

Chapter 1

Will sat on his boss' porch with his feet propped up on the railing. This wasn't what he wanted. Well, he wasn't going to complain about getting the day off, but he knew that this change in plans meant it was probably time for another change. Will picked up his laptop and started checking his emails. There were the usual assortment of junk mails and a few genuine job offers in the mix, but he deleted all of them. He stopped for a moment to look over the message from his mother.

It was the usual message. "Where are you? When are you coming home? You could at least call, or write back. Do you know what you're putting your Father through?"

There was more, but Will deleted it before he got upset. It might have been different if she would write something new, but it was almost exactly the same email that he'd gotten a hundred times. She didn't understand the choices he'd made with his life, and as a result, she didn't get a response from him anymore.

This was probably the worst last day of work that Will had ever had. His boss, Mr. Wallace, didn't even know that Will was going to leave at the end of the day, but it was definitely time to get out. Will hadn't come to California to sit on a porch drinking pink lemonade and playing on the computer. There was a little bit more to the job, but waiting for someone to drive down a dirt road looking to buy used furniture was truly pointless.

It was even more pointless when you considered that there hadn't been a single car that drove past the main house in the hours that had passed since Will started. This wasn't exactly a public road. Just as Will was thinking this, he noticed that there was a cloud of dust heading his way.

At first, he couldn't make out what kind of a car it was because of all the dust. Will thought about leaving a note for Wallace that the road could definitely use some maintenance, but then Wallace probably wouldn't bother to do anything about it. Besides, how many cars actually drove on this road?

Oddly, the car started to slow down as it approached the house. Will set down his glass of lemonade and his laptop, then he stood up with his hands on the railing in order to get a better look at whoever was driving the bright red '72 Oldsmobile Station Wagon that was pulling up to the house.

The driver-side window rolled down and a woman's hand with bright red nails reached out of the window and opened the door. The driver stepped out of the car. She was quite tall for a girl which was something that Will appreciated. She had blonde hair that was extremely curly, and fell down below her shoulders. Her outfit was a bit distracting because she was dressed like a colorblind gypsy. The long skirt and long-sleeved top were fine, but it was the layers of clothes each with its own strange pattern and colors that were an issue. She was certainly pretty, but Will just wasn't sure what she was trying to accomplish with this outfit.

“Can you tell me where I’m at?” the girl asked breaking Will out of his train of thought.

“This is the Wallace farm,” Will replied.

“That doesn’t help me at all,” she answered back. “I’m trying to get back to the city.”

“I’m afraid you’re going the wrong way then.” Will said. “If you go back the way you just came, and just keep driving straight for about 15 miles, you’ll find the main road again.”

“I guess I got a little more lost than I thought,” she said with a big smile.

Will took a moment to enjoy her smile and the beautiful brown eyes that looked at him. “Can I offer you a drink before you take off?”

“I could use a drink, but I’m going to be driving so I guess I should say no.”

“Don’t worry about it.” Will said with a laugh. “My boss doesn’t drink alcohol so the strongest thing I can offer you is some lemonade.”

“I guess I can handle that,” she laughed. “So what are you doing here on the porch in the middle of the day? Doesn’t your boss have something for you to do?”

Will walked up to the porch and poured the girl a glass of lemonade. “It’s a long story, but I guess he’s decided that I’m more valuable here on the porch than out working in the fields today. There is more than just sitting and drinking lemonade though.”

“Really?” she asked with mocking surprise. “What more could he possibly ask you to do?”

Will pointed to the furniture by the side of the road. “My extremely important task is to sell this furniture. Impressive isn’t it?”

The girl walked over to look at the two chairs that were there by the road. They were a pair of matching black leather recliners. Will sat down in one of them and invited her to take the seat next to him.

“These are some extraordinary chairs,” she said taking a seat.

“Yes, they are comfortable,” Will replied.

“So, what are you looking to get for them?”

“I don’t really care.” Will answered. “I’m pretty much done here, and I’ll probably move on tonight. I’ll take whatever you want to offer.”

“Do you like cherries?” she asked.

“Cherries?” he queried in return.

“Yes, cherries, I just happen to have a couple of baskets of cherries I was hoping to sell out of the back of my car until I got a little lost earlier today.”

“Two baskets of cherries in exchange for two recliners?” Will pondered. “I think we can make that work.”

“Seriously?” the girl asked.

“Sure, I’ll even help you load them up in your car.”

“Any chance you’ll help me unload them too?” she asked with a playful grin.

Will thought for a minute. “I don’t even know your name. What’s in it for me?”

The girl smiled. “I don’t know your name either.”

“I’m Will, and you are?”

“Maybe I’ll tell you tonight when you stop by to help me with these chairs.”

Will laughed as he agreed. They unloaded the cherries and loaded up the chairs. Will took the address to her house and walked back to his room to pack. There wasn’t any point in staying and it was time to move on anyway.

Will loaded up his few possessions and made his way to move some chairs.

Chapter 2

It had taken a little effort to find her apartment. The apartment wasn't in the worst part of town, but it was pretty close. Will parked his car right behind the red station wagon and tried to decide what he was going to do next. He wasn't worried about the job. He'd left much better jobs than that one, and he'd decided a long time ago that he would never again work at a job that he couldn't just walk away from whenever he wanted. No, it was what to do about this mystery girl.

Before he had a chance to think about it, the door opened and she walked out. She'd changed into a pair of jeans, but she was still wearing the same top. She walked to the back of her car and opened it. Will stepped out of the car and joined her.

"So do you have a place picked out for these things?" Will asked.

"Yes," she replied. "I think I have just the place."

"I hope you measured first," he joked.

"I may be a girl," she said as she poked him with her elbow, "but I know enough to measure twice and cut once."

"Touché," he responded.

"Don't worry, I'm just used to being put down for being a girl," she said as she put her hand on his shoulder. "It's just my standard response."

"Shall we take these chairs to their new homes?"

"Definitely," she said as she reached for a chair. "I also made you some dinner as a thank you."

Will stopped for a moment. He grabbed one end of the chair and started walking towards the door. "I don't think I can take this from a girl with no name."

"I have a name, I'm just trying to decide if I can trust you with it," she replied.

"You invited me to your apartment and made me dinner. I think you should have made up your mind by now. Let's try this again. I start by telling you my name, and then, you tell me yours. My name is Will, and you are?"

"I guess you're right," she answered. "My name is a little tricky. I made it up myself."

Will leaned closer. "Try me."

"OK, but don't say I didn't warn you," she said with a grin. "My name is pronounced 'puh-tree.' It's fine if you can't get it at first."

“I think I can handle your name, Patri. I’m not too bad with things like that,” Will answered.

Patri’s face brightened as she heard her name pronounced properly. “I’m impressed. I didn’t think I’d ever meet someone who could manage my name the first time.”

“There’s more to me than just working on a farm,” Will responded.

“I’m starting to see that, Will,” Patri said. “Set this one right here.”

Will set the chair down and looked around the apartment. It wasn’t large, but the space was used very well. In the living room, there was a couch, a coffee table and several lamps. There were several paintings on the wall as well as several ceramic pots, and mugs and plates.

“I love all the ceramics here,” Will commented. “Where did you get them?”

“I made most of them,” she replied.

Will picked up the mug in front of him. “Did you make this one too?”

She shrugged and said “Yes, that is one of mine.”

Will looked the mug over some more. “It’s a great mug. I like the way it fits in my hand.”

“If you like it, it’s yours.”

Will set the mug back on the table. “I’d hate to take this from you it looks like you put a lot of work into it.”

“I can make another one in the studio tomorrow,” Patri answered.

“I suppose you could,” Will started and then the timer on the stove went off. “You take care of that and I’ll grab the other chair.”

Will headed down the stairs and grabbed the chair while he thought about how strange this situation was. He wasn’t really sure where things were going. He still needed to figure out what he was going to do for work, and now he had this strange young woman to think about. By the time he got back, he hadn’t really resolved anything. Patri showed him where she wanted the chair and they sat down to dinner.

“I hope you like lasagna,” Patri said.

“I love Italian food,” Will replied as he put his napkin in his lap. He looked at the setting and realized she’d set the mug he was looking at with his plate. “You shouldn’t have gone to so much trouble.”

“It wasn’t that much trouble,” she said as she served him a piece of lasagna. “I had one in the freezer waiting for a special occasion.”

“So this is a special occasion?” he asked.

“Well, it’s not every day that I buy recliners with baskets of cherries,” she replied with a wink, “so I would say yes.”

“I guess there’s no point in arguing with that,” Will said raising his mug.

“Oh, that reminds me,” Patri said running to a door, “I didn’t get the wine. I’ll be right back.” She ran through the door and shut it behind her.

Will thought about starting his dinner, but his mother had drilled proper manners into his head from the day he was born. “William, you must never start a meal until all the guests are seated.”

The door opened and Will was confused for a moment. “Didn’t you have blonde hair a moment ago?”

Patri was standing in the doorway with a low-cut blue t-shirt and straight brown hair that fell just above her shoulders. “That was a wig,” she replied, “sometimes I like to change my appearance when I go out.”

“Well,” Will commented, “it is a little confusing when someone suddenly changes hair color.”

“I suppose you’re right,” she answered, “but I certainly wasn’t going to wear that wig all through dinner.”

Will thought for a moment. “I’m glad you took it off. I think you look much better as a brunette. It really makes your eyes stand out more.”

Patri blushed a little as she thanked him. She held out an open bottle of wine. “Would you like a drink with your meal?”

Will held out his mug as Patri poured his drink. “Just never let my mom know that I’m drinking wine out of a mug.”

“I can get you a glass if you’d prefer,” she answered.

“No, I’m not too worried about pleasing my mother anymore.” Will replied. “You shouldn’t worry about it either.”

“Well, I’ll try to push it out of my mind during dinner at least,” Patri said with a chuckle. “It sounds like someone has some Mother issues.”

“It’s not just my Mom,” Will answered. “I’ve got issues with both of my parents.”

“I know the feeling,” she replied. “Let’s have a toast-to not living at home anymore.”

Will laughed as he raised his glass, “I’ll drink to that.”

The two clinked their mugs and took a drink. They started their meal and ate in silence for a while. Occasionally there was a comment or two or a request for a dish. As the meal came to a close, the conversation resumed.

“Thanks for the wonderful meal,” Will said.

“It wasn’t a big deal,” Patri answered. “It was taking up space in the freezer anyway.”

“I was wondering if I could ask you for something else,” he added.

“It doesn’t hurt to ask,” she replied.

“Can I crash on your couch?” he asked. “I don’t really have a place to sleep tonight.”

Patri thought for a moment. “That all depends on what we’re going to do tomorrow.”

“I haven’t really thought much about tomorrow yet,” he answered scratching his head. “It’s been pretty low on my priority list.”

“That’s fine,” she responded. “Why don’t we go on a hike and see what happens. I’ll even pack us something for lunch.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Will replied, “but let me take care of the dishes tonight.”

Patri nodded and helped to clear off the table. She got the couch ready for Will while he washed and dried the dishes and then they went to their separate beds for the night.