

# Chapter One

**I** DIDN'T know how to make the little girl stop crying. She hovered against the wall of the North Shore Children's Center, her bunny print blanket wrapped around her, big tears splashing down her chubby cheeks. She'd been here three days and cried nearly all the time. I didn't know her story, or even her name, but it about drove me crazy that I couldn't figure out a way to make her feel better. I knew she was probably just scared, and who could blame her? Being here made me want to cry, too. But you can get away with stuff at four that you can't at twelve.

I bounced a curled knuckle against my bottom lip and wondered if there were any games on my phone she might like to play with. Or I could show her my snow globe. What little kid wouldn't think a snow globe was cool? It was at least worth a shot. But before I could duck back inside

my room to grab it, the sharp *tap-tap-tap* of Miss Austin's high heels made me stop. She rounded the corner, her red dress stretched tight against her wide hips. She caught sight of me watching from the end of the hall and wiggled her fingers. "Oh, there you are, Poppy. I was just coming to find you."

Her words gave me a jolt, though I couldn't think of anything I'd done wrong.

She paused long enough to swoop the little girl into her arms as she passed, patting her back and mumbling in her ear. Her big hoop earrings jiggled and danced with each step until she stopped in front of me. "I wanted to let you know that your grandma was released from the hospital today and moved to the Huckleberry Home."

It's a funny thing how fast your brain can work, because the instant I heard the word *released*, my heart just about seized up with happiness. If Grandma Beth had been released, that meant she was out . . . free . . . it meant she was coming to get me. But then almost as fast, my brain told me that Miss Austin had continued to talk after the word *released*, that she'd said something about the Huckleberry Home, and my heart loosened again. "But . . . isn't that a nursing home?"

"It's one of Spokane's best."