

WINNER OF THE GOLDEN SPUR AWARD

THE

ORPHAN TRAIN



ADVENTURES

A Family Apart



JOAN LOWERY NIXON

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JENNIFER SHOOK BACK her long, dark hair, damp from the summer's heat. "I wish we were home," she snapped so suddenly that she startled her younger brother Jeff, who was sitting on the steps of the front porch. "It's so boring. I miss the city. I miss my friends. I wish, oh, how I wish, we were home."

"Stop wishing," Jeff grumbled. "We haven't got a home." He squinted and slowly aimed, preparing to throw a pebble along the gravel path that led from the front porch of Grandma Briley's house to the road.

Just as he let it fly, Jennifer deliberately nudged his shoulder, causing the pebble to flop onto the grass.

"Hey!" Jeff shouted. "Cut that out!"

"Then don't say dumb stuff like that. We do too have a home. At least we will when Dad gets through with his assignment overseas."

"You know what I mean," Jeff said. He quickly

aimed and threw another pebble before Jennifer could interfere.

"I miss Dad," Jennifer said.

"I miss Mom, too," Jeff said.

"Mom? How can you miss Mom? She's right here."

"No, she's not. She's upstairs working away on that novel that never seems to get finished."

"That's not her fault. She keeps getting interrupted. Anyhow, that was the whole point of our spending the summer here in Missouri, so Mom could concentrate on her writing and we could get to know Grandma better."

"Grandma's almost as busy as Mom," Jeff complained. "In the morning she's jogging, in the afternoon she's working for that historical society, and at night she goes to City Council meetings."

Jennifer nodded. "And here we are stuck out in the middle of no place with nothing to do."

She heard a chuckle behind them, then a click as the screen door opened. "'Out in the middle of no place?'" Grandma said as she squeezed onto the top step between them. "Well, I'll grant that northwest Missouri doesn't have all the excitement to offer that Washington, D.C., has, but you could hardly call it 'no place.'"

Jennifer felt her face grow even warmer. She pushed at the hair that clung damply to her cheeks and stammered, "I didn't mean—uh—that is—it's different in Missouri, and—"

Grandma tilted her head and studied Jennifer. "You know, you'd be a lot cooler with that lovely long hair off your neck." She got up, tugging down her shorts, and held out a hand to help Jennifer up. "Come with me—both of you. I've got something to show you that ought to relieve your boredom."

As soon as they reached their grandmother's bed-

room, she pointed to the bed. "First, we'll take care of that long hair," she said. "Have a seat, Jennifer. Just give me one minute, and you'll see what I mean."

Jennifer stared at Grandma's own short-cropped curls and opened her mouth to protest. "You're not going to—" she began, but she relaxed with a grateful sigh when Grandma simply picked up a silver-backed hairbrush. The rhythmic strokes of the brush were soothing, and soon Jennifer's hair was swirled over her grandmother's left hand.

"Jeff," Grandma said, "will you please hand me a few bobby pins from that box on my dresser? There ought to still be a few of them in there."

"Bobby pins!" Jennifer gasped. Nobody used bobby pins! What in the world was she going to look like?

Her grandmother poked and patted at Jennifer's hair. Finally she said, "Stand up and look in the mirror, Jennifer. My, I've got a beautiful granddaughter."

Jennifer stared at the face in the wood-framed mirror that hung over Grandma's dresser. Her hair was parted in the middle and caught in a bun low on her neck. She looked older than fifteen. It wasn't so bad—kind of old-fashioned, but actually pretty nice. Lightly touching her hair, she sneaked another look, then met her grandmother's friendly grin. "Thanks," Jennifer said.

"Now," Grandma said, "wait till you see this." She bent to reach into the low cedar chest that stood in the corner of the room and took out a book covered with faded blue fabric. She opened it carefully and removed a sepia-toned photograph. Without a word she handed the photograph to Jennifer.

Jennifer felt prickles dart up her backbone as her eyes met those of the slender, dark-haired girl in the photograph. "Who is this girl?" Jennifer asked. "She looks like me."



❧ A Family Apart ❧

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The Orphan Train saga follows the story of the six Kelly children, whose widowed mother has sent them west from New York City in 1856 because she realizes she cannot give them the life they deserve. The children, especially thirteen-year-old Frances Mary, feel an overwhelming sense of betrayal and abandonment. They cannot understand that Mrs. Kelly has made the ultimate sacrifice for them.

Their arrival in St. Joseph, Missouri, separates the children not only from their mother, but from each other as well. Frances has promised Ma that she will look after her youngest brother, and to do so she must masquerade as a boy. "Frankie's" adventures eventually involve her in the activities of the Underground Railroad. Was splitting up the family really her mother's greatest act of love?

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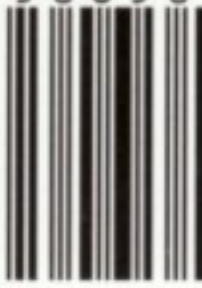
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