

EXISTING

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CHAPTER 1

“You can’t say anything, not one word.”

“Okay, I won’t.”

“Not a word!”

“Okay!”

“Promise!”

“I promise.”

“Okay. Remember, you promised.”

“Okay!”

Crystal looked into her sister’s eyes to be sure she was telling the truth. Taylor didn’t seem serious enough, but then what could she expect from a 12-year-old?

“And why can’t we say anything?” Taylor asked.

“Because they don’t really want us. They are just taking us because they have to.”

“They don’t have to. Mom said we were probably going to live with a foster family before she knew about them.”

“They are like a foster family! And don’t call her ‘Mom!’ If Tammy was really our mom, she would have kept us!”

“She couldn’t keep us with all of her kids too. It was too many.”

“You really listened to her, didn’t you? We are just too different to stay with them. Well, that’s why you can’t talk to these guys, because they will just try to confuse you.”

“You mean we can’t EVER talk to them?”

“Never. You promised!”

“I know, I know! I won’t.”

“You girls need to put your seats in the upright position now, we’re getting ready to land shortly,” the flight attendant told them.

“Yes, ma’am,” Taylor said, as she and Crystal obeyed.

This was the first time they had ever been on a plane. Crystal looked around so she could memorize the sights, the sounds, the feel of the plane. She doubted they would ever have the opportunity to fly again. She was not looking forward to landing, and what would come after that; in fact, she was

not looking forward to anything at all. What good could come out of flying across the country to live with people she couldn't remember, who didn't want them anyway?

"Maybe they'll be really nice," Taylor said.

"If they are, it's only because they have to be."

"No, they don't."

"Well, it doesn't matter. We don't have anything to say to them."

"How will we know them?"

"I think Mo—Tammy sent them a picture of us."

"But why would they take us if they don't have to? They're not relatives or anything."

"I don't know why, but do you really think anyone would want us? Look at us! Everyone on this plane is white, and we are mixed."

"Daddy always said we were golden brown."

"I told you not to talk about him!"

"But I--"

"Not a word! The plane is about to land."

The girls were silent for the rest of the flight. This was how Crystal liked it – silent. She didn't want to explain anything to anybody and she didn't want to hear what anyone else had to say about anything. Nobody knew her, what was inside of her, and nobody wanted to know. Nobody cared, and she didn't need anybody bothering her.

The plane landed in Portland, Oregon. Crystal and Taylor got their bags from the overhead bin and followed the other passengers into the airport. While Taylor looked around curiously, Crystal kept her head down to avoid the stares of the strangers.

"Hello, girls," a friendly voice boomed enthusiastically. "Welcome to the Great Northwest!"

Crystal tapped Taylor to remind her not to say anything. Taylor nodded, as Crystal glanced up and then away from the man with the friendly voice. She caught a glimpse of a big smile and gentle eyes.

"You must be tired after that long flight," he continued. "You probably don't remember me and my wife, but we remember you. I'm Pastor Young, and this is my wife, Sister Young. You girls have really grown!"

"Well, it has been 10 years – or was it 11?" Sister Young said kindly. Crystal didn't remember them at all. She was surprised to see that they were a mixed couple; Pastor Young was black and his wife was white. That might explain why she and Taylor were being transported across the country to live with them; but that still didn't mean they wanted Crystal and Taylor. Crystal avoided their eyes.

“Do you have a suitcase? Did you check any luggage?” Pastor Young asked.

Taylor shook her head and held up her paper sack with her clothes in it. They hadn’t been able to bring much; they hadn’t had much to bring. Crystal didn’t respond.

“Well, let’s go to the car,” Pastor Young said. “We have a long drive ahead of us. Are you girls hungry?”

Crystal didn’t feel hungry. She looked at Taylor, who glared at her and frowned, without responding verbally.

“I’m sure you must be, after that long flight,” Sister Young said. “We’ll get something to go, and you can eat it in the car.”

“Do you like hamburgers?” Pastor Young asked. Without waiting for an answer, he continued, “Or do you like chicken? We’ll pick up some chicken. I’m a little hungry myself.”

Pastor Young continued to talk as they walked across the huge airport and through the parking garage to the car. It wasn’t a new car, but it was a pretty turquoise color, and it was very clean. Pastor Young opened the door for them to get in the back seat.

“It will be nice to have young people in the house again,” Sister Young remarked. “And girls! We’ve only had boys before. I am really happy you are coming to live with us. I think you’re going to like our home. We live on a farm – did your mother tell you? -- way out in the country, and we have plenty of room.”

Crystal was familiar with farm life in Tennessee. They had lived on the edge of a small town, on a dusty farm. The kids at school had teased them – not so much for being poor, because they all were poor, but because she and Taylor were the only two people in town who didn’t have blond hair. The other kids had called them awful names and most of them wouldn’t even speak to Crystal. It had become easy for her not to talk to people, especially during the past few months. Taylor had had a couple of friends at school but Crystal was sure they wouldn’t last long, as soon as they were old enough to realize how different she was from everybody else in that small town.

Crystal looked with disinterest out the car window to the lights of the city as they drove away from the airport. She couldn’t remember ever being in a city this big, a city full of selfish, stuck-up people who didn’t care anything about anyone but themselves. She tuned out the conversation that Pastor Young and his wife were attempting to have with her and Taylor. The lights became a blur and Crystal fell into a deep sleep before they stopped to get the chicken.