



chapter 1

She held the baby tightly in her arms, tears silently streaming down her face—tears not of joy, but of grief, and of loss, and of never going back. She caressed the baby’s skin with her eyes as the priest gently brushed his fingers up and across its smooth, pink forehead. The child was so delicate, so quiet, so achingly beautiful.

“You have a lovely little girl there,” said the priest.

Pat did not answer him. She knew her daughter was lovely, indescribably so. Hadn’t she spent the last day and a half counting her toes, stroking her silky hair, and breathing in her sweet, powdery smell? The child was more than lovely; she was perfect—perfect enough to pass anyone’s inspection.

All that was left was to see that she was christened with the name Pat had dreamed about for the last nine months—Suzzane.

The ceremony didn’t take long. It was just a formality, really, a sprinkle of water on the hair, a smear of oil above

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the brow, and a few prayers. But Pat felt better about things now. Well, a little better anyway. At least her daughter would have a place in Heaven and a name given to her by her own mother. That would have to be enough.

The nurse handed Pat a Kleenex. She nodded, said a quick thanks, and dried her eyes.

She felt herself smiling as she was wheeled down the short hallway from the chapel to the nursery. Though she wouldn't have been able to explain why—even to herself. What did she need Vince for anyway? She was going to get a job and find a little place for her and little Harry to live, and they would be happy again. And Suzzane? She would never have to know what it is like to be hungry, or afraid, or betrayed. No, for her, it would be different—she was going to belong to a family.

Pat watched through the glass, as the nurse wrapped the pink blanket more snugly around Suzzane's tiny body and tenderly laid the sleeping child in the bassinet. Yes, her little girl was going to have a good family.

Pat went back to her room alone.

She climbed into the bed and cautiously laid her head against the pillow. The headache that had tormented her ever since she had walked down to the pay phone to call Vince was threatening to return. Vince, the wretch. She had loved him once—at least she had thought she did. He had seemed so affectionate and kind. Now he was a loathsome thing.

How could she have been so stupid? His kind of love wasn't real. It was self-centered and deceitful and only as

big as what he could get out of it. What a miserable loser. He didn't deserve to be a father.

But she didn't really hate him; at least, not the way she wished she could. No, she felt more pity for him than hate. He was a selfish user who didn't know what real love was, and she was lucky to be rid of him.

Sleep had almost found her, when Pat heard the sound of soft shoes on linoleum that announced a visitor. The distinctive smell of Pall Mall cigarettes, lightly masked by Ivory soap, told her that it was her mother. Pat opened her eyes.

Ma was a tiny woman. Shoulder-length gray hair and deep lines on her forehead made her look much older than fifty-one. Life had been hard on her. Still, she looked nice in the yellow and orange dress that hung to just below her knees. It was her best dress—this visit was important to her.

“How are you doing?” Ma asked.

Pat sat up against the pillow. “I'm doing good. How did you get here?”

“What does that matter? I brought you these.” Ma held out a brown paper bag. It looked new. She must have stopped at Woolworth's on the way to the hospital.

Pat peeked inside the bag, then pulled out a pair of soft, blue slippers. They looked just like the kind Ma wore herself. “They're pretty,” Pat said. “Thanks, these floors are cold. Would you mind setting them on the nightstand for me?”

Ma placed the slippers neatly on the nightstand, then turned the green leather chair so that it faced the bed and

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sat down. Pat leaned her head back and closed her eyes. The headache was swelling again.

The two women sat quietly for several minutes, Pat in the bed and Ma in the chair. It was Ma who broke the silence. "Patsy, I can't believe you're going to give her up. I never saw such a beautiful baby."

"You saw her?" asked Pat, her eyes now wide open.

Ma looked puzzled. "Of course I saw her, just before I came in here."

"No one was supposed to see her. I told them that."

"You can see right through the window; she's the only white baby in the nursery. It wasn't hard to figure out which one was her."

"You shouldn't have even gone to the nursery. I told you on the phone I didn't want any visitors, and you knew I didn't want anyone to see her."

"That's ridiculous. Of course I can see my own granddaughter."

"Ma, you shouldn't think of her as your granddaughter; you're just making it harder on yourself."

"Bah! Of course she's my granddaughter. And I don't see how you can even think of giving her up!"

Pat took a deep breath. This was hard enough without her mother's interference. "You know how it is for Harry and me. We're barely making it. I can't possibly take care of another child. Not the way she deserves. I want her to grow up in a family—a good family—and to have a father who loves her and cares about her."

"Your father was never around, and you turned out fine."

“That’s just it. I don’t want my daughter to go through what I’ve gone through. Ma, I want her to have a family.”

“Children belong with their mother,” Ma retorted.

Pat closed her eyes again. She rubbed her temples and squeezed the back of her neck. They had warned her to lie flat after the spinal. Why didn’t she ever listen to people who knew better?

“Does Vince know?” Ma asked.

“I called him yesterday,” answered Pat. “Well, I called the dispatcher; Vince was out on a run. It wouldn’t have made any difference. He dumped me the minute he found out I was expecting; he certainly wouldn’t care that he had a daughter.”

“He doesn’t deserve a daughter.”

“That’s what the dispatcher said.”

“You told him?”

“You bet I did! I wasn’t gonna waste the call. He not only wrote down my message; he said he would post it on the bulletin board. All the other drivers read it before Vince even got back.”

“What did it say?”

“The message? ‘Congratulations, Vince—you have just become the father of a beautiful baby girl.’”

“You didn’t! Serves him right—the deadbeat.”

Ma left soon after that, but her words echoed in Pat’s mind. *Children belong with their mother.* The words had shaken Pat’s resolve. Would Suzzane really be better off with other parents? Harry seemed to be doing okay, and all he had was a mother. If love was all that was needed to raise a child,