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SINCERELY YOURS ...

“Life is about weathering storms,
But if you have Faith,
You're never alone!”

— Sonia D. Hebdon

CHAPTER 1: NEW BEGINNINGS

Haven Cove: 1989

Sunlight streamed through the window, casting golden rays that danced across Josie's face as she tossed and turned beneath the covers. She was deep in a dream—a memory from her third birthday. Her father cradled her in his arms while she leaned over a cake, her tiny lips pursed to blow out the candles. Click. The sound of the camera echoed in her mind as the image instantly formed on a Polaroid. Then, just as quickly, the memory began to blur and fade, swallowed by the harsh blare of her alarm clock.

Groggily, Josie reached out, fumbling for the snooze button. Rubbing her eyes, she yawned and heard the familiar clatter of her mom in the kitchen. The smell of the sea drifted in through her open window, a sharp, invigorating breath of nature—clean, crisp, and faintly salty. It was 7:30 a.m.—forty minutes until school. She hit play on her CD player, and the unmistakable sounds of **The Psychedelic Furs**, “Pretty in Pink,” filled the room. Josie jumped up, hairbrush in hand, belting out the lyrics as if she were on stage.

She twirled around the room, flung open her closet, and picked out an eclectic outfit from her collection of thrift store treasures. With a skip in her step, she made her way to the bathroom. Hot water poured down, surrounding her in a cloud of steam.

Her long black hair clung to her shoulders as she scrubbed quickly. Still humming, she wrapped herself in a towel and padded back to her bedroom—until a noise halted her. A rustle outside her window caught her attention. She turned swiftly and caught a glimpse of movement—a boy ducking out of sight in the neighboring window. “Crap,” she muttered, her heart pounding. She crept to the curtain and peeked around it. Someone was there. Or had been. She screamed, “Mom!”

Footsteps thundered up the stairs. Her mom burst in, red-faced and wearing an apron dusted with flour. “Josie, what’s wrong?” “Someone was watching me! From the McClains’ place next door!” exclaimed Josie, alarmed. Her mom walked to the window and gestured. “Not empty anymore.” Outside, a moving truck was parked, and two men were carrying boxes into the house. The “FOR SALE” sign now bore a bold red “SOLD” sticker. Josie exhaled, “Oh.”

“Get dressed,” her mom said. “Breakfast is ready. First day back—you don’t want to be late.”

The door closed behind her. Still wrapped in her towel, Josie peeked again toward the open bedroom directly across from hers. There he was. He stood with the carefree confidence that only teenagers seem to master, his hair a wild crown of sun-bleached spikes that caught the light like blades of gold. Each strand seemed to defy gravity, as if charged with some unseen energy. Beneath the rebellious halo, his dark brown eyes contrasted sharply with deep, stormy pools hinting at stories he'd never share.

A glint sparkled in his gaze, a mix of mischief and mystery, as if he were always two steps ahead of the world, challenging it to catch up. He wore a vintage black leather jacket adorned with band pins and was busy arranging books on a shelf. He looked up, sensing her gaze, and their eyes locked.

“Hi,” he said, flicking his hair as he approached the window. “Hi,” Josie replied, clutching her towel tighter. “Great music before,” he mentioned. Startled, she blinked. “Huh?” “The Furs!” “Oh yeah, they’re pretty good,” Josie responded, feeling quite uncomfortable standing half-naked in front of a stranger.

“I’m Blaine. Just moved here from California,” he said, trying to stay calm and casual. Josie hesitated, “Well, um—nice to meet you, Blaine. Can we maybe ... talk later? I’m still in a towel.” Blaine blushed. “Oh—sorry! I’ve got more boxes to grab anyway.” He turned to go. “Josie!” she blurted. “My name’s Josie.” He grinned, “Josie. I like that. Like Josie and the Pussycats,” he said with a cheeky smirk. “Lovely to meet you.” He waved and vanished from view. Heart racing, Josie leaned against the wall, grinning.

“Blaine,” she whispered. Josie’s thoughts were suddenly interrupted by, “Josie!” her mom’s voice bellowed. “You’ll be late!” “Coming!” she shouted back, quickly pulling on her leopard-print pants, Doc Martens, and a black Clash T-shirt.

Tying her hair up, she grabbed her skull-printed knapsack and bounded down the stairs. As she stepped outside, she glanced at Blaine’s window. He was gone. Sliding into her black Volkswagen Beetle, she pushed the cassette into the car’s player, blasted “Bizarre Love Triangle” by **New Order**, and sang along on her drive to school. Maybe, just maybe, this year wouldn’t suck after all, Josie thought.

The bell rang for recess just as Josie stuffed her books into her bag. She was about to leave the classroom when her Senior English teacher called out, “Josie? Can I see you for a sec?”

Students rushed out the door, eager to escape before Mrs. Alexander could name any other students. With her blonde hair and thick-rimmed glasses, she gestured for Josie to come to her desk. She closed the classroom door behind them and motioned for Josie to take a seat. “You’re a gifted writer, Josie. My husband works at the local newspaper, and there’s an opening for an advice column writer. He’s keen to bring in a fresh voice, and I thought of you.”

Josie blinked. “Me? No way!” said Josie, surprised by Mrs. Alexander’s request. “You’d write anonymously. No one at school needs to know. It pays well, and it would look great on your college applications,” she said while tidying up her desk and talking to Josie. Josie hesitated, her anxiety bubbling up, and she asked, “The column—What’s it called?” “Sincerely yours,” Mrs. Alexander smiled, pulling a folder from her desk. “You can even write under an alias of your choice.”

“Are you sure I’d remain anonymous?” Josie asked nervously. “Only my husband and I—and your mom—would know if you decide to tell her; and I do suggest you tell your mother about this opportunity,” said Mrs. Alexander, tilting her head down to reveal the warm hazel eyes hidden behind her steel-rimmed glasses.

“I’ll think about it,” said Josie as she motioned to get up from her seat. “Take a couple of days to consider this wonderful opportunity,” Mrs. Alexander said warmly, “And maybe ... don’t tell your friends, just yet?” Josie nodded as she slipped through the door. She barely took two steps before— “Hey! Josie and the Pussycats!” boomed a deep, charming voice down the hall. Josie quickly spun around. Blaine stood there, grinning, his jacket decorated with band pins. She could finally see what music he was into! The Clash, Echo & The Bunnymen, and The Cure were displayed like badges of honor on the front

lapel of his black vintage leather jacket.

“You again?” she said, startled. “Trying to get a first-class education,” he smirked, offering her a Chupa Chup. She took it shyly.

“Thanks,” she said. “I’m still figuring out this place. Could use a friend,” said Blaine as he slung his leather backpack over his shoulder.

Josie nodded. “Sure. Do you want me to give you a tour?” she asked, unwrapping the chocolate-vanilla delicacy and popping it into her mouth.

“Well, uh—Mrs. Johnson took care of that already,” Blaine said, as he flashed a smile, showing his perfect white teeth. They strolled casually along the school corridor lined with lockers, surrounded by a sea of students busily stuffing their belongings into coffin-style lockers before heading to the cafeteria for lunch.

Blaine suddenly stopped to examine a flyer on the bulletin board. “So, what do people do for fun here?” He turned and made eye contact with her, making Josie’s heart skip a beat.

“Well, there’s Lambert’s Lookout on weekends. Bonfires, music, illegal beer...” said Josie. “Not my scene,” he replied sternly. “What about real music? Local bands? Gigs?” said Blaine excitedly. “There’s Drop ‘N’ Roll on 68th Street. A punk and new wave nightclub,” remarked Josie. “Thursday night is popular with the university students,” she added. Now we’re talking. Is it licensed? Josie raised a brow. “Yeah.” “I’ve got an ID maker at home,” he said with a wink. She stared, “I don’t want to know this,” said Josie, turning away from him.

“Relax. I want to see some bands. Come with me on Thursday night?” said Blaine, trying to coax Josie into committing rebellion. Josie paused and turned

back to him. “I’ve never been,” she said curiously. “First time for everything. Be my plus one?” Blaine said, putting his hands together, giving her a sweet smile, and pleading with her. She hesitated, “Okay ... I guess.” “Cool. Swing by after school, and I’ll hook you up with a fake ID,” he grinned. He leaned in and kissed her cheek. “You’re a doll, Josie.”

Josie stood frozen as he walked away, heading toward the art department. The Prom Queen patrol sauntered past, giggling. “Did you see the new guy?” Tammy whispered. “Blaine. Rumor has it that his dad is Dean Cordwell, the lead singer of the rock band Vibes. Cheated on his mom, so she moved them here,” said Tammy, taking a sip of her Diet Coke. “Dibs!” giggled Ginger, twirling her strawberry-blond curls around her left index finger. Josie rolled her eyes and opened her locker, only to find her two best friends, Abby and Carrie, suddenly beside her with larger-than-life grins on their faces.

“Have you heard?” Carrie asked. “I live next door to him,” Josie said dryly. Abby gasped, “You get all the luck!” “He’s just a guy,” Josie replied as she placed her books back into her locker, ready for lunch, and slammed the locker door shut. Abby giggled, “he’s cute, Josie.” “Well,” Josie said, turning to her closest friends, “he is just a guy who asked me to Drop ‘N’ Roll on Thursday night,” she added with a sheepish grin. “Boy, you get all the luck,” Carrie remarked. “Yeah. And I’m sleeping at your place Friday for my cover, okay?” Josie said to Carrie, throwing her bag over her shoulder. “Ahh,” Abby grinned. “Nice cover.”

They made their way to the cafeteria, chatting about their weekend plans. Josie slipped her headphones over her ears and pressed play on her CD Walkman. **The Cure’s** “Close to Me” filled her head.

She opened her notebook, and words flowed out.

What if tonight's only just a dream? The bell rang, jolting her from her thoughts. She shoved a spoonful of yogurt into her mouth and dashed off to history class. Her mind wasn't on the Middle Ages; it was on her afternoon with Blaine next door, and she didn't know what she would wear.