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Hearing Whispers

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT
CHRISTIAN FICTION

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Love

Hearing Whispers

Fruit of the Spirit
Book 1

Tracy Wainwright

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Dedication

To Tiffany and Leigh Anne, you've been wonderful encouragers to me! I'm so grateful for your friendships.

1

Thirty days. Sarah Booth couldn't believe it. She almost pinched herself. She would be Mrs. Jakob Adderley in mere days. She stared into the mirror, holding her wedding dress in front of her. She'd already tried it on a dozen times and promised herself she wouldn't put it back on until June nineteenth. Her wedding day.

She twirled twice, gave her reflection a final smile, and danced to the closet where the satin and pearl dress would hang for one more month.

On her way back through the den to her room, she grabbed her wedding planner and a box of highlighters and pens. She plopped onto her bed, sat crisscross applesauce, laughed at herself for using the term she'd picked up at her elementary school internship, and opened to the page listing the final preparations. She had two weeks left to confirm the totals for the reception. Elysa was scheduled to go with her to buy the flowers on Friday and spend the weekend putting the bouquets and table arrangements together. It probably wasn't too early to make her hair and nail appointments. She read down the list. Plenty of things to keep her busy and prevent her from jumping out of her skin over the next four weeks.

She ripped a blank sheet of paper out of the back

of the book and made a timeline. First on the list: get their marriage certificate. By the end of Jakob's lunch hour the next day, she'd have it in her hands. She tossed the book and pen aside and leapt off her bed. Might as well go ahead and grab her birth certificate and slip it in her purse.

Her mom wasn't home, another night out with her best friends at some concert, but Mom wouldn't mind if she hunted for it on her own. The gray, two-drawer filing cabinet holding important documents, records, and bills sat in the back of her mom's closet. She pulled open the bottom drawer and flipped through the files until she found the folder with her name on it. Behind school awards, medical records, and other miscellaneous papers from her childhood, she spotted the document she searched for. She took the certificate out and slipped the folder back into the hanging file it came from. She reached to shove the drawer closed when a folder toward the back caught her eye.

"H.B.B.," she read. Her dad's initials. It wasn't super surprising that her mom still had a file on her dad, but Sarah had never noticed it before. Curiosity drove her. She grabbed the folder and opened it. Her parents' divorce decree glared at her. She'd never read it and had no desire to. A large envelope with her dad's name and their previous address on it lay behind the thick document. The return address had 1DNA as the business name.

Sarah pulled the envelope out and debated opening it. She shook her head and reached to put it back in the drawer. Then she pulled it back, opened the

tab, and plucked out the single sheet of paper. Her hand trembled as she read. It couldn't be. The sheet of paper clutched in her hand shook along with the rest of her body.

She scanned the wrinkled document again. There had to be some kind of mistake. She'd known about her dad's relationship with the woman who was now her stepmother and that it had caused her parents' divorce, but this was worse.

She sank to the floor, tears overflowing and rushing down her cheeks. She swiped them away and read the blurry words a third time.

She glanced at the date on the DNA test. Two years before her parents' separation. The child referenced on the document couldn't be her half-brother or half-sister. They'd been born after her dad had gotten remarried. It wouldn't make sense for her mom to have a DNA test for either of them anyway.

So, who was it for?

Her dad's name was listed under the heading *alleged father*. Sarah whispered the name on the other side of the sheet, "Danielle."

The list of numbers didn't mean anything to her. The bottom part was what shocked her.

"Probability of parentage 99.99 percent."

Her dad had another child. Sarah had another sister. She clutched the paper tighter, crumpling it. Her father had kept a sibling from her. A lump formed in her throat. So had her mother.

Sarah rechecked the date and calculated. Twelve years. She'd have been nine when the child was born.

She closed her eyes. Pictures of Allison and Andy played through her mind. She wasn't exactly close to her half siblings, but they were fun, and she enjoyed being around them the couple of times a year she visited. They had dark hair like hers but curly like their mother's.

What did this child look like?

"Danielle" would be twelve or thirteen. A young girl who might like an older sister who'd traversed the world of adolescence and survived.

Or maybe she had an older sister. Or was an older sister.

She shook the sheet of paper in front of her face. It told her so much yet left out so much. A million questions spun in Sarah's mind. She pushed herself up and paced her mom's bedroom. She could wait until her mom got home and confront her. Ask why she'd never been told about her dad fathering another child. She could find out who the girl was, who the mother was, and how she could get in touch with her.

No.

She stopped and blinked back hot tears. Asking her mom would bring up old hurts. Sarah's parents had stayed married for two more years after the test was conducted. She couldn't imagine what her mom had been through. The divorce had been horrendous. And her mom had already gone through a category five emotional tornado.

Straightening out the crinkles and folding the sheet back the way it had been when she found it, she resolved to figure it out on her own. Sarah closed the

drawer, stood, and raced down the hallway. She grabbed her purse and rushed out the door and to her car.

She had to get to Jakob. He'd know what to do. And if not, at least he'd be someone she could tell—a shoulder she could cry on.

Jakob. Her rock. She still couldn't figure out how she'd landed him. The hottest guy in school, and he'd stuck with her for five years and put a ring on her finger. Soon, he'd be her husband, and she'd rely on him for support instead of her mom. Might as well start with the huge issue she'd just been confronted with.

Twenty minutes later, she pulled into a parking space and leapt up the three flights of stairs to her fiancé's apartment. She flipped through her keys. It shouldn't take so long to find the right one, but she had too many keys and trinkets on the ring. It didn't help that her hands shook.

Jakob's muffled yell from the other side of the door halted her hand as the key hovered in front of the lock. There must be a baseball game on. Well, even if it was his favorite team playing, he'd have to tear himself away from it. She needed him.

She inserted her key, and he hollered again. Female laughter followed.

Sarah froze. Who was that? Maybe Scott, Jakob's roommate, was dating someone new. She waited, listening. She didn't hear Scott. Just Jakob. And some girl. Her heart sped, and her throat clogged.

No. It couldn't be true. Especially at that moment

when she needed him the most. In the past hour, her world had already tilted. She couldn't take anything else.

She didn't dare move. No more yelling, laughing, or anything else filtered through the door. What should she do? Knock and barge in? Turn and flee? She'd already slid her key in the lock. All she had to do was turn it, and she'd know the truth once and for all. She couldn't hide from what might be the truth.

Her stomach twisted as she turned the key and opened the door.

Bile rose in her throat as Jakob peeled his lips off the barely dressed blonde next to him on the sofa. His eyes rounded as he stood.

"Sarah, I—" His Adam's apple bobbed. "What are you doing here?"

"You're going to question me?" She turned her gaze to the interloper and narrowed her eyes. The blonde's face was overly made up and the blue dress she wore scarcely covered the essentials. "Who is this? Your buddy who came over to watch the game?"

He stepped toward her. "She's a friend, yes. Really, nothing's going on."

"Oh, really? That's how you're explaining the lip gloss smeared all over your face." She lowered her eyes. "And your neck. Seriously, how stupid do you think I am?"

He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand and took a step closer. "Sarah, listen. Scott was supposed to be here and something came up. I couldn't back out on the invitation. And you haven't been around hardly at

all since you've been home. It just happened." He reached for her hand. "It was just a kiss, and it'll never happen again. I promise."

Excuses. It all felt so familiar. All those times she'd brushed off what she'd heard. Believed him. She stared at the man in front of her, seeing him clearly for the first time. He wasn't the jock who'd fallen for the quiet nerd from high school. He was a jerk who wanted to eat his cake and have it too—a smart, stable woman for the long term, and to keep things exciting, a string of women who cared nothing about a man's vows.

Just like her dad.

She balled her fists. "Save it."

"Sarah, listen to me."

"I'm through listening." She choked back the tears pushing their way through her resolve. "I didn't want to believe all the rumors, but I guess I have proof now. You can save your explanations. I'm not interested."

She turned toward the blonde on the sofa. "And you. Did you know he's engaged?" Sarah's voice rose. Her whole body trembled as she returned her gaze to Jakob. "Was engaged."

She slipped the small, oval diamond off her left ring finger and held it out.

Jakob put a hand on her shoulder. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean for any of this to happen."

She snorted and backed up out of his reach. "No. You didn't mean to get caught." She glanced at the girl again.

The woman avoided Sarah's gaze.

Sarah's heart pounded, aching more with each

beat. She couldn't take any more. She backed up toward the door. "Have a nice life, Jakob."

Sarah hurled the ring at his handsome face, spun, and fled. She ran down the steps and to her car. Hot tears flowed as she cranked the ignition and squealed out of the parking lot.

All the years she'd lost to him. There must have been more lies she'd missed. She was so stupid for not seeing it. Her experience should have prepared her and made her an expert detector of lies.

Obviously not. A sob broke through, and she pounded the steering wheel. She'd never allow herself to be deceived again.

"Nope. I'm done with men. No more giving my heart away." She swiped at the steady flow of tears and gunned her car through the last stop light the second it turned green.

She pulled into her driveway, parked several yards back from the garage door, and took a deep breath. She had to calm herself in case her mom was home. The lamp on the table beside the sofa shone through the curtains covering the front window. Maybe Mom had left it on for her. She hadn't noticed it before she left.

She failed at keeping her hand steady enough to insert her house key, finally giving in and clasping her other hand over her wrist. The key fell into the lock, and she quietly turned the handle, and slipped inside. Silence greeted her.

Her mom must still be at the concert.

She dropped her purse and keys by the door and

trudged down the hall. Her wedding planner and pens still lay sprawled out on her bed. She shoved them to the floor and fell onto her comforter. The engagement picture she and Jakob had taken three months before glared at her from the bedside table. She picked it up and threw it across the room. It shattered against the wall.

Sarah collapsed in tears.

2

Sarah tossed another handful of ripped up pictures into the trashcan. After sleeping well past ten, she'd tackled the task of vengeance. Not on Jakob directly. No, she didn't have the energy for that. But she could certainly vent her hurt and anger on his pictures.

She'd finally made it through all the albums she'd scrapbooked over the last five years. Every picture and reference to Jakob had been ripped out and shredded. The gaping blanks in her albums reflected the cavernous holes in her heart, but she refused to think about those. There were too many things to get done. After the photos and other memorabilia, she'd tackle the wedding details. All the appointments for the fittings for the bridesmaids' dresses, putting together party favors and flower arrangements, and sending the DJ a song list.

Or applying for a marriage license.

She groaned and leaned against the side of her bed. Her head pounded despite the ibuprofen she'd taken when she'd awakened. Instead of checking off the rest of her wedding to-do list, she'd have to make a new list of everyone she had to contact to cancel. The myriad of phone calls wouldn't improve her emotional

state.

Nor did the constant intruding thought about the piece of paper she'd found. A sister. She had another half-sister. Her head throbbed harder.

It was all too much to take in. Her chest felt so tight she could barely breath.

She needed to talk to Elysa. That always helped. Her best friend didn't even know yet that the engagement was off. She hadn't decided whether to say anything about her sister. Maybe one thing at a time.

Sarah checked her phone. A little after three. Elysa might be home. Since they'd graduated, she'd been helping her grandmother out at her flower shop, saying she'd die of boredom waiting to get a full-time job, but she was usually done by mid-afternoon. She tapped Elysa's name in her recent calls list.

Her friend picked up after the second ring. "Hey, girly. What's up?" The steady swoosh of wind came through clearly from her handsfree device.

"Just checking in. You on the road?" She swallowed the growing lump in her throat.

"Yeah. Left Nani's at one and have been running errands since. Heading home after one more stop."

"So the rest of your day is free? Maybe we could meet for dinner tonight?"

"Sorry, my friend. The folks have a big shindig planned. Part of the continuing graduation celebration. They've invited all the family who weren't able to make it to graduation.

Sarah slid down on the floor and laid her head on

a photo album. "That's OK. I understand."

"You don't have plans with the man tonight?"

Tears filled Sarah's eyes, and she blinked them away. She swallowed and cleared her throat. "No. I saw him last night. Briefly."

"Briefly? I thought it was boys and sports night or something."

"Yeah. Me, too."

"So?"

Elysa left the question hanging in the air. Sarah would rather tell her in person. Have her best friend's live, in-person sympathy. But she couldn't not say anything after the topic had come up. She took a deep breath. "He had company all right, but not the boys."

Elysa remained silent, most likely processing before filtering her words. She had made a real effort lately to not let loose everything she thought about Jakob. Maybe Sarah should have listened instead of being offended and hurt all those times.

"Oh, Sarah. I'm so sorry. What'd you do?"

"I screamed, hollered, and threw that measly excuse for a ring in his face."

Elysa gasped. "You didn't."

Sarah grinned. Her best friend and roommate wouldn't have thought it possible. "I did."

"And?"

"And nothing. He called me and texted a few times this morning, but I didn't answer. I've been purging my room all morning."

"Good."

The one word spoke volumes. Elysa had

supported her and helped her with all the wedding plans, but her dislike of Jakob had never been in doubt.

"Yeah, I guess."

"Come on, Sarah. Better now than a year from now."

"True." Her friend had such an annoying habit of being right even when she didn't want to hear the truth. "It still hurts, though."

"I know it does. Can I do anything?"

She brushed an escaped tear off her cheek and closed her eyes. "I don't know. I have a million phone calls to make. And I don't even know how to begin to notify people who were invited."

"It's a lot, I bet. Maybe I could come help one day next week. And of course, I'll cancel the fresh flower order from Nani's."

"What about tomorrow? You can help me make my list, hold my hand while I make some calls, figure out how to uninvite people to my non-wedding. Then we could catch a movie or something?"

"No can do. My cousin's baby shower followed by a business thing with my dad's employees will fill up my Saturday. You can join me Sunday. That way we could make a plan after lunch."

Church. Elysa was more than persistent about that one. "It's my day with Mom. You know, waffles, strawberries, catching up over a pot of coffee."

"Yeah. I guess that does put us into next week. What about Monday?"

The day that had been carved out for making headway on wedding errands. Now it stood wide

open. Well, except for canceling everything. "Sure. Whatcha thinkin'?"

"Lunch at Tuscany's, eleven thirty. We can head back to your house after."

Mmm. Garlic knots. "Sounds fantastic."

"Great. And Sarah?"

"Yeah?"

"You'll be fine. This won't beat you. I know it hurts horribly now, but God can take that pain and make something beautiful out of it."

She rolled her eyes. "God?"

"Yes. We'll talk about that more on Monday. At lunch."

Good thing she loved Elysa. She sighed. "If we must."

"We must. OK, see you then. And remember, I love you, and you'll get through this even if I have to drag you through it."

"Yeah, I know."

"‘Yeah, I know,’ she says. I'll cut you some slack because your heart just got broken. Next time, however, I expect more of a best-friend-like response."

Sarah smiled. "OK."

She hung up. After a long shower, she cleaned up the mess she'd made that morning and headed downstairs to scrounge for dinner. Her stomach protested the fact that the evening trip was the first she'd made to the kitchen that day.

Her mom had left a note on the fridge. "Decided to head to the beach with Junie after work. We're going to a sand sculpting comp. tomorrow. Will be home late."

See you Sunday morning.”

Well, Sarah certainly wouldn’t ruin her mom’s weekend with her friend by dropping her bomb on her. Bad news could wait.

Opening the refrigerator door, she discovered two containers of leftover Chinese food. She sniffed, approved, and grabbed a fork before heading back upstairs to her den. There was nothing to grab her attention on any of the hundred options she scrolled through on the TV while she ate saucy chicken and fried rice. She chose an amazing home transformation show and half watched it.

She needed to take more ibuprofen. Maybe then her brain could wrap around all the major life-changing revelations she’d had in the last twenty-four hours. An ex-fiancé and a new sister. None of it seemed real.

After she finished off the food in the containers, she disposed of them and browsed her viewing options again. Fatigue pulled at her mind and all of her muscles. She couldn’t remember feeling so exhausted. Not even after the one all-nighter she’d pulled her first year at college. She didn’t do well without a full night’s sleep and never let herself procrastinate that badly again.

Giving up, Sarah clicked off the television and got ready for bed. Fatigue took over soon after she climbed in. She could deal with all the turmoil her life had become another day.

~*~