

Chapter 1

Of Course We Want Her

“Mama, are we almost there?” Brian, our five-year-old son, sat between us that rainy Thursday evening on the journey from our college town in eastern Washington to Seattle, clutching the fingerprinted picture of his “prayed for” sister.

“Not too much farther,” I reassured. “Let’s draw some pictures. I’ll put the photograph of Noreen in my purse.”

As my husband, Mert, drove, Brian and I doodled; and I thought about the vague details we knew of Noreen’s parentage and first year.

When we reached Seattle, we spent the evening with Mert’s brother, Mo, and his wife, Sharon.

Friday morning we met Miss Jay, the social worker, and drove to the foster home. She introduced us to Mrs. Dirk and Noreen. Then the caseworker said, “Well go into the kitchen and leave you to get acquainted with Noreen.” I sat on the carpet and Mert on a footstool. Brian inspected the room.

I took some keys out of my purse and jingled them. Noreen studied me and inched forward.

“Notice her blue eyes and blond hair,” I said. Mert nodded and we exchanged a knowing glance.

“She’s big for a one-year-old. I wonder if she’ll be as tall as her mother?” he whispered.

I tossed Mert the keys. Noreen’s eyes followed. She waddled over to him. He picked her up and handed her the keys. She gave them a toss. He retrieved them. She laughed and pitched them again.

We played for about thirty minutes, then made an appointment to visit and take Noreen out after she napped. As we reached the car Miss Jay asked, “Do you still want her?”

“Of course,” we all chorused.

While Noreen slept, we ate and shopped. I found her a blue dotted Swiss Sabbath dress to match her eyes. Mert and Brian picked out a doll.

“She’s asleep,” whispered Mrs. Dirk when we returned later.

Mrs. Dirk explained Noreen’s daily schedule and chattered about the child’s love of music, her sicknesses, her likes and dislikes. A cry from the bedroom interrupted us. Mrs. Dirk changed Noreen’s diaper

and handed her to Mert. “She’s had a lot of colds ... plagued with diarrhea ... never eaten candy,” were phrases that caught my attention as the foster mother followed us to the door. She watched as we piled into the front seat of our compact car.

Noreen giggled as Brian handed her the doll. Brian’s brown eyes sparkled.

We spent some time at a nearby park. Brian tried all the playground equipment. We chose the swings. Noreen sat passively on Mert’s lap as they swung back and forth. “It’ll be nice to have a quiet little girl,” he commented.

“Yes, it’d be hard to keep up with two as active as Brian,” I answered.

When we tired of the playground we returned to the Dirk’s and made plans to pick up Noreen at the adoption agency the next morning. Brian cried as Mert backed our car out of the driveway. “Can’t we take her now?” he pleaded.

The next morning we climbed the stairs of the massive brick building. We opened the heavy doors and a woman greeted us.

“You must be the Vincents.” We nodded. “Right this way.” She ushered us into a small room. “Miss Jay will be with you in a minute.” She left.

We each took a chair. Soon the social worker entered carrying a folder. She handed us several documents.

“Sign on all the lines where I’ve marked an X.” She stood by the window and stared out as we studied and signed the papers. “You’ll be foster parents for a six month probationary period. It’s state law. Your caseworker will keep in close contact with your family during this time. Hell then write a report for the judge as part of the court’s evidence in the adoption. Any questions?” “Yes,” said Mert.

“Oh, just a minute,” she said as she turned from the window. “I’ll get Noreen.”

Through the window we saw the foster mother hand the child and a grocery bag to Miss Jay, then stumble tearfully to her car.

I wiped away tears as Miss Jay entered with the bewildered child. She handed Noreen to me. The toddler wore a faded red snowsuit. White lining seeped out of the many holes. Her toes protruded from her shoes. Mert inspected the contents of the bag and pulled out an empty disposable bottle and a few other discarded plastic containers.

“Her toys,” Miss Jay answered our puzzled looks.

“We didn’t bring any diapers,” I told her.

BEAUTIFUL IN HIS TIME

“Most foster mothers keep any good things,” she explained. “The cost comes out of their pay. I’ll get you some diapers.”

Brian played peek-a-boo with his new sister while we waited. Miss Jay returned with half a dozen worn, but clean diapers. Now we can get her back to the apartment without any complication, I thought as I remembered Mrs. Dirk’s comment about diarrhea.

As we walked down the hall with the social worker, Mert asked, “Why did the agency keep her a year? Why wasn’t she adopted sooner?”

Miss Jay stopped and hesitated. “It was a mistake. We thought there was a medical problem, but it was all a mistake.”