

The Fire Starter

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For my Mum
Auntie Sa
And Chloé

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Chapter 1

It was so weird to think that this was our new home. I couldn't imagine life without Dad in this crummy little flat. It just wasn't right. I sat alone on the floor of my new bedroom, surrounded by cardboard boxes, whilst the moving people lugged our furniture all the way up to the fifth floor. We'd been evicted from our old house when Dad left, and Mum couldn't afford to keep paying the bills. Her job as a cleaner didn't pay very well.

Andrea and Theo, my younger twin brother and sister, loved Dad more than anything. He would play princesses with Andrea and do silly high-pitched voices and he'd play football with Theo and always let him score goals. Because they were only three when he left Mum told them that he had just gone on holiday, and we would see him again soon. The youngest of the family, Clover, hadn't yet said her first word when Dad left, so his absence didn't particularly bother her. But being the oldest, I knew that Dad wasn't coming back.

"Ember!" called Mum from the front door. That's me. I'm Ember. Like the heart of a fire. That's what Dad used to tell me. I blinked, slightly surprised at suddenly being pulled away from my thoughts. I slowly rose to my feet, traipsed

down the hall and entered the new living room. "Thanks," Mum said to the delivery men before shutting the door.

"Yes Mum, what did you need?" I asked.

"Oh there you are! I wondered what you were up to. We're going to start unpacking now, just to get it over and done with. Your stuff has been put in your bedrooms already, so all you'll need to do is put your things where you want them. While you do that I'm gonna move the last of the furniture around a bit."

"Sure." I said. Andrea got up from the floor and skipped down the hall and Theo, much less enthusiastically, followed.

The twin's room was small, cramped and was probably meant to be a large storage cupboard but it would do. Their new bunk bed fitted, as did the chest of drawers and a desk. I looked down at the mountain of junk on the floor and sighed before saying "Come on then kids. Let's unpack." It took a while because Theo kept chucking his pants around the room and Andrea insisted upon making sure everything was absolutely perfect, but in the end everything was in its place. Once they'd finished I said "Okay, let's go and get you guys something to drink. It's been a long day."

I took them back out into the living room where Mum was giving baby Clover a snack. I eventually found two cups in a random box amongst all the mess, as well as a bottle of lemonade in a cool bag. The twins sat down on the sofa, guzzling lemonade, sharing a bag of crisps, and watching their favourite show on our old iPad. I wanted to sit down with them and relax but my new room had to be sorted out too.

I went back to my room and opened one of the many boxes and started putting all my belongings away. This was quickly

accomplished and feeling like everything was ready, I went back out to sit with the twins.

Mum breathed a sigh of relief and sank into an armchair as I appeared in the doorway. She'd finished moving all the furniture around and had made this cramped and stuffy flat seem like home. Well, sort of. "All finished Mum?" I asked, flopping into the armchair opposite.

"Yep," Mum smiled. She'd clearly been very hard at work because she was pink in the face and shiny with sweat. "I've got everything running smoothly. The water, WIFI, and electricity. I've also put every last thing in its place, dusted and hoovered the whole flat, cleaned the bathroom and the kitchen and I'll be serving dinner in a few minutes."

"Wow Mum. That didn't take long. You must be exhausted. You're brilliant! I think you should have a well-deserved rest."

"No, that's alright. I need to look after you lot."

"We'll be fine! You'll only be in the next room. Plus, they're already in their Pj's. All there is to do is feed them and brush their teeth." I replied.

"Are you sure that's alright? Thanks Honey," She got up from the chair and sloped wearily off to her room.

There was a bing from the kitchen, and as there weren't any doors separating the living room from the kitchen-dining room, I could see it was the little egg timer that had made the sound. I turned off the oven and found a pair of oven gloves after opening practically every drawer there was, then took out the tray of fries and fish fingers before getting the sweetcorn out of the microwave. After finding plates and cutlery, I laid the table and called the kids over for tea. Theo and Andrea sat down and hoovered up their dinners. As the twins ate, I spoon-fed Clover a tub of pureed apples then put

her to bed and sat Andrea and Theo in front of the TV with milk and cookies.

A little while later we went off to bed. I'd never normally go to bed at the same time as the twins, but it had been a long day and I found it hard to keep my eyes open. After brushing their teeth and reading them two quick bedtime stories, I curled up in bed. It took a long time for sleep to come because it was so weird to be in our new home.

Chapter 2

The next morning when I woke up, Mum came to tell me she was going to work, that the kids were ready, and we were going to go to the park at ten o'clock with the twins' friends and their mum, Abby. They lived on the floor above. That's one of the reasons Mum chose to move here. I gave her a quick hug before she left, then I dragged myself out of bed to eat the toast she'd left for me. "Hi kids," I said when I entered the living room, and they waved back. The twins were watching CBeebies, and Clover was playing with her rattle in her highchair. I quickly ate breakfast and got ready, then put the twins and Clover in their shoes and coats and we left the flat and made our way to the park that lies opposite. We crossed the road and the twins ran into the park after spotting their friends.

They played for hours until it started to pour with rain and a wind whipped up around us. All of a sudden, the park was deserted. Theo's coat had blown away in the wind and he was chasing after it so Abby took Andrea, Clover and both her kids back to her flat and told me to meet her there. Eventually Theo caught the coat and we ran from the park hand in hand. There was not a single soul in sight, not even a car on the road. That's when it happened.

The rain was so heavy it was impossible to see more than a few metres. Then Theo's hand slipped from mine. I thought he'd just fallen over so I leant down to haul him up and I fell too. But I didn't land with a thud on the road. I just kept falling through the air. I felt like I was going to keep falling forever.

Chapter 3

The temperature dropped rapidly as we fell and the hole we'd fallen through got smaller and smaller until it vanished completely, drowning us in darkness. I was surprised at how slowly we were falling. It was like someone had pressed a button to make everything go in slow motion. I suddenly stopped falling and thudded onto a cold, slimy floor. I sat up, astonished I hadn't been turned to mush on hitting the ground. To my left a dank slimy tunnel was dimly lit by spluttering gas lamps. "Theo!" I called out.

"Ember" he replied, scurrying over to me.

"What happened?" I gasped, enveloping my brother in a tight hug.

"Where are we?" Theo gulped.

He was trembling. I picked him up and saw the scared expression on his face. I wrapped him up in his coat even though it was sodden and told him, with uncertainty; "I'm sure it's fine. We just need to find someone that can help us."

"But there is no one down here," Theo whimpered.

Inside I agreed with him. Who on earth would be here? But I shook my head and replied; "Of course there is. Don't look so scared. Let's go and see if we can find someone."

"Ok..." Theo mumbled. I looked up just to make sure that there was no way of getting back up to the hole. Nope. There

was no way we were getting back up there, even if someone threw down a rope ladder.

We wandered aimlessly in the gloom for hours. I occasionally glanced over my shoulder because I couldn't shake the feeling that something was following us. Eventually I gave up. "It's no use Theo. I'm sorry. We'll just have to stay here and hope that someone finds us. Mum will tell the police we've gone missing, and they'll use experts and trained dogs to sniff us out. It'll be alright." I slouched against one of the slimy walls and sighed. "Look Ember!" Theo pointed to something glinting far up ahead. He stood up and took my hand.

"What do you see Theo?"

"I see a...come on, let's go!" I was taken by surprise when he started running into the distance.

"Theo! Hold on!" I jumped up and charged after him, catching up easily. After a moment, I thought I saw something too. Not very clearly - it was just a little flash of golden light. It blinked on and off over and over again. Against my better judgement I decided to go and find out what it was. There was no point sitting in the dark waiting for someone to come and rescue us. Nobody even knew we were here yet.

We kept on running until we reached a... well, what actually was it!? It looked sort of like the eye of a storm, I guessed. It was different shades of purple and it swirled and boiled angrily in the air the front of us. I could feel it pulling me closer. I had to use all my strength to stay where I was.

"Stand back! You don't want to get pulled inside!" I said worriedly, sticking my hand out in front of him. We stood stock still and considered the sight in front of us. Now I knew what I'd seen glinting. Every so often a streak of gold light would zip across the purple clouds then vanish again.

"I want to go inside!" said Theo.