

OnTheStreets

byPaulaRugen

Kaitlynlookedbothwaysbeforeshecrossedthestreet.Mum,weakfromhungerandillness,awaitedherreturn.Tonight,whileKaitlynsearchedforfood,sheknewtheyalsoneededwarmsocks,coatsandblankets.‘I amnotsurehowmuchlongerMumcansurviveonthestreets.Sheisalwayscold.’

TheonlythingKaitlynhadeverreallywantedwastogobacktoschool.Instead,shihadtoforageforfoodeachday.Besides,shadnothadashowerinweeksandhadnootherclothes.

‘Itwasn’talwayslikethis.WhenDadwasalive,Ihadclothes,awarmbed,foodandwenttoschooleveryday.Nopointinrememberingthough...’

Whenthe trafficstopped,Kaitlynranacrossthestreetandintothealley.Sheknewshemusthurry.Thekitchenhelpwasjustthrowingleftoverfoodintothegarbage.‘Iwillgetthebestmorselstonight.’Kaitlynopenedherplasticbagandbegan togatherthefoodtherestaurantthrewawayeachevening...steaks,potatoes,vegetablesandsometimesdessert.

Assheturnedtoleave,twoboysappeared.Fearmadeherhidethebagunderhersweater.

“Letusseewhatyouhave!”sneeredtheshortestboywhilethetallonelookedon,laughing.

Kaitlyndasheddownthealleyandshouted,“Leavemealone!”

The taller boy chased her, catching her as she reached the street. Pushing her to the ground, he grabbed the bag, snickering. “You didn’t think we would let you take the best food, did you?” The boy disappeared into a vacant building, leaving Kaitlyn on the ground with a bloody knee and no food.

Angry with herself for not fighting harder, Kaitlyn pulled herself up against the wall. She hobbled back into the alley, tears rolling down her cheeks. ‘Every time I get decent food, they take it from me.’

As she approached the garbage bin again, a helper dumped more food. Kaitlyn hid in the shadows, waiting, thinking about her desire to attend school.

Reaching into the garbage bin again, she found an apple, bread and two tomatoes. With nothing to put the food into, Kaitlyn stuffed it into her pockets and hurried to the safety of Mum.

Still hungry, Kaitlyn and Mum snuggled under their tattered blanket and piece of cardboard. Before falling asleep, Kaitlyn allowed memories of Dad to surface. ‘I miss him—warm cocoa, help with homework, bedtime stories. I want to go back...’

The next morning, Kaitlyn returned to the alley looking for food. A woman, whom Kaitlyn had never seen before, was standing near the restaurant’s door. Seeing Kaitlyn, she walked toward her smiling, “What’s your name?”

“Kaitlyn.”

“Do you go to school?”

Looking away and stretching her frayed sweater around her, Kaitlyn shook her head. “No.”

“I see you here daily, and I want to help.” Handing her a bag, she continued, “This food is for you.”

Taking it, Kaitlyn looked up, eyes wide with surprise.

“If you go to this address, you will be helped,” continued the woman. “Then you’ll be able to go to school.”

Kaitlyn was so amazed she couldn’t speak. The stranger smiled, turned and walked away.

Threedayslater,KaitlynandMumweresettledintoaroomatahomelessshelter.
Mumhadajobinthekitchen,andKaitlynhadcleanclothes.

Boardingthebusforherfirstdayofschool,Kaitlynwhispered,“Thankyou,Fairy
Godmother.”