

Chapter 6

In the chapter, Mrs. Valerie Pickwell calls her children for dinner with a unique and magical two-note whistle that perfectly resonates with all ten Pickwell kids, ensuring none are ever late for mealtime. This phenomenon is consistent, as signaling for dinner, they all come running from various activities around their neighborhood, creating what Mrs. Pickwell fondly refers to as her “small nation.” The large family gathers around a Ping-Pong table, the only piece of furniture spacious enough to accommodate everyone, and dinner is filled with laughter and spaghetti—a staple meal for them that recurs every third night.

After dinner, as the children clear away their plates, Dominic notices a new boy sitting at the table. The siblings engage in a light, confused discussion about the boy’s identity, with each sibling mistakenly believing another one knew him. The boy prompts curiosity and creates a sense of mystery among the Pickwell kids. As they rush out to find him after realizing he’s missing, they spot him in the distance—the unknown boy is running along the railroad tracks, clutching a book.

What catches their attention is not just his presence but the peculiar way he is traversing the tracks. Unlike the Pickwells and other neighborhood kids who tread cautiously along the wooden ties or the cinders, this boy is bold enough to run straight along the steel rails themselves, an audacious act that leaves the Pickwell children blinking in surprise. The essence of their curiosity and childhood wonder emphasizes the thrill of new encounters, leading to intriguing possibilities in the narrative. The chapter encapsulates family dynamics, explores themes of belonging, and introduces an adventurous spirit through the enigmatic figure of the boy on the railroad.