

Pine Valley Series : Book Three

A PLACE  
CALLED  
THE WAY

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## CHAPTER TWELVE

Late one afternoon, Candelaria left the house, following a path that led through the woods over to her mother's. It was 1951 and, her father, the children's Grandpa Jesse had passed away, leaving Candelaria to take care of her aging mother. She helped any way she could. Going for walks became an enjoyable pastime for them both, sometimes making it a picnic. Her mother, Ev, was nearly eighty, by that time, so their pace was slow and contemplative.

Candelaria appreciated spending time with her mother, which, in comparison to her home life, was quiet and serene. Her mother was the very picture of grace and simplicity, walking with her hands clasped behind her back, sometimes fashioning a walking stick from a tree branch. They would talk about the old days, sing songs, and laugh.

The shade was always welcome on warm, summer days, but, at that particular time of year, the air was much cooler. Leaves on the elms along the road, the maples in the woods, and the oaks were turning colors, yellow, orange, and red, piling in great drifts along the roadsides. The dampness from recent rains brought out

the muddy, earthy odors of leaf mold and dead and decaying grasses and weeds. Puddles reflected the golden-yellow of leaves from above, along with the sky, so deeply azure.

Candelaria was about to share a minor tidbit of news, when she was startled by the sound of other voices. She and her mother looked at one another as the laughter of young people drew near.

She asked her mother, "Who could that be?"

Ev shrugged her shoulders and drew up her hands while shaking her head. "Don't know," she answered. She looked at her daughter, waiting, then questioned her in a whisper, "What do you want to do?"

The voices were familiar to Candelaria. She stood in place listening to them as they faded away. She and her mother both agreed the young people must have gone. Her mother was soon joking about it, being snoops over a couple of high school students walking home from school.

They continued walking along for at least another twenty or thirty minutes, stopping occasionally to look at something or comment on it.

Candelaria asked her mother, "Are you tired?"

"No," Ev answered. "Let's go to the livery stable. I haven't seen Jim in a long time." Her lower lip drew down in a childish pout.

Candelaria reluctantly agreed. "All right," she said with a noticeable sigh.

"What's the matter, mi hija?" Ev asked.

"I don't feel welcome there anymore," said Candelaria.

"What do you mean?" Ev was concerned.

Candelaria said, "Walter Henry gives me looks like he doesn't want me around." She stopped walking and grew sad.

Many was the time when Rosa laid her head in Ev's lap and poured out her grief over what took place in her family's home. So, as Candelaria stood there looking so sad, Ev knew why. Her daughter's family life was troubled, not only because of her grandson's problems, but because her daughter and her son-in-law were not getting along with one another. She hesitated saying anything, since her granddaughter told her in confidence.

They waited near the road, neither of them knowing what to do. A light breeze drifted through the woods. With it, came those same voices they had heard earlier. The young people, a boy and a girl, had evidently lingered somewhere nearby and were stomping through the leaves and talking.

Looking in that direction, Candelaria soon spotted them. "There they are!" she said, trying to keep her voice down.

Two people came up the embankment out of the woods and onto a back road nearby that led toward the houses in Edenville. They were less than a couple hundred yards away and showed not the slightest awareness that they were being watched. It was Sylvia Cadwallader and Tucker Stewart. Sylvia was buttoning the front of her blouse, putting on her sweater, and straightening her skirt, while he was tucking in his shirt and putting on his jacket. He pulled a leaf from her hair. They laughed and embraced one another.

Candelaria and Ev stood frozen to the spot, watching the two engage in some serious kissing like—

"Oh, Laria," said Ev while looking at her daughter. "I can hear your mind from here, mi hija. Don't think those thoughts."

Candelaria's eyebrows were down in her seriousness, so angry, appalled, as she asked her mother, "What kind of girl would do such a thing, Mamá?" She was flabbergasted.

Her mother kept shaking her head and cautioned her daughter. “We’d better go back to the house,” she said. “This is no time to be seeing Jim.”

Defiant, Candelaria said, “No, this is exactly the right time to see him.” She wanted to tell her son what she had seen, so he would know what kind of girl Sylvia was and forget about her for good.

Ev was afraid, growing impatient, and told her daughter, “Come on.” She began to walk back to her house, urging her daughter to listen. She tried to keep her voice down, but her daughter was ignoring her. “Forget about it!” she said. “It’s none of our business!”

Still, Candelaria would not heed her mother’s words, watching Tucker and Sylvia slowly walk away, his arm around her waist. They kissed again and Candelaria turned her head away, suddenly ashamed of herself for having watched them.

Ev gestured quickly with her hand for her daughter to come with her. “Laria!” she said in an emphatic whisper. “Ven aquí! Now! Let’s go!”

It was then that the spell was broken and Candelaria finally surrendered. She believed that God showed her this for a reason, showed *her*, not her son. Recalling the time he was hurt by this girl, shocked her into realizing what a dangerous mistake it would be to tell him. It would be wrong, even cruel.

“You’re right, Mamá,” she said. “Let’s go back to your house.”

Regardless of their seriousness, Ev could not resist making fun of what they saw.

“Laria.”

“What, Mamá?”

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Making sure Candelaria was watching her, Ev repeated, “Laria. Laria, mírame. Look.”

Candelaria looked her way as her mother began pretending she was kissing someone passionately, which got them both laughing again.

“Ahh, Life,” Ev said with a smile.

Candelaria reminded her mother that Jim was planning to go to his Uncle Jefferson’s house after school, so he was not at the barn. They talked about other things, what her mother wanted to do at the house, like clean out more of her husband’s clothes and his personal possessions.

Ev remarked sadly, “I don’t need those things.”

They were quiet the rest of the way back to the house. Ev occasionally stopped to pick up a little stone or an interesting piece of wood and examine it. Candelaria renewed her obsession over what she had seen take place between Tucker and Sylvia. She had not talked to Tucker Stewart since he was a little boy. The idea of confronting him as a teenager about his behavior was out of the question. The reminder that he was a teammate of her son’s and the brother of her daughter’s friends, affirmed her decision to avoid saying anything to him, or anyone.

Stepping out of the drugstore one day, she nearly collided with Tucker and some of his teammates on their way to the diner. She noted he was grinning like he had some kind of private joke on his mind.

“I think it’s going to rain,” he said to his friends, and they laughed.

Tucker’s rude comment closed the issue for Candelaria, who realized that, despite his actions, he was still a kid. She asked herself if she would continue to judge him and Sylvia or forgive

them. She decided to forgive, for even she could remember what it was like to be young and in love.