

*With the help of a loving teacher, two neglected girls in a foster home find love and guidance for a better life. A hulking boy provides protection when trouble approaches the girls.*

# Finding Hope

By David Allen Cole

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David Allen Cole

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## Chapter 1

Lily Easter, with sleepy eyes, scanned her tiny square shaped room again. The bare cinderblock walls painted dull pink. The old twin size bed was pushed flat against one of the walls. The wire bed springs screeched loudly every time she laid down. A small table perched by the head of the bed. On the table were three items: a picture frame that was empty, a little plain box that contained a necklace with half a heart, and an antique alarm clock. Someone else must have the necklace with the other half. She didn't know who. She had given up hope of finding the other half. Lily was one year old when she came to the Foster Home with only the necklace on her. Someday, she hoped to fill the empty picture frame with her real family. Now that she was twelve, that hope was fading.

The Edgewood Foster Home had been Lily's residence for eleven of her twelve years. It indeed wasn't much but was all that Lily had known. She called it "*home*." This facility had twelve rooms for kids, all with the same dimensions and with the same starkness. The only difference was half the rooms are painted pale blue for the boys. None of the rooms had

any windows so that you couldn't see outside. The building resembled a "Y." The Edgewood Foster Home had two wings. One wing for the girls and one wing for the boys. There was a large room, called the common room which had a small television with a few chairs and some beanbag furniture where all could relax. The only way in or out of the rooms was through the door. It seemed more like a prison than a home, but it gave the kids protection, and some of them surely needed it. Residents would come and go, some would stay for a week, some would stay for a year, but Lily was the exception, she had been here for practically her whole life.

Bob and Mary Tanner ran the Edgewood Foster Home. A husband and wife team. They have no children of their own. They try to treat each boy and girl as their own. Mary possesses a teaching degree but prefers helping the disadvantaged kids placed at their facility with their troubles. The Tanners didn't have very much money, but their heart was in the right place. They did the best they could. The community respected the Tanners for their unrelenting service to the children.

Edgewood, the small town itself, was also the county seat. The four-story courthouse, which was

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Edgewood's tallest building, was in the center of the town and surrounded by many diverse businesses: restaurants, dress shops, a bakery, taverns, banks, a single screen theater, even a car dealership. Everything you needed was available within walking distance of the courthouse.

###

Lily's windup alarm clock broke the peaceful silence at 6:30 AM. It was the first day of school. Most of the kids at the *home* dreaded this time of year, but not Lily. She loved going to school and seeing her favorite teachers. She loved the smell of the newly scrubbed classrooms. She loved the new motivational posters placed strategically in the halls and classrooms.

She dressed quickly, putting on her favorite outfit. She only had one pair of shoes, black slip-ons. She brushed her shoulder length blond hair and hurried to the large dining area for breakfast. Lily is the first one there. The dining table was large and rectangular with seating for fourteen. The kids had scratched their initials on the large table that provided proof they existed here. It gave them some comfort they might at least be remembered somewhere. The plates, silverware, napkins, and glasses were all placed on a

separate smaller table, and each diner was expected to collect their utensils and proceed to the dining table.

Mary's breakfast was the favorite meal she made for the day. She loved the kids to start the day with a full stomach. Lily rushed through breakfast and burst through the front door. There was no time for small talk. The Edgewood Junior High school was visible from the Edgewood Foster Home, but the Eagle river prevented students from taking that shortcut, at least during the summer months. In the winter, when the river was frozen solid, they could just walk across the ice to get to school. Instead, they had to take the only bridge in town, which was a mile away. So, to get to school, it was a two-mile trip total. Edgewood didn't provide school bus service for in town kids. During severe weather, Mary or Bob would drive an old van and take the kids to school.

"Hurry up Jenny," shouted Lily.

Jenny was also a resident of the Edgewood Foster Home. Jenny picked up her pace until she caught up with Lily. Soon they reached the bridge. The bridge was wide and had a separate sidewalk with a high stone barrier protecting pedestrians from the traffic. The other side of the sidewalk had a five-foot iron rail preventing

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anyone from falling thirty feet into the river. The two girls stopped and peered down at the river below. Due to recent heavy rains, the river was high and swift-moving, creating a dizzying effect and the girls carefully backed away and hurried to get across the bridge.

The rest of the way to school was through the business district. The two girls peeked through the windows especially the bike store. There, Lily saw the most beautiful pink bike. She couldn't take her eyes off it. She studied all the details; the white handle grips with pink streamers flowing out of the ends, the shiny black tires, the soft padded seat. Jenny finally peeled Lily away from the window, and they both hopped and skipped the rest of the way to school. Jenny thinking about her first class, Lily thinking about that new bike.

The first day of school was just getting students and teachers acclimated to each other and getting reacquainted with old friends. Most had not seen each other since the school was let out last year especially the farm kids who lived in the country and didn't make it to town very often.

Lily's second-period class was math, with Miss Lorene. Also in this class was Ace Frampton, easily the



biggest kid in the school, who now was holding a much smaller boy by his feet dangling the boy head first, high over his desk. Lily was Ace's best friend.

Ace was promptly marched to the Principal's office by Miss Lorene. What Miss Lorene didn't see was the little boy dumping Lily's schoolbooks onto the floor. What she did see was Ace "educating" the little boy with the proper protocol regarding Lily. Ace wasn't mean unless you picked on Lily. He lived on a farm just outside of Edgewood. Rumor had it that Ace only took a bath on Saturday night, which made him tolerable for Sunday School, but intolerable the end of the school week. Kids would hold their breath when he was near but were careful not to appear too obvious doing it.

Emotion and not intellect fueled Ace's actions. He was quick to act on his feelings. He never gave any thought to the consequences of his actions. Ace only saw things in black or white, he didn't spend any time in the grey area. If he witnessed anything he considered wrong, he would act on it. Therefore he was well known by the administrative staff. He would never lie or try to deceive anyone, that would require some thought. Quite frankly, he wasn't capable of it.

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The bell sounded, and school was finally let out at 3:30 PM. Lily rushed over to say thanks and say goodbye to Ace, who was waiting to get on the school bus. Ace just waved and entered the bus. A couple older boys in the back of the bus teased Ace about Lily. Ace turned around and growled at them. The older boys would remain quiet for the rest of the trip.

Lily went back to the *home* the same way she went to school, only in reverse. She also stopped and admired the new bike from the window. The bike store had many bikes, but Lily just looked at the pink one. She wasn't in a hurry, so she stayed and stared a little longer.

###

When Lily arrived *home*, a meeting was in progress in the community room. A small girl was in the middle of the room, flanked by the Tanners and some other adults that Lily has never seen before. The adults are dressed in dark suits. They are talking very low. She thought she saw tears flowing down Mary Tanner's face. She couldn't make out what they were saying. She stared at the little girl. She noticed the soiled dress, the uncombed blond hair, and the dirty, worn shoes.

Mary finally notices Lily standing there, “Come over here Lily, and meet our new friend.” Lily purposely strode forward and knelt facing the young girl at eye level.

“This is Angela, and she is going to be with us for a while.”

Lily reached down and took Angela’s tiny trembling hand and gently shook it. “I am very pleased to meet you, Angela.” Angela didn’t look up, and Lily sensed that the little girl is scared.

“Lily, why don’t you take Angela to your room and introduce her to Goldie, while we discuss some things here,” Mary suggested as she pointed her finger in the direction of Lily’s room. The Tanners often called on Lily to help with the younger children. Lily was the oldest and had been at the Foster Home the longest. She had earned their respect with her kind disposition, and she fostered a special rapport with the new younger children, who always came to the Edgewood Foster Home under extenuating circumstances.

Still holding Angela’s hand, Lily gently pulled the tiny girl past the adults down the hall toward her room and introduced her to Goldie, who promptly planted a

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sloppy kiss on the startled face. Lily laughed and that helped to ease the little girl's fears. "This is Goldie, and she loves to give kisses." Angela finally looked up at Lily, and a slight smile appeared. Lily knew that Goldie's magic had worked once again. Angela sensed she had no reason to fear either of them. Angela took an instant liking to both of them.

Goldie was a golden retriever and had been at the Edgewood Foster Home as long as Lily. Goldie was especially fond of Lily and was friendly to anyone who Lily liked, and since Lily liked everyone, Goldie liked everyone too.

The three spent the rest of the evening talking and listening. Lily is doing all the talking, and Angela is doing all the listening, and Goldie is resting her head on Angela's lap enjoying the constant gentle stroking of Angela's tiny hands. Goldie and Angela are both enjoying the attention.

Lily is very careful not to ask questions that would be uncomfortable or painful for Angela to answer or give any thought. She just wanted the little girl to be comfortable with her. She knew the other kids at the *home* would most likely just ignore Angela, and that would be good. That night, Angela stayed in Lily's

room. Angela tossed and turned most of the night and at times would cry out in her sleep, “No, no.”

###

The next morning Lily gives Angela the job of taking care of Goldie which entailed letting Goldie follow her wherever she went. She knew that she would not be going to school and wanted to give her something to do to keep her from thinking about why she was there at the home.

That day after school was let out, Lily went to see Rose Boston, her English teacher. Everyone called her Miss Rose, and she was the most liked teacher anywhere.

Lily told her about Angela that she was an emergency placement. Lily did not know the details of what happened to Angela, but Lilly knew it must be bad.

She told Miss Rose about Angela’s troubling tossing and turning in the night, plus the crying. Miss Rose listened carefully and then told Lily, “I am going to call Mary Tanner to see if you and Angela can come over Sunday and have supper with my husband and me. Do you think that might help Angela?”

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“I think that would be a great idea. I am sure we will be able to.” Miss Rose was the nicest person Lily had ever met and was her all-time favorite teacher. To earn spending money, Lily often would help Miss Rose with small tasks around the house or classroom. Miss Rose’s husband was the high school football coach. Everyone called him, Coach Boston, even if he wasn’t their coach. Lily didn’t know what his first name was. He was nice too, and he was always talking to the younger boys about football. He always said the same thing: “The only activity where you can knock the heck out of someone and not get into trouble.” Lily often dreamed of having parents like Miss Rose and Coach. She also wondered what her real parents were like? Did they have other kids? What kind of people were they? Were they good or were they evil, and she also wondered why they didn’t want her? What did I do to make them not like me?

“Oh wait, Lily. If you don’t mind, I would also like to invite Ace.” Miss Rose knew her husband would like that. Coach loved talking about football, and she thought Ace would enjoy it also. She knew her husband would entertain him while the girls could do their own thing.

When Lily made it back to the *home*, Angela was in her room taking a nap with Goldie snuggled up to her. Lily decided to see if Mary had received a phone call from Mrs. Boston and to see how Angela was coming along. She went into the kitchen, and Mary was there preparing supper.

“Did you get a call from school?” asked Lily.

“I did,” replied Mary. “Miss Rose is going to pick you and Angela up at 2:00 PM, this Sunday.” Lily was very excited. It was always a treat to spend time at Miss Rose’s house.

Lily asked, “How did Angela do today?” Lily was too young to remember anything about her arrival at the *home*. But she knew how the other kids felt when they arrived, and she was determined to help Angela any way she could. She was concerned after the first night.

“She didn’t leave your room all day. I think she was sad you were away at school. Thank goodness for Goldie.” Lily was determined to help Angela any way she could.

## Chapter 2

The next three days of school were uneventful. No one picked on Lily, so Ace didn't spend any time in the principal's office much to everyone's relief.

Saturday finally rolled around, and Lily had big plans for this day. Mary had already filled Lily's backpack with goodies for their excursion. Lily and Angela rushed through breakfast and announced to Mary, "Angela and I are going out to play. We will be back later this afternoon". They were already out the door when Mary gave her ok. Goldie was right behind them trying to catch up.

They walked and walked and followed the Eagle River heading out of town. Then they found what Lily was searching. Just off the river was a patch of tall reed-like grass and they headed for the middle of it. The grass was five-foot-high and provided the perfect cover. Once inside, you were invisible to the outside world. Lily had been here many times and called this place the "fort."

Lily opened her backpack, which contained all the needed essentials: sandwiches, apples, bottled water,



and a ball for Goldie. They spent the pleasant day lying on their backs and looking up into the sky identifying different animal shapes from the continuous line of cumulus clouds in the sky. The bright sun provided warmth, and the gentle cool breezes provided comfort. They listened to the soothing, flowing river, the constant chirping and singing of the songbirds. The sounds were so relaxing, so peaceful, so serene. Bad thoughts flowed out of their minds just like the water down the Eagle River. Angela's smile was so huge; it surely had to hurt her face. They watched the birds flying overhead. Some were flying low, ready to catch their lunch, some flying high, just gliding without flapping their wings trying to spot their lunch.

Goldie kept bringing the ball to either girl, anxiously waiting for one of them to throw it. When they did, she would retrieve it, and the cycle repeated itself until their arms were sore. The girls finally collapsed to the ground, exhausted, with Goldie beside them with her tongue hanging out, panting mightily, trying to catch her breath.

While resting, Lily told Angela all about her school, what she liked and didn't like; her teachers, the ones that were nice; boys she thought were cute. With that,

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Angela held her nose with her fingers, “Yuck,” she giggled. She also brought up Ace. Angela was going to meet him tomorrow at Mrs. Boston’s house and didn’t want her scared of him because of his enormous size.

“Ace and I are in the same grade, even though he is two years older than me.” Lily went on to explain, “Apparently, a couple of his teachers liked him so much, that they kept him in their class again. He is very tall and wide, but also very nice. He won’t let anyone pick on you or me. He will be a good friend to you.” Angela was anxious to meet Ace but thought he sounded kind of scary. The girls played hide and seek, Lily, showing Angela all the great hiding places where you were protected from view by anyone looking for you.

The trip back to the *home* took a lot longer than going to the *fort* mainly because they were not in a hurry and they stopped along the way to see the different sights and hear the different sounds that existed along the river. For now, Angela forgot about her painful past and was enjoying the present.

###

Angela stayed in Lily's room that night. They were both so exhausted; they immediately fell asleep. Counting sheep would not be necessary tonight. Angela enjoyed a more peaceful sleep, no tossing or turning or crying. Maybe because she was so tired or perhaps because she wasn't thinking about her past.

They both woke up the next morning refreshed, still excited about all the fun they had yesterday. Lily and Angela hurried to the dining room and greeted Mary, "Good morning," the girls shouted in unison.

"Good morning, you two," replied Mary. "Time for breakfast." The girls were starving, and Lily helped Angela with her plate, filling it with scrambled eggs, bacon, and buttered toast. Mary filled up two glasses of milk and placed them where the girls were sitting. After they finished breakfast, Lily took her and Angela's plate and scraped the remaining food into the garbage can and placed the empty dishes and glasses in the dishwasher. She thanked Mary for a delicious breakfast. After Church and Sunday School, Lily took Angela back to her room where they waited for Miss Rose to pick them up at 2:00 PM.

As a rule, the clock runs much slower or, so it seems, when you are watching it. At least that is what

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the girls found out. As 2:00 PM approached, the girls moved into the common room and patiently waited.

Miss Rose arrived right at 2:00 PM sharp! She turned her car off, got out, and approached the Foster Home. She greeted Mary with a hug, and they talked outside for a while. Lily and Angela waited inside until the adults finished their conversation. Mary finally motioned for the girls to come out.

Lily, holding Angela's hand, made the introductions. "Miss Rose, this is Angela. Angela, this is Miss Rose."

"Pleased to meet you, Miss Rose," replied Angela.

Miss Rose reached out her hand to Angela and gently said, "I am so pleased to meet you, Angela." The little girl could sense the compassion in Miss Rose's voice and manner and immediately felt comfortable with her. She had grown up to fear adults, but she was not afraid of Miss Rose.

It was time to leave, and everyone got into Miss Rose's car. It was a pretty red car with four doors. The girls got in the back. Lily knew they were going to pick up Ace and there was no way he could fit in the back

seat. Lily helped Angela with her seat belt. Angela was excited to be surrounded by such nice people.

Ace lived in the country and to get there; they had to travel on a gravel road. It was a bumpy, uncomfortable ride. Fortunately, because of all the rain, there wasn't much dust from the gravel road which made it easier to breathe and see. During a dry spell, the dust behind a vehicle looked like a smoke signal letting folks know there was a vehicle approaching.

Miss Rose turned into the lane leading to Ace's house. He lived in a large, older two-story house that was surrounded by many outbuildings used for storage and farm animals. As she pulled up to the house, she could see Mrs. Frampton standing in the doorway. They both waved, and then she stepped out of the doorway and Ace appeared. He bent down as he walked through the door so as not to hit his head. Lily watched Angela's reaction as Ace approached. To her relief, Angela didn't appear scared, although her eyes seemed as big as saucers. She was glad they discussed him yesterday at the park.

Ace bumped his head getting into the front seat. He managed to snap his seatbelt despite his knees being level with his chest. He looked uncomfortable. Miss

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Rose apologized, “Ace, I’m sorry my car is so small. Try to ease your seat back if you can.” Miss Rose’s car was not small, but Ace’s size made it appear so.

“I’m fine, ma’am, really,” Ace replied, smiling, although he didn’t look fine. He looked like a giant pretzel.

The ride back to town was more bumpy and rougher than when they were on the way to pick up Ace, especially on the passenger side of the car. The car shocks on the passenger side received a big workout and made all kinds of screeching noises whenever Miss Rose hit any bump in the road. Instinctively, the girls in the back seat held onto each other tightly for the duration of the trip.

They pulled up to Miss Rose’s house. Ace had to unfold himself, and it took him longer to get out of the car. Her house was in a quiet, tree-lined neighborhood of well-maintained homes. Large backyards shaded by majestic oak and maple trees that were here long before any houses. It was the kind of neighborhood you would see in pictures of fancy magazines.

Miss Rose led them inside where they met her husband, Coach Boston casually dressed in sweatpants

and an Edgewood High School football sweatshirt. In his hand was a clipboard, which he carried with him always. He took one look at Ace and started writing on his clipboard. The coach asked, "What grade are you in, Ace?"

"The seventh grade, sir," replied Ace.

Coach dropped the clipboard on the floor. He picked it up with a smile on his face. "Come on, let's go outside," and he led Ace out the door to the backyard.

Lily heard Coach tell Ace as they headed out, "Football is the only activity where you can knock the heck out of someone and not get into trouble."

"Would you girls like to help with the chocolate chip cookies?" Miss Rose asked while walking into the kitchen.

"If it means we get to eat them, yes, yes, yes," screamed Lily.

Miss Rose's chocolate chip cookies were famously delicious, renowned for being the best. "I think we will have to make a double batch," laughed Miss Rose, who was thinking about Ace. The girls heartily agreed.

Once the cookies were in the oven, Miss Rose pointed to the cabinet in the family room where a stack of board games was. “You two can pick out what games you want to play.” Lily had been here before to play games and already knew which ones would be best for Angela to play. She pulled out Trouble, Chutes and Ladders, and Candyland.

Angela announced, “I’ve never played any of them before.”

Lily asked, “What games have you played? There are lots of games here.”

Angela answered, “I’ve never played any board games before.”

Lily couldn’t believe what she heard. What kid has never played any board game? She was determined to remedy this and make sure Angela had a great time.

The aroma of the chocolate chip cookies soon brought the boys back in the house. Ace headed straight for the kitchen and Coach headed for the medicine cabinet in the bathroom looking for something that would ease the pain of his back, arms, legs, well just about everything that moved. He tried writing something on his clipboard, but he couldn’t hold the



pencil. Apparently, Ace had worked him over thoroughly.

The kids quickly finished off the cookies, then Rose and the kids sat down to play games. Coach laid down and took a much-needed nap. The first game they played was Trouble. Aptly named, because Ace had trouble understanding how to play. Ace always had problems with any activity associated with numbers.

Miss Rose thought it would be a good time to provide a math lesson to Ace, who was embarrassed and frustrated. Rose was always anxious to help any needy kid with school lessons.

“Ace, you and I are going to play a game,” she started. “Everyone has a favorite number. Mine is three because I have three brothers and sisters. I want you to think about a favorite activity you do and let’s associate a number with that activity.”

Ace thought a while and announced, “My favorite number is four.” He seemed very pleased with his choice.

“Excellent, Ace. Why is four your favorite number?”

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With a smile on his face, Ace replied, “Because I get four helpings of mashed potatoes for supper.”

Both Lily and Angela tried hard to suppress a giggle.

“Excellent, so if you had four helpings yesterday and four helpings today, how many total helpings of mashed potatoes did you have for the two days?”

Without hesitation, Ace replied, “That’s easy, eight.”

With that answer, everyone clapped and cheered. Miss Rose had unlocked the secret to helping Ace understand math by associating numbers with food. Even Ace was excited. He never knew that math could be so tasty.

Miss Rose was also going to cook supper. She asked Angela, “Would you like roast beef and mashed potatoes for supper?”

Angela was still full, from the chocolate chip cookies, but she politely replied, “Yes ma’am.”

Ace was prancing around the family room holding up four fingers. It felt like an earthquake. Everyone laughed and knew what that meant.

Miss Rose went into the kitchen to put the roast on and sent Coach to the grocery store to get more potatoes, and the kids started playing Chutes and Ladders.

Coach returned with a big bag of potatoes. He had also stopped at the high school and picked up some football pads. They were not for Ace, but for him. He was preparing for another assault from Ace.

The kids continued to play games. It seemed that Angela was winning every single time. Lily didn't care, she was happy Angela was having such a fun time. Ace didn't care; he was connecting numbers with food items. Eggs were a zero; hot dogs were a one, pork chops were a two, hamburgers were a three, mashed potatoes were a four, and so forth. He was on the verge of creating a new number system rivaling anything the Romans had devised.

Miss Rose had the most fun of anyone! She loved to hear the children laugh and have so much fun. She and the Coach did not have any children, nor any nieces or nephews to enjoy. It brought her so much joy to have days like this. That is why she became a teacher. She was a person who had a lot of love to share, but no little ones at home with to share it.

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Coach came out to the family room to collect Ace. He was wearing all the pads he brought from the high school; knee pads, hip pads, shoulder pads, and a helmet. Ace looked at him and said, "I know, I know, football is the only activity where you can knock the heck out of someone and not get into trouble." The clipboard crashed to the floor.

Coach just looked at him and knew he was in trouble. The pads would only help so much. He repeated to himself, "Dead man walking, dead man walking," as he disappeared out the door to the backyard to face the carnage.

The girls prepped for supper by setting the table. Lily put out the plates and glasses; Angela put out the silverware and the linen napkins. Ace would be seated at the head of the table, mainly because that was the only place he would fit. He was also given a serving platter instead of a regular plate for obvious reasons.

Miss Rose called out to the boys, "Supper's ready, come on in!"

Ace bounded through the door and headed straight to the dining room. Nobody had to tell him where he was sitting. Coach crawled in on all fours heading to his

room, muttering, “I will eat later.” He was in awful pain, but grateful to be alive.

The four sat at the huge table and bowed their head in prayer. Lily and Angela had never seen this much food. Ace appeared to have tears in his eyes and silently practiced his new math in his head. He thought about having a nickname based on his newly acquired math expertise. He liked the nickname “food professor.” Just the thought of it made him hungrier.

Miss Rose quickly prepared a plate for her husband and set it in the refrigerator for later. She knew, if she didn’t do it now, there might not be any food left when they were finished eating. Leftovers would be out of the question.

Watching Ace fill his platter, was like watching the Egyptians build the pyramids. Layer after layer of roast and mashed potatoes. Miss Rose took a picture and briefly contemplated sending it to Guinness.

Everyone was enjoying supper especially Ace. In between bites, he announced, “Miss Rose, this is the best meal I have ever eaten. Do you think it would be ok if I moved in with you and Coach?” A loud groan

emanated in the other room and the sound of a clipboard hitting the floor. Everyone else just laughed.

When supper was over, they all took their plates to the kitchen and scraped the remaining food into the garbage can. There was no need to clean Ace's platter. It went directly into the dishwasher.

Much to Ace's dismay, it was time to go back home. He was hoping for an after-supper snack. The girls put the games away. The kids thanked Rose for everything and Miss Rose thanked them for coming over. Ace went to find Coach to thank him and saw him in bed bandaged from head to toe like a mummy.

Miss Rose put her arms around the girls and gave them a big hug. "Lily, if you want, can you and Angela come over next Saturday and help rake the leaves in the back? Of course, I will pay you both."

"I'm sure we can. I will ask Mary when we get back," an excited Lily replied. She had been saving money for that new bike for over a year.

Miss Rose drove them home, taking Ace home first.

###

The next day at school, Coach came to the Junior High and asked to speak to Ace. The office called the classroom where Ace was. "Could you please send Ace Frampton to the office."

Ace was surprised; this was the first time he went to the office unescorted. Upon arriving at the office, he was pleased to see Coach. He reached out to shake Coach's hand. Startled by the gesture, Coach stepped back, then realized Ace's intentions were peaceful.

"Ace," Coach began, "I know you want to play football in junior high."

Ace interrupted, "Yes sir, I do."

Coach continued, "We have a slight problem. Some of the parents, actually a lot of the parents are afraid because of your size and strength that you might injure their kids."

Ace looked like he was about to cry. He clenched his giant fist.

Coach added, "A petition is circulating to prevent you from participating in junior high football and has been sent to the school board for consideration." Coach did not mention that he was the one who started the

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petition. “But, I have spoken to your parents, and we agree that because of your size and strength, plus your age, you should be permitted to play high school football instead. I have spoken to most of the school board members, and they agree as well. How would you feel about that?”

Ace was so excited, he smashed his massive fist down on a heavy wooden table and shattered it into a hundred pieces of shrapnel heading in all directions. The clipboard crashed to the floor. The coach was thinking about where to find a uniform big enough that would fit Ace.

When Coach walked out, the ladies in the office were finally scrambling out from under their desks. One had started to dial 9-1-1.

“Practice starts tomorrow after school. See you at the high school football field,” Coached shouted to Ace as he headed to his car.

###

On the way back from school, Lily stopped at the bike store. The pink bike she longed for was still there. Because she stopped so often, the clerk knew her well.



He laughed, “it’s still here, practically with your name on it.”

Lily smiled, “I know, someday,” and she left and hurried home to see how Angela was.

Goldie and Angela were waiting at the door for Lily. Lily told Angela all about the bike; the color, the sleek tires, the streamers. Lily remembered all the details. The more she described it, the more Angela wanted to see it. Lily promised Angela, “I will take you to see it tomorrow after school.”

## Chapter 3

The Edgewood High School football team has not won a football game in two years. Expectations for this year were not very high. They had the same kids back that played last year. The only difference, because of a drop in high school enrollment, they would be playing eight-man football instead of the customary eleven. Edgewood only has 12 kids going out for football. They just had a varsity. There were not enough kids to play junior varsity.

When the kids saw Ace, they thought a new kid had moved into town. They did not realize he was only in the seventh grade. He was also much larger than anyone else on the team. The players did not have their uniforms yet, so today's practice consisted of strength and conditioning drills.

The first drill was the "tire run." Tires are placed side by side in a long line, and you quickly maneuver up the line as fast as you can, stepping in the middle of each tire. Every player fell flat at least once, except Ace. With incredibly quick feet and extraordinary agility, he didn't have any trouble and quickly completed the drill error-free each time.

Ace had never lifted weights before. Coach showed him how to use the free weights, the bench press, the leg press, and the exercise bike. For such a small school, Edgewood had an excellent weight training setup. Ace took to it like a duck takes to water. It was a good first day; nobody got killed.

After practice, Coach traveled downtown to visit the dress shop in the town square. Mrs. Hogan, the owner of the store, was surprised to see Coach. He had never been in her store before without his wife.

“Help you with something, Coach?”

Coach Boston was a little out of his league. “I hope so. Can you make me a football uniform, a big one?”

Mrs. Hogan had run this store for 30 years, and this was the strangest request she had ever heard. At first, she thought he was kidding her. Coach Boston wasn’t known to be a joker. So, she asked him, “Who is it for?”

“New kid on my team,” Coach replied.

“How old is he,” she inquired.

“Fourteen.”

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Mrs. Hogan couldn't help herself. "Is his last name Goliath?"

Coach didn't catch on with her attempt at humor.

Deciding to be serious, she asked, "Okay, I think I can do it. What kind of material does it need to be?"

"Something strong and capable of stretching."

"Can you bring the young man in so that I can get his measurements?"

"I will bring him by tomorrow, after practice." With that, the coach was out the door.

###

The next day after school, Lily collected Angela at the *home*, and they walked to the bike store. Angela had never ridden a bike before, even one with training wheels. She was amazed anyone could ride one and not crash.

From Lily's description, Angela, immediately knew which bike Lily wanted. It was a beauty. They stayed and dreamed a little longer, then they left the bike store, knowing supper was cooking at the *home*.

They didn't get very far before Angela spotted something in the window of the toy store. Staring at her was a frilly yellow, blue Cinderella floor length dress. Angela remembered seeing the movie when she was at the hospital and wished she could be her and have a happy ending, just like Cinderella.

"Isn't it pretty, Lily?"

"It is," replied Lily.

Lily patiently let Angela look the dress over, top to bottom, more than once, before nudging her away from the window.

###

The second day of practice covered the same drills as the first practice. Again, Ace was perfect at the "tire run." His teammates watched in amazement at his agility and speed. He also could lift more than anybody else.

After practice, Coach and Ace traveled to the dress shop to get his fitting. Ace had never been in a dress shop before and was a little embarrassed going into such an establishment.

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Mrs. Hogan greeted them, “Welcome back Coach, who do you have here?”

“This here’s Ace Frampton, football player.”

Mrs. Hogan looked at Ace and looked at the seamstress tape measure she carried. “This isn’t going to work. I’m going to have to connect two of these things to get his size.”

She went to the back room and emerged with a second tape measure and deftly connected them with masking tape. She took all the measurements, added the numbers together and wrote them on her notepad. She thought these measurements could be used to make a tent.

She told Coach, “I should have this made by Saturday.”

“Can you make three?” Coach asked.

“Should not be a problem,” replied Mrs. Hogan.

Coach and Ace headed to the car. In the car, Coach asked Ace, “How do you like practice so far?”

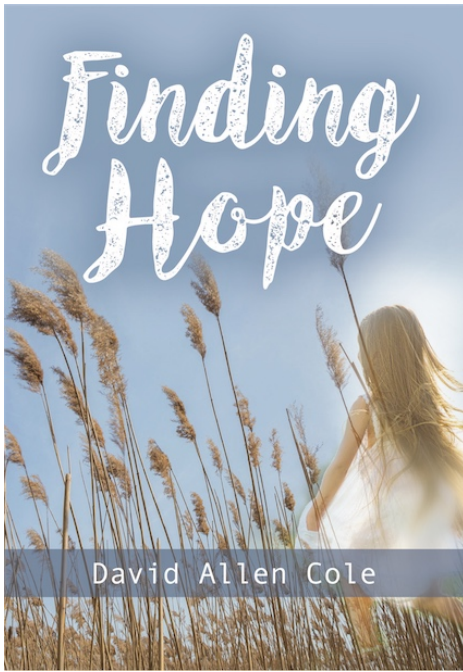
“I like it so far, but I don’t know much about football,” admitted Ace.

“You’ll learn. How are your teammates treating you?”

“OK, they ignore me, but that’s ok. None of the players have been mean to me.”

Coach knew that some of the senior players would attempt to play pranks on the freshman and since Ace was just a seventh grader, he would be an obvious target. But being seniors, Coach thought they would be smart enough not to mess with Ace. He also suspected Ace would protect the younger players from these senior pranks. Heaven helps those who tried.

Coach dropped Ace off at his house in the country and then drove home.



*With the help of a loving teacher, two neglected girls in a foster home find love and guidance for a better life. A hulking boy provides protection when trouble approaches the girls.*

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By David Allen Cole

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