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Opening extract from

The Only Child Club

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"No," Ryan said.

Surina pointed to her name. "But I'm on your list."

"Everyone's on the list," said Ryan, "because I need to make sure that I haven't forgotten anyone in the class. But lots of them will be crossed off. And you will definitely be crossed off."



"Why?" asked Surina.

"Because you have brothers and sisters," Ryan explained. He ticked them off on his fingers. "You have a brother in the next class up, and two sisters in the nursery. So you can't join, because this is the Only Child Club. It's for only children."

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"Well, boo to you!" said Surina.

Ryan shook his head. "I'm sorry," he told her, "but you're not an only child. So you can't join. And you won't be the only one to be crossed off."

Surina wasn't pleased. She stuck out her tongue. "Well, double boo to you," she told him.

Ryan pretended that he hadn't heard and just carried on with his writing.



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~Chapter Two~

Crossing People Off



As soon as the buzzer went for break, Ryan picked up his list and went round the playground, checking to see who could join his club and who would have to be crossed off. Most people got crossed off. Tyler had a sister. So did Teddy and Gurdeep. Nathan had two brothers. Sian had two sisters, two stepsisters and a half-brother. Susie, Emily

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and Mandy all had one brother. Matt had three.



asked Zachary.

"No," Ryan said.

"Oh, go on!" wheedled Zachary. "Just for now. Just till he starts crawling about and

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snatching my stuff, and being a proper brother."



"No," Ryan told Zachary firmly. "It wouldn't be right." And he put a thick black pencil line through Zachary's name on the list.

Zachary shrugged. "Oh, well." He looked at all the crossed-off names. "Good luck in finding someone."

"Thank you," said Ryan, and he carried on round the playground, holding his list, looking for the rest of the people in his class.

Patrick wanted to join.

"I'm sorry," Ryan said. "You can't. You're not an only child. I know you have a sister."

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"But I'm adopted," Patrick argued. "And I can't remember back that far, but maybe before I was adopted I was an only child."



"Well, you're not an only child *now*," Ryan said sternly. "You have a brother and a sister in the big school who pick you up every day. So you are definitely not an only child."

Patrick stared at the list. It was plastered with thick black pencil lines. "Who's going to join?" he said. "You've gone round the class and crossed out everyone."

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"Not *everyone*," said Ryan. He counted up. "There are three people not crossed out. Jade, Oliver and Tasha. And then there's me."

"Four altogether?" scoffed Patrick. "That's not much of a club."

"That's all right," Ryan said. "We only children are used to not being in a crowd."



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~Chapter Three~

Jade



Jade didn't want to join.

"I'm busy every break," she said.

"You can be busy in our club," Ryan tried to tempt her.

"No," Jade said stubbornly. "I want to play on the bars. We're doing double swingers and I'm the best. I want to stay the best, and that means practising and never missing my turn."

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Ryan said, "Are you sure? We only children ought to stick together."

Jade stared at him. "Why?"

Ryan couldn't think of any answer to that. So he pretended his shoelace had come undone and bent to tie it up. He kept his head down, fiddling with his laces, till Jade got bored and went back to the swing bars. Then he crossed Jade's name off the list, but lightly, in case she ever changed her mind.



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~Chapter Four~

The First Meeting



Ryan and Tasha and Oliver sat on the bench outside the lunch hall. Ryan took charge.

"Right," he said. "This is the very first meeting of the Only Child Club so I think we should make a list of all the things that only children never get to do. And then we can do them."

"All right," said Oliver.

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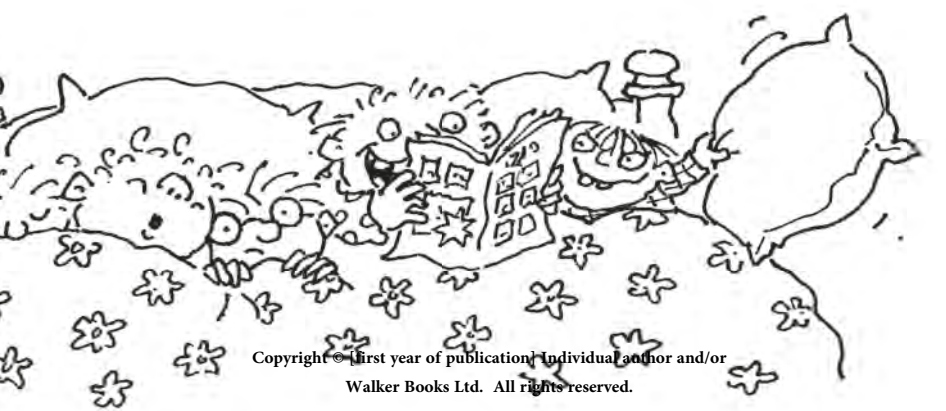
"Good idea," agreed Tasha.

They sat and thought.

"Sharing a bedroom?" suggested Tasha after a while.

Ryan shook his head. "No. That won't do. I have to share my bedroom a lot. I have to share it every time my cousins come to stay, and that's quite often."

"I have to share mine, too," admitted Oliver. "I have a lot of sleepovers with Tyler and Gurdeep. And when my Aunt May comes, she sleeps in my bed and I have a little



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