

## BIRTHFATHER'S RIGHT?

*Jennifer L. Fahy*

"Yeah, this is Jamal Pinckney, Keisha's ex. I got your messages and I don't like this adoption thing." He sounded upset. "I don't believe in adoption, you know. African Americans just don't do adoption. We take care of our own. I wasn't ever gonna have a child of mine be adopted."

"I've been trying to get a hold of you for several months," social worker Gretchen Fuller interrupted. Gretchen's heart sank as she tried to absorb what Jamal was saying.

"Well," Jamal quipped, "I've been busy."

"I can understand that you have a busy life," Gretchen tried to stay calm. "However, time has been passing and Keisha had to look at what was the best option for her and this pregnancy without hearing from you. She considered her options and decided on adoption. Do you have another option for this child?"

"Well," Jamal replied, "I can't take care of it. I'm not even sure it's my child."

Moments later, Jamal ended the conversation almost as abruptly as he began it. As she hung up the phone, Gretchen began to review her options. As the social work supervisor at Trinity Family Services, she knew there weren't many.

### **Trinity Family Services**

Trinity Family Services was a not-for-profit, pro-life, Christian adoption and

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family services agency with offices in several states. In Ohio, Trinity Family Services had offices in Toledo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, and Columbus. Programs included a domestic infant adoption program, international adoption, special needs adoption, crisis pregnancy counseling services, and an abstinence education program. Through these programs, Trinity Family Services worked toward their mission of showing God's love by providing services to improve the lives of children and families. Overall, in the state of Ohio, Trinity Family Services completed about 30 domestic adoptions and 75 international adoptions per year.

### **Infant Domestic Adoption Program**

The infant domestic adoption program at Trinity Family Services in Ohio rarely had to advertise its services. On average, there were about 25 families statewide waiting to adopt an infant at any time. All adoptive children were less than 2 years of age. Trinity Family Services required all prospective adoptive families to be active Christian couples who had been married a minimum of 2 years. These requirements for prospective adoptive families fulfilled Trinity's Christian values of providing stable, married, two-parent homes for children. It usually took approximately 18 months to adopt an infant.

Prospective adoptive families had to complete a series of steps in order to be approved for an adoption. First, prospective adoptive parents completed a written application. Next, one of Trinity's adoption social workers conducted a family assessment which included checking personal and employer references, a background check, family physicals, family and individual interviews, and a home visit. Finally, prospective adoptive parents had to become licensed as foster parents because the adoptive child would live in their home under agency supervision for 6 months before the adoption was finalized. The total cost of the adoption process for families was approximately \$13,000. Many of the adoptive families had chosen adoption after years of struggling with infertility. The adoption process for families was often emotional and stressful.

Trinity's infant domestic adoption program funding came largely from fees for services paid by adoptive families subsidized with gifts received from individuals, churches, corporations, and foundations. The total cost of each adoption was about \$15,000-16,000.

## Gretchen Fuller

Gretchen Fuller, a 25-year-old Caucasian from the Midwest, was in her first social work position at Trinity Family Services in Ohio. Gretchen's Christian worldview and interest in helping children and families drew her to the social work profession. She had always had a particular interest in adoption. Growing up, she had several adopted cousins, and from a young age knew about adoption.

Gretchen attended Rochester College, a small Christian liberal arts school in Michigan, where she majored in sociology. During college, she completed an internship in the pediatric unit of a hospital and really enjoyed working with children and families. Immediately after graduation, Gretchen entered the University of Michigan's master's program in social work. Gretchen focused on administration and management but balanced her coursework with clinical classes on family systems. During her master's program, Gretchen completed clinical internships at a domestic violence agency and a community mental health agency, and an administrative placement in a BSW program at a Christian college. After graduation, Gretchen was excited to be hired as a supervisor for Trinity Family Services' Columbus and Cincinnati offices. Gretchen was particularly excited about working in a Christian adoption agency because it allowed her to serve God by helping the "needy, widow, and the orphan" of modern day society.

Gretchen's new position entailed managing eleven staff: five social workers and two support staff in the Cincinnati office and four social workers in the Columbus office. Gretchen's new position required that she re-locate to Cincinnati and travel frequently between the Cincinnati and Columbus sites. Beyond supervising direct service staff, Gretchen was also in charge of hiring and training new workers, doing budgeting and bill-payment, handling crises any time of the day or night, and taking overflow cases as needed.

### Monday, December 27, 2004

As Gretchen walked into her office on a cold December morning she noticed her phone light blinking. She set down her things and pulled her chair up to her desk. She sighed, thinking, *that Christmas holiday was way too short...I'm just not ready for another 60-hour work week. I've only been in this job for 7 months and already I'm burnt out. I wish I could find someone to hire for our open birthparent counselor position to take the pressure off of me.* She picked up the phone and dialed into her voice mail.

"Gretchen, Cindy Novak from Cincinnati Women's Reformatory. It's Thursday, December 23, 4:30 pm. Give me a call."

After listening to her other messages, Gretchen hung up and pulled out Cindy's card from her contact file. *I will have to take this case myself, she thought, until I can get a new staff person hired.*

Gretchen had first met Cindy, a social worker at Cincinnati Women's Reformatory, at a workshop last July. Since then she had worked with her on a number of referrals. She picked up the phone and dialed Cindy's direct line.

"Cindy Novak," the voice on the other end said immediately.

"Cindy, this is Gretchen from Trinity Family Services. Just got your message."

"Hey, Gretchen, thanks for calling me back. We just got a new inmate on the segregation unit. She's pregnant and says she is interested in adoption. Can we set up a visit?" Cindy asked.

"Sure," Gretchen said, opening her planner. "I can do tomorrow or Wednesday."

"I can probably get you cleared for Wednesday. How does 9 a.m. work?" Cindy asked.

"Fine, see you then," Gretchen replied.

### **Wednesday, December 29, 2004**

As Gretchen drove across town to the prison for her appointment, she thought about her first experience seeing a prospective birthmother at the prison. *It's a challenge to empower birthparents to make the best decision for themselves in such a restricted environment. They can't make a phone call when they want, schedule their own visits, or even have private conversations. How can I empower this client? Especially when she is in the maximum security segregation unit?*

After parking, Gretchen proceeded straight to the guardhouse. "Hi, I'm Gretchen Fuller. Cindy Novak scheduled an appointment for me to see Keisha Brown."

"Ok, let me check the schedule," the guard said. "I will need to see your driver's license."

"Here you go," said Gretchen. The guard walked back to the office and returned a minute later.

"Alright, here is your visitor's badge; you must have it visible at all times. Why don't you take a moment to lock up any valuables you have in the locker to your right? Here is the key for number 6. It would be best if you removed all your jewelry," the guard directed. "When you've finished come back to the desk and I will

take you through the metal detectors.”

When Gretchen returned to the desk, the guard directed, “Okay, please step through the metal detector.” Gretchen walked through the detector.

“Alright, if you’ll wait outside, a guard will be around in a few minutes to pick you up and take you to the maximum security area for your visit.”

After a few minutes, a truck pulled up to the guardhouse.

“Hey, Gretchen, long time no see,” Joe Mankowski, a long-time guard at the prison, greeted her warmly. “Hop in.”

“Hi, Joe! How have you been?” Gretchen asked as they drove off. “Did you have a good Christmas?”

“Yeah, we went to the in-laws’ house,” Joe replied as he drove to the prison complex. “The kids had a great time. How ‘bout you?”

“It was good, nice to relax for a few days, too bad it didn’t last longer,” Gretchen said as the truck pulled to a stop.

“OK, here we are. Just follow me,” Joe directed as they entered a large building. Joe approached a door and unlocked it. “Just wait here, and I’ll bring the inmate into the next room in a few minutes.”

Gretchen scanned the room. One wall was transparent glass. On the other side of the glass was a room that was a mirror image of the room she was in. Each room had four partitioned booths with a table, chair, and a callbox. She sat in the first booth closest to the door. Gretchen leafed through the information she had brought. After about 20 minutes of waiting, she heard a door open and looked up.

The first person through the door was a young, thin, African-American woman dressed in an oversized orange jumpsuit that almost concealed the small bump on her belly. Her hands were shackled in front of her and her feet were shackled as well. Joe followed her into the room, directed her to sit down, and locked her hand shackles to the table.

The young woman looked up and smiled self-consciously. She leaned her head to her shoulder, “Sorry about my hair. I haven’t been able to fix it since I got here.”

“I don’t imagine they let you have your hair supplies here, huh?” Gretchen said, hoping to break the ice.

“No, they sure don’t,” Keisha replied with another smile.

“Well, I’m Gretchen Fuller.”

“Keisha Brown. I’m glad they let you come over.”

“Yeah, Cindy arranged for me to come,” Gretchen explained. “She told me that

you're interested in adoption."

"That's right," Keisha agreed.

"Well, I would be happy to answer any questions you have about the adoption process. How many months pregnant are you?"

"About six," Keisha answered.

"And I suppose that you'll still be in here when you are due?" Gretchen asked tentatively.

"Yeah, I have a year 'til I'm even up for parole," Keisha explained. "They moved me from Cleveland to the segregation unit here because I walked off from my mandated work release program last summer. So now, I am considered an escapee. Me, an escapee? Yeah, right."

"So, you got pregnant this past summer?" Gretchen asked.

"I was living with my family in Cleveland and I started dating Jamal. Towards the end of the summer, I hadn't gotten my period and wondered if I was pregnant. Sure enough, I was. I told Jamal and he got mad and said he didn't want anything to do with that. Then, the cops found out where I had been living and came over and picked me up," Keisha said.

"I'm not trying to be offensive, but I need to know, are you sure that Jamal is the father?" Gretchen asked.

"Yep," Keisha replied, "he is absolutely the father."

"Do you have any family members," Gretchen explored, "who could help you with the baby?"

"Not really," Keisha said, "only my grandmother and she's already taking care of my son, Devontae. She can't take care of another baby. I don't really have any other options."

*I don't like to hear that she doesn't have any options, Gretchen thought. Adoption is a big choice and it would be better if she felt it was the best choice, not the only option.*

"Is this really what you want to do," Gretchen delved deeper, "or is it just your last option?"

"Well, it is my last option," Keisha shrugged, "but it would also be better for the child. I can't keep this baby 'cause I'm in prison. Jamal hasn't answered any of my letters since I've been here. My grandmother can't handle another child. I've already screwed up by being away from my son and I don't want that for this child."

"It must be really hard to be separated from your son," Gretchen said.

"Yeah, and I don't want this child to have what my son has had. His father

doesn't talk to him or take any responsibility. I was raised by my grandmother and didn't really see my mother or father. I just don't want that for another one of my kids."

"You said that Jamal hasn't been talking to you?" Gretchen probed.

"No, Jamal is such a jerk! He hasn't made any attempt to talk to me even though I've been trying to get a hold of him for weeks. He is not taking any responsibility for this."

"Just so you know," Gretchen explained, "in order to complete an adoption, I will need to make a good faith effort to get Jamal's consent to terminate his parental rights."

"Good luck with that," Keisha said sarcastically.

"Well," Gretchen said, "let me tell you a little about my agency and the adoption process. As you know, I work for Trinity Family Services' infant domestic adoption program. We are a not-for-profit, Christian agency and we help birthparents to find good homes for their babies. All of our adoptive families are Christian couples who are married and have been educated about adoption. If you choose adoption, you would fill out some paperwork, choose an adoptive family, and after the baby is born, go to court and explain to a judge that you want to voluntarily terminate your parental rights. This is a very difficult decision and I want you to know that you can change your mind at any time until you terminate your parental rights in court. If you are still interested, I will leave you some information and you can think about it."

"Yeah, I'm still interested," Keisha replied. "Leave me that information and I will think it over."

"This is a very important decision," Gretchen said, "so think about this carefully. If you have any more questions, just tell Cindy and she'll get a hold of me."

"Ok, thanks," Keisha said. "Well, nice to meet ya."

"It was nice to meet you too," Gretchen said.

*I wonder if this case will go any further, Gretchen thought as Joe escorted her out of the prison. A lot of times the first meeting is purely informational and we never hear from the woman again. Nothing is ever certain in an adoption – so many women change their minds. But it's sure encouraging that a woman in such difficult circumstances would choose to carry her baby to term.*

**Monday, January 3, 2005**

The following Monday, just as Gretchen returned to her desk after leading the weekly staff meeting, her phone rang.

Cindy Novak was on the line. "Keisha Brown is still interested in adoption and she wants to take the next steps."

"Well, the next step for Keisha will be to fill out a pile of paperwork. What would be the best way to do that?" Gretchen asked.

"Keisha can't have a pen in her cell," Cindy explained, "so the best thing would be to have her come up to the social work department where she could work at a desk."

"Okay," Gretchen said. "It's best to have someone available to help with the paperwork as she fills it out. If I am available via phone, could you sit with her in the office while she does the paperwork?"

"Yes, that would be fine. When could you do this?" Cindy asked.

"Well, is there any way you could make time today?" Gretchen asked.

"I could make that work," Cindy said. "Why don't you fax the information over and I will call you back in an hour when I can get Keisha up to the office."

"Okay," Gretchen replied, "I'll wait for your call."

As planned, Keisha filled out the necessary paperwork that afternoon.

**Friday, January 21, 2005**

A few weeks later, Gretchen returned to the prison to talk with Keisha about her preferences for an adoptive family.

"How are you doing?" Gretchen questioned.

"Okay," Keisha said. "Oh, I found out that I'm having a girl."

"Really?" Gretchen replied. "That's great. By the way, I wanted to let you know that I have sent several letters and left many phone messages for Jamal and he has not contacted me. So as far as we know, we can keep moving forward with this adoption."

"He isn't answering my letters either," Keisha fumed. "He thinks because I'm in jail that he doesn't have to talk to me."

"Well, I'm here today to talk about the things that you want in an adoptive family. What kinds of things are important to you?" Gretchen asked.

"It'd be nice if they were African American," Keisha replied. "But if they're



white, then they need to expose the baby to African American culture.”

“Good, what else?” Gretchen asked.

“Well, the mom and dad have to be good people. It would be nice if they had other kids for the baby to play with. And now that I know I am having a girl, they have to know how to do hair,” Keisha answered. Gretchen and Keisha continued to talk about Keisha’s hopes over the next half hour.

As Gretchen left the meeting, she tried to think of a family that would be a good match. *I’ll have to check if we have any African American families looking to adopt right now. I know there are several White families available. I wonder if any are open to an African American child,* she thought.

### **Friday, February 4, 2005**

Gretchen answered her phone and heard Amy McDonnell, an adoption social worker in Trinity’s Toledo office on the other end of the line.

“Hi, Gretchen! Guess what? Good news. I know you’ve been looking for an adoptive family for Keisha for two weeks now. Well, I think I found a family she would like. I was at adoption worker training and ran into Beth, an adoption worker from St. Mary’s Social Services. She has a family licensed through their minority adoption program and they are looking for a baby to adopt.”

“Really? What do you know about them?” Gretchen asked.

“Well, the parents are both Caucasian but they have African American relatives. They live in Toledo and they previously adopted a biracial boy from us. They are both active in the adoption community and have taken classes on cross-racial adoption. We could do an interagency contract with St. Mary’s.”

“Can you send me their file?” Gretchen asked.

“Absolutely. I hope it works out,” Amy replied.

“Me, too,” Gretchen answered. After Gretchen received the information on the adoptive family, she looked it over. Thinking this family would be a good match, she mailed the profile to Keisha and crossed her fingers.

### **Tuesday, February 8, 2005**

A few days later, Cindy called to say that Keisha wanted to set up an appointment.

Gretchen was excited and nervous as she drove to the prison for the meeting. *I*

*wonder how she feels about the adoptive family.*

After exchanging greetings, Keisha got straight to the point. "The family looks great, when can I meet them?"

"Well," Gretchen replied, "I can give them a call when I get back to the office and set up an appointment."

"Good. I want to get all this stuff settled," Keisha said.

When Gretchen got back to the office, she immediately called the adoptive family. Evelyn Anderson answered the phone, "Hello?"

"Hi, my name is Gretchen Fuller. I am a birthparent counselor at Trinity Family Services. I believe that Amy McDonnell, an adoption social worker here at Trinity spoke with you and your caseworker from St. Mary's about a birthmother we are working with who is interested in adoption. I showed her your profile and she's interested in meeting you both. How do you feel about coming to the Cincinnati Women's Reformatory to meet her?"

"Sure, it takes about ninety minutes to drive there. When are you thinking?" Evelyn asked.

"I have spoken with the social worker at the prison and she said that Tuesday, February 22, at 2 p.m. would be a good meeting time. Would that work for you and your husband?" Gretchen asked.

"Let me check my calendar," Evelyn replied. A moment later, she said, "Yes that would be fine."

### **Tuesday, February 22, 2005**

The Andersons met Gretchen at the Cincinnati office to drive together to the prison.

"How are you feeling about our meeting today?" Gretchen asked as they left for the prison.

"We're really excited, Evelyn said. "I hope she likes us."

"I hope so too," Gretchen responded.

"Do you know of any complications with this case, Gretchen?" Ken asked. "When we adopted our first child we had a number of issues with the birthfather agreeing to the adoption. It was very stressful and the adoption almost didn't go through."

"Well, so far," Gretchen explained, "after repeated attempts, we haven't heard from the father. The birthmother, Keisha, is certain that she wants to do this adop-

tion. Today, we will be meeting with her over a videoconference system. She's in the maximum security division and normally wouldn't be allowed any visitors, but the prison has allowed these special meeting arrangements due to Keisha's circumstances."

"When is Keisha due?" Evelyn asked.

"In just one week. Well, here we are. We'll have to go through security checks once we're inside," Gretchen added.

After going through all the checks and screening, the Andersons accompanied Gretchen to the visitor meeting area. A guard showed them to a small partitioned area in the room with a TV, camera, and phone box. They pulled three chairs over and soon realized that the camera could only see one person at a time. To talk to Keisha, they had to take turns with the phone and the chair placed directly in front of the camera. Fortunately, the Andersons seemed to find musical chairs more humorous than frustrating. Keisha asked them all sorts of questions, including if they knew how to do African American girls' hair. Evelyn assured her that she knew it was very important for little girls' hair to be perfect.

Later that day, Cindy called Gretchen to report, "Keisha said the family is good. Go ahead and set it up."

*Great, Gretchen thought, everything is falling into place. Keisha likes the Andersons and the baby will have a good Christian home to grow up in.* Gretchen called the court office and was able to squeeze onto the court schedule a termination of parental rights hearing for March 25th.

#### **Thursday, March 3, 2005**

"This is Gretchen Fuller," Gretchen answered as she answered the phone.

"Yeah, this is Jamal Pinkney, Keisha's ex. I got your messages and I don't like this adoption thing. Is this really what Keisha wants? I mean, doesn't she have someone who can take care of this baby?" Jamal sounded upset. "I don't believe in adoption, you know. African Americans just don't do adoption. We take care of our own. I wasn't ever gonna have a child of mine be adopted."

"I've been trying to get a hold of you for several months," Gretchen interrupted. Her heart sank as she tried to absorb what Jamal was saying.

"Well," Jamal quipped, "I've been busy."

"I can understand that you have a busy life," Gretchen tried to stay calm. "However, time has been passing and Keisha had to look at what was the best

option for her and this pregnancy without hearing from you. She considered her options and decided on adoption. Do you have another option for this child?"

"Well," Jamal replied, "I can't take care of it. I'm not even sure it's my child."

"Keisha named you as the only possible birthfather." Gretchen answered.

"Whatever, that doesn't make it my child. But," Jamal continued, "I still don't know about this adoption thing. African Americans don't just give their children away."

"I think that she's just looking for the best possible plan for this child's future," Gretchen replied. "She loves this child very much and this is a difficult decision for her."

"I need to think about it. I gotta go," Jamal said as he hung up the phone.

### Monday, March 7, 2005

On Monday morning, Gretchen checked her messages after being out of town for the weekend. The baby had been born in the hospital on Saturday afternoon and Keisha had already been transported back to prison Sunday morning. They needed someone to fill out all the discharge papers and pick up the child.

Gretchen got straight to work. She faxed back and forth the necessary paperwork to the jail and hospital. By mid-day, she had a foster parent from Trinity's receiving home program pick up the baby. It was Trinity's policy to place the baby in a temporary foster receiving home until the court date to terminate parental rights. Then, the baby would be transferred to the pre-adoptive home.

After settling matters, she called Keisha to check up on her. "Hi Keisha, how are you feeling?"

"I'm feeling okay. I'm pretty tired. I'm having a really bad day today. I finally got a letter back from that jerk, Jamal," Keisha complained angrily. "He waits all this time to write me and now he thinks he gets to tell me what to do!"

"What did the letter say?" Gretchen asked.

"He wrote that what I'm doing is wrong and he doesn't think he is the father. He said even if he was the father, he wouldn't agree to this adoption and that I need to find someone to take care of this child. Of course," Keisha fumed, "he's not offering any help. I don't have any relatives to take care of this baby, but he wouldn't know that because he never talked to me. Just sends me a letter out of nowhere!"

"On top of everything," Keisha stated, "I called my grandmother today and told her I had a baby."

"You hadn't told her you were pregnant?" Gretchen asked incredulously.

"Actually, no. She was really upset. She was against the adoption, too. She said she definitely couldn't take care of another child. She said that maybe I should let the child go into the foster care system in Cleveland and then someday I could get her back. But I'm not sure that is a good idea. I don't want this child to go through moving from house to house and not knowing any family. I don't know that I would ever get the baby back for sure anyways, and this way I know that she will have a good, stable family that I have chosen."

"Well, as you know, it is still not too late to make another decision. Until you terminate your parental rights at court, you can make any decision you feel is best. You should also be aware that the state has the right to terminate your parental rights involuntarily once the child is in the foster care system. What would you like me to do at this point?" Gretchen asked. "Or do you need more time to think about it?"

"I've already thought about it enough," Keisha said. "I still want to go forward with the adoption. It's the best option I have. I'll talk to my grandmother and Jamal again and explain to them why I am doing this."

#### **Tuesday, March 8, 2005 – Friday, March 18, 2005**

For the next several weeks, Gretchen was inundated with calls. Keisha's grandmother, Josephine, called her on several occasions, always saying the same thing. "I don't believe in adoption. This is wrong. I can't take this child but I am going to find a relative who can." However, after repeated calls to relatives, Josephine couldn't find anyone to care for the baby and did not want to take care of the baby herself.

Gretchen also received a phone call nearly every other day from Jamal. At first, he kept expressing that he could not be the father. He wanted a DNA test. So Gretchen set up a test for him. A week before the test, his attitude changed.

"I just want to find out if I'm the father," he said. "I think she's a liar."

"If you are the father," Gretchen asked, "then what are you going to do?"

"Even if I am the father," Jamal replied, "I can't take care of this child. So I guess we're going to have to do this adoption thing."

A week later, the test results confirmed Jamal's paternity. He and Gretchen set up a time to sign paperwork terminating his parental rights.

**Monday, March 21, 2005**

Gretchen drove across the state to the Trinity Family Services' Cleveland office to meet Jamal. When he came in, she immediately recognized that the baby had his facial features. Gretchen began explaining the paperwork to him, careful to make sure he understood everything he was signing. He signed the notice of the court hearing on March 25th and his right to appear. He signed the most important document--the consent to terminate parental rights--and the notice that he had received a copy of Ohio adoption laws. Gretchen got to the last form, which was by far the longest and most complex. It was Trinity's legal document for birthfathers, *Your Alternatives and Rights*. The form explained all the birthfather's rights and informed him of possible alternatives to giving up parental rights.

Suddenly, Jamal sat back and folded his arms, "I'm not ready to sign that."

"Okay," Gretchen replied, "that's fine. However, I want you to know that this form is not a necessary form, only a supplement. You don't have to sign it and your rights can still be terminated."

"I just can't sign that now," Jamal seemed upset. He shifted several times in his seat and began looking around the room.

After a few more minutes of conversation, Gretchen gave Jamal copies of all the forms and he left.

On her drive home, Gretchen kept thinking, *What happened? He was filling out the paperwork and then all of a sudden he stopped. He didn't take back the papers he had already signed. Maybe the language of the last document made him change his mind? Then why didn't he ask for the other papers to be torn up?*

**Tuesday, March 22, 2005**

The next day Jamal called Gretchen. He asked, "Do I still need to sign that last form?"

Again, Gretchen explained that it was not needed; she could present the documents he had already signed. That would be sufficient for terminating his parental rights.

"I just wish I could talk to her on the phone," Jamal said. "You know, I can't talk to her in segregation, only send her letters. I'd feel better about all this if I could talk to her."

"Let me see if I can arrange a phone call," Gretchen said. "I'll get back to you as soon as I know."

Gretchen called Cindy at the prison to see if there was any way that Keisha could make a phone call to Jamal. Cindy's supervisor approved it so they set up a call for a couple days later.

**Thursday, March 24, 2005**

It was now only one day before the scheduled court date. Gretchen traveled to the prison to be there when Keisha made the call. After Gretchen finished prepping Keisha for court, Keisha dialed Jamal. *Hopefully, this call will resolve this*, Gretchen thought.

But the call did not go well. Jamal screamed at Keisha, telling her that it was her fault she was in prison and her fault that this baby had nowhere to go. Keisha was both crying and angry. She explained why she thought adoption was the best option to Jamal. However, at the end of the thirty-minute phone call there was still no resolution.

After she had hung up the phone, Keisha was very angry, "He's just messing with me. He wants to get back at me. He doesn't care about what is best for the baby."

That afternoon, when Gretchen got back to her office, Jamal called her again. His thoughts and sentences were scattered. He asked, "What's going to happen now?"

"Well," Gretchen said, "Keisha still wants to do this adoption. She's ready to terminate her parental rights at court tomorrow. As far as I can tell, you understand the termination of parental rights paperwork we filled out and that you have a right to appear at court tomorrow. You haven't said that you have a different plan for the baby, so the case is still proceeding."

"I'm the father of this baby," Jamal interrupted, "I don't think I can do this adoption. I don't know. I'm just not sure." He rambled on for several minutes sounding conflicted and confused until he abruptly stated, "I gotta go. I'll call you later."

After Jamal had hung up, Gretchen thought about her options. *What should I do? The baby has to go somewhere. Keisha clearly wants the child to be adopted, and Jamal has no alternative to offer. The court hearing is set for tomorrow.*

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