

A Daniels Sisters Mystery

GOLD MEDAL MYSTERY!



Chapter one

— TEAM SPIRIT —

WRITTEN BY JANEL RODRIGUEZ-FERRER



*"So we say with confidence,
'The Lord is my helper;
I will not be afraid.'"*

HEBREWS 13:6



— Chapter One —



My three sisters and I stepped out of the church and into the sun. It was a warm, Sunday afternoon in May in Roland Lake, near Franklin, Tennessee. It was so warm, it felt like summer. “It’s like we’re back in Texas,” I said as I fanned my neck with my hand.

My twin sister, Amber—although the family calls her Kitty—nodded. Then she nudged me with her elbow and called out, “Race ya!” She gestured off to the side. She wanted us to run down the ramp that made the church accessible to people who needed wheelchairs, strollers, or who otherwise had difficulty managing the stairs. Although I know why it looked tempting (running downhill and letting gravity pull you forward could make

you feel superhero-fast) I didn't think it would be right while there were still people around who could actually need the ramp.

I shook my head sternly. "That's not a good idea." Then with a sneaky smile, I sprinted towards the parking lot. "But I'll race you to the car!"

"Hey! No fair!" Kitty shouted at my back while I enjoyed my head start. "You cheated!"

I wasn't really cheating. I was only trying to draw her away from the ramp and, well, tease her. I started laughing, though, which slowed me down.

Then big sister Lena's voice called out from behind us. "Can Cammie Daniels hold on to her—let's face it—unfair lead? It appears not, because here comes Kitty! She's catching up. She's on Cammie's heels. Now she's by her side! Now the twins are neck and neck, matching each other's pace, stride for stride!"

This narration made me both want to speed up and laugh more, which made it even harder to outrun Amber. Then suddenly:

Thunk-thunk-thunk-thunk-thunk-thunk!

Another set of feet had joined in the race! It was our second oldest sister, Ansley. She rushed by both of us,

her laughter first floating in the air around us and then trailing behind her like a scarf as she sped ahead and beat us to the car.

By the time Lena, Aunt Sam, and Dad joined us, we three “runners” were all either panting, laughing, or coughing.

“Getting in shape for the Gold Medal Games, I see,” Dad said as he casually unlocked the doors to the car. His eyes twinkled.

“Oh, yeah!” We all nodded enthusiastically.

The “Gold Medal Games” were starting on Monday. It was a sporting competition—sort of like a mini-Olympics. There would be three Christian schools in the district competing. Ansley would be participating

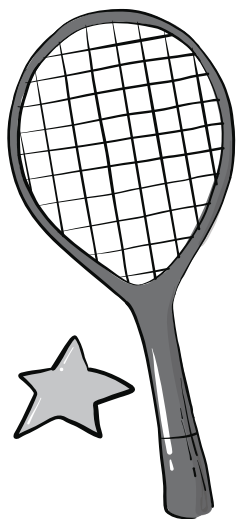


in gymnastics. Lena would be playing tennis. Kitty and I had signed up for soccer. But we were all going to run on the track teams for our different grades. There were going to be actual first, second, and third place medals for each event, too.

Thinking about this, I said aloud, “How cool would it be if we all won medals?”

“Gold ones, especially,” Ansley said. “Like Coach Flip.” Philip or “Flip” Well was Ansley’s gymnastics coach. He’d won a gold medal in gymnastics in the real Olympic games some years ago. Ansley got to see it and hold it and everything!

“I would be proud if any of you girls medaled,” Dad said, “no matter if you got gold, silver, or bronze. But I’d also be proud of you if you didn’t medal. Competing in sports is very challenging, and participating in events like this is more about putting your best effort into it. But cheering other people on, making friendships, showing good sportsmanship if you lose—those are all important, too—probably even



more important—and what makes these games fun.”

After we all got in the car, buckled in, and headed toward the pancake house, Dad continued. “Remember how we were reading the passage from Paul’s first letter to the

Corinthians? About how all the different parts of the body work together as one? That’s what teamwork is like. Your school’s team is going to be made up of kids who are good at different sports, and will be of different ages, skills, and backgrounds. But united, they will be the Roland Lake Team.”

This got me thinking. “But also, you can have a soccer team like ours, right? And we’re obviously all on the team because we’re all good at soccer. But we play different positions on the team because one of us might be better at defending, another one at crossing, and another at assisting.”

“You are so right,” Aunt Sam said. She was sitting in the front seat next to Dad, facing forward. I couldn’t see her face, but I could hear the smile in her voice.





Aunt Sam was Dad's sister. She came to live with us after our mom went to live with Jesus. She really helped us a lot. She cooked meals, took us to school, and loved on us all the time. And whenever we got sad missing our mom, she was there to be sad with us and to hug us and help us through it.

She turned to me and said, "Doesn't it feel good to find something you're good at and to practice and get better at it?"

Everyone else in the car agreed.

I liked challenging myself to get better and better at soccer. It wasn't just about kicking or running, either. It was about strategizing. Trying to figure out your opponent's next move. Or how best to get past the other team and get your ball in the net. My school team was pretty good at working together. It made me wonder how well the teams from the other schools played with one another.

"It will be cool to meet some kids from other schools," I said aloud. As much as I liked to compete, I liked to make friends, too.

Suddenly Dad changed the subject. "Uh-oh, it's looking pretty full out there." He slowly drove the car

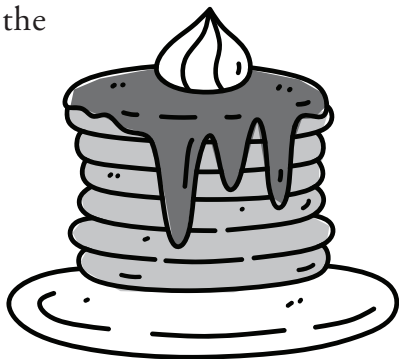
around the parking lot next to the strip mall near the pancake house. “Can y’all look for a space?”

My sisters and I all looked out the windows for any available parking. As the car crept along and circled and circled, I heard my stomach grumble.

This is going to take forever, I worried. Just then, I spotted a place up ahead. “There! Near the basketball court.”

“Good eye, Ash!” Dad said, and he steered the car over to where I pointed.

(He calls me ‘Ash’ because my real name is Ashton. But the family mostly calls me “Cammie.” I got the nickname because I love to take photos and film things on my phone. Actually, both Kitty and I do, but Kitty was already nicknamed Kitty for the times she used to pretend she was mom’s kitty cat. So I got called “Cammie” for “camera.” I liked that my twin and I had nicknames that were used only by the family. It made me feel kind of special.)





After we parked, the troop of us got out and headed toward the pancake house. As we passed by the small basketball court, I enjoyed the smacking sounds a basketball was making against the asphalt while someone dribbled it. It gave me a wave of that “summer” feeling again. When I turned my head to see who was doing the dribbling, I was just in time to see a basketball sail through the air in a smooth arc and swish into the basket.

Nice one, I thought.

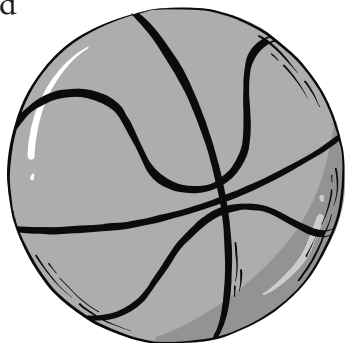
Suddenly, the angry voice of a young boy cut through the silence. “That was my shot!” he yelled. “You took my shot!” I recognized him as Zachary Monroe, a boy who went to my school. He wore his short, brown hair spiked up, which made him look as prickly as his temper.

“Hey, hey, calm down.” A tall, muscular boy smiled at Zachary and held his hands up as if in surrender. I knew him, too. Kai Tung Wu. He was an athletic kid who seemed to be on every sports team in school.

A freckled girl (with eyes so blue I could see their color from where I was standing) fearlessly stepped in between the boys and said, “Kai didn’t steal the ball,

and you know it, Zach.” She had a strong southern accent.

“You’re telling me you didn’t see that, Dallas?” Zach said. He pointed off to the side as if a screen would magically appear and show an instant replay of what just happened.



Dallas shook her head and readjusted her ponytail. “Face it, cuz. You were just too slow.”

The fourth and tallest player in the group was a blonde girl wearing a blue T-shirt with the words Trinity Academy across the back. She had been standing nearby with the ball tucked under her arm, watching the scene unfold. Suddenly she tossed the ball aside, walked away from the argument, and sat down on a concrete bench on the edge of the court. Next, she pulled a pink backpack that had been on the ground onto her lap. She took out an asthma inhaler and pumped a spray of medication into her mouth. Then she put the inhaler back into the front pocket of her bag. Finally, she unzipped the main pouch of her bag, took out a

cellophane-covered book, pushed her glasses up the bridge of her nose, and began reading.

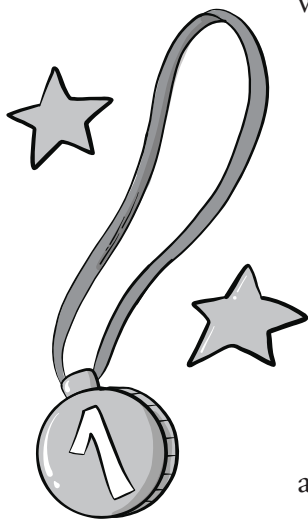
“Oh, come on, Ruby,” Zach said to her, “the game’s not over yet.”

Ruby kept reading.

“Oh, the game’s over all right,” Kai said with a grin. “Because I won. And I always win.”

Zachary glared at him, his face red with anger. And even though Zach was obviously fuming, I could see why Kai was smiling at him. Zach’s spiky hair and flaring nostrils made him look almost cartoonishly funny. Besides, Kai was right: he was the best athlete in our grade.

Kai probably doesn’t even know what it’s like to lose, I thought. On the other hand, everyone knew what Zach was like when he lost: if he was playing baseball and struck out, he would break his bat; if he was playing tennis and lost, then he would take it out on his racket—and on whoever was close enough to





hear him rant and rave.

To be honest, Zach is a pretty good athlete, I thought, but as long as Kai is around, his chances of winning—and everyone else’s for that matter—are slim. Zach was better known for his complaining than for his talents and abilities. He may never win a sports trophy, I thought, but if there is a gold medal for sore losers, he would win that for sure!

Suddenly, to my surprise, Ansley shouted, “Hey, Ruby!” And waved.

Ruby turned out to be the blond girl, who looked up from her book, smiled, and headed over to where my family and I were all standing.

“Isn’t she from Trinity?” Lena asked aloud (she’d noticed the T-shirt, too), “How do you know her, Ans?”

“She was at Roland Lake during the fall term,” Ansley explained. “Her family moved out of the neighborhood at the beginning of the year.”

“Hi Ansley,” Ruby said with a shy smile. “I was thinking about you the other day. All my old friends from Roland Lake, actually. Will you be competing at the Gold Medal Games?”

Ansley nodded enthusiastically. “I sure will! I hope

you are, too. Everyone in the old gang will be so glad to see you again.”

“I’ll be glad to see them, too. But I won’t know which school to root for!” Ruby giggled, flashing her braces for a second.

“Don’t you like Trinity?”

“Of course,” Ruby said shyly. “But what I really like best about it is that it’s so close to home I can walk there. I don’t have to wait for my mom to drop me off or pick me up anymore. Now I’m not late for school and she’s on time for work—most days, anyway. She still has to drive my sis to practice.”

We all chuckled at that—even my dad and my aunt.

“The morning rush can be a challenge!” Dad shook his head knowingly. “Especially with more than one child who’s interested in sports!”

“Your sis wants to be in the WNBA, doesn’t she?” Ansley asked.

Ruby nodded. “She’s seriously good, too. I think she’ll make it.”

“Cool,” I said.

Aunt Sam turned the conversation back to Ruby. “What brings you to your old neighborhood now? Have you eaten? Would you and your mom like to

join us for brunch? We just came from church.”

“Oh, no, that’s okay,” Ruby said. “I ate already. My mom works at the pancake house. She traded shifts with someone, so she had to come in today. I was just going to read a book in a corner somewhere—”



“—*Ooh*, what book is it?” Ansley asked.

Ruby held up a retro-looking hardback book. The picture on the cover showed two teenage girls peering through some bushes and at an old abandoned-looking mansion. “It’s a mystery. These kids have a secret club where they help people and solve mysteries.”

The hairs on the back of my neck prickled. “Really?” I exchanged glances with my sisters.

“We love mysteries,” Ansley said.

Last month, my sisters and I created the Daniels Sisters Detective Agency—our own secret club. And we even solved a mystery about a missing pearl necklace, helping the woman who had lost it to be happy again. Of course, we couldn’t really take the credit for it. God



was with us all the way. We had just cooperated with His plan. Still, we really had a lot of fun. And even though some of it had been hard work, we wanted to solve another mystery as soon as possible.

“I love mysteries, too,” Ruby said. “That’s why I was going to find a spot to just go read this when a couple of other mall brats invited me to this pickup game.”

“‘Mall brats’?” Kitty and I repeated at the same time. “Kids whose parents also work in stores along the strip. See, we’re not exactly mallrats. We don’t hang out here by choice. We’re more like army brats, who have to live on army bases where their parents work. We think it’s a funny thing to call ourselves. We should make ourselves T-shirts.”

“That’s a neat way for you to all know each other,” Lena mused. “You’re kind of like a team—or even a family.”

Ruby rolled her eyes (with a smile) and looked behind her for a moment. “Yeah, we fight like one, too.”

I gestured to the space behind Ruby. “So does that girl—Dallas?—also go to Trinity?” I asked.

“No, she goes to Faith Academy. Her mom works at Finders Keepers.” She pointed to a stationery and home goods store a few doors down from the pancake house.



“Wow!” Lena raised her eyebrows. “So you’ve got all three schools, Trinity, Faith, and Roland Lake represented here. You guys can hold the Gold Medal Games yourself.”

“Except we’re all playing for the same team,” Ruby said with a laugh.

“Well, even in the Gold Medal Games you will all be playing for the same team,” Dad said. “God’s team. So remember: no matter who gets the gold, Jesus always wins.”

We all burst out laughing because it was true. As we said our goodbyes and headed for the pancake house, I sighed to myself and wished the “athlete” representing our school on the “Mall Brats” team could remember how to be a better sport.

“Race ya!” Kitty yelled out, suddenly. And she began running for the front door of the pancake house.

I gasped. “No fair!” and began running after her.

And we were immediately all laughing again. Then we thundered neck-and-neck (and neck) the rest of the way there until we all reached the front door and grabbed the door handle at the same time!

Kitty stared at me open-mouthed.



“It’s a three-way tie!” Ansley let go of the handle and jumped up and down.

“Wasn’t that nice of Jesus?” I said. “He let us share in the win!”

Lena was grinning when she caught up with us. “I think you can call that a win for the Father,” she said, pointing to Ansley, “for the Son,” she pointed to me, “and the Holy Spirit!” She pointed to Kitty.

We all giggled. Okay, then,” I said. “I hope Jesus likes banana pancakes! Because that’s what I’m going to order!”

Dad and Aunt Sam, who were right behind Lena, laughed too. “I guess we can ask Him when we get to Heaven one day,” Dad said. “Until then, His favorite pancake flavor will remain a mystery.” He chuckled. “Still, I’ll bet He’s a fan of cinnamon, like me.”

“Oh, Dad,” Lena poked our father in the ribs with her elbow and flashed her deep dimples in a smile.

The server grabbed some menus and asked Dad where he would like us to be seated. But when Dad asked, “How about it, girls? Want that booth near the window?” my mind was a million miles away.

Hearing the word “mystery” again had sent a shiver



down my spine. Maybe the Holy Spirit was trying to tell me something. Was another case on its way to us Daniels Sisters? I hoped so.

— MEET THE — DANIELS SISTERS

THE DANIELS SISTERS ARE BACK FOR A SECOND ADVENTURE!

After solving the Mystery of the Pearl Necklace and creating the Daniels Sisters Detective Agency, Lena, Ansley, Ashton and Amber find themselves with their first “official” case after a mysterious disappearance at the Gold Medal Games.



The Daniels sisters trust God's Word to help them with their Detective Agency and their lives.

**YOU can learn along with them in this month's
Reflections Journal!**

The Daniels Sisters are fictional, but did you know they were inspired by four very real sisters? We first met the Pitts Sisters (and their Daniels Sisters characters) in a series of books: *Lena in the Spotlight*—three books featuring Alena Pitts' character, Lena Daniels, followed by Kaitlyn Pitts as Ansley Daniels in *Ansley's Big Bake Off*, Camryn Pitts as Ashton Daniels in *Ashton's Dancing Dream*, and Olivia Pitts as Amber Daniels in *Amber's Song*.