

The Runaways

Every word of the argument stuck inside her head like a brick wall.

"She's so grumpy." Mum was shaking her head, tutting.

"When will she learn to control herself?" Dad was sitting on the sofa and talking quietly as he turned off the TV. Niamh knew straight away they were talking about her. Her body tensed as she sat, silent, on the stairs.

"She's a typical teenager." Mum answered, clutching dad's hand. "All she ever thinks about is what she wants – poor Katie is frightened to death of her, she shouts so much!"

She could feel herself heating up. Her breathing quickening. As she rose to her feet, her parents turned their heads and stared her straight in the eye. Saw anger there but didn't speak a word.

"You're lying!" she told them.

"Niamh" Mum said squeezing dad's hand, tight.

"You're lying!" She repeated, raising her voice.

"Niamh, please stop." Mum's eyes watered as she stepped towards her. She backed away.

"You obviously don't want me here – I might as well have left on my thirteenth birthday. No teenagers allowed in this house." She frowned forcefully, getting her message across.

"That's not what we said!" Dad was on his feet too now and shouting at her. She paused, startled by his sudden anger.

"I hate you! I hate you all... because you hate me!" turning and whipping her jacket off the shelf, she opened the door.

"No!" Mum squealed as I sprinted down the drive.

She tried to hold it back but it was too late – tears streamed down her cheeks. The wind was cold and icy. She ran and ran until she was as far away as she could get. Then she hid and cried herself to sleep. She woke to the sound of whimpers and whines from behind some dustbins. The sun was as bright as a lightbulb that morning and Niamh was tired. Exhausted. Still she dragged herself to her feet and set off after the sound. The dog was weak and cold when she found him – even under the blazing sun. He was a greyhound, fawn with brown speckles on his ears and tail, and was young. He looked only about six months old. Niamh knelt down on the pavement and stroked the top of his head, reassuringly. He felt kindness and comfort in her and did not back away. He knew at once she meant him no harm.

“What’s your name? Doesn’t look like you have one. I’ll call you... Jinx.” He seemed happy enough with that and tried to stand up.

“No, don’t. You’re too weak – you have to rest, I’ll get food.” Niamh smiled and stood up to find something to eat. She had little money; it was enough to buy some food for the both of them.

Niamh came back not long after she left me lying behind those bins. When she returned she brought the smell of warm jacket potatoes with her. Half she placed carefully on the floor in front of me, half she ate herself. Gratefully, I gulped down my half and lay back down to sleep. Niamh stayed with me every day and night until I was strong enough to walk again. When that day came, we set off to find a safer place to stay. She led me down to a bush, blooming with flowers and leaves. I padded along beside her as she crawled into the bush. Straight away I made myself at home and slumped down on a pile of dry leaves. I watched as Niamh climbed up on a branch and lay down staring longingly at the families and their dogs playing out in the park. When darkness fell, cold fell with it. Although I was tired I did not sleep, the cold kept me wide awake. I could see Niamh shivering above me on her branch. Eventually she clambered back down. After she had gathered up some more leaves she lay down and curled up around me for warmth. The trees stared down at us swaying in the wind.

The next day was far warmer than the night had been. Jinx and Niamh were half frozen to death. The two of them trotted up the lane towards the high street – here they could get food and drink. They went into a gym and ordered a large sensational steak slice from the café. There was a water dispenser in the corner and Niamh couldn’t resist it. She lifted her empty drinks bottle out of her rucksack (she had brought it with her when she left home.) Cautiously she stepped towards the machine. Jinx stuck like glue to her side. The cafeteria lady had been watching her closely. She could tell she was homeless by the way her clothes looked.

“It’s okay. You fill your bottle. Take as much as you can.” The lady was kind and smiled over at Niamh and her dog.

“Oh, and by the way that’s a very fine dog you’ve got there. He’s so beautiful!” She added, leaning over to stroke Jinx.

“Thanks.” Niamh beamed back at her.

“What’s his name?”

“Jinx.” She told the woman. It brought tears to her eyes, like she was remembering something. She paused. Then patted Niamh’s shoulders,

“If you ever need food, drink or even warmth – come back here, I’ll be here.” She was forceful but in a kind way.

“Okay, we will.” Niamh replied. She knew this woman meant only the best; otherwise she would not be behind the counter of a café.

When they left the gym, Niamh remembered the park. Jinx followed her gaze and perked up his ears when he saw what she was looking at.

“Come on Jinx!” Niamh found a good bench with a great view of the entire park. She nodded to the dog,

“Off you go, boy.” She had never seen him run before; just walking or jogging. He was a firework across the lawn. Racing against any dog he met. They would try but fail at beating him. It lifted her heart and took her breath away. This could have lasted forever. Niamh would have sat watching him. Mesmerised by him. It grew dark, though. Despite the fun he was having, Jinx padded back to the girl. Together they headed back to the den.

It was gone! Someone had cut it down and burnt it to a crisp. The ruins reminded her of the argument. The look on her mother’s pale face. She was screaming at her parents. Cursing at them. Scowling at them...

Niamh and Jinx curled up in a bush, nearby. She was clutching an old photograph of her, Katie and their parents one Christmas around a fire. Tears welled in her eyes... The two of them left early the next morning – after a small breakfast of half and steak slice and a drink of water. Niamh retraced her steps and started to sprint down the pavement in the direction of home. The dog raced along beside her stretching out each leg with every stride. Occasionally leaping ahead but he would always slow down and wait for Niamh until she caught up. He was enjoying himself so much; he didn’t even stop when they reached the ancient gate at the end of the driveway.

“Come back here, Jinx!” Niamh chuckled as he stopped abruptly and trotted back to her. She took a deep breath then crawled under the bars. Her dog following close behind. The front door opened and Niamh ran up and hugged her parents tight. She directed Jinx towards the back garden before her mum and dad noticed him. There she would keep him hidden.

Written and typed by Grace Year 6

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