

Skyla. Bernardo quickly turned off the dangling lightbulb, and before he pulled the door shut on his way to the yard, he grabbed his biggest shovel.

I could smell the freshly shorn wood. I ran my fingers along the rippled aluminum wall.

"What's going to happen?" whispered Owen.

"I think she's going to come over and try to convince Gram to send me with her," I whispered back.

I kept hearing Skyla's words, "Something could happen to her any time now, old as she is."

Softly, Owen said, "Why doesn't Skyla want me, too?" My mind tumbled to think of some comfort words.

"It's plain and clear she only wants me so I can be friends with Clive's daughter and so she can get money from the state. So, I'm nothing special." I touched my cheek and winced from the tenderness. I could still hear Skyla saying that there was more where that came from.

Owen thought on what I'd said for a minute. Even in the almost dark, I could see his round eyes intent on my

face. He shook his head. "I think she never wanted me when I was a baby because I wasn't . . . you know, like everyone else, and I think she doesn't want me now."

"But Gram wanted us, Owen. And our father. Those are the good things. We were lucky for that." I scooted over close to him and put my arm around his shoulders while we waited.

We heard Lulu's barking first. Owen and I carefully peeked through the window in the door. We could see Gram and Fabiola, who was now holding Lulu, and Bernardo by their side. The three stood shoulder to shoulder, like a barricade.

Skyla stood in front of them talking so soft, almost cooing, that we couldn't hear her words.

But Gram's voice carried in the crisp night air. "She is not going anywhere with you and that is that!"

The cooing stopped and Skyla's voice fired up. "Clive told me you'd be like this. If you don't go along, all I have to do is show up with a police officer. You can't prove any

legal rights to her. She'll have to go with me. Is that what you want? Me showing up with a police officer to take Naomi?"

I held my stomach, thinking I might be sick. Would Gram have to let me go?

"Skyla, I'd go to the end of the earth to protect that child. I'll go to court if that's what I have to do."

Skyla laughed. "The court would never deny custody to a natural parent. Clive told me all about it. There's not a judge that wouldn't give me my own child."

"You abandoned those children!" said Gram. "That will count for something. And there's another kettle of fish to consider. What about their father?"

"Him? What about him? He hasn't seen them in years. He doesn't care." Skyla stumbled, then steadied herself. "Now where is she?"

"Skyla, what makes you think I'd turn her over, especially with you in your condition. You're drinking. I can tell."

"That does not concern you! Now, I'm saying it again. Clive, Naomi, and I are going to Las Vegas. Where is she?"

Bernardo took a few steps toward Skyla with the shovel pointed out.

Skyla walked backward, slowly, and waved a shaky finger at Gram. "Fine! I'll be back with Clive to pick up Naomi at noon on Saturday, and I expect her bags to be packed. If she's not ready, I'm going straight to the police. I'm not going to forget you making problems for me and Clive. Naomi doesn't belong to you. She belongs to me. She is *my* daughter."

Fabiola and Lulu spent the night with us in Baby Beluga, but it was a small comfort because I didn't sleep a straight ten minutes. I had ideas of Skyla and Clive scooping me up at any moment to the point I was more tired when I woke up Friday morning than when I'd gone to bed the night before. It didn't matter. We didn't go to school anyway, which was fine by me. I stuck to Gram like an ivy plant on the side of a barn and glanced over my shoulder at the least little sound. That afternoon, Gram went with Fabiola to do private errands and said I couldn't come along. Owen

and I stayed with Bernardo, and Lulu was close by as guard dog. But even then, when one of the grove workers knocked on the door, I ran to the kitchen and started to cry.

That night Gram and Fabiola barely watched *Wheel of Fortune*. They had their heads together, talking quietlike the whole time. When I crawled into bed my body collapsed into the mattress, heavy and limp, like a half-full flour sack. It was a different kind of tired than I'd ever known my whole life.

Gram came to tuck me in, smiling.

I had already asked her a dozen times, but I had to ask again; "Are you sure Skylla's not coming for me tomorrow?"

"Don't you worry," said Gram. "Tomorrow you are definitely not going to be with Skylla."

"But the police —"

"Shush," said Gram. "I have plans, Naomi, but you don't need to be concerned with them. Now, can you muster a tiny smile for me? The last few days you've had a permanent wrinkled brow."

I struggled to make my mouth turn up on the ends. Then I skipped into sleep.

A regular sound, like a clock, rocked me in a deep, gentle fog with no nightmares or dreams, just nothingness, over and over. Mist and motion, mist and motion. I felt suspended in a hammock of sleep, swaying back and forth. When I did wake in the morning, I felt as peaceful as a kitten after a long nap, until I blinked several times. Then the restfulness startled out of me.

I sat up. "Owen!"

Sleepy eyed, Owen sat up and looked at me.

We both grabbed the sides of our beds.

The walls pitched and vibrated. An earthquake!

"Gram!" I called, but there was no answer.

I tried to think. What did they tell us to do in school? Stand in a doorway or a small bathroom.

I struggled to get out of bed and to help Owen. I pulled him along behind me and tried to balance with one

hand against the trailer wall, but I could hardly stay straight. The shaking kept up at a steady pace.

"Gram!" I called again.

I stumbled down the narrow hallway with Owen. For a second I was afraid to look into the living room/kitchen. I'd seen those earthquake movies and the reports on television. Nothing left on the walls. Cupboards open and dishes smashed on the floor. I leaned forward and peeked into the room.

Gram and Fabiola sat at the drop-down table drinking coffee. Out the window behind them, cars sprinted by in the opposite direction. It wasn't an earthquake. Baby Beluga was moving down a highway!

Through the window in the front of the trailer, I could see Bernardo's truck towing us with his trailer hitch. Lulu was perched next to his shoulder on the top of the seat, looking out the back windshield at us and panting. Luggage and boxes snuggled tight in the truck bed, tied in with rope. My eyes shifted to the counters inside Baby Beluga.

They were stacked with boxes of groceries, bottled water, a twenty-four pack of Nature's Pure White bar soap, and an economy box of transparent tape.

I'd never seen Owen so happy. He jumped up and down the best he could, seeing how we were in a moving vehicle. He was giggling so hard he finally had to sit on the floor.

"Can Lulu ride back here with us?" he asked between fits of clapping.

"No," said Gram. "We are all moving into the safety of the truck as soon as Bernardo stops."

"Gram?" I said, still holding on to the side of the trailer for balance.

"Naomi, in my wildest dreams I never thought I'd uproot Baby Beluga. I told Skyla I'd go to the end of the earth to protect you, and I am fulfilling that prophecy. Besides, I always said you and Owen should know your Mexican history, so we are taking a holiday vacation to Mexico."

"To Oaxaca," said Fabiola, "to see our family and for *La*