

# **FINAL HARVEST**

## **Book One Finding Home Series**

### **by Barbara Howard**

#### **EXCERPT**

The seat in Moe's old pickup truck was worn through so badly that the foam padding pushed out of the ripped seams. He laid an empty feed sack over it to protect Traci's legs from being pinched by the tattered brown vinyl. The roof liner hung down and brushed the top of her head, and the rear-view mirror was missing. There was a rancid odor that she dared not ask about. Despite all of that, she was grateful for the ride. Moe had not hesitated when she approached him that morning at the farm. He dropped everything, lifted her into the cab and got them down the highway.

There was no one stationed at the Rest Haven receptionist desk when she arrived. Traci glanced down each corridor for assistance until finally one of the attendants stepped away from his task cleaning the window cocoon and approached her.

"Hello, can I help you?"

"Hello," Traci said reaching for her wallet. "I'm here to see Mr. Earl Garrett. I apologize for not calling ahead. It was a last-minute idea to drop in for a visit."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Earl is no longer with us," the attendant said frowning. "We're all very sad about that. But we know nothing in this old world is permanent. Still, you get attached to the residents. Some more than others."

"Oh, I didn't know."

"They usually contact family members first," the attendant said looking her over. "Are you a relative? Wait, I think I remember seeing you here before. What is your name again? Wait, it'll come to me." He studied her face for a few minutes. "Boy, Mr. Earl really enjoyed your last visit. After you left all he did was play his music. It was so loud that the other residents complained about it." He laughed and shook his head. "But next thing you know, they were dancing in the hall. It was something. I sure am going to miss that old man. But when it's your time to go..."

He shrugged and wheeled the service cart to a spot along the wall. "We should have some paperwork for you to complete, though. Give me a moment to take care of Miss Clarice down the

hall here and I'll be right with you." He walked away toward the office. "In the meantime, go ahead and sign the book for me, please."

Traci rushed back to the parking lot and climbed into the truck.

"What happened?" Moe said helping her pull the door closed.

"He's dead."

"Are you sure?"

"Pretty sure," she said patting her forehead. "They wanted to give me some paperwork or something. I don't know. I just make a mess of everything. What was I thinking about coming here in the first place? Instead of helping, I just make things worse." She grabbed a fistful of her hair.

"Listen, Miss Traci," Moe said and loosened her grip and pulled her arm down to her lap. "Ain't nobody mad at you but you. Everything you did was to help us and to keep alive what Miss Rowena started. And we appreciate that. Everybody does. Don't get down on yourself about nothing."

"Wait here," Traci said and took a deep breath. She climbed out of the truck and slammed the rusted door behind her.

She walked back to the reception desk and waited for the attendant to return. There had to be something that she was missing about Earl Garrett. If she had gotten this far, what did she have to lose to ask a few more questions? She glanced down at the Visitor Registry. And there it was.