

DAUGHTERS OF THE FAITH SERIES

# *Almost Home*

A STORY BASED ON THE LIFE OF  
THE MAYFLOWER'S MASRY CHILTON

*Wendy Lawton*

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## Windmills and Wounded Hearts

Mary!" The shout was punctuated by vigorous pounding on the door.

Mary jumped, poking herself with the sewing needle. She stuck the smarting finger into her mouth to keep the drop of blood from staining the *brocade* sleeve she'd been stitching.

"Coming!"

She managed to slide her needle into the lining fabric for safekeeping.

The yelling and banging on the door grew more insistent. "Mary Chilton!"

Mary opened the heavy wooden door to find the errand lad, Cornelijs.

His breath came in gasps. "Your father was set upon by a pack of boys. They pelted him with rocks. Isabella sent me to fetch you." He pressed his side. "Go quick, Mary. He be bleeding somethin' awful."

Her father? Bleeding? Just a few minutes after Mother

and the girls went to work at the linen mill, James Chilton had left to take a small stack of bodices to Mary's oldest sister, Isabella, for embroidery. Whatever could have happened?

"Where is he, Cornelijis?"

"By the windmill near the Grote School. Close to Bell Alley."

Mary grabbed a jumble of linen strips from the scrap basket and rummaged in the *apothecary chest*, finding a small packet of *sticking plaster*. She shoved them into her apron pocket and poured some water from the tin basin into a clay jug before setting out.

She ran along the canal bank, wishing the April thaw had not come. How much faster it would have been if she could have strapped skates to her shoes and skated along the frozen canal like she and her older sisters, Ingle and Christian, did all winter long. Instead, windmills creaked, and the oars from brightly painted canal boats splashed through the water on this breezy spring morning. Doors on many of the cottages stood open as housewives swept or scrubbed their much-prized blue tile floors.

Mary stopped once, bending over to catch her breath, but she did not tarry long. Why did Isabella have to move all the way over to the other side of the tract when she married Roger?

As Mary neared Bell Alley she saw a cluster of people. She made out Isabella talking and gesturing widely to a constable. Drawing closer, Mary heard her sister's anxious voice.

"My father delivered some of the tailoring work to my home and picked up the lace cuffs I finished." Isabella's words caught in her throat. "When he left, I watched from my doorway as he walked alongside the canal."

Isabella spotted Mary. “Oh, I’m so glad you’re here, Mary. Elder Brewster came, but I knew you’d be along. I dare not leave the children, and I did not know . . .”

“Go ahead and help the constable finish,” Mary interrupted, moving toward the knot of people. Though Mary was nearly twenty years younger than her sister, they understood each other. Isabella hated the sight of blood.

Still sounding flustered, Isabella turned back to the constable and continued. “My father passed the alley, and a gang of boys came out to taunt him. They said something about English killjoys.”

Mary could picture it. That kind of thing happened too often. The tolerant Dutch considered it “merriment” carried a little too far. To the sober English *Separatists* like her family, it felt more like harassment.

William Brewster crouched beside her father. As Mary came near, she cringed. Blood matted Father’s gray hair and ran down his face from the jagged gash on his forehead. Mary’s lungs stung from running. With the blood, the noise, and the milling people, her knees weakened and started to buckle.

“Do not be alarmed, Mary,” said Elder Brewster. “Scalp wounds bleed heavily, but they are usually not as bad as they seem. Once we get him home, we will fetch the surgeon, Jacob Hey, to stitch the wound.”

Mary stiffened, shaking off the momentary wooziness. “I brought plaster and bandages.”

“Thank you, Daughter,” her father said with a wobble in his voice. “I can always trust you to take good care of me.” He tried to smile but winced instead.

Mary set to work cleaning the gaping wound with water-soaked linen rags. Father closed his eyes and leaned slightly against his friend as she worked. Mary poured a bit of plaster onto a nearby paving stone and dripped two or three drops of water onto the white powder—just enough to make a sticky paste to cover the open gash and stop the bleeding.

As she worked, Mary listened to Isabella tell the constable how the boys picked up stones when Father ignored their taunts. Though they probably intended only to impress each other with their bravado, one rock hit Father with staggering force. The boys scattered.

Mary clenched her teeth rather than risk saying something harsh. She had seen them before. Those boys paraded around Leyden wearing fancy plumed hats and embroidered *doublets* over puffy-padded short *breeches*. Instead of a collar they sported enormous stiffened *ruffs*. Ribbons and bows encircled their *breeches* and decorated their shoes. They resembled a flock of fancy roosters, strutting to show off colorful plumage.

And, for some reason, nothing infuriated them like the plainly dressed men of the Green Gate congregation.

The constable shook his head as he wrote out Isabella's complaint for the *magistrate*. "These big boys have too much spirit in them, but soon they will take their rightful place at the mill." He paused and nodded. "Aye . . . and then their proud necks will be bent to work."

When she finished tending her father, Mary hugged her sister good-bye. "Hurry back to the children, Isabella. Elder Brewster said he would help me see Father home."

Isabella kissed her father's cheek and hesitantly left to go back to her little ones.

Mary poured the rest of the water over her hands, washing the plaster off her fingers and drying her hands on her apron. She gathered the bundle of lace cuffs from the stones at the edge of the canal. Taking Father's arm, she and Elder Brewster helped him to his feet. His normally white collar was creased and soaked with blood. Why would anyone act so cruelly?

Elder Brewster kept breathing deeply through his nostrils. Mary had known him ever since her family moved to Leyden. She recognized his agitation.

"James, I am fair worried about our children," Elder Brewster said.

Mary's father stiffened. "Surely you do not think those boys would attack the children of our congregation. The *magistrate* was right. They just got carried away. Someone tossed a rock and an insult, and it seemed like sport to them." He stopped to catch his breath as they continued to move slowly along the canal. "The Dutch people have been most hospitable, William."

"That I know, James, but the Dutch folk are too easy on their children. They allow them far too much and require far too little. I worry about the influence on our children."

"Aye," Father said. "The younger children in our congregation prefer speaking Dutch over English, and some of the older ones long for the richly decorated clothing."

Mary wished she could speak up, but she knew no one would appreciate a twelve-year-old girl's thoughts on so weighty a matter. For her, 'twasn't so much wishing for beautiful clothes and the colorful life of the Leyden people; 'twas that she yearned to belong—to really belong.

As they walked along the dike, Mary noticed newly inhabited stork nests atop the roofs on many of the colorful cottages. They passed a windmill with flower-filled window boxes on the first floor where the miller's family lived. Slivers of green poked through the soil of a well-tended flower garden—the promise of lilies to come. How Mary loved the beauty and cleanliness of Leyden. One day each week was set aside for scrubbing, and the housewives of Leyden scrubbed everything in sight. They hauled buckets of water out of the canals and splashed the water against the houses and onto the street as they mopped and scrubbed and rubbed and polished.

*I don't know where I belong, but someday—if it please the Lord—let me have a house to scrub. Someday, let me have a plot of land for planting. And someday let me unpack our linens and smooth out the wrinkles and lay them in a press. Someday . . .*

As Elder Brewster continued to talk with her father, she silently prayed one final request—*And please, give me room in that someday garden to tuck in a flower or two.* Flowers meant you planned to stay.

Mary remembered very little about moving from Sandwich in Kent, England, to Holland nearly ten years ago. She was still in *leading strings* when they left, but even now in Leyden, she sometimes dreamed about the smell of salty sea air and the sound of water lapping up against the quay at Sandwich harbor.

She remembered loving her English house with its white-washed stone walls. When she played outdoors she would