

The Lucky Winner

Tomi Farrell

CHAPTER 1

It was the same sky as on that day.

It spread as infinitely as our desires, deep into the unknown.

The dismal, grey concrete building stood before me in somber silence, as if the world had lost all of its colors. The sharp blades of the razor wire fence looked like they were ready to cut through one's heart without any mercy.

Today, I turned seventeen.

Wow, I've already lived for seventeen years?

Okay, I take that back.

A decent amount of people might protest to such a statement, so I'd just keep it to myself.

My little house was located in a little town called Little side, North Dakota. I wasn't sure if people could easily grasp what small towns were like, but if I said that merely nine hundred and sixty people lived in our town, that should give you a pretty good idea of how small it was.

It did pride itself on owning the world's largest metal sculpture, which they showcased on what they called the Enchanted Highway. My mom always bragged about it whenever we had visitors from other towns. As a child, I always thought my town was so famous and everybody in the world, even the residents of Mongolia, knew about it. As soon as I entered adolescence, however, I came to the disappointing realization that it wasn't true. From then on, I was deeply

embarrassed whenever my mom proudly talked about our world's largest metal sculpture. I didn't know why she always mentioned it. It was as if there were nothing else to talk about.

Well, that was probably true.

I lived alone. In a thousand square-foot, two-bedroom house with a den. The lot was uselessly oversized. I used to live with my parents and an older brother in this house. The two bedrooms were occupied by my parents and my brother, while the small den was my former room.

That room was absolutely the biggest tragedy of my life—it didn't even have a door! Well, at least, not until five months ago. I hated it when my brother got one of the bedrooms. I'd protested the injustice whenever I could, eternally attempting to have our rooms switched. I was a sixteen-year-old girl. I had a life. I had friends. And, potentially, boys. I needed a bedroom with a door. What need did my brother have for a bedroom? Especially when all he did was play video games in the living room where the TV was? However, despite my countless protests, I was doomed to the doorless den, and all I could do was put up a curtain for privacy. Which meant nothing.

Well, I wasn't *doomed* to a doorless life forever, after all. I later had doors installed to my den, and I moved into the master bedroom that my parents used to occupy. The whole house was my space now because they weren't here anymore. The house I used to complain about being so tiny now seemed so big. And quiet. I thought about getting a pet every once in a while, but I didn't want one unless I knew, with over a hundred percent confidence, that I could take good care of it. I was studying to go to Stanford and putting all of my focus on earning a decent score on the SATs. Getting a pet would have taken up a great deal of my time.

I had more than enough money to support myself for the rest of my entire life. I wouldn't even have to get a job after graduation. But that wasn't what I wanted. I was determined to get a PhD from Stanford and eventually become a psychiatrist. That was my goal.

I was born to very conservative parents who were diligent Catholics and attended church every Sunday. The priest, Father Paul, was Dad's age and we knew his whole life story. Well,

with the total population of the town being only nine hundred and sixty, there wasn't much left to know about each other. Now, you might think that was nice. Knowing everybody was like having the whole town as one big family—*so relaxing, helping each other and laughing with each other without worrying about anything...*

Well, I could tell you this: you'd know what it was really like but only after you lived in one. Example: imagine you did something bad or wrong. Once you committed it, that was it. The whole town would know about it the next morning. It was actually far from being a relaxing environment. It was nerve-racking. Especially for someone my age.

My mom was a very kind, modest, and soft-spoken lady. She worked as a waitress at a small restaurant called Nancy's Diner, adjacent to a gas station. She never took her job lightly and treated it as if she were a marketing director at a big ad agency. She always arrived at the diner fifteen minutes before her shifts and only worked lunches. The nights were reserved for us so she could be at home to make us dinner and so we could all eat together.

My dad was a trucker. He was gone two to three times a month, usually for a week or so, and yes, he wasn't home very often. When he was home, he helped Mom with the household chores and kept himself busy by fixing things. He was as good a husband and father as you'd expect and fairly typical. And quiet. Kind of similar to Mom. If anyone believed in the theory that *opposites attract*, that wasn't the case at all for my parents. They seemed to thrive on the idea that *similars attract*. They never fought and never cursed at each other. They were a prime example of a healthy, functional couple.

Growing up alongside my brother, Kyle, however, was tough. I often thought his sole purpose in life was to embarrass me. He was the king of nerds. If he had been completely invisible at school, it would have been better. But no, his nerdiness was so extreme, it made him stand out so much that it was sheer torture! His video game addiction, which began as soon as he could speak, was rewarded by a pair of Coke bottle glasses that he needed by the age of ten. His glasses looked like the ones *Milton* wore in *Office Space*.

Yikes!

Kyle was obsessed with *Candy*, an animated character from one of his games. What happened one day shall forever remain the most traumatic event of my life. I'd witnessed him in the middle of—*you know what*—with *Candy's* picture in his *other* hand.

I took a deep breath and approached the prison. Yes, that was where my family now awaited.

So, what happened to them?

What happened to my kind mother? What happened to my gentle dad? What happened to my geeky brother? How did they suddenly turn into malicious monsters? How did that happen, really...?

Well, it all began on that one day.

Our luckiest day ever...

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