

THAT ONE DAY

(BLURB)

This is the story of Chrissy Leslie, who goes through 'That One Day', where she suffers a terrible loss, and feels like her life has been ruined forever. However, when she tries for a new beginning, she finds that she is able to find peace and solace again in the form of friends, who take care of her and look out for her during her worst moments.



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CHAPTER ONE

I was talking quietly with my friend, Kate, in homeroom when an announcement came through the intercom calling Chrissy Leslie to the office. Kate shot me a questioning look but I shook my head in response to her silent question. As I slowly walked towards the door and out into the corridor, I could feel the stares of people burning into my back.

I couldn't remember doing anything wrong. But maybe they had made a mistake? Maybe they meant another Chrissy Leslie? I was pretty sure I was wrong, but I clung to that hope as I pushed open the door to the office.

"The Principal would like to see you," the receptionist said, giving me a sympathetic smile. Feeling more confused than ever, I nodded and entered the principal's room. It was a clean bright room, with the many shelves filled with an assortment of files and books. Principal Morelli was sitting behind a table with a woman I didn't know standing beside her.

"Please take a seat, Chrissy," Principal Morelli said. I obeyed, noticing as I did so that both the table and the chairs were made of oak. That didn't help my nerves.

"Good morning, Chrissy. I'm Mrs. Williams, your social worker," Mrs. Williams said, extending a hand. I shook it, feeling nervous at her grave expression.

"Chrissy, I'm very sorry to break this news to you, but your parents have been involved in a terrible car accident," she said. "Wh-what? Are they okay?" I gasped. "Are you here to take me to the hospital?"

Mrs. Williams slid a glance at Principal Morelli.

"It was a fatal accident," she said quietly. "Your parents didn't survive."

I stared at her, uncomprehending. Surely this wasn't true. She had to be joking. This couldn't be happening to me, Chrissy Leslie, who lived with two loving parents in a pretty house at the end of Jordan Street.

"You're joking right?" I said numbly.

"I know this is hard to take in, but I'm not joking," she said gently. "According to your files, you have only two very old and unwell grandparents who live at the other side of the country. I have already contacted the first person on your emergency contact list, Amelia George."

"My Mom's best friend," I said automatically. "Yes. She will be here shortly," Mrs. Williams said.

I gulped down some air, suddenly realizing I hadn't been breathing. I had known Amelia since I was a kid. She was like a second mom to me. Things will turn out fine. They had to. After a few minutes, there was a knock on the door and my Mom's best friend, Amelia entered.

I rushed to her and threw my arms around her, the tears that had been threatening to escape ever since I heard the news suddenly dripping down my cheeks. "Don't worry, Chrissy, it will all turn out fine," Amelia said, hugging me tightly back.

"Ms. George, I would like to speak to you privately," Mrs. Williams said from behind. I clutched on even more tightly, feeling like I'll never let go.

"Whatever you have to say, you can say it in front of Chrissy," Amelia said firmly.

"Alright then," Mrs. Williams said. "There had been an accident on Waltair Road, involving two cars. One of the cars, while trying to overtake, slipped on the puddles caused due to last night's rain and crashed into the other car, containing Abigail and Daniel Leslie. The occupants of both the cars were ... killed," she glanced at me on the last word.

There was a moment's pause. Then Mrs. Williams said, "For the time being, Chrissy can stay with you while I try to find a suitable foster home for her. This will only be a temporary arrangement."

"Okay. Come on Chrissy, let's leave," Amelia said.

As the both of us left the school, the memory of my morning's goodbye to my parents came to mind and further tears blurred my vision.



CHAPTER TWO

(Three weeks later)

Even weeks later, I still couldn't get used to the fact that my mom will never again come up to my room to gently shake me, reminding me that there's school and I need to wake up. Instead of Mom's sweet voice, it was Anaya, Amelia's five-year old daughter, who woke me up with her excited "Chrissy, wake up!"



I rubbed my eyes blearily and blinked at the sudden explosion of light that was coming from the sunlight streaming in through the open window.

"Chrissy, Chrissy, get up!" Anaya chanted over and over again until I finally rolled out of bed, laughing at her enthusiasm. If it weren't for Anaya, I had little doubt that I wouldn't have woken up for at least another couple of hours. I quickly washed up and dressed then went down with Anaya for breakfast.

"Morning, Chrissy," Amelia called out, as I took a place at the table.

"Morning," I greeted back. "Is that pancakes I smell?"

"With choco chips!" she said, serving me a plateful of delicious smelling pancakes. Just then, the doorbell rang.

"I'll go and get it, you continue eating," Amelia said.

I nodded, my mouth too full to say anything.

After a few minutes, Amelia appeared in the door way, looking unusually serious.

"It's Mrs. Williams," she said, answering my question before I voiced it. "She would like you to hear what she has to say."

Feeling nervous, I walked with Amelia into the sitting room. Even though Mrs. Williams had called on many occasions to check on me, coming here was a different matter entirely. That could mean only one thing: she had found a foster house and I was going to have to move away from Amelia.

“Good morning, Chrissy. I hope you’re doing well?” she enquired.

“Yes,” I replied.

“Let’s go straight down to business. For the past weeks, I’ve been trying to find a good home for Chrissy to live in. Unfortunately, there aren’t any house that are available at the moment,” Mrs. Williams said.

My heart leaped, thinking that she was about to say that I was allowed to stay with Amelia.

“However, I consulted my Head and after a few discussions it has been decided that you will be sent to a boarding school. Its name is Woodrock Boarding School for Girls and it’s located in our neighbouring town, Woodrock Falls. Now, I know you will be worrying about fitting in. But I can assure you, the kids in this school will be very kind and I’m sure in time you will learn to enjoy your new school immensely. The arrangements have al-“

“Wait just a moment,” interrupted Amelia. “Surely matters such as this can’t be decided just like that? I mean, how do I even know that this is a good school?”

Mrs. Williams gave a tight smile. “As I’m sure I’ve already told you, Ms. George, that Chrissy was only in your care temporarily. I’ve already looked up this school and the reviews are all positive. Chrissy will get a good education and learn a lot. The best thing is, that we don’t even have to pay any fees! This school is very charitable and regularly donates money to orphanages. As an added bonus, every year they have a program that allows one child among many to enter without having to pay any fees. Chrissy is very lucky to get this opportunity. Now, as I was saying, the arrangements have already been made. Chrissy has three days to pack up all her belongings and then I will come to pick her up and drop her off at her new school.”

I stared at her, aghast. How could such a huge decision have been taken without me even knowing? Now I was being carted off to an unknown school in a completely different town.

“I really have to get going now. Remember, in three days time I’ll be here. Chrissy, make sure you’re ready by lunchtime. I’ll arrive a little after. Thank you for your hospitality.”

And just like that, Mrs. Williams left, leaving me to stand back and watch as my life was ruined.



CHAPTER THREE

Three days had me standing in the guest bedroom Amelia had let me use during my stay, looking around and checking to see if I had packed all my things.

The last few days had gone by in a blur. I'd cried a fair few times, partly from grief for my parents and partly because I will have to leave Amelia soon. I had spent as much time with her and Anaya as I could. But even then it wasn't enough. I was going to miss both of them terribly.

Just then the doorbell rang. I swallowed, knowing it was Mrs. Williams. I went down the stairs to find her sitting in the dining room with Amelia.

"Ah, Chrissy, I see you're ready," beamed Mrs. Williams. "You've packed all your bags?" "Yes," I replied. "Very good. Then shall we leave?" I nodded, unable to say anything.

As Mrs. Williams went in the hall to put my bags in the trunk, I turned to Amelia and, without another word, hugged her as tightly as I could.

"Promise you'll call to give me news?" she whispered. "Promise. Give Anaya my love, okay?" "Okay."

Mrs. Williams' voice called out from the doorstep. "Chrissy, come on quickly, we're getting late!" "Yeah, I'm coming!" I shouted back.

Grabbing my handbag from the table, I walked with Amelia to the door. After one last hug, I got into Mrs. Williams' little blue Audi.

I stared out the window as the town of Rosewood flew past me. It was still hard to believe what was happening. At the same time, I wondered what my new school will be like. Will I enjoy it, like Mrs. Williams said? I sort of doubted it.

I spent the rest of the ride reminiscing all the fun times I had with my parents. And then all of a sudden, Mrs. Williams was telling me we had reached and to help with getting the baggage out.

“I’ll take you till the office, then you can go to your dormitory and decorate it up. Your belongings from your old house had been transferred to your room yesterday,” she said, smiling at me. I forced a smile back.

“The school looks very nice, don’t you think?”

And I had to admit, it did look very grand. It was a huge building, painted a gleaming grey colour, with the lawns leading up to the stairs reflecting the sunlight.



A tall man in a white and maroon suit appeared, rolling a trolley ahead of him.

“Good afternoon. I was sent here to help with your luggage.” he said in a formal voice.

He picked up my suitcase and lugged it onto the trolley.

“Please follow me. I will lead you to the office.”

Mrs. Williams and I followed him to the stairs and into the school. The inside of the school was painted a much brighter colour than the outside: a pretty shade of light green and white. There were many paintings of who I assumed were past headmistresses hanging on the walls.

We turned a corner and found a board reading 'OFFICE' in front of a black door. The man turned to us. "I have been told that your dormitory number is 9. I will take your luggage to your room while you are in the office."

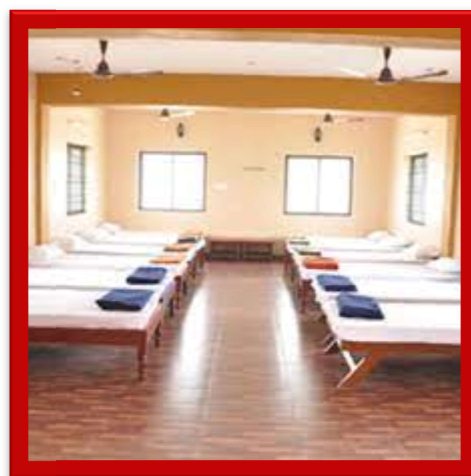
"Okay. Thank you very much for your assistance," said Mrs. Williams.

Then she turned to me. "Do you want me to go in with you, or can you manage it on your own?" "I can do it on my own, thanks," I replied. "Okay, I guess this is goodbye then. I hope you do well in this school, Chrissy. I will be calling occasionally to check up on you." I nodded.

She turned around and walked briskly back to the door and out.

I entered the office, feeling slightly nervous. The office receptionist smiled down at me. "Good afternoon. I'm Ms. Sanders. Are you a new admission?" she asked. "Yes. My name is Chrissy Leslie." She peered into her screen and, after typing something onto her keyboard, nodded. "Ah yes, found you. Chrissy Leslie, dormitory number 9. If you follow me, I can show you your dormitory. How about that?" "Sounds good. Thank you."

I followed her out the office and up a pair of stairs, and after a few turns, we reached a door with the number 9 written on it. "Here you go." "Thanks again for leading me here." "No problem." Ms. Sanders then turned around and walked back down. I took a deep breath and pushed the door open.



CHAPTER FOUR

I stared round my new dormitory. The room was much bigger than I thought it would be. There were two beds, and two study tables standing in front of the beds, leaning against the wall. At the side, there was a door leading to what I assumed was the bathroom. Two windows stood on each side of the room, brightening the room with the sunlight that was pouring in.

The left side was already done in purple and black. The bedspread had a large 'RYLEE' written on it, which I supposed was my roommate's name. Her study table was littered with books and pens, and above it there was a bookshelf that was mostly filled with drawings and little globes with different designs inside, only about 2-3 books on it.

On the right side, there were three large cartons of my belongings, just like Mrs. Williams had said. I sighed, knowing it will take some time to open and unpack all of them. I put my bag down onto my bedside table, and lay down on my bed. After some time of just gazing up at the ceiling, I got up and started unpacking my suitcase. One by one, I removed my clothes and toiletries, setting them carefully in my allotted cupboard.

It was nearly an hour by the time I finally finished unpacking my suitcase. I pushed a few strands of hair back from my sweaty forehead.

I blew out a breath. I still had the cartons to unpack. Perhaps I could do one of them today, and the remaining two tomorrow.

The door opened, and I jerked my head, startled, towards the door to find a girl with a waterfall of jet-black hair flowing down her back and green eyes standing in the doorway, staring at me.

She raised her eyebrows. "I suppose you're my new roommate?" I nodded. She eyed me with something alike to curiosity. "And you're the one who came into the school for free?" I swallowed my mouth suddenly dry. Somehow, there was just something intimidating about this girl that made it hard to speak, even though she wasn't exactly being mean. She shook her head. Without another word, she walked into the room, climbed into her bed and took out her phone. And just like that, our conversation was over. I cursed myself for not making a better impression.

And I too continued with my work. After an hour and a half, I had finally finished unloading the first carton. By that time, the girl, who I guessed was Rylee, had already gone out of the room again.

I blew out a breath, exhausted. I checked my phone, and to my surprise, it was already seven 'o' clock.

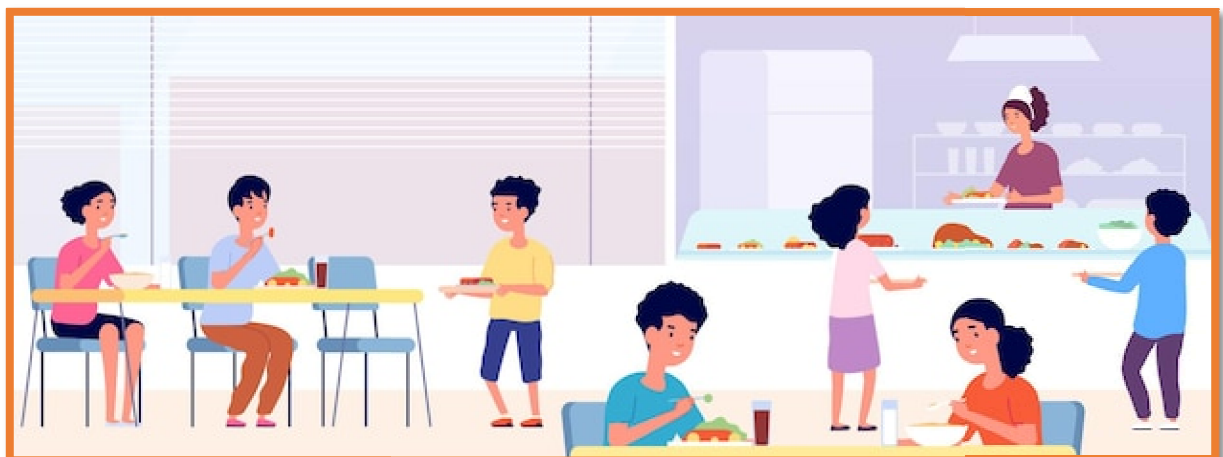
I quickly changed out of my clothes, deciding to wear something prettier for dinner. Looking inside my cupboard, I picked out an oversized tie-dye t-shirt and some white shorts. I tied my long dark blonde hair into a high ponytail.

I looked into the mirror and smiled, pleased with what I saw.

I stepped outside my room, joining the crowd that was heading towards the Dining Hall. I was uncomfortably aware of the curious looks that were being sent my way. I didn't want to draw too much attention to myself on my first day.

I blinked as I entered the Dining Hall. It was huge. There were elegant tables all around the room with four chairs to each. Most of the tables were occupied, except for the ones in the corner. There was a long table laden with big steel bowls, with a label in front of each bowl on which the name of the dish was written. A queue of kids were grabbing plates and serving themselves. I went over to the table and picked up a plate. Peering at the labels, I served myself with what I wanted.

After I had loaded my plate, I stood there unsure of where to sit. Finally decided on one of the corner tables, I walked there as quickly as I could, keeping my head down so that no one saw me. In my hurry to reach there, I



didn't see the blonde girl. I bumped into her, my plate of food flying into the air and splattering all its contents onto the girl. I stared in horror at her. The Dining Hall had suddenly gone silent.

"I'm so sorry," I stammered. "I didn't see you." The girl, apparently speechless, didn't say anything as she stared at her cream top, which was now completely stained.

"How dare you!" she shrieked, suddenly finding her voice. "This was a designer top, you know! And now you've completely ruined it!"

"I said I'm sorry," I said, my voice trembling. "I didn't mean to. And it was as much your fault as mine. If you were looking where you were going, this wouldn't have happened." She stared at me incredulously. Then realization dawned on her face. "You're the new girl, aren't you?" she said. "The one who came in for free?" I tried to reply, but found that I was unable to.

She got up in my face and spat—

"Well, then you should know that I am the queen of this school. You will obey *my* rules and do what *I* say, Charity Box." The tears started pouring down my cheeks before I could stop them. "Oh look! She's a crybaby too!" the girl said, shaking her head in disgust.

I turned away and ran, through the doors, into the corridor, and out into the lawns. There I hid behind a tree, and cried. I cried and cried and cried till I couldn't anymore. *Why* did this happen to me? Just why? Why did Mom and Dad have to die? I wished I could live with Amelia. I didn't want to stay in this school, where now everyone will call me a Charity Box. After some time, I stood up, still shaking slightly. Deciding to head back to my dorm, I walked as quickly as I could.

When I entered my room, I found Rylee sitting on her table, her head bent over something. She glanced at me as I closed the door, but didn't say anything, for which I was grateful. I didn't want to engage in a conversation just then. Without another word, I climbed into my bed and buried myself under my covers.



CHAPTER FIVE

The next day, when I woke up it was close to six a.m. I considered going back to sleep, but then decided against it. I could use the time to unpack the rest of the cartons. I rolled out of bed and did my usual morning routine. After tying my hair in a cute side ponytail, I went down, wondering if there will be any breakfast at this time.

When I entered the Dining Hall, there were only a few stragglers around the room, which was a relief. I walked up to the long table and served myself to some fried eggs and bacon. After finishing my breakfast quickly, I went back to my dorm and got started on the leftover cartons. The first one had all the stuff I had used to brighten up my old room. I used them to decorate my side of the dorm. I filled my bookshelf with all the books I had and added a few frames of me and my parents to the wall behind my bed. When I was done I looked around and felt happy with the result.

A few minutes into the second carton, my phone started ringing. I checked it and found Amelia's name. I snatched it up and pressed 'accept'. We talked for about half an hour, about various things from how my new school was to how many marks Anaya got in her English spelling test. After that, I told her I needed to unpack the last carton, so she hung up with the promise to call again within a week.

By the time I finished all the unpacking of the last box too, Rylee had also woken up. She looked around the room and raised her eyebrows at me.

"Looks quite pretty now, the room," she remarked. I didn't reply.

There was a pause. Then—

"Look, I'm sorry about what happened last night in the Dining Hall. I should have warned you, I guess, being your roommate." I blinked, surprised. An apology was what I was least expecting. "Messing with Brittany," she continued. "Well, that isn't exactly a good idea. She's got a lot of power in this school. The Principal loves her."

"The girl's name is Brittany?" "Yeah." Silence again.

"I don't want to be involved in all this drama, but if you want, I could be your buddy." "Buddy?"

“You know, lead you around the school, tell you who to stay away from and all.” For the first time since I stepped foot into this school, I smiled. “Okay.” And so I made my first friend. Rylee went to the bathroom to freshen up, while I continued unloading the cartons. By the time I was finally done, I was hot and sweaty.

Deciding that a walk through the gardens will do me some good, I grabbed my phone, plugged my earphones on, and tapped ‘PLAY’ on my playlist. I spent the rest of the morning relaxing, enjoying the fresh air and sunshine. As I was walking through the corridor back to my room, I heard someone call my name and looked back to find Rylee hurrying towards me.

“Hey,” she said. “I was searching for you. Where were you?” “I’d gone to the gardens for a walk,” I replied. “Right. So I was thinking, maybe you can sit with me and my friends during lunch? So that, you know, you aren’t left alone ... “

I felt a warm feeling in my chest. Even though she didn’t need to do it, Rylee was trying her best to make me feel included.

“I would love that,” I said happily, smiling at her. She grinned back.

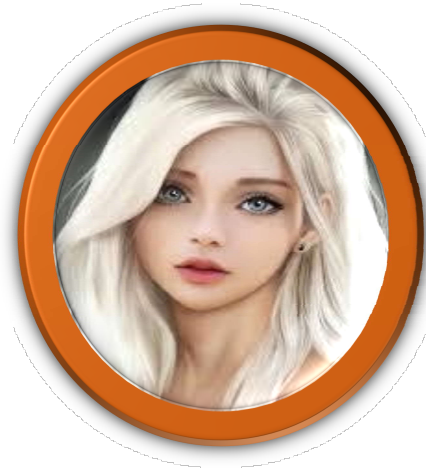
“Want to go on that tour now?” “Sure.”

For the next hour, Rylee lead me around the school, pointing out the various rooms. In between, we also told each other about ourselves. She told me that she had lived in Woodrock her entire life, which was why she knew most of the kids here. In turn, I told her about my life in Rosewood and my best friend Kate. All in all, I enjoyed it immensely. So much so that I nearly forgot about Brittany. However, I was reminded of her when we passed her and her clique on our way to the Dining Hall.



“Really, Lewis, I thought you could do better than that,” she said, shaking her head. “What do you mean?” Rylee said, through clenched teeth.

“Hanging out with the Charity Box. I had expected more of you. How disappointing,” she tisked.



“Well, Chrissy’s definitely better company than you must be. All you and your friends do is gossip and criticize people,” Rylee retorted.

Brittany rolled her eyes and huffed. Without another word, she marched on with her friends by her side.

“I’m so sorry,” I said quietly. “I didn’t think by hanging out with me, she’ll bully you too.” “It’s fine. Not a big deal, really.”

I wasn’t completely convinced of that. Brittany seemed like the type of person who would go to any lengths for anything. I felt slightly worried of what she might do to Rylee just because she was having contact with me.

CHAPTER SIX

The rest of the day passed peacefully. During lunch, Rylee's friends, though not outright rude, were a little cool towards me. Rylee assured me that it would take time, but eventually they will warm up to me. I was a bit doubtful about that, seeing as I was Brittany's new target, but I just smiled at her and thanked her for inviting me.

I got ready for tomorrow, as it was a school day, and laid out the uniform (a white shirt with a maroon overcoat and skirt), deciding to wear a pair of chunky black boots that would go well.

After tuning off the lights, Rylee and I chatted for some time, but both of us felt sleepy, so we dozed off quickly. The next day, I woke up feeling nervous but excited. I washed up and did my hair, choosing to braid it into a French braid. Rylee and I had already compared our timetables, and most of our periods were the same, to my relief.

Our first period today was History. "Our teacher is Ms. Carton," Rylee said. She's nice enough, but tends to throw surprise tests a lot, so we need to pay attention in class. We have a pop quiz every Friday too." "Great. Just what I need, tests every week on my worst subject." She looked at me, surprised. "History's your worst subject? But it's so easy!" "Not for me," I grumbled. She patted me on the back.

"Don't worry, Ms. Carton will cut you some slack, since you joined in the middle of the year." "Hope so." We reached the classroom. Rylee had insisted we go a bit early so that she can introduce me. When we entered, Ms. Carton was shuffling through some files, and didn't notice us at first. "Good morning, Ms. Carton," Rylee said. "Good morning, kids." "Miss, this is Chrissy Leslie. She's new," Rylee said. I smiled politely. "Ah yes, I was told there will be a new student today. Well, Ms. Leslie, how do you do?" Ms. Carton asked. "I'm fine, thank you," I replied. "Very well. Please take a seat."



We both moved towards one of the desks. By then, many children were pouring in, a few shooting me looks. I ignored them.

History, as usual, was boring and uninteresting. Ms. Carton taught well, but History just wasn't fun for me, like other subjects were. After History, I had English, while Rylee had Chemistry. We both parted ways, each going to their own destination.

I felt a bit nervous without her, but told myself it will be okay. A few minutes after Ms. Watson had started the class, Brittany arrived. I swallowed, not liking being in the same class as her. I fervently hoped that we didn't share any more classes. That will be a nightmare. "Ms. Moore, late as usual," said Ms. Watson, glaring at her. "It will be detention if you're late to class again."

Brittany rolled her eyes and took a seat without saying anything, though she did glare at me as she walked past my desk. The rest of the day went by happily. I hung out with Rylee during most of it, though she had to go for basketball practice after school was over so I had to find something for me to do. But overall, today had been a very good day.

By the time I finally rolled into a bed, I had a tired but happy smile on my face. School was turning out very fun, and I felt like nothing could ruin my happiness. If only I knew how wrong I was.



CHAPTER SEVEN

“Art was so fun!” I exclaimed to Rylee. We were done with our classes and were heading to the Dining Hall for lunch. “Told you,” she replied, smiling at me. “Ms. Walsh is such a cool teacher! Even if your painting is not good, she’ll only encourage you. She’s so funny too.” “I know, right?”

It had been a week since I arrived here, and I was fitting in well. Though I did get the occasional ‘Charity Box’ whisper in the hallway, I always ignored them. Rylee and I loaded out plates with what we wanted, and headed to our usual table. During the past week, Rylee’s friends had finally warmed up to me, just like she had said, and I felt a little bad for thinking otherwise.

“Hey,” Naomi greeted, as we sat down. “So, Chrissy, how was art? Today was your first day with Ms. Walsh, right?” asked Carmen. “Yep, it was great! I loved Ms. Walsh.” I replied. “Cool.” We continued chatting about our various classes, when I felt something spill on my back.

“Oops, I’m so sorry, Chrissy! It was an accident,” a snide voice said from behind. I yelped, jumping up from my seat and spinning around to see who it was that had spilled the strawberry milk on me, though I already had a very good idea who it was, judging from the voice. Sure enough, Brittany stood there, with an empty glass in her hand and a smirk on her face, while all her friends around laughed loudly.

“That was done on purpose, Brittany,” Rylee said hotly, looking furious. Brittany only just laughed and turned and walked away back to her seat. Rylee accompanied me back to the dorm to clean myself up.

“Will she ever stop targeting me?” I said, my voice shaking as I tried to clean up my shirt with the wad of tissues Rylee had handed me. She didn’t answer.

“I don’t think that will come off,” she said. “You’ll have to change your shirt.”

I nodded, and turned to my cupboard to pick a random top. Without even glancing at what I’d taken out, I removed my sodden shirt and put on the fresh one.



“Do you want me to bring something up to eat?” she offered. I shook my head. “Thanks for your help, really, but, I-I would prefer to be left alone.” She nodded, understanding at once, for which I was grateful.

After Rylee left, I took great, shaking breaths, trying to calm myself. But despite my attempt, the tears started streaming down my cheeks, and my shoulders heaved with great, heavy sobs.

I curled up into a ball on my bed, and just cried. I cried for my parents, for them not being here, standing beside me and comforting me. I cried for Amelia, wishing I could have stayed with her. I cried and cried, for everything that had happened since that horrible day, when I got the news that Mom and Dad had died. That they would never, ever come back. Eventually, I slept off, so tired I was. I was already deep asleep by the time Rylee came in to check on me.

* When I woke up, I didn’t feel much better. It was only nearing five o’ clock, so I decided I might as well get up and finish some of my homework. It was a weekend, thankfully, as I didn’t think I would have been up to facing Brittany again. I took out my books, and started on my History homework, as that was the hardest for me. After a while, Rylee came in, sweaty and panting. She stopped short at the sight of me sitting at my table.

“Hey,” she said hesitantly.

“Hey. Look, I wanted to thank you for helping there. I can’t express how grateful I am to have you as my friend.” She flushed. “It’s fine. No big deal. How are you, now? You were sleeping when I checked in last.” “I feel better,” I said, though I didn’t really. “Want to go for a walk or something?”

“Nah, think it’s better if I stay in.”

“Good,” she said, looking relieved. “I don’t think I would have survived a walk. Basketball practice was brutal. I feel dead.” She slumped back onto her covers.

“Sad. What all did you do?”

“It was mostly working out today. You know, staying fit. We did loads of push-ups, sit-ups, jumping jacks, the whole package.” I nodded.

“Also, one more thing,” she added. “Every student is supposed to do an extracurricular activity. Pretty sure the principal is going to call you in soon

to talk to you about it.” I groaned. I was never much of a sports person. I had always sucked at every sport I tried, and I had tried many. I ran for an hour thrice a week and went for dance classes regularly, but that was about it. Now even that was not happening. “It’s fine,” she said, looking amused. “Surely you can’t be that bad?” “I’m bad, trust me.” “Oh well.”

After that, Rylee too got out her books and started work. We spent the next hour or so in silence, completing our work for the day. By the time dinnertime rolled around, we were done.

Since I didn’t want to go and face Brittany just yet, Rylee brought up two plates of food, and we ate in the gardens, as it was a strict rule that no one was allowed to bring any food inside the dorms.

As the lights were finally turned off, I stared at the starry ceiling. Rylee had got these cool stickers that glowed in the dark. She had stuck them on the ceiling, so that before sleeping, we could gaze up at them. After some time of thinking of nothing and everything at the same time, I pulled up my covers higher, and let my eyes close.



CHAPTER EIGHT

Throughout next week, snarky remarks and whispers of 'Charity Box' followed me. Even in class, I could hear people muttering about me. While walking in hallways between classes, I was constantly pushed into lockers or shoved aside. I felt like breaking down, but I was determined not to let them get me. I ignored all the remarks and just got up and walked on every time someone shoved me.

Rylee and the others, who all felt sorry for me, assured me that in time, the bullying will stop. Eventually, they will get tired of not getting a rise out of me, and will give it up. However, that hasn't come true yet.



I walked towards Math class alone, as Rylee had Biology. When I entered the room, half the class had already arrived. As I walked towards my usual desk, I could feel the stares of people digging into me, but I ignored all of them, like Rylee had advised me to.

Halfway through class, a call came through the class telephone and Mr. Thomas, our Math teacher, attended it. All the kids used the time to chat to their friends or check their homework. After talking quietly on the telephone for a minute or so, he turned around and searched the class till his eyes landed on me. Then he said, "Ms. Leslie, the Principal would like to see." Dread rose in me. What had happened now? I nodded, and walked out into the hallway and towards the office.

What if even Amelia had-? But no, I couldn't even bear to let that thought form in my head. Nothing has happened, I told myself firmly. Perhaps the Principal always talked to new children after a few weeks to see how they were settling in.

When I entered the office, the receptionist directed me towards the Principal's room. The first thing I noticed about it was how neat it was. Everything, from the things on the table to the files sitting in the various cabinets and shelves, was neat and orderly.

Not a thing was out of place. Somehow, this seemed to make the place even more daunting.



Dr. Robertson was sitting behind the table, her hands clasped together on the table. “Good morning, Ms. Leslie. I am very sorry to interrupt you in between your classes, but there are a few things I would like to discuss with you,” she said. I nodded. “Okay.” “For one thing, I trust that you are doing well and are liking the school?”

My throat felt constricted. “Yes, the children have been very nice to me,” I managed. “Very good. Now, I would like to talk about your extra curricular activity here.” I groaned inwardly. I should have known it would be this, I guess, as Rylee had already warned me. At the same time though, I couldn’t help but feel relieved too. Nothing bad had happened in Rosewood.

“As I’m sure you’re already aware,” she continued. “Each and every student has to take part in at least one extra class. We have many options over here. Basketball, Tennis, Badminton, Cheerleading, etc. However, since you have joined in the middle of the year, not many vacancies are available.”

I stared at her, dismayed. I’d been hoping to join the cheerleading club as dance had always been one of my strong points, but it was sure to be full. Cheerleading was way too popular a sport to have any vacancies.

“What all teams are open now?” I asked.

“At the moment, only the archery team and softball team are.”

My eyes lit up. I’d always wanted to try out Archery, and here was an opportunity presenting itself to me.



“The Archery team, can I join it?” I asked eagerly.

“Yes, of course. I will speak to Coach Kent. You won’t need to try-out, as there aren’t any other options for you. Your first practice will take place today in the evening at four o’ clock.”

“Okay. Thank you for your time.” With that, I left the office.

“I couldn’t believe my luck!” I gushed. “I had wanted to try archery since *forever*. And I got it!” Rylee laughed at my enthusiasm. “Glad you’re happy. I was afraid you’ll get a horrible sport.” It was nearing four, and Rylee was leading me to the archery field, as I wasn’t yet completely thorough in my way around the school. “Have you had any practice with archery before?”

“Yeah. My parents and I had gone to this resort, and there had been an archery field with an instructor. And it was free too! I didn’t learn a lot, as I stayed only for a week at the resort, but I do know the basic way to handle a bow and all.” “Cool!” We finally reached the field. I gazed around in amazement at the lush green fields, with the sunlight making the place glow.

“It’s beautiful.” I breathed.

Rylee smiled. “That’s Woodrock school for you. Anyway, I need to go for basketball practice. Coach will kill me if I’m late. Good luck, Chrissy! Don’t worry, you’re sure to do well.” “Thanks!” We hugged and then she left. I moved towards a shadowed area under a roof, where a group of children had already gathered. “Ugh, what are *you* doing here?”

“Oh, great. The one good thing about my day is going to be ruined because of her.”

“How can the Principal allow her to join a team? Who knows what she might do.” The mutters of annoyance and disgust followed me, and my smile faded. In my happiness in getting this opportunity, I had nearly forgotten that I might not be welcome by my fellow teammates. Just then, a tall, fit-looking man appeared, who I assumed to be Coach Kent.



“Good evening, kids!” He searched the group, then his eyes landed on me. “Ah yes, Chrissy Leslie? Dr. Robertson spoke to me in the morning and told me that you will be joining today. Can I ask you one question?” “Yes, okay.”

“Have you had any experience with archery before?” It was the exact same question Rylee had asked me only a few minutes ago.

“Uh well, not much, to be honest. My parents and I had gone to a resort a few months back, and there had been an archery field with an instructor there. I spent a week with him, as I stayed there at the resort for only that much time. I don’t know much, but I know the general stuff.”

“Very good. That is all that’s needed. Now, the rest of you go to your targets and practice, while I explain it all to Ms. Leslie. Understand?”

“Yes, Coach.” Everyone chorused, and went to their own targets. Then Coach turned to me and smiled. “Let’s get started, shall we?”

For the next two hours, I learned the basics of archery. It was one of the best evenings I had spent in this school. I felt elated by the time practice was over and Coach told us all to go back.

CHAPTER NINE

“P.E next for both of us,” Rylee said, checking both our timetables. I sighed. P.E classes had been a nightmare, right from the first class. We had it only thrice a week, thankfully, as I didn’t think I would survive if there were more classes than that. We entered the locker room, and went to our respective lockers to find our gym clothes and change into them.



By the time we were both done, most of the children had already lined up. “Quickly, everyone! Get into line!” barked Coach Davies. He was a tall, muscular man, who looked bad-tempered most of the time and had very little patience.

“Right. We’re going to run drills for some time, then I’ll divide all of you into teams and you’ll play dodgeball. Got it?” “Yes Coach,” we chorused. We started taking rounds around the huge room. After about five minutes of that, I felt something hit my ankles, and the next thing I know, I was lying on the floor with my ankle throbbing excruciatingly.

Coach came running towards me. Rylee too got out of the line and helped me up. However, my ankle was hurting so bad, I could barely focus. Coach felt my ankle, gently massaging it. “It’s fine, it’s fine, only a sprain,” he muttered. By then, all the kids had stopped and were standing and watching me. I could feel my face burning with humiliation.

“You! I saw you, you tripped the girl, didn’t you?” Coach said loudly. “Me? But, Coach, I didn’t do anything!” I heard an all too familiar voice reply innocently. I gritted my teeth, now sure of who had tripped me. “Don’t lie. I saw you. Stay back after class, and I’ll decide a suitable punishment.” I looked up in time to see Brittany roll her eyes. “Continue running, all of you.” Then he addressed Rylee. “Take her to the hospital wing. The nurse will bandage her ankle up.” She nodded and helped to the door and into the corridor.

“She did it on purpose,” I said, as hot and thick tears slowly dripped down my cheeks. I felt so done with all of this. I had put up with the bullying for weeks now. Will it ever stop?

“Don’t think about it now. Come on, let’s go to the hospital wing. Nurse Danae is very nice. She’ll take care of you.” I nodded shakily. After getting my ankle bandaged very tightly by the nurse, who told me to try to put as little pressure on it as possible, we walked to our dorm as P.E had been our last class for the day.

“Do you want company, or would prefer to be alone?” Rylee asked gently. “I think some alone time will do me good.” She nodded and left. I took a shaky breath. Don’t cry, I told myself. Brittany wasn’t worth it. But despite that, I could feel a burning behind my eyes that could mean only one thing.

I left the dormitory and went to the gardens. There, I hid behind the bushes, and let the tears flow. After some time, I pulled out my phone and messaged Rylee: *Can you please come to the gardens? Near the fountain* She sent a thumbs up back.

I closed my eyes while waiting for her. In a few minutes, I could here the creaking of twigs and then Rylee called out my name. I opened my eyes and stood up to show her where I was. “Hey, what happened?”

“I-I wanted to tell you something.” “Sure.” She sat down with me. “What is it?” “Well, I guess you think, like everyone else, that I came here without paying anything because my parents were too poor to afford it?” She shifted uncomfortably.

“I’ll take that as a yes. But that’s not true.” My voice trembled slightly. “The reason why I came here in the first place was because my parents had died.” She jerked her head towards me, looking shocked. “*What?*” Tears streamed slowly down my cheeks. “Y-yes.

They died in a car accident. I wanted to live with my Mom’s best friend, Amelia, but my social worker wouldn’t allow it. I was supposed to be sent to a foster house, but there weren’t any available then, so she sent me here.” “Chrissy, I’m so sorry ... “ She hugged me tightly.

“You should have told me before, you know. I could have helped you so much.” I was now truly crying. “I-I didn’t f-feel like talking a-about it to anyone ... “

We stayed like that for some time, hugging tightly, while she whispered words of comfort to me. Before, I’d been afraid that Rylee would be angry that I didn’t tell her anything about this. But her reaction had been the exact opposite. Only now, I realized how lucky I was to find a friend like her.

Eventually, we broke apart and went back to our dorm. I was a bit withdrawn during dinner, something that didn’t go amiss by the others, but Rylee shook her head to signal not to question me, and they accepted it and chatted away as usual as if there was nothing wrong.



CHAPTER TEN

The next day, while I was walking towards breakfast with Rylee, the stares and whispers of kids followed me.



While this was not surprising as it had been going on for many weeks now, there was something about them that unnerved me this time. Only after a few minutes did I realize why. None of the people were treating with hostility, like they usually did. No, this time, they looked *sympathetic*. I clued Rylee in, and she looked around for a moment to see if I was right, and then she nodded. “That *is* weird,” she said, frowning.

We entered the Dining Hall, and made our way to our usual table. However, the others weren’t chatting together like they always did. When we arrived, there was an uncomfortable silence. Then— “Is it true?” Naomi asked, in a low voice. “What’s true?” I asked, confused.

“That you didn’t come here because your parents are poor, but because they died in a car accident,” said Carmen bluntly. Naomi scowled at her. “What? I’m just saying it as it is,” she said defensively. “That’s exactly the problem,” Naomi muttered. “The point is, how did you both find out?” Rylee said quickly, as Carmen opened her mouth to reply.

“Well, isn’t it obvious?” Naomi said, puzzled. “From others, of course!” “Who others?” I said sharply. They both stared at me. “It’s all over the school, Chrissy. Didn’t you know?” I groaned and sank down onto my chair. Now the pitying looks made sense.

“How do you think they found out?” Rylee asked, turning to me while frowning. “There was no one else around, was there?” “Where did you both

talk about it?” “In the gardens behind a tree. The place looked empty of people, so we thought it was safe.” “*Rylee!* Anyone could have heard you there! It doesn’t matter if it looked empty, who knows, anyone could have been hiding behind the bushes like you two were, and they would have heard you!”

We both were too dumbstruck to say anything. It seemed such a simple concept. Why hadn’t we thought of that too? “Well, what’s done is done. No turning back,” Rylee said heavily. Just then, Brittany arrived at our table. All of us stood up. “And what do you want?” Carmen said aggressively. Brittany didn’t reply to her. Instead, she looked at me and said, “Chrissy, can I please talk to you? Only for a minute.”

I stared at her, taken aback. This was the first time that she hadn’t called me Charity Box *and* was being polite. “S-sure.” We walked outside the Dining Hall as at that moment, every eye in the huge room was fixed on us, which didn’t really describe privacy. Brittany turned to me after we reached the staircase. There was a pause.

“I’m sorry,” she said abruptly. “I shouldn’t have bullied you like that. I didn’t know you had suffered such a loss though.” “It doesn’t matter if I’ve suffered a loss or not,” I said, not looking at her. “You shouldn’t bully people even otherwise. You never know what they might be going through.” “I know.” Another pause. “Thanks for the apology. I appreciate it.” I smiled at her. She gave me a hesitant one back.



EPILOGUE (Five months later)

I was dipping my feet in the lake, as the weather was extremely hot, when I heard someone call my name. I looked up to see Rylee come running up.

“Hey! Was looking for you. I thought I’ll find you here. It’s become your favourite place, hasn’t it?” “Yep,” I laughed.

She sat down beside me, took off her shoes and socks, and gently lowered her legs into the lake. We smiled at each other. For the next half an hour, we chatted together about school. It was amazing, having cool water bob around my feet while I talked and laughed with my best friend. And at that moment, I felt so happy. I had a best friend who cared about me, everyone had finally stopped bullying me, and I was doing quite well in school too.

I knew that I will never truly heal from my parents’ death, but I was happy here, and at that moment, I knew my parents would be proud of me for handling everything so well.

