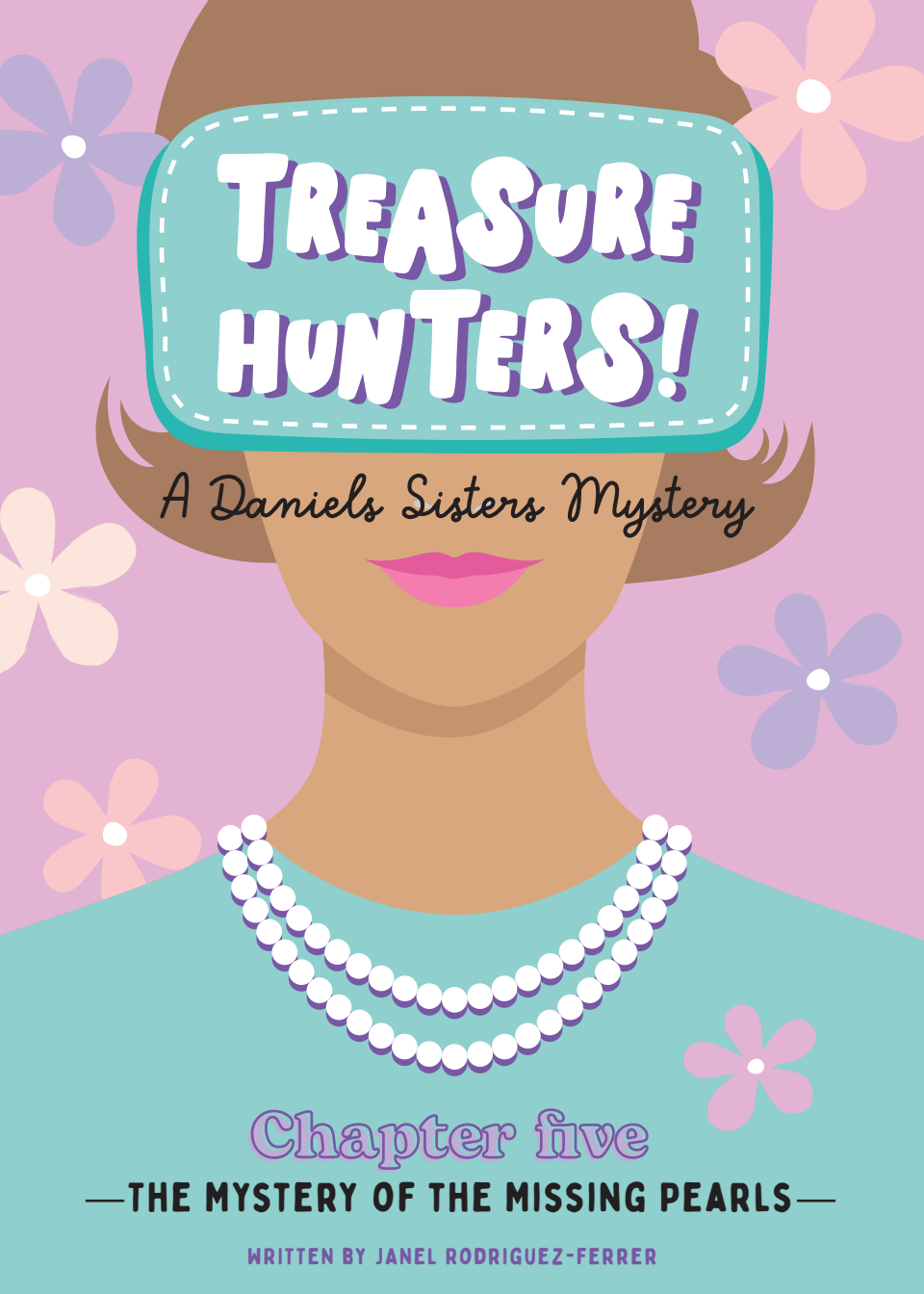




TREASURE HUNTERS!

A Daniels Sisters Mystery

Chapter five

—THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING PEARLS—

WRITTEN BY JANEL RODRIGUEZ-FERRER

"Those who promote
PEACE..
have joy."

PROVERBS 12:20



– Chapter Five –

THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING PEARLS

We were on a treasure hunt! It was just after church on Sunday, and my sisters and I had been matched up with an older person from the congregation to join for lunch and a conversation. After all, our elders are, as Dad put it, “the treasures of the church.”

So there we were, all four of us, running across the lawn behind the church. We weaved around the maze of picnic tables, looking for an older person with a name card that read: Cynthia Martin. As we rushed around, we waved and smiled at every older person we passed until we finally found her. She was sitting in a wheelchair by one of the last picnic tables in the back. She was a little stooped over and had to lift her head to get a good look at us. Her short, curly hair was

white all right, and the face under it was definitely wrinkled. But her smile made me think of a young girl's. And her face lit up at the sight of me and my sisters. "Are you all for me? Four for the price of one?"

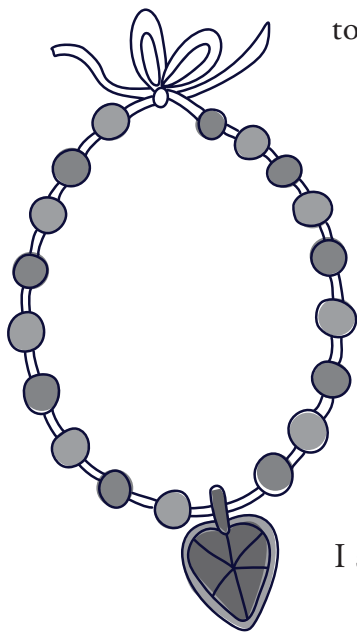
"Yes, ma'am," Lena said. And she introduced us all by name.

"Lovely names, beautiful faces," she said. "And pretty necklaces, too!"

I got up close to her to show her mine. "Wanna see? All our necklaces used to belong to our mom," I told her. "But since she died, Dad gave them to us."

"How lucky you all are," Miss Cynthia said. "You seem to all get along and can share things so nicely."

I looked around at my sisters. I knew sometimes we could argue quite a bit, but we always got over it pretty quickly. I shrugged my shoulders and





agreed. “Yeah, we do.”

Suddenly, something like a shadow of sadness came over Miss Cynthia’s face. “It’s not like that for me and my sister. We haven’t spoken for years.”

I tried not to look as shocked as I felt. “What? Why not?”

“Because,” Miss Cynthia pressed her thin lips into an even thinner line. “When our mother died, she left me her precious pearl necklace. But Belinda took it from me! She stole my inheritance!”

My sisters and I exchanged looks. We didn’t know what to say.

Finally, Lena spoke up. “I’m sorry to hear that, Miss Cynthia.” And she tried to change the subject. “So ... have you always lived around here?”

“Yes,” Miss Cynthia said, getting a faraway look in her eyes. “I grew up in this town. I used to have such a beautiful home. Now I just live in a small apartment by myself.”

Poor Miss Cynthia, I thought to myself. She sounds lonely.

“Are you hungry? Why don’t I get you something to



eat?” Lena asked, changing the subject again. “I can get you whatever you want.”

Miss Cynthia asked for some watermelon and some cornbread and mashed potatoes and other food “as long as it was soft.”

“Coming right up!” Lena got up and headed toward the food tables.

I looked at Cammie and Kitty nervously. Without our big sister leading the conversation, it was going to be harder to talk to Miss Cynthia. I didn’t want us to say anything to upset her.

As I tried to think of something, Miss Cynthia asked Cammie for some sweet tea, and Cammie ran off to get it. Then she asked Kitty for a slice of pie, and Kitty left to take care of that, too. Now all three of my sisters were gone getting food, and I was left to face Miss Cynthia alone.

I swallowed hard and turned back around to face her. What do I say? I wondered. Dad says older people have a lot of wisdom to share. And I’d like to hear some. But, maybe instead of thinking about what I could get from her, I should be thinking about what I

could give to her instead.

That's it! I nodded to myself. I'll give Miss Cynthia my time and attention and listen to her talk about whatever she wants to talk about!

Once I made my decision, I flashed Miss Cynthia a big smile. But she just sat there, staring into space.

She was even scowling a little bit. And suddenly, a kind of understanding downloaded into my brain.

Miss Cynthia was unhappy! But not with me.

She was unhappy because she hadn't spoken to her sister in years.

She was sad that she couldn't get around anymore without using a wheelchair.

And she was uncomfortable—maybe even in pain—because her back was bent over.

Understanding all these things made me feel a pang of sorrow for her in my heart. This is why (even though





it made me feel nervous to bring it up), I decided to talk to her about her sister.

“Miss Cynthia? Have you ever asked your sister—um, that is, Belinda—for the pearls back?”

Miss Cynthia’s eyes looked straight into mine.

“Many times. But she always said she didn’t have them.”

I raised my eyebrows. “Really? Well, that’s good, then!” I felt relieved. “Maybe she didn’t take them, after all.”

“No. She was lying,” Miss Cynthia said. “She must have taken them!”

“But ... how can you be so sure?” I asked. “Unless, that is ... did you see her take them?”

“No, but I just know she did!”

“Oh,” I said. Miss Cynthia was looking both angry at the memory of her missing pearls, and happy that someone was listening to her. So I continued to ask her ques-



tions. “Hmm. Did she ever at least say she was sorry?”

Miss Cynthia shook her head. “No. Of course not. That would be admitting she took the necklace. And Belinda swore to me she never took it. But there’s no other explanation.”

“Why not?”

“You don’t understand,” Miss Cynthia insisted. “For years my sister and I argued over who would inherit Mother’s pearls. One of the last things Mother ever told us both was to stop fighting over them. And that she’d decided they would go to me.”

I gasped. “She did?”

“Yes!” Miss Cynthia leaned in closer to me. “The words came out of Mother’s own lips. When we asked her about the pearls, she said that they were ‘for Cynthia.’”

“You mean, you were there and heard her say it?” I asked. “Belinda too?”

“Yes. We both heard those very words come out of Mother’s mouth. There was no mistake! The names Cynthia and Belinda sound very different from each other, don’t they?”

“That’s for sure.” I nodded. “Then what happened?”



I mean, how did the pearls disappear?” I really wanted to know. (And I was beginning to feel like a detective!) Miss Cynthia patted the collar of her dress as if she were touching an invisible necklace. “One day when I went looking for them, I couldn’t find them—or even the silver jewelry box she kept them in. They used to be in our home safe. But when I opened it up, they were gone! Since Mother and Belinda were the only two other people besides me who knew the combination, I knew it had to be Belinda.”

Even though it did sound to me like Belinda took them, it also sounded like there wasn’t any real proof that she had.

Just then my sisters started coming back with food for Miss Cynthia, and they began listening to our conversation.

“Maybe your mother moved the jewelry box someplace else?” I said. “Maybe she hid them!”

Miss Cynthia looked doubtful. “Why would my mother move them someplace other than the safe? What’s safer than a safe?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted with a shrug.



As my sisters began to place the food in front of her, Miss Cynthia said, “Thank you, thank you,” and arranged some paper napkins on her lap. Then she continued speaking to me. “At first, I thought the same thing you did. I wondered if perhaps Mother had moved them. And I turned the house upside down looking for them. But it was like they had vanished into thin air.”

“Hmmm,” I said dreamily. “The Case of the Missing Pearls.”

“What’s that?” Miss Cynthia asked as she took a sip of her sweet tea.

“Oh!” I giggled. “I just think it sounds like a real mystery.”

“It is a mystery!” Miss Cynthia said. “Because I don’t know what my sister did with them.” Then, squinting at me, she dropped her voice to a whisper. “Want to see what the pearls look like?”

“Yes! Yes!” My sisters all said.

But I was a little confused. How could she show me the pearls if they were missing? “Um ... sure?”

We watched as Miss Cynthia took out what looked



like a hand-sewn bag and opened it with trembling hands. Then, after fumbling inside of it for a minute or two, she took out a small brown wallet. When she opened it, I saw that she had some old black-and-white photos inside of it. She held one up to my face.

“See? Mother is wearing them in this photo.”

I gently took the photo in my hand to get a better look as my sisters crowded around me. In it, a young lady (with a hairstyle that was way more old-fashioned than the ones in Aunt Sam’s yearbook), sat holding two small girls in her lap.

One of the girls must be Miss Cynthia and the other, Belinda, I thought.

They were all smiling and looked so happy together it made me sad to think about how their mother was now gone and the sisters were no longer speaking to each other.

“Look! Look!” Miss Cynthia pointed with a crooked finger. “Do you see? Do you see them? There they are. A double strand of real, natural pearls. They could be tied with a black silk ribbon in the back.”

I took a closer look at the photo. Ah, yes, there they

were. Lying close to the woman's collarbone. Two rows of shiny, white "stones" against what looked like a velvety black dress.

I took one last look at the smiling babies and handed the photo back to Miss Cynthia. "Where is Belinda now?" I asked, curious.

"She lives in a nursing home." Miss Cynthia said and snapped her purse shut.

I looked around at my sisters. If we all lived to be old, I hoped we were never that far away from each other and hoped we spoke every day. I didn't want us ever turning out like Miss Cynthia and Miss Belinda. Later that afternoon as we drove home in the car, we told Dad all about our meeting with Miss Cynthia. (I did most of the talking because I had talked to her the most.) When we told Dad how she didn't speak with her sister, he clucked his tongue.





“That’s a shame. And she lives alone, you say? Maybe the church can do something for her. Have someone check in on her every week. Call her up. Do some grocery shopping, that sort of thing.”

“She must be awfully lonely,” Kitty said.

“It sounds like she could definitely use visitors from time to time. Are any of you up to doing that? Kind of adopting her as a ‘grandma?’”

My sisters and I didn’t say anything at first. It sounded like it could kind of be hard work. But I finally spoke up. “Maybe we could go two by two, like the apostles did.”

“That’s a good idea,” Dad said.

I started imagining what these visits could be like. “And I could bring her fresh-baked goodies. She likes to eat soft things.”

Lena broke in, “I think what Miss Cynthia really needs is reconciliation with her sister. They need to make up. You know, forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us?”

Cammie, Kitty, and I all agreed. “Definitely.”

“Yeah, maybe you or Aunt Sam can come with us to



talk to her,” Cammie told Dad.

“And if she and her sister did make up,” I said, “I just know Miss Cynthia would be a lot happier and a lot less lonely. But how can we help make that happen?”

Dad kept his eyes on the road. “Do any of you know where Belinda lives?”

“Only that she lives in a nursing home,” I said.

“I guess that’ll need further investigation. But it would be good to locate her. Then we can see if we can help them heal that hurt.”

I sat up. Hearing the word “investigation” got me thinking. “I guess the only real way to help them heal,” I said slowly, “would be to solve the mystery of the missing pearls!”

“Wha-at?” Dad asked with a laugh in his voice.

My sisters and I all began bombarding him with the story of how the jewelry box vanished from the safe.

And I finished, “What if Belinda really did take the pearls? What if she’s sorry about it now? What if she wants to apologize to her sister but can’t because Miss Cynthia won’t talk to her? Or what if we were able to find the pearls and find out that Belinda is innocent?”

Then maybe she and Miss Cynthia can be friends—and close sisters—again.”

“That’s a lot of *what-ifs*, Ansley,” Dad said as he pulled into the garage. “And I don’t know if finding the ‘lost treasure of the missing pearls’—or whatever—really needs to happen.” He shut off the engine and turned in his seat to look at all of us. “What I do know is, if we can possibly help these two ladies rediscover the treasure they have in each other, then we should at least try.”

What Dad said got me thinking and then day-dreaming and then planning for the rest of the day. So much so, that I only half paid attention to the conversation we had around the table at dinner. And the movie we all watched together in the family room afterward also went by in a blur. By the end of the day, when it was time for bed, I changed into my coziest pair of unicorn pajamas (I will never stop loving unicorns) and tiptoed to Lena’s room.

“*Pssst*,” I said to her from the small crack where her door was slightly open. “*Pssst!*”

Lena, who was sitting on her bed and strumming

her guitar, didn't hear me at first. So I waited until there was a quiet moment between chord strums before I whispered again. "*Pssst!* Lena!"

Lena jumped a little in surprise. Then she saw the sliver of my face in her doorway, and she hurried over. "What is it?"

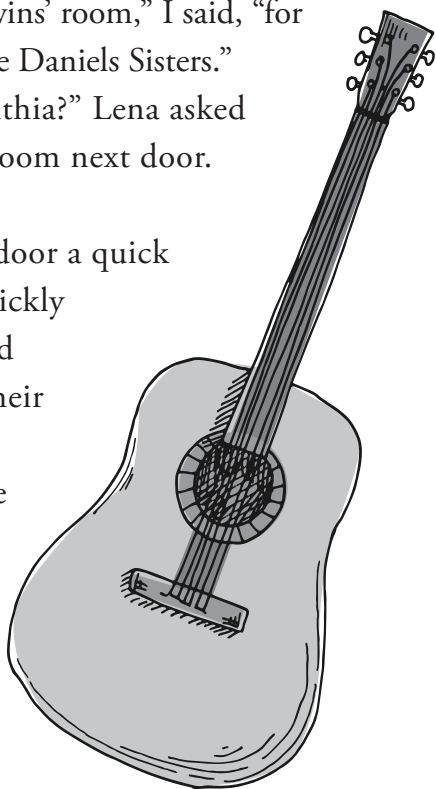
"Come join me in the twins' room," I said, "for an emergency meeting of the Daniels Sisters."

"Is this about Miss Cynthia?" Lena asked as she followed me to the room next door.

I nodded.

After giving the twins' door a quick light knock, Lena and I quickly slipped inside. Cammie and Kitty were climbing into their bed (they shared a bunk bed) when we came in. The same look of curiosity on their faces made them look more like twins than they usually did.

I waved them down to





the floor where they could join me and Lena on the rug and form a circle.

“I’ve been thinking,” I said, “we have to help Miss Cynthia.”

Kitty yawned. “We know, we know.”

“No, I mean like ... I think the only way to really do this is to find those missing pearls!”

“You said that in the car,” Cammie said. “But how are we supposed to do that? It’s like, impossible.”

“No, it isn’t. It just means we have to solve the mystery. You know, like when I helped you guys at camp last year when Kitty’s coat went missing. We can do this, guys! We’ve done it before!”

“You mean ... be like detectives?” Kitty asked. Cammie held out her arms like she was holding up a sign and announced (a little too loudly), “The Daniels Sisters Detective Agency!”

When we all went “Shhhhh!” she dropped her voice back to a whisper. “That would be cool!”

“I’m thinking more like the Daniels Sisters *Secret* Detective Agency,” I said. “Other people shouldn’t know we are detectives, after all.”

“We’re kids,” Cammie said flatly. “No one’s going



to think we're detectives."

Kitty giggled.

Lena crossed her arms. "That sounds great—fun and all that—but have you thought about where we would even begin to look for those pearls, Ansley?"

The twins looked at me expectantly.

"I have," I said, curling my lips into a slow smile. Then I took a breath and waited for the imaginary drum roll in my head to finish before saying, "*The Traveling Treasure Trunk Show*, of course!"

— MEET THE — **DANIELS SISTERS**

**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***.



And the adventure continues for YOU
through the **Reflections Journal**!

**This month's Reflections Journal will help take you along with
the Daniels Sisters as we learn how to become Peacemakers!**