

Two professionals in the music world enter the Foster Care Program. This leads them into a world of bullying, child abduction, and child abuse. Alanna and Jared are determined to bring two sisters out of that world and give them a better life. Charlotte saves Janet from a teenage boy bent on abducting her.

# THIS IS THE DAY

by J.A. Fulkerson

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# THIS IS THE DAY

*The Day for Celebration*



J.A. FULKERSON

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## CHAPTER 11

If Charlotte had any ill feelings about the matter of Janet moving in, she kept them well-hidden. Alanna saw no reason to suspect anything but a pleasant visit for the girls. In a way, this worried her more than if Charlotte had openly lashed out against her sister's intrusion into the life she was enjoying with Alanna and Jared. Instead, from the moment Janet arrived, Charlotte seemed perfectly at ease with her sister's presence. They spent time together, seemingly enjoying each other's company as though there had never been any conflict between them. Still Alanna kept a watchful eye on them, even though she hated doing it.

And then Derek showed up for an impromptu visit and both girls went crazy with their flirtatious antics. Crazy to the point of embarrassing Alanna, even though Derek seemed taken in by the girls. Alanna realized that was probably the most embarrassing part of the situation to her. When she could stand it no more, she called both girls into the kitchen for a much-needed talk.

"All right, girls, enough is enough. You are both acting like a couple of hookers and I want it stopped right now." Her straightforward candor shocked both girls, as it did Alanna herself. But her searing glare was enough to silence them and leave them with no response. They recoiled into silence and waited for Alanna's tirade to run its course.

“We had this conversation once before, but I see it needs repeating. Neither of you is old enough to behave this way. Derek is not interested in you, and...”

“He didn’t seem to mind at all,” Janet interrupted saucily with a giggle.

“Well, *I mind*,” Alanna said through gritted teeth. “And it will stop now, understood?”

Charlotte stood silently, her head hung in embarrassment. Janet, on the other hand, looked defiantly at Alanna, a smirk on her face.

“Is that understood, Janet?” Alanna repeated, even more demanding than before.

Janet’s haughty glare faded but she refused to give Alanna the satisfaction of a response.

“Janet?” Alanna persisted and finally elicited a smirky nod from Janet.

Alanna was not completely satisfied with Janet’s response, but she accepted it for what it was. Alanna wanted to believe that Janet would live up to her word but obviously Janet would bear close scrutiny. Charlotte, on the other hand, gave the appearance of being ready to accept and live by Alanna’s rules.

Alanna eased out of the kitchen and breathed a silent prayer that the matter had been fully resolved. As she allowed the door to swing closed behind her, she heard a loud argument break out between the two girls – one so loud and contentious that she was forced to stop

and listen. As the verbal altercation grew more intense, their battle of words and accusations rose to fever pitch, spilling out into the dining room where Derek and Jared burst in from the living room, bewildered by what was taking place in the kitchen.

Alanna blocked their intrusion into the kitchen with a wave of her hand. She wanted the drama to play itself out in hopes of learning more about the background of the girls. But she was not prepared for the outpouring of emotions which greeted her.

“You were always Daddy’s little angel,” Charlotte ground out through lips barely open enough for the words to force their way out. “He always took you places and left me at home.”

“Well, I’d have gladly traded places with you,” Janet spit out, her words dripping venom and her voice cracking with emotion. “Any time,” she began again, but her voice broke and no words would escape.

“Oh, sure, you really went out of your way to get me invited along, didn’t you?”

“You stupid moron, he didn’t want you. He wanted me – I was older and...”

Outside the kitchen door, Alanna listened intently, letting Janet’s emotional outpouring register. Her mouth dropped in horror, and she turned her head to allow her troubled gaze to meet Jared’s as he attempted to lend his comfort with the touch of his hands on her shoulders.

Inside the kitchen, the tirade continued. “You never were any good at catching on, were you, little sister?” Janet’s voice took on a conspiratorial tone. “Well, I’ll let you in on a secret. If you think our Daddy was such a great man, let me enlighten you. Our Daddy...”

Alanna pushed open the kitchen door, interrupting Janet before she could finish what Alanna felt might place a burden on Charlotte which she should not have to face at this stage of her life. It was enough that Janet herself had been put through an ordeal that Alanna could not even imagine happening to any young girl. It never occurred to Alanna that her interpretation of Janet’s conversation might not have been the correct one. She felt certain that what Janet had been about to reveal had been the most contemptible of actions imaginable.

Alanna burst through the swinging kitchen door, startling the two girls, and for a few shocking moments, no one spoke. Alanna was the first to regain her composure. She made her way past the girls to the refrigerator and gazed inside searching for something, although she had no idea what she was looking for.

“Everything okay in here?” she asked in her best unconcerned voice. When neither girl responded, she added more giddily, “Must be. You haven’t strangled each other yet.” No sooner were the words out of her mouth than she wished they had never been born. “Guess I’d never make a good comedienne, would I?” She realized that her feigned laugh was probably far from believable and she decided to stop the pretense. She stood looking from one to the other, still holding the jar of mayonnaise she had grabbed unknowingly from the

refrigerator. When she noticed what she held in her hands, she plunged it back onto the shelf and slammed the door.

Charlotte covered her smile with her hand and discreetly turned her head. Janet's eyes flashed and the remnants of unshed tears still shimmered before she turned from Alanna, her hands squeezed into fists at her side.

"If I can do anything – for either of you – we can sit here at the table and talk," Alanna offered as she sat gingerly in one of the chairs and folded her hands in her lap.

Neither of the sisters responded. Charlotte's eyes darted toward Janet while Janet remained frozen and stared at the ceiling. Charlotte's mouth opened but no words came out. She tried again and in a whisper, she begged Janet to refute her previous implications about their father. Janet merely threw back her head and told Charlotte to believe what she wanted. Filled with despair, Charlotte sank into a chair across the table from Alanna, her troubled eyes filled with pain.

Alanna pressed her hand across Charlotte's in an effort to comfort the girl. She tried to will Charlotte to release her frustration as she turned her attention to Janet and hoped that she might offer a retraction.

"I don't really know what this is all about," Alanna began, searching for the right words as she went along. "But you both know that it's very wrong for anyone to violate another person." Alanna hesitated to go further; she hoped – even prayed – that Janet would retract her conversation with Charlotte so that there would be no need



to take this even further. But Janet showed no inclination toward doing so.

“Charlotte, would you mind going into the living room and asking Jared what it was he sent me in here for?” Alanna requested. She saw the light of excitement come into Charlotte’s eyes, knowing that Derek was in the living room with Jared. Alanna was not happy with herself for her choice of diversions, but she did want to have a private talk with Janet, and it was the first thing that came to mind. Charlotte bounced out of the kitchen jauntily and Alanna hoped that she would be gone long enough to get to the bottom of things with Janet.

Alanna motioned for Janet to sit across from her at the kitchen table. With reluctance, Janet dropped into a chair and folded her arms, gazing toward the ceiling with no apparent sign of interest. Alanna slowly eased into a chair across from her, contemplating what approach she should take. She considered several options before plunging forward.

“Were you about to shatter your sister’s world by accusing your father of...?”

“No, dammit, I wasn’t *just* accusing him. I was going to tell her the truth.” All the rage bottled up inside her poured out in a storm of fury. “It’s about time that little twit learned the truth.’

“And you think she’s going to be better off knowing that, do you? And by the way, I would appreciate it if you wouldn’t use that kind of language in this house.” Little by little, even though Janet had not actually spelled things out completely, she had said enough. Alanna

knew without a doubt that Janet was admitting to sexual abuse by their father, apparently lasting many years.

“It’s going to make me feel better if she knows what I had to put up with all those years. She ought to feel a helluva lot better when she finds out why the old fart didn’t seem to give...why he didn’t pay much attention to her.” Flames of anger and humiliation swept through her. Her eyes had a haunted look before she wrapped her arms around her head. She held back her sobs by sheer determination.

Alanna reached out a hand to her, but withdrew it just as quickly. Sadness crushed her, and words of compassion died in her throat. She now saw Janet as a tortured soul and not as the instigator she had at first believed her to be. Alanna’s heart wrenched as she searched for the right words.

“Janet, I don’t know what to say,” Alanna began. But the right words weren’t coming at all. “I am truly sorry for what you must have gone through – for what you probably must be suffering even now.” She meant every syllable and could only hope that Janet would accept her words at face value.

“Don’t worry about it,” Janet offered without expression. “It’s not your fault.”

“Maybe not, but I do feel so heartsick for you. And I can’t help worrying about it. It should never have happened to you – or anyone else, for that matter.” Throwing caution to the wind, she enveloped Janet briefly, sensing Janet’s discomfort mounting.

Charlotte stood in the doorway and watched the scene between Alanna and Janet. Uncertainty overcame her and filled her with a feeling of being left out of something in which she should have been included. Neither Alanna nor Janet noticed her at first, each lost in her own private war.

“Jared said he thought you came in here to get some ice cream,” Charlotte finally announced when she could find a steady voice.

“You know, you’re right,” Alanna responded, tilting her head in a thoughtful manner. “You’d think I could remember something like that, wouldn’t you?” she added in a voice that belied the intense subject of her conversation with Janet “Okay, girls, let’s have some ice cream. Charlotte, why don’t you ask the guys to join us? Okay?”

Charlotte hesitated briefly, still curious about whatever had gone on between Alanna and Janet, then left the kitchen. Moments later the three returned. The tension in the air was almost palpable and it didn’t take long for both Jared and Derek to feel it. Without being observed by either of the girls, Jared caught Alanna’s attention and gave her a questioning look. Alanna shook it off. Jared understood the meaning of her pleading look and let the subject die on his lips. Unspoken communications between them had become a part of their life over the years – neither had to verbalize feelings and yet each had the uncanny knack of knowing how to react to each other.

“Well, ladies,” Jared said to the room, “the company is very enjoyable, but there’s a very exciting game on TV right now. So, if you’ll excuse us, Derek and I will get back to it.” He shot Derek a glance that interrupted Derek’s questioning look, and the two left Alanna and the girls alone in the kitchen.

*THIS IS THE DAY*

Alanna's keen observation of both Janet and Charlotte as the ice cream rapidly disappeared gave her no clue to their inner thoughts. Janet's smugness was apparent, to Alanna, at least. Several times she caught a half-smile of insecurity flit across Janet's face while Charlotte stared blankly into space as though she had the weight of the world on her shoulders. Each time Alanna saw this, she became further caught up in the tragedy. Janet's ordeal weighed heavily on Alanna's mind; Charlotte's apparent lack of knowledge about her sister's plight also caused concern for Alanna. She wished that it had never been brought to light and yet she felt an undeniable urge to try and help Janet work through her anger and humiliation. Their father's sickness gave Alanna a sharp pain in the pit of her stomach.

As the ice cream was devoured, the subject of the girls' childhood remained in the back of everyone's mind. It was like a silent specter hanging over their heads, ready to consume them at any moment as readily as they had done to the ice cream.

## CHAPTER 12

Janet's school suspension came to an end and she returned to her former group home. The subject of her father never came up again, for which Alanna felt grateful. Alanna had kept a very close eye on both girls while Janet remained in her home, ready to step in if she was needed. She tried to reassure herself that she would know what to do if the need arose, and yet she didn't feel completely competent. Her first priority would be to protect Charlotte, if at all possible, but as to how to best accomplish that, she felt uncertain. Her prayers were that she would not have to make the choice. She felt certain that Charlotte would not benefit from the knowledge and feared that it would only serve to set her self-confidence back further.

Lost in her thoughts about Janet and wondering how she was getting along since she had returned to the group home, she failed to notice Charlotte standing across the kitchen. Alanna turned from the sink where she had been peeling potatoes for dinner and nearly dropped the pan when she saw her.

“Oh, Charlotte. I didn't see you standing there.”

“I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you.” She had a far-away look in her eyes and averted her gaze quickly. “When Janet was here...when you talked to her...What did she tell you?”

Alanna attempted to hide the turmoil she felt and hoped that Charlotte hadn't noticed her stiffen at the question. She set the pan of potatoes on the stove and turned on the burner, then dried her hands on a towel and turned to face Charlotte.

"Well, we talked about a lot of things," Alanna began. "Let's see, we talked about..."

"About our dad," Charlotte interrupted, and she leveled her gaze on Alanna.

"Actually, I don't think we really talked about him at all." Alanna knew she might be stretching the truth somewhat, but in actuality Janet had not come right out and put her damning accusation into words. "Besides, I think that Janet only meant to try, in her own twisted way, perhaps to let you know that you're actually worth something."

"Then you think what she said was the truth? That our dad..."

"No, Charlotte, I'm not saying that." Alanna embraced her, cradling her head against her own shoulder and trying her best not to lose control of her own emotions. "I'm saying that I think Janet really looks up to you.

"Oh, sure. Now she's pulled the wool over your eyes, too – like she does everyone else," Charlotte spat out and wheeled around to leave.

"Wait. Charlotte, wait. Listen to me." Alanna had no idea what she was going to say or how she would say it. But she knew she couldn't let Charlotte down this way. "I don't know what Janet was going to

say to you, I really don't. But does it really matter? I mean, whatever your father did or didn't do, he's gone now. You and Janet are still here, and it seems to me you're beginning to rebuild your relationship."

Denial flashed briefly across Charlotte's face as she wheeled around to face Alanna. But Alanna's remarks brought a flood of tears to her eyes – she found she couldn't deny that she had begun to accept Janet. Yet she continued to feel the old pain of feeling left out of family matters. "Do you think what she was going to say was the truth?" Charlotte managed to say in an almost inaudible whisper.

Alanna hesitated, taking the time to consider her response, and drew in a deep breath before she spoke. "I think that if it was true, Janet wanted to tell you because she needed to get it out in the open so you would stop blaming her for all the wrong things that were going on in your family."

"How could Daddy do those awful things..."

"Now wait a minute. We don't know that he did, do we?" Alanna wanted to be supportive – to alleviate Charlotte's fears about her father – but Charlotte wasn't listening.

The pain in Charlotte's eyes broke Alanna's heart. Her hollow eyes held none of the warmth which had endeared her to Alanna from the beginning. Charlotte stood silently, unaware of Alanna, unaware of anything except her own fractured soul, unaware of everything except the misery and discontent she felt.

"Charlotte," Alanna spoke softly to her.

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But Charlotte refused to allow Alanna to intrude into her melancholy. Instead, she turned away, her shoulders slumped, and slowly made her way across the kitchen as though under some spell.

“Charlotte,” Alanna called out to her again. “Charlotte, I’m so sorry. Let’s talk about this.” She watched as Charlotte disappeared from her sight. Her head bowed and her eyes swam with tears. She felt that she had done more harm than good, and she wanted to punish herself for her failing.



## CHAPTER 19

By the time spring break came around, Janet had made many friends among the other students, especially the upper class men of her new school, Oak Park. Although she enjoyed her popularity, she was level-headed enough not to let this interrupt her studies; she ranked near the top of her class academically.

On the other hand, Charlotte began to suffer from feelings of being left out of the relationship she had previously enjoyed with Alanna and Jared before Janet had come to live with them. She tried not to let her feelings overcome her, but they persisted. Her relationship with Janet appeared to be on the upswing, but Alanna felt that something was not quite right between the two sisters.

There had been only an occasional sighting of Sam during the past few weeks, but occasionally Charlotte would see him lurking about at times when Janet was involved with one project or another.

Then one Saturday, as Charlotte was upstairs looking for something special to wear to the movies that night, she glanced out her window and nearly lost her breath. Outside, standing in the shade of the tall flowering mimosa tree she thought she saw Sam gazing at the house. She ran across the room, closer to the window, and peered out from behind the drape to get better look. Sam was leaning against the tree, his arms folded across his chest.

Charlotte was certain her eyes were playing tricks on her. How would Sam have been able to make his way out to Alanna and Jared's country home? It was nearly five miles from town just off the county road, and Charlotte knew he didn't own a car. She blinked her eyes and ventured another look. Sam was there.

Charlotte ran from her room and crossed the hall into Janet's room. Janet was seated at her dressing table brushing her long auburn hair. She became so startled by Charlotte's hurried entrance, she dropped her hair brush. "What the hell's the matter with you, Charlotte? You see a ghost or something?"

"He's out there, Janet. Sam's out there by the Mimosa tree."

Janet picked up her brush from the floor and continued brushing her hair as though there were nothing wrong with Sam being in their yard.

"Did you hear what I said?" Charlotte nearly yelled. "Sam's out in our yard."

"I think you're getting paranoid, sister dear. How would he get out here?"

"I asked myself the same thing, but he is there. Come into my room and see for yourself."

Janet allowed herself to be dragged into Charlotte's room where she reluctantly peered through the window to the yard below. "See? I told you. There he is."

"Where? There's no one there," Janet argued.

Charlotte's mouth dropped and she threw aside the drape to gaze into the yard. There was no one there – no Sam, no one; not even a jack rabbit which could almost always be seen scurrying through the yard. Charlotte turned toward Janet in shock. "But he was there – right under that tree." She returned her gaze to the tree but there was no one there. "When will Alanna and Jared be back?"

"I don't know. They went out awhile ago but didn't say when they'd be back. Why?"

"Someone's got to do something – find Sam and make him leave."

"For heaven's sake, Charlotte. Simmer down." Seeing the anxiety Charlotte was feeling, Janet said, "I'll go out and look around, then." Before Charlotte could disagree, Janet flew from the room and down the stairs.

Charlotte continued to peer through her window and saw Janet cross the yard, searching for whoever had been near the tree. Janet gazed up at Charlotte standing at her bedroom window and shrugged her shoulders, then turned back toward the house.

Charlotte's mind was spinning. Her heart was in her throat and she wondered if she might have been hallucinating after all. Her eyes continued to scan the yard outside but no sign of Sam appeared as she listened for Janet's footsteps on the stairway. After several minutes passed and Janet did not appear, terror arose again and her head began to pound.

The minutes ticked by, seemingly at a snail's pace to Charlotte, as she waited for Janet to return. She paced about her room, returned to

the window to look outside for Janet, and then paced some more. But Janet was nowhere to be seen. Charlotte was consumed by dread and uncertainty about what she should do. She feared that the longer she waited, the worse Janet's situation might become and she had no idea what dilemma Janet might be facing. What if she had found Sam lurking about somewhere and he had overpowered her and...She didn't even want to continue with that thought. She glanced down the driveway to the highway, hoping to see Alanna and Jared returning to take control of the situation. Finally it became apparent to Charlotte that she would have to be the one to find some way to do whatever was necessary to find Janet and rescue her, if necessary.

She made her way through the back door, staying close to the building and keeping the shrubs and trees between her and the back yard area. Her eyes darted furtively over the grounds, seeking anything to suggest Janet's location. The back acreage of trees seemed the most logical place for Sam to have taken Janet, if, indeed, that is what had happened. There were also small buildings – a tool shed where the lawn equipment and landscape tools were kept, a small workshop where Derek had completed a few woodworking projects as a teenager living at home, and, of course, the two-car garage near the house. Charlotte knew that Sam might have taken Janet into any one of those buildings. Since it would be easier for Charlotte to investigate the buildings than to try and find Janet without being seen in the woods, she began to ease her way toward the garage first. There was a side door with a small window on the side wall, and with only Alanna's compact car inside, Charlotte quickly decided that they were not in the garage. She reasoned that one of Alanna's car doors would

probably be standing open if two people were inside, and all doors were closed.

Charlotte crept along the hedge separating the garage from the work shop. She approached the small building from the windowless side and eased along the wall toward the front, walking slowly and avoiding the potted plants which Alanna had set at the corners of the building. Janet peered into the building from the corner of one of the windows and saw no one. She crouched low and eased to the other side of the window, keeping her form below the window. Her vision inside the building revealed nothing, leaving the back wall as the only possible unseen area. But if she looked in from a better vantage point, she risked being seen by anyone inside. And then she could be of no help at all to Janet.

While she attempted to decide upon a course of action, a faint sound came from within the work shop. Or was it just Charlotte's imagination? She couldn't be certain because she wanted so badly to hear Janet's voice. Her concentration peaked but she heard nothing more. She finally decided to take a risk and quickly peek in through the front window. She bobbed her head up, glanced in, and then ducked back down. She hadn't seen anyone in her expeditious attempt and she crouched down in front of the door and attempted to decide what she should do next.

In her dilemma, she failed to notice a familiar, welcome sound coming from the front of the house. Slowly her awareness came alive, but she couldn't believe, at first, what she was hearing. She listened intently until she was certain, and then she crept from the work shop toward the house and crept through the back door. Inside, she raced

through the house and met Alanna and Jared as they came in through the front door. Breathlessly, she tried to speak, but she couldn't get the words out.

“Charlotte, what’s the matter?” Alanna asked as worry snaked through her.

“Slow down, Charlotte,” Jared added, holding her at arms length . “Relax and tell us what’s wrong.”

Charlotte took in a large gulp of air and willed herself to explain her anxiety. “He’s here. He’s got Janet. We’ve got to find them.”

“Okay, that’s better. Who’s here? Who has Janet?” They both spoke simultaneously.

“Sam. Sam’s here somewhere.”

Alarm spread through Jared and Alanna and they looked at each other with horror etched on their faces. “Sam’s here? Are you sure? Where?”

“I saw him by the Mimosa tree. Janet went out to make him leave. She didn’t come back in. I was trying to find them but I can’t.” Charlotte blurted out the words and began to cry hysterically. “You’ve got to find them before...”

Both Alanna and Jared bolted out the back door as Charlotte shouted after them, “I checked the garage already.”

They ran toward the work shop, Jared in the lead as he held Alanna back. He twisted the door knob and threw the door open, letting it bang against the outside wall, and ran inside. A quick glance

around gave no indication that anyone was in the building. Jared quickly exited, followed by Alanna, and together they sprinted toward the tool shed, keeping a row of privet hedge between them and the building and crouching low as they approached. A few yards from the only door of the building, Jared stopped Alanna and whispered, "I'll throw the door open and we'll rush him. You go to the right, I'll go to the left." Alanna nodded her agreement and breathed deeply as she prepared to make her entrance. Just as they were about to carry out their plan, they heard Charlotte screaming from the house, "He's here! Alanna! Jared! He's here."

They ran toward the sound of Charlotte's voice and as they rounded the corner of the garage, they saw Sam lying on the ground, Charlotte standing over him with a baseball bat, and Janet on her knees a few yards away, crying and gazing at Charlotte in amazement.

Jared took the bat from Charlotte's hand while Alanna helped Janet to her feet and embraced her.

"He ran out of the workshop," Charlotte announced.

Jared and Alanna looked at each other, their mouths open in astonishment. Had Jared overlooked them in the building? He would ask himself that question many times and would never have forgiven himself if this had been the case.

After the police had investigated and taken Sam away, and Janet had recovered some measure of composure, she recounted the events of the afternoon. She hadn't found Sam at first, but he had accosted

her on her way back to the house. At first he had seemed nice but when Janet had refused his advances, he had become aggressive and had pulled her toward the wooded area behind their property. When Charlotte had begun looking for them, he had forced Janet into the workshop where he held her until Charlotte had run back to the house to tell Alanna and Jared what was happening. He had been about to force her into the woods when Jared and Alanna arrived and they were caught behind the buildings and he decided to make a run for it. But Charlotte and her baseball bat caught him in the front yard.

Alanna embraced Charlotte and they both let their tears flow freely. “And that brings me to this,” Alanna began. “Charlotte, did you ever think of the danger you put yourself in when you went after Sam?”

“Not really,” she responded hesitantly. “All I could think was that Janet might be in real danger from that pervert.”

“If I never thought it before,” Janet began, the brightest smile she had ever shown to Charlotte beaming on her face, “you’re the bravest person I’ve ever known.”

Charlotte touched her hand to her heart. She could think of no response to offer as she stared at her sister unbelieving. She lost her breath as Janet’s slow smile warmed her, and they fell into each other’s arms like two souls who had just found each other after a lifetime of turmoil.

“This is the day...” Alanna said to no one in particular.



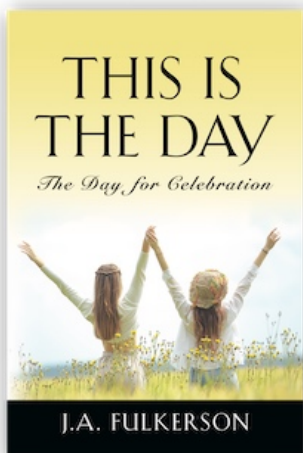
*THIS IS THE DAY*

The two girls ascended the stairs to their rooms arm in arm. Alanna collapsed into an overstuffed chair in the living room, completely drained and shaking inside from the experience. Jared brought her a glass of Chardonnay which she accepted eagerly. Their eyes met and held, and Alanna let her relief show as she took a sizable sip of her wine. Jared dropped onto the arm of the chair and leaned over her, taking her in his arms.

“It’s over now, pretty lady,” he whispered.

“Thank God,” she offered in complete reverence. “And I think we’ve seen the emergence of something wonderful between Charlotte and Janet too.”

“Yes, I believe you’re right. And all thanks goes to you for sticking it out when it looked like a lost cause.”



Two professionals in the music world enter the Foster Care Program. This leads them into a world of bullying, child abduction, and child abuse. Alanna and Jared are determined to bring two sisters out of that world and give them a better life. Charlotte saves Janet from a teenage boy bent on abducting her.

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