



The Christmas Orange

Jake was nine years old and for as long as he could remember he lived within the walls of an orphanage. He was one of ten children supported by what meager contributions the orphan home could obtain in donations from local townspeople.

Throughout the year there was very little to eat, but at Christmas there always seemed to be a little bit more than usual. The orphanage seemed a bit warmer and there was time for holiday enjoyment. But most importantly there was the Christmas orange!

Christmas was the only time of year that such a rare treat was provided and it was treasured by each child. They each enjoyed their very own orange and prized it as they slowly savored each juicy section. It was truly the light of their Christmas and the best gift of the season. Jake had been looking forward to his Christmas orange all year long!

On Christmas Eve, Jake somehow managed to track a small amount of mud from his shoes onto the new carpet in the orphanage. He didn't even notice it had happened. But it was too late and there was nothing he could do to avoid punishment. The punishment was swift and grim. Jake would not be allowed his Christmas orange! It was the only gift he would have received from the harsh world he lived in. Now, after a year of waiting, it would be denied him.

Tearfully Jake pleaded that he be forgiven, but to no avail. He felt hopeless and totally rejected. Jake cried into his pillow all that night and spent Christmas Day feeling empty and alone. He felt that the other children didn't want to be with a boy who had received such a cruel punishment. Perhaps they feared he would ruin their only day of happiness. Maybe, he reasoned, the gulf between him and his friends existed because they feared he would ask for a little of their oranges. Jake spent the day upstairs, alone, in the unheated dormitory. Huddled under his only blanket, he read about a family marooned on an island. Jake wouldn't mind spending the rest of his life on an isolated island, if he could only have a real family that cared about him.

Bedtime came but Jake couldn't sleep. How could he say his prayers? How could there be a God in Heaven that would allow a little soul such as he, to suffer so much all by himself? Silently he sobbed as he prayed for the future of mankind, that God might end the suffering in the world, both for himself and all others like him.

As Jake climbed back into bed from the cold, hard floor, a soft hand touched his shoulder, startling him momentarily. He was surprised when an object was silently placed in his hands. The giver disappeared into the darkness, leaving Jake with what, he did not immediately know!

Looking closely at the object in his hand in the dim light, he saw what looked like an orange! Not a regular orange, smooth and shiny, but a very special orange. Inside a patched together peel were segments of nine other oranges. Together they made one whole orange for Jake! The nine other children in the orphanage had each donated one segment of their own precious orange to make a whole orange for Jake.

