

**Hannah L.**  
**~THE SAME~**

Ben blinked his eyes open. He stretched his arm and sat up, rubbing his eyes. He winced as he remembered the bruises he got a few days ago. It was pitch black in the orphanage's sleeping quarters, and Ben felt along the cold floor beside his mattress for his small pocket-sized flashlight. It was mostly silent in the room, aside from Lucifer snoring as loud as an elephant, but even so he had to move slowly as to not accidentally knock something over, stub his toe, or trip or trod on someone's outstretched hand or foot.

He lost his balance and almost fell once or twice, and his small blue flashlight provided little light, but he managed to make it to the closet without disturbing anyone. He grabbed his clothes and his old, two-sizes-too-small grayish-brown converse shoes. He made his way towards the hallway, which led to the kitchen and then the front door.

It was 6:00a.m, and his shift at the newly opened pet shop and veterinary started in half an hour. Ben was looking forward to escaping what sometimes felt like torture that he was used to experiencing regularly. He was bullied, just for the way he was, by Lucifer and his buddies. They all had something in common at the orphanage, but Lucifer refused to face that fact, picking on people different from the others.

As he was thinking about that, a new thought sprang into his mind.

*The new animals are coming in today.* He changed his clothes and put on his shoes as fast as he could, now not caring who he disturbed. He rushed out the door. Ben ran down the hard sidewalk, enjoying the misty, after-rain air. The sun was barely just rising above the horizon, shedding beautiful rays of light into the dark sky, and casting shadows along the sturdy buildings. As he raced down the street, he had only one thought in his mind.

*I want to be the first one to meet those animals.*

Ben heard the first melody of the morning, sung by choirs of morning birds that flew into the brightening sky and gracefully landed together in flowering cherry trees with a lovely bright pink blending into the white petals, telling their own stories to one another. Ben always found comfort in nature and animals, and he felt like the luckiest person in the world when he got his job, knowing that every day he could spend his time with animals, distracting himself from... well... himself.

As he approached the shop, he slowed and looked through the window. Lilian, his workmate, was just heading towards the back, and Ben walked through the door, the little bell above the door frame jingling quietly. He walked into the back, spotting Lilian sitting on the ground, looking at the new arrivals their boss had brought in much, much earlier.

Lilian turned as Ben approached her.

"Hey, Ben!" Lilian smiled at him.

"Hey." Ben replied cheerfully, trying to get a look at the pets.

“Aren’t they cute?” Lilian said after a brief moment of silence as she peered at a small border collie puppy who was dozing in the corner of her cage.

“Yeah, I guess so.” Ben tried to act somewhat uninterested for some reason, maybe because he didn’t want anyone to see he got so excited just from a few common pets.

“A few of these were found just on the streets! It’s heartbreaking to look at some of these, but at least we’re taking care of them now.” Lilian paused for a moment, then continued, “ I saw one earlier that I thought you might like. She was found in an alley somewhere around our area. She’s over here.” She led Ben to cage further back, and she showed him a skinny black kitten with a white tail-tip that was also dozing, but was right in a little spot of sunlight from the back window.

As he crouched down to get a better look, the kitten sleepily and slowly opened one of its eyes. It heaved itself up into a sitting position, and Ben’s eyes widened and got watery. He nearly fell over as the black kitten lazily washed itself, while also warily keeping an eye on him.

The kitten was missing part of its front leg. He stared at it as he thought.

*It’s just like me.*