

“Christmas Remembered”

a prequel to *THREAD THE HALLS* by Lea Wait

Wreaths made at home or by friends hung on most Haven Harbor doors. People full of secrets and holiday cheer smiled at everyone they met. Carols filled the air in downtown Haven Harbor, as store owners decorated their windows with their most tempting merchandise. Clean white snow covered dead leaves left by autumn and torn fast food wrappers tossed by careless passersby.

Mama always had a job; restaurants needed waitresses for holiday parties, so she was happy, and had money to spend. Gram made different cookies every day. Smells of ginger and spices and molasses and lemon mixed with the pine scent from our gaudily decorated tree in the living room.

Christmas in Haven Harbor was my favorite time of year.

Gram and I had always strung popcorn and cranberries for the tree, and made paper chains.

But the year I was in kindergarten was the best Christmas yet. Every school day in December we sang Christmas songs and colored Christmas pictures, drew Christmas trees, and made Christmas ornaments to put on our classroom’s tree and then take home. We generously poured glue on dried starfish and sand dollars and shells Miss Alison had collected during the summer, and sprinkled them all with red and green and gold glitter.

Patently she showed us how to paint some starfish to look like Santas. We cut out stars and circles and snowflakes, and made papier mache frames to hold our school pictures, which we could give to our parents as gifts and then hang on our trees at home.

I loved every moment, and everything we made. But the ornament I was most proud of was the tinfoil star for the top of the tree. Miss Alison had straightened out sixteen wire coat hangers, and helped us bend them into stars. Wire at the bottom would hold them on a tree. The silver tinfoil sparkled as we carefully covered our stars.

Miss Alison knew each one of us, and knew our families. I didn't have a dad, so instead she helped me make a picture frame for Gram. But I insisted the silver star was the best; it was for Mama.

On the last day of school before the Christmas holidays I carefully carried my creations home. Mama was at work, but Gram exclaimed over all the ornaments, and helped me hang them on the tree.

I kept the special star separate.

On Christmas Eve Mama and Gram and I turned off all our lights except those on the tree and the fire in the fireplace. We sat and listened to carols and ate Christmas cookies and ribbon candy. And I couldn't wait any longer.

I ran upstairs to my room and pulled my special present for Mama from under my bed, where I'd hidden it.

She opened it carefully. "A star, Angie. It's perfect. It's just what we need!"

I glowed as she held me up high and I fastened that that star on the very top of our tree, where the tinfoil reflected all the colored lights. I could smell the mixture of the pine tree and Mama's perfume and the spic of the lemon and molasses cookies.

I'm 28 now. I haven't celebrated Christmas in Haven Harbor for ten years. But this year I'm home again. Mama's gone, but Grams' still here, and I want this Christmas to be the best ever.

But, first, I have to find that star.