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Chapter One

"I've written a letter to your great-uncle," Mrs. Owens explained to twelve-year-old Charity and her older sister Hope. "I'll send it with the next teamster headed for Austin, but it will take a while to get there. I've asked him to come to Galveston to pick you up. He's your only living relative. At least Orphans' Inn that's what your mama told me before she died. Your parents left a will, and your great-uncle Bullock will be Orphans' Inn in charge of their money until you reach adulthood. If the sale of your father's shipping business goes through, you could end up with quite a good sum."

"Have you ever met Great-Uncle Bullock?" Charity asked.

"Once," Mrs. Owens replied. "But it was years ago, before he settled in Austin. I understand that he's doing quite well. He owns a large hotel there."

"What's he like?" Charity asked.

Mrs. Owens hesitated a bit too long. "I just remember him as big...and kind of loud. I don't think he has a family of his own—at least he didn't when I met him. But that was a long time ago—before you were born. He'll be pleased to learn that he has two great-nieces. It must be lonely living alone."

Charity shuddered. Mrs. Owens, the next-door neighbor who had taken in all four Bullock children Orphans' Inn when Mama and Papa died of yellow fever, never said anything bad about people. She always saw the good in them. It worried her that Mrs. Owens Orphans' Inn couldn't think of anything good to say about Great-Uncle Bullock.