

Family Forever—Book One

just another  
*Home*

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*This book is dedicated to our Heavenly Father, from Whom every good thing comes.*



*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*  
~ Romans 8:28 (NIV)





*one*

A midnight phone call was the last thing Abbie Grayson expected at the end of this beautiful Tennessee spring day, even if the nighttime had turned stormy. She grabbed her cell phone from the nightstand while her husband John stirred beside her. A check of the caller ID made her heart pound. Could this be the call they'd been waiting for?

She held her breath and swiped her finger across the screen. "Jamie, hi," she whispered as she walked across their spacious bedroom and dropped to the reading chair in front of the bay window.

"Abbie, I'm so sorry to be calling you this late," the social worker said. "But I have a situation, and, well, it's not what you signed up for, but you came to mind anyway, and I just wanted to discuss it with you."

"Uh, okay, sure." Abbie twisted one of her long brown curls around her index finger.

John woke up and came around to sit on her side of the bed, facing her. "Who is it?" he whispered.

Abbie placed her hand over the phone. "It's Jamie Richards from the foster care agency."

"Well," Jamie began. "We have a boy who's been in and out of

foster care for many years. I've been his case manager for a long time and know him well." She sighed, and there was a palpable pause. "I know you and John said you didn't want to take any emergency placements or children over ten years old. But Abbie, my heart is telling me that the two of you could provide the perfect home for him right now."

John stared at her, and her head spun. "Okay, go on." It wouldn't hurt to hear her out, would it? She listened as Jamie told her about sixteen-year-old Sam, who'd been in and out of the system since his mother died when he was five. His father had custody of him on and off but was not a capable parent. Neglect and his father's drug use often resulted in the boy being returned to foster care. Earlier tonight, his father was arrested in a drug raid, in front of Sam.

"Like I said, I know this isn't the type of situation you had in mind. But it would only be for a few days until I can find another solution." Jamie paused again. "What are you thinking?"

John's intense gaze from just a few feet away bore into her. He looked both concerned and curious. "Let me discuss it with John and call you back in a few minutes," Abbie said.

"Of course," Jamie said. "And not to put extra pressure on you, but if you could let me know within the hour. He needs someplace to go tonight, if possible."

"I understand." The conversation ended, and Abbie stared at John, her knuckles white from clutching her phone. "Jamie has our first placement."

"Right now?" John asked as he turned his head toward the bedside clock and ran his hand through his hair.

"Yes." Abbie took a deep breath and paused. She'd have to tread lightly. "It's an emergency placement."

"Emergency placement?" John's voice rose. He was wide awake now. "I thought we agreed we wouldn't do those and would only take long-term placements."

"You're right, we did." Abbie nodded but averted his gaze. "Jamie is the case worker for this boy and knows him well. She



thinks we'd be a good fit. He's in serious need of a place to go tonight. And there's something else." Abbie paused and bit her lower lip. "He's a teenager—he's sixteen," she said quietly.

"Abbie," John half-shouted, "when you talked me into this, we agreed we wouldn't foster teenagers, only young kids." He stared at her, his voice rising. "And no emergency placements. This situation is everything we agreed we wouldn't do."

Instead of responding, she stood and grabbed her satin robe from the back of her chair, slipped it on, and walked to the kitchen with John following her. He was right, of course. They had agreed to no emergency placements, but the call with the social worker had pulled at her heart.

She grabbed a glass from the cabinet, filled it with water, and stared straight into John's eyes as she leaned against the kitchen counter and took a sip. Any nervousness leftover from the phone call a moment ago was gone. Abbie noted gray streaks sneaking into her husband's hair—hair that once matched his dark brown eyes. After thirty-plus years of marriage, surely he realized she wouldn't back down without a fight. But she needed to measure her words with care as he was still trying to wrap his head around this whole foster-care situation.

John loved kids. They'd raised a son and a daughter, but once their children grew up and were out of the house, she and John had browsed stacks of travel brochures. They even talked about buying a vacation home in the Florida panhandle, not far from extended family. Then something deep in Abbie's soul changed, and she wanted to foster kids. After much discussion and prayer, John agreed, although he still had concerns.

John exhaled and broke the silence at last. "What else did she tell you about him?"

She smiled slightly. John would see her side.

"His name is Sam," she replied and repeated everything Jamie had just told her about the boy.

"I have to tell you, I feel a little ambushed right now," John huffed. "I thought we were on the same page about this. But I

guess we're not." He pulled out one of the kitchen island stools and sat.

"Honey, what are you really afraid of?" Abbie put her hand on his shoulder and sat on the stool beside him. "I know there's more to your hesitation than just wanting to travel and retire in a few years. You're a college basketball coach. You work with teens and young men every day, and you love it. So, what is it?"

"You know what it is, or rather, *who* it is." He looked away from her before he continued, his shoulders slumped. "It's Andy Quinn. If I couldn't help a player under my watch, then why would I be able to help another troubled kid now?"

His answer didn't surprise her, and she hurt for him. So many years had passed, but John had never completely recovered from his perceived failure. "No. That situation was vastly different." Abbie shook her head. "Andy was nineteen years old and into drugs, alcohol, theft—you name it. You gave him every opportunity, but in the end, it was Andy who made the decisions that led to his downfall, not you." How could he still not believe the truth by now?

John nodded but didn't look convinced.

"I feel like God wants us to do this," Abbie reasoned. She caught herself twisting one of her long curls around her finger again and stopped. She wasn't as confident as she wanted her husband to believe. "I believe He placed this boy in our path for a reason. Please consider this, hon. I've prayed every day, asking that we get an opportunity to make a difference in a kid's life, even if he or she doesn't fit into the neat little boxes we've drawn."

John drew a deep breath and nodded. "Maybe you're right. Pastor Rob did just say in his sermon Sunday that God calls us out of our comfort zones. When do we have to let her know?"

"Now," Abbie uttered. "He needs a place to go tonight. I know we can provide stability and a safe place for him. Besides, it's only emergency placement, which means it's just for a short time. A few days, tops."

“Only emergency placement. Meaning the boy was just removed from a traumatic situation.” John got up and paced their large, open kitchen and combined great room with his head down. Abbie recognized his process. He would weigh the pros and cons and silently pray, hoping to hear an answer from God.

She prayed her own silent prayer. *Please God, I believe You placed this boy in our path for a reason. Don't let this be more than we're equipped to handle, and for John's sake, please don't let it end up as another Andy Quinn situation.*

At that moment, John stopped pacing and turned to look at Abbie. “All right, as long as it's only for a few days.”

Abbie was overjoyed, but at the same time, her intuition told her it might not be that simple.