

FOUR

Remembering

Jessie must have slept, because she woke to a gray day and a howling wind. It wasn't supposed to be like this. Staring at a crack in the bedroom ceiling, she thought back to the happy days before her summer dreams turned into a nightmare.

Was it just three weeks since school had let out for the summer? A light breeze had ruffled her hair as she arrived home and climbed the porch steps that day. Maine winters could be brutally cold, and June was still cool enough for a sweater, but Jessie was looking forward to July and August. Those months were great for picnicking, swimming, and sitting outside while visiting.

"I'm free," she yelled as she threw her books on the table by the front door.

"Don't shout," Mom called from the kitchen. "Come in here and talk to us in a normal voice."

When Jessie entered the room, Billy was sitting at the table eating bread and butter and drinking lemonade.

"I'm gonna fish and swim with my friends all summer," he mumbled.

"Don't speak with your mouth full," Mom said.

Billy finished his bite before continuing. "I wish Dad were home to go with us."

Jessie frowned. "I don't understand why he joined the U.S. Lighthouse Service."

"He spent too much time at sea when he was in the Merchant Marine."

"Then why can't he get a job in town? Emily's father is looking for a clerk."

"Your dad loves the sea, and he'd hate being cooped up in an office all day." Mom cut a slice of bread and started buttering it. "Working for the Lighthouse Service gives him a chance to do something he loves while spending more time with his family."

"How?" Jessie asked as she poured a glass of lemonade. "He's still gone most of the time."

"He has to start at the bottom as a substitute keeper." Mom handed Jessie the bread. "When he gets an assignment as an assistant keeper, he'll take us with him."

Jessie winced. She didn't like having Dad away so much, but if being with him meant leaving her friends, she'd rather he didn't get promoted. Her parents wouldn't understand how she felt, though, so she didn't say it out loud. Instead, she asked the question she dreaded.

"How long will that be?"

"Your father says it could be several years. It depends on what openings come up and how many people are in line before him."

Good.

"Living in a lighthouse will be fun." Billy shoved his plate back and stood up. "Can I go play, now?"

"Yes you may, but put your dishes in the sink first."

When he was gone, Mom turned to Jessie. "What are your plans for the summer?"

"I'm going to spend time with my friends and see every film at the cinema." Her Aunt Betty played the organ to accompany the silent films, so the owner let Jessie and Billy in for free.

"Not every movie," Mom said. "You aren't old enough for some of them."

Taking a bite, Jessie sighed. She did enjoy the comedies, and at least she'd get to see those. But her friends were allowed to see the romances, so why couldn't she? Still, it was no use arguing about it, so she changed the subject.

"My clothes are too tight. Can we buy new ones tomorrow?"

"Madison's Department Store is expecting another shipment of fabric in a week. I thought we could look for material and patterns then."

"But all my friends have ready-made dresses."

"Their fathers make more money than yours does."

That was another reason he shouldn't have taken a job with the Lighthouse Service. But Jessie didn't dare say it or Mom would lecture her about liking material things too much.

Draining her cup, Mom smiled. "Besides, I enjoy making your clothes."

Jessie scowled. "I don't want to look like a little girl."

Mom rose and poured herself more tea. "You can come with me, and we'll choose patterns that are fashionable as well as practical."

Would they? Jessie didn't trust Mom's fashion sense. Dress length shouldn't be a problem since women's skirts were almost as short as girls' skirts these days, but Mom would probably pick shift dresses with straight lines instead of the dropped waists that flappers had made popular.

Although Jessie was twelve, Mom and Dad still treated her as a little girl. Would they ever let her grow up?

That reminded her of something else she wanted to ask. Again.

"Can I get my hair bobbed?"

Mom put her hands on Jessie's shoulders and looked her in the eyes. "Stop begging. You know how I feel about short hair. It makes women look as if they don't have any morals."

Jessie could name many respectable women in town who had cut their hair. But before she could mention them, the telephone rang. Two longs and one short meant it was for them.

"Henderson residence." Mom beamed as she listened. "Thank you."

"Who was that?" Jessie asked.

"It was a message from your father."

"Why didn't you talk longer, then?" The call would have been expensive, but Dad had been gone almost a month.

"It wasn't your father on the phone. He sent the message through someone from the Lighthouse Service. They called to say Dad would be home on Friday."

The day before Dad was due home, Jessie sat with her friends at a table outside Wilson's Ice Cream Parlor. It was the first time they had been together since vacation began.

Emily dug her spoon into her banana split. "What is everyone doing this summer? My family is going to our cabin for the entire month of July."

"Papa rented a place at the beach," Lucy said. "We're leaving July 1st and staying there for two weeks."

Tossing her head so that her bobbed hair swung, Amy smiled. "I'll also be away in July. We're going to New York City because Mom wants to shop and see some Broadway shows. They have the latest fashions, so I'll buy my school clothes then."

Jessie sighed. "We aren't going anywhere."

"Oh good." Amy hesitated. "I mean, I'm sorry you don't get to go anywhere, but I'm glad everyone will be here for my birthday in August. Just think. We all turn thirteen this year. Dad says that's a special birthday because it's the first year with *teen* in it. He says that means we're growing up."

"Are you going to have a party?" Lucy asked.

Amy licked chocolate syrup off her spoon. "My birthday's during the state fair in Bangor, and Daddy said he'd take us all there in the Nash. We'll stay overnight in a hotel before coming home."

Jessie, Lucy, and Emily all gasped. None of them could afford such an expensive outing, but Amy's father owned the bank.

Shivers of excitement and anxiety ran through Jessie's body. She had never been away from home without her parents before, but she was pretty sure Dad would let her go. He kept telling her she needed to try new experiences and stop being so fearful. Besides, he trusted Amy's father.

"Since it's a special birthday, we should each have a party," Lucy said. "The ice is solid in January. We can go to my uncle's farm and skate on his pond. Afterwards, we'll have some of my aunt's yummy apple pie and hot chocolate."

Emily leaned forward. "Because my birthday is just before Halloween, I've already started thinking about having a costume party. Everyone can come as their favorite literary character."

Jessie groaned inwardly. A costume party might be fun, but she had no favorite literary character. Amy and Lucy probably felt the same way since Emily was the only one of the friends who read a lot. Mom would probably have some ideas for Jessie, though.

While the other girls talked, Jessie bit her lip. She couldn't compete with the other girls, but maybe Aunt Betty could talk the cinema manager into letting her friends in for free just once. So when the other girls looked at Jessie, she said, "A movie. Then we can come over here for ice cream." Her parents could afford that, couldn't they? And, as the youngest of the group, she had ten months to convince Dad and Mom.

Jessie had spent the next afternoon jumping rope at Emily's house. When she returned home, she heard voices coming from the kitchen. One was Mom, and the other was one she hadn't heard for a while.

"Dad!" she shrieked as she flew into the room. "You're home!" She wanted to give him a hug, but he was sitting at the table drinking coffee and she would have spilled it all over him.

His eyes twinkled. "Pretty obvious, I'd say."

Looking up from his seat on the floor, Billy held up a top he had been spinning. "See what Dad brought me."

"I have something for you, too." Dad handed Jessie a red leather-bound book. "A diary."

She beamed. "Thank you." All her friends had diaries and she had felt left out. This one was nicer than Lucy's or Emily's. It was almost as pretty as Amy's, except Amy's blue leather cover was stamped with her initials in gold lettering.

"We've been waiting for you." Mom poured Jessie a glass of milk. "Dad has news."

Billy pouted. "He told Mom but wouldn't tell me 'til you got here."

Jessie sat down at the table. "What is it?" she asked before taking a sip of milk.

"I've received an appointment as assistant lighthouse keeper, and we're going to move in two weeks."

The milk came flying out of Jessie's mouth. "I don't want to move. Can't Mom and Billy and I stay here?"

Mom handed Jessie a dish rag to clean up the mess on the table. "We're a family."

"The whole point of my joining the U.S. Lighthouse Service was so that we could be together," Dad said.

"But . . ." Jessie took a deep breath to keep from crying. "Does it have to be so soon? Amy is taking Lucy, Emily, and me to the state fair in Bangor for her birthday in August, and we get to stay in a hotel overnight. You want me to try new experiences, and I'll never have a chance like this again."

"I'm sorry." Dad rubbed his forehead. "It would be a good experience for you, but our move will be an even greater adventure, and it can't wait. The assistant keeper received a new assignment, and I need to be there in just over two weeks to relieve him."

"Mercy. We'll have to rush to be ready by then." Mom paused. "Why is he leaving?"

"I don't know." Dad grinned. "'Ours not to reason why, ours but to do and die.' Or however Alfred Lord Tennyson put it."

"Yay." Billy scrambled after his top. "Where are we going?"

"The light station is called Lonely Rock, and it's about twenty miles offshore."

Jessie's heart sped up. "Lonely Rock! Are we going to be the only ones there?"

Dad laughed. "It got its name because there is nothing around it, but no, we won't be alone, and I don't expect you to be lonely. I'm only the assistant keeper, and the head keeper and his family will be there, too."

Refilling Dad's coffee cup, Mom asked, "What do you know about them?"

"Not much. His name is Jonah Elkhart, and he has been the head keeper at Lonely Rock for years. I was told his wife enjoys having another woman on the island, so she will be company for you."

"What about me?" Jessie could hear her voice getting higher and squeaky, but she couldn't control herself. "Will there be any friends for me?"

Dad kept his own voice low and looked her directly in the eyes. "I don't know about the head keeper's family, but you'll have us. That should be good enough."

For him, maybe, but Jessie wasn't a loner like Dad. She needed people.

None of that seemed to bother Billy, who stood up and bounced from one foot to the other. "I don't need friends to swim and fish and explore. I'll watch for German submarines."

"The war is over," Jessie said.

"I'll make believe it isn't. Or I'll be a pirate searching for buried treasure."

Nothing would make Billy unhappy as long as he could pretend. But Jessie didn't have his imagination, and she needed her friends.

Besides, she couldn't move to an island where anything could go wrong. Nor'easters and hurricanes were bad enough along the Atlantic shore, but she had heard they could be much worse on an island. And what if somebody got badly hurt? They'd be miles from a hospital.

Her heart pounded. There must be something she could say to change Dad's mind. But what?

Then she had an idea. Although Jessie didn't care about school, her parents did.

"If there aren't any children, there won't be a school there. We can't miss school."

Mom chuckled. "I never thought I'd hear you say that."

"The Lighthouse Service has been dealing with that issue for years," Dad said. "They have books and lesson plans for children who can't go to a formal school. You'll be even better off than most since your mother was a teacher before we got married. She will help you with your lessons when you have trouble."

Not only would Jessie still have to do school work, but Mom would expect more from her than her other teachers did. Mom wouldn't let her get away with sloppy work, either.

Jumping up from the table, Jessie's milk spilled. She didn't stop to clean it up as she ran upstairs to her room, pulled a box from under the bed, and found Millie. Mom had made the rag doll for Jessie's second birthday, giving her yarn hair the same brown as Jessie's and green button eyes only slightly darker than the ones Jessie saw in the mirror.

Although Jessie had put Millie away when she turned eight, she still found the doll comforting at times.

Hugging Millie, Jessie flung herself on her bed and sobbed.

Her life was ruined.