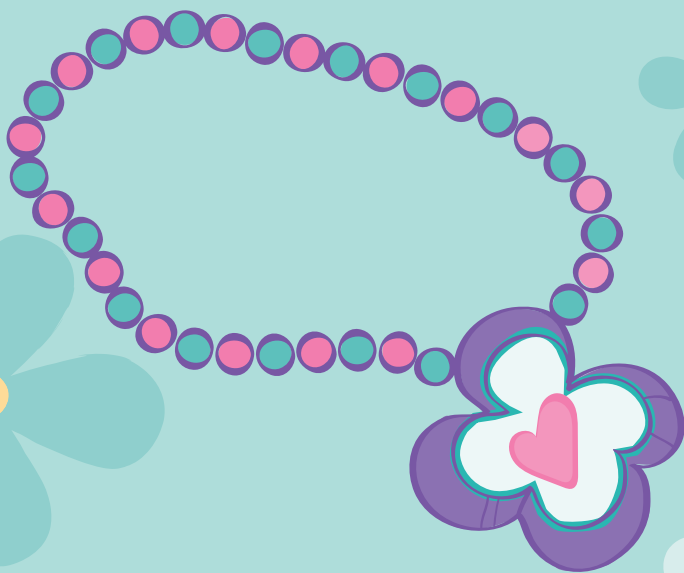


TREASURE HUNTERS!

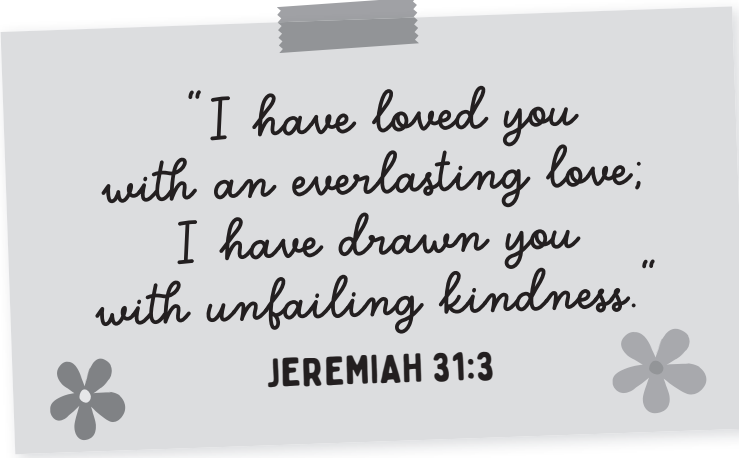
A Daniels Sisters Mystery



Chapter three

— PRICELESS MEMORIES —

WRITTEN BY JANEL RODRIGUEZ-FERRER



*"I have loved you
with an everlasting love;
I have drawn you
with unfailing kindness."*

JEREMIAH 31:3



– Chapter Three –

**PRICELESS
MEMORIES**

I stood in the entryway and stamped my foot.
“I can’t believe you guys started the treasure hunt without me!”

My sisters all stared at me, wide-eyed and unblinking. If I wasn’t so mad at them, I would have laughed at how funny they all looked. They were frozen in place, each posed to reach inside the large cardboard box that was on the floor.

Kitty spoke first. “We haven’t seen anything yet!”

Cammie nodded. “We *just* started ...!”

Lena put her hands on her hips and gave me her best “big sister” look. “Aunt Sam literally just handed it to us.”

Aunt Sam walked over to me and gently removed my gym bag from my shoulder. “It’s true,” she said



soothingly, “Lupe’s mom let me know you were on the way back. I knew you’d be coming through the door around now. Calm down, Ansley.”

I clucked my tongue. “It’s just that they promised.” “Actually, we didn’t *promise*,” Cammie said in a dramatically deep voice.

I pouted at her. “And I haven’t even had my lunch yet. You’ve all eaten, right?”

Aunt Sam gestured to a spot on the floor. “I’ll make you a sandwich. You can join your sisters. It’s just a box of some of my old things I thought you might like to start with.”

I sank to the floor and sat in a spot between the twins and across from Lena. I was still mad at all of them—at first. But as soon as we started pulling things out of the box, I found myself *ooing*, *aahing*, and giggling with them over Aunt Sam’s treasures. In no time at all, the anger that had filled my heart like hot air in a balloon had totally deflated.

“Look at this!” Lena waved a flat, hardcovered book at Aunt Sam. “Your old high-school yearbook!”

“Ah, yes! Well, you girls do realize that that’s not



worth any money,” Aunt Sam said. “But it is filled with memories.”

“You’re telling me!” Lena laughed as she began flipping through it. She stopped at a page and pointed. “Look at those hairstyles! And those clothes!”

“Fashion trends come and go,” Aunt Sam said. “But they come back again! You’ll see. You may be laughing now, but in a few years you’ll be thinking that those are very fashionable outfits.”

Lena snickered. “I don’t think so.” But as she continued turning pages, she began saying things like, “Well, that’s a nice skirt.” And “Ooh, her hair is nice.” And soon enough, she was sitting apart from the rest of us, lost in the pages of Aunt Sam’s past.

“Look at *these*,” Kitty said, holding up what looked like a small binder. Its fabric cover had a flower pattern design on it. “There are photos in here. Look! Here’s one of Dad as a kid!”

I peered over her shoulder. “I’ve never seen these before.”

Cammie jumped up and looked over Kitty’s other shoulder. “Cool! New pictures!”

We all laughed because of course, the pictures





weren't new at all. They were old childhood photos of Dad, Aunt Sam, and their other siblings. But we knew what she meant.

Aunt Sam set a tray down next to me.

The scents of a freshly made BLT and hot chocolate danced up my nose. “Mmmmm! Yum! Thanks, Aunt Sam!” I sat back on my heels. “I’m starved. We stayed late after class so Guadalupe could interview Coach Well. That reminds me. You’ll never believe what I got to see with my own eyes today—an actual Olympic gold medal!”

“Wow!” My sisters all stopped what they were doing to look at me.

I told them all about Coach Well’s interview with Guadalupe for the school essay. When I finished, I added, “But can you believe it? Coach Well says that Olympic medals aren’t worth very much money.”

Aunt Sam settled on a stool near the counter and nodded. “And neither are the photos you’re looking at. I mean, unless there was a picture of a famous person from before they were famous in there somewhere. Sometimes those are worth something. Otherwise, they have no value to anyone else except to the people in the photos.”

Kitty clutched the photo album to her chest. “They do to me! And *I’m* not in the photos.”

Aunt Sam smiled warmly at her. “Yes, but that’s because you’re family. The people in those photos have a personal connection to you. That’s what we mean when we say things have ‘sentimental value.’ And why to you they might be treasured objects. But to someone else, those objects will mean nothing special. In fact, to a stranger, *all* the things in my box of memories might be considered, well ... trash.”

Lena looked up from the yearbook. “You mean like that saying about how one man’s trash is another man’s treasure?”

“Exactly.”

I looked sadly at Aunt Sam’s box. It didn’t seem right that someone would call her things “trash.” “Even this?” I asked her. I had just found a little jewelry box covered in seashells tucked under a college sweatshirt. I picked it up and handed it to her.





Aunt Sam gently took the box and looked it over. “I got this many years ago as a gift. I was so excited. I had wanted one ever since seeing a bunch of them at a shop near the beach. So, it’s not like this is a rare or valuable piece. And here, take a close look. You can see how it’s now actually falling apart in some places. Still ...” she beamed at it. “I got this as a birthday present when I was about 9. Back then I thought it was the most beautiful thing I’d ever seen. Isn’t it pretty?”

“Yes.” I ran my hand over the differently sized and colored shells that decorated the top. The shapes and ridges were fun to touch. “Nobody designs like God.”

“Amen,” Aunt Sam said, and she carefully lifted the top open.

I held my breath. Maybe there would be some necklaces or rings inside of it. Or a gold bracelet? Instead, Aunt Sam took out a tiny bottle that was half-filled with a golden liquid and laughed. “My first perfume! It was called Midnight Dream! I’d almost forgotten all about it!” Aunt Sam laughed again when she saw the expression on my face. “You look disappointed. But it’s like I’ve been telling you. The value of



these sorts of treasures is more in the memories they make than in anything they might be worth in dollars.”

I felt my face burn. I hadn’t meant to look disappointed. But there was a tiny part of me that still wished we could find something worth a lot of money. Something that would also help us to get on the *Traveling Treasure Trunk Show*. Later that evening, when our dad got home and joined us for dinner, the show was still the main thing on our minds.

“So, what do you think, Dad?” Lena asked. “Do you have any antiques or heirlooms that we could bring to the show?”

“Yeah!” Cammie nodded. “Maybe you can ask Grandma or Grandpa if they have anything that used to belong to one of their—or our—ancestors?”

“Or maybe you have something from the olden days,” Kitty said, giving Dad a nudge. “Like from back when you were a kid?”

Dad, who had just taken a forkful of his dinner, began to cough.

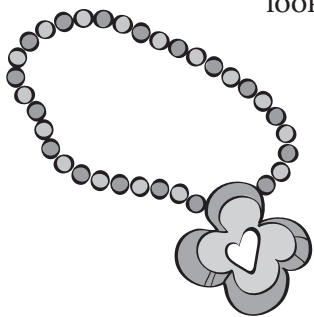
Kitty patted him on the back and continued. “We saw on the show that old toys can be worth lots of money!”

“Olden days?” Dad rasped between coughs and reached for a glass of water. After he took a few gulps, he looked thoughtful for a minute. “Your mom had a few pieces of jewelry ...” He got quiet for a moment and then took another forkful of food before saying, “If you girls are interested, we can take a look at them tonight. Until then, let’s leave any more treasure talk until after dinner. Deal?”

My sisters and I all nodded at each other excitedly. Our beautiful mom had died a year ago, but we loved remembering her and talking about her any chance we got. “Deal.” I agreed for us girls.

Later that evening Dad had us wait a little bit outside his office before calling us inside. When the four of us were finally allowed to enter, we saw that he had laid out some jewelry pieces on his desk. And placed behind them, looking like a queen sitting on a throne, was Mom’s big wooden jewelry box.

Dad gestured at them all. “I wanted to show you some of your mom’s treasures. They’re really yours now. Except for that box. That’s





mine. And in there you'll find what she treasured most in this world."

I felt my eyes bug out. "Really?" I leaned over to reach for the box.

"Nu-uh." Dad waved his finger. "These first." He made a circular motion over the necklaces. "You'll see that all these necklaces are different. Most of them are not made of expensive metals or precious stones. They're just pretty things to wear. I was thinking of giving one to each of you as a present from your mom. But ..."

We looked over them as Dad continued. "This first one is a necklace of colorful beads given to your mom as a gift from people in a village she helped while on a mission trip to Africa. But if you think we should sell it ..."

"No! No!" We all cried out at once. "Not that one!"

"That's too special to sell," Cammie added. "And too pretty," she added with a giggle. She picked it up and held it against her chest to admire it.

"You're right," Dad said, and he smiled approvingly as Cammie put it on. Next, he lifted a chain with a heart pendant on it. "But what about this one? Does this look familiar, Kitty?"

“It *does* look familiar,” Kitty squinted as she tried to remember why. Then she said, “I know! She’s wearing it in that photo we have of her that’s framed in the living room. From the day you took us home from the hospital. You’re holding baby Cammie and Mom is holding newborn me.” Kitty quickly took the necklace from Dad’s hands. “We can’t sell that one, Dad! I should keep it.”

“And this one,” he said, picking up a short and very delicate gold chain with a singular green stone dangling from it. It sparkled a little in the light. “Since this one might be at least gold-plated, it might be worth a little more money. Should we sell it?”

“No!” Lena’s raised voice startled us all. Seeing our expressions of surprise, she lowered her voice and explained. “Mom wore that to the premiere of *Above the Waters*.” *Above the Waters* was a movie Lena had acted in a couple of years ago. “Mom and I went shopping together and we bought these matching necklaces. I think ... I’d like to wear them together now,” she looked at Dad with searching eyes, “... if I may.”

Dad nodded and handed over the necklace to Lena. “It’s yours.” Then, picking up the last one, he said to me,

“Well, Ansley, you can keep this one or sell it. It’s made of real silver, so it also might be worth a little something. It’s a necklace your grandma—that is, your mom’s mom—gave her for Mother’s Day a few years ago.”

A pendant shaped like an open scroll dangled from a chain. I remember seeing my mother wearing it and reading the words engraved on it many times. Even though I knew the words well, I cupped the pendant to read them carefully again. It was a quote from the Bible. It read:

The Lord bless you, my daughter.



Ruth 3:10

I read it a few times and then smiled up at Dad. He knew what I was going to say. “Of course, I don’t want to sell this. She used to say it was like wearing a blessing from her mom. Now, when I wear it, it will be like wearing a blessing from *my* mom.”

Dad gripped my shoulder and gave it a light squeeze. Then he put the necklace over my head so I



could wear it. “This jewelry ... these necklaces ... they are like the kind of treasures Aunt Sam was talking about earlier. The kind that has value because of the memories or emotions attached to them. But what if all of this jewelry was made out of really expensive gold and jewels and worth thousands of dollars? Would you want to sell them then?”

“You mean, if this was still a gift Mom had gotten from *her* mom, but it was like, made of diamonds instead?” I said, lifting the pendant. “Or if Kitty’s or Lena’s necklaces were solid gold? Or Cammie’s rubies and emeralds?”

“Yes, that’s what I’m saying.”

“I don’t think I would want to sell mine,” Kitty said, “because Mom would still have worn it home from the hospital, right?”

“Me neither,” Lena said, “if she had still worn it to my movie premiere.”

Cammie and I exchanged glances and said at the same time, “None of us would.”

“Why not?” Dad asked. But he was smiling.

“Because they’d still hold special meanings for us,

and not just be worth money.” Lena spoke for all of us.

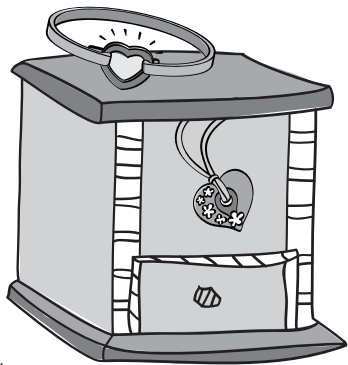
“Very good. You understand, then.”

“But Dad,” Cammie said.

“Yes, honey?”

Cammie took a breath and finally asked the question we all wanted to know the answer to. “What about the treasure in *there*?” She pointed to the big, wooden jewelry box.

“Oh, that. Well ...” Dad walked around his desk to sit on the chair behind it. Then he pulled the jewelry box closer to him. “I won’t be taking the treasure out of the box, but I will let you all take turns taking a peek at what’s inside. Okay?”



We all agreed it was fair. We just wanted him to let us look as soon as possible.

“Okay. Let’s start,” Dad said. “Lena?” He waved her over.

Lena was immediately at Dad’s side.

“Don’t tell your sisters what it is,” he told her,



opening the box slowly, “but what you are looking at right now is without a doubt, your mother’s greatest treasure.”

Lena peered inside for a moment. “But Dad—” she began. But then she stopped and just stared silently down at the box.

“Beautiful, wouldn’t you say?” Dad said. “Your mom certainly thought so.”

Lena smiled and wiped one of her eyes with her sleeve. Was she ... crying?

Dad called me next. “Ansley?”

I jumped at the sound of my name and hurried right over to his side.

Dad had closed the box again. “Are you ready?”

I glanced over at Lena. She nodded encouragingly at me. “Yes, I’m ready!”

Dad opened the box.

Light glinted at me from inside, making me shut my eyes for a second. *It’s definitely shiny!* I thought. Then I opened my eyes and took a second look.

I was confused.

The only thing I could see at the bottom of the

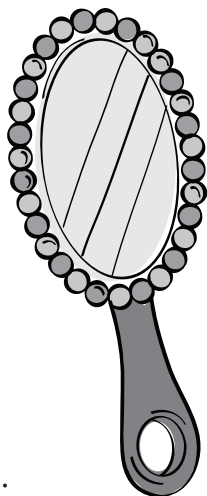
box was me. That is, my face. When I blinked, it blinked. When I smiled, it smiled. My face was being reflected at me from a mirror at the bottom of the box.

“That right there was her most precious treasure,” Dad said. “Do you understand?”

A feeling like I’d just been covered by a warm and cozy blanket came over me. “Yes,” I said to Dad. And though I smiled at him, I suddenly understood why there had seemed to be tears in Lena’s eyes before. Blinking fast, I hurried to stand by her side and let the twins take their turns looking inside the box.

When Cammie did it, Dad told her, “See? Your mom’s most precious treasure! Easily worth more than all the diamonds and rubies in the world.” Finally, Kitty took her turn. When she saw her reflection, she gasped and asked, “Me?”

“Yes,” Dad said, “You! You were her most beloved and priceless treasure! And so were Cammie, and Lena, and Ansley!”





And when your Mom left to live in God's Kingdom, she entrusted that precious treasure to me. And I will do my best to keep that trust. I promise all of you. I may not be able to be a mother to you girls, but I will do everything I can to be the best father I possibly can to all of you."

"Thanks, Dad!" Lena said.

"You already are the best," I said.

"We love you!" the twins told him.

And we all rushed at him, piling on top of Dad in a spontaneous group hug.

After a moment, Dad laughed through our smothering arms and said, "Girls, girls! I'd like to get up now!" This just made us all giggle and hug him even longer, just to tease him and stop him from getting out of his chair.

Then, all of a sudden, I felt like I was frozen in a moment in time. And something like a deep understanding dawned on me. I realized right in the middle of all that love and laughter, that family matters most. It was like what Dad had been trying to tell us all along. No gold, no silver, no gems—*nothing*—



could ever compare to the treasure of family.

Finally, Dad shooed us away as Aunt Sam entered the room. “Okay, girls, give those necklaces to Aunt Sam for safekeeping. I have some work to finish.”

“I can keep them in my seashell box,” Aunt Sam said as we all took turns handing them over to her. “Would you girls like that? And I’ll put the box on my dresser where you all can get at it whenever you want.”

“Great idea,” Dad said. “Now, get ready for bed. I’m going to call Pastor Whittaker. You all have given me an idea for tomorrow. And I want to talk to him about it.”

I was just stepping out of the room as Dad said this, and my curiosity made me turn around.

“Tomorrow? For *church*? What kind of idea?”

“For a treasure hunt,” Dad said. “A real one.” Then, smiling mysteriously, he waved me away. “You’ll see ...”

— MEET THE — **DANIELS SISTERS**

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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***.



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