

*Remember  
When*

*Judith  
McNaught*

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*To St. Jude, Patron Saint of Impossible Things*

*You put a lot of overtime in on this one—  
Thank you.*

## Acknowledgments

This is the page where, traditionally, authors offer a few words of thanks to those people who have been rather helpful, or extremely tolerant, during the gestation of their novel. In the case of this novel, which has taken forever to write, there is not enough space on this page to *properly* thank even one of the following people for their enormous help, understanding, and support. I can only hope each of you will realize how important you were, and you are, to me . . .

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### And to

John and Whitney Shelley and Clay McNaught—for being my family *and* my friends.

# Chapter 1

*Houston, 1979*

**D**IANA, ARE YOU STILL AWAKE? I'D LIKE TO TALK TO YOU."

Diana stopped in the act of turning off the lamp beside her bed and leaned back against the pillows. "Okay," she called.

"How's the jet lag, honey?" her father asked as he walked toward her bed. "Are you exhausted?" At forty-three, Robert Foster was a tall, broad-shouldered Houston oilman with prematurely gray hair who normally exuded self-assurance, but not tonight. Tonight, he looked distinctly uneasy, and Diana knew why. Although she was only fourteen, she wasn't silly enough to think he'd come there to talk about whether she had jet lag. He wanted to talk to her about her new stepmother and stepsister, whom she'd met for the first time this afternoon when she arrived home from a vacation in Europe with school friends. "I'm okay," she said.

"Diana—" he began; then he hesitated, sat down on the bed beside her, and took her hand in his. After a moment, he began again. "I know how strange it must have seemed to you to come home today and find out I'd remarried. Please believe that I would never have married Mary without giving you a chance to get to

know each other if I hadn't been positive, absolutely *positive*, that the two of you will learn to love each other. You do like her, don't you?" he asked anxiously, searching her face. "You said you did—"

Diana nodded, but she didn't understand why he'd married someone he hardly knew and she'd never met until today. During the years since her mother died, he'd dated some really beautiful and very nice Houston women, but before things got too serious, he'd always introduced them to Diana and insisted the three of them spend time together. Now he'd actually married someone, but it was a lady she'd never set eyes on before. "Mary seems really nice," she said after a moment. "I just don't understand why you were in such a hurry."

He looked sheepish, but his answer was unquestionably heartfelt. "There will be a few times in your life when all your instincts will tell you to do something, something that defies logic, upsets your plans, and may even seem crazy to others. When that happens, you *do* it. Listen to your instincts and ignore everything else. Ignore logic, ignore the odds, ignore the complications, and just go for it."

"And that's what you did?"

He nodded. "I knew within hours of meeting Mary that she was just what I wanted for myself, and for you, and I knew when I met Corey that the four of us were going to be an exceptionally happy family. However, all my instincts warned me that if I gave Mary more than a little time to decide, she'd start thinking about all the obstacles and agonizing over them, and that in the end she'd turn me down."

Loyalty and common sense made that possibility seem entirely unlikely to Diana. Previous women had gone to absurd lengths to attract and hold her father's interest. "It seems to me that practically every woman you've taken out has wanted you."

"No, honey, most of them wanted what I could give them in the form of financial security and social acceptance. Only a few have truly wanted me."

"But are you sure that Mary truly wanted you?" Diana asked, thinking of his statement that Mary would have turned him down.

Her father grinned, his eyes warming with affection. "I'm *completely* sure she did, and she does."

"Then why would she have turned you down?"

His smile widened. "Because she's the opposite of mercenary and

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status conscious. Mary is very intelligent, but she and Corey have led a simple life in a tiny little town where no one is wealthy, not by Houston standards. She fell in love with me as quickly and deeply as I fell in love with her, and she agreed to marry me within a week, but when she realized what sort of life we live here, she started trying to back out.

"She was worried that Corey and she wouldn't fit in, that they'd make some sort of inexcusable social blunder and embarrass us. The longer she thought about it, the more convinced she became that she'd fail us."

He reached out and gently smoothed a lock of shining chestnut hair from Diana's cheek. "Just imagine—Mary was willing to toss away all the material things I can give her, all the things everyone else was so anxious to grab, because she didn't want to fail me as a wife or you as a mother. Those are the things that are important to her."

Diana had liked her new stepmother well enough when she met her today, but the tenderness in her father's eyes and the love in his voice when he talked of Mary carried an enormous amount of additional weight with Diana. "I like her a lot," she confessed.

A smile of relief dawned across his face. "I knew you would. She likes you, too. She said you're very sweet and very poised. She said you'd have had every right to get hysterical this afternoon when you walked in the front door and met a stepmother you'd never heard about before. And wait till you meet your new grandparents," he added enthusiastically.

"Corey said they're really neat," Diana replied, thinking back over all the information her thirteen-year-old stepsister had provided during their first day together.

"They are. They're good, honest, hardworking people who laugh a lot and love each other a lot. Corey's grandfather is an excellent gardener, an amateur inventor, and a skillful carpenter. Her grandmother is very artistic and very talented at handcrafts. Now," he said, looking a little tense again, "tell me what you think about Corey."

Diana was quiet for a moment, trying to put her feelings about her new stepsister into words; then she leaned forward, wrapped her arms around her knees, and smiled. "Well, she's different from the other girls I know. She's . . . friendly and honest, and she says



what's on her mind. She hasn't been anywhere but Texas, and she doesn't try to act cool and sophisticated, but she's done lots of things I never have. Oh, and she thinks *you're* practically a king," Diana added with a grin.

"What a clever, discerning young lady!"

"Her own father ran out on her mom and her when Corey was just a baby," Diana said, sobered by the thought of such an unspeakable act by a parent.

"His stupidity and irresponsibility are my good luck, and I intend to make certain Mary and Corey feel lucky, too. Want to help me pull that off?" he asked, standing up and smiling at her.

Diana nodded. "You bet," she said.

"Just remember, Corey hasn't had a lot of the advantages you've had, so take it slow and teach her the ropes."

"Okay, I will."

"That's my girl." He leaned over and kissed the top of her head. "You and Mary are going to be wonderful friends."

He started away, but Diana's quiet announcement made him turn back and stop. "Corey would like to call you Dad."

"I didn't know that," Robert Foster said, his voice turning gruff with emotion. "Mary and I hoped she might want to someday, but I thought it might take a long, long time, before she came around to that." He studied Diana for a long moment, and then hesitantly asked, "How do you feel—about Corey calling me Dad—I mean?"

Diana grinned. "It was my idea."

Across the hall, Mary Britton Foster was seated on her thirteen-year-old daughter's bed and running out of small talk. "So you had a nice time with Diana today?" she asked Corey for the third time.

"Yep."

"And you enjoyed going over to the Hayward children's house and riding their horses when Diana took you there this afternoon?"

"Mom, we're all teenagers; you aren't supposed to call us children."

"Sorry," Mary said, idly rubbing Corey's leg beneath the blankets.

"And it wasn't what you'd call a house; it's so big, it's practically a motel!"

"That big?" Mary teased.

Corey nodded. "It's about the size of our house."

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The fact that she'd referred to Diana and Robert's house as "our house" was very revealing and immensely reassuring to Mary. "And do the Haywards have a barn at their house?"

"They call it a stable, but it's the same as a barn, only it looks like a beautiful stone house from the outside, and it's as clean as one on the inside. They even have a guy who lives down at the stable and looks after the horses. They call him a groom, and his name is Cole, and the girls think he's a complete hunk. He's just gotten out of college at—I forget where—but I think he said it's here in Houston."

"Imagine that," Mary said, shaking her head in amazement. "Now it takes a college degree just to get a job looking after horses in a barn—er—stable."

Corey suppressed a laugh. "No, I meant he's just finished the semester, and pretty soon he starts another one. The horses are just awesome!" Corey added, switching to the topic of primary interest to her. "I get to ride again at Barb Hayward's birthday party next week. Barb invited me, but I think Diana asked her to do it. I met a bunch of Barb and Diana's friends today. I didn't think they liked me very much, but Diana said I was just imagining it."

"I see. And what do you think of Diana?"

"Diana's . . ." Corey hesitated, thinking. "Diana's cool. She told me she's always wanted a sister, and maybe that's why she's being so nice to me. She's not a snob at all. She even told me I could borrow any of her clothes that I want."

"That's very nice of her."

Corey nodded. "And when I told her I liked the way she wears her hair, she said we could practice different styles on each other."

"And . . . um . . . did she say anything about anyone else?"

"Like who?" Corey asked with sham confusion.

"Like me, and you know it."

"Let me think. Oh, yeah, I remember now! She said you looked mean and sneaky, and she said you'll probably make her stay home and scrub floors while I get to go to balls and dance with princes. I told her she was probably right, but that I'd ask you to let her wear the glass slipper as long as she didn't leave the house."

"Corey!—"

Laughing, Corey leaned forward and hugged her mother as she finally told the truth. "Diana said you seemed very nice and she likes you. She asked if you were strict, and I said you were

sometimes, but then you feel guilty and bake up batches of cookies to make up for it."

"Did she really say she likes me?"

Sobering, Corey nodded emphatically. "Diana's mother died when she was only five. I can't imagine what life would be like if I didn't have you, Mom—"

Mary hugged her daughter close and laid her cheek on Corey's blond hair. "Diana hasn't had a lot of the advantages you have. Try to remember that. Having lots of clothes to wear and a big bedroom isn't the same as having Grandpa and Grandma to love you and teach you all the things you learned when we lived with them."

Corey's smile faded a little. "I'm going to miss them something terrible."

"Me, too."

"I told Diana about them, and she was really interested. Could I take her to Long Valley sometime soon so she can meet them?"

"Yes, of course. Or maybe we could ask Robert to let them come for a visit."

Mary stood up and started to leave, but Corey's hesitant voice stopped her. "Mom, Diana said I could call Robert, Dad. Do you think he'd mind?"

"I think he'd *love* it!" She looked a little sad then and added, "Maybe someday Diana might want to call me Mom."

"Tomorrow," Corey said with a knowing smile.

"Tomorrow, what?"

"She's going to call you Mom, starting tomorrow."

"Oh, Corey, isn't she wonderful?" Mary said, her eyes filling with tears.

Corey rolled her eyes, but she didn't deny it. "It was my idea that she call you Mom. All she did was say she wanted to do it."

"You're wonderful, too," Mrs. Foster said with a laugh as she kissed her daughter. She turned out the light and closed the door when she left. Corey lay there, thinking about the conversation and wondering if Diana was asleep. After several moments, she scrambled out of bed and pulled on an old plaid flannel robe over her nightshirt emblazoned with "SAVE THE TURTLES" across the front.

The hallway was dark as pitch as she groped her way across the hall toward the door of Diana's room. Her fingertips finally encoun-

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tered the doorframe, and she raised her hand to knock just as the door flew open, startling a muffled squeal from her. "I was just coming over to see if you were awake," Diana whispered, backing up and beckoning Corey into her room.

"Did your dad have a talk with you tonight?" Corey asked, perching on the edge of Diana's bed and admiring the cream lace ruffles at the throat and wrists of Diana's high-waisted, pale rose robe and the delicate lace trim on her matching quilted slippers.

Diana nodded and sat down beside her. "Yes. Did you mom have one with you?"

"Yep."

"I think they were afraid we weren't going to like each other."

Corey bit her bottom lip and then blurted, "Did you happen to ask your dad about me calling him Dad?"

"I did, and he loved the idea," Diana said, keeping her voice low so that this cozy pajama party for two wouldn't be ended by parental decree.

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. In fact, he got all choked up." Diana looked down at her lap and drew a long breath, then lifted her eyes to Corey's. "Did you mention to your mom about me calling her Mom?"

"Yes."

"Did she say anything?"

"She said you're wonderful," Corey replied, rolling her eyes in feigned disagreement.

"Did she say anything else?"

"She couldn't," Corey replied. "She was crying."

The two girls eyed one another in smiling silence, then, as if by mutual agreement, flopped onto their backs. "I think," Diana said after a moment's contemplation, "this could turn out to be really, really *cool*!"

Corey nodded with absolute conviction. "Totally cool," she proclaimed.

Yet later that night, as she lay in her own bed, Corey found it hard to believe that things had turned out so well with Diana.

Earlier that day, she would never have believed it was possible. When Diana's father had married Corey's mother after a two-week courtship and brought his new wife and daughter to his Houston home, Corey had dreaded meeting her stepsister. Based on what

little she'd already discovered about Diana, Corey figured they were so different they were probably going to hate each other. Besides being born rich and growing up in this huge mansion, Diana was a year older than Corey and a straight-A student; and when Corey took a peek into Diana's feminine bedroom, everything was so neat it gave her the creeps. Based on what she'd heard and seen, she felt sure that Diana was going to be disgustingly perfect and a complete snob. She was even more sure Diana was going to think Corey was a dumb hick and a slob.

Her first glimpse of Diana when she walked into the foyer this morning had confirmed Corey's worst fears. Diana was petite, with a narrow waist, slim hips, and real breasts, which made Corey feel like a deformed, flat-chested giant by contrast. Diana was dressed like a model from *Seventeen* magazine, in a short tan skirt, cream-colored tights, and a tan-and-blue plaid vest topped off by a jaunty tan blazer with an emblem on the front. Corey was wearing jeans and a sweatshirt.

And yet, despite Corey's absolute conviction that Diana would be a conceited snob, Diana had been the one who broke the ice. It was Diana who had admired Corey's hand-painted sweatshirt with the horse on the front, and Diana who'd first admitted that she'd always wanted a sister. Later that afternoon, Diana had taken Corey over to the Haywards' house so Corey could take pictures of the Haywards' horses with the new camera Diana's father had given her.

Diana didn't seem to resent the fancy camera her father had bought for Corey or hate the idea of sharing him with Corey. And if she thought Corey was a dumb hick, she definitely hadn't shown it. Next week, Diana was taking her to Barb Hayward's birthday party, where everyone was going to ride horses. Diana said her friends would become Corey's friends, too, and Corey hoped she was right.

That last part didn't matter nearly as much as having a sister so close to her own age to spend time with and talk to—and Corey wouldn't be doing all the taking either—she had some things to give Diana. For one thing, Diana had led an awfully sheltered life, in Corey's opinion. Earlier that day, she'd admitted she'd never climbed a really big tree, never eaten berries right off the vine, and never skipped rocks across a pond.

Closing her eyes, Corey sighed with relief.

## Chapter 2

COLE HARRISON LOOKED OVER HIS SHOULDER AT DIANA FOSTER, WHO was hovering in the open doorway of the stable, her hands clasped behind her back, watching her new stepsister in the riding ring with the other girls who were attending Barbara Hayward's birthday party. He picked up a brush and a currycomb and stopped on his way into one of the stalls. "Would you like me to saddle a horse for you?" he asked.

"No, thank you," she replied, and her soft voice was so very polite and adult that Cole bit back a smile.

He'd been working as a groom at the Hayward estate for the last two years while he went to college, and during that time, he'd seen and heard enough to form some strong impressions about the teenage daughters of Houston's ultrarich. Among those observations was that the thirteen- and fourteen-year-old girls who hung around with Barbara Hayward were all crazy about boys and crazy about horses, and they were desperately eager to perfect their skills with both. In addition to their obsession with boys, they were totally

obsessed with their looks, their clothes, and their status with their peers. Their personalities ranged from giddy to sulky, and although they could be charming, they were also demanding, conceited, and catty.

Some of the girls were already raiding their parents' liquor cabinets, most of them wore too much makeup, and *all* of them tried to flirt with him. Last year, their efforts had been amusingly clumsy and easy to deflect, but they were becoming bolder as they grew older. As a result, he was beginning to feel like a sex object for a bunch of single-minded, precocious adolescent girls.

That wouldn't have been nearly as exasperating if they'd restricted themselves to blushing and giggling, but lately they'd progressed to come-hither looks and languishing stares. A month ago, one of Barbara's friends had taken the lead in the "chase" by boldly asking Cole's opinion on French kissing. Haley Vincennes, who was the unchallenged head of the clique, instantly reclaimed her position as lead by informing Cole that she thought he had "a great butt."

Until a week ago, when Diana Foster brought her new stepsister down to the stable to introduce her to Barbara, Cole had rarely seen Diana, but the petite brunette had always struck him as a refreshing exception. Everything about her was appealing and wholesome, and yet he sensed there were depths to her that the other girls lacked. She had hair the color of dark copper and a pair of startlingly large, long-lashed eyes—clear, luminous, mesmerizing green eyes that regarded him, and the rest of her world, with genuine interest. They were expressive eyes, bright with lively intelligence, glowing with wit, and yet filled with a sweetness that never failed to make Cole feel like smiling at her.

When he'd finished brushing the mare, Cole patted her flank and left the stall, closing the heavy oak door behind him. As he turned to put the currycomb and brush on a shelf, he was surprised to see that Diana hadn't left. She was still standing in the doorway, her hands clasped tightly behind her back, her expression anxious as she observed the noisy activities in the riding ring and the practice area outside it.

She was looking so intently at whatever she was watching that Cole leaned to the left to get a better angle of the riding ring. At first,

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all he noticed was twenty girls who were laughing and shouting as they watched each other trotting in figure eights or jumping low hurdles. Then he noticed that Corey, Diana's new stepsister, was completely alone at the far side of the corral. Corey shouted a compliment to Haley Vincennes as she rode past with three other girls, but Haley stared right through Corey as if a compliment from her was completely meaningless, then said something to the other girls that made them look at Corey and laugh. Corey's shoulders drooped; she turned her horse and trotted out of the ring as if she'd been verbally ejected instead of silently shunned.

Diana's hands tightened convulsively behind her back, and Cole saw her bite down hard on her lower lip, reminding him of a distressed mother bird who knows her chick isn't doing well outside the nest. He was both surprised and impressed by Diana's obvious dismay over her new stepsister's plight, but he also knew her hope of seeing Corey accepted was probably futile.

He'd been present last week when she first brought Corey down to the stables and introduced her to Barbara and several of the other girls who'd come to the stable to see a new foal. He had witnessed the stunned silence that followed Diana's introduction, and he'd seen the expressions of hostile superiority as the young debutantes-to-be discovered Corey's background and judged her an inferior.

That day, Diana had seemed to take for smiling granted that Corey would be made welcome by her wealthy friends. In Cole's opinion, she was in for some sharp and lasting disappointments, and based on Diana's worried frown now, she was arriving at the same conclusion.

Touched by the intensity of the emotions playing across her expressive face, Cole tried to distract her. "Corey's a pretty decent rider. I don't think you have to watch her that closely or worry about her."

She turned partway around and gave him a reassuring smile. "I wasn't worrying just then; I was thinking. Sometimes I frown when I think."

"Oh," Cole said, trying to protect her dignity by pretending he believed her. "A lot of people do that." He thought for something else to say. "What about you, do you like horses?"



"Very much," she said in her strangely adult and oddly endearing way. With her hands still clasped behind her back, she turned fully toward him, obviously willing to continue the conversation. "I brought them a bag of apples," she added, nodding toward a large brown sack just inside the door.

Since she apparently preferred to feed them, not ride them, Cole leapt to the obvious conclusion. "Do you know how to ride?"

She surprised him again by nodding. "Yes."

"Let me see if I have this straight," he joked. "When you come here, you don't ride, even when all your friends are riding, right?"

"Right."

"And you do know how to ride, and you do like horses very much. Right?"

"Right."

"In fact, you like horses so much that you bring apples for them, right?"

"Right again."

He hooked his thumbs in his belt loops and studied her curiously. "I don't understand," he admitted.

"I like them much *better* when I'm on the ground."

There was embarrassed laughter in her voice, and it was so contagious that Cole grinned. "Don't tell me—let me guess. You were thrown and got hurt, is that it?"

"You got it," she admitted. "I rushed a fence and got a broken wrist."

"The only way to get over your fear is to get right back on," Cole lectured.

"I did that," she assured him gravely, but with a twinkle in her green eyes.

"And?"

"And I got a concussion."

Cole's stomach growled, and his thoughts shifted to apples. He lived on a tight budget, and he seemed to have an appetite that was never satisfied. "I'd better put that bag of apples away before it gets stepped on or someone trips over it," he said. Harrison picked up the bag and started toward the rear of the stable, fully intending to share in the horses' bounty. As he passed one of the stalls near the end of the long aisle, an ancient named Buckshot put his head out