

# Chapter 1

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“**L**eah, is your book bag packed for our trip to Palisades cabins?” asked Leah’s mother, Chris Crandall. Chris added a bag of marshmallows and graham crackers to the groceries already packed in the red tub. She’d been packing the tub throughout the week as she prepared for the family’s vacation to Palisades State Park.

“I’ll go and pick out some books,” replied Leah. “Should I pack anything else?”

“Remember, the cabin doesn’t have a television and we’ll be gone for a week. So, you might want to pack a deck of cards, some paper, pencils and maybe a game or two.”

Leah started to climb the stairs toward her bedroom. No television, she thought. Leah couldn’t believe that they were going somewhere that didn’t have a television.

“Just think of the fun we’re going to have,” added Mrs. Crandall. She picked up the red tub and headed for the door. “I’m going to go load these groceries into the car and help your dad. I’ll be back for your book bag in a few minutes.”

Leah finished climbing the stairs. She heard the side door open and close as her mother left the house. Leah had forgotten that the cabin was the only place on earth without TV and cable. She would miss her favorite weekly shows, but she did like to read, write and draw. She was excited that her two dogs, Molly and Ally, were going along on the trip.

The two dogs were Leah's best buddies, except of course for Laura Lemming. Laura was her very best neighborhood friend. Leah sighed. She would miss Laura while she was away at the cabin.

Leah started to load books into her bag from her very full bookcase. She quickly added several pencils and pens, a pad of drawing paper, her journal and a variety of other items as she thought about Laura. All summer Leah and Laura had been inseparable. They had biked together, solved neighborhood mysteries, and shared other fun summer activities and adventures.

It was fun being with mom and dad but Leah wished that Laura was going with them to the cabin. Leah was an only child. It was fun when one of her friends went on a Crandall family activity. And, of course, Laura was always Leah's first choice to accompany them.

Leah closed her bag, grabbed her tennis shoes, and started downstairs. She figured that there would be a lot of hiking on their vacation. Mom and dad loved to hike. Her parents had talked constantly about all the hiking that the family was going to be doing in the park. Leah sighed again. It would have been fun to have Laura with for them

for all of that hiking.

Laura was also leaving on a family vacation. Laura's parents had planned their vacation at the last minute. They were going camping at some state park whose name Laura could never remember.

"Too bad it wasn't Palisades," thought Leah as she headed towards the garage to find her mom and dad. Both parents were standing and waiting for Leah when she entered the garage. The car was packed full and Leah wondered if there was going to be any place for her to sit.

"Alright then," said Leah's dad, as he took her book bag and loaded it into a small space by the window. "Hop in Sweets," said Mike Crandall to his daughter. "I've got a spot for you in the back seat."

Leah wiggled into the only empty space in the back seat of the SUV and clicked her seat belt. It was probably a good thing that Laura wasn't going with them. She would have had to ride on the roof, thought Leah. There was no room left anywhere in the car.

Molly, one of the family's dogs, nudged the back of Leah's head with her wet nose as Leah settled into her seat. Both of the Golden Retrievers were sitting behind Leah in the cargo area of the SUV with the Crandall luggage and supplies. Tails wagged. Clearly the two Crandall dogs were ready for the outing.

Chris Crandall gave Leah a "thumbs up" and a big smile as she settled into her seat in the car. "Well, we're off on another family adventure. Let's go," commanded Chris as Leah's dad backed the vehicle down the drive.

## Chapter 2

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Leah liked the setting for the cabin as soon as she saw it. The rustic, split log cabin sat on the edge of the woods. The front of the building received plenty of sunlight as the light filtered through the trees, while the back of the cabin was tucked in amid old oaks and softly colored maples. A large stone fire pit, perfect for nighttime fires and marshmallow roasting, was located several feet from the large wooden deck that covered the front of the cabin. Both Leah and her dad praised her mother for her fine choice of cabin locations.

“Hurry Dad, I can’t wait to see the inside,” urged Leah as her dad worked to unlock the heavy wooden door while holding the leashes for both of the dogs.

“I’ll take Molly and Ally’s leashes so you’ll have both hands free,” Leah offered to her dad. The dogs immediately assumed that Leah was taking over so that she could take them for a walk. Both dogs jumped off of the deck to face the stone walkway that led into the woods.

“You silly dogs,” laughed Leah. “We’ll have plenty of time for walking later.” She tightened her grip on the leashes and ushered the big retrievers into the cabin behind her dad and mom.

“Wow! This is so cool!” exclaimed Leah. “Look, there’s a bedroom and even a bathroom with a shower. But where’s the living room?” she asked her mom.

“You are standing in it,” replied Mrs. Crandall. “See this section here is the kitchen and that over there is the living room. And, that over there is the dining room. It’s all contained in this one room.” Mrs. Crandall proceeded to show Leah how the table sides popped out to form a table big enough for four and how the futon folded out for sleeping.

“Then, this room is a kitchen, dining room, living room, and even another bed room?” asked Leah.

“That’s right,” confirmed Leah’s mom. “Cabins have to make good use of limited space for its occupants.”

“Who gets to sleep on the futon?” inquired Leah.

“We thought maybe you would or perhaps a guest that might be joining us later.”

“A guest? What guest?” questioned Leah. No one had told her that someone else was going to be at the cabin.

“Oh, that’s a little surprise between your dad and I. You’ll find out soon enough,” Mrs. Crandall chuckled as she started unpacking the groceries.

Leah checked out the cabin’s only bedroom. It was small containing only a bed with an oak headboard and a pine dresser for clothing. It didn’t take Leah long to finish

exploring the inside and soon she was standing beside her mom wondering what she should do next.

“Sweetie, why don’t you go and unpack your book bag on that stand by the futon,” suggested Mrs. Crandall to Leah. “Then you can go outside and help your dad stack the wood we’ll be using for the fire pit. I can finish up in here.”

That all sounded like a good idea to Leah. She loved being outside helping her dad. She quickly unpacked her books, journal and a pen before placing the book bag on the small, wooden stand beside the futon.

She wondered about the surprise guest that her mom had mentioned. Grandma and Grandpa B were in Texas visiting her great aunt, so she knew it couldn’t be them. Her other grandfather had just come home from the hospital after having surgery, so she didn’t think that it could be Papa or Nana. No one had mentioned that her cousins were coming, so she was quite curious about who would be joining them.

“Here comes my helper,” said Leah’s dad as she walked toward him while he was splitting wood. “How about you pick up the pieces I’ve already cut and stack them by the fire pit?”

“Sure Dad,” replied Leah. “Mom says we’ve got a guest coming to stay at the cabin, going to tell me who it is?”

“Nope. Don’t want to spoil the surprise,” grinned her dad. “You’ll know in a couple of hours. I’m sure you can wait that long.”

Leah didn't think she could wait five minutes to find out the identity of the mystery guest. How did her dad think she could wait a couple of hours? "Oh come on, Dad. How about a clue?" she urged.

Mr. Crandall handed Leah a small armload of newly cut wood to add to the stacked pile. "Okay. One clue. Ask me one really good question and I'll answer it," he offered.

Leah was stumped. She could only ask one question. She wanted it to be a good one. She was sure that if she simply asked for the name of who was coming that her dad wouldn't answer that question, but she thought it was worth a try. "My question is: what is the name of the person who's joining us at the cabin?"

"Now pumpkin, you don't really think that I am going to answer that question, do you?" laughed her dad.

"No, but I thought it was worth a try," giggled Leah.

"I'll tell you what, I will give you one more chance for a question," said Leah's dad as he finished stacking the split wood.

Leah handed her dad a piece of wood that had fallen off of the pile. She thought about pointing out to him that he was really stacking the pile too tall, but decided to wait to see if it all continued to balance. Sure enough, the pile seemed to balance perfectly and her dad declared that the job was done.

She really wanted to know the identity of the secret guest but since her dad wouldn't give her the person's name she thought she'd try a different question. At least she could find out if it would be someone that she'd enjoy

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being with at the cabin. “Will I be happy that this guest will be staying at the cabin with us?” questioned Leah.

“Oh, yes!” replied her dad. “You’ll be overjoyed.”

And just that quick, Leah was certain that she knew the name of the mystery guest.