

# WEST OF WINSOR

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by  
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## Chapter 1 “The Green Light”

### Part 1

*A year ago I was pondering my final year of, what I like to call, elementary school. I know most people don't consider eighth grade to be elementary school but it was to me. I knew high school would be different. What I didn't know was just how different.*

*Everything changed over the last six months. My grandmother, who lived with us for most of my life, was gone. She had been sick for a while but still, I wasn't prepared. It never really registered that she could or would be gone one day. Then one morning, when I was getting ready for school, she had a heart attack. I was there and saw it all. I was there, in the hospital, when the doctor came in and told us to make a decision. I was there when he came in and said she was gone.*

*I haven't seen my Uncle Kyle in almost a year. I used to see him all the time but he just stopped coming over to our house and hanging out. Dad said he got a new job down south but that didn't make sense because Uncle Kyle didn't call or even come to Grandma's funeral. Will told me I should let it go. I guess for now I have to.*

*My parents told me six weeks ago that we were moving to central New Jersey because dad was taking a job at [Ludington](#) University. My parents closed their catering business, said goodbye to friends, and sold our home. Tomorrow I'll be on [Lamarr](#) Ave., unloading a U-Haul filled with my stuff, in front of our new*

house. On top of that, we will be boarding two college students. I've barely done sleepovers with my friends, let alone live with strangers. I can honestly say all of this is way outside my comfort zone.

Mom said [Lovelace](#) is a nice town. She said there's a quaint and long main street reminiscent of old New Jersey called [Winsor](#) Street. It's lined with boutiques, college stores, nice restaurants, and cafes. Our house is just west of Winsor, which is convenient, because we can walk to Winsor instead of always having to drive like we did in our old town. Everything you could want is on Winsor Street and most of it is mom-and-pop. Way different from the busy routes lined with box stores I am used to.

Ludington University is top notch, right up there with Princeton. I'm proud of my brother for getting in. Hopefully, I'll be going there in four years too. But I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. I should have learned by now not to make plans. "Man proposes, God disposes" my grandma used to say.

I'm hoping high school will be as cool as I think it is. Will had fun in high school and had lots of friends. I'm sure if I can ignore the anxiety of starting a new school and having to make new friends, I'll be okay. I'll keep trying to convince myself anyway.

I just finished reading my first high school book for summer reading – *THE GREAT GATSBY* by F. Scott Fitzgerald. I like it but that's not strange for me since I love to read. I'll probably read it again before school starts. There's a paper due the first week of school about the book. I'm thinking of doing my paper on a concept my Language Arts teacher from last year talked about – life imitating art or art imitating life.

After reading *THE GREAT GATSBY*, I feel like I'm watching the people around me morph into what I've read. Me too, even. We're not so different from the characters in the book. My family and I are embarking on a new adventure. I guess our boarders are too. In a way, we're all chasing a dream or at least the dream we think we want. I feel like I'm the one staring across the water at the dock with the green light.

Sometimes I wonder how this will all play out. What impact will the people around me have on my life? How will their back stories and ambitions entwine with mine? And scariest of all, what genre am I in – comedy, drama, romance? For now I have no choice but to turn the page and find out.

Juliette finished typing in her journal. Her mind raced with questions that would all be answered within the next few days. What will her new school be like? What's it going to be like living with three college students? Is the new house nice? She and Will hadn't even seen it yet. Everything had happened so fast. What was the rush? Was this all part of a midlife crisis? If it wasn't, then what was really going on? She wasn't a child anymore. Why couldn't someone tell her?

Juliette was part scared out of her mind and part excited. She really didn't want to move but what kid ever does? She forced herself to think of the unknown as something exciting instead of something scary. She thought of the move as a new adventure instead of a sad ending. She forced herself to relax by welcoming the metaphorical empty pages that were open before her and fell asleep.



The summer sun was able to sneak out from behind the clouds a few times in the morning. More clouds were on their way and a thunderstorm was on the radar later in the evening. The clouds and breeze were a blessing, allowing the back of the moving truck to remain somewhat hospitable to human beings. The Wynn family had left before sunrise that morning in hopes of having the truck unloaded and back to U-Haul before five. So far they were ahead of schedule.

“Mom, these boxes say bathroom. Which one do you want them in?” Will asked.

“Put all the bathroom boxes in the master bathroom for now. I need to go through them to figure out what goes where,” Tina said.

“Mom, Joe Joe is hissing. I don't think he is very happy.” Juliette held up the cat carrier whose inhabitant was a growling gray cat with its ears back.”

“Oh, poor Joe Joe. He is definitely not happy,” Tina said, taking stock of the unhappy feline who refused to make eye contact with her. “Set up the litter box in the bathroom in your room. Put a note on the door so no one opens it and lets him out. The last thing we need is a missing cat.”

“Okay.”

“Give him some food and water too. He probably won’t eat but maybe it will relax him a little,” Tina said. She knew Joe Joe would be feeling better in no time. It was just a matter of getting acclimated and adjusted to their new surroundings and that went for all of them.

Tina climbed back onto the truck and pulled boxes to the edge. Charlie grabbed a large one.

“Charlie, why don’t you let Will take the heavy ones?” she asked.

“I’m fine,” Charlie stated.

“Are you hungry?”

“Starved.”

“The kids are probably hungry too. I’ll go to the cafe around the corner for sandwiches. What do you want?”

“I’ll take an eggplant parm.”

Charlie brought the large box marked “POTS” into the kitchen where Will was piling boxes against the back wall.

“Your mom is going to the cafe around the corner. Let her know what you want. Ask Juliette too, please.”

“Mom should come in here and start opening boxes.”

“The truck is almost empty. We’ll start opening them soon. Is all your stuff in your room?”

“I think so. When is the cable guy coming to hook up the internet?”

“Tomorrow.”

“Tomorrow? How am I going to use my computer until then?”

“You’re not. You’re going to move furniture, unload boxes, and put stuff away until you’re exhausted and you pass out in your new bedroom.” Charlie smiled at Will.

“You have no idea how hard this is,” Will teased his father.

“Which part, the unloading part or the computer part?”

“The computer part, of course.”

“Go get your sister’s order.”

Will made his way through the chaos sprawled throughout the house until he could hear Juliette in her bathroom. A large note reading “DO NOT OPEN. CAT INSIDE” was barely stuck to the door by a used piece of packing tape that had part of the cardboard box still stuck to it. Will knocked.

“You can come in,” Juliette said.

Will poked his head in.

“Hurry up and shut the door. I don’t want Joe Joe to get out,” Juliette commanded.

Will entered and saw Joe Joe huddled at the back of the toilet.

“I’m coming down,” Juliette said. “Just trying to get him to relax.”

“You’re probably better off just leaving him alone. He’ll come out when we’re all asleep and snoop around.” Will looked around the large bathroom. “You know you scored the biggest room in the house.”

“No, it’s not. Mom and Dad’s is bigger.”

“Barely. Not sure how I got stuck with the smaller room.”

“Cause you’re a guy and mom wants all the guys to use the hall bathrooms.”

“Totally sexist.”

“Boys are slobs. You know it.”

“Totally sexist.” Will said again.

“Okay, Joe Joe, I’ll see you later.” Juliette pet the cat one last time and escaped the bathroom with Will.

“Mom is getting lunch from a cafe. What do you want?”

“They have breakfast?”

“I have no idea.”

“Oh, my God,” Juliette said in a nasally, exaggerated voice. “And *you* are going to Ludington University? What *do* you know, Will? Like, get it together.”

“That is an awful sound,” Will said.

“I can’t believe you don’t like, um yeah, my voice. You’re so out of it Will. I have to educate you.”

“You should talk like that on your first day of school.”

“Right, I totally should, um yeah. But I’m like, saving it for your girlfriends.”

“You go right ahead little sister. Revenge is sweet. Remember that.”

“Hey,” a young man stopped in front of Will and Juliette as they stepped out of the house and onto the sidewalk.

“Hey,” Will said.

“This is eleven fourteen Lamarr right? I’m Jacob Ramirez.”

“Yeah, you’re one of our boarders. Welcome man.”

“Thank you.”

“This is my sister Juliette.”

“Hey, Juliette, how’s it going?”

“Hi,” Juliette said politely.

“Where did nasal girl go?” Will teased.

“Shut up, Will,” Juliette said giving Will a shove.

“Mom,” Will called. A barely audible voice echoed from the back of the truck. “Mom, Jacob is here.”

Tina pushed wet hair off her forehead. She was a sweaty mess and she knew it. This wasn’t how she planned on meeting their boarders but there was nothing she could do about it.

“Hi Jacob. Nice to meet you,” Tina said as she jumped down from the truck. “I’m sorry we’re still unpacking. The closing kept getting delayed.”

“No problem.”

“Is that all you have?” she asked pointing to the duffle bag hanging from Jacob’s shoulder.

“I mailed a box of stuff. Do you know if it came?”

“It did come,” Will said. “I put it in your room. I’ll show you where it is.”

“Before you go,” Tina said. “I’m going to get lunch. Would you like something Jacob.”

“No, thank you.”

“Did you have lunch?”

“Not yet.”

“Where did you walk from?” Tina asked.

“Bruh, resistance is futile,” Will said to Jacob. “She can’t rest until you’ve been nourished.”

“Mom, do they serve breakfast now?” Juliette asked.

“I think so.”

“I’ll have egg and cheese on a roll,” Juliette said.

“Yeah, me too,” Will said.

“I’ll do the same. Thank you,” Jacob relented.

“Well, that’s easy to remember.” Tina said as she handed a box to Jacob and another to Will. “Juliette, can you take that box into the kitchen? I’ll be back in a few,” she said then checked her back pocket to make sure she had cash and a credit card stowed away.

“Come on, I’ll show you around,” Will said to Jacob as they carried the boxes inside.

“Dang, this house is huge,” Jacob said.

“Today’s the first day I’ve seen it. It is pretty big. It’s old too. It’s a Victorian. It was a Bed and Breakfast for many years, then an older couple lived in it for a while, and now it’s our dorm,” Will explained.

“Cool looking house. I wasn’t expecting anything like this. Is it historic?”

“I think my dad said it was built in the mid 1800’s. It was refurbished along the way but not restored so the inside *looks* old Victorian but it’s not *actual* old Victorian. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah, I get it. Got any ghosts?”

“I don’t know. Guess we’ll find out. You can put the box here. So, this is the family room, as we’ll call it. That’s the parlor where you can receive guests. Lady callers are only allowed between three and five and must be chaperoned.”

Jacob looked at Will surprised and confused.

“I’m kidding, man. My parents aren’t that neurotic,” Will said. Will continued walking Jacob around the main floor, showing him the large dining room, kitchen, another “sitting room” which he explained would become a study room for the students, and then the den, which was adjacent to the downstairs bathroom, that would become an office type room for his parents.

They ascended the curved staircase adorned with a beautifully carved wooden railing. At the top of the stairs was the master bedroom and bathroom. Down the hall were six large rooms each with a name on the door. First was Will’s room and across from him was Jacob’s room. Next was Danny’s room.

“Haven’t met Danny yet. He is supposed to be here at four.” Will pushed the door across from Danny’s open. “This is our chillax room or lounge. It’s going to have a TV - our Xbox will be set up in here, mini fridge - stuff like that.”

“Cool. I was good with just having a room to sleep in.”

“My parents wanted this place to be more of a college dorm for us than just a house with rooms. And speaking of rooms, down here is the queen’s room. I mean my sister’s room.”

“Oh man, you’re not jealous of the little sis are you?”

Will knocked then opened the door at the end of the hall revealing a large bedroom with a private bathroom.

“Dang, this room is the size of my apartment back home.”

Will gave Jacob an “I told you so” look.

“Juliette and Joe Joe will reign here.”

“Joe Joe?”

“He’s the cat. There are two bathrooms for the three of us up here. That’s the grand tour. Any questions?”

“Nope. I’m good.”

“I’ll be downstairs moving boxes and furniture.”

“I’ll get settled then come down to help.”



“Cool. Shout if you need anything,” Will said then left Jacob in the hall.

Jacob stood in front of the door with his name on it. He gently pushed it open. It was a nice size room – twice the size of the room he shared with Shia back home. A sigh of relief relaxed his body. He didn’t care that he was standing in the largest house he had ever been in, he was just glad and relieved that Will and his family seemed nice. It brought a sense of peace to his heart – a feeling he hadn’t remembered having since he was a child.

Jacob’s cell phone rang. On the other end was Shia, Jacob’s twin sister.

“Hi Shia. I just got here,” he said. “How are you?”

“Ok,” she said. Shia’s voice was a blessing but he could tell her strength was a facade.

“You can do this,” he reassured her. “Shia listen to me, the best thing you can do is get on that bus. I’m going to be okay here. Now it’s your turn. Get on the bus. No matter what Auntie says to you - no matter what Dante says to you, you get in the car with dad and you get on that bus. Okay?”

Jacob’s mind was racing. Listening to Shia and knowing they would not see each other for a long time was heartbreaking. He and his twin sister had never lived apart until now.

“I promise you it will be okay,” he said. “You’re doing the right thing. You can do this. I know you can. Shia, I love you. Please be safe.”

Shia’s goodbye stung. Tears welled in Jacob’s eyes. He clasped his hands, closed his eyes and quietly said a prayer for his sister.



Daniella Mackenzie Karter found [Winsor](#) Street to be quaint in a lackluster sort of way. There was nothing flashy or excessive about the town or the people for that matter. Back home this place would garnish an “ew”, at best, from her friends.

Overall, Daniella was pleasantly surprised by New Jersey. Other than flying into Newark now and then, she had never spent time with New York’s neighbor. Why would she? Anyone with any social standing

would be in New York City. New Jersey wasn't even on the radar. It might as well have been North Dakota for all she cared but things were different now.

After her red eye arrived in Newark airport, she had the driver take a detour before heading to the town of [Lovelace](#). They drove northeast, kicking off their tour in Hoboken. From there they headed west to the mountainous top of New Jersey and then south. They drove through small towns and large ones, over mountains brimming with lush green trees, down highways filled with box stores, and past farms with horses, cows and alpacas. Some towns were densely populated with houses and stores close together while other towns were more sparsely populated with homes far apart and on bigger pieces of land with big lawns and long driveways. Some towns seemed very old, while others had chunks of land dotted with new construction and baby trees. She was taking it all in.

Her cell phone buzzed yet again. She knew before looking it was probably her mother. She declined the call. Not a second later her caller ID showed "Colton". She declined that call too. Daniella brought up the text thread from her mother from the night before when she was at the airport getting ready to board her plane to New Jersey.

'I'm going to school. Leave me alone.' she had texted her mother.

'What school are you going to?'

'I'll tell you when I feel like it,' Daniella wrote back.

'What if something happens and you need me?' her mother responded. Daniella laughed out loud. "Wow, that's a good one mom," she said to her phone. Daniella typed a reply. 'I'll be fine. If you can't deal just go to the "medicine" cabinet like you usually do. You won't even know I'm missing.' That was the end of the thread.

The driver pulled the black sedan over in front of the cell phone store on Winsor Street. Daniella hopped out before the driver could open her door and went inside.

"Hi, how can I help you today," a gray haired man asked. She assumed he was the manager or owner since the other employee in the store looked like a college student.

“I need a new phone.”

“Are you looking for anything in particular?” he asked. He had a gentle demeanor, not your typical pushy salesman. Daniella liked him. He seemed “normal”.

“Just a smart phone. Whatever you have is fine.”

“How much do you want to spend?”

“I just want a decent phone that will get me through school without any problems?”

“Do you have the SIM card from the old phone? I can put that in so you don’t lose your data.”

“No, I don’t. The phone was destroyed,” she lied.

“Sorry about that.”

“I need to set up an account as well.”

“You can use your existing carrier.”

“I want a fresh start. Who do you recommend?”

The man explained a few different plans and showed Daniella a few phone choices. Daniella listened patiently then asked, “If I were your daughter, which one would you pick?”

“This one,” he said.

“Great! Let’s do that one then.”

“What name am I setting the account up in?”

“Danny Mackenzie. And I’ll pay cash.”



Tina walked into Cecelia’s Cafe or CC’s as the locals called it. It was part cafe and part market and donned a display cabinet filled with Italian pastry and cakes.

“What can I get for you?” Cecelia asked.

“I need one eggplant parm, three egg and cheese on a roll, and I haven’t decided what I’m eating yet.”

“No problem. I’ll get the other sandwiches going.”

Tina scanned the menu. Money was tight and although CC's prices were reasonable, it still bothered her to have to buy food that she could easily make at home for a fraction of the price.

"I'll take the roasted veggie sandwich," Tina said.

"You got it." Cecelia took stock of Tina's not so presentable appearance. She had seen this many times before. Every year to be exact. "Moving in a college student today?"

"Moving a whole family."

"Oh yeah, where?"

"Just around the corner. The blue house on Lamarr."

"You bought the Victorian? I love that house! I'm so glad someone finally bought it. It was empty for so long. Are you new to the area?"

"We're from northwest New Jersey."

"Well, welcome to the middle!" Cecelia smiled.

"My son is going to [Ludington](#), my daughter is going to Lovelace High School and we have two college students, boarders, who will be with us."

"Send them over during the week. We have some great breakfast and lunch specials."

"Thank you. I'll let them know."

"If you need anything just come by or give me a call. I'm Cecelia. Whatever you need, let me know. My husband is pretty handy too. He can fix just about anything."

Cecelia put the sandwiches on the counter. Then she filled a small box with pastry and rang up Tina's order.

"These are for you and your family and your boarders - can't forget them," Cecelia said putting the pastry box into the bag.

"But I..."

"My treat. It's your welcome to the neighborhood pastry."

"Thank you so much."

“Sure. Have a good day.”

“You too.”

Tina walked out of CC’s with a smile on her face. Maybe [Lovelace](#) would be the beginning of better things.



The Victorian was beginning to resemble a home instead of a cardboard box convention. Tina and Will managed to get most of the kitchen unpacked and put away. Charlie and Jacob had the living room, dining room, and study area furniture situated, while Juliette unpacked boxes and offered her opinion on furniture placement. Joe Joe remained in Juliette’s room but did make a brief appearance under the bed which made Juliette feel better.

Tina and Will dropped off the truck earlier than expected then hit the grocery store for perishables that would not keep in the moving truck. Their first dinner in the new house would be Pasta Primavera served promptly at six thirty.

“I’m so glad the kitchen is in good shape. I’ll never remember where we put everything but at least its here somewhere,” Tina said.

“I’m going to take the cardboard outside,” Will said.

“There are two more empty ones in the pantry we can break down.” Tina opened the pantry door then paused. A squeezing pain raced through her chest taking her breath away and making her wince.

“Mom, are you okay?”

“Yup, I’m good,” Tina managed to get a little air into her lungs and moved past the distraction. It wasn’t the first time that week it had happened, she just hadn’t mentioned it to anyone. She grabbed the two boxes and gave them to Will.

“Are you sure you’re all right?” Will studied his mother’s face. She looked a little pale but it had been a long day, a long week for that matter, so he figured she was probably tired and in desperate need of a break.

“I’m fine. I think I just moved wrong. It happens as you get older.” She smiled at her son. “Take these to the garage. I’m going to go check on your father and his crew.”

As soon as Will left, Tina braced herself against the counter. It would pass just as it had before she thought. When she could take a deep breath without pain, she walked into the other room.

“Wow, this looks great!” she said forcing a smile.

“We have a lot of books,” Juliette said with two stacks next to her and another box full of books in front of her.

“Yes, we do,” Charlie said. “But they are mostly family books.”

“Chick A Chick A Boom Boom is a family book?” Juliette asked.

“Yes,” Tina responded. “That was one of your favorites. You and Will both loved that book.”

“Seriously?” Juliette squirmed.

“Shelf please.” Charlie said. “Someday we’ll read it to our grandchildren. Jacob, can you grab the end of the couch and pull it over the rug?”

Jacob and Charlie pulled the couch forward and plopped it on the large rug in the center of the room.

“Thank you, Jacob. You have been a tremendous help today,” Charlie said.

“Yes, thank you!” Tina said.

“Sure,” Jacob said humbled.

“Okay, I know it’s only like three thirty,” Will said when he entered. “But I could go for some coffee.”

“Oh shoot!” Tina said. “That’s what I forgot, coffee.”

“We have a lot more boxes to unpack and four more beds to put together so why don’t I go grab some coffee at Starbucks?”

“Sounds good. I could use one too,” Charlie said.

“Here,” Will said handing his mother the phone. “We’ll order online then I’ll go pick it up.”

Tina placed her order. “Who’s next?” she said.

“Me,” Juliette said jumping to her feet. Tina handed her the phone.

“Jacob, do you want anything?” Charlie asked.

“Um,” Jacob contemplated. He did want a cup of coffee, it had been a long day for him as well, but he did not want to spend the money. He knew things were going to be very tight for the next four years, every penny counted.

“It’s our treat,” Tina said as if she were reading his mind. “You’ve been such a big help. It’s the least we can do.”

“Okay, sure. Thanks.”



Daniella grabbed her latte from the Starbucks’ counter. Her driver reminded her it was almost four o’clock, the time she was supposed to arrive at the house and unpack but she had one more stop to make. So what if she was a little late?

A dark hair, dark eyed college student pulled the door open just as Daniella leaned into it - her new phone in one hand and her drink in the other. Daniella managed to keep herself from bumping into his chest but could not stop the latte from splashing onto both of them. It was only a sprinkle but they were both wearing it.

“Nice job,” she said with a bite.

“Yeah, sorry, I guess. I was opening the door,” Will said. “Maybe if you weren’t on your phone you would have noticed.”

Daniella rolled her eyes at Will and walked down the street to her next destination. Will shook his head and walked into the Starbucks.

The clothing boutique Daniella had her eye on was still open. The clerk inside was a fashion statement in herself, leading Daniella to believe she could be helpful in pulling outfits together. Daniella hadn’t planned on shopping just yet, but figured getting a head start was a good idea since she had time to kill and hadn’t brought much with her from home. It wasn’t a large boutique but seemed to carry a little bit of everything.

“I need jeans and tops,” Daniella said. “What do you recommend?” Daniella scanned the store unfamiliar with the labels or if they even had a label.

“Are you looking for something designer?”

“Designer? Like who?” Daniella was confused.

“Like Joe’s Jeans or 7?”

Daniella smiled. Those weren’t designer jeans in her world but that world didn’t exist anymore.

“Sure, those are fine. Maybe we can put a few outfits together?”

“No problem.”

The clerk ran around the shop pulling jeans and tops, gathering accessories and shoes. Daniella went into a dressing room and tried it all on. Two hours later she had her picks – ten pairs of jeans, fifteen tops ranging from summer to ‘get me through fall’, three pairs of pajamas and five pairs of shoes. The clerk had a huge smile on her face as she rang in the clothes. Daniella plopped her Louis Vutton on the counter and dug for her wallet.

“I love your Louie,” the clerk said.

“Thanks,” Daniella responded. “Do you want it?”

“What? That’s a thousand dollar bag.”

“Fifteen hundred actually.”

“I can’t afford that,” the clerk laughed.

“I’ll trade you. Your bag for mine.”

“Is this a joke? Are you going to call the police or something after we trade?”

“No, not at all.”

“Is it a knock off?”

“Definitely not. I just want a new bag.”

“Okay, I’m not one to argue. Customer is always right. Right?”

After Daniella paid, the two women emptied their bags onto the floor then repacked their new ones.



“Are you walking far? I can help you carry your bags,” the clerk said.

“No, I’m parked right around the corner. I’ll be fine.”

“Thanks again for the bag. It’s so not a fair trade,” the clerk paused then had a frightened look on her face from an obvious revelation. “It’s not stolen is it?”

“No, I promise you it’s not stolen or borrowed.”

“Well, come back again. If you ever need anything maybe I can help you out.”

“You put some cool stuff together. Thanks,” Daniella said then left the store, walked around the corner, and into the waiting car.

“Ok,” she said to the driver. Now you can take me to Lamarr Ave. I’m ready.”



Charlie and Will returned to the house to find a light haired woman walking up to the house holding a manila envelope in her hand. Charlie parked the car in the driveway.

“Do you know her?” Charlie asked Will.

“Dad, I don’t know anybody here.”

Will carefully handed his father a tray of drinks and approached the smiling woman.

“Can I help you?” Will asked.

“I’m here for Professor Wynn. Hello, Professor,” she said to Charlie. “I’m Allison. We met a few months ago at President Wellington’s office when you came in for your interview.”

“Then, nice to see you again,” Charlie said cordially.

“I came to drop this off.” Allison handed Charlie the manila envelope. “It’s the finalized contract and your orientation info. I emailed it to you as well.”

“Thank you.”

“I hope you don’t mind, but I asked President Wellington if I could volunteer in your department. She said it was fine. I’m a business major but I’m interested in the food industry so I thought it would be a good idea to work there as well.”

“I think that is a great idea.”

“Did you get the invite to the faculty mixer? You didn’t RSVP. President Wellington wanted me to ask you.”

“I did and I’m going. I’m sorry. We’ve been busy with the move and I completely forgot.”

“No problem. I’ll take care of it.”

“Well, I just wanted to stop by and introduce myself.”

“Thanks for dropping this off.”

“Sure. I’ll see you on Monday.”

“Mixer sounds fun,” Will said as Allison walked down the sidewalk. “Who’s catering it?”

“I start on Tuesday. The assistant chef is hosting the mixer. Come on, everyone’s going to have cold coffee,” Charlie said then headed inside.



Shia sat in the front seat of the car staring at the bus idling on the corner. Her whole life was about to change – every familiar thing in her life was about to disappear. She looked at her father who was sitting in the driver’s seat trying to hide his emotions by turning towards the window. Both were searching their memories for happier times in their life, for the life they wanted compared to what they had actually lived.

“Shia it’s time,” her father said then cleared his throat.

“I know,” Shia whispered. Her eyes welled with tears but she took a deep breath and pushed them away. She didn’t want her father to worry about her. She wanted him to think she was brave. She needed to be brave.

Shia opened the door.

“Listen to me.” Her father turned to her. “When your past comes lookin’ for you, you keep lookin’ straight ahead. Got it? Don’t turn around – not for one second. Just keep lookin’ straight.”

Shia obediently nodded.

“You can do this,” he said in Spanish. “You make us proud. I love you.”

Shia hugged her father, kissed him on the cheek and left the car. Her father, glassy eyed, drove away. As soon as her father was out of sight a voice called from a distance. Shia turned to see Dante, her boyfriend walking quickly down the street in her direction – his gang colors and tattoos on display. He yelled her name again in his usual demanding way then broke into a jog. Shia watched him move as if in slow motion – her mind racing. She knew what she had to do, what her only option for escape was. She turned and sprinted for the bus. She quickly got on board and found a seat. Dante stopped at the corner across the street from the bus where Shia had previously been standing. His eyes search the windows of the bus until he found hers. She watched him for a moment then turned away.



Jacob and William were upstairs putting the rest of the beds together while Charlie and Tina were opening boxes looking for bed sheets, bedspreads, and pillows. Juliette called from downstairs. She had succeeded in her mission.

“Mom, I found the bag of mail you were looking for.”

“Oh, thank God,” Tina said to Charlie. “I was afraid it was lost or thrown out by mistake.”

“You don’t throw anything away by mistake,” Charlie reassured her.

“I know. But you do,” she said with a teasing eye.

“That happened once and we got the new car title just in time to sell it.”

“Oh, I remember,” Tina laughed as she and Charlie headed downstairs.

“Do you want me to stay here and go through the boxes?”

“No, I’ll send Juliette up. Let’s go through the mail together. Who knows what’s in there? It’s been forwarded to this address for over a week.”

Charlie and Tina emptied the bag on the kitchen table and starting sifting through envelopes and catalogs, tossing most of it in the recycling bin.

“Ah, my employee packet. Probably something I should hold on to,” he said, placing it to the side.

“There’s a letter here from our attorney,” Tina said. She looked at Charlie with a quizzical eye.

She read through the letter.

“You’ve got to be kidding me!” she said and handed Charlie the letter. He read through it quickly.

“There’s nothing we can do,” he said shaking his head. “We can’t even go after him? That’s ridiculous.” Charlie’s face flashed red with anger.

“I’m sorry,” Tina said. She put her hand on Charlie’s.

“I’m sorry,” he said. “It’s my fault. He’s *my* brother.”

“It’s not your fault. You trusted him. I trusted him.”

They sat in silence for a moment.

“Look,” Tina said holding up a catalog. “We can order a four thousand dollar grill from Grandin Road for the backyard.”

Charlie laughed with Tina.

“That’s all?” Charlie said. “Four thousand dollars? We can do better than that. Let’s order the outdoor wine rack too.” Charlie squeezed Tina’s hand. He forced a smile onto his lips then continued. “We’ll be all right. We’ll figure it out. It’s like being newlyweds all over again with barely enough money to pay the bills. See we’ve come full circle.”

“We were a lot younger then and had a lot more energy.”

“Yeah, but now we have teenagers in our house. They have lots of energy. We’ll make that work in our favor.”

“You are forever optimistic Professor Wynn.”

Juliette walked into the kitchen with an awkward look on her face.

“My bathroom sink is leaking,” she said.

Tina dropped her head into her hands. Charlie smiled.

“Just keep swimming. Just keep swimming,” he said and left the kitchen with Juliette.