



CHAPTER 12

SINCE HER ARRIVAL in California, Jamie had never been around any other children, except casually when shopping with the doctor or when they went out to a restaurant. She had never spoken with any of them, even to exchange a word or two. Because the doctor much preferred them to stay at home and cook together, they did little dining away from the house.

There were occasions when it was necessary to purchase certain items, so some time had to be accorded to shopping trips, however reluctant he might be. At such times, she often saw other children and young adults trying on and buying clothes, most often with their mothers, who seemed to fuss over them unnecessarily. She wondered how it would feel to have someone doing all the things those mothers did, such as pulling garments onto their daughters, tugging them off again, looking at them critically as they submitted to all the pushing and prodding. When Jamie shopped, the doctor told the salesperson what he wanted Jamie to have and it was done. The most Jamie was expected to contribute was her body, which was used to check the size and color of the garments the doctor chose.

After one shopping sojourn she was desperate to know what other children did with their days. This seemed especially urgent as she had recently entered into that stage the stores called teens and for which group they established a separate section of clothing and other items. She asked the doctor about this.

“They do much the same things as you do, Jamie, except not as well.” He reached for her and pulled her to him. “Some of them waste a lot of their time trying to fill up their hours with trivial matters, because they have no direction in their lives.”

“Do I have direction in my life, doctor?”

“You have me and I am your direction. Do you need anything more?”

At his words, Jamie’s heart seemed to leap inside her. The thought

of anyone or anything else in her life was both incredibly exciting and unbearably frightening. The doctor was her all in all and she believed would be so forever. It was as if she had been born the day he adopted her. At the same time, she sensed a great lack in her life, not only for the companionship of other young people, but for more contact with adults.

The doctor was her father, her lover. He was her teacher and the disciplinarian of her soul. Jamie might say that he was her god, except the concept of a god seldom entered her mind unless she was with Mrs. Bronson, who alluded to God frequently. Jamie also encountered the god concept when reading certain classics, and in those the god image was too alien for her adequate absorption.

Once, when he was in a meditative and possibly nostalgic mood, the doctor casually mentioned to her that she had been baptized in a Catholic chapel at the orphanage when she was a tiny baby. And he went on to say that he had been a Catholic, as well. She didn't understand, nor was she very curious about, what he was saying, so she did not ask him what he meant about Catholic. Neither did she comprehend what he meant by baptism. He didn't choose to explain, and she didn't dare ask.

Much later, when she would have liked to bring it up again, she was more than reluctant to broach the subject. She was afraid to introduce a subject that could become so controversial. She told herself he would explain in good time, at least if it were something he wanted her to know. She kept these thoughts in her deepest heart and rarely allowed them to slip near the surface.

One midsummer day not long after Jamie entered that mysterious sounding age called teen, Jamie and the doctor went swimming, as was often their habit when the temperature spiraled up on the days of desert heat. They lounged around the pool, able at a moment's notice to leap in and cool their burning skin. They had been frolicking in the water, and Jamie was now stretched out on the wooden deck, trying to watch her naked flesh turn brown in the sun.

She had grown out of that stage when the muscles of her arms and legs began to grow long and hard and ropy. Now, not only had her breasts developed nicely, if still small, but she had become plump and soft. She did not grow very plump, just enough for both her and the doctor to enjoy the contrast between them.

"Doctor, dear," Jamie began timidly, "Can we talk about some things? Really important things like the differences between us?"

The doctor looked uncomfortable with her question, which surprised

her, as he rarely seemed nonplussed by anything she asked.

“There’s little to discuss. Because you are a girl, you now have breasts. That is the major difference, I suppose.”

It was quite evident that he didn’t want to talk about this.

“Will I have children someday? Isn’t that a major difference between us?”

“That will never happen, my darling, which makes me very sad indeed.” He squatted on the deck beside Jamie, clothed now to protect his skin from the sun. “Unfortunately, your illness makes it impossible.”

Jamie was terribly shocked at his words. She said nothing in reply. It seemed impossible for her to speak at all. What did this mean? What could be so terribly wrong with her if she felt so well and strong all the time? She wanted to question him further but his tense expression discouraged her. His face reflected an inner struggle, then he smiled and said, “You had better dress now, too, as I do not want my sweetheart wrinkled like a prune and with skin like tanned leather.”

He made a funny face and as always, he made Jamie laugh. They joked together a few minutes. She did not return to the subject as it was clear he would say no more about it. When he decided a subject was out of bounds no amount of nagging or whining could persuade him to change his mind. In fact, such tactics made him the more determined to avoid the question.

Jamie wanted most desperately to ask him how people went about getting children. Did they all go to an orphanage and select one as the doctor had done? Did they find them in some other special place? How did they know which children were theirs and which someone else’s? Did her illness make it impossible for her to care for children? Is that why he said what he did? Jamie tried very hard to recall what her needs had been when she was very small. She could not remember anything about being small that she might be unable to do for another child someday. The whole subject made her head ache and she tried not to think about it.

With so much to talk about that didn’t cause a strain between them, it was more pleasant to avoid that which did. Now Jamie concentrated on these things, such as music, books, the ocean, and the skies, to avoid thoughts that caused pain in her head. Despite her best attempts, she was aware that there were many things about their life that were different from other people’s lives. Some of them she had recognized since childhood, while others had made themselves known to her more recently. For instance, Jamie had begun to suspect that it was unusual for just two

people to live together and have no contact with outsiders.

“Will I ever have friends? Other than you, I mean? That seems to be the ordinary thing with other people.”

“You are not ordinary,” the doctor answered in a grumpy voice. “You are special. When the right time comes, I’ll know what to do.”

“The right time,” Jamie said musingly. She rolled over lazily and got up to dress. The sun was still very hot, so she stepped into the outside shower and washed away the perspiration and heat on her skin.

The doctor called to her that he had a late appointment in his office and would be back soon. Jamie watched him as he walked toward the office, where a car was pulling up into a parking space. His hair gleamed in the sun and she noticed that much of it had become gray. He was changing, even as she was changing; however, it was in different ways. She knew his changes meant he was getting old, but she had no idea how old. What, she thought, will I do if he gets really old and dies? She shivered at the idea, frightened of being alone forever.

She stood in the sun a few minutes to dry off then pulled on shorts and a top. It was time to begin dinner preparations, so she went inside.

Mrs. Bronson was still at the house, later than usual. Jamie was alarmed to see her. Had Mrs. Bronson observed them in the pool? Usually, the doctor checked carefully to be certain she was gone before they engaged in any kind of intimate play. Mrs. Bronson made no comment, so Jamie decided she had seen nothing. She wouldn’t mention it to the doctor.

Jamie began to gather the items they would need to cook their dinner. Mrs. Bronson was just putting the finishing touches on the newly cleaned kitchen floor.

Jamie stopped working and scooted up onto one of the kitchen stools, her special place when she wanted to visit with Mrs. Bronson. She noticed that, now, she could sit directly on a stool.

“Mrs. Bronson,” she began, “where did you get your children? Did you buy them or adopt them from an orphanage the way the doctor got me?”

Mrs. Bronson looked shocked. “Of course not!” she exclaimed. “They came naturally, as the good Lord planned.”

Now it was Jamie’s turn to be amazed. “What do you mean, they came naturally? And how does your Lord enter into it?”

Mrs. Bronson, now that her initial reaction to Jamie’s question had calmed, replied, “Jamie. Hasn’t he told you anything at all about these

things? And you getting to be such a big girl already?"

"I don't know what things you're talking about, Mrs. Bronson." Jamie noticed that her hands were shaking. "What has getting a child got to do with your Lord? And how do you get a child naturally?"

Mrs. Bronson said, "Well, first off, the Lord is the one who makes all the little souls who come into this world. He plans them in heaven then sends them to their families." Her voice faded a bit as she continued. "He has a special way of doing this, but it isn't for me to tell you about that. It is your father's job since you have no mother."

"But, Mrs. Bronson, if your Lord made me in heaven and sent me to a family, why did the doctor deliver me, whatever that means, in the orphanage? And where is this heaven? Is it near here? All the way to Boston? Or where?"

"Oh, Jamie," Mrs. Bronson answered, with tears in her eyes. "There is no way I can answer your questions. I would if I could, but first of all it's not my place. And then, I don't know anything about you being delivered in an orphanage or why your mother was there in the first place." She paused, caught her breath sharply. "Only the doctor knows all those answers. I guess he'll tell you when he thinks you're ready. As to heaven, it is where the Lord lives and from where he sends us here to earth. Again, it's the doctor's place to explain all this to you."

Suddenly, Mrs. Bronson looked at the wall clock and exclaimed. "Look how late it is. I've got to get moving. We're having company for dinner tonight and I'm already late." She laughed briefly. "Good thing I started the meal this morning. I'll only be a bit late." She dashed to the door. "Goodnight, Jamie. I'll see you tomorrow." Jamie waved a limp hand at her as she ran from the kitchen as though fleeing a raging lion. It was so strange for Mrs. Bronson to flee like that. Jamie worried for her safe footing.

"Goodnight, Mrs. Bronson," she replied in a very small voice.

After Mrs. Bronson left, Jamie walked outside and looked up the rise at the building where the telescope now lived. There was no sign that any of the workmen or installers had ever been there. Except for the distant cries of people on the beach, she might have been alone in the whole world.

Jamie shoved all her conflicting thoughts down as far as she could. How could she ask the doctor about her deliverance or delivery or whatever he called it? Would he tell her about her family that Mrs. Bronson's Lord planned for her? How had she missed landing in the right place

from the Lord's heaven? And where was this heaven, ruled by this Lord who couldn't aim well enough to land her in the right place? And how did the doctor get involved?

Jamie shook herself to get rid of her thoughts. Later. She would talk to the doctor later, when it seemed a good time, but not yet. Besides, it was time to prepare a difficult and tricky dinner.

The dinner turned out even better than Jamie had hoped, then they had some lovely time together afterward, just resting in each other's arms. Snuggling close to the doctor, she realized for the first time just how much she had grown. The doctor used to be able to hold her entirely in the crook of his arm but that was no longer true. When she sat on his lap, her legs dangled to the floor and it was difficult to hold a comfortable position, so she had begun cuddling next to him instead.

"What will I do when I grow up?" Jamie murmured against his chest.

"We will work that out later. It is too early to concern ourselves with so distant a time."

"Mmmm," she said into the mat of his chest hair. Then she wriggled up a little in order to speak to him more clearly. "But don't we need to think of some kind of special training if I am to really do something. For instance, I know that you attended a number of schools before you became a doctor. Will I do that, too?" He sat up abruptly and pushed her away from him. "Stop nagging at me about your future. I don't have all the answers right now." He got up. "Besides, you are still too young to worry about such things. There is a lot of future yet."

His voice was the testiest she had heard it in a long time and she was afraid. Abruptly, he sat back down, a couple of cushions away this time.

"Please, dear doctor, don't be angry at me. I promise not to talk about these things. I'll wait for you to bring them up first or we will never talk about them again."

Jamie could not control the tears and the great sobs that began to pull her apart. She wanted to throw herself on him and hold him so tightly he could never get away but when she reached for him she grew frightened again. What would she do if he stopped loving her?

Very soon, he was calm and pulled her close once more. He held her until the sobs subsided and the tears dried up.

"You are my beloved," he said. "I'm sorry I got so angry. It was just that I have asked many of these questions myself, as you have begun to grow up, and I don't have the answers yet. Sometimes it makes me a little crazy."

From that time, she never again presumed to bring up the subject of her future, nor did she talk about her past. She did not mention the orphanage or Mrs. Bronson's Lord. While she could not entirely stop thinking about them, she managed quite well, and shoved such thoughts away as they arose.

At least for now.