

# Chapter 1



“Imagine you’ll find our little town pretty dull after the bright lights of Toronto,” drawled Sarah’s grandfather, dragging out each word the way the winding road seemed determined to drag out the drive from the airport.

*Dull?* Dull described paint faded from the sun. An overcast day was dull. No, dull was not the word that came to mind as Sarah anticipated the long summer ahead. This promised to be the most ridiculous thing her mother had ever asked her to endure. What a waste of a summer! Most people hadn’t even heard of Wolfville, Nova Scotia.

“It’ll be an interesting change, I expect,” Sarah replied politely, disgusted at how much like her mother she had

just sounded. She leaned her head against the headrest and pretended to sleep. She didn't feel like talking right now.

As Sarah closed her eyes she could hear her mother's pleading voice.

"It's only for two months, Sarah. Imagine ocean breezes blowing through the quaint little village. What's not to like?" Her mother checked her reflection in the mirror, patting her stylish auburn hair. "The summer will be over before you know it, and then we'll go somewhere exotic for a week together. Promise." She touched up her lipstick then glanced at her watch. "Now be a dear and don't fuss so much. You know how I hate fussing. This travel series we're shooting in southern France is on an impossible schedule. You'd hate it." Sarah had felt like screaming, not that it would have made any difference.

So here she was in the middle of nowhere Nova Scotia, while her mother, the beautiful Nicole White, host and producer of *Travel with Us*, frolicked in the south of France.

The last time Sarah had been to her grandparents' place had been fourteen years ago when she was two. That summer ended in a huge fight, which her mother refused to talk about. After that they never went back. Now she expected Sarah to spend the entire summer with them. What was with that? Maybe her mother thought she needed a father figure. It was a little late now. Grandparents were for spoiling little kids.

"See that farmland over there?" Sarah's grandfather

asked, interrupting her thoughts. "All that land was marshland that the Acadians reclaimed in the sixteen hundreds. Take a close look at that grassy hill over there with the dirt road on top. That's a dyke, still intact hundreds of years later. Incredible, isn't it? All this land would have been waste marshland if the Acadians hadn't built the dykes and washed the land of the sea salt. Mighty smart for peasants, I'd say."

"The deportation of the Acadians," Sarah said more to herself than to her grandfather. "I remember that story from school." Everything went fuzzy as she took a closer look. The heat must be getting to her. The dyke was blurred like an out-of-focus photograph. Sarah blinked in an attempt to clear her vision. Then everything was crystal clear again. "That was weird," Sarah muttered under her breath.

"What did you say?" her grandfather asked. "I didn't quite hear you."

"I was just saying that the dykes are very interesting." Sarah wasn't sure what had just happened, but she didn't want her grandfather to think she was crazy.

"Interesting and very clever," her grandfather commented. "The Grand-Pré National Historic Site has an impressive Interpretive Centre that tells the Acadian history and how the dykes work," he continued. "There are people dressed up tending the gardens and cottages out back and everything. If you're interested maybe we could go tomorrow."

"Sure." Sarah caught a glimpse of a smile in her grandfather's eyes. Pete White was distinguished looking, with his

closely cropped silvery white hair and prominent cheekbones.

She looked out the window at the orchards of neatly ordered apple trees separated by brightly painted houses. Off in the distance, the deep blue of Minas Basin glittered under the midday sun. This breathtaking valley could rival anything she had seen when travelling with her mother. Sarah sighed. Lately her mother had been including her less and less, saying dumb things, like it was time that she branched out with her own friends and her own life. As if she liked being her mother's shadow. Her mother wasn't even around enough to know that she didn't have any friends. Not any close friends, at least.

"I'm going to pick up some fresh strawberries for your grandmother." The shiny blue Ford pickup came to a stop at a bustling outdoor market. "You might as well stretch yer legs a bit."

"This is as bad as rush hour on the subway," Sarah muttered as she squeezed through the throngs of people huddled over the fresh produce. A sundress would definitely have been a better choice, she thought. She pulled at the silk top that now clung to her like plastic wrap. Pausing for a moment, she shaded her eyes against the bright rays of the sun. Despite the buzz of activity under the green-striped canopy, everyone seemed happy and relaxed. Not pinched and worried-looking like in Toronto, where everyone had to be somewhere half an hour ago.

“Sarah, over here!” Her grandfather waved to her from the other side of the market. “Got some folks I want ya to meet.” Every head in the market turned in her direction. Sarah felt the curious stares as she walked past. She wanted to melt into a puddle on the ground right then and there. Thankfully she didn’t know anyone within a thousand miles of here. She carefully wound her way through the stands of fruits and vegetables trying not to let her new skirt touch anything. Her mother didn’t think she should meet her grandparents in shorts so she had settled for this cool purple print skirt made from Thai silk that she had found at her favourite boutique.

“This pretty flower is my granddaughter, Sarah.” Pete White beamed with pride. “Sarah, I’d like you to meet our next-door neighbours, Mr. and Mrs. Outhouse.”

“Pardon me?” Sarah was sure she must have heard wrong. What kind of a name was Outhouse?

“You can call us Dorothy and Roger, dear,” the short round woman chirped.

Still wondering about the odd name, Sarah reached out to shake hands with the couple.

“Excuse me,” said a pleasant voice behind her.

Sarah turned to find herself looking into the tanned face of a rather nice-looking guy. That’s when he tripped, launching a tray of Grade A mini-missiles. In her attempt to get out of the line of fire, Sarah slipped on her high-heeled sandals and landed in a slimy puddle of shells and yolks. “Oh

no, my skirt is ruined.” She glared at the cause of her humiliating tumble.

“Sorry about that,” the youth mumbled as he rushed to grab some paper towels.

An icy glare was Sarah’s only reply as she ignored the outstretched hand offering to help her. She was embarrassed beyond words and wished he’d leave her alone.

“Suit yourself.” He handed her the paper towels and then walked away.

Her grandfather helped her to her feet as several of the women rushed to Sarah’s rescue clucking about stain-removal remedies and oohing over the elegant silk. Sarah just wanted to get out of there. She hoped never to see any of these people again, particularly the klutz who had dropped the eggs. Just as they were about to leave, she spotted him heading towards her. She quickly looked the other way. The last thing she wanted was some lame apology.

“Sorry again about the low-flying eggs. They’re usually not so out of control.”

“I’m fine,” Sarah replied coolly, ignoring his attempt at humour.

“I really am sorry.”

Sarah turned abruptly from him and headed toward the truck.

“It was an accident, ya know,” her grandfather said as they pulled out of the parking lot.

“I know.” Sarah’s voice was barely audible.

“You acted mighty angry back there.”

She knew she should make some sort of apology for her behaviour but couldn’t quite bring herself to say anything. Anyway, it wasn’t as though it was her fault the guy dropped the eggs. What a great start to the summer!



Luke looked at his watch for the fifth time in the past hour. Closing time, finally. Usually he enjoyed his busy days working at Aunt Maggie’s market. The farmers were friendly, always eager to swap stories and he enjoyed the tourists too. But today, he couldn’t wait to get away. Away from here and out to the peace and quiet of his boat.

*Crash!* Luke cursed as the top flat of strawberries he was carrying slipped from his grasp and clattered to the floor. Shiny red berries scattered freely.

“You’re having a bit of an off day.” Aunt Maggie grinned. “I don’t remember you ever dropping anything before, even when you were really little and more in the way than not. Now in the course of one afternoon you’ve tried to demolish the place.”

Luke knew Aunt Maggie wasn’t angry. Aunt Maggie rarely got angry. Still, he knew she relied on the money the market brought her in the summer, and she couldn’t very well sell squashed strawberries and broken eggs. Luke adored

his eccentric great aunt. For as long as he could remember, more of his summers had been spent on his aunt's farm than with his own family in Halifax. He had never really liked the city. When Aunt Maggie's husband George had died suddenly of a heart attack two years ago, Luke knew what he wanted to do. Although he was only sixteen at the time, his parents reluctantly agreed that he could move in with Aunt Maggie and continue his schooling in the valley. They weren't keen on the idea, but Aunt Maggie had heart problems and was too stubborn to hire someone to manage the farm for her. He had been helping his great aunt with the farm and the outdoor market ever since.

Luke picked up the strawberry flats more carefully this time and put them in the cooling shed in the back of the market where they would stay fresh. "I don't know what's wrong with me today," Luke muttered somewhat sheepishly. "But don't worry. I'll cover the damages."

"Hogwash, you will!" Aunt Maggie snorted. "Anyways, you better save your money for cleaning bills. That was some fancy outfit Pete's granddaughter was wearing." Her lopsided grin teased him.

Luke groaned, wishing his aunt had not brought up the embarrassing incident. "Cleaning bills? I don't think so. I'd be surprised to see her back here any time soon."

Aunt Maggie chuckled. "You've probably got that right. From her reaction I'd say it was a new skirt. Pete has probably already dropped it off at a drycleaners. Still, it wouldn't



hurt to offer to pay for the cleaning when you see her tomorrow.”

“What!” Luke set down the tower of cherry boxes more suddenly than he intended.

“You drop one more flat of berries and you’ll be making jam all day tomorrow, young fella.”

“What do you mean, ‘when I see her tomorrow?’” His dark brows squeezed into a scowl. “You’re joking, right?” Luke followed his aunt as she went to get the money from the day’s sales out of the till. “I’m going sailing tomorrow. It’s my day off,” Luke reminded Maggie, sounding more hopeful than he felt.

“Well, maybe she’d like to go with you,” Maggie replied casually.

“Well, maybe she won’t be invited,” Luke snapped.

Aunt Maggie smiled her crooked smile, as she looked Luke straight in the eye. “She really got to you, didn’t she?”

“Come on, Aunt Maggie. Give me a break. You know Miss ‘High-Heels’ is not my type. She’d probably hate sailing. The water would ruin her clothes and she might even break a nail!”

“Well, I don’t give a horse’s petutti if she’s your type or not,” Aunt Maggie stated flatly. “She’s just arrived from Toronto and doesn’t know a soul. She’d be bored silly sitting around with Reta and Pete. They’re lovely people, but she’s sixteen and let’s face it, I’m sure she’d much rather have you for company.”

“Yeah, right! Did you see the look she gave me? I’m amazed the sparks from her eyes didn’t set the whole canopy on fire!”

“She’ll have calmed down by tomorrow. Regardless, Reta’s gonna help me do some baking for the county fair and I already told her to bring her granddaughter along.”

“Who’s going to run the market?”

“Mondays aren’t that busy. We’ll just open a bit later, that’s all.”

“Well, maybe she could . . .”

“No, Mr. ‘I’m-Too-Embarrassed-To-Face-Her,’ she’s not going to help with the baking. You’ll run into her sooner or later. It might as well be sooner.”

Luke let out a long moan. He knew there was no changing her mind. When Aunt Maggie made a decision, nothing short of an act of God could alter it.

As they drove back to the farm, Aunt Maggie chattered on about all the latest news from the market but Luke scarcely heard a word. All he could think about was the city girl who threatened to ruin his day tomorrow. Luke had his share of attractive girls vying for his attention, so why had this one gotten to him? He still couldn’t believe he’d tripped over his own feet. He had seen her from under the canopy where he was putting out some hothouse tomatoes. Dressed to kill, her honey-coloured hair gleaming in the sunlight, she seemed to float through the crowd. Man, she was hot! He lost sight of her when he got the eggs for Mrs. Brown

only to find himself squeezing past her on his way to the parking lot. Their eyes met for a split second. That's when he lost it and stumbled. How could he be such a klutz? It wasn't like him at all. He could feel his cheeks getting warm just thinking about it. Her eyes. That's what did it. She had the largest, soft brown eyes. Like a fawn.

“Get a grip, buddy,” Luke cautioned himself. “She's not your type.”