

The Best Friends Club



By
Sophie
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Book #1

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by Sophie P.

Chapter 1

Look Closer

“Mail, Mail call, Mail!” came the voice over the loudspeaker.

Kristina Parkinson, one of the many kids in the New York City Orphanage for Girls, got up, sighed, and took a look around the room. It was big, but without much empty space. There were two rows of beds, one to the right of the door and one to the left, and they each had twelve beds. Kristina sighed again, took one last look around the room, and headed toward the mailboxes. She pulled out a note. The envelope read: TOP SECRET. She looked inside and was surprised at what she saw. She read aloud, “EMERGENCY MEETING. 11:50 in the living room-for best friends club only.” She threw it in the trash and hurried to the living room.

Kristina belonged to a club called The Best Friends Club. Ren Pastel, Lexi Salie and Ashley Walter came together with her to form the club. “Hey guys, what’s happening?” she asked when she got there. Then Kristina noticed that Ren’s eyes were red. “OK Ren?” she asked. Ren only looked at her. Ren’s long brown hair that was prepared into two braids and wrapped around her head was drooping. Ashley handed a slip to Kristina. She had crossed out everything but six words and re-written them. The slip looked like this:

2014 Year Teams

10-

11+

Blue	Red
Ren ——— <i>Sophie</i>	Ashley W. ——— <i>Kathy</i>
Olivia K. <i>Julia</i>	Kristina ——— <i>Laura</i>
Lila <i>Natalie</i>	Kate <i>Mary</i>
Lilly <i>Olivia G.</i>	Helen <i>Carolyn</i>
Ashley A. <i>Grace</i>	Carol <i>Sharon</i>
Patty <i>Nancy</i>	Natalia <i>Lexi</i>

“What?” Kristina asked, confused. “I don’t get it.” Lexi raised her eyebrows.

“Look closer. Are we all on the same team?” Lexi asked. Then Kristina understood.

“No,” she answered. She looked at Ren. “Ren,” she said, “I’m sorry.” Suddenly, the lunch bell rang.

“See ya,” Lexi said, and bounded off to lunch.

“Come on,” Natalia said.

“Last one there is a rotten egg!” Ashley called. The girls sprinted to the picnic area. Then Ren had an idea.

Chapter 2

The Project

Ren spent the rest of the afternoon working on her project. Ms. N, the orphanage keeper, was mean and hated creativity. She always kept a close eye on Ren, because Ren was always laughing and having fun. These two behaviors were also hated by Ms. N. So she spent her project time in the terrible basement. The stench was sickening. It was dusty and anyone who went there got dust in their eyes. But there was one joy. The pets that some orphans brought with them were kept there, including Ren's adorable cocker spaniel puppy Carmel. She enjoyed being with all the little animals, but it was shocking to see the innocent animals in such bad shape. They loved it when she came. They watched as each week she made new activities or projects.

This time Ren's project was a campaign fighting for creativity and freedom. None of the girls in the orphanage really felt free. "Maybe if we have freedom we can choose our teams so the club can be together," she thought. She was writing letters to the girls explaining her project and how important it was to keep it secret from Ms. N. Then they would have a surprise set-up and speech. "Yea!" she whisper-shouted, then buried her face in Carmel's thick fur.

. . .

The next day Ren got up early to visit the animals, but Ms. N. stopped her. "What do you think you're doing?" she snapped as Ren opened the trap door in the floor that led to the cellar. She froze.

"I-I was just gonna visit my dog, ma'am," she murmured.

"And what would you also be doing?"

"I don't understand ma'am."

Before Ren could even explain, Ms. N. yelled, "You're breaking the rules!" Ren was so startled she fell through the trap door and made a big racket which woke most of the girls.

“Fudge,” she grumbled, rubbing her shoulder. She slowly climbed up the ladder only to face Ms. N. again.

“Since you did not do as you were told and woke your fellow orphans, please make breakfast,” she said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Ren replied, and walked quickly out of the room.

Chapter 3

Breakfast

Ren wiped her forehead with her sleeve.

“Fudge,” she thought. “I’ll never get my project done if Ms. N. keeps catching me.” She opened the waffle maker to see if it was done. She slid the last waffle on to the platter and set it on the table. She stood back to admire her work. In the middle of the table were the waffles. On each side of the waffles were candles, and to each side of those were sausage and eggs. At either end of the table (in front of the Ms. N. and Ashley’s places) were salt, pepper (one side), and two bottles of maple syrup (the other). Ren took out her phone and texted Ashley, “At least Ms. N. lets us eat good food😊!”

Suddenly she heard footsteps. She stuffed her phone in her pocket and pretended to rearrange the silverware.

“Everyone’s ready,” Ms. N. said.

“So am I,” answered Ren.

Ms. N. pushed a button on the kitchen wall, and a second later a line of girls paraded into the kitchen. Ashley was leading, and Kristina and Lexi were the caboose. Ashley was Ms. N.’s star student, so she was always at the front of the line. She had nine years of practice with acting, having studied it from age two until she came here when her parents died two years ago. Little did she know how it would pay off in the orphanage; she had to pretend to like Ms. N. The good thing was Ms. N fell for it *every* time. Ashley had been in two movies and lots of plays which was a thrill, but this kind of acting wasn’t fun.

On the other hand, in Ms. N’s eyes, Kristina and Lexi were the *worst* girls in the orphanage, beside Ren, so they were always last in line. They both thought they should be able to do whatever they wanted, which caused much discord with Ms. N. In addition, both girls could block out all other important things if they were engaged in something they really liked. Kristina, the oldest of the group at sixteen, was a very determined girl. She liked competitions and to take on challenges. She wanted to be an inventor or engineer. Lexi was a fashion freak and was fifteen years old. She designed clothing whenever she could, and Ren

was a shy nine-year-old with super long brown hair. She was very creative and was a very, very good drawer. She won many competitions, but now that she was in the orphanage, she didn't get much drawing in.

The girls took their seats.

"Everyone, take a waffle," Ms. N. instructed. "Syrup, eggs, sausage or bacon, salt and pepper." Once everyone had food Ms. N. announced, "Now it is time to eat." The girls gulped down their food then proceeded to their first lesson. Ren and Lexi headed off to Electronics while Ashley and Kristina went to Arithmetic.

Lexi sighed. "This is going to be a long year," she told Ren.

Chapter 4

Natalia

Ashley tossed and turned but could not get to sleep. She looked at Ren who was sleeping soundly after the long day of tests and “home” work. “What will I do without her?” she thought.

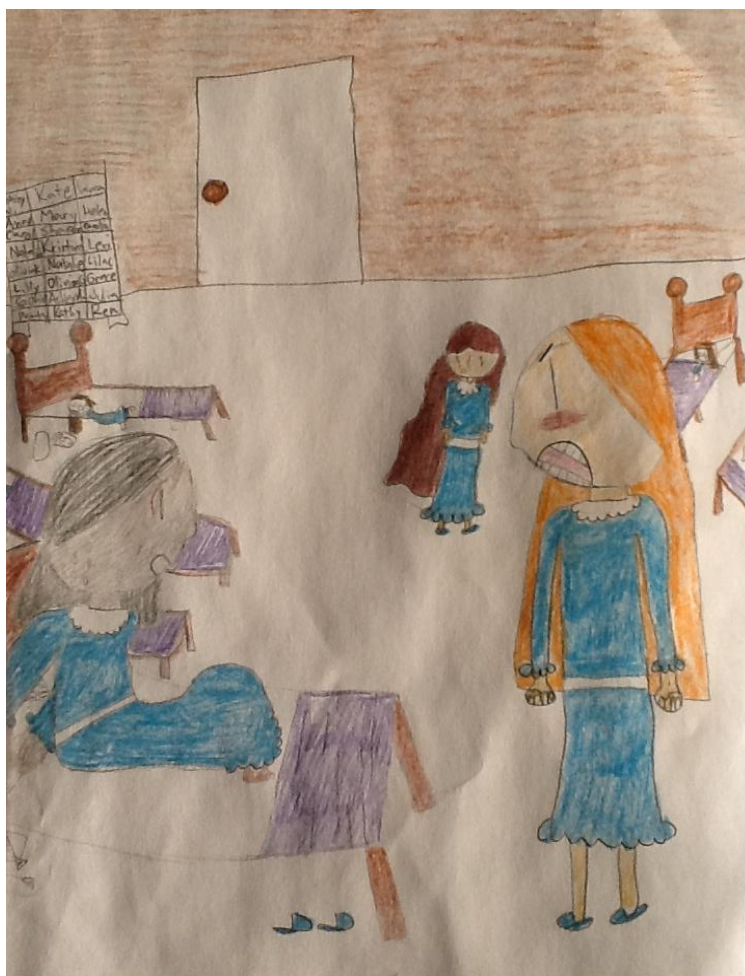
“Can’t sleep, Ashley?” a voice said sweetly. Ashley bolted upright. Then she heard cackling. She scowled, not even turning her head.

“Natalia, stop it!”

“Oh dear,” Natalia said. “What gave me away?” Ashley lay down, not facing Natalia. “Are you having a tantrum? Oh dear, oh dear.” Suddenly Ashley leapt out of bed and marched over to Natalia.

“I don’t care who you are, but I won’t let you make fun of me *every day* because something bad is happening in my life! And I won’t just stand here and say, ‘Hey Natalia, you *can* watch over me at night to see if I can’t sleep, and if I can’t, make fun of me!’ I will *not* let you do that!”

It was an odd speech followed by an odd silence followed by Ren’s voice. “I won’t either, but remember, Ms. N sleeps just next door, so shhh.” Ashley turned, saw Ren, and frowned. “Ashley...” But before Ren could finish, Ashley stomped across the room and climbed back on her bed. Ren sighed and did the same.



. . .

Lexi yawned and sat up in bed. She looked at the clock. She groaned. It said 5:30. She gently pinched herself to see if she was dreaming. "OWWW!" She thought. Then she looked at her phone's alarm clock. There was still 1 hour and 30 minutes left until it went off. "How much you wanna bet I'm the first one up?" she muttered as she searched for a book on the shelf. "Yada yada yada ya-AHA!" she exclaimed. She pulled *Anne of Green Gables* down from the shelf, and brought it to her bed. Along with gossip and lip gloss, Lexi managed to fit in a love of reading. She soon got engaged in Anne's adventures, and the time quickly passed.

Chapter 5

The Contest

As the year went on, the tests and frustration grew. Then one day Ms. N. had an announcement. "Right now I will tell you about this year's competition," she said. Each year there was a different contest towards the end of the year. "There is going to be a pet grooming show and competition!!!!!" Most of the girls started talking excitedly, except Natalia, who was allergic to all animals with fur.

"What about meeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee?" she whined.

"Sorry, you'll have to sit out," Ms. N. replied. Ren giggled. "Anyway, you'll get into your groups and each group will get assigned half the pets that are kept here. Your group will groom them every day. At the end of the year you will dress up your pets and we will have a pet fashion show."

Everyone started to chit-chat even more. Ren took Kristina's sleeve and pulled her to the bedroom. "What?" Kristina said, annoyed.

"Can we talk?" Ren asked. Ren told Kristina about her project.

"So you're going to make a big riot because you want to draw?"

"To be creative," Ren corrected. "And yes, I think this riot's worth making."

"You're on your own."

Ren gawked. That was so not like Kristina! Was the club going to fall apart? She stared helplessly as Kristina joined the others. "I'll have to find someone else to help me," she sighed.

. . .

"Ugh," Lexi muttered. She was doing a test and was stuck on what Ms. N. called a 'bright ideas' question. She had a task to design some new technology to improve the way people communicate over the Internet. " "Hmm... if people can already communicate through a camera on screen, could they do it by hologram interaction? Hmm... what would that take . . ." she pondered.

"Stuck on something?" a familiar voice asked.

“Well, how good are you at bright ideas questions, Ash?” Lexi asked Ashley, annoyed.

“Why don’t you ask Kristina? She’s the techno-wiz,” Ashley replied.

“She’s too busy working on the contest.”

“That’s too bad, but why didn’t you try asking her anyway?”

“Dunno.”

“Well we’ve got all day,” and with that Ashley strode out of the room. Lexi sighed and went to find Kristina. She found her scrubbing extremely hard on Sparky, a white rabbit.

“Be a little softer,” Lexi advised.

“Hmm?” Kristina mumbled.

Lexi snatched a sponge out of Kristina’s hand and put her hands on her hips. “Chill!” she laughed.

Kristina scowled. “What do you want?”

“Could you help me with a bright ideas question?”

“Really? Tests? This is way more fun! Hurry up and help me.”

Lexi grumbled something about not having the test done on time but despite that she picked up a kitten and started by dumping a bucket of water on it. After fifteen minutes, Lexi exclaimed, “You’re right! This is awesome!”

“Told you,” Kristina replied. But Lexi didn’t even realize that this would pull her away from the club...

Chapter 6

Natalia's Plan

Ren got her pencil and headed toward the trap door. "I can't remember how many times I've been caught," she grumbled. "Twenty, sixty, probably one hundred. I better not be this time." Slipping through the door, she found Natalia and Carolyn (Natalia's best friend) chatting by the animals. Natalia was sneezing between every two words. Ren scurried behind an old dusty bookshelf to eavesdrop.

"Poor kid," muttered Carolyn. "How can I help you?"

Natalia huffed, "Get rid of the animals, get rid of the brushes and combs, get rid of the whole contest!" Carolyn was startled, then she said, "But that will ruin it for everyone."

"That's the point. If I can't enjoy it, no one should," Natalia burst out.

Carolyn frowned and was about to walk away but then caught a glimpse of Ren's hair and went back to Natalia. She whispered something in her ear and walked back up stairs. Natalia marched over to Ren's hiding place and hissed, "You won't tell or you'll regret it." She then walked upstairs muttering to herself.

. . .

Ashley worried. She worried about her friends, she worried about tests, but she worried most about the contest. Most girls were totally obsessed with it, and it was Ashley who caused Lexi to get distracted from her other work by suggesting that she ask Kristina to help with her communications task. Since Kristina was already preoccupied with it, Lexi had gotten caught up as well. However, Ashley was determined to keep the club together. She turned her attention to her phone which had just beeped indicating a message. It read, "Message from Ren: Hey can we meet in the lounge?" Ashley sent a message back and hurried to the lounge.

"Wait. What?" Ashley questioned after hearing Ren's story.

"Long story short, Natalia's planning on shutting down the contest, and anyone who knows is in danger, but I need your help," said Ren.

“Anyone who knows beside Carolyn is in danger you mean.”

“Right.”

“Okaaaaayyy, so what are you trying to tell me?” Ashley asked.

Just then, Lexi came in. “Good news Ash, we have officially cleaned ten more pets than the ten and unders.” She eyed Ren suspiciously and said, “You’d better hurry up. You’re way behind.” She giggled and went back to work.

Chapter 7

The Discovery

The next month was all about the contest: doing it, planning it, and winning it. Ren was washing a cockatiel named Merida when Kristina ran in.

“Ren,” she cried, “all the pets are gone and Natalia too!” At first, Ren thought this was just a joke. After all, Kristina and Lexi *had* abandoned Ren in helping with the project. But she finally got up and said sternly, “I know where to look.”

She led Kristina to the basement. She moved the old bookshelf out of the way to reveal a secret door. She pulled a key off the necklace she always wore and opened it. The hall seemed to go on forever. Kristina gaped. Ren noticed and smiled. “My artist’s study. Natalia must have followed me in sometime.” They both climbed in and saw a trail of soapy suds.

They walked through the tunnel and saw Natalia covering the pets in something thick and black. When she saw Kristina and Ren, she jumped, spilling soapy water all over the floor. She stuttered, “I-I was just getting the paint off th-these p-p-pets.”

“But you’re allergic,” Ren cried, misunderstanding.

Natalia smiled wickedly. “This fur remover will make it so that there will be no more sneezing coming out of me.”



The girls ran at Natalia and she screamed hysterically. Ren gathered all the animals (even the ones that had already lost their fur) and brought them back to the animal room but didn't put them in their cages. Then she collected all the girls in the orphanage including Ms. N. and showed them the animals and Natalia.

"Carolyn, help me," Natalia pleaded. But Carolyn just stood there.

"Well, that takes care of that problem," Kristina said bouncily. Ren smiled.

"So it does." Ms. N. looked sternly at Natalia as she said it.

Chapter 8

Project, Here We Come!

The day of the contest had come. All the girls touched up their pets, and Lilac, one of the girls at the orphanage, set up the red carpet. At the same time, Ren got her project set up. Her friends helped her; she convinced Kristina and the club and most of the other girls to join her cause.

“Ren, you’re up,” her friend Julia urged. Ren jumped. She had been in her own little world.

“Right.” She whistled for Merida the cockatiel to come and slipped on her sweater.

Julia laughed, “She’s cute.” Ren peeked behind the curtain that Lilac had also set up and gasped. It seemed like the whole town was there. Julia seemed to read her mind. “Ms. N sent out letters to the neighborhood about it,” she said. Ren nodded and walked out with Merida.

She smiled. “This is fun,” she thought. She noticed that there was a couple that was taking notes and pictures.

“Ren,” Julia hissed, “get!” Then Ren understood that she was just standing there.

“Right,” she mouthed. She took a sharp turn, then posed, then walked off the carpet.

Some older girls giggled, “We’re totally going to win.”

“Guys, please be quiet,” Kristina sighed.

. . .

At the end of the contest, Ms. N. announced the points that each team got. While that happened, Ren met with her friends to go over the presentation they were going to give.

“All right, remember, Ashley, you’re in control of any rude comments that people throw at us. Kristina, you’ll be the main guide at the stations. And the rest of you know what you’re doing, right?” Ren inquired. Four heads nodded.

“ . . . And the turquoise team got nine points also. The contest is a tie!” Ms. N. cheered.

“Now,” Ren whispered. The lights went out, which caused quite a commotion.

“What the . . .?”

“Help!”

“Who turned out the lights?”

And then there WAS light. Ren, microphone in hand, started talking. “None of you was expecting this but I have something to say. The amount of freedom here is limited. I think that should change. If there is no freedom there is no happiness, and if there is no happiness, there is no life. And if there’s no life, well, that’s bad. So from here on out, I will refuse to do anything that is ordered to be done by Ms. N. or anyone older than me unless we have freedom of creativity.”

“Creativity is another story!” someone shouted. Ashley, who we know was in charge of crowd control, kept a close eye on them as the presentation went on.

“Creativity is not another story,” Ren said calmly. “Freedom and creativity are in the very same category – being complete. And now, meet me in the yard in ten minutes.” A few people clapped, but before Ren could be asked any questions, she snuck through a secret door no one knew about. As this was happening, Ms. N. was completely astonished. She was proud and angry at the same time. But she decided to just stand with the others and watch what the group of her students would do next.

Chapter 9

Suspicious

In the short ten minute pause, Ren was giving herself a cool down party when her friends burst into the room. “That went well! Very well!” Lexi exclaimed.

“I know,” Ren took a deep breath.

“You okay?” Julia asked.

“I’m cooling down,” Ren said with another deep breath.

“Okaaaay?”

Suddenly Ren jumped up and said, “It’s time! Ready?”

Kate laughed. “Sure we are!” The group walked down the hall to the door and went out into the yard. People were already there, including Ms. N. who was

still too shocked to do anything.

“Sooo . . . you’re probably ready to *BURST* with curiosity, am I right?” Ren said, smiling. “Hope you like it.”

Lexi stepped up and announced, “We’re going to put on a show. There will be stations, each one reminding you of how important freedom and creativity are. The first station is a singing and dancing show and short lessons if you’d like.

Then Kate came up and said, “The second station is an art show with our very own art, and Ren here will be starting paintings for you to see! The third station is just some books about slavery to



show you what it's like to be imprisoned."

"And finally, the fourth is just a get-to-know-us station. We would all like to be adopted someday," Julia finished.

"There will be food and drinks afterward," Ren informed them. Ms. N. gawked.

"Let's get started," someone yelled from the crowd.

"Good idea!" Kate exclaimed. Ashley, Kate, and seven other girls headed toward the mini-stage for the first station. Ren, Julia, and Carolyn went to be guides at the art show and the other girls distributed themselves among all four stations. It was a success. The neighbors were very interested. At the end, Ren was approached by the couple who were taking pictures and notes during the show.

"What is your teacher's name?" They asked.

"Jessica N." Ren answered.

"Thank you," they said with a smile and walked away.

. . .

After the long day and huge success, Ren ate some dinner and then went to bed, but she couldn't help wondering about that couple.

Chapter 10

Adopted!

Ms. N. woke the best friends club girls, along with Kate and Julia, early.

"Girls, I have exciting news," she said. "You've been adopted!" The girls stood there, dumbstruck. "Get packed. They are here and ready."

Ren asked, "Are you sure we'll *all* adopted?"

"Yes, you are," Ms. N. reassured her.

. . .

". . . and Ren. Those are my kids," said Tracy, Ren, Kate, and Julia's new mom.

"And mine are Lexi, Ashley, and Kristina," said Alan, their new dad. The girls had been adopted into two families, but they were connected.

"That sounds right," Ms. N. beamed. "Why don't you take something to remember the orphanage?"

Lexi got her *Anne of Green Gables* book, Ashley got a piece of fabric from her bedspread, Kristina got a framed picture of all the girls in the orphanage, Ren got a heart carved from wood in which everyone etched their name, and Julia and Kate both collected autographs from all the girls. Ms. N and the rest of the girls waved them goodbye as they walked out the door. They all climbed into the same car and headed downtown.

"Where are we going?" Kate piped up after an awkward silence.

"Out for ice cream. Sound good?" Tracy replied followed by a chorus of "awesomes" and "yeses". When they got to the ice cream shop, they hopped out and saw two elderly women there.

"Girls, meet your grandmothers," Alan said.

"Hey," they muttered. They were all shy around strangers, except Kate who said, "Hi, nice to meet you!" Then they all went inside to have ice cream.

. . .

Ren, Julia and Kate were turning in circles looking at their new room. It was MAGNIFICENT! It was split into three big parts, Kate's, Ren's, and Julia's. Each part was mostly empty except for PJs and a bed. Kate's had smiley-face sheets and PJs for the night, Ren's had white and blue and purple striped sheets and PJs and Julia's had the word "dance" in different fonts all over it. On the floor was a note that read, "Give us a note telling us what you would like in your room. Hope you enjoy!" They all wrote their notes and delivered them to their parents.

"Wow," James, Tracy's husband said, "You guys don't ask for much. We can get you a lamp and a trash can, but don't you want a desk and a lounge area too?"

"We've never had one besides the living room," Julia pointed out.

"Well then, let's give it a try."

Chapter 11

A, Different, New, Life

Lexi, Ashley, and Kristina's rooms were different. They each had one and they were already filled. Lexi's had a lounge space, a desk for making and designing clothes, and an empty bookshelf. Ashley's had a bookshelf full of play scripts and tips, and a big open space for practicing. Kristina's had a desk with recycled objects, like buttons, to construct things, books to help with ideas, and a lab to try crazy experiments. They were each thinking about their new family when their thoughts were interrupted.

"Girls, you have to get some new school supplies," said Alan.

"New?" Lexi made a face. "Why can't we use our old stuff?"

"Not everything will be old. I'll bet you can use your old text books. And pencil boxes."

"Okay," Lexi sighed.

Ashley laughed, "Cheer up! At least we'll be taught by real teachers instead of Ms. N.'s weird tutors." They all started to laugh with her.

. . .

All the girls were nervous. It was their first day at the new school. They met at a corner near both their houses and walked together.

"Are you sure we'll be okay?" Lexi asked.

"Oh Lexi, you fraidy-cat. Stop worrying," Ashley said. Lexi straightened her skirt.

"Come on we're here already," Ren said, pointing. And they stepped inside their new school.

