





# CHAPTER 1

I guess we shouldn't throw stones," Bea said as they pulled up in front of the new house.

"What?" her mom said, sounding distracted. She had been driving the moving van while Bea's dad and little brother, Charlie, followed behind in the car. They had hit the road at 6 a.m., and now it was almost dinnertime.

"There's that expression," Bea said, "that people who live in glass houses shouldn't throw stones. We shouldn't throw stones because this house has a *lot* of glass."

Mom smiled a little. "That's true. I like it, though. All the windows make everything feel so open and sunny."

In Bea's opinion, the new house was weird. The wood was unpainted, the windows were floor-to-ceiling, and there were lots of weird angles between the roof and walls. Her dad, who loved the new house, said it was an example of "postmodern architecture," whatever that meant. He thought the new house said a lot more about who they were as people than their old ranch-style house, which was "like living in a shoebox."

Bea already missed the nice, normal shoebox house in the neighborhood where she could walk to her best friend's house. She missed her old school and the dance studio where she had spent so much time that it felt like a second home.

Now no place felt like home.

She understood that they'd had no choice but to move. Her dad got laid off from his job, and her mom's part-time work didn't pay enough to support the family. New jobs in a new town had been the only option, but that didn't make it any easier. Especially since Bea was going to have to walk into school on her first day of eighth grade not knowing a single person.

"Isn't it great?" Dad stood outside the moving van with a huge grin on his face. He was wearing one of the bright-colored Hawaiian shirts he favored, and his long goatee had been twisted into a braid, of

all things. “I can’t believe we got such a great deal on this place! It’s got charm to burn.” He looked over at the house like a proud papa looking at his newborn baby. “It’s so retro! Nothing looks more retro than something that was built to look ultramodern decades ago.”

Mom smiled back at him. “Yeah, after we get unpacked we’re going to have to hit the flea markets and find some kitschy ’80s stuff like our parents had when we were kids. It’ll look perfect in the house.” Bea’s mom was just as quirky as Bea’s dad. She was partial to weird-colored nail polish and earrings made of random objects like guitar picks. She had even dyed a blue streak in her hair.

Sometimes Bea felt the urge to tell her parents to grow up.

“Oh, it won’t look perfect,” Dad said, offering Mom his arm as she stepped out of the van. “It’ll look *radical*. Or tubular.” He looked over at Bea. “That’s ’80s slang.”

Bea breathed a heavy sigh. “I know it is. I’m not an idiot.” She stepped out of the moving van onto the sidewalk.

“Nobody said you were,” Mom said. “Don’t be so touchy.”

Bea didn’t feel like she was being touchy. It was

just that her family was so annoying. Charlie was already in the front yard, running around, hitting a tree with a stick, and generally calling attention to his weirdness. She hoped none of the neighbors could see him. This wasn't the first impression she wanted to make.

"I guess the first thing we should do is get Devo into the house," Mom said.

"I'll do it," Bea volunteered. Devo was the family's tabby cat, named after some '80s band her parents liked, and he and Bea had a special bond. "I'm going to put him in my room first, okay?"

"Okay," Mom said. "But close the door so he doesn't get out while we're moving stuff in."

Bea picked up the cat carrier, and her mom opened the house's front door. The empty rooms in the house looked huge, cavernous. But the comparison to a cave stopped there because the sunlight pouring through the gigantic windows was blindingly bright. "Well, Devo, this is your new home. Your big, weird, new home," Bea said. She took the cat carrier up a staircase that looked like it belonged outside a kid's tree house instead of inside a real house. The first room on the right was the one she'd picked. It was smaller than her parents' room but bigger than Charlie's.

The air that was released when she opened the

door was at least twenty degrees colder than the air in the hall. Shouldn't rooms that had been shut up be hotter than the rest of the house? *One more weird thing about this place*, Bea thought. The house already looked weird enough with all its big windows and strange angles. Did its temperature have to be weird, too?

She set the cat carrier on the floor of her empty room and unlatched its door. "Welcome home, buddy," she said. When Devo didn't emerge, she squatted down to make sure he was okay. The vet had prescribed him a kitty tranquilizer for the trip, and when Bea peeked in at him, he opened one green eye, then closed it, and went back to sleep. "Okay, night-night, then," Bea said. As she stood to leave, a smell hit her nose, fruity and artificial. After a few sniffs, she identified it as grape bubble gum. But except for Devo in his carrier, the room was completely empty. Where could the smell be coming from?

Back outside, Dad was trying to organize the troops. "Okay," he said. "We just heard from the heavy-lifting guys. They should be here in about fifteen minutes. In the meantime, you kids grab the boxes with your names on them, and your mom and I will start unloading kitchen stuff."



By six o'clock, most of the stuff was in the house. Bea's room had her bed and dresser, and she had managed to set up Devo's food and water station and litter box. He had finally emerged from his cat carrier and was sniffing around suspiciously, sometimes emitting a low growl while staring at nothing. "Lots of new smells, huh, buddy?" Bea said. "If you figure out where that bubble-gum smell is coming from, let me know."

Bea heard footsteps and looked up to see Charlie standing in the door, his sandy-blond hair sticking up in random places like always. One of his shoes was untied. "Can you come help me with something for a minute?" he asked.

"Reluctantly," Bea said. She was busy unpacking the stuff she kept on her dresser—her jewelry box, her trophies from dance competitions, her favorite dance recital photos.

"Hey, your room's a lot colder than mine," Charlie said.

"Yeah, it must be the AC vent in here," Bea said, setting a figurine of a long-necked black cat on her dresser.

"The AC's not running," Charlie said. "Say, can I have a piece of your gum?"

"I don't have any gum," Bea said. She had given up

gum two years ago after some kid in class told her she chewed like a cow.

“I smell gum, though.” Charlie sniffed the air. “That really soft grape kind.”

Bea smelled it, too, as clearly as if it were in her own mouth, but she would rather give Charlie a hard time than agree with him. “I don’t know what you’re talking about,” she said. “You must be hallucinating.”

“You don’t smell it?”

“Nope,” Bea said, though the fake grapey aroma filled her nostrils.

“Bea! Charlie! Dinner!” Mom called from downstairs.

“How can there be dinner when the kitchen stuff isn’t even unpacked yet?” Bea said.

“Maybe they got pizza—or burgers!” Charlie said with a hopeful look on his face.

Bea shook her head. “Do you really think we could be that lucky?” Their parents called fast-food restaurants “purveyors of poison,” and the food they cooked at home tended to be absurdly healthy. Ratatouille. Stir-fried veggies with steamed brown rice. Scrambled tofu.

“No, probably not,” Charlie said.

At the dining room table, they sat down to a loaf of bread, a jar of peanut butter, a jar of strawberry jam,

and a pitcher of tap water. “Our first meal in our new home,” Mom said, pouring water into paper cups. “Nothing fancy, but we’ll do better when we know where the pots and pans are.”

“And where a grocery store is,” Dad added.

Bea thought PB&J was perfect. She already felt overwhelmed by her strange and new surroundings, and she was even more overwhelmed when she thought of starting at her new school on Monday. Right now, the taste of peanut butter and jelly felt like the only thing that was familiar.