

Lost & Found

By Taylor Cheyenne

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Chapter 1

This is the story about 7 orphans, the people around them, and their adventures inside and out of an orphanage just outside of a little town. To go forward, we must first go back to see how everything started, and meet our characters.

First we'll start with Ms. Hencherlan, the orphanage owner. All she wanted was to care for the children who were thrown into the orphanage system, she adored children. When she turned thirty-three, she purchased a building just outside of a little country town. She added bunk beds, tables, many chairs, lamps, a few television sets, board games, bought food and the necessities, like shampoo, soap, just things like those. She also fixed up the backyard the backyard was so large; she even had a pool installed. When she thought it looked fun and welcoming, she put up her sign, and put up flyers to show that she was in business. She didn't expect new orphans to come flowing in right away, so she used that time to make sure everything was perfect, she went back to the store and bought some clothes of all sizes, and some dolls, and toy trucks. Within a few months, she had about nine orphans in her care. They were all under the age of thirteen, all but one had dark or medium brown hair, it was more of a golden brown color, her name was Nicole. After a while she invited her husband to come look at the orphanage, to see all her progress. He came, but he didn't really seem impressed with all she had done for these children. He thought her idea was childish and that it was unrealistic. They fought over it for several hours, each having a different perspective on the subject. Then he just got up and left, and that was it, they were over. It broke her heart that it happened this way. After a few days of sorrow, she got up one morning and just woke up feeling like she didn't really care anymore. She became sour, and she was very much strict. She marked the pool only for her, it was off limits from then on. The orphans had to take care of themselves, until a day or two before corporates came to check up on the orphanage. Those were the days when they could go in the pool, and actually just have some fun. Unfortunately, it didn't last but for a few hours each month. And this was the start of Ms. Hencherlan's sour life. She didn't want to see the orphans much, so she usually kept to herself in her room, or stayed out all day around town, or sometimes out of town. She began drinking occasionally, and she met a man named Saul Ligorini. The two hit it off, they were great friends, he was seen at the orphanage a lot. They both had an unattractive personality, so they were like a power couple. They made the life at the orphanage just that much worse. By this time, there had been twelve more orphans brought into the orphanage, so they all took care of each other like family.

For the orphans, we'll start with Carla, when she was about one year old, her father had left her mother, and she couldn't keep up with her payments, so she had no choice but to give Carla up

for adoption. Through her years in the orphanage she became bitter, but she was determined to not let anyone hurt her like that again. She became close to Ms. Hencherlan, but that was the only person, and she became kind of a teacher's pet. She always played by the rules, and she dressed as if she was in a private school of some sort. She was always thinking about what she would say before she would say it; she wanted to have perfect speech. She took care of herself, she brushed her teeth twice a day, brushed her hair about seventy-five times on each side for silky smooth hair, and she kept herself clean and poised and dignified. She would occasionally help Ms. Hencherlan with meals and getting the other orphans to bed, and waking them in the morning too. Ms. Hencherlan would also hold school in the orphanage so that the children were getting an education. Carla was at the top of the class, she always read books, no matter what the genre. At one point, Carla was brought home, she wasn't adopted yet, a couple wanted to see how she behaved. She cleaned their whole house, made them breakfast, lunch, and dinner, did what she was told when she was told, and didn't misbehave in anyway. The thing was, the couple just couldn't believe it, this little nine year old was perfect, but she was just too perfect, they wanted a little more of a challenge. They took her back, and adopted one of the other girls at the orphanage. From that day on, Carla became absolutely horrid, she was moody, she always corrected others, but she stayed the same when she was around Ms. Hencherlan.

Now there's Clair, she's had such a troubled life. She was brought into the orphanage system when she was about three months old, and she's 14 now. She always asks herself if there's something wrong with her, why was she put there, doesn't anyone want her? One of her several families just couldn't make ends meet, so they had to bring her back to her first orphanage, which was somewhere in northern Nebraska. The next family that she was brought into seemed like "The family," then the husband had left, and one night as she slept next to her new mother, her mother just decided she couldn't do it anymore, and she overdosed. Clair woke up, and she tried to wake her up, but she wouldn't, she called 911, but she was already gone, there was nothing they could do. Then she turned 12, and she was the most excited she had ever been, she was going to meet her birth parents! She put on her best dress, styled her hair in a careful braid around her head, and had her bags packed and was ready to go. First she was brought to a rehab center, and she was confused, surely her parents just worked there. But when she got inside, she realized this wasn't true, she was brought to an open area, it had some circular tables, Clair assumed this was the cafeteria. She was escorted over to one of the tables, and a few minutes later, her mother came out. Clair was shocked, but in a way, she was a little proud. She noticed right away how beautiful her mother was, at the moment she was a little rugged, but you could see the beauty underneath. She had shoulder length, dark blonde hair, and medium green eyes, just like her. She saw so much resemblance between the two of them, they both had prominent cheek bones, green eyes, both of them had that confident stride about them. There was so much she wanted to say to her, but before did, she simply said, "Why?" Her mother's eyes slightly widened, she straightened her stance, slowly walked over to the table, and sat down.

"What's your name even," demanded Clair?

"Deiana."

She stared at Clair, then she smiled, "You remind me so much of me when I was your age... and you know, I never wanted this to happen you know."

“Do you even remember my age?” Clairra retorted. “If you didn’t want this for me, then why did you just drop me off like I was yesterday’s trash!?”

Clairra’s eyes were tearing up, she looked away to bring herself back together.

Her mother’s eyes wandered down to the table, then she looked back up and lightly laid her hand on Clairra’s shoulder, Clairra shrugged it off blatantly. She finally looked back to her mother, and she tried to speak, but she felt as if she just couldn’t anymore.

“I have so many questions for you... but I’m not sure if I should even ask you now.”

“Ask away Clairra. I’ll answer each one, honestly.”

“Where’s dad?”

“He was killed by a gang over in New York on a business trip. Just in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

Clairra’s face dropped, a tear fell down her face. She rubbed it away and composed herself, “When, when was he killed?”

“About two weeks after you were born,” her mother paused, “he adored you so much, you were his little princess.” They both smiled slightly.

“Why are you here? I mean obviously it’s a rehab center, but what lead you to be brought into this place?”

Her mother took a deep breath, and closed her eyes as she prepared herself to tell her story.

“It all started when your father died. I’m definitely not saying it was his fault, but that’s just around the time when this started. After he died, I was alone to take care of you, I didn’t know what to do. I turned to drugs to take away my pain and problems. I might have been messed up, but I knew that this wasn’t the environment that I wanted you in, so I brought you to the orphanage. The people there seemed great, I knew that you would be alright,” her eyes were tearing up, she put her head in her hands and continued, “But I never thought about anything too well then. I went on with my drugs, then one day, I was just sitting in my apartment, looking at the ceiling, I thought I had no reason to go on. So I prepared myself, I wrote a note, and right as I was about to jump, one of my friends grabbed me and pulled me back in. She saw how messed up I was, so she brought me to the hospital first to make sure I didn’t have any medical problems, besides the drugs of course, and they brought me to this place.” They looked around the room.

“So, you didn’t just drop me into the orphanage because I was too much work,” Questioned Clairra?

“No! Not at all. I only have six months left in here, and then I’m going to get a house, and I’ll come back and get you. We can be happy.”

Clairra was ecstatic, she couldn’t wait to leave the orphanage. Then she thought, she had friends back in the orphanage, she didn’t want to leave them.

“What about my friends?”

“Oh, well I’m sure they’ll be fine. They’ll find a home soon.”

“No! I’m not going to just leave them there! I’m like a big sister to them, they look up to me, they love me, and I love them too.” Clairra was getting scared.

“Well... how many of your little “friends” do you have?”

“Six.”

“Six? Well honey, I’m sorry but not even I can adopt seven children, especially all at once. And do you know how much it would cost to take care of you all?”

Deiana was getting a little tired of this, she wanted her daughter, and she wasn’t going to adopt six more.

“Well, I’m sorry,” Clairia had been waiting her whole life to live with her mother, but she couldn’t if she didn’t have her other “family”, “But it’s either all seven of us, or none at all.”

Her mother looked shocked. Her eyes widened, she stiffened, then her voice turned slightly stern.

“Clairia Ann, you will come home whether you want to or not.”

“Mother, you aren’t technically my mother anymore, you aren’t my legal guardian, you gave me up remember? You have no power over me right now.”

Clairia got up, “Goodbye Deiana.”

She walked away, and waited outside for her ride back to the orphanage.

When you look at Patrick in the sunlight, his eye color is very prominent against his hair; his hair shines like black onyx, his eyes as light as a baby blue apatite gemstone. He’s pretty tall, he’s fourteen, his birthday is in May, and he loves to play soccer and basketball, rain or shine. Sometimes he’s pretty quiet, and during those times, he enjoys reading a book, usually adventure or a comic book.

Patrick has been in the orphanage for about three years now, and he kind of enjoys it, but he misses his best friend. His mother would get abusive when she was under the influence of alcohol. So usually, when Patrick saw that she was drunk, he would run out the back door with his backpack, and ride his bike to his best friend’s house, halfway across town. His best friend was George Flenk, and George’s family understood the troubles Patrick was going through, so they let him stay there when he needed. George and Patrick would go out in the backyard and play with their Nerf guns, or they would ride their bikes around the neighborhood. When they felt like going out and about, they would walk down a few blocks to the Aluminiums Arcade.

They would play Pac-Man, Donkey Kong, Galaga, and Super Mario World. The two of them were fascinated with the old arcade games, and they wished to be video game creators when they grew up. They would be best friends forever, they would never think of abandoning the other.

Then one day, Patrick and George were playing on their Playstation2, and they heard a knock on the door, Patrick went to get it. Two policemen were at the house, it was a sunny day, and the light was shining bright in his eyes, they asked if there were any adults around. George called for his parents, and when they arrived, he walked back to the stairs, and as soon as he was out of sight, he darted down the stairs. Patrick looked alarmed when he saw George, he asked what was wrong.

“The cops, they’re at my door. They’re probably looking for you, I’m not sure but, I don’t want to take any chances,” gasped George as he tried to catch his breath.

Patrick’s eyes widened, then he frantically looked around the room to find some sort of hiding place, he could see none, and it was all just too obvious. Then George glanced at the small ground level window right behind Patrick, and he ran over to open it, Patrick realized what he was doing, and he started helping George go out the window.

“What are you doing,” said George as he jumped down?

"I'm helping you out, and then I'll come out after you," Whispered Patrick.

"No, no, no. Just you're going out, you'll go around to the deck, and hide up in the old Oak tree in the backyard."

Patrick looked astounded, but then they heard the others coming down, George shoved Patrick out the window, and Patrick ran as fast as he could to the deck. He then quietly climbed up the stairs, then stood on top of the grill, and jumped to the nearest branch, and then he climbed up till he was hidden. He was up a good twenty feet, but he wasn't scared of heights, he never has been scared of them. Then he heard them out on the deck, and he stood as still as he could. Then he felt the branch slightly give way, then a big crack, and he fell halfway down the tree before he finally grabbed onto a branch. And that was it, the police stood there looking down at him, and then they walked down the steps and told him to come the rest of the way down. Patrick did so, and then one of the men held him by the arm. Patrick shrugged his hand off, and he ran over to George and whispered something in his ear, and George ran inside. He came back out with a large duffel bag, which he had filled with some food, clothing, a few blankets, and a tracfone programmed with their house phone. Patrick and the Flenk family shared one last hug, and then the men were getting impatient.

"We don't have all day you know, we have to get him to a safe environment, with some legal guardians. The only one we know of is his mother..."

"No! I'm not ever going back to my mother! She was horrible, I don't ever want to see her or hear of her again! Don't take me back there!" Exclaimed Patrick.

"Whoa there little man, just calm down. Okay, so why don't you want to go back," Asked one of the officers?

"She's horrible, she would go out and use the food stamps, and then she'd come back every night drunk, and she would get mad at me and beat me unconscious. So then I started leaving right when she got home, I would always have a bag of clothes and just all of my stuff over at George's house here. I would ride my bike over here, I didn't care that it was halfway across town, and it doesn't seem that my mother misses me all that much."

"Well, she's the one who called this in; she said she had a runaway minor." Said the other officer."

"Well quite frankly, I could care less who called it in, but I am not ever going back there. I hate her," Snapped Patrick.

"Well then where are you supposed to go?"

Patrick thought for a little bit, and then it hit him,

"Here! I could stay here! The only have to adopt me, right!?" Patrick was excited, and then his best friend would literally be family.

"Well I'm afraid it's a little more complicated than that. I mean, you could, but we have to go through a legal process first. First we have to bring your mother in front of the court for beating you, and then you'll stay in an orphanage for the time being. Then after we settle all that, you'll be put into the orphanage permanently, but all this will take a year or two. So if you still want to have him by then, you can, unless he's adopted before you get there," Explained the officers.

Patrick's face dropped as low as the ground. He looked down at his shoes, and closed his eyes so that they wouldn't see him cry. He looked back up at his "Family," it was pretty much the only

family he had ever known. They looked back with compassionate eyes, and they hugged for one last time. Then the officers walked away with Patrick, and the Frenks looked on and waved as they drove off.

After the case was settled, Patrick was in the orphanage, and he used the tracfone to call the family. A man answered, but he didn't recognize the voice, he asked for the Frenks, and he said that no one lived there by that name, but they had bought the house from those people. Patrick thanked the man for his time and hung up. He memorized Mrs. Frenk's cell phone number, so he dialed that up. It rang and rang, then she finally picked up, it was great to hear a familiar voice.

"Mrs. Frenk! It's me, Patrick!"

"Oh, Patrick, hello."

"I called the house phone but the man there said that you guys had moved or something. Where in town are you now?"

"Well, we're not exactly in town."

"Oh, are you guys outside the city, country side?"

"No Patrick. We moved to Colorado. My husband got a great job offer over here, and we wanted to wait for you, but we only had a few months till we had to leave or else the job went to someone else."

"But... we were supposed to be a family, and have fun together," his voice lowered as he started to tear up.

"Oh Patrick, please don't cry. We really wanted to come get you, but this was only a few months after you were taken there. George begged us to stay, but we had a deadline to leave," Mrs. Flenk sounded positively sincere, so Patrick thought he could understand. So he lied.

"Okay, I guess it's fine, it's actually not a huge deal, I kind of like it here."

She sounded unsure,

"Okay, but if you ever want to talk to any of us, just call, and in the future, we might be able to come for you, I don't know exactly when, I hope soon though."

"Yeah, sure, that's cool too. Okay so I guess that's it then... well I'm gonna go, it's time for lunch," He slowly trailed off.

"Okay hun, stay safe, take care of yourself. Have a good day Patrick."

And that was the last time Patrick talked to any of the Frenks, and this was the beginning of Patrick's journey into the orphanage.

This next child is an eight year old who is quite the mischievous little one. With light brown hair, golden brown eyes, and the power of being adorable on his side, he can never get caught. Meet Andre, he has only just been put into Ms. Hencherlan's orphanage. His parents had died in a car crash when they were coming home from a business trip, and no one could seem to find any family close-by. So he was dropped off at Ms. Hencherlan's orphanage, there's not too much to the story of his journey into the orphanage system. He went through a few different orphanages, but he finally landed with Ms. Hencherlan. He hates Ms. Hencherlan, he tries to make her job just that much harder, but it gets blamed on Carla, or anyone in her "prissy" group. When Ms. Hencherlan is around, he always acts like a little angel, and he always compliments her. But when she's gone, he wreaks havoc on Carla, and Ms. Hencherlan, but he's good enough to where he has never gotten caught in

the act, or even after. Ms. Hencherlan will occasionally bring Andre to the store when she goes shopping, and she'll get him some treats, but has him swear not to tell any of the others, so he has to hide it. He hides it inside his bear, it had a battery case a while back, because it could sing or talk, then he took it out. In that empty space, is where all of his treats are stored, and you could never tell the difference unless you picked it up. He's like a "Momma's Boy," except, it's with Ms. Hencherlan, and he despises her, he just acts as if he loves her when she's around. It definitely helps to improve life in the orphanage though, if Ms. Hencherlan likes you, then you're fine. There's not much, but this was Andre's short adventure into the orphanage.

Nicole was put in the orphanage at the same time as Patrick, so it's only been about nine months or so. Nicole just had her seventh birthday in April, Ms. Hencherlan loves Nicole just as much as she does Andre, so she got her some cheesecake for her birthday. Nicole shared it with everyone there, even Ms. Hencherlan. She loves to wear skirts and dresses, and when she wears this one shade of purple, it makes her green eyes pop with her medium brown hair, and it has a light red tint to it. She loved to braid people's hair, she would do a French braid, or sometimes she would fishtail it. She loved to sing, dance, and make jokes around the orphanage; she would do little performances for the other orphans. Her goal was to make everyone's life in the orphanage just that much better. She knew that it was a bit hard to be here, but she always looks for the bright side of things. When she sees a few smiles because of her acts, it makes her feel great; she feels so helpful. She is wise beyond her years, so she is a big role model for many of the orphans, even the elder ones. Nicole loves to read and learn, she'll read any type of book whenever she has free time. She'll occasionally read some sort of medical books and magazines, or non-medical magazines. She would read all about different up comings in the medical technology and cures. The only reason she reads them is from her love for helping people, she's always wanted to be a medical professional as an adult. She may be stubborn at times, and she doesn't really get into fights, unless it's with Carla. Nicole hates Carla, Carla will always correct her, and it can tick Nicole off. So sometimes when she's especially not in the mood for Carla, she'll go kick her and start naming off all of the imperfections of her. Nicole knows many things, so she uses her wide vocabulary and her wide variety of knowledge to her advantage. She raises her voice slightly, but she never completely yells; she just won't do that.

Landon has been in Ms. Hencherlan's orphanage for just about half a year and he gets in trouble at least every other day. Landon is always getting in trouble, he does everything with Andre, but he's the one who gets caught. He doesn't care when he gets in trouble, he does it on purpose. He has secret passages to get food and get outside, and to hang out with all of the others. Everyone helps the other, no one is left out, there are groups, but in the end they all are like a large family. He has brown hair and brown eyes, and he's pretty tan from being outside and playing soccer in the summer. He is one crazy kid; he usually is just bouncing off the walls and running all over the place. Once you get to know him though, he is still kind of crazy, but he's calmer.

He talks about the most random things, usually having nothing at all to do with the conversation at the time. He'll talk about hamsters, hippos, giraffes, rhinos, elephants, blue Kool-Aid, yogurt pretzels, and bugs. You just never know what the next topic is that he'll bring up. His birthday is just coming up in a month, in May, and he's pretty excited, he's been counting down the days since

the beginning of the year. He loves tacos; he always talks about tacos, eggrolls, and taquitos. You could never forget his face; he has one that no one could duplicate, same with his personality.

Now last but not least are two little ones; fraternal twins Vincent and Vivian. These two are always side by side, the best of friends. They just won't let anyone separate them. When they were younger, they had to sleep in the same crib or else one would cry and wake up the other, making them both start crying.

Vivian has a sort of pride that you just can't break, she keeps her head up. She is very young, but being in the orphanage her whole life has made her strong. This girl has an amazing vocabulary for age, and she always learns more from Nicole, but she still loves to just take naps and color a little outside the lines sometimes. She wants to learn to play the piano, and maybe even the guitar someday.

Now Vincent is a little different, he's more self-conscious and careful. He knows just as much as Vivian, but he uses more of his time practicing drawing and writing. He's gotten very good at art, it's second nature to him. He draws and paints pictures for the other orphans too, they can tell him what they want, or they ask for a surprise. He doesn't have the best social skills, but he's gotten oh so much better about that too. He used to isolate himself from the others, but Nicole would still stay by his side. She didn't want him to be alone.

But when they were even littler, Vincent was always the happy one, Vivian was a bit of a whiner. He was also a bit of a chunky monkey, and Vivian wasn't at all. He would be happy and laughing, and Vivian would be crying. But when Vincent cried, he really cried, he would scream sometimes along with that too. It would make you want to cry along with him. But when these two were happy, everything was great, and most everyone was happy too.

CHAPTER 2

It was a bright morning; the birds singing their songs, a slight breeze against the trees and the grass. Everyone was up and outside, with the exception of Ms. Hencherlan and Carla of course. All of the orphans were out having fun, some playing tag and others playing with the basketballs. Vincent and Vivian were over at the swings, with Andre and Nicole pushing them forward each time they swung back. Clairra was playing basketball, one on one, with Patrick. They were all having so much fun, then one of the orphans who had gone inside for a drink came running back out, trying to talk, but they were so out of breath. So Clairra stepped in,

"Anna, what happened?" She finally had caught her breath by then, so she started to explain.

"So I was over in the kitchen, ya know, and then the doorbell rang, so I went to answer it. I looked out the little window by the door, and I saw Saul. So I ran back in the kitchen to make sure it wasn't messy, cause you know how Ms. Hencherlan and Saul would just scream at us in turn, all day long. And then I sprinted out as he kept pressing the doorbell, when finally Ms. Hencherlan screamed, 'I'm coming, I'm coming just calm down!' And so yeah, the 'Disgusting Duo' is back together again."

Her eyes were a little wide, and her cheeks a little red, and everyone knew this was bad news. Saul; or Mr. Ligorini as the orphans are to address him, is Ms. Hencherlan's fiancé. He is a crooked man; he's always out gambling and buying things he doesn't ever use. He hates the orphans; he just hates children in general. If it wasn't against the law, none of them doubt that he wouldn't lock every one of them away in a terrible place. So Ms. Hencherlan and Saul are the perfect match, almost too perfect.

The orphans had tried before to help her find another boyfriend after Saul had left her one time, and life was great, until he came back one day and asked for her forgiveness, and asked her to marry him. They haven't gotten around to actually getting married, but they sure act like they are. They don't really care about any of the children. No one knows why Ms. Hencherlan has even kept the orphanage.

Claira knew this man very well, she's been with Ms. Hencherlan her whole life, and she remembers when she had been a kind lady, before all of this. Saul had taken Claira by her feet and would dangle her out the window, he really wanted to drop her, but he knew that he couldn't do that to someone so young. Other times he would hit her if she did something wrong, she has a scar from one of those times. It was this one time when he told her to go and pick up all the toys outside, and at first she did, but then she started playing and she forgot about everything. Then he came out yelling at her and he had a curling iron in his hand, he came towards her progressively getting faster. She tried to run, then she got cornered and he brunt her on the back of her arm. So she's had a bad history with him, and she hates it when he comes back around to visit. It's always a surprise though, he doesn't come in a pattern, he doesn't call, he doesn't even send a message; he just comes up to the door at random. Then everyone is on edge, watching everything they do, because when Saul and Ms. Hencherlan are together, all of the orphans' lives get that much harder.

All of the children stayed quiet, and they ran all over frantically trying to pick everything up before he came out back. They put the toys in the box, threw away the trash, and then made sure that each of them looked presentable. They may not look like royalty, but they had to look good for Mr. Ligorini, or there's the chance that he would get mad at them. He has a very short temper, anything that the orphans did would set him off, Ms. Hencherlan was one of the very few people that he would have a longer temper with. They finally all found a book, some shared with another, and they sat down in a circle reading aloud one of the pages right as he came out.

"And as the river flowed down to the sea, the birds crying overhead, Jonah walked along the path; starting his new life in California."

He stared right at them, scanning over their faces; then he walked around them and observed them. He got a disgusted look on his face, then he looked back at Ms. Hencherlan.

"Have these little weasels been doing what they're supposed to? Cause if they haven't, you know that I have my ways of making them."

Ms. Hencherlan sighed, she didn't really love a lot of the orphans, but not even she would ever subject them to Saul's punishments,

"Oh they've all been doing good, not too much trouble."

He still looked a bit dissatisfied, so as he was walking, he whacked Claira on the back of her head. She winced, but she said nothing, Patrick was right beside her, and he looked like he wanted to

hit Saul back: but Clairra put her hand on top of his and looked at him, she shook her head quick. She didn't want him in trouble, she really liked him, and she wouldn't let him do that for her. He looked down, he understood; he still wanted to hit Saul back though.

Clairra could see that, so she took his arm and pulled him up and they ran into the house. Saul looked back at them, but he disregarded it; he didn't really care about it. He started getting everyone in a line, he had the orphans in alphabetical order, and he left two spots open; one spot for Clairra, and one spot for Patrick. Then he had them march, around the yard, under the slide, over the bridge; he just had them walk all over, while he was shouting out different commands.

Inside, Clairra was comforting Patrick; she didn't like what Saul did either, but there wasn't much she or Patrick could do about it. He was shaking his head,

"He doesn't have the right to do that. It's abuse."

Clairra looked up and around the room, then she looked at him, he turned his head and looked back at her. Clairra thought to herself,

'His eyes are so beautiful, I could get lost in them... and he's so sweet.'

Then she heard her name.

"Clairra. Clairra!"

She saw him looking over her, she had fainted. Luckily she was only sitting against a wall, so she just slid over. He looked a little scared, he genuinely cared. She sat up, and again, she looked at him.

"Hey, I have a serious question Patrick."

He looked unsure, but he smiled and said, "Okay."

"Do you...." She looked back and forth as if she was making sure no one else was around, "Do you like Starbursts?"

His smile grew even bigger, and he shook his head.

"Why yes I do."

They both laughed. Clairra enjoyed times like these; just them, hanging out. He got up, and then he held out his hand for her and helped her up too. She couldn't help it, so she just flat out went and hugged him. And he hugged back, he was taller than her, so it was a little awkward, but they both enjoyed it. They heard everyone coming back in, so they walked out to meet them all. All the orphans were red and panting. He sure made them run. Landon wasn't red or panting though, he was just barely pink, and was breathing a little hard, but that wasn't even a workout for him, it was more like play. They all ate supper, and then they went upstairs to the large room where they all slept. All the girls were on one side of the room, and all of the guys on the other. The room was only separated by several large curtains, you couldn't see through it, and it was occasionally a trouble to get through them if you didn't go through the middle.

Patrick's girlfriend, Beth, was pretty cool, she was thirteen, she was nice to most everyone, but Clairra wasn't sure if Beth really liked her all that much. Anyways, Beth waited until she thought everyone was asleep, then she sneaked over to the guys' side, and woke up Patrick with a slight shake of his bed. He woke up, he saw her then he opened his eyes a little more,

"What are you doing?"

"I came over here cause I wanted to talk with you silly."

He shook his head quickly, and got up, and he led her to the curtain, to the girls' side.

"We can talk in the morning, I'm really tired right now though. Mokay?"

She looked offended for a second, then she wiped that into a smile,

"Oh, okay honey. I get it. Talk to you in the morning then."

They both walked back to their beds, and laid down, and fell asleep.

In the morning, it was raining and cold, so it was an inside day. They all got out some board games, and some got on a few computers. Landon doesn't care, so he runs out and plays in the rain anyways. Nicole got together a group of other girls, and had them sketch out ideas on other skits they could perform. Andre watched some TV with Vincent and Vivian on either side of him. Patrick, Clair, and some other orphans came and joined Andre on the couch, and then Beth came by. She scanned over them and gave Clair a quick glare, then she smiled,

"Is there room for me?"

Everyone looked down the couch to see if there was room, there was none, and they looked the other way, same there too. Then one of the orphans exclaimed,

"You could sit on the ground in front of the couch!"

Beth didn't look happy, so she went over to that orphan and hugged him. While she was hugging him, she was secretly whispering in his ear,

"You know what little boy, I think that you need to keep your mouth shut before it gets you hurt. Now kindly get off the couch and do something else so there's room for me to sit by my boyfriend."

He looked surprised, but he got up and said that he thought he heard his name in the other room, and he ran off. Beth looked satisfied with her work, then she told everyone to move down a spot so she could sit over by Patrick.

And there Patrick was, he was between Clair and Beth, it seemed awkward, and everyone was silent. Then Andre decided to break the silence,

"What does everyone want to watch?"

Everyone started yelling out different names of the shows they preferred, but they all settled on Comedy Central. While most of the kids were watching the show, Clair decided to go get a snack for everyone, so she got up and walked to the kitchen, Patrick asked where she was going, and he got up to go help her.

In the kitchen they talked and laughed while they were making sandwiches and cutting up some fruit. They got some chips and soda, water and juice, and they played some music, and then Beth walked in. They stopped laughing, and then went back to work, they were done and Clair started to walk out with a tray, then Beth stepped in her path.

"You're not going anywhere until I set up some rules here."

"I'm sorry but you have no authority over me, and I'm older than you," Clair side stepped, Beth did the same, while Patrick was nervously watching.

"Clair, Patrick is my boyfriend, emphasis on my. You have no right to take him from me."

"I know he's your boyfriend, emphasis on I know. And I'm not trying to take him from you, I never have, never will."

"Why? Oh my god, you're such a little liar, I know you've been flirting with him constantly!"

By this time, many of the orphans had gathered behind the breakfast bar, watching everything unfold. Clairra stepped back and walked over to them and set the tray down for them.

“You can put the other tray over here too Patrick.”

She walked back and faced Beth,

“Okay let me set some things straight. Why? Because I care about Patrick too much to do that to him, because I honestly, genuinely, really like him. Like, like-like him. That sounds so second grade, like-like, ha. You’re his girlfriend, I understand that, I’m not oblivious. Each time I’ve told someone that I liked him, they’re like ‘Oh, well isn’t dating Beth?’ And I’m always having to tell them that I know that, I’m not stupid. You can yell at me and tell me all these rules for me all year, but I honestly don’t care. It’s not your choice to make, and I have the higher rank here, I’m older than you. It’s Patrick choice on what path he chooses, not either of ours. You need to stop being so jealous and controlling of him, I’m sure that he doesn’t enjoy that.”

Clairra looked over at Patrick, looked back at Beth, then walked right up to Patrick, and hugged him. It wasn’t a huge deal, but Beth was already mad.

“What was that!?! You don’t just go up to someone and hug them like that!”

“Calm down Beth, it was just a hug. See, you’re always on edge, do you seriously not trust him so much as to where you blow your top?”

Beth let out a large huff and Clairra walked back over to her.

“Patrick is my best friend okay? There’s nothing you can do to change that.”

That last sentence just threw Beth over, she lunged at Clairra and they both landed on the ground. Patrick tried to run over to tear them apart from each other, but Nicole held him back. She told him not to worry. Clairra had gotten the wind knocked out of her, but Clairra had kept her knee up and Beth had landed on it, knocking the wind out of her too. Beth rolled off beside Clairra and they were both catching their breath again. Then Clairra tried to get up and Beth grabbed her hair, pulling her back down, then she pulled her back up. Beth threw a few punches, but didn’t do much damage, gave Clairra a small cut above her eye, but that’s it. Clairra twisted behind Beth and grabbed her arm, Beth released Clairra’s hair, then they were both breathing heavily.

“You need to calm down and get ahold of yourself Beth. This isn’t good for you, or anyone around you.”

Beth spit, “You’re just saying that cause you know you’re gonna lose the fight.”

Clairra sighed and looked around at everyone. She tilted Beth’s head in the same direction.

“Look at all them, this is your family right now. If you keep acting like this you’re going to lose this family too.”

Beth settled down and Clairra released her and stepped back. They looked at each other for the longest time, it may have only been seconds, but it seemed like minutes. Then Beth looked over at Patrick, and sighed.

“I’m sorry, to both of you... to all of you.” She looked around her, “I guess I should work on my temper. Patrick, I’m especially sorry to you. You know I..”

“No, just stop there Beth. I’m sorry too, but this just isn’t going to work out anymore. I never realized how out of control you were until now. And I can’t be with someone like that. Clairra’s my best friend, you can’t just go up and try to fight her like that. For starters, you’ll never beat her, and it

just isn't right. Did you notice that she didn't throw one punch at you? All she did was get you into a hold, and it's practically harmless. Meanwhile you threw multiple punches, missing most except for about two of them, and even those barely made any damage. You can't just go around doing things like this. I can't do this anymore, not with you."

Then he walked out, and Clairia looked back at Beth, then went to find him. She looked all over, in the rooms, in the bathroom, then she was passing the back door, and she saw him sitting on the steps. She opened the door and sat by him, she smiled slightly.

"That was really sweet of you to defend me back there,"

He looked at her and smiled and listened to what she was saying, "You know, I've really liked you for a while now..."

"Yeah, so I hear. Me too by the way."

"Hmm?"

"Oh well, I've liked you for a while too. I just wasn't sure on if you felt the same."

He looked down, and Clairia took her hand and laid it on the side of his face and turned it towards her.

"It's impolite not to look at a girl when she spills her feelings to you."

They both laughed, and smiled at each other, he put his arm over her shoulder and they sat and watched the rain pour down.

Chapter 3

The next morning everyone was rudely awakened by the "Disgusting Duo." They were screaming and shaking beds, bullhorns, alarm clocks all sounded off in a domino effect.

"Sorry about the rude awakening children, but we have an announcement to make!" Ms. Hencherlan's voice rung out like an angel, "We are finally making it final. We're getting married!"

The children all cheered, they may not like either of them all that much, but for those who had known Ms. Hencherlan before she changed, they were happy for her. Then Saul spoke up.

"Okay now shut your traps! This means I will be moving into this lovely establishment..."

"So you'll be an orphan too," interrupted one of the orphans!?

"No, I'll be like Ms. Hencherlan, another adult to watch you little roaches."

Ms. Hencherlan felt a tug on her skirt, she looked down to see Vivian, with Vincent right behind her. They hugged her legs, because that was the only part of her they could reach. Her face turned bright, and a smile formed. She bent down and hugged the two of them back. Everyone was watching with anticipation, to see what she'd do next. Most of them thought she would have yelled at them, they knew she had a soft spot, but they didn't know exactly what that was.

"Come on Saul, let's go, we have to prepare."

He looked back at the orphans with a sour look one last time, then followed after her.

Everyone waited a few minutes, then they started chattering.

“What was that?”

“So she’s not soulless!”

“Well I knew that, she just doesn’t let her guard down like that a lot.”

“SHUSHHHHHHHH!”

Nicole looked tired, for the first time ever. She had just the slightest darkness under her eyes, and she had bloodshot eyes for a few minutes.

“I am really tired okay. I didn’t get a lot of sleep last night because I had nightmares. Nightmares! I never have nightmares!”

Claira walked over and picked Nicole up, she carried her over to her bed and told her to go back to sleep, and that there’s nothing to worry about. Then she led everyone over to the guys’ side of the room. Surprisingly, the curtain kept a lot of the sound out of the girls’ side. And later Nicole came back over looking fresh and revived.

Throughout the day, not a word was heard from Ms. Hencherlan or Mr. Ligorini. The children were starting to wonder what was going on. So one of them went up to her door and listened.

“I hear some music. Ew, it’s classical, definitely not my rock,” they whispered, “And I hear them talking a little.... they’re talking about the wedding. We’re good.”

Everyone felt a little relieved after receiving this information, they were worried that something had happened. Even if it was Ms. Hencherlan and Saul, they still kind of cared about them.

Through the day, everyone was outside running around and playing with their friends. It’s like one big family, no one could make them hate each other, there may be fights, but they wouldn’t let that break them apart. The only time that had happened was the day when Ms. Hencherlan changed into what she is now.

It was a quiet day, the sun was barely hiding behind the clouds, the birds chirping, the breeze calling out to the flowers. Ms. Hencherlan had always been a sweet lady, she never yelled or did anything to the children, there were no punishments. Then one day she started screaming at them for the simplest things, like not washing a glass before putting it away, then she made everyone do 5 laps around the house. Everyone was so confused, Claira went and asked her if anything was wrong. She just growled out that she didn’t want to hear anything from any of them for the rest of the day, and if she did, they would do more laps.

They thought that it wouldn’t last, maybe she was just in a really bad mood that day, they assumed that it would be normal the next day. They couldn’t have been more wrong, in fact she was even worse than before. She had them work all day, cleaning, picking up, and rearranging things. By the end of the day, everyone was exhausted, and they knew this wasn’t just a one day thing, but they didn’t know how long it would last. After about a week of her sour behavior, other began taking on the same qualities. They were all tired, of her, and of others. One day everyone just exploded and started yelling at each other. Then it got physical, they started pushing and tripping and hitting each other. It went all the way into a full out brawl, Claira was the only one not doing anything, she was watching Vincent and Vivian, so she just went upstairs. She stayed there for about half an hour, then it sounded quiet downstairs. She crept down the stairs and saw all of them, they were passed out all over the floor, some with small cuts, and some with bruises. She felt some sort of sorrow for all of

them, she knew it was hard, but they had to stay together. She swore that she would never let that happen again, not while she could help it.

She thought back to that memory and shuddered. She shook her head and smoothed out her jeans, then she fixed her hair by putting it up in a ponytail, and she had Nicole fishtail it for her. And this was the day when the new girl came in. She had a pretty face, her hair cut short, with bangs, it was dark brown with a couple lighter brown streaks, not super noticeable though. She had a nose ring, and she was really weird when they all saw her. She was all like,

“OMG hey guuuuyyys! Hahahaha that’s so way past cool!”

She kept saying on how she liked trolling, no one understood what that was. She loved turtles, in fact she had a clip on one that she attached to one of the belt loops on her jeans. She was really colorful too, on the first day she wore regular jeans, and bright rainbow shirt, and green converse. They discovered her name was Alexandria, she was fourteen, like Patrick and Clair. After that day, she was pretty popular in the orphanage for a while, then it died down, but she was accepted into the family nonetheless.

And one night she told a story that her friend Noel, who liked to be known by “Leaping Rhino,” had told her.

“I was fighting a giant spaghetti monster, with lightning coming out of my hands, and I had, some awesome rouge armor. I defeated said monster and fed the planet Zuu'ron. Then the monsters son tried to seek revenge on me, and came at me. I got eaten by it, but it has no idea that I'm a teen, so I'm always hungry, so I eat him. But victory is short lived, and the monsters son's, friends, cousin hears of this and comes at me again, but I still have lightning hands, and I lightning him. Then Cthulhu took him down to his sea home in the bottom of the ocean, where he then put it in his fridge and waits until the old ones wake him up for real, because he's still supposed to be asleep. Then there was a parade, and I was a hero. Then a statue of me fighting the three monsters was made in honor of me, made of solid tin.”

Then Landon decided to be sarcastic and said,

“They all live happy in candy land, until the world bursts into flames. But they are the only ones who die. Then you start a whole different story about their afterlife as Egyptian pharaohs.”

Throughout the night they all told some more stories, and they laughed, they had fun, and then they all fell asleep.

Chapter 4

After a few weeks, Saul was still in the orphanage. No one thought that he had any intention of leaving anytime soon. He was still being his horrible self, and his acerbic attitude started to wear off on Ms. Hencherlan.

One day the orphans had had enough, they all got together to meet up in their room. Everyone was there, except for Carla's group, they had specifically excluded them for security reasons. None of them wanted her group to go and tattle-tale on their plans, so they had two of the orphans out by the door keeping watch. Then they started discussing the situation, with all of its pros and cons, and different scenarios on what they could possibly do.

Claira, Patrick, Nicole, Andre, Landon, Vincent, and Vivian all were in their own group composing a plan all of their own. They figured out their plan, and enlisted the help of the other orphans. At first the other orphans weren't too sure about the plan, but in the end they agreed.

From then on, they all were preparing. Shifting objects around in their room, tying sheets together and making sure they were secure, packing things up. When they were all done with their assigned tasks, it had been a little over a week, it was a Saturday, and everything was ready.

Earlier that morning, right around dawn, a group of orphans had retrieved a sack of food from the kitchen. They were being as quiet as mice, for fear of awakening Saul and Ms. Hencherlan. Then they sneaked back up the stairs, avoiding all of the creaky spots, and gave the sack of food to Claira, who was in the process of getting Vincent and Vivian up. Patrick helped to wake up Landon, Nicole, and Andre, then he secured the rope of sheets to a bed that had been pushed, just under the window, to the wall. The seven got their jackets and coats on, and helped each other get their bags over their shoulders. They quietly said their goodbyes to the other orphans, who most had known for their whole life, who had helped them immensely in the past week to prepare for this moment.

One by one, they shimmied down their homemade sheet rope. Patrick went first, so then if one of them fell, he could catch them, and Claira was last, helping the youngest children down before her. They finally all had reached the ground, and signaled for the orphans to drop down their supplies of food, clothing, and a few blankets.

As they were walking away, they looked back and waved one last time, then continued on into the woods behind the orphanage. After walking for a while, the twins had started to tire of the walking and they began to slow down. Claira recognized this, so she picked Vivian up and put her on her shoulders, and told Patrick to do the same with Vincent. They walked until what seemed about noon, making a few stops along the way to rest, and discovered a small lake. Claira put Vivian down and lifted Vincent off of Patrick's shoulders and set him down beside Vivian.

They dropped all of their off by a large tree and ran up to the lake and looked down into it. It was as crystal clear, they could see all the way to the bottom. They saw fish swimming along the shallow waters, and some ducks in the deeper water. The fish were gliding through the water, and the ducks were drifting in a line as they were following their mother near the reeds. It was so beautiful and so calm, no one was talking. They just wanted to enjoy the serenity of the moment.

Then Claira interrupted the silence,

“I think I’m going to go, to go get some sort of shelter figured out... I’ll look around the area. Nicole, I want you to look for food, bring Andre with you to help you. Patrick, can you stay here and watch Landon and the twins?”

Patrick thought for a second, he looked as if he would rather do something else, be more active, but he decided that he should stay.

“Sure, yeah I can.”

Claira looked at him appreciatively and started off.

As she walked she glanced around her, looking at all of the life around the trees. She walked for about 20 minutes, and she wasn’t paying attention to where she was walking, and she slipped down a small incline. She rolled down the hill and arrived at a meadow; she got up and checked herself for any too serious injuries, and brushed herself off. She looked back up towards the meadow and saw a fawn frolicking along, with its mother behind it. She felt joyous, and she ran out into the meadow and lay on the soft ground for a while. She thought of all the wonderful things that had happened, and that were bound to happen someday. She thought of her family at the orphanage, and wondered how they were doing. Then she remembered what she was supposed to be doing, so she quickly got up, causing her to become slightly dizzy. She sat back down and waited until the dizziness went away, then got up a little slower.

She walked back and as she was walking, she discovered a small cabin; it looked abandoned so she checked it out. It had no lights on, but it looked like a nice shelter for the time being. Claira ran back to the lake and got everyone together; she told them about the cabin, and they picked up their stuff and left the lake to go to the cabin. They walked in and set their bags down on the wood floor, and then Claira started a fire in the fireplace to warm themselves up. Patrick was looking around the cabin, it had 3 small bedrooms, a bathroom, and the living room and kitchen were in the same room. It was getting late, so they all chose a room and went to bed.

Chapter 5

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They awoke to the smell of bacon, eggs and pancakes, each orphan believed it was one of them cooking the delightful smelling foods. Claira thought it was Patrick, Patrick thought it was Claira, Nicole, Andre, Landon, and the twins thought it was Claira and Patrick. They all came out to a startling surprise; none of them were making the breakfast, it was an old lady. She looked over her shoulder and spoke.

"You know it's not good for someone to be breaking and entering," she turned completely around, "Especially at your ages."

She had a slight smile on her face, and continued,

"So what brought you children here? Are you runaways?"

Claira stepped up,

“We’re orphans, and we ran away from the orphanage, so yeah, I guess we are runaways of some sort.”

The old woman walked over to the fireplace to throw a few logs on the fire, and then walked over to a rocking chair several feet away.

“Excuse my manners, my name is Heather... I’ve lived here for a long time; there was just too much hustle and bustle in the city, so I decided to come out here. It isn’t too far from town to where it’s a hassle to go to, but it isn’t too close to where you hear the city sounds,” She looked out the window then remembered, “Oh! You children can help yourselves; there are eggs, pancakes, and bacon. There’s also some milk and fresh orange juice or lemonade.”

They jumped up and quickly walked over to the table. They each grabbed a plate and piled it with a little bit of each of the steaming foods, and walked back over to sit on the floor near the fireplace.

Heather watched in amusement, she hadn’t seen her own children in years. They never wrote to her, never called her, never came to visit, she felt alone for the longest time, until this group came around. She felt happiness swell up inside of her, a tear slid down her fragile face as she smiled ever so brightly.

“Tomorrow we’ll be going to town to visit my youngest daughter, Robin. I saw her yesterday and she invited me for lunch, but I’m sure you’ll be able to come.”

They all looked quite happy, and the rest of the day was filled with baking and cooking; preparing for the next day. The end of the day came near, and they were exhausted, they stocked the fire one last time for the night. Heather sat in her rocking chair as the children walked to their rooms to sleep till morning.

Chapter 6

They woke early the next morning, excited to meet Heather’s daughter. They wondered what she looked like, how she acted, where she’d been in the world, they had so many questions.

Heather still had some of her children’s old clothes, so she let the orphans wear them. She had made every one of the dresses and shirts; they were perfectly stitched with some embroidery on the

dresses. She helped style the girls' hair, tucked in the boys' shirts, and had one more look over them. Then got them all into the car and drove off.

They arrived at her daughter, Robin's house, and it was magnificent. It was large, painted a light cream color, and there was another large building set to the side. They piled out of the car and ran up to the door and saw a hammock to the right of the door, which was quite tempting, but they stayed in place. Heather called out to them for help with the food, they ran back and each grabbed a platter to bring in. Then a new voice was heard,

"Do you guys need some help there?"

They quickly turned their heads and saw her. She was tall and beautiful, medium brown hair pulled back in an elegant hair tie, brown eyes, and she had much more of a tan than the rest of them. Smiling, she walked over and picked up the rest of the load. Leading the group back into the house, she told them about how happy she was that they were there.

"I haven't gotten to see mom in a few years, I was traveling all over the world. I never had the time so I just didn't have the need for technology at the time. I got back and there was all of this new technology that came into play. Now I hear that one company is set on adding holographs to their gadgets!"

She held the door open as the children walked into the house in awe. They saw a large transparent sliding door leading out to another building with an indoor pool, then another door in that building leading outside. Robin told them to follow her; she led them to the kitchen and told them to set the platters on the counter.

It was a large room, the counter in the middle of the room like an island, the countertops around the walls were made of a light grey marble, the refrigerator, stove and dish washing machine all in a platinum shine.

Robin led them out of the kitchen and into the living room, told them to take a seat and make themselves at home, then she left the room. She came back with a fairly large box, opened it, and handed out some gifts to all of them. Clair was given some amazing clothes, shirts and jeans, a few dresses. Patrick got a soccer ball, basketball, Landon got an airsoft gun, Andre got some plush toys, Nicole got some new books and some dresses, the twins received a few pairs of clothes, some plush toys. All of them received some candy, money, and a bike.

They exclaimed with joy and went looking through their new gifts. Nicole automatically started to read her new books, one of which was a mystery, and the twins played with their toys.

Heather and Robin looked on happily, and then Robin brought out one more box. It was a little smaller, but still fairly large, and handed it to Heather. Heather looked up at Robin and smiled, and

opened the box. She gasped and lifted a dress out of the box, continued by a book and a small, carved wooden box.

"I haven't seen this dress since the day after I got married... where was it?" Robin rolled out a little pink, plastic suitcase and rested it by Heather.

"You put it in my doll case, and I didn't know about until just before I had left for my trip."

Heather started to cry, tears of joy, and started to look through the book covered in glitter and ribbon. Pictures of when she was young, of her closest friends, of her family, of her adventures, were all in this scrapbook.

She slowly stood up and immediately hugged her daughter.

"You still have to open that last little box, and I bet it looks familiar," said Robin with a soft smile.

Heather looked back at her wedding dress, her scrapbook, and that little wooden box and sighed.

"I think I'll save that for tomorrow, but now, how about lunch?"

They laughed and called for the children to follow them into the dining room for lunch. Each person took a platter and set it on the long, oval table, and uncovered the food inside. Robin got the silverware and set it by each plate. Then they all sat down and started to pass out the food all around the table.

"Oh I almost forgot!" Robin finished chewing, "What does everyone want to drink?"

The children all exchanged glances at each other and decided, "Soda!"

They had never had soda except for once, when one of them had brought some back from town when they went with Ms. Hencherlan. They thought it was the most spectacular tasting drink in the whole world.

Robin laughed and walked back into the kitchen and came back out with some 7 cans of cold soda.

The kids jumped up and ran to her and grabbed a soda, they sat back down and opened the cans. They started to lightly sip the carbonated drinks, and then remembered their manners, and thanked Robin.

They continued their dinner, and Robin allowed them to stay the night if they wanted, and they did. They watched some movies, then went to bed.

Chapter 7

A warm light shone through the window, and progressively grew brighter throughout the morning. Under the plush covers of their beds, the people in the house were awakening to the warm sun. Downstairs there was the smell of breakfast drifting upstairs, enticing smells filling the whole house, waking those inside even more.

The first to awake was Andre, who immediately woke Nicole, who jumped up and started running down the short hall to the stairs. She climbed onto the wide banister and started to slide down and then around a slight curve, she reached the bottom and jumped down. Andre was just reaching the top of the stairs, and he decided to slide down the soft carpeted stairs, penguin style. Nicole encouraged him down, and he finally was on his way down, he came to a slow stop at the last few steps and stood up. They started to run to the kitchen just as Clairia walked down the hall, holding Vincent and Vivian's hands, one on each side of her, she helped them down the stairs, going slow so they wouldn't fall. Soon they were all in the kitchen, helping to make breakfast, setting the table, and waiting for the others to wake up.

Finally Patrick and Landon came downstairs and they all started eating the wonderful breakfast set before them. Pancakes, waffles, cereal, bacon, hash browns, toast, fruit, juice, and milk all were being passed around the table. They finished eating, and Robin brought some breakfast up to Heather, and came back down to a clean table. She went into the kitchen and saw all of the children cleaning; washing dishes, sweeping the floor, wiping counters, and she was amazed. She had never seen children their ages act so mature, responsible, and courteous.

"You guys! You didn't have to do this, I could have done it!"

They all looked back at her, and Clairia answered,

"We know, but we want to help out. It wouldn't be polite if we didn't, so we just decided to get it done."

She smiled sincerely and went to the fridge, she pulled out a tall glass, containing a strawberry smoothie.

"We weren't sure what flavor you liked, but we thought that strawberry sounded pretty good."

Robin was handed the glass, and she looked appreciatively back at them all and took a sip. She closed her eyes as she savored the flavor.

"It tastes... absolutely amazing!"

The children laughed and seemed satisfied with their work.

"Now, you need to go relax, just leave it all to us today, even you need a break every once in a while," said Clairia.

Robin swallowed another sip of smoothie,

“No, I’m fine.”

Nicole huffed,

“Robin, just go relax. Don’t worry about it okay? We’ve got it under control.”

Robin sighed, and finally gave in. She thanked them and walked out of the kitchen.

The children continued to clean, and when they finished, they got ready for the pool. They each put on a swimsuit that Heather had bought for them, and they ran through the clear doors and jumped into the warm water.

There were a few that couldn’t swim though, and Nicole climbed out of the pool to where Landon, Vincent, and Vivian were and told them to follow her. She led them around the pool until she finally spotted a large, plastic container labeled, “SWIM GEAR.” She opened it, and inside was exactly what they needed: floaties. She helped to blow them up and put the arm floaties on Vincent and Vivian, and put a circular float around Landon, then they all joined in on the pool fun. They splashed each other, played games, and swam around the pool back and forth. They were having so much fun, they hadn’t been in a pool in what seemed like forever. Heather came in, and then Robin came in, both with a tray.

“You guys hungry yet? You’ve been having a hay day out here for a couple hours.”

Patrick laughed and swam up to the ladder,

“I think we can make time for a snack!”

They climbed up the ladder, out of the pool, and brought together different folding chairs set around the room to form a circle like seating arrangement around a small table. Heather and Robin set down the trays and uncovered one, and inside was sandwiches, fruit, and some chocolate, the other tray was filled with glasses of cold, fresh lemonade.

The seven children each took what they wanted, and enjoyed the treats. Heather and Robin smiled and told them that they were all going to the park later that day. They all agreed, and continued with their activities. While they were swimming, an orange kitten came up to the door and looked inside at all the children in the pool, and it started meowing and pawing at the transparent door. Nicole looked up and noticed the animal, so she got out of the pool and walked up to the door. She carefully opened it and stuck out her hand, the cat rubbed against it, so she opened the door even wider and started to pet it. After petting it for a bit, she tried to pick it up and it gladly sat in her arms. She felt so happy, she had always wanted a cat, and she closed the door and turned around to show the others.

“You guys, look at this!”

Her voice was loud, but soft enough to where it didn't startle the cat, and the sound rang through the room and the others all looked over to her. She smiled proudly as they all gasped in awe and started to get out of the water. They crowded around Nicole and this small orange kitten, and Clair's voice sounded out with questions.

"Nicole, where did you find that? Are you sure it's safe? What if it's sick and gets us all sick too? Are you sure you should have brought that in even?"

Nicole stared wide-eyed at all of them, looking at all of their faces. She looked hurt, she really wanted to keep the kitten.

"She was at the back door. No, I'm not sure. Well she looks healthy, she doesn't look sick at all. I wouldn't have just left her out there, and I know none of you would have either. I really want to keep her, we've never had a pet, and she's young, she's probably all alone out there," She paused for a few seconds, "She's probably an orphan just like us."

Those last words sunk in, and they understood that, being an orphan. It can be the loneliest years a child can have. They smiled at Nicole and ran out to find Heather and Robin to ask if they could keep her. Happiness swelled up inside of her, and the kitten, still in her arms, started to purr, as if she understood what was happening.

They all came bursting through the door, the children pulling Robin through the door, and pushing Heather in with her. Nicole stood up and slowly walked towards them with her little bundle of fur, which had fallen asleep in her arms, and showed Robin and Heather. They looked down and their faces softened, so they started to lightly stroke its soft fur. As they looked back up they saw 7 pairs of eyes looking back at them,

"It's quite adorable, and it looks perfectly healthy. Where'd you find it?"

Nicole quickly answered,

"She was right outside the back door here, she was meowing and I heard her."

Robin produced a light laugh and kneeled down to about Nicole's height,

"Hmm, well I've never seen her before..."

"Can we keep her!?"

Robin's eyes widened and looked back at her mother, who didn't look surprised at all.

"Well, I'm not sure, but I think we can do it this one time."

Chapter 8

Throughout the next few days, they went to the store and bought all they needed for their new pet, and they prepared the house, setting up scratching posts and the spots where the food and litter box would be. During this time, they kept the kitten in the master bathroom to keep her out of trouble. The next step was to name her, and they spent quite some time figuring out what name would best suit her. They went through names like Pumpkin, Julius or Orange Julius, Blossom, and they finally settled on Oren, which means “orange” in Welsh. They started to call the kitten by her new name and she seemed to catch on to it after a while.

After staying at Robin’s home for a couple more days, they had to leave, and the children were heartbroken. They had to leave Oren, their new adorable kitten, and Robin, who said that she would take good care of Oren and make sure she got plenty of love. They packed up their bags and said their goodbyes, and then they had to leave. As they were staring out the back window looking back at Robin’s house, they already missed it.

Arriving back to Heather’s home, the children slowly piled out of the small car. When they got inside, they started to stock the fire and get dinner ready. Afterwards, they walked to the lake and sat with their feet in the water as the sun went down over the trees, now just a golden glow shone through the sky. Sitting there in silence made them think about everything that happened, that was happening, and what would happen. They knew that they couldn’t live here forever, they would either have to move on somewhere else, or they would be found and taken back to the orphanage. So they started to discuss their options and the pros and cons of each action. They finally decided that they knew they would have to leave soon, but they needed to plan a little more. They needed to know where they would go if they left, surely not everyone would be so welcoming if 7 children appeared in their home.

“Dinner’s ready,” yelled Heather from the cabin, “Come in before it gets cold!”

As they were walking back, they encountered a surprise visitor, and this was the worst surprise they could have run into. It was Saul Ligorini.

“Well, well, well, look who I found. You brats have caused me and Alice a lot of trouble from you running off like that.”

Nicole corrected him,

“It’s ‘Alice and I.’ Not ‘me and Alice.’”

He snarled at her and stepped forward towards her, she took one step back. He stood back up and straightened his jacket out. He stood tall and looked down at all of the children with a disgusted expression on his face.

“Children, come ea...”

Heather trailed off as she saw the children and the familiar figure standing apart. She didn't understand what was going on, but she enjoyed the surprise visit.

"Well it's been a while since I last saw you mister. I thought you'd never come to visit me again."

Heather walked over to Saul and hugged him, she looked ever so happy to see him. The children didn't understand this, a lady as nice as Heather being friends with a man as horrid as Saul.

"Oh my, where are my manners! Children, this is my oldest son.."

Claira interrupted, "Saul."

Heather looked startled for a moment, then composed herself, "Why, yes! Do you all know each other?"

They stared at each other for a few seconds, tensions rising between Saul and the children. Then, being as suave as he was, he looked at Heather and answered smoothly, "Why yes we do. I've known all of these children almost their whole lives. My fiancé and I have been running an orphanage for a while, these children ran away. And I've been searching for them for the past week..."

The children gasped and looked at Heather; her old face producing a confused expression. She glanced at each of them, and then back to Saul, her eyes turned sad.

"So... you 7 are runaways. Can't say I didn't suspect it, you're 7 children, and you certainly didn't look or act homeless. I don't really know what to say, I can't say I blame you for running away from their orphanage though. I probably wouldn't want to stay there either."

She laughed with the children as Saul looked on, with a little bit of hurt showing in his face. He wasn't happy, and he wanted to just grab the kids if he found them and go, but them being close with his mother put a small kink in the plans. He explained that the children needed to go back to the orphanage; they don't have a legal guardian for the moment besides Alice and himself. The orphans back at the orphanage have been misbehaving horribly because of the runaways.

Heather and the children listened while Saul told his story, which the children thought was mainly made of baloney.

"Well, I guess they would have to go back, how far did you say this orphanage was from here?"

Saul smiled ominously, "About 9½ miles, you guys sure can walk far. I probably couldn't walk that far in a short amount of time, I would take a lot of time. How long did it take you to get here anyways?"

"Half a day," said Patrick, "and that's with multiple breaks."

Saul actually looked impressed with them for once, it surprised the children.

“Hmm, well we still need to bring you...” He remembered Heather was there, “children back to the orphanage, as in, today.”

This brought an up rise of dissatisfaction from the children, groaning at the thought.

“You are all wonderful children, and you will find a family, a wonderful family that loves you. They’ll come soon enough,” Heather winked towards the children.

They finally gave in, said their goodbyes, but before they even started to get in the car, they all already missed their temporary home.

Chapter 9

The drive back to the orphanage was an uneventful one, Saul didn’t want to talk to the children any more than he had to, and the children didn’t want to talk with him in such close proximity to them. When they finally made it back to the orphanage, Ms. Hencherlan and Carla were standing out on the steps, arms folded, tapping one foot impatiently.

Saul told them to get out, and they did, but they did this as slowly as they could. Ms. Hencherlan told Carla to get inside, and she did, then Ms. Hencherlan stormed over to the 7 runaways.

“You... You little brats! Do you have any idea on how much trouble you could have caused me if people found out MY orphanage had runaways?!”

They stared in different directions, just anywhere but her face; they didn’t want her to see their fear of her, it would just power her on. They nodded when needed, shook their heads when needed, and finally she was done with her rant.

“You will all be going to your room right now! Eat your dinner quickly and get right up to bed. You 7 will be grounded to your room for 2 weeks, and grounded to the house till the end of summer!”

They sharply inhaled and looked up with a fearless stare, but inside they were crying for help. They walked past her into the house, and did what they were told. As they walked into their room, they were happily greeted by all their friends with hugs and smiles.

This improved their moods a little, but they still missed Heather and Robin immensely. They lay in their beds, thinking about all the fun times they had with those two in such a short period of time. All of them missed those eventful days, and they missed their new kitten.

Later in the night, everyone was asleep but Nicole, she had just been woken up from a dream. She dreamt Heather and Robin came to the orphanage and adopted them all and they lived happily ever after, just like some of the books she read. Living in an orphanage until they were adults wouldn't give them a happy ending, all of them being adopted into one family would. She thought about Oren, her little fluff ball, which was the only pet she had ever been close to having. When they had run away from the orphanage, they had the best week of their lives; they probably wouldn't ever see Heather and Robin again though. She started to tear up, and she fell asleep.

It was all hustle and bustle in the morning; somebody had called the orphanage in interest of adopting some children, and Ms. Hencherlan wanted it to be perfect. She had Saul help her cook and clean for the guests, this was surprising. The only reason she was doing this, was so the children didn't look tired, it would bring up questions, and she didn't want to have to lie.

Two cars arrived in the driveway, and Ms. Hencherlan ordered the children to go play and have fun, and they took the offer. Clairra, Patrick, Landon, Andre, Nicole, Vincent, and Vivian decided to all go upstairs and watch T.V.

About fifteen minutes later, one of the orphans ran through the door,

"Ms. Hencherlan wants you all downstairs to meet the ladies that came."

They looked at each other with looks that showed they had no interest, but they went down anyways. When they got down the stairs, nobody was there, so they started looking. They finally went to the backdoor and there everybody was, including the caller. They had familiar faces, and the children ran up to the two women.

"Robin! Heather!"

They turned around to the sight of the 7 children running towards them, and they took them all into a group hug. Ms. Hencherlan looked on with a hopeful look, and all of the children could tell it pained her slightly to be so caring towards all the children that day.

Robin was holding something in her arms, and she gave it to Nicole, who rejoiced it. She was ecstatic to be able to hold her little orange Oren again. She walked over to the steps of the backdoor and sat there cradling the kitten, which quickly fell asleep rocking in the warm light of the sun. Other children soon crowded around Nicole and her kitten, and she told them to be quiet so they didn't wake Oren up.

Heather and Robin turned away from the children for a moment and were speaking to Ms. Hencherlan, but they couldn't hear what they were saying. They dispersed throughout the backyard and finally came back together by the steps.

"I never thought I'd see him again," Nicole looked up at them, "They're going to adopt us aren't they?"

Claira thought about it, "I don't know for sure, but I don't think that they would come just to visit and bring Oren with them."

They sat quietly thinking about it, and they decided that could be the only reason these women were here. Then they saw Ms. Hencherlan following them up the steps back inside, the children followed. Heather and Robin continued walking, right out the front door and into the car.

Nicole started to cry, she ran up the stairs, and the others followed.

They were all devastated, they didn't understand why they would just come and drop Oren off, say a few words, and leave. They sat in the large bedroom for an hour, without saying a word, when Ms. Hencherlan slowly opened the door.

"Get your bags packed," she said with a smile, "Then get downstairs ASAP."

"Why?"

"Why?" She repeated, "Because you've all just been adopted!"

She seemed happy, probably because she didn't have to deal with them anymore, but then she hugged them all. She stood back up and walked to the door; she looked back at them and wished them good luck, then continued out. They quickly packed their bags, ran down the stairs, and when they saw Robin and Heather waiting, they felt happiness flowing throughout their whole body. They stacked their bags in the back of the two cars, and drove off. They finally got what they wanted, a home, and a family that loved them too.