

Blue Hearts

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One dark winter's night, a baby mysteriously appeared on the cobblestone steps of the Winterbry Orphanage. In her hand was a small bluebird necklace and a picture of a man and woman, with a note saying *Imogen and Lachlan*, which everyone assumed were her parents. Extensive searches were undertaken, but with no luck. Matron Kimberly Rose named her Brianna Blue, after her bluebird necklace and her piercing blue eyes. No one knew how she came to be there, or where she was from. For fourteen years, Brianna hid the emptiness in her heart and her desire to meet her real parents.

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Brianna sat in her seat at the dining table in the grand hall, the smell of freshly baked lasagne making her mouth water. As she dug her fork into her lunch, Matron Kimberly Rose called her name.

Reluctantly leaving her lasagne, Brianna rushed over, her eyes lit up with curiosity. Matron was always happy, but today she seemed stern and business-like as she marched towards a small room, with Brianna struggling to keep pace. Matron flashed Brianna a smile before ushering her inside.

Behind a large desk, a man in a Hawaiian shirt and surf shorts grinned and waved. Brianna smiled at his quirkiness. A woman wearing a bright pink shirt embossed with a cat wearing sunglasses looked at the man and then at her.

'Brianna, my name is Harmony. Arlo and I had a daughter. She had the same blue eyes as you.' Harmony began to tear up. 'Three years ago, she turned thirteen. A week later, she passed away as a result of heart failure. We were devastated and it left a large hole in our hearts. For medical reasons, I am no longer able to carry a child. Arlo and I decided that we wanted a child to love and raise as our own. Matron has told us how polite, well-mannered, kind, and hard-working you are, and we would like to offer you the opportunity to be a part of our family and to have a permanent home.'

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Rushing out to the purple minivan parked on the street, Brianna clambered in the back while Matron spoke to her new 'parents'. After a few minutes, Matron turned and walked back towards the orphanage, while Harmony and Arlo jumped in the minivan with Brianna.

“Brianna, we hope this is the beginning of a fantastic journey together. We hope you enjoy your new home and your new life with us,” Harmony said, leaning around the seat to look at her.

“Thank you for accepting me into your home and hearts and I’m sure our journey together will be wonderful,” Brianna replied with a smile and, listening to the roar of the engine, she watched the orphanage, the only home she’d ever known, get smaller and smaller until it faded away.

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“Welcome home, darling,”

Brianna followed Harmony up the winding stairs to a small room. Opening the door, Brianna stepped inside. In the corner, she noticed a single bed. On the opposite wall, Brianna’s favourite thing, a bookshelf full of novels, was sitting beside a desk with drawers. On the back wall was a small window. Brianna rushed over and peered out. The view of Winterbry was breathtaking and, in the distance lay forest for as far as she could see. Even at the orphanage, Brianna had asked for the bed beside the window. She had always loved nature and animals and loved being outside.

“Get settled in, darling. I’m making dinner now, so come down when you’re ready.” Harmony smiled as she left the room.

As Brianna made her way down the stairs, she heard a TV. Brianna imagined that most families would gather around the dinner table and bond with each other during dinnertime, but she was greeted by the sight of Harmony and Arlo lounging on the couches, dinner plates in hand, watching the news.

Brianna slumped down on the couch and looked down at her plate of microwave nachos.

“So, Brianna, you looking forward to life with us?” Arlo asked.

“Honey, I told you not to push her on the first day,” Harmony scolded. “Sorry, darling, Arlo isn’t very subtle. Do you like your room?”

“Yes, it’s very nice thank you,” Brianna replied.

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For the next six months, Brianna lived in bliss. Her parents were the best she could ask for and she grew to love them. She forgot her life at the orphanage and embraced her new normal life. Even though she loved her new life and her new parents, Brianna still longed to meet her real parents, and the emptiness in her heart remained.

One evening, Brianna was eating dinner with Harmony and Arlo when a news story caught her attention. A young woman, who looked like the one in Brianna's photograph, had been rescued from a fire in Lindsberg; a town about one thousand kilometres away from Winterbry.

'Are you okay sweetheart?' Harmony asked.

'I'm fine,' Brianna replied, but she was already formulating a plan.

That night in her room, Brianna lay in bed, thoughts racing. She wondered if the woman was her real mother. Only one way to find out, she thought.

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The following morning, Arlo and Harmony said goodbye to Brianna and left for work. The chilly morning air raised hairs on the back of Brianna's neck as she packed up her belongings and left for the local train station. She sat in the cold for two hours, waiting for the train to arrive. When the train entered the Winterbry station, Brianna boarded and found a seat at the back, so she could be alone.

For fifteen hours, Brianna watched the vast landscape whizz by and thought about what she had gotten herself into. She worried that she had it wrong. A thought crossed her mind that scared her: what would happen if whoever had left her at that orphanage didn't want her then, and they still didn't want her now.

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Brianna wandered the streets for an hour before she came across Cantan Street and found number fifteen. She walked up the path towards the door when dogs started barking, making her jump. Her nerves were frayed, yet she tried to keep calm. She reached up to ring the doorbell but stopped. She took a moment to reconsider. Her fear of rejection swelled inside her. Shaking the negative thoughts from her mind, she rang the doorbell before she could change her mind for good.

Two voices came from inside the house, one deep and one more feminine. The door opened, revealing a woman in her early thirties. She stood, staring at Brianna.

Brianna opened her mouth to explain but only two words came out. 'Remember me?'

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The woman's blue eyes were a dead giveaway that they were related. They had the same jawline, nose, everything.

'You really are my mum, aren't you? What's your name?'

'I'm Imogen. And you are?'

'Brianna Blue,'

‘What a lovely name. I gather the orphanage took good care of you?’ Imogen asked.

Brianna ignored her question. ‘Why did you leave me in that orphanage, with only this?’ Brianna held out the necklace for Imogen to see. ‘And where’s my father? For the last fourteen years, I’ve been waiting, longing to meet you. I won’t judge you. I just want the truth.’ She tried to keep calm, but tears were welling in her eyes.

‘Oh Brianna. I was seventeen. I was just a girl. At the time, that necklace was my only possession and it was all I had to give you. As for your father, he left me three weeks after you were born. I haven’t seen him since. I had lost everything and was forced to grow up fast. I wanted you to have the best possible start in life. I knew I had to let you go and I had to move on with my own life. I have a new life now, with a partner and a baby boy on the way. I’m so sorry.’

‘It’s okay. It’s just— Well, it’s been my whole reason to live for these past fourteen years. To see you. My real mum. But I understand.’

With tears pouring down her face, Brianna turned her back to her mother and walked away.

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She didn’t know what to think. She didn’t know what to do. Sitting at the back of the train, Brianna thought about where the train was going, and if she really wanted to go there.

She found herself thinking about her new family. They had given her hope, a chance to love and be loved. They had given her a home and a normal life. Why was she trying so hard to find people who gave her away, when she had a loving family who, right now, were probably worried sick and searching the whole town of Winterbry for her?

For fourteen years, Brianna had had an emptiness in her heart that she thought was because she never knew her real parents, but she knew now that all she was missing was being loved. The emptiness in her heart had disappeared. She realised that home isn’t always where your biological family are. Home is where your heart is.

Brianna settled down at the back of the train, ready for a long trip. She was going home.