

# WEST OF WINSOR

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by  
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## Chapter 2 “Wake up”

### Part 2

Danny finished the math exam twenty minutes early. She waited patiently at her desk with the other students who had also handed in their test. When she bent over to grab a book from her backpack she noticed Will across the room quietly tapping his pencil. His other hand was holding his head in defeat.

From the reaction of the students the class seemed to be split with some students finding the test easy and others finding it difficult. Danny figured this wasn't uncommon for core classes. Whatever subject you liked or were comfortable with in the past, you did well in. Whatever subject you were uncomfortable with or struggled with in the past, you were now being tortured by in core classes. It was quite obvious to Danny that Will was in full blown torture mode.

School came easy to Danny ever since middle school. She hardly had to study in high school and still graduated with an A in every subject. Although she scored high in the math placement exam, she decided to take the easy A class. This kept her schedule light in case she needed more time to study for harder classes. Those harder classes were yet to be found. So far, her hardest assignment was writing *The Awakening* essay. But she knew she would figure it out even if it meant using another person's life experience to do it. No one knew her. She could write anything she wanted.

Danny plopped *The Awakening* on her desk. She read through the highlighted passages discussed in class, the critical reviews at the end of the book and even thumbed through her notes. She thought about what Jacob had told her and Will the night before – about the moment his eyes opened and he could no longer live the same life. He had found a way to relate to the main character of the book – why couldn't she?

“Pencils down. Please pass the exams to the front if you haven't already done so,” the Professor said.

Will brought the exam to the front then slouched back in his seat and closed his eyes.

“Thursday we start the next section. If you had a hard time with this test I suggest you get extra help. You will need a clear understanding of this section to move on.”

Will snatched his bag and headed out of class.

“Hey,” Danny called to him in the hallway.

“Hey,” Will said, his mind still on the exam.

“How did you do?” Danny wasn't sure why she was asking.

“I am pretty sure I failed.”

“You were up...”

“Yeah, I was up all night studying and I'm pretty sure I failed.”

“Don't overreact. It's only the first exam.”

Will stopped dead in his tracks and faced Danny.

“Yes, it's only the first exam and I failed it. Do you think it's going to get better from here?”

Will stared at Danny for a moment then shook his head and walked away.



The best part of Phys. Ed. was assembling in the gym for attendance. That's where the seniors, juniors, sophomores and freshman began their class and that was where Juliette could see Matt Dellis.

Brooke was insanely jealous that Juliette was lucky enough to see Matt, even if it was only for a few minutes at the beginning of Phys. Ed. – in his shorts and school t-shirt.

The ball Matt and his friends were tossing to each other popped off of Matt's fingers and landed right in front of Juliette. She picked it up and looked up just in time to have Matt in her face and smiling.

She dropped the ball in his hand.

"Thanks," he said with a smile. Then trotted back to his friends.

"You are so obvious," Max said.

"Huh?"

"You like Dellis."

"No, I don't," Juliette contested.

"Um, yeah right and that's what all the other obvious girls say when I call them out. Funny, I thought you were different."

"What are you talking about?"

"New girl with new insights. I thought you would be different. I don't know, maybe see things differently."

The idea of being "different" was somewhat horrifying to Juliette. She preferred invisible. She wasn't shy by nature but just liked being an observer as opposed to a participant.

"I'm a teenage girl. What do you want from me?"

"Aha! So you admit it. You like him."

"I didn't say that but you are free to judge. That's what you are doing, right? You're judging me?"

"Well, no I just was making an observation. The same observation I've made for many girls around here."

“Okay, so what? What if I do? What does it matter? I’m sure there’s someone around here you like or have liked, right? So what’s it matter?”

“I guess it doesn’t.”

“The grass is green. The gym is blue. We all like someone somewhere along the way. Your observation is noted. Your judgment is noted.”

“Jeez woman, back off. I was just messing with you. You don’t have to get all defensive.”

Juliette shot Max the death look.

“Okay,” he said. “I’m going to get in my line now and leave you alone. See you at lunch.”

Max walked away leaving Juliette a little perturbed and a little amused. Max was funny. He always said what he was thinking – no filter, which at times was really funny and other times a bit uncomfortable. Nonetheless, his observations were always honest and sometimes dead on.



“Will!” Jacob called from behind. Will slowed up and waited.

“Hey,” Will said.

“What’s up, man?”

“Nothing. Definitely nothing.”

“That’s not the voice of unrestrained optimism that I’m used to.”

“I think I just failed my first math exam.”

“Oh.”

“I’m so pissed. I friggin hate math. I hate it. I don’t need it. Why do I have to be tortured by something I’m never, EVER, going to use? I don’t know why we have to take some of these classes. It’s just added crappy pressure for absolutely nothing. I mean, if I was going into a field that uses crappy, friggin math, I get it. But I’m not. I can add, subtract, multiply and divide just fine. I can even figure out angles and area and stuff. So when I buy a house it’s useful. But this stuff is crap. Algebra.

Who gives a shit about algebra? Why do I need to know algebra. Why? Why? Why? It's going to kill my GPA. My parents are going to have to pay for another class if I fail it and I know they can't afford to do that. For what? For fucking algebra!"

"I'm going to buy you a drink. I think you need one."

"You can't buy me a drink. We're underage. You have to be twenty-one and we're only eighteen. That's a difference of three years. You know how I know that? Because I can do basic math. Didn't need friggin algebra to figure it out."

"Um, okay. I was going to buy you a frap or something. Something chemically infused to create an endorphin rush. Sugar you up to take the pain away. Same as alcohol only legal." Jacob smiled.

Will stopped and looked at Jacob.

"Seriously?" Will asked.

"Yeah. CC's is right here. Let's go."

Jacob and Will walked into a line at CC's that stretched back to the door.

"What's going on?" Will asked.

"I don't know. I've never seen it this crowded," Jacob said.

The student in front of Jacob and Will let out a frustrated sigh then left CC's. Behind the counter Cecelia was putting orders together while a college student was at the register. It was immediately obvious to Will that they were seriously understaffed. Will saw an order sitting on the back counter under heat lamps while Cecelia was putting together some coffee orders. Will started to walk towards the counter.

"Where you going?" Jacob asked.

"Follow me," Will said.

Will dumped his backpack behind the counter and walked up to Cecelia.

“I can help,” he said while washing his hands. Like a pro, he checked the ticket, placed the plates on his arms then made his way to the table with the corresponding number sticking out of a metal stand. Jacob followed Will.

“Ever work at a restaurant before?”

“No,” Jacob said.

Will announced each dish to the four students at the table then placed the plate in front of its respective diner.

“Can I get you anything else?” he asked.

“Ketchup and hot sauce,” one customer said.

“And can I get another coffee?”

“Sure,” Will said. “Be right back.”

Jacob followed Will back behind the counter. Will scanned the area getting a feel for the layout.

“Ketchup and hot sauce,” Will said pointing to a shelf to his right. “And grab the coffee so you can do the refill.”

Jacob looked at Will wide eyed.

“You got this,” Will said.

Jacob grabbed the ketchup, hot sauce and coffee and made his way back out onto the floor.

“Here,” Cecelia said tossing Will an apron. “You’re not covered by my insurance so don’t get hurt,” she said with a quick smile.

With Will and Jacob serving guests, Cecelia was able to go into the back and help the shorthanded cook, as well as, make cold foods, cappuccinos, etc. The woman on register continued to ring in orders and take care of to-go orders.

After about forty-five minutes things were under control. Cecelia breathed a sigh of relief. She knew she was horribly behind on food prep but at least she hadn't lost too much business from walkouts.

"Well, who are my knights in shining apron?" Cecelia smiled.

"I'm Will."

"Jacob."

"Can't thank you guys enough," Cecelia said.

"My parents used to own a catering business so I know how it goes," Will said.

"I just followed him," Jacob said.

"You guys did a great job. You saved my butt today. My husband had a family emergency. My adult staffer and two other employees called out. I couldn't get anyone to cover. It's hard with students in class. So, you guys want a job? I have one student who has only shown up for two of his last eight shifts. Time for him to go. I have openings."

"I'm in!" Jacob said delighted.

"Uh," Will hesitated.

"Grades come first. If you don't think it's a good idea then tell me now instead of calling out. I'm flexible so we can work around your schedules."

"Sure, I'm in," Will said.

"Great! Can you stop in tomorrow and we'll go through the schedule? I can't do it now because I have too much to catch up on. I'll pay you guys cash for today."

Cecelia walked over to the cash register and counted out money then handed each one forty dollars.

"I rounded it up to four hours."

"Thank you," Jacob said.

“Thank you,” Will said.

“No, thank *you*. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Will and Jacob left CC’s with a smile on their faces.

“I got money in my hand,” Jacob said. “This feels awesome!”

“And we have jobs.”

“I know that’s great! I was going to try to get one before school started but people kept telling me to wait until I had my flow going. You know, like not screw up my school work. I have to say man, you know your stuff. I was scared out of my mind when you told me to start serving coffee. I’ve never done anything like that before. I was afraid I was going to drop everything.”

“You didn’t have a job when you were in high school?”

“I’ve had a job since the day I turned sixteen but it was retail. I stocked shelves, moved merchandise – stuff like that. I never had to really interact with customers unless I was carrying something for them.”

“Oh. Well, you did fine. Welcome to the food industry.”

“It’s cool.”

“Do me a solid?”

“Sure, what?”

“Don’t tell my parents I have a job.”

“Um, okay.”



Tina placed the groceries on the table in the kitchen then walked over to the stove to heat up water for the French press. It had been a long day of running around and soon it would be time to prepare dinner.

Before everything fell apart Tina spent her days at the “office” which was the catering kitchen she and Charlie owned. They shared the brunt of all the duties. It was a wonderful partnership with both of them participating and earning a living doing what they both loved – cooking. When they had the catering business they were able to enjoy their children and participate in their children’s lives. Somehow it just seemed to work. Even when things were crazy – when they had two little kids and a growing business they could barely keep up with – it just seemed to work.

Both she and Charlie applied for the position at Ludington University. Their lives were identical when it came to their resumes but according to Dr. Kellar, what tipped the scales toward Charlie, was the two years work experience he had over Tina. Charlie was two years older.

Tina and Charlie had figured out what the other person would do should Ludington offer one of them the position. It wasn’t hard – whoever wasn’t working full time would take on running the house. Yes, running the house was a business, but it lacked the hustle and bustle of their previous business and lacked the social aspect of dealing with clients that Tina had come to love.

Tina pulled a pile of mail from one of the grocery bags and sifted through the envelopes and catalogs. Most of it was junk mail that went right into the recycling bin. She was relieved to see there were no letters from the lawyer. In reality, letters from their lawyer should be a benefit since they were still trying to recoup their losses, however, there were days when Tina believed no news was good news.

Tina ground enough coffee for one cup, put the grinds in the French press, added the hot water, gave it a stir then unpacked groceries while the coffee steeped. She left dinner’s ingredients out on the counter and put everything else away. When she was done she poured herself that one cup of afternoon coffee to give her sails a second wind.

She sat back in the chair and pondered what she saw in the kitchen. She thought to herself that this might be the first time she really took a moment to look at the house instead of just racing through it as if it were just an object and not actually a home.

She noticed the nicks in the plaster walls, the old and worn floor tiles and the distressed wooden cabinets. She would have paid more attention to the details when she and Charlie first saw the house if it wasn't such a Godsend. They had breezed through the home inspection with the inspector telling them the house was in decent condition and had good bones.

The décor was dated but not dated in the historic sense. The previous owner did a nice job of trying to keep the feel of Victorian charm in the house but did it with plastic and imitation molding not the real thing. The house looked fine at face value but if the eye looked a little closer it could tell the inside was the product of an underwhelming make-up job.

She and Charlie were both handy. They figured if little dings happened along the way they could handle it and so far they had. If nothing major happened they would be all right. It would take them a few years to get back in the black but eventually they would get there.

Tina wanted them to stay on track which is why she decided to ignore the pain in her chest that had been coming and going. She figured she could manage it on her own and skip having to pay copays or deductibles. It was probably nothing – a new tick in the world of aging. She had always been a healthy person so as long as it only lasted a minute and went away, she would be fine.

This time it came just as Danny walked into the kitchen with her earbuds in her ears and her backpack slung over her shoulder. The women startled each other. Danny didn't hear Tina gasp but saw the look on Tina's face and her arm pop across her chest. Tina forced a smile and didn't breathe for a moment. She tried to cover up the pain but it didn't work on Danny.

Danny took her earbuds out.

“Are you okay?” Danny asked. She was quite uncomfortable with the situation.

“Oh yeah,” Tina said with forced confidence. “I just moved wrong. It happens when you get older.” She gave Danny the same excuse she had previously given Will. “Do you need anything?”

“I was going to grab some Ramen,” Danny said.

The pain had gone as quickly as it came. Tina breathed with ease.

“I’m actually making homemade soup for dinner,” Tina said. “Why don’t you join us?”

Danny was on the spot. She didn’t want to be rude but she also didn’t want to sit at dinner. She wasn’t used to having a “family” dinner and found it odd and uncomfortable.

“I, um...” Danny stammered.

“Come on. Have dinner with us.”

“Sure,” Danny relented.

“Would you like me to make you a snack?”

“No thanks. I’ll wait for dinner.”

Danny smiled then took the kitchen stairs up to the second floor. She was not happy about going to dinner and she was sure Will would have something to say about it.