

Chapter 1

Farewell to James

The distinct Nova Scotia fisherman's home longed for a fresh coat of whitewash to cloak signs of weather beaten shingles. The inhabitants inside were no brighter than the outside now that darkness drew near. Burnt oil fumes told the lamps were lit only moments earlier. Dancing flames, totally unaware of the occupants concern, joyfully cast their lively shadows against the walls. Yes, this home located at the Cove named in her honor, Peggy's Cove, was in a somber mood that night.

Why would James ever want to sail with Captain Simms on that wrenched northern voyage? questioned Peggy. His life could end as it did for all those on our ship that dreadful night. I wish those nightmares would stop so I could forget. To bad they wouldn't be as void and as empty as the hole left in my mind before the wreck on Halibut Rock. Maybe if I join the others in the parlor and draw my favorite critters with happy faces and big eyes my heart will find a speck of cheer.

Stop interrupting my drawing, she threatened, while sweeping back long strands of fair hair, exposing eyes that were as blue and as deep as the sea. Sometimes I wish you'd stay where you belong!

Throwing her hair in place interrupted Peggy's concentration, her mind drifted. *Imagine people saying, if I don't express my feelings with words, they can read my thoughts through my eyes. That's impossible. How old am I anyway?*

Maybe I'm big or small for my age. Does my voice really have a Scottish accent? Maybe. The Cove people do talk a little funny. If only I could remember. That would drive Mr. Amnesia to wherever he came from and put an end to his rejoicing over robbing my memory. Why couldn't some piece of evidence have drifted ashore to give at least one clue? Mary says I've adjusted well and compared me to a butterfly emerging from its cocoon. Imagine! Well some of my friends fear what I might attempt next.

I'm glad Sally is my best friend in the village. I like her bold, brave spirit and teaching me how to swim underwater with my eyes open. James helped too by explaining the moods of the sea. I liked tagging along on fishing trips.

My friends have so much fun on the ocean. It's a playground for them. Swimming, fishing or just plain rowing doesn't bother them in the least. I wish I wasn't haunted with fear.

Unaware, Peggy's confidence slowly grew like a snail trying to reach its destination. Each victory was a stepping stone, which cleared the path for more daring adventures. Her past victories brought determination to overcome any gloom. However, James sailing to dangerous waters beyond Greenland was more than she bargained for. The thought of icepacks crushing the ship sent her mind on a mission of making mountains out of molehills.

James being the firstborn, and the first to leave the nest was a spitten image of his Pa according to the men of the Cove, just a little shorter.

He loved the sea, which beckoned him since childhood. Spending too much time on land made him feel like a fish out of water. Two years earlier he no longer resisted the call, boarded the Senora with Captain Simms's to sail the great blue beyond.

Peggy helped fill the void in the heart of James after his little sister Elizabeth died of a fever four years earlier. On more than one occasion, both James and Mary called Peggy Elizabeth. The first time shocked her, but John sometimes went through all three boy's names before finding the right one. It was a family joke.

The dreadful silence in the room only served to let her mind wander down the desolate path she called 'Missing James.' *What was he thinking right now? Did he miss me? His absence feels like raw wounds on the bottom of a barefoot heel!*

Mary sat unusually quiet, mending socks and pants. Occasionally she wiped the corners of her soft green eyes with a dainty handkerchief. Perfectly braided and pinned auburn hair, with a few curls escaping, framed her face. It accentuated her fair skin and beautiful mouth from which no cruel words were spoken. Her loving character added to the beauty of her features. Caring for others was as natural as breathing, and whatever her past, Peggy knew she was blessed to be here, with Mary. Despite living in a small fishing village, Mary was poised, possessing dignity and a good mind, along with her warm nature. It made her loved and trusted by everyone. That night she tried concealing her emotions, but wasn't doing very well. "Why don't you just go have a good cry?" suggested Peggy. "You told me it helps one feel better."

Mary departed to her room at the blink of an eye, no doubt to relieve the tension by accepting Peggy's suggestion. Returning a short time later with somewhat more composure was a good act, but red moist eyes told her secret. "I'm sorry if I upset you, I was only trying to help," said Peggy.

“No! You’re right; I’m just a little edgy. Things will be better in the morning.”

Across the room, the old rocking chair played its squeaky tune, repeating the same two notes in perfect sequence. John read while his fingers absently combed through his thick beard that now contained the odd streak of grey. Those dark eyes could pierce steel and yet revealed kindness. Strong arms and hands told he understood hard work. No fisherman could hide the tough skin and ruddy complexion that exposed he was a toiler of the sea. Women in the community said he was a good catch, but it was his strength of character that Mary loved most.

His attention was only half absorbed by the book as frequent glances in Mary’s direction showed his concern. He understood her feelings. Quietly he left his musical chair, walked to the sofa, sat beside and wrapped his arm around her. She relaxed, laying her head on his shoulder while giving a faint smile that reassured the family everything would be just fine.

Peter and Joe played Chinese checkers, but not with the usual excitement and teasing that competitive boys do. Peter, now fourteen, was going through the transformation from boy to man. He inherited Mary’s features with red hair and hazel eyes. Joe was definitely a combination of John and Mary. Everyone could see both of them in his looks and character. Children teased him about the freckle shaker man coming to visit. Mary claimed she gave him those and every one held a mother’s kiss. The fact that her freckles had disappeared with age and no doubt his would too, was his only consolation.

While getting ready for bed, fear knocked on Peggy's door again. *Go away, nobody's home*, she silently yelled.

It helped, but didn't take away that gap left by the dangers that lay in the path of James.

Get to sleep and stop acting like a baby. You'll feel much better in the morning. Now close those eyes and relax!

Just as she was settling, another knock pounded on her head. This time it was hurricane season! He whispered in her ear how a calm ocean could quickly change to a merciless sea monster and swallow its victims like a frog snatches its prey. She shuttered just thinking about it. *Stop it I tell you! Get out of here at once*, she demanded.

After convinced that everything would be all right, she snuggled under the blankets hoping for a peaceful sleep.

If only Mama and Papa could have outwrestled that storm I wouldn't be in this mess. My family must be out there somewhere. Do I have brothers, sisters, grand parents, uncles or aunts? Are they searching for me? Will I ever discover who I am? Will I have to cross the Atlantic again to find out? I hope not!

After exhausting every miserable question that surfaced, sleep arrived but rest wasn't peaceful. Another nightmare put her in a sweat. Loud tapping on the window awoke her. "Hector! Thank heavens you brought me out of that horrible nightmare. If it weren't for that, I'd scold you for being such a naughty bird! Waking me."

She remembered her first day at the Cove when his leg had become tangled in a net that was spread out drying on the rocks. After numerous bites and a lot of squawking, she enthusiastically held him. *If only I could be set free like you Hector? You were caught only a few fleeting minutes.*

Hearing the chatter downstairs, Peggy knew she was the last one up. Delicious smells lured her directly to the kitchen. A hearty breakfast of porridge, cinnamon toast with applesauce and a hot drink awaited her. Taking her place at the table, she asked, "So, are you boys going to do anything exciting today?"