

(Please note this excerpt contains spoilers to *The Greatest Gift of All*, Book 1 of the *Date with Destini* series.)

CHAPTER 1

I woke up with my heart racing, trying to catch my breath.

It was the second night in a row I had had the bad dream. For the second time, I couldn't remember what happened, but it had me scared enough to head across the hall to my foster mom, Miss Charity's room to sleep with her.

The house was dark, but like always, Miss Charity was already awake when I walked in the room.

"What's the matter, Destini?" she whispered.

"I had a bad dream," I said, suddenly feeling like crying.

Miss Charity scooted over to make room for me, and I climbed in bed with her.

"It's okay," she said, placing a kiss on my forehead. "It's probably just nerves. Tomorrow's a big day for Tiff."

Tiffany Davis was my best friend. We had been in foster care together, and a few months ago, we had both found forever families just like we had always dreamed. These nice people named Mr. and Mrs. Schneider had decided to adopt Tiff, and Charity Montgomery, who Tiff and I had both met while doing a play was going to adopt me.

At least that's what I hoped.

The whole adoption process seemed to be taking forever. Part of me was starting to get a little scared that it wasn't going to happen. As much as I liked Miss Charity, I told myself not to get too excited. Around Thanksgiving last year, I had thought I was going to get out of foster care because my real daddy, Dr. Lorenzo Windham, found me. He was really nice, and he had even given me a dog named Wiggles. On the day I was supposed to go live with him, he and his wife, Mrs. Windham, had changed their mind.

I don't think I had ever cried so much.

I didn't really like Mrs. Windham—she had told me I couldn't call her Momma—but I loved my daddy, and I wanted to get to know him. I hadn't heard from him since Thanksgiving though, and sometimes I wondered if I would ever hear from him again. He had kind of disappeared, just like my momma who I learned had died. I tried not to think of them too much, but sometimes I did, and it made me sad.

Miss Charity, who had grown up in foster care, had told me it was normal to feel that way. She said everything happened for a reason. If my daddy hadn't changed his mind, she wouldn't have the chance to adopt me. That was a thought that made me happy.

"What are you thinking about?" Miss Charity whispered in the darkness.

"I don't know," I said, even though that wasn't really true.

Miss Charity pulled the covers up under my neck, tucking me in a little tighter then placed a kiss on my forehead. "Now why don't I believe you?"

I couldn't help but giggle. "Because you know me so well," I said.

"Yep," she said. She turned over and glanced at the clock. It was around midnight "Since

we're both up anyway, why don't we grab a snack?"

I jumped out of bed before she could change her mind and headed down the stairs to the kitchen so fast that I woke up my dog, Wiggles. She and Miss Charity weren't too far behind.

"You get the milk, and I'll make the sugar cookies," I said.

"Got it," she said, grabbing two glasses from the cabinet.

Sugar cookies and milk was our favorite late-night snack. Miss Charity loved them just as much as I did. I had started making the cookies and pretty much everything else we ate right after I moved in with her because she was a pretty bad cook.

"So I've been thinking," she said, sitting at the table. "Your birthday is coming up in a few months. What do you think about having a party?"

I widened my eyes, and I nodded so hard I almost hit my afro on the back of the chair. I had never had a birthday party before. I imagined all my friends singing happy birthday to me, then blowing out the eleven candles that would be on my cake.

"Can it be a sleepover?" I asked, thinking how cool it would be to have all my friends spend the night at my house. Wiggles must have sensed my excitement because she placed her front paws on my leg and wagged her tail.

Miss Charity laughed. "Sure," she said. "That sounds like fun."

I grabbed a piece of paper from a desk drawer where we kept school supplies and started making a list of the people I wanted to invite. I wrote down Tiff's name, then checked on the cookies.

"Is Tiff excited about tomorrow?" Miss Charity asked.

I nodded. "She's excited and a little scared," I said. "You think she'll like the present I got for her?"

Tiff had ended up in foster care after her parents had died in a car accident. The only thing she had from when she lived with them was a stuffed cow she called MooMoo and a picture of her parents. She had lost MooMoo for a little while around the time we had had to move out of my aunt, Betty Thomas's house. I had never seen her so upset.

For her adoption day, I had gotten her a locket with a picture of MooMoo inside, so she always had him with her, no matter what.

"I think she'll love it," Miss Charity said, running her hand over my afro and smiling. "The locket was a great idea."

While we were waiting on the cookies to finish baking, I worked on my list some more. I looked out the window at the house right behind us, trying to think of who all I wanted to invite. All the lights in the house were out, which meant Tiff and the Schneiders were probably asleep.

When Tiff and I had left my aunt Betty's house, I had thought I would never see her again. The craziest thing had happened when I moved to Miss Charity's house in Hoover. It turned out Tiff and I were neighbors. Not only did we see each other every day, but we attended our new school, Langston Intermediate, together too.

I added a few more names to my list then passed it over to Miss Charity.

"You forgot Jordan," she said, grabbing my pen and jotting down the name.

I tried my best to hide my frown.

Moving in with Miss Charity had made a lot of my dreams come true. So far there had only been one bad part.

Jordan Henley.

Jordan was this mean girl from my old school. She was also Miss Charity's niece.

I had to see her all the time because Miss Charity and her family loved to get together to eat and do stuff. Jordan pretended to be nice when her family was around, but once they left, she became mean again.

"If you say so," I said, losing a little excitement about the party.

Miss Charity started making a list of ideas for the party, and seeing all she planned to do had me wondering if this really was such a good idea.

"That must have been a really bad nightmare," Miss Charity said when she realized I had stopped talking. "You sure everything is okay?"

The oven timer went off, and I went to take the cookies out of the oven, trying to figure out what to say.

"Destini," she said when I took too long to answer.

I turned to look at her.

"I know what happened," I said.

"What happened with what?" she asked, wrinkling her nose.

She had gotten up to pour the milk and turned to frown at me. I focused on putting the cookies on a plate.

"Destini?" she said, placing her hand on top of mine to stop me. "What's going on?"

"I know you lost your job."

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