Chapter 1

Moving Day

Bea peeked out from the covers, remembering the family would move today. Months ago Daddy had teased, "Hey, town girl, how'd you like to be a farmer and have chicks, a cow, ducks, and the whole business?"

Bea thought it sounded great.

Daddy had pulled one of her curls. "Six years old is a good time to start farming. You and Dale can have a little garden and feed the chickens. You'll like the farm." All that had been months ago. Now, this morning, they were going to move to the farm, and Bea was scared. She looked around her room at the pink wall with baby lambs on it and her big window from which she could watch the street. Her chest felt tight, and she bugged her eyes out to keep the tears from coming. This would be someone else's room after today.

Of course she could take her Swiss clock, Siamese cat lamp, toys, and Mitzie, her little fox terrier dog; that was nice. But there was what Mama and Daddy called her problem. When she met strangers and even some people who were not strangers, she couldn't talk to them. It seemed as if her mouth locked up, and the more they tried to get her to talk the tighter it fastened together. Sometimes her whole body tightened up when she met new people.

That's why Bea felt so scared this morning. Everyone would be strangers in their new home. She knew she wouldn't be able to talk to them.

She cuddled down farther in bed. It felt cozy and safe.

Smiths wouldn't live next door to them on the farm. Mr. Smith gave Bible studies to Mama and Daddy. Mama, little brother, and Bea went to Sabbath School with the Smiths. She liked Sabbath School. No one tried to make her talk there. They smiled and did the talking. Mama said she might join the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and Bea wanted to be a Christian too. Daddy believed Jesus would come soon, but he didn't say he might be an Adventist.

Mitzie barked at Bea's door, and Dale, her three-year-old brother, yelled, "Bea, Bea, Bea." He sounded like a BB gun.

"I'm coming," Bea called and jumped out of bed. She dressed quickly, ran out the door, grabbed Dale's hand, and with Mitzie yipping behind, dashed into the kitchen.

Mama laughed, "About time! Uncle Bill's here with the truck, and everything is about loaded for the move. Get washed and scoot to the table."

Daddy stuck his head in the door. "If we step on it, we can make the trip today. Then Bill and I can come back tonight, sleep here, and take the rest of our belongings in the morning."

"Good. I'll get halfway settled tomorrow," Mama replied.

After breakfast Bea ran next door to tell Mrs. Smith goodbye. She liked Mrs. Smith and never felt shy with her.

Mrs. Smith hugged Bea close and said, "Honey, Jesus wants to help children. He loves you. Remember to pray. Mama and Daddy aren't members of the church, and you're moving away from Christian friends. You be a good girl and help the family, remember Jesus, and pray."

Bea promised she would. Then she ran back to help Mama finish packing. As she went by the truck, Uncle Bill leaned out the window. "Hello, Bea. How's my little niece? Has the cat still got your tongue?" Of course she couldn't answer. Those words always made her feel as if something was squeezing her body tight. She ran into the house.

At last they were ready to go. Daddy took Dale and Mitzie with him in Uncle Bill's truck. After Mama stuffed another bag in the back seat of the car, Bea sat in the front and squirmed her feet between two boxes of things on the floor. Then Mama started the car and followed the truck down the street. Bea waved at Mrs. Smith until they turned the corner.

Bea asked, "Is it a long, long way?"

"We'll be there by late afternoon." Mama smiled.

They soon left the city behind. It seemed to Bea that the scattered houses, trees, and fields flew by, and small herds of cattle and flocks of sheep followed them.

Bea colored in her color book and looked out the window again. She shifted her body. Her legs felt as if stickers were pushing in them. It must be a long way.

Mama had brought a picnic lunch, and at twelve o'clock they stopped to eat. Soon they started out again. Bea exclaimed, "Will we ever get there?"

Mama laughed. "We're over half way. It won't be long until you see our new home."

After much sighing, watching out the window, and wiggling, they followed Uncle Bill's truck up a gravel driveway to a square farmhouse with an upstairs. Bea cried, "We're here!"

She gazed at a big barn and a chicken house. Mitzie barked and chased some ducks in front of the truck. Dale pointed to a cow inside a fence which was attached to the barn. He said, "My cow, my cow." Everyone laughed.

The men unloaded the truck and car. Then they left to get the rest of their things.

"Come inside, children," Mama called. "Let's explore."

Bea found her room had kittens and flowers on the wallpaper. Dale's room had puppies and flowers. Bea thought, "The people who lived here must have had a little girl and boy."

Mama said, "We'll have another picnic outdoors." She pushed articles around in the food boxes, hunting for certain things. Soon they had a lunch ready and carried it outside.

"Three trees growing out of one trunk!" Bea exclaimed. "And a picnic table with a bench on each side!"

"And a swing!" Dale added.

They put the food on the table and sat down. Bea and Dale needed no urging to eat. "You're eating like two hungry bears," Mama said.

All at once Mama whispered, "Be very quiet and turn slowly toward the big maple tree close to the back of the house. We are not the only ones changing homes."

Bea looked from top to bottom of the tree. She couldn't see a thing. Then she followed with her eyes where Mama pointed to a pile of dried leaves in the fork of some branches.

Bea gasped as she saw an animal with a swirly tail disappear in the dried leaves. She watched the squirrel come out, whish along a limb, and dart into a hole in the tree trunk.

Mama whispered, "The hole is her den. She has babies, and she's moving them from the den to a summer home of leaves."

Soon the mother squirrel appeared with a tiny baby held firmly in her mouth. Quickly she leaped from the hole to a bough and to another limb to disappear in the leafy nest. She came from the nest without her baby, looked around, and leaped from one bough to another and soon came back with another baby. They watched the mother make three trips.

Suddenly Mitzie came bounding around the house. She sat in front of Bea doing her begging trick. Her little paws quivered as she sat up asking for a tidbit.

Bea moaned. "Oh, Mitzie, you frightened the mother squirrel."

Mama explained, "I don't think so. The squirrel's move is probably finished. I think she's giving her babies lunch now."

Dale laughed. "Squirrels have lunch."

"Why do they move?" Bea asked.

Mama said, "It's not healthful for babies in a dark hole, and squirrels are poor housekeepers. They must move or clean house. Maybe they're lazy."

Laughing at the squirrels, they went into the house with Mitzie following close at their heels.

Their beds were not set up, so Mama helped make a bed on the living-room floor for Dale and Bea. She put quilts and pillows on the couch for herself. She said, "We must straighten your blankets some. Your bed looks like a squirrel's nest. Now I'm going to lie down. I'm very, very tired."

While Mama rested, Bea and Dale ran upstairs and down. They inspected the kitchen and all the empty rooms. Bea discovered a little room under the stairs. Dale peeked in. "It's dark."

Bea said, "We can have this for a playhouse."

Dale repeated, "Playhouse, playhouse."

Mama called, "Come, you little squirrels, crawl into your nests and sleep. We'll be very busy when Daddy returns."

Daddy and Uncle Bill came the next day with the rest of the things. For days they arranged furniture, unpacked dishes, towels, clothes, and toys. Daddy got a job in the town nearby, so he could only help evenings.

Friday, Bea asked, "Will we go to Sabbath School tomorrow?"

Mama said, "We'll have Sabbath School at home. Maybe Daddy will be interested later. He didn't go to all the Bible studies; perhaps he doesn't understand. Right now he thinks it's very important to work every day he can, and that includes Saturday. He feels the family needs the money. Besides, it's expensive to move."

Bea remembered the Sabbath School teacher's saying, "There's nothing in the world more important than loving and obeying Jesus."

She frowned. It sounded as if things were going to go wrong. This must be what Mrs. Smith talked about. Would Mama and Daddy forget Jesus?