

## *Chapter Twenty-Three*

*This last deception will be worse than the first*

Matthew 27:64

*December 6, 1999, 5:00 P.M.*

I felt exhilarated to have landed safely. All of our bags arrived in one piece, including the one with the broken zipper, and we checked into our room, number 504, at the Lillie Hotel without any problems. I had no tours of the red light district of downtown Hanoi as I had in Bangkok.

Aside from being tired and hungry, my adrenaline had kicked in as I anticipated receiving my baby. I walked back downstairs to the lobby to get more information from the desk clerk on when that would be. The young woman at the registration counter knew Anne, my contact person, as many adoptive mothers had previously stayed at the Lillie Hotel. I was surprised to see the other two ladies from the airport already in the lobby. They were crowded around a young man that I did not know. The young Vietnamese lad spoke very broken English

“Your baby be here soon,” he said to the young lady I came to know as Jackie. She had a husband and five-year-old son back home in Canada.

*So that's how it worked,* I thought. Anne had a contact person at the hotel that would have the babies dropped off after the adoptive families or mothers arrived.

He looked at the second Canadian lady, who was an older woman, and said, “Your baby be here soon, too.”

I was excited for them and could hardly wait to hear the same words spoken to me. My heart fluttered in anticipation to meet my new baby. This was the moment for which I had waited so long. The other mothers cleared out of my way so he could address me with news about my baby.

“There is problem with baby,” he said to me.

“What?” I asked. “What problem with my baby?”

I thought he meant some sort of medical problem. My excitement to be in Vietnam and anticipation of receiving my baby evaporated into worry and fear. He started to explain more but because of his poor English I couldn't understand most of what he said. I briefly reflected back to Nepal and how fortunate I was that Ankit spoke English so well.

“When will I receive my baby?” I asked. I could feel my blood pressure rising as I tried to control the tone in my voice. The receptionist at the desk tried to help with translation, but the most I could get out of either of them was that he didn't know. Anne would call me tomorrow.

“Tomorrow?” I repeated. That was totally unacceptable.

“Please have her call me tonight,” I yelled at him, “immediately!”

I was visibly upset that I was talking to him and not to her. How could she do this to me? How could she not let me know what was going on and send this guy who spoke such poor English to be the bearer of bad news? Being fatigued and jet lagged from the trip did not help. I felt slighted that the other ladies were receiving their babies and I wasn't.

The time difference made communication back to the States difficult. It was too expensive to call so we had to rely heavily on fax and email. No one had met us at the airport and I didn't know who this young man was that was speaking to me. In my anger the only word that seemed to fit was "crony."

I sent an email to Jill, the International Adoption Coordinator at the adoption agency, notifying her that we had arrived safely but there was a problem. Could she please contact Anne and have her phone me. I related to her what I knew, which wasn't much, and asked her to please find out what was going on. Nine thousand miles away, I didn't know what help she could be. The Midwest wasn't that much closer to Hanoi than Gainesville.

Because the hotel was so small, it was easy to detect other activities of the guests. I discovered the two women whom I had met earlier had their babies dropped off within the hour. I could faintly hear the sounds of a baby crying down the hallway from my room. Jenni and I sat in our hotel room not knowing what to think. I felt badly that she had accompanied me all the way to Vietnam on what was supposed to have been a wonderful experience of adoption and Vietnamese culture. We emptied our suitcases and watched Vietnamese television without interest. The excitement of being in a foreign country had lost its appeal and dissipated into emotional survival, one hour at a time.

"Maybe we will hear something good tomorrow," Jenni tried to encourage me.

"Yes, maybe," I responded, still feeling unconvinced.

Jenni quickly dozed off into sleep land but no matter how long I closed my eyes, my mind kept replaying the scenes of earlier in the day. At 3:30 a.m., wondering if anybody had sent me an email or fax, I gave up and went downstairs to the hotel lobby to check, but I found no faxes. I asked the night attendant if I could check my email using the computer in the internet room. In the middle of the night there wasn't a line waiting to access it. He turned it on and gave me the password, making a note on my account to charge the nominal fee for email use. In comparison to phone calls, it was a pithy penny, but no emails had been received in my inbox either.

I felt like we had been abandoned and forgotten. If it was 3:30 a.m. in Hanoi, it was 3:30 p.m. in Gainesville. The adoption agency would have received my fax, so why hadn't they responded? I went back up to my room and climbed into bed.

I finally succumbed to a restless sleep with lingering thoughts of the other women with their babies and fear that I may never receive mine. It seemed like only moments later that I was awakened to Jenni moving about in the room. My nightmare returned as I came back to reality.

"I am going to go down to check my email again," I told her. I grabbed some clothes, quickly dressed, and hurried back downstairs to check the computer.

I found this email sitting in my inbox from the adoption agency:

Dear Lori, I emailed Anne right after I got your fax. She has emailed me back and told me that she has been in touch with her staff person in Hanoi and the staff person staying at the hotel with you. Anne stated that their information regarding the birthmother is she is asking for money. Anne has not confirmed that so she did not want to inform you of hearsay until she has all the facts...it may be nothing, which she sincerely hopes is the case. She says it is a frequent occurrence with the distances and difficulties in communication to get misinformation and also for there to be last-minute delays. Anne assures me that they are doing everything that they can to tend to the situation. Anne said she will inform me once she has concrete information. [The director] said that oftentimes in these situations God is

given the opportunity to prove Himself strong and overcome difficult situations. We are praying for God to prevail. Jill.

I had assumed I would be working with Anne when I arrived. It was upsetting to me that she wasn't in Hanoi, but as I found out later, she lived seven hundred miles south in Ho Chi Minh City. That meant I had to rely on the "crony" who spoke no English.

I shared the email with Jenni without saying anything.

"This is horrible," she replied.

"I know."

"What are you going to do?"

"Wait to hear something from Anne or Jill. What else can we do?"

Later that afternoon when we walked down to the hotel lobby, we found Anne's "crony" in a heated argument with another man. About five feet eight inches tall with medium tan skin, he wore beige slacks and a black leather bomber jacket. He couldn't have been more than twenty to twenty-five years old. The arguing was disconcerting, and I could tell he was not happy to see me. He and the other man quit arguing when they saw Jenni and me approaching.

I tried to ask him one more time for more information, but it was like asking one of my six cats to tell me which one had left an unpleasant present on my front doorstep. If anything, he only exacerbated the situation because he didn't appreciate my emotional state of mind. The young lady working at the desk tried to translate for me.

"They can't find the mother. She is hiding," is all I could understand.

"Come on," Jenni said. "Let's go get something to eat in that Italian restaurant."

We walked down the stairs to the Ristorante Roman just below the Lillie Hotel and sat down in the first booth by the window facing Hue Street. The hostess greeted us and asked us what we were doing in Vietnam, questions I didn't feel like answering. I let Jenni do the talking. We sat for a long time and I didn't say anything. Jenni let me think, and I stared out the window watching the cars and motorcycles motoring up and down the street.

The waiter brought us our food and I said a half-hearted grace, wondering where God was in all of this. Lots of things went through my mind, some of which seemed irrational. I wondered how much Jenni would understand if I tried to share some of it. I finally put my tea down, looked her dead in the eye, and said, "Jenni, I really feel like there is an Evil that is preventing me from adopting a child."

She listened intently and I wondered if she thought I was crazy. Again we didn't speak for a long time and I picked at my spaghetti and slid the meatballs around my plate. It was normally my favorite meal, but I had no appetite. Even though Jenni didn't know what to say, just her presence was comforting, knowing that she cared and was willing to listen.

Later that night back in my hotel room, the phone rang. I picked it up and it was Anne. I had hoped to hear words of encouragement but instead I was accused of causing the problem.

"If you hadn't postponed the trip, this wouldn't have happened," she berated me. "The mother was ready the last time for the adoption if you had come. Why don't you go out and have a good time sightseeing and maybe she might turn up."

I was livid! How could she suggest I go out and go sightseeing? I had waited three years and traveled nine thousand miles to adopt a child. I hung up the phone feeling outraged. "God, where are you?" I cried.

Sleep eventually overtook me but I was awakened by nightmarish, consuming anxiety. Kidnapped! In my dreams I saw myself alone in Vietnam, my arms empty. The baby that had

brought me halfway around the world was gone. Visions of her being stolen flashed through my mind. I grabbed my Bible and tried to pray, but I was too consumed with anguish. I couldn't.

The next morning Jenni and I went downstairs to the restaurant inside the Lillie for a late breakfast. Between haunting dreams, jet lag, and defeatism, I was not very good company for anybody. I poured some coffee and tried to wake up.

It was all too painful to think about. Three years of waiting after filling out papers that seemed as voluminous as Florida cockroaches in the summertime, followed by refilling out the same hated documents after they expired; sharing with my friends and family my hopes and dreams; traveling halfway around the world and spending thousands of dollars; telling my daughter I was bringing her home a baby sister; all the planning, anticipation, and trusting that God would hear and answer my prayers.

I also couldn't help but think about all the people that were so negative about me adopting again. I pictured myself returning home to the humiliation and embarrassment of coming all the way here and falling prey to a kidnapping and scam—every cell in my body wanted to fight back, “No, you can't do this to me. This is evil!”

“Anne isn't doing anything to help the situation,” I told Jenni. “She thinks we should go out and do some sightseeing, like that is really going to make me feel better.”

“I think she is blackmailing you,” said Jenni, “or it's something illegal she's not telling us, or she's already given up the baby and she's making the whole thing up. I don't like her and I don't think you should depend on her to find the mother.”

“What do we do?” I asked. I didn't know whether to listen to Jenni because I wanted to believe Anne would come through for me.

“It just doesn't add up. I can tell by the translator's body language that he's withholding information and not being straight with us, not to mention he was quarreling with that other man. I assume he's another messenger. I did not like that Anne was difficult to get a hold of, and after your conversation with her, it confirms my suspicions.”

“Yeah, I know,” I lamented.

“Last night I couldn't sleep and really wanted something to feel connected to home,” Jenni continued, setting down her drink, “and on my dresser was a paper in English that I picked up and looked at. I got to thinking and had a conversation with God. “Why not put an ad in the paper to try and find the mother ourselves?”

“Yeah, let's do it,” I said. It actually sounded like a good idea and at least we would be something rather than sitting around the hotel doing nothing.

“Maybe we can ask the lady at the desk which would be the best newspaper,” I suggested. We quickly finished breakfast and hurried back to the hotel lobby.

Jenni asked the receptionist, “What newspaper has the largest distribution in Hanoi?”

We explained what we wanted to do and she listened intently, showing excitement as she caught hold of our idea. She had been privy to the previous conversations with Anne's messenger and understood my desperation to do something.

The young lady showed us three or four different newspapers published in Hanoi but held up one in particular and waved it at us as she explained. She spoke only a little bit of English, but what she lacked in communication skills she made up for in kindness.

“I do what I can,” she said. She handed us the newspaper and showed us where we might be able to advertise for the missing birthmother.

My lackluster opinion of Anne for the time being was put on the backburner now that I had a way to channel my frustration and anger. The bits and pieces I knew of things that happened

before I arrived in Vietnam came more into focus with my raw emotions being pushed aside. I now felt angrier with myself than her because I had ignored warning signs I should have heeded, but at least now we were doing something.

By the time we came up with the wording for the notice and chose the newspaper out of the several the clerk had showed us, it was approaching the late afternoon.

“It’s too late to do anything today,” I told Jenni, but let’s go first thing in the morning to the newspaper office.”

“Sounds good,” Jenni replied.

The next morning we took a taxi to the *Lao Dong Newspaper* with the name of the “mother” of Thi My-Duyen in a carefully worded Vietnamese caption. After the cab dropped us off, we walked around for a while as we had been taken to the wrong location. Jenni had bought a translation book and was trying to speak Vietnamese to get directions from passersby. I was glad she was doing the hard work and letting me be passive.

We eventually found the right office and walked into a dimly lit room where a Vietnamese man sat at an entrance booth. We explained to him our problem and presented him with our little notice written in Vietnamese. After paying him a small amount of money, he told us it would only take a day or two to appear in the newspaper. Having finished the task, we returned to the hotel feeling satisfied.

We had now been in Hanoi for three days without hearing any encouraging news from Anne. All Jenni and I could do was wait patiently to see if our missing person’s notice produced results. That evening following our trip to the *Lao Dong Newspaper*, I emailed the adoption agency and called Anne to let them know what we had done. Neither was very happy with me.

“I wish you hadn’t done that,” Anne said. She was very agitated and upset about it. “I told you we are doing everything we can. You need to let us handle it.”

“Why not?” I asked.

She couldn’t give me a good answer. Every time I asked what she was doing to find the mother, she was very evasive. The adoption agency said in an email it might cause more harm than good. I felt it was worth the risk.

As our time in Vietnam dragged on, I asked God to reveal Himself in a miraculous way. I sent out emails to friends and family asking them to join me in prayer and for God to prevail. While in Hanoi this didn’t come naturally because I didn’t feel like praying or spending time with God, but I did feel a sense of evil lurking behind the walls of silence that Jenni and I couldn’t bridge. I also sensed the evil wanted me to feel isolated, alone, and abandoned. I felt like locking myself in my room and not showing my face to anyone. I was depressed, and humanly speaking, didn’t think praying would do any good.

The one thing I had in abundance in Hanoi was time. What else could I do but pray? God was waiting on me to surrender the little girl I had come to adopt and the three long years of waiting. God knew I was a sheep in need of a Great Shepherd. I had to believe that His love for me was higher than the highest mountain, which I had seen, and deeper than the deepest ocean, which I had almost seen.

Could I believe He knew my hurt, my pain, and my anger—an adoption fiasco filled with lying, deception, and greed? I had heard about it on the Internet and television—children being stolen and sold to desperate would-be parents. I never thought it would happen to me. Jesus Himself was betrayed by one of His closest friends. Could Jesus bring redemption to this horrible injustice?

The next morning when I walked down to the lobby, I sat down and looked out the large

window overlooking Hue Street. One of the adoptive mothers caught sight of me and walked over with her baby. I had intentionally avoided the other adoptive mothers because I didn't want to talk about my misfortune or tell them what had happened. It was too painful.

“Did you hear about the woman from the States who is here in Hanoi, and the ‘mother’ went into hiding and wants money?” She exclaimed. “Isn't that awful? It's all over the web that her baby was kidnapped! That poor lady came all the way to Vietnam for nothing—isn't it terrible? I wonder who she is.”

I stared at her in disbelief. I never went to those web sites, but it angered me that so many people knew and were talking about it. How could they know more than me? After that I couldn't bear to see the other mothers with their new daughters.

As Peter denied Jesus three times and ran away in deep distress, I needed go to God and pour out my raw emotions. Did I believe that God understood my sorrow and pain? Did I believe He wouldn't leave me in this dark dungeon of doubt and depression? I was inconsolable and unfit to be around.

I left the hotel disillusioned and scurried down Hue Street to the Hoan Kiem Lake. Alone and hurting, I trudged around the lake with tears falling uncontrollably. I sobbed in anguish fearing that my dreams were gone. Passersby stared at me and a couple of women asked if they could help. I shook my head and scurried off.

As Jesus spoke to His followers in parables, I need to tell my own personal parable.