

# PROLOGUE

I remember when I was born—six years ago. Mommy says it's impossible that I'd remember my birth. Of course, I didn't know the date. Babies don't know dates. But I remember faces and voices. Mommy was smiling and crying at the same time, and I didn't understand what she was saying. But the sound of her voice made me happy.

I was very hungry, and I'm still almost always hungry. It's hard to get enough to eat. She nursed me, but her milk wasn't enough. She brought me to the condo where we live now. I remember a man's face. He looked into my crib but didn't talk or pick me up. He stretched my arms and legs, examined my hands and toes, and turned me over. Then I never saw him again.

My crib became too small, and Mommy moved me to a regular bed. I understood what she was saying, and I replied in Russian. That made her cry, and she cried every time I did something new. I tried to please her. Why was she unhappy when I tried to be like her?

As soon as I learned to walk, Mommy stood me against my closet doorframe, made a mark, and wrote "five months." She said, "Your father will want to know." He never came to see us, so why would he want to know? After that, she marked my height every week. She shook her head and cried when she looked at the marks. She had to use a stepladder to make a mark for age six.

She bought me new clothes. I wore children's clothes when I began to walk. Now I wear women's plus sizes. People stare at us, especially at me. But I just smile. I think it's because we speak Russian. We walk in Gerald Park some afternoons. Kids want me to play basketball. But Mommy says no. "But I can easily reach the basket," I tell her. She still says no. I want to go out more, but she's afraid.

I taught myself to read English. I read the newspaper. She said I should watch TV to learn proper English. So I watched Sesame

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Street, then Nickelodeon. I looked for news about Russia.

Last week something awful happened. I screamed, “Mommy, there is blood in my pants.” She cried again, shaking her head that this shouldn’t happen to me now. I thought I was going to die. She stopped crying when she realized how scared I was. *What is happening to me?*