

Lil, why have you put me in the workhouse? ... Well, *you* might call it St Mary's but I call it t'workhouse, and so does our Vi. I know it's clean - them sheets are almost as white as my hair is now. It used to be chestnut, you know, and I never once had it cut.

Me mam was Eleanor Ferguson - her dad was a coastguard at Filey but he came from County Down: his sisters were the belles of Northern Ireland! Me dad, Edward Colley, died in my arms when I was only ten or so; I was already skivvying by then. The doctor said inflammation of the bowel from painting and decorating but we thought it was consumption.

I met Jack Appleby when I was 19. The school housekeeper didn't like us maids going courting with fisher lads - what if he doesn't come back? Well, he did come back, just in time to marry me at St Mary's before our Nellie arrived. We christened her Ellen Maxwell, after his mother in Longwestgate. She taught me how to knit ganseys in Scarborough pattern. We all knit the same, with the right needle under our arm to steady it – but not on a Sunday, of course.

Applebys are used to grieving – one of Jack's uncles drowned, then their Jim's boat was run down with loss of all hands, year our Vi was born. Year after, their Ellen died at 21. She ran out in the snow in her nightgown when t'chimney caught fire and died of consumption. I always told my lasses to be careful not to catch a chill at that time of the month.

The next year my Jack and his dad lost two crewmen in a storm. Nine days later, my new bairn died of bronchitis. Eliza Tapping. She had violet blue eyes ... too beautiful to live, they said.

Teacher let Nellie take our Jim to school with her at 18 months, after I had our first Olive, but she got measles and died at 14 months. When I had next one, our Jim said, 'It's our Olive come back', so we gave her same name. Was bad luck: she died at 16 months of rickets convulsions, when I was

carrying our Lil. The doctor said she hadn't been out in t'sun enough, but where was I to find sun downstreet in Scarborough in winter?

When you were born I could scarcely look at you, Lil – big dark eyes and all that black curly hair – don't know where you got that from! That solemn little lass over there has got your curls and dark eyes. Your Aunt Tapping wanted to adopt you because they had none of their own and I had so many. But in the end I couldn't give you up ...

I always kept my house spotless. I used to bake cottage loaves in t'fire oven with a bit of bacon for t'bairns. They used to play in Castle Dykes all day long and then I had all them pinafores to boil and starch. Vi, Lil and Ivy used to wash and iron for me when they were older. But I wasn't suited when they didn't put pairs of socks and pyjamas together on t'rack.

Our Jackie said he wanted one of them little towels airing on the fender – we had dozens with all them lasses. I gave them the best advice I could when they started: 'Here, wear this and keep off t'lads.' Some on 'em took more notice than others ...

Our Arthur was the clever one but I needed them all earning their keep, so the lads started as errand boys and the lasses in service, except our Rosie. It wasn't easy feeding and clothing all them bairns.

I hated that bombing a few years back, as bad as bombardment in 1914. They said: Remember Scarborough – as if we'd ever forget. What cowards, killing all them people, firing from the sea. I lent my Paisley shawl to a woman running up Eastborough. I was carrying Rosie by then, holding our Sid, trying to get up town, with shells landing, your dad at sea, then our Lil comes flying down Westborough to find me.

Jack stayed with the fishing fleet but U-boats torpedoed that many trawlers in 1916. He was engineer

on Dalhousie when it was sunk and floated on his back until t' Germans picked him up. When he gave up fishing, we removed to Sherwood Street further up town and I could have my walnut table, my china dogs and my ladies' chair in me room.

Our Jackie's gone now at 37. He worked for Farrar's in Halifax but that cough just got worse. I think it was all them mill chimneys. He lasted longer than our poor Jim, dying of fever in New York, just after he just got his master's tickets. I saw bairns once when we went to Belgium to look at Jim's grave, but that was lost in war just gone.

It's been a hard life but I was glad to move up town. I've seen a lot of change: motor cars, the pictures, aeroplanes, telephones and wireless. I did a competition once to name a phonograph with a dog – and I said it should be 'The Voice of His Master' – but I didn't win ...

I do like music though - will you sing 'We'll Gather Lilacs' again for me, Lil?

Emma Appleby (1870-1954)

Vivienne Ravis