

# Chapter 3

Then, as I took a few reluctant steps toward Josh, watching him bend low, then change directions, his arms outstretched as he ran, I realized I had a completely backward Josh, want being chased. Josh was chasing. He was chasing after Percy. Okay, okay. So sometimes my imagination runs away with me. Running through an old graveyard like thieves in bright daylight is only natural that a person might start to have weird thoughts. I called to Josh again, and this time he heard me and turned around. He looked worried. *Amadocome help me!* he cried. Josh, what the matter? I ran as fast as I could to catch up with him, but he kept darting through the gravestones, moving from row to row. Help! Josh shouts wrong? I turned and saw that Mom and Dad were right behind me. In Percy, Josh explained, out of breath. I can get him to stop. I caught him once, but he pulled away from me. Percy? Percy? Dad started calling the dog. But Percy was moving from stone to stone, sniffing each one, then running to the next. How did you get all the way over here? Dad asked as he caught up with my brother. I had to follow Percy, Josh explained, still looking very worried. He just took off. One second he was sniffing around that dead flower bed in our front yard. The next second he just started to run. He wouldn't stop when I called. Wouldn't even look back. He kept running till he got here. I had to follow. I was afraid he'd get lost. Josh stopped and gratefully let Dad take over the chase. I don't know what that dumb dog problem is, he said to me. Hes just weird. It took Dad a few tries, but he finally managed to grab Percy and pick him up off the ground. Our little terrier gave a halfhearted yelp of protest, then allowed himself to be carried away. We all trotted back to the car on the side of the road. Mr. Daves was waiting by the car. Maybe you'd better get a leash for that dog, he said, looking very concerned. Percys never been on a leash, Josh protested, warily climbing into the backseat. Well, we might have to try one for a while, Dad said quietly. Especially if he keeps running away. Dad tossed Percy into the backseat. The dog eagerly curled up in Joshs arms. The rest of us piled into the car, and Mr. Daves drove us back to his office, a tiny, white, flat-roofed building at the end of a row of small offices. As we rode, I reached over and smacked the back of Percys head. Why did the dog run away like that? I wondered. Percy had never done that before. I guessed that Percy was also upset about our moving. After all, Percy had spent his whole life in our old house. He probably felt a lot like Josh and I did about having to pack up and move and never see the old neighborhood again. The new house, the new streets, and all the new smells must have freaked the poor dog out. Josh wanted to run away from the whole idea. And so did Percy. Anyway, that was my theory. Mr. Daves parked the car in front of his tiny office, shook Dads hand, and gave him a business card. You can come by next week, he told Mom and Dad. Ill have all the legal work done by then. After you sign the papers, you can move in anytime. He pushed open the car door and, giving us all a final smile, prepared to climb out. Compton Daves, Mom said, reading the white business card over Dads shoulder. That's an unusual name. Is Compton an old family name? Mr. Daves shook his head. No, he said. Im the only Compton in my family. I have no idea where the name comes from. No idea at all. Maybe my parents didn't know how to spell Charlie? Chuckling at his terrible joke, he climbed out of the car, lowered the wide black Seltzer hat on his head, pulled his blazer from the trunk, and disappeared into the small white building. Dad climbed behind the wheel, moving the seat back to make room for his big stomach. Mom got up front, and we started the long drive home. I guess you and Percy had quite an adventure today. Mom said to Josh, rolling up her window because Dad had turned on the car conditioner. I guess, Josh said without enthusiasm. Percy was sound asleep in his lap, snoring quietly. Youre going to love your room, I told Josh. The whole house is great. Really. Josh stared at me thoughtfully, but didnt answer. I poked him in the ribs with my elbow. Say something. Did you hear what I said? But the weird, thoughtful look didnt fade from Joshs face. The next couple of weeks seemed to crawl by. I walked around the house thinking about how Id never see my room again, how Id never eat breakfast in this kitchen again, how Id never watch TV in the living room again. Morbid stuff like that. I had this sick feeling when the movers came one afternoon and delivered a tall stack of cartons. Time to pack up. It was really happening. Even though it was the middle of the afternoon, I went up to my room and flopped down on my bed. I didnt nap or anything. I just stared at the ceiling for more than an hour, and all these wild, unconnected thoughts ran through my head, like a dream. Only I was awake. I want the only one who was nervous about the move. Mom and Dad were snoring at each other over nothing at all. One morning they had a big fight over whether the bacon was too crispy or not. In a way, it was funny to see them being so childish. Josh was acting really sulky all the time. He hardly spoke a word to anyone. And Percy walked, too. That dumb dog wouldn't even pick himself up and come over to me when I had some table scraps for him. I guess the hardest part about moving was saying good-bye to my friends. Carol and Andy were away at camp, so I had to write to them. But Kathy was home, and she was my oldest and best friend, and the hardest to say good-bye to. I think some people were surprised that Kathy and I had moved such good friends. For one thing, we look so different. Im tall and thin and dark, and shes fair-skinned, with long blonde hair, and a little chubby. But we've been friends since preschool, and best friends since fourth grade. When she came over the night before the move, we were both terribly awkward. Kathy, you shouldn't be nervous, I told her. You're not the one who's moving away forever. Its not like youre moving to China or something, she answered, chewing hard on her bubble gum. Dad Falls in only four hours away. Amadue. Well see each other a lot. Yeah, I guess, I said. But I didnt believe it. Four hours away was as bad as being in China, as far as I was concerned. I guess we can still talk on the phone, I said glumly. She blew a small green bubble, then sucked it back into her mouth. Yeah. Sure, she said, pretending to be enthusiastic. Youre lucky, you know. Moving out of this crummy neighborhood to a big house. Its not a crummy neighborhood, I insisted. I dont know why I was defending the neighborhood. I never had before. One of our favorite pastimes was thinking of places wed rather be growing up. School wont be the same without you, she sighed, curling her legs under her on the chair. Whos going to slip me the answers in math? I laughed. I always slipped you the wrong answers. But it was the thought that counted, Kathy said. And then she groaned. Ugh. Junior high. Is your new junior high part of the high school or part of the elementary school? I made a disgusted face. Everything is one building. Its a small town, remember? There's no separate high school. At least, I didnt see one. Bummer, she said. Bummer was right. We chatted for hours. Until Kathy was called and said it was time for her to come home. Then we hugged. I had made up my mind that I wouldn't cry, but I could feel the big, hot tears forming in the corners of my eyes. And then they were running down my cheeks. Im so miserable! I walked. I had planned to be really controlled and mature. But Kathy was my best friend, after all, and what could I do? We made a promise that wed always be together on our birthday into maturity what. Wed force our parents to make sure we didnt miss each others birthdays. And then we hugged again. And Kathy said, Dont worry. Well see each other a lot. Really. And she had tears in her eyes, too. She turned and ran out the door. The screen door clattered hard behind her. I stood there staring out into the darkness until Percy came scampering in, his toenails clicking across the linoleum, and started to lick my hand. The next morning, moving day, was a rainy Saturday. Not a drop of rain. No thunder or lightning. But just enough rain and wind to make the long drive slow and unpleasant. The sky seemed to get darker as we entered the new neighborhood. The heavy trees bent low over the street. Slow down, Jack, Mom warned shrilly. The street is really slick. But Dad was in a hurry to get to the house before the moving van did. They'd just put the stuff anywhere if we were not there to supervise, he explained. Josh, beside me in the backseat, was being a real pain, as usual. He kept complaining that he was thirsty. When that didnt get results, he started whining that he was starving. But we had all had a big breakfast, so that didnt get any reaction, either. He just wanted attention, of course. I kept trying to cheer him up by telling him how great the house was inside and how big his room was. He still hadn't seen it. But he didnt want to be cheered up. He started wrestling with Percy, getting the poor dog all worked up, until Dad had to shout at him to stop. Lets all try really hard not to get on each others nerves, Mom suggested. Dad laughed. Good idea, dear. Dont make fun of me, she snapped. They started to argue about who was more exhausted from all the packing. Percy stood up on his hind legs and started to howl at the back window. Cant you shut him up? Mom screamed. I pulled Percy down, but he struggled back up and started howling again. Hes never done this before, I said. Just get him quiet! Mom insisted. I pulled Percy down by his hind legs, and Josh started to howl. Mom turned around and gave him a dirty look. Josh didnt stop howling, though. He thought he was a riot. Finally, Dad pulled the car up the driveway of the new house. The tires crunched over the wet gravel. Rain pounded on the roof. Home sweet home, Mom said. I couldnt tell if she was being sarcastic or not. I think she was really glad the long car ride was over. At least we beat the movers. Dad said, glancing at his watch. Then his expression changed. Hope they're not lost. Its as dark as night out there, Josh complained. Percy was jumping up and down in my lap, desperate to get out of the car. He was usually a good traveler. But once the car stopped, he wanted out immediately. I opened my car door and he leaped onto the driveway with a yelp and started to run in a wild zigzag across the front yard. At least someone's glad to be here, Josh said quietly. Dad ran up to the porch and, fumbling with the unfamiliar keys, managed to get the front door open. Then he motioned for us to come into the house. Mom and Josh ran across the walk, eager to get in out of the rain. I closed the car door behind me and started to jog after them. But something caught my eye. I stopped and looked up to the twin bay windows above the porch. I held a hand over my eyebrows to shield my eyes and squinted through the rain. Yes, I saw it. A face. In the window on the left. The boy. The same boy was up there, staring down at me.

## Chapter 4

Wipe your feet! Dont track mud on the nice clean floors! Mom called. Her voice echoed against the bare walls of the empty living room. I stepped into the hallway. The house smelled of paint. The painters had just finished on Thursday. It was hot in the house, much hotter than outside. This kitchen light wont go on, Dad called from the back. Did the painters turn off the electricity or something? How should I know? Mom shouted back. Their voices sounded so loud in the big, empty house. Momtheres someone upstairs! I cried, wiping my feet on the new welcome mat and hurrying into the living room. She was at the window, staring out at the rain, looking for the movers probably. She spun around as I came in. What? Theres a boy upstairs. I saw him in the window, I said, struggling to catch my breath. Josh entered the room from the back hallway. Hed probably been with Dad. He laughed. Is someone already living here? Theres no one upstairs, Mom said, rolling her eyes. Are you two going to give me a break today, or what? What did I do? Josh whined. Listen, Amanda, were all a little on edge today Mom started. But I interrupted her. I saw his face, Mom. In the window. Im not crazy, you know. Says who? Josh cracked. Amanda! Mom bit her lower lip, the way she always did when she was really exasperated. You saw a reflection of something. Of a tree probably. She turned back to the window. The rain was coming down in sheets now, the wind driving it noisily against the large picture window. I ran to the stairway, cupped my hands over my mouth, and shouted up to the second floor, Whos up there? No answer. Whos up there? I called, a little louder. Mom had her hands over her ears. Amandaplease! Josh had disappeared through the dining room. He was finally exploring the house. Theres someone up there, I insisted and, impulsively, I started up the wooden stairway, my sneakers thudding loudly on the bare steps. Amanda I heard Mom call after me. But I was too angry to stop. Why didnt she believe me? Why did she have to say it was a reflection of a tree I saw up there? I was curious. I had to know who was upstairs. I had to prove Mom wrong. I had to show her I hadnt seen a stupid reflection. I guess I can be pretty stubborn, too. Maybe its a family trait. The stairs squeaked and creaked under me as I climbed. I didnt feel at all scared until I reached the second-floor landing. Then I suddenly had this heavy feeling in the pit of my stomach. I stopped, breathing hard, leaning on the banister. Who could it be? A burglar? A bored neighborhood kid who had broken into an empty house for a thrill? Maybe I shouldnt be up here alone, I realized. Maybe the boy in the window was dangerous. Anybody up here? I called, my voice suddenly trembly and weak. Still leaning against the banister, I listened. And I could hear footsteps scampering across the hallway. No. Not footsteps. The rain. Thats what it was. The patter of rain against the slate- shingled roof. For some reason, the sound made me feel a little calmer. I let go of the banister and stepped into the long, narrow hallway. It was dark up here, except for a rectangle of gray light from a small window at the other end. I took a few steps, the old wooden floorboards creaking noisily beneath me. Anybody up here? Again no answer. I stepped up to the first doorway on my left. The door was closed. The smell of fresh paint was suffocating. There was a light switch on the wall near the door. Maybe its for the hall light, I thought. I clicked it on. But nothing happened. Anybody here? My hand was trembling as I grabbed the doorknob. It felt warm in my hand. And damp. I turned it and, taking a deep breath, pushed open the door. I peered into the room. Gray light filtered in through the bay window. A flash of lightning made me jump back. The thunder that followed was a dull, distant roar. Slowly, carefully, I took a step into the room. Then another. No sign of anyone. This was a guest bedroom. Or it could be Joshs room if he decided he liked it. Another flash of lightning. The sky seemed to be darkening. It was pitch-black out there even though it was just after lunchtime. I backed into the hall. The next room down was going to be mine. It also had a bay window that looked down on the front yard. Was the boy I saw staring down at me in my room? I crept down the hall, letting my hand run along the wall for some reason, and stopped outside my door, which was also closed. Taking a deep breath, I knocked on the door. Whos in there? I called. I listened. Silence. Then a clap of thunder, closer than the last. I froze as if I were paralyzed, holding my breath. It was so hot up here, hot and damp. And the smell of paint was making me dizzy. I grabbed the doorknob. Anybody in there? I started to turn the knobwhen the boy crept up from behind and grabbed my shoulder.