



## Chapter One

1862

Eliza Mitchell-Howe stared down at the necklace she was holding in her hands. The blue-red stones glistened in the candlelight and reflected on the silver-coloured setting. 'It's not silver, it's gold, white gold,' said Jack.

Eliza sighed and put the necklace back in its case and the case on the table. She gazed at the blue leather with the name of a prominent Newcastle jeweller tooled in gold leaf.

'Yes, yes, we can. I can always afford to buy beautiful things for you, hinny,' Jack said softly, tenderly. He put his arms around her and held her unyielding body to him. 'Howay, man, Eliza, don't look like that. I've had a grand day at the races. My luck was in and I doubled up twice and won both times on the nose. I'm telling you, my luck has changed. We're going to be fine; just

you wait and see.' He gazed at her face for any sign of her relenting but she showed none. 'Don't spoil it now, hinny,' he coaxed. 'Let's away to bed, I've missed you, pet.'

Eliza sighed. What was the use of talking, of trying to make him see what he was doing to her and the bairn she carried in her belly? Besides, already she could feel herself weakening. The old magic he raised in her when he touched her was dimming every other thought and she gave herself up to it.

When his father found out he had taken money from the business to go to the races they would be thrown out. John Henry Mitchell-Howe hated gambling. Gambling had been the thread running through his family that had ruined them. His great-grandfather had been gentry, a respected man, but with a son who was a gambler, a man who would bet on anything and everything. The family had ended up with nothing except for their name, Mitchell-Howe. John Henry's father had been a gambler too and he had ended up in the gutter, shunned by his fellows. By his own efforts, John Henry had built up his business.

It was a warm June night but Eliza shivered. She put a hand on her belly; what would happen to the babby? It was almost dawn before exhaustion caused her to drop into a disturbed sleep.

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Eliza woke suddenly and sat up in bed. ‘Jack? Jack?’ she called, and put out a hand to him but he was gone; his side of the bed was empty. What time was it? She climbed clumsily out of bed and went to the window to draw the curtains. Blinding light flooded in, the sun was high in the sky; it must be well into the day. Hastily she poured water from the china jug on the washstand into the matching bowl and splashed her face and arms, gasping at the coldness of the water. The baby moved inside her as though joining in the protest and she put her hand on the bump caressingly.

There were sounds from downstairs, voices and small thuds, but the house was too solidly built for her to hear much. She paused in her dressing and listened, thinking she had heard a note of anger, but no, it would just be Annie, her mother-in-law, cleaning the stair carpet with tea leaves and berating her little thirteen-year-old maid, Bertha, for something or other. Annie liked to do most of the work herself for she didn’t trust anyone else to do it properly but all the same she would be annoyed that Eliza had slept in. She took it as a sign of sloth. Eliza was expected to do her share of the housework even though she didn’t do it well enough for Annie either.

‘Expecting a babby is not an illness,’ she would snap at any sign of weakness on Eliza’s part.

Annie was not on the stairs and the hall below was

deserted. As Eliza came out of the bedroom she shared with Jack she saw the stairs were already cleaned and not a speck of dust dared to dance in the sunbeam that came through the tall window on the bend of the staircase wall. Lordy, Annie would be mad. She was halfway down the stairs when the door to the study burst open and Jack came out, followed by a roar of anger from his father.

Jack took the stairs two at a time, barely pausing as he passed Eliza to say, 'Come back upstairs, we have to pack.' His face was white and his lips set in a thin, hard line.

Eliza's anxious 'What?' was drowned out by her father-in-law's shouting.

'Get out of my house, you limb of Satan, get out and don't come back! I have given my orders and if you ever try to get into the workshop or my office again I'll have you charged with trespassing. You will not get the chance to rob me again, I swear by all that's sacred you will not! Now, you've got ten minutes to pack your bags and go.'

'John Henry! What are you saying? What about Eliza? The lass is almost ready to drop her bairn!'

'She'll be all right, remember where she came from,' John Henry snapped. 'Her folk live in a hovel up by a pithead down Durham way. Any road, I'll not have your thieving son in this house nor in my workshop, I'm telling you I will not.'

Eliza missed what else was said between her parents-in-law as Jack grabbed her arm and dragged her up the stairs and into the room, banging the door behind them. Eliza stumbled a couple of times, once tripping on her skirt, but he had such a hold on her she couldn't fall. She felt the baby move within her as if in protest and she held a protective hand over it for a moment but the movements subsided.

'You took the money from the office,' she said flatly as she turned to face Jack. 'You promised me, Jack.'

'Stop whining, woman,' he snapped. 'It came out all right, didn't it? You got your bauble, didn't you?' He smiled cruelly, wanting to hurt her as he was hurting. 'It's more than your da could ever buy for your mam, isn't it?'

Eliza shrank inside herself for a minute only before remembering, of course, she had the necklace. She could sell it and it might be enough to pay John Henry back and then maybe he wouldn't throw them out. It was as though Jack had heard her thoughts.

'Give me the necklace,' he demanded.

'Why?'

'Never mind why I want it, just get it.' Jack was impatient; he held out his hand and wriggled the fingers. Eliza gave an involuntary glance at the drawer of her dressing table, where she had put the necklace. Jack saw and strode to the dressing table and took it out and slipped it into his pocket.

'It's mine, you gave it to me!' cried Eliza.

'Don't be stupid,' he snapped. 'I need it, don't I? Now get my stuff packed, we'll go down to the inn for now. I'm going out, I'll be back when I've finished the bit of business I have to do.' He swept out of the room and she heard his footsteps as he ran downstairs and the bang of the front door as he went out. Crossing to the window, she saw him walking jauntily along the road in the direction of Alnwick. She watched until he turned the corner then turned back into the room and started to pack their belongings.

Two o'clock, dinner time and Jack had not come back. Eliza sat by the bed with the luggage on either side of her and waited. Though her stomach rumbled she did not go down to the meal and no one called her to it. It was as though the household had given up all thought of her or Jack.

It was only when she heard the clanging of the front doorbell, followed by a loud hammering on the door and his voice shouting, that she realised he was back and the door was locked against him. Inside her the baby jumped as though in alarm. Eliza stood up hastily and went to the bedroom door and out on to the landing. Jack continued to ring the bell and shout through the keyhole but no one answered him. The noise stopped and he ran from the house, and after a moment she heard

him trying the back door but it was locked too and no one let him in.

Eliza's stomach churned; she didn't know what to do. She couldn't even reach the top bolt on the front door so she couldn't let him in. And even if she could, what good would it do? His father would simply send him on his way again. No, she would have to go down with the luggage and get his father to let her out. Perhaps that was the way: John Henry might take pity on them when he saw her so far gone with the babby and let them stay. She picked up the bags and began her descent of the stairs.

The bags were heavy and because of them she couldn't hold on to the balustrade. She leaned over to one side, using the rail as a support. Pain shot through her back and she gritted her teeth and forced herself to put one foot in front of the other. She felt for the edge of the carpeted riser but she was too far to the side and her foot met the newly polished wood at the side and slipped. She was holding on tightly to the handles of the bags and the weight of them went forward and dragged her with them, and her foot lost the stair altogether and she fell heavily, banging her head on the ornate cast-iron post at the bottom. The bags thudded against the floor of the hall, skidded a few inches and stopped. Eliza lay in a crumpled heap at the bottom of the staircase. The cut on her forehead where she had hit the post oozed a



little blood. Blood also began to stain the seat of her dress a darker brown against the light brown serge but a startling red against the white maternity smock she wore over it. She was spared the shame and embarrassment of having her father-in-law see what was happening as she had lost consciousness. She wasn't even aware that John Henry and his second son, Henry, had carried her back up the stairs and laid her on the bed she had shared with Jack.

'You see? You see what's happened now?' Annie cried. 'What are you going to do?'

'Aw, see to the lass and shut your mouth, Annie Mitchell-Howe,' snarled John Henry. 'I'll away downstairs and tell that young hellion to hadaway for the midwife. Henry, get back to work, we're behind on the orders any road. This has nowt to do with you.'

Henry looked affronted. 'Aye it has, Da. An' the way I look at Eliza here, she needs a doctor, not just the midwife.'

'Aye well, get the doctor then. But mind, don't you let your brother in, do you hear me? I'm behind you, I'll get the midwife.'

'Yes, Da,' said Henry, and went out.

'By, John Henry, you'll rue the day, you will an' all,' said Annie. She was leaning over the bed, trying to help Eliza. 'The bairn's on its way, tell Bertha to put water on to boil and bring it up. A full kettle, mind. That newfangled doctor is forever washing his hands.'

John Henry paused with his hand on the door. 'As soon as the lass is over this she can be on her way an' all. She's no responsibility of mine.'

'Aye well, let's see if she does get over it, John Henry,' said Annie. She lifted Eliza by the shoulders to take off her dress and the girl's head rolled and she moaned. Annie hastily laid her back on the pillow.

'Mebbe I shouldn't have moved her,' Annie said anxiously.

'She'll be all right,' said John Henry. 'She's off tough stock.'

Annie glared at him, her anxiety making her shout at him. 'Are you still there? Will you get away for the midwife or have I to go myself? Do you want the lass to die here and the babby, our grandbairn, with her?'

'No, no, I'm going now,' said John Henry. 'It's not but a cock's stride to the midwife's place.'

## Chapter Two

Eliza opened her eyes and there was her mother-in-law bending over her. ‘God be praised,’ said Annie. ‘She’s coming round, John Henry.’ Eliza was bewildered; what were they doing in her and Jack’s room? John Henry’s face appeared at the bottom of the bed. He stared at her, unsmiling.

‘Aye, I can see that,’ he said gruffly.

‘Jack?’ Eliza asked and the word came out as little more than a whisper. She tried again. ‘Where’s Jack?’

‘You needn’t think he’s getting in here again,’ said John Henry. ‘I’m a Christian man. You can stay until you’re up to the moving but as soon as the doctor says you are fit for it you and the babby are out.’

‘John Henry!’ said Annie.

‘Don’t you “John Henry” me. She was fool enough to marry a gambler and a thief and she’ll have to abide by it. No doubt her and her folk thought she had done

well for herself. Our Jack would be a great catch to them.' He laughed grimly. 'Aye well, now they'll know just what sort of a catch.' He turned his back and stalked to the door.

'Eeh well, Eliza, I'll have to abide by his word,' said Annie. 'I know me an' thee haven't been close but I wouldn't have thrown you out, not with the babby an' all. I'll try to keep you for a while longer but you'll have to go soon.'

Eliza was barely aware of what her mother-in-law was saying. Her body ached, her head ached and a fog of weakness enveloped her. But over it all, she longed for Jack.

'Jack? Where's Jack?' she asked again.

'You'll see him soon enough,' said Annie. 'Now howay, you'll have to feed the bairn. Here he is three days old and he's had nowt but cow's milk.'

The bairn? She'd had the babby then? She had thought it was all a terrible nightmare. The pain she had thought was tearing her in two; the pain that had gone on and on, and she had dreamed she was in hell and it was her punishment for her sins. Everlasting hellfire.

But Annie was lifting her shoulders and putting a pillow behind her, and she was handing her a shawl-wrapped bundle. Eliza gazed down at her son. He had a fuzz of dark hair and his blue eyes were unfocused yet still he turned to her and nuzzled at her with his

mouth wide open. Not finding what he wanted, his tiny fists waved in the air and a small crease showed on his forehead. He made sucking noises and moved his head around impatiently.

‘Why, man!’ said Annie in exasperation. ‘Let me unbutton your shift or the lad will die of starvation before he finds your titty.’

He was not long in finding the nipple once he felt bare skin; he took no guiding towards it. He found it and hung on, sucking hungrily. And Eliza, gazing down at him, felt the purest bolt of love sweep through her. All her difficulties and miseries were forgotten or at least submerged as she communed with her child.

‘He’s a grand little lad,’ Annie said softly. Eliza glanced at her. Her mother-in-law’s face was softened, her normally harsh expression gone. She caught Eliza’s eye. ‘He’s our first grandbairn, isn’t he?’ she said defensively.

Eliza said nothing. She had no energy to point out that when she had to go then it might be the last Annie saw of the baby.

The following Saturday Eliza found herself standing on the step at the front of the house. She had the baby in her arms and boxes at her feet. She hugged the baby to her breast and gazed down towards the bend in the road. Surely Jack would come any minute. He would

hire a horse and trap to take her into Alnwick, wouldn't he? Annie had sent to tell him to come and collect his wife and bairn.

Jack had not yet seen the baby. He had come to the door and made one more attempt to get in, shouting up at her window, 'Eliza! Eliza!'

She had been feeding the baby and by the time she got to the window he was gone. John Henry had been at home and he had sent Jack packing. Eliza lay down on the bed and cried with frustration and the ache she had in her for Jack and the weakness of her body that stopped her running after him.

Now, almost a week later, she was still not herself but stronger than she had been and the doctor had pronounced her fit to move.

'I don't suppose you have far to go in any case,' he had said. 'Your husband has work away, has he? Not too far away?' Inquisitively he looked at John Henry who had just come into the room. He had heard talk of how wild Jack Mitchell-Howe had turned out to be and of a rift in the family.

'Aye,' said John Henry. 'Now, if you'll give me your bill, Doctor, I'll pay you now.' He held open the door and the doctor found himself following him out. Eliza was alone as she stood on the step waiting for Jack. Neither John Henry nor Annie had any intention of seeing their eldest son. It was as if he didn't exist any more,

Eliza thought. By, John Henry was an unforgiving man, oh aye, he was. The clatter of horses' hooves on the stones of the road made her look again towards the bend in the road, but it couldn't be Jack for it was a carriage and two horses pulling it that came along the road. But it was Jack driving she saw, and she didn't know whether to laugh or cry as he halted the horses and jumped down in front of her. Dear God, what had he done now?

Relief and love for him swept all other emotions from her as he took her in his arms and kissed her on the lips extravagantly, and the feel of him holding her brought back the old intoxication.

'Mind the babby, Jack, don't squash the babby,' she cried, but softly, and Jack let her go and looked down at the baby, though all he could see of him was the top of his head, as he was swathed in a shawl against the cold wind that blew at this back end of the summer.

Jack moved the shawl aside and looked down on his son's face. The baby looked him straight in the eye solemnly for a few seconds then away, turning slightly towards his mother and making sucking noises. The tip of his tiny tongue showed between his lips, pink and milky. Jack laughed with delight.

'Howay then, let's have you both into the carriage,' he said. 'The lad wants his dinner.'

'Where are we going?' Eliza asked.

‘You’ll see.’

As he turned the horses, a curtain at one of the first-floor windows of the house twitched, but neither Jack nor Eliza noticed. They bowled round the bend and through the village and people turned to stare and mutter among themselves that mebbe Jack Mitchell-Howe and his father hadn’t fallen out. Mebbe it was all gossip and Jack was doing all right for himself. Anybody at all who could keep a carriage and pair like that must be doing all right.

‘An’ good luck to him an’ all,’ said Bill Oxley as he clasped his hands over his apron as he stood in the doorway of his grocer’s shop. ‘If he stays off the gambling he’ll do all right. He has as good a hand as his father when it comes to the carpentry.’

‘Aye well, it’s a big if,’ commented Mrs Wearmouth, who was standing in front of him with a large basket in her hands. ‘Now, are you going to let me in to do me shopping or not? I can always go into Alnwick if you’re too busy to serve me.’

Eliza sat in the carriage and watched the countryside roll by. There were hundreds of things she wanted to ask Jack but now was not the time. Now was the time to enjoy sitting beside him with the baby on her lap and being happy, for soon enough she would have to ask. He was revelling in driving her to whatever place he had found for them. In *being* in a position to be able to take



her away from his father's house in style. The child had been lulled into sleep by the movement of the vehicle but then he woke and was hungry and she suckled him, enjoying the feelings he roused in her and murmuring softly to him.

'Where are we going, Jack?' she asked after they had left Alnwick behind and were rolling south along the Great North Road.

'You'll see, it's not far now,' he replied.

They bowled over the bridge across the Tyne and into County Durham and ate a meal in an inn in Chester-le-Street and went on again until at last they stopped in Durham city, in front of a tidy little house in the shadow of the cathedral.

'Where are we, Jack?' Eliza asked as he handed her down from the carriage, for all the world as though she were any grand lady. 'Whose house is it?'

'It's ours, Eliza,' Jack replied. He made a flourishing gesture with one hand and put his other arm around her shoulders. 'Our luck has turned, hinny, our boat came in. I knew the necklace would be our good luck charm. I couldn't put a foot wrong at York races and since then every card I take is an ace.'

'The necklace?' Eliza felt sick. She pictured the necklace in her mind's eye. It seemed evil to her now, glittering in the light of the candle as it had that night in his father's house. 'It's sold then?'

‘It was but don’t worry, pet, I have it back. It was the first thing I did, get the necklace back. I’ll put it round your pretty little neck and there it will stay.’

Eliza clutched the baby to her and he stirred as though in protest. ‘I don’t want it!’ she cried.

‘Don’t be daft, pet,’ said Jack, smiling. ‘Howay in, I have a surprise for you inside. You don’t want to catch your death out here in the cold, do you?’

The front door of the little house was opening and he drew her towards it. And there, wiping her hands on her apron, was Eliza’s mother, Mary Anne.

‘Mam!’

Eliza forgot all about the necklace as she felt her mother’s arms around her. All the tension of the last days seemed to dissolve and she found herself weeping onto the snowy bib of her mother’s apron.

‘Hey, man,’ said Mary Anne gently. ‘Pull theesel’ together, our Liza. You’re all right, there’s nowt the matter that cannot be put right. You’ll squash the life out of me little grandbairn in a minute. Let’s have a look at him, any road.’

She drew Eliza into the parlour of the house while Jack stood aside, beaming all over his face at the success of his little scheme.

‘Give him here,’ Mary Anne commanded, and she took the baby and moved the shawl away from his face so she could look at him properly. ‘Aye,’ she pronounced

after a moment. 'He's a right bonny bairn. But then, why wouldn't he be? He's got his mother's face on him.'

'I think he's like his da,' said Eliza. 'A handsome lad.' She smiled over her mother's head at Jack.

Mary Anne barely looked up at Jack. 'Aye well, handsome is as handsome does,' she commented.

'Oh, Mam,' said Eliza. She hadn't seen her mother since the day of her wedding to Jack. They had left the cluster of houses which could hardly be termed a village and which had grown up round the pithead near Haswell in the county of Durham. The place didn't have a name in the early years when Mary Anne had followed Tommy as he carried his pick and shovel across the coalfield as he looked for better paying work than was to be had in the old worked-out bell pits of Cockfield. No one named it, not even the mine owner, but it had come to be known as Blue House after an ancient tumbledown farmstead that stood nearby.

There was a Wesleyan chapel, though not much of a one, for Wesley had paused nearby in his perambulations about the countryside and worked his magic on the local people. The chapel was tiny and barely accommodated Eliza's family, and no one from Northumberland had turned up to see Jack married.

'They'd think our Eliza wasn't good enough for the lad,' said Mary Anne.

'Nowt of sort,' Tommy had retorted. 'Our Eliza is

good enough for any man an' I'll fell the one that says she isn't!

Jack had been on his way home from Durham, where he had been delivering a beautifully crafted mahogany sideboard to a friend of the bishop. The friend had been visiting the duke in Alnwick and seen some of John Henry's work. In the event he had got the sideboard for less than half he would have paid a more fashionable furniture maker and was well pleased. Not pleased enough to pay up immediately, though. Jack had the thankless task of going home to his father without the money due. So he had put off the day and driven the cart around the countryside a bit, and when he saw a 'pitch and toss' gambling school in the shadow of a pit heap he went over to it and joined in.

The idea was to gamble on which side a coin would land when pitched in the air, and he was lucky, he won most of the pitmen's pennies. He and Tommy, that is. Afterwards Tommy invited him back to the two-roomed cottage for a bite to eat before he went on his way. A stranger was something of a novelty at Blue House and the miners were hospitable when they were able. Tommy had bought pies at Granny Hadaway's tiny shop on the corner of the row and they'd had a feast in the little kitchen along with Mary Anne and the bairns. Eliza was the oldest, and she was bonny, with a wealth of

dark curly hair and deep violet eyes. All the pit lads were after her but once she saw Jack she knew he was the one for her and they were married within three weeks.

She was so happy to leave Blue House with her new husband. It was like living a dream. She was delighted when they crossed the Tyne and saw the wonder of Stephenson's railway bridge and the bustling city beyond. She was delighted with driving through the Northumberland countryside beside her lovely man and she was delighted with the ancient town of Alnwick, still fortified by great walls 'gainst the Scots.

'Against the Scots?' she had asked fearfully when Jack told her the reason the town was like that, and he had laughed.

'The Scots don't come down now, you goose,' he had said. 'It was centuries ago.'

Eliza felt foolish. She hadn't gone to school, had never had the chance. She couldn't write her name even. But she would learn, she told herself. Someday.

The disillusionment came when they reached Jack's parents' house and she stood with him in the hall facing John Henry and his wife. The air in the hall was icy and the looks John Henry and Annie gave her were icy to match. They stared at her then looked away towards their son.

'Where the hell have you been?' demanded John Henry.

‘Hello, Father,’ said Jack. ‘I got married.’ He indicated Eliza. ‘This is Eliza.’

‘Where’s my money?’

‘He’s sending it to you at the end of the quarter,’ said Jack. He was flushed; he looked like a small boy caught out in some naughtiness. Eliza stared at him; he seemed like a different man from the one she had married.

‘You’ve gambled it away! I should have known better than trust you,’ said John Henry bitterly.

‘No, he did not!’

Eliza couldn’t help herself; she jumped in in Jack’s defence as she would have done for her little brother James, who was always into scrapes.

‘You speak when you’re spoken to, lass,’ snapped John Henry.

‘Sssh, Eliza,’ said Jack at the same time.

Almost a year later, in the little house in Durham city, the memory of her introduction to her husband’s family flashed through her thoughts as she watched her mother hold her baby with practised ease.

‘By, Mam, I’m that glad to see you,’ she said, her voice breaking. ‘You and Da are worth two of that lot in Northumberland.’

‘Now then, you’re a bit overwrought,’ said Mary Anne, looking keenly at her daughter. ‘Howay, sit down by the fire and feed the bairn. You’ll feel better come the morn.’

## Chapter Three

‘I don’t want to wear the necklace,’ said Eliza.

‘Why not?’ asked Jack. ‘I like to see it on your pretty neck.’ His expression was genuinely hurt and puzzled. He felt he would never understand Eliza. Surely every lass liked real jewellery? Anyway, he had to find out where the necklace was.

‘It’s not really mine, is it? It’s your emergency fund for the next time you lose all your money on a horse or the turn of a card or whether a black beetle will beat a cockroach in a race—’

‘Eliza! How can you say such a thing? I’ve told you, it’s yours and I’ll not take it away from you again, I won’t!’

Eliza lifted Thomas out of the tin bath and sat him on the towel on her lap. Thomas smiled at her with eyes wide and innocent-looking as his father’s. She wrapped the towel round him and rubbed him dry then dusted

him with boracic powder before taking his flannel vest from the brass line under the mantel shelf and putting it on him. Thomas wriggled but was still smiling when his face emerged from the neck of the vest. He was a sunny-natured bairn, she thought. She looked up at Jack, who was lounging against the edge of the table, waiting for her to reply.

By, she thought, Jack was a bonny lad, he was, especially when he raised one eyebrow at her when he saw he had her attention again.

‘I have the necklace put away safe,’ she said and pulled Thomas’s petticoat over his head and pushed the linen buttons through the holes.

‘Where?’ asked Jack.

Eliza sighed. ‘Jack, you’re not being dunned for money again, are you?’

Jack flushed. ‘No, I’m not. How could you think it? I told you, I don’t want to take the necklace away from you, I’m not going to do that. I just want to know where it is. I like to see you wearing it, Eliza.’

‘I have it safe,’ she said stubbornly.

Jack stood up straight and stomped to the door. ‘What you mean is, you don’t trust me. Well, I’m warning you, Eliza, I won’t have you keeping secrets from me. I’m your husband and it’s not right. I’ll give you time to think about it.’

As the back door crashed behind him, the brass sneck



dropping onto the bar with a metallic click, Eliza stared out of the window as he strode down the yard and round the corner into the street. Thomas struggled as she held him against her and murmured in protest, and she looked down at him.

‘There, there, pet,’ she said. ‘We’ll go to the shop in a minute and buy something nice for dinner. Then we’ll walk along by the mill race, you like it there.’

She sat the baby in the fancy carriage Jack had brought home after a day at the races. It was the only baby carriage in the street, for though this part of Durham was a little better than some of the mean little terraces which clustered at the foot of Castle Chare, the folk living here being artisans rather than labourers and pitmen, it was only the really better off who could afford such a thing as a baby carriage.

‘Nothing but the best for my lad,’ Jack had said when Eliza questioned the wisdom of buying it. So it stood in the tiny hall and they had to squeeze past it to get in and out, which was the reason they used the back door rather than the front.

Thomas crowed and waved to everyone who went by as they made their progress down the street towards the steep path leading to the river. The sun sparkled on the water as she pushed the baby carriage along the towpath. There was a cool wind blowing on the top of the hill but here, sheltered by the high banks of the Wear, it was

warm and almost springlike. In spite of her niggling doubts and worries Eliza felt her spirits rise.

Perhaps Jack was not in debt to anyone, perhaps he had made a new start and she just didn't trust him enough, just as he said. He had opened a workshop-cum-shop in Saddler Street and she knew he was a good carpenter just like his father. Why, they had only been in Durham for six months and already he had satisfied customers who came back for repeat orders. His reputation was beginning to grow. She should have more confidence in him. Since Thomas had been born he spent less time at the races and he worked hard at the joinery, she knew he did.

Only, whenever he asked her about the necklace her heart sank. She had it hidden away in a bag of sugar in the back of the kitchen press. He would never look there, she was sure he would not. The necklace was her insurance.

Eliza stood by the mill race so Thomas could watch the water rushing over into the pool below and spreading out in ripples to the wider river. Thomas crowed and clapped his hands, an accomplishment he'd only recently acquired. She smiled at him and he smiled sunnily back and tried to bounce up and down on the pillow, succeeding only in falling back against it. Eliza turned him on his side and pulled the coverlet over his shoulders.

'Time for your nap, my little pet,' she said and began

to push the baby carriage up the steep path to the shops. She would call in to see Jack at the workshop, she thought. She hated there to be bad feeling between them. Pausing at the top of the hill, she allowed the wind to play on her face while she got her breath back. She felt slightly sick and leaned against the ancient wall surrounding the cathedral grounds until the feeling receded. Thomas was asleep, she saw, his thumb firmly in his mouth. Eliza smiled fondly and walked on, the baby carriage jiggling on the cobblestones.

The shop was closed, ornate cast-iron shutters over the windows and door.

Where was Jack? Eliza stared at the shutters as though she had made a mistake and they were open.

‘Howay, move out of the road, Missus,’ an impatient male voice said. ‘That thing you’ve got there is blocking the way.’

‘Sorry.’ Hastily, Eliza moved to the alley at the side of the shop and set off down it. Of course, Jack must be in the workroom, he just hadn’t opened the shop yet. But the door to the workshop was closed and locked. Maybe he’d gone out to a customer? With some difficulty, for the alley was narrow, she reversed the carriage and went back to the street. She couldn’t understand it; Jack would have told her if he was going off somewhere, wouldn’t he?

A man was hammering a notice to the front door of

the shop. He had to reach through the bars of the shutters to do it.

‘What are you doing?’ Eliza demanded. ‘That’s my husband’s shop, you have no right!’

He hammered in the last nail before answering. When he did turn to her he looked her up and down, unsmiling. ‘Your man’s, is it, Missus? Well, mebbe you can tell me where I can get hold of him?’ It was the man who had asked her to move out of the way; a big, broad-shouldered man with a ruddy face and small blue eyes.

‘Why do you want to know? It’s none of your business.’

‘Aye but you’re wrong there, Missus. It’s my business all right. An’ I mean that, I have the deeds here in my pocket.’

Eliza reeled with the shock. ‘The deeds! You can’t have the deeds, you’re a liar!’

The man patted his pocket. ‘Oh but I have. An’ if you were a man I’d knock you down for that.’ He stopped and glanced down at her white face. She looked stricken. His tone softened. ‘Listen, I’m a reasonable man. You tell that man of yours to bring me the keys by four o’clock the day and we’ll say no more about it. But it’s no good him thinking he can run off with the keys and get away wi’ it. You just tell him that.’ Putting the hammer in his pocket, he strode off towards the market place.

Eliza stared after his broad back until he disappeared

round the bend in the road. It was a nightmare, she told herself, it couldn't be true. Jack had given no sign that morning, he had not. She turned to the notice on the shop door. But she couldn't read it, of course. She looked about her for someone who might be able to read it to her.

'Did you not go to school?' asked the man in a clerical collar and the black garb of a clergyman who happened to be walking past on his way to the cathedral, she presumed.

'No, sir,' Eliza muttered. She burned with the shame of it.

'It is not too late, you know,' he said kindly. 'We are holding adult classes in the Town Hall. It will cost you two pounds only for the whole course—'

'Please, sir, just read it to me,' cried Eliza, and Thomas woke and began to whimper. The clergyman hastily read the notice, then, lifting his hat, hurried away.

FOR SALE  
JOINER'S WORKSHOP AND  
RETAIL PREMISES  
An opportunity to take over a thriving business.  
APPLY:  
JOSEPH MENZIES AND SON  
19 SILVER STREET  
DURHAM CITY

Eliza stood gazing after him for a moment then stared at the notice again, trying to decipher it for herself. But it was just a mass of symbols to her. She began to walk away.

‘Is something wrong, Missus?’ a concerned voice asked, but she shook her head blindly and stumbled on, for once oblivious to Thomas’s cries. Down Silver Street and over the bridge, up the hill a short way then right to the street where she lived. The door was locked; she rarely locked it after her so Jack must be in. She banged on the knocker and called, ‘Jack!’ There was no answer. But she did have a key, she remembered, and fumbled in her reticule for it. Once inside she left the crying baby in the baby carriage in the entrance and ran through the house. Drawers were open and their contents spilled out. She ran up the stairs, still calling, ‘Jack! Jack!’ But he wasn’t there. Of course he wasn’t, one part of her mind told her. She went down the stairs and picked up Thomas. He was soaking wet.

‘Whisht, babby, whisht,’ she murmured to him. ‘I’ll have you dry in a minute.’ First she had to make sure Jack had not found the necklace. She stood in the doorway of the kitchen and gazed at the trail of sugar that spread from the press to the kitchen table. The bag was on its side on the floor by the table and it was empty.

Eliza was frozen into stillness until Thomas’s cries and his scrabbling at the bodice of her dress made her

sit down almost automatically and undo the buttons and allow him access to her nipple. The baby sucked, frantically at first then more slowly. She looked down at him and Thomas stared back with wet, reproachful eyes though he was still nursing. Milk dribbled down his chin and wet her dress but she was barely aware of it.

‘Oh, Thomas, what is going to happen to us?’ she whispered. Thomas blinked and grabbed her finger and held on tightly. Both of them jumped when there was a loud knocking at the front door. Eliza waited, her heart thumping in her chest and her nervousness communicated itself to Thomas, who stopped sucking and began to wail. The knocking came again, louder this time. Eliza covered herself and went to answer it.

‘Now then, Missus, we don’t want any trouble. We’ve come to take what owes, though. You’ve to be out by noon.’ The burly men on the doorstep thrust past her.

‘Hey! What do you think you’re doing?’ Eliza shouted and Thomas howled louder. But she knew what they were doing, oh yes, she knew. They were candymen, bum bailiffs.

‘Howay, Missus. We’re only doing our job, like,’ said the one who had spoken before. The other one was clearing the hall table, emptying drawers onto the floor then pulling it away from the wall. ‘I have the papers here if you want to see.’

‘I’ll take this out, will I?’ the second candyman asked