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Title of Thesis:
Keeper of the Light

A thesis
submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Professional Writing in English
at
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by
KAY RAMSBOTTOM



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Abstract

Keeper of the Light is an historical novel based on the true story of Mary Jane Hebden, a country gentleman's daughter, who in 1839 at the age of 22 sails to New Zealand on the emigrant ship *Duke of Roxburgh*. There she is reunited with her fiancé George Bennett, a seedsman, who left on the *Cuba* two months earlier.

It is a time of change in Britain. A youthful Queen Victoria has just come to the throne, and the combined works of Jane Austen have recently been published under her own name for the first time. The poor are suffering terrible financial hardship from loss of work caused by the Industrial Revolution, and the rising cost of food due to the Corn Laws. The New Zealand Land Company and the British Government have their eyes on the distant prize of New Zealand, and it is a race to see who will get there first.

Against this background, a young English woman sets out on a 13,000 mile voyage halfway around the world in order to wed the man she loves. A journey that sees her running away from her home in Yorkshire, and ends with her taking on a man's job in New Zealand in order to support her family.

In Britannia, the fledging colony of the New Zealand Land Company, the ordinary lives of Mary and George – marriage, birth, work and death – are interspersed with extraordinary events like earthquakes, fire and floods. News to and from 'home' must travel by ship, and takes three to six months to arrive, if it arrives at all.

A unforeseen change in circumstances forces Mary to take on a job as keeper of the temporary lighthouse at Pencarrow, the isolated headland at the entrance to Wellington harbour. She and her family live in a two-room cottage that is 'neither wind- nor water-proof' with a smoky lantern in the window that must be tended all night. Access is by boat, and the nearest town an eight-mile walk away along a rocky beach.

The cottage is replaced with New Zealand's first permanent lighthouse four years later, and Mrs Bennett becomes Head Keeper, the first – and only – female lighthouse keeper in New Zealand's history. She must maintain her position in the face of opposition from the Assistant keeper, William Lyall, who complains to the authorities that he can't manage with only a woman's help.

In all, Mary Jane Bennett held the position of Keeper of the Light at Pencarrow Head for ten years. Her part in New Zealand's history deserves to be celebrated, and yet like many historical achievements by women, it remains little known, even in the country of her birth and in her adopted home. This novel sets out to tell her story in her own words, in a fictionalised re-telling of actual events.

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When it came to writing this book, the second edition of Paul Bennett's self-published family history, *The Bennetts of Pencarrow*, was an invaluable resource, as well as a starting point for further research. I'm very grateful to the helpful staff at the Bill Laxon Maritime Library in the New Zealand Maritime Museum in Auckland who allowed me to access their copy, and other relevant research materials. Paul Bennett was the great-great-grandson of Mary Jane and George, and a talented journalist and artist. I hope he would approve of the use I have made of his information in this book, however he passed away in 2012.

I would also like to express grateful thanks to Tamsin Falconer from New Zealand Historic Places Trust for allowing me to accompany her on an inspection tour of Pencarrow Lighthouse and experience Mary Jane's workplace in a way the public is not usually able to.

The further research required for this book would not have been possible without the incredibly rich resource of the Alexander Turnbull Library in Wellington and Archives NZ, and their knowledgeable and helpful staff. The Papers Past newspaper archive provided a great deal of useful and fascinating information, as did the Hutt City Council's database of emigrant records. The descriptions of the 1848 and 1855 earthquakes drew extensively on eyewitness accounts collected by Grapes, Downes & Goh for the Institute of Geological & Nuclear Sciences, and published on the Earthquake Commission website. I am also grateful to Ann Harlow for bringing to my attention her ancestress with the unusual name of Douglas McKain, when I was in need of a midwife. She too broke out of traditional roles for woman in the early days of the NZ Company settlement. I also

made use of the records publicly available in genealogy websites such as Ancestry, FamilySearch and Geni to find out more about my characters' families.

I could not have written this book without the support and encouragement of my family and friends, and the incredibly helpful advice and feedback from my wonderful supervisors Catherine Chidgey and Tracey Slaughter, and the members of our creative writing group at the University of Waikato, especially Kim Pears and Brad McLaren.

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Keeper of the Light

by

Kay Ramsbottom

For my mother,
another Mary who crossed the oceans
to be with her Yorkshireman,
and left us too soon.

Prologue

Have you read that marvellous novel, *Pride and Prejudice*? It is my favourite of Miss Jane Austen's stories, because the circumstances of my family are so very similar to Elizabeth Bennett's. Her father is a country gentleman, and my father is a country gentleman – so far we are equal.

Suppose Mr Bennett had refused to grant Mr Darcy permission to marry his daughter, and forbidden Elizabeth from ever seeing him again. I admit it is nigh impossible to conceive of anyone refusing that eligible young man, but try to imagine it. Their heart's desire thwarted, they decide to elope and marry against her father's wishes, but instead of a quick dash to the Scottish border to make their vows, what if instead they ran away to the other side of the world to start their new life together? Wouldn't that be exciting? Bold and adventurous?

We thought so – George and I – for that is what we did. We sailed as far away from England as it is possible to go without actually starting back again. If you stuck a knitting needle through England on a globe of the Earth and pushed it all the way out the other side, the point would be very close to New Zealand.

That is where we went.

ENGLAND

February 1838 – February 1840

Of this at least I am certain, that none but a born romp and hoyden...

is fitted for the boisterous evolutions of a sea-voyage.

– Thomas Hood, "The Schoolmistress Abroad," *New Monthly Magazine*, 1842

My name is Mary Jane Hebden and I was born at the end of 1816, the year without a summer, when crops failed due to extreme cold and excessive rain. Famine and food riots were commonplace, and the very fact of my existence shows I was more fortunate than many babies born that year.

I grew up in a two storey manor house named Braisty Woods, on a farm near the edge of the Yorkshire Dales. Its solid walls are built of the hard-wearing sandstone which is mined a few miles hence in Pately Bridge. My father, William Hebden, is a country squire of independent means. His brother John, his sisters Judith and Anne, and their mother Grandmama Jane all lived with us. Uncle John manages the farm, and Papa employs the Turnbull family to run our other farm at Fountains Earth. I have a brother Will, four years my elder, whose footsteps I dogged since the day I could walk. My sister Ann is the baby of the family, doted upon by all. I remember holding her, red-faced and squalling, when I was but five.

The area surrounding Braisty Woods is a farming community, so the marriage prospects for my siblings and me are limited. Although we can trace our roots back to the Norman conquest, as my father has been known to boast, our family no longer has any great fortune or name to recommend it. Both suffered when our ancestors supported the losing side in the Wars of the Roses and had much of their land confiscated. But we were still considered well-off until Papa came into his inheritance in 1813 and frittered away our remaining money on hounds, horses and high living in just three years. Now we scrape by on the income from a mere 125 acres.

My father hoped for another marriage coup like that of Grandpapa Hebden, who managed to snare Grandmama Jane, heiress of the Bake family, with a dowry of 3000 pounds. Our best

prospects for this were the Harker family of Harefield Hall, where Mama was regularly invited to tea. Harefield Hall was our Netherfield, a vast rambling house of golden stone with turrets and rooms aplenty, and a commanding view over the countryside. Mr Harker is a grocer, it is true; but he is a rich grocer, which makes all the difference. Among their six sons and four daughters there were several who would meet my father's approval as son- or daughter-in-law. Their first-born, John, is a contemporary of Will's and has never shown more than a similar brotherly affection and tolerance towards me, much to Papa's disappointment. The eldest daughters, Ann and Mary, are close in age to my brother, but he has not yet succeeded in wooing either of them. Then come three younger brothers, any of whom would be an excellent match for my sister, but not for me. Perhaps due to the ease and shelter of their life, they all seem rather young and frivolous.

Despite the two farms and a woollen mill in Hartley, we were not sufficiently well-off to afford to send me to London or Bath to catch a wealthy husband. Six social seasons came and went without so much as a single proposal since I came out into society at the age of sixteen. Oh, there were suitors – local farmers' and tradesmen's sons who sought to marry up – but Papa made it very clear to them, and to me, that down was not the direction I would be marrying. At almost twenty-two I was officially heading into spinsterhood, like Aunt Judith and Aunt Anne.

In March of 1838 our family had just returned from London after seeing Will's regiment off at Gravesend, amid rumours of approaching trouble in Afghanistan. He'd looked very handsome in his uniform – red jacket and navy trousers, white sash and gold braid gleaming – and sat his bay horse so well. He and the other new recruits to The Queen's 16th Lancers had been training at Maidstone in Kent, and were heading over to India on the *Lord Exmouth*. As the ship left the dock, the brass band played and the crowd gave three cheers. Back in Braisty Woods it felt like winter would never end – there was snow on the ground, and the weather was grey and dreary like my mood. There was no-one to lark about the estate with. I missed my brother very much.

George Bennett broke up these dull days like a gleam of sunshine presaging spring, when he delivered the seeds for the farms and the kitchen garden. We had ordered from the catalogue sent out by the seed merchant at Harrogate, a new innovation which saved the employees much travelling, and made us aware of a hitherto unknown range of possibilities for both vegetables and flowers. Papa and Uncle John selected the grain and fodder for sowing in the fields, and Mama and I chose for the home garden. Some of the flower names were unfamiliar to us, and as I particularly wanted new specimens to paint, it was only natural that I seek out the seed merchant to explain what I needed.

In the courtyard, Uncle John was checking the sacks of seed with the merchant, a tall well-built young man with springy hair the colour of seasoned oak. Uncle introduced me and told him to give me the miscellaneous packets destined for the house gardens. Instead he politely offered to carry them.

“Yes, yes,” agreed Uncle vaguely; he was busy counting.

As we walked around to the kitchen entrance, I noticed how well our strides matched. “I’m sorry, I didn’t catch your name.”

“George Bennett, at your service, Miss Hebden.”

“Thank you, Mr Bennett. Actually there is a service I’d ask of you.”

“Name it, and I shall do my best.”

“I am intrigued by your catalogue, but there are so many choices I hardly know where to start. Could you explain how they will look?”

“Are you after something in particular?”

“Yes – something I haven’t seen before. I think I have painted every blossom both wild and cultivated within five miles. I long for something exotic and unknown.”

“Ah, I see – so you’re an artist?”

“A watercolourist.”

He frowned thoughtfully. “I believe I could be of most assistance if I could see what you already have. Would that be possible?”

“I’ll ask Mama.” We had arrived at the kitchen door. “Please wait here.” He handed me the bundle of seed packets and I nearly fumbled them as a jolt of warmth passed from his hand to mine when our fingers touched. I hurried inside and dropped the package on the scarred and scrubbed kitchen table. In the morning room I found Aunt Judith, who was trying to teach my sister Ann a complex embroidery stitch.

“Where is Mama?”

“She’s not feeling well. My sister is putting her to bed with a cold compress.”

This was not an uncommon occurrence – Mama has suffered from melancholy these fourteen years, since the death of her last child, baby John, in infancy.

“I wanted to ask her permission to show the new seed merchant around the gardens, so he can give me some advice on which flowers to choose.”

Aunt Judith looked at Ann, who was earnestly unpicking a tangle of threads on her embroidery frame, and sighed gently. “We shall accompany you. A walk sounds like a splendid idea, don’t you think, Ann?”

“Yes please, Auntie!” Ann jumped to her feet so hastily the embroidery fell to the floor. “I’ll get my bonnet.”

That first day we visited the walled kitchen garden and then showed our visitor through Papa’s folly, as my Uncle John called it – a vast brick and cast iron-beamed glasshouse that was almost as large as the manor itself. Mr Bennett showed a quick intellect and a keen interest in the many plants we had growing, and asked me which specimens I had already painted, and the colours I had a preference for. He took notes in a small pocketbook, and described some of the more unusual plants that he thought might be of interest.

“See here? This one comes all the way from Australia.” His finger underlined the name *Clematis sp. Australis* in his dog-eared copy of the catalogue. “It’s a climbing vine with white star-shaped flowers.” He must have seen my slight moue of disappointment at the hefty one shilling cost. “But you want something really unusual. Let me see...what about *Cladanthus Arabicus* from North Africa?” He described the large daisy-like yellow flowers, the lacy aromatic foliage and the unusual growth habit, giving me time to assess the price. It was one of the thruppence items; they sold nothing cheaper.

“That sounds wonderful, thank you.”

Mr Bennett made a note of my order, and then offered his regrets that he had to hurry away to make his next delivery. Aunt Judith, Ann and I walked him to the delivery cart, where a chestnut Suffolk Punch mare waited patiently, her feathered feet solidly planted. One of the farm boys held her reins. Before Mr Bennett climbed up into the driver’s seat, he swept his hat off and out to one side in an exaggerated bow.

“Your servant, Miss Hebden, Miss Hebden and...Miss Hebden,” he said, and I had to laugh.

* * *

A few weeks later Mr Bennett brought my packet of *Cladanthus Arabicus* seeds, and I paid for them with a silver sixpence that I’d been saving since I found it in the boiled pudding last Christmas. It so happened that mine was the last delivery before his afternoon off, so he had some free time to spend with us. Ann and Aunt Judith accompanied us once again as I gave him a full tour of the grounds – the nut walk, the orchard, and the many fine specimen trees which were already old when my grandfather was born.

As we walked, we talked. At first we made polite conversation about ordinary things – books and music, his job, my painting. Mr Bennett was surprisingly easy to talk to. Slowly Ann and Aunt Judith drifted further behind as Ann tired. Soon I found myself telling him how I missed my brother Will and he confessed that he also missed his family in Durham. His father is gamekeeper

there at Gibside, the estate of the Dowager Countess of Strathmore. Mr Bennett is the middle child of seven – his brother Francis is 30, sisters Jane, 29, and Mary Frances, 26 are his elders, then after him come three more girls – Ann 22, Elizabeth, 19 and Margaret Frances, called Fanny, who is 17 like my sister. With so many sisters, it is not surprising that like me, Mr Bennett doted on his older brother as a child and followed him everywhere.

Toward the back boundary of the house gardens, at the highest point, we reached the foot of my favourite tree, a particularly tall and broad oak that could well have been planted by our Norman ancestor.

“What a wonderful climbing tree this would be.” Mr Bennett’s head tilted way back to look up at the crown a good forty feet above. “You must be able to see for miles from the top.”

“You can,” I said without thinking.

“You’ve climbed this tree?” The hint of disbelief in his voice made my chin lift.

“I have.”

“As a child?”

“All my life.”

Aunt Judith sighed. Ann giggled.

His raised eyebrow was a challenge I couldn’t ignore. I met his sceptical gaze as I reached up and tugged on the ribbon which held my bonnet in place. The satin bow slid smoothly open and I handed the bonnet to Ann. He swallowed.

“Wait here a moment.” Whatever my aunt might have thought, I wasn’t so lacking in decorum that I would afford him the opportunity to see up my petticoats!

On the far side of the wide bole were half a dozen planks which Will and I had nailed to the trunk many years ago, forming a set of steps to reach the lowest branch, about ten feet above the ground. Having done this many times before, I was up and standing on the first branch in a matter of moments. From there it was an easy traverse around the back of the tree, stepping up from limb

to limb, until I was almost in view of where they stood waiting. I leaned out slightly so I could be seen, and waved. "Hello!"

His mouth dropped open slightly when he saw how far up I was already. "That was fast!"

"There are steps on the other side."

"Permission to come aboard?"

I laughed. "Granted."

He dropped his hat to the ground and made for the other side of the tree. As he climbed, I continued my ascent, always keeping the trunk between us. Finally I reached my favourite branch, the one with a natural bow in it where I liked to sit and see the spire of St Cuthbert's, some three miles distant. The soft new leaves were beginning to unfurl, hazing the branches in spring green. By the time he caught up to me, I was sitting demurely, only the toes of my boots showing under my tidied skirts. He peered around the trunk at me with sparkling eyes and grinned. For the first time I noticed what nice teeth he had. "Why Miss Hebden, I do believe you are a hoyden!"

As our laughter drifted down to the small upturned faces below, I saw Aunt Judith shake her head.

Later she let me invite Mr Bennett to take tea with us. Papa was away and Mama was again indisposed. He was very complimentary about my framed watercolours and botanical embroidery which hung in the drawing room. By the time he left I felt I had made a new friend.

That year Mr Bennett visited whenever he was in the neighbourhood. It wasn't long before we dispensed with the formalities, and began to call each other by our Christian names. George would usually bring me some treasure found on his travels – a spotted toadstool, a wild rose with striped petals – and I painted them all. Once it was a nest which the wind had blown out of the hawthorn next to his lodgings, a wispy delicate thing with two tiny pale blue eggs and the shards of a third. At first he had put it back in the bush in the hope the parents would come back, and waited several days, but in vain. I loved him for that. We roamed the estate and surrounding countryside

with Ann as our chaperone. Sometimes, when she grew tired or lagged behind, he sat her side-saddle on his placid gelding and took the reins to lead her behind us. In spring we sat on drystone walls and laughed at the antics of the lambs, with their whirring tails and stiff-sprunged leaps. In autumn we marvelled at the heroism of Grace Darling and her father, the lighthouse keeper at Longstone. We arranged to meet by chance at the sweet shop in Pately Bridge, where you duck to go under the stone archway which says 1666 and enter a cool dark cave full of sugar jewels. In June we talked of the young Queen's coming coronation and wondered whether she would make an end to the hardships brought about by the Corn Laws.

“Are you going to the Coronation Ball in Harrogate?” asked George.

“Yes! Are you?”

“Only if you promise me at least one dance.”

I promised.

The night of the Ball remains in my memory as one of the most magical of my life. Mrs Harker had kindly invited Ann and me to join their party, and agreed to act as our chaperone for the evening. Their carriage joined the queue around the block, waiting to unload passengers at the door of the Crown Hotel. I remember the gay bunting and flags on all the shopfronts and the verandahs. The excitement of walking into the ballroom and seeing all the ladies dressed in their elegant silks or their best taffeta, their jewels glittering like the chandeliers above, and the gentlemen in their finest evening wear. My eyes searched for George but it seemed impossible I would spot him in such a crowd. In the end he found me, and I will never forget feeling the warmth rise in my cheeks as his admiring gaze swept over me, from the flowers and ribbons in my artfully arranged hair to the toes of my satin dancing slippers. Grandmama Jane had loaned me her pearls and I touched them self-consciously as he bowed over my other hand. Suddenly all of my awareness was focused on that crucial joining where the heat of his fingertips radiated into mine – his breath warmed my

skin through my thin glove and the faintest brush of his lips branded my knuckle. I returned his bow with as graceful a curtsy as I could muster with knees that felt slightly wobbly.

I must have danced with other men that night – I know I had promised the Harker boys at least one each – but I only remember dancing with George. A giddiness like champagne fizzed in my blood as we met and parted and met again in the age-old steps of the dance.

A few weeks later we shared a picnic under a willow bower of shade on the grassy banks of the river Nidd. I sketched George as he fished with a withe, while Ann made flower chains of sweet clover blossoms. After lunch we sat and watched the white swans sail by. Ann fell asleep with her head on my lap. George seemed unusually quiet. At last he spoke.

“Mary, may I ask you something?”

“Of course.”

“If your father will agree, would you do me the honour of becoming my wife?” His eyes searched mine anxiously. My heart jumped, and stopped, and started again. Joy blossomed in my chest.

“Yes. I would marry you tomorrow if I could.” I couldn’t stop the smile which was spreading across my face.

His eyes lit up in answer and he took my hand. “Then you love me as I love you?”

“I do. I love you, George.”

He picked up Ann’s discarded flower chain and wound it about my ring finger. “I love you, Mary Hebden.” He leaned forward and our lips touched in a gentle kiss as sweet as clover nectar.

Ann stirred and reluctantly I pulled away. “But he will never agree.”

I was right. It was the end of September, once the harvests were in the barns, before George was able to get an interview with my father. He never told me what Papa said to him that day, but when he came out of the study George his sun-browned skin was almost white. He glanced at me and looked quickly down at the floor with a shake of his head.

Papa stuck his head out of the door and barked, “Are you still here? Get out.” He glared at me. “Mary Jane, in my study. Now.”

I stood like a penitent while he strode heavily about the room, abusing George for his effrontery, berating me for my lack of good sense, smacking his clenched fist into his palm for emphasis. He stood over me, solid jowls flushed, and tried to intimidate me with his bulk. I was having none of it. I lifted my chin.

“I am over twenty-one, Papa. I don’t need your permission to marry.”

“By God,” he exploded, “you will hold your tongue, Miss. You are a Hebden. You are not marrying some common seed merchant who managed to get his hand under your skirts.”

I gasped as if he had slapped me. “Papa, we have done nothing wrong! George Bennett is a perfect gentlemen.”

“Hah! A seed merchant whose father is a gamekeeper!”

“You’d rather marry me off to a Harker, whose father is a grocer.”

He looked sourly at me. “Name marries fortune if needs must.”

“Let Ann marry a wealthy man. She’s the delicate one, she will need a houseful of servants. I do not.”

“You marry up, or you do not marry at all.”

I reasoned, I argued, and in the end I begged, but he was adamant.

I took my case to Grandmama Jane. At sixty-six, she was becoming frail, and spent most of her days in her rooms, alternately reading and dozing by the fire with her feet on the tasselled ottoman, but her mind was as sharp as ever. If anyone could influence her son’s decision, it was she. On entering her sitting room I noticed her well-thumbed book had slipped to the floor. As I returned it to the side table, I saw it was her favourite, the combined works of Jane Austen.

Grandmama Jane opened her eyes and focused on my reddened eyes. “Mary Jane, dear child, whatever is the matter?”

“Papa has refused to let me marry Mr Bennett.”

She snorted. “And a good thing too. Imagine being Mary Bennet all your life, that dull pious girl.”

“It’s not funny, Grandmama. I love George.”

She looked sideways at me with a quirk on her lips. “Are the shades of Braisty Woods to be polluted by such a union?”

“Please, Grandmama, be serious. Don’t let him keep me from a happy marriage as he did his own sisters, for lack of suitable prospects.”

“Your Aunt Jane was allowed to marry.”

“Papa could hardly refuse to allow her to marry his own brother-in-law!”

“True.” She chuckled. “What a pity your mother did not have more brothers, to accommodate Anne and Judith.”

I tried a different tack. “At this rate, you will have no grandchildren to carry on the Hebden name.”

“I have high hopes for Will,” she said airily.

“Don’t tease me so, Grandmama.”

She must have heard the catch in my voice, for she took my hand in her soft powdered one.

“I am sorry, my dear. You are not on the shelf just yet. Why, the elder Miss Harkers are not even betrothed.”

“They have suitors aplenty. They are in the happy position of being rich enough to pick and choose.”

“You are too young to be so bitter.”

“I am old enough to know my own mind. And to marry without Papa’s consent.”

That shocked her.

“You and Grandpapa married for love. Why can’t I?”

Her eyes softened as she gazed back into the past. She sighed.

“I want you to be happy, Mary Jane. Give your father a few days to calm down, and I will speak to him.”

It was all in vain, though. Papa was adamant and would not be moved.

It became much more difficult for me to see George, now that he wasn't allowed to visit, and Papa insisted that I be accompanied by one of the 'adults' and not just Ann if I went into town. Fortunately Aunt Judith had developed quite a soft spot for George and soon became our co-conspirator, turning a blind eye to our rendezvous in Pately Bridge or Dacre Banks, and agreeing to send and receive letters on my behalf.

We discussed elopement. The Scottish border could be reached in less than two days if we travelled all night – but I was sure that Papa would follow us to Gretna Green and drag me back, by force if necessary, and find a way to get the marriage annulled. It was the only plan we had, though, and George was saving every penny for it, when fate, or more accurately my father, struck a cruel blow. Papa wrote to the seed merchant in Harrogate to complain of George's 'inappropriate advances' and threaten action if his employment was not terminated. Meagre as my father's business was, the loss of it probably wouldn't have been enough to sway the merchant, however he couldn't risk of someone of Papa's social standing spreading the news throughout the Yorkshire gentry. Despite accepting George's explanation of his innocence, he regretfully gave him the sack. I hadn't realised my father could be so vindictive as to ruin a young man's prospects. It made me so angry when I found out why George had lost his job, and the worst part was that I couldn't confront Papa without giving away that I was still in touch with my suitor.

George went back to his family in the north while he looked for work; times were hard everywhere in the countryside. Food was expensive and jobs were scarce. I didn't want him to end up working in a factory mill like my father's, 12-hour days that would give him 'cloth ears' from constant exposure to the racket of the machines that cleaned, carded and spun the wool, and the

belts and pulleys that drove them. That or a job in the coal mines for which Durham was famous, where ‘killed in a pit’ was a common epitaph. In the meantime he was helping his father on the Gibside estate when a chance encounter with Sir William Hutt, the second husband of the Countess, led to a conversation that was to change our lives.

Gibside Cottages

25th November 1838

My darling girl,

I was speaking with Sir William today about our predicament. He is a strong supporter of Mr Edward Gibbon Wakefield’s model of colonisation, as demonstrated in South Australia. He hinted there will soon be opportunities for clever and capable young men – his words, not mine, I hasten to add – in a proposed venture to colonise New Zealand. He has offered to support my application, and as he is a Director of the Colonisation Association, my success is effectively guaranteed.

My mind is suddenly racing with ideas, the principal one being, could this be the answer to our prayers?

It is one thing to ask you to elope to Scotland with me; it is quite another to ask you to run away from all you hold dear, to the very edge of the world. I don’t know if it would be the maddest adventure ever, or just madness – I need your level head to tell me. Should I accept?

Yours ever,

George

I thought of the letters my family had received from Will since he arrived in Calcutta. Pages full of the marvels he had witnessed on the voyage – mountainous islands rising sheer from the ocean, seabirds with wings twice the length of two grown men, Neptune ceremonies. Exotic sights on land – parrots, monkeys, fireflies, camels and elephants. I longed to see them for myself.

Braisty Woods

7th December, 1838

Dearest George,

You are what I hold most dear. Where you go, I will follow.

Accept.

Your loving

Mary

Sir William arranged work and a place to stay in London for George and his cousin John, one of the groom-labourers at Gibside, while the New Zealand Colonisation Association organised its plans. By January of 1839, George was living in Crosier Street, Lambeth, and keeping me apprised of the progress with regular letters. The Company had already bought its first ship in December, the *Tory*, then in late March news reached them that the British Government were planning to introduce a bill in Parliament which would prevent the private purchase of land in New Zealand. Since the Company's colonisation scheme depended on buying land cheap from the natives, and selling it at a much higher price in England, with the profits to fund the transport of emigrant labourers, this would spell disaster for their plans.

The New Zealand Land Company was quickly formed, with Sir William as one of the Directors, and the *Tory* was fitted out with all speed. She left England on the 12th May 1839, with Colonel William Wakefield as expedition commander, carrying £3000 worth of barter goods.

Meanwhile the Company had already started selling the land for the first settlement – location to be announced – eleven hundred sections, each comprising one town acre and one hundred country acres, for £1 per acre. With the income from the land sales, the Company was able to begin fitting out more vessels and advertising for emigrants. George sent me a copy of the advertisement.



In order to be accepted, applicants had to provide testimonials as to their qualifications, character and health from respectable persons – clergymen, magistrates, doctors – and references from employers. They would be guaranteed jobs by the New Zealand Land Company on arrival in the colony, or free to seek work for themselves, the idea being that they would provide skilled labour for the landowners and eventually save enough to purchase their own land. Wives of approved emigrants would not have to pay for their passage. Single women of good character could apply, as long as they travelled with a family member, or as servants to ladies travelling as cabin passengers.

To discuss our options, I needed to be in London with George. Letters were too slow and the risk of interception grew with every one. It was time for me to run away from home.

* * *

The Royal Agricultural Society held their inaugural Show in Oxford on the 17th July 1839 – an exhibition of the finest examples of the various cattle, sheep and horse breeds from all over the

British Isles. Gentlemen farmers like my father flocked to it in the hope of winning prizes, improving bloodlines, and discussing the latest farming innovations. A few well-chosen hints that other bloodlines might be on display was all it took to make him believe it was his idea to have me accompany him.

Naturally I took a large travel trunk to ensure I had enough pretty dresses to entice rich farmer's sons to fall in love with me. Papa wasn't to know that under the top layers of lace and frippery were far more practical items – sturdy shoes and warm woollens, plain shirts and blouses, my sewing kit and watercolour box, embroidered linen sheets and pillowcases from the trousseau that I'd been working on since I was sixteen. Concealed beneath some books at the very bottom was my bundle of letters from George, tied with a pink grosgrain ribbon, and a small purse of coins which was all the money I had in the world.

If my family thought my farewells more prolonged and effusive than they ought to be, they made no comment, although Aunt Judith did give me a long and speculative look as I squeezed Ann tight a second time. Just before I climbed into the carriage she took my hands and pulled me in close, pressing her warm cheek to mine for the space of a few breaths. I could smell the familiar rosemary from the rinse water she used on her hair.

“Take good care of yourself, dear Mary,” she whispered. “I shall miss you.”

As the carriage drove away I twisted around in my seat to see them all for what might be the last time – Uncle John, Aunt Anne and Aunt Judith, and of course my dear little sister. Even Grandmama Jane and Mama had come downstairs for once. I waved and waved until the drive turned a corner and they were out of sight.

Once we were in Oxford it was a simple matter to make my escape – on the day of the Show I told Papa I had a headache and wished to lie down. He encouraged me to rest so that I would look presentable for the evening's entertainments. I had already written to George and told him the name of the Inn we were staying at. He was waiting outside with a horse cab to take us to the railway

station, and as soon as he was sure Papa was well clear, he and the cab driver came and collected me and my trunk.

I didn't want Papa to worry, though, so I left him a note saying we had run away to Gretna Green. That will have kept him busy for a while.

It was wonderful to see George again. Letters are all very well, but written words are a poor substitute for a smile, the warmth of fingers intertwined, the intimacy of thigh pressed to thigh in a small cab or a crowded 3rd class railway carriage.

The train was slow and gave us several hours to talk. If we were to marry before emigrating, we would have to pay for a special license – we couldn't risk publishing the banns each week for a month, in case it lead Papa to us. Also – and here we both blushed to discuss it – if I was with child by the time we sailed, it could make a long sea voyage all the more dangerous. George had already applied and been accepted. We had to get my application in quickly so that with luck, we might emigrate on the same ship.

In my reticule I carried a character reference from the Wesleyan Minister who'd known me since birth. I told him that I needed it to apply for a position as a governess to help support my family – but please not to mention it to Papa, as he would be mortified if he thought our financial straits had become public knowledge. Papa's spendthrift ways being well known in the community, that seemed perfectly plausible to the Minister, and the dear man hastened to assure me that the secret was safe with him. As soon as we arrived at the boarding house in Poplar that George had found for me, we would fill out my application to emigrate.

George mentioned that he had met Colonel William Wakefield at the farewell dinner for the Tory.

“He seemed like a very decent gentleman,” he said. “I was a little surprised, to be honest.”

“Why?”

“Well, given the scandal in his past...”

“What scandal?”

“He and his brother Edward went to gaol for three years for abducting an heiress.”

I remembered hearing my Aunts talk about it – it was a well-known cautionary tale for young ladies. In 1826, Edward Gibbon Wakefield and his brother William lured 15-year-old Ellen Turner out of school with a fake letter claiming her mother was ill and asking for her. Instead he took her to Gretna Green, where he convinced her to marry him to save her father from bankruptcy, which was also a lie, and then accompany him to France. He was twice her age. Her uncles pursued them to Calais and managed to recover their niece, and after Wakefield was convicted of abduction the marriage was dissolved by a special act of Parliament. I suddenly wondered if Mr Wakefield inspired the character of Mr Wickham, or vice versa.

“Miss Ellen Turner. I remember.”

“It worked for him once before,” said George.

“Really? I hadn’t heard that.”

George shrugged. “As a young man he eloped with an heiress and ward of Chancery, Eliza Pattle, who was 16. To avoid a scandal, he received a very generous settlement, and a job promotion to Turin.”

My eyes widened. “He did well out of it.”

“More so than the lady.”

“What do you mean?”

“She died four years later after bearing his second child.”

I shivered. So commonplace an end for the lady seemed unfair after such a romantic escapade. And these were the men to whom we were entrusting our future.

* * *

Charlotte Cottages in Grundy Lane, Poplar were not nearly as charming as they sounded, but the landlady was kind and the rooms were spotlessly clean. At first I had trouble sleeping with the

constant noise – voices of passers-by, the clop of hooves and the thrum of carriage wheels right outside my window at all hours. This was not the refined part of London we had stayed in when we saw Will off to India; it was working-class dockside suburbs. In the heat of summer, it was ripe to bursting.

On my application I put my trade down as Governess, but George told me that I would probably have to accept any service position in order to get free passage. He received confirmation that he and his cousin John were to sail with the survey team on board the *Cuba* at the end of the month. It was an all-male excursion. Even John's wife and infant son were to travel by a later ship, and George was anxious to know that my emigration was assured as well, before he set sail without me.

Sir William was able to put him in touch with a couple from Birmingham who were travelling as cabin passengers on the *Duke of Roxburgh*, and were in need of an educated female servant. Mr and Mrs Pierce interviewed me at their Cheapside accommodation, and seemed very happy with my reference and my person. They assured me my duties would be light – more of a lady's maid than a housemaid. They were childless so would not be needing a governess. Before meeting them I was concerned that not having the luxury of choice, I would have to work for people I didn't like. But I needn't have worried. They were lovely, and offered me the position right away.

I have seen the Company Surgeon and been given a clean bill of health. There is nothing now to prevent me from following George.

* * *

The *Cuba* sailed on the last day of July 1839. As the barge took us down the Thames to Gravesend the day before departure, George and I held hands but hardly spoke at all. It was summer but I felt cold all over, except where the heat of his body touched mine. The crew and emigrants had to sleep aboard that night so the ship could catch the tide on the morrow. John Bennett's wife and I took a room together in Gravesend so that we could be there in the morning to wave our menfolk

off. We all dined together one last time, roast mutton with new potatoes and fresh green peas. George tried to make us laugh by saying that it was probably the last meal he'd be able to keep down for the next week, but it fell flat. Afterwards he and I went for a walk to give John and his wife some time alone.

From his pocket George pulled a black velvet drawstring bag and handed it to me. Inside was a thin gold band with a small square garnet mounted in the centre. "This was my Grandma Margaret's wedding ring. My father wanted me to have it for my wife. Would you keep it safe until I can place it on your finger on our wedding day?" It was such a small thing, and yet it meant so much. I told him I would treasure it until that day, and ever after.

"I have a gift for you also," I added, giving him a small white rectangle from my reticule, bound in green ribbon. He pulled on the bow and the white wrapping opened to reveal itself as a linen handkerchief, with the initials GWB embroidered in brown silk in one corner, and a border of pale green oak leaves. "To remind you of when we met." Inside the fabric was a small oval picture frame with a miniature self-portrait I had painted. "And to remember me by until we meet again."

George lightly ran his fingertip over the curve of the glass. "This is beautiful," he said, his voice husky with emotion, "but not nearly as beautiful as the original." His hand moved to cup my cheek, and for a moment I could see the gold flecks in his hazel eyes before his lips came down firmly on mine and my eyelids fluttered closed. I felt that kiss all the way down to my toes. Whatever might happen, I would have this perfect moment to remember.

As dusk fell, the men boarded the ship, having received their farewell hugs and kisses liberally salted with tears. The anxious women who loved them – wives and sweethearts, mothers and sisters – melted away into the shadows. When I shut my eyes I imagined I could still feel the pressure around my ribs and the warmth of George's palms on my shoulder blade and the small of my back as he held me tightly one last time.

John's baby cried for most of the night and so did his mother. We were all three red-eyed in the morning as we watched the *Cuba* take our men away.

That first week after George left was the hardest to bear – I missed his cheerful countenance so much. He was the only person in London that I knew well. I worried that they wouldn't even make it safely to Portsmouth – it wasn't unknown for ships to collide in the Thames in the thick yellow fogs, or to come to grief in the Channel if the weather was bad. It was such a relief when his letter arrived.

On board Cuba, Portsmouth

7th August, 1839

My darling girl,

Well we have made it safely as far as Portsmouth. Only 13 thousand more miles to go! I do hope I get my sea legs soon or there will be nothing left of me by the time we arrive.

The mattresses supplied by the Company are quite comfortable but they will get very dirty being dragged up onto the deck to air. I have bought some canvas and thread in Portsmouth to sew a cover for mine; you might wish to do the same, so that it is still fit to keep by the time we reach our destination. Also some sea soap for washing in salt water, as we are only given a small amount of fresh for drinking.

We are leaving tomorrow so I will only have time to send this one letter.

I have been missing you every day. I pray for your safe travel, and look forward to the day we are reunited somewhere in New Zealand.

Your loving

George

By the time it was in my hands they were already several days into the next part of the voyage. What if he fell ill, or was injured, with no gentle hands to cool his brow and feed him broth? What if he fell overboard and drowned? What if the *Cuba* was lost at sea and never seen again? So many what ifs. I worried constantly, but as the following days turned to weeks I learned to accept that there was nothing I could do to help him, and nothing to be gained except ill-health by dwelling on it. I had to have faith that our future was in God's hands now – we would be reunited if that was His will.

After a month went by, I found that my thoughts began to turn more and more to the family and the home I had left behind. I had never been away from them for any length of time before, and I missed them. At first those feelings had been pushed aside by the excitement of arriving in London, settling into the boarding house, seeing George every day without fear of discovery, but now they began to intrude with an aching intensity. Some nights I cried myself to sleep feeling so lonely for anything familiar. I longed to write to Ann and tell her how I felt, or describe the fashionable ladies at the Queen's Bazaar, or the giant whale skeleton that George and I had paid 1s to see in a pavilion in St Martins Lane. But I couldn't risk a letter falling into Papa's hands.

There were some approved emigrants who changed their minds and decided to stay in England – I began to understand how they felt. If it had not been for the thought that my future husband was waiting for me, that he was the one I loved with all my heart, who held the key to my true happiness, I might have done the same.

In the end, I found two things that helped.

Preparations for the voyage kept my hands busy, sewing the clothes I needed to fulfil the company's mandate – serviceable articles of clothing which were sturdy enough to withstand a life of manual labour, and a mattress cover as George suggested. My pretty dresses I packed away for now. I would need at least one when I got married, and surely there would be balls and parties once society was established in the colony. Surely there would.

Writing this account kept my mind busy. I had brought with me the beautiful leather-bound journal that Grandmama Jane had given me for my 21st birthday. I had a vague idea that perhaps I might keep a voyage diary, as seemed to be the fashion among emigrants. The pages were still as pristine white as untrod snow. For a moment I ran my fingers over the inside cover, admiring the swirling blues and reds of the marbled end paper. Then I took up my freshly sharpened quill, dipped it in the ink well, and began my story –

My name is Mary Jane Hebden and I was born at the end of 1816...

*As slow our ship her foamy track
Against the wind was cleaving,
Her trembling pennant still look'd back
To that dear isle 'twas leaving.*

– “As Slow Our Ship”, Thomas Moore, Irish Melodies

Aboard the *Duke of Roxburgh*

Tuesday 17th September, 1839

We left the East India Docks early on a fine clear morning, leaving behind the smells of fish and fruit, manure and sweat, wet hemp and dry spices. The steamer which towed us to Gravesend plumed dark smoke from its stacks at first, gritty with coal smuts and sparks, lightening through grey to white as the engine fire burned hotter.

Everyone was on deck to celebrate the moment of departure. I had no-one on shore to see me off, so I studied the people instead. The ladies and gentlemen who are paying for their passage were up on the poop deck. The ladies alternated between waving pocket handkerchiefs and mopping their eyes with them. The gentlemen waved their hats. Children played tag with scant regard for the working sailors or the emotional scenes around them. There were four couples from steerage on the lower quarterdeck, one with a little girl and another with a baby and an older infant. One of the wives seemed especially young – she was slight and reminded me of my sister. Most of their fellow emigrants will be joining us at Portsmouth. Family on shore waved back, hugged each other, and called out blessings. All were aware that even if we do arrive safely at our destination, we may still never see each other again this side of Heaven.

I thought of my family – dear Ann, whom I miss terribly, and Grandmama with her books. Mama and my aunts and uncle, whose lives revolved around Papa and his whims. I remembered him scattering pennies to the children in Pately Bridge, and laughing as they scrambled. My brother

Will escaped to make his own destiny, and so must I. Somewhere out on the vast ocean ahead of me waits my beloved George. God willing, we will meet again in New Zealand, on the other side of the world.

Thursday 19th

Captain Thomson and his men came aboard tonight around 7pm and announced that we would depart for Portsmouth in the morning. There we will take on board the rest of the steerage passengers and provisions for the voyage. For two days we have been anchored off Gravesend, waiting for clearance by customs, which has given the cabin passengers a chance to get to know each other. Although the weather has been changeable during the daytime, we have enjoyed the moonlit evenings exchanging stories on the Quarter Deck.

I have been billeted with the other single women travelling steerage, two decks down. Our quarters are at the rear of the ship. The single men are housed at the front, and the married couples in between. On the next level up are the rooms with windows – the state rooms and cabins for first class and intermediate paying passengers, the Officers' and Surgeon's quarters, and the infirmary. I already envy them the sunlight and fresh air.

So far there are only three other females in steerage with me – Catherine 'Kitty' Connor, a young Irish woman who is servant to the Surgeon, Dr Healy; Emma Clarke from Staffordshire, who is my age; and an older lady, Barbara Hunter, who is 'servant' to her late husband's brother, which I take to mean she is travelling for free on the Company purse while Mr and Mrs Hunter and children pay for intermediate cabins.

The resinous smell of fresh timber and sawdust fills the air – the ship has just been fitted out for this voyage with new cabins, beds, bunks, bulkheads, sick room, mess tables and two water closets, one either side of the main stairs. The emigrant quarters are divided down the middle by long fixed mess tables, at which we are to take communal meals, with wooden benches and shelves

above. On either side are two rows of bunks, like stacked grocer's crates, six feet deep and eighteen inches wide. In these we must sleep with either our heads or our feet pointing towards the mess table. Kitty and I have chosen the two bottom bunks side by side, nearest the door. Barbara and Emma have done the same on the opposite side. It was hard to decide the least awful prospect – the lack of decorum involved in climbing backwards out of a top bunk and dangling our legs in the air with nether regions exposed, or the risk of being in a lower bunk underneath someone suffering seasickness or worse. Decorum won in the end. There is no space to sit up, and no privacy. I am already planning the curtain I will sew for the entrance with the spare fabric I brought for piece work.

Our trunks and any large items are stored in the hold. All we have are canvas bags in which our voyage clothes and washing necessities are stored. My gowns are plain, of sturdy cotton in navy and brown, and will still probably be ruined by the time we arrive at our destination. As required, we have brought our own bed linen, blankets and coverlets to put on the mattresses and bolsters supplied, and our own eating utensils. There are nails hammered into the walls and the bunk uprights for hanging items, and covered wooden buckets as chamberpots.

Soon after we boarded we were informed of the rules aboard ship: up at 6am, lights out at half-past 10. The steerage passengers are responsible for preparing their own meals in groups of six, with the provisions collected daily from the galley. The cabin passengers dine in the cuddy, a room beneath the raised poop deck at the rear of the *Duke*. They will have two sittings for every meal – the first to consist of single ladies and gentlemen and children, the second for married couples. This seems strange, to separate the children from their parents and expect the single ladies and gentlemen to supervise, however it has been the cause of a stroke of great fortune for me. The aforementioned Hunter family have ten children, among them four girls aged between fourteen and nineteen. This afternoon Mrs Pierce sent for me and introduced me to Mrs Hunter. It seems she had heard I had

applied as a governess and wanted to know if I could act in that capacity on the voyage, if the Pierces could spare me. Mrs Pierce allowed that she could.

Mrs Hunter explained. “My sister-in-law is a little overwhelmed keeping the children entertained in these confined conditions. I’m conscious that the older girls are at an impressionable age to be dining with five single gentlemen, without adequate supervision. Poor Barbara only has one set of eyes.”

I was glad to accept, not only for the extra wages but also for the opportunities it would afford – more time up in the fresh air, a chance to mix with people from my social class, and better rations. My duties for the Hunters will include helping the younger children with their lessons, and chaperoning the older girls at meal times and on deck. After breakfast I will help Mrs Pierce dress, and when I am not being a governess, I will clean and tidy the Pierce’s cabin and do their washing and mending. This will put me in a strange social position, straddling the line between cabin and steerage, gentlefolk and commoner. Perhaps neither side will accept me as an equal.

I went with Mrs Hunter to their cabin to meet her brood. She does bustle like a clucky round hen. The eldest child is Jessie, 19, George 18, then four more daughters – Margaret, Helen (named after her mother), Isabella and Frances, followed by two more boys, David and William, then Catherine and lastly Robert, 6. No wonder Barbara is exhausted.

The cabin are furnished with the passengers’ own furniture. The Hunter family have even brought their piano!

At supper, Mrs Hunter introduced me to the first table as their new governess. Nearly all were friendly and made me feel welcome, especially Mr Greenwood, who is also from Yorkshire and looks to be about the same age as my George. There was one couple who ignored me completely, Mr and Mrs Gomm. Why they are not dining with the other married couples, I have yet to discover.

Friday 20th

We sailed from Gravesend at about 6am, the morning clear and fine with only a slight breeze. By noon the weather had turned blustery, and with the rocking this caused, some of the Hunter children began to complain of feeling ill. Fortunately we anchored in the afternoon and the sea was quite calm. We saw a ship in the early evening, the *Abel Gowan* coming from Sydney, and there was cheering at the notion that she has almost completed the voyage which we have just begun.

Mrs Hunter tells me that some of the gentlemen are unhappy that the Captain and his officers are not dining with them, and have decided to appoint a committee to convey their disappointment to Captain Thomson. They are planning to make regulations concerning meals, appoint chairmen, and generally take charge of our little society. Idle hands are the Devil's work, Aunt Judith says.

Saturday 21st

Under weigh again at 9am in a strong breeze. As the day wore on, more and more passengers began to feel ill, so by evening as we left the Downs and passed Dover, most of the emigrants were suffering from seasickness. Mr Lyon, a Scottish gentleman, had advised at breakfast that the best way to stave off the *mal de mer* is to keep one's eyes fixed on a steady point on land. This would be easier to do if the heavy rain weren't making it impossible to be on deck. By the time I retired to bed, the rocking motion of the ship had increased to the point where it was difficult to write, and I was beginning to feel very queasy indeed.

Sunday 22nd

I think I'm going to die. It might be preferable to feeling as ill as I do now.

Monday 23rd

We all briefly felt better this morning, which dawned fine and still. The children were enjoying the release from the confinement of the cabin, playing chase around the masts and hen coops, climbing in the rigging, and making all the adults laugh with their antics, when young Francis Healy, son of the ship's Surgeon, slipped from the ropes and fell heavily to the deck with an audible crack. His piercing screams were awful to hear. White of face, his father examined him and discovered Francis had broken his thigh-bone. It cast a sombre mood over the passengers, so serious an injury this early in the voyage. Dr Healy and his assistant Mr Bryant have set the bone. Kitty says with rest it should heal cleanly.

Friday 27th

We have finally reached Portsmouth after six days of contrary winds and rough weather, including a gale which carried off our top gallant main mast head in the middle of the night. The sailors are like cats in the way they keep their feet as the ship is tossed about by the waves. At a call from the lookout, the Bosun blows his whistle, Captain Thomson gives his orders, and the sailors spring into action in the rigging to reduce sail. They have a chant which they sing in time with hauling on the ropes. One will start and they all join in –

“Haul a bowling, the Duke's a-rolling, haul a bowling, a bowling haul”

repeated in variations, with an emphasis as they all pull together on the same word.

Despite the weather, the sailors are hard at work at daybreak every morning, sprinkling the decks with powdered lime as per the Surgeon's orders to limit the spread of disease, and scrubbing them clean.

The cabin passengers have drawn up a letter of protest about the quality of the potatoes, biscuits and brown sugar, which they plan to send to the Directors of the New Zealand Land Company in London as soon as we get ashore.

Monday 1st October

Captain Aron, one of the Company Directors, came aboard and examined the goods in question. He agreed with the Captain to take on a fresh supply of superior quality potatoes, white lump sugar and best biscuits for the sake of the ladies and children. The steerage passengers will of course make do with the inferior goods.

Some of the women resent what they see as my preferential treatment, dining on better rations with the cabin passengers, and being allowed on the poop deck to supervise my young charges. It doesn't bother them so much that Barbara enjoys the same, because she is clearly family. Fortunately it doesn't seem to upset Kitty. She is also educated, although her family are poor. She says the Irish believe in education for all children, and is planning to organise school lessons for all the steerage children, she says, "to keep them out of mischief and give their poor mothers a break."

Tuesday 2nd

My legs felt quite strange when I went ashore today, as if they wanted to wobble about and go different ways. It seemed as if the streets were rolling like the sea. I had prepared a small packet of letters for my family. I know they must have been worried about me all this time, but until now I couldn't risk giving away my location. The hardest one to write had been Ann's, because I knew she would be the most upset at the thought of my being so far away, so I kept it short and to the point.

Aboard the Duke of Roxburgh, Portsmouth

2nd October 1839

My dearest Ann,

I hope that you will forgive me for my long silence. I could not risk our father finding me and ruining my future happiness. George and I did not go to Gretna Green, as I told Papa, but to London where we have been living

separately as we are not yet married. This next will come as a shock to you, and for that I'm sorry – we have decided to emigrate to New Zealand. It is the only way I can be sure that I can marry for love, without Papa interfering. George left on the Cuba 2 months ago as a member of the survey team, and I am travelling on the Duke of Roxburgh as governess to the Hunters, a respectable Scottish family. We sail from Portsmouth tomorrow. I will write to you as soon as we arrive at our destination, so that you may know where to write back with all the news from home.

Your most affectionate sister,

Mary Jane

Saturday 5th

We have been in Portsmouth more than a week, taking on upwards of one hundred steerage passengers and all their luggage. All was noise and confusion as farewells were said with loved ones, tears were shed, sailors shouted instructions, luggage was stowed, cattle, sheep and horses lowered into the hold. Mr Hunter's mare Temperance screamed and kicked, and the sailors stayed well clear of her flying hooves, whereas his Jersey cow Daisy stayed perfectly calm, chewing her cud throughout with stolid indifference. Crates of hens arrived and feathers flew as the three coops on deck were filled and pecking order established.

Quite a few emigrants arrived at the docks with nothing more than a cloth sack containing their worldly goods, others with only the clothes they stood up in. A group associated with the Company, the British Ladies' Female Emigrant Society, have organised charitable collections to supply these poor folk with whatever they are lacking before they board. The steerage quarters are now full – there are babies crying, children running everywhere, exhausted women trying to control them. We have families split apart for the first time ever – anyone over 16 is assigned to the

appropriate quarters, boys in with the single men, girls with the unmarried women. Some of the girls cried themselves to sleep the first few nights; others seemed to relish the freedom of being away from their younger siblings.

Our departure was delayed an extra two days by poor weather – every moment I was anxious in case my father should appear, although I knew it to be impossible. We finally got back under weigh at 8am this morning. I fancy the poor old *Duke* rides a little lower in the water than she did a week ago! As the rays of the setting sun touched Lands End, many of the new passengers were sick beyond caring that they were seeing perhaps their last view of England. Mrs Healy is very poorly as well, and declares she wishes herself back home in her native land, seated by the fireside. However Dr Healy sang a song of farewell on deck, ‘As Slow Our Ship’, and the eldest Miss Hunter, Jessie, sang ‘Who Will Sing Our Songs To Me’, and ‘Home Our Home’ in a sweet, pure soprano.

Sunday 6th

We had our first church service at sea. At 10am the passengers began to assemble, the cabin passengers on the poop deck and the free emigrants by the capstan. There was much discussion over the form the worship should take, as there are several different denominations on board. Mr Greenwood said that it is customary for the ship’s Surgeon to act as Chaplain aboard ship, however Dr Healy is a Roman Catholic and declared that his beliefs would not permit him to perform the service of the Church of England.

We all stood about for an hour before it was unanimously agreed that a mixed form could be used. Mr Pierce read the 100th Psalm. After that we sang a hymn, then Mr Prouse, a free emigrant, led us in Psalm 106 and read Chapter 26 of Luke from the *New Testament*. One of Rev. Hale’s sermons was shared, another hymn was sung, and we closed with one of Nester’s Psalms. It was

lovely to hear voices united in song, rather than raised in discord, as we moved gently through smooth seas.

The second service, after dinner, did not go as smoothly. Mr Farrar, a foppish man of the Church of England persuasion, objected to any other kind of service being performed. Several others supported his opinion, so that the argument went on for half an hour or so. Finally it ended when he went off to his cabin and we were able to resume worship. The matter didn't end there, however, as the debate resumed in the evening and high words were exchanged. Two of the gentlemen were on the point of writing out challenges to fight duels with two other gentlemen, but wiser heads prevailed and they were reconciled before retiring to bed.

Monday 7th

The weather was quite calm today for a change. I felt a great deal better after breakfast and was able to go up and enjoy the sunshine on deck with some of the Hunter children. There was hardly any breeze and the ship was moving smoothly through water which makes my fingers long for the Pthalo Turquoise in my paint box. We are somewhere in the Bay of Biscay, off the coast of France.

Around 10am, there was excitement among the passengers when a group of large fish appeared and began to leap and dive playfully alongside the ship. They are the most charming creatures. Sleek and streamlined, with identical patterns of dark grey on the back, cream on the chest, and light tan on each flank. Their long snouts or beaks seem to be smiling as they cavort. George Hunter Junior tells me they are called porpoises, and they are air-breathing mammals. He is the eldest son, and at 18 seems keen to be thought of as an equal with the other adults. He looks set to idolise Mr Greenwood.

Before long some of the gentlemen decided it would be great sport to have a shooting competition, and fired many times at the porpoises with both rifles and fowling pieces. Thankfully none of the shots seemed to have any effect.

Tuesday 8th

The first table eats breakfast at 7 o'clock, dinner at 1pm and tea at 7pm. The second table dines an hour after the first. We have fresh meat, preserved meat and pea soup twice a week each, unless the weather is too rough for soup. Preserved meat is what we in Yorkshire would call stew; meat cooked with carrots and other vegetables until soft. It is then stored in tins, and tastes quite as good as if it had been cooked the day before. Our allowance of one pound of raisins each per week is usually received in the form of rice or flour puddings. We have a daily ration of water, wine and porter with meals, also brandy for the gentlemen, and unlimited quantities of tea and coffee, butter and biscuits.

Saturday 12th

The last few days we have had nothing but heavy rolling seas so that most of my time and attention was focussed on staying on my feet. It has been most amusing at mealtimes to watch as one and then another passenger attempts to keep the food on the plate, the plate on the table, and themselves on the chair as everything rolls with the motions of the ship. Chairs, dishes, puddings, meat, back and forth from one part of the cuddy to another, or from one end of the table to the other. Cups and glasses rolling about, tea and wine spilling everywhere. To see one person trying to save a pudding, another a wine bottle and a third a cup of tea, all the while trying to balance themselves as well, and then all going over together in a laughing heap – all but the Gomms, who take themselves far too seriously – I have never seen anything so funny in my life.

Sunday 13th

Today we had Sunday service with no opposition. Mr Hunter led the worship, starting with the morning hymn from the English prayer book, confession and thanksgiving from the same, followed by a sermon from the *Scottish Christian Herald*.

I take the opportunity to write wherever and whenever I can: on deck in the sunshine, while the other ladies are sewing, knitting or embroidering; at the communal table in our quarters after supper; even during lessons, when the children are engaged in repetitive tasks like practicing their letters. It keeps my hands busy. Holding a pen is not so different from holding a paintbrush, and my fingers miss the sable-tipped instruments which made my drawings sing with colour. Words are a poor substitute, but they are all I have until I can unpack my trunk at our destination.

I am not alone in this. Many on board are keeping a diary of the voyage to send back to their families, or for their own amusement. I often see Mr Greenwood and Mr Lyon scribbling away in the cuddy after meals. Some of the other women in steerage are literate, like Kitty and Barbara Hunter, and write in a journal as I do, or compose letters for family back home in the hope that one day they may send them.

Monday 14th

Sometime after midnight our sleep was disturbed by the cries of a woman in travail. I lay awake, muscles tensing with every scream, praying for the safe deliverance of mother and child. It was several hours before we heard her reach the crisis point, and then silence. We waited with breath held. Then we heard it – the lusty crying of a newborn baby. There was spontaneous applause and cheering throughout the steerage deck. Our first *Duke of Roxburgh* baby!

Wednesday 16th

“The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” Mr Farrar read the funeral service as we passed Cape Trista on the northern side of the island of Madeira.

Little Joseph Williams, 13 months, who has been sickly since we came aboard, died in steerage during the night. His father James stood with bent head and bowed shoulders as three older sisters cried loudly with their arms about each other. His mother Katherine pressed her face into the neck of his twin Benjamin, who looked bewildered as she held him tight. The younger siblings held the hands of the eldest brother. The small, canvas-shrouded figure balanced on the stern rail was a stark contrast against the ultramarine of the sea and the vastness of the rugged headland beyond. The sailors tilted the board and the weighted body slid over the edge.

“We therefore commit his body to the deep...”

Thursday 17th

The Gomms are not pleasant to be around. He is a former Lieutenant in the 67th Regiment and seems always irritated or angry, and constantly rude. She appears to think herself far superior to the other ladies. They are both not yet thirty – I would guess that she is only a year or two older than me. Their trifling annoyances have not seemed worth putting to paper, but today matters came to a head. Captain Thomson told him to stop annoying the other passengers, and if he had any complaints to bring them to him instead. Well! Mr Gomm unleashed a torrent of abuse on Capt. T which lasted for some time, and ended with ordering the Captain not to speak to him again as he would not hear anything further. The passengers stood open-mouthed while the Captain turned an interesting shade of Rose Madder.

It has been suggested that the Captain might put the Gomms ashore when we reach St Jago in the Cape Verde Islands, and let the British Consul there deal with them.

According to Mrs Hunter, “The Consul would be obliged to send them back to England and come after the New Zealand Land Company for the expense, who would then pursue the Gommms for the cost.”

However at length Mr Gomm came to his senses and apologised, so I hope we will now be free from further upsets.

Friday 18th

Yesterday a shark followed the ship all day in a sinuous glide. The sailors see it as a bad omen, and try to catch it so that they may kill it, but without success.

Before lunch we came in view of Palma, one of the Canary Islands. As the wind was quite light we were in sight of it all day, and a strange appearance it presented, rising like a pyramid above rugged rock hillsides. Mr Greenwood said that it is some 4000’ above sea level, and of volcanic origin.

I’m not sure I have enough colours in my paintbox to capture the beautiful appearance of the peak rising through golden clouds touched by the setting sun. A school of porpoises played in the azure water, which shaded from indigo to purple as the sky deepened and the first star appeared.

Saturday 19th

The wind was so light that we seemed nearly becalmed, and it took all day to pass the Canary Islands. Mr Greenwood told me their names – Hierro, Gomera, and the famous peak of Tenerife – the top just visible above the clouds although it was 80-100 miles distant. We are some way off the coast of southern Morocco.

After dinner the gentlemen held a moonlit meeting on the poop deck to make important decisions regarding the running of the committee. After much discussion over brandies they decided that each person should have their turn at being chairman on a rotating basis, with the office

changing daily. Further it was agreed that all disputes arising between any passengers should be submitted to the decision of the Committee, and that we should have one religious service every Sunday, similar to last Sunday's. Their self-congratulatory speeches carried easily to the quarterdeck, where Kitty and I were trying to enjoy the cool night air.

They are all cut from the same cloth as my father – men who think they rule the world, who think they have the right to tell us who we can marry and how we should live our lives.

Sunday 20th

This morning's Divine service was given by Mr Hunter, and the sermon read by Mr Pierce. The thermometer shows 74°F. The instrument hangs in the shade of the cuddy, so on a sunny day like this it is often 10-15° higher in the cabins than the thermometer reads. The emigrant quarters are even worse, and stuffy to boot. The breeze on deck is very welcome.

In the evening we sang under a haloed moon which washed us all to shades of grey. I wonder what George is doing now – is he also dreaming romantic dreams in the moonlight?

Tuesday 22nd

Yesterday we saw many groups of porpoises. They seem more numerous here, and greater in variety of colour than their French cousins. Some are nearly solid grey, others have white or pinkish undersides, and another kind have light grey patterns on their flanks, in stripes or spots.

While on deck I noticed a disturbance of the sea some distance away, which appeared to be travelling towards us. As it got closer, it resolved into hundreds of narrow, silvery fish leaping from the water and travelling through the air for many yards at a time, fins outstretched like the wings of birds, before submerging again. I could see that they were pursued by large and colourful predatory fish. Some that flew too high were plucked from the air by frigatebirds, with long sharp beaks that matched their pointed sooty wings and their narrow forked tails. Others thudded into the side of the

ship and fell senseless into the sea, to be swiftly devoured. One of the sailors laughed at my astonishment. “Flying fish, Miss. Very common in the tropics, they is.”

It is true – today we crossed the Tropic of Cancer and entered the Tropics!

Wednesday 23rd

The thermometer was reading 77, which in Yorkshire would be a warm summer’s day, however the foggy, cloudy weather makes it seem so much hotter. My chemise was sticking to my ribs, and my petticoats were clinging. A shower of cool rain would have been most welcome.

Many passengers were on deck enjoying the fresh breeze, and watching the flocks of flying fish which surround the ship. Suddenly a darker cloud appeared to the east, and seemed to be moving swiftly towards us. I thought my prayer for rain had been answered, but when the first pattering came on deck it was not drops of water but large ugly insects. Soon every surface of the ship was crawling with them. In appearance they were like common English field grasshoppers, only yellow with wings speckled brown, and as long as my thumb. The ladies screamed as they got caught in their hair, the boys picked them up and teased the girls. As fast as the sailors swept them out of the scuppers, more fell to take their place.

Mr Greenwood seemed delighted. “A rain of locusts from the coast of Africa 300 miles away!”

Thursday 24th

We saw a vessel some way off. It is not often that we see another ship, so the gentlemen spent some time passing the spyglass and commenting upon her. In the end they agreed she was Dutch, by her colours.

No-one knows why or how, but sometime this evening Mr Montieth's expensive Italian iron was taken from the steerage emigrants' fire and apparently thrown overboard. I suspect it had something to do with the Gomms. All the trouble seems to come from them.

Friday 25th

Today we passed Santa Antao, the northernmost of the Cape Verdes Islands. There was disappointingly little to be seen due to the fog.

Kitty and I brush and plait each other's hair before bed each night, as Ann and I used to. One hundred strokes from scalp to ends. Kitty's hair is a beautiful colour, coppery gold in the lamplight. It feels like silk as I slide my fingers through it, gathering the crackling strands into three thick sections and weaving them together, fingers flexing over and under the hanks in a nimble dance that requires no thinking. I can let my mind drift back to the window seat in my room, sitting by the open casement with Ann, while the scent of lilacs drifted in on the summer air and the swallows settled their babies for the night in the eaves. Or seated cross-legged on the floor before a cheerful winter fire, dreaming pictures in the flames while the brush smoothed its way down my back, listening to Ann count the strokes under her breath, just as Kitty does.

Saturday 26th

Hot. It is so hot. 82° at 6am. The wind dropped and we were nearly becalmed all day off the island of Brava. Much of the coastline is dark and rocky, with dramatic hillsides stippled with many hues of green. The surrounding water shades from dark to palest Manganese Blue. A shark played around the stern attended by several pilot fish. Some desultory attempts were made to catch it, but it was too hot to make much effort. Several of the gentlemen got quite burnt on the backs of their necks while trying, and will have to spend the next few days with their blistered skin dressed with oil and cotton.

Saw the largest island of St Jago in the distance in the late afternoon.

Sunday 27th

A stiff breeze came up last evening and we are now making 7 or 8 knots. Mr Hunter performed Divine service, reading from the *Scottish Christian Herald*.

Capt T has decided to leave off dining in the cuddy with the passengers, and is grumbling at everyone. Perhaps he is tired of hearing complaints against the Gomms, and regrets not putting them ashore when he had the chance.

Monday 28th

We were at tea this evening when the wind began to pick up. Flashes of light appeared in the portholes, followed by a distant rumble of thunder. "Eight miles," announced Master David, who had been counting under his breath. As the storm came nearer, the time between the lightning and the sound grew shorter and shorter. Suddenly a tremendous crack overhead made us all jump and bright light flared in the glass of the deck prism above the table. I could smell a strange metallic scent. Little Elizabeth Monteith burst into tears, and that set the other little ones off. George Hunter and Mr Lyon did their best to settle the table with reassurances about our likely safety. There were several more strikes about the ship before the storm moved off. There is nothing quite like a thunderstorm in the middle of the ocean to make you acutely aware that the only thing separating you from the sea is a floating structure made entirely of flammable timber.

Sunday 3rd November

Weather in the tropics seems to be characterised by light or non-existent airs during the day, followed by gusty winds and heavy showers of rain overnight. This has been the pattern all week since the thunderstorm. Most days we see schools of porpoises, bonito and dolphins. On Wednesday

the sailors caught a shark, which Mr Lyon declared will be 'good eating'. On Friday the sailors had a day of military exercise – much running about and shouting, and firing the small cannons, which made the whole ship move sideways. It was exciting, but also very loud.

Mr Jackson performed the service. In the evening we saw many bright falling stars.

Monday 4th

A fine, breezy day. Mr Lyon has taken to reading in the main top; I imagine it must be peaceful away from all the gossip and noise of the other passengers. The ladies must content themselves with the deck. The Captain seems angry about something to do with Mr Farrar, and abuses the passengers. With the dark of the moon approaching, we enjoy star-gazing on deck in the evenings. There seem to be an unusually high number of shooting stars, and tonight a large bright meteor left a fiery path trailing across the night sky.

Thursday 7th

The night skies have continued brilliant all week. It makes me wish George were here, when I see the married couples enjoying the heavenly show, the man's arm around the woman's waist, her head resting on his shoulder. I hope that one day we may do the same.

Saturday 9th

We lost another child last night in steerage. Mr Farrar conducted the funeral service at 9am. Katherine Williams comforted the grieving mother, who wept on her shoulder. I could picture Mama when I was eight, crying for baby John, being helped back to bed by Aunt Judith and Aunt Anne after the funeral.

This afternoon the sailors managed to harpoon one of the many porpoises that surround the ship. It was a large specimen, fully 8' long, with smooth skin that looked like polished stone. In the

evenings we have been watching them playing in the phosphorescent seas, their glowing outlines streaming cold blue flames in their wake. They are such magical creatures. I hated to see it struggling on deck with the weapon embedded in its bleeding side, and went below before they began to butcher it.

After tea we heard angry shouting coming from the ship's galley. It turned out to be a drunken fight between Tucker the cook and a sailor called Welsh Bob. The cook stabbed his tormenter into the sailor's shoulder, so Welsh Bob drew his knife and was set to inflict some serious injury on Tucker, but first mate Mr Lesley stepped in and put an end to the fight. All the sailors are now angry at the cook.

Sunday 10th

Divine service was performed by Mr Jackson. A heavy shower of rain forced us to break off worship and take shelter in the cuddy. It was crowded and uncomfortable with so many standing close and steaming in the confined space, and although I normally avoid them, I found myself standing next to the Gomms. He began to make rude faces and insulting remarks to me. I didn't know what to say or where to look. Then he began to abuse Mr Hunter in the most base and blackguardly fashion for giving him reproofing looks. To repeat the whole affair would fill my poor journal with language that a lady would not put to paper. I thought of my brother William, who is much the same age as Mr Gomm, and pray that he is not learning the same vile kind of behaviour in the militia in India.

Mr Gomm was also rude to Mrs Hunter yesterday, she said, and her husband complained about it to the Captain who as usual paid little attention.

Mrs Hunter went on. "So then my husband wrote a letter to the Captain demanding protection from the insults of Mr Gomm, and this seemed to bring the Captain to his senses a little. He and the Surgeon gave Mr Gomm a stern talking-to."

Judging from today's outburst it seems to have had little beneficial effect.

Kitty says that Mr Farrar had some sort of fit last evening up on deck. She thinks he might have the falling sickness. I did wonder why a well-off bachelor of 35 was not married. Now it occurs to me that Mr Farrar might be in want of a wife, but he has not been able to find one who could accept his failings.

Monday 11th

During the night we crossed the Equator. I was looking forward to some rituals to mark the occasion, but there were none. The sailors all went about their morning tasks with frowns and surly looks. I asked Mr Hunter if he knew what was wrong, and he said they were unhappy because the Neptune ceremonies were dispensed with by prior arrangement with the Company. I knew from Will's letters that anyone on board who had not previously crossed the Equator was required to give up wine for four days, or submit to being dunked three times in the ocean. Those who had already crossed were exempt, and one of their number would be chosen to play Neptune, another Neptune's wife Amphitrite, and the rest would administer the initiation of the 'landlubbers' into the Order of Neptune. I thought it sounded quite fun. Mr Hunter said it was superstitious nonsense and dangerous besides.

While I agree that it would have been inappropriate for the women and children, I'm sure that it is not just the sailors aboard who would like to see Mr Gomm get a good dunking.

Wednesday 13th

Many of us stayed up late on deck as Mr Lyon said it was likely to be the best night yet for falling stars, but unfortunately we only saw a few north of the Pleiades.

Saturday 16th

The squabbles with Mr Gomm have been increasing all week. He continually needles Mr Farrar about his affliction. Capt T said the first man to strike a blow will be clapped in irons. At dinner today, Mr Gomm was dissatisfied with how quickly he was being served and called the Captain to the cuddy to complain. The row quickly became heated, with other passengers chiming in. Without warning, Mr Gomm seized the Surgeon's nephew by the shirtfront and shoved him into a post. John cried out and covered his nose, bright blood leaking from under his fingers. I didn't have enough hands to cover my young charges ears and eyes, which were wide and fearful. The Captain and Mr Greenwood pulled Mr Gomm away before any more harm was done, but no arrest was made, despite heated appeals from the other passengers. Mr Lesley told us later that the Captain doesn't have the power to put any of them in irons.

The gentlemen have arranged a meeting this evening with the Captain to discuss their concerns about the Gomms' behaviour, particularly after today's outburst in full view of young ladies and children. Mr Greenwood says the men are determined to write a letter of complaint to the Captain, demanding protection from Mr Gomm and desiring that he and his wife be put ashore at the next convenient port.

Sunday 17th

This is getting absurd. Today Mr Gomm came out of his cabin and found John Healy innocently standing on the steps opposite. He insisted that this was done to insult him, and called on the Captain to witness it. The Captain heaped abuse on poor young John, who already has two blackened eyes and a swollen nose after yesterday's assault, but later apologised to him.

At least some good has come of it. The Gomms are now taking meals in their own cabin, at the Captain's insistence, or so he says.

Monday 18th

The letter of protest, drawn up by Mr Greenwood and signed by all the cabin passengers, was given by Mr Lyon to Dr Healy, who passed it on to Captain Thomson. It included an official request to put in to the Cape of Good Hope and land the Gomm's there.

Tuesday 19th

Capt T had Dr Healy tell the cabin passengers that in answer to their protest, everything in his power had been done to keep the peace, but he had no authority to put into any port. There was much muttering at the part about keeping the peace, which he has signally failed to do. He went on to suggest that if the cabin passengers were to guarantee to pay the expense of 300 pounds, he would make port at Cape Town.

The cabin passengers are very unhappy at this and have answered only that they would consider the matter. Meanwhile Mr Gomm continues to be rude at every opportunity. Mrs Gomm retaliated by lodging a complaint against Mr Lyon. Feelings against them both is now very strong.

It was a beautiful moonlit evening. We all tried to dispel our unease with dancing on the quarterdeck, which always lifts the spirits, and for the less energetic there was whist, chess, backgammon and such from the library.

Thursday 21st

We celebrated Mr Pierce's birthday with singing on deck. It made me wonder what my birthday might have been like if I was still at Braisty Woods. Receiving gifts from Ann, and my mother and father. New watercolours, ribbons and perhaps a dress. Jellies and trifle and light-as-air cakes and all such things that can't be had aboard ship.

Saturday 23rd

A week confined together does not seem to have done the Gomms much good. While I was giving the children lessons, we heard Mr and Mrs Gomm shouting and screaming at each other. There was a brief repose, and it started again. This happened several times, and then in the midst of one argument I happened to glance out of the Hunter's window and saw a white petticoat sail past in the wind. Mrs Hunter, Jessie and I crowded our heads together in the opening to see. From the Gomm's cabin window there issued dresses, chemises, stockings and bonnets, flying through the air like colourful petals and landing limp in the sea. Mrs Gomm's voice rose to a pitch of shrieking, saying stop it, no, no, and then suddenly was cut off with a choking scream.

"George," snapped Mrs Hunter, "fetch the officers." I had never heard her so concise. He ran out and we could hear him shouting for the Captain and Dr Healy. Thudding feet on the stairs and a pounding on the Gomm's cabin door signalled their intervention.

George Hunter came back into the cabin flushed and agitated. "He was strangling her with a napkin!"

Sunday 24th

Mr Jackson performed the Divine Service. Mrs Gomm attended, in a slightly-too-long petticoat and a slightly-too-large jacket. A few of the women had loaned her their spare garments, although they hadn't offered their best. It is surely unChristian to say, but there was some satisfaction in seeing her arrogance so reduced. She wore a scarf around her neck to hide the bruises. One or two of the ladies spoke kindly to her, but for the most part she was ignored. Mr Gomm didn't dare to show his face. In some ways he reminds me of Papa, with his bluster and his shouting, however Papa would never strike a woman.

With all the upheaval yesterday, I forgot to note that we crossed the Tropic of Capricorn around 4pm, and so left the Tropics.

Monday 25th

The stars in the night sky look different here than they do at home. Mr Greenwood has been teaching David Hunter the names of the constellations, and listening to them I learn that the kite-shaped formation beginning to appear in the skies is called the Southern Cross, and that sailors use it to navigate by. A hazy white patch is the Large Magellanic Cloud.

Tuesday 26th

Mr Jackson and his wife Emma have joined us at the first table for meals. Mr Greenwood introduced them to me as they are friends of his – he and Mr Jackson applied for passage together. I got along immediately with Mrs Jackson, who sat next to me. They are also from the West Riding in Yorkshire, so it feels like talking to someone from home. She confided that the late dining schedule for married couples did not agree with Mr Jackson's health, but that the presence of the Gomms had deterred them from making the change sooner.

Wednesday 27th

Clear skies with a fresh breeze today. We are making good speed and it is noticeably cooler. Several of the gentlemen have been spending time in the main top. In the evening Mrs Gomm had to call out several times for her husband to come down, he having ignored the messenger she sent up for him. When he finally descended he strode stiffly up and down the poop deck several times, fists clenched, and he spat on Mr Greenwood and George Hunter as he passed them to go back to his cabin. I begin to wonder if he has some mental affliction.

Saturday 30th

One or two of the cabin passengers asked the Captain if we might have a treat for St Andrew's Day, and he invited all of the ladies and gentlemen to join him for rum punch and singing

in the cuddy. I suspect this was a ploy on his part to find out which passengers are still friendly to him. Mr Greenwood and the Hunter family did not attend, which meant I could not.

Sunday 1st December

Mr Hunter gave the service. The weather continues to cool – the thermometer read 64°.

Tuesday 3rd

This morning Mr Gomm broke wind in front of Mrs Parnell. Her complaint was ignored by the Captain, so her husband took it up with Dr Healy, saying that he and the Captain encouraged Gomm in his bad behaviour. Dr Healy got very angry and called him a “d___ed liar” and then told the Captain. Capt T began to pace back and forth across the poop deck, flushed in the face, saying loudly that the men were not gentlemen at all but “d___ed blackguards” and repeating several times that he only wanted to keep peace. Everyone on deck could hear him.

Later Mr Greenwood said that this only confirmed that the Captain would take Gomm’s side over any other.

Before tea, Mr Gomm was again making fun of Mr Farrar, calling him names and miming falling and shaking. During the meal poor Mr Farrar ate little but drank more than usual, and became quite drunk. Mr Jackson and Mr Lyon had to help him to his cabin.

Wednesday 4th

Mrs Emma Jackson and I are fast becoming friends. She grew up in Bradford, about 25 miles from Braisty Woods. She is only a year or two older than I am, with rich chestnut hair framing an oval face and light blue eyes. I would like to make a portrait of her, the combination is so striking. Mr Farrar’s unusual drinking last night was the main topic of conversation at dinner. He wasn’t feeling well enough to put in an appearance. I feel quite sorry for him.

In the evening Mr and Mrs Gomm came on to the quarterdeck, and began to spread themselves across the available space on both sides, so that other passengers could not get past. It was not clear if they were acting in accord, or trying to stay as far apart from each other as possible. The ladies retreated below for fear Mr Gomm would become abusive.

Thursday 5th

Nearly becalmed all day. One of the gentlemen managed to shoot an albatross. They are such majestic birds, skimming above the waves and soaring with ease on their enormous wings. I wish they would leave them alone. They cannot be eaten, so what is the point of killing them? The men are bored and seek relief from the monotony wherever they can find it, I suppose. I worry they will bring bad luck on us, as Coleridge says.

Mr Gomm took offense to Mr Lyon jumping off the last 2 steps of the ladder, which is nearly opposite the Gomm's cabin, saying he had done it on purpose to wake Mrs Gomm. Mr Lyon went to the Captain to complain about being shouted at by Mr Gomm. Soon the other disgruntled passengers clustered around, adding their voices to the complaints. In the middle of this the man himself appeared and demanded to know what lies "that d___ed Scotsman" was telling about him.

Mr Lyon, who is Lilliputian compared to Mr Gomm, was so insulted that he stepped forward and sprang up on his toes, striking Mr Gomm a heavy blow in the face. Strangely for someone who has oft repeated the threat to break every bone of people who have vexed him, Mr Gomm appeared quite stunned by this and gazed about for a few seconds as if seeking support. He then stepped towards Mr Lyon but the Captain moved between them and Mr Jackson, who is quite tall and solid himself, took a position next to Mr Gomm, ready to restrain him if necessary.

Mistaking this for support, Mr Gomm said to him, "You are an Englishman, stand by," but the Captain said he would not allow any fighting. Mr Gomm then said it was only the Captain that

kept him back, that Mr Lyon's blow was no more than a fleabite but he would take it to his grave, and more insults along the same lines until at last the Captain persuaded him to return to his cabin.

It was fortunate for him that he did, for it was suggested by several of the gentlemen that given the opportunity they would tie him to the mizzen mast, give him a good beating, and then tar and feather him.

About half past 8 o'clock Mr Gomm appeared on deck and loitered near Mr Lyon, holding his arm down by his side as if concealing a weapon. Lyon called to Mr Hight and Mr Farrar who were nearby, and Gomm left. An appeal was again made to the Captain to interfere, and after much discussion it was agreed to let Mr and Mrs Gomm use one side of the poop deck exclusively for their exercise, and all the passengers to use the other, on an alternating weekly basis until the end of the voyage. It seems to me that the Gomms got by far the better part of that bargain.

Friday 6th

Becalmed all day. Another argument began when Mr Jackson and George Hunter Jnr walked on Mr and Mrs Gomm's side of the deck, even though it was by misunderstanding – they mistakenly took the agreement to mean that walking was allowed on any side, but that sitting etc was to be on the side prescribed. The Gomms were not even there. However once they came on deck and discovered the 'intruders', they began to sprawl themselves on the passengers' side in a sort of petty revenge. The male passengers clenched their jaws and fists tight. Captain Thomson ordered all passengers to leave the weather side after 8pm. There will be no singing on deck tonight.

Saturday 7th

It is rumoured the Captain will divert to the Cape, as he is afraid the passengers are becoming mutinous. Mr Lesley has expressed his disapproval of the Captain to Mr Greenwood. The first mate and the Captain are apparently not on good terms. Mr Greenwood tells us he is keeping

minutes of the behaviour of the Captain, the Surgeon and Mr Gomm in a book, in case there is an enquiry into their conduct.

A whale came alongside the ship, at least 40' long, which seemed large alongside the *Duke*, but was only half the size of the skeleton I saw with George. It was medium grey, with bumps like barnacles on the head and fins. Mr Lyon called it a sperm whale. The sailors harpooned another porpoise.

George Hunter Jnr caught an albatross with pork on a string. Once on deck, it seemed to get confused and couldn't fly away, though free to do so, and was easily killed. Laid out on deck its pure white angel's wings spanned 12' from tip to tip. The feathers felt like smooth velvet under my fingertips.

Elizabeth Roberts, wife of one of the Cornish miners, had a baby boy. Both are doing well. Perhaps there is no truth in the superstition.

Sunday 8th

Mr Pierce conducted the Divine service. Becalmed all day. The cabin passengers do little but gossip, so that rumours of diverting to the Cape increase hourly. I so hope that we will continue on as planned. Every day added to our journey is another day away from George.

Monday 9th

Becalmed. We saw many albatross and Cape pigeons all day. The sky was a clear rich blue with thin wisps of cloud up high, mare's tails streaming in a wind couldn't be felt.

Tuesday 10th

The weather changed overnight and we are now enduring a gale and rolling seas. The stunsail tore free and was lost. Some people have the seasickness again.

Wednesday 11th

Royal sail split. Mr Hunter's cow Daisy is off her feed.

Thursday 12th

Stiff winds all day. Poor Daisy died during the night. Lucy Monteith has been relying on the fresh cow's milk since we left Portsmouth, as her mother was so ill with seasickness that she lost her milk, when Lucy was just 6 weeks. Fortunately one of the mothers in steerage has agreed to be a wet nurse. Dr Monteith has arranged with the Surgeon to give her some extra rations from the stores reserved for women who are lying-in.

Mr Hunter is inclined to blame Mr Gomm for the loss of the cow, saying if everyone had not been so distracted by all the nonsense about going into the Cape, more attention would have been paid to the health of his animal.

Sunday 15th

Mr Jackson conducted the service. Petrels, albatross, boobies and Cape hens in great abundance around the ship, now that the wind has fallen. We came on deck after tea just in time to see a school of bottlenose dolphins, the wet slate of their skins rising and falling in gentle arcs as they passed the ship.

Monday 16th

Warm and pleasant today. It is strange to think that they are coming into late autumn back in England. The trees around Braisty Woods will have dropped their richly coloured cloaks, and the farmers will be making bets on whether there will be snow by Christmas Day.

All around the ship, large patches of water have the appearance of sandbanks, which was alarming at first sight. Mr Lyon says it is quantities of floating fish spawn. We saw two ships off in the distance.

All week Captain Thomson has been refusing to disclose the latitude and the longitude to the passengers, in an attempt to keep them in suspense as to whether he is still going to put into the Cape or if we have already passed it. However the gentlemen aren't fooled as they are doing their own calculations and Mr Greenwood thinks they are pretty accurate.

Mr Gomm came up on deck after tea and spat at Mrs Hunter, myself and several of her girls. We got up and moved to a different part of the deck to avoid an argument.

Tuesday 17th

About half an hour after midnight, one of the vessels we saw yesterday came alongside – the *Lenobia*, bound for Calcutta. They are 77 days out from London, having departed from the Downs the same day we did, and left the Cape on the 10th. By a strange twist of fate, their mate is brother to a sailor on the *Duke of Roxburgh*. However Capt T refused to let them speak to each other, no doubt surly that their information confirmed that the Cape was well behind us. When I think of how much I would like to speak to my sister again, even if only for a few minutes, I consider this most cruel.

Kitty relayed the news that one of the Cornish miner's wives, Mrs Elizabeth Tucker, added one more to the ship's company this morning with the delivery of a baby girl.

The gentlemen have arranged that some male passengers should stay near the top of the steps where the ladies like to sit in the evening, so that they could attack Mr Gomm at once if he should spit at the women again. Second mate Mr Gittins overheard and stopped to talk to Mrs Hunter. At first he seemed to doubt her story, but several witnesses confirmed it.

Mrs Hunter can be quite fierce when roused, especially where her children are concerned, declaring, "If he attempts anything of the sort when he comes up again, I will give him the thrashing

he deserves!” It made me feel warm and a little sad at the same time, as if her motherly protection was extended over me as well – my own mother has not been fully herself for so long that I can’t imagine her doing the same.

The second mate went to Mr Gomm’s cabin and told him what had been said, and soon Mrs Gomm came up. After sitting on the poop deck for a few minutes, to gather her nerve I suppose, she approached Mrs Hunter and tried to explain away her husband’s behaviour as a consequence of his asthma causing him to twist his fingers and spit wherever he is.

Mrs Hunter snorted. “There was no mistake, Mrs Gomm. Your husband did indeed spit at me and my daughters. We have already submitted to a number of insults and we are not disposed to submit to them any longer!”

“Mr Gomm has decided not to come up on deck any more, even though it makes him feel quite unwell to remain in his cabin all the time,” said Mrs Gomm plaintively, as if she expected us to feel sorry for him. She was sorely mistaken if that was the case. “He has heard that the other passengers intend to provoke an argument in order to justify giving him a beating.”

Wednesday 18th

We are compelled to head more to the South than necessary, on account of the wind. At dinner Mr Greenwood said that we are already further south than our destination, but that we will need to go three or four degrees further still in order to pass below Van Diemen’s Land, so we can expect it to get much colder. He believes that it would be faster to sail through Bass Strait between Van Diemen’s Land and the Australian mainland, but the Captain is sticking to his course. I think he must be heartily sick of getting told how to do his job by young gentlemen with half his years and none of his experience.

We saw a school of sperm whales passing. One and then another would come to the surface with a great whoosh of spray from a hole on the top of their heads, like a giant nostril. As they turned I could see their pale and furrowed undersides dotted with barnacles.

Friday 20th

Mr Gomm has stayed in his cabin since hearing last Tuesday that the other passengers will hang him for any more insults.

Flocks of small, swallow-shaped white birds follow the ship, although there is no land in sight.

Saturday 21st

Toady is the first day of summer here, and of winter back home. There is a strong breeze blowing from the south-west and Mr Greenwood was right – we have all had to put on extra layers of clothing to keep warm. The thermometer reads 54°. How strange to think the temperature is likely much the same at Braisty Woods today. The log fires will be roaring sparks up the chimneys and Ann will be decorating the family rooms with holly branches and pine boughs. I wonder if George is getting ready to celebrate his first Christmas in New Zealand, and what that would look like. They should be there by now. Christmas in summer – what a strange thought.

Sunday 22nd

Divine service performed by Mr Hunter. The wind fell during the night and the breeze was light. Mr Hight caught another albatross. This time I asked one of the sailors if they were concerned about the bad luck it would bring.

He smiled. “Bad luck, Miss? Nay, Cook soaks them overnight and then makes a sea-pie for the men. Good luck for us.”

“But – what about the Rime of the Ancient Mariner?”

“The rhyme of the what, Miss?” He shook his head, puzzled. “Sorry, don’t know that one.”

At least it was some consolation to know that the killing wasn’t completely senseless, as I’d thought.

In the evening the sea was filled with cylindrical sea creatures which glowed blue in the wake of the ship.

Monday 23rd

Mr Greenwood has been proven right about some of the gentlemen being quite accurate in calculating the latitude and longitude themselves. He explained to me that by getting the correct time from the sun each day at noon, they were able to check how much time their watches had lost each day for the past week, and knowing there are 15 degrees of longitude to an hour of time...I confess I do not really understand the calculation, but he seemed very pleased with himself. When the Captain was informed of the circumstance, he was anxious to see if they were anywhere near correct and checked his own calculations against the ship’s chronometer. He was most surprised to find that the gentlemen were correct on the degree of longitude to within a few minutes. The latitude is of little import, Mr Greenwood says, as we are as far south as we need to go, except when we go around Van Diemen’s Land.

Tuesday 24th

Slightly showery. The single gentlemen arranged to celebrate Christmas Eve in the evening after the Captain had finished his solitary tea in the cuddy. Mr and Mrs Hunter were invited from the second table, and their children. All the ladies and gentlemen dressed up in their finest; I felt like a drab peahen beside their peacock silks.

Before we assembled, Mr Jackson had arranged to give the cook a bottle of brandy in exchange for warming us some water. He had to go two or three times to collect it before it was finally ready. The warm water was mixed with wine in pitchers and glasses were handed around. Before long, the steward brought two tureens of candied almonds and two bottles of port wine, calling it a small present for the children. One of the bottles of port was mixed with warm water and handed around among the children; when it was finished they all went to bed.

A discussion began about whether the cabin passengers should have partaken of the almonds and the wine from the steward, as they had vowed not to accept any special favours from Captain Thomson. In the end it was agreed that they should substitute one of their own bottles for the one that had been opened, and that both should be left on the table untouched.

Soon after midnight the Captain, who had been drinking in the Surgeon's cabin with the Healys and a few others, came into the cuddy and out of courtesy he was invited to have a drink with us, but he declined.

Wednesday 25th

Christmas Day got off to a bad start. In the small hours of the morning the Surgeon was woken by someone banging on his door, who turned out to be the cook needing the doctor's services. At breakfast, Emma told me that the cook and another sailor called Scottish Jack had got drunk on the brandy and an argument had broken out. Scottish Jack stabbed the cook in the forehead with the tormenter, in revenge for the cook having injured Welsh Bob in a similar fashion weeks ago. Apparently the sailors have been nursing a grudge against the cook and the steward since that time, and resent what they see as their preferential treatment by the Captain and his officers with regard to food and alcohol. Every Captain knows, if you want a happy ship, don't upset the Cook.

When the Captain heard about the incident, he asked where the brandy had come from, and of course he now blames the first table passengers for the entire affair.

It didn't end there, however. Soon after 8pm, two sailors by the name of Thomson and McCullough went down to the galley and began to threaten the cook and the steward. Alarmed, the steward sent the ship's boy to fetch the first mate, but every time Mr Lesley got to the galley the sailors had vanished away. They even beat the boy for telling tales. Without proof, the Captain and Mr Lesley were inclined to make light of the threats, but the steward was so afraid for his safety that he went to borrow a pair of pistols from Mr Hight, one of the cabin passengers, which Mr Hight at first declined.

However while the steward was absent, the cook was again visited by McCullough making threats, and this time Mr Lesley was able to catch him in the act and order him away. After some hesitation he left and went up and loitered on deck.

"What are you doing, McCullough?" asked Mr Lesley sharply.

"Waiting for the cook to come up on deck," McCullough declared, "for I'll have the blood of that d__ed black nigger even if I hang for it!"

From the cuddy we could hear the shouting so Mr Hight went up to see what was happening.

Thompson joined McCullough, and stepping close to Mr Lesley said menacingly, "If you intend to defend the cook then we will take you and the cook both and work the ship with you."

On hearing this, Mr Hight went and loaded his pistols and left them behind a trunk for the steward. Mrs Gomm, having seen Mr Hight loading the pistols and giving them to the steward, or so she claimed, went and told Mr Lesley. He retrieved the pistols from the steward and put them in his own cabin for safe-keeping. During all of this the Captain was in Monteith's cabin drinking with Dr Healy, Farrar and Monteith, apparently unaware of what was going on.

Barbara Hunter and I were putting the children to bed when we overheard Mrs Gomm in the corridor.

“Oh, Mr Lesley, I dare not go to bed, I’m so afraid something evil is intended.”

“It would be as well if those people minded their own business,” called out Mr Hight.

“I’m not mentioning any names,” replied Mrs Gomm.

The slam as Mr Gomm opened his cabin door made us jump. “If you come out here, Hight, I’ll break every bone in your d___ed skin”.

“I will,” Mr Hight answered.

I opened our cabin door a crack and peeked out in time to see him run into the passage with his fists clenched.

Mr Gomm stepped back sharply into his cabin. Mrs Gomm picked up a chair and stood in the doorway with it to prevent Mr Hight from entering the cabin or striking her husband. With hindsight it was quite funny to see this fluttery goose defending her former soldier with a piece of furniture, but nobody was laughing.

Mr Gomm stepped up behind his wife with a bottle in each hand, and Mr Hight stood in front of her, and they began to shout abuse at each other with her and the chair sandwiched between. Unable to restore peace, Mr Lesley went to fetch the Captain and Mr Healey.

“What is going in here, Mr Hight?” snapped Capt Thomson.

Mr Gomm immediately began to increase his abuse, calling Mr Hight all kinds of names, secure in the belief that he was safe with the Captain watching. Mr Hight made a rush at Mr Gomm and struck at his face. I believe the blow didn’t land, but regardless the Captain immediately flew into a rage and began abusing Mr Hight in the most base manner, calling him a cowardly dog, etc, and following him down the passage as he walked away. I was shocked that he would use such vulgar language within earshot of ladies. He said he had retrieved the loaded pistols from the steward and seemed convinced they were evidence of mutinous intent.

Hight turned and began returning the abuse in every way he could until the Captain clenched his fist in Hight’s face and dared him to strike him. He used every insult at his disposal, I believe to

provoke Mr Hight into striking the first blow so that he could accuse him of mutiny, but Mr Hight knew better and after more verbal sparring argument they stalked away from each other.

Soon after, Mr Gomm called Mr Hight out of his cabin and another heated altercation began in the passageway. It dragged on and on, a long-winded rehash of every past disagreement. Don't they care that everyone nearby, including the children, can hear every word?

Mr Gittins interrupted with, "If you must argue, don't do it here. Strip and fight it out on the forecastle like *men* should!"

Finally the Captain ended the argument. "Mr Gomm, go to your cabin and stop making such a noise!"

I daresay I will remember this Christmas as long as I live, and it won't be for peace on Earth and goodwill to all men.

Thursday 26th

It took so long to write up yesterday's events that I didn't even mention Christmas dinner. It was delicious. Despite his injury the cook had outdone himself. We had two joints of fresh mutton, and one of pork, and two kinds of pudding, one with raisins and one with plums. The plum pudding was doused with brandy and set alight, just like we do at home. Mr Greenwood declared that he had never tasted better. Mr and Mrs Hunter dined with us, which the children really enjoyed, and all passed quietly and in good humour. At teatime we had delicious Christmas cake. At first the passengers were inclined to reject it as a special favour from the Captain, until they found out from the steward that it had been planned for before we left England.

The second table passengers drank perhaps too freely of the unlimited wine at dinner and Mr Pierce spoke his mind pretty freely to the Captain, who was taking Christmas dinner with them. He criticised him for not being impartial and listening always to the Gomm's and the doctor. So it was

no wonder that the Captain was already in a bad mood yesterday, even before the altercation with Mr Hight.

Today at breakfast and dinner we spoke of little else. In the end some of the gentlemen approached the Captain and told him plainly that since he cannot or will not give us protection from Mr Gomm's insults, they are prepared to take matters into their own hands and finish him. It appears the Captain took this threat seriously, for this evening he called all the passengers together on deck and demanded that tomorrow all firearms are to be surrendered to him. This brought on a rather heated discussion in which the gentlemen said they were not willing to do this, having already gone two thirds of the voyage without being asked to. In the end he agreed that giving up their powder would do.

A shoal of black whales passed the ship, the first I have seen. Are black animals harbingers of death, I wonder, or is that just superstition?

Friday 27th

Around breakfast time a vessel was spotted and came close enough to exchange names and coordinates, although not close enough to speak as the sea was quite heavy. She was the *Reform* of Hamburg and seemed to be bound for South Australia, Mr Wakefield's first model colony. We soon left her far astern.

Mr Lesley delivered a written request from Captain Thomson requiring all powder be handed in for safe storage in the ship's magazine. Messrs Scott, Jackson and John Healy replied they would only do so if the Captain could produce an authority for the request, or at least a satisfactory reason. This led to a very lengthy discussion on deck in which all of the gentlemen eventually took part. At first Mr Monteith, in support of the Captain's position, said that George Hunter Jnr had been going around to all the passengers and inciting them not to give up their powder. This was utterly false, and quickly refuted by Mr Greenwood and Mr Jackson. Thus

silenced, Mr Monteith eventually went below with Dr Healy, and they had the Captain to themselves for a considerable time. Although he did not give up his demand for the powder, Mr Jackson says they were able to change his mind on several subjects.

Saturday 28th

This morning one of the steerage passengers, Mr Jason May, died of water on the lungs. Kitty says he must have known he had it when he came aboard, but the Surgeon only became aware of it ten days ago when Mr May became ill. His widow told her they married a year ago, and were emigrating for his health.

At 7pm we sang a hymn. Mr Pierce conducted the funeral service, and briefly addressed all the emigrants. Dark clouds were piling up in the west with fiery outlines as the body was committed to the deep.

Considering we have on board some 195 souls, from the infant who was born a week ago to an old greybeard of 75, we have been very lucky to have lost so few. I pray to God that George and his shipmates on the *Cuba* are faring as well or better.

Sunday 29th

Cold fresh breeze. Came in sight of Amsterdam island, and the much smaller St Pauls, which was little more than a speck on the horizon. I had not realised how much my eyes craved the hues of earth until those tussocked hillsides rose brown and green and yellow out of the interminable blue. Mr Lesley says we are roughly halfway between Madagascar and Australia. We saw funny little black and white birds called puffins, stuffing their large orange beaks with silvery fish and flying off with their orange legs dangling beneath them. They look quite comically worried. It made me regret that my painting things are stored in the hold. There were many albatross of a

different kind to those we have seen before; their necks and chests dappled-mare grey rather than snowy white, and more of the white sea swallows.

There was a large attendance at today's worship led by Mr Pierce.

Monday 30th

Saw another ship some distance off. She appears to be homeward bound. We are hardly moving due to the light wind.

Mr Lyon says one of the sailors was caught breaking in to the spirit room. At least the Captain can't blame the passengers this time.

Tuesday 31st

The vessel we saw yesterday is still in sight and is now going the same way as us, not home after all. The Captain seems to think she is a whaler under French colours. In the evening a strong breeze came up and we left her far behind.

All day there were floating rafts of yellowy-brown seaweed going past, with knobbly starfish clinging to them.

Wednesday 1st January, 1840

Good breeze, showers in the morning broke up what was otherwise a pleasant day.

Thursday 2nd

The sailors have been having their own private celebration of the new year, it seems, with several appearing continually drunk for the last few days. I spoke too soon about the Captain; he has accused the cabin passengers of giving his men alcohol. He is trying to hide the fact that they have broken into the spirit room, but the steward told Mr Hight and Mr Parnell all the details at dinner.

The young wife of Henry Baker in steerage had her first child, a daughter. I have noticed her on deck in recent weeks – she is so slight that it seemed like she was all belly, but I don't know her name. She was one of the few steerage emigrants to come aboard in Gravesend, the one who reminded me of Ann, but without my sister's spark of mischief.

Friday 3rd

The strong breeze and low fog today made it feel like we were flying through clouds and rain. So it was a surprise when Mr Greenwood spotted a sail shortly after noon, only about 5 leagues distant, as her approach had been concealed. At sighting us she bore down and we hoisted our colours, and she raised the French flag and continued to approach with the obvious intention of speaking with us. Although the war with Napoleon ended the year before I was born, the Captain and his officers must be among those who remember the terrible cost of our victory at Trafalgar; they did not alter course in the slightest. The French captain surely felt the insult when his ship came quite close but ours made no attempt to lay to and exchange pleasantries. How nice it would have been to see some new faces after more than three months at sea. Here we are, two specks met by chance in the unpredictable vastness of the ocean – it seems foolish to let national pride stand in the way of some exchange of humanity. Captain Thomson relented and chalked our longitude to show them, but their Captain did not return the favour and they continued on their way.

Sunday 5th

No Divine service due to the weather being stormy with rain and low clouds.

Monday 6th

Heavy wind during the night brought down some of the sails. We were woken by the clatter and the shouting of the crew on deck. By breakfast time the wind had abated somewhat and the day turned fine.

This evening Mr Gomm was back up to his old tricks and got into an argument with Mr Jackson, calling him a liar and 'Old Squeers', and referring to Mr Greenwood as 'Snike' when he tried to intervene. I had to ask Emma what he meant. Apparently they are characters from a serial called *Nicholas Nickleby* by Charles Dickens. Emma related the story to me with great enthusiasm, and told me how relieved she was that the final part of the story was released only days before we left Portsmouth. She said she would have been in agonies of suspense if she'd had to wait months to find out how it ended. Old Squeers is a gruff, violent, one-eyed schoolmaster, and Snike is one of his disabled and much-abused students. Nothing at all like her kind husband and the enthusiastic Mr Greenwood. Mr Gomm is very strange.

Tuesday 7th

We heard the sad news this morning that a little girl, Jane Roberts, died in steerage. She was unwell when she came aboard, but the steerage passengers are angry that the Surgeon didn't do more to help her. They have heard that Dr Healy gets paid a 10s bonus by the New Zealand Land Company for every person over 14 years of age who disembarks safely at our destination, and thus has no incentive to look after the little ones.

The burial service took place at 11pm under the clear cold gaze of the Southern Cross.

Friday 10th

There has been a favourable wind for several days, and Mr Greenwood says we have made good progress and are probably close to Kangaroo Island which belongs to the colony of Sth

Australia. The thermometer shows 50°, but the wind makes it feel colder still. I have had to put on all my clothes just to keep warm. I think longingly of the roaring log fires at home.

Capt T and Dr Healy are looking downcast. Possibly they are thinking the day of reckoning is near at hand, when they will be held accountable for their actions when we reach New Zealand. Mrs Healy has been sounding out the ladies about a reconciliation, but without success.

Mr Hunter says today was the date we were scheduled to rendezvous with the other settler ships at Port Hardy, and the Captain is probably worried that we have not made good enough time.

Saturday 11th

Two whaling vessels were seen during the night, one so close that the fires on deck could be seen where they were boiling the blubber.

It seems there might be another ship not too far ahead of us to the west. We saw quantities of straw, an empty cask and a sheep pelt floating past. Perhaps it is *Oriental* or *Aurora*, who left Plymouth before us, in which case we are not too far behind after all.

Sunday 12th

Another baby boy was born in steerage during the night, to the Bassetts. It seems likely we will land as many as came aboard. Not all ships are as lucky, I hear, although Mr Lesley says that the *Duke* had a good reputation when she was a convict transport. She made two voyages to New South Wales, with five hundred men aboard each time, and only one death. I can't imagine how they could have squeezed in that many – we have enough lack of freedom with less than half that number. Where did they all sleep?

While Mr Jackson was giving the service, there were gasps and exclamations from those passengers nearest the rail on the right side of the ship. A whoosh of spray shot high into the air. We all crowded close to see an enormous sperm whale had surfaced alongside, grey as a thundercloud.

He must have been close to 60' in length, more than half as long as the vessel itself. His blunt square head was wide enough for three men to stand abreast. The flippers and the fin on his back were surprisingly small by comparison. I wonder if he was hiding from the whaling ship we saw to northward later in the evening.

Monday 13th

Mr Lyon was joking with Mr Jackson in the corridor today, saying, "come out of your kennel, Squeers, I'll smash every bone in your body," and was overheard by Mrs Gomm, who went to the Captain and said they were challenging her husband to fight. Capt T asked Mr Lyon if it was true.

"It was a joke!" Mr Lyon exclaimed. "Besides, their cabin was dark with the door shut."

Later when Mr Lyon was passing their cabin, Mr Gomm emerged. "If you ever say such a thing again I will serve you properly." He beckoned to his wife and pushed her towards the stairs. "Go and fetch the Captain to watch me punch Mr Lyon."

She scurried off to to his bidding, and in a short time returned with Capt Thomson.

"I am insulted past bearing," said Mr Gomm, "but although I intend to punch Lyon I will wait until we reach New Zealand and deal with him there."

In the exchange of hot words that followed, Mr Lyon rashly told Gomm, "There are stronger things against you in Dr Healy's account than you know, and if the Doctor's log isn't falsified then it will be the strongest evidence of any against you."

At this Mrs Healy, who was standing nearby, ran to her cabin and told her husband that Mr Lyon said he falsifies his log. The doctor came out shaking with rage and demanded to know what Mr Lyon had said against him.

Mr Lyon replied, "Among the many complaints which have been made against Gomm, you yourself have said that he will never be quiet until he has been given a thorough thrashing."

“Well,” said Dr Healy, “what if I said that I have told Gomm that he is going to a place where he will have neither the Captain nor myself to protect him, and there will be no favouritism?”

At this it seemed that all would be settled amicably but then Mrs Healy piped up, “Yes, but he said that you falsified the log.”

“Mr Lyon never used that word,” their nephew John Healy said, and Dr Healy turned on him and began to abuse him, calling him a low drunken blackguard and worse names. I think he would have struck him if Mr Jackson and Mr Gittins had not intervened and carried him off to his cabin.

Mr Lyon then turned to Mr Gomm and gave him a fierce smile which bared all his teeth.

“Please note the Doctor’s advice about giving you a good thrashing.”

Later on deck when everyone had calmed down Mr Lyon explained to Dr Healy what he had meant, and all was smoothed over between them.

Tuesday 14th

Gentle breeze and foggy for most of the day. Celebrated the Old New Year with a feast of boiled puddings. The complaints from the steerage passengers on Dr Healy’s lack of attendance are beginning to get severe.

Wednesday 15th

Nearly becalmed all day. Captain T very surly and downcast. Many incidents that he and his cronies had probably hoped were all forgotten are being recalled and discussed.

Thursday 16th

Light breeze. The Doctor and his party are starting to sound out the steerage passengers on their views about him. In a blatant attempt to restore the good opinion of the cabin passengers, he and his wife hosted a feast of pies and champagne in their quarters this evening.

Friday 17th

At 7 o'clock we were off the south west coast of Van Diemen's Land. The morning was spent passing the bold and magnificent coastline which rose some 5000' above the ocean in places, a picturesque sight further enhanced by two or three large rocky outcrops offshore.

I looked for signs of Hobart Town but the slight haze made it difficult to see any details over a long distance. We saw a brig heading in to the town, and also another whaler, this time to the south of us.

Sunday 19th

Very contrary weather today – showers, thunder, lightning and inconstant winds – so we made little progress.

Mr Hunter gave the sermon for what may be the last time as he has been alternating with Mr Pearce and Mr Jackson, and the strong expectation is we will have made landfall before another three weeks have passed. His speech was more concerned with worldly affairs than with spiritual, and their significance to the free emigrants especially and the cabin passengers generally. He spoke of the upheaval of society and the dark cloud which appeared to hang over England at the time we left – many passengers leaving behind a society which constricted them, and seeking a brighter, freer life in the new colony.

I thought how right he was about the constriction, although in my case the thundercloud was not poverty but my father's countenance on the day George asked for my hand in marriage.

Tuesday 21st

Mr Lesley was overheard expressing his disapproval to the Captain today on the subject of his own treatment by the Captain, and the general conduct of the Captain towards the passengers, and asking if there was a satisfactory explanation for it. Capt T is looking most surly.

Wednesday 22nd

A good breeze and a fine, pleasant day. At dinner the cabin passengers were reflecting on how much they had enjoyed the voyage, despite all the altercations.

Mr Greenwood said, “All things considered, I have never spent four months more comfortable, and even had I paid for my passage I would not have considered the money ill spent, for I have seen the wonders of Creation in the mighty deep over a run of 16,000 miles in all variety of climes except polar.”

I wondered if he would feel the same if he was travelling in steerage, sleeping in a box not much larger a coffin, surrounded by the stench of livestock and his fellow man.

He went on. “Despite the hardships of the sea that we have encountered, I feel a person can live as comfortably and as healthy as ever he could on land.”

There were several calls of “hear, hear” and a toast drunk in agreement. I have no doubt the feeling of well-being can also be attributed in no small part to the many hundreds of bottles of wine and porter that the cabin passengers have consumed between them over the course of the voyage.

Thursday 23rd

This afternoon Mr Gomm made the first public appearance on deck since the threats to his person became serious a month ago. He looks rather peaky from being out of the sun for so long. I can't imagine being confined in even a luxury cabin for so long a time – I would go quite mad.

He and his wife sat quietly near the water filters from about 3pm until tea time, when they went back to their cabin. After eating they returned to the same spot, and then Mrs Gomm began walking up and down on the weather side for some time, until more passengers arrived and it began to be quite crowded. At this point Mr Gomm called for his wife to walk on the lee side, which she did, and everyone was pleasantly surprised.

Friday 24th

It seems Mr Gomm has had enough of being sent to Coventry. Today he came into the cuddy twice, after an absence of some 6 weeks. He didn't stay for dinner but it annoyed the Captain and Dr Healy, for it made a lie of their claim that they had ordered him to stay in his cabin.

Sunday 26th

No service today on account of the strong wind turning into a gale. The main sails were taken in – *haul a bowling, the Duke's a rolling* – and the topsails reefed tight. At dinner we were rushing the meal on account of the tremendous rocking and pitching, when Mr Lyon began to make a horrible gagging sound and put a hand to his neck. He had swallowed a bone which became lodged about halfway down his throat. It was obvious from the pallor of his skin and the watering of his eyes that he was in the most severe pain. Mr Greenwood and Mr Jackson assisted him to the infirmary, where he was put to bed with a poultice on his throat.

Perhaps the proximity to our destination is making us complacent, or Neptune himself is taking issue with our recent self-congratulations, for we had another accident in the afternoon. Mr John Healy was on deck in the storm when the sudden pitch of the boat made him lose his hold on the rail and fall from one side of the poop to the other, landing heavily against the side of a hen coop. His upper leg was severely bruised and he was also carried to his uncle the Surgeon, who now has two patients confined to bed.

Monday 27th

Overnight the storm abated, and the day turned fine. By afternoon the wind was so light we were making hardly any visible progress. On days like these the main deck looks like a wash-house, with mattresses airing and clean washing hanging from the rigging. If the wind picks up there will

be a scramble to bring in the laundry before it flies off into the ocean. Mr Gomm was on the poop deck most of the day looking fierce, although no-one seems to know what has upset him this time.

When Kitty was brushing my hair she said Mr John Healy and Mr Lyon have both been bled, and the former is now looking much better, and Mr Lyon no worse.

Tuesday 28th

We are making little progress as the winds have now turned against us. Had they been in the right direction we should probably have been at our destination in two more days. However it is heartening to see the sailors bringing up the anchors, chains, ropes and cables in preparation for our arrival. I pray that I may soon see George's beloved face once more.

It is interesting to watch the reactions of the other passengers, especially the free emigrants. Some seem grateful that it will soon be over, some are indifferent, and some – well, it cannot be more plainly expressed than in the words of Mr ____, who said he “wished the voyage would last another 7 years as I never lived so well in my life.”

Mostly it's the women who wish to make an end of it. They are still doing the cooking and cleaning, mending and child-minding, but confined in far more taxing conditions than back home. Dark, damp and smelling always of animal and human ordure. While the men are having a long holiday, probably for the first time in their lives, and being better fed than most of them have ever experienced.

Meanwhile the cabin passengers congratulate themselves on completing the detailed minutes of the voyage, commenting that it is not likely to show the Captain in a good light. In the evening the document was passed around so that the ladies could add their signatures to it.

Wednesday 29th

Captain Thomson and his supporters are looking unpleasant and on the defensive. Mr John Healy is much better, up and about on deck. My Lyon still has a sore throat, but believes the bone is gone, and was out of bed a little today.

Just before sunset there was a smudge, a barely-there hint on the horizon – no-one could say for certain – but some were sure it was land they were seeing before nightfall hid it from view.

Thursday 30th

We were so keyed up last night it was hard to go to bed. Kitty and I stayed awake much later than usual, whispering of what the morning might bring. So it was from a deep sleep that I was woken at 4am by the shout “Land ho!” From other beds and the cabins above I could hear the thud of feet hitting the deck and the murmur of voices. No-one wanted to miss the first sight of their new home, myself included. I heard the scrape of the match as Kitty lit the lantern, and when I climbed from my bunk I could see my own excitement mirrored in the gleaming faces before me. We dressed as quickly as we could, helping each other with lacing and buttons. Barbara Hunter slept on. Kitty shook her foot and urged her to wake up, but she only muttered something unintelligible and rolled over to face the other way. We looked at each other and giggled. “Quick,” said Kitty, “let’s get upstairs before the ladies want our help dressing.”

In the passageway there was a crowd of passengers queueing for the stairs. We slipped in among them with our heads down and no-one said a thing. They were all too focussed on getting on deck.

All about the ship were high hills rising dark and steep out of the sea. They seemed closer than they probably were, our vision used to nothing but ocean as far as the eye could see. It was cold but no-one cared. Kitty and I gripped each other’s hands tightly as the light grew behind the magnificent coastline. Colour seeped into the sea, the cliffs, the densely wooded slopes and the

awe-struck faces lined up along the railing. As the sun rose, so too did a sound unlike any other I had heard – a dawn chorus of such epic proportions it was deafening. It sounded like ten thousand feathered throats had opened and were pouring their hearts out in song, welcoming us to their home. Our home.

We did not enjoy the sight of land for long before the day became wet and foggy. The ship turned north to find Cook Strait, the passage between the two main islands, where we are meant to rendezvous with the *Oriental* and *Aurora* at a place called Port Hardy in D'Urville Island.

Friday 31st

At 6.30 this morning we cleared Cape Farewell, the northerly tip of the south island, and thought that we would be at anchor in Port Hardy by nightfall. However the wind came up, and the lookout sighted breakers ahead, so that we had to steer northwards again to avoid the possibility of hitting an uncharted reef.

We had two babies born safe and well today – a double blessing. Mrs Hawke was delivered of a son, and Mrs U'ren welcomed a baby girl. I hoped she might be named something romantic to commemorate our arrival, but they have called her Gertrude.

Saturday 1st February

By daybreak we were in sight of D'Urville Island and the wild, mountainous coast of the South Island. We spent all day fruitlessly searching for the entrance to Port Hardy. The whole coastline seems to be a series of narrow passages or inlets between steep hillsides. There are no other ships to guide us, no roads or houses to indicate the presence of a town, only the occasional wisp against the solid green, which could as easily be smoke from a hearth or a stray banner of fog. The land is picturesque in the extreme, with bold hills and rugged cliffs, some appearing chalky like the Downs and other a deep, rich rust.

As evening fell the Captain gave up the search and took us away from the coast, the wind having picked up and the barometer falling, a sure sign of an approaching storm.

Sunday 2nd

Blowing very hard all day – we spent hours beating about in sight of the island with little progress. By mid-afternoon it had increased to a howling gale. Nearly all sails taken in and closely reefed. The ship is rolling hard in really heavy seas. Writing is difficult.

Monday 3rd

During the night the middle hen coop overturned and struck Mr Gittins. He was severely bruised on his left side. After a few hours the Surgeon bled him and he seems to be doing well, but will be confined to bed for a few days. The poor sleeping hens must have been blown overboard. At breakfast the Captain warned us against sitting on the loose coop until the carpenter could secure it, but most of the passengers kept to their cabins in any case, conditions being very disagreeable on deck. I was in my bunk around 4 o'clock in the afternoon when there was a loud crash which vibrated through the timbers around me. There were screams and shouting – had we hit a reef?

I ran upstairs to the cuddy – on the way passing George Hunter junior who was calling for Mr Lesley in a panic – to find chaos and confusion. The ship's bell clanging, voices crying "man overboard", a pale and shaking Mr Hight being helped through the doorway by Mr Floyd.

He said Mr Hight and Capt Thomson were sitting on either side of the coop to hold it down when a heavy wave hit the side of the ship and the coop flipped over, crushing the Captain against the rail. Before anyone could go to his assistance, a burst of the sea carried him overboard.

"It could have been me," Mr Hight said. Mr Floyd helped him to a chair.

Mr Greenwood came in from outside and sat down heavily. His hair was plastered to his head and his clothes were dripping. His voice was low and shook.

“I threw the longest rope I could find but it was far too short. All the longer ropes are furled with the sails.” Someone handed him a brandy and he took a gulp. “We threw some of the timbers from the coop but he couldn’t reach them. The last I saw of him he was far astern and seemed to be sinking with his hand above his head.” The brandy in his glass quivered in his two-handed grip. “The crew are trying to lower one of the boats.”

I felt I could have done with a brandy myself. The Second Officer injured, and now the Captain lost overboard, possibly drowned. Only four days ago we first came in sight of the dramatic folded hills of New Zealand, and the long white clouds which capped them. Surely disaster couldn’t befall us with our destination in plain view?

The cutter which was lowered in the hopes of effecting a rescue got smashed to bits against the side of the ship as they tried to bring it back aboard.

The storm began to abate about 10pm. The loss of the Captain, in so awful a circumstance, is weighing heavily on everyone’s minds. I cannot sleep for thinking about that poor man with his hand in the air, being carried farther and farther from his ship, knowing he was about to die. It makes me feel sick.

Tuesday 4th February

The mood on the ship is very subdued – the Captain was not well-liked by most, but no-one would have wished such a dire fate on him. I cannot imagine how awful it would be to drown within sight of deliverance, able to see your goal but unable to reach it. For the first time, I wondered if Captain Thomson had a family waiting for him back in England, and how they would feel when they got the news. Eagerly looking forward to his return after an absence of nine or ten months, only to receive a trunk of his possessions and a letter of regret from his employer. I must ask Mr Hunter if the Captain was married.

What with the storm and the rescue efforts, the ship drifted a long way to eastward. By 10am today the winds were light and we spent all day trying to get back to D'Urville Island but were forced to abandon the attempt by 6pm. We saw several fires on land in the afternoon and presumed them to be an alarm raised by the natives at the sight of our ship.

During the day we were in sight of Stephens Island, a series of bold iron-bound cliffs surrounding open bays with alternating hills and dales behind. To the south of the island a cluster of rugged rocks form a semi-circle like the crater of an extinct volcano.

Wednesday 5th

Today we had visitors on the Duke, the first in four and a half months! We had spent hours trying to locate the harbour entrance at D'Urville Island, without success, when around 5pm Mr Jackson spotted a small sail boat coming off the shore. We had seen another large fire on land, but Mr Lesley, who was now acting Captain, chose to ignore it as he was apprehensive it was the natives trying to trick us. When it was clear that the boat was heading our way, the sailors dropped anchor and hoisted our colours.

The news spread below decks quickly and soon the deck was crowded with passengers eager to see the new arrivals. On board the small boat were an Englishman, Mr Clarence, the French whaling Captain whose boat it was, two sailors – one French one English – their large bulldog, and a native New Zealander who attracted much attention. Mr Clarence was appointed by Colonel Wakefield to give letters of instruction to each Captain as they arrived at Port Hardy.

While Mr Clarence delivered his news to Mr Lesley and the officers of the New Zealand Company, the rest of us were entertained by the European visitors, and the intelligent-looking native lad they had brought with them. He knew some words of English and performed a creditable bow to the ladies, making us all giggle. He seemed quite aware of the impression he was making, and rather amused by it. As a gift he presented us with two woven baskets of New Zealand potatoes, of

a peculiar purple colour. The workmanship of the baskets was exquisite, supple and smooth, quite unlike the lumpy cane baskets I was used to.

Later I was able to ask Mrs Hunter what news Mr Clarence had brought. Most importantly to me, the *Cuba* arrived in early January. I can only hope that means George is safe. The *Tory* made a very fast voyage and arrived last August. After some exploration, Port Nicholson in the island north of Cook Strait has been chosen as the site of the new colony, and Col. Wakefield has already begun purchasing land there. The natives are apparently well disposed towards us and preparations are being undertaken for the arrival of a large number of emigrants. The *Oriental* arrived next on the 17th, before going on to Port Nicholson, and the *Aurora* on the 24th. George must be quite frantic with worry at the lateness of our arrival.

Mr Clarence was shocked to hear of the loss of Captain Thomson, and stayed with us until nearly 8 o'clock, giving Mr Lesley all possible information to assist in our navigation through the Strait. The fire they had left burning on shore guided them home while we gave them three hearty cheers and made ready for the last stage of our journey.

Thursday 6th

The weather continues to frustrate us. We were mostly becalmed all day, knowing we were only a day's sail from our final destination.

There was another altercation when Mr Greenwood went to fetch the spyglass from the storage bin. Mr Gomm had his arm resting across the lid of the bin and felt himself insulted when Mr Greenwood lifted the lid without asking him to move his arm. Mr Gomm sprang up with his fists clenched and appeared on the point of striking Mr Greenwood, but was prevented by the presence of other gentlemen who gathered around. Apparently fearing for his safety, Mr Gomm sought protection from Dr Healy, without success. He then went to fetch Mr Lesley and brought him back on deck, but he didn't find the same level of support there as he had received from poor

Captain Thomson. After some discussion between them, Mr Gomm was overheard to say that he would have the blood of three or four, and if the Captain had lived then some would have been sent in chains to Sydney. I am not sure he is right in the head.

Friday 7th

By 7am we were at the entrance to Port Nicholson. All four of the ship's guns were fired to alert those on shore to our presence. After tacking about for over an hour we had got some way inside the port entrance, but with a heavy wind and the tide against us, and no-one on board familiar with the harbour, Mr Lesley thought it prudent to drop anchor and wait.

We soon saw an English vessel coming out to meet us, and as it came closer it was clear it was none other than George's ship, the dear old *Cuba*. As their vessel came alongside the *Duke*, our decks became crowded with passengers who cheered and waved, while the *Cuba*'s crew waved and hallooed back. I was struggling to see over the heads of the other passengers, and trying to push my way through the crowd, when I found my way blocked by another troublesome hen coop. Looking around for some means of stepping up and finding none, I realised I was standing next to Josias Tucker, the blacksmith. I seized his massive forearm and hissed, "Josias, a leg-up, please." He gaped down at me for a moment, then he grinned and his huge hands nearly spanned my waist. I laughed as he swung me bodily into the air like a giddy child and placed me gently on top of the coop. I glanced down at his apple-cheeked wife and she smiled indulgently.

"Ee's a strong one, my 'usband."

I anxiously scanned the faces on the other vessel, and there he was! Dear George. Laughing and jumping up and down, waving both arms scissor-wise above his head, looking straight at me. His face was tanned, and he looked a little thinner, but he was most assuredly alive.

PORT NICHOLSON

NEW ZEALAND

February 1840 – July 1852

*And when, in other climes, we meet
Some isle, or vale enchanting,
Where all looks flowery, wild, and sweet,
And nought but love is wanting;
We think how great had been our bliss,
If Heaven had but assign'd us
To live and die in scenes like this,
With some we've left behind us!*

- "As Slow Our Ship", Thomas Moore, Irish Melodies

Port Nicholson, New Zealand

9th February 1840

My dearest Ann,

How long it has been since I saw you! It feels strange to be writing this knowing that you may not read it for another six months or more. I miss you and thought of you often on the voyage. I hope you, and our Aunts and Uncle, and Mama and Papa and Grandmama Jane are well, but especially you, dear sister.

I will send this through Aunt Judith to be certain it reaches you. I suspect Papa might withhold my letters as he doubtless considers me a bad influence. I don't know how long it will be before a ship departs, so I will keep adding to it until then.

There are presently only three English vessels in the harbour, and many colonists are still sleeping aboard while accommodation on land is being organised. The ships are obliged to house us for four weeks after the

voyage ends. The Aurora and Oriental arrived late last month, and their passengers are still living aboard. There is much to-ing and fro-ing with the ship's boats as the colonist's possessions are unloaded, and goods are piled everywhere on the beach – furniture, tea chests, fruit trees, trunks and tents.

The Company's first ship, the Tory, is away exploring in the north, and the Cuba was departing on a survey trip to the island south of us as we arrived. So even though I have seen my beloved George alive and well, so near and dear and yet still out of reach, I have some time to wait until we are reunited. If only the Duke had arrived a day or two sooner!

*The landscape here is very picturesque. Dense verdant forest comes right down to the water's edge, which is the most beautiful shade of turquoise. The harbour sits cradled in a bowl of folded hills. At the back is a grey shingle beach which slopes gently back toward the native settlement. I will send you a watercolour when I have unpacked my painting box. Fresh water is available from the nearby river. There are two small islands inside the harbour, and we are anchored in a sheltered position behind the larger, *Somes Is*. The air is so full of birdsong it is almost deafening, and in the evening we see large native pigeons doing acrobatic displays above the trees.*

We arrived here yesterday after 125 days at sea since leaving Portsmouth, and not once in that time did we go ashore. You might think that we would be bored, but not at all. It would take pages to tell you of the wondrous things we saw – porpoises, whales, dolphins, flying fish (yes, really!), albatrosses, puffins, petrels and swifts – even a shower of locusts.

There were games and dancing and singing, and the food was plentiful, if a little repetitive.

The voyage was a both a wonder and a trial – the greatest trial of all being the odious Mr Gomm and his silly wife, who kept us all from boredom and contentment by being so horrid and annoying. Now that we are arrived I can safely say that we are all looking forward to not being confined on board ship with them for any longer than we have to.

I have a greater appreciation of the hard work that our servant does, now that I have experienced it for myself, although the Pierces are kindly employers. My job with the Hunter family allowed me more liberty and opportunities than the other servants, for which I was most grateful. I wish you could meet their eldest son George, who is both clever and amusing. I do believe you and he would be an excellent match, if I were allowed to arrange such things. Wouldn't that be a fine joke, if we both married Georges?

Colonel Wakefield met us at the entrance to this harbour, which has been chosen as the site of the new colony, and stayed the night on board to guide us in safely. Several native canoes came up to our ship, and the men climbed aboard to barter and visit. They are all deeply tattooed, especially on their faces, and seemed very friendly and happy to see us. One of their boats contained fourteen natives who had come from the South Island especially to see the Colonel. To think that they had crossed that stretch of water which has lately given us so much grief, in only a small open vessel, seems quite astonishing.

But I am getting ahead of myself. You will no doubt be thinking, what grief? I'm referring to the tragic loss of our Captain five days ago, washed overboard during a storm within sight of our destination. No matter how unpopular he was with the passengers, none of us would have wished that dreadful fate on the poor man.

We lost one ship's boat during the attempt to rescue Capt. Thomson, and the other is leaky, so we cannot go ashore easily. Some of the passengers have engaged native canoes to take them exploring, while others have gone on the Oriental's boat to visit the Yorkshire emigrants on their ship. They gave very encouraging reports of the soil, climate and capabilities of the place. Mr Greenwood said that "competent judges have deemed the harbour one of the finest in the world". He and his friend Mr Jackson have already chosen a site for their temporary residences and begun building, even though the paying colonists are entitled to assistance from the labouring emigrants at the Company's expense. Apparently the earlier arrivals are complaining that the sections are not yet surveyed due to the excessively long time the Cuba took coming out. I am so looking forward to seeing George again when he gets back and hearing about their voyage.

I will close here for the night; the candle is getting low and my hand tired!

Postscript 11th February

Finally we were all able to go ashore for the first time. You cannot imagine, dear sister, how peculiar it feels when you first walk on solid land

after a long voyage. The land seems to be rolling and your legs feel quite wobbly. Rather like getting off a horse after a long ride, but a hundred times worse.

We were welcomed ashore with a feast in our honour at the native village. I could see no sign of cooking fires or boiling pots, and was prepared to be disappointed – but oh – the delicious smells that issued forth when they uncovered a large pit in the ground. Roast pork so tender it fell off the bone. Whole fish baked wrapped in leaves. Potatoes both plain and sweet. Baskets of edible greens. After nearly 5 months without fresh vegetables, I almost cried when I tasted their piquant essence of spring.

The village is on a rise at the back of the harbour, with a commanding view. There are numerous well-made huts and a larger elevated building, which must be of special significance as the posts and lintel are highly decorated with carvings of people, animals and patterns, all painted red with insets of colourful shell. The whole is surrounded by a palisade of timbers, with the taller posts at intervals also red and carved with warrior-like figures holding spears and making fearsome faces. The level of anatomical detail I will leave to your imagination – suffice to say it made me blush.

Speaking of which, here is a story that will make you laugh. When we went ashore for the first church service it was low tide, and the boats could not go all the way up onto the shingle. Everyone was in their Sunday best and didn't want to wade through the intervening water. We just sat there not knowing what to do! The native men came to our rescue. They shed their robes and mats and waded into the surf naked as Adam to carry us ashore

on their backs, laughing at our embarrassment and joking amongst themselves in their musical language. We ladies didn't know where to look – Mrs Hunter told her girls to shut their eyes.

Some of the natives speak quite good English, which they learned from visiting whalers, missionaries, and one or two white men who live among them and have married native women. One of the men asked Mr Hunter how many wives he had, to have so many children. He seemed astonished to hear the answer was one. Children are less numerous here, and it is heartwarming to see the tender way the men carry babies about on their backs inside the woven mat they wrap themselves in.

While we were ashore, one of the Cornish women in steerage had a baby girl aboard the ship. She was too near her confinement to come ashore with the rest of us. That makes eight babies born aboard the Duke, and all of them healthy, and the mothers too, thanks be to God.

Paper is scarce, and what little there is expensive. I was too profligate with my pages on the voyage over – my journal is at least a third full already, and I don't know where or when I will be able to get another.

I doubt the Gomms will stick it out here. None of the cabin passengers were willing to go ashore with them, and they were made to wait for the last boat. They do not have that happy knack of getting along with people that is vital in a place like this if you are to thrive. I made some wonderful new friends on the voyage that I'm sure I will cherish for life. I have become particularly close to Emma Jackson and her husband, James, and I hope that George will like them just as well.

Postscript Feb 20th

There was such excitement when white sails were spotted at the harbour entrance today. The arrival of more emigrant ships is eagerly awaited by all, but especially those who were separated from their families and forced to travel on different vessels. None more than me – I was so hoping it would be the Cuba returning. I couldn't help but be disappointed to find that it was Bengal Merchant out of Glasgow, with Scottish settlers aboard.

Postscript 4th March 1840

The Cuba is back! The thrill that ran through our little community quickly faded, once those with sharp eyes or spy glasses identified her, but not for me – tomorrow I will see George again. Now all I lack here is you, dear Ann, to make me completely content. I dreamt of you last night. You were sitting in the rose garden making flower chains with Papa's prize roses. I could smell their sweet scent and I was so worried that he would be angry at you, but you smiled at me and said, "Mary," and I woke up with your voice still clear in my mind. I miss you so. I'm glad that I was able to give you the news about George before the Aurora departs with the mail for England. Please give my love to Mama, and Aunt Anne and Aunt Judith and Uncle John, and my respects to Papa.

Your most affectionate sister,

Mary Jane

5th March 1840

George found me waiting on shore to meet him, and lifted me by the waist and spun me around laughing. In full view of everyone he kissed me soundly as soon as my feet were back on the ground, and I felt like I was floating again. A loud, “Ahem,” broke us apart. A well-dressed gentleman who had come ashore in the same boat was standing beside us trying to look stern, not wholly successfully. George flushed and grinned at the same time. He took my hand and introduced me to Captain Newcombe.

The Captain bowed. “Miss Hebden, delighted to meet you at last. We have heard so much about you,” he said dryly.

There were a few snorts of laughter from the boat, but none of them unkind.

“Mr Bennett, I think we can manage without you for a few hours. Why don’t you go with your fiancée and see what the emigrants have achieved in our absence?”

We had to cross rough track and duckboards across swampy land to get to where the Pierces had put their large tent. I asked him to wait a moment while I fetched something from inside.

“Happy birthday!” I handed him a roll of parchment tied with a piece of my hair ribbon. “I’m sorry it is a few days late, I hoped you would be back in time.”

He unrolled the watercolour I had done of a bright blue toadstool I found growing in the forest. The sky blue of the cap was startling against the green ferns and the rich dark humus.

“Oh, this is exquisite! You are so talented, my darling girl. Thank you, I will treasure it always.” He kissed my cheek and the imprint of his lips was warm.

Several delightful hours were spent together wandering about the colony hand-in-hand. There were some sideways looks, but we were just so happy to see each other that once our fingers entwined, we couldn’t seem to let go. He was leaner and his curls were tied back like a sailor’s, but in essentials he was unchanged. He was still my beloved George.

We exchanged eager stories of the marvels we had seen, and all that had happened on our voyages, the highs and the lows. He was shocked at Captain Thompson's loss, and suitably outraged by Mr Gomm's behaviour, and asked me to point him out, but he was nowhere to be seen. Then he told me that the *Cuba* had such a slow voyage out they had been forced to put ashore for fresh water at Praya in the Cape Verdes Islands. I was keen to hear all about that experience, but as George described how a storm came up and they were forced to leave four crew members ashore for a few days, I could hear the tension in his voice. He recounted how the ship was nearly swept onto the rocks when they went back to pick them up. And then the most frightening part – those crew left ashore brought yellow fever aboard. Fortunately the illness was able to be contained and all survived.

I shivered at the thought of what might have happened, and of the effects if such a fever had come aboard the *Duke*, or any of the other ships heavily laden with emigrant families, all crowded together below decks. I had a greater appreciation for Capt Thompson's aversion to making landfall anywhere en route. It was more than just a matter of time and money saved.

7th March

Even the heavy rain could not dampen our spirits today when three more ships arrived together – the settler ship *Adelaide*, the freight vessel *Glenbervie*, accompanied by the *Tory* returning from Kaipara – making seven English ships at anchor in the harbour. The *Adelaide* carries the authorities to speed up the survey process, so her arrival is welcome, but the most eagerly anticipated has been the *Glenbervie*. I could almost hear the collective sigh of relief when she was identified. Nearly everyone has vital supplies aboard her, with which to live, trade or build. She also brought a bank manager, clerks and a safe to establish a branch of the Union Bank of Australia, our first bank. Our little town of Britannia is growing quickly.

Tonight is our last aboard the *Duke*, as our four weeks of free accommodation ends tomorrow. Many of us are already living ashore, whether in tents, native-built huts, or Manning's portable houses, brought ready-made in pieces from England.

8th March

Last night we all had cause to question the wisdom of placing our temporary housing so close to the river. In the darkness, the river rose fast and silently from all the recent rain. Roused from our beds by the shouts of our neighbours, Mrs Pierce and I lit the lamps while Mr Pierce went outside to see what was causing the alarm. When we joined him an astonishing sight met our eyes. The shingled banks of the normally placid Hutt River were completely hidden by a roiling sheet of dark water, like India ink spreading across a wet parchment. The row of tents nearest to the river, most of them belonging to the Cornish settlers, were half-submerged. Some had already fallen and the current was tugging at their ropes. Others resembled Chinese paper lanterns, lit from within as the occupants frantically piled their possessions above the water line.

Mr Pierce ran down to join the steady ant line of colonists carrying belongings to higher ground. Mrs Pierce and I began lifting trunks, boxes, whatever we could manage and stacking them on the beds. No-one was able to go back to sleep for fear the river would continue to rise. Those of us with tents or huts still dry gave shelter to the women and children. Mrs Pierce ushered Elizabeth Tucker and her four children inside, and fussed over them with shawls and blankets while I stoked the stove and made hot tea. Fortunately the floodwaters came no closer and by morning were receding.

When the sun finally rose, our spirits were lifted by the sight of all the ships dressed in colours to celebrate yesterday's arrivals. By a prearranged signal they fired a gun salute which echoed off the surrounding hills and startled many birds into flight. The natives launched three of their large decorated canoes and raced around the ships, adding to the general air of excitement.

10th March

Our sleep was disturbed again last night, this time by volleys of musket fire coming from the direction of the pah. The first thought that seemed to enter everyone's minds was that somehow we had angered the natives and they were preparing to attack us. Our men were issued arms and assembled on the beach ready to defend themselves, but all remained peaceful on our side of the river.

Later we heard that what caused the disturbance was the ambush and beheading of a native chief by his enemies. Several war parties headed out in canoes to avenge his death. The thought that we are very isolated here and at the mercy of the goodwill of the local tribe is always in the back of our minds.

2nd April

There is not much free time to be had in the colony. Since the flood we have been restoring order, and some emigrants have decided to move further away from the river. Unsurprisingly, the Cornish settlers decided to rebuild their homes on higher ground, and they now live on what has been dubbed 'Cornish Row'. With so much to do, and so few to do it for them, a more egalitarian society seems to have developed, the higher classes of necessity having to cut timber, milk cows and chase pigs like the rest of us.

When I do see George, which is not as often as I would like, he usually has news from the 'bigwigs' as he calls them. Apparently they are worried about the Treaty the Crown has signed with the native chiefs at the Bay of Islands, and what effect this might have on the lands already purchased by the Company.

We discuss the Proclamation of Her Majesty placing Governor Hobson in charge of New Zealand and declaring it to be within the boundaries of the Colony of New South Wales.

George was indignant. "We're not convicts – we're free men!"

Indeed, and women too.

Tomorrow George is away again on *Cuba*, to survey Charlotte Sound.

7th April

The *Duke* sailed for Sydney. I felt a pang to see her go, my home of five months. Before she left, I asked Captain Lesley if he would take a letter for me, and see that it got onto a ship headed for England. He said he would be happy to. He seems more confident these days, now that he has got used to being in command of the ship.

14th April

There was an unprovoked attack on two young boys, Richard and Henry Eaton, who were at work planting bushes outside Mrs Shannon's house up the Hutt River. A native hit Richard in the side with a spear, before wounding Henry in the head, then went into Mrs Shannon's house and stole some bedding and other loose items. The head injury required stitches. Rumours are flying – the natives have turned against us, the boys were raiding their potato crops, it was a raid by another tribe – but as yet there are no facts.

18th April

The *Cuba* returned today. I have been longing to see George's dear face again.

Col Wakefield's newly established Constabulary Force are already earning their keep. Henry Baker was arrested and charged with ill-treating and beating his wife, and threatening to kill her. He was bound over in the sum of forty pounds, to keep the peace towards her for the term of six calendar months. I remember her showing off her infant daughter for the first time aboard the *Duke* of Roxburgh, barely more than a child herself. I have heard of men who mistreat women, like Mr Gomm, but I never thought a man would beat a nursing mother. It makes me so angry. How dare he

beat the mother of his child, how dare he. So much for choosing ‘men of good character’ for the settlement.

19th April

I have in front of me the first newspaper printed in the colony, the second issue of the *Gazette*. Mr Revans brought his printing press and supplies aboard the *Adelaide*, having already printed the first issue before he left London.

Mr Pierce has placed an advertisement for his shop, the ‘*Britannia Hotel & Stores*’, the first in Port Nicholson. It stocks groceries of all kinds – bread, flour and biscuits, spirits, wine, ale and porter, in cask and bottle, hams from York and Westphalia – as well as haberdashery, ironmongery and cutlery, and nails direct from our own *Britannia* works. It sounds so very formal – “J. Pierce hopes that the competitive system of puffing, so much practised in the old world, will never be introduced in this Colony; he therefore refrains from introducing prices, and merely invites a trial” – as if we are in the paved streets of London, not this raw timber building in the swampy end of a harbour, ten thousand miles away.

It appears that he will have stiff competition for his wares, if the advertisements are anything to go by. A long list of luxury goods are offered for sale from the *Glenbervie*, by none other than Mr Lyon and Mr Hunter, and Mr Telford is selling staples like flour and oats, sugar, tea and butter from his house at the eastern end of the Company’s warehouses on the beach.

Some of the addresses make me giggle. “Last tent, west end of the Beach”, and the ever so elegant “River side.”

Mannings of Holborn are advertising their Portable Colonial Cottages for £15 and upwards, which “may be erected in a few hours, with joists, floors, doors, glazed windows, and painted inside and outside.” I have been very envious of the ones I have already seen.

In addition to my regular domestic service in the Pierce's home, my employment now includes working in the shop, which makes a pleasant change. Mr Pierce was pleased to discover that I have a quick head for figures, which he says is a great asset when serving behind the counter. Mrs Pierce says I'm good for business in other ways, and winked at me. I had to ask what she meant.

"Why Mary, have you not noticed the number of young men who linger about the shop until they can be served by you?"

"No, Mrs Pierce."

She shook her head and laughed good-naturedly. "Your head is full of that George! You're a handsome girl, and with the lack of eligible females here, plainer ones than you are doing very well for themselves when it comes to catching a husband."

"I hope you don't think I..."

"No, no, that's not what I meant. But a well-bred, educated girl like you could aim very high indeed. Mr Hunter's boy seems to come here often, for someone whose father has his own warehouse full of goods."

"But..." Georgie Hunter? I'm four years his elder, and until recently, governess to his younger siblings. She must be mistaken. "I...I'm promised to Mr Bennett."

"It never hurts to keep your options open."

21st April

The *Bolton* arrived, with the latest newspapers and letters from England. I don't expect any letters from home yet, but still it is an ache to witness the joy as others receive theirs.

As we waited on shore to greet the new arrivals, I noticed a young woman on the boat was bent over, shielding something on her lap with her arms. I wondered what it might be – some new-hatched chicks perhaps, or a kitten. Intrigued, I made my way through the crowd to her side.

Cradled in her arms was a small burlap sack filled with soil, out of which sprang a small but healthy rose cutting. I congratulated her on keeping it healthy on the voyage. Roses will only grow true from cuttings, and she said she wanted to bring a piece of her mother's pink climbing rose to remember her by, so her husband Jacob put the cutting in a potato before planting it, which helped keep it alive.

“What a clever idea, Mrs...?”

“Harris. Sophia Harris.”

“Well done, Sophia. I hope one day I may get a cutting from your rose for my garden.”

25th April

The Gazette is extolling the virtues of Port Nicholson – “It wants only a beacon on the reef, and a lighthouse on the eastern headland, and it will be as safe to enter, day or night, as any harbour in the world.” I shivered at the thought. Pity the poor keeper doomed to so remote a watch.

29th April

Cargo from the *Bolton* is being unloaded directly at Thorndon – Mr Hunter has already relocated his storehouse there. There are several more hotels and taverns opened, warehouses and retail shops, even coffee rooms. Australian ships bring large numbers of cattle and sheep, so we are not without fresh meat. There are also plenty of wild pigs to be had, as well as goats and large numbers of native birds, which the gentlemen shot daily when we first arrived.

2nd May

The English news mentions an outbreak of scarlet fever and typhus in November last year, brought on by the humidity of the late rains. Many children have died in Kendal – that's only 60

miles from Braisty Woods. I tell myself it does no good to worry about it now; no doubt it was all over when I was still aboard ship. But I can't help thinking about it.

7th May

It seemed much colder this morning, and when I looked to the north there was a powdering of snow on the highest peaks of the Tararua ranges.

9th May

In the newspaper there is an estimate of the number of people living in Port Nicholson. 'Approximately 840 Maoris' appears a very dubious guess to me, as they have based it on there being '210 men' and then have assumed there is one woman for every man, and one boy and girl child for each couple, which is absurd. We English number 1275, based on emigrant records, plus an additional 100 or so from sources unknown.

16th May

There is to be a grand fete and public ball at Thorndon when the plan for the new town is complete about two months' time. Gentlemen will pay a £2 subscription and may invite as many ladies as they like. A ball at last – I do hope I will be invited. I will have to air out my best frock and make sure it needs no repairs after being packed away for so long. We are all tired, I think, of work and more work. It will be good to have something to look forward to.

17th May

Henry Eaton has died from the head wound received last month. He was only 11.

23rd May

Josias Tucker has opened a smithy in a shop at the back of Mr Hunter's stores. Mr Hunter will be pleased to have a farrier close by for Temperance. There are not many horses in the colony as yet, but a few more arrive with each livestock ship from Australia.

26th May

During the night a fire broke out in Cornish Row, where the Tuckers moved after the flood. The native style of construction, with bundles of reeds for walls and thatching, is quick to build and the hollow reeds keep in the warmth. But when dry they are liable to catch fire easily, and the usual strong wind spread it quickly. Fifteen huts burned to the ground. Thankfully no-one was killed, and most of their families were able to save their furniture and clothes, but one or two lost everything. The Reverend Butler is to preach a charity sermon on Sunday next, to collect funds for the displaced. Mr Pierce is also accepting donations at the hotel. Those families who were not able to find temporary lodging with their neighbours or employers have been given quarters in the Immigration Houses.

No sooner had we settled the displaced and gone back to our own beds when there was a sudden jolt and shift sideways, and what felt like a wave passed through the house, then a rough bumping, as if my bed were on the back of a cart travelling over a rutted street. George had warned me that the country is prone to quakes, being volcanic, but I had never experienced one before. An hour later, it happened again. It was alarming, but also somewhat exciting – I have felt an earthquake!

27th May

Two more minor quakes today. The second was so faint that I wasn't sure if it was my imagination, but the tinkling of the glass bottles on the shelves of the shop confirmed it.

29th May

Col. Wakefield has called up all men between the ages of 18 and 60 to form a militia in case we need to defend the settlement from attack. I never thought that George would be called on to be a soldier in our new life. The Wesleyan faith is a peaceable one, and like me, he firmly believes that man should not take up arms against his fellow man. My brother and I had heated words about this when he first decided to join the 16th Lancers. It is the only time I have had a serious argument with Will. Traditionally it is always the second son that joins the military, but our lack of fortune made it an appealing alternative for Will, despite being the firstborn. I hope that George is not called on to fight and put his convictions to the test.

30th May

The river flooded again and this time it was far more serious. All of the settlers were affected as the water rose steadily to two or three feet deep and swirled through the tents and huts. It was a day of bizarre sights amid the chaos. Mr Monteith sat atop boxes playing 'Home Sweet Home' on his accordion while muddy water surged around him. I saw a pig tied to a tree, swimming for his life. Mr Duppa reached his bell tent by whale boat and found his writing desk and other possessions floating inside. Three women were marooned on a bedstead in their home and when Bill Taylor discovered them, he set about making tea in a floating iron pot and fed them ship's biscuits until the waters receded.

31st May

A group meeting of all the men was held to decide the future placement of the settlement. Captain Smith, the Surveyor-General, used to be in favour of developing a town where we currently reside around the river at the north end of the harbour, whereas Col. Wakefield always wanted it to be at the southern end at Thorndon, where the Maori people have their potato gardens. Some

businesses have already set up there, where the sheltered water makes it easier to unload goods. Since Petone has proved to be prone to flooding, as the natives had tried to warn us, and difficult to access by boat in rough weather, general consensus was reached to move the official settlement to the south end of the harbour. Capt Smith and the survey party, of which George is part, are to begin mapping out the new town and developing a plan.

News has reached us via the *Bee* that the *Aurora* was wrecked trying to leave Kaipara Harbour last month, carrying a load of Kauri spars and the mail to England. I will have to write my letter to Ann over again.

4th June

The Colonial Secretary, Mr Shortland, who arrived two days ago from the Bay of Islands, has issued two proclamations from Mr Hobson, the Lt Governor of New Zealand, asserting the sovereignty of Queen Victoria over the Northern and Southern islands of this country. It must be strange for a woman to wield such power, especially one who is but twenty-one.

11th June

Finally there is some news from England, via the *Speculator* and *Hope*, just arrived from Sydney. Letters from home, although none for me, and copies of the English newspapers to the end of last December. No mention of the outbreak of illness in Lancashire. The wool trade and manufacturing have taken a downturn in the north – Papa will not be pleased. Unemployment and poverty among the working classes are worse than ever. The young Queen is to be married to her cousin Albert sometime this year. It may have already happened by now.

20th June

George is still looking after the stores of the survey team at Thorndon while they map out the future town acres. Everyone is anxious for it to be complete, so that they can make their selection, but I wish it done for another reason – so that I might get to spend more time with my intended. It isn't enough to see him just on Sundays, and then only if the weather is fine enough to land the boats at Petone. He assures me that Capt Smith has said the work will be finished soon, and the plan drawn up and on display within a few weeks.

25th June

The *Brougham* has arrived, carrying supplies of beef, pork, flour and biscuit for the colony, and news that Queen Victoria married her Prince Albert on February 10th. She broke with tradition and wore a white gown to match her bridesmaids, and the wedding feast featured a 300lb plum cake that was three yards across.

27th June

When *Brougham* left London on February 15th, no account of the *Tory*'s safe arrival in New Zealand had been received, so in England they don't yet know where we have settled. My second letter can't possibly have reached there yet. Ann must be so worried that she has not heard from me for 9 months.

3rd July

The *Premier* has arrived from London with the English news to 2 April. The Queen is *enceinte*, which is a dainty way of saying she is going to have a baby.

13th July

Yesterday after church, George surprised me with a ticket to the public concert and ball being held this evening at the Commercial Hotel. It will be the first opportunity since we arrived to dress up in my best outfit and put my hair up and sparkle for a change. I'm so looking forward to it.

18th July

In the newspaper, for everyone to read, it says that in the Police Court last month, Mr MacNamara was fined £5 for assault and breach of the peace, and Holmes, Bennett, Newall and Anderson were fined £1 each. I wish they had made it clear that it was Mr John Bennett, not my George! He may be George's cousin, but I hope we will not have much to do with him in future.

19th July

The town plan is finally complete and will be on exhibit at Capt Smith's house for a week starting tomorrow.

Mr Gomm and his wife were strolling along the jetty when he took offense at something someone said, and went at them with a knife. Luckily Col Wakefield was nearby and intervened.

25th July

The Gazette reports that in the Police Court hearing on the 20th, the case of Gomm vs Allen, Anderson, Sutherland (senior and junior) and Brown for assault was dismissed. However, the case brought by Anderson, the Sutherlands and Brown vs Gomm was upheld, and he was bound over to keep the peace.

25th August

There has been a terrible accident. Two boats coming from Brittainia in a strong south-west wind capsized in the heavy surf off Petone beach. Mr Allen's boat overturned 100 yards from shore with twelve people aboard. Mr Wright's passage boat and Mr Hunter's boat were put in to assist but were swamped immediately. The Englishmen waiting ashore waded in to the icy water as far as they dared, but most cannot swim. Some Maoris shed their clothes and threw themselves into the sea – they are such strong swimmers, even the women. With their help, nine of the passengers were pulled ashore. Three were alive; Mr Bradey, Mr Fowler, and the steersman. The other six were laid out insensible on the land.

Among them were three I knew from the *Duke* – Mr Hight, the blacksmith Josias Tucker – and worst of all, Mr Pierce. Every effort was made to resuscitate them, but to no avail. To see them lying there, so limp, pale of face, lips blue, who once were so hale and full of life – nothing in my life prepared me for seeing this, and now I cannot stop remembering it. Two of the missing three later washed ashore. One has not yet been found.

Nearly two miles out another boat owned by Mr Coglan capsized off the east end of the beach. The three unconscious occupants were rescued by Mr Collett's boat, and restored to life by the efforts of Mr and Mrs Collett, and Mr Watts.

Mrs Pierce is sleeping. Dr Healy gave her a draft of laudanum. What will she do now? Her husband was her only family here. And what will that mean for me, if she decides to go home to England?

26th August

The Maoris have erected a large carved post at the water's edge. Mr Barrett explained that it is not a memorial to the dead, as I assumed, but a sign that a 'ra-hooi' has been placed on the bay

following the drownings. The waters are off-limits for fishing and shellfish gathering until the ban is lifted.

Mr Barrett is a former whaler who is married to a daughter of one of the native chiefs. He has been living on Kapiti Island for some 15 years, and is one of the reasons the local tribespeople speak and write English surprisingly well. When the Tory arrived, he was the one who helped them find the entrance to this harbour. He has been of great help in communicating with and smoothing over any misunderstandings with the natives.

27th August

This morning the wind carried the distant reports of many guns being fired. There was a great deal of apprehension that we were about to be attacked. Soon what seemed like all of the able-bodied native men of Petone came running out of the Pah, fully armed, and took to the water in a number of large canoes, or waka as they call them.

Each vessel holds about twenty of the warriors, three standing – the steersman at the back, a lookout at the front, and what appeared to be their equivalent of a coxswain in the middle, exhorting them to greater effort. The rest sat in pairs and wielded their single paddles, keeping time with their chant. It was a very lively sight, the canoes passing and re-passing each other. With their raven hair tied back and their tattooed faces, muscles flexing under their gleaming dark skin, they made an impressive show.

The waka remind me of Viking ships, the way they curve up at each end, with carvings on the prow and the raised post at the stern. I heard they were headed out towards Palliser Bay, which is to the east of the harbour entrance. Another tribe lives there, with whom they recently made peace. Now there seem to be concerns that the others have broken faith.

28th August

The funeral took place today at 2pm. The dead were all interred together in a mass grave. Service and prayers were performed by the Reverends Butler and McFarlane, whose words were impressive but hardly seemed enough to disperse the collective grief which numbed us all. The wind crept icy fingers down my spine and fluttered the hems of black dresses and shawls. The nine colonists drowned were: Messrs John Pierce, William Elsdon, Frank Hight and John Lancaster, blacksmith Josias Tucker, thatcher Charles Rogers, steward John Griffin of the *Cuba*, a sailor called Martin from the *Jewess*, and the still-missing character know as Colonial Bill.

At my side Mrs Pierce looked pale and wept quietly into her handkerchief. In the crowd, Mr Hight's infant son Charles cried and struggled in his mother's embrace. On the other side of the grave stood Elizabeth Tucker, baby Beth in her arms, and her three other young children. Her face was white and set into bitter lines that made her look much older than her thirty-three years. First flood, then fire, and now this – she must feel as if they're cursed.

Two ships arrived in the late afternoon, which proved to be some much-needed good news for Mrs Pierce. They belonged to my late employer, and have been missing for a long time, presumed lost. It seems the hand of Providence that they should arrive today, when she is most in need of the financial support.

29th August

The Gazette commended by name the Maoris who assisted at the rescue. The five men were Ma Hau, E Wanga, E Pake, E Ware and E Pouni, and the three women were E Tutu, E Wa and E Ui – Petone's own Grace Darlings. I wonder if their courage will be internationally acclaimed, as hers was.

30th August

Mrs Pierce is going to reopen the Hotel and store for trading tomorrow. It isn't seemly, so soon after her husband's death, but she wants to keep busy – and really, what choice does she have? Poor woman. She has been very kind to me, more like a mother than an employer. She hopes I will not get married too soon, as she will be relying on my help to keep everything running smoothly. Female servants are hard to find and keep here, she says – with so many single men in want of wives, even the plain and stupid girls can catch good husbands.

George and I haven't set a date yet. We are waiting for him to finish his surveying work and then we need a place to live and an income. One of his friends from the *Cuba*, William Allen, is getting married on Wednesday next to Martha Draper from *Aurora*, and he has asked George to be one of his witnesses. William is twenty-five years of age, with a good trade, and Martha is thirty and can't even write her own name. I see what Mrs Pierce meant.

16th September

George and Mr Lyon have been collecting money to help support the widows and children who lost their fathers. Between them they were able to raise over £70.

19th September

Dr Monteith has written to the paper with his advice on how to best to treat victims of drowning. It will happen again here – so few Englishmen know how to swim – so I'm keeping a copy. Even British sailors aren't taught how to swim, so there is less chance they will jump ship when in port. That seems very cruel.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE "NEW ZEALAND GAZETTE."

SIR,—Several melancholy deaths from drowning having lately occurred, I feel it a duty to make a few remarks upon the treatment of cases of suspended animation, for the guidance of the public generally in the absence of medical aid; it being frequently at too great a distance to render the prompt assistance necessary in such cases. Should you consider the notes worthy your attention, an early publication of them will greatly oblige, Sir,

Your obedient servant,

G. D. MONTEITH,

Petoni, Sept. 18, 1840.

Surgeon.

DIRECTIONS.

After having taken off the wet clothes, endeavour gradually to restore the natural temperature of the surface by means of hot napkins or flannels, placing the body almost horizontally, the head being a little elevated, and, if possible, make the patient swallow a few spoonfuls of some aromatic stimulant. Artificial respiration should at the same time endeavour to be kept up by breathing in at the mouth or nostrils of the patient, so as to inflate the lungs, and afterwards the air expelled by pressure made with the hand upon the chest. Holding ammonia and ether to the nostrils, tickling the inside of the throat with a feather, friction over the region of the heart with aromatic tinctures, aromatic vinegar or common table salt, hot bottles of water or heated bricks to the feet, hands, and arm pits, and boiling water in bladders or flannels dipped into it and applied to the pit of the stomach, and should be resorted to in rapid succession, to endeavour to kindle up the almost extinguished spark of life.

It is too frequent a practice to hold the head of the patient downwards, to give vent, as is erroneously supposed, to a quantity of water. Such treatment tends only to the speedy loss of every chance of re-animation.

3rd October

At last we have heard that news of the successful settlement of Port Nicholson was received in England in late April or early May. In consequence, two more emigrant ships are on their way –

the *Martha Ridgeway* and the *Resource*. I hope that one of them will bring me a letter from home. I long to hear their news.

4th October

The weather is beginning to warm up now and feel like spring – will I ever get used to spring being in October? – and it was fine and sunny with only a light breeze, so after church George suggested we walk along the waterfront as far as Mr Allen’s stores. There is much new building taking place all around the curve of the bay, and we commented on the progress made since last week, and the different styles of construction. Mr Allen’s stores are at the end of a smaller bay which indents the large one, and which I have often said to George is the prettiest spot in the harbour. We were almost at our destination, with only a small rise between us and Allen’s, when George stopped and pointed at the water.

“Look,” he said, “is that a whale?”

I turned to see but couldn’t spot anything unusual. “Where?”

George stood behind me and pointed again, so that I could sight along his arm. “There.”

It was very hard to concentrate with him standing so close. I could feel his warm breath on the back of my neck, and it made my skin tingle. “I can’t see anything.”

“Wait,” he said, and put one hand over my eyes.

“Now I definitely can’t see anything.”

With his other hand on my shoulder he steered me in a half-circle, so that we were facing away from the sea, and then uncovered my eyes. I was looking at a large timber cottage with a front door in the middle, real glass windows either side, a raupo thatched roof with wide gables at each end, and a picket fence.

His warm lips brushed my ear as he whispered, “Welcome to your new home.”

5th October

What a wonderful surprise it was yesterday. George showed me around the cottage while he told me how he had been saving his pay week after week so that he could build us a house when his surveying job ended, and how he had seen this house advertised complete for several months, and he'd been so worried that someone would buy it before he could, but finally he had made an offer which had been accepted and now it was ours. He scarce took breath he was so excited. The house has three rooms, and a passage front to back, timber floors, and a separate out-house containing a kitchen, store-room and servant's room. It's positively luxurious by colony standards.

"It's perfect for what I have in mind," he said.

"What do you have in mind?"

"The Durham Arms."

It made excellent sense. We could live and work in the same place. There are always new arrivals needing a place to stay, or single men wanting a home-cooked meal. I already had experience in the business from my time at the Britannia Hotel.

I didn't think Mrs Pierce would be best pleased that we would be in competition with her, but I did her an injustice. I told her as I cleared away the breakfast things, so that she wouldn't hear it from someone else first. I felt so guilty that I started to cry.

"You silly goose, why are you crying? Sit down." I sat and she patted my hand. "This is happy news, isn't it? Now you can marry Mr Bennett?"

I sniffled that it was indeed happy news.

"So have you chosen a date?"

"We are waiting for St Paul's to be finished, so that we can be married in a house of God."

"That will be lovely."

"Reverend Churton thinks it will be ready in about 6 weeks. Will that be enough notice?"

“Plenty. You can help me train a new clerk before you go. I will miss you, though, so far away on the other side of the harbour.”

“I will miss you, too.”

“I daresay. But not for long, with a husband to care for, and before your first anniversary a little one to keep you busy, God willing.” There was a wistful catch in her voice, and she stood up briskly to dispel it. “Now, time to get on and open the shop.”

10th October

There it is in black and white in the newspaper – George White Bennett, licensed publican of the Durham Arms. He has also advertised for an experienced cook, a barmaid, and an active young man as waiter.

20th November

We were married this morning in St Paul’s, the sweet little timber church on the hill behind Thorndon. The weather was sunny and mild, with a fresh breeze. I wore my best dress, the one that George first saw me in at the Coronation Ball. I had thought of making a white wedding dress, in the new fashion inspired by Queen Victoria, but realised how impractical that would be for everyday wear. It was surely a fad for the wealthy that wouldn’t last. The Reverend Churton performed the ceremony, and George finally was able to slide his grandmother’s garnet ring onto my finger. The Jacksons were there – James as best man and Emma as matron of honour. James and Mr Alfred Hodges were our witnesses. I wonder if we are the first couple to be married in Wellington rather than Brittania, since the town was renamed in honour of the hero of Waterloo?

Last night I stayed at the Jacksons’ cottage in Thorndon, so that Emma could help me get ready.

While she was arranging my hair this morning, she asked “Mary, has your mother ever talked to you about what to expect on your wedding night?”

“No. Mother hasn’t been well for many years. I was mostly raised by my spinster aunts.”

“Ah, well in that case...” And she proceeded to enlighten me. “Generally men enjoy it more than women. They have...needs, which must be met regularly.”

“Don’t women have needs?”

“Some women do.”

I had always thought that the marriage bed was for the getting of children, but it seems there might be more to it than that.

After the ceremony, we walked with our guests back to the Durham Arms for a wedding breakfast. Mrs Taylor, the new cook, had outdone herself. There was a variety of bread, hot rolls and buttered toast, eggs, ham and tongue in aspic. The luxury of hot chocolate and a fruit cake with white sugar icing marked the special nature of the occasion.

21st November

Yesterday was the happiest day ever. The Queen could not have enjoyed her wedding day more. Emma had warned me to expect some pain, but if there was any I didn’t notice it.

Durham Arms, Lambton Quay, Britannia,

21st November, 1840

Dear Will,

I hope you have received my previous letter telling you of my safe arrival in New Zealand. I should have written again but I am sure that dear Ann has kept you informed, and I have been so busy as there is much to do here.

I remember the excitement of seeing your Regiment off from Gravesend when you sailed for India, the band and the cheering, you and your brothers in arms looking so dashing. Your stories of the voyage and the wondrous things you have seen in India awoke in me a desire for adventure beyond the stone walls of Braisty Woods, and now I am living that adventure. I so long to hear from you. Please write soon at the above address.

I have saved the best news for last – yesterday George and I were wed. Yes, your sister is a married woman. I am wonderfully happy, the only thing that could possibly have added to my joy was if my dear brother and sister could have stood up with me.

Your affectionate sister,

Mrs George Bennett – but you may still call me Mary Jane

30th November

St Andrew's Day. Mr Lyon invited us to a party at his farm Glenlyon, just west of Petone, where we joined a large group who gave three cheers as the first Scottish thistle was planted. Afterwards we all sat on blankets for a picnic lunch, whiskey toddies and oat cakes. It was quite the reunion of *Duke* passengers – the Hunter family, the Jacksons, Mr Greenwood and Mrs Pierce – and we received many warm congratulations on our recent marriage.

In the evening there was a dinner at Barrett's Hotel, Britannia, where the gentlemen drank many toasts, to Queen, country and each other, followed by a select ball with a quadrille band. George has been selling tickets at the Durham Arms for the last few weeks. At 16 shillings per couple, I thought we could not afford to go, but George surprised me with a pair of tickets as a

honeymoon gift. It was heaven to dance again, and show off my wedding ring, and have everyone call me Mrs Bennett.

6th December

The *Cuba* arrived back from Sydney and the Bay of Islands yesterday. Captain Newcombe was good enough to drop by with a letter addressed to 'Miss M.J. Bennett' in Aunt Judith's familiar neat handwriting. As soon as he was gone I opened it eagerly.

Braisty Woods

25th July, 1840

Dear Mary,

We heard of the safe arrival of the Duke of Roxburgh in the New Zealand Journal published in London on the 18th inst. It contained only scanty news of the Colony, but at least it gave me a destination to which to send this letter.

I have some very sad news. It grieves me to write it as much as I know it will grieve you to hear it. Your sister Ann was taken into the arms of the Lord on the 4th March, after a wasting fever.

We are devastated, none more so than your mother. She no longer comes downstairs and takes her meals in her room, when she eats at all. Your father is drinking too much. The house feels so empty without you both.

Please write soon and tell us you are safe and well.

Your loving

Aunt Judith

George says he heard a crash from the bedroom and found me lying on the floor. He carried me to the bed and was going to call the doctor, but didn't want me to be alone when I woke up.

* * *

It is so hard to care about the daily goings-on of life in the colony when all I can think of is Ann lying there cold and all this time I haven't known. George has been so very solicitous, taking me out for a gentle stroll every morning, bringing me sweet rolls from the bakery to tempt me to eat. I feel numb. Was it my fault? Would Ann have fallen ill if I hadn't run away? Would she have recovered if I'd been there to tend her?

Emma visits often and tells me things she thinks might be of interest. The *London* arrived on the 12th with 193 emigrants and 43 cabin passengers. Queen Victoria has appointed her Albert as Regent should she die before her children reach majority. The Gomms have left town without settling their debts, and no-one knows where they have gone, or how. The first step toward a town Library has been taken, with an exchange and reading room set up in Captain Rhodes' storehouse. Mr Wades has begun delivering clay bricks made in our own brickfields, so we may soon see some sturdier public buildings under construction. None of it diverts me.

Our first Christmas together was a sad affair in consequence. It was another warm day, and so did not feel at all like the holy day should. Mrs Taylor had excelled herself in the kitchen, with roast leg of lamb with mint sauce followed by mince tarts, boiled suet pudding and custard. George said by the time she was finished cooking in the heat, she looked like a boiled pudding herself. The food was delicious, but I could only eat a few bites. I want to be at Braisty Woods, with holly on the table and snow in the fields outside, a blazing log fire in the hearth, and my family all around me. But even if I was, Ann wouldn't be there.

The end of 1840 and the start of 1841 was marked with gun salutes from all the vessels in port, and ringing of their bells. Emigrant ship *Blenheim* arrived a few days ago in time for the celebrations, with another 150 emigrants in steerage, and eleven in cabins, all Scottish and

personally selected by the Laird McDonald. Blue lights on the *London* were answered by the same on shore, and cheers from the throng on the beach. We dined at the Jacksons before joining the merry crowd, and I tried to laugh and smile with them, for George's sake. I really did. The night may be warm, but I feel like my face is frozen.

In England they have commenced building a tunnel beneath the Thames for those on foot. Here the colonists are still trying to invent a superior means to prepare New Zealand flax for export than the native method of scoring each separate leaf by hand with a mussel shell. The Great North of England Railway has reached Darlington, more than halfway from York to Newcastle. To think that if we had stayed and married in England, our families might one day visit each other by train. But Ann would still be dead.

A town Committee was formed to plan a fete and ball on Friday the 22nd January to celebrate the anniversary of the arrival of the first settlers in Port Nicholson. Unfortunately they couldn't reach agreement on whether the event should be open to all residents, or only the 'gentlemen and ladies'. So now we have the ridiculous situation of there being 'public' sporting matches – sailing and whale boat rowing, a canoe race for the Maoris, horse hurdles, jumping in sacks, a rifle match, climbing a greased pole, and catching a soapy-tailed pig – and 'select' ones – again horse hurdles, a rifle match, sailing, rowing and native canoe races. Only in the latter, the price for fastest canoe is £5, rather than three sacks of rice. I can guess which will be more hotly contested by the natives.

At least Mr Hunter is championing the lower classes with an impressive prize for the winner of the hurdle race – the 'Pickwick Purse' of £15, 15s. Of course he may rather be hoping that Temperance will win, and the prize money stay in the donor's pocket. Entertainments are to be provided to the Maoris from the various pahs, and the day to conclude with a grand war dance by them, on Te Aro flat. In the evening, a popular ball will be held in the large room at the Southern Exchange, while the select one takes place at Barrett's Hotel. I will go to neither as I'm still mourning for Ann.

Another month has gone by. George has become a committee member of the Wellington Land Association. Tonight was the inaugural meeting at the Durham Arms, and subsequent meetings will be held here every Thursday night. Their purpose is to combine funds to buy land, subdivide and re-sell it, or let it to raise funds to help artisans, mechanics and working class people afford to buy land sooner, by a system of share and ballot. The workers came out here with the promise of owning their own land, but as yet the majority of it is in the hands of the wealthy. We pay ground rent on the land the Durham Arms stands on, and we have workers to pay and goods to purchase. It is very hard to save money. I used to enjoy visiting the Greenwoods and the Jacksons on their acreages at Lowry Bay, but now I go less often. They are very kind in letting us keep some livestock there, as there is no space for our pigs and cattle on our town quarter acre. George spends quite a bit of his free time there these days, fishing with the other men. I think he's given up on trying to break through the wall of sadness which surrounds me. Perhaps he doesn't love me anymore.

11th April 1841

Mrs Jabez Allen has been blessed with a baby boy. I took her some broth and a cap I had sewed for the little one. When I arrived she had just fed him and I held him, milky-drunk and sweet. His little scrunched-up face reminded me of Ann when she was born, and Mrs Allen gently took him back when she noticed I was dripping silent tears on his swaddling.

“What's wrong, Mary?”

Her kind voice broke open something inside me that had been walled up since I received Aunt Judith's letter. I poured it all out, how I was filled with joy being married to George until Aunt Judith's letter arrived, and then I felt so guilty that I'd been happy when Ann was dead that I couldn't enjoy being a wife anymore, and maybe it was my fault that she had died because I had been so selfish running away and leaving her alone...

“Now, now, you take too much to yourself. The Lord decides these things, and there is nothing you or I can do to change His will. When did your sister pass?”

“In March of last year, soon after we arrived here.” My voice cracked a little on the last word.

“Then your mourning period is over,” she said firmly. “What you need is a babe of your own to take your mind off your troubles. If I know your George, he’s been very considerate of how you’re feeling?”

“He has.”

“He’s a sweet man. But he can’t be patient forever. It’s time to be a wife again, if you want one of these,” she said, planting a gentle kiss on her sleeping son’s forehead. He half opened one eye, like a sleepy pirate, and we both laughed. A little bit of the ice that has been numbing my heart these last few months began to soften.

20th April

George spent the day fishing at Lowry Bay with James and the Greenwoods. Mr Greenwood’s brother Joseph arrived last month on the *Lady Nugent* and they are farming together near the Jacksons. I have since seen him a few times at Methodist Chapel. He seems a quiet, devout young man.

It was a fine, warm day, so I took the opportunity to air the mattress while I boiled the copper and washed the bed linen. I swept the floors and finished making the new dress I had been working on, from some printed cotton from Mr Lyon’s store. I washed my hair and rinsed it with rosemary water.

When George came home we had a lovely supper of fresh fish with mashed potatoes and Maori cabbage. Afterwards I suggested an early night and instead of curling up on my side of the

bed, as had become my habit, I snuggled up to him and kissed his lips. He tasted of salt and sunshine and it was lovely, just as it used to be.

10th May

Yesterday we stopped at the South Sea Coffee House on the way back from church service, as we often do. The coffee tasted very strange, though George noticed nothing amiss.

Then this morning I felt quite queasy, as though I had eaten something that disagreed with me, although I'd had no breakfast. I mentioned it to Mrs Taylor, who gave me a hot roll and a cup of milky tea, which helped settle my stomach. She also said I should 'check my dates'. For a moment I had no idea what she meant, and then I realised. I think I may be *enceinte*!

2nd June

George went to Lowry Bay with James and several other men to fish and try to catch our pigs. The Greenwoods are making progress with the clearing their land – stumping trees, burning fern and flax – but there is still so much bush and swampy land in the area where the animals can hide. In the end they caught only two swine.

14th June

A letter came for George, via the *Catherine Stewart Forbes*, which arrived from England on the 11th. He read it and then he put his hand over his face. I knelt by him and asked what was the matter, and he wordlessly handed the note to me. His brother Francis wrote to say that their father died in December, a few months shy of his 60th birthday. Francis went on to say that their sister Mary had her baby in September, not long after he sailed, and both were well, as were Francis' two young sons.

I put my arms around George and rocked him. I know how it feels to lose someone you love and not be able to grieve with your family.

16th July

James and Emma have opened a 'Woollen Drapery Establishment' on the Quay next to Lambton Tavern. Their stock comes from the West Riding – when I ran my fingers over the smooth weft of a bolt of superfine broad cloth I wondered if it could have come from the Hebden mill.

7th September

I was browsing the selection in the Public Library – there was a limited selection and many I had read before – when I felt a peculiar sensation in my midriff. It felt like a little fish doing somersaults inside me. The wonder of it was such that I dropped the book I was holding, and got a stern look and a tut-tut from the librarian.

George is over at Lowry Bay with James. He has been there several times in the last few weeks, either fishing or pig hunting with the men. I can't wait to tell him when he gets back.

24th September

A letter has reached me via the *Regia* from Sydney. I don't recognise the handwriting but the wax closure has been stamped with a military seal. I cannot think who this might be from.

Meerut, India, 17th June 1841

Dear Mrs Bennett,

It is with regret that I write to inform you that your brother Private William Hebden died yesterday after a short illness. Amongst his effects I

found your letter, and knowing how fondly he spoke of you, I wished to offer my sincere condolences on your loss.

William was a fine young man who was well-liked and respected by his fellow soldiers. I have no doubt that given time, he would have made an excellent officer if circumstances had been different.

I have informed your parents of this sad news in a separate communiqué.

Yours sincerely,

C. Havelock

Adjutant, The Queen's 16th Lancers

When George came home he found me throwing clothes and shoes into my trunk.

“Mary, what are you doing?”

“I’m going home. I have to get back to England.”

He looked alarmed, and approached me slowly, as you would a panicked horse. “What has happened?” His voice was low and soothing.

I couldn’t speak so I pointed at the letter on the dresser. He picked it up and read. For a moment he shut his eyes and shook his head. He came and took the pile of underthings from my hands and guided me to a seat on the bed. Sitting down beside me, he put one arm around my waist and with the other he gently held my clenched hands, slowly rubbing his thumb over the taut knuckles all the while speaking quietly and softly.

“My poor lass. I’m so sorry I wasn’t here when you got the news. Of course you must go home if that is what you want. Of course you must. I will go with you, my sweet girl. I just wonder if now is the best time, with the baby coming. Your brother wouldn’t want you to risk the baby, or yourself, now would he? I know how much he loved you. I know how much you loved him, my

poor lass...” The soft cadence of his voice affected me more than the words themselves. I turned my face into his chest, like a wounded animal, and his arms held me close while I broke apart.

27th October

Joseph Greenwood has come to stay with us until his arm heals. He’s a quiet, devout young man who improves his mind by reading. I see him at church most Sundays, although sometimes he attends a different service, or even more than one. Yesterday at Lowry Bay he fell while getting to the boat and put out his right arm to save himself, causing it to be broken in four places. His brother James brought him to Wellington late last night and had it set by Dr Fitzgerald this morning.

It has helped take my mind off Will, looking after him. The pain was bad so the Doctor gave him syrup of poppies to help him sleep, and one night, deep in a laudanum nightmare, he said some strange things. Garbled protests about James hitting him around the head with a boot, teasing Joseph about when he will go courting and get married, and emptying a chamber pot over him. George and I looked at each other with troubled eyes. If true, this was a side of Mr Greenwood that he had kept well hidden on the voyage over and in the time since.

The *Gertrude* arrived on the 31st with more emigrants, among them the Thompsons, a man and wife who have been brought over to ‘do’ for the Greenwood brothers. I hope that this will make life easier for Joseph, and I tried to use it as an opening to get him to talk about the things he’d said about James, but he clammed up. I wish I could get a look at the diary he writes in every night. Luckily he can write with his left hand.

His arm wasn’t healing properly and had to be reset several times, which involves breaking the new connections and starting over again. Dr Fitzgerald had to call on the assistance of several men to hold him down. On the last occasion Joseph said the sight of it made strong men like Major Hornbrook ill.

After a few weeks with us he returned to Lowry Bay, but found that a one-armed man was not well-suited to farm labour. Fortunately we were able to help secure him a position in charge of Mr Lyon's store on Willis Street.

29th November

James and Emma have been robbed. Emma noticed £7 was missing this morning. They think it was Mr Lee, the American coloured man who works for them. We were visiting on Saturday night when Emma paid him from the cash box. They went to church on Sunday, leaving the house unlocked with Jibsey on guard, but he wouldn't attack Mr Lee, who was very friendly with the dog. Fancy stealing seven weeks' wages and thinking to get away with it. George has gone with James to give a statement to the constable.

8th December

There was a shocking report in the newspaper of the gruesome murder of an Englishwoman on Robertson's Island in the Bay of Islands. Her mutilated remains were found in her house, along with those of her manservant, one of her children and a grandson of the local Chief. Another child is still missing. She was the widow of Captain John Robertson who drowned a year ago opposite his own house, within view of his family. Poor woman.

12th December

Last night the wind changed direction very suddenly about 6 o'clock and three ships came to grief in the gale. Coming through the heads at the time, the *Winwick* was driven ashore in Lyall's Bay, while the cattle-laden *Middlesex* struck Barrett's Reef. An American whaling ship, the *Elbe*, suffered a broken mast and was driven into Palliser Bay and wrecked.

14th December

A town meeting was held in the Exchange to consider the best means to make the harbour accessible and prevent future wrecks. Captain Wilson said the true cause was the want of a beacon or some distinguishing mark at the heads. It was agreed almost unanimously that a Pilot and Harbour Master ought to be appointed immediately, and a lighthouse erected. Some parties criticised the New Zealand Company for not having built one before now. A subscription has been started to put up a signal at least, and to form a company to build a lighthouse should the Company or Her Majesty's Government refuse to do it.

15th December

A man's body was discovered lying on the beach about one mile from Petone. At first it was thought to be poor Mr Dunn, who drowned when Cogan's boat was upset again last week, however he was identified as Mr Archibald Milne. He had suffered a deep wound to the back of the head, probably from a tomahawk, and damage to his face and chest, as if he had been dragged on the beach. Witnesses are saying that they saw a young native man following him home, near the Koro Koro stream.

We closed the Durham Arms to attend his funeral at 2pm. It seemed like most of the town had done the same, judging by the large number of people in attendance. There was a lot of talk in hushed voices about the recent acts of violence towards the settlers by unknown Maoris.

The subsequent inquest into Mr Milne's death heard a number of witness who saw the young native man following the victim closely, and were able to identify him by name, however when he was examined on the stand through an interpreter he claimed not to have been there that day, but the day before. The jury found the cause of death to be 'wilful murder by person or persons unknown', which doesn't make us sleep any easier in our beds at night.

4th January 1842

George appeared at the Court of Quarter Sessions as a witness to the theft of the Jackson's money. There was evidence given by others that Mr Lee paid off a number of small debts with notes in the days after the theft, so he was found guilty and sentenced to three years' hard labour.

* * *

The baby in my womb is most active at night. There are kicks and thumps which keep me from sleep, as does as having to get up three or four times a night to use the chamberpot. Before we blow out the candle, George delights in lying next to me, watching the small lumps of fists or feet pushing their way under my skin like moles beneath the grass. I have symmetrical jagged red marks on either side of my swollen belly, parallel claw tracks, where the skin has been stretched beyond breaking point, and similar marks on the sides of my enlarged bosoms. George likes to trace them with his fingertips, and when I shiver, the baby kicks.

I feel so big and ungainly. I haven't seen my toes for weeks. Walking to the Post Office or the Library is getting more uncomfortable every day, both from the weight of the baby pressing into my pelvis so that the bones ache, and passersby eyeing me askance. It's the middle of summer, and on top of chemise, corset, petticoat and dress I now have to wear a loose jacket to conceal my figure. I think once Christmas has come and gone I will stay at home and enjoy my confinement free of corsets and censorious looks.

Durham Arms, Lambton Quay

22nd January 1842

Dear Mama and Papa,

Yesterday your first grandchild came into the world, a little girl. The midwife Mrs McKain was very pleased with me and said I was a model patient. We didn't need to call the doctor as all went very smoothly. I started

feeling birth pains in the early morning hours, and delivered our daughter a little before 4pm.

She is a dear little thing, with a fuzz of dark hair like mine and perfect little rosebud lips. I have enclosed a little sketch I did of her asleep this morning. George says that she looks like his baby sister Margaret Frances did when she was born, whom everyone calls Fanny, and so that is what we have decided to name her.

We thought about calling her Ann, after both our sisters, and George's mother, but I am still too sad about Ann, and I don't want to feel any grief when I hold this beautiful little girl. I hope you can understand that.

George and I are both well. This is a beautiful country and I wish you could see what a success my husband has made of the Durham Arms, and in what esteem he is held by many of the most successful gentlemen in the colony.

Please give my love and respects to Grandmama Jane, Uncle John, Aunt Anne and Aunt Judith.

Your loving daughter,

Mary Jane

24th January

I'm so tired. I used to be a good sleeper but now I wake at the slightest whimper. My whole body has become one giant listening ear. Fanny nurses every few hours – more in the evenings. My bosoms are swollen and very sore. I am still confined to bed so George went on his own to the Anniversary Day Fete, and the first exhibition of the Horticultural and Botanical Society. There were prizes for the best cottage gardens, also awards for the best peas and beans, cauliflowers and

potatoes, carrots, beets and onions. Mr Burcham exhibited a giant cabbage which weighed over 21lbs. Captain Smith is also quite the gardener, and won several prizes, including second place in the best bunch of flowers category. Baron Alzdorf received a special prize for four apples which were the first fruits from the trees he brought from England.

I thought I would be sorry to miss the Anniversary Ball at Barrett's tonight but all I want to do is rest and sleep.

2nd February

Fanny was baptised by Reverend Hadfield, the Archdeacon of Kapiti, in the church where we were married. James and Emma Jackson stood as her Godparents. The Greenwoods and the Allans came, and Mrs Pierce. A week after Fanny was born, she visited and brought me a gift. When she handed me the small parcel tied with string I thought it would be a baby bonnet or mittens or some such. I unwrapped the brown paper and beneath that was a layer of old silk, yellowing and beginning to fray at the corners, protecting the most exquisite christening gown. Its long panelled skirt was made of embroidered bleached cambric, with a v-shaped insert of lace in the short bodice, and a matching inverted panel on the front of the skirt. The boat neck and the gathered waist had narrow white silk ribbons threaded through embroidered eyelets. Small capped sleeves ended in lace ruffles. It was a perfect miniature of a lady's gown. I had made a christening gown for Fanny but it was nothing like as magnificent as this.

I stammered my thanks. "Mrs Pierce, this is exquisite. I can't possibly accept such an expensive gift."

"I hope that you will. I was christened in that robe." She rocked gently in the wooden chair that George had made me, and gazed down at Fanny asleep in her arms. Her expression was full of love, but her smile was fragile. "I thought that I would pass it down to my own children, but it was

not to be.” She looked up at me then, and her eyes were luminous with unshed tears. “I would like you to have it for your children, and their children after.”

6th July

Yesterday afternoon just after sunset a house being built near the courthouse caught fire. The carpenters weren’t able to put out the fire in time and it spread to the court buildings, the post office, and the police station. Sadly our dear little church was also lost. It was fortunate that the occasional showers of rain helped put out the flames, or the fire could have spread along the beach in our direction. The Editor of the Gazette, watching from Petone, said that after an hour the intense blaze resembled a beacon light.

3rd October

Mr Hunter and Mr Lyon received the most number of votes in the election of Aldermen for the borough of Wellington, and Mr Hunter was declared Mayor. I often visit Mr Lyon’s shop on Lambton Quay to admire the beautiful fabrics, shawls, and gloves, even though I cannot afford them. People stop me in the street to tell me what a pretty baby Fanny is, with her dark curls.

10th November

Last night it seemed we had only just gone to sleep when a hammering on the door of the inn jolted us awake.

“Fire! Fire!” a man shouted. We could hear the same warning repeated again and again, growing fainter as the stranger moved to the next building, and the next.

I realised I could smell smoke and hear other shouts of alarm and the chilling screams of women. George leapt up and opened the curtains. A dancing red light illuminated the room. I heard him suck in a sharp breath. By the flickering glow I got up and found my dressing gown. George

quickly pulled trousers on over his nightshirt and stamped his feet into boots, before turning to me and taking my face in his hands.

“Wake the guests, Mary. Then get to a safe place.” His eyes searched my face and then he glanced down at the Fanny asleep in the cradle. “I love you.” His lips pressed mine and he was gone.

In the hall I found our two male guests and Mrs Taylor were already awake, dishevelled and haphazardly dressed. From the front door we could see several buildings ablaze in the vicinity of Mr Lloyd’s bakehouse, along the curve of the waterfront to the left of us. The wind from the north west was blowing half a gale and with each gust a murmur of sparks flew to the nearest houses and stores along Lambton Quay. In the red light we could see the black outline of frantic figures pulling the raupo walls and toitoi thatch from the timber homes before the fire could catch hold. My eyes strained to see one that looked like George.

Mrs Taylor ran back inside and came out with two timber buckets from the scullery, a copper jug and an empty chamber pot. “To wet the thatch,” she cried.

That broke the spell of fear we stood under. We each took a vessel and filled it from the water barrels out the back, dousing the walls and the roof as high as we could throw, over and over. Closer the inferno raged, like a ravening dragon. The speed at which it devoured everything in its path was frightening. We could feel its heat and hear it roar like a thousand spinning jennys. Our efforts seemed puny and futile by comparison. My arms ached. The water barrels were nearly empty. I could see figures running out of burning buildings with bundles and boxes in their arms, carrying them down to the beach. I realised we must do the same, before it was too late.

“Save what you can,” I screamed at my companions.

In our bedroom Fanny was sitting up in her cot and crying, holding up her arms to be picked up. I hadn’t even heard her over the roar of the fire. I wanted to comfort her but there was so little time. I piled clothes, shoes, books in the middle of the bed, and tied them up in a bundle with the

bed linens. By the time I stuffed it out the window I could see the fire was almost on us. I picked up Fanny and she clung to me, shaking and hiccuping. I took hold of the rope handle of the trunk which sat at the foot of our bed and started dragging it to the door when two strangers ran in and lifted it.

“Get out, missus! The roof’s on fire.”

I followed them out and down to the water’s edge, picking up my bundle of linens on the way. Our cash box and my journal were in that trunk. I wasn’t letting it out of my sight.

Outside it was chaos. Numerous buildings were alight, others had already collapsed in a ruin of embers. The air was hot and smoke stung my eyes. Men were running out of our inn with any goods they could save, while others tore blazing thatch from the roof and walls with gaffs and poles and even oars, and pitched it burning into the sea. All along the beach were women and children, some with their worldly goods piled about them, others with nothing more than the clothes in which they slept. Mrs Taylor and I sat on my trunk and leaned into each other’s shoulders, Fanny cuddled between us. Soon the Durham Arms was fully alight, and the conflagration drove back those who were trying to rescue it, and then they ran doggedly on to the next building, and the next. I watched as the roof caved in on itself and the standing timbers twisted and writhed in the tortuous heat, as our first home and our livelihood crashed into ruin before my eyes. It wasn’t until Mrs Taylor took my hand and said, “There, there, lassie,” that I realised I was crying.

George returned at first light the next morning, reeking of smoke, his voice thready. He was so weary he moved like an old man. His clothes were full of tiny holes where hot embers had landed and burned through the cloth. I put my arms around him and wept with relief.

11th November

George has joined cabinet maker John Wales as trustees of the Wellington Baking Company, selling superior flour at a reduced rate of £2, 2s per sack to families and other affected by the fire, cash only. He has also found occasional work with Wallace & Co., delivering supplies to whaling stations and remote farms.

We are housed in the temporary accommodation the Company provides for new emigrants. It is overcrowded and noisy, rather like being back aboard ship. When it rains, the roof leaks and all our things get wet. James and Emma lost their shop in the fire, and have already moved permanently to their land at Lowry Bay. Emma is urging us to come and join them.

15th December

The Fire Relief Committee chaired by G. Hunter has raised over £300 by subscription, as well as donations of timber and other building materials, spare clothing, cloth and offers of free labour.

We moved to Lowry Bay a few weeks after the fire. James and Emma have leased us some of their many acres, and George has built a neat timber cottage with the help of our friends. There is no shortage of timber here from the trees we are cutting down to make pasture. It may not be as luxurious as the poor old Durham Arms, but it's nice to live under our own roof again, and there are only three of us after all. Now that we are back on the Petone end of the harbour, and a little to the east, we don't get early morning sun due to the steep hills behind, but we do see lovely sunsets across the water. George can ride into Petone, and I can visit Emma. We regularly dine at their house, or the Greenwoods. I like to keep an eye on Joseph, to be sure that James is treating him well.

29th December

The mail from England arrived aboard the *Bombay*. There is always a crowd gathered when a ship arrives, in the hope of a letter from home. We all long for that moment when our hand touches the paper that our loved one's hand has touched, and we are transported, however briefly, to the place the letter came from. I can see the writing desk by the window, the rose-patterned carpet, hear from the fields the high-pitched bleats of lambs who have lost their mothers, and the deep reassuring baa of the ewes. I press the paper to my face, hoping to catch the elusive scent of home, but it is gone. All that is left is ink and the smell of the sea.

Braisty Woods,

14th June 1842

My dear niece,

I am sorry to have to tell you that your grandmother Jane passed away peacefully in her sleep last night. She has not been very active of late and the doctor said it was just her time – a visitation from God. It was a shock to us all as she seemed so happy to hear your news about the arrival of baby Fanny, and she was delighted with your sketch and kept it in pride of place by her bedside. She loved all your letters about life in the colony, and often had me read them to her over again, like stories in a favourite novel.

This loss will only make your mother worse, I fear. The approaching anniversary of Will's death will be a sore trial for her. Anne and I take turns nursing her as she must be watched night and day, if you take my meaning.

It would do her such good to have you home again, and to hold her first grandchild. Your father has even said that he will send the passage

money for you and baby Fanny to come home to Braisty Woods. We all miss you so.

Your loving Aunt Judith

When I was small I used to drag a dining chair over to the wall so that I could stand on the seat and touch the silhouette portraits of my grandparents. Grandpapa William died before I was born, so I always thought of him as he was in the picture – turned to the right, chin up, aquiline nose – he had a sleek, self-satisfied look to him. Papa is very like him. But Grandmama Jane’s picture intrigued me more. My childish fingers would trace her slightly Roman nose, her determined chin, and the line of pearls about her long, elegant neck, trying to imagine what she looked like as a young woman. She was a beauty in her day. It fascinated me that up close, the details which looked so real from a distance – the necklace, the lace of her bonnet, collar and cuffs – were no more than illusion, sketched on to the black paper afterwards by the skill of the portrait artist.

Leaving England, I believe my thoughts were mostly of the excitement of the voyage ahead, and a future married to the man I’d chosen. Deep down I suppose I knew that I would likely never see Grandmama Jane again, but I always felt that she understood my decision and approved of me choosing my own path, and that helped. I couldn’t have foreseen that so many losses would follow my departure, and the profound effect they would have on my mother. Would I have stayed if I had known? I can’t say. I would give anything to see the family I left behind – Ann, and Will, and Grandmama Jane – but they’re gone, and my going home won’t change that.

The life I have here, with George, is real. So although Papa has unbent his stiff neck enough to welcome me back on his terms – “you and baby Fanny” – I’m not giving up my husband.

* * *

In the middle of March George went out on some supply trips for Wallace & Co. on the *Ocean*, firstly for the coast east of the heads, where there are remote farms, and a week later with

Mr Wallace himself, delivering stores to whaling stations at Cloudy Bay and Manawatu. I do worry when he is away at sea. Even experienced Captains find the harbour entrance treacherous, especially in a southerly gale. Most won't risk it at night at all. There have been more calls for a harbour light on the heads, and a marker on the end of Barretts Reef, so that the channel is navigable in all tides and at all hours, but so far nothing has come of it.

This farming life takes a constant toll. In England they take for granted the centuries old stone walls and hedgerows that keep the stock from wandering, fields that are already in grass and only need ploughing to make way for crops, rocks removed by previous generations and made into walls and foundations, trees that were cut down for building houses, barns and yards so long ago that they don't consider there were ever trees there to begin with.

Here we must fell the trees, stump them, pull up roots, move rocks, just to make way for the plough to clear a little land for planting. We must cut up the trees to build the houses and barns and pens. Life then becomes a constant round of planting – potatoes, cabbages and wheat – weeding, harvesting, ploughing again for the next crop. We must let the cows and sheep out, fetch them back in, find the lost ones, bury the dead ones, milk the cows, wash the sheep with tobacco water to cure the scab. All the while building, making cheese, baking bread, sewing clothes, washing linen, clearing more land, so that year after year there may be more sheep to tend, more cows to milk, more lambs to cut and calves to reunite with their wayward mothers.

I thank the Lord that Sunday is a day of rest or we should all be dead from exhaustion.

19th June 1843

The Government brig *Victoria* brought the news of a clash between surveyors and a party of Maoris at Wairau, the fertile valley near Cloudy Bay on the other side of Cook Strait. One of the surveyors was attacked and his tent burnt down. I'm so thankful that George no longer works with the survey party.

A volunteer force of about 20 men was assembled at Nelson and lead by Capt Arthur Wakefield, younger brother to Col. Wakefield, and Chief Constable Thompson, to deliver a warrant for arson. It was felt that a show of force would impress the natives. However while attempting to cross over to the Maori encampment by a makeshift canoe bridge, one of the English party stumbled and his rifle went off. Both sides began shooting and several of our men were killed.

1st July

More details of what is now being called a massacre have come to light. As the shooting continued on both sides, Captain Wakefield attempted to call a ceasefire and surrender under a white flag of truce, at first without success. Eventually he, Mr Thompson and seven others surrendered in order to put an end to the conflict. One of the Maori leaders demanded the lives of all nine in retribution for the death of his wife in the affray and single-handedly executed them with a tomahawk. Altogether, twenty men were killed in the massacre, and at least five wounded. The Maoris lost four. By the time the news reached Wellington, and a party lead by Col Wakefield had set out to investigate, several days had passed, and when they arrived they found that the dead had already been buried where they lay by Wesleyan missionaries.

Within days, a meeting was held at the Exchange and presided over by Mayor Hunter at which it was decided to make arrangement for the defence of the colony. A Committee of Public Safety was appointed. Memorials have been sent to the authorities detailing the massacre and lack of defense of the colony. A battery of 3 guns has been placed on Clay hill at Lambton Quay, and another at Thorndon. Three guns fired at either of the batteries is the arranged alarm signal. George is a member of the military sub-committee to organise a volunteer corps of 400 men. They are to assemble at 9 o'clock on Sunday mornings, at either Te Aro or Thorndon Flat on alternate weeks, and drill for two hours.

5th July

Someone has been hurting animals belonging to well-known settlers, including a tomahawk injury to Mr Hunter's old horse last week – could this be native retribution for Wairau? That would be cowardly, to take their anger out on helpless animals, and I have never thought of the Maoris as cowards. Mr Hunter has offered a reward of £2 for information.

20th July

Mr Greenwood brought the news that dear Mr Hunter, our Mayor for so short a time, passed away last night at midnight. It is said he caught a chill returning home in the rain from a Council meeting last Saturday evening. He was always such a gentleman on the voyage. The esteem in which he was held by the whole community was apparent. His funeral was attended by his family, the officers of the New Zealand company, all the clergy of Wellington, most of the settlers and upwards of one hundred Maoris. All the ships in harbour flew their flags at half mast, and the *Nelson* fired its guns as the procession passed along the beach.

I wonder what Mrs Hunter will do now that he is gone?

7th August

Three small shocks of an earthquake about four in the afternoon.

2nd October

The wheat needs weeding again. On the one hand, it is astonishing how well everything grows here – fruit trees, vegetables, roses, no sooner have you put them in the ground than it seems they have begun to sprout – but on the other hand the same holds true for less desirable plants. Like many farmers here, we are already cursing the Scottish thistle that Mr Lyon so lovingly planted.

There is a native bush called Tutu that the cattle and sheep will eat, causing colic and in worse cases, convulsions and death. The men try to cut it down wherever they find it, but without fences the stock can roam where they will on the hillsides. More than once this has caused some problems with the local tribe, when the sheep got into the pah gardens and ate their crops. At one time the Maoris set their dogs on Mr Greenwood's sheep, and Joseph shot one of the dogs in front of the woman who owned it. The general disregard for the rights and feelings of the original inhabitants makes me uneasy.

1st November

I thought I was coming down with some illness after getting caught in the rain on our way back from a visit to the Todd's house at Antry Bay with the Jacksons a few days ago. The choppy waves in the harbour made me feel seasick, which I haven't felt for a long time – we go back and forth to Wellington by boat all the time – and since then I have been feeling unwell, especially in the mornings. Then this morning it occurred to me that I may be expecting again.

James and Emma are celebrating their wedding anniversary with a dinner party in a few days and we are all invited. It will be lovely to have an opportunity to change out of my plain housewife clothes and wear a pretty gown again. George has told me in confidence that the boatbuilders who have been at the Jackson's for the last month, building walls for a new barn, have also secretly been building a small schooner for James to give to Emma as an anniversary present. He is going to name it the *Emma*; how romantic. George made me promise not to tell Emma – as if I would!

12th December

I received word that a parcel for me had arrived on the *Mandarin*, and was waiting for collection at the Post Office. It was a large tea chest, and it was so bulky that I had to pay a carter to

fetch it home for me. Once we had levered off the lid, the nails screeching their protest, I found a letter on top of what looked like folded calico.

Braisty Woods

2nd May 1843

Dear Mary Jane,

We were very sorry to receive your news about the fire in Wellington, and the destruction of your home and livelihood. I thank the Lord that you and George and baby Fanny were spared. We are all well here, although your mother still suffers.

Your father has asked me to send you Ann's things and her trousseau items, to replace what you lost to the flames. Having them in the house is a reminder of grief for your mother, and the doctor says they would be better removed. I know Ann's clothes will be too small for you, but perhaps you can alter them, or save them for when Fanny is older, or sell them if you need some extra income. I have also packed the clothes you left behind, which I'm sure you have missed.

Your cousin John Webster and his wife Ann had a baby boy on 14th February 1843, and they named him Henry Valentine. I know that will make you smile.

Praying this finds you safe and well.

Your loving

Aunt Judith

Soon the blue counterpane was covered with calico bags. One by one I pulled out the contents, and the smell of home came with them. Dresses, skirts, nightgowns. Sheets, pillow shams,

blankets. Here was the sprigged muslin I was wearing the day George proposed to me on the riverbank. There was the pillowcase Ann was working on the day he first came to the house. It brought tears to my eyes to see that she'd perfected what she was struggling with that day, and produced an exquisite border of yellow flowers in raised stem stitch with French knots for detail. At first I didn't recognise the species, but then I realised they were *Cladanthus Arabicus*. It must have flowered after I left. I pressed it to my face and wept.

20th February 1844

George was called to give evidence at the trial of Samuel Dunster, a former employee of the Jacksons, who was caught stealing firewood from James' stockpile of timber stacked and ready for shipping. Dunster was sentenced to three weeks in gaol. The judge said he hoped the example would deter further depredations in the town belt, where some of the finest trees have been wantonly cut down for firewood by colonists. It is now getting so expensive to buy wood that many consider it cheaper to burn coal from Sydney. We are lucky to live on the farm, where the more trees we cut down, the better.

30th March

The beacon at the eastern side of the entrance to Port Nicholson, contracted for a year ago, is about to go up. It will be 37' high, painted white, and topped with a zinc flag painted red. I hope it lasts longer than the one which the settlers put up two years ago, which could not withstand the gale force winds at Pencarrow Head.

24th April

Finally the bridge over the Hutt river has been completed. This will make it much easier to travel into Petone on foot or horseback, without having to wait for low tide which often occurs too

early or too late to make crossing convenient. Even at low tide it is not possible for ladies to cross without either soaking their skirts, or losing their modesty.

Bennett Cottage, Lowry Bay

15 July 1844

Dear Mama and Papa,

I hope that you will be pleased to hear that you have another grandchild. Our little girl was born a week ago, and we are both doing well. George says that she is the very image of me, with her wide-spaced eyes, and has decided to name her Mary Jane – after me, and his elder sisters Jane and Mary.

Little Fanny is so pleased to have a baby sister to play with. She doesn't seem to mind that it will be some time before Mary Jane is old enough for games. You would smile to see her singing songs to the baby to stop her crying – she is quite the little mother!

The farm is doing well. Vegetables grow an enormous size here, as the soil is excellent and the climate so beneficial. There is an abundance of game right on our doorstep – ducks, fish, giant pigeons and wild boar. With our own cattle and sheep, we have milk, cheese and meat a-plenty.

Please think kindly of me. I would so like to get a letter from you.

Your loving daughter,

Mary Jane

3rd April 1845

George left on the schooner *Susanna Ann* with Captain Hensley and a crew of several other white men and about a dozen Maori lads. Messrs Johnson and Moore hired him to collect some barrels of oil from the whaler *Chelsea* which wrecked in the Chatham Islands, and was purchased at auction by a Mr Anketell, along with the *Susanna Ann*. I wish I could go with him – I would love to experience a sea voyage again, and see the famed Chathams – and I shall miss him and worry about him the whole time he is gone.

7th May

George is finally home. Fanny jumped into his arms and wouldn't let go, and I wish I could have done the same, especially when he told me what happened there. While he and his assistants were preparing the oil barrels for rafting to the *Susanna Ann*, a group of drunken armed men led by William McClatchie and George Hempleman boarded the ship and threatened them. George was hit in the face with the barrel of a musket by a man called Gifford, and then the cocked weapon was jammed in his stomach several times, with the threat, "You bloody b____r, I'll blow your bloody guts out." George said that he was terrified the gun would go off accidentally. When one of George's men protested, he was punched in the face by McClatchie, knocked off the barrel he was sitting on, and severely beaten. I begged him not to accept any more such jobs.

"No fear of that," he said.

24th June

George went to the Police Court to testify to the assault by William McClatchie and George Hempleman. They were committed to trial at the next sitting of the Wellington Supreme court, and granted bail at £100 each, and sureties of £50 each. Gifford is still at large.

7th July

On Saturday afternoon awful news reached us of the *Tyne* having run aground and wrecked at Sinclair Head on their fourth voyage here. The concern and affection felt for Captain Robertson was obvious from the number of settlers and militia who turned out to assist in the rescue of the crew, my George among them. On Sunday about 400 assembled by the wreck and eventually, through means of a rope attached to the bowsprit, all hands were safely ashore including Captain Robinson and the only passenger, a Mr Selby.

It makes me cold all over to think what loss of life might have occurred if it had been an emigrant ship, as George says the rear cabins were underwater, and the bulkheads destroyed. Still the loss of the cargo will be keenly felt, as is the first vessel to arrive from England since February, bringing goods, packages and mail from home.

Captain Robertson has said that visibility was limited due to rain and fog, but he was obliged to seek the safety of harbour because of the south-east gale. He is recommending a light at Baring Head, to avoid any more losses.

25th December

We had a delightful Christmas at Lowry Bay estate with the Jacksons and the Greenwoods. Emma had made some beautiful dresses for Fanny and Mary Jane, her God-daughters, and Fanny insisted on wearing hers to church service at Petone. Everyone said how pretty she looked, and how grown-up. I gave George a secret present on Christmas night, as we went to bed pleasantly tipsy after the delicious feast of turkey and plum pudding – I snuggled close and whispered in his ear, “I think I’m expecting.” He said he couldn’t have wished for a better present.

17th Aug 1846

Our third child was born today – another dark-thatched daughter! George brought the other girls in to see their new sister, and he seemed just as thrilled as they were. He says he doesn't mind what they are as long as they're healthy, and so is their mother.

"I shall die surrounded by beautiful raven-haired women," he joked, and a goose walked over my grave. When I shivered he bent and kissed my brow. "Only a jest, my pet."

I changed the subject. "What shall we call her?"

"I was thinking..." he hesitated, "Anne? For my sister, and yours?"

I looked at the tiny sleeping bundle in my arms. It was time to banish the sadness I felt every time I thought of my sister, which happened less often as the years went by, but had never entirely left me. Here was a new life to love as I had loved her, to honour her memory with.

I held out one hand to George and he twined his fingers through mine. "Yes," I said, "let's call her Anne."

25th September

I often take tea with Emma when George is helping James with work on the estate. She enjoys playing with the girls, and sometimes I am even able to take a much-needed nap while she watches them. Today the men were clearing more land for planting, pulling out stumps of felled trees with chains and a bullock team. It's hard and heavy work, chopping through the roots and levering the stumps up with crowbars in order to get the chains in place.

We were on the verandah enjoying our tea when James' man Stephen came thundering up to the house on James' horse.

"Mrs Jackson, come quickly."

One look at his ashen face and Emma dropped the delicate cup on its saucer, making the porcelain ring. She ran down the front steps and Stephen lifted her effortlessly and sat her

sidesaddle in front of him. A quick jab of his heels and they galloped off through the orchard and were soon out of sight. I looked back at Emma's cup and saw that a thin crack now ran up through the pink rose at the centre of the bouquet painted on the side, and tea was leaking through it.

George told me afterwards how James had suddenly staggered and put a hand to his temple. George asked what was wrong, and he answered but the sounds made no sense. Then he dropped like one of his felled trees. The doctor who pronounced him dead said the cause was a ruptured blood vessel. He was 37.

We laid James to rest in a private plot on the hill above the house, his favourite spot for sitting and enjoying the afternoon sun, while watching the ships come and go in the harbour. I will miss his ready laugh and his generous nature. For a week I slept at Emma's house, keeping her company and helping her deal with the many settlers who came to pay their respects. Mr Greenwood and his brothers helped Stephen and George dig the grave and build a palisade fence around it to keep out marauding pigs.

I thought Emma might decide to go home, but she said no, this was her home now.

5th December

We had an unusual number of earth tremors overnight, starting after 5 o'clock and not finishing until 9 this morning. We have become so used to occasional light shocks – a dozen to twenty per year – that no-one even remarks on them anymore. But several last night were strong enough to make the walls move and the hanging lamp sway from side to side. Perhaps I will have an earthquake for my thirtieth birthday.

12th November 1847

The *Bee* arrived yesterday with the mail from home. There was a letter from Aunt Judith that shocked and saddened me. She writes that in June the doctor recommended Mama be admitted to a

new asylum 15 miles away at Clifton, for her own safety, and Papa agreed. There will be nurses and orderlies there who can watch her around the clock. Poor Mama. Judith says she has settled in well, and the buildings and grounds of Clifton are beautifully kept. Of course this frees up my Aunts to spend more time keeping house for their brothers. Papa was ever the selfish one.

28th November

My monthlies are late. I think I may be expecting again. It seems like no sooner do I get one babe off the breast than another is on the way. I love my children, but it's so tiring looking after a houseful of them – sometimes I envy Emma's childless state, although I know she feels the same about what she sees as my blessing. Perhaps I will end up with a brood of ten, like Mrs Hunter. At least mine come two years apart – some of her children are very close in age. I suppose it is not so difficult when you can afford to hire a nanny or a wet nurse.

I wonder why it is that the Maori women have so few children? It's not illness, for those they do have seem strong and healthy, unlike many of the babies born in England, especially to the poor. More than one native man has commented on the fecundity of the white settlers, with apparent envy. Perhaps the cause is a secret known only to the women.

Mrs Jackson's, Willis St, Wellington

7th May 1848

Dear Aunt Judith,

I hope this letter finds you and all the family well. You will see from the address that we are back in Wellington, presently staying in the town house of our dear friend Emma.

Two days ago George was thrown from his horse on the beach and severely injured at the hip joint. He is now in hospital, where they were able

to restore his leg to the socket, however the doctors say he will be confined to bed to heal once he is allowed home. I doubt that he will be able to do heavy farm work for some time. We have some savings to tide us over but without Mrs Jackson's kind support I don't know what we should do.

Fanny, Mary Jane and Anne are thriving. I am beginning to show, and I expect it won't be long before the kicking keeps me awake at night.

I trust that you will understand the reasons for, and forgive, the brevity of this letter. Please give my love to Aunt Anne, Uncle John, and Papa, and kiss Mama for me when you next visit her.

Your loving

Mary Jane

8th July

Mrs Hunter passed away unexpectedly this week and was buried alongside her husband. I remember fondly how she told off Mrs Gomm on the *Duke*, and threatened to give Mr Gomm a good thrashing. Now their eldest son will have to look after his siblings. I hope he does a better job of putting their happiness above every other consideration than my father did, when he became head of the family.

30th July

We have a son at last! When George hobbled into the room after the doctor left, his smile was a joy to see. Even though he loves his girls, I know he has been hoping for a son. He tenderly smoothed back the sweat-soaked strands of hair which clung to my brow, and placed a gentle kiss there.

“Well done, my love.” Then he looked at the mushed little face that was all that was visible in the closely-swaddled bundle in my arms. A pair of dark blue eyes stared calmly back at him.

“Hello, Francis. What a little champion you are!”

When we talked about names before the birth I assumed that George would call our first-born boy after his father, as he had been. Instead he said he wanted to name him for his brother Francis, just as Francis had called his son George ten years earlier. I would have liked to christen him William, after my brother, but I have let George choose our children’s names from the beginning as it seems to give him such pleasure to call them after his brothers and sisters.

There was a tap at the door. A childish voice piped up, “May we see the baby?”

We smiled at each other. Fanny can’t long resist a new infant. “Come in.”

Fanny sidled around the door, supporting Anne on her hipless waist with one arm under her bottom. As usual, the baby – I would have to stop calling her that now – had one chubby fist clenched tight around a handful of her sister’s long dark hair. Mary Jane pranced in behind, dancing and singing a little song under her breath. George sat on the bedside chair and pulled her into his lap. Fanny perched on the bed beside me with Anne on her lap. They all looked at their baby brother, patting his wrappings, Mary Jane making silly faces to see if he’d react. Fanny prevented Anne from poking a finger in his eye.

George chuckled. “He’s in for a hard life, I reckon. Petticoat government.”

“What’s that, Papa?” piped Fanny.

“It means his life will be ruled by you three girls – and your mother, of course.” He picked up my hand and kissed it, smiling at me. “Lucky chap.”

* * *

Reverend Robert Cole baptised Francis, as he had Mary Jane and Anne. Listening to his sermon, I could see why Jessie Hunter chose him as her husband a few years ago. He is a compelling preacher, with his deep-set fervent eyes and high cheekbones accentuated by a dark

mutton chop beard, but a kind, warm soul as well, like her late father. I was hoping Jessie would be at the christening. When I asked after her, Rev. Cole said the cold damp weather had worsened her cough, and the doctor advised bed rest.

22nd September

Jessie died of consumption today. She was only 29. I remember her beautiful singing voice on board the Duke of Roxburgh. I haven't heard her sing for several years, and now I never will again.

16th October

Sometime before 2 in the morning we woke to find the house shaking and rocking to such an extent that we were scarcely able to stay in bed, except by gripping the side boards. Francis woke in his cot and began wailing, but I dared not put out a hand to soothe him. I could hear the thud of books falling off the shelves, and the tinkle of glass objects smashing in the kitchen. After a few minutes the severity of the movement had reduced enough that we were able to get up, soothe the baby and fetch the girls from the other bedroom. Fanny and Mary Jane were crying, but Anne was fast asleep. We got ourselves and the children dressed, just in case we had to rush outside, and for the remainder of the night we sat in bed, feeling strong vibrations and concussions every few minutes until day dawned.

Another sharp shock a little before six got us smartly outside, where we found the top of the brick chimney was sheared off above the eaves. Just as well we had not lit the fire, or we might have set alight the roof. For the rest of the day we felt a series of smaller shocks at irregular intervals, one quite sharp at noon and another at half-past three, each preceded by a low rumbling sound.

17th October

On Tuesday afternoon the 65th Regiment was due to give its first weekly performance of the season – gay drum polkas and waltzes – on Thorndon Flat. It was a beautiful and sunny day, and although slight tremors had continued since a strongish shake around half-past seven in the morning, it appeared the worst was over. We went, along with what seemed like half the town, to enjoy the afternoon and take our mind off the damage caused last night.

A somewhat scandalous tale was being whispered from ear to ear. It said that the Lt. Governor, Mr Eyre, got up after the quake to look for cracks in the earth, and tried to get the Colonel in command of the barracks out of bed – to which that braggart is said to have replied that he shook his own bed more than any earthquake could!

A little after half-past three, with the regiment on full dress parade and the band in the middle of Lanner's Damp Waltz, a short shock rocked the ground for a few moments. Loud bangs like cannon fire came from the north, accompanied by a roaring sound. The line of soldiers began to go up and down, and the band members to go sprawling. Elegant ladies fell over in the middle of the dance, displaying flashes of bare legs amidst the froth of their petticoats.

George gripped my waist and we half knelt, half fell to the grass, Francis clutched in my arms and the girls clinging to us, wide-eyed with alarm. All around us screaming people were thrown down or prostrated in fear for the several minutes. I could see foot high waves moving through the earth and feel the ground kicking sideways beneath me.

When it was over a cloud of brick dust rose and hung over the town. Despite the continued shaking we hurried home, seeing rubble in the street wherever we looked. Someone told us that Barrack Sergeant Lovell and two of his children were crushed by the collapsing Government Store wall and the soldiers were trying to dig them out. At our house we found the effects on the clay walls were much more pronounced – long horizontal splits where each successive layer of cob had been laid down, and a crazed pattern in the plaster work inside. The chimney work inside the house,

which had still seemed sound this morning, now sported gaps and large cracks in the mortar. The floor of pressed clay has lightning bolt cracks spreading out from the wall posts.

George set up a makeshift tent in the garden, well away from the house walls and chimney, and moved our bed in there, and the cot. The girls can sleep with us. The house seems safe to enter, but we dare not linger in case there is another quake. I am back to cooking meals over an open fire, as I learned to do in the early days of the colony. George has gone to lend a hand in town. The earth still trembles now and then, like a jelly.

Fanny lay with an ear to the ground, and said, "I can hear the giant, Mamma. He's grinding bones to make his bread."

At dusk my husband returned, his face solemn. Sgt Lovell's eight-year-old daughter was dead when pulled from the ruins, and he and his four-year-old son have been taken to hospital.

18th October

An unusually high tide flooded Lambton Quay and all the land around the harbour, affecting those who were camped on the beach, and in their gardens. Captains of ships anchored in Port Nicholson offered refuge on board, and many families took up the offer.

We hear Sgt Lovell's little boy last night died after a few hours. His father is still alive, but his left leg is badly injured.

The shocks continue all day – sometimes I have to hold my pen and delay my writing until the latest has passed.

19th October

About 5 this morning I was sitting up in bed nursing Francis in the middle of a terrible storm, when we had such a sharp shock, stronger than either of the two previous, that it shook him from my breast. It felt as if an enormous steam locomotive was rushing through the ground beneath

us. It was of shorter duration – maybe ten minutes altogether from the first extreme bang until the last rough vibration – but it caused more damage than all the others put together. The solid bed of brick which forms the lower part of our oven is split, the bricks of the chimney have completely fallen in on themselves, and the plaster of the rooms is torn apart. The cob walls, already cracked and split by the first two earthquakes, have crumbled to the ground.

People's livestock panicked – cows bellowing and horses neighing in terror – and rushed about their paddocks, some crashing into fences and injuring themselves. The poultry shrieked and flapped as if beset by foxes.

Like ours, chimneys that were damaged in the first two shocks simply collapsed in the third one, as did many of the large brick buildings. Fitzherbert's store is bowed in the middle like a sagging circus tent. Baron Alzdorf's hotel, The Wellington Tavern, where Colonel Wakefield died last month, was completely destroyed. The Wesleyan Chapel is ruined. Patients from the Colonial Hospital, with its gaping hole at one side of the second floor, have been moved to Government House, while those from the military hospital were taken to timber barracks at Mt Cook. Prisoners from the ruined gaol were placed in the custody of soldiers.

Those made homeless were sheltered by those fortunate enough to have timber houses, though some who did not trust being indoors slept in the open or walked about all night. Ships in harbour offered a place of refuge away from ground which was suddenly seen as untrustworthy. Tents or makeshift shelters were set up on the beach or open ground, and in the bush. Many camped on the western hills, for fear of tidal wave, and large fires could be seen at night, around which they talked, played and sang.

It seems like half the people are anticipating some ultimate paroxysm in which a volcano will burst forth beneath our feet and blow the town up, or the ground will open and suck us all into the Stygian depths. The Rev. Cole has been busy performing baptisms, as those who had not yet had their children baptised have hastened to do so.

Sgt Lovell has died of his injuries, leaving a grieving widow and two children. I knew him as a lay preacher at our church on Manners Street – only last Sunday I saw him preach what now seems a prophetic sermon from St John xvii, 4 – “I have glorified thee on Earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest us to do.” Incredible as it seems, given the destruction I see everywhere I look, he and his little ones were the only deaths in the town.

The Lieutenant Governor has proclaimed tomorrow a day of public solemn prayer and fasting. The different denominations will give services at different times in the two churches still standing – the Episcopalian Church and the Presbyterian Chapel – because they were built of timber.

21st October

Mrs McKain paid us an unexpected visit. She and Mr Robert Park, a civil engineer, are assessing the damage caused by the earthquake for a report to the provincial government. I was cradling Francis and Mrs McKain tickled his bare toes, eliciting a gummy smile.

“I can see this bonny boy is growing well. He looks more like his father every day.” She looked at the girls playing dollies in the shade. “You two certainly do make beautiful bairns, Mrs Bennett.”

She told me that one good thing had come out of the quakes – her friend Dillon Bell, the most favoured of many suitors for the hand of the beautiful Jewish heiress Miss Hort, has finally achieved his heart’s desire. He was among the guests staying at the Hort residence on Monday night. At the first shock everyone rushed outside into the garden in their nightclothes, and meeting each other in the dark and confusion, Mr Bell said, “What, is that you, Margaret?”

Miss Hort swooned into his arms with “Oh, Francis!”

“And after the excitement was over,” he related to Mrs McKain, “I found that however shaken the world might be I was fixed for life.”

She laughed heartily and then took her leave. Midwife, nurse, and now surveyor – widow McKain is certainly a remarkable woman.

24th October

Another strong shock at 2pm. Screams and shouts could be heard when it started – everyone fears the earthquakes are increasing in strength each time – but it was not nearly as bad as the last.

27th October

A week's embargo was placed on ships leaving the harbour, to avoid settlers departing in panic. Yesterday the *Subraon* sailed for Sydney with 66 on board who vowed to start again elsewhere. This morning the news reached us that they had wrecked close to shore on Barrett's Reef at the Heads. Fortunately all lives were saved but most of their property and much of the freight was lost. The families spent a miserable night on the beach, or at the Pilot's house a mile off. Some even walked back over the hills to Wellington, arriving about 3 in the morning.

“Give me dry land, even if it does shake a bit,” one of the rescued woman said.

21st November

The Horticultural Society went ahead with its exhibition, which had been delayed by two weeks, and gave 1st prize to Mr Spinks, one of those who so recently tried to flee on the *Subraon*. The Band of the 65th Regiment continues to play once a week amid the rubble on Lambton Quay. The general feeling seems to be that we must make the best of things.

30th November

Earlier this week Governor Grey arrived with his staff on *H.M.S. Havannah*, bringing with him a package from Auckland containing an Address of Sympathy and the first installment of a subscription for our aid – £400 – plus an additional £100 from the Bishop.

George attended the public meeting tonight at the Britannia Saloon, where it was decided that sufficient funds were left from the Fire Fund of 1842 to meet the town's needs, and the Committee decided to return the £500 'with thanks'. They do not wish to appear weak to our rival city, and they fear acceptance of such assistance would confirm reports of Wellington's destruction which might deter future English settlers from making it their destination.

It is all very well for the wealthy gentlemen of this town to affect financial independence, but such a sum could have gone a long way to restore the losses of the poor folk of this town, many of whom must once again start with nothing.

Lutton Row, Te Aro Flat, Wellington

23rd Jan 1849

Dear Aunt Judith,

My last letter was after the October earthquake. By the time you read this, I suppose that you will already have seen reports in the English newspapers, and received my hasty news. In case it does not arrive, I can confirm that we are all well and suffered no injury or lasting ill-effects, although like many others we have been cooking outdoors while the chimney of our cottage is rebuilt. The new one will have iron banding to proof it against any future shocks, God forbid. The walls of the cottage,

which was of cob construction, did not survive the shaking, and George has rebuilt them with timber.

Yesterday we took the children to the second day of the anniversary races, to join in the annual celebration of the foundation of the colony. It felt like the whole of Wellington had turned out on Te Aro flat!

There was foot racing – military and civilian – and hurdles. Nine owners competed in the cart-horse race, which is always exciting to watch, with the swaying of the carts and the thud of the great hooves shaking the ground. The three riders in the Maori horse race were loudly cheered – each one guaranteed a placing, as some wit remarked. Later the inhabitants of the local pahs performed a war dance for the crowd. The sheer power of it raised the hairs on the back of my neck and brought tears to my eyes.

The crowd gasped when Mr Rhodes, riding Forlorn Hope, took a fall in the steeple chase. He sat up cradling his arm but the horse was unhurt, so George leapt on with Mr Rhode's encouragement and finished the race for him, and then went on to win the next two heats. Fanny and Mary cheered him on and screamed with excitement when he won, little Anne burst into tears from the noise, and baby Francis slept through the whole thing. I was so proud of my husband; he's an excellent rider. It's such a relief that he has suffered no permanent damage from his accident last year.

The day ended on a sad note, though, no doubt as a result of too many visits to the beer tent. A Private of the 65th Regiment was injured when he fell off a cart being dragged around by a number of people, and it ran over his head. He was taken to hospital in a very precarious state.

I have enclosed some sketches of the children and our cottage – the front garden is looking so pretty with a Harris Rose blooming pink along the picket fence, and sweet peas climbing up the trellis. Whenever I smell them I think of you, as they were always your favourite, and remember picking them together in the garden at Braisty Woods. Please give my love to Aunt Anne and Uncle John, and to Mama when next you visit her. It might be best not to tell her of the earthquake. Give my respects to Papa.

Your loving niece,

Mary Jane

What I did not say in my letter was the proximity of our cottage to the unwholesome smells of Mr Howe's tannery in our street. The Supreme Court heard a complaint about it last December, so I hope that some good may soon come of that.

5th June 1850

I knew from Mrs McKain's silence that there was something wrong. This pregnancy has been somewhat different from the start – morning sickness which lasted all day, and some spotting that made me wonder if I was about to miscarry. I was glad that we were back in town, where a midwife was close at hand. The birth itself went smoothly – after four children I hadn't expected any difficulties in that respect. With a cheery "Another girl, Mrs Bennett," she quickly tied off the cord in two places and cut between them with a sharp knife. As she wrapped the baby in the receiving blanket I saw her smile turn to a frown as she looked at my new daughter's face for the first time. She lifted the swaddled infant and carried her to the dresser, where the light from the window gave a clearer view. The child cried a little, not lustily like my others, but more like the mournful cry of a gull. The fine hairs on my arms and the back of my neck rose.

“What’s wrong? Mrs McKain?”

Mrs Mac didn’t answer at first, peering closely at the baby’s face, touching the back of her neck, flexing her limbs.

“Mrs McKain!”

She glanced at me, then looked away. “I’m sorry, Mrs Bennett. The wee one’s...not right.”

I felt cold all over. “What do you mean? Let me see her.”

“It might be best if you don’t. You don’t want to get attached.”

The air rushed from my lungs like I’d been winded. “What? Give her to me!”

She picked the baby up and held her out, reluctantly it seemed.

“In my experience these little ones don’t usually last long, and well, some would say that’s for the best.”

Just then I felt the last powerful contraction – the afterbirth coming away. Mrs McKain laid the child next to me on the bed while I groaned and pushed, and when that was over I ignored the midwife fussing about and cleaning up while I examined my new daughter. She looked back at me calmly with those dark blue eyes that all infants have. There were tiny white dots in her irises. Did all babies have those? I’d never noticed them before. She had the same shock of dark hair that our other children were born with, but her face seemed more pinched somehow, the bridge of the nose flatter, the eyes more almond shaped and closer together. There was a faint wash of blue around her rosebud mouth. She reminded me of someone – I couldn’t think who.

Mrs McKain helped me into a sitting position, rearranging the pillows to give maximum support. I moved the baby to my lap and opened the blanket for a better look. She seemed perfect in most aspects – the usual number of fingers and toes, all with their tiny seashell nails. I slid one hand under her head and another under her bottom and lifted her gently. Although the room was cold she didn’t tense or startle – she was almost floppy in my hands. I put her down again and wrapped her

warmly, then unbuttoned my nightdress and put her to a breast. She suckled weakly for a few moments and then let go as if exhausted.

Mrs Mac watched me closely. “Do you see the blue around her lips? It means she has a weak heart. The blood is not pumping as it should.”

I clutched my baby closer. “Isn’t there anything you can do?”

“I’m afraid not. For an adult I would use digitalis, but it would be too risky for an infant like this.”

“Like this?”

“I’ve seen these bairns before, Mrs Bennett. Their hearts cannot stand to be pushed too hard. Sometimes they improve on their own, even grow up, but they always die young.”

I knew that babies died, of course I did, and mothers too. I’d been lucky to have four healthy children who were all thriving. People would say I shouldn’t mind if I lost this one, if it was meant to be. But I did mind. I minded very much. I latched on to the one phrase that mattered most.

“How can I help her grow up?”

Mrs McKain sighed. “Ah lass, I can see you’re determined. My advice would be keep her warm, feed her often, and don’t let her cry or exhaust herself – and don’t get too attached.”

“Thank you, Mrs Mac. Would you ask George to come in, please.” I covered myself up.

The midwife went out with the bundled-up birthing cloths, and in a few moments George came in and sat beside me on the bed so that we were shoulder to shoulder. He took my hand and raised it to his lips.

“Well done, my love.” George stroked a gentle finger over the baby’s forehead. She had fallen asleep, and with her eyes closed, she looked less...odd.

“George, I’m not sure this baby is going to live. The midwife says...” my voice cracked.

“She says what?”

“That we shouldn’t get too attached.”

We sat together, watching this new life, a wet and crumpled butterfly that might never unfurl. A movement at the door caught my eye – Fanny, poking her head around the frame. At nine, she was old enough to begin to wonder about the mysteries of childbirth.

“Come in, Fanny,” I said, “and meet your new sister.”

As Fanny looked the latest arrival over with an experienced gaze, I was taken back to a memory I had long forgotten – myself at around the same age, meeting my baby cousin Elizabeth for the first time. Sweet and harmless, still living with with her parents at age 25, being what the doctor called ‘of defective intellect’. That’s who our new daughter looked like.

“What will you name her, Papa?”

“Well, let’s see,” he said with a twinkle, “we have Fanny, Mary Jane and Anne already – that leaves only one of my sisters without a namesake – she had better be called Elizabeth.”

Little did he know how fitting that was.

I squeezed his fingers. “Fetch the doctor, please George – and a priest.”

12th June

Baby Eliza has defied our expectations and survived her first week. Reverend Cole came to the house that first day and christened her in a private ceremony. Day and night I tucked her inside my nightgown like a newborn kitten, and woke her up to feed every few hours. Every morning that she was still alive felt like a victory. I was so determined to save my child that I didn’t stop to question the wisdom of whether I should. Like I had with all our children, I felt intense love from the moment I felt the first quickening, and just because God had seen fit to make her different didn’t change that. It was only when her facial swelling from the birth began to subside and her features became clearer that I understood what Mrs Mac had seen. Here was a child that to others was an abomination, an object of revulsion at worst, or pity at best. Children like Eliza are shunned by society – hidden away at home, or placed in the workhouse or an asylum from birth.

Until I know whether she will live I tell myself there is no point in worrying about what other people will think. Several times I have taken out my Bible to inscribe her name and birthdate underneath the other children's – my pen hovers and yet I cannot bring myself to write.

26 July 1851

The Spectator announced today the wreck of the barque *Maria* on the rocks at the Karori Stream, about 3 miles west of where the Tyne came to grief, early Wednesday morning. Only two out of the 31 on board survived the disaster – the apprentice who was steering at the time, and a Malay seaman. The settlement is in shock – we have lost ships and valuable cargoes before, but never such a terrible sacrifice of life.

Since the wreck of the *Elbe*, the *Winwick* and the *Middlesex* ten years ago, there have been repeated calls for a light at the Heads. Surely now the voices cannot be ignored, although the bigwigs still cannot agree on whether it should be at Pencarrow Head, where the current beacon stands, or at Baring Head, as Captain Robertson suggested years ago.

A deputation has since been made to Governor Grey, who said that the Council had voted to devote a 1s per gallon duty on spirits to a fund for the purpose of building a suitable lighthouse, and he was prepared at once to advance the required sum – as soon as the best site could be determined.

5th June 1852

There has been another wreck near the heads, this time of the *Henry* with the loss of all five crew, again attributed to the lack of any light to show the position of the harbour entrance. At the subsequent public meeting it was agreed that a temporary light house should be immediately erected at Pencarrow Head. The Governor-In-Chief has approved a plan to erect a cast iron lighthouse there, and a separate dwelling for the keeper. As any cast iron lighthouse must be ordered from England, shipped over, and then constructed, it has been suggested that the keeper's cottage could be used as

a temporary beacon, with a semi-circular window attached to it in which a lantern can be placed to guide ships.

I once pitied the isolation of any keeper out at the Heads, so far from town. Now I envy their solitude, away from the prying eyes and cruel gossips who judge our Eliza every time I take her out in public. She is too heavy for me to carry everywhere, so George adapted the baby walker with a wooden seat and a push handle. But it only draws more attention to her difference. I have begun to stay inside, to avoid the stab of their hatpin eyes as I push the contraption down the street. To shut out the whispers.

“Poor thing.”

“Shameless”.

“Still not walking at two years old.”

“What a burden on her poor mother.”

I pretend not to see the pregnant women who cross the street to avoid contact, or make the horned hand sign to ward off evil when they think I’m not looking – or sometimes even when I am. As if they might infect their unborn child just by getting close to mine. Invitations have dwindled, for all of us. Seldom do their classmates invite the children to birthday teas.

Mary Jane came from home from school in tears and asked me, “Mama, what is a village idiot?”

Well-meaning friends and complete strangers have taken it on themselves to tell me that the town has an asylum now, and she’d be better off there.

They don’t see how sweet she is, the way her smile can light up our home. The girls and Francis dote on her, and George as well. It doesn’t matter that she can’t talk in words yet – like any baby she communicates what she wants, and we learn to understand it. She may not be able to walk, but she can crawl, and there are no shortage of willing hands to pick her up as soon as she cries or raises her arms to be carried. She doesn’t look different to me anymore – she just looks like herself.

I have asked George to look into the salary they are offering for the position of light keeper. Our accommodation would come with the job. We might finally get ahead for once.

PENCARROW

July 1852 – March 1866

28th July 1852

On first sight the cottage looked promising. Nestled in the shoulder of the hillside, out of the worst of the fierce southerly winds, was a sweet little weatherboard building with a bay window at the front and a metal chimney poking up through the shingled roof. Above it on the crest of the hill, the day mark beacon gleamed white in the sunlight, the jaunty red triangle on top making it look like an impossibly tall three-legged wading bird.

Although we were all quite out of breath with the long steep ascent, the children exclaimed with wonder at the sight and seemed to draw extra energy out of the very air, the way children do. Francis let go of my hand that he'd been dragging at for the last ten minutes and ran off after his whooping sisters, calling "Wait! Wait for me!"

From her perch on her father's shoulders, Eliza bounced with excitement, chubby fists clenched deep in his curls, her solid little legs drumming his chest. She squealed and he let go of one ankle to pat her knee. "Watch out, jockey, horsey will have no hair left at this rate." She chortled and shouted "Dah!" and he smiled at me.

The path was just a rough cleared track which climbed steadily from the beach along the hillside, where Mr Mills and his men had brought the preassembled parts of the cottage up from the bay earlier this month. Behind us, hired men were unloading our worldly goods – bed frames and mattresses, trunks and boxes, tools – from the ship into a rowboat and ferrying them ashore. It felt like the first days in Petone all over again. Soon they would begin carrying everything piece by piece up to our new home. I didn't envy them the task. My legs were already aching.

As the track veered inland to avoid the steep cliffs and began to curve around the base of the hill, the scenery drove such thoughts from my mind. To our right the sea stretched shimmering across to the other side of the harbour entrance, a few white breakers marking the rocks that made up Barrett's Reef, the bane of captains trying to navigate into Port Nicholson and one of the reasons

for the construction of our little lighthouse. On the opposite shore I could just make out the Harbour Master's house and a few others. To our right the hillside fell away more gently to our water supply, a beautiful freshwater lake fringed with reeds at one end like a beard, and several more headlands rising behind. It reminded me of the view over the Dales from Brimham Rocks, where my family used to picnic when I was a child.

On closer view the building was quite unusual. The main room had a flat roof which sloped down from front to back, while the slightly smaller adjoining room had the usual peaked shape of most settler's cottages. By the time we reached it the children had already explored both inside and out and run off to see the view from beneath the beacon. They had left the door open and George stood aside to let me go in first. I must admit, my heart sank.

The walls were lined with white-washed calico and in places I could see glowing patches where the light outside showed through knot-holes or warped edges in the external weatherboards. The main room with the bay window was about ten by twelve feet. The smaller room, where the children would sleep, was to the left as we walked in. The bay window which had looked so promising from below was actually a hexagonal lean-to built onto the front of the cottage for the housing of the lamp. One side of the hexagon opened to the cottage, and the other five sides contained plate glass windows so that the light could be seen from several angles by passing ships. There was a built-in shelf at the level of the window sills, on which the lamp would stand, and a metal chimney set into the roof above, to carry away the smoke. These were the only windows on the sides facing the sea.

A rough lean-to out the back housed a small cast-iron cooking stove, a new technology that I was not very familiar with. There was no fire place to warm the cottage itself. It was not nearly as nice as the snug cottage we had left in Luton Row.

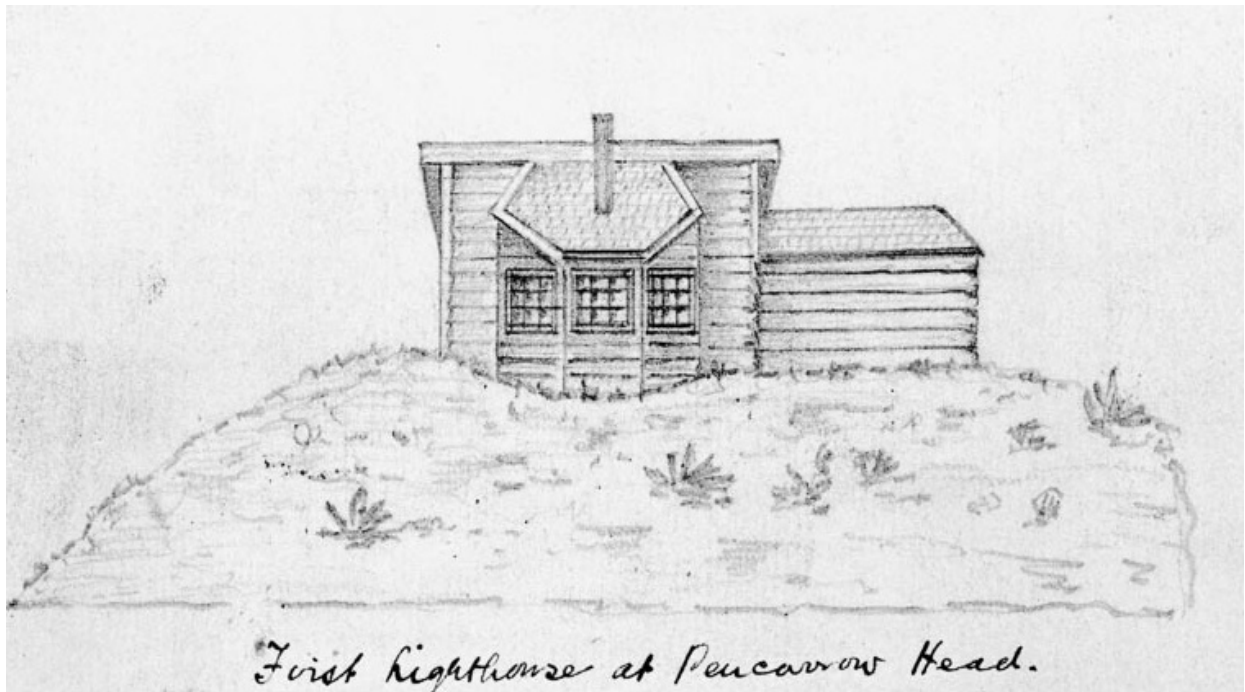
I didn't let George see the disappointment on my face. This had been my idea, after all.

That night we had planned to make a ceremony of lighting the Moderator lamp for the first time, but after an afternoon of assembling furniture, unpacking crockery and making beds, the children were drooping by sunset. The neat little bunk beds that George had made were waiting in the smaller room, so the four older children could sleep undisturbed by the smoke and brightness of the light, and the sound of us tending it. The chest of drawers and the oak blanket box were in their room, as the main room was already crowded with our bed and trunk, Eliza's cot, the dining table and chairs, and the kitchen dresser. George lit the lamp while I laid out a cold supper of sliced meats, pork pie, hard-boiled eggs and bread and butter. Mastering the stove could wait until morning.

As dusk fell outside, so did the temperature. The coldest nights always followed the cloudless days. Soon we were adding layers of clothing – woollen gloves, extra stockings, coats, hats and scarves. The lamp gave off some heat, but most of it was lost through the glass panes of the alcove. Usually on nights like these I warmed the bed clothes with bricks heated in the fire and wrapped in flannel. But we had no fire. So after supper I got into our big bed with the children clustered around to listen to bedtime stories. It soon grew warm and cosy, and it was not long before they were all asleep in a tangled heap, like a pile of puppies.

George smiled and sang in a whisper, “There were six in the bed and the little one said –,”

“– roll over, roll over.” I snuggled down under the covers. “Set the alarm and then come to bed.”



Over the next few days it became clear that the stove was next to useless unless there was no wind at all, which seldom occurred. Sometimes it took several hours to boil water. Once again I started cooking over an open fire. The builders had left a ring of blackened stones out the back, where they had made their meals, so with the children's help we collected stones from the beach every day and build a low sort of drystone wall to shelter the flame from the wind and keep in the heat.

Firewood, oil and food supplies had to be brought up from the storage shed on the beach, as well as buckets of fresh water from the lake.

Our cattle and sheep still grazed at Emma's, but after two days a milch cow arrived, driven along the coast from Lowry Bay by two Maori lads as George had arranged.

George found a good clay patch in the hillside below the cottage and started chinking the gaps in the walls with it. We began a list of all the things we would need to make the place more habitable – long timber planks, nails and iron brackets to make a rain gutter to catch the water that ran off the rear-sloping roof and soaked the fire-pit, a rain barrel to store it, material to sew a curtain to keep out the worst of the lamp smoke in the alcove, posts and cord for a washing line, wood to

make shelves inside and benches outside – the list grew daily. It was going to eat into a large portion of our savings, on top of the cost of the relocation, which we had already paid out of our own pockets.

It wasn't long before we discovered how terrifying it was to endure a typical southerly gale in that exposed position. The wind whistled through the boards and drove the rain in sideways through the walls. The roof leaked. The lamp guttered and smoked in the downdraft from the useless chimney. Gusts rocked the house so that it seemed like another earthquake.

George wrote to the Provincial Secretary and I have kept a copy of his letter.

Light House, Pencarrow Head

15th August 1852

Sir,

I beg to lay before you a few of the difficulties that I have to contend with here.

The house is neither wind or water-proof. The stove is of very little use. I have been four days without being able to boil the kettle inside or out. Water is a full quarter mile off. Wood from one to three miles. Lamps and windows to clean every morning, besides the former to trim every two hours at night.

I have written to Capt. Sharp asking permission to come to town on the first of next month when I trust you will consider my salary very much too low.

I have the honour to be, Sir,

Your obedient servant

George Bennett

George writes a good hand; rounded and generous, not spiky and impatient like my own. I refrained from telling him that he had spelled hours incorrectly.

At their meeting, the Harbour Master gave the complaints short shrift, and George came home fuming.

“What did Captain Sharp say?” I asked.

“ ‘The house, being new, is as proof against the weather as wooden houses usually are in an exposed position’ ”, he said, accurately mimicking the Captain’s rather nasal whine. “ ‘The stove is the same as those used in government offices.’ Pah! Show me a government office that shakes in a gale like this place does!”

“And the issue of water and firewood?”

“He said I was aware of the distances when I accepted the position, so he couldn’t see that I had any complaint on that score.”

A quarter mile – even three miles – doesn’t seem very far on paper. But try adding a yoke of wood or water to your back, and wind so fierce that every step takes all your strength to push against it, and the distances feel trebled or more.

A few weeks later we received a reply from Governor Grey, saying that in view of the report he had received from Harbour Master Sharp, he was politely declining the request for a salary increase. It had seemed like a sinecure when we made the decision to move here. £70 per annum – far more than George was making as a clerk – just to keep a lamp burning all night in the window of a brand new cottage that cost us nothing.

It was soon after that refusal that George began deepening the excavation he had made for the clay, digging into the side of the hill to make a sort of cave. Narrow but tall enough to stand up in, it looked like no more than a thatched shed from the outside, but inside went back a dozen feet or more. He made sure it was safe from collapse, with timber supports and beams like the coal mines near where he grew up. Inside the entrance he built a rough fireplace, with stones from the

beach mortared with clay. The chimney poked up through the thatch to carry away the smoke. Out of the wind, the fire burned hot, and that's where I cooked meals and heated water for our weekly baths.

The walls were lined with timber, to prevent the collapse of the soil and keep the room dry. It reminded me of the narrow sleeping quarters aboard ship. At the back was a sleeping platform where we could all squeeze in together and take refuge on those nights when storms rattled the cottage so hard that we feared it would be torn from its moorings.

3rd November

Eliza has started to crawl and pull herself up on the furniture. As she stands there swaying, holding on to the edge of the bed, she gives a cheeky grin as we applaud. Perhaps she will be walking in six months. I hope so – I think I may be expecting again.

6th December

Eliza seemed very tired yesterday. I put it down to too much play with the other children – they like to encourage her to practice walking – but I did say to George that she looked a little blue around the lips, as she sometimes does when she over-exerts herself. She didn't want much supper, so I cuddled her while we ate and read stories. She was already asleep when I kissed her goodnight and tucked her into the cot.

George shook me awake from a deep sleep. "Mary, something is wrong with Eliza."

He was holding her against his chest, with her head on his shoulder. I could see that her whole little body was shaking with the effort of drawing rapid breaths. I sat up in bed and he passed her into my arms, then sat down close to us. I pulled back the baby blanket in case she was overheating, or smothering, and pressed my lips to her brow. Her skin wasn't unduly hot, rather cool in fact, and much paler than usual. Her eyes were shut as if asleep. Her wrists and ankles

seemed a little swollen, and her lips were blue, the tinge spreading around her mouth as we watched. She took another shuddering breath – and another – and then her whole body seemed to stiffen for a moment, and collapse in on itself.

I shook her. “Eliza.” And then more urgently. “Eliza!”

George chafed her wrists and ankles in turn. I lifted her limp body and held her against my chest as George had, and slapped her back as if that might dislodge whatever had stopped her breath. But I could feel the difference in the weight of her even as I did. There is a bonelessness in the dead that the living do not possess, even when unconscious. I have seen it before, when Mr Pierce drowned. Some animating force has gone. It was gone from Eliza.

We buried her the next afternoon in the place where the hillside flattened out below the cottage, a little sheltered dell above and to the right of the path, which we passed every time we went to and from the beach. It was a pleasant sunny spot where we liked to sit out of the wind and watch the light sparkle on the ripples of the lake at the bottom of the long slope – a good place to rest and catch our breath if we were carrying something heavy up the hillside, as the girls often carried their little sister. It was they who helped me choose it while George slept after breakfast. We had told them the news during the meal, that Eliza wasn’t asleep but gone to heaven with the angels, and that we had decided to bury her here at Pencarrow Head so that she would always be close by.

George and I had talked it through before sunrise, and we disagreed at first – he thought she should have a proper funeral and be buried in a churchyard, but I said that as she had never been christened, only baptised, that might be difficult to arrange. Besides, I couldn’t bear for her little body to be treated with the same disrespect as when she was alive, a strange specimen to be examined and judged. I could imagine the insensitive comments, meant well perhaps – “it’s for the best”, “a blessing really” – and I couldn’t stand the thought. In the end George agreed to go along with my wishes.

After the midday meal, while he built a small coffin from spare timber, Fanny and I bathed Eliza for the last time and dressed her in a ‘Sunday best’ frock that Anne had long outgrown. It was one that I had saved for the next daughter, but Eliza had never been taken to church to wear it. She looked peaceful and pretty in the pale green poplin, with the pink sash tied in a bow at the front instead of the back.

“She looks like a present for the angels,” sobbed Fanny, tying the matching pink ribbon around the neatly combed curls. In the little coffin lined with her favourite comforter, she looked peacefully asleep.

While George dug the grave, the children and I went to gather wildflowers – purple stars of native orchids and honey-sweet sprigs of white manuka blossom – which we placed around her. We all pressed one last kiss on her pale forehead, and then George nailed the planks of the lid on with gentle taps, as if trying not to wake her. Together we carried the casket to the grave and lowered it onto the hole. It looked so small and naked that I ran back to the house and dug out one of the embroidered pillow shams from Ann’s trousseau, that I had never been able to bring myself to use. Draped over the top of the coffin, the white linen and the yellow flowers shone in the afternoon sun like an embroidered altar cloth.

From memory, George recited the words that we had heard at so many funerals since we came here. “Unto God’s gracious mercy and protection we commit you. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face to shine upon you...”

Francis and Anne clung to my skirts as he spoke. Fanny and Mary Jane stood leaned shoulder to shoulder, clasped hands raised to their lips and heads bowed. A gull cried as it wheeled overhead and out to sea. I could smell the raw turned soil and see the glittering drops that sparkled as they fell from George’s jaw and splashed onto his boots.

Into the silence that followed I began to sing. “Nearer, my God, to thee...”

The sound came thin and reedy through the tightness in my throat. Then George joined in, and Fanny and Mary Jane, and their voices gave me strength, and our song lifted and soared like the gulls above. But when it was finished we all stood mute, not knowing what more to say or do without a minister to lead us.

Then Fanny stepped forward and began to recite Psalm 23, the prayer that I had taught them all to say before bed. “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures...”

As we all began to recite the familiar phrases, I closed my eyes and could see Eliza in my mind, her lips moving as she earnestly tried to say the words at bedtime along with her sisters and brother. I was sure she understood their meaning, even if she couldn’t say them. God would accept her into Heaven, flawed or not, for surely He had made her that way for a reason.

* * *

Later in the week I walked into Eastbourne, the lullaby ‘shush, shush’ of the waves soothing my pain, and posted a notice to the newspaper office. I wanted there to be some record of my daughter, or it would be as if she never existed.

*Died.— At Pencarrow Head, on the 6th December, Eliza,
daughter of Mr G.W. Bennett, aged 2½ years.*

On the way back, the wind was a firm hand on my back, an insistent pressure propelling me home.

Emma urged us to come back to Lowry Bay, now that Eliza was gone, but the grief was still too raw. I couldn’t leave my baby alone here. I didn’t want to have to explain to the people in town and endure their sympathy, or worse, their remarks that it must be a relief. And what if the next baby was the same? We’ve settled into a routine now, and the warm weather has made it a little easier. Even the cow comes in to be milked every day, without having to be found and fetched back as she used to.

The children love the freedom, and seem healthier than they've ever been. We go on long walks around the lake, collecting flowers for me to paint, and the girls to press for sending home in letters. We all miss Eliza, but we feel closer to her here. Supplies are delivered to the beach, and I enjoy walking along the foreshore into Eastbourne for small necessities, even though it's eight miles away. If the sun is shining and the wind not too strong, it's very pleasant to be alone with my thoughts, with only the warbling of the birds for company. George's vegetable garden is thriving, and he often catches fish off the headland if the sea is calm, or in the lake if it's not.

15th May 1853

We had an unexpected visitor today, a Mr Carter who turned up just in time for breakfast, having roused the poor Maori crew at the Pilot House out of bed before dawn. It did not seem to occur to him that 'the lazy fellows', as he put it, could not easily take him across until high tide. Instead he forced them to drag the pilot boat a long way down to the water's edge in the dark and row him three miles across the harbour mouth, all for a stick of tobacco.

He was of that peculiar class of Englishman who think nothing of setting forth on a long journey with only a hat, a small rucksack and a stout walking stick, with blithe confidence that a bed and a meal will be provided wherever they happen to arrive, no matter how inconvenient to the householder. He hailed George, who was toiling up the slope with a load of firewood on his back, with a jovial reference to Robinson Crusoe.

"What, does he think I wear my Sunday best to carry the firewood?" George grumbled later.

His opinion of the inadequacy of our dwelling, while not voiced, was writ large on his face and I note he did not impose on us for a bed for the night as he had the poor Pilot. The children were delighted to have their lessons disrupted by his intrusion and he thought it funny to see them 'running about like wild goats'.

The sheer effrontery of the man!

* * *

I tidied Eliza's grave yesterday, as I do every Sunday. It is getting harder to kneel down with this big belly in front of me, but getting back up again is the really difficult part. The white daisies which we planted on the raw mound six months ago have already flowered and gone to seed, and the wild grass has covered up the scars between. I trim it low with kitchen scissors, pick out a baby thistle at the roots to avoid, and tell Eliza that last week was her 3rd birthday. The baby inside me stretches and kicks me in the ribs at the sound of my voice.

3rd July

This morning I woke with a nagging pain in the lower back, which got worse as the morning wore on. For the past week the weather has been cold and stormy, so the children and I couldn't go to Emma's to await the birth as planned. I knew my time was near, so everything needed for the lying-in was prepared and ready just in case – birthing towels, a sharp knife and a clean receiving blanket.

I took Fanny aside and explained to her that she might need to help her father deliver the baby. She may only be eleven, but she's a sensible and intelligent child who takes her responsibilities as the eldest quite seriously, and is used to looking after her siblings when I go to Eastbourne for necessities. I know I can rely on her to keep her head. I also told George what to expect, as he had never been allowed in the room at any of my previous confinements. He was more worried than Fanny that something would go wrong, but I told him if it did, he could signal the Pilot for assistance and they would send the boat with a doctor. Whether the doctor would get here in time there was no telling, but I left that in God's hands.

After breakfast I didn't stop George from going to bed in the children's bedroom as he usually did, suspecting that later on he might be glad to have got some sleep while he could. As the children did their schoolwork I walked around and around the dining table where they worked,

pressing my fingers hard into the aching bones either side of my spine and rubbing. The first birthing pain felt familiar, like a wide belt drawn too tight around my hips. Fanny was watching me.

“Should I fetch Papa?”

I smiled reassuringly at her. “Not yet, chick, we’ve some way to go yet.”

The shelf clock ticked off the minutes and chimed the quarter hours. By the time we’d finished lunch the pains were two quarters apart – by mid-afternoon one quarter – then I could count 5 ticks between each one. The pains were stronger and longer each time, my belly squeezed in a giant’s fist, tightening then relaxing. I sent Mary Jane and George to make supper and hot water. Fanny took Anne and Francis into the bedroom while I changed into my oldest shift and petticoat and a warm jacket, then she helped me pull back the bottom sheet and put an oilskin over the mattress ticking. It would be December before we renewed the chaff stuffing, and I didn’t want to sleep on a foetid bed until then.

Fanny stayed with me until George came back with the steaming bucket. My awareness turned inwards after that. All I could focus on was the wave that pushed through my body, the widening sensation in my loins, the grip I had on George’s hand. The pain grew unbearable, my body said push, George said he could see the head, and then there was a rush of fluid and a relief and Fanny cried “It’s a boy.”

It was just as well that I had told George and Fanny what to do, because once they placed the baby in my arms nothing else mattered. He was perfect.

We named him George, after his father and his paternal grandfather. In a few weeks we will take him to Petone to be baptised by Reverend Wheeler.

18th August

We had a visit this evening from the Governor, His Excellency Sir George Grey. He sailed from Wellington in the Government Brig Victoria and was landed on the beach at Pencarrow Head,

where George was waiting to meet him. As they climbed the hillside, Sir Grey noticed the small white cross and asked who it was for, so George told him about Eliza, and then showed him the shelter that George had built so that we wouldn't lose another child. His Excellency had tears in his eyes when he had finished.

I was quite nervous, having such a bigwig to dine, but he was a charming man and put us all at ease. After supper I put the children to bed while George showed Sir Grey the operation of the lamp, and took the opportunity to raise the subject of his pay being inadequate to cover extra expenses. Tomorrow Sir George will proceed up the Wairarapa Valley, then overland to Hawkes Bay and Poverty Bay, and back across to Otaki, so it may be some time before we hear a decision.

8th October

The Independent has criticised the effectiveness of the temporary lighthouse. In a letter to the Editor, Captain Weller of the *Pengard Park* calls it a 'paltry affair' that from two miles off looks no brighter than a star on a clear night. In reply, the Editor calls it a 'trumpery affair called a lighthouse.'

It is hard not to take this personally. If they only knew how seriously George and I take our responsibility, and with what diligence we tend the light every night – trimming the wick every two hours to keep the flame bright, manually lifting the pressure weight and winding the spring, refilling the oil reservoir several times a night, and cleaning the smoke-stained glass of the alcove windows every morning.

10th October

We have been informed that the Harbour Department, which includes the lighthouse, will now be under the auspices of the Provincial Government. Increasingly irate questions are being

asked in the newspapers as to what has become of the money raised in the past two years by the shilling tax on spirits, which was intended to fund the purchase of a permanent cast-iron lighthouse.

2nd November

After his conversation with Governor Grey, George wrote to the Civil Secretary. I have kept a copy of his letter.

Light House

2nd November 1853

Sir,

Having had some conversation with His Excellency Sir George Grey while at my house, on the subject of the lowness of my pay, and he being kind enough to promise me the sum of (£20) Twenty Pounds for Contingencies; I have now the honour of applying for the same, trusting my application will be favorably received.

I have the honor to be

Sir

Your most obedient

humble servant

G.W. Bennett

4th February 1854

Some gentlemen from the Harbour Light Committee visited to inspect the light, as mariners have complained that it gets increasingly red and dim as the night wears on. George explained we are aware of this but that there is little he can do – the fumes from the poor quality oil coat the lamp glass as the night wears on and it cannot be cleaned while operating, also the chimney which was

meant to conduct the smoke outside is poorly positioned and therefore nearly useless, so the windows are covered in soot by morning.

The inspectors commented that everything appeared to be very clean and in order, and a credit to the keeper – but sweet George was quick to say the credit for the neatness and cleanliness should be entirely mine. They also said they thought the location was well chosen, and with a minor modification of adding a polished reflector the light might be made more powerful.

23rd November

A few days after our 14th wedding anniversary, George received a letter from his brother Francis, with the news that their mother Ann died on the 26th June, aged 71. I held him while he cried. I have always wondered if George was her favourite child, because she gave him her family name as his middle one.

23rd January 1855

Last night we had guests, Graham Speedy and his friend John, who are driving sheep along the coast from Wellington to the Wairarapa. We were enjoying dinner when, without any of the rumbling notice which earthquakes usually give us, we felt a violent shock which threw us from our chairs. George had just trimmed the lantern for the second time, so it must have been a little after 9. Bottles and plates went flying off the table. Pictures jumped from the walls. The lamp swung crazily on its hook, casting nightmare shadows around the room. The glass panes of the windows shattered and fell. The house shook and rocked like a ship in a fierce storm. Suddenly I was reminded of the day we lost the Captain in Cook Strait, and I was filled with a terrible fear that the cottage would flip over like the hen coop and carry us all into the sea.

The children were screaming in the bedroom and hammering on the door. George crawled over and tried to open it but it was jammed fast. Suddenly it flew open and they tumbled out, Fanny

holding Georgie and shielding him with both her arms. Their father threw his arms around them and tried to hold them in place.

Graham and John lifted me from the floor and together we staggered for the back door, holding each other up. Again, the door wouldn't open. Graham looked up at the frame twisting in and out of true and I realised he was waiting for right moment. "One, two, pull," he shouted, and it swung inward. Outside the barrels of flour and oil from the lean-to were rolling and jumping in front of the only exit, threatening to crush our legs if we stepped outside.

"Mattress," said John, and staggered to our bed. "Give us a hand, Gray."

Together they wrestled the mattress to the door, rolling like a couple of drunks, while I clung to the frame. Bent it into a u-shape and pushed over the top of the barrels, it made a saggy bridge with one end jammed in the doorway. John was the first over, with two long light steps, and then he stood with one foot on the end of the mattress and his arms out, beckoning urgently. 'Come on, missus.'

I looked uncertainly at the children behind me. George nodded. "Go, Mary."

Graham saw my hesitation. "I'll help him. You go. It will be easier for them if you're out there waiting."

I tried to do as John had done, and then I was falling into his waiting arms and swung to one side, where I knelt and clung to the bucking ground. Next came Fanny, leaving Graham holding Georgie with one arm and the doorpost with the other. Then Francis scuttled across on his hands and knees. They both clung to me. Mary Jane was crying hysterically, so George lifted her by the waist and swung her as far out as he could, giving her a little push as her feet touched down, so that she stumbled forward and caught John's hands. She fell into my lap, sobbing.

"Go on, Anne," urged George, and she ran across. Now I had all my children but one.

Graham jumped across with Georgie and handed him to me, and the relief I felt as he wound his little arms around my neck made me feel faint. George came last and sank down with us. All

around us in the dark we could hear the bleating of terrified sheep, and crashing sounds which I realised were rocks from the cliffs hitting the shore below.

As quickly as it came, the earthquake stopped, leaving the earth merely trembling like a patient with the ague. An eerie howl rose from the drover's tent, where they'd left their sheepdogs Gyp and Blue tied up.

That tent was a welcome refuge. We squeezed the mattress in and left the children in Fanny's care while we tried to restore some order. The men helped George set the barrels back upright and rope them together, while I ventured into the house to get some clothing and blankets. The sight that met my eyes was astonishing. The dining table was upside down, and the chairs scattered, some broken. The heavy bed frame had moved to the opposite wall, and the kitchen dresser had toppled, smashing all the crockery. In the children's room every drawer from the chest of drawers was on the floor, with the frame lying on its side on top. It was a wonder no-one was hurt. For once I was glad that we didn't have a brick fireplace.

Thankfully the gale which had been blowing all day had died down a few hours earlier, and the rain had stopped. About ten minutes after the quake I heard a strange noise, a rushing wet crashing like a river in full spate. I ran to the edge of the cliff, or as close as I dared in the circumstances, and looked down into the harbour. A wave of churning water was surging into the entrance, a straight line from side to side of the heads. The white froth at its leading edge glinted in the moonlight, and spray shot high where it crashed into and over the land at either edge. I hoped Dan and Sally were all right at the Pilot House, and Emma at Lowry Bay.

The children and I stayed in the tent, while the men camped under the stars. We felt tremblings all night, with shocks of lesser or greater intensity about every half hour, each preceded by a low rumbling, like the sound of carriage wheels outside my lodging in Poplar, and then the land moved up and down, forward-back and side-to-side, all at once. It made me feel seasick.

Another severe shock at quarter past five put us all on edge, but it didn't last long.

24th January

The first thing we noticed when the sun came up was the extremely low tide, with the shoreline exposed far beyond its normal limits, then the sea soon rose and covered it again – this happened every half an hour for much of the day, and when it eventually settled in the evening, the tide line was about six feet higher than it used to be.

George went to check on the cave and found the chimney destroyed, although the walls surprisingly had held. Graham and John helped him clear the rubble, and then together they moved the heavy iron stove down to the shelter, something George had always meant to do anyway. By the time they were done I had made porridge over an open fire. At least the shepherds had a hot breakfast inside before they went on their way, whistling the dogs to round up the flock, and leaving with many thanks and good wishes on both sides.

Vibrations and shocks continued all day, growing further apart as the day advanced. In the afternoon we had a visit from a Mr Edward Roberts of the Royal Engineer Department. He had spent the day sailing the coastline from Wellington to Palliser Bay, looking at the line of white marine growths exposed above the water, to gauge the amount of land elevation. He said at Wellington itself it was 4-5', but on the eastern side of our peninsula at the base of the escarpment, the land had risen 9', and that a fault line was clearly visible heading inland, with a raw vertical cliff newly exposed.

News of the destruction in Wellington and Petone was grim. All the brick chimneys came down in the first shock. As happened seven years ago, most of the single-storey timber buildings survived. The brick structures suffered most – the newly-built Government Offices, the Council Chamber, and the Gaol have tumbled down, as has the heavy portico of the Union Bank and the Baron's lovely new hotel, which he insisted on rebuilding in brick after the last quake. He was the only fatality in the town, killed by a falling brick chimney, being unable to make his escape due to a

recent temporary paralysis. I thought sadly of how he used to boast, “Look at my house, that is the way to build against earthquakes, no shock will destroy that.”

Several other people were wounded – a woman with a fractured skull, another with a broken arm, a soldier with cracked ribs, a man with a broken leg. I thought it would be worse, given the number of visitors in town for the 2nd day of the 15th anniversary celebrations.

Just after the shock the tidal wave rolled in and flooded all along the beach, so that scantily clad families fled up the hill in the dark with only blankets to camp under. The waves flowed across the isthmus between Lyall Bay and Evans Bay, leaving hundreds of fish stranded on the dunes, caught by the rushes.

The soldiers of the 65th Regiment have gone around the settlement, offering assistance, and are now at work clearing away debris. They have given up their tents to settlers made homeless by the quake.

25th January

The earth continues to tremble. Sharp shocks again at one in the morning, 11 am and 1 pm. At least we are forewarned by the rumbling. We are sleeping in our clothes, under a tent of blankets.

26th January

I wish I could walk into Eastbourne to see how they fared, and send a letter to Emma, but I’m afraid of being caught between falling rocks and the sea if another quake should happen.

27th January

Emma must have heard my thoughts, for today she sent Thompson in the schooner to check on us, and offer us sanctuary at Lowry Bay Estate. George said the children and I ought to go,

because it would be safer, while he stays and keeps the light. I didn't want to leave him, but it was a relief to be able to take the children to a place that offered better shelter.

As the *Emma* sailed up the harbour, I was shocked by the huge raw gaps on the hillsides between Pencarrow Head and the Hutt. At least a third of the Rimutakas' eastern slopes were laid bare, the trees shaken loose and piled up at the base. Some of the slips were hundreds of feet from top to bottom and 200-300' wide. Even though it was high tide, we could see – and smell – the shellfish which had been left stranded by the land elevation. I realised that I could now walk to and from Eastbourne whenever it was convenient, without having to wait for low tide and then hurry the whole way.

Thompson told me that the beautiful totara suspension bridge over the Hutt – not long since repaired after the last big earthquake seven years ago – slid ten feet off its supports so that the left end fell into the river. There are crevices 2-3' wide in the Hutt valley, and the swamp at the back of Petone and behind Lowry Bay estate is draining.

30th January

For the last few night we've all been sleeping in the big barn on beds of fresh summer hay. The children think this is a marvellous adventure, even though there are shocks about every hour. The tides are still very irregular, but even at their highest people can now walk around Rocky Point from the Hutt at any time, without getting their feet wet.

When she heard this Emma sighed. "The privacy of our bathing is gone forever, for we can never be sure that someone might not come round."

It was true – I remembered with fondness the many days when she and I had cooled off in the sheltered bay on a hot summer day, knowing we were safe from the eyes of passersby.

Stories about the effects of the earthquake have been arriving daily. A land slip has covered part of the road from Wellington to Petone. Large quantities of mud were ejected from a fissure in

the ground near the Union Bank opposite Emma's town house in Willis Street, and blue-grey ooze still seeps from the crack. Thankfully Sally and Dan Dougherty and their children are safe – they escaped the tidal wave by climbing the steep slopes behind the Pilot Station as far as they could, after their house was shaken to the ground, and are staying with friends.

At Palliser Bay the wave was much bigger. It swept away sheds and the boatman's cottage at Te Kopi, some 27' above the shoreline – fortunately he had seen the wave coming and known the import, so took his family to higher ground. The wharves and bales of wool stored awaiting shipment to Wellington were washed away. In the Wairarapa four Maoris were killed when a mudslide buried their hut.

Captain Kennedy of the *Lady Grey* said the sea in Cook Strait two days after the quake was spread with hundreds of dead fish, many of them deep sea ling, and others species never before seen. The *Josephine Willis* reported they had felt the shock 150 miles out to sea, and thought the horrible grating noise meant they had run aground.

1st February

We all went across in the *Emma* to attend a thanksgiving service for preserving the settlers from danger. Disappointingly few attended. I saw first-hand the destruction along Lambton Quay – shop fronts fallen out, glass smashed, crooked houses with roofs dislodged in some cases. There were tents everywhere, on the streets, the parks, and in front gardens. We were fortunate to get a pie for lunch from Mr Lacy's, his bakery being the only one still in operation. They are in great demand, few people having a place to bake.

Afterwards Emma dropped us back at the lighthouse, with a tent that I had borrowed from the militia. I miss George and the children do too. I ought to be at his side.

3rd June

It cannot be. It cannot. I keep telling myself this, but I saw it with my own eyes.

George went into town to attend church. We should all have gone but these days I am queasy enough as it is. Our midday meal was nearly ready, so I left Fanny in charge of the stove while I went to see if George was on his way back in the Pilot Boat. I spotted the vessel as they were crossing near Barretts Reef. From up high I could see what they could not, a wave approaching that was larger than the rest, a freak occurrence like an invisible hand pushing the water up from below. I cried out but they couldn't hear me. Everything seemed to happen very slowly and with perfect clarity – the water foamed and curled over, smashing into the boat which broke apart, spilling the men out like tiny dolls. Their arms flailed as they splashed and swam to the nearest rocks. I couldn't tell which was George.

I turned and ran for the cottage. I told Mary to help Fanny serve the dinner, then afterwards to keep everyone inside at lessons. Snatching up the spyglass and the red blanket off our bed, I ran back to the edge of the cliff.

I could three men making their way to shore by swimming from rock to rock – one had already made it to the beach. Clinging to a large outcrop, there were two others who were not swimming, and I trained the glass on them. One was George, and the other was the Coxswain Mr Hawkins. My husband had pulled himself up on the rock as high as possible, so that only his legs were underwater. Mr Hawkins was saying something to him, and he was shaking his head. Now the other two swimmers had made it ashore, and they all seemed to be shouting and making beckoning motions, encouraging the two marooned on the rock to follow their example.

I knew that the water was deadly cold. The tide was rising. They could not afford to wait much longer – but George couldn't swim.

I scanned the harbour for signs of rescue. Dan Dougherty ran out of his house and took horse, galloping in the direction of town. There were no other boats approaching, and we had none. I was no lighthouse heroine, armed only with a rowboat.

When I trained the glass back on George, I saw that Mr Hawkins had managed to get hold of a piece of the wreckage, the timbers still gleaming white. He passed it to George, said something more, and then launched himself off the rock and swam strongly towards the beach.

Now there were only two things in the circle of the lens; the rock, and the figure holding fast to it. George turned his head to look in my direction. Hold on, I wanted to say, hold on. I lifted the blanket by one corner and held it high. The wind made it flicker and twist like a flame in the afternoon sun, a beacon on the shore. He nodded a little and lifted one hand. Already the water was up to his waist, and the rock seemed much smaller.

Time was measured out in breaths, in the beating of my heart, in the number of waves which broke over the reef, creeping ever higher. At some point George closed his eyes, his hands relaxed, and when the next wave broke over the rock and receded, he was no longer there, but floating face down in the foam.

My knees gave way. Arms fell like lead weights to my sides, and glass and blanket dropped to the grass from nerveless fingers.

A boat came around the headland, the oars pulling like the frantic black legs of one of those insects that skate across the surface of a pond. They lifted George's limp form into the boat, and took him to shore. I took up the spyglass again. A woman from one of the houses brought a pail of steaming water and an armful of cloth. I watched them labour over him, breath and heat and massage, following Dr Monteith's instructions. I saw the moment when they gave up, and covered his face.

It was Fanny who found me sitting there in the damp grass some time later, and scolded me for letting myself get so cold. She wrapped the blanket around my shoulders, rubbed my arms and legs vigorously, and then helped me get to my feet.

“Mama, what were you doing, sitting out here in the cold and dark? Think of the baby.”

It was only then I noticed that the sun had set, and winter dusk was folding us in her cold grey embrace.

“The lamp. I must light the lamp.” The sound of my wrung-out vocal chords made Fanny look up into my face.

“What is it, Mama? What’s wrong?”

I told her what I had seen, and we held each other tight while we cried.

Once the lamp was lit, Mary Jane served supper. Fanny had made a shepherd’s pie with the leftover cooked lamb, which looked and smelled delicious, but I couldn’t eat more than a few bites, and neither did she. We had agreed not to tell the younger ones until we received the official word, just in case I was mistaken, or some miracle occurred when they took him to the coroner. Francis asked where Papa was, and I said he was probably delayed in town. Fanny looked at me sharply. God forgive me for the lie, but I wished it were true. After supper Mary Jane read us some of Mr Dicken’s new book, *A Child’s History of England*.

The children had not long been in bed when I was startled by a light knock at the door. My heart began beating fast as I approached the door and unlatched it. I half expected to see George standing in the doorway, alive and smiling – to find that it had all been a terrible misunderstanding, that what I had seen hadn’t been George after all, but only someone who looked like him. Or perhaps it was a dripping spectre, come to haunt me. I needed both trembling hands to turn the doorknob. Standing in the doorway was dear Emma, looking very concerned. Behind her stood Thompson, carrying a wicker basket and holding an oil lamp high. I stepped back to let them in.

“Oh my dear,” said Emma, and folded me in her arms. “I came as soon as I heard.”

It was then that I began to sob. She stroked my back and rocked me gently. Thompson put the basket on the dining table and went back outside, quietly closing the door behind him.

“What will I do, Emma? What will I do without him?” I cried all the harder, sobs that seemed to break open my chest and tear my throat.

She didn’t make the mistake that men make, of telling me what to do, or how to do it – she just made soothing noises and held me while I cried out the first shock and pain and disbelief. When I had quieted, she walked me to the armchair, sat me down and offered me her handkerchief. She sat next to me and waited while I wiped my face and blew my nose.

“You and the children are welcome to stay with me at Lowry Bay, for as long as you need,” she said.

It was a tempting offer. To be looked after and coddled, to send the children to the local school, and have time for myself again, time to allow me to think about the future.

“Someone must keep the light.”

“Thompson will do that. I can spare him.”

“That’s so kind of you both – but he can’t stay awake all night, and then work all day.”

She smiled wryly. “And you can?”

I thought about the routine George and I had established, how we had learned to share the watch duties so that both of us could get some sleep. I couldn’t think how one person alone could do it – unless they could sleep during the day. Unlikely, with five children to care for.

“I don’t know. I can’t...,” I put my hands over my face.

“Why don’t you give yourself some time to think? At least until after the funeral?”

“I’m afraid if I leave here I won’t be allowed to come back. And then how will I feed my children?” The tears broke out afresh.

Emma rubbed my back. “We won’t tell the authorities. But you can’t be alone out here, not like this.”

She was right; I knew she was right. “Alright, we’ll come and stay with you. At least until the funeral is over.”

“Good. And tonight I’ll keep watch with you, and Thompson will sleep in the cave. And then at midnight we’ll wake him to tend the lamp, and you and I will sleep in your bed.”

I was grateful to have Emma take charge. My mind was numb. And I hadn’t been looking forward to sleeping alone.

* * *

At Lowry Bay the children were cosseted and spoiled with treats by tender-hearted Mrs Thompson. Emma and I had broken the news to them after the Police constables had come to see me at the lighthouse. We thought it would be best to tell them first, with the promise of a trip in *Emma* followed by the treat of staying at the estate for a few days. In hindsight, this wasn’t the best plan. Mary Jane had hysterics when it came to getting on the boat.

“What if we capsize and drown like Papa?” she wailed.

No amount of reasoning seemed to calm her down. After a few minutes Emma took her aside and said something which seemed to work. Mary Jane stopped her histrionics and looked at Emma with a stricken expression, and then at me. Emma hugged her, and then we all got into the tender and Thompson rowed us to the schooner.

When the opportunity came to speak to Emma alone, I was curious to know what she’d said that was so effective.

“Oh,” she laid an apologetic soft hand on mine, “I told her that you didn’t need to be upset any more than you already were, in your condition.”

Poor Mary Jane. I’d forgotten about the baby myself.

I couldn’t sleep soundly in Emma’s soft and frilly guest room. I kept waking every half hour, waiting for the ting-tang of our shelf clock that reminded whoever was on duty to trim the wick, and sometimes woke them when drooping eyelids may have closed, just for a moment. I missed the

quiet wakeful hours, watching the lights go out one by one in the houses across the harbour, tending the light between catching up on sewing by candlelight, or writing in my journal. Listening to my family breathe in the darkness, and knowing they were safe.

* * *

Wellington Inquisition

on

George White Bennett

June 6th 1855

Information of witnesses taken this 6th day of June 1855 in the District of Wellington at the house of John Matthew Taylor in the said District, before John Dorset, Surgeon Coroner for the District of Wellington touching the death of George White Bennett then and there lying dead as following:

Samuel Hawkins – being duly sworn states –

I am Coxswain of the Pilot Boat. I was sailing through the narrow passage across the Harbour with Mr Bennett as passenger on Sunday between 12 and 1 o'clock. I had two natives and one white man as a crew – a sea came suddenly up and broke into the boat – and washed the whole of us out. I and Bennett rose out of the water and both got on to the same rock. The rock was about 50 yards from the land and surrounded by water. I remained on the rock about half an hour with Mr Bennett but before going I drew some part of the boat to help him in supporting himself on the rock – the tide was coming in and to save my own life I swam ashore. But Mr Bennett not being able to swim preferred the chance of staying on the rock. He remained there on the rock as far as I

can judge about two hours. He was then washed off the rock and to all appearance was hardly quite dead when picked up by the Custom House Boat which arrived from town with Mr Dougherty the Pilot in it, who had seen the accident and gone for help. We took Mr Bennett on shore and tried all the means in our power, but of no avail, to resuscitate him. Had there been another boat at the Pilot Station there would have been no loss of life.

Samuel Dougherty, being duly sworn states

I am Pilot of the Harbour and on Sunday about 1/2 past one the children called out that the Boat was wrecked. I immediately looked through the glass and saw the men on the rocks, if I had had a spare boat I could have got them all on shore in 20 minutes and no life would have been lost. I immediately rode to town and got the Custom House Boat and got a volunteer crew when we went to the place of the accident and found the Body of Mr Bennett floating on the water about 500 yards from the reef where the accident happened. Finding warmth in the body we took him ashore and tried to bring him to life – but with no success after trying about an hour. I have no hesitation in saying that had I had a small dinghy at the station I could have saved Mr Bennett's life.

All the above information were severally taken and acknowledged

the day, year and place first above mentioned, before

John Dorset,

Coroner

for the District of Wellington

Verdict – death by accidental drowning.

The jury recommend that there should be a spare boat at the Pilot Station and a full crew of 5 men as they consider a life was lost from there being no means of assistance.

Jurors

Gilbert Pickett

William Jenkins

John Hemmings

Edward Stafford

John Sutherland

Robert H Carpenter

James Martin

Samuel Gawith

Henry Read

William Lyall

Thomas Cummings

Frederick Aitchison

Dan Dougherty came to offer his condolences after the inquest at the Royal Hotel on Wednesday. As a woman, I had not been allowed to attend. He told me that George had been very unlucky and probably would have survived if he had known how to swim, or if there had been another rescue boat. He mentioned that one of the jurors approached him afterwards and wanted to know how he might apply for the position of Keeper.

“I was rather short with him, as you can imagine. Mr Bennett not even decently buried yet.”

“What was his name?”

“William Lyall.”

The more I thought about it after Dan left, the more angry I became. Why should I let some stranger come in and take over everything that George and I had built together? Who would tend Eliza’s grave, and replace the wildflowers on it every Sunday? George had given his life in service, but there would be no compensation for his widow and children. If I wrote to my father now, it would be at least half a year before before I heard whether he would take us in. And what would we do in the meantime? At best I might earn twenty or thirty pounds a year as a domestic servant, even assuming anyone would employ me if I admitted my condition. And once the baby came, what then? Live on the charity of others? Send the children out to work? In England, children as young as

Frances are working in factories sixty hours a week for pennies, just to help put bread on their family's table. Thank God this is not England. That's not a life I would wish on any child.

After supper that evening I told Emma that I had come to a decision.

"I'm going to stay on as keeper of the light as long as they will let me. To do that I need to show that I can manage without..." my voice failed – I couldn't say his name yet, "...on my own."

"And how will you do that?"

"Fanny can help. She's thirteen, and she's strong and sensible."

Emma smiled. "Just like her mother."

The next morning the *Emma* took us back to Pencarrow Head. It was a solemn procession that climbed the hillside, sombre in clothes that Mrs Thompson had died black for us in the copper wash tub. I carried Georgie on my hip – he was kicking and bouncing with excitement at going home. The older children knew that their father was dead, but at two, he was too young to understand. When we got near the end of the path he wriggled and demanded, "Down, Mummy."

I put him down and he ran on ahead, calling, "Daddy! Daddy!"

Behind me I heard one of the girls sob. I glanced back to see Anne slip her arm around the slender waist of Mary Jane, who was crying into her hankie. Frank was trudging behind them, shoulders hunched, hands in pockets. Fanny followed, her face pale as she looked out at the reef. Bringing up the rear was Emma, who had offered to stay for as long as we needed. She returned my gaze with brimming eyes.

I looked ahead in time to see Georgie come out of the cottage, and run around the front of it, still calling for his father. Mr Thompson came out of the doorway, yawning and looking ruffled. He must have been asleep after keeping watch all night. Georgie reappeared around the other side, having completed a circuit of the house, saw a man and ran straight to him, thumping into the side of Mr Thompson's legs and throwing his little arms around his knees.

"Found you, Daddy!"

Mr Thompson gently ruffled Georgie's curls, before lifting him to his hip. "Hello, Georgie."

Georgie's eyes widened and then he frowned doubtfully. I could see he thought this was a rotten trick, pretending to be daddy. "Where Daddy, Ton-tun?"

Mr Thompson looked to me for guidance.

I stroked my little boy's downy cheek. "Daddy's gone to Heaven, Georgie. He's not coming back." My voice cracked on the last word.

He swatted at me and wriggled until Thompson put him down, and then trotted off to the cooking cave, yelling "Daddy? Daddy?".

5th June 1856

Last night the vessel *Queen of the Isles* ran aground on the rocks which jut out directly below the Lighthouse. I didn't know there had been a wreck until first light, when I saw a lifeboat passing Barretts Reef under quite heavy seas. I found I could not speak or breathe, I could only wait to see if they made it safely past the rocks. When they had, the spell broke and I could move again. I ran to the cliff edge and saw the wreck lying on its side, half underwater. On the shore there were no bodies, just some packets of mail caught among the rocks.

9th June

The *Emma* came to take us to Wellington for George's burial. With no wildflowers to pick at this time of year, Fanny, Mary Jane and Anne collected all the pressed flowers in the house and wove them with plaited dry grass into a small wreath. As we passed Barretts Reef they threw it into the water. Many of the flowers broke apart when it landed and their pale corpses drifted in the gentle swell. I shuddered and thought that I might be sick.

The Harbour Department had arranged the funeral. We walked in the wake of the hearse along Bolton St to the cemetery, the black ostrich plumes on the horse's headstall nodding as it

plodded up the steep hill. I was surprised and touched to see so many settlers there, rich and poor together. George may have been one of the earliest arrivals, but he wasn't a 'gentlemen' – and apparently that didn't matter.

Reverend Baker conducted the service. I was so lost in my own melancholy thoughts that I don't remember any of his words, or the hymns we sang. I just remembered my husband. Fanny and Mary Jane stood on either side of me, our hands clasped. They in turn held hands with one of the other children – Fanny with Francis and Mary Jane with Anne. They all looked so young and scared. I saw many pitying looks from the crowd. Beside Anne, Emma held Georgie, who buried his face in her neck.

Many people came up afterwards to offer their condolences – the Hunters, the Lyons, Joseph Greenwood, Mrs McKain – and Charles Sharp, the Harbour Master.

"I thought you'd like to know, Mrs Bennett," he said in his nasally voice, "that Captain Lewis of the *Queen of the Isles* has said you bear no portion of the blame for the wreck of his ship."

"I beg your pardon?"

"Oh, there were rumours that the lamp was not lit as it should have been, that it was a mistake leaving a woman in charge of the light. But rest assured, Captain Lewis has said that the land and your beacon were visible for a considerable time before she struck."

I swallowed my anger. "Thank you, Mr Sharp. Tell me, have you advertised the position yet?"

"Not yet, no."

"Then may I suggest that I stay on as temporary keeper? Until I find an alternative situation, that is. Or my father might send for us."

He looked doubtful. "That would be quite irregular, Mrs Bennett. What about the heavy work?"

“I can pay to have the firewood and supplies delivered to my door – out of my own wages of course.”

I could see him thinking it over. It would cost less to employ a woman, which made me angry – I would be doing the same work – but it would still be more than I could earn elsewhere. Still he hesitated.

“Mr Sharp, I have buried a child at the lighthouse, and now I have buried my husband in its service. At least let me support what is left of my family by carrying on his work.”

He looked around at the prominent townsfolk who had turned out to support me and my family. He didn’t want to have to defend himself against the recriminations which might follow if he turned a poor widowed woman and her five children out of their only home.

“Very well, Mrs Bennett. You can stay on as Keeper of the Light. For now.”

3rd December

Exactly six months to the day after my George passed, I went into labour.

Fanny and I had already planned what we would do when the time came. She would be my comfort and midwife, Mary Jane would heat and fetch the water, and Anne would take charge of feeding the other children.

I had pre-arranged a signal with Dan, so if something went wrong he would know to bring Sally and a doctor over in the Pilot boat, but I didn’t expect anything to go wrong. I wasn’t sure that I cared if it did, if it meant I would be with George again.

Such feelings have been my frequent companions since the funeral. While I kept the watch from midnight to dawn, I scribbled them all down, pages full of dark thoughts and bitter recriminations against a Creator who would take my husband away so cruelly. I have torn those pages out now and burned them. Today was a new beginning.

As soon as Fanny handed me that red-faced, wailing baby I felt such a powerful love fill me that nothing else mattered. Here was George's last child, and mine as well. I had to live, to take care of him. I had to try to be happy again, for his sake, and for all the children's.

Fanny has been a wonderful help since the accident, taking care of everything in the mornings while I sleep after the watch, as I used to for George. At the birth she was calmness itself, capable and composed – I couldn't have asked for a better midwife – but she always looks so serious, even stern.

I patted the bed next to me. "Come and say hello to your new brother."

She carefully sat down next to me and I handed her the swaddled infant, who had stopped crying and was looking at us with wonder. Fanny lifted him up so they were face to face to face, and looked deep into his eyes. At that moment he hiccuped, and looked so surprised that we both looked at each other and laughed.

"Oh Fanny, it's so good to see you smile again."

She kissed me on the cheek. "It's good to see you smile again too, Mama."

I had written to my family after George died, but it was too soon to expect a reply. Now I wrote again to tell Papa that I had named my last son William Hebden Bennett. There has always been a William in our line of the Hebdens, going back generations. I hoped that he would see that as the olive branch it was meant to be.

As the months went by I received letters of sympathy from my aunts, then letters of congratulations on the birth – but I waited in vain for a letter from my father that said, "Come home, all is forgiven".

22nd June 1858

Manufactured by Messrs Cochrane & Co. to the plans drawn up six years ago by the very same Mr Roberts who visited us after the big earthquake, the new cast iron lighthouse has arrived from England in 480 separate packages on board the *Ambrosine*. It was unloaded at Rhodes & Co.'s wharf and is likely to stay there for several months, as the Provincial Government has been unsuccessful in getting anyone to tender to move the packages across to Pencarrow Head and unload them here. Hardly surprising, when the total is said to weigh 60 tons!

Site preparations are already underway on the top of the hill which stands above the cottage. The old day mark beacon has been removed, and a new flagstaff erected next to our cottage, displaying a white flag with a red ball over it. The ground is being levelled and excavated for the foundation. A new house for the Head Keeper is being built on the sheltered eastern slope overlooking the lake. The Assistant Keeper will live in the existing cottage.

I have applied for both Keeper's jobs. I don't hold out much expectation of getting either, knowing that I will be competing with men for the position. But I hope the efficiency with which I have run the temporary lighthouse, and the accuracy of my reports, for which I have been commended, will stand in my favour.

18th September

Finally the brigantine *Caroline* has delivered the packages to a small bay outside the Heads, about half a mile from the intended site, making several trips over a number of days. The lighthouse parts will be rafted to the shore, where Mr Edward Wright has constructed a tramway up the hill, with a steam-driven winch to haul the heavier parts to the top.

* * *

Fanny has had a hard time keeping Anne, Francis and George at their lessons, when all they want to do is go and watch with Mary Jane and little William. The boys especially are fascinated by

the equipment and all the manly goings-on. I'm sure Mr Wright must be heartily tired of their endless questions, but he is very patient with them.

I confess I am also interested in the process of assembling a prefabricated lighthouse. My first concern was how would something so tall and heavy withstand a big earthquake? Mr Wright showed me the thick octagonal iron ring to which the iron plates of the tower will be bolted. It will be sunk 3 feet in a bed of cemented brick, resting on a base of concrete. Then a hollow central column will help support each of the two internal floors, and house the weights for the clockwork apparatus which turns an occluding screen to make the light appear to flash at 2 minute intervals. The walls will be made of solid cast iron plates nearly an inch thick, held together every 6 inches with thick iron bolts.

“This tower will still be here when we're long gone, Mrs Bennett,” he said proudly. “Your grandchildren's grandchildren will be able to visit it.”

I rather liked that idea.

It has been fascinating to watch the assembly. All the packages were numbered, so that this miracle of engineering appeared to proceed very smoothly. The heavy pieces were hoisted into place with ropes and pulleys, and the help of a very patient cart horse called Samson.

Every afternoon I rose from sleep eager to see what progress had been made that morning. The cast iron wall plates had edges bent at just the right angle so that each could be attached to the one on either side, and above and below. The plates are laid horizontally, each forming one of the eight walls in the octagonal tower. As the tower rises, the plates become narrower, so that the sides of the tower appear to curve gracefully inwards until the walls become straight in the upper lantern room.

There are twelve vertical rows of plates in total, with an internal floor every 11', at the top of the 4th and 8th row. The floors, made of chequered wrought iron plates, rest on girders bolted to flanges on the central column and the side plates. The ground level room is 15' across. The heavy

timber door is on the north-east side, away from the prevailing winds, in a recessed doorway with a small portico for shelter from the rain. There are 3 small window openings set in the 3rd row of plates, one at each quarter of the room from the door.

The middle room has four such openings and is 13' wide at floor level. The top, or lantern room, is 11' across, with large plate glass windows replacing the solid plates on the six sides visible from the sea and the harbour. One of the metal walls contains a small door, giving access to the 2' wide gantry which runs around the outside of the tower, and the moveable ladder which goes up and over the roof, for the purpose of cleaning the windows and accessing the smoke hood.

It is a good thing I am not afraid of heights.

* * *

The construction was finished well before the opening celebration planned for New Year's Day. From the base of the tower to the very tip of the copper weather vane is 45'. Below the vane is a key-hole shaped ventilating hood of the same metal, with a flange on one side to catch the wind. The roof is also of copper. The walls have been painted white so that the structure will serve as a day marker as well. Clutter and tools have been cleared away, and the workmen have left. Only Mr Wright remains. Once everything was complete he invited me to come and view the finished lighthouse.

We entered the tower through the heavy timber door. On our right, a light iron staircase went up to the first landing. As I followed Mr Wright I caught glimpses of my house, the headland opposite, the Strait through the little windows. Next came an even narrower flight of another 13 steps, past views of the lake and Port Nicholson, up to the octagonal room which holds the chandelier. I had to hold my skirts tight against my legs as I squeezed up the last few steps, which are barely 12 inches wide.

The lamp immediately commanded my attention, filling half the room and reaching almost to the roof. Mr Wright says it is a second order catadioptric light, but I could see why he also calls it

a chandelier. A brass cage filled with angled crystal panels surrounded the central burner, the middle lenses thick concentric circles and the panels above and below like a series of curved glass steps. The angles bend and concentrate the central source of illumination and send it out in a straight beam, in a clever design by Monsieur Fresnel. Standing a few feet off the floor on a turntable atop a column which housed the clockwork gears, it looked like a gigantic glass flower or beehive. It was blinding in the sunlight.

Mr Wright chuckled as I shaded my eyes. “Oh yes, that’s why lighthouses need curtains. There’s a danger of fire or melted equipment if the lamp is not shaded during the day. If you stay on as Keeper you will need to arrange to have curtains made.”

To get away from the glare I opened the little door out onto the gantry and stepped outside. Looking down through the holes in the perforated cast iron made my knees quiver at first, but the view from up there was incredible. I could easily see the snow on the mountains across Cook Strait.

26th December

The Pilot Boat collected us as usual today, to attend church in Wellington. On the way Dan pulled an envelope from his shirt pocket and handed it to me.

“Harbour Master asked me to make sure you got this.”

I looked at the letter with its official seal, and my hands trembled. This must be the response to my application. I didn’t want to open it here, where children and the crew might see me cry.

“Open it, Mary. It will be fine.” He gave me a broad wink and grinned. He knew something.

I cracked the seal, swallowed and unfolded the letter. The first few lines leapt out at me – “pleased to offer you the position of Head Keeper at an annual salary of £125 plus firewood...”

I jumped up and waved the letter in the air. “I got it. I got it!”

Everyone cheered and clapped.

Dan laughed. “Congratulations, Keeper Bennett. Now sit down or you’ll have us all in the drink.”

As I sat, beaming, to read the letter properly, I saw a familiar name and my smile faltered a little. William Lyall. He was to be the Assistant Keeper.

* * *

Mr Lyall and his wife are due to arrive on Friday, the day before his employment commences and the lighthouse is officially opened. In the meantime, with the help of two hired men, we moved all of our things into the new residence. It was luxurious compared to what we were used to, with three bedrooms and an indoor cooking stove. No more sheltering in the cave on cold windy nights!

For the first time, the girls and the boys had separate bedrooms and so did I. It felt strange, and very bare. We are going to need more furniture. The girls and I were busy sewing all week – firstly curtains for the bare windows and then outfits for the opening ceremony. We made matching smocks for the boys, in fawn cotton with dark piping, and then we dug through the trunk that Aunt Judith sent all those years ago to find something for the girls. Mary Jane chose an old dress of my sister’s, green velvet with wide bell sleeves, and Anne also got something similar from her namesake as well, only in dark blue. Fanny chose a summer dress that I’d last worn when George and I were courting, cream with black polka dots and black pompoms down the front. With some minor alterations to sleeves and hem length the dresses fitted beautifully.

“What about you, Mama?” asked Mary Jane. “Aren’t you going to wear something pretty?”

“No, if I want to be taken seriously I must dress seriously, I’m afraid.”

I’m going to wear my smart and serviceable navy skirt and fitted jacket over a white cotton blouse and petticoat.

31st December

Mr Lyall and his wife Lucy arrived, accompanied by his stepson Robert Buckeridge. After they had finished moving in we showed them around the new lighthouse, visited the cooking cave, and then invited them over for afternoon tea. Mr Lyall seemed rather stiff and ill-at-ease. He sat on the edge of his chair and refused all of the sandwiches and cake that the girls offered around. Mrs Lyall was nervously chatty, but she was easily quelled with a sharp glance from her husband.

From her I learned that the family came out on the *Mariner* in 1849. Her husband served in Her Majesty's navy on a man-o-war, but before that he had a shoemaking business in Putney. Here a look from Mr Lyall made her change the subject. Her son Robert is about the same age as me. He and his wife Ann live in Taita in the Lower Hutt, with a large family starting with daughter Amelia, who was born in 1837 and ending with Mary in 1862. She was about to tell us all intervening names and birthdates when her husband abruptly stood, thrust his cup and saucer at Fanny, and said, "Thank you for the tea, we must go."

1st January, 1859

Mr Wright spent today instructing Mr Lyall and myself in the operation of the lamp, the eclipsing screen, and our duties as light keepers. The Moderator lamp stands in the centre of the Fresnel lens cage. To reach it, we must stand on a short stepladder to unlatch one of the brass-framed panels and step inside the chandelier. First we empty any oil remaining in the lamp reservoir and refill it with fresh oil. The reservoir holds enough oil to keep the lamp burning even on the longest night of the year. Then the clockwork pump is wound up and started to pressurise the oil, a valve is opened and the wick lit and adjusted to the correct height. The glass panel is closed and the clockwork mechanism started so the eclipsing screen rotates around the chandelier, making it appear to flash every two minutes. The weight which powers it takes about one hour to fall down

the central column, after which the keeper must wind it back up to the top with a handle attached to the side of the apparatus.

Mr Wright is going to stay here for the next week, to oversee our initial training and ensure we understand the care and maintenance of the catadioptric light, the first of its kind to be used in this country.

While we were working, we could hear the cheerful beats of the German band playing on board the steam ship *Wonga Wonga* on the first of its two excursion trips to view the new lighthouse. Mr Wright suggested we go out on the gantry and enjoy the moment. The steamer was decorated with coloured bunting and we could see couples dancing on deck. Someone pointed at us and soon the rail was crowded with people waving and cheering. We waved back. I could see Lucy and the children standing down below us doing the same. The band struck up God Save the Queen and the voices raised in song rolled up the hill like a tidal wave. Beside me Mr Lyall stood to attention and saluted.

In the evening the *Wonga Wonga* anchored off the lighthouse about 7pm. Soon after, the official party came ashore – the Superintendent, Captain Rhodes, the Provincial Treasurer and one or two others – and made their way up to the lighthouse, where the Superintendent lit the lamp for the first time at night. The party had brought along the photographic artists Messrs Swan and Davis to record the occasion, and I asked him if he would take a family portrait of the children in their best.

Bennett Children Photograph 1859

May be viewed at:

'Pencarrow Lighthouse family', *New Zealand History* (2020)

<<https://nzhistory.govt.nz/media/photo/pencarrow-lighthouse-family>>[Accessed 10 July 2022]

From a family collection. The author was not able to obtain family permission to use the photograph in this thesis.

Back: Francis 10, Anne 12

Middle: Mary Jane junior 14, George junior 5, Fanny, nearly 17

Front: William 3, in his first breeches

When Mr Wright left he took with him my letter for the Provincial Secretary.

Pencarrow Head

Lighthouse

8th January 1859

Mr Fitzherbert,

Sir,

I beg to hand over a list of articles required for the use of the

Lighthouse

127 yds 3~4 Sails Cloth

1 Skein fine Sewing String

1 Palm a few Sailmaker's Needles

1 Iron Scraper for the door

1 Dust Pan

3 Door Mats

2 Iron Trays for Chimney Glasses

Scissors for trimming Lamps

Soft Linen for cleaning Chandelier

1 Short and Long Step Ladder

Journal Books

Writing Paper &/c

Wax Matches

Time Piece

1 American Bucket

I remain

Sir

Yours Respectfully

M J Bennett

*Mr Wright will be
kind enough to give
you a description of the
Iron Trays*

I will miss Mr Wright. He has been an excellent buffer between myself and Mr Lyall. Now I must deal with my assistant's scorn of my abilities on my own.

* * *

Cleaning the smoky residue off the lenses is a three hour job which must be done every day. It involves standing inside the chandelier and rubbing every surface of the glass with a soft cloth until not a smudge is left. Then the keeper must use a step-ladder to do the same on the outside of the lenses. The inside of the lantern room windows must also be cleaned daily, and the outside if weather permits.

Mr Lyall and I share the watch, with a handover at midnight. The seventeen hour nights are split into two watches, of eight and nine hours each. My Lyall insists on sleeping on the second floor of the lighthouse during my watch, in case of accidents 'which you could not handle on your own'. It is so irritating to have him constantly underfoot and watching my every move. I cannot fetch supplies from the ground floor or visit the privy without disturbing his sleep, or keep myself alert by singing. I can only sit on the hard-backed chair in the lightroom and read or sew by the dim light of the lamp. It is odd that the light which shines so brightly for ships 30 nautical miles away casts only a poor illumination on the person who tends it.

"Mr Lyall, I have run the existing lighthouse on my own for the last three years."

“This equipment is far more complex. It is a delicate piece of machinery which I wouldn’t expect a woman to understand.”

His pedantic condescension makes me want to scream.

Several times when I have come on watch I have found one of the screws in the mechanism which drives the lamp’s oil pump is loose. If it were to fall out the keeper on watch would have to summon the other keeper, and one would have to work the oil valves by hand to prevent the lamp going out, while the other replaced the missing screw with an identical one from the spare Moderator lamp. In the morning the fallen screw would have to be located on the floor of the light room or at the bottom of the central column, as there are no replacement screws available – they are precision made in England. I am beginning to wonder if Mr Lyall is loosening them deliberately in the hope that I won’t notice, and the light will go out on my watch, or I will have to call for his assistance. So far I have not said anything, just made the necessary adjustments at the beginning of my shift.

I also found a leak in one of the lamp oil cisterns. Whether it was accidental or not, I must report it to the authorities as we cannot repair it ourselves. I believe I will also mention in my letter the mysterious self-loosening screws. It is time I asserted my authority as head keeper, regardless of my sex.

To Mrs Bennett, Light Keeper, Pencarrow Head

Provincial Secretary’s Office

Wellington 4th Feb 1859

Madam

*I have received your several communications of the 1st and 3rd inst
(both received yesterday) referring to the leakage of the cistern of one of the*

lamps, drawing my attention to the want of a supply of sundry necessary articles, and requesting that you may be furnished with a list of the quantity of oil etc for which you are held responsible; – all of which shall receive immediate attention.

The detection of a leakage in the cistern of one of the lamps shows the necessity of using the lamps alternate months, by which means they will hopefully be kept in an efficient state of repair, in case of any emergency that may arise; by this arrangement therefore it will be desirable that you should continue to pay particular attention.

An extra Moderator Lamp according to your request shall be supplied; to be used in case of any accident happening to both the other lamps; a contingency not probable, but still one that ought to be provided for. I have given an order for this and it will be forwarded to you at the first opportunity.

I have the honour to remain

Yours faithfully

William Fitzherbert

Mr Fitzherbert has also forwarded a lengthy reply from Mr Wright. The engineer states that the screws are liable to work loose, but not likely to do so, if inspected occasionally and tightened with a screwdriver. I will bring this to Mr Lyall's attention. The revolving apparatus will need the weights reduced to maintain the eclipses every two minutes, now that the gearing runs more freely from increased wear, but the whole is to be removed on 1st September next. It is felt that if the mechanism were to break down, the means to repair it are not available in the colony, so it would be better to do away with it altogether and change the light to fixed rather than flashing.

The goods I have ordered are on their way, although the long wax matches and the scissors for trimming lamp wicks are not available in Wellington, so Mr Wright advises that the two pairs of scissors I already have will do, if I send them in alternately for sharpening. The long matches we must manage without. The iron tables to hold the lamp glasses have been ordered but not yet completed. He sounds rather peeved by that.

The quantity of colza oil is 610 gallons – three tanks holding 150 gallons each, and 32 five gallon cans which should be transferred to the main tanks as they empty. The leakage of one of the lamps is due to a slight imperfection in the workmanship, he says, but is easily repaired. He is arranging for someone to do so as soon as the weather improves.

24th January 1860

Lucy came by today but she wouldn't come in. She seemed quite anxious and kept looking around. She said William had gone into town to post a letter. It must be very lonely for her out here, without children to keep her company. She probably thinks the same of me, pitying my lack of husband. In any case, we often enjoy a cup of tea together when Mr Lyall is absent. Today she brought me a sheaf of crumpled papers – she didn't quite meet my eyes, just thrust them into my hands and mumbled something about the children being able to use them for scrap paper – and it wasn't until I looked at them properly that I realised that they were samples of a letter Mr Lyall had been writing. Judging from the number of pages, it had taken him quite a few attempts to get it right. Once Lucy left I laid them out flat and began to read. My hands began to shake as sentences leapt off the page at me.

“unless some alteration is made before the Long Cold nights the Lighthouse Duties cannot be Done with Safety by one Man and a Woman”

“I cannot undertake another Winter with the help of a woman only”

“did not Average more than Six Hours Sleep out of forty-eight last Winter and that Broken”

That was entirely his own choice!

“I have generally Slept in the Lighthouse and saved the Light by being on the Spot”

Oh what a hero you are, Mr Lyall.

“waited twelve months for Mrs Bennett to get a man to help me finding she did not I could endure it no longer it is her Idea that Sutch work is Extra and not expected of the Lighthouse Keeper”

“all ought to be Ballanced to each Other in a Way that Experiance and Attention alone must Teach before anyone could be considered safe to be left alone for one Night without great Risk and a Woman could not Possibly be left as Various accidents might occur that She could not meet Without the help of a Man”

I felt hot all over. Odious, illiterate man! Pompous little shoemaker who thinks a few years on a naval ship makes him an expert light keeper!

“hoping Your Honour will find a favourable opportunity if Possible before the Winter Sets in of Improoving the Condition Without Disadvantage to Mrs Bennett”

How kind of him to be so considerate of a mere Woman. I nearly snatched the whole lot up and threw it in the fire – almost – but no, I needed them to plan my strategy. I was not going to let him get away with this. The battle lines were drawn.

* * *

I waited a few days, so as not to cast suspicion on poor Lucy, and then when I went to take over the watch at midnight I took Francis with me. Mr Lyall seemed surprised, but said nothing more than a polite good evening, before going over the night's entries in the log book with me. When he had finished I thanked him as usual, and then I explained to him the reason for Francis' presence.

“Mr Lyall, I have noticed that you are looking increasingly tired of late. I worry that you are not getting adequate sleep in the camp bed here.”

“I can manage, Mrs Bennett,” he said stiffly. “Someone must be here to assist you in case of emergency.”

“Quite. That is why Francis has agreed to sleep here in future, while I am on duty.”

He looked horrified. “A lad! Mrs Bennett, you cannot be serious. A young lad can’t be expected to act as an Assistant Keeper.”

“Of course not. You misunderstand me. Francis will be here to fetch you, should an emergency arise that I am incapable of dealing with on my own.”

He twitched a little at that, as if the phrase struck a chord. “But – he is a child.”

“Hardly that, Mr Lyall. Francis will be twelve this year. Many boys are already apprenticed at his age, as I’m sure you were.”

“It seems very irregular, Mrs Bennett...what will the authorities say?”

“I imagine they will be relieved to know that the Assistant Keeper can now get an adequate amount of sleep to ensure his lighthouse duties can be done with safety.”

A definite twitch. I think I may have, as they say, taken the wind out of his sails, the old sea dog.

The new arrangement worked exceedingly well. Francis was delighted to be allowed to stay up until midnight every night, and then sleep in the lighthouse. It has been good for him, to feel that he has an important role to play, and have a place of his own to sleep, away from his elder sisters who insist on treating him like a child. Mr Lyall actually became pleasanter to be around, once he was not tired all the time, and after a few nights he unbent enough to ask if Francis might also stay with him during his shift.

* * *

The years came, and the years went – some busier than others, some quieter. The discovery of gold in the south island drew many ships away from Wellington at the start of the decade. Shipwrecks still occurred despite the light, although not as often. Mr Lyall and I learned to muddle

along together. I'd like to say that he never questioned my authority again, but that wasn't the case; however I don't believe he ever complained to the authorities in writing after that first attempt. He seems to have become quite fond of my boys, teaching them manly skills like carpentry, fishing and shooting. I'm sure he taught Francis to smoke that pipe that he thinks I don't know about.

Uncle John died in May of 1860, and left a legacy of £450 to his sisters, and nothing to his brother. Aunt Anne bought a property in Harrogate and she and Aunt Judith successfully run it as a respectable boarding house, leaving my father to fend for himself at Braisty Woods. I don't believe either of them have ever forgiven him for putting my mother into the asylum.

Fanny, Mary Jane and Anne run the household capably while I keep the light, managing the cooking, washing and cleaning, milking the cow and making butter and cheese. As I had taught them their letters and sums, so they teach their brothers. They are always sought after at dances and admired in church, but they seem in no hurry to marry and leave.

There are small joys to be had which make the loneliness bearable. Watching the moon lay a silver path across the water. The fierce brightness of the stars on a still winter's night. Writing in the log the daily tasks of the Keeper, noting the ships coming and going.

29th January 1866

A letter arrived for me on the *S.S. Tararua*. As soon as I saw the handwriting I began to tremble so much that Fanny exclaimed and brought me a chair. The forceful script with its overblown capitals was still familiar to me, although I hadn't seen it for over twenty-five years. I broke the seal with shaking hands and read.

Braisty Woods

11th October 1865

Dear Mary Jane,

I am sorry to give you two pieces of news that I know will grieve you.

Last month your mother departed this world at Braisty Woods. The asylum doctor told me that her health was failing and she'd been asking to come home so she could die here in peace. I fetched her in the carriage and she seemed to perk up and enjoy the ride, exclaiming over familiar sights and places. I had hired a village woman to take care of her, but it was hardly necessary. That evening she went to sleep in her favourite room, the one with the blue wallpaper, and she didn't wake in the morn.

She was laid to rest in the churchyard at Dacre Banks. My sisters came to the funeral and they all remonstrated with me for not having written to you for all these years, and told me 'now is the time'.

Still my stubbornness prevailed, until a few days ago when I heard from Anne that Judith had followed your mother into the next world on the 7th. It made me see clearly for the first time that I'm no longer a young man. I have only one surviving child, and six grandchildren who are strangers to me. This house needs children and laughter in it again.

I want you to come home, and to that end I have instructed my Bank to send a Letter of Credit to the Wellington branch of the Union Bank so that you can purchase tickets. I will provide for the boys' education when you get here. It is time to look to their future.

Your father,

William Hebden, Esq.

I could imagine his gruff, no-nonsense Yorkshire tone. I knew after so many years away that I would probably never see my mother or Aunt Judith again, but knowing it and feeling it in my

heart were two different things. Hearing the facts of their deaths so bluntly and unexpectedly drove the breath from me.

Fanny crouched next to me. “What is it?”

I handed her the letter and she scanned it quickly, then covered my hand with her own. “I’m so sorry, Mama. What will you do?”

“I don’t know yet, Fanny. I need to think.”

In the quiet hours of the watch that night I let the thoughts flow through me.

In the decades since I first received news of Ann’s death, and then Will’s and Grandmama Jane’s, the grief had faded to occasional flashes of sadness. Most of the time I found I thought of them as being ‘back home’, with the family. If I were to return now, I wondered if it would feel like losing them over again. Mama and Aunt Judith would be gone as well, to add to the ache. But the longer I wait, the higher the risk that Papa and my other aunts might follow them.

There is peace in England, and land that we’ve owned for generations. Here, the Company purchases are disputed, and the accord that we enjoyed with the Maoris in the early days is becoming a thing of the past. The violence of the wars in the central North Island have already spread to New Plymouth and could eventually reach here. Even if they don’t, the displaced and disaffected likely will.

Mr Lyall will soon be leaving for his new post as Head Keeper of the new light on Somes’ Island. Another assistant keeper will be arriving here. Do I really want to go through that all over again, having to prove my competency to a man, needing to do everything not just equally well, but better?

Perhaps it is time. My girls should be thinking of marriage, not stuck out here helping me tend the light and keep house. In New Zealand they are likely to end up as farmer’s or shopkeeper’s wives. Back home the Hebden name might still be worth something, perhaps a life of relative ease if they marry well. The boys ought to go to a proper English school and learn how to be gentlemen,

and manage their inheritance. They deserve to see England and be able to decide for themselves if that is where their future lies. But no-one there can ever be told about my life here as a lighthouse keeper, or their prospects will be ruined.

By morning, I had made my decision. We were going home.

*As travellers oft look back at eve,
When eastward darkly going,
To gaze upon that light they leave
Still faint behind them glowing*

- "As Slow Our Ship", Thomas Moore, Irish Melodies

14th March, 1866

It felt strange to be standing on the deck of a large sailing ship again. As I looked out over the timber wharves, numerous warehouses and busy streets of Wellington, it was hard to reconcile the bustling port town I saw with the sparsely populated settlement that I remembered.

Whitewashed timber cottages line the wooded hillsides in rows like peggy teeth in a green man's jaw. The dense forest which once reached to the water's edge now only survives in the deep gullies. The Maori paha and the old whares have gone, the flammable raupo replaced with timber, bricks and shingled roofs.

Yesterday we visited my husband's grave for the last time. The rambling Harris rose surrounded three sides of the enclosure with its spiky arms. The fragrant pink flowers were long finished, but Francis and George Jnr spent some time carefully weaving the springy new briars through the railings. Fanny, Mary Jane and Anne must have denuded the hillsides of Pencarrow in order to make the enormous bouquet of wildflowers which they placed before his headstone.

I had brought one more thing with me from the lighthouse surrounds – the small white cross from Eliza's grave. Over the years the salt-laden wind and the driving rain had stripped it back to bare wood numerous times. Once again I had painted the timber white and carefully filled the carved letters and dates with black. I knew that the church wardens here would take better care of her marker than the new keepers would. In front of the left side of her father's monument I dug out a small hole and planted the heel of the cross, so that he sheltered and protected her once more.

“Goodbye, my darlings.”

The supplies are all loaded. Our trunks are in the hold and our travelling clothes and toiletries have been meticulously organised in the cabin by Anne. What a luxury it will be to sail in a proper cabin, with actual beds and chairs, drawers to store our clothes, and windows to look out of. This time I have kept my paints and brushes with my travel things, so that I might capture the wonders of the voyage.

It seemed a good omen that the clipper *Wild Duck* was still in port when we needed to book passage home. She has become a well-known favourite in Wellington, making seven fast and successful voyages in the last six years. This season, she will be our third export wool ship, carrying 1500 tons of wool and sheep hides to England, some of which belong to the Hunter family. I find there is a certain irony going home sitting atop £11,000 worth of George Hunter’s wool exports.

One and all, former passengers have praised Captain Bishop for his uniformly courteous and refined manner, and his care and skill as a seaman are well-known. If I must entrust the safety of my whole family to one man, I could not have chosen a better.

Several other returning settlers have apparently had the same thought. I recognised some familiar faces from the days of the Durham Arms – Mr Pharazyn, who came out on the *Jane* in ‘41, and Mr Fell, who arrived as captain of the *Katherine Stewart Forbes* in the same year, and stayed. He now has a wife and four children. It will be good for my younger boys to have company on the voyage.

Over the past few days, as the last of the cargo was stowed, and the passengers settled, I’ve met our other fellow travellers. This ship won’t be crowded, like the *Duke*. There is one other married couple, the Sewells, and some young singles – Miss Andrews, Miss Minnie and her brother, and the recently widowed Mr Lowe, who sadly only emigrated with his wife last year. Also sailing with us is the infamous Colonel Warre, and a Captain Corrogan. There will be much to talk about to pass the idle hours. On the dock a crowd had gathered, friends and family and well-

wishers, to see us off. I waved at Emma, who was there arm-in-arm with her fiancé Mr Thomas Davies, and they both waved back.

Captain Bishop looked at his pocket watch and approached me. “Mrs Bennett, it’s almost time to get under weigh. Are all your children aboard?”

I looked around. There was Fanny, talking to Miss Andrews. There were Mary and Anne, shadowing William as looked longingly at the activity in the rigging. But no sign of Francis and his brother George. Drat those boys.

I gave the Captain an apologetic smile. “They can’t be far away.” I hoped.

“I’ll fire the first signal to let them to know it’s time to come aboard.” He gave me a wink, and nodded to the first mate, who pulled a pistol from his belt and fired a shot into the air off the seaward side. Several people jumped.

Ten minutes later there was still no sign of them. The second signal of two shots was fired. All the passengers were now standing at the rail, anxiously scanning the foreshore.

“There they are!” cried Anne, pointing.

Sure enough, Frank and George came haring down the nearest street as if their lives depended on it. Frank had his boots dangling by the laces in one hand and was running barefoot. George seemed to have lost his hat. As the crowd on the dock parted for them there was some good-natured ribbing and slaps on the back. By the time they reached the top of the gangplank and stood panting on the deck, they were grinning.

“George,” I said reproachfully, “where is your hat?”

He clapped a hand to his head and looked stricken. “I must have left it in the sweet shop!” He turned and bolted back down the gangplank. There was some laughter from the crowd. Captain Bishop sighed and made a tsk sound as he looked at his watch once again.

“I’ll get him,” offered Frank.

Fanny pulled him back by the sleeve. “No you don’t. You stay here.” And with that she gathered her skirts and ran down the gangplank. The crowd cheered.

“And there goes another Bennett,” said the Captain, under his breath.

But Fanny had longer legs than her brother and soon caught up to him. It was evident an argument was going on, as he gesticulated towards the shops and she pointed at the ship. Captain Bishop gave an order and three shots were fired. Sailors on the wharf untied all but one of the hawsers. Fanny grabbed George by the ear and marched him back through the crowd, amid general applause and several loud whistles from sailors in the rigging.

Finally anchor was weighed about 3pm and canvas spread. A salute was fired as the *Wild Duck* began to move through the water, and was answered by the *Commodore*, the fourth wool ship, which will follow us home. As we set sail before a fine north-east breeze, we passed other ships whose shapes were as familiar to me as my children’s faces. The steam ships *Lady Bird*, *Phoebe* and *Queen*. The sailing vessels *Shepherdess* and the *Bee*, the *Flying Cloud* and *Sandfly*. For once I was passing them, instead of the other way around.

As we rounded Point Halswell, the lighthouse came into view. The afternoon sun was painting the hillside with golden light and long shadows. The white of the cast-iron tower glowed with a soft radiance, as if lit from within. I could see the blinds being raised, one by one, that we had painstakingly sewed a decade ago. Two tiny silhouettes appeared on the gantry and waved – the new keeper and his assistant. The children gathered around as we looked our last at our home on the hill. Then as we sailed outside the heads I saw something that I had never seen from without – the moment the lamp was kindled and the beam shone forth like a glorious star. A light to guide us safely home. A light that I had kept.

* * *

Far out to sea I stayed up for one last midnight duty. The officer on watch nodded to me as I made my way past the wheel to the rear of the poop deck. The journal felt like an extension of my

hands as I lifted it to the polished rail and let the weight rest there. My fingertips moved over the whorls and cracks in the leather one last time, tracing the salt-water stains and scorch marks, remembering the events which caused them. Twenty-five years of my life were contained between its covers. My George lived in there. I slid both arms around the book and hugged it to me tightly, closing my eyes and remembering the feel of him in my arms. It was harder than I thought it would be to let it go. At last I pressed my lips to the cover, then let it tilt and fall into the wake of the ship. It quickly sank and was gone.

Epilogue

June 1871 – Bradford, Leeds

Three young men sat at the top of an oak tree in Manningham, watching the young lovers stroll arm-in-arm and nannies push prams about the park below, oblivious to their presence. Someone with sharp eyes might have seen the wisp of smoke that arose from the clay pipe that they passed between them.

Frank took a puff and sighed on the exhale. “Listen you blokes, I’ve had enough of this school business.” Regular thrashings from Headmaster Johnson had failed to beat the accent of the Colonies out of him. “When term ends, I’m leaving.”

George leaned forward and took the pipe from him. “What? Where will you go?”

“I dunno...anywhere but here.”

“What about University?”

“I’m 22. If they don’t think I’m ready for University yet, then I’m never going to be.”

“What will Grandpa say?” A young 15, William was still intimidated by the man he was named after.

He thought back to when they had first arrived at Braisty Woods. William Hebden Senior had not liked having three boisterous boys about the house who wouldn’t kowtow to his authority the way he expected them to. Running barefoot about the estate, swimming naked in the river. “Young savages,” he called them. The ‘discipline’ he administered came to an abrupt end one day when Frank, who was already taller and more muscular than his grandfather, took the willow cane out of his hand and snapped it across his knee. Not long after, they were sent away to boarding school ‘to become young gentlemen’.

“I want to go home,” said George abruptly.

“Back to Braisty Woods, you mean?”

George shuddered. “Not that musty old pile of bricks! Home to New Zealand.”

The pipe went around a few more times while they thought about this.

“I miss the kai,” said Frank. He could still taste the watery cabbage and stringy boiled beef they’d had for dinner. What he wouldn’t give for some steaming pork fresh from the hangi, the way they used to do it at the pa, or some kahawai caught with a hand-line off the rocks at Pencarrow. Fish that didn’t smell like it had been dead for a week already.

George blew a smoke-ring. “I miss the freedom.”

“I miss the lighthouse,” said William.

The others looked at him. They had got so used to hiding that part of their past that they almost never mentioned it, even amongst themselves.

George nodded. “What about the estate? You’re the heir, Frank.”

He shrugged. “There’s not much estate left, is there? Grandpa saw to that. Besides, Ma’s the heir really. She and the girls deserve to get it when he dies, after waiting on him hand and foot for the rest of his life.”

The house and gardens had been very run-down when they arrived in 1866. Grandma and Aunt Judith were long buried. Fanny, Mary, Anne and their mother were expected to be cooks, servants and housekeeper in exchange for the roof over their heads, and grateful for it. Privately Frank suspected that was another of the reasons Grandpa had sent the boys away, because he was sick of Frank standing up for his mother and sisters.

“We could go to the goldfields, restore the family fortune.” That was typical George, always dreaming big.

Frank knocked the spent dottle out on the tree trunk and tucked the pipe into an inner pocket. “I’d settle for a quiet life sheep farming.”

“Mama will be upset.”

“She’ll get over it. Besides, Mary’s about to get married. There’ll soon be grandbabies to keep Ma happy.”

Three months later, they stood at the polished rail of the *Queen Bee* as the hawsers were loosed and hauled in, to be coiled dripping on the deck. The clipper began to pull away from Gravesend. They waved their hats and shouted goodbye to their mother and sisters on the dock, who alternated between waving lace handkerchiefs and wiping away tears with them. William's pockets were stuffed with many last-minute 'necessities' and treats the women had showered on him and his brothers. His skin still felt the imprint of all the kisses pressed upon it, the pinched cheeks (that was Anne), the fingers combing through his hair, trying and failing, as usual, to tame the springy cowlick in his wayward curls. They were all his mothers, just as Frank was the only father he had ever known. His eyes stung, his throat ached, and he waved until the huddle of women were a faceless blob in the sea of humanity, and even then he didn't stop.

* * *

Pencarrow Lighthouse

10th November 1880

Dear Mama,

Today I started work as an Assistant Lighthouse Keeper. The Principal Keeper, Mr Cunningham, took me on a tour but not much has changed in the lighthouse itself. Margaret was impressed with the Keeper's cottages though, and so was I. The service built two new houses side-by-side in 1871, with real stone fireplaces and a lovely view over the lake. She and little Will ought to be snug as bugs there, I reckon. Our old house has been kept for visitors, and even Mr Lyall's place is still used as a storage shed. Not many sheds with a view like that.

I can't tell you how good it feels to be back here. Everywhere I look it reminds me of you and my sisters. It's like coming home.

*The thing that really struck me, though – when I arrived Mr
Cunningham wrote my name into the log book, and underneath he added
'son of Mrs Bennett'. I've got a lot to live up to, it seems.*

Love always,

William

Author's Notes

This novel is a work of fiction based on a true story. As much as possible the people and events are taken from historical record, however as Mary Jane Bennett did not keep a diary during her lifetime, and left no personal letters, I have used my imagination to fill in the gaps and to present my interpretation of her story.

I first heard about Mrs Bennett, the keeper of New Zealand's first official lighthouse, and the only woman ever to hold that position in this country, from an exhibit I visited in Wellington in 2008. Regrettably I can't remember the exact venue. Her story intrigued me, and continued to nag at me for years. The more I found out about what a remarkable woman she was, especially for her time, the louder the nagging became. Yet very few people I spoke to seemed to have heard of her. A children's book, *Lucy Goes to the Lighthouse* by Grant Sheehan was published about her story in 2018, and in 2021 her story was included in *Guiding Lights: the extraordinary lives of lighthouse women*, by Shona Riddell, a descendent of the Bennetts.

A number of articles have been published about Mary Jane, and they seem to contain essentially the same information. During the course of my research, I realised that they could all trace their inspiration back to an original article by Ellen Ellis, *A First and Only for Pencarrow Lighthouse*, which was published in the *Historic Places* journal in March, 1987. Ms Ellis worked for Archives NZ at the time. I was having difficulties locating the source materials that she used, but fortunately I was able to track her down through that old standby the phone book, and we had a lively discussion about our mutual fascination with M.J. Bennett's story.

The embarkation records for Mary Jane Hebden give her age as 20 in 1839, although her application to emigrate says 22. Her christening took place on 11/12/1816, so throughout the book I have based her age on that date. Her actual birth date could have been weeks or months earlier, as was common, however given that it was a year with high infant mortality (the 'year without a summer' mentioned in the story, probably due to the climate disruption caused by the 1815 eruption

of Mt Tambora in what was then the Dutch East Indies, now Indonesia) it seems likely that her parents would have christened her as soon as her mother was able to take her to church.

The voyage record is closely based on the actual diaries of two gentlemen who travelled as cabin passengers on the *Duke of Roxburgh's* first voyage to New Zealand, James Dent Greenwood and William Lyon. As much as possible I have attributed any direct quotes from their diaries to them in Mary Jane's 'journal'. The ill-treatment of Joseph Greenwood by his brother James is taken from Joseph's diary.

Mary Jane Hebden's original application listed her trade as governess, but the Company rules excluded single women from travelling alone. The embarkation records list her as servant to the Pierces. However in Paul Bennett's self-published family history, *The Bennetts of Pencarrow*, the author believes that Mary Jane became governess to the Hunter family on the voyage, and I very much wanted her to have the extra freedom that being a governess would confer. She could move in the social sphere of the cabin passengers as their equal, sharing their thoughts and experiences as her own, so I chose to accept that as fact. Governesses were often impoverished but educated women of good birth, which made it acceptable for them to dine with their employers. I have taken the liberty of using this to place Mary Jane at the same dining table as the other single cabin passengers and children, allowing me to use the Greenwood and Lyon diaries as source material. Miss Hebden would most likely have taken meals down in steerage, as the rations were better for cabin passengers and the Hunters would have needed to pay extra for her. Mr Hunter's financial accounts at the end of the voyage show no evidence that this was the case.

The Gomms were a real couple and did indeed cause as much ill-feeling on the voyage as written. Embarkation records state Mr Gomm was a former Lieutenant in the 67th (Foot) Regiment, aged 27, and his (unnamed) wife was 24. I did wonder from his behaviour whether he was suffering from what would now be recognised as post-traumatic stress disorder, as a result of his military service. I took a small liberty in the narrative, of directing Mr Gomm's insults in the cuddy at Mary

Jane instead of an unknown ‘married woman’ as Mr Greenwood’s diary states. Other than that, the description of them and their actions is an accurate recreation of that given by Greenwood and Lyon. Mr Gomm was a litigant in the court case mentioned in July 1840. His last purchase from the Company stores seems to have been on 5/12/1840. He was subsequently written off as a bad debt in the company records on 1/1/1841, owing £1, 15s and 8p. Unfortunately I have been unable to find any record of where the Gomms went or what they did after they left Wellington. The last record I found was an unclaimed letter addressed to ‘Gomm’ at the Auckland GPO in March 1842. If anyone knows more about what happened to them, I would love to hear it.

The current name of the Wellington suburb Petone (pr. puh-**tow**-nee) is a corruption of the original Maori name Pito-one, meaning ‘end of the sand beach’. Up until 1858, a few different spellings were used in the newspapers – Pitone, Petoni, Petone – however to avoid confusion I have used the modern spelling.

In the two decades since the second edition of *The Bennetts of Pencarrow* was published in 1999, the internet and the widespread digitisation of records have made the life of a researcher much easier (and simultaneously much more complicated). For that reason, some of the details in this book may differ from the records presented by Paul Bennett and Ellen Ellis. I have done my best to be accurate. For any errors, I take full responsibility.

Little is known about Eliza, and during my research I dubbed her ‘the mystery child’. I was unable to find any record of her birth or christening in Wellington, although there were records for the other children. Of course, with fires, floods and earthquakes documents get lost or destroyed, but as Paul Bennett points out, Eliza was the only one of the seven children not written into Mary Jane’s Bible. The only existing documentation of her is the death notice published on 11/12/1852, which gives her age as 2½ years. I have based her date of birth in the book on that notice, making it around early June, and as my late mother’s birthday was the 5th, I chose that date. By an odd coincidence there was a daughter of Dr Bennett born in Auckland on 1/6/1850. At first I wondered

if this child had been incorrectly attributed to George and Mary Jane's family, but the death notice is clear proof that this is not the case. There is no funeral record, and Paul Bennett's book states that she was buried on the hillside above the cottage (rather than below as I have described in the book). It seems strange that she wasn't buried in a churchyard. The idea came to me that a disability might have accounted for all of these discrepancies, as well as her early death and her parents choosing to move to an isolated location, as children with disabilities in those days were generally shunned by society. They were often kept hidden at home, placed in asylums or even simply allowed to die. There is no record to say that Eliza had Down Syndrome or any other illness; that is pure speculation on my part.

Mary's mother was also somewhat of a mystery. Although I found her date of death in July 1865, I could find no record of her in the 1841, 1851 or 1861 UK census, either at Braisty Woods or at Fountain's Earth, where her husband was recorded in June 1841, or anywhere else. However I did find a Mary Hebden of the right age who was committed to the North Riding Lunatic Asylum at Clifton on 15/6/1847, the year it opened. The asylum housed both pauper and private patients, with conditions including 'epileptic dementia, chronic melancholia, chronic mania, idiocy and lunacy'. Clifton was only 15-16 miles from Braisty Woods, and I have chosen to assume for the sake of the narrative that this was Mary Jane's mother.

While searching for the Hebden name in the Yorkshire West Riding asylum and workhouse records, I came across a reference to an Elizabeth Hebden, b.1825, living in Allhallowgate Workhouse in Ripon in 1861. She is described as 'defective intellect, not dangerous, of clean habits, unsound mind since birth'. I managed to find her in the previous census in 1851, aged 27, living at home with her father Constantine, 77. When he died in 1857, she must have been put in the workhouse, and was still there three decades later in 1887, aged 62. I found this heartbreaking, and so I included her in the book as Mary Jane's cousin Elizabeth that she is reminded of when Eliza is

born. I don't know if they were related, but they did live in the same parish and district of Yorkshire, so it seemed a reasonable supposition.

George and Mary's marriage certificate records their wedding date as 20/11/1840. However, the newspaper announcement says 'On the 19th inst.' Clearly one is incorrect. I chose to use the date on the official document signed by Reverend Churton. In the announcement, George is described as being from Gibside, Durham. According to *The Bennetts of Pencarrow*, George's father was a gamekeeper. In the 1840s Gibside was an estate of 600 acres of parklike grounds surrounding Gibside Hall, the home of the Dowager Countess of Strathmore and her second husband, Sir William Hutt, Member of Parliament and Director of the New Zealand Land Company. I thought it fair to assume that Gibside estate would be where George's father worked as gamekeeper, especially once I realised that Sir William Hutt, MP was the referee on George's embarkation record, which was rather unusual.

Some readers may wish to know what happened to the living Bennett children. The three sons stayed permanently in New Zealand after the *Queen Bee* arrived in Wellington on 10/1/1872. Frank, George and William travelled as 3rd class cabin passengers along with an as-yet-unidentified F.T. Bennett (not Fanny I believe, as the passenger list published in the *Wellington Evening Post* on 11/1/1872 says 'Messrs F.Bennett, G.Bennett, W. Bennett, and F.T.Bennett'.) The three daughters remained in the UK with their mother and grandfather.

Paul Bennett's book mentions a family rumour that Fanny Bennett danced with the Prince of Wales. I like to think that when they first arrived back in London in 1865, Mary Jane might have given Fanny (23), Mary Jane jnr (21) and Anne (19) a taste of the London social season. Three such striking looking girls from 'the colonies', all coming out into society together, would surely have attracted attention, perhaps even of the heir to the throne, who was also 23.

However it appears no matches were made, as William Hebden Snr, Mary Jane and her three daughters were recorded residing at Braisty Woods in the April 1871 census, with 3 acres of land

and no live-in servant. The same census records her three sons living at 35 Skinner Lane, Manningham, Bradford with Headmaster Johnson, about 23 miles south of Braisty Woods.

Fanny Bennett married Christopher Coates in 1875 but sadly did not long survive the birth of their first child in May 1876, and died in August of that year aged 34. Family history suggests that one of the sisters came out to New Zealand to visit her brothers. There is a record of a Fanny Bennett departing the UK for New Zealand on the *Adamant* in August 1874, one year before the wedding date. I like to think this is our Fanny, having one last adventure. Maybe she wanted to be sure she was making the right decision before she got married, or perhaps she took her fiancé to meet her brothers.

Mary Jane Jnr married Thomas Grange in 1872, and had 3 children: Eleanor, Frances and William. She died in 1923 aged 78. According to Frank's descendants, she and Frank stayed in touch by letter their whole lives.

Anne married Matthew Hind in 1879. They also had 3 children: Mary, Frank and Edith. Anne died c.1913 aged 67.

Francis (Frank) Bennett, married Katherine D'Ath in 1887 and they had eight children. He died in Wellington in June, 1930 aged 81. Family history says Mr D'Ath, Katherine's father, had also been a passenger on the *Queen Bee* and took the boys under his wing. He helped get Frank his first job as a surveyor, and later encouraged the match with his daughter. However, he is not on the *Queen Bee* passenger list mentioned above. Possibly he was on the boat which took them to the South Island.

George Jnr never married, and died in Nelson in August 1940 aged 87.

William married Margaret Hughes in 1878, and they had seven children. He died in Porirua in November 1929 aged 73. He was assistant lighthouse keeper at Pencarrow starting 10/11/1880, and then at Portland Island starting 1/2/1885. He resigned and left the service on 2/5/1887.

William Hebden Snr died in mid-July 1874. His will named his daughter as executrix and left effects under £300. It seems likely that Mary Jane sold or leased the family home after his death, as she was living at Springfield Villas with her daughter Mary Jane Grange in the 1881 census. She died on the 6th July 1885 with an estate of less than £78 and is buried in the churchyard at Dacre Banks.



In 2009, 150 direct descendants of Mary Jane Hebden and George White Bennett met at Pencarrow to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the opening of the lighthouse.

The last word in this narrative rightly belongs to Mary Jane. In November 2021 I was in Wellington doing further research, and I decided to see if I could find any record of George Bennett's headstone in the early settlers' part of Wellington Cemetery. I knew that George had originally been buried in the Bolton Street cemetery, however according to the Wellington City Heritage website, "The cemetery remained largely undisturbed until the early 1960s when it was identified as part of the route of the proposed Wellington Urban Motorway. The decision to take the

middle part of the cemetery for the road was confirmed in 1967 despite much public protest. Some 3,700 graves were eventually disinterred and the remains placed in a mass crypt on the east side of the motorway. Many of the gravestones and memorials from the disinterments were later returned to unaffected parts of the cemetery.”

It was a lovely day, and as I wandered along the steep paths which zig zag their way between the graves, down the hillside from the Botanic Gardens, I stopped and read many headstones, checking to see if they were from the correct era, and hoping I might randomly come across George’s. I saw an area where many old headstones stood in a haphazard jumble down a steep embankment, all facing away from the path. It seemed an awful effort to climb down just so I could read them all, but I felt drawn to them. About halfway down the slope I thought, “Wouldn’t it be funny if Mary Jane was guiding me?” and as soon as I thought it, I also thought “Here.” I turned around, and right beside me was a headstone with the name George Bennett on it. It wasn’t *her* George, I should clarify, the date of death was wrong – I later discovered that there is no surviving grave marker for G.W. Bennett – but *it was the only George Bennett headstone in the entire cemetery*. I felt like MJB had played a little joke on me, a gentle nudge in the ribs, and I hope that means she gives her approval.

Glossary of Terms

Beating about – sailing in a zig-zag pattern to make progress against the wind; i.e. tacking.

Becalmed – when a sailing ship is unable to move due to lack of wind

Capstan – a mechanical arrangement for lifting great weights, usually the anchor

Cuddy – a cabin in the stern of a sailing ship beneath the poop deck

Kai – te reo Maori for food

Poop – the aftermost and highest part of a large ship's hull; also a raised deck at the rear of the ship.

Porter – strong brown ale

Quarter Deck – the main deck

Royal sail – the name of a light sail spread immediately next above the top-gallant sail, to whose yard-arms the lower corners of it are attached; it used to be termed top-gallant royal, and is only used in fine weather.

Scuppers – openings in the side of a ship which allow water to drain from the deck

Spinning jenny – an early Industrial Revolution machine which automated the process of spinning wool or cotton thread in large cloth mills

Stunsail – A corruption of studding-sails: fine-weather sails set outside the square-sails.

St Jago – modern-day Santiago

Tormenter – a large 2-pronged fork used to take out cooked meat from a ship's cookpot

Van Diemen's Land – modern-day Tasmania

Waka – te reo Maori name for a large decorated canoe with a raised prow and stern

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