

Where You Go

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Some journeys begin with a choice to stay.



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Chapter One: The Decision

The suitcase handle squeaked when Lina pulled it out.

She tried not to let it echo too loud in the quiet room, the way it made everything sound more final.

Naomi was sitting in the chair near the window, hands folded over her lap like someone waiting for news that wasn't coming. Her face looked older in the morning light, like the silence itself had added years overnight.

Lina hesitated. "I can leave after lunch if you want me to help with..."

"No," Naomi cut in gently, not turning from the window. "You should go now. Before you change your mind."

Lina blinked. "You think I *want* to leave?"

Naomi exhaled slowly, the kind of sigh that comes from deep in the bones. "You should want to."

Lina sat on the edge of the sofa, the suitcase beside her like an accusation. "Why do you keep pushing me out?"

Naomi turned then, her eyes dark and quiet. "Because there's nothing left here for you, Lina. No husband. No children. No future. You're young. You should go live before this place buries you, too."

The words landed like stones.

Lina looked away, blinking hard. "You think I don't know that?"

Naomi softened, just a little. "I know you do. And I know staying feels like the right thing. But sometimes the right thing isn't the kindest thing. Don't stay out of pity. I can manage."

Lina stood, slowly. Walked to the window. They stood side by side, staring out at nothing in particular.

"I'm not staying because I feel sorry for you," Lina said. "And I'm not leaving because it makes sense."

Naomi didn't speak. She didn't argue.

And that said everything.

They sat together in silence while the sound of a bus engine passed in the distance—the one she was supposed to be on.

Lina's fingers toyed with the zipper of her suitcase. She finally looked over.

"I know you think you're doing me a favour by letting me go," she said. "But I don't need an exit. I need something to hold on to."

Naomi's lip trembled, just slightly.

"And maybe," Lina added, "you do too."

She reached for the suitcase handle, snapped it back down, and pushed it under the bench by the door.

Then she walked back, pulled Naomi's old knit blanket off the armrest, and sat down beside her.

They didn't speak again for a while.

But Naomi's hand, after a long moment, settled gently over Lina's.

Chapter Two: The Field

The first morning came cold.

Not weather-wise ... just... quiet. The kind of quiet that wraps around your neck and makes everything feel a little too still.

Lina stood in the kitchen, staring at the mug in her hand like it might tell her what to do next. Naomi was still asleep in the back bedroom, her door closed. They hadn't talked much since the night she stayed. Just enough to make things functional. Not enough to make them comfortable.

The bus had pulled away. Her suitcase was under the bench. But the weight of staying hadn't fully landed until now.

The job came through a neighbour, a woman who saw Lina helping Naomi up the steps and asked, "Do you clean?"

Lina had nodded before really thinking it through. Now she stood in someone else's kitchen, scrubbing dried spaghetti sauce off a stove top that looked like it hadn't been wiped in weeks. She wore gloves that were too big and shoes that pinched, and every time she bent to wipe something, her back protested. Her body wasn't used to this work. Not like this.

But it was something. And something was more than nothing.

She cleaned two houses that day. The first one was polite. The second one didn't look at her at all.

That night, Naomi didn't ask how it went.

They sat at opposite ends of the living room, the TV murmuring in the background. Some old game show that neither of them really watched.

Naomi finally broke the silence. "You didn't have to take that job."

Lina didn't look up. "Somebody's got to buy groceries."

"I get by."

"I know," Lina said, a little too sharply. Then, softening: "But I don't want you to just get by."

Naomi glanced at her but didn't respond.

Lina folded her hands in her lap. "It's not forever."

"I'm not asking for forever."

"I know," Lina said again, but this time, she meant something different.

The next week passed in routine. Scrub. Rinse. Carry. Cook. Naomi took her pills without complaining. Sometimes they sat in silence. Sometimes Naomi hummed a tune under her breath, something old and half-forgotten.

One day, Lina came home to find a note taped to the fridge.

There's stew in the crockpot. I added the rosemary you like. N.

Just that.

She read it twice.

The rosemary she liked.

On Friday, the woman Lina worked for offered her tea before she left. It was the first time someone had spoken to her like a person, not a service.

They talked about nothing. But it felt like something.

As she walked home that evening, her feet aching and hands raw from bleach, Lina saw a pair of neighbourhood kids kicking a soccer ball across the road. One waved at her. She smiled. It was small. But it anchored her feet to the pavement.

Later that night, Naomi stirred sugar into her tea with a shaky hand.

"Your mother," she said slowly, "she'd be proud of you, you know."

Lina didn't answer right away.

"I'm not sure," she finally said. "But thank you."

Naomi nodded, then looked up. "You don't have to prove anything, Lina. Not to me."

"I'm not," Lina said. "I'm just... staying."

And for the first time, Naomi smiled. Not a big smile. Not a brave one. But a real one. Like something buried was starting to breathe again.

Chapter Three: The Encounter

It started with a bruise.

Not a bad one, just a pale, blueish bloom on Lina's wrist where the mop handle had snapped back too fast. She didn't even notice it at first, not until she reached for her coat at the end of the shift and flinched.

"You alright there?"

The voice came from behind a row of shelves in the small corner store she cleaned on Saturdays. A man stepped into view, holding a clipboard and a pack of canned tomatoes under one arm.

Tall. Kind face. Plaid flannel shirt that had seen more sun than starch.

Lina instinctively pulled her sleeve down. "Yeah. Just a bump."

He didn't push. Just nodded, set the cans down, and turned back to stacking.

She should've walked out. But something about the ease in his shoulders made her pause.

"You work here?" she asked, immediately regretting how obvious it sounded.

"Owner," he said, smiling. "Inherited it from my uncle. I'm Will."

She gave a tight smile. "Lina."

He didn't say anything else. Just let the silence be. It wasn't awkward - more like an old song you couldn't place, but didn't mind hearing.

"You do a good job," he said finally, eyes still on the shelf. "Most people just mop around the corners. You actually move stuff."

She shrugged. "Corners get dirty, too."

He glanced over, like that was the most profound thing he'd heard all day. "Yeah. They do."

Later, when Lina told Naomi about the brief exchange, Naomi raised one eyebrow but said nothing. Just stirred her tea and muttered something about "*store owners with opinions.*"

Lina didn't bring it up again.

But the following Saturday, when she reached for the mop bucket, she noticed someone had left a pair of padded gloves in the supply closet. No note. It was just folded neatly on top of the cleaning rags.

She wore them without asking.

The next week, Will was restocking cereal when she arrived.

"You like coffee?" he asked casually.

"I like silence," Lina replied with a half-smile.

"Then I won't talk while you drink it."

He poured her a cup from the back office thermos. Black. Hot. No small talk.

They drank standing in the supply hallway, side by side, both leaning on opposite walls.

It felt like standing in the shade after too much sun. Not cold, just... covered.

When she handed the cup back, he said, "You don't flinch when people don't fill the space."

She blinked. "Is that a good thing?"

Will smiled. "Rare thing."

That night, Naomi said nothing again. But there was a second cup on the counter beside the kettle, just in case.

Lina didn't comment. Just poured.

And somewhere in the silence, something small and sacred began to grow.

Not loud. Not certain.

But real.

Naomi took a sip, then stared into her cup for a long moment.

"What did you say his name was?"

"Will," Lina said. "He owns the corner store. Just started chatting while I cleaned."

Naomi's eyes narrowed slightly. "Will Avery?"

"Maybe. I didn't ask."

Naomi nodded once. Slowly.

"His mother was a Hayworth. My cousin's girl."

Lina blinked. "So... you're related?"

"Distant. A few branches off. But yes." Naomi looked away, her voice suddenly quieter. "He's one of ours."

Chapter Four: The Risk

Lina stood outside the store longer than usual.

The wind had picked up. One of those spring gusts that smelled like something trying to bloom but not quite brave enough yet. Her hand hovered over the door handle.

She wasn't nervous. Not exactly.

But something in her chest tightened every time she saw him now. Not in a romantic way, at least she didn't think so. More like the kind of tightness that comes when someone sees you in a light you forgot you had.

She pushed the door open.

Will was restocking batteries behind the counter. He looked up and gave a nod - casual, like always. But the corners of his mouth lifted, just a little.

"You're early."

"Felt like walking."

"You want the usual?" he asked, already turning to the back room for coffee.

She followed without answering.

They stood in the hallway again, two cups, two silences, one familiar rhythm.

He didn't ask questions. She didn't fill the space.

But today... something sat between them. Not tension. Not comfort, either. Something in between.

Will finally broke it. "You know, I don't really need the cleaning anymore."

Lina looked up, startled.

"What?"

He leaned on the doorframe. "I keep things tidy now. Learned a few things from watching you. But I kept the job because... I liked having you around."

She blinked. Her stomach flipped, not in the cute way. In the *oh no, this was safe and now it's not* kind of way.

He saw it and backed off, just slightly. "I'm not trying to mess anything up."

Lina looked at her cup. "You didn't."

"Then what's that look?"

She didn't answer right away. Then she said, "Don't you ever feel like peace is a fragile thing? Like, if you name it, it breaks?"

Will tilted his head. "You think peace is what this is?"

Lina nodded. "For the first time in a long time, I'm not running. I don't want to risk losing that."

He didn't push. Just took a slow breath. "I think peace isn't what you find when you hide. I think it's what you choose, even when it could fall apart."

She hated how true that felt.

And how seen.

That night, Naomi was already in bed when Lina got home. A light was on in the kitchen, and the crossword puzzle lay unfinished on the table.

Beside it, a folded napkin. A note in Naomi's handwriting:

"If he's one of ours, don't make him a stranger."

Lina held the note for a long time.

The fog didn't lift.

But it thinned just enough for her to see the door she was standing in front of.

She didn't open it.

Not yet.

But she didn't walk away, either.

Chapter Five: The Redemption

The next few days were quieter than usual.

Not tense, just careful. Lina went to work. Naomi folded laundry. The rhythm of staying had returned, but underneath it, something had shifted.

Like a door left cracked open, even if no one said it out loud.

On Tuesday, the weather broke. Sunshine poured through the living room window and landed across Naomi's lap while she dozed in her chair.

Lina trimmed the dead leaves off the potted basil plant by the sink. She'd nearly given up on it last month, but it kept hanging on, stubborn little thing.

She understood that now.

Later that afternoon, Naomi was having a better day. They walked slowly to the edge of the neighbourhood park, not far, but farther than usual.

Naomi sat on a bench in the sun, her knit shawl around her shoulders. Lina sat beside her, arms crossed, not really watching the kids playing soccer nearby.

After a while, Naomi spoke.

"You're not the same girl who showed up at my door."

Lina shrugged. "Maybe not."

"I didn't want you to stay."

"I know."

"I didn't want *anyone* to stay. I thought staying would cost more than leaving."

"And now?"

Naomi looked up, squinting into the sun. "Now I think... sometimes the cost is worth it."

That night, a knock came at the door.

Will stood outside, hands in his pockets, not carrying anything. Not pretending he had a reason.

Naomi opened the door before Lina could reach it.

"Come in," she said simply, and turned away without explanation, as if she'd been expecting him.

He stepped inside.

Lina blinked. "You okay?"

Will nodded. "I wasn't going to come. But I didn't want to miss something I didn't know I was allowed to hope for."

Lina felt her throat tighten. "And what exactly is that?"

He gave a small smile. "Dinner. Maybe."

She exhaled. Laughed once, short and surprised. "You're persistent."

"Only when it matters."

They ate together, nothing fancy. Soup. Toast. Naomi's apple crumble from the freezer. They didn't talk about anything deep.

But there was warmth.

And laughter.

And a strange, quiet sense of something whole.

Later, as Lina rinsed the dishes, Naomi stood beside her, drying slowly.

She didn't say anything until the last plate was done.

Then, softly:

"Your mother would've liked him."

Lina smiled, but didn't look up. "You think so?"

Naomi touched her arm. "I know so."

The basil plant by the window caught the last of the light.

Tiny green shoots had appeared where the leaves had been trimmed.

No one noticed.

Not yet.

But they were there.

Chapter Six: The Harvest

A year later, the basil had to be repotted.

Lina stood at the kitchen sink, brushing soil off her fingers and turning the little clay pot gently in her hands. The roots had wrapped themselves tight, curling in and around each other like they belonged there.

Naomi was humming in the living room. Will was in the backyard, arguing with a stubborn hose. The sound of water sputtering and his mild swearing drifted through the open window. Lina smiled to herself.

They hadn't rushed anything.

No declarations. No big moments. Just meals. Shared errands. Long walks. A few hard conversations, and a lot of small ones. Some days were sweet. Some were still sharp. But the sharp ones didn't define everything anymore.

The grief hadn't disappeared. It just didn't get the last word.

Naomi still had rough days, pain that flared without warning, memories that showed up when the house got too quiet.

But she had taken up knitting again. The hallway now held a few framed photos. And on the kitchen counter sat a jar full of handwritten notes, things they were thankful for. Naomi had started it. Lina kept adding to it.

Will had built a tiny bench in the backyard, under the tree that bloomed each spring but never bore fruit.

It didn't matter. The blossoms were enough.

That afternoon, Lina sat on the back step with a notebook in her lap.

Not to write anything profound.

Just to remember what it felt like to stay.

To choose.

To plant herself when everything in her wanted to run.

She glanced toward the garden, where the basil plant had been joined by tomatoes, thyme, and a few scraggly sunflowers that refused to grow straight.

It was messy.

It was beautiful.

It was hers.

About the Author

I've had the honor of blending two of my favorite things — Bible learning and double knitting. Now I get to design patterns and write stories that help people grow in faith, one spiritual stitch at a time.

With decades of life behind me, I've learned that the quietest stories often carry the loudest truth.

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