

Chapter Twenty-six

“I’m Canceling the Adoptions, Period!”

October 17–20, 2001

While we must wait for the official adoption ceremony, John and I become somewhat reluctant tourists. It’s not that we’re disinterested in seeing and experiencing the Vietnamese landscape and culture, but we’d rather be tourists with our baby in tow like a Canadian couple we’ve befriended.

Not only do Pierre and Jean have their baby, Kate, but she’s only six months old, the same age we were told we’d have Lucas. When the longing for my own baby becomes too much to bear, I ask them if I can hold Kate, even if it’s only for a moment. They oblige me often as I accompany them on trips to local museums and eateries.

One afternoon we go to a museum together. There’s an exhibit called “Memory of War,” but in fact, memories of the war linger throughout Ho Chi Minh City. As we walk into hot, crowded shops, I notice that more than one sells rings—class rings. When I take a closer look at what’s inscribed on them, I find the rings belonged to students who had gone to schools in various U.S. states. It spooks me to see so many class rings from American students for sale. I wonder what may have happened to the owners of those rings. Have they been taken off the lifeless fingers of dead American soldiers and are still in circulation decades later?

What a different culture! When we want to leave the dull sameness of the hotel, it’s stressful. For one thing, each time we venture out, we find ourselves being stared at. It’s so strange to be considered “different.” This is a first-time experience for us. It gives me compassion for the minorities in America who sometimes find themselves the only non-Caucasians in a room.

For another, John and I are definitely larger than the native Vietnamese. He stands much taller, while we are both wider, making me self-conscious. In fact, one day, we stroll inside an ice cream shop. We gasp at the size of the stools. Their circumference isn't much bigger than the lid of a large yogurt container.

On another excursion to a market, there's a group of young Vietnamese girls of about eight years old. They hide from my husband—a 6-foot 2-inch, 230-pound, odd, dark blonde man with blue-green eyes. When we round a corner and spot them again, they run away screaming. But their simultaneous laughter tells me they aren't actually afraid of him.

For most of the sightseeing, we are shepherded around by the typically brusque, sometimes unpredictable Lan. I am not fond of her. Memories of war seem to linger in her heart and mind with her hot then cold—but mostly cold—attitude toward us.

On October 18, our fifth evening in Vietnam, John and I along with the Drummonds are invited by the Brinks to have dinner at the famous Rex Hotel rooftop restaurant.

The hotel is rather well-known as the site of the United States military command's daily press conference during the Vietnam War. The press conferences were named "Five O'clock Follies" by cynical journalists who disagreed with the optimism of the American officers. In these briefings, the United States and South Vietnamese military and civilian press officers would give a breakdown of the day's hostilities, casualties and alleged successes. Its kitschy rooftop bar was a well-known hangout for military officers and war correspondents.

The seven of us are seated at a large table. Mr. Brinks breaks the news that the following day's adoption ceremony has been called off.

That makes eight canceled travel dates to Vietnam, two canceled ceremonies I expected while in Vietnam, and one fourteen-hour roundtrip drive to see our babies for less than two

hours. It's crushing to have to do more waiting. Now that I've held Baby Lucas in my arms, my longing to officially become his mother and have him as our child permanently is only stronger.

Lan's words to us that we arrived too early ring in my ears. It is clear now that the agency has not been forthcoming with us about when the ceremony and the official adoption of our babies will take place. Whatever the truth is, Mark Drummond is incensed.

Seated at the end of our rectangular table, I don't hear the conversation that begins between Mark and Mr. Brinks until it starts to get loud.

Suddenly, Mark jumps up and threatens to use political connections back in New York to have Mr. Brinks' adoption license pulled if we don't get our babies on the nineteenth. Mr. Brinks stands up too. Although about a foot shorter than Mark, he forcefully volleys back, "I'm canceling the adoptions, period!"

Hearing this breaks me. I begin to weep at the thought of returning home empty-handed while the two men quarrel. Mark blames Mr. Brinks for the extra waiting. Mr. Brinks places the blame on our facilitator, Lan. Mark points out that Lan works for Mr. Brinks. Who has control here? It's all so confusing, but I believe that those who are to officiate the ceremony are the primary people that need to give the green light for us to proceed.

I can't listen any longer and slide out from our table. Tears overcome me at the prospect that Mr. Brinks would cancel our adoptions.

As I walk away, I silently plead with God. No more of this madness, please Lord! I keep my head down so that strangers won't see the tears streaming down my face as I make my way back inside the hotel toward the elevators to go and find a bathroom.

I enter the rooftop elevator and push the button for the lobby. The elevator stops at a floor with a waiting couple. The fluorescent lighting makes me feel vulnerable and ashamed of my

tears. I take the rest of the ride in the elevator with my back to the couple. I need a moment alone to ask God to help me compose myself and accept the frustration and disappointment I've been carrying with me for so long. But there isn't any people-free place to go to for privacy, and I cannot find a bathroom. My only option is to go back up to the roof and to the arguing. I have no choice but to return to the table for a dinner we ultimately don't eat. I sense our dining experience at the famous Rex Hotel overlooking Ho Chi Minh City, the former Saigon, was meant to be our consolation prize.

God must have good reasons for requiring me to have more patience, more faith. But I feel so spent already and wonder if I can make it through this process. I fear it's going to remain true that, as Lan said, we have been brought to Vietnam too early.

We *should* be holding our babies on our laps in celebration during this fancy dinner. But after travel delays to Vietnam that stretched into agonizing months, we are merely teased with an attempt to placate us with a two-hour visit with our baby boys. Fourteen hours spent in a speeding, honking, bouncing van to and from the orphanage carrying only a bulging diaper bag is bittersweet.

Clearly, I must continue to have faith in the Lord. If He means for John and me to return home without Lucas, He must have a really good reason why. Yet I don't believe that will be the case. He is showing me how faith in Him, as I see Him at work, begets more faith. I just have to continue to trust despite tonight's gut punch and breakdown. I must trust *Him*—not the Brinks, not Lan, not the officiants for the adoption ceremony. Only God. Faith and trust bring with them tremendous peace to the believer.

The next morning the phone rings while we are still in our hotel room. It's Lan. I'm stunned when she immediately chastises me after my hello.

“Vietnamese women don’t cry,” she says harshly.

How on earth did this woman know I was crying at the Rex Hotel the night before? Does she have spies? I should tell her, “But I’m not a Vietnamese woman. I’m an American.” Instead, I stay silent. This woman plays quite an integral part in our bringing our son home. I dare not say anything that might offend her, on top of my tears the night before.

This happens to be the day that my tunics are ready. Lan escorts me alone to the Ben Thanh market to pick them up. On the way back I tentatively bring up the adoption ceremony and how it’s taking longer than we expected. She tells me, “We want you to appreciate these babies,” suggesting that the delays are on purpose.

“We absolutely do and will,” I say, although I think her statement is incredulous for someone in the adoption business. Lan is well aware of an adoptive parent’s big attachment to an assigned child even before she or he sets foot in a foreign country.

Once more during our rapid steps I notice the physical anomalies present among people here. I ask her about it.

“It’s from a generation of the aftermath of Agent Orange.”

She shrugs.

As an American, a pang of guilt hits me. Only because I want to know how she’ll respond I ask, “How can the Vietnamese stand giving their babies to Americans?”

“It’s not easy,” she says.

“Not all of us are bad,” I reply.

“No, not all of you,” she responds.

This confirms my thoughts that she has a problem with Americans. I can't help but wonder how she came to be in the position of an adoption facilitator for Americans with such conflicting feelings about us.