

WEST OF WINSOR

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by
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Chapter 1 “The Green Light”

Part 3

Mina walked into the upscale hotel with the key in her hand. The hotel was relatively new to the area but not too close to the University allowing for a quick and confidential escape from life. She looked up and down the hall then placed the key in the slot.

Tye was standing in front of the sunlit window when she entered. The sun was low in the sky shrouding the room in an orange glow.

“I was hoping you would come,” he said, his dark skin complimenting the light blue, button down shirt he was wearing.

“I knew you’d be waiting,” Mina said. She dropped her bag and key on the desk and walked up to Tye.

Tye put his hands on the Korean beauty’s cheeks. His heart beat just as it had the first time he met her, the first time he kissed her, the first time they made love.

“Can you be mine, if only for an hour?” Tye asked.

“Yes,” she said smiling. Tye beamed then kissed her beautiful lips.

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“You have Professor Fine for Multimedia, too?” Will asked Jacob as they stood in the hallway waiting for Danny. “What did you think?”

“She seems tough but I heard she’s good – that she keeps the class pretty interesting.

“Yeah, that’s what I heard too.”

“Why are we waiting for Danny?”

“So she is on time. I have twenty five more math equations to get through tonight.”

Will knocked on Danny’s door.

“It’s eight,” he said. “Let’s go.”

Danny opened the door then closed it right behind her.

“No, it’s 7:58. If you could read a clock you would know that. And it’s not going to take us two minutes to walk down a flight of stairs.”

“I have homework I have to get done and don’t want to be waiting on you.”

Danny stared at Will with a raised eyebrow.

“You have issues,” she said.

“You two are going to be fun,” Jacob said walking down the hall.

Charlie, Juliette, and Tina were waiting downstairs. Homemade cookies and water were on the coffee table.

“Greetings!” Charlie said.

“Yes, greetings!” Juliette followed.

Jacob and Will sat on the couch. Danny took stock of the seating in the room and sat on the chair farthest from Will.

“Thanks for coming down,” Tina began. “I know this is a little corny but we need to have a meeting to go over the rules. Just like an RA would do in a dorm.”

“Tina and I are very happy to be sharing our home with you,” Charlie said. “We hope you see our home as your home for the next two semesters. We believe you are amazing young people and you should be proud of yourselves for accomplishing what you had to to get to this point and be going to a school like Ludington.”

“Now that you have your schedules all set and classes are rolling along, we’ve set up the house schedule and the ground rules. Here we go. Please do not bring guests into your bedrooms. You can hang out in the den, dining room, wherever, just not in your rooms. Just a reminder from when we corresponded over the summer, we have a no tolerance policy for drugs and underage drinking. On the lighter side, in the kitchen each of you will have your own cabinet where you can store whatever foods you would like. Juliette.”

On cue, Juliette picked up a basket from behind the couch filled with random toiletries, detergent, dryer sheets, a soft, plush blanket rolled and tied with a ribbon, a few packets of Ramen soup, and a container of homemade granola. Juliette handed a basket to each of them.

“As you know,” Tina continued. “The laundry room is in the basement. Use it as you’d like. The baskets are yours. We tried to think of things you might have forgotten or may not realize you need.”

“Thank you,” Jacob said. “This is really nice.”

“Yeah, thanks,” Danny said confused.

“Our pleasure,” Charlie said.

“Dinner will be at six thirty each night. If you can’t make it I will pack up your dinner and put it in the refrigerator with your name on it for leftovers. The kitchen will be open for breakfast every morning from eight to nine-thirty. You can grab and go, stay and eat or skip. It’s up to you. Just remember it is included in your rent and you really should start off with a good breakfast. Lunch you are on your own.”

“There is no curfew for the house,” Charlie said.

“Yes!” Juliette cheered.

“There’s one for you Juliette. Nice try,” Charlie replied.

“Oh,” Juliette frowned.

“As I was saying, there’s no curfew for the house, however, we do ask that you are mindful of the time and the rest of us, so please, if you are coming in real late, just be quiet.”

Jacob, Danny, and Will nodded in agreement.

“And finally,” Tina said. “Charlie and I are good proofreaders, so if you need anything looked over, feel free to ask.”

“What about visitors?” Will said.

“Visitors?” Charlie asked.

“Like coming in from out of town.”

“Let us know in advance. *Way* in advance,” Charlie said.

“Oh, and do you provide shuttle service to and from parties,” Will poked.

“William,” Charlie said in a strong parent tone.

“JK,” Will said with a smile.

“Oh, and just a reminder,” Tina said. “Since you two are sharing a bathroom, probably a good idea not to leave stuff lying around.”

“Yeah, Will,” Juliette enforced. “Glad I’m not sharing the bathroom with you anymore.”

Jacob laughed. “That’s what my sister would say.”

“That’s about it,” Tina said. “Any questions? Anything you would like to share with us?”

Jacob and Danny looked at each other then shook their heads.

“I think you should know,” Will began. “that in third grade, I was the one who wrote with permanent marker on Mrs. Linden’s desk.”

“William!” Tina said. Juliette giggled.

“All right funny guy,” Charlie said as everyone got up to leave.

“There was also this other time when...”

Charlie gave Will a playful push forward. “You’re done,” he said.



Lenny wandered down Winsor Street. Most of the businesses were closed with the exception of a few restaurants and bars that had their doors and windows open to enjoy the gorgeous night.

Lenny knew the town well. He had grown up here and even attended Ludington when it was still a college and not yet a university. Lenny didn’t think about those days anymore. It was a long time ago when he was at his best, when life was an opportunity full of adventure and promise, when it was something to be excited about.

A small group of college students passed by Lenny paying him no mind – young women and men, laughing and walking back to campus. Lenny casually lingered around a garbage can where he spotted half of a cold cut sandwich still viable and almost fully wrapped, sitting on top of the heap. He scanned the area relieved to find it vacant of watchful eyes, then reached in and snatched the sandwich. He made his way around the corner then inhaled the sandwich. When he was done, when every last crumb was consumed, he walked back to Winsor and tossed the wrapper back into the garbage can. He proceeded down the street and around the corner to his destination, a small, quiet bar, frequented by locals.

“Hey, Lenny,” the bartender said. “How’s it going?”

“All right,” Lenny quietly replied. “You?”

“No complaints, Lenny. No complaints. The usual?”

“Yeah.”

The bartender placed the draft in front of Lenny.

“\$3.50,” the bartender said.

Lenny reached into his pocket and pulled out four crumpled one dollar bills and a five dollar bill.

“I’ll have a shot too,” Lenny said.



Tye pulled Amina in closer to his chest. It seemed like it had been forever since she lay nestled in his arms.

“What time is it?” Mina asked.

“Just after eight.”

“Should we go? Are you finished?” Mina teased.

“Am I finished? Baby, I am never ‘finished’ with you. I want you with me all night and all day and all night again,” Tye said while kissing Mina. Mina laughed at his playfulness. He was always playful, a compliment to her ability to always be serious.

Tye kissed Mina’s neck and cheek. She forced herself to relax and open her heart to his loving kisses and his gentle caresses. She battled against the past, trying to keep certain thoughts out of her head so she could enjoy the present and allow the heat of love back into her heart. Unfortunately, her cell phone interrupted the moment.

“Hello.... Again?” Mina said. “What is it?... Ok, give her the Tylenol and tell her I’ll be home soon. Thanks.”

“I guess it’s time to go?”

Mina was already out of bed and putting on her shirt when Tye spoke.

“That was your mom,” Mina said. “Tori is running a fever again.”

“How much?”

“A hundred and two. Maybe we should bring her to Dr. Barton.”

“Mina, it’s a fever. Let’s see if the Tylenol will bring it down first.”

“But this is the second time in a week she spiked a fever. What if...?”

“Honey, you can’t freak out every time she gets a fever. I’ve seen a few kids this week with a virus that runs a fever, then a runny nose, then a little cough, and it goes away.”

“But you don’t know if that’s what it is.”

“Did you marry a doctor just for the prestige or are you going to listen to me?”

“I’m sorry,” Mina said. “I just get so scared. You never know if...”

“Mina, we’ll go home. I’ll take care of her. If I think anything is off we’ll take her to Dr. Barton. I promise. Okay?”

Mina looked desperately into Tye’s eyes. He knew what his wife was thinking and wrapped his arms around her.

“I can’t go through all that again,” Mina said as she hugged Tye. “I just can’t.”

“I know.”

“I love you,” Mina said.

“I love you,” Tye said and pulled her in tighter.



Danny plopped the stuffed laundry basket from the Wynn’s on her bed. She pondered it for a moment - its contents so basic and necessary. There were no sparkling gems or designer names in the basket only common items. Nothing in it shouted “I spent this much on you” or “My gift is better than that gift.” It was just a nice gesture, an act of kindness with no other representation other than “Because you might need this, this is for you.” Danny found it all odd. Why would you give someone a gift of something they need? Where is the showmanship in ‘need’? There were toothbrushes in the basket. Toothbrushes? She separated the contents of the basket then put everything in its place.

Danny double checked her homework list making sure everything was complete. It was still early - only nine o’clock. Would she study for math or read a chapter ahead in her art history book? Or

maybe tonight she would go to bed early for a change. She was feeling tired, more so than usual for nine o'clock at night. It had been a long couple of weeks, a long summer for that matter. Maybe she was finally feeling the effects of everything she had done and everything she had accomplished to get here. She thumbed through her art history book for a moment then put the book back on her desk. She decided she was going to bed.

She walked over to the mirror behind her door and popped out her dark brown contact lenses exposing her token lavender/blueish eyes – a beautiful eye color that seemed to change depending on what she was wearing. Despite the hair extensions and the make up, she was sure it was the contact lenses that kept her secret. Without them, the world would quickly figure out who Danny Mackenzie really was.



So far things were going pretty well, Juliette thought, as she scrolled through the social media feeds on her phone. She managed fifteen new followers on Snapchat and Instagram, she made two new friends at school, Brooke and Jordan, and her teachers, with the exception of her science teacher Ms. Connor, seemed pretty solid.

Brooke and Jordan were in different classes with Juliette and polar opposites as well. Brooke was very pretty with long flowing chocolate brown hair, green eyes, and a lean, hourglass shape that highlighted her perfect boobs. Jordan, on the other hand, had a short, thick body type, was so pale she joked about glowing in the dark, blonde curly hair that was more frizz than curl and a flat chest.

Juliette met Brooke first, in math class, then met Jordan the following period in English. At lunch they converged on the same cafeteria table. Jordan and Brooke who had grown up together, laughed at having both “discovered” Juliette, turning their duo into a trio.

Lunches were spent talking about homework, YouTube videos, and of course, boys. Juliette had discovered the cutest guy in school. It wasn't hard. He stood out like a glowing Greek god walking

down the halls. He was a junior named Matt Dellis or “delish” as the girls referred to him. He was tall, dark and handsome. He played soccer in the fall, fenced in the winter and did track in the spring. He was smart, handsome and was dating senior class president, Sarah Mirkle. It was only the beginning of the school year but the big question was already making its rounds – what would happen when Sarah went off to college?

Jordan and Brooke came online at the same time Juliette was finishing up her math homework.

“I can’t see you,” Jordan said.

“Hang on,” Juliette said. “My camera just fell off.”

“Where are you?” Brooke asked.

“In my bedroom,” Juliette said.

“Where is your house?” Jordan asked.

“We’re on Lamarr.”

“Did you move into the Wellington house?” Jordan asked.

“I don’t know.”

“Is it the big blue one with the white trim?”

“This one,” Brooke said as she held her phone in front of the camera.

“Yes, that’s it,” Juliette said.

“Cool!” Jordan said.

“We have to have a sleep over!” Brooke said.

“Why? What’s so great about this house?” Juliette asked. “Don’t tell me there are ghosts or something?”

“No, not ghosts. Love,” Jordan said.

“Everyone in town knows the story about Della Wellington,” Brook said. “It’s Lovelace folklore.”

“It’s true,” Jordan said. “My grandmother told me it was all true. She even has newspaper clippings from back then. Well, supposedly she did. I haven’t seen them but dad said he has. I think there are some at the museum too.”

“What happened?” Juliette asked.

“It’s really not a big deal, at least not now it wouldn’t be but back then it was like this huge scandal,” Brooke said.

“So weird. If I had to live back then, I think I’d lose my mind,” Jordan replied.

“I know, me too!”

“Hello,” Juliette said. “You still haven’t told me what happened. Never mind, I’ll look it up.”

“She was a rebel,” Brooke said.

“You can’t blame her,” Jordan said. “She couldn’t vote, she had to listen to her brother...”

“Yeah, ew, I could *never* do that,” Brooke said.

“She wanted to go to school, like away somewhere and they wouldn’t let her and supposedly she was crazy smart,” Jordan said.

“Yeah, and then she ran away but they brought her back. So she ran away again. This time with her boyfriend. Her brother found out and put her in a psych hospital but luckily they got married and her husband got her out. But that’s when things really got crazy. I did a report on her in sixth grade,” Brooke said.

“She was born in 1900 back when women couldn’t do anything but pay taxes,” Jordan said.

“That’s obnoxious,” Juliette said.

“I know right,” Jordan said.

“I have her Wikipedia page up,” Juliette said. “She was arrested during the suffrage movement.”

“Because of her brother,” Brooke said.

“What happened to her parents?” Juliette asked.

“Her dad died – supposedly he was cool and then the brother took over everything,” Jordan said. “Della was really smart and her brother wasn’t but because he was a guy he got to do whatever he wanted.”

“Guys, I have to go in a few minutes,” Brooke said. “Juliette, what did you get for the fifth algebra problem? I’m stuck.”

Juliette was engrossed in Della Wellington’s Wikipedia page and didn’t hear what Brooke said.

“Juliette? Hello?”

“Sorry,” Juliette said. “What did you say?”

“I have to go soon. What did you get for the fifth algebra problem?”

“I’ll look,” Juliette replied.

“Did you guys get the quiz on *The Great Gatsby*?” Brooke asked.

“No,” Jordan answered. “We had to write an essay. I wish we had the quiz instead.”

“I think I want my sweet sixteen to be a *Gatsby* party. His parties were sick!” Brooke said. “I’ll be Daisy and Delish can be *Gatsby*.”

“You wish,” Jordan said.

“Every night!” Brooke replied.

Juliette laughed. “You like Delish?”

“Who doesn’t?” Jordan said.

“Juliette what do you think. He’s hot right?” Brooke asked.

“I guess.” Juliette blushed. “Okay, I have the math problem,” Juliette said. “Ready?”



Campus was a tranquil retreat on a Saturday morning and the weather remained comfortable. Danny knew it wouldn’t last and the cold of winter was just around the corner. Her morning jogs were

still an escape just as they had been all summer. Being from Southern California, she contemplated whether or not she would be able to continue her runs once the weather changed.

Danny liked being up early when most of the world was still asleep or lounging in their pajamas. The runs gave her a chance to clear her head and focus, either on life in general or classwork. She soaked in nature, the cool, crisp morning air and appreciated the detoxifying feeling of sweating. Running wasn't on her radar until last summer when her neighbor encouraged her to join him. They started with walks and then progressed to jogging and eventually did a long distance run which Danny was both surprised and impressed that she was able to complete. Once she did it, she kept doing it.

The green of New Jersey was a vibrant cup of coffee to the senses. New Jersey, unlike Los Angeles, was swimming in trees. They were everywhere. They were huge and they were green. A towering canopy wherever she went and it was nice. The trees were like a veil of protection from the "other" world that was out there – the one that she had escaped from.

Tiny droplets of rain landed softly on Danny's skin. She had run through the campus twice, making sure she ran past the [Sequin](#) History building – the farthest building from the house on Lamarr – to guarantee her at least a two mile run. Now it was time to head back towards town, down [Winsor](#) and then west to the house on Lamarr, for a shower, breakfast, and a day of research for her first college paper assignment.

She laughed to herself thinking she was grateful Will was not in her literature class. She was sure he would be knocking on her door for help. She wasn't against working together or helping each other out, she just wanted to maintain a distance – from everybody. She isolated herself the best she could and considering her housemates, she felt she had done pretty well. Will and Jacob were harmless. She had a gut feeling about Jacob which she figured would eventually play out. She knew he was hiding something. His lack of offering information paralleled hers. Will, on the other hand, was chatty and opinionated almost to the point of prying. He was the kind of guy who asked questions and didn't

even realize he was doing it. Nonetheless, he was harmless – just a silly young boy still dating his high school girlfriend. Who does that?

Winsor street glistened from the sunlight poking through the clouds – the residual effect of a rain shower that passed as quickly as it came.

To latte or not to latte? The question became a debate in Danny’s head as she approached CC’s. No latte she determined. There was coffee at the house and she didn’t need the calories anyway.

Danny’s phone vibrated against her arm. That was odd, she thought. Maybe she messed up her alarm. She rolled her jog into a walk and continued down Winsor Street. Her phone alarm was not going off. She had received a text. Also odd, since she gave her new number out to only one person, Mrs. Wynn, in case of emergencies.

The text read, ‘We know who u r. We know u r here. Keep the secret?’

Danny stopped dead in her tracks and searched the area. Two joggers, a man and woman were running towards campus, an old guy who looked like he hadn’t showered in a week was loitering near CC’s and a few random cars drove down the street. Danny’s heart sank. In one moment she was sad, the next scared and the next pissed. Who was this? How could anyone possibly know she was here? And why would they care? It’s not like she announced she was disappearing. She just did it.

Danny unlocked her phone then deleted the text. She pushed the sinking feeling in her gut away and decided to keep running.