'An intriguing insight into a fascinating figure from history: Mary is a bold, brilliant and truly inspiring heroine'
KATHERINE WOODFINE

LIGHTNING MARY



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To my wonderful scientist son, Henry, for his encouragement (nagging!) and his pride in his old mum.

To all the readers out there. It's your talents that matter, not the package they come in. Mary did not get the recognition she deserved in her lifetime because of poverty, gender and class. Don't let anything stop you. Go for it!







Part One

Prologue

'Tisn't everybody gets struck by lightning and lives to tell the tale.

But I did. Not that I recall. I was only a baby. My father wasn't there when it happened but he would have told you the story if you'd asked him and would have recounted how he found me wrapped in a cloth, quite gone from my mind. Like dead. But not.

It was the night the circus came to Lyme Regis. Jugglers and fools. Bearded ladies. Performing monkeys. Dashing riders on powerful steeds, performing amazing acts, so folks said. More like showing off on a pony, if you ask me.

A neighbour of ours, Elizabeth Haskings, took me to see the spectacle, perhaps as a kindness to my mother who had just given birth to another stillborn, or so she could use me as a reason to get up close enough to see the riders' handsome faces.

There was an almighty storm. Rain lashing down like

something out of the Bible . . . Noah's flood, maybe. The lightning lit up the sky over and over again and the thunder was like ten thousand rocks bouncing down from the cliff face and into the sea. Elizabeth held me tight in her arms as we sheltered under a huge tree with two others. All screaming, no doubt. Except me. I am not, nor ever have been, a screamer.

A bolt of lightning struck that tree, a mighty elm, and split it in two. But it didn't stop there. It struck Elizabeth and the other folk and frizzled them up like fat in a pan. Elizabeth dropped me like a stone when it struck her.

My father heard word that I was dead with the rest of them and he threw his chisel aside and ran up from his workshop fast as he could, with terror in his heart and tears in his eyes. Some folk had carried me back home and put me in a basin of hot water to try to bring me back, but I reckon it was only when I heard my father calling: 'Mary! My Mary! Come back! Come back to me!' that I drew breath again. I think it would have broken his heart to lose two Marys.

It is strange that I should have so nearly been burned. There was another Mary before me. My big sister, she would have been. She burned away in a trice in a terrible fire. Mother never spoke of it, but I know what happened. Left for a moment in a room full of Father's wood shavings, she tipped over the lamp and *whoosh*, she was gone!

And then I came.

They do say I was a dull, sickly child before the Lord smote me with his lightning and that I burned brighter after; but I don't know about that. All I know is, something lit a fire in my being and it wasn't the lightning . . .

1
Devil's Toenails and Snakestones

I loved my father. He was the best father in the world. My mother was always too busy with the babies when I was growing up. She kept having more of them to replace the ones that died. I am the second Mary in this family, as I told you.

I never paid the babies much attention. They were always crying or screaming . . . or dying. Mostly dying. Then Mother would be wailing and refusing to eat. Father had a sad look about him for a day or two, but once they were in the ground, he'd be off to the cliffs, all alone at first but then, at long last, he started taking me and Joseph with him.

Joseph was born two years before me, but we were thick as thieves. We did almost everything together when we were small and I loved him nearly as much as I loved Father. Nearly.

Mother said it was a good thing that Joseph was so kind as to play with me because I didn't have many friends.

The girls and boys at Sunday School were silly creatures.

They didn't work hard. They just laughed and skipped and wasted time. I couldn't be doing with them. Once, one of the girls, Emmie, tried to tie up my hair in ribbons. She said I must try harder to be pretty or I would never have a husband. What a fool! I have never cared to be pretty. Better to be strong or clever, or strong *and* clever, and I didn't need a husband for that!

I was about six, I think, when Father first took me hunting for dragons' teeth and the like. Why would anyone choose to play with a doll or sing silly rhymes whilst jumping over a rope, when they could be finding treasure?

I had been wanting to go with Father ever since I could remember. The stories he told me when I was a little child! The treasures he brought back! Crocodile teeth, all white and sharp. Snakestones. Tiny serpents curled up in the rock, changed into stone by saints in days gone by and flung far out to sea. Father said if we got them wet they might wake up and wriggle away or bite us with their venomous fangs!

He let me hold them. I'd wrap my fingers round them as hard as I could in case they started squirming. Sometimes I thought I could feel them trying to squeeze through my fingers and escape but when I looked, there they were, imprisoned in their little rock.

Ladies' fingers were hard and shiny, not like ladies' fingers at all. Some folk call them thunderbolts but Father never did

back then, maybe because he thought it would frighten me, reminding me of the lightning strike. But as I got older, he started calling me his little Lightning Mary when I was being clever, asking good questions about the treasures and such.

Then there were the Devil's toenails . . . Now, you'd think they'd be scarier than ladies' fingers, wouldn't you? But I never minded them. They do look like a great, big white toenail, though! Ugh! I should think the Devil would have black toenails. Or maybe red.

When I was very little, these treasures were like magic to me and I wanted to find some for myself more than anything in the world. Father said I was like a puppy, snapping at his heels, begging for attention. 'Persistent', he called me. I liked that. I like persistence, so long as I get whatever I am persisting for.

Anyways, one day – a Sunday it was – my father jumped up from the table and announced that he was taking me fossicking on Black Ven. Mother straight off began to scold him. She was always trying to stop his 'little expeditions' as she called them. Usually she was cross because she thought he should be working to put bread on the table.

But this time it was different. She did not want him taking me to Black Ven. Even I could tell from the name that it was a bad place. It doesn't sound like a good one, does it? Sounds like a place the Devil might hide, waiting for poor souls who

stray from the path . . . especially on the Lord's Day when they should be in church or praying or, where I should have been, at Sunday School.

'It's a dangerous place, Richard! You can't take the child! Why, only a week last weren't there two killed in a landslip? Besides, don't you always say how important her learning be? Why take her away from school on the one day she can go?' she pleaded.

I ignored the bit about school. I would have been very sorry to miss it usually, but Mother's pleading had had quite the opposite effect. Two killed! I felt a shiver go down my spine but it wasn't fear, I can tell you. Plain excitement.

Mother must have seen the look on my face because she started arguing harder than ever.

But my father wasn't having any of it. He'd made up his mind to go, and go he would and take me with him, whatever she might say. She tried hiding my boots but Joseph found them and helped me put them on my feet before she could utter another word.

'You coming too?' I asked Joseph as he stood up and brushed the dust from his knees.

He winked at me. 'Not I! Ezra, Nathan and I are off up the field to fly Ezra's new kite. You can have Father to yourself for once!'

I felt another shiver of excitement. I pulled my bonnet on

and wound a comforter around my neck, for it was a bitter winter's day.

Father pinched my cheeks. 'We'll get a bit of colour in that pale little face of yours and more learning than in a whole week of school!' he said.

'If you don't get her killed first,' muttered Mother under her breath. 'Seems like I am the only one God-fearing enough in this heathen household and tis left to me to pray for your souls.'

Father snorted and then tried to sneak a kiss from her but she shrugged him off. He chuckled. He knows her ways.

'There'll be time enough for prayers when we get home again, Molly. The good Lord don't begrudge a man time spent teaching a child to marvel at His creation! Don't you make no never no mind. I may even speak at Chapel this night, if the spirit take me!'

'If the Devil don't take you, more like,' Mother said, for she liked to have the last word on a subject.

Father grabbed his special fossicking 'hoe' from by the door and then rummaged about in his sack of tools and handed me a tiny little hammer. I nearly threw it back at his feet, for it looked for all the world like something for a doll to me, but he caught the look in my eye and stayed my hand.

'You'll need it, Mary. Trust your old father. You'll see.'

I felt as proud as could be to be going on an adventure with Father. Just me!

We walked through the town with our shoulders hunched against the cold. We met few folk, it being Sunday, but I saw more than one nosy old biddy peek round her shutters and shake her head in disapproval. Father made no mind of them. We cut through the churchyard past St Michael the Archangel. Any moment those bells were going to start up again, trying to remind us where we should be on the Lord's Day but Father just started whistling in that jaunty way he had when he was off on an adventure. Father was a Dissenter. He didn't hold with the folk in St Michael's. Said they churchgoers were a lot of fancy folk who had forgotten about God and the Bible and were more interested in the rules made up by the church and that's why we went to Chapel where they put God and Jesus first instead of themselves.

'We'll be at Chapel right enough this very eve,' Father said, as if to reassure me but I was not in need of reassurance. The opinions of others mattered as little to me as they did to Father.

We walked over the turf to the path to Black Ven and Charmouth beyond. The sea lay to our right, a deep, forbidding grey. Sometimes it heaved like a great beast and spewed its foam onto the shore. Mostly it lurked as if it was in a sulk.

'Wind's going to get up a bit,' my father remarked. 'You scared, my little Mary? Scared 'bout what you've heard?'

'Not I!' I said, my words snatched by a gust of wind. 'I am on an adventure and I would not miss it for the world!'

'That's my girl! My Lightning Mary!'

He gave me a swift hug and we picked our way along the path for a few yards before he stopped again.

'Path's getting narrower by the day, Mary! Time was, you could walk side-be-side along here but see how it's fallen down onto the shore?'

He was right. I could see places where the ground had given way and gone tumbling down to the beach, taking the grass with it. The sea beast was dragging the land away into its giant mouth, dragging it in and spitting it out again.

'Will the path still be here when we turn back, Father?'

'Why?' he smiled. 'Are you afear'd? Do you want to turn for home now? It may be gone, tis true . . .'

'It would be an adventure if it was gone!'

He smiled again. 'You're a brave girl, my little lightning streak! Everything's an adventure to you, it seems! But your ma would roast me alive if anything happened to you!' He looked a bit sad, most likely thinking of the first Mary, who did get roasted.

It was slippery. You do have to watch your step. I was too young to understand then, but later I learned how dangerous

it can be and I became anxious when Father went off on his own – and with good reason.

Of course, some folk end up in the sea by their own choice. Old Mr Cruickshanks used to go fossicking with Father, and when he ran out of money and couldn't even afford a bit of bread, he jumped off Gun Cliff and let the sea take him and his troubles. Mother said it could be Father doing that if he didn't get his cabinet-making done. Without that work – making furniture for rich folk – there'd be precious little money coming in from the sale of 'nonsenses', as she called them!

Besides, cabinet-making wasn't so very profitable in any event. Once a lady called Jane Austen called in at the workshop. She asked Father if he would give her a price to mend the broken lid of a box. He had to go round to her rooms to see it, for she was too grand to bring it to us. He gave her a fair price, five shillings, but she was too mean. She said that was more than all the chairs and tables were worth in the rented rooms! Father was most annoyed but he bit his tongue. She had no idea of the work involved to piece together the fragments and remake the little hinges! Father found out that she wrote books for rich ladies with nothing better to do than lie about reading nonsense and that she did not even put her own name on her books, so they must have been quite bad and maybe that was why she could not afford him.

Mother said he should have offered to lower his price, but Father wouldn't hear of it. He always said that if you charge nothing for your work, people think it's worth nothing. Mother muttered something about not telling him to mend it for *nothing*, but he wasn't listening. He had a trick to close his ears when Mother complained and I think I have that same trick myself. It is very useful.

It wasn't long before we reached Black Ven. To be truthful, it's a dirty grey more than black. Blue Lias clay, Father told me. Not really blue, neither, but the Lias bit is right, though. Layers and layers. (*Lias* means layers! Did you work that out?) Different shades of grey with some little seams of bright ochre and rust. A bit of grass clings to its sides. That day, what with the dark clouds hanging over us and the blackness of the rock, I could think it a devilish dark place indeed . . . and that set a little fizzle of excitement in my heart, I can tell you!

My father crouched down and took my face in his hands. 'Take a proper look at ol' Black Ven,' he said. 'It in't to be trusted. See this?' He pointed to a slab of dark, sludgy rock. 'That'll be off down the slope and into the sea before you can think the word *help*, let alone speak it. There used to be fields up there and cattle grazing on the sweet, green grass. All came toppling down one day. Cattle drowned. Farmer's life ruined. Lucky to be alive, himself. Used to be houses back along where we come, past the church. All gone. Swallowed

by her.' He tilted his head towards the great green-grey sea. 'She's had a lot and she'll have more and she don't care whether she swallows cows or land or gardens or children. And the land can't be trusted to stay. It rushes to go back to her, to the sea . . . Won't hardly give you so much as a whisper of warning. You must understand, Mary, the land is cruel and the sea is cruel and life is cruel and that's the way it is.'

'Why do you come here, if it is so very cruel and dangerous?' I was frightened now, I will admit.

'Because of this!' He tapped a lump of clay. 'All because of this box of treasures.'

2
From the Mud Comes Treasure

Father tapped that lump of clay ever so gently. Then he just seemed to coax it and stroke it as if it was as frail as a wren's egg.

Gradually the mud fell away and I could see a stone in its centre like the pit in a plum. He took out his brush and swept away the last of the dust. Then he gave the stone a sharp little tap and it split in two, as if by magic. He held it out on his palm for me.

Curled up in the rock was the tiniest serpent you ever did see, with little stripes running all round its body. I could see little sparks of gold in it too. It looked alive, as if it might uncurl itself at any moment and wriggle away!

'Here,' said Father gently. 'Hold out your hand. This one's for you, little Mary. Your first treasure. You can keep it as a memento of your first treasure hunt with your old Pa.'

'It's beautiful!' I gasped, and I felt a fire catch hold in my head and my heart as I held the little thing.

'It'll be more so when I have had a polish of it.' Father smiled. 'You wait and see! It'll make a necklace fit for a queen! That's what we call a golden serpent, that is. T'in't real gold, but it's as like to real as makes no difference. Now, stow that away safe in your pocket, Mary, and take out that little hammer I gave you. I can't be doing all the work here!'

'But how do I know where to look?' I asked, for to be truthful, the mud and rocks looked all of a piece to me then, all the same as each other.

'You got to trust your instincts, Mary, and you got to be looking . . . really looking! If you want to find a curiosity, you got to be curious! See how this rock is all piled up like a heap of washing? Layers and layers? You have to look for anything that looks strange in there, see, where the beasts get trapped. A bit further down, you might find some ladies' fingers, nearer the foreshore. Or look for flat stones . . . but don't you try to split them without letting me see them first. There's a trick to it and if you get it wrong, you'll smash it to pieces.'

I stared at the cliff face and then I closed my eyes and pictured treasure in my hand and money in my pocket. Father was already collecting a heap of clay lumps and I began to do the same. My fingers were stiff from the cold and it was hard to get a grip. In future I would remember to put on my mittens.

My hand hovered over the rocks. I could not make up my

mind which to choose. I confess I made a little wish that I might find something exciting all by myself and make my father proud of me.

The first few lumps yielded nothing. They fell away under my hammer and left nothing behind. The next ten, twenty, thirty were the same, but Father seemed to be having more success. I saw him slip three or four pieces into his bag in what seemed like no time at all.

'You are so quick, Father!' I said, rather envious of the ease with which he seemed to find things.

'Quick?' he replied quizzically. 'Why, Mary, we have been here for more than the whole morning! See that pale sun and the sea so close? We don't have long before the sun will be off home to the West and the sea will be wetting our boots. We shall have to hurry home if we are to beat them both and be gettin' ourselves cleaned up for Chapel!'

He was right. The feeble sun, which could just be seen tinting the grey clouds ahead of us as we had walked to Black Ven, was now right above our heads. The sea was no more than two feet away. How had the time passed so swiftly?

Father had stopped work and was gathering up all his tools but I could not bear to think of going home without finding something by myself. I suddenly spotted a lump of rock the size of a goose egg. I seized it, tapped away at it and picked off lumps of clay with my frozen fingers. There, in the

middle, was an oval stone, quite flat, about the length of my forefinger.

'Father! Could this be a curiosity?' I asked.

He stopped what he was doing and approached to take a look at what I had found. 'Why, do you think it might be, Mary?'

'I don't rightly know,' I said. 'I just feel it in my bones!'

'Bones, eh?' He winked at me. 'Bones to find bones, eh, Mary? Well, let's see if your bones are right!'

He gave the rock one of his sharp little taps and it fell in two, just like the one that had held my first treasure.

'Is there anything there?' I was so excited I could hardly breathe!

'Indeed there is, child!'

There, like a tiny chalky ghost, was a most curious creature, like nothing I had ever seen before.

'That's a scuttle you got there, Mary! He's like a cuttlefish. You've maybe never seen cuttlefish alive, but you've seen bits of them on the beach. Those white, feather-light things that look like a petal . . . the things the birds seem to like so much.'

My first find! A scuttle! I hid it in my pocket with my first treasure. I felt so happy that I could have skipped about for joy but for the strange feeling that the ground beneath my feet might slip away if I disturbed it.

Father finished packing away his tools. He looked at the sky, which had turned a sullen grey, grim clouds covering the setting sun.

'Right! Best be heading home now,' he said. 'Weather's closing in and it'll be dark soon. We don't want to be stranded now, do we? And we don't want to be getting a scolding from your ma! She'll be worriting!' He gave my cheek a pinch. 'Got that colour in 'em, like I promised,' he chuckled.

'When can we come here again?' I asked.

'That's my girl! We can come just as soon as I have finished that desk. Sooner I am paid for that work, the better. With the price of corn these days, tis a job to put bread on the table. These little findings of ours won't fetch much this time of year. Not so many fancy folk visiting. Still, we'll have a store of treasures ready come the spring, won't we, Mary?'

'Maybe we'll find a big treasure, Father?' I said, in a hopeful way.

'Don't see why not! With you and Joseph and me all hunting together? I'd say it were as good as found!'

3
Learning the Trade

Summer was the best time for selling, but winter was far and away the best for finding. Those storms throw the earth about, revealing treasures and then, just as quick, hiding them again. You have to be out there all weathers if you want to find things. But it's mighty dangerous.

The tide can come in while you aren't watching and the sea will sweep you up and carry you off. The ground beneath your feet can be snatched away in an instant. Worse still, the ground above you can come tumbling down and bury you deep, where no one would find you until the sea carried the mud and rocks away again . . . and then it would be too late.

You were not even safe in your own home. When I was a very small child, the sea rose up in a rage one night and hurled all manner of stones and such against our house. The water poured in – a great torrent – and sucked away the whole staircase as it left, leaving us all stranded upstairs. I scarce

remember it, but Joseph could recount the whole story of how we were all rescued through the bedroom window at dawn and Mother often spoke of the destruction visited upon us by the sea.

But the sea, for all she can be a monster, is also the treasure-seeker's friend. She can wash stuff clean so you can see it and she can bring down curiosities from high above where you'd never hope to reach them otherwise. Without the sea to pull apart those layers, we'd have slim pickings indeed. We thank her in our hearts, but fear her too.

Father took Joseph and me on his expeditions whenever he could. We were even out on Christmas Day with our baskets and hammers. There wasn't a muffler knitted could keep out the cold and Joseph and I had to fight to keep our teeth from chattering after Father joked that the noise and the rattling would bring the cliff down on top of us! We worked as hard and as fast as we could for the few hours of light the good Lord gave us but the luck I had had when I had first searched with Father seemed to have abandoned me. Most of what we found was what Father called 'ornery' but it would earn us a few coins come the spring and anything was better than nothing, as he rightly said.

Mother despaired. 'What are you thinking of, Richard, to risk the lives of the only two children left to us? And on Christmas Day too!' she wailed.

‘But we want to go with Father!’ piped up Joseph. ‘It’s interesting! It’s good for us to be out!’

Seemed Mother wasn’t the only one to think we should bide at home. One day that winter, a woman we’d never seen before, new to Lyme maybe, came up to Father and poked him in the chest with her walking stick. She must have been spying on us for she seemed to have her mind and her opinions quite made up.

‘You ought to be ashamed of yourself!’

Father was bewildered. ‘Why?’ he asked. ‘What have I done that I should be ashamed of? I can think of nothing. Do you have the right man?’

‘Indeed I do!’ she growled back at him. ‘These children are nothing but servants to you! Why, if they were slaves in the New World, you could not treat them worse! You daily risk their lives and for what? To line your own miserable pocket!’

And with that she gave him an extra hard jab with the stick and marched off up Broad Street, muttering as she went.

Father stood, dazed, for a moment. ‘Well, do I make you my little slaves?’ he asked. ‘Do you feel mistreated by your old father?’

‘No, no!’ we cried, for we would sooner be in our graves than miss our adventures on the cliffs.

I loved to be out there with him. All weathers. I knew he would have been out there morning, noon and night but his cabinet work took him away for days at a time, making some fancy piece of furniture for folks with money to burn but still too mean to pay what's fair.

'You must make hay while the sun shines,' Mother always said when he got what she called proper work. He muttered and looked black as thunder but he knew it had to be done.

We had to be grateful to the nose-in-the-air highborn folk at every turn. The sun brought out all manner of fancy types from Bath and London. Prancing about in the Assembly Rooms. Picking their way around the town and holding their noses down at the quayside and grimacing at the boxes of the fancy fish that only they could afford to eat while we had the leavings. Dressed up in silks and frills, whether they were men or women, and looking as silly as could be to my mind. What was the use of a pale pink dress if it was trailing in the mud? What was the use of a bonnet with ribbons and feathers if it got snatched away by the wind? If I had to choose between fine clothes and a fine adventure, I'd choose adventure any day.

Of course, I had no such choice and the plain truth was that when the summer brought these silly creatures into Lyme by the carriage-load, that's when Father could sell some

of his curiosities and make enough money to keep Mother happy for a while. He was quite well known and folk came from miles to see what was on his little table in front of the workshop. Joseph and I were proud to see our own finds laid out for them to gawp at. Of course, those folk in all their finery had to keep their gloves on to touch anything, so scared were they of a bit of dust or dirt, poor creatures!

At least they were a bit more sensible than the mad people who came to Lyme in the winter months. Those poor souls followed the advice of a certain Dr Crane of Weymouth who advised bathing in the sea in January and February for its 'benefits to health'! How I used to laugh at the sight of them, taking off their clothes in the bitter cold and rushing across the stones, yelping like puppies, and on into the grey water, screaming with pain as it turned their bodies blue and then red as any boiled lobster. They didn't stay in long, I can tell you, and as for it being a cure for all ills and the secret to good health? Well, all I can say is that more went home in a box on the back of a cart than in a carriage, so a fat lot of good all that freezing water did them. I could have told them straight off that it was a fool's errand and I would have charged them a lot less than any doctor for that advice. I do wonder where people's brains are sometimes.

I did not have much regard for those people as a rule, it is

true, but there was one encounter which was a pleasure to be remembered always. My first real trade, when I was no more than eight years old. An old gentleman picked up a tiny little ram's horn I had found and which Father had polished so that it shone in the sunshine. My heart thumped in my chest as I watched the old gentleman turn it over and over in his hand, staring at it in wonder.

As I watched him, my hand went to the snakestone that hung from a leather strip around my neck. It was the one Father had found for me on my first visit to Black Ven. He had split it down the middle, polished both faces of the stone and put a hole in near the snake's head for the leather. It gleamed a rich golden brown when it caught the sun and maybe it was a good-luck charm too, for the old gentleman seemed to catch a glimpse of it before he spoke again.

'I'll give you twopence for this,' he said, holding out the coins.

'Sixpence!' The words were out of my mouth before I'd had a moment to think. Father looked at me as if he did not believe what he had just heard and, truth to tell, it should not have been more than three pennies at the most.

'That's a lot of money, young lady, for a bit of old stone,' said the old gentleman.

'It's not a bit of old stone,' said I. 'It's a treasure and I

risked my life to fetch it out of the treacherous mud of Black Ven so rich folk like you can gaze on it.'

The old man laughed. He seemed kind enough, not like some of them London types with their airs and graces. He turned to Father. 'Your daughter drives a hard bargain, but she's understood the importance of provenance.'

'What's provenance? Don't you mean providence?' I replied. It was a bit cheeky to talk back at a gentleman but I like to know the meaning of words.

He smiled again. 'Provenance is all about where things come from, my dear. Here's your sixpence. Now *that* is providence! May it buy you a good dinner for you and your family. She's a credit to you, sir. A brave little wench!'

He pocketed the ram's horn and tipped his hat at me. I thought my heart would burst. My first sale in front of Father. He could see how good I should prove at commerce!

Father ruffled my hair, laughing all the while. 'Well, my little Lightning Mary. You'll be taking over from your old pa in no time at all. We'll be rich!'

But we weren't. Nor never like to be so with the meanness of most of our customers. They picked over stuff, tutting at prices, and my outspoken ways did not always work the same magic with them. Father, on the other hand, could charm a bird out of a tree if he had a mind to and between us we sold enough to buy bread and milk and even meat.

'These rich folk, Mary, they'll beat you down at every turn! You got to stand your ground. Look them in the eye and don't take any of their nonsense. It's the only way and don't you forget it! But hark at me! I'm telling the toughest little saleswoman in all of Dorset!'

He would always ruffle my hair when he praised me. It was just about the only touch I could ever bear.