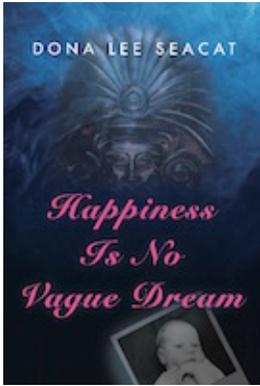


DONA LEE SEACAT

*Happiness  
Is No  
Vague Dream*





*Happiness Is No Vague Dream is the story of a strong, intelligent, young woman forced to deal with unexpected and difficult challenges during the turbulent years of 1964 and 1973.*

*At 16, just months after Callie Seymour's mother dies, Callie gets pregnant. She wants to keep the baby but no one supports her in this. Her family disowns her. She is sent to a Catholic Home for Wayward Girls in Kansas City, Missouri, where she gives birth. Callie names her baby, Elisabeth. Just before the child is taken away for adoption, a nurse takes her photo and gives it to Callie. The shot captures Elisabeth's birthmark, a small strawberry-shape on her neck.*

*By 1973, Callie, twenty-four, has put herself through college and become a newspaper reporter. And each year since her daughter's birth, Callie has placed a letter into her child's official adoption file in the hopes that they can one day reestablish contact. After writing a controversial exposé on immigrants in Kansas City, taking a life-changing trip to Colombia and falling in love, Callie finally realizes that happiness is no vague dream. It depends on being courageous and persistent, loving your work, and having a clear conscience.*

# Happiness Is No Vague Dream

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# **Happiness Is No Vague Dream**

*Dona Lee Seacat*

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## Chapter 1

Today, July 7, 1964, is my sixteenth birthday, and I'm missin Ma so much. I can remember other birthdays when she always made a fuss about me. She'd run her hands over my head and tell me she was glad she'd had me. She liked a famous quote that went "Every day may not be good, but there is something good in every day." Then she'd say "It was a good day when you were born even if I wondered sometimes how we'd feed you."

I wish Ma were still here to muss my hair and joke about how I wore her out. But Ma is dead; she died a month ago. I still can't believe it. She never complained about feelin poorly. She always looked tired. That was just Ma. When she took sick, it just seemed like a bad case of the flu. She was throwin up and had diarrhea for what seemed like a long time. She finally got so bad we had to take her to the hospital. The doctor told us cancer had "taken over her body." It all happened so fast. Even though Ma was fifty-five years old, she wasn't old enough to die.

Every summer, since I started school, I always feel kinda lost, stuck like I am out here on the farm. But this is the worst one ever. I'm in the house all day by myself. It's hot—"hotter than Hades," Pa likes to say. It's too hot to be outside for long. The sun beats down from early mornin till late at night. It's been over 100 degrees for the past week. There don't seem to be any way to get away from the sun in the summertime.

Inside the house is even worse. We don't have any big fans that might help cool things down a bit. We just have an attic fan we sometimes turn on at night and a little portable fan we bought a few summers ago at Sears. I move it from room to room but it hardly does anythin at all about the heat.

Of course, Ma isn't here to make things normal and Pa's a mess. He didn't talk much before, but now he don't talk at all. He just works around the farm all day 'til dark. Then he comes in, eats some supper, and goes to bed. He doesn't even look at the newspaper or the Farmer's Digest like he used to. He doesn't even look at me. He must feel lonely. But so do me.

After Ma's funeral, my older sister, Jennie, who's married and lives with her husband, Sam, on a farm about five miles down the road, stayed with us for a few days. Now she comes over two or three nights a week to see that I have something decent to eat. Pa doesn't cook anything at all, for him or for me. I can cook a little. Ma taught me a few things about fixing food. I'm not fussy about what I eat. But I do get hungry. My favorite foods when I'm by myself are macaroni and cheese (the kind in a box) and peanut butter and jelly sandwiches on white bread.

Besides Jennie, I got three brothers. There's Henry (we call him Hank), Peter, and Jeremy. Hank moved to Kansas City where he's got a pretty good job. He works for a car dealer, sometimes workin on old cars, other times tryin to sell someone a new car. The other two, Petie and Jeremy, rented an old house in town and have jobs—not great jobs but at least they earn enough to live on their own. Petie is the head custodian at the Presbyterian Church. He's in charge of maintenance, too, so he's constantly workin around the place, fixin broken windows and such. Jeremy is an assistant to the local vet. The doctor takes care of a lot of sick farm animals plus the usual cats and dogs that are people's pets. Jeremy loves animals so this job is right up his alley.

Both of them have several girlfriends each, and when I see them in town, they're always laughin and braggin about their social life. They'll say somethin like "I took Mary Lou out on County Road last night. We traveled all around the County." Or "Janie and I went to a box social at her church the other night. The 'sweets' in her box sure were delicious." Then they roll their eyes and act like they think I don't get it.

I don't see how they could have a very excitin social life in the little town of Minneola, but they seem happy. If I were them, I'd want to get out of here as soon as possible and move to a bigger city...maybe Wichita. Even Dodge City is better than Minneola.

Ma's only been gone a few weeks, but it seems like everyone else is going about their lives as usual. They must not miss Ma like I do. Pa must miss her a lot but he don't say a thing about it. He never

asks me how I'm feelin either. In fact, nobody ever talks about how they're feelin without Ma.

I don't know what to do with myself. I love to read but after awhile, even that gets borin. Some days I can't stop cryin. Course, I have to stop if someone is here but there's hardly anyone ever here but me. I know how Robinson Crusoe must've felt, shipwrecked on that island with no one to keep him company.

Pa used to drive me to the library in town every two weeks to check out books and I'd bring home a big stack. Usually, I'd read all of them before they were due back but he'd never make an extra trip so I could get more. He can't be bothered to take me anywhere now, let alone the library every two weeks. I've read all the Louisa May Alcott books in the town's library plus some of Willa Cather's short stories and *My Antonia*. Willa Cather lived in Nebraska. She's called "a prairie writer."

I like to write. I've got a diary that I was writin in a lot before Ma took sick. I like to describe beautiful things I see in nature, what happens to me each day, how I feel, what people do I like and don't like. Maybe someday I'll publish somethin good, somethin like Willa Cather. I'll be called a prairie writer, too. But I'm not writin anything today. I'm not in a good mood. Nothin's happenin around here. Maybe Jennie'll come over later and bring me somethin special. She knows I love her fried chicken. Since it's my birthday, she might bring a cake. But I can't count on it.

I'm thinkin I want to call Orem. I haven't seen him or talked to him since Ma's funeral. I don't know if it's proper for me to call him, even if he said I could. I figure he's probably at work. He's a mechanic in a local garage. Maybe I should hitch a ride into town and walk in and surprise him at work. I've never done that and it feels a little scary to think about.

I'd only got interested in Orem during the last few months at school. He was a senior—two years older than me—and at first I just looked at him and thought he was cute. Then, one day in study hall, he motioned for me to sit down at his table. We weren't supposed to talk in study hall but I looked and the teacher who was monitorin us wasn't payin any attention so I sat with him.

“What?” I said.

I was thinkin things like: Is my hair okay? Do my clothes look all right? What does he want with me?

He answered, “Stick around. I just want to talk to you a little. Do you have a boyfriend?”

What a question to ask.

“No, not really.”

Maybe he’d think I was a real dud if I flat-out said no but I’d never come close to havin a boyfriend.

“Would you like a lift home after school?”

I knew he drove his family’s old pick-up to school. He’d passed me walkin down the road toward my house from the school bus stop many times. He’d never even waved before.

“Yeah, I guess that’d be okay,” I said.

“Meet me in the parking lot after homeroom,” Orem said.

From that day on, we sort of flirted with each other—in the halls, in the library, in the cafeteria. I knew he liked me but I couldn’t figure out why. He was so cute I’d have thought all the girls his own age would be after him. He was popular. Occasionally, one of the senior girls would walk by me and whisper “Orem Taylor’s got a crush on you.”

I’d just ignore them. Course, I did notice that sometimes, if I was gettin somethin out of my locker to go home, and he was waitin to drive me, he’d stand at my locker, leanin on the open door and sort of bendin over me, almost brushin the top of my hair with his chin. He looked real good. He was kinda tall with dark brown hair—he wore it a little long in back—and the kindest brown eyes I’d ever seen. Plus eyelashes to die for. When I’d look up at him, I’d get a tingly feelin all over my skin.

But in the truck, ridin home, he was always what Ma would call “proper.” He didn’t even try to touch me. We’d talk about school, what dumb thing some teacher had done, maybe about baseball season finally beginning. He played on varsity, and he was eager to start. But he was also worried that he might not be able to play this year. His family was strugglin, like most folks in this part of Kansas. We was in the middle of a real dry spell. His pa might expect him to

help out around the farm more than usual. His family had a small truck farm and in the summer, they sold produce and flowers from a roadside stand near their house. He said his daddy wasn't too keen on his playin baseball this spring. He hoped to turn his mind around somehow. To earn some extra money, Orem had gotten a part-time job at a gas station on weekend. I admired Orem for how he felt about helpin out his family.

When Ma was still alive, she didn't feel all that friendly towards the Taylors even though they were some of our nearest neighbors. I think she and Orem's mom had a little tiff a few years back. I never really knew what about. Ma just plain didn't want to talk to Miz Taylor. Orem started drivin me home shortly before she took sick and died. Every time she'd see his pickup comin in our driveway, she'd get all flustered and angry. Once, she called his parents worthless toads. I was so mad at her I didn't talk to her for a couple of days, 'cept to say "Yes, ma'am" and "No, ma'am." She tried to forbid me to ride home with Orem. But I ignored her.

Then she was so sick she didn't care what I did. Lookin back, I can see that she must've been feelin bad—that was what made her worry more about me. If she'd 've been healthy, I think she could've learned to like Orem a lot. Of course, that never happened.

Anyway, baseball season came and Orem got to play. He was real good—a star on our high school team. I went to all the games and cheered and hollered, just like I knew somethin about baseball. I'd sit with a few of my friends in the bleachers, then wait behind the team's dugout when the game was over for Orem to come out. He'd always come and get me to go home. By now, I think people sorta knew we was together.

All he'd do, though, was hold my hand as we walked to the truck. He'd open the door for me, real gentlemanly-like, and tell me to lock the door after he shut it. If the team had won the game, Orem was real chatty while we were drivin home; otherwise, he kept to himself. When we'd get to my house, he'd park a ways back from the house. I could tell he wanted to kiss me for days before he finally did. I wanted him to kiss me. I was afraid to encourage it, though, because I'd never kissed a boy and I was afraid I wouldn't know how

to do it right. One night, though, he finally leaned over ever so quietly and kissed me. It was the nicest thing imaginable. Soft, warm, mint-tasting. I wanted it to last forever. But it didn't.

"You smell real nice, Callie," he said. And then he tousled my hair. "Feels like corn silk," he murmured. I was hot and embarrassed and excited all at the same time. These feelins were new and I was scared to death I was gonna do somethin I'd be sorry for. Orem was lookin at me real serious-like, his hands on both sides of my face. I didn't want to look away, but I had to. I quick opened the door and jumped out of the truck before he could come around and open the door, wavin goodbye to him and sayin "See you tomorrow at school, Orem."

From that time on, I couldn't stop dreamin up ways for us to be together. I even thought about tryin to run away together so we could be with each other all the time. That was a foolish idea. Neither one of us had any money to live on. He could barely afford to keep gas in that old pickup truck. But I wanted to be with him in the worst way.

Every time he'd drive me home, sometimes from school, sometimes from a game, he'd kiss me that same way: with my face held between his hands, soft, and gentle, and persuasive. I'd heard about French kisses but he didn't do that to me. I was glad. I was a little scared of French kissin. Because he seemed to know that, I thought he was the most considerate boy I knew. But I could tell that, each time, it was harder for him to kiss me that way—you know, gently, softly.

By now, Ma was pretty sick and didn't get out of bed much. I had to take on a lot of responsibility around the house. Pa kept givin me a hard time about spendin time with Orem. We'd started to be extra careful my folks didn't never see me with him in the truck. He'd let me out at the end of the road, behind some trees, so it would look like I'd walked home from school from the bus stop. Or after a game, we'd park a ways from the house to kiss awhile, then he'd drive me up close to the house and let me out. He never walked me to the door. He said he thought he should, but I wouldn't let him. The less Ma and Pa saw of him the better.

Right after school was out, Ma took a bad spell. Her fever went way up and Pa drove her to the hospital in Dodge. I couldn't believe somethin this serious was happenin just when I was feelin so good about my life. All this time she'd been sick I'd tricked myself into believin she was gonna get better. Now I had to admit whatever Ma had was serious.

I had no chance durin this time to see Orem. Every day while Ma was in the hospital, I had to make the trip—about thirty minutes each way—to be with her. Then I'd have to wait for someone to come pick me up to take me home. I hated spendin time in the hospital. The smell alone—medicines, disinfectants, sick people—made me sick to my stomach. If I even glimpsed someone in the hallway who looked seriously ill, I thought I might faint. Besides, Ma was almost never awake. She hardly knew I was there. But I felt too guilty if I left her, even for a few minutes to go to the bathroom. She died after only a week in the hospital. The doctor said he was real sorry but the cancer was just too far gone to treat.

Orem came to Ma's funeral. I was touched that he'd come, specially since she'd never been very nice to him. Later, at the cemetery, he pulled me aside for a few minutes. "Callie, I want to be with you real bad. I think about you all the time."

"I know. I feel the same. I want to be with you but I can't right now. I have to look after Pa, and the house, and everythin. It's gonna be hard when Jennie goes back to her house. She's been a big help the past few days while she's been stayin with us. I don't think we can see each other for a while."

I hated tellin Orem this. I could hardly look at him. I kept scuffin my shoes together. The path was dusty and my good shoes was gettin dirty. Cleanin them up someway seemed important to me right then. I finally stopped rubbin my shoes, pushed my hair behind my ears, and looked straight at Orem.

He took hold of my hands and said, "Call me as soon as you think you can see me. I'll be waiting."

I wondered if he really would—wait. Maybe he thought I was makin an excuse because I didn't want to be with him. I hope he didn't think that. It wasn't true.

So now here it is, five weeks since Ma died. It's my birthday and no one has remembered. I don't think Orem even knows it's my birthday but I decide I have to see him. It's a long, hot walk to town. I wish someone would drive up, magically, and offer to take me. It won't happen. I wander around the house for a while. I try to clean up the kitchen a little bit. I don't want Pa to be mad at me when he gets home for leaving a mess.

I go in the bathroom, splash cold water on my face and wrists to cool off, brush my hair into a pony tail, and put on a little lipstick. I've definitely decided: I'm goin into town to see Orem. I leave a note for Pa on the kitchen table. All it says is "Gone to the library for some books. Back by 6:00 p.m. Callie"

When I finally make it to the gas station, I'm sweaty and don't feel very pretty, like Orem says I am. He's there, workin on a car behind the garage. He don't see me at first. When he does, his face brightens right up. He's got such a great smile. I love it. His smile makes me feel so much better.

"Callie," he shouts "I'm so glad to see you. Wait a minute and I'll finish up here and then we can go somewhere."

He seems real surprised to see me. I think he's happy, too.

There's a beat-up old folding chair near where Orem's workin so I sit down in it. I don't want to get him in trouble with his boss, but he says that's no problem.

"Gus is a good guy. He won't care you're here. I'm supposed to be off now anyway. I'm just finishing this last job."

Orem goes in the bathroom to wash up. He's only gone a minute, then he says, "Come on. Get in my truck. I've been wanting to show you a special place for a long time."

Once we're in the truck, away from the station, he pulls over for a second to hug me. "I've really missed you," he says. "I been waiting for you to call. I didn't call you because I didn't want to make your pa mad at me, any more than he already is."

"It's my birthday," I say. "I'm givin myself a present. Seein you."

When he starts the truck up again, he heads north out of town, not towards my house.

“Where’re you goin?” I ask.

“Never you mind,” he says. “You’ll like where I’m takin you.”

We’ve driven past all the stores and the one restaurant in town. He’s not takin me to get a snack or some kind of present. I’m terrible curious about where we’re going. Finally, he pulls off this dirt road next to a big corn field, with rows and rows of corn, taller than we are. The field looks lush and beautiful. We’ve had some rain the last few days and everythin has greened up.

I understand what’s happenin now. We’re gonna really make out. I want to but I still feel queasy about how to do it. I put my hand over my mouth and blow into it, hopin I don’t have bad breath. I push the stray hairs hangin down on the sides back into my pony tail. Do I smell bad? I wonder.

Orem comes around to my side of the truck and opens the door, takin my hand as I jump down. He looks at me and grins. Then he grabs a flannel blanket out of the back of the truck and leads me down the rows of corn. The rows are narrow and we’re bumpin into one another as we’re walkin. The feelin of Orem’s bare arm on my own, the soft furry feelin of his hair, is makin me tingle. In a few minutes, we come to an open space smack in the middle of the corn, big enough for him to spread down the blanket.

“How’s this for a private place?” Orem says.

Now we’re standin on the blanket, facin each other with the sun pourin down on the tops of our heads. The tall corn is wavin and blowin around us, all green and glisteny. Orem leans over and touches my lips softly—like he always does—but his hands are on my shoulders and he’s pushin me towards the ground. I can’t resist. The corn seems to be invitin us to lie in it. I can’t believe how good it feels, just to lie there on the flannel blanket that smells like Orem, with him next to me. I can feel his body heat as we look up at the sky.

Then he’s kissin me all over my face and mouth. I’m kissin him back. These kisses are different from the ones before. These kisses are hard. And long. His tongue is in my mouth and it’s not gross. I love the feel of it. I put my tongue in his mouth. It seems like we just can’t kiss each other hard enough.

Orem's moanin and sayin my name. "Callie, I want you so bad. I think I'm gonna die if I can't love you. I love you so much!"

I know I love him, too. I begin givin in to him. It don't feel like sinnin. It feels almost religious. He's all hard, hurryin to tear off his jeans, pullin on my jeans and panties. I'm givin in to him. I want to help him get our clothes off as fast as I can. It feels so right. I want to give everythin to him. I want to pour my love all over him. I feel him gettin more and more impatient to get inside me. He's on top, pushin and sayin my name, over and over. "CallieCallieCallie."

I open myself to give him everythin. I look up at the sky with my eyes wide open and think

"Oh, God. This is what I want. This is what I need to do...give myself to Orem."

And now he's completely inside of me and we're rollin and turnin right there in the field. What he's doin to me hurts quite a bit and I start to cry out. But then he moans again and I feel so much tenderness for him I don't care if it hurts or not. I shut my eyes and concentrate on Orem. The sun is bright behind my eyelids and it's so hot. I'm so hot. I'm wet all over. I feel like I'm in heaven.

Now I'm on top and even though my eyes are still shut, I know everythin that's happenin. He's moanin with the sheer joy of what we're doin and I'm takin him deep inside me, givin him everythin. It don't hurt so much now. And Orem's yellin and moanin and callin out my name. Then he's done and quiet.

But I'm just beginnin. Suddenly I'm like a possessed person. I never knew anythin could feel like this. Each time Orem moves, waves of pain and pleasure pour over me. I feel my heart poundin. I can't get close enough to Orem. Now I'm moanin louder than he did. I see him lookin at me like I'm a vision. My breasts are in his hands and he's strokin them. He's bein soft and gentle but he's also pullin on them a little. I've never felt anythin like this before in my whole life. I feel like I'm floatin in a warm sea of water. I want it to last forever.

Finally, with one last loud scream, I shiver all over, then fall back on the blanket beside Orem. We lie there on the blanket together, our legs tangled together, our arms flung out at our sides. I

## Chapter 22

One early February night, Lily woke me up. When I turned on the bedside lamp, I could see she was cryin, and I could tell she was scared to death. She was also in a lot of pain and could hardly sit up. The clock on the bedside table said 12:30. It was black as pitch outside.

"Callie, I think I wet the bed. I can't hold it. Everything hurts, especially my back."

Now, I was scared too. For a minute, I couldn't think straight. It was way too soon for Lily to be havin her baby. But I knew I had to get help for her.

"I'm gonna get one of the nuns," I said. "Just stay in bed and try to be calm. Keep covered up and stay warm."

I stuck my feet into my slippers and pulled on my robe as I went runnin down the stairs. Sister Faustina was on duty that night, thank goodness. She's a real nurse and I thought she could help Lily.

"Sister Faustina, help," I said. "Lily's in a lot of pain and she says she wet the bed."

Sister Faustina didn't hesitate.

"It's unusually early in her pregnancy but her water must have broken. Go to Jordan's room and wake him up. Tell him he'll have to drive Lily to the hospital, right away. I'll go see to her."

I was a little shy about goin to Jordan's room and wakin him up. His room was right off the kitchen but I'd never been inside it. But this was an emergency and I had to get him. I knocked on his door and he answered right away.

"Okay, Missy," he said, "I'll bring the car around to the front. Easier to get out that way."

When I got back up to our room, Sister Faustina was helpin Lily pull her coat on over her nightgown. I could see the corners of a bloody towel stickin out under the coat. I pulled the sheet back and saw blood in the bed. I could even smell it. Sister Faustina was tellin Lily that she'd be okay.

"The blood is normal," she said to me. Lily was in a lot of pain and kept moanin and cryin.

I found my boots, still in the closet from our day of escape, and pulled them on over my slippers. I grabbed my coat.

"I'm goin with you," I said. My heart was poundin so loud in my chest I could hardly talk.

Sister Faustina didn't stop to argue with me. She put an arm behind Lily's back and gently walked her down the stairs. When she opened the front door, cold air rushed in and we felt the freezin night. Jordan was there holdin the car doors open. Lily got in the back seat and I jumped in beside her. I grabbed her hand and tried to soothe her. Sister Faustina got up in front with Jordan.

"It's too soon for the baby to be coming," Lily cried.

That's what I'd been thinkin too but I wasn't gonna say it.

"Hush, now, Lily," Sister Faustina rasped. "Your water just broke, that's all. Put some marrow in your backbone, girl. You'll be fine once we get you to the hospital."

It seemed like even in an emergency, Sister Faustina barked out orders.

Jordan pulled up in front of the hospital, as close to the entrance as he could get. Sister Faustina came around to the back seat to help Lily out. She was so busy helpin Lily she didn't even notice me. But Jordan knew I was there. He said, "Missy, I don't think you gonna be able to stay. I'll be waitin here to take you back home."

I nodded to him and hurried on in behind Sister Faustina.

Right away, a nurse came with a wheel chair, put Lily into it and rolled it down the corridor and out of sight.

"Come, Callie, we must go back to the Home. Lily is being taken care of now. You know you're not supposed to be here. Go. Get in the car with Jordan. Immediately."

"But, Sister." I dared to speak up to her even though she scared me. But it was no use.

"No, Callie, absolutely not. You must get in the car and go back to the Home with me. Lily will be taken care of properly. There's nothing more either one of us can do here."

I wanted to be polite so Sister would tell me what was goin on with Lily as soon as she knew anythin. But I was so mad she wouldn't let me stay I could hardly talk. I had to follow her like a

little child, out of the hospital and back into the car. When we were on our way home, I dared to ask her a question.

"Sister, how will we know what happens?"

"The hospital will call once they've examined Lily and determined how to help her. You must go back to bed now and sleep. You have your own health to consider."

Sister Faustina must've been jokin to think I'd get in bed and go to sleep. I went in the bathroom and took a hot tub bath, tryin to calm down. Then, after I was in my pajamas, I paced around the room and looked out the window. All I saw was the dark, wintry night. I tried to picture the hospital nearby and send positive thoughts to Lily. What was happenin to her? I couldn't imagine. I knew she was in pain. Were they gonna help her with that? I had so many questions but no answers.

I decided to get out my journal and try to write somethin. But I couldn't gather my thoughts enough to write even one sentence. All I could do was put the date at the top of the page. February 5, 1965. Then I turned the light off, snuggled into the blankets and shut my eyes. Eventually, I fell asleep.

In the mornin when I went down to chapel, everyone acted normal. I stared at the nuns' faces as they came down the aisle to their seats. They looked calm and serene as always. I tried prayin for Lily but I didn't get very far. I wasn't sure what to pray for. I just kept sayin her name, over and over, in my head. When the nuns filed out of the chapel at the end of mornin worship, Sister Faustina nodded her head at me and walked by. I couldn't tell if she knew anythin about Lily or not.

About eleven o'clock, I was in the classroom doin lessons with Sister Theodora and Sister Delphina and I saw Sister Faustina outside the door. She motioned for me to come out into the corridor.

"Do you know anythin about Lily, Sister?" I blurted out.

She cleared her throat as she always did before speakin, then in her brusque voice said, "Yes, Callie. We know that Lily is doing as well as can be expected. She'll be all right. But her baby has gone to be with God. It was a boy, but he was too small and his lungs were

too undeveloped for him to live. God has called him to be a cherubim in heaven."

I was stunned. I didn't know what to do. Scream? Cry out loud for Lily and her baby? Curse God and all the angels? I just stood there, frozen, looking at Sister Faustina. I couldn't keep from sobbin.

Just then, Sister Gertrude came down the hallway. She walked up to me, took my hand, and said, "Come, Callie. Come to my office until you feel better. You can stay with me as long as you need to." Her voice was soft and calming, in contrast to Sister Faustina's.

Now I was so loud anyone could hear me. Sister Gertrude was bein kind to me in a way that was probably unheard of in the Home. Somehow, I was lucky that Sister Gertrude seemed to care for me a little. She wasn't actin like a Virgin Gestapo. She was bein nice.

Sister Gertrude guided me into her office. She found a hankie to give me. The last time I was here, I was real angry at her for snoopin in my room and findin my diary. I thought she was definitely a Virgin Gestapo that day. Now I felt grateful to her. My feelins confused me quite a bit.

I sat down on a big, comfortable chair Sister Gertrude pulled up for me. She leaned against her desk and said, "You might want to know the hospital called Miss Somers immediately to tell her of Lily's situation. She's has been with her for several hours. She's the one who called to tell us about the baby...and about how Lily is doing. She said to tell you she'd come to see you as soon as she could. She wants to get Lily's personal belongings when she's here. Perhaps you can help her with that."

I had to think a second when Sister referred to Sable as "Miss Somers." We never used her last name. I nodded. Thank goodness, Sable had been with Lily and she hadn't been alone. I wondered if I'd be all alone when my time came. Then I realized that Lily would be leavin the Home soon and I would be as good as all alone here. My thoughts was pingin all around: Lily with her poor, dead baby, me by myself in the Home, me havin a baby by myself. Every thought made me cry harder. By now, Sister Gertrude had replaced the hankie I had with a whole box of tissues. She didn't try to talk to me but I could tell she glanced at me from time-to-time. I put my head down on my

knees and for a while, my cryin was pretty loud. Finally, I was completely tuckered out. I looked up. Sister Gertrude was still sittin at her desk.

"I think I'll go to my room now, Sister," I said. "Maybe I can gather up some of Lily's things so it'll be easier for Sable when she gets here. Do you know when she's comin'?"

"I expect her around two this afternoon."

When I stood up to leave, so did Sister Gertrude. She came round from her desk and faced me. She put her hands on my shoulders and said, "Callie, we don't know God's will but we have to accept it. You're a strong and courageous girl. I know you'll find the means to carry on. You need to bring comfort and solace to Lily." Her words sounded almost like a song.

Then she patted my arm, saying, "I'll call you when Miss Somers arrives."

"Thank you, Sister Gertrude, so much, for helpin me. I'm really grateful," I said. I wanted to say more but couldn't think of the right words so I stopped. I was amazed that one of the nuns could've been this kind and gentle. There was no way to tell her how I felt.

The first thing I did when I went in my room was turn on the radio to our favorite classical music station. Even though the music made me sadder, it was also soothin. It was better than the lonely silence of this bedroom.

I took Lily's suitcase out of her closet and put it on her bed. I noticed that someone had already taken away the blood-stained sheets and put clean ones on. I felt awkward about takin things out of her drawers so decided to wait for Sable and let her tell me what to do. I stretched out on my bed and tried to relax. In a minute, there was a knock on the door. Sister Gertrude was there with Sable. I threw my arms around Sable's neck. She held me for a minute. Sister Gertrude coughed, then said, "I'll leave you to seeing about Lily's things," and left.

"I started tryin to pack some things but decided to wait for you. I wasn't comfortable goin through her drawers and stuff," I said. "But first, please tell me about Lily."

We both sat down on my bed. Sable held my hand.

"Well, Callie, it's a sad story but you need to hear it. Lily was in labor for about an hour when the doctors decided the baby wasn't going to come out on its own. They'd already given her an injection to help the pain. But they had to get consent from her guardian—that's me—to do a Caesarean. I'm glad I was there. Do you know what a Caesarean is?"

"It's when they have to operate to take the baby out," I said.

"Yes. It's major surgery. Of course, they put Lily out completely before the surgery. The operation went smoothly but, unfortunately, the poor baby was just too small to live. When they took him out, he didn't breathe on his own. They gave him artificial respiration for some time."

Sable hesitated for a moment, looking out the window. In a minute, she looked back at me.

"The doctor then declared him dead."

For a minute, I couldn't think of what to say. I finally asked, "When did Lily find out?"

"She was back in her room, waking up from the anesthesia. I was there. I sat beside her and held her hand while I told her. Of course, she was in shock...and dreadfully upset by the news."

I could only imagine how Lily must be feelin.

"Well, what's gonna happen now? What's she gonna do?"

"She has to stay in the hospital for two or three more days. Then I'm planning to take Lily home with me. I'll take care of her, and I have several friends who'll help out when I'm at work."

My envy bone ached a little when I pictured Lily stayin at Sable's house and havin Sable take care of her. I felt ashamed of myself for being envious of my friend whose baby had just died. I tried to make up for it.

"Can I go see Lily at the hospital?"

"I've already asked Sister Eugenia. She said 'no.' She thinks it would start a pattern. Soon, everyone would want to go to the hospital to visit friends. The rule is 'The girls don't leave the Home except to have their babies.' You already slipped past that rule when you drove with Lily to the hospital. They're not going to punish you for it, but Sister Eugenia is very strong in saying you can't go again."

"That's not fair. Lily needs me to be with her. Maybe I could help her some way. That makes me mad."

Neither of us spoke for a minute. Sable just kept strokin my hand. Finally, I asked the question I dreaded hearing the answer to:

"What's gonna happen to the baby?"

I couldn't bear to picture the tiny dead baby.

"A priest blessed him in the hospital, right after he was born. That meant he could be buried in a Catholic cemetery. I told Lily I'd pay for a marker on the grave. She named him William and gave him her last name, Walker. But she calls him 'Baby Billy.' Do you like the name Billy? What about William?" Sable asked.

"I like Billy because it rhymes with Lily. But I like William even better. I love the flower 'sweet William' and now that flower will always make me think of Lily's baby. I think William Walker sounds distinguished."

"I like the name she chose. It makes him seem more real. Now Lily's going to need time to recover, both physically and emotionally. The surgery will make her physical recovery even slower and more difficult. I'll be glad when you girls can be together again."

"I hope it won't be too long. I already miss Lily a real lot."

"Callie, I was going to wait until closer to your due date to discuss this with you. But now is a good time to talk about this."

I felt a sharp pang of worry. What was she going to tell me? That she couldn't take care of me as well as Lily? How could I get along without Sable comin to visit and without Lily to talk to? The loneliness I pictured just then moment felt unbearable.

"I want you, as well as Lily, to come live with me for as long as you want. I'm planning to get the papers drawn up—and signed—that will make me the legal guardian for both of you. After that happens, I'll give up my position as Lily's social worker. She might not need one after that anyway. What about you? Would you be happy if I were your legal guardian and you lived with me?"

Unbelievable relief took over my whole body when she said this. I threw my arms around her.

"You already *are* my guardian angel. Yes, of course, it's okay to make it legal. Do you really want us to live with you?"

"Yes, I've thought about it a lot. I'll talk to the nuns about it when it's time for you to leave here. I think it's a great plan, for both you and Lily."

I jumped up from the bed and pulled Sable to her feet so I could really hug her. She hugged me back. I almost couldn't handle such feelings of relief and happiness. I started cryin' again.

"Come on, Callie. No time for tears. We've got to finish gathering Lily's things. I'll see her each day at the hospital until she's discharged. As soon as she leaves, I'll drive over here and you can at least come out to the car and visit with her for a minute. I'll insist on that with Sister Eugenia. Try not to be too sad. We'll all be together again soon."

I was still sad, but I also felt so happy I thought I might explode. I knew I could get through the next two months now even though I didn't want to be here.

"Sable, I don't have anythin to send to Lily. But I can write her a note if you'll wait a few minutes. Can you wait?"

"Sure. I have to talk to Sister Eugenia anyway. I'll go downstairs to see her while you're writing. Come down when you've finished. I'll carry the suitcase down if you'll bring the bags of Lily's things. I think we have everything."

"OK. It won't take me long."

Writin the note to Lily was one of the hardest things I've ever done. I couldn't pretend I was Louisa May either. I told her how sad I was that Sweet Baby William had died and we would always remember him in our hearts. I told her I'd be there to help her over the sad times, just as I'd need her to help me. I ended the note with this sentence: "I'll be so glad when we're together again. We are truly soul sisters and I'm happy you're in my life. Love, Callie."

When I finished my note, I went downstairs. Sable was standin in the entryway with Sister Eugenia. She shook Sister's hand and I heard her say "Thank you. I'll be back in a couple of days."

Sister Eugenia nodded in my direction, then walked on down the hallway, stiffly, like a soldier. I gave Sable one last hug as soon as Sister was out of sight. Then, I couldn't help myself. I had to say it. "I love you, Sable. Thank you for bein so nice to me."

Sable's eyes were wet with tears and she stroked my cheek for a minute. She gave me one of her beautiful smiles, then said she'd see me soon. At that moment, I could feel Ma's presence nearby. It was a magical feelin I'd never had before.

Sable opened the door and went out quickly so's not to let in a lot of cold air. I turned and went upstairs. When I was back in my room, I took out my journal and started to write. The first thing to come out of my head was this poem about Lily's baby. It was written on the page where I'd put the date the night Lily went to the hospital.

*Sweet Baby William  
Arrived on the earth  
But found no breath,  
No air, only death.*

*One of God's angels—  
A cherubim fair  
High in the heavens  
Now breathing air.*

*I cry for the babe  
who never drew breath.  
I wish I'd known him  
before he knew death.*

*Can I pray for his soul?  
I will try with my might.  
But I know he's forever  
out of my sight.*

*His mama, poor Lily,  
I cry for her, too.  
Although the baby was 'borrowed'  
as she always knew.*

While I was writin, I kept wishin I knew how to write better. I also wished I was smarter and had read more books. I wished I was back in school, a real school where I could actually learn somethin. I made a promise to myself that as soon as possible, I'd go back to school and learn everythin I could. I'd be a *real* writer someday, I promised myself.

I tried not to think about my baby. He was kickin around like mad these days, specially when I got upset. When I felt the kickin and movin, I didn't feel so lonely but I *did* feel sad. I couldn't forget his bein because he was part of me. But I was pretty sure I was gonna have to make a new life without him.

Later, when I looked back at this page in my journal, I saw the stains from my tears fallin on the page. I will keep this journal with me always. It's the proof of what I'm goin through now.

Late in the afternoon a couple days later, I was called downstairs from my nap. I was groggy but woke up fast when Helen, the messenger that day, told me Sable was outside with Lily in the car.

Just then, Sister Theodora appeared and said, "You may step outside for a few minutes, Callie. Be sure to put on a coat. And make haste not to keep Miss Somers waiting."

I grabbed my coat and hurried out the front door. As always, the cold air shocked me when it hit me in the face.

Sable was sittin in the driver's seat of a dark blue car with four-doors. When I got closer, Lily opened the back door and said, "Quick, Callie, get in here before you catch your death!"

The car was warm inside and the windows was steamin up. I grabbed Lily by the shoulders and we rocked back and forth, gigglin and laughin and cryin for a minute. She was so bundled up I could hardly see her. She had a stocking cap on her head, the winter coat she always wore, and a soft plaid blanket across her lap. At first, I felt a little uncomfortable with her. It seemed like she'd been gone a long time. I didn't know what to say. I didn't think I should comment on the most obvious thing: that she didn't have a belly anymore. As usual, Lily helped me out.

"Thanks, Cal, for the note you sent after Baby Billy died. It helped a lot."

"Oh, Lily. I'm so sorry about everythin."

I could see Lily's face now and could tell it was paler and thinner.

"Are you feelin better now?" I asked.

"Yeah, I'm doing better. I'm going to Sable's house 'til my stitches are healed up and I feel like walking more than I do now. Then I think I may try going back to school. I'm not sure. How do you feel, Cal? Are you doing OK?"

"Yes, except I miss you fierce. I want to know more about what happened to you in the hospital. Can you tell me somethin about it?"

"It's not that I don't want to talk about it. I can't remember much at all. I was in so much pain. They gave me a drug right away to take away the pain but it took my memory, too. I remember seeing Sable's face and hearing her say they had to operate. Right after that, I was completely asleep and didn't wake up until I was back in my room in the hospital. So I don't remember anything about the birth part.

"When I came to, Sable was sitting beside my bed. I could tell by her face something was wrong. She was so gentle when she told me about Baby Billy but I couldn't believe he was dead. One of the nurses—her name was Madeline—asked me if I'd like to see him before she took him away. I said I wanted to. In a little bit, she came back into my room carrying this tiny bundle in a blue blanket. At first, I was afraid to look. Madeline was really nice. She said, 'He just looks like he's sleeping. Don't be afraid.'

"She pulled the blanket back from his face. He was so tiny. I couldn't believe how sweet and innocent he looked. She let me hold him for a short time. I looked and looked at him. I told him I loved him and would always remember him. Then Madeline took him from my arms and left the room.

"Later, Sable told me he'd been buried in the Catholic cemetery near the hospital. She's going to have a stone made to put on his grave. It'll say his name, William Walker, and his birth and death date. Isn't it sad it's the same date?"

I didn't know how to answer Lily. I was so filled with sadness I almost couldn't speak.

"We'll always remember Billy, and the day he was born and died," I said. "It was February 5, 1965."

About that time, Sable, who hadn't said a word yet, turned halfway around and said "I know you girls want to talk but I told Sister Eugenia I'd only stay a few minutes. Callie needs to go back inside so she doesn't get in trouble."

I moaned. "Too short a time, Sable," I said.

"I know. But we need to go. Lily hasn't been out of bed much at all and I don't want her to have a relapse on me."

What she said forced me to think about poor Lily and I felt selfish for wantin her to stay longer.

"Okay, Sable. When will you be back?"

"I'll come on Friday afternoons. You can count on it, unless I have an emergency. I'll try to call Sister Eugenia and tell her if I *can't* make it here to see you. You take care of yourself. Eat well. Get lots of rest. You'll soon need all your strength."

"Lily, I have to tell you. I'm gettin a new roommate tomorrow. I don't want to share our room with anyone else. But I have to. Sister Eugenia told me her name's Susannah and she's comin from Arkansas. That's all I know. I'll write and tell you what she's like. I hope I'll see you soon."

"And I hope you like Susannah. Write and tell me all about her. You can send your letters 'special delivery' with Sable."

We hugged once more and I leaned over the front seat to give Sable a quick little kiss on the cheek. Sable waited while I walked back to the front door, then she and Lily drove away. I got hit by a gigantic pang of loneliness then. I wished I could die in my tracks. Once inside, I headed for the library to sit in one of the big chairs and think about the changes in my life. There were going to be many more—too many, I knew for sure.

## Chapter 32

In the morning, before I leave for work, Sable asks, "What movie did you see?"

"American Graffiti. It was really good. It should have won the Oscar this year. Just so real, the way teenagers are. We both loved it."

"Were you upset last night? I thought you looked a little annoyed, or angry. Something?"

"Oh, a little. No big deal. I don't like it when people can't see how important desegregation is. Bobbi was sort of obtuse, I thought. A bit like the old ostrich with its head in the sand."

"I agree. I didn't say anything, but now I wish I had."

"Good heavens. Don't argue with your friends because of me. I shouldn't have said anything. I still like Bobbi, most of the time."

"Do you know if you'll be here tonight for dinner?" Sable asks, changing the subject.

"I'll call you later. I want to keep going on the follow-up to the integration piece. I'm counting on Mr. Johnson's secretary to set up interviews. Otherwise, I'll probably have to cover some routine bank hold-up in the city."

I have to laugh, picturing that story as routine. Now I'm involved in another kind of story, I don't want to be interrupted from writing about it.

Sable laughs, too. She knows how important my writing and photography are to me. She also knows covering a bank holdup used to make my day.

"Well, I hope all goes well. Call me." She hugs me as I head for the door.

The office is buzzing. There's a big fire in downtown Kansas City—still blazing. Several reporters are covering it. And there really was a bank robbery, in Overland Park. Brenda got the assignment. Thank goodness. I hope I won't get sidetracked by either event and can concentrate on my Jefferson High series.

I scan all the messages scattered around on my desk. Sure enough, there's a note to call Principal Johnson at Jefferson High. I call him right away.

"Hi, Callie. Good news! We've set up a couple of interviews for you. Can you go to a home this evening?"

"Of course I can. Tell me who I'm seeing and where they live."

"Carmen and Manny Lopez, Colombians. Their daughter, Pola, is supposed to be there, too. Carmen's English is pretty good, Manny's not so good. Pola speaks excellent English."

"Was she involved in the fight?"

"Not directly. She's a good friend of Sofya, one of the girls who was. You might want to interview Sofya's parents next time."

"Good. Tell me a little about Manny and Carmen."

"You'll like them. Carmen's a house cleaner, Manny works for the Santa Fe. They're 'salt-of-the-earth' folks."

"Sounds great! What time should I get there?"

"Meet me at the school at 7:00. I'll drive you to their house. It might be hard for you to find. You're not familiar with this part of the city, right?"

"I could find it. But it will be nicer to go with you. You can be the ice breaker."

"They're excited about your piece. They thought the one that was in last week was great."

"Thanks. That's good to hear. See you at 7:00."

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I barely get in the door of the school when I meet Mr. Johnson striding down the corridor.

"Good. You're on time," he says. "I value punctuality. You may know this, but Latinos have a reputation for being late. It's a standing joke here: 'Colombian time,' 'Guatemalan time,' 'Mexican time.' They think Americans are constantly rushing. I guess we probably are."

Mr. Johnson is dressed in jeans, a tee shirt under his windbreaker, and sneakers. I'm glad I changed after work into something less dressy: corduroy slacks and a turtleneck sweater.

We get into his Chevy Nova. It's dirty on the outside and the inside is almost as bad. He tosses some toy trucks and cars into the back so I can sit in the passenger's seat. I wonder how it would feel to have kid's toys in my car.

"Someday, I'll clean this heap," he mutters as he slides behind the steering wheel.

As we drive to the Lopez's home, Mr. Johnson tells me more about the family.

"Carmen and Manny came to the States from Colombia five or six years ago. Manny was one of the lucky ones who found a job fairly quickly with the Santa Fe."

"Do you know what he does? Is he an engineer? A conductor? What?" These are the railroad jobs I know about.

Mr. Johnson chuckles.

"Nothing so elegant," he says. "Manny's on the road crew, repairing the tracks, shoveling the snow off in the winter, hacking down weeds in the summer. Not glamorous work. But it pays pretty well, at least, for an unskilled laborer."

"Carmen is a house cleaner. She has three or four regulars she cleans for weekly. I'm not sure how much she's paid. The advantage is she can arrange her work schedule around the kids' schedules."

"How many kids do they have?"

"There's Pola, the oldest. She's almost sixteen. Then there's Manny Jr.. He's also at the high school, a freshman, so he's about fourteen. The youngest is Jose, or JoJo. I think he's seven or eight. He goes to the neighborhood elementary school."

My breath is sucked out of me for an instant. Elisabeth is almost eight now. Where is she going to school? Does she like her teacher? Does she feel comfortable with adults? There are so many things I wish I knew about her.

The neighborhood we're in, from what I can see, is certainly not well-to-do but it's not terrible, either. Even though the air still has a nip to it, kids are playing outside. I see a few black kids running around as well as two or three Latinos.

We pull up in front of a small, two-story bungalow.

"Here we are," Mr. Johnson says as he parks the car.

The other houses on the street are similar, although some of them don't seem as well-kept as the Lopez's. Their home is painted white with dark green shutters and a green door. The small front lawn is neat, not cluttered with wheel toys and junky items like some of the yards. There's a maroon pick-up truck in the driveway.

Mr. Johnson rings the doorbell. It doesn't work. He knocks. Immediately, the door is opened by an adorable brown-eyed boy.

"This must be Jose," I think. I try not to fixate on him because I know he's about Elisabeth's age.

"Buenas noches," I say.

"Hi," says Jose back to me. "Come on in. We're waiting for you."

Well, I think, at least one person in the family speaks English. I can talk to Jose if no one else understands me. Just as I'm thinking this, Carmen comes up behind him.

"Hello," she says in a soft, pleasant voice. "Come in. We're happy to have you."

"Thanks for letting me come."

As we shake hands, I take in Carmen's petite, almost dainty, good looks. Her long dark hair, smooth and silky, is pulled back and caught with a large silver barrette. Her dark brown eyes, so much like Jose's, are friendly and welcoming.

Manny has followed her to the door and Principal Johnson shakes his hand and pats him on the shoulder. They're easy together. They know each other pretty well, I guess. Mr. Johnson introduces us.

"Hello, Mr. Lopez," I say.

"Por favor, mi nombre es Manny. Call me Manny, okay?"

"Okay, you call me Callie, deal?"

He smiles and nods in agreement. Manny is taller than Carmen. He has a stocky, solid physique. His short-sleeved shirt shows off his strong forearms and powerful shoulder muscles. He obviously does physical labor.

Mr. Johnson and I follow Carmen and Manny into a sparsely-furnished but comfortable living room. The walls are a cheery shade of light yellow. Tieback curtains of a sheer fabric add to the light

feeling in the room. A sofa is against one wall with a small trunk in front of it used as a coffee table. Multi-colored throws are draped across the back of the sofa and on an overstuffed chair near the couch.

A large TV occupies the wall across from the sofa. A crucifix hangs on the wall above the TV. There are several small occasional tables with framed family photos clustered on them. More family photographs are on the TV. Religious figurines are mixed in with them. I remember the figure of Mary holding Baby Jesus that Susannah gave me to take to the hospital when Elisabeth was born. Suddenly, the memory of Susannah makes me miss her, her kindness — and Elisabeth.

While we're standing in the middle of the room, Mr. Johnson pulls Jose aside and says, "Would you like to go to the mall with me while they talk? Maybe we can find ice cream."

Jose grins, then glances at his mother. She nods her approval. Mr. Johnson adds "not to worry" as he tells Carmen and Manny they'll be back in about an hour.

"Jose is adorable," I say. "He's at such a great age." I try not to think about his age too much.

After Jose and Mr. Johnson leave, there's a moment of awkwardness. Manny, Carmen and I stand in the middle of the room, staring at each other. Then Carmen laughs and motions me to sit in the big chair.

"Siente se. Sit down," she says.

When I sit down in the chair, I sink so deeply into the cushions my feet are practically sticking straight out in front of me. The springs have seen better days. I scrooch around until I can place my feet more comfortably on the floor

"Would you like something to drink?" Carmen asks. "I've just made some hot chocolate. It's a favorite drink in Colombia. We drink it all year. Do you like chocolate?"

"I love chocolate. A cup of hot chocolate would be great. Thanks."

She goes into the kitchen and I hear her rattling dishes. Manny is intent on setting up a couple of folding TV trays. He doesn't talk at

all. In fact, I have the feeling he's trying not to swear at the stubborn legs of the trays that seem to be stuck shut. When he gets them opened, he puts one next to my chair, the other in front of the couch.

Carmen comes back, carrying a large plastic tray of cups, saucers, spoons and napkins plus a plate with several pieces of some kind of pastry. She sets the tray down, then goes back into the kitchen and brings in a large pottery pitcher. She pours the hot chocolate into three cups.

"You must try the milhojas," she says. "That means 'thousand leaves cake' and I made it special for you. It's a favorite Colombian sweet. Muy deliciosa!"

I feel a little awkward, trying to eat cake, drink hot chocolate, set up the recorder and stay on top of the chair cushions. I put the recorder on the floor and taste the cake and hot chocolate. Both are rich and delicious. The three of us concentrate on eating for a minute.

"Would you like more chocolate? Let me fill your cup."

I'm already feeling the rush of sugar and would like to say "no" but I know if I did, I'd appear rude, so I nod and say "yes, please." She gives me seconds of everything.

Carmen then sits down on the sofa, leaving a space between her and Manny. I juggle my cup while I put the tape recorder on the trunk-table in front of them. I have to stretch to reach the trunk and almost spill the drink. I feel like a complete spaz. Manny notices my problem and moves the trunk closer to me so I can reach it easily. I'm impressed by his awareness.

"Thanks, Manny. I'm trying to do too much. I have to put my cup and plate down. The recording will help me write my story. The machine is on. Just keep talking and we'll give it a try. Say something into the recorder, Manny."

He laughs, looks uncomfortable, and blurts out, "What do I say? I not speak English very good. Con su permiso, Carmen habla por mi. Okay?"

I have to laugh. "You just recorded your voice, Manny. That's what I wanted you to do. Muy bueno. And yes, Carmen can do most of the talking if you want. Now it's your turn to record, Carmen."

Carmen says "My name is Carmen Lopez. I live in Kansas City."

At this moment, Pola comes into the room and sits down between her parents. She's small and pretty, like her mother, with a bright smile. She's now smiling at her parents' puzzled expressions and speaks in Spanish to them. They nod. When I replay the tape so they can hear their voices, they're pleased. The three of them laugh at how strange their own voices sound on the machine.

"Don't worry about how you sound. No one but me will hear the tape. I want to talk to you about your life here in the United States and how it's different from your life in Colombia. I'm especially interested in the things you miss the most about Colombia. Entiende?"

"Si, si, muy bueno," Manny says.

"Yes, it's good. Let's talk," says Carmen.

The interview flows. I jot down some notes but mostly I just listen to the two adults and the daughter tell their stories. Sometimes, I put in a word or a question to draw them out a little more. The things they miss are not surprising: friends, family, the beautiful weather, the food.

Then Carmen speaks about their life in the States.

"Our house here is smaller than our house in Cali. Very small for five. Rent's not cheap. Sometimes there are problems in the neighborhood. Not many people speak Spanish. Talking is hard with neighbors. Not all kids here are nice." She clasps her hands together and tugs at her fingers.

Pola interrupts. "Mama worries that something bad will happen to us. It's much safer here than in Colombia. The kids in the neighborhood are fine. She worries too much."

"Well, most of the kids are fine," Carmen says. "We just want a better life for our kids than we had growing up. We hope we can give it to them."

I feel sad as they describe their jobs, how hard they must work, how hard it is to fit in. Adjusting to this new life would be difficult. I interrupt to ask a question I must ask.

"I know that Cali is considered the drug capital of Colombia. It's in the newspapers and on the radio all the time. Stories about killings,

kidnappings, smuggling. Did you—or did your children—experience problems because of drugs?"

Manny and Carmen exchange a look. He shakes his head slightly. I wonder if Carmen will answer my question. She searches his face for a moment and says, "It's okay, Manny. This is the United States. We don't have to be afraid." Then she looks at me, nods her head, and goes on talking.

"In Cali, we worry a lot about drugs. Drugs are big business. Even innocent people are killed over drugs. The drug cartels are powerful and the leaders can't be trusted. They kidnap children for ransom. They disappear people. And sometimes they kill. It's scary. It makes us nervous. We worry about our children's safety."

This concern for their kids is obvious, as is their affection for them. As she speaks, she reaches out and strokes Pola's hair. Manny pats Pola on the back.

Just then, Manny Jr. comes in. He's wearing jeans, a knit tee shirt with a collar and some shabby, but stylish, half boots. With dark eyes and brown skin, he looks like a typical American teenager. Like his sister, he speaks excellent English. The parents' pride in their teenaged son is clear.

"What about you, Manny? Did you want to get away from the drug dealers? Were you affected by the drug trade in Cali?"

Manny Jr. hesitates for a moment, then says, "Not so much. I stayed away from anyone dealing drugs. Our main reasons to come to the States were to get good education and good jobs. These things are most important."

The parents nod in agreement; we continue talking. I'm impressed with how aware Manny and Carmen are about the class and racial divides in the United States.

"We think life is better in the States so thanks be to God we finally can come here. It *is* better here, but not ideal," Carmen says. "The school has problems. Not enough money to run it well. Too many kids in classes. Much fighting in the hallways and in the school yard. Fights between black kids and Latino kids"

"We don't have as many friends here as we did in Cali," Pola puts in. "I miss my friends a lot."

Manny Jr. nods his agreement. "I think it will be a long time before we have really good friends in the States."

While Pola and Manny Jr. are talking, Manny puts his feet on the trunk, Carmen keeps rubbing her hands together, sliding her wedding band up and down her finger. Their body language reveals both much fear and some dissatisfaction with this new life. Later at home, listening to the tape of this conversation, I hear again the sadness and concern reflected in their voices.

Fortunately, just as their words are becoming slower and more uncertain, Jose bursts through the door.

"We brought ice cream for everyone," he announces. "You, too, Manny!"

"Yay! Good job, JoJo," says Manny Jr.

Everyone heads into the kitchen. It's as immaculate as the living room but not modern like Sable's kitchen. Carmen serves heaping bowls full of three kinds of ice cream: chocolate, vanilla, and fudge ripple. I snap photos, feeling too full of cake and hot chocolate to want ice cream. The others don't have that problem. They dive into it. From their excited talk and delight in the unexpected dessert, I can tell that such a treat is not a routine part of their life.

I hope my pictures will capture the warmth the family feels for each other. I get some great shots of Jose, spoon sticking out of his mouth, grinning from ear-to-ear at the camera. I'd like to shoot the whole roll just of him. But I can't let my emotions affect my professional judgment.

Finally, Principal Johnson motions to me and says, "It's time for us to go. I'm sure Callie has gotten more than enough pictures of all of you. You'll definitely be famous."

I put my camera back in its case, gather up the tape recorder and the two tapes of conversation, and stuff it all into my bag.

"Thank you so much for everything. You've been terrific. I'm going to be able to write a great story. And I loved the Colombian treats you served."

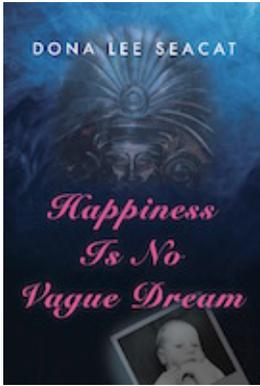
As Principal Johnson is holding the front door open for me, Carmen comes to put her arms around me. She gives me a tight, warm hug. I hug her back. We stand there for a moment, our arms

around each other. I'm aware of a strong feeling of affection for her and she seems to feel the same about me. We look at each other for a moment and as I say, "Thank you." She says "Muchas gracias." It's a special moment.

In my car headed home, I turn on the radio. I'm not in the mood for the classical music that first comes on. I turn the dial until I hear a song by Carole King: "I Feel the Earth Move." I love it. In fact, I love all the songs on her album "Tapestry." I've owned it since it first came out. I play it often on Sable's stereo.

Even though the song is peppy and upbeat, I feel sad listening to it. The words remind me of how I felt that summer with Orem. We made love all the time. I'd never been so happy. I haven't had a love affair like that since. Some sexual relationships, yes; passionate love affairs, no. Getting pregnant and having to give up Elisabeth was just too painful. I've been feeling that empty, lost space all evening. Then, sensing that Carmen and I might become friends, I realize how much I miss Lily, too.

Suddenly, my eyes fill with tears. Luckily, I'm in a place where I can pull over to the side of the road. I sit there for a moment, listening. Carole King's voice soars loudly out of the car radio, but my sobbing is louder.



*Happiness Is No Vague Dream is the story of a strong, intelligent, young woman forced to deal with unexpected and difficult challenges during the turbulent years of 1964 and 1973.*

*At 16, just months after Callie Seymour's mother dies, Callie gets pregnant. She wants to keep the baby but no one supports her in this. Her family disowns her. She is sent to a Catholic Home for Wayward Girls in Kansas City, Missouri, where she gives birth. Callie names her baby, Elisabeth. Just before the child is taken away for adoption, a nurse takes her photo and gives it to Callie. The shot captures Elisabeth's birthmark, a small strawberry-shape on her neck.*

*By 1973, Callie, twenty-four, has put herself through college and become a newspaper reporter. And each year since her daughter's birth, Callie has placed a letter into her child's official adoption file in the hopes that they can one day reestablish contact. After writing a controversial exposé on immigrants in Kansas City, taking a life-changing trip to Colombia and falling in love, Callie finally realizes that happiness is no vague dream. It depends on being courageous and persistent, loving your work, and having a clear conscience.*

# Happiness Is No Vague Dream

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