

Believe
Chapter 6
Excerpt

“You know what I’d like?”

Fiona was reading her new Nancy Drew mystery so I knew she wasn't listening. “What?” she asked, without looking up.

“Spinach, I want a great big plate of creamed spinach.”

“Un-huh.”

Nope, she hadn’t heard a word I'd said. I tossed my comic book on the floor of the bus. “I said I want spinach.”

“That’s nuts!”

The look on her face gave me a case of the giggles. “I said I want to go home.”

“Me, too.” She put down her book.

“I want to sleep in my own bed.”

“Right on.”

“How much longer are we going to be on this trip?” I'd been wondering about for a while.

“I heard Daddy say this is our last town before we head home.”

“Yay!” Then I noticed that Daddy had pulled into a motel parking lot, and best of all, there was a swimming pool. A pool with blue water and a diving board! “Look at that! There's a pool. We can swim in clean water.”

“And I see a café.” Maeve had jumped on my bunk and joined us in looking out the window.

Daddy hopped off the bus and strolled into the office. Fiona and I held hands and crossed our fingers. “Please, please, please come out with a key,” she muttered. “If we stay here we can have a hot breakfast, and cold milk and French Fries,” Maeve said.

Our noses were pressed to the window when we saw Daddy carrying two keys with attached plastic tags.

I was bouncing on my bunk. And when I found out that Daddy would be preaching in a real church with hymnals, pews, choir robes and an air conditioner, I was so happy I could have danced a jig. A restaurant, a toilet that flushed, clean sheets, and a television was hard to beat.

The church-goers in Parker's Corner called a revival a booster. Daddy's sermon that night was about Job—that poor man. No matter how many verses of the hymn we sang no one walked down the aisle to accept the invitation. Daddy was about to call it quits when a man strolled down the aisle, stopping to speak to people along the way.

“Finally,” Fiona whispered. “I'm tired of singing but he doesn't count. He's the preacher at this church, so I think he's already on a first name basis with God.”

“Darn,” Maeve muttered.

Something about him gave me the willies. “So that's Brother Fred?” His aura was weird.

Brother Fred sashayed and schmoozed before finally making it to the pulpit. He snatched the microphone out of Daddy's hands. If one of us pulled a stunt like that, Mama would have taken a switch to our backside.

“Brother Micah, thank you so much for that wonderful sermon.” It sounded like he was talking in capital letters. No wonder his flock needed a booster.

“I'm sure my children appreciated your wisdom, I know I did.” His children? “And your girls are beautiful creatures of God.”

I took another look at his aura. He didn't look like a man of God. I was wondering what that was all about when he patted my head and his colors turned into a swirl of black, dark grey and muddy green. Little bits of electricity bounced around his head, almost like an evil halo, and something started squirming and wiggling around him like it was trying to scratch its way out of a sack.

I wanted to scream, but I couldn't utter a sound. It felt as if I had a balloon stuck in my throat. And then I fell into a place so dark and scary that I couldn't breathe, or say, or do anything, and even worse, no one else could see what was happening. I turned to run, but my sisters were in my way.

Maeve put her arm around my shoulder. “What's wrong?”

I was trapped, and the boogeyman was about to take me to hell.

“No! No!” My scream came out as a squeak. Don't let him touch me, I prayed, but God didn't seem to be listening.

Brother Fred touched my cheek and everything went dark.

That's when I saw the teenager. The girl was wearing bright orange lipstick and she had black goop around her eyes. Her neck was twisted like she was trying to look behind her.

Oh God! Oh God! Oh God! She was dead!

The minute that horrible thought crossed my mind, I started screaming and couldn't stop. I could hear Daddy and Mama, but it sounded like they were a long way away. More than anything, I wanted to crawl into Mama's lap where it was safe, but I couldn't stop screaming.

Evil had become a living, breathing monster. The story of the boogeyman wasn't something made up to scare little kids. He was real and his name was Brother Fred.

"Sh, sh, Spring honey. Take a deep breath." That was Daddy's voice. The next thing I knew, I was in his lap and he was rubbing my back.

But what were we doing on the floor? And where were all the people?

"I'm scared." I burrowed my face into Daddy's shoulder. Terrifying things were lurking out there, things that little girls shouldn't see.

"I know, baby, I know."

"Is Spring okay?" Fiona asked. Her freckles looked like dirt sprinkled across her nose and Maeve was wringing her hands.

"She'll be fine," Daddy said and then spoke to Mama, "Why don't you take the rest of the kids back to the motel café and get them burgers and milk shakes. Spring and I are going out for a treat."

"Are you sure?" Mama asked.

"Yeah, we'll talk later. Kids, grab your stuff and go with your mom. And twins, you guys behave." Beau and Bubba responded with a 'Yes, sir.'

Scoops was an old-fashioned ice cream parlor with white wrought iron tables and candy-stripped wallpaper.

"Would you like to share a banana split?"

Most of the time I would have jumped at the chance to have chocolate, caramel and strawberries. But I kept seeing that girl's face.

"Banana split it is." Daddy's smile was sad, probably because I'd gone nutty in the middle of his service.

I tried so hard not to make a big deal about being different, not to draw attention to the fact I could see things other people couldn't, but tonight had been way too much. The colors, the smell, the girl—it was all too, too...too!

I wanted to stuff all the bad things into a place that I didn't have to think about.

“Give us the works, lots of chocolate and two spoons,” Daddy told the teenager behind the counter.

“Right up, sir.”

With the ice cream in his hand, Daddy took me to a table in an out of the way corner, away from the giggling teens and noisy families.

“I need a cuddle,” he said, patting his lap. That was the best invitation I'd had in a very long time. Daddy wouldn't let the bad man get me. Just the thought of Brother Fred gave me chill bumps. Little girls should be thinking about dolls and pretty dresses, not seeing dead people.

“Do you want to tell me about it?”

“Uh huh.”

“Let's talk, and remember, I won't let anyone hurt you. You know that, don't you?”

I really wanted to stick my thumb in my mouth, but instead I just snuggled closer to Daddy and nodded my head. I closed my eyes and thought about what I'd seen.

“I saw a dead girl who had dark hair with a bow.”

“Okay.” Daddy had taken a napkin out of the holder and was writing on it. “What else?”

“The lipstick and stuff looked like a clown. She had on a pink shirt and blue jeans.”

“Could you tell where she was?”

I thought that would be harder, but then I had the answer. “She was in the woods near a road. I saw a sign that said Bubba's Beer and Bait. Will that help?”

Daddy kissed the top of my head. “I'm sure it will, little one.”

Once I started talking, it seemed I couldn't stop. It was like the time I'd puked up some bad chicken salad; once it was all gone I felt better.

But I was still really, really scared.