



# Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>

A boy becomes a man chronologically but not always in his mannerisms or his personality. That part takes a lot of work. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> was a lost child from the age of seven, until his college professor came into his life, then things began to change. As an adult, no one expects change anymore but this morning's bus ride will turn his life on its heels.



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The day beings as it always does, with a bus ride to his favorite spot. “Good Morning Sir.” The bus driver smiles as he greets his favorite passenger.

“Morning Mr. Sam. How is the driving today in this weather?” Mr. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> asks.

“Doing well sir. Oh, the wife says to tell you thank you for that business advice, it has paid off very well for us. I can actually look forward to a sound retirement now,” the driver says.

Mr. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> sits down in his regular chair satisfied knowing he has done a good thing again. It wasn’t always like that. His life certainly didn’t start off as easily as his adult life looks to be. As a young child he was in an orphanage. He was brought there at the age of seven, passed the age of anyone actually adopting him but old enough to remember everything about his parents and who they were.

For the first two years being at the orphanage he made himself into the model child. Followed all the rules and absorbed as much as he could in school. He wanted to know all they were telling him, but soon it became very hard for him. His eyes would play tricks on him and he saw wrong numbers and would get assignments messed up.

One day one of his teachers pulled him aside and asked him to read some work out loud at his desk. It was then that the teacher realized his student wasn’t ignorant or foolish but his eyesight was bad. He informed the orphanage that the child must get his eyes checked for glasses. But hearing the word glasses made the child quite nervous. His father had glasses and they made him very scary looking. He didn’t want people to be afraid of him. His mom wore glasses too but she was special, everything about her was special. Only after he accidentally broke his father’s glasses is when he ended up in the orphanage with the words ‘troubled child’ pasted on his papers, he had seen the words over the officer’s shoulder.

It wasn’t his fault that his glasses were on the floor, he happened to walk in, and when then he heard the crunch, his father turned around and gave him the tongue lashing of a lifetime; those were the last words he ever spoke to him. His father nearly spit on him as the officer took him away. In the car ride to the orphanage he had asked the officer, “Is breaking glasses against the law?”

“No, that would be ridiculous child,” he said.

“Then how come he called you after I accidentally stepped on his glasses?” he asked innocently.

“Son, I don’t know, but I’m bringing you to a good place. It’s not scary. I promise. It has a lot of children for you to meet. A good place,” the officer said.

Sitting on the bus, his memories are taking him far back this morning, he is not sure why his mind is going there. Usually it means something, he will wait and see. He looks out the window and then around at who is on the bus, nothing seems out of the ordinary so far. He lets his mind wander back, it’s not so bad; it is his life after all.

The administrator of the orphanage took the child to see an eye doctor. “It’s only your eyes, he isn’t going to hurt you child. Why are you so afraid?” she asked him with concern.

The child explained about the day he came to the orphanage and why. The administrator hadn’t been there when he first came, she was relatively new to this place. “Oh, I see. Hmmm.



Let me talk to the doctor first and make sure he understands that he has to give you handsome glasses and ones that won’t be crushed under anyone’s feet so no one can get in trouble. Will that be ok?” she had asked him.

“ok,” the child answered softly.

As the administrator spoke quietly with the doctor, the child sat in a special chair with many gadgets around him. He looked around and saw a Roman numeral three printed on a piece of framed paper after a name. “Sir, why is there a three in your name.” he asks hoping he is seeing it right.

“That is because my name is Dr. Manny Crunches 3<sup>rd</sup>. Which means I am the third one in my family to have that name. My grandfather had that name, my father and now me.” The doctor stands tall with pride to explain this.

“You have a good family,” the boy had answered.

He had smiled at the child proudly, “Now, let’s examine your eyes, shall we?” the doctor took his time to look at the child’s eyes, he put special drops in them and everything. He had him look through holes and read charts and look at letters hidden inside colored dots. The testing took a long time.

“Ok, here is a piece of paper, about what kind of glasses you need. I made sure to write down non-scary ones and only the kind that won’t break under feet. We don’t want anyone getting in trouble. But son, I want you to know something.” The doctor looked around to make sure the administrator was not in the room any more.

“yes?” he asked meekly.

“It wasn’t the glasses that made your father put you where you are. It was because he didn’t think he could take care of you in the best way and he wanted the best for you so they sent you to the place that could do better for you. You understand me?” the doctor had asked him.

“I broke his glasses with my careless feet, he told me so.” He says

“But you didn’t put them on the floor, he dropped them and couldn’t find them. That is why things like that are called an accident. Please, use your glasses, wear nice ones that make you look handsome and feel special and you will see everything around you much better. Your school work will be better. I promise,” the doctor had smiled at him.

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Many years after being at that doctor and learning to live with glasses that made him handsome, the boy grew to be a teen and that teen grew to find out that he had a very good aptitude for numbers. He understood them like no one else around him. He worked a summer job at an office working as an errand boy and during that time, when no one was around anymore, he corrected people’s math on their papers without telling them.

One day he was caught sitting at a desk and writing on a piece of already typed on paper.

“Aha! It’s you!”

The teen had turned around like a trapped animal, he looked down at his pencil and back at the person standing in front of him. “I had wondered who had the balls to correct me. What makes you think you’re smarter than an educated adult, huh?” the man was angry.



The teen, always been taught honesty is the best, he had said, “I don’t correct with balls sir. I use my head. Look, when you combine these numbers it only gives you part of the answer to your question. But if you add in these other factors from the other paper, it gives you a different way of looking at the information and the numbers aren’t good. If you’re planning on buying this sir, you will lose money. Look,” he had said innocently enough.

The adult pushed him aside and read his work, then he compared the two sheets and read the information again, he took out his calculator and did the numbers the teen put together. He sat there and thought about this for a moment. “Pull up a chair,” he had instructed, sternly.

“Look at these papers, if you find mistakes you tell me before you write on them,” he said. The teen spent the rest of the day pouring over document after document, fixing numbers and wording. By the end of the day, the adult who had been angry was happier than the teen had ever seen him all summer. Then all of a sudden, the man yelled at everyone else in the office. “You all had better recheck any document before bringing them to me tomorrow. This boy has found more mistakes than correct items in all of what you turned in today. If I had gone with your numbers,” he roared, “I’d be out of business by next week. But now I see how to turn things around. You all better be looking sharp tomorrow.”

He closed the door and the teen sat their shocked, he didn’t want to get anyone in trouble, he was only helping the best way he knew how. “I’m sorry sir, I didn’t mean to cause trouble. I love numbers and when I saw them on your desk, I couldn’t help myself. Am I fired?” he had asked solemnly.

“Fired? Are you kidding? After they all leave, I expect you to be looking at everyone’s papers tonight, we aren’t leaving until you’re done. I’ll go get dinner for the both of us. You, my son, will be happy to know your future has been sealed. You are going to college at night, after you’ve worked here all day for me. We are going to make quite a pair, you’ll see,” the man had said.

So, that’s how his life started new again, he had finished the summer and actually went to college to learn all about what his boss does, he learned about so much; even math he didn’t know existed. Michael was so happy to be in a class. The other kids came to him for help all the time and he explained things very simply to them.

At work he explained things to other adults. Adults who didn’t work there came by and asked for his help but when his boss got wind of this, he wasn’t happy. “Boy, you can’t help anyone who walks in,,” he said.

“I can’t? But they needed help, their numbers were all messed up,” he said.

“Yes, but I pay your salary. Your head can only be on my business while you are under this roof and I am the one paying for your school. In other words, I own you. You will do no work for anyone other than me. Do you understand that?” he yelled at him.

“Sir, I am on scholarship to school. You do not pay a cent, yes you introduced me to this particular school but they like me so much you haven’t been asked to give them a dime. And with all the money I have saved you recently you could have paid for three people to go to college for all four years. I don’t like to be owned I’m not property and I’m not stupid! Good day sir,” and with that, he walked out on his first job.

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The next day at school, more than one of the adults who had come to the other business came to find him and ask him his opinion about their papers and their numbers. In the library one of the professors found out what was happening and interrupted, "Excuse me, we don't conduct business in this library, if you are paying this young man to do your work, then pay him now, he is done being your free ticket." The professor had been quite stern and the young man, no longer a teen, had grown silent thinking he had done wrong yet again. He waited for the man sitting there to pay Michael before he began speaking.

"Son," the professor sat down. "I know that numbers come easily to you. I see that. But you can't let these men take advantage of you like that. He handed you money, was it enough for the time you gave him?" he asked.

The young man opened his hand, he hadn't even checked. He opened it to see two fifty dollar bills. "This looks like a lot for doing only an hour's work." He said to his professor.

"You have a good business head, you see things straight and narrow and that is your gift to the world. Will you allow me to be your mentor, I can assist you in becoming the great man I think you can be." He offers.

"I have no place to live now sir."

"Where have you been living?" the professor asked.

"I lived in the orphanage, then I lived in the dorm for a while but then when I went to work for my first job I lived in the office, every night I was given dinner and told to do the numbers. During the day, I came here. But he said he owned me and I left. I'm not property; that much I know. You think I'm dumb I can see it in your face," he got up to leave.

The professor grabbed his hand, "I think you're honest, and in some ways a bit innocent. Come home with me. My house is big, my wife likes to take care of kids, we had many of our own but they are all away in college themselves or older than that. Come, where are your clothes? Your belongings?"

"I had left them in the dorm and come back and forth from the job to get them and change each day," he answered

They took a walk to his old dorm. This was part of his scholarship; the college sees something in him that he has yet to see for himself and this professor wants to show him why he is on academic scholarship.

Many hours and many days later the professor finally got across to this young man all that he is worth. All that he can offer the world. He showed him how to use his math gift to change other people's lives for the better. How he can be part of a variety of professions, and most importantly he taught him that he has to be more careful as to whom he helps and why they are asking.

By the end of that semester at the professor's house, the young man had made a decision about himself. One evening at dinner with his new 'parents', he made an announcement. "I want to be called Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>," he said smiling. "Can we make this legal?"

The professor's wife had tears in her eyes, she had looked at her husband and he smiled, "It would be my honor to call you that. But why if I may ask."



“Easy, when I was younger people called me all kinds of names, many I didn’t like. Each year at school I would try to change their thinking but it always came back to Mike, and I never liked how that sounded, it doesn’t fit me. Mike is harsh but Michael is serious and I think I’d rather be known as someone who is serious about what they do. McDoogle, well, as your wife surmised quickly, is a combination of your name and hers and the 3<sup>rd</sup> is because I want people to think I came from a long line of good people, no longer do I want to be known as an orphan.

The orphanage was good to me. No one ever was abusive or mean, but it wasn’t a home like this, it was a place I lived. This is the first home I’ve ever had since being a young boy. You are both crying, have I overstepped? Overstayed my welcome? I’ll go pack,” he stood to go.

The professor’s wife stood and ran to him and held on to him very tightly, after a moment he realized he wanted to hug her back and so he did. The family he never had finally came to fruition. The professor joined them in a group hug.

“Next week is winter break, you will come with us to the mountains, all our kids are coming; its where we always gather for holidays. You are part of our family and when they hear your name, they will love it and you as well,” the wife said.

So, Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> was born on that day and ever since, he has been happy to be a part of his new family’s lives. When he graduated college the professor and his wife presented him with official adoption papers, even though he was above age, they wanted him to know how serious they were about his being part of their family. Not quite the same as having an adoption done as a child but it meant the world to him, especially because his “brothers and sisters” had made a point to show up to graduation. The professor even made sure that his diploma had his full name printed on it.

Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> became well known all around town and even in other counties as a premier business consultant. He could straighten out a business strategy within a few months of being involved. If they chose not to listen to his advice, they usually failed, if they listened, they would not only survive but thrive. He was sought after which also gave him a lot of flexibility. He could pick and choose who he worked with, his professor always helped him pick out the people he would work for in the beginning, introduced him to a lawyer who would draw up contracts with everyone to make sure he was never taken advantage of again. Professor helped him a lot in the beginning.

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Years passed quickly and now that young man is thirty-five, Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> could happily pull back on the amount of work he does if he wanted to. He keeps working though, having invested his money well from early on, he is in a very good financial position right now. He has helped all his brothers and sisters and parents on planning for their futures. He made sure his professor would be able to retire sooner than he thought he ever would. Now the professor teaches for fun and not for salary. Michael likes doing good work for people. It makes him happy.

Today, he goes through his usual routine, he already went for his morning walk, had his breakfast at the diner at the corner of his street and now he is taking the bus to his favorite park



where he likes to work on his computer to catch up on whatever he is doing at the moment. The bus driver always greets him nicely.

People tell him he can afford to get a nice car or even be driven but he likes the bus, likes the company of others, he spent his whole childhood being alone, he doesn't want to do that as an adult. Cars are lonely, you only drive yourself. He has a car and uses it when he visits clients but for himself, he takes the bus.

At one stop this morning a young lady gets on, she could not be more than ten years old, the bus driver looks at her with caution and looks around for anyone else to be with her. She pays her fare and looks for a seat, the only one that doesn't look scary is next to Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>. He moves over so she can sit by the window and he the aisle. "Good morning young lady," he says.

"Good morning," she whispers.

"Where are you headed on this bright sunny day?"

"I'm headed to help my mom," she says trying to sound smart.

He shakes his head, he knows she should be in school, something must be up. The bus starts again, then without warning, the clouds come in, the thunder and lightning start up quickly and the girl is frightened. He puts an arm around her and pulls her in closer, she grabs on to his arm and pulls it around her like a seatbelt and buries her head into his arm. He holds on a little tighter.

As the bus drives on, he does not let go of her. His arm feels kind of heavy and he feels wetness on his shirt, he looks down and sees the child is sleeping and drooling on his shirt. He still does not move. A few minutes later the bus driver looks back at him to show him they are at his stop but he shakes his head no and the driver shrugs and begins to move the bus again. A little while later the girl wakes up. She takes a moment to figure out where she is and then jumps back to the window. The rain has subsided now to a slower steadier rain without the added noise of the thunder.

"What's your name," he asks her.

"Eloise Thortan" she says uneasily.

"Really? I thought it would be Princess," he smiles at her.

She tries to smile back but then he notices something else in her eyes, she is scared. As she probably should be, he is a stranger to her.

"Do you have school today?"

"I'm going to see my mom," she answers

"You said that already. Where is mom?"

She does not answer and he stops questioning her. The bus keeps going for another twenty minutes then it comes to a stop and the bus driver calls, "Last stop before I turn around." The little girl stands and so does Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>. "I will walk with you, it's raining and I have a large umbrella."

She gets off the bus and so does he, he is not sure where they are, but they certainly aren't near any homes that he knows of. This looks like an industrial area more than anything else. "Show me the way," he says smiling his easy smile.

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The girl knows she should be frightened but somehow, she is not. “She is this way.” She points towards the end of the road. He follows without question. Soon enough he sees something and realizes where they are headed.

“Your mom is in here?” She bows her head and shakes it up and down. “Come, take my hand it gets slippery in here when there’s rain.” She takes his hand and she leads the way through the cemetery to her mother.

She sits on the bench nearest her mother. “Hello Momma. It’s me again. I don’t know where you are really but your husband said you are here now and that is it. I don’t believe this to be true. He doesn’t like me anymore. He says I’m an annoyance. He told me again that one day he will be gone and I’ll have to deal with life on my own. He is waiting for a new job and then he is leaving. This man here had a big umbrella and brought me here, see? I’m not alone today. You don’t have to be nervous for me.” She is quiet a minute then begins to laugh.

“Yes, his hair is a bit funny but he has a beautiful smile Momma.” She looks over at him and he smiles again. “See? He kept me safe in the storm, you know I hate storms, will I die in a storm like you did?” she pauses again, this time for a longer time.

“I understand. I will. I know, but I had to see you. Ok, next time I will wait till after school. They probably won’t even notice me gone,” she says.

Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> watches this exchange, he knows exactly why his past came to his mind this morning, it was to remind him its time he gives back what he had received. No orphanage for this young princess, he sends a quick note to his lawyer to find this girl’s legal guardian and fast. Then he asked to get papers for temporary custody, immediately because he did not like what he heard her say about the father.

He sits quietly and waits, the girl talks, then she listens and answers. She talks some more and he learns all about how she has to take care of the house now, the cooking and the ordering of food for takeout. She cleans the house and even does laundry. He comes and goes as he pleases, sometimes he has a guest in the house and she has to take care of both of them.

His blood is boiling and he wants to create a bit of a storm himself right now. But he won’t, he awaits an answer from the lawyer. The lawyer who will also do about anything for him that’s legal because, he too, is a recipient of Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> good business sense. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> is the one who recognized that the lawyer’s wife was the thief in his office and the lawyer has always been eternally grateful. He will hear from him shortly. He has connections everywhere, Michael is sure this will work out.

The phone finally buzzes, “You’re insane!!!! No way is he giving up his gravy train. She inherited all her mother had, the house, there is a college fund for her. He would never give her up. Use her up yes, but not give her up.” The lawyer answers after he calmed down.

“For the right price he will,” he simply says.

“You sure?” the lawyer asks.

“Do I have a choice?” he asks.

“No.”

“Give him the house, if she needs college later, I will tell her the monies came from her mother,” he answers the lawyer.

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“You sure you know what you’re doing? Being an instant dad?” he asks.

“I think this is what I’m supposed to do today. Trust me,” Michael answers.

“Consider it done, I’ll meet you at your place tonight to finalize everything,” he answers.

Then Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> hears the girl again, “Momma, don’t cry. It’s ok. I don’t mind. He never hurts me I promise. It’s only that he likes it when I touch him, he says it feels good after a long day,” the girl begins to cry herself.

“No Momma, he doesn’t hurt me I promise. Please don’t cry I can’t bear it when you cry.” The girl sits on the bench and turns to her protector of the day, she is not sure why he is still there, she looks to him and he smiles as big as he can.

“Tell your momma something for me, will you?” he asks.

“Ok”

“Tell her you are coming home with Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> and see what she says. Tell her I will make sure you go to school and even go to college. Would you like that? Oh, and tell her I have two big dogs for protection and enough ice cream to feed a whole army,” he smiles at her. All the while he has typed to his lawyer what he just heard her say about what the father asks her to do on a nightly basis.

“Um, ok,” she whispers. She repeats what he said word for word to her mother. “What do you think Momma? He wants to know.” She waits and waits, shaking her head yes and then she turns to him and says with a weird face, “Momma said to tell you that it is ok, but you still are a stinky pinky.”

Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> freezes. No one knows that name except one person. His childhood friend from the orphanage. After he got his glasses his good friend, Winslow, she told him the glasses made him handsome but he was still a stinky pinky boy.

“How did your momma die?” he asks with tears in his eyes now.

“She had a bad heart,” she says. “There was a bad storm.”

He shakes his head, yes, this is his friend. “Did she have a scar on her chest from here to here.” He makes a line down the middle of his chest. He knows she had heart surgery when they were younger.

“Yes, did you know my momma?” she asks.

“As a matter of fact, I did. We were friends when we were your age. Isn’t that funny? Come, we have a lot of things to do today. First, we have to go to your house and get all your clothes and anything else you want to take with you to my house. You’re going to live with me now. Ask Momma, she will be ok with this I believe,” he says.

“I did, she said you had nice eyes and you do. She said you had a scar on your left hand and I see that from here. But she also said now that I will be loved I may not need her so much. Is that true? Will I not hear her again?” she asks.

“Well Princess, you will hear her as long as your heart wants to. But today, is the beginning of your new life. What do you say we get out of the rain, and get to know each other over a nice big lunch? Do you like the diner food or would you rather have pizza?”

“Oooo I like the diner. Momma took me there once, we had macaroni and cheese and garlic bread,” she smiles.



They leave as quietly as they came, each one taking a moment in private to say goodbye to Winslow. His long-lost friend had been around him all these years and he didn’t know. His sad heart grows but he looks at the child and his heart grows in a different way. This is what he is meant to do now. She will not have to wait to find a professor. She will have a loving family right now.

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Winslow’s ex -husband put up a fight and wanted to take Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> to court to protest what was happening. They had been to her home, her father was not there at the time, they took everything she wanted, items of her own, her mothers and some things that reminded her of her mother, pictures of the two of them and some of the valuables that she knew where her mother had them hidden. The husband obviously did not or he would have taken them and sold them already.

Because of what Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> said to his lawyer, the judge had asked if it was ok to meet with the child privately. With a child advocate in the room, of course. The ex-husband began to protest and the judge said, “Why?” with raised eyebrows.

“She is a minor,” he contested.

“Ok, the court appointed child advocate will be with her. Any more objections?” he challenges the ex-husband to answer.

“No sir,” and he sits down.

Inside the judge’s chambers he asks her some questions about her home life. Being a child of ten, she was open enough to tell him everything that goes on in her home life and when he pushed the subject of physical contact with her step father she didn’t seem to think it was wrong or shameful to say anything about that either. The judge looks at the advocate. Having known Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> since their college days, he knows she will be in good hands. “How did Mr. McDoogle say he knew your mom?” he asks

“Oh, they knew each other at my age,” she answers innocently.

The judge, knowing he grew up in an orphanage had the whole story now, and all he needed. He gives a lot of credit to his old college friend for doing this and even more credit for not wanting to press the charges that could easily be done, but that doesn’t mean he can’t press the issue himself.

Back in the courtroom, Princess, as she will now be called, runs back to her new guardian. She jumps to his lap and he hugs her back. It has only been a week since she moved in with him but her life has changed significantly and all for the better.

The judge sits down at his desk, he looks to the new loving father and then over to the trash on the other side. “Here is how I see this going down. You have no real parental rights since you never did adopt her and she has always had her mother’s name. By sheer luck you have a roof over your head and by the grace of God and that man across the aisle from you is letting you keep said roof. However, if you choose to sell the house, the monies will go to the child as it is in her and her mother’s name, your name is not on the papers.

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On a personal note, I'm not going to press charges of child endangerment or abuse, at least not now, but that doesn't mean I won't change my mind in the future. Instead, I am going on record as having you indicted for suspicion of child endangerment, this will stay on your record for quite some time. If you so much as get a traffic ticket with a child in the car, it will show up. Your good fortune won't last forever."

He pauses and then looks over to his old college friend holding on to his new daughter, "As for your two, I can proudly announce, you are a family and I expect to still see you at all family functions." He bangs his gavel down.

The ex turns to look at the judge and then at the girl and back at the judge about to say something about being biased when the judge stares at him and say, "Try it. I dare you."

He shuts his mouth and without another word walks quickly out of the courtroom and continues to walk quickly out of the building.

"What does this mean?" Princess asks.

"It means the court says Winslow is no longer around to be your monmma but I can be your poppa if you want or father or dad or.."

"I like Michael," she says.

"Me too," he hugs her again and they walk out.

~ ~ ~

The lawyer meets them back at the house and so do his parents, he introduces them to his new girl for the first time.

"Well to be honest I was hoping the first girl you brought home would be a little older, but she is beautiful." His mother kisses him with tears in her eyes. She knows how much this means to him. The lawyer explained who the mother was to the professor and his wife.

"Do you know how to knit?" Princess asks.

"No. Do you want to learn?"

"Momma once told me all grandmothers know how to knit," Princess says.

"Well, how about this, we both will go take classes to learn how together. Would you like that?"

"Can I?" she looks to Michael

"She is your grandmother after all," he smiles.

"Come, do you want to play with the dogs with me? They like to play in the den." She pulls her grandmother's hand and they leave the room together laughing all the way.

"Son, I say this time and time again, you never cease to make me proud. But why so fast? Usually these things take time. You should have gotten to know her better maybe. How did you move the court system?"

"I know all I need to know," he leans over and whispers to his father what she had admitted to her mother at the cemetery and then to the judge.

"She will be loved by everyone; all her new aunts and uncles and she is the oldest cousin that will be good when people need babysitting," Michael says to the professor.

Professor pats Michael on the shoulder and heads to the den to play with his new granddaughter.



“That was amazing. I’ve never felt so good about doing something for a friend than what we made happen today. Let’s do this again. I want one, but I don’t know how. I want to give someone a life they wouldn’t normally have,” the lawyer says to Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup>.

“Call the orphanage, go visit, there are so many kids there. I send them a check once a month to make sure they make a giant birthday party for everyone born that month. It’s the least I could do, well, and this. I love doing this. Winslow was special you know. Her physical heart might have been broken but otherwise it was bigger than the ocean is wide,” he smiles at his memory of his friend.

“Do you think Eloise will ever go by her given name,” the lawyer asks.

“In time, or not. That will be her choice, we can always legally change it back if she wants,” he says.

The two friends smile at each other. “Ok, on my to-do list for tomorrow. Come Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup>, let’s go join your new family.”

~ ~ ~

And it began, the weekly visits to the orphanage. The bonding with the kids. The lawyer had been so overwhelmed he didn’t know what to do first. He loved visiting every week, loved playing ball with the boys in the courtyard. Working on homework with the older kids. He even was able to convince many of his colleagues to join him. In fact, they started a new program and each one has been paired off with at least one teen for guidance and at least once a month there is a game of teen on adult basketball both boys and girls.

Many of the female lawyers or the wives of the others, take different days to go and meet with the girls, teens mostly, who need someone to help them see their own self-worth. Many of these teens became great babysitters to these people. Grateful for time out of the building but even more grateful for the sense of belonging they never had.

Months quickly pass and soon it is spring, time for spring dances, the men teach the girls how to dance and the women teach the boys. They decide that the orphanage is going to host its own formal prom this year and everyone is invited. The new volunteer staff as well as the whole student body are busily preparing for their own spring formal. Dresses are being donated by a local shop that heard of what is taking place, tuxedos are being dropped off from various people and shoes upon shoes show up at the orphanage almost daily from a local high school.

The administrator does not know what to make of all this attention but she isn’t going to be upset, she embraces all of this because she sees what a difference it is making in her children’s lives. Then one day, her favorite boy shows up, Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup>.

“Still wearing your handsome glasses, I see,” she says as a greeting.

“Haven’t broken a pair since I was seven or was it eight?” He smiles back at her.

“You know, I wish we weren’t in business anymore but I’m glad we are. We serve a big purpose and your friends have certainly made things happier around here.”

They sit down and talk about all that Michael’s lawyer has done since the day he mentioned getting involved. He had no idea all the changes were his lawyer’s idea.

“So, you don’t need my birthday parties any more I see,” he says with a grin.

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“Oh, no I didn’t mean that. The young ones look forward to that but it’s the older ones who always felt forgotten, certainly you know how that feels,” she says warmly.

They talk some more, he tells her about his daughter and whose daughter she was originally. The administrator has tears in her eyes. “Oh Winslow.” She says holding her heart. “We should make a plaque for her here,” she cannot help her tears.

“No, Princess says her mom always liked to teach, she was a preschool teacher. Let’s decorate the preschool playroom in her honor. I’ll call Dominic, he will do it for Winslow surely. We will make a whole dedication ceremony.” He says proudly.

“Oh Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>. What would this community be like without you?” she hugs him and he hugs her back.

Since his college years, he has learned to love, learned to hug, and almost learned to trust that not everyone is out to take advantage of him.

When he leaves, he calls Dominic, “Hey old friend. Been awhile,” Dominic calls to him on the speaker phone.

Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> explains what he wants to do. “On it. Do you have contact numbers with everyone else? If not, let’s start a social media group and get everyone involved in this grand idea, someone knows where someone else is, we’ll get our whole graduating class involved. For Winslow, everyone will come man. Everyone,” his last words come out a bit choked.

Winslow was loved by everyone. Dominic wanted to date her but she told him it would be like dating a brother, but he pinned for her for a long time after graduation. If only he had been with her in the end, he would have loved her to pieces and her daughter too. He is happy that Princess will be in loving hands.

“Ok, let’s do that. We will round the troops. Dominic you’re the best man I know for this. Only you know how she would want the room painted,” he tells his fiend.

While Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> starts the social media page ‘Remembering Winslow’ for the dedication, he never imagined it would turn into something so special. He sits at his desk this morning looking at pictures everyone has posted, and not just the ones from the orphanage, he had a graduating class of twenty-five from there, but his whole high school became aware of the event and every day more and more names show up on the page.

Pictures of Winslow in all manner of happiness, in class, in front of the class, making a speech in the auditorium, sleeping in the library, laughing in the hallway. The list goes on, the comments of remembrance also overflowing with love, his eyes water as he reads many of them. Winslow didn’t only touch the hearts of those she lived with but of everyone she met.

“Father Michael are you ok?” Princess asks.

“What did you call me?”

“Well, I think you really are to be my father and therefore it is not nice to call you Michael. What else should I call you?”

“Well, Father Michael sounds like I’m a preacher, how about we settle on Poppa Michael or even plain Poppa, I hear my brothers and sisters call the Professor that all the time,” he says.



"Ok, you look like a Poppa, we can do that. You don't mind if I don't say Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> like everyone else?"

"No child, that is for adults, Poppa will do fine from you," he smiles.

His smile always makes her feel better, she has been very anxious lately. She realizes she hasn't seen her mom in a long time with all that has been going on. Her move, the court and now planning of the dedication. Getting to know everyone around her. She has been busy for a very long time.

"Come, sit with me."

Princess slowly walks over to him and climbs into his lap, her new favorite place to be. She looks at the screen and freezes. "Is that Momma?"

"Yes, remember I told you I was going to ask my friends who knew her to make comments about her, about how happy she always was?"

"Yes, but you said twenty-five, I see on the side here that there are over a hundred people now on this page," she points to where that number is.

"Very observant of you. Yes, it would seem my whole high school has become part of this page, everyone keeps telling other people and more and more are posting not only memories of her but pictures as well. Some are older ones, those are people from the orphanage and some are from high school, then there are an occasional few that are even from college. I will give you the password to this page so you can see her any time you'd like. I think she will be pleased to see you through this as well as in her sleeping spot, don't you?" he asks referring to the cemetery. He knows they haven't been there in a while and that it is probably her reason for being a bit sad at home these past couple of days.

"Oooooo, Momma was sooooo pretty as a child, not like me," she says.

"What? Why on earth would you say that? Is anyone else in your school named Princess?" he asks turning on his charm fully for her even though the thought of her thinking this brings tears to his eyes.

"People only tell me I have a big smile but not a pretty one like Momma had," she says.

"Well, isn't it my smile that made you like me?"

Princess thinks about this and turns to him, she sees one of his genuine smiles directed straight at her and this makes her feel good. "Yes, yes it was. And Momma still thinks you're a stinky pinky. I had never heard her say teasing words before so she must have really liked you." She turns to scroll through the pictures some more and suddenly stops and looks back at him, then at the screen.

"It's you!" she screams.

"Me?"

"You're the one who was with her when her heart went bad, you're the one who carried her to the head lady, you and that man Dominic. You saved her, didn't you, and now you saved me! I'm beginning to like stinky pinkys," she grabs him around his neck and showers him with kisses all over his face.

Remembering that day brings tears to his eyes, Dominic and he thought she was dead, they had never seen anyone have a heart attack before, especially someone so strong in their eyes. He



had picked her up like she was a toothpick and the two of them ran inside calling to the headmaster. An ambulance was called and the next thing they knew she was in the hospital for a long stay. Dominic and he snuck out and went every day. Although, he believes they let them, everyone knew how close the three of them were.

“I made you cry, don’t cry Poppa. I’m happy to be here and Momma is happy I’m here too. She told me the other day. She likes Gold and Silver and said you should have named them Penny and Nickle. Does that mean anything to you?” she asks.

Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> laughs at this reference. “We named the two mice that ran around our home that. We used to joke that if we ever had bigger animals in our life, we would give them more worthwhile names than that; that is why my dogs are Gold and Silver. You really do hear your Momma don’t you.” He asks.

Princess bows her head, “I only tell you this. Kids at school would think I’m crazy.” She says.

“That’s ok, it only means something to me anyway, doesn’t it? We don’t have to share her with them. Has she said anything about Dominic’s painting? It’s amazing you know.” He states simply.

“Yes, she told me he is capturing everything she always loved. Momma taught children but she always said her first love was animals. She said someone gave her a bear named ‘Winnie’ when she was a child but she only liked it because of who gave it to her not because she liked the bear. She only liked real looking ones. We used to talk a lot her and me, we talked about everything and anything.” She looks back at the screen to read some more of how people felt about her mom. Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> puts his hand on her back and reads over her head which ones she has stopped to read, “That’s a boy from the orphanage.” Or he would say, “This happened in high school.” With each item he identified who was in the picture for her so she would know even more about her mother and love her that much more. He never wants her to forget her and with this page open, he hopes she never will. Dominic suggested they print out all of the pictures and put them in an album for her to see any time she wants. Dominic’s wife is working on that part for Princess.

“How come you don’t have a wife Poppa?” she asks as she reads on. “Look, here you are so happy with a nice lady next to you.” She points. He looks at the picture, he smiles and yet his heart breaks a little, again. Before he can answer her, he takes a deep breath, “That was the only girl I ever gave my heart to. She crushed it down hard. After that I was happy being me and learning all I could learn at school, shortly after that picture was taken, the Professor found me and my life turned around and I became a very busy person. Since college, I have helped a lot of people fix their businesses; that is what people pay me for. I know numbers very well and I understand what needs to be done to help them succeed. People like how I think and I like to help people. But you my dear Princess, you I’ve loved from the moment you fell asleep on me on the bus. You have my whole heart.” He says honestly and easily.

“Ok, but I think she still loves you.” She says.

“How would you know that child? You see shortly after that picture, she started dating another boy, someone from a stable home, someone who had family, until the professor, it was



only me. She had always said she wanted a big family. She married him the following semester and had their first child before graduating college. I’m sure she has a family of her own now.” He says.

“Could be, but Poppa, she is the one who posted this picture. She still has it and it must still mean something to her or why would she have saved it all these years? Are all these people going to come to the ceremony? Did you know you have it planned for Momma’s birthday?” she asks a whole slew of questions but she asks them innocently and softly.

“Yes, I remembered her birthday, for me this is easy; it’s actually exactly between mine and Dominic’s which is why we always had big celebrations together. This will be no different. Dominic and I still celebrate together, if we aren’t in the same room, we call each other and have a drink over the phone, we usually drink one to Winslow every year.” He says.

“Oh, so you did this day on purpose?” she asks.

“I’m sorry, I didn’t ask you, will it be too hard for you?” he asks.

“No, I celebrate Momma’s birthday in my room every year. I gather all my animals and we have a party together, she would like that don’t you think?” she asks

“And this year, we will be in a room painted by Dominic that has many animals in it. I think she will love this room too, and I think she loved your celebrations. Come, how about we go visit Dominic and then Momma today.” He offers

Princess turns around and hugs him again. “You read my mind. Can we bring her ice cream?”

“Sure child, anything you want.” He says.

~ ~ ~

Dominic has been working on this room for a couple of weeks now. When his friend met him with Winslow’s daughter next to him, they mapped out how the room would look. Her daughter reminds him a lot of his old friend, her enthusiasm and love for life.

Dominic admits to himself that his schoolboy crush on Winslow was simply that, she was so much more but Winslow was right, they were family, it would have been weird to date each other, everyone in the orphanage felt the same way, they are all family. Many of them are still in touch somewhat. Others said they needed to move on and move away. He and Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> have remained like brothers since graduating high school.

They went to the same college where Dominic finally learned to give his heart to another. His wife, ahhh, that is a funny story. Someone is tugging on his pants, he looks down, there she is again, the little girl he has seen every say since starting this project, she makes her way into the room every day at some point and stays the rest of the day.

The orphanage doesn’t seem to mind her being here with him, seems she doesn’t talk to anyone and he is the first person she has gone to since getting there. “Yes my dear, what do you need?”

She holds up a different cup of paint than the one in his hand, it is a different shade of green that he thought to use elsewhere, he looks at it and looks at the spot he is about to paint, then back at the one in his hand. The girl is right, this one will work better. “Ok, let’s switch, you put this one back down over by the paints and I’ll use the one you brought me.” He takes the cup from her and exchanges it with the one in his hand

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She happily walks carefully over to the table of paints and reaches up to set it down. This is when he notices that she must have pulled over the chair earlier when he wasn’t looking and she lined up all the paints by color and shade. There they are in a line and in perfect color order. Dominic smiles, well drawing is what brought him out, maybe it will be for her too.

She pulls on his pants leg again, “Careful I almost made a mistake here. Is there more?” he asks

She won’t talk with him. Every day she sits and watches, from the time he primed the whole room with off-white, to the day he began drawing the murals on each wall. She sits in silence and communicates with him in her own way. He knows nothing about her except that she is three years old. She shows him three fingers all the time. She smiles when he finishes different items and shakes her head no when he needs to fix something, and he always fixes it.

“Do you have a mommy?” he asks her today.

She shakes her head no, “A poppa?” he asks. She shakes her head no very fast. Hmmmm, that’s pretty telling isn’t it? He thinks to himself. “I need to paint the grass on the bottom here, would you like to help?” he asks. Figuring that grass doesn’t really have to be exact and that he can always cover it up quickly.

She walks over to the table again and looks up at the colors, she climbs on the chair and looks around the table and then she finds the one she wants, she climbs down holding it tightly, she then takes the cup over to where Dominic is. She sits on the floor and begins to carefully paint short strokes of green from the floor up so that the tip of the grass is in the right direction. Dominic watches a couple of moments and smiles, he has had a paintbrush in his hand ever since he can remember too.

Each day, it’s the same thing. He comes in to start working and within the hour she shows up. She works with him side by side sometimes she stands there and holds on to his pants and other times she actually has the brush in her hand and is working on some small part.

~ ~ ~

Today is the beginning of the third week at the orphanage. Dominic is scheduled to be done by the end of the week and then Sunday there will be a grand re-opening of the room with all of their old friends showing up. All 25 of them will be there, they have all committed to coming already. Even those that said they’d never be back. Winslow is the powerful source that is drawing them back. Dominic is not sure how many from their high school class is coming but every day Princess sends him a message of two more, or three more, it is going to be a great tribute to Winslow. What better tribute can there be then to have everyone she touched together for her. She was always saying everyone should stay in touch. Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> started the social media page and Dominic checks at night to see what is new, there is always something new, three weeks later and still more comes.

He has shown his wife every day. They sit together and he talks about all the people in the pictures, it has brought them even closer. Some of his kids look as well, everyone likes to hear their father talk about his childhood friends. The only one they know is Mr. D. They call him this



because pronouncing his full name is too much for them. His oldest is as old as Princess. They have met a couple times and thankfully hit it off well.

Dominic shows up in the room early today and stops frozen in his tracks. A woman comes running up behind him. “Oh, I’m sorry we didn’t know you were coming early.” She says softly, not to wake the child.

“What’s going on?” he asks as he looks at the child, who is sleeping curled up holding a stuffed bear on the pile of smelly painter’s tarps.

“Every night she finds her way into this room, we even tried locking the door but in the morning check we still find her in here. She sleeps through the night here, in her bed she has fits of nightmares all through the night. So, we have let her sleep here, we don’t know why but it keeps her calm. I’m sorry sir, I will move her right away.” She starts to go in the room but Dominic stops her as he grabs her arm.

“No, leave her be. I’ll work around her. You go tend to the others.” He says softly.

After the woman leaves, he takes a picture of the sleeping child and sends one to his wife and one to his best friend. “Can you guess what I’m thinking?” he sends as a caption to the picture. Within seconds his wife writes back, “I’ll call the lawyer.” Dominic had not thought of that, but now that she mentioned it, yeah, it’s a good idea.

His friend writes back, “When we all snuck out to paint the surprise mural on the basketball courts at school and Winslow slept on the tarps so we had to be extra careful not to spill paint.” Dominic smiles, he knew his friend would get the reference. He tells him what his wife said and Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> writes back, “She is right, you know.”

Dominic laughs out loud and then the child stirs, he quickly covers his mouth. As much as everyone swore off of this place, no one can get it out of their heart. At least five others have come back to adopt a child from here over the years. They spread the word to all their friends who are even slightly toying with the idea, many make it happen, others who live in the area have begun to volunteer to be mentors. This too is much needed.

Dominic looks around the room, it is filled with happy memories of Winslow. The time they went to the zoo and found a sleeping lion next to her cub, it’s on one wall, the time they went on a hike in the woods with high school and saw some exotic birds who had probably been pets and released up in a tree, there on another wall. Then there are the pictures of all things Winslow; rainbows, fluffy clouds, garden paths of bright orange and purple flowers like the ones she planted in front of the orphanage every spring. The best memory is the campfire and the silhouette of a woman playing guitar. Everyone who knows her will remember Winslow playing down at the beach on the night before graduation. Many of their high school friends came by to hear her play and sing. It became their goodbye; many tears were shed when people left but mostly everyone was happy to have had each other in their lives and Winslow connected them all. For all the children who will play in this room, they will find comfort. Dominic is sure. Winslow’s spirit is fully captured, he has done his best work since his college thesis.

As Dominic looks around to see where the finishing touches need to go, he begins to think about his college thesis, it happened almost by accident. Dominic was an art major. He was not sure at the time what he was going to do with his art but he had to perfect his skills if he was going

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to do anything that will earn him a real salary. He had to learn all he could about drawing, it was something he began to do at an early age and it is the only thing that kept him sane through some very trying times.

His art instructors pushed him and challenged him further, he was having the best college experience a person could ask for. However, like every student, he had to take some other courses besides art, these he struggled in. Marisa, she was a science major, headed for medical school and took all her classes very seriously, too seriously according to him.

He would tease her and sometimes tickle her to make her smile in class. She would swat him with her hand or book even but all the while, she sat next to him the very next class. Dominic cared for her as a friend. She kept bugging him to study the other courses while he bugged her to take life less seriously. They were a crazy pair. Dominic didn’t go anywhere without his sketch pad. She never went anywhere without her backpack full of books. Together they studied and worked in the library, in the park, at the diner. You could always see them together when he wasn’t with Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> or when he wasn’t in actual class. Marisa would never take an art class, she said she didn’t know her blue from her red. He would tease her that she better figure out those two colors if she wanted to pass anatomy. They would laugh.

Senior year came and the art teacher Dominic admired most pronounced the thesis options. All these years of taking class, Dominic never once considered it work. This was a pleasure trip he was enjoying but the idea of a thesis, a group of items to be done on the subject of the professor’s choice and not his, didn’t sound like fun at all. He dreaded it completely.

Half way through the year they had to produce a prototype of what they wanted to present. The subject was to be ‘college years’. Which means he would have had to start this from year one. He worried about his upcoming meeting with the professor for days, paced his room, was distracted when he talked to friends.

Marisa was the one who finally called him out on his anxiety, “What’s going on?” she asked innocently. With Marisa it was easy to talk, like he always had with Winslow, he told her his worry. She began to laugh and he turned to her with a scowl. “What’s so damn funny Marisa? Not everyone is headed to medical school you know.”

Marisa stopped suddenly, “Hey Dominic, I thought you were kidding that you were worried. I’m sorry. Honey please. Come here.” She walked over to his sketch book which she has seen many times throughout the years. She opens a few pages and says, “Your thesis.” She turns the pages all of which are pictures of her. Sometimes it’s the back of her laying down on the grass studying, there is the one in the library where she snuck up to the top of a bookshelf after hours and laid there with a book open, Dominic was there to capture her in every place they went, who needs photography when you have a Dominic painting your life as you go along. It was always his whimsical part that kept her moving through college and she is hoping that it will keep her motivated through med school.

“You see darling, you’ve been capturing me all these years; this is your thesis. What more can you draw on campus life, you’ve captured me doing every kind of studying there is. You made my serious study life beautiful.” She had turned to him then and grabbed his face into hers and planted the most beautiful kiss he had ever received.

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That is when he realized Marisa was his, forever. They became even more inseparable then. He met her family and brought one of his paintings as a gift instead of flowers, he had no idea who his parents were but he brought one that he thought would be a good living room painting for anyone. Turned out he had picked the exact thing her mother had been searching for, the colors were perfect, the design, the hidden hearts all over the painting, made the item match that much better. To this day she proudly says it stole her heart away upon first glance.

Dominic’s paintings and drawing supported them through medical school, her father had planned on helping out financially but in the end, he did not need to. She had scholarship to school and Dominic made enough to support them at home. By the time she finished school they had two children, they now have five and by the looks of things, soon to be six. Dominic lives a blessed life.

When he hears the child stir, he walks over to her and bends down, “Good morning sunshine, did you sleep well?” he asks.

Her face turns to him and she cries, “I’m wet.” She says. But it was music to his ears. She spoke to him, actual words. He lifts her up and swings her around screaming, “whoohooo!!!”

The woman who was there before came running in, he looks at her all smiles, “She woke up and told me she is wet.” He smiles to her. Tears come to her eyes.

“Come Winnie, let’s get you to the bathroom and cleaned up.” She says reaching for the child.

Dominic is caught completely off guard, the child grips harder around his neck, “I’ve got this, show me the way.” He sends a quick text to his friend and wife about the child’s name. Ping, his phone chimes quickly, “I’ve already called the lawyer, he is all about making this work out. Oh my goodness Dominic, a girl!!! I can’t wait to meet her.” his wife says. They only have one girl, their oldest, the rest have been boys.

Now his phone is ringing, “Are you pulling my leg!” his friend yells.

“No, can’t make this stuff up.” Dominic says as he is washing the girl now and she has begun to giggle as he tickles her while getting her washed up and dressed for the day. The woman never leaves his side, she is amazed to see this connection and to hear the young girl’s voice. It’s music to her ears.

“Well, have you called Benny yet?” his friend asks.

“Marisa already did with the first picture I sent today. I guess Winslow still has my heart but this time we will really be family.” He smiles

“Yeah, this time it is permanent. Do we have a cake for Sunday? Winslow never did her birthday without her cake you know.” His friend says.

“Marisa took care of that too, she knows what we are like on our birthday. Now that we know where she is, I’m sure next year we will be there. No?” he asks.

“That sounds great. Who says you can’t have a birthday at a cemetery. Princess will like that, we went the other day, hadn’t been for a while. Princess says Winslow likes the bear behind the bush by the way.” His friend laughs.

“Man, that part still creeps me out a bit, she doesn’t say things like that in school, does she?” he asks concerned for the kids.

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"No, she knows they won't understand. She also said she doesn't think it will last much longer because Winslow's voice is getting softer and softer, she thinks her momma stayed with her until she found a place to be loved. She only wanted love for her and Princess is comfortable with that. The social media page is helping her understand who her mom was. It's been great. I keep asking people to send in old photos and lots of stories for her daughter, almost everyone has sent. You and I don't need to write things down, she will hear enough from us as the years go on." Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> answers.

"You know my friend. We did ok, you and me. I have the large family I always wanted and you have spent your life helping others with your own gift. We did pretty damn good from my standings. Hey caught that picture of you and Phoebe, can't believe she still has that one. Torch runs deep I guess." Dominic laughs, the little girl in his arms has become very animated all of a sudden as they find clothes for her to wear.

"Funny you said that, Princess said the same thing. She said why would she keep the picture if she didn't still care? But if she did, I'm not hard to find you know. How many people with my name could there be?" he asks.

"Well, at least two if you're the third." The two of them laugh. "Going to get this little one a bite of breakfast, dinner tonight?" Dominic asks.

"Yeah, meet you at Wally's." he hangs up unsure of all that he is feeling now.  
~ ~ ~

Benny worked his magic, as he always does, and had a speedy adoption prepared so that after the party on Sunday, Dominic and Marisa will be going home with six children, not five. The boys were jumping around at having another kid in the house, their daughter can't wait to have someone she can doll up. She and Princess have become good friends in school too. Everything is coming together as Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> always wanted.

Princess is on the social media page again tonight and she sees that Phoebe has posted another picture of herself and Poppa. She decides to do something about these pictures. She sends a private message to Phoebe. "Hello, this is Princess, Winslow's daughter. I used to be called Eloise but my new Poppa, Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> decided Princess suits me better. I am wondering why you are posting pictures of you and him. This hurts him you know. He gets tears in his eyes every time." She hits send and hopes she doesn't get in trouble.

Then she looks at the other posts; seems as the day gets closer more and more people say how much they miss her momma in their life. How much she made everyone around her happy. Princess, Eloise, thinks about the woman they are talking about. When she was alone with her momma, this is the one she knew. When they were in the room with her momma's husband, Momma was never smiling. "I wonder if Poppa knew that?" she says out loud.

"If Poppa knew what?" he asks from behind her. She turns quickly to see him with a sad face on.

"If you knew Momma wasn't happy around her husband. She was happy with me, when we were alone. Is that why you took me away from him? So that I could be happy too? Did you think he would not let me be happy like Momma?" she asks.



“I took you away because I loved your momma and knew she would like me to take care of you. I also took you because of what you said he made you do to him. That’s against the law, no man should ever ask that of a child, its unheard of, even gross, and something only adults who are in love and married do behind closed doors. Does any of this make sense to you?” he asks.

“I’ve learned about body parts in school and what they are used for. I didn’t know it was wrong.” She bows her head down ashamed.

“No, you didn’t, which is what made the judge so angry at that man. Remember that? Remember he said he was going to keep something on the man’s record? Well, that mark on his record is a very bad thing for him, hopefully he will never hurt another child in his life. Maybe you saved a life that day like I had saved yours.” He smiles at her.

“I saved a life? Really? Me?” she asks.

“Yes, you Princess Eloise, you saved a life.” He says assuredly.

“I don’t like Princess Eloise, I like only Princess. Momma said my name came from my father’s side of the family and she had no choice, they wrote it down on the papers without asking her because it was his mother’s name. Momma had no choice, she said she would have called me something that meant gift because that is what she thought of me from the moment I was born. We can stick with Princess if you don’t mind. I’ve been thinking about that a lot and I want it to be my real name. Can we change it?” she asks.

“Your adoption papers say I adopted Princess, daughter of Winslow Harrington. Didn’t you ever look at them? I can show you again if you’d like.” He says.

“No. Are we all ready for Sunday?” she asks trying to change the subject.

“Yes, the cake is ordered, your dress is ready, my suit has been pressed. Dominic and Marisa have all the decorations and the papers for little Winnie to go home with them. Let’s see, what else could there be. Ahhhhh yes, this.” He pulls something out from his pocket. Princess looks at the box, it looks old. She can tell it’s a jewelry box, “What is that?”

“Open it, it was your momma’s” he says. Inside the box is a locket, it opens to have three faces in it, her momma’s, her new Poppa’s and Dominic’s. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> took the time to put in as current a picture as he could find of all of them. The last one of Winslow was of her smiling really big right at the camera from high school graduation.

“Where did you get this?” she asks.

He bows his head a bit, “It was sent to me one day a long time ago, with a note saying, and I quote, ‘she doesn’t need reminders of being a boy’s toy.’ No return address at all.” He says watching her.

“It was from my dad then. He didn’t like her talking about her old friends. He would yell at her and say they weren’t family that they were all a bunch of misfits from an orphanage then he would tell her how lucky she was he found her and was willing to have her. He left when I was seven. I may have been young but I remember hearing all their fights. She married again when I was eight but then at almost nine, her heart couldn’t carry any more sadness so she left me here to pick up the pieces. But I’m not sad, I’m not, you are the best piece of my life now and somehow, I knew you, well, I knew someone would find me.” She says softly.



That explains why she was so close but they couldn’t find her. Her ex cut her off from her previous life, she could no longer reach them physically or through her heart, giving this piece back to her daughter is the right thing to do; he knew it would be. “You’re angry at me, aren’t you?” she asks.

“No honey, I’m angry at me for not fighting why I received the necklace. I could have been in your life all along and you would never had had to deal with the second husband, can you ever forgive me for not trying to find you when I had the resources to do so? Dominic and I, we didn’t know what to do, it was hard on both of us when she got married and left us. Dominic couldn’t keep the locket, it was too painful for him I offered it to him first before keeping it myself. Oh, please say you forgive me.” He bends down to face her in the eye to be sure

“I have done a bad thing, you will not be happy.” She takes his arm and pulls him towards the computer and opens the message she sent, only without her knowing there is a message that was sent back, she hasn’t read it yet. They read together.

*“Dear Princess,*

*Thank you for reaching out to me and letting me know your Poppa has seen the pictures. It was not meant to upset him but I was hoping it would help him open his heart again. If he has you in his life, I know his heart is open and I know he has a really big one too. I’m glad to see that he and Dominic the lion are still fast friends, they are good people.*

*I don’t know if he told you who I am but I am the one who probably closed his heart forever. We were together a long time, or it seemed to me to be a long time, but my parents were not as understanding as your Poppa. They wouldn’t allow me to be with him. They made threats on my college career and many other ways that are hard to explain, so that I had no choice but to walk away from the only love I’ve ever felt.*

*Please tell your poppa, that yes, I had two children with the man he knows I married but as soon as I was done with graduate college, as soon as I was done with establishing my career and was able to stand on my own two feet, I left him, left his family’s money and left my own too. I have my two boys with me because I was able to prove their father didn’t even know them or care enough about them to have custody.*

*I am by myself in this life and I miss your poppa all the time. I will be there on Sunday and I’m hoping for a happy reunion. Can you tell him this for me? Can you be my messenger and tell him how much of a coward I was? I was not as strong as he needed me to be then, but I am now. I really am now. I promise you that. I will never hurt him. I could never do that to the only man I’ve ever loved.*

*Looking forward to meeting you Winslow’s princess. He couldn’t have picked a better name.”*

Princess looks at her Poppa, tears are running down his cheeks and she feels bad, she bows her head and tries to walk away. Instead of being angry he pulls her on his lap and sits down at the computer with her. He copies Phoebe’s letter and sends it to Dominic, Michael knows he will understand the magnitude of what was said. Phoebe, his Phoebe is still his after all these years. He hopes she is not disappointed when she sees him.

“Why is he called Dominic the lion?” she asks.

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“Well, that’s a rather interesting story. One night, after Marisa and Dominic had finally admitted their love for each other, they were supposed to meet by a certain bench at sunset by the science lab. He wanted one more picture for a series of pictures he was drawing, he had to make a whole group of pictures all on the same subject for what is called a thesis. It’s like your graduating test. Anyway, he was coming close to the lab when he heard screaming, some girl was yelling the word ‘no’, and things like, ‘get off of me.’ Well Dominic went running towards the voice and wouldn’t you know, that girl who was yelling was Marisa, there was a boy pushing her towards the wall of the building touching her where he had no right to touch her, and Dominic exploded. That’s the only way I can say what happened. He jumped on the guy and literally pulled him off of her and then in superhuman strength he picked the guy up over his head and threw him about five feet away, the guy landed on his back. Dominic had roared, every witness said the same thing. He roared saying to the guy as he threw him, ‘the woman said no’.

We had campus police who had heard her scream too and they were already running towards her when they saw him pull the guy off and throw him. The guy on the ground had the wind knocked out of him and I think he broke a rib or two from the fall, he pointed out to the police that Dominic did this unprovoked but they said he should be glad it was him and not them, because they would have beaten him for sure. They arrested him for his attack on Marisa, Dominic was never charged with assault, but word got out that Dominic was not to be hassled with and that no one better lay eyes on his girl.

People around who saw this happen said he sounded like a lion with his roar. They all came to help but he and Marisa were ok. She thanked everyone for being willing to help. Not many people will help but at our campus, we looked out for each other. We all have saved someone I guess.” He finishes his story remembering that day with a smile. He was one of the witnesses that saw his friend’s super human strength.

“Wow, is that why they have a couple of lions by their front door?” she asks.

“Yep, and the few in the house as well. All were gifts by the people who were there. Everyone had the same idea for a wedding gift and Dominic and Marisa kept them all. Weird story huh?” he asks.

“You’re not mad at me for sending the message?” she asks.

“No, I’m proud of you. I’ve been too scared to send one myself. I’ve wanted to many times but I suppose I didn’t want to get hurt again, what if it was as innocent as posting the only picture she had of that time. We didn’t take pictures of everything then the way people do now.” He explains.

“Will you want to see her on Sunday then?” she asks.

“Yes, I suppose I will want to see her. You’ll have to keep me from being nervous though. I haven’t seen her since that picture.” He says.

“Ok, I will hold your hand if you hold mine when they name the room after Momma.”

She says.

“Deal.”

~ ~ ~



Since opening his heart to Princess, Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> has grown taller, he walks taller and with more pride. He has learned how to have fun again, they laugh, they play, and he makes sure she does all her studies to the best of her ability.

Sunday morning comes fast and they are all at the orphanage already. Benny, Dominic, Marisa and kids, the professor with his wife and kids plus many, many more from long ago and far away. The director of the orphanage has greeted back all her old students with love and affection. There was a special group, she saw most of them grow up from the time they were ten years old.

Everyone is mulling around the big gym together having punch and cake. "Excuse me everyone, may I have your attention." Marisa says

"Many of you may not know me but I'm married to Dominic. He is the artist who has taken his vision, his memory and his heart into this project with the help of Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> and Winslow's daughter, Princess. We are here to celebrate her birthday and her life. Those of you who were lucky enough to know her may recognize her in the room that we are dedicating to her today. Dominic said you will see many shared memories. For those of you, like myself, who did not know her when you were young, you will see a room full of love, hope and happiness; the three traits I believe she must have had inside her at all times.

Without further ado we ask that you turn your attention over to the south side of the gym where Princess is waiting to cut the opening ribbon of Winslow's room."

There is some applause and then Princess cuts the ribbon to a roar of cheers. People flow in smoothly and walk around looking from one wall to another, there is so much to capture; you can't see it in one glance. Then the murmurs start, "oh my, look over here.", "wow, that's our tree hut we built", and this one "it makes me feel she is right here". A comfortable silence takes over the room as everyone who has a shared memory relates it quietly to the significant other they have brought with them today. Tears flow but they are happy ones, Dominic receives many hugs and pats on the back as does Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>. Princess is introduced to so many people who have brought her the pictures they posted and some different kinds of mementos from her mother.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you again." The director's voice sounds over the loud speakers. "But we have some very important announcements to make here today. First off, Mr. Benny as he is known here, has officially adopted Sophia *and* her brothers Carmen and Joseph. They will be leaving us today but promise to be back for all the future teen programs we will be having in Mr. Benny's after school program." There are a lot of cheers, many from the kids as well as the adults. "Oh, don't get in a roar just yet. There is more. We would like to proudly announce that this year's graduating class will be 100% of them. We have not had that since the year Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>, Dominic, Winslow and their classmates were here but due to Mr. Benny's program, we do now and hope to continue this in the future." To this there is an even bigger round of applause. Benny stands even taller, if that was possible. He is already standing next to his children; ages 16, 12 and 8. He could not split them up, when he became close to Sophie he began to befriend the boys as well.

"Ah, and the piece de resistance is that our own Dominic the Lionhearted will be taking home our little Winnie, a fitting tribute to all he has done here in honor of his old friend, dare I



say sister, Winslow. We wish you all the best of luck and look forward to many, many more happy gatherings. The outer courts have been set up with some games and activities for the day, please join me.” She says as the back doors to Winslow’s room are opened and everyone walks out slowly to enjoy more of the festivities.

“Good afternoon Princess, may I introduce you to my boys? This one is Barren, he is my oldest and he is 13, and this one is?” she questions her son and he answers, “I’m Hercules now.” He says proudly.

“Ok Hercules here is 10 like you. However, he likes to change his name a lot, that’s why we ask him all the time.” Phoebe smiles at her.

“My name is Princess because my Poppa says the name fit me.” She says proudly.

“Yes it does.” Her poppa says from behind her. “Hello boys. Do you like ice cream? Princess here can take you to the ice cream booth if you’d like. My treat.” He says smiling. The boys who have tried hard not to show they are enjoying the day can’t help but smile at him.

“Ok, but maybe you should give me the money. I’m the oldest and I know my math very well.” Barren says.

“Well, young man, that is very responsible of you. Here, let me know if there is any change. Princess take them over to Mr. Benny’s booth ok?” She smiles knowing he won’t charge them any money. “Ok Poppa, come this way,” she starts to walk off quickly but Barren puts his hand on her shoulder.

“Wait up, it’s a crowd we don’t want you to get lost, ok?” he says as if stepping into a big brother role for her is a natural thing to do.

“You look fantastic Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>. Does anyone call you Mike anymore?” she asks.

“No, I have but one name, I chose it and that is what I go by, with everyone.” He says firmly. He hated being called Mike as a child but invariably someone always did.

“As long as nothing has changed with you. I see your smile is the same, you have maybe a couple of distinguishing looking grey hairs but all in all, you’re still the man I once fell in love with.”

There she said it, she couldn’t hold it in any longer. She has been watching him all afternoon, watching how everyone gravitates towards him as they used to. His charm was always natural, never forced. Many of the people she met here introduced themselves as clients of his. She knew he would be successful, she had only hoped he would be happy too.

Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> watches her mouth as she spoke. He watches her eyes as well, they are full of water waiting to fall down her cheeks. His heart pounds more than it should be, he should be angry at her, he should be wanting to walk away and let her hurt the way he did so many years ago but he can’t. Instead he pulls her in for the kiss he was never able to give her.

Princess and the boys are watching them as they come closer, then they stop walking and stay where they are. Somehow all three of them know their lives have changed at the moment of that kiss. Barren says, “You see Princess, I told you my mom loved him. She hasn’t stopped talking about him since that social media page opened up. We’ve heard all about him. She told us all about our father too and how he never even put up a fuss about her taking us with her. Not



even once. I don’t want to have his name anymore; I want to change it like Hercules here does all the time.”

“Come with me.” She says holding his hand, and pulling Hercules along for the ride. She marches right up to her Poppa and his new love and announces quite matter of factly, “Barren would like to change his name to Michael McDoogle 4<sup>th</sup>.” She says with gusto.

The two adults peel apart from each other, Dominic and Marisa heard the pronouncement, as did the Professor and his wife. All heads turn towards Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>.

He looks around and sees everyone he loves watching him, he is holding on to Phoebe this time tightly, nothing will let her go, not even a judge, he will argue to the end of the earth if he has to. “Well now, that’s a big step you’re jumping to Princess.”

Dominic slaps him on the back of the head and everyone laughs, except the children, they don’t know what is so funny, they were quite serious. Phoebe pushes on her beau to look at the kids’ confusion. “Oh Princess, we are not laughing at you.” He bends down to look at, his most likely, soon to be son and says, “I would be honored if you took that name. It’s always supposed to go to the first-born son you know. Can you handle that responsibility?” he asks in a serious voice.

“If you would trust me with such a thing sir, I will make you proud.” Barren stands taller as the words come out. He feels as if he has been knighted, given a title and not a name. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> is passing on his name. He stands taller than he thought he could, he pics up Phoebe and twirls her around as if she is no heavier than a loaf of bread. When he puts her down Princess approaches again and pulls on his shirt sleeve.

“Yes Princess.” He says

She pulls him down to her mouth and she whispers, “Thank you for giving me brothers, maybe we can do a girl next?” she asks.

He looks at his princess and pulls her in for a hug, to have his own child with Phoebe would be the icing on the cake to his sweet life. “We may work on that my dear but not today ok?” She hugs him around his neck and he stands still holding on to her.

“Ok everyone, it looks as if our family is growing by leaps and bounds. Come, let’s join the rest of today’s festivities and get to know one another.” He calls to all around him.

Six months later they are headed back to Winslow’s room. It only seems fitting to get married there, in the room where it all started. For Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> it was where he met his friend/brother Dominic, for Phoebe it was where she rekindled her only real love and for the kids, it’s where they realized they would be a family.

Dominic and Marisa helped Phoebe with all of the bride’s side of the affair, since her family no longer speaks to her because she left her successful husband. The one they felt had so much promise to make her a good life.

Professor and his wife and their children have been handling the groom’s side of the wedding and the orphanage has been busy handling the decorations. All 25, well minus Winslow, of the original group from the orphanage, are coming to the wedding.

Benny and his kids will be there, with Benny’s new girlfriend. Someone Sophie introduced him to. Sophie takes great pride in bringing them together, she met the woman on a camping trip

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with her friends from school. They all belong to a group that does nature hikes and long bike rides, anything having to do with being outdoors and learning about and appreciating nature. Her brothers love being outside too, Benny has learned a lot from the kids and they have learned how to be diligent about other simple things in life like taking care of the house and what it means to have responsibility towards others and themselves. Sophie now realizes that college is an actual option for her, her brothers have also decided that things have turned around and being such a close part of this wedding celebration has brought it all full circle to them.

“Poppa!!!!” Princess calls from her room.

Michael McDoogie 3<sup>rd</sup> runs to her room, “What is it Princess? Is everything ok?” She looks to him with sadness. “I can’t hear her anymore, I’ve tried these past few days but nothing, nothing about the wedding, nothing about Phoebe, not even a whisper.” She says.

“Do you remember what you told me? That Momma said she will continue to speak to you until she knows you will be loved. Am I right?” he asks.

“Yes.” She says.

“Don’t you think Phoebe loves you? Look at the dress she bought you for today? Look how she has shown you all the ways you could do your hair for today and the games she has already taught you that only girls play. I believe you already have some secrets with her as well. But that’s ok.

And one more thing, didn’t she also tell you that once a week when she works over near Momma’s resting spot that she will make sure to bring her your flowers and pictures? How much more love can your Momma want for you? Your new brothers even like you, and boys are annoying I know, I was one of them.” He smiles.

“Did I only think I heard her?” she asks.

“No, you said things to me only she could have told you. Especially about Dominic’s painting, you hadn’t even seen the bear yet had you?” he asks.

“but maybe if I clear my mind of everyone else, she will be there.” She says pleading.

“Maybe, but also, maybe she is letting go so you can be with your new family. You will wear her locket all the time, you will carry all your memories with you forever but now you have someone to share them with; me, your new brothers, and even Phoebe, Professor and his wife all my brothers and sisters. You can tell all of us or none of us but never think she is gone. I’ll bet she is at the wedding today, you’ll see, there will be something that says she is there. I know Winslow, she wouldn’t miss this day for anything. We will see her at many things in your life, we have to look, she will be there. Maybe we just can’t hear her any more, ok?” he pulls her in for a hug and takes out another box from his back pocket. “I was on my way to give this to you, from your grandmother, the professor’s wife. She says all flower girls should have one.” He says holding out the box.

Princess looks down and sees a long box, she opens it and sees a watch, but not any kind of watch, it’s one that matches the colors of her dress exactly and the face of the watch has an iris on it, her momma’s favorite flower. “Did you tell her about irises?” she asks.

“No, as a matter of fact, she bought this on her own the other day when I had lunch with her, she gave it to me before I left. You see, I told you we’d find your momma today.” he smiles.



~ ~ ~

Dominic and Marisa's kids walk down the aisle first, then Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> walks down with the professor and his wife flanked on either side of him. He looks around the room to see all the paintings again, he watches as there is a butterfly that lands on the wall, it flutters over to him and lands on his shoulder and opens and shuts its wings three times and flies away.

After that Benny's daughter Sophie walks down, then comes her brothers, next is Michael McDoogle 4<sup>th</sup> and Humphry, a name Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup> picked out for him and has since stuck. Finally, Princess walks down carrying iris petals and dropping them from side to side. The last one to walk in is Phoebe, who is flanked by Dominic and Marisa. Dominic is frightened at so many people watching him, his wedding with Marisa was much smaller, out of the blue a butterfly lands on his shoulder too, he looks to it and it flaps its wings three times. He looks to the groom and they shake heads. Winslow approves, they both recognize the sign and they both watch as the butterfly floats over to Princess and sits quietly on her shoulder, no longer moving and Princess looks to the groom and then to Dominic, they both smile at her and she turns her head to kiss the butterfly, now it opens its wings and leaves.

The whole crowd does not notice any of this, instead they stand as the bride walks past. Her eyes are only on her future husband, she cannot see another person in the room, she doesn't care who is here or who is not, only that she is walking towards him. Her one and only Mr. Michael McDoogle 3<sup>rd</sup>.

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