

*The*  
DISAPPEARANCE OF  
MARIA  
GLENN

A TRUE LIFE  
REGENCY MYSTERY

NAOMI CLIFFORD

# The Disappearance of Maria Glenn



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*A True Life Regency Mystery*

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- Maria's gravestone © Naomi Clifford.

# Characters

It is the reader's misfortune that many characters in this story share surnames, even though they are not related, or at least not closely. Two men called James Bowditch appear in the narrative, one a young farmer who played a central role in the drama, the other a draper who was only on the sidelines. John Burroughs appeared as a defence witness for the Bowditches but should not be confused with Judge John Burroughs who tried one of the cases in the story. Neither of them were any relation to William Burroughs, a parliamentary candidate in Taunton in 1818. James Scarlett, a son-in-law to Mrs Bowditch, was not related to the eminent barrister of the same name who defended the Bowditches from 1819 and later became known as Lord Abinger. William Woodford, a Taunton carpenter who appeared as a witness for Maria Glenn in London, was not connected with the wealthy Woodforde family of Taunton, who were powerful Bowditch supporters. The story features both Henry James Leigh, a Taunton solicitor, and James Henry Leigh Hunt, a radical journalist. Two women called Susanna and two called Elizabeth also feature, so I have used Betsey Bowditch and Susan Bowditch to distinguish them from Elizabeth Snell and Susanna Mulraine. And as if that were not enough, both the churches that feature in the story, one in Taunton and the other in Thornford, Dorset, are dedicated to St Mary Magdalene.

## *The Tuckett household and friends*

Maria Glenn – A young heiress from St Vincent

George Lowman Tuckett – Maria's second cousin and uncle by marriage; a barrister in Taunton

Martha Tuckett – Maria's aunt, her mother's sister

Frederick, Glenn, Fenton, Gertrude, Lucretia and Anna Eliza Tuckett – Maria's cousins

Mary Ann Whitby – Nursemaid to the Tuckett children

Jane Marke – Cook in the Tuckett household

Elizabeth Snell – Housemaid working for the Tucketts

Sarah Slade – The Tucketts' former nursemaid

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MARIA GLENN

Mary Fenton Glenn – Maria’s widowed mother, resident in St Vincent  
William Glenn – Maria’s paternal grandfather, owner of two plantations  
on St Vincent  
Rachael French – Maria’s maternal grandmother  
Maria Burrows – George Lowman Tuckett’s sister, married to John  
Burrows, a magistrate in London  
The Rev Blakely Cooper – A Church of England clergyman, resident in  
Yetminster, Dorset  
William Thompson – A Taunton doctor  
William Woodford – A Taunton carpenter

### *The Bowditches and their friends*

Joan Bowditch – A widowed farmer at Holway Green, Taunton  
William Bowditch – Joan Bowditch’s eldest son, an innkeeper resident  
in Taunton  
James Bowditch – Joan Bowditch’s second son, a farmer living at  
Holway Green  
Betsey Bowditch (later Gibbens); Susan Bowditch (later Gibbens);  
Sarah Bowditch – Joan Bowditch’s daughters resident at Holway  
Green  
Ann Bowditch – Joan Bowditch’s daughter, working in Ireland  
Mary Scarlett – Joan Bowditch’s daughter, married to James Scarlett  
James Scarlett – A journalist and printer at the *Taunton Courier*  
Juliana Paul – Joan Bowditch’s eldest daughter, married to Thomas  
Paul  
Thomas Paul – Juliana’s husband, a gentleman, of Thornford, Dorset  
Susanna Mulraine – A young married woman, often resident at Holway  
Green farm  
Charles Puddy – A farmer  
Rev George Henry Templer – A clergyman and magistrate, of  
Thornford, Dorset; nephew of Thomas Paul  
James Bowditch – A Taunton linen-draper, not related to the farm  
James Bowditch  
James Sutton – An innkeeper in Taunton

## CHARACTERS

### *Lawyers and judges*

Henry James Leigh – Tuckett’s solicitor, of Taunton

Thomas Fooks – A solicitor in Sherborne, Dorset

Serjeant Albert Pell – A barrister, head of Tuckett’s team

Stephen Gaselee – A barrister (Tuckett’s team)

Abraham Moore – A barrister (Tuckett’s team)

Charles Frederick Williams – A barrister (Tuckett’s team)

Robert Casberd – A barrister (head of the Bowditches’ team at  
Dorchester)

William Selwyn – A barrister (defence team)

Henry Jeremy – A barrister (defence team)

James Scarlett – A barrister (head of the Bowditches’ team after 1818)

Charles Abbott – Lord Chief Justice of England

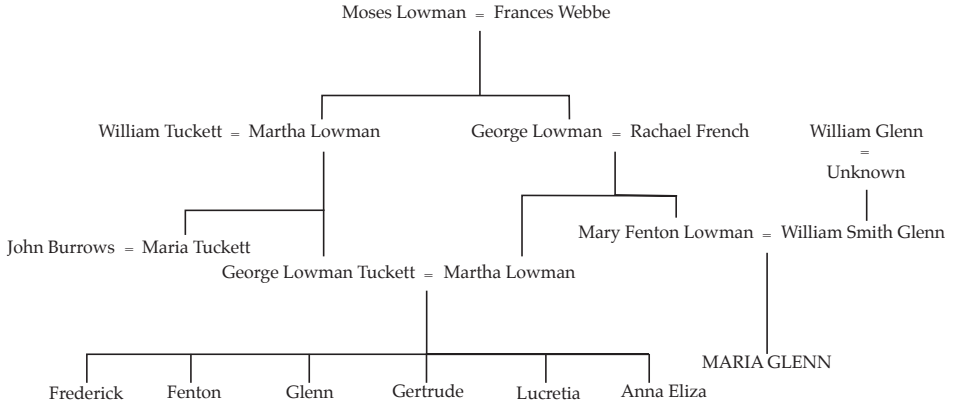
William Kinglake – A solicitor in Taunton

John Oxenham – William Kinglake’s employee, a solicitor

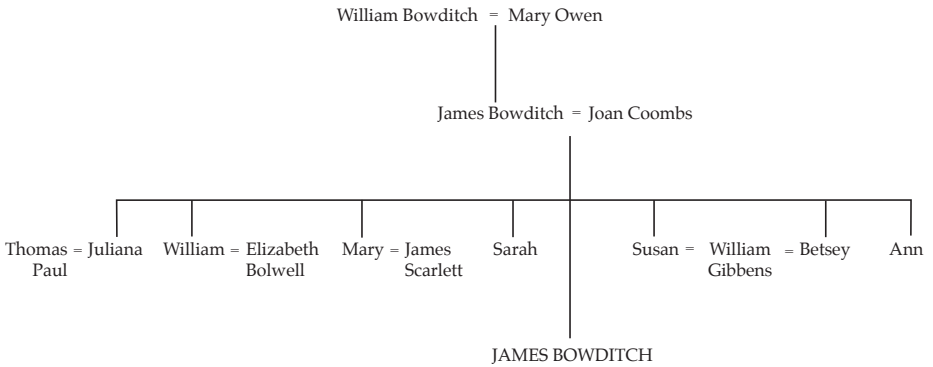
James Alan Park – Judge at the Dorchester trial

# Family Trees

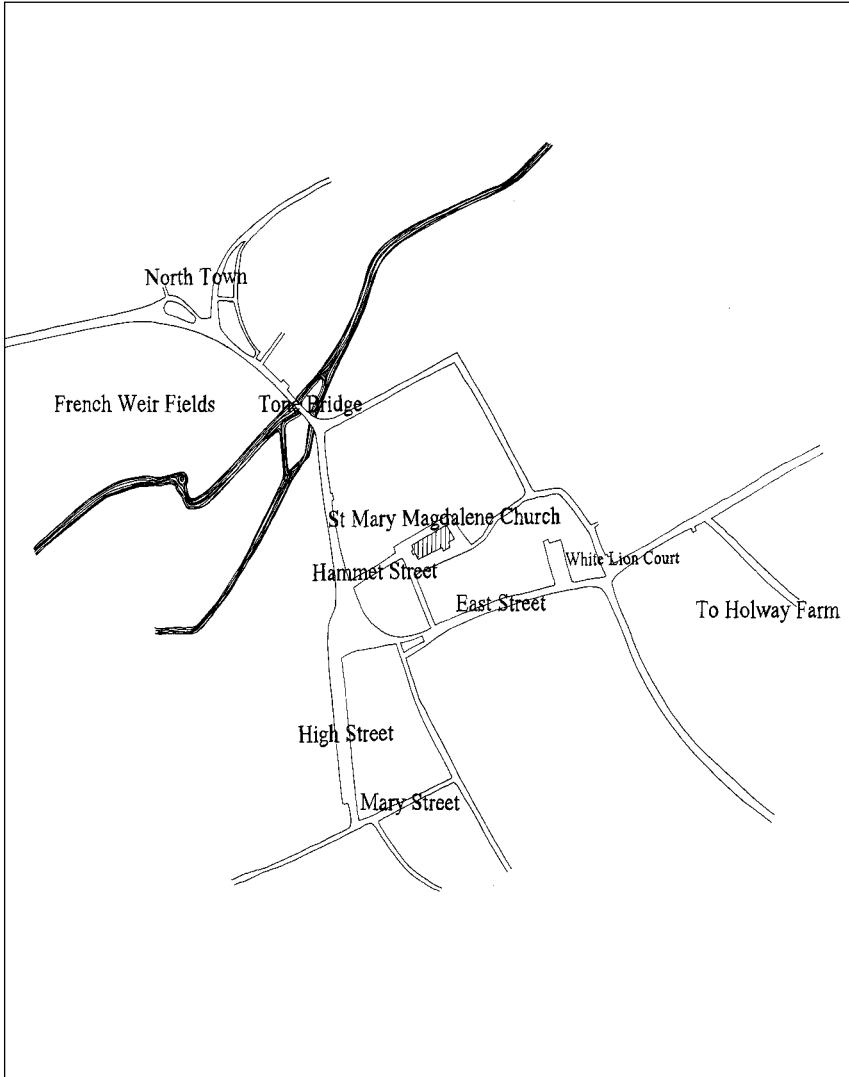
## MARIA GLENN'S FAMILY



## BOWDITCH FAMILY



# Map of Taunton



# Slavery

Like many people looking into their family history, Maria Glenn's descendants have found aspects of their ancestors' lives both surprising and distressing. The discovery that the Glenn and Tuckett families had owned slaves on the island of St Vincent gave them a good deal of personal pain.

It would be difficult to find many middle-class British families in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries whose lives did not in some way brush the edges of slavery or, as here, sit right in it. Unfortunately, however regrettable our ancestors' behaviour, there is, of course, nothing we can do to change it.

# Preface

In 2010 I was browsing through the British Library's online newspaper archive when I came across an extraordinary tale from 1830. A man had been sent anonymous letters by a woman who wanted him to rescue her from her uncle's house on the Clapham Road, which happened to be a couple of hundred metres from my own home in south London.

To effect the escape he should bring a rope ladder, some cash and a gun, she wrote, adding that for his gallantry he would be rewarded with her hand in marriage, and her fortune – for everything a woman owned, if it was not tied up in trusts, would automatically belong to her husband. He was keen as mustard and showed up, suitably equipped, with a friend. They were both promptly arrested.

It turned out that the inhabitant of the house, an unpopular hardline magistrate, had also been sent an anonymous letter, but this one warned that his house would be under attack that night. He had fled, but had left his brother in charge, armed, and asked the night watchman to be especially vigilant.

Of course, there was no captive woman and the whole thing was a hoax, probably set up by one of the magistrate's enemies.

This peculiar story set me thinking about the way marriage was viewed two hundred years ago. Here was a young man, perhaps not rich, who had a chance of getting something for almost nothing. For this, he was prepared to lock himself into a relationship that could last for his entire life, without ever having previously met, seen or talked to his bride-to-be.

After that I was on a mission to look at elopement stories and to try to understand their meaning. 'Elopement' means simply flight, running away or escaping and there were certainly many hundreds of cases in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of elopement reported or advertised in the newspapers. Servants and apprentices absconded from service, sometimes with possessions or clothing they were not entitled to; wives and husbands left their partners and children to chase new romantic interests or end abusive regimes; and of course runaway lovers duped



## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MARIA GLENN

their families and friends and headed for Gretna Green or other destinations where they could marry without the consent of others.

It is this last type of elopement that has come to define the word. In England, the main players in these family dramas ranged from rebellious and misguided teens to besotted or money-grabbing stalkers who kidnapped their victims and dragged them off to Scotland or anywhere else where English law did not run.

In the developed world now, adults rarely have to elope in order to be together: we can generally marry whom we please. But there should be no room for complacency about couples that run away to be together. In 2012 a fifteen-year-old girl absconded to France with maths teacher Jeremy Forrest. He was arrested, extradited and convicted of child abduction. In the end, it looked less like a romance than an everyday story of vulnerability and exploitation.

In the UK, forced marriage is still with us. In 2013 the Government's Forced Marriage Unit dealt with over 1,300 cases of coercion, of which fifteen per cent involved people under the age of fifteen. In that same year, schoolgirls suspecting that they may be forced to marry when taken abroad were advised to put cutlery in their underwear to set off airport metal detector alarms. Meanwhile, in Kyrgyzstan bride kidnapping is said to be endemic.

My research into elopements eventually brought me to sixteen-year-old Maria Glenn and the mystery over what happened to her on the night she disappeared from her uncle's house in Taunton. After the prosecution of her alleged abductors she emerged as both a victim and heroine, but she and her enemies had told such utterly different versions of events that it was clear that one of them was lying. Public opinion chose to doubt her and she endured not just humiliation but what we might now call a campaign of 'slut shaming.'

As an adult Maria tried to put her teenage experiences behind her and never spoke of them to her children. She would be astonished by the attention she is now getting, and probably more than a little pleased that, at last, nearly two hundred years later, her story is finally being told in full.

Much of this tale is told through reports published in newspapers but I was also fortunate that the solicitor Henry James Leigh left two sets of invaluable correspondence (one in Dorset County Archives, the other in Somerset County Archives), both of which contain important information

## PREFACE

about Maria and her uncle George Lowman Tuckett, and that Tuckett wrote and published two pamphlets in her defence. Maria's descendant, Mike Hudson and his wife Ann, gave me access to family letters passed down through the generations.

That this is a true story and relies entirely on documented information is obvious. However, the reader should know that I have added three imagined scenes to open the three separate parts, each of them based on known facts.



# PART ONE

## Taunton

North Town

22 September, 1817, a Monday, at about two or three in the morning.

George Lowman Tuckett, former Solicitor General of Grenada, now reduced to living in Taunton and earning a living as a jobbing barrister on the Western Circuit, loved by his family but disliked by his peers, is woken by his wife Martha. In a panic, she tells him that Maria, their sixteen-year-old niece and ward for the past four years, is not only missing from her bed, she has disappeared from the house altogether. Feeling unwell, Martha had got up and needed Maria's help, but the girl is nowhere to be found.

Tuckett checks the chamber Maria shares with two of her young cousins. Her bed is empty. Downstairs the parlour door has been wedged shut from the inside. He forces it and sees that the sash window is up and, beyond that, the garden gate is open.

He wakes the servants and interrogates them. He has so many questions: What did they see? What did they know? Where might Maria be now? Didn't his little daughters Lucretia and Gertrude wake when Maria was leaving their bedroom? Had Maria said anything to anyone about running away? Who opened the window and jammed the door? Where is Maria's little red trunk?

He dresses quickly. Time is of the essence and he wants to search the streets of Taunton. He is thinking: Why was I not more attentive? Why did we not do something when Maria started withdrawing into herself and crying in her bedroom? He'd assumed she had guessed his secret — that he and Martha had decided to send her back to boarding school. But then, just yesterday, she had shaken all that off, and she had been her old self: a sweet, obedient, good girl.

He and Martha have protected and sheltered Maria. They have ensured

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MARIA GLENN

that she has remained innocent of the wickedness in the world, but he suspects that there is evil-doing in her disappearance, and that it is the work of a man. But who? Maria knows no men, he is sure of it. He once thought that the son of Mrs Bowditch at Holway Farm had looked at her, but he had dismissed it. Young Bowditch is a handsome young man, granted, but he's an ignorant, uneducated oaf, not someone Maria would want for a husband even if she were old enough for such things. Besides, just yesterday, at the turnpike gate, Tuckett caught Bowditch in close conversation with his girls' nursemaid, Mary Ann Whitby. Bowditch flushed and walked away when he saw him, and afterwards Tuckett warned Mary Ann that he would tell her mother if he saw her with Bowditch again. But perhaps it was not Mary Ann but Maria Bowditch really wanted. If so, it would not be for her looks, but for her inheritance. She is a plain child and, until her grandfather dies, she has no money in her own right. So it was puzzling. If Maria has run off with Bowditch there will be no fortune at all because her grandfather will disinherit her in an instant when he finds out.

The servants are slow. It takes them an age to get him a shirt. He catches Jane muttering to Elizabeth but can't make out what she says. Has he imagined that he heard her say 'Bowditch'? He sees a look here. A glance there. He speaks to the nursemaid Mary Ann but she turns her face from him and looks at the floor. To his questions, she answers only, 'I'm sure I don't know, sir.'

Then she says that if Tuckett will promise to forgive her before she says it, she will tell him something.

'Of course, of course I will, if you promise not to deceive me,' he says.

Maria might have eloped with James Bowditch, she tells him.

'She said she would poison herself if she could not have him.'

He sends the cook, Jane Marke, to Holway Green Farm. She's back within an hour, out of breath from running, gasping out that she woke Mrs Bowditch from her bed and that Mrs Bowditch says she hasn't seen Maria and that her son James has had no part in any of this. Indeed, she was shocked at the very idea. Tuckett knows she may be lying. After all, he's seen people do so in a thousand court cases.

At last he pulls on his cloak and takes his stick, and slams the door as he leaves.

The morning is chilly, and a mist is settling over New Town, shrouding its new terraces in damp grey air. He shivers as he breaks into a thin sweat.

## TAUNTON

A sinking feeling invades his heart. What will become of Maria? And how will this affect his career? His hopes of returning to the West Indies are crumbling. As he walks towards the Tone Bridge, the buildings themselves have taken on an impermanence. The life he has built in Taunton is no longer solid. What he thought was certain, is no longer.

He remembers the promises he had made to Maria's mother, who is his first cousin as well as his wife's sister: to keep her daughter safe, to supervise her future, to arrange a good marriage. These are as dust. Now Maria's name will be in the papers. She will be ruined and his reputation will be questioned. His own children will suffer. And worst of all, Maria will be obliged to marry Bowditch, if it is Bowditch she is with.

The working people of Taunton are already up but Tuckett hardly notices them and walks on past the timber yards, chandlers' shops, farriers and blacksmiths' yards. At the coaching station he orders messages to be sent to inns in Bristol and London asking the keepers to be on the look-out for Maria — and Bowditch of course. They are probably heading for Gretna Green, or maybe they have decided to lie low to evade pursuers. The thought of that appals him. Maria, unmarried, in lodgings with Bowditch. For a moment, when he is asked for a description, he is hesitant. What should he say? Young. Small. Plain. Wearing a white frock and a purple pelisse, and a bonnet with a projecting hood. In possession of a small red trunk, but no other luggage, no other clothes. Innocent. Trusting. And Bowditch? He keeps it simple. Short, aged about twenty-five.

Suddenly he is exhausted and wants to be at home. Perhaps there has been some news or perhaps Maria has returned to tell them it is all a misunderstanding. That she sleepwalked away from the house.

The house is in quiet turmoil. Mary Ann, the nursemaid, asks to see him in the parlour. She tells him that in the night Jane Marke went downstairs, opened the parlour window and put the red trunk under it.

He calls for Jane. Her reaction will show her guilt, he thinks, and indeed it does. He tells her that she is dismissed and that Mrs Tuckett will pay her quarter's wages. She does not attempt a defence but makes an accusation of her own: 'Mary was as bad, if not worse, than me,' she says and turns to Mary Ann saying, 'You have done what you wished. You have tried to take away our lives. Never mind, I will tell enough of you.' She knows she has done wrong, Tuckett thinks, and she knew the penalties for what she has done before she did it.

## THE DISAPPEARANCE OF MARIA GLENN

As she leaves by the kitchen door, she looks towards Elizabeth Snell, the housemaid, and says, 'Come, Elizabeth, you may as well come too.' Elizabeth does not move and just looks to the floor. Tuckett knows now that all three of his servants are involved. He cannot sack them all. He has six children and his wife is often ill. In any case, by keeping Elizabeth and Mary Ann in the house, he may learn more of what has happened and what they have done.

In his parlour, Tuckett calculates the hours Maria has been gone. Twelve or more. He has not given up hope that she will come back unwed, but he knows too that there will be a point when he will shift to the other bench and be forced to count her lucky that she is married.

The doorbell jangles. He can hear a woman asking for his wife. In the parlour this woman introduces herself as Mrs Priest. I am related to Mrs Mulraine, she says. He knows the name; Mrs Mulraine is a young woman who sometimes lodges at Holway Green Farm with the Bowditches. Maria has talked of her. 'I have some news you will be interested to hear,' says Mrs Priest.

It is true. Maria has run off with James Bowditch to be married. But Mrs Priest says something else, something that gives Tuckett hope, even though it disgusts him. Maria has been seen behaving in an outrageous way, says Mrs Priest. She has been parading about town with Bowditch and skipping off to meet him in French Weir Fields, sometimes without her bonnet and shawl.

Tuckett knows this is a lie. Maria would never do such things. In any case, when would she have done this? Martha keeps Maria close – she is, after all, her beloved sister's precious only child. She is not allowed out alone except for school and errands. He struggles to be polite to Mrs Priest as he shows her the door.

By five o'clock, Tuckett is in Taunton again, heading for his solicitor's office in Hammet Street. As he crosses the Tone Bridge, he hears his name. A pretty young woman beckons to him. 'Do you have any news?' she asks.

She is Mrs Mulraine, the lodger from Holway whose relative Mrs Priest has just told horrible lies about Maria.

'You may rely on it that I will bring every one of you to justice,' he says. He tells her that Maria's disappearance – he can't bring himself to say elopement – will break her mother's heart, and that her expected inheritance will be lost.

## TAUNTON

'I had nothing to do with it,' insists Mrs Mulraine.

'Was Mrs Bowditch concerned in it?' asks Tuckett.

'Yes, she was. They were all concerned in it but myself. I am a mere visitor in her family,' says Mrs Mulraine. She looks straight into his face. 'I have come to tell you where Miss Glenn is, for her sake. She has been taken to Mr Paul's house at Thornford in a yellow gig with a top to it.'

Tuckett knows her game. Mrs Mulraine wants to distance herself from the crime. And he knows that telling him where she is means that Maria is probably already married.

Tuckett rushes away to his solicitor's office. Within an hour, his lawyer Henry James Leigh is in a hired chaise and four, heading for Thornford in the neighbouring county of Dorset, accompanied by two of Taunton's bailiffs. Tuckett has told him to call on Thomas Fooks, a solicitor in Sherborne, who will guide him to Thornford and assist him in finding Maria.

Night is coming on.



## CHAPTER 1

# In Health

One of the chief beauties in a female character is that modest reserve, that retiring delicacy, which avoids the public eye, and is disconcerted even at the gaze of admiration.

*A Father's Legacy to His Daughters,*  
Dr John Gregory (1761)

At some time in 1811, after a six-week transatlantic crossing, a thin, pale girl of about ten, stepped off a packet ship at the port of Falmouth in Cornwall.<sup>1</sup> Maria Glenn had left the West Indian sugar island of St Vincent,<sup>2</sup> to begin a new life with her uncle George Lowman Tuckett, his wife Martha and their five children in Taunton, Somerset.

Sending her to England was not a rejection but an act of love by her devoted mother. It was customary to send white children 'home' to complete their education. Mary Fenton Glenn was trying to ensure a good future for her daughter, and for this she was prepared to sacrifice the pleasure of her company. Mary was a widow, her husband, a barrister called William Smith Glenn, having died when Maria was three and Mary and her own mother Rachael lived modestly on a small income. As Maria was a notably plain child, Mary knew that in order to make a good marriage she would have to rely on the expectations of her grandfather's two large sugar plantations.

Maria would not have made the journey across the ocean unaccompanied. It is possible that her uncle Tuckett, or another trusted adult, was with her or she may have been given to the care of a mature female known to the family who happened to be making the journey. Whatever the arrangements, after the ship docked she would have travelled, probably by chaise, to join her new family 130 miles away in Taunton.

She had been her mother's dearest love in St Vincent, an only child