

DOLPHIN SKY

By Ginny Rorby

Chapter 34

Kirk scrawls a note on a piece of Buddy's notebook paper and sends it with her when she leaves to visit Jane for the final time before her report.

Jane bursts out laughing. "I'm sorry." She raises her hands. "It's an invitation to have Thanksgiving dinner with your family." She shakes her head and laughs again. "That's very nice. I'm not laughing at that. It's the note at the bottom. 'If you have a special recipe for turkey, it would make a nice change.'"

"It sure would." Buddy laughs, too. "We ain't never had a turkey we could chew."

"I don't know how to cook turkey either, but I still have all my own teeth, so I'll be brave and accept the invitation. Tell him thanks and, though I bet he already suspects this, I'm a great potato masher."

Early Thanksgiving morning, Buddy covers their kitchen table with a white sheet. She sets a place for Jane opposite the Admiral, and makes sure all Jane's silverware has the same patterned handles.

She roots through a cupboard looking for real paper napkins instead of paper towels like they usually use. From her grandmother's old recipe box, she takes four blank but yellowed index cards, folds them in half, and carefully writes each of their names on one to mark their places at the table. In the center, where the turkey will go, she cuts and lays a circle of sea grape branches, leaving a space just the right size for the platter.

She borrows candle holders from Iris, then goes back across the road to see if she has any spare candles.

"Is there something special going on at your house?"

"Jane Conroy, the stone crab lady, is having dinner with us."

Iris's eyebrows go up. "I've been hearing about her. Nice of you all to feed her."

"Don't say nothing, but I've been thinking Dad should be looking for a new wife, and she'd make a good mom. She don't cook, but that don't matter all that much."

"Your dad and a lady biologist. That would be an interesting match." Iris's eyes twinkle, as she lines up a selection of candles on the kitchen counter.

All were used, but Buddy chooses two green ones, because they will look nice with the sea grape leaves.

At home, she lights the taller of the two, and lets it burn down until they are the same height.

Kirk is at the stove when Jane arrives. Though she parks near the kitchen door, Buddy goes out the front to greet her and brings her through the living room to the kitchen.

Jane smiles and crosses to the stove to shake Kirk's hand, but when she turns and sees the table, her place card, and the rose from Iris's garden on her plate, her face goes soft. Tears well in her eyes, before she blinks them back. "Thank you." She hugs Buddy. "I've never felt so welcome."

Kirk takes the potato masher from a drawer and hands it to her. "I was told this is your specialty." He smiles and jerks his thumb toward the pot billowing steam on the stove. "Do a good job, the potatoes may be the only part of the meal we can chew."



Buddy backs toward the door, grinning. "I'll get the Admiral." Neither answers. Both have turned to their jobs: Jane is testing the doneness of the potatoes with a fork, Kirk is looking at the cornbread, which is stuck to the pan. Jane glances at his struggle to bring even one chunk out whole. "Looks like it would be easier to cut the pan away," she says.

When her dad laughs, Buddy releases the fingers she has crossed behind her back, smiles and slips out of the kitchen.

"Well, will you look at this," her grandfather says as she wheels him to his place at the table.

Buddy blushes.

"We ain't never eaten as fancy as this." He winks at Jane.

"Now that we're all here," Jane says, "I have a little something for each of you." She'd left a bag on the sofa in the living room; she comes back carrying it. She pulls out a bottle of wine for Kirk-good wine-which she must have gotten when they were in Miami. For the Admiral, she has framed the picture she took of Buddy leaning over the railing at the Seaquarium, nose to nose with Hugo.

"And I brought this for you." She hands Buddy a soft, poorly wrapped package. "I thought it would match the skirt you wore to Miami."

Buddy opens it carefully. The red V-necked cardigan is folded so the monogram, EM, in curly letters just below the left shoulder, is the first thing she sees.

Jane pats her hand. "It fits you now, Elizabeth Martin."

Buddy glances at her father. His eyes soften. "It's beautiful," he says.