

## **BETH**

by Roger Elliott

### **A STORY IN FIVE MONOLOGUES**

for 2, 3 or 4 actors

### **SCENES**

Setting : the corner of a quiet country churchyard near Shaftesbury.

Scene One : autumn 1798

Scene Two : 20 years later : autumn 1818

Scene Three : 16 years later : autumn 1834

Scene Four : 5 years later : autumn 1839

Scene Five : present day

### **CHARACTERS**

SCENE ONE : 1798 : **BETH** : a 17 year old country girl - orphaned, ill-educated and poor. She works as a maid at Girton Hall. She lights the fires, and does general cleaning - the lowest position of all. Pretty & quiet she talks with a soft Dorset accent.

SCENE TWO : 1818 : **BETH** : now aged 37.

SCENE THREE : 1834 : **NATHANIEL** : Beth's son Nathaniel, now 22. Apprenticed to a blacksmith since the age of 13.

SCENE FOUR : 1839 : **JOHN FLETCHER** : Beth's illegitimate first-born who she gave away soon after birth. John was brought up a Quaker.

SCENE FIVE : 2022 : **MAGGIE FLETCHER** : John's many times great granddaughter, a PhD student from Pennsylvania researching John's English pedigree.

**SCENE 1 : LATE SUMMER 1798**

**BETH** enters, a small bunch of field flowers including some Toadflax in her hand. She is simply dressed and carries a bundle over her shoulder. She crosses to the headstone and squats down. She puts the flowers by the headstone.

**BETH** : There you go Mother. You always did like Butter n' Eggs and they's wonderful this year. And the shakes have been good too, fluttering about all over the place. One of the girls at the house, Elsie, she calls 'em jim-jams but then she's from over Bristol way...

(BEAT)

Sorry I haven't been to see you for a bit ... you know how it is. I get so little time off its difficult to come this far....

I saw Mrs Henderson the other day. She does look older and her legs is bad but she asked to be remembered... so ...

(BEAT)

Oh Mother I do miss you something terrible .. it might be nigh on three years but it still feels like yesterday. I miss you. And I need you. Now. Need your counsel ... and your forgiveness....

I'm in trouble Mother ... I've done something I shouldn't have, though it weren't my choice, or my fault ... well maybe just a little, but not really ...

I'm with child Mother ... I know, I know ... you lectured me so often. Told me. Scolded me. Warned me. Men are not to be trusted ... they will say anything, anything, to do what they want...

Well, this was a little different. Not at the end but at the beginning. He, James that is ... the Bishop's son ...found me cleaning the silver in the back kitchen ... it all seemed so innocent. He talked to me, told me of his time in Oxford ... he's at the University there...then he told me how pretty I was ... how I was the only girl in the whole house he wanted to kiss ... and could he ... kiss me...

I suppose I should have said no .. I know I should have said no ... but I didn't. I didn't say yes mind ... but I didn't say no. And we kissed. Simply. Quickly. I didn't sleep that night, thinking I'd done wrong but when nothing happened I thought less about it....

I haven't kissed many boys - you made sure I didn't - but I have kissed some. And this seemed no different - except of course he was Master's son.

Then a few days later he come back. Found me there again. He closed the door and came over to me. 'Hello little Beth' he said, and kissed me again. Then he ... you know ... touched me. Pressed against me. Held me so I couldn't get away... then he lifted my skirts and ..

(PAUSE)

I didn't really understand what was happening Mother, but I didn't want to do it ... that .. I really didn't. But we did. It was over so quick I wasn't sure if it was real ... but now I know it was with his bastard in my belly...

Mother what could I do? He's Master's son, and Master's a Bishop, a real one, and what am I? A maid. I clean the fires in his house and he pays me. A pittance maybe but I am their servant. So ... you know ... he did it. It was my first time I swear ... and it wasn't nice.

Its all so unfair. He does what he wants but its me as has the problem. He's done it with some of the other girls in the house 'afore but none of them have .. you know ... found themselves expecting.

God what a mess! I have no idea what I am going to do....

(PAUSE)

I knew he, James, didn't have any money of his own and wouldn't do right by me anyway, so I went to see his father, Bishop Martin. He listened and seemed to believe me. For a moment I thought it would all be alright. He called James into the room but James denied everything .. said he had never so much as talked to me. The Bishop then got angry and accused me of lying, of being false, and dismissed me without a reference.

So here I am ... I'm lost Mother...

I did even think about getting it gone ... that's really why I went to see Mrs Henderson ... she said make a strong tea from tansy and pudding grass ... let it steep for a day or two and then take four spoonfuls morn and eve... but I couldn't do it, Mother. I know you lost a couple early and you've always said a child is a blessing from God. So I felt you wouldn't like it if I went that way ... if I did that .... so I didn't, and I won't...

Oh, I wish you were here Mother. I wish you could tell me what to do...you were always so wise. You always knew what was proper and what wasn't. You looked out for us always ... but you're not here.

So ... so I wrote to Matthew. Well, I didn't write but Elsie wrote for me. And Matthew replied. He's a good brother to me, Mother. I know you two didn't always get on but I think you was sorry when he left so sudden. Went off to London to make himself, prove himself.

And he said 'Don't come to London'. He's in shared rooms so has no space himself ... and he says there's many a girl in trouble on the streets with a young 'un and there's nowhere to go other than the workhouse ... and they are grim in London, the workhouses.... he suggests I go to a small market town and ask for help from the church. Seems odd to me asking for anything from the church since it was one of their own, and a senior one at that, as has cast me out but maybe there's someone nice and kind and with a better soul as would take me in ...

Do you think that's a good idea Mother? I can't decide ... can't see the wood for the trees... it seems a really risky plan but then what are the options? The worst that can happen would be that I end up in the workhouse there and if that's what would happen in London anyway then I'm no worse of.

I'm so angry. He gets his fun but its me what pays the price.

So that's what I am doing Mother. I have my pack and I have enough money - just - to pay for the night coach to Exeter. I'm terrified what I will find there, but if staying at Girton Hall or going to London is not an option, and I've no family to go to ... what else can I do?

I have come to say goodbye. Once I am in Exeter I doubt I will ever be able to get back. I just want you to know I love you, and miss you, and will remember you always...God bless you...

NELLIE picks up her pack and goes to leave. She turns and looks back.

**BETH** : Wish me well Mother...

**BETH** leaves.

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE BREAK : The Cuckoo (Folksongs From Dorset)

**SCENE 2 : 20 YEARS LATER - LATE SUMMER 1818**

**BETH** enters. Now 37, she is better dressed. She looks happy and confident. She carries a single rose. She puts it by the headstone.

**BETH** : There you go Mother. I know you can't smell it but you'd love it. It smells of dew, heather and honey all at the same time.

I expect you're surprised to see me again, given the state I was in last I was here. And I'm surprised too. I really expected to end up in the workhouse, if I even made it that far.

But you were right Mother. You always said there are good folks out there, always believed in people. Well I was lucky enough to meet some, two of the very best, and it happened right away.

I was on the coach, sitting up top outside... the cheapest seat and all I could afford. It rained and not having a proper coat I got soaked. We stopped near Honiton the change horses and get a meal in the inn. I didn't have money for that so was outside trying to shelter from the storm when one of the other passengers saw me. He ... a Mr Fletcher ... took me inside and sat me by the fire and bought me a meal. Pie and taters. Nothing had ever tasted so good Mother. And when we was on the way again he lent me his coat ... said he was inside and didn't need it.

When we was in Exeter and I was giving him his coat back he asked me where I was going and did I have family waiting. He had been so nice to me and I was so tired and cold I burst into tears and told him all. He was silent when I had finished .. I thought he was just going to walk away but he said I should go home with him. He explained that he was married, and had a wife waiting, and I would be safe. So I did, go back with him.

I stayed there all through my time. He, Samuel, and his wife Rebecca they was wonderful. They didn't judge me, or tell me I'd done wrong. And do you know why? Because they are Quakers. I like their religion Mother, it supports folks, helps and encourages ... it doesn't preach or punish or scare people witless with threats of hell fire and damnation...

I went with Rebecca sometimes to their Meeting House ... they don't have parsons preaching or hymns and prayers ... they just sit in silence till one of them wants to say something. It was quiet and restful ... and the women are equal with the men. They are all mixed together ... imagine that!

But after a time I missed the music and the singing ... and especially the smell of the candles ... so didn't go much after.

But they did even more than that for me ... Samuel Fletcher and his wife Rebecca ... he taught me to read and write ... and she taught me to cook and sew ... and I will be thankful to them all my life for that. And when my time came Rebecca helped the midwife and I had him in their house, my son ... I called him John mother, after Father... and his father afore...

But I still had a problem ... the real problem ... I couldn't stay with Sam and 'Becca forever but how could I work and look after John at the same time and that's when I had to make the hardest decision of my life.

Sam sat me down and explained that he and 'Becca couldn't have children. I didn't quite understand why, but they couldn't, and he told me they had even thought of adopting a child from the workhouse ... so, what did I think of the idea of them adopting John? I knew by then that they were good people, honest people, wonderful people and I knew John would have a good life there and a better life than I could ever give him ... so I said yes. It was a dreadful thing to have to do, give away your child, but I knew it was for the best...

I couldn't stay there after that. I couldn't bear to see John every day but as their child not mine. I had to leave but for that they'd helped me ... I could read and write and cook and keep house... I didn't have to be a maid no more...

Then a local farmer lost his wife and was looking for a housekeeper. The Fletcher's said he was a good man, so I went there. And I kept house. He was a bit older, but not too much ... and we both wanted company ... and comfort. It took nigh on a year of meals together and sitting by the fire of an evening but we did, eventually, seek each other. It was good Mother. It was nice. It felt safe and loving ... yes loving. I'd never known anything like it.

I'm married Mother. Proper married. I'm Mrs Tompkins now. Mrs Elizabeth Tompkins. We have farm ... a small one mind ... but with cows and a pig and lots of chickens. Its a good life Mother ... an honest life ... but there's even more.

I didn't think we would at first, not for lack of trying ... but I have two children with Edward ... that's my husband name ... two children. Margaret came first - Meg - she's twelve now ... and then came Nathaniel - he's nine. Nathaniel ... that's after Edward's grandfather ... anyway, they're glorious Mother, the children ... even if I do say it myself.

I never thought I'd be this happy. This content. Its hard work mind, working the farm with all those animals... they take a lot of looking after. So do the children of course... but we are happy and luckier than many... and we have each other.

I don't see John anymore but Rebecca writes me two or three times a year with his news ... he's doing very well and wants to go to University. University! But apparently he can't do that in England because he's a Quaker, so he's going to Dublin. He wants to be a doctor. My son, a learned man .. a doctor! I never thought I'd see that. I don't suppose you did either Mother.

So that's my news ... three children, all hale and hearty and happy ... and a husband to boot. He's not as hale and hearty as I'd like, but I hope he's as happy. He says he is and he seems to show it. But there's no respite on a small farm and I think all the early mornings in the wet and mist with the cows has taken its toll on his health.

I look after Edward best I can. I love him Mother ... I like saying that! That I love a man, a good man, and he loves me back.

I'll try and come and see you again soon, Mother ... I think of you often and I wish you could meet Meg and Nathaniel, and they you ... you'd have been a wonderful Nan ... one as any child would be lucky to have ...

Goodbye Mother .... I will try to come back ... goodbye....

**BETH** leaves.

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE BREAK : Poor Sally Sits A'Weeping (Folksongs from Dorset)

**SCENE 3 : SIXTEEN YEARS LATER : LATE SUMMER 1834**

**NATHANIEL** enters. Beth's son - now 22. A country blacksmith, he is wearing his Sunday best.

**NATHANIEL** : Hello Nan... its a lovely day ... can you hear them larks singing? 'Tis so nice and peaceful here I can see why Mother wanted to be with you ... sorry, I'm getting a bit ahead of myself ...

(PAUSE)

I have some news Nan, and I don't know if it will surprise you.

Well you know Father died ... wasn't much of a shock given how hard he had worked all his life since he was but a smut. Born and bred on that farm he was, died in the same room, the same bed, where 'e were born and all but a life of toil and hardship was there between the two. He were a good man and I miss him and his honesty still.

As you know I came with Mother a few times when she come here, especially the last time when she came to tell you about Father and she told you she were worried the landlord would have us out. That it were Father that was the tenant and with him gone we could have our time but then we would then have to go too.

She were right ... we lost the farm. So then it started. The wandering.

I was happy on that farm, Nan. Real happy. We all were. They was good times. Hard work but honest work. I liked being with the animals best but we all shared and shared alike and 'cos we grew stuff there was always food on the table. We all wanted to stay but instead we had to pack and go...

Mother didn't know what to do. All she was good at was keeping house and helping run a farm but with two children who was going to give her a job doing that. So it was decided there was no option but Meg would have to go into service. Mother was more than 'stressed about that, about Meg going back to where she started but then there was no position found for Meg. With the number of men lost in the French wars, maids were staying in service longer and Mother couldn't find for Meg.

It were decided I'd be apprenticed instead so I went off to a blacksmith near Salisbury. I were twelve then, or thirteen. Mother was upset about it, even more than me.

I were at a house near Wilton. Do you know Wilton, Nan, it's just a mile or two from Salisbury? A nice place - well, both of them is nice. Proper nice. There's a beautiful house in Wilton Nan, a big estate, and the smith I were with did a lot of work on the estate. Shoe'd all

their horses. Mended their gates. Whatever needed doing. It was a nice place to be and they was all lovely people and I wasn't unhappy. Well I was at first - homesick like - but then I made some friends. It was good work, I was learning a good trade and got fed well.

Mother and Meg though ... they had it harder. They both worked here and there but nothing worth the salt. They was in Shaldon when it came, renting a small cottage . They was both cleaning the fish catch of a morning on the beach. You'd have thought they was fine ... but then it came. The Death. Two month ago now it was . Cholera Morbus they call it, the Doctors. To us it was just the Death. Came from across the water, from France and the East ... and just swept across the country. It seemed to miss Wilton but Shaldon and all that land around got it bad.

I don't know who got it first, Mother or Meg, but living so close I don't suppose it made much difference. I hope they comforted each other. By the time the news reached me in Wilton it were over. It wanted them both ... and took 'em both.

Mother talked of you often Nan, and this place. She said she always found it a comfort to come here and see you ... so I have talked to the vicar and if its alright they'll come and join you, lie with you... so you can all be together...

They're going to do it tomorrow, Nan. There won't be many here mind but I'll stay and see it done proper. It'll be a comfort to me to know she ...well both of them, Mother and Meg... will be with kin and not alone.

So there's only me now Nan ... but I have some news of my own too. There's a maid at Wilton as has caught my eye. Nellie. And she's sweet on me too. We've been stepping out for a few months now. I only see her for two hours every other week. Its not much but I think its firm Nan.

There's a couple of cottages on the estate as has been left to neglect. I want to ask if I can marry Nellie and have us move in. I'd do the place up and we can both shake the garden back into shape to grow what we need. I could still work for the smith and Nellie could move out of the main house to the kitchen or the laundry of wherever needs the help. Until of course there's young 'uns. If there are...

And if we have a child, a girl, we'd like to call her Mary Elizabeth after you and Mother.

Do you like the sound of that Nan? Do you think that's a good idea? I do - most of the time - but then just occasionally I get doubts. How do you know? About love I mean?

It all seems to change all the time. I think I love Nellie, but it all feels like ... oh I don't know ... like trying to walk in a wood blindfolded. I'm used to solidity. Certainty. I work with iron. Heat and iron. Positive. Solid. Dependable.

But maid stuff. Love. Emotions. None of its solid. It seems to change all the time. My only consolation is that I wouldn't miss Nellie so if I didn't love her. At least that's what Isaac says anyway. He's my master, the smith. He's a nice man, a good man ... Isaac Harreson.... and a darned good smith.

He's been real good to me ... didn't argue when I asked for a few days leave when Mother died and has helped with the cost for this though I'll pay him back over time...

I think that's all my news Nan. The men will be here in a minute to prepare for the 'morrow. I do hope I did right. I'll see you then ... God bless Nan .... God bless.....

**NATHANIEL** leaves.

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE BREAK : The Sprig of Thyme (Folksongs from Dorset)

**SCENE 4 : FIVE YEARS LATER : LATE SUMMER 1839**

**JOHN FLETCHER** enters. Beth's illegitimate firstborn was brought up a Quaker and is now a doctor. Quakers at this time wore a sort of uniform and John is no exception.

He walks around ... reads a few headstones ... then sees the right one and approaches.

**JOHN FLETCHER** : Thee must think me very remiss, not having been to see thee afore, but in truth it is but now that I knew thee as my mother, as having given life to me and brought me into this world.

I'm John Fletcher and had always believed Rebecca Fletcher as being my mother, and her husband Samuel as my father ... but Rebecca has now told me all.

She's not well Beth, not well at all. She's not long for this world so I have come back from America to see her before the end. I sat by her bed three days gone and though she were frail she said there was 'summat she had to do, and had been meaning to do for many a year but since she hadn't seen me in a time she'd not done it. She said she had started many a letter but never finished a one ... so it was now time. And she told me all. About thy hardship and thy time in service. And thy meeting with Sam on the coach...(LAUGHING) She said thou was as wet as an elver in a bucket. And a'shaking with the cold, and that Sam took thee inside, sat thee by the fire and fed thee.

I never knew that thou were a'carrying and it were me that thou bore. Rebecca explained that she and Sam had never been blessed and so 'twas good for all that they a'cared for me. I have always called them Mother and Father, and respected them as such, and will continue so ... but now I know more. So ... Elizabeth ... Beth .... Mother too ... I thank 'ee.

They were very taken with thee Beth, and said thee was as clear a case of Good and Light in a fallen maid as could be seen. I know thee went to a few Meetings with Rebecca but I know thee was not in the Sisterhood before and I don't know if thee went more after thee were gone from Bradnninch. I hope so.

I think Rebecca told thee I went to Dublin, to the University there. I wanted to go to Oxford but we're not admitted, anyone in the Brotherhood, because we won't take the oath. So Dublin it was. I studied Medicine ... so that's what I do, Beth, I am a doctor. I spent a few years in Dublin after my studies, working at the hospital there. And running a clinic for the poor.

It seemed, nay seems still, not fair that money decides what little help a poor family get when their need is often more, usually more, than the wealthy. I always do what I can but its never enough...

I always came back to Devonshire when I could to see Samuel and Rebecca - Mother and Father to me. Samuel was an Elder by this time and it was during one visit back that I met the American minister William Slavery as was staying with us while he toured around England, preaching and ministering. I was entranced with his energy and zeal and his ardent belief and ability to do good. We talked many an hour through the night and he invited me to visit him in America. In Pennsylvania. There's a lot of the Brotherhood there he said. So I went...

Its a wonder Beth. There's so many people and so much going on. Its mayhem at times, and not always civil, but the energy, the desire. It's an exciting place to live. But there's a lot of need, true need, and what's wonderful is that I feel I can do good there given time. I'm truly hope I can.

I live near Bethlehem Beth, well on the outskirts, twixt town and country. I have a small house there with my wife Hannah. We had a son, Joseph, but The Lord took him far too young with the colic. It was dreadful and I will never forgive myself that I couldn't help him but now Hannah is with child again and I pray she may safely be brought to bear. A grandchild for thee.

Rebecca thought thee had two after me ... two other children with your husband. Edward was it? I see (LOOKING AT THE HEADSTONE) one is with thee here, Margaret ... so maybe the other is still living. And maybe married. I like to think so, happy and married and healthy. And maybe, therefore, thou have several grandchildren already.

But if Hannah comes to term there should be another. If so I will tell her of thee. And I must write down these family names. Hannah would be interested.

Thee'd like Hannah, Beth. Everyone likes Hannah. She is a pure soul and a true friend to all, and she helps me nurse the sick. She has the touch. Here, let me show thee...

(HE OPENS HIS BAG AND TAKES OUT A MINIATURE PAINTING. HE HOLDS IT OUT)

That was done in our garden, before we had Joseph. We'd not been long a'married then. I'm blessed and thank the Lord for it.

I wish I had know thee proper, Beth. Really known 'ee. I shall always wonder now what there is of thee in me. Would thee think like this? Would thee do this? Is this actually thee, in me, doing this? Is this who I am because of thee?

I'm sorry. Hannah always tempers me in my musings. One can ask a question - or maybe ask one question two ways - but the same question ten ways! Its just my mind - I can't stop it rambling, roaming, reaching for many answers - when just one will do.

Rambling! As I am now ... I must go. I promised Sam I would feed all tonight, though I am not confident that they are ready for Pennsylvania fare - which is fair and plain not fancy.

I'm not sure if I will ever get back to see thee more Beth. Mother. I need to get home before Hannah's time but don't want to leave Rebecca too soon so I'll stay in Bradninch a week more then must to Bristol and the boat back. I am sure thee would send Rebecca thy good thoughts if thee could, and I'll tell her I came. God Bless thee Beth, and let Him shine his Light through thee and thine always.

**JOHN** leaves.

FADE TO BLACK

SCENE BREAK : The Turtle Dove (Folksongs from Dorset)

**SCENE 5 : PRESENT DAY**

**MAGGIE - 27** : A Phd student from Pennsylvania, researching John Fletcher - her many times great grandfather - and investigating his English heritage. She is smartly but informally dressed. She walks around the stage, stopping often, as though reading other headstones ... she stops in front of our headstone. The wording is difficult to read and she rubs it clean a little....

**MAGGIE** : Aaah, there you are ...

(SHE READS THE HEADSTONE - THE FIRST TIME WE HAVE HEARD IT)

In Loving memory of John Jeremiah Smithson, born 10th August 1754 and passed this life 11th January 1788 ..... God Rest His Soul For Eternity...

... and his loving and devoted wife Mary Jane Smithson, nee Williamson, born 10th June 1762 ... died 14th January 1795....

... and their daughter Elizabeth May Tompkins 1781-1834

... and her daughter Margaret Jane Tompkins 1806-1834....

Wow! Three generations, right here ....

(SHE TAKES OUT HER IPAD AND TAKE A PHOTO OF THE HEADSTONE .. THEN TAPS AWAY FOR A FEW SECONDS)

I suppose I should introduce myself to you all. Hi ... I'm Maggie ... Maggie Fletcher...

You don't know me but we are related. I'm a student from the US ... from Bethlehem, Pennsylvania ... and I'm doing a Phd about my great great great ... lots of greats... grandfather, John Fletcher. You may know him as the revolutionary thinker that supported women's rights before that was a fashionable thing to do. Then maybe you don't even know that.

John Fletcher. I always thought his parents were Samuel and Rebecca Fletcher ... that's what all the paperwork said and I have spent years thinking that was the case... but then I found an entry in one of his diaries that he kept when he came back to England to see his dying mother, Rebecca, in 1839 ... and that entry says, quite clearly, that his mother was not Rebecca but was really Elizabeth May Smithson ... who later married and was then Elizabeth May Tompkins....

And here you are .. Elizabeth May... the diary calls you Beth ... so I hope its OK if I do too...

He only discovered the truth about his parentage late, when Rebecca was on her death-bed and told him everything...

Its some time since I read that diary and its taken me years but I had to trace this back, to find the truth... especially as its my story too ...so here I am...

I think Samuel and Rebecca Fletcher adopted your son or at least they brought him up as their own and he took their name. So ... so you may not know what an amazing man he was. What a special man and what he did for society ... and women's rights in particular. He came from a time when society allowed a man to beat his wife. To keep her in order. To keep women subservient. A time when most women, when they married, gave up all rights to their houses, their money, their children ... even their bodies.

John didn't agree with this. Well in truth none of the Quakers ever agreed with this. They didn't see women as inferior, as second class ... they thought women were equal before God, and therefore before all men. But John ... he was adamant about this. Why should a man beat his wife? Why should a man beat his horse? Or even a dog? Are not all creatures the work of The Lord? And was not Man created from Woman? If so, why should any woman be considered inferior to any Man?

It was great thinking. But he did more than think ... he acted. As best he could, given the times of course.

John was a good man ... Quaker, Elder, Doctor, Husband, Father ... and I have had a very interesting time finding out about him and writing about him. Oh, I know he's an ancestor of mine, so that has made it even more interesting... but his life was intriguing and anyone learning about him couldn't help to admire him. That's what I am hoping anyway, with my thesis - which, of course, I hope to publish.

You probably know he was a doctor. And he was. A good one. And always heeded the need of the poor and set up free clinics wherever he went. He hated that the poor didn't have proper access to the latest medicines and was very good at getting the local men of money, both old and new, to fund these projects. Some were men that didn't even help the workers in their own factories but wanted to be seen helping the wider society. The hypocrisy was ridiculous.

He was a great doctor but he did so much more. John. It's taken some perseverance, some digging to find this, but he worked behind the scenes in other prominent movements. The two that have interested me, and the two I know most about, are the fight for women's rights that I have already mentioned.

But did you know about his work against slavery? His journal tells me he came here ... to this place ... to 'see you Beth' as he says. At the time Rebecca was close to death but his wife Hannah, back in Bethlehem was pregnant and I know he wanted to get back.

Did you know he didn't get there? For the birth of his daughter ... my 8-times grandmother... Miriam. Why wasn't he there? Because he was at the first World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. He thought that was more important than being with his wife as she brought their child into the world half-way across the globe.

He always put the good of the wider populace, especially his patients, first, before his wife and family. And himself last. He must have been hell to live with. If I was his wife I would have wanted more attention at home.

Anyway, he was in London. For that conference, that meeting of the great and the good arguing that slavery was wrong. That as a concept it was morally bankrupt. And those that made their living from it should cease and do something else.

I know he wasn't a lawyer, John, but he was an eminent and well respected doctor and knew enough about the law to make valued judgements and arguments. And there was a man there from the US, at the convention, that he met. And liked. William ... William something I forget ... anyway a year later this man, William, was back in the US and part of the legal team in the La Amistad case. You won't have heard of it but it was a huge slavery court case in America. Anyway, he asked John to go and help them. He thought John's medical expertise could help. He went. And they won.

So, he was a brilliant doctor that helped the poor. He always championed and defended women's rights. And he was active in fighting slavery. Do you wonder he is my hero. And I want to thank you Elizabeth May for bearing this child.

John's diary doesn't cast any light on exactly who his father was. Rebecca told him you worked for the Bishop of Cambridge, so maybe it was someone in that household ... but the sheer fact that Samuel & Rebecca brought him up suggests he wasn't a love child and that he wasn't planned ... or wanted...

Whatever the situation was, and however difficult, stressful and painful it was, thank you for giving us this man. He helped. He did good. A lot of good. For all of us.

He made a difference. And so, therefore, did you.

I hope you won't mind if I tell this story, John's and your story. It deserves to be told.

Goodbye Elizabeth May. God bless You.

**MAGGIE** leaves.

FADE TO BLACK.