

Abandoned in Search of Rainbows

A. K. DRIGGS

ACT I



ON THE ROAD WITH MOM

Naples, Florida is behind us now. It's the summer before my fortieth birthday, and Mom and I are driving cross-country in her car with the stuff she chose to keep with her rather than send along with the moving van. We're heading to the Vegas condo I found for her in The Lakes, only ten minutes away from the rental house I share with Shannon and Kyle.

It's a busy time for Avatar, my company, but I'm not concerned about being away from it. One thing I know for sure about myself is that the busier I become, the more I can take on. And right now, what matters most to me is that I convinced Mom to make this move. I need to watch over her, be there for her. God knows she's always been there for me. Well, except for that one time. I look over at her and take in her sadness, her aches and pains.

I want so much for her to be happy. And because I'm in the driver's seat right now, I'm working some magic. We're singing together. I glance over and catch a little sparkle gleaming from her baby blues that once upon a time dazzled every beholder. To see her smile like that still takes my breath away.

Mom reaches over to my arm and suddenly asks, "You still have it? The article?"

“Not on me,” I tell her. “But I still have it. At home.” I decide not to mention that I also still have it in my head. Without realizing it, I had memorized effortlessly every word of it. I know where Mom’s going with this, and it makes sense. Mom wants to talk now, not sing. She wants to go down memory lane while we’re on this trip.

“Go ahead, honey,” she says. “You start.”

I look over and see she’s tearing up. “Okay if we start at the beginning again?” That’s usually where we start because the truth is we both know I can never hear her tell these stories often enough, even though by now I know all of them not only by heart but also backwards and forwards.

Mom leans against the passenger window, closing her eyes. “My God, Kim,” she says, and though I’m passing a truck, I can hear her smile. Mom continues. “I’ll never forget that moment,” she says, “the moment I turned the page, and there was your precious little face. And I’ll never forget what happened after that, every step of the way.”

❖ ❖ ❖ CHAPTER 1 ❖ ❖ ❖

IN THE BEGINNING

January 25, 1954, in upstate New York was another gloomy and frigid winter day. In downtown Rochester, piles of icy snow, filthy from automobile exhaust, road salt, and sand, lined the sidewalks.

As Mrs. Slora, owner of Saeger's Grill, the neighborhood bar and restaurant located at 218 Clinton Avenue North, tended to her chores inside, she saw a young woman enter through the bar's side door. Dressed in a long, black coat and a flowered kerchief tied around her head, she appeared very tired. As the young woman headed directly toward the restroom, Mrs. Slora noticed that she was carrying a brown paper bag.

After several minutes had passed, Mrs. Slora realized she'd not seen the woman come out of the restroom. Thinking there might be a problem, Mrs. Slora hurried over to find out if she could help. But when she opened the restroom door, the woman was not to be found.

What she did find, however, was the paper sack the woman had been carrying. It had been placed on the lid of the toilet seat. Mrs. Slora walked over and peered inside the bag. To her utter dismay, she saw a tiny infant, sleeping peacefully.

Bits of dark brown hair flared out from beneath the blanket in which the child had been wrapped. As gently as possible, Mrs. Slora removed the tiny bundle, unwrapped the blanket, and saw that the abandoned infant was a baby girl.



The police came quickly after Mrs. Slora's phone call. Detective James Martin immediately sent the foundling to Genesee Hospital. Nurses took over. The baby, they reported, appeared to be in good health. In a few days, they would turn her over to the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. Soon, SPCC director, Guy D. Harris, reported that his agency would be joining in the police investigation to find the foundling's mother.

Although not front-page news, the abandoned baby rated high in human interest and ran in the following day's paper.



While reading the January 26, morning edition of the *Democrat and Chronicle* newspaper over breakfast, Betty blurted out, "Bob, look, here in the paper." She pointed with enthusiasm to an article. "Now there's a little girl that needs a home. Why can't we have her?"

Bob leaned over his eggs and toast and quickly read the article showing a photo of an infant girl with dark brown hair resting in the arms of a nurse. Somewhat emotionless, he replied, "Why, that is quite a story. Honey, I don't know why we can't have her." And he went back to reading the business section.

Betty looked at him with frustration. Was that it? He had nothing more to say on the matter? She was distraught and pulled the paper back to her chest. She sat in silence staring at the little face of the baby being fed a bottle by a nurse. Betty's heart sank as she thought of herself. *Will I ever have a little girl of my own?* And she felt sad for the little girl. *Who would abandon such a beautiful child?*

She continued drinking her black coffee and turned the page to read an article that the Supreme Court had ruled that race-based segregation in schools is unconstitutional. That was the only thing that pleased Betty that morning.



The article said the infant had been crying "lustily." The caption of the photo of the baby being fed read: "WHOSE? Foundling girl,

abandoned in rest room, finds solace in bottle offered by Nurse Ruth Lyon in Genesee Hospital. Investigators seek baby's mother.”

At the hospital, doctors identified Mediterranean traits and ordered numerous blood tests to see if they could verify the baby's nationality. The results were inconclusive. The authorities determined that the female baby was approximately two to four days old, so when they created her birth certificate, they dated it January 23, 1954. They named the foundling Jane Churchill.

