

Chapter 1

Secrets in the Walls

The trip to town had taken Eric longer than he'd expected. He had set out that morning to run to the hardware store to get some more supplies for the cabin, but one thing had led to another. After a quick stop at the bank, he pulled into the grocery store to replenish some staples—coffee, eggs, bread, and something to throw on the grill for the next couple days should do it. Then he received a call from his boss and had to make a quick run to their job site to meet the drivers who were delivering the roof shingles they needed first thing Monday morning.

When he turned off the main road, it was already midday, and Eric was thinking about how half of his

day had been wasted. Another weekend was flying by and he wasn't making much progress on his grandfather's old cabin, but it was a labor of love—particularly because as a boy, during the summers, he had spent a month there with his grandfather. He had enjoyed every minute spent fishing with his grandpa, and now that his grandfather was gone, he intended to spend even more time there. In fact, he was renovating it and building an addition onto the back to make it even larger. When he was finished, the cabin and the acreage it sat on were going to be Eric's home.

The unmarked road was little traveled and, with the exception of the people who owned the other cabins along the lake, traffic was rare. The road twisted and turned, giving the properties even more privacy as it took the residents further into the countryside, which was as scenic as it was reclusive. As Eric's truck wound around a curve, he noticed a car pulled up into the cabin to the north of his grandfather's property. That's funny, he thought. I've been staying here for a couple months and have never seen anyone there before.

On a whim, Eric turned into the gravel driveway. As he neared the cabin, he noticed an elderly man sitting on the front porch, who quickly rose to greet him.

"Hi, there," he said. "Eric Schultz—I'm staying in the cabin just down the road. I haven't seen you here before, so I thought I'd swing by and introduce myself."

"Good to meet you, young man," the gentleman said. "The name's Carl—Carl Vaughn."

"It's great to have a neighbor. I've often wondered who lived here—do you live here? Or is this your summer cabin?"

“Well, I guess you could say it’s like a summer cabin. Actually, my friends and I have been coming here to hunt and fish for many years. It’s going to be sad to see the place go, but it’s time,” Carl explained.

“Oh, are you going to sell the cabin?”

“Well, I don’t think there’s all that much to sell. The cabin itself hasn’t been updated since I bought it 40 years ago. It’s probably not worth anything to anyone, except myself. So I figured I’d knock it down and sell the land. It’s a nice piece of property, and I’m sure some young person like yourself could build something nice here and start anew.”

“Tear it down?” Eric asked, shocked. “But these old wood cabins are historic. They belong here. Besides, they don’t make them like this anymore. As a matter of fact, I’m adding on to my grandfather’s cabin and want to keep it as authentic as possible, but there’s no way I can match the old logs and stones. The old wood floors are in decent shape, but some boards are rotted. If I could save them, I would. But it’s not looking good. There are just so few places like these old cabins anymore.”

“I admire your passion, son,” the old man said. “But the place is getting to be an eyesore. Besides, I just don’t have a use for it anymore. Unfortunately, a couple members of the old gang have passed on. The rest of the fellas have retired and settled down. Over the years, we’ve come here less and less. We haven’t hunted the land in years, although last year we threw a hook and a line in a time or two. In reality, the last time we all got together it was mostly for sentimental reasons—a trip down memory lane, so to speak.”

“Mr. Vaughn, I’d hate to see the cabin get torn down. I’m a builder—a craftsman in the construction trade—and I could help you get this place fixed up if you’d like,” Eric offered.

Carl stood and opened the door. “Please, come in. Let’s get out of the sun and talk.”

They sat at the kitchen table, and Carl poured them each a glass of iced tea.

“I’d like to thank you for your offer,” Carl said. “But I want to get the property ready to sell. You see, I recently sold my business, and my wife and I are relocating. It’s time to enjoy our time together and spend it with our grandchildren. I will admit, though, that I’m going to miss this old cabin,” he said, looking around. “Oh, if these walls could talk.”

“Oh, yeah? I take it you and your friends had some good times here,” Eric replied.

“Yes. Good times, indeed. You see, this place wasn’t just a fishing cabin. It wasn’t just any old cabin—it was the people in the cabin that made it what it was. We hunted here, we fished here, and we made plans here. Big plans, mighty big plans.”

“What kinds of plans?” Eric asked.

“You name it, we planned it. Businesses were born here, son. Ideas became multimillion dollar inventions. At times, there was more motivation, inspiration, and debate in this room than there was when the Cubs finally made it to the World Series. Eric, while most guys leave a fishing trip with tall tales about the big one that got away, we left this cabin with tall goals that we never let go of. Oh, if these walls could talk, the tales they would tell ...”

“Wow. I’m really impressed,” Eric said, looking around the cabin. “Now that I know that, it seems even more of a shame to tear this cabin down. It seems like you’d want to preserve some of its history and all those memories.”

“Oh, those memories are preserved, I assure you. They’re now on store shelves. They’re features in automobiles. They’re part of technology and medicine. It wasn’t the cabin that inspired them—it was the great minds that visited here, all working in synergy to support and advise each other. We were quite a team, young man, quite a team.”

Eric paused, letting his new friend reminisce for a moment. Then, he got an idea.

“Um, Mr. Vaughn, excuse me, but I’d like to make you an offer.”

“You want to buy this cabin?”

“Oh, no. I’m sorry. Um, actually, I was thinking that I would be happy to tear it down for you—for free. You’d get what you want and it wouldn’t cost you a dime. The only thing I’d ask is that you let me keep and preserve as much of it as possible. I’d love to incorporate the history of this cabin into my cabin. I could use some of the materials, and I assure you, I’d take great pride in knowing that I was able to preserve such an important piece of your past.”

“Hmmm. Well, that is something to think about. I can certainly afford to pay someone to take the cabin off my hands, but if you’re serious, I’d actually prefer to let you knock it down, and I think the fellas would agree. I came here this weekend to remove some of the items I want to keep, but I was going to leave other

furnishings and items behind. If they are of any interest to you, you're welcome to anything you can use," Carl offered.

"Thank you, sir. Thank you so much," Eric said, shaking the gentleman's hand. "I promise I'll get to work on it as soon as you're ready, and I'll clean the site up when I'm done. It will be all ready to go on the market. Just let me know when I can get started."

Eric jotted down his name and phone number on a notepad he found sitting in the center of the table, grateful that he'd followed his instincts and stopped by to introduce himself. The materials from the cabin could be repurposed for the addition and would fit in with his grandfather's cabin quite well. That made Eric think of something.

"Hey, Mr. Vaughn, since you've been here so long, did you know my grandfather, William Schultz? Since your properties are side by side, had you two ever met?"

"Oh, yes, young man. I did know your grandfather. I only saw him once every few months, for a couple days at a time, but, yes, we knew each other. As a matter of fact, back in the day, we hunted and fished a time or two. Your grandfather had a great mind, Eric. I admired William very much, and he spoke highly of you, though I'm sure you were a young lad back then."

Smiling, Eric chuckled. "I'm sure I was. Thank you. That means so much to me," Eric said. "I'll leave you alone now. Just give me a call about when I can start. In the meantime, if you need anything, I'm just down the road."

Watching Eric's truck back out of the driveway, Carl thought about what had transpired. Although he'd just met the young man, he liked him. In fact, there was something about Eric that reminded him very much of William, who had been a good friend and neighbor whenever Carl had visited the cabin. Eventually, William even became a member of the mastermind group that had met in Carl Vaughn's cabin for decades. It was a closed group—a secret group in many ways—and most people believed they were just a group of guys who got together for a man cave kind of weekend. But it was more—so much more.

It's too bad, Carl thought, these walls can't talk. It was a shame that the secrets to their successes couldn't be passed on, especially to Eric. William would have liked that....

Then Carl had an idea. Pulling his keys out of his pocket, he went to the old desk under the living room window and unlocked the center drawer. Reaching in, he pulled out a metal box and set it on the table in front of him. With one turn of the key it opened, and Carl reached in and picked up a handful of tokens.

Maybe, just maybe, these walls can talk, he thought, smiling.

