

28.

SHOPPING

The kitchen door slammed behind Crystal as she entered the house, causing her mother to jump again. “Crystal!” she shouted, “Why do you insist on slamming that door every time you come in?”

“It’s not me, Mom! It’s that stupid door! We should get a regular screen door, instead of that 1940s *Lassie* thing.”

“Crystal, how many times have I told you, I don’t like you using the word ‘stupid?’”

“Mom, how many times have I told you, ‘I don’t slam the door?’ Can’t we just buy another one?”

“We don’t have the money for a new screen door just now. Can you please hold onto it until it shuts? It’s really not that hard.”

“Fine,” said Crystal as she stomped out of the kitchen.

“Crystal Elizabeth Black! Come back here this instant!”

Crystal’s voice dripped with sarcasm as she reappeared in the kitchen. “What, Mom?”

“Quiet Feet!”

As a younger girl, Crystal would react quickly to this command. Today, Crystal muttered, “Your voice is louder than my feet!” and raised herself onto her tiptoes, making sure her mother was watching as she quietly slipped away, her hands held up in front of her like a little mouse.

“We need to get going in about fifteen minutes,” Mrs. Black said to her drama queen.

“Just call me,” Crystal replied.

= ☪ =

“So, what have you done with yourself this week?” Crystal’s mom asked as they drove into town. “How do you like that new girl... what-was-her-name?”

“Breanna,” Crystal said, her eyes riveted to the road ahead. “She’s nice.”

“Just nice?” her mom asked. “Joe says you’re spending all your time together. Sounds like more than ‘just nice’ if you ask me.”

“Okay, I’m sorry... you found us out... we’re lovers.”

“CRYSTAL! That’s not even funny! Why would you say such a thing?”

“Mom, she’s really nice! She and I are probably best friends, okay? That’s all there is to it.”

“Well, why couldn’t you just say so? Why do you always have to pull my chain over everything?”

“Pull your chain?’ What are you, eighty years old?”

Crystal knew she was being too sarcastic. *But she keeps opening herself up for it*, she thought. *Why does she have to be so dorky sometimes?*

“Crystal, I’m really tired of the way you’ve been talking to me lately. Honest to God, I don’t know what to do with you when you get like this.”

“Like what, Mom? You ask me questions and I answer them. Then you come back with some dorky phrase like, *Pull my chain*’ and what am I supposed to say? I mean, what does that even mean? *Pull my chain!*”

“Honestly, Crystal, you can make conversation into such a chore.”

“Alright, Mom, let’s try something different. Let me think...” Crystal put her hand to her chin and cocked her head to look at her mother.

“I’ve got it... I want to tell you about my week, okay?”

“Sure,” Mrs. Black replied, relieved that Crystal was going to make a stab at having a real conversation.

“Alright, on Monday I took a ride on Sandy and discovered a maze in the woods that led me to a secret garden on the back of our property – just like the book, only even more beautiful. On Tuesday, Breanna rode with me and we found a secret pasture; a secret hole in the ground leading to a secret cave; and a secret island in the middle of a secret lake.”

Crystal’s mom rolled her eyes, but kept on driving.

“On Wednesday, Breanna and I discovered there’s a secret valley underneath Blackridge Farm with fruit trees that grow peaches as big as volleyballs, only we couldn’t explore the whole thing because it’s so huge that we needed our horses, but when we tried to get them in there Snowflake got spooked and threw Breanna to the ground and she’s got this huge bruise on her butt and bump on her head and hasn’t been able to ride all that well for the past couple of days. On Thursday, we discovered a secret house in the middle of the secret garden that’s fully furnished with everything from a hot tub to a home movie theater, and an elevator that goes down to the bottom of the secret valley that I told you we found on Wednesday, only we didn’t find that out until yesterday, but then Breanna and I had this huge fight because I wanted to look for Joe’s son and his family but Breanna wanted to go swimming in the underground lake with the thousand-foot waterfall.”

Crystal finally took a breath and turned to look at her mom. A devilishly sweet smile crept across her face. “So that was my week, Mom; how was yours?”

Mrs. Black kept her eyes riveted straight ahead on the road and didn’t acknowledge the end of Crystal’s story.

In a gentle, almost singsong voice, Crystal finished. “I’m telling you the truth, Mom.”

“Oh, stop it!” she shouted. “Don’t you think I can tell when you’re just making things up? All I want to do is to be able to talk to you – like we used to, when you were... I don’t know... TEN!”



“I’m telling you the truth, Mom.”