

Sample Chapter

# JULIA'S MENDING

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## CHAPTER ONE

### EXILE

"Lih-ber-tee Falls," the train conductor's rich baritone boomed. "Liberty Falls, next stop!"

Julia Applebee clenched her journal. So far it contained only today's entry, dated July 22, 1887. Julia gripped the small book so tightly that her fingertips made little pockmarks in its soft brown-leather cover. Almost there, she thought. Her heart began to beat faster.

"Your journey's nearly over, child," Mrs. Darbee reminded her.

Julia pretended she didn't hear her grandmother's elderly friend. Mrs. Darbee, on her way to visit her married daughter at the end of the line in Oswego, New York, had agreed to look after Julia as far as Liberty Falls. She'd laughed at Julia's plan to change trains at Weehawken and go on to California alone. "You're only twelve," she'd protested, as though Julia didn't know her own age.

I can't go back, Julia thought. Grandmama would never permit it. But there must be a way to go on. All I need is a little help. She watched the stout conductor thread his way toward them down the narrow aisle of the O&W passenger car. The bright gold buttons on his dark blue uniform threatened to pop off every time he drew breath to announce the next station. His face was red and blotchy. A line of sweat stood out in beads on his upper lip, above an enormous walrus mustache. Julia frowned. It's no good, she thought. He won't take me seriously either. He'll look at me and tell me that young ladies don't travel by themselves.

"Poor man," Mrs. Darbee murmured, her double chins quivering with every word. "That heavy wool uniform must be unbearable in this weather."

Unbearable, Julia repeated to herself. She turned away from Mrs. Darbee and stared out a window grimy with smoke from the steam engine ahead. Everything is unbearable! It's unbearable that I should be on this train at all!

The sultry summer weather added to her misery. Even the lace trim on her beautiful new traveling suit from Ghormley's, the smartest dressmaker in New York City, was limp and sticky. The long, dark green skirt felt pounds heavier than it had at the beginning of their journey.

She tried not to think about that. It was too painful to remember that Grandmama's last words to her had been a stern lecture. "Young ladies do not display emotion in public," she'd said. Julia had managed not to cry when they said good-bye, but if no tears showed on the outside, inside she had been sobbing as if her heart would break.

She could barely remember the ferry ride from New York City to the train station in Weehawken, New Jersey. It blurred together with her first hours on board. Then, gradually, she'd become aware of things around her—the hardness of the reclining chairs, in spite of their red plush upholstery; the constant shaking of the train as it swayed and jiggled its way north; the heat; the grime; and the rapidly changing countryside. There were no more city streets or brick buildings. As far as she could see, there were only miles and miles of fields and trees and small houses.

Julia clung tightly to her journal. It was the only link she had left with her mother, and the only sure means of escape from Liberty Falls. Unfortunately, it could not work quickly.

In the journal she meant to record her unhappiest private thoughts. Julia smiled at the blurry image of herself on the glass, and the brown-haired, blue-eyed girl smiled back. When it came time to exchange journals with her mother, Mama would see that it had been a mistake not to take Julia with them. She'd persuade Papa that it was time to send for her.

Papa had been very unfair. Not only had he and Mama gone off to be missionaries in China without her, but Papa had decided she could not stay with Grandmama in New York City either. He had exiled her to Cousin Lucy Tanner's farm in the country instead.

Grandmama's Washington Square townhouse was the place Julia thought of as her real home. During the last few years she'd gone to stay there every time her parents were busy with church work, and so she had spent more time with Grandmama and her maid, Alice, than with Mama and Papa. I'd be living there now, she told herself, if Papa hadn't heeded the "call." She wished he'd never heard of the Christian Missionary Alliance or their pledge to send twenty thousand missionaries out by the turn of the century. Most of all she wished he hadn't quarreled with Grandmama Pemberton over it. Grandmama did not want her daughter Louise, Julia's mother, to go to China. She'd told Papa it'd be enough to turn her off religion for good if they went. Papa'd promptly written to Cousin Lucy, and that was why Julia, in spite of her protests, was on her way to Liberty Falls in wooden passenger coach No. 65.

The trip from New York City had taken just over four hours so far. The train had stopped at dozens of stations along the-route. Big towns like Middletown and Fallsburgh had seemed small and dirty to Julia, and the last stop, Luzon Crossing, had been little more than a wide spot in the road. Except for the time when she was writing in her journal, Julia had stared out the window at the unfamiliar countryside and brooded. She'd hardly said a word to Mrs. Darbee after that first, unproductive conversation. She was startled when the old woman spoke sharply to her.

"It's none of my business," she said, "but if you scowl too much, your face may stick that way. It would be a great pity. You've a few good features, you know. Your grandmother's cheekbones and your mother's pert nose. It's a shame you inherited Tunis's chin, but you certainly needn't stick it out in that stubborn way he does. Calls attention to it. Makes you look hostile. Not a good quality in a young girl." The train whistle sounded. It was long and loud and ear-shattering, but Mrs. Darbee kept right on nagging. "And don't purse your lips in a thin, hard line like that," she finished. "Look agreeable when you meet your cousins for the first time, and you'll find your new life much easier."

Julia forced herself to smile and thank Mrs. Darbee for her concern, but deep down she was seething. Everyone claimed to know what was best for her, but no one ever asked her what she wanted. It wasn't fair!

They were thrown back against the cushioned seats as the engine jolted and jerked its way up to the wooden platform that served as a train station. It let out several noisy blasts of steam, then shuddered to a stop.

The hours on the train had crept slowly by, but now everything happened so quickly that it took Julia's breath away. Mrs. Darbee hugged her and wished her well, nearly smothering her in an ample, lilac-scented bosom. Then a uniformed porter helped

Julia get her carpetbag out from under the seat and unloaded her trunk from the luggage car.

Abruptly, she found herself all alone. Cousin Lucy and her husband, Gil Tanner, were nowhere in sight, and no one else came forward to claim her either. Only an old yellow dog watched her arrival, and he was more interested in scratching a flea than in welcoming her to town.

I can't stay here, Julia thought. Her hands were sweating under her white cotton gloves as she looked in vain for another human being. She'd been told Liberty Falls was the nearest place to Cousin Gil's farm in Strongtown with a depot for taking on and letting off passengers. It should be a thriving community, teeming with life. Instead it was small and dreary and deserted at midday. She could see a few houses, one hotel, a schoolhouse, a store, and a blacksmith shop. Not a single building rose over two stories high, and she had to look at them through a dismal gray haze. The air was full of soot from the engine.

"All aboard!" the conductor called, although there were no passengers waiting.

I could get back on, Julia thought, and hide. If I keep stowing away on trains going west, maybe I can even get to San Francisco before Mama and Papa embark. Then they'd have to take me along. She advanced two hesitant steps toward the train as it started to move. Her trunk was in the way. She'd have to leave it.

Julia's eyes stung. The train was moving faster and faster. More gritty cinders fell on her as it heaved a last steamy sigh and stranded her in a billowing cloud of black smoke.