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# Toby Johnson

LIBBY wildly searched the yard for a place to hide before she burst into tears in front of everyone. Her heart almost stopped as Brenda Wilkens walked toward her. Brenda was dressed as if she were going to church instead of to an outdoor open house in Toby's honor.

Libby rubbed her hands down her jeans and looked frantically for a way to dodge Brenda. Where was Ben? He'd promised to keep Brenda from making trouble.

Libby slipped behind her Sunday school teacher, Connie Tol, who was asking Toby how he liked being adopted into the Johnson family. Libby blinked hard to keep the tears back as Toby answered excitedly. Of course he was glad! Who wouldn't be?

Goosy Poosy honked indignantly from the chicken pen where Kevin had locked him until after Toby's special party. Libby looked at Goosy Poosy and shivered. Maybe she should turn him loose to fly against Brenda and knock her down. She wouldn't look so smug then.

Rex barked, tugging at the chain to which Libby had tied him earlier. Vera had said that Rex couldn't run loose with all the guests around. He might jump up on someone in his excitement.

Libby knelt beside Rex and hugged him with her face pressed against his black-and-tan hair. "Oh, Rex! Toby's adopted. And I want to be! It's not fair! It's not!"

Rex whined and wriggled. He tried to lick Libby's face.

Was everyone looking at her and wondering why the Johnsons hadn't adopted her? Maybe they were glad Toby was adopted and she wasn't. Everyone had brought gifts for Toby. He'd stood by the table with Chuck and Vera beside him and opened everything. He hadn't sucked his thumb once. With his hair as red as Chuck's, he could pass for Chuck's real son. Vera had kissed him and acted as if he were her real son.

Libby touched her hair. It was brown and ugly and didn't look like anyone else's in the Johnson family. She wouldn't pass for one of the family at all. She was tall and skinny and ugly. Nobody would kiss her in front of all these people and say she was her real daughter. Susan, Kevin, and Ben were the real Johnson kids. Toby was an adopted Johnson, but she was still a foster girl, a welfare kid who really didn't belong anywhere.

Libby looked at Grandma and Grandpa Johnson as they sat beside the table of food. They'd driven a long way to be here on Toby's special day. Libby watched as Grandpa called Toby to him and slipped his arm around him.

Libby looked away and caught sight of Brenda still pushing her way toward her. Quickly Libby slipped around the doghouse and headed for the side of the house. She couldn't let Brenda catch her. Oh, where was Ben? He said he would help keep Brenda away.

Susan called to Libby and motioned for her to join her. Libby shook her head sharply. She couldn't talk with Susan and her friends right now. They would be sure to say something about Toby being in the family now and how wonderful it must be.

If only she could get to the side door and sneak inside where Brenda couldn't find her! Then she could hide in her room with Pinky, the big pink dog Susan had given her when she'd first moved in with the Johnsons, and with Teddy, the teddy bear that Grandma Feuder and Bob Dupont had given her for helping them. Pinky and Teddy wouldn't make fun of her and call her a welfare kid.

Just as Libby reached the door, someone grabbed her arm. She glared over her shoulder, expecting to see Brenda, then sighed in relief. "Hi, Joe." He was Brenda's brother but he was never mean. Joe was her friend.

"Come play ball with us, Elizabeth."

She liked for him to call her Elizabeth. For just a minute she felt better.

"We're going to play in back of the chicken house. Ben and some of the boys are setting up a baseball diamond now." Joe slapped his mitt against his leg. "Susan and some of the other girls are going to play."

"Brenda too?" asked Libby sharply.

Joe laughed, shaking his dark head. "You know she wouldn't play. She might get a little messy. But she told Ben she'd watch him."

And Libby knew she would. Brenda would get mad if another girl even looked at Ben.

Libby remembered all the mean things Brenda had done out of jealousy. Libby took a deep breath. "I don't want to play ball today, Joe."

"But you're the best batter. I wanted you on my team."

Libby smiled. She wasn't *that* good. Joe was just trying to make her feel better. "I guess I can play for a while."

Just then Dave Boomer called Joe and he ran off, yelling over his shoulder that he'd see Libby in the field. She watched him run, his long legs flying. Joe could run almost as fast as Ben.

Libby walked around the crowd of people. Goosy Poosy honked as she hurried past the chicken pen. "You're too noisy," said Libby, playfully shaking her finger at the big white goose. "Kevin will let you out later."

"I should let him out now."

Libby spun around and gasped as Brenda stopped beside the chicken pen gate. "Don't you dare open that! You'll be in big trouble if you do."

Brenda threw her head back and laughed, her long, dark hair flowing down her slender back. "I'd just tell everyone that you did it."

"No one would believe you," said Libby,

her heart racing. But someone might. Brenda could tell a lie and make it sound like the truth.

“Why aren’t you standing around Toby with all the happy people?” asked Brenda with a wicked twinkle in her dark eye. “Toby *Johnson* is a very happy boy today. Are you happy, welfare kid?”

Libby knotted her fists at her side. How she wanted to punch Brenda! But she wouldn’t do it. She’d promised Jesus that he could be in charge of her life. Jesus wanted her to love Brenda Wilkens. And that seemed impossible!

“Do you know why you aren’t the one being adopted instead of Toby?” Brenda shoved her face close to Libby’s. “Nobody wants you, that’s why. You’re Elizabeth Gail Dobbs, and that’s who you’re always going to be!”

Libby took a deep breath, forcing down the bitter taste in her mouth. She turned away from Brenda, but Brenda grabbed her arm and spun her around.

“You’re really jealous that Toby is adopted and you aren’t. And you’re never going to be! You’re a welfare kid and you’ll always be a welfare kid!”



Libby's fist shot out and caught Brenda on the nose. Blood spurted. Brenda screamed. Libby raced away, her ears ringing. Brenda was right! She was only a welfare kid. She'd always be a welfare kid.

Libby dropped to the ground behind a tall oak and sobbed against the cool grass. She was Elizabeth Gail Dobbs. She'd never be Elizabeth Gail Johnson! "Dobb the Slob." That's what Brenda often called her, and that's what she was!