

HOPE

everlasting

A story about the amazing
power of faith, hope and love

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For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says
the Lord, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give
you a future and a hope.

Jeremiah 29:11 NKJV

Dedication

In loving memory of my grandfather O. D. Hewitt
and my sister Becky Jean Hewitt: They rest in heaven
but are never forgotten.

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Prologue

He was sitting on the dirty floor of the storage shed. It was cold, dark, and smelly. It was located just outside the kitchen, and there was a bag of rotting potatoes sitting in the corner. They wasted so much food, and yet they denied him the basics. Their dogs ate better than he did. The smell of the rotting potatoes made his empty stomach churn. His head pounded where it had hit the wall when the “man of the house” (as only he called himself) shoved him away after beating him with a belt for not ironing his shirt exactly the way he wanted. Of course, it was never right, no matter how he did it. He knew it never would be. It was simply an excuse for another beating.

His back and legs were burning with pain, and now he would miss another day of school and the chance for a little extra food. He knew he couldn't take much more of this abuse. They kept threatening to take him out of school for good, and he wouldn't wait for that to happen. The food he got at school was the only thing that kept him going. He was going to have to run again, and this time he would keep going until he got out of the state completely. It was the only thing left to ensure his survival.

A fuzzy picture of his mom flashed into his mind along with her constant reminder, "God is with us, and there is always hope." The last four years had taken their toll, and he was losing those memories and any form of hope. The picture in his mind slid away with his tears.

Chapter 1

After dropping off the baby at the home for girls, he wandered for hours. Dawn arrived, bathing the sky in early morning light. Eventually, he left the road to follow a path that seemed to go on forever—just two dirt tracks running through a field. He didn't have any money left for the bus, and everything he owned was in the backpack on his back. He was lost in both mind and spirit. He had nowhere to go and nobody who cared. At least the baby had a chance of finding someone who would love and care for her. That time had passed for him. His mother had died when he was ten, and part of him had died with her. His father was never in the picture, and his mom hadn't liked to talk about it. It

had something to do with the war, and she always cried when he asked about it, so he had quit asking.

Four years of living in foster homes had produced nothing but fear and pain, but even those were over for him. He would turn sixteen at the end of the month. Two years of being a runaway and scrounging for food and shelter had aged him even more. Still, if he got in any trouble, or someone recognized him as a runaway, it would not be good for him. And if anyone found out about him leaving the baby, it would be bad, really bad. He still couldn't believe that Star had left her baby and walked away. It just proved, once more, that you really couldn't trust anyone.

After hours of walking, he saw an old barn up ahead. It looked like it had held hay and tools at one time, probably for working in the fields, maybe even for animals. The barn was old, weathered, and appeared to be deserted. It was obviously abandoned and had been left to fall apart, just like him. He made his way to the door hanging by one hinge and looked inside.

There was still some hay in the barn and a couple of old horse blankets hanging on large hooks in one wall.

On the other side of the doorway was a rickety ladder leading up to a loft of sorts. A couple of old burlap bags hanging over the edge suggested it had been used as a place to store seed or corn to keep it off the floor where it would stay dry. Tentatively checking each step of the ladder to make sure it would hold his weight, he climbed up. The loft was not as old as the rest of the building; the wood was newer. There were several wooden crates in the corner. He climbed carefully onto the platform, testing each step to make sure it was sturdy enough to hold his weight. It creaked a bit but felt solid as he walked across to look in the crates. The first couple of crates were empty, but one held old chains and tractor parts. There was a large tractor seat propped up behind them in the corner.

Once he determined the loft was sturdy, he had an idea. He grabbed a couple of the burlap bags and went back down the ladder where he had seen some hay. He stuffed the large bags full of the hay, and one by one, he carried them back up to the loft. He arranged the crates along the front edge of the platform and pulled the foam out of the cracked tractor seat. Going back

for another trip, he took the remaining bags and filled them with hay. Again, he carted them up to the loft. He also pulled the heavy blankets from the hooks on the wall and carried each of them up to the loft. He was sweaty and exhausted, but he finally had all the bags and the blankets up on the loft platform. Arranging them tight together, he was able to make a rough mattress on the other side of the crates with the foam at the top. He placed one of the blankets over them and lay down to try them out. It was bearable, and using the other blanket to pull over him, he had a place to sleep that was protected from view by the row of crates. It was warmer than being outside, and he needed to rest.

It was so quiet in the barn. A sort of peace settled over him. He was strained and anxious from the past couple of days and tired from the hours of walking. It wasn't long before he drifted off to sleep. He dreamed about the girl and her baby.

They had met at the homeless shelter right after she had the baby. The baby didn't have a name because she said she couldn't keep her. She called herself Star, but he didn't think that was really her name.

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Sometimes when he spoke to her, she didn't answer him; it was as if she didn't know he was talking to her. They were traveling from town to town, staying in old buildings when they could find one, and eating what they could get their hands on. He had sold his leather boots to get enough money for formula, diapers, and fast food burgers, never expecting her to take off and leave him with the baby. Now all he had left were worn-out sneakers he had picked up at the homeless shelter along with a ragged coat, hat, and thin gloves they had provided. He had left the only blanket he had with the baby, so he would have to find another. He needed a job where someone would give him a chance. He had no references and no way to dress for an interview, so as soon as an employer got a good look at him, they dismissed him.

In his dream, the girl was talking sweetly to the baby, holding her close and making her smile. Then the girl turned into his mom, and she was telling the baby she loved him. *Him?* Was he the baby? He tossed and turned on the uncomfortable bed and finally fell into a deeper sleep.