

*December 1854*

*Presque Isle Lighthouse*

*Lake Huron, Michigan*

*My name is Isabelle Thornton and I sit down at my father's desk this winter day to put into words all of the many thoughts and experiences I've had since the big storm hit in October two months ago.*

*Isn't it strange how often the best things in life come out of a storm? It's a phenomenon I don't understand, but yet that I've learned to accept.*

*It's our human instinct to try to avoid the difficulties and storms that life may bring us. We want to hide away as if by so doing we can escape the impending hardship. And yet, usually there's nothing we can do and no place we can go to avoid the storms. They have a will and mind of their own and bear down upon us anyway.*

*My storm began when my mother went blind. Even though my parents never said anything to me, I knew they worried that the same would happen to me eventually too. I prayed they were wrong, but knew they were right when I began to lose my night vision the same way my mother had when the disease had first afflicted her.*

*I decided to prepare myself for the coming storm. I wanted to see as much as I could before my world went completely black. I wanted to draw and dissect*

every miniscule detail of every insect, every leaf, every rock, every aspect of the world around me. In doing so, I hoped I could memorize the details, that I could imprint them into my mind so that even after I went blind I'd still be able to see them.

I also resigned myself to a life of singleness. Although my father never said anything after my mother died, I had the feeling he agreed that marriage was out of the question for me. How could I plan a life with a man when I had no future? I didn't want to be a burden on a husband. And I certainly didn't want to have any children for fear of passing on the disease to them.

I decided that I'd live out my life here at the Presque Isle lighthouse with my father. Even though I didn't want to burden him either, I knew he'd take care of me, and do everything he could to keep me safe.

Perhaps I didn't have much to look forward to, but I had a wonderful home and a loving father. What more did a woman like me need?

As it turns out, there was more I needed. And I didn't realize it until an early winter gale blew in a very special man out of a shipwreck. Henry Cole washed up on our beach injured and half-dead. My father and I brought him into the lighthouse to try to save his life.

*In saving his life, he saved mine. He doesn't realize the impact he had on me. But in the two short months he lived with us, he brought me more joy than I'd ever known in the rest of my nineteen years. I didn't realize how lonely, isolated, and cynical I'd become until he showed me a new way of living. He taught me how to laugh, play, and live life to the fullest. His companionship, his friendship, and his fellowship enriched my life.*

*For the first time in my life, I fell in love. Even though I knew I shouldn't love him, that we didn't have a future together, that I wouldn't ever burden him with my blindness, I couldn't stop the love that was blossoming.*

*And he didn't want to stop the love from growing either. He told me that I was the first woman he'd ever loved and asked me to marry him. At first I resisted, hadn't thought I could marry him, but he showed me how to love unconditionally. He learned about my impending blindness and told me it didn't change his love, that it didn't matter to him, that he wanted to marry me anyway.*

*Even though he's gone now and I have no hope that he'll return, I know that he loved me. I won't doubt it, even if he never comes back.*

*But what I know even more is that I can't put my hope in the things of this earth any longer. My life doesn't have to end if I go blind. Or because Henry isn't a part of it anymore.*

*I've realized I can't put my hope in having my sight. I can't put my hope in a man. I can't put my hope in my circumstances. All of those things are fleeting. They'll fade. They won't last forever.*

*Instead, I have to put my hope in the Giver of Life. He's the only One who can truly help me through the storms of life. He's the only one who can give everlasting hope, the kind of hope that is strong enough to see us through any difficulty we face.*

*I don't know how many days I have left until I lose my sight altogether. It could be days. Weeks. Perhaps years. But the truth is that it's coming. Eventually. And there's nothing I can do to change that fact.*

*But there's one thing I can change. And that's my outlook. Just because I'm going blind doesn't mean I have to give up hope of living.*

*I choose to have hope.*

*Will you?*

*Isabelle Thornton*

*P.S. I pray that my story and the accompanying wooden cross will give you hope for as long as you need it. Henry made the cross out of the wood that washed up on shore from his shipwreck. He made it to remind him to continue to have hope and to pray. May it remind you never to give up hope. And then make sure you to pass my letter and cross on to someone else who needs hope.*