

CHRIS CRUTCHER



• WHALE TALK •

CHAPTER 1

In the end, write it down. Back up and find the story. Mr. Simet, my English and journalism teacher, says the best way to write a story, be it fact or fiction, is to believe aliens will find it someday and make a movie, and you don't want them making *Ishtar*. The trick is to dig out the people and events that connect, and connect them. No need to worry about who's wearing Nike and who's wearing Reebok, or anybody's hat size or percentage of body fat. Like Jack Webb on the *Dragnet* series on Nick at Nite says, "Just the facts, ma'am. Just the facts."

The facts. I'm black. And Japanese. And white. Politically correct would be African-American, Japanese-American and what? Northern European-American? God, by the time I wrote all that on a job application the position would be filled. Besides, I've never been to

Africa, never been to Japan, and don't even know which countries make up Northern Europe. Plus, I know next to nothing about the individuals who contributed all that exotic DNA, so it's hard to carve out a cultural identity in my mind. So: Mixed. Blended. Pureed. Potpourri.

Adopted.

Big deal; so was Superman.

And like Superman, I was adopted by great people. The woman I call Mom—who *is* Mom—Abby Jones, was in the hospital following her fourth miscarriage (and final attempt at the miracle of birth) where she met my biological mother, Glenda, right after my presumed bio-dad, Stephan, had assisted in my natural childbirth only to come eyeball-to-eyeball with the aforementioned UNICEF poster boy. A second-generation German-American married to a woman of Swiss-Norwegian descent, he was a goner before my toes cleared the wet stuff. Any way he matched up the fruit flies, he couldn't come up with *me*. Because my mom is one of those magic people with the natural capacity to make folks in shitty circumstances feel less shitty, she consoled Glenda and even brought her home until she could get her feet on the ground. Evidently Glenda was as surprised as Stephan; she'd had a one-night stand with my sperm donor to get even for a good thumping and had no idea

the tall black-Japanese poet's squiggly swimmer was the one in a billion to crash through to the promised land.

Things sped rapidly downhill for Glenda as a single mother, and two years later, when she brought Child Protection Services crashing down on herself, getting heavily into crack and crank and heavily out of taking care of me, she remembered Mom's kindness, tracked her down and begged her to take me. Mom and Dad didn't blink—almost as if they were expecting me, to hear them tell it—and all of a sudden I was the rainbow-coalition kid of two white, upwardly mobile ex-children of the sixties.

Actually, only Mom was upwardly mobile. She's a lawyer, working for the assistant attorney general's office, mostly on child-abuse cases. Dad likes motorcycles; he's just mobile.

We never did hear from Glenda again, Mom says probably because the separation was too painful, and shameful. Sometimes I find myself longing for her, just to see or talk with her, discover more about the unsettledness within me; but most of the time that ache sits in a shaded corner of my mind, a vague reminder of what it is not to be wanted. At the same time all that seems out of place, because I remember nothing about her, not what she looked like or the sound of her voice or even

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