

# The Spring Creek

By L.B. Stanley

## Chapter 1: Orphans and Rockwell

**P**a was very ill. Ma did all she could to get him better, but everything she tried seemed to not work. Leah and Buddy worried and were both very helpful, but still, Pa was weak and fragile.

“Ma,” started Leah one day, “D-do you th-think Pa will, um, well, die?”

“Of course not...” Ma stopped and sadly lowered her head.

“Ma, is something wrong? Can I get you anything? Ma?” Buddy asked as he quietly walked up.

Ma looked up with hot tears in her eyes. “It’s time y’all know; your father is dying, doctor says. It’s possible he could die any day now,” Ma said without hesitation.

Buddy walked away sadly while Leah quickly cried, “Oh, Ma!” and ran to embrace her mother.

The next day, Leah and Buddy woke up to a frightening surprise when Ma helplessly screamed. They almost ran down the ladder to find their mother with nasty tears running down her hot, red face, and their father stiffly lying on the bed. Leah and Buddy immediately understood what had happened: Pa had died.

The funeral two days later was a sad one. Ma was dressed in a dark dress with a black veil covering her lovely face. Aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents and friends came. The reverend kept talking about Pa, but Leah and Buddy didn’t care to know; they just stood staring at their father, who was gently laid in his beautiful casket.

After the funeral, the reverend drove Ma and her children home. The rest of the family followed to bring food for the small family. One by one each family quietly left with a sad good-bye.

After everyone left, Ma smiled sadly, saying, "Alright, you two, let's make you a birthday cake," and then going into the kitchen, "Now, Leah, you get the baking soda and Buddy..."she paused and took a deep, *deep* breathe. The next thing Leah and Buddy heard was a loud boom. They ran to the kitchen to find their mother lying on the floor. Leah bent down to check if her mother was breathing and said to her brother, "Go get Aunt Mary and Uncle Jack."

"I can't," he cried, "I can't run fast enough. You have longer legs than me. I'll stay here with Ma, you go and get them."

"Oh, bother," she mumbled as she ran out the door. While she ran as fast as she could, she thought, *I've got to keep running. I'm running for Ma's life. I have to keep running.*

Finally, she caught up to her aunt and uncle. Her uncle was a doctor. She told him what had happened and she hopped into the wagon as they hurried back to the house.

Uncle Jack said that the cause of this was grief. He said to Leah and Buddy, "Some people die from this, but your Ma's strong. I'm sure she'll live."

But Uncle Jack was wrong. Two weeks later, Ma died. It was very surprising and sad, especially for the children. After the funeral, (which was just like Pa's) Uncle Jack and Aunt Mary discussed where the children would live.

"Jack, we can't leave them here. They need to be in an adult's care," Aunt Mary said.

"But we can't take them home. We've already six children of our own, not to mention a dog, two cats, a pig, and a rabbit. The only place we can send them is to an orphanage," Uncle Jack replied.

"But, what about the dog, Jack? She can't just stay here forever," Aunt Mary said as she glanced at Erwin, Leah and Buddy's dog.

“They can take her with them. Doesn’t your cousin, Amelia Carter, own an orphanage? I’m sure she’ll let them bring the dog,” Uncle Jack said.

“I’m not sure, but it’s worth a try,” Aunt Mary replied.

The next day, Uncle Jack and Aunt Mary sent a letter to her cousin, Mrs. Carter, telling her that the children were coming from Tullytown, Pennsylvania.

Soon they were on their way to Springfield, Illinois. And soon enough, they were *in* Springfield and at the orphanage.

Aunt Mary knocked on the red French doors and a tall, scrawny-looking woman with thick, dark hair made into a large bun came out. She had spectacles and evil black eyes. She was Mrs. Carter.

“Amelia! Well, it’s been a long time!” Aunt Mary exclaimed with her arms wide open to embrace her cousin.

Mrs. Carter put her bony hands out to stop her and said, “Yes, yes, it’s been a while.” She turned around, drew up her skirt, and walked up the steep stairs. They all went in.

“Please, have a seat,” Mrs. Carter said as she sat herself on the giant chair.

As soon as everyone sat down, Erwin ran in and jumped onto the couch beside Leah.

“My goodness!” Mrs. Carter squeaked as she jumped up and hit the poor dog off the couch. “Get that vicious, dirty creature out of my home!”

“Amelia, she isn’t vicious,” Uncle Jack said. “She’s the children’s dog.”

“Hmm, yes, well, get it out anyway,” she said, staring at Leah and Buddy.

“But, miss,” Leah said, trying to stay calm, “She’s really loyal and can chase away any mice or rats, that is, if you have any.”

“I don’t care. Just get it out,” she said. Then, she changed the subject and asked, “So, y’all are the Kagan children?”

“Yes’m,” Leah quickly replied with a loud gulp. She elbowed Buddy, who also replied, “Yes’m,” with a gulp.

“I’m Leah, and I’m eleven, almost twelve,” Leah said.

“And I’m Buddy, and I’m seven... going on eight,” Buddy said.

“Very well,” Mrs. Carter replied.

“Well, we best be going,” Uncle Jack said as he nudged at his wife.

“Mm, yes, of course,” Mrs. Carter replied.

Aunt Mary was saying a sad good-bye to Leah and Buddy. “Good-bye. I’ll miss you. Mrs. Carter will take very good care of you, I’m sure.” And they left, but someone was snuck into the basement: Erwin.

“Your bedrooms are upstairs, so go and settle in,” Mrs. Carter demanded as Leah and Buddy sadly trudged up the staircase.

Then, a girl, younger than Leah, but older than Buddy met them. She was a pretty little girl with dirty-blond hair and freckles on her nose and beautiful blue eyes.

“Hi,” she greeted with a smile, “I’m Sky McMoyers. I’m ten years old.”

“I’m Leah, and I’m almost twelve. Oh, and this is my shy little brother, Buddy. He’s almost eight,” Leah explained.

“Come, I’ll show you your rooms and you can settle down,” Sky said as they followed her to their new home.

## Chapter 2: The Popplewell Children

**A** week later, Leah and Buddy had settled down and made new friends: Sky McMoyers and her sister, Desi, who was seventeen with brown hair and brown eyes; Lily Willow, who was nine with blonde hair and blue eyes and her sister Rachel, who was eight with red hair and green eyes; Albert Quinn, who was twelve with black hair and brown eyes and his brother, Andy, who was ten, who looked just like his brother; and last, Christiana and Gabriel Garrison, who were twins at six years old.

But there were two more that weren't there just yet.

Two English children from London arrived with their grandmother. They were both really young and shy. Their parents had just died in a train crash and their grandmother, their *only* living relative, brought them. She said that she couldn't keep them, for she was very elderly and would soon die herself.

Soon after, their grandmother left. That's when Mrs. Carter started being bossy.

"So, I'd like to know your names, please," she said, placing her bony hands on her hips.

"I'm An-na, and I'm seventeen," the girl said, a little shakily, "and this is my brother, Skandar. H-he's fifteen." Anna looked down at her feet and flushed a little pink, while Skandar looked around and started trembling and also flushed pink.

"Alright, I'll call Desi McMoyers and Leah Kagan to show y'all to your rooms," Mrs. Carter said, then shouted carelessly, "Desi! Leah! Come down this instant!" And they hurried down the steep staircase to see what Mrs. Carter wanted.

"Girls," she started, "Come, show these children to their rooms. They'll tell you their names and ages." She marched off with her snooty attitude.

"Hi, I'm Desi McMoyers, and I'm seventeen," Desi smiled at them. "Oh, and if y'all are wondering, that was Mrs. Carter, the mean orphanage keeper."

“And I’m Leah... Kagan,” Leah said as she held out her hand to Anna. She slowly put her hand up to Leah’s, and then quickly shook it.

“I’m Anna Popplewell, and this is Skandar. I’m seventeen and he’s fifteen,” Anna said.

“What a coincidence,” Leah smiled, “Anna and Desi are both seventeen.” Anna and Skandar looked at each other and smiled at Desi and Leah.

“Come on, we’ll show you to your bedrooms, or as I call mine, *home*,” Leah said as they all laughed and climbed up the staircase.

“Here,” she started, “Anna, you can sleep in Desi’s bedroom, and there’s the extra bed.” A small cot was in a bedroom corner beside a small shelf with a shiny mirror and at the end of the bed stood a dresser with five drawers and ten shiny silver knobs, two on each drawer.

Then, Leah led Skandar into his own bedroom down the hall from her room. “This can be your room if you like,” she started. “You can pick whichever bed you want. Maybe someday someone will join you in here, but for now, you’re alone.” The bedroom had two cots, one in a corner with dressers and shelves and chairs. Each bedroom had a window, a closet, and a clock. Then, Leah looked at the clock in his bedroom and said, “Oh, I’ve got to go feed my dog-“ and quickly held her hand up to her mouth while Skandar stared wide-eyed.

“What?” he asked. “Aren’t we allowed to have pets?”

“No, but my brother and I snuck her in. Please don’t tell,” she whispered.

“Okay,” he said. “I won’t. I promise.”

“I gotta go,” Leah said. “It was nice meeting you. See ya.”

“See ya,” he replied as she left.

## Chapter 3: The New Hersha Kagan

**M**rs. Carter had an announcement to make. “Children,” she started one day, “I’ll be leaving for a day to Minneapolis and I’m leaving my son, Bill, in charge while I’m gone.”

Soon after she made the announcement that day, she left. As soon as she left, Bill treated *everyone* with no respect at all. Girls were like ants, being stepped on and tortured every second with hateful words and dirty tricks, while boys were like balls, being kicked around the place, non-stop.

Bill was fourteen years old. He had blonde hair and hate in his dark-brown eyes. Apparently he looked just like his father, who had died just three years ago.

“Alright, children, go to your rooms and be quiet because I’m having a party,” Bill said as he pointed toward the staircase.

“Are we invited?” Andy asked, staring wide-eyed at Bill.

“Of course not, stupid! This party’s only for older boys, my age, not petty little children like all of you. Now, I told you something and I expect you to do it,” he said, frowning angrily at the children.

Skandar frowned and placed his hands on his hips. “I’m fifteen! I’m not a baby! What about me?” he asked.

“No, you’re odd. You and your sister are both English and are, well, just different. Now, go on!” Bill yelled as he marched off.

Skandar and Anna sadly trudged up the stairs with their heads hanging wearily. Leah stopped them and said, “You’re not odd at all. You are some of the nicest people that I’ve ever met.”

Anna lowered her head again and mumbled her thanks and walked off, while Skandar looked up and beamed, saying, “Thanks. At least *someone* cares.”

A little while later, everyone heard a knock at the door.

*Who could it be*, Christiana and Gabriel thought to themselves, while Leah and Sky knew exactly who it was: *Bill's snippy party guests*.

As soon as she heard the doorbell ring Leah rolled her eyes then thought of a great idea: to sneak out for a while with some of her friends and have a "party" of their own.

She made the invitations and stepped out of her room. She slipped the invitations under Sky's, Skandar's, Lily's, and Albert's bedroom doors. A half an hour later, she heard four gentle knocks at her door. It was her guests. She softly opened the door and motioned her guests to come in.

"Okay, well, I was thinking that maybe *we* could do something fun for ourselves, like, make a swing in the woods or something," Leah explained.

"Fly a kite!" Lily suggested.

"Buy a horse!" Albert exclaimed.

"Go to the library!" Sky shouted.

"Go on an adventure!" Skandar proclaimed.

"We could do *all* of this, except for, um, buying a horse. All of our money put *together* couldn't even buy a pig!" Leah joked. Albert blushed.

So they were on their way. First, they made the swing. Albert got the wood and Lily got the rope. They all found a nice climbing tree in the woods and tied the swing to the tree. Then, they played for a while.

Next, they made the kite. Sky and Leah found yarn and rope and quickly, but carefully, made the new kite. Skandar and Albert found a field not too far out of town. Again, they played a while. They ran circles freely and flew the kite with ease.

They went to the library. They spent a couple of hours reading and looking, reading book after book until soon enough, they decided to leave before Bill found out they were missing. They left after two hours of reading fantasies and mysteries.



Finally, they went on their “adventure.” They traveled to Farmer Dodd’s farm and gazed in awe.

“Who has ever seen such a marvelous farm?” wondered Lily.

“I don’t know, but whoever hasn’t, they’re missing out on *a lot*,” Leah said, still gazing in awe.

In the distance, they could see Farmer Dodd shooing something away. The children raced to hide. Luckily, Farmer Dodd didn’t see them, but Leah did see a lamb, crawling sadly away into the woods. She ran off after Farmer Dodd was out of sight to the small lamb.

“Leah, where are you going? He’ll catch you!” Skandar called. No answer echoed back at him, so everyone else followed her.

Before they could reach her, Leah walked back with the little white lamb in her arms.

“Everyone, meet the new Hersha Kagan,” said Leah as she tickled the lamb’s stomach.

“How do you know it’s a girl?” Lily asked.

“Because she is just as gentle as my mother was before she died. Oh, you should have met her. She was the sweetest, gentlest person you’d ever met,” she said as tears rolled into her eyes. “Oh, well, we’d better go before Mr. Carter punishes us.” They all laughed as they started home.

## Chapter 4: Rivals and Friends

**S**oon enough, they came home to here laughter coming from downstairs. The party was still going.

Then, the next day, Mrs. Carter came home. She announced that all of the children would soon be going to school.

Everyone was excited. Well, *almost* everyone.

Leah was nervous as ever. The school bully from her school in Tullytown, Carl Hartford, told her that she would never make any friends (though she made friends in Tullytown), for she was something of a tomboy, hair pins tumbling out of her hair, staining her dress and stockings, playing boy games, for instance, she would play baseball all throughout lunchtime, or go fishing after school. (Homework never interested her when she was a little girl.) *How can I face the whole school?* She wondered. She hoped her friends at the orphanage would stand by her and be her friend. She was as anxious and nervous as ever.

Two days later, they came to school. Leah hid behind Skandar with Sky beside her. It was easy for her, for she was small and Skandar was somewhat taller than her. Everyone split up to meet some friends, while Leah followed Desi to meet this scrawny-looking boy about her age.

After talking to the boy for a moment, Desi introduced them to each other. "Leah," she started, "this is Jim Starling. Jim, this is a good friend of mine, Leah Kagan." The boy then bent down to shake Leah's hand. She shook it then buried her face into Desi's back. "How 'bout you go over there and talk to that girl?" Desi said as she crouched down. "She's Jim younger sister, Christy." She pointed to the girl.

Tears rolled into her eyes as she clung to Desi and cried, "Oh, Desi, please don't make me! I'm scared, Desi, I'm scared!" She immediately remembered what her father did when she did the same thing to him. He had said, "Don't worry. I'll be here for you whenever you need me." But now, he wasn't here and all she had was Desi. She dried her tears.

"I'll go. I'll go only if you'll be here for me," Leah whimpered.

"I will," she said. "I will *always* be here for you."

Then, she ran off to join the girl when she saw another, pretty girl appear. The second girl wore a pretty pink dress with her own matching parasol. Her curled blonde hair bounced as she walked and her shoes sparkled in the sun. She looked at Leah slyly and turned her head back at Christy. She stuck her tongue out at Christy then walked away.

"Hello, I'm Leah Kagan and I've just turned twelve," she said with a cheerful smile.

"I'm Christy Brown Starling an' I'm twelve, tur," the black girl said as she smiled a big smile. "Dat's my ado'tive brotha, Jim. His fam'ly ado'ted me when I was a small kiddy. Oh, an' da was Nancy Owens. Her fam'ly owns the mircintil'. She's snooty and snobby. She is 'most fideen.' Isn't kind at all, nope, not a bit." Christy put her hands on her hips and glanced over at Nancy, who was already bullying someone else. "She told me she don't like ya, but I do. You're one of the first people to not make any fun of me. Where do ya come from?" she asked.

"Tullytown, Pennsylvania," Leah answered.

"Ain't that a li'l far from here?" Christy wondered.

Leah giggled. "No, I don't think you understand. I *used* to live there, before my parents died. Now I live at Rockwell Orphanage, not far from here."

"Oh!" Christy said as she also giggled.

"I'm gonna go teach that Nancy a lesson for treating my new friend badly," Leah said as she marched over to Nancy.

"You do da, girl!" Christy shouted with a loud, cheery, laugh.

Leah tapped Nancy on the shoulder. Nancy looked over and said, "Humph!" and turned back around. Leah, angry with Nancy, tapped her on the shoulder

again, a little harder. Nancy looked again and rolled her eyes at Leah. Leah, as angry as ever, slapped Nancy on the shoulder.

“Ow!” cried Nancy as she jumped up and whirled around to see who did it. She saw Leah and screamed, “You evil creature!”

“Well, that’s what you get for bullying my friend, Christy!” Leah cried as she turned towards the black girl, who was laughing so hard that tears rolled down her black cheeks.

“You’re friends with *her*?” Nancy said with a vicious giggle.

“Who *wouldn’t* be?” Leah said, and then said with a sly smile, “Of course, I know the answer.”

“What?” Nancy asked with her hands on her hips.

“Only snooty snobs like *you!*” Leah said as she walked away, laughing hard.

Then, a pretty young woman stepped out and rang a large bell. All of the children went into the school house.

Skandar led Leah and Buddy to the teacher’s desk.

“Miss Kendall,” he started, “This is Leah and Buddy Kagan. Leah is twelve and Buddy is eight.”

Miss Kendall looked kindly at Leah and Buddy. “You may take any seat you’d like. Do you have any school books?”

“Yes ma’am. They were our Ma’s before she died,” Leah said.

“Alright, you may take your seats and we’ll begin class.”

Leah glanced at Christy. Christy was patting the seat beside her. Leah smiled and sat beside her new friend.

## Chapter 5: A Beginner's Good Grades

**T**wo days after arriving to school, Leah received an English test and a history test. Leah worked hard. After she finished, she took it to Miss Kendall. Miss Kendall graded it, and, she had good news: Leah had gotten a 100/A+ on both!

Then, she received four arithmetic tests. She was working on multiplication, division, algebra, and fractions. All night that night, Leah studied hard. The next morning, she took the tests. Miss Kendall graded these tests, and Leah got a 91/A- in fractions, 87/B+ in algebra, 97/A+ in multiplication, and 100/A+ in division. Miss Kendall was *very* proud.

Last, she received a science test. It was her first time to take a science test, but she worked hard anyway. After Miss Kendall graded them and handed her the paper, Leah was surprised that there was an 88/B+ on it! She and Miss Kendall were both very surprised and proud.

Buddy, on the other hand, wasn't doing so well. He was more interested in fishing and games.

When he received his English and history tests, he didn't study at all. He received a 75/C+ in history and an 81/B- in English.

In arithmetic, he received an 80 in subtraction, 72 in multiplication, and 90 in an addition review.

But he was most interested in science and he had a dream to become a scientist when he grew up. This got him to *finally* study and he started to study about animals, plants, human bodies, and things like that. To everyone's surprise, Buddy got a 94! Miss Kendall was very proud and promised that if it was Buddy's wish to become a scientist, then she would pay for him to college if he only studied hard. Buddy promised and went straight to work. Leah was very surprised at Buddy for wishing to be a scientist, but was also very proud.

## Chapter 6: The Sitters

Leah stood gazing at the marvelous music box, while Rachel and Lily stood beside her, Lily staring at a glass doll and Rachel staring at a china tea set.

“Oh, don’t you just wish we could afford these things?” Lily sighed in awe.

“Do I *ever!*” Rachel gasped.

“Well, we’d better get going before Mrs. Carter realizes that we’re gone,” Leah said, still gazing at the music box.

They left. Rachel was skipping in front of Leah and Lily. Leah and Lily kept talking about the interesting things they had seen.

“Oh, it’s- it’s *so* miserable being poor when Mrs. Carter is one of the richest people in town,” Lily said, the last few words sounding harsh.

“I know... if there was only some way we could earn money ourselves...” Leah paused and smiled excitedly. “There *is* a way, Lily! We could *baby-sit!*”

“Yippee!” Lily squeaked, and then said a little soberly, “What about Rachel? Isn’t she too young?”

“I know!” Leah shouted. “We could surprise her with the tea set! She would be so happy! Don’t tell her about it, though. Alright, we can meet in the kitchen since Mrs. Carter has a telephone in there and we can call people, asking for jobs! Just, uh- don’t tell Mrs. Carter about this. She won’t be very pleasant if she knows.” The girls laughed aloud.

The next morning, Leah and Lily called people that they can sit for. No one said yes, so they decided to ask some of the kids at school.

At school, Lily met up with three of her friends, Jennifer Dowdy and Millie and Molly Jonsen (twins).

Leah met up with three friends and a rival, Christy Starling, Maud Smith, Beth Andersen, and yes, Nancy Owens. Leah remembered that Nancy, Maud, and Christy each had young siblings.

“Hi Christy and Maud and Beth,” she said, then glancing at Nancy, “Hello, Nancy.”

Nancy rolled her eyes and groaned.

“I was wondering if any of you will need a sitter for your brothers and sisters. Lily and I need to earn some money, and so-“

“Oh, Billy!” squealed Nancy as she ran to Bill.

Everyone was silent as they watched Bill walk off with Nancy, who was chattering away.

Then, Christy broke the silence. “Sho, I’ll asks my Mama if you could sit fo’ Danielle, an’ Nicholas, an’ Vanessa, an’ the twinsies, an’ Bella. Oh, an’ yes, Janine.” Leah stared wide eyed. *Wow. That’s a big family*, she thought.

My family, too,” Maud said. “You can sit for Jonah, Donny, Caleb, Susan, Janet, and Maurice.”

“My goodness, what big families you both have,” Leah said.

Beth said, almost whispering, “You can sit for Chelsea and Michael. They’d just love you.” She smiled kindly.

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Two days later, Leah sat for Chelsea and Michael Andersen. They were very good for her. Chelsea was eight years old and had bright blue eyes and had blonde hair. Michael was five and had green eyes and strawberry-red hair.

“So, what do you want to do?” she asked.

“Play jump-rope!” Michael exclaimed.

“Read us a story!” Chelsea cried running for their favorite book. “This one, please.”

“We could do both, so, which one should we do first?” Leah asked.

“Jump- rope!” they both jumped up and shouted.

They went out and played for a bit until Michael got tired. So then they went inside and read the story, a chapter from *Little Women*, and after that Michael took his nap. Leah and Chelsea sat in the living room, playing games of Go-Fish. They were on their seventh game when Mrs. Andersen and Beth came back.

“Hi, Beth!” Leah cried as she hugged Beth. “Hello, Mrs. Andersen. Michael is taking his nap. Chelsea and I were just playing Go-Fish when you arrived. I also fed them their snack, a slice of bread with melted cheese on top.”

Then, Chelsea cried, “Mommy!” and ran to embrace her. “I’ve had a wonderful day. Leah was real nice to us; she even read a chapter of *Little Women* to us. You should pay *lots* of money to her. She deserves it.”

Leah, Beth, and Mrs. Andersen laughed, and, before she knew it, Leah was saying goodbye with six dollars in her hand.

The next day, she sat for Christy’s siblings. They were wild and hyper, but were good kids.

Danielle was ten, and a good student. She looked a lot like Christy, just a little younger. Nicky was eight, and was full of adventure. He had short black hair. Vanessa was seven, and one of the two calm children. The twins, Shelby and Cassandra, were both five. They were identical, but somewhat different. Bella was four. She was the second of the calm children. Last was their cousin, Janine, who was born in Africa. She was nine.

At the end of the day, Leah trudged down the road wearily, for she was fatigued, but at least she had \$7. 75. Altogether she had \$13. 75!

Soon, she had to sit for the Smiths.



Jonah was eleven. He was short, but nice. He had curly dark brown hair and brown eyes. Donny was nine. He had red hair and green eyes. Caleb was eight with brown hair and brown eyes. Susan was six with blonde hair and blue eyes. Janet was five and looked like her big sister. Maurice was the baby.

They were good kids, and when Susan, Janet, and Maurice were laid down for their naps, Leah enjoyed being with the boys.

Desi and Sky were walking into town, passing the Smith home. They caught Leah playing in the creek with the boys, laughing hard as ever, and hair pins tumbling out of her hair.

Then, when the others awoke, Leah and the boys went in and changed into some fresh clean clothes (Leah used an old dress of Mrs. Smith's).

When Mrs. Smith got home, she paid Leah. Six dollars! Now, altogether, she had \$19.75! Fifteen dollars for the music box, four dollars for Rachel's tea set!

Lily had earned twelve dollars, so they bought the tea set and their things. How happy they were when Rachel stared wide-eyed in awe and happiness at the new tea set!

## Chapter 7: Punished for the Good Deed

**G**abriel rolled his eyes. “Aw, drat’s!” he panicked as he stared at his arithmetic test. “Why would Miss Kendall give me *multiplication* facts that I don’t even know about? I barely know how to add!”

“I agree, brother,” Christiana said, nodding in agreement.

“Let me see this,” Sky said, grabbing Gabriel’s paper. “Mm-mmm, I see. I guess she accidentally printed the wrong facts on your paper. I know that’s what happened, ‘cause I didn’t see any other papers on her desk except for her teacher book.” Then, Sky’s eyes widened. “I’ll help you with your work, Gabe!”

“I’ll help you, Christiana!” Leah cried. “C’mon, let’s go get started on these tests!”

At home, they worked on those papers, teaching the twins how to multiply. While on their sixth problem, Bill caught Leah and Christiana, Leah writing something down on a piece of paper. She was just showing Chris how to multiply, but Bill thought she was giving Christiana the answer. So he told his mother.

How do you suppose his mother handled it? She scolded Leah and Sky for “giving the poor children the answers” and sent them to the basement without lunch *or* dinner. They were punished for the good deed.

“Ughh, how cruel of Mrs. Carter to put us down here for doing something good. I should’ve known better than to ‘help’ Gabriel. I should’ve just minded my own business,” groaned Sky, kicking a can away.

“Yup, it is miserable, but, we were doing the right thing until that boy got us into trouble,” Leah said. Then, she looked up through the window and saw an officer. “We might just be in luck.”

“Huh?” asked Sky.

“Look,” Leah said, pointing at the officer. He stood there, waving at people and shaking their hands.

“He looks like he has nothing to do,” Sky said, staring at the man.

“Now he does!” Leah cried, going up to the barred- window. “Hello, sir?” she called. He turned around and bent down to the window.

“Yes, little miss?”

“Mrs. Carter locked us in here for helping our friends with their homework. Can you help us get out?”

The man looked very unhappy. “I’ll do more than that. I’ll give her a ticket for this nonsense.” And he marched over to the door.

“Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!” Sky giggled and cried, but Leah hushed her. They could hear the officer yelling at Mrs. Carter and then he let them out.

“We’re free!” they yelled as they burst out of the basement.

The officer handed a ticket to Mrs. Carter. She paid it, not very happy, and he left with a nice, “Good-bye” to Leah and Sky.

Mrs. Carter got angry and tried to say something, but couldn’t. She marched out of the room. Bill came up to them.

“How dare you!” he cried.

The girls giggled and high-fived each other, walking merrily out of the room. And everyone was glad to see that they were back, especially Gabriel and Christiana, who were tired of trying to multiply by themselves.

And, luckily just in time, Gabriel and Christiana got an A+ on their tests. They were very happy.

## Chapter 8: The Great Idea

**A**fter being locked up in the basement, Mrs. Carter and Bill were even *more* hateful to *all* of the children.

Mrs. Carter didn't talk to them at all, unless to say hateful words to them like, "You dirty, useless, rats!" or, "Stupid, lazy children!" or even, "Why did I start this orphanage? All I get is horrible, useless, and ugly children! Kids are of no use and can't ever do anything right." Of course, the kids ignored every word she spoke.

Bill, though, always hurt the younger kids' feelings. He would say, "Toilet water is the best perfume for girls!" or, "You boys play ball like girls!" or, "My grandma can bat the ball better than you!"

The kids were tired of being treated like babies, so Sky and Leah started making plans.

"Everyone in this orphanage treats us like little babies!" Sky said to Leah one morning. "Well, I take that back. Only Mrs. Carter and Bill make fun of us."

Leah was walking in circles, thinking hard about what to do. Then, she smiled. "I know what we can do!" she exclaimed. "We can *run away!* We can go *tonight!* I'll tell Lily, Rachel, Buddy, Skandar, and Anna, and you can tell Desi, Albert, Andy, Christiana, and Gabriel!"

"Good idea! I'll go right now!"

"So will I!"

Luckily, everyone said that they would come. But when they went to school that morning, it was hard for Leah and Buddy and the rest to say good-bye to their friends, and it was especially hard for Leah to say good-bye to Christy Starling.

"Hey, um, Christy, I need to talk to you," Leah said to Christy.

"Ya, what d'ya need to talk to me 'bout?" Christy wondered.

“Do you promise to keep it a secret?”

“Yup.”

“Well, we will be, um, running away tonight, so, I- I just wanted to say good-bye.”

Christy looked down and started to sniffle. Leah did the same, but she tried not to show it.

Then, Christy looked up, wiped her tears away, and then said, “I wish you don’t have to leave, but I understand. Da Miz Carter! She’s so mean. If she weren’t mean, do ya think da you’d stay?”

Leah sighed and said, “I don’t know. Maybe, but everyone hates just living in that orphanage. We probably would’ve left.”

“I’ll miss ya,” Christy said. She hugged Leah quickly and ran off. *This*, Leah thought, *is the last time I’ll ever see Christy Starling*. She stood, staring at her friend, and then walked away.

“How did it go?” Lily asked as Leah came over to them.

“Alright, I guess,” Leah answered, but she knew deep down in her heart that it was one of the hardest times in her life.

Later that evening, all of the children secretly started packing, while Skandar and Albert went into town, bought a horse and wagon, and also bought some food.

Then, at ten o’clock that night, they, two by two, crept out of the orphanage. And they left that night.

## Chapter 9: Following the Spring Creek

**T**he children drove a little ways into the forest. Then, they set up a small camp.

“Here,” Albert said, handing out small steaks to everyone. “We got these while we were in town.”

“No wonder it took so long,” Rachel said. Everyone laughed while cooking their steaks.

Leah couldn’t sleep that night. She couldn’t help but thinking about Christy. She already missed her and missed all the other kids at school, except for Nancy Owens.

The next morning, they packed up and went deeper into the woods.

“Where are we going?” Gabriel asked.

“Um, I guess the first shelter we come to,” Anna said. She was sitting cozily next to Skandar with a blanket wrapped around her. Skandar was driving the wagon, also wrapped in a blanket.

“An old barn would be better than living in an orphanage with a mean orphanage keeper and snippy little boys,” Buddy said.

Sky chuckled and said, “You sure are right. Any place would be better than...” she paused. The wagon had stopped. Everyone was silent. They were all confused, all except for Skandar.

Then, Leah broke the silence. “What are we doing, Skandar?” she asked.

“Don’t you hear that?” he asked.

“Hear what?” Sky, Leah, and Lily asked at the same time.

“The water. There must be a river or something nearby!” he said as he drove the wagon towards the noise. A few minutes later, they came into a clearing beside a large creek.

Skandar looked at his map. He said, "We're at the Spring Creek. If we travel for a couple of more days, we will get to a clearing. It may have a barn!" Everyone shouted for joy as they hopped out of the wagon. They ran to the creek to drink the water.

After an hour, they hopped back into the wagon and headed south. It took two days to get to the clearing. When they got there, they couldn't believe what they saw.

There was an old barn beside the river. There was also a burned down house near the barn.

Everyone got out looking around. Leah and Sky peeked into the barn. There was hay all over the place. There was also a ladder leading up to a hay loft.

The girls looked at each other and beamed. They ran up the ladder and jumped down into the sweet-smelling hay.

Soon, Lily and Rachel joined them, along with Christiana, Gabriel, and Buddy.

After a while, they decided to stop and join the others.

"Where have you been?" Desi asked.

"Just playing in the barn," Lily smirked.

"We want to explain something to you," Desi said.

"Okay," Leah said.

## Chapter 10: Old Man Millard's Barn

**A**nna started, "This is Old Man Millard's barn. He lived here a long time ago, before any of us were born. He sold *lots* of produce to the villages nearby. But one night, his house caught on fire. He had been in the barn while it happened, and when he saw it, he grabbed a bucket and ran to the creek. He kept splashing water on his house, but nothing worked. So he went into the house, trying to save his belongings. But as he headed out, a beam caught fire and fell. There was no way out, so he—"

"Died?" Gabriel asked. "How could he? He was so kind."

"Well, yes, he did die, and no one knew about it except for an old man named Henry Stanford. He was the only one to find the barn. But no one else knows because Henry died soon afterwards," Skandar said.

"Well, is this our new home?" Sky asked.

"I think so," Leah said. "Is it our home?"

Skandar nodded. Everyone beamed and jumped for joy.

"Yippee!" Leah, Sky, and Gabriel kept shouting.

"Alright, let's start moving into our new home!" Buddy shouted as everyone ran to the wagon to grab their bag.



## Chapter 11: Settling Down

**T**hey made beds out of quilts and piles of hay. The boys slept on the first floor while the girls slept in the hay loft.

Skandar built a table out of some old posts and set it near the doorway. He also made some chairs to go with it, a counter in the corners, and, with a little help from the other boys, some walls to separate the rooms. He also built twelve crates to make their beds with.

The boys separated a pile of hay from the big pile to make their beds. They put the hay into their crate and covered it up with a quilt. Then, they put a pillow on top and covered it with another quilt. The girls did the same thing.

They made the inside look nice, but when Gabriel and Christiana asked to grow a garden beside the barn, the others said no. They didn't want other people to notice that they lived there.

Skandar made a chimney and a fire place to cook food. He, Buddy, and Albert also cut some firewood and piled it inside the lean-to.

That night, after Desi and Anna cooked the meal, everyone sat at the table to eat.

"It's been a long day," Desi said while cutting the venison on her plate.

"It sure has," agreed Skandar.

"Just five months ago we moved into the orphanage. Remember that, Buddy?" Leah said.

"Yeah and Mrs. Carter got angry at us for bringing Erwin," Buddy said as he glanced at Erwin.

"I'm glad you brought her along," Sky said.

"So am I," Andy agreed.

"She's the best dog ever," Rachel smiled at Erwin.

"I'm glad I made friends like y'all," Leah said as she smiled at everyone.

"So am I," Sky agreed. Everyone nodded in agreement.

Once everyone got to bed, Leah couldn't sleep.

"Sky, are you awake?" she asked.

"Ya," Sky answered.

"What was the hardest part of your life?"

"When I was abused by my parents. What is yours?"

"When my Ma and Pa died. And when I said good-bye to my friends. But now, I feel like I'm the happiest girl alive."

Sky giggled. "Me, too."

"Good-night, Sky."

"Good-night, Leah."

Leah knew that even though she had been through a lot of hard times, it turned out to be very exciting. She knew that she *was* the happiest girl alive.