

The Windsteads of Gramly Manor

One

Beth Windstead grabbed her duffle bag and loaded all the books on her shelf into it. Oh, she couldn't wait! She had hardly been able to contain herself when she'd heard the news. They were going back to Gramly! The fact was almost too good to be true. She pulled out her suitcase and stuffed clothes into it, not bothering to fold them.

She dumped her belongings into the cardboard boxes she'd been saving in her closet. Gramly! She couldn't wait. As she was clearing her dresser, she noticed a little photo. It was a picture of Gramly. The little windows were so charming, the greenhouse was all shined up, but four year old Beth was sitting on the step, not smiling, but tears streaming down her pudgy face. They were moving away from Gramly, and little Beth had been devastated.

But now they are going back! Gramly! The place of Beth's birth! Home! True, the apartment building they'd lived in, in New York, for years was home to the rest of the family, but not to Beth. To Beth it was a place of homesickness. Sadness. Hatred. She despised that tiny apartment in that small, stuffy building. She loathed the loud noises they'd hear from neighbor's parties that went on every night. She's hated them ever since they stepped foot inside the apartment building.

They were leaving, now. Away from that place that Beth couldn't stand. Going to the place that Beth loved. But would Gramly be the same? Had Mr. and Mrs. Chang, the caretakers of the estate, taken good care of it? Beth would have to find out.

Beth was what her family called a loner. Her family, which consisted of two adults and six kids, was big for most people. Beth was the oldest, and she was eleven, then it was Amy, who was nine, Peter, who was eight, Claire, who was seven, Becky, who was five, and little baby Heidi, who was almost a year old. All

the girls had long, black hair, even Heidi, who had grown her first lock just a month ago. Peter was the only boy, though he rather liked it that way.

He claimed that he got all the special privileges, such as ice cream with Daddy, and lots of other things with Daddy. Peter also was the only red head, which fit him, because he had a fiery temper, as well as a mischievous personality. Amy was a story teller and wished to be an author when she grew up. She was currently working on a story, entitled *Praise for the Cats*, starring Winslow, the family tangerine colored cat.

Then there was Claire, who was always crafting. Her favorite craft was making twig baskets.

“All I need,” she claimed, “is yarn and twigs. Scissors also, if you include them to cut the yarn.”

Becky was the Windstead’s Ramona Quimby. In fact, she had her own imaginary friend, named ‘Roberta’, after Ramona’s little sister. She was always getting into trouble after Amy read her *Ramona the Pest* when Becky was three. She’d actually saved up her money to buy three bags of apples, lugging the two pound bags to the apartment building cellar, and taking a bite out of each and everyone.

Heidi, a little baby, every night for the past month, would wind her fingers around her hair. Then they’d get stuck, and she’d cry and scream until Mrs. Windstead came and brushed them loose. She practically was always in some predicament.

When they moved away from Gramly, seven years ago, she and Amy and Peter were little. None of them had understood at that ages why they had to move for their father’s job, and little Heidi couldn’t understand now, why they were moving back. But after the birth of Heidi, their parents decided that city life was too crowded for their family of eight, and Gramly, still in their possession, seemed

to be calling them, now that Mr. Winstead had the opportunity to work from home. Beth still could hardly believe it. Going back to Gramly!

Claire, Becky, and Heidi had all been born in the tiny apartment building. Amy and Peter didn't remember Gramly, so Beth gathered all her siblings together to comfort them. None of them were handling the news well.

All the children gathered in Amy's room. Amy's room was what any girl could wish for. It was completely pink. Pink everything. Beth walked down the hall and went into Amy's room, where all her siblings were sitting and looking distraught.

Beth cleared her throat. "You all know why I called you here." she said, looking around at all the sullen faces.

"Listen, I know you guys all think you'll hate Gramly, but..."

Peter glared at her. "Why even name a building? You could just say that you live at this huge house on top of a hill with Unicorns and Fairies dancing all around."

Beth picked a drooling Heidi off the ground. "Dude. Don't. Interrupt. Now, let me talk. The way you all feel now is the way I felt when I left Gramly."

Amy sighed, and Claire rolled her eyes and huffed loudly.

"Come on guys!" Beth cried. "So what? Mom and Dad decided our family is too big and we have to move. You guys haven't even seen Gramly! It's in this neighborhood called Fern Glen. Oh, and Gramly has a ton of land, including acres of trees. There's so many trees you all could have your own tree houses! Also, the house next door to us has horses!"

"Can Winslow come?" Becky asked.

Beth nodded. "Of course! Also, Gramly is one of the oldest houses in Fern Glen. There are secret rooms in the mansion, not to mention that there are way more rooms than this whole apartment building has all together! And Dad said we

could finally get a dog once we're settled in. Also there is a family there, the Changs, who have three kids!"

Peter yawned. "Big deal. What about our friends here?"

Beth brighted. "Well, Peter. You love the Staten Island Ferryhawks, and a lot of the players live in Fern Glen!"

Peter grunted, but his frown faded.

Claire looked nervous. "Well, we've always lived here!"

Beth smiled. She was getting the hang of encouragement. "Oh, so yeah. I'm obviously the only kid here who remembers Gramly, and only three of us have actually lived there, so all you know is the hubbub of city life. Remember when we went camping last year? It will be like that, but inside, in a huge house, and, Dad is getting a pay raise soon, and he promised to get us some decorations to make Gramly feel like home!"

Still the Windstead kids looked depressed, but some not as much as they had before.

"Listen. Do you know what it means to discover something new?"

Amy raised her hand. "It means to find something new," she squeaked.

Beth nodded. "So, you guys will be able to unearth so many new things. I know you'll like it there. I just know it. You'll meet so many friends and find out you have so much more to yourselves than you realize! Listen, maybe this is hard, but sometimes you have to go through a storm to see the sun."

Amy smiled at this, because she'd invented that little quote.

"And Mrs. Riley is moving with us!"

Mrs. Riley was the kind old woman next door who always made the Windsteads cookies.

No one showed any sign of excitement.

"Is anyone excited?" Beth asked incredulously.

"Nope," Peter said, pulling Becky's pigtails, and Heidi joined in.

“Mope!” she screamed.

“Exactly!” Beth said, glaring at Peter. “He is a mope, Heidi!”

Heidi cackled with laughter, and Amy braided Heidi’s little lock of hair. Heidi’s cute little hair stood up, and looked like a little mohawk on a baby.

“When are we moving?” Claire asked. “Maybe I’m a little excited.”

Beth shivered with excitement. “A week from now,” she said, trying to contain herself.