

## Chapter 1

### Moving

Sherrie Raines cast one last, longing glance around the bare house... searching. For what? She was positive she hadn't left anything behind. Memories maybe, hiding here where the boys had grown up.

She could hear them tossing a football around on the front lawn and pictured her husband Jack outside by the moving van getting impatient as he waited for her. Still, she was reluctant to leave. When she stepped out the door, it would be for good. It would be like putting her seal of approval on their move to Maine, and she wasn't sure she was ready to do that. Yet.

"Just a minute," she called out the window to Jack. He was leaning against the fender of the van, watching the boys with a rare smile. She wished she hadn't packed the camera. "I'm just going to check upstairs again. Then I'll be right out."

He nodded indulgently, and she closed the window, unconsciously locking it too. Against what? Robbers? She lingered in the hallway, in the stairwell, in each of the bedrooms upstairs. Scott's room, Caleb's room, both spotless. Sherrie wouldn't have considered leaving a mess for the next owner to clean up. What would they think of her?

She leaned against the windowsill and watched them through the sparkling glass. Caleb tossed the ball to Scott, who ran for it as if his life depended on it. Caleb followed Scott's progress with his eyes, but his face never lost its impassive, sullen expression.

Sherrie knew he didn't want to leave Tennessee, his friends, and all their relatives. Ever since Jack announced they'd be moving and had the house built in Maine, Caleb had become withdrawn. A few times she'd caught him scribbling in a notebook and decided he'd taken to journaling as a way to express himself. Jack said it was healthy, but she wasn't sure.

Scott, on the other hand, was ecstatic about the move. But then, she mused, he was ecstatic about everything from broccoli to math homework to chores. It didn't seem to matter to him. She waved when he saw her in the window and grinned. Jack pointed to his watch. She nodded vigorously.

Time to go. Time for the final goodbye. She ran her hand gently along the windowsill, picturing Caleb's tousled five-year-old head

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bowed there saying his prayers. Shaking herself, she hurried from the room before the threatening tears could spill.

All the lights... off. Windows... closed. She pulled the big outside door shut behind her, turned the key in the lock one last time, and marched briskly down the steps. She dropped the key in Jack's outstretched hand.

"Ready?"

She nodded and attempted a businesslike smile. "Ready."

"Do you have the map?"

She patted her purse. "Right here. I'll give it to Caleb. I've got the route marked in red. We shouldn't have any trouble. I'll drive slowly anyway."

She scooted into the car and buckled up, glancing in the rearview mirror to be sure Scott did too. Caleb reached into the back for his things. He was going to sit up front with her and read the map. As he picked up his notebook, she saw him swat at Scott.

"Knock it off," she warned. "I don't want to have to spend the whole trip watching you two. You're not babies anymore."

"Aw, Mom," Caleb protested in that hoarse, squeaky, high-low voice that kept making her do a double-take whenever he spoke lately. She stifled a grin. "Tell him to stop making fun of me."

"I'm not."

Sherrie rolled her eyes. "Get in, Caleb. Hurry up; your father's waiting." He sat down and buckled up. On his lap was the yellow notebook. She jerked her head at it as she pulled out in front of the van and waved at Jack.

"What are you writing about, Caleb?"

He squirmed uncomfortably. "Nothing."

"Well, you must be writing about something," she probed.

"Just stuff," he replied evasively.

Sherrie let the subject drop, but she wondered why he wouldn't talk to her about it. Lately, she was seeing a new side of Caleb. One she was very uncomfortable with. This Caleb didn't want her around, moped around the house, and wrote about "stuff" in a notebook that had "PRIVATE PROPERTY OF CALEB RAINES" written across the front in big letters.

"Someday," she promised herself, "I'm going to read it." She'd never seen the book except when Caleb was writing in it, so she was pretty sure he hid it somewhere in his room. She toyed with the idea of demanding to read it but decided that it would probably make him stop

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writing in it, and she wouldn't learn anything except what he'd already written. Better to read it sometime when he wasn't around so he wouldn't know.

"Anyway," she argued to herself, "there isn't anything in there that I shouldn't be able to read. He is my son, after all." They bumped softly along the highway, and Caleb's pen scratched without pause. Sherrie eyed the scrawling words uneasily. What was he writing about? Her? The move? Scott? What?

She bit her lip in frustration. She'd find out sometime, she determined. Sometime soon. She tried to take her mind off the notebook by mentally unpacking the boxes. Most of their belongings had already been shipped up to Maine the week before. All that was left was in the van Jack drove.

A big sign welcomed them to Virginia. "We just left Tennessee, boys," she informed them, forcing herself to sound cheerful. "Say goodbye to the old home state."

"Goodbye, Tennessee!" whooped Scott obligingly. Caleb looked up briefly, then returned to his scribbling. Sherrie spent some more time worrying about his writing and mentioned it to Jack that night as they tried to sleep at a plush hotel in Pennsylvania where they stopped for the night.

"Oh, don't worry about it." Jack yawned. "It's probably just a phase."

"But I want to know what he's writing about." "Nothing. Stuff. He's fourteen years old. What can he have to write about?"

"I don't know," she replied, still suspicious. "Did you ever have a diary when you were his age?"

"No. I can't write. Why do you think I became a doctor?" Sherrie giggled. "Stop. I'm serious. I've been thinking of reading it sometime when he's not around," she confided. Then added hastily, "Just to see what it Bays.9

She felt Jack shrug. "So? Read it. What harm can it do? I'm telling you he writes about nothing."

Sherrie relaxed, glad that Jack thought it was OK too. The nagging objection in the back of her mind retreated into silence. Now she just needed the right opportunity. She sighed deeply and snuggled into Jack's shoulder.

The next morning, everyone was irritable. Around lunchtime, Sherrie decided she'd rather jog the rest of the way than be cooped up in the car with her whiny offspring. At a rest stop, she made Scott ride

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the rest of the way with his father. Jack shot her a questioning glance, but a quick glare dared him to ask why.

The remainder of the trip was made in a silence broken only when Sherrie commented on the seascape passing fleetingly on the right. Once she rolled the window down and was surprised to smell the ocean, briny and thick. The air seemed to invade the car and settle over them like a cool, moist blanket.

As the sun was about to dip behind the rolling hills that Maine called mountains, they pulled into their driveway. Sherrie sat behind the steering wheel feeling the stillness for a moment before climbing wearily out of the car.

Piles of fresh dirt were mounded in the yard. Jack reminded her that the builders would be back to grade the lawn later in the week. She regarded them uneasily.

“How soon?”

“How soon what?”

“How soon will they be back? I don’t like those piles.”

“By Wednesday. They’ve got a few things to finish in the house too, remember?”

Sherrie groaned. “No, I’d forgotten. How am I supposed to unpack with builders messing everything up?”

Jack pulled the doors of the van open. “Grab an armload, boys,” he instructed. “Don’t worry about it, Sherrie. It’s little stuff.”

He grunted as he took a box off the van and began to carry it into the house. Caleb followed him, notebook tucked under his arm. Jack stopped and swung around to face him.

“Caleb, didn’t I ask you to grab something from the van?”

Caleb held up his notebook. “I’ve got something, Dad.”

“From the van, Caleb. Go back and get something.”

Caleb turned sharply and almost ran into Scott, who had so much in his arms that he couldn’t see where he was going. Scott whistled as he staggered up the steps into the house and dropped his armful with a crash on the bare living-room floor.

Sherrie glared at him as she set her load down on the tarp covering the sofa. “Gently, Scott.”

He picked everything up and stacked it neatly on the sofa. “Want me to go get some more, Mom?”

Sherrie nodded absently. Where was she going to put all this stuff? Especially if she couldn’t unpack everything. Finally, she decided it

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didn't matter, since she wasn't up to unpacking anything tonight anyway.

That night they ate supper using the biggest box for a table and smaller ones as chairs. Sherrie tried to ignore the wrinkled noses when she brought the two-day-old sandwiches out of the cooler. The homemade whole-wheat bread was soggy, and the avocado, onion, and lettuce inside had all blended together with onion as the predominating flavor.

"All right, I'm sorry," she said defensively. "I'll go to the store tomorrow. Is there a decent store around here?"

Jack thought a minute. "I think there's a health-food store right in downtown Pawlet. If I'm right, it's small. There's also a grocery store."

Caleb crunched a carrot stick. "Do you think we could have some potato chips?" he asked hopefully. "Or maybe some nachos?"

Sherrie frowned. "You aren't serious?"

Caleb ducked his head. "Guess not," he mumbled, but Sherrie didn't believe him. Lately he was making quite a number of cracks about the food she cooked, and worse, he was requesting junk food every time she went to the store. This time she decided to confront him.

"Do you know what potato chips would do to you?" she demanded. Caleb didn't answer, and Scott appeared thoughtful. "They'd fill you up with a lot of grease and calories and salt. You wouldn't want that, would you?"

"Guess not."

"Well, I hope not anyway. I hope I've brought you up better than that. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, you know. It's sinful to dump toxic waste like potato chips into it."

"Your mother's right, Caleb," Jack agreed. "We spend extra money to buy healthful foods because we believe that's something God wants us to do. You understand that, don't you, son?"

A hot flush crept up Caleb's downcast face. "Yes, sir."

Jack nodded and took another bite of his sandwich. "That's good. I'm glad we got that all cleared up."

Sherrie was thankful that at least the carob cookies had survived the moisture in the cooler. Jack and Scott helped themselves liberally, but Caleb skipped dessert. Getting up from the "table," he went to sit on the tarp-covered sofa with his notebook. Soon his pen was scratching vigorously.

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Sherrie raised her eyebrows. Jack shrugged as if to say, “Too bad, more for us.” Sherrie bit thoughtfully into a cookie, wishing she could understand this change coming over her son. She didn’t like it, not at all.

The rest of the week passed uneventfully. If she hadn’t been so busy trying to get the house in order, she would have been much more nervous about meeting the members of their new church.

After the first three days, she decided that she just might like Maine after all... eventually. The builders, with their funny accents, were considerate and managed to finish everything in time for her to get most of the house in order by Sabbath. Neither of the builders was an Adventist, she discovered, and seemed stumped that there was a church in their town that they’d never heard of. Jack, who was taking the week off to help her and the builders, was just as puzzled as Sherrie at this news.

Sabbath evening, as they gathered for sundown worship, Sherrie looked around her new home with a deep sense of satisfaction. Almost everything was done. The Harry Anderson painting they gathered around for worship hung in an honored corner of the living room. They knelt around it, each picturing themselves as one of the children gathered around Jesus.

Jack led out in prayer, and Sherrie tried to encourage the boys to be more vocal by inserting a reverent Amen whenever he paused. Sometimes Scott ventured a timid echo to her loud, firm Amen, but his sounded so unsure that it whistled off into nothing. Caleb never opened his mouth during worship. Instead, he rocked back and forth from one knee to the other, shifting and shuffling until she was sure he’d be across the room by the time they finished.

Scott played his harmonica while they sang a few songs; then Jack pronounced a Sabbath blessing on each of them. It was a family tradition, passed on by Sherrie’s folks, and Jack made up a new blessing each week or found one in the Bible. Then one of the boys offered a closing prayer, usually in a voice so soft they had to lean forward to hear it. When worship ended, Sherrie and Jack sent the kids to bed and decided to turn in too.

“Nervous about tomorrow?” Sherrie asked as she shuddered into her nightgown. Maine nights were cold!

“Why should I be?”

Sherrie shrugged. “You know, meeting all those new people. First impressions.”

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“No, not really. I am nervous about starting work on Monday, though.”

“Well, let’s not talk about that on Sabbath,” Sherrie reminded him as she slipped in between the frosty sheets.

“Sorry,” he grunted. She knew he had to be nervous to mention work on the Sabbath. She felt bad for him.

“It’ll be fine, Jack. Everything will be fine. Go to sleep.”

“Sure. Good night, Sher,” he murmured.

Sherrie rolled over and watched the moon climb steadily until it looked like a ball caught in the skinny branches of the tree outside her window. It was the last thing she remembered before falling asleep.