In Another's Eyes

by YvaJ

Summary

Thomas Wilkenson is more than meets the eye. This story chronicles the friendship that he shares with Willy Wonka and the time leading up to the Golden Ticket tour. The story is told through both his and Willy's perspective.

Notes

This story was written during 2008 thereabouts. It was originally posted on Fan Fiction net, but was removed several years back when I left the site. I am posting it here now because it is one of my favorite stories that center on Willy Wonka and because it is so long, I hesitated about submitting it because reformatting stories takes a good deal of time to do. I will be updating this when I get the chance to do so. Each chapter will be told from Thomas Wilkenson's perspective unless otherwise noted. There will be a notation at the top of the chapter that will indicate when it's being told from Willy Wonka's perspective.

Because of some of the amazing reviews that I received at the other site, I decided to redo some parts of the story and I hope that the newer information helps it to maintain the continuity of it. I hope you enjoy it.
Chapter 1

In Another’s Eyes

A ‘Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory’ Story

By: YvaJ

Chapter 1: The Beginning

July 12, 1971

He looked at the world through a pair of rounded spectacles, his coal-like eyes taking everything in with a distanced coolness. It seemed strange that a man like this would still have a strand of youth and vitality in him contrary to the hard existence he had endured during the past forty or so years.

It was not so much that he delved in his own self-pity; he simply knew what it meant to have a harder existence than most. Most people did not know much about him; in fact, he was not someone who talked openly about his experiences at all.

The tall, thin, dark-headed man with the bolder-like hat adorning his head seemed to turn heads wherever he went. It was not necessarily because he resembled someone famous, but because he seemed to carry an essence about him that some might describe as being somewhat unsettling. The simple resonances of his voice seemed to indicate a tense personality that was compounded by the words he spoke and the manner in which he addressed others.

Oftentimes when seen on the streets, people would scurry out of his way, and small children would stare up at him in wonderment. As they did, their eyes would take in his stoic jaw-line and hardened expression. His mouth only seemed to curve upwards in a smile on rare occasions. Otherwise it looked rather like a straight line that etched its way across the lower part of his face.

What most people did not know about the eccentric man in their mists was the extraordinary work that he occupied himself with. For the past seven years, he could have boasted having a job that was the envy of all those around him. Contrary to his earnestness in behavior and manner, he had a spark in him that gave way to a capacity for making mischief.

His name was Thomas Wilkenson and ever since he had taken on the job offered by his best friend, he realized that it was a job, which proved more secretive than working as an operative in the CIA. In fact, if people were to actually have found out what he did for a living, he might have become as famous as the man for whom he worked. This was part of the reason as to why it was he did not live in a relationship or with a family. His family pretty much consisted of one very eccentric man who made chocolate.

Of course he once had a family, but his parents had died, and he had lost his younger brother as well. Simeon had been his name and he was two years younger than Thomas. He had worked as an independent artist in the Notting Hill section of London. The two brothers had once been very close. They had to have been, as they had both been children of war. Soon after the bombing raids started in London, they were forced to leave the city and live in the countryside along with many other children. During the time they were away, they had lived in the home of an odd elderly gentleman named Reginald Wonka.

It was there where he and Simeon were first introduced to William Wonka. The two teenagers had
been at the house for several days when Reginald’s overworked and stressed out son, Wilbur stopped in for tea with an eight-year-old boy in tow. The little boy was introduced to them as this man’s son, and their host’s grandson.

William, or as his friends called him, Willy, was a small boy with naturally curly locks of golden hair that seemed to stick out in all directions. Thomas and Simeon often pondered whether or not Willy got his wiry hair from sticking his finger in a few too many light sockets. Neither of them spoke of this, instead, they spent their time trying to ignore the strange manner in which their younger cohort carried himself. Besides that, it seemed rather rude to sit at the table and say over tea how Willy looked as though he’d been playing about with a light switch. Some things were simply better left unsaid.

Thomas remembered how he could still taste the saccharine in his mouth several hours after that fateful visit. As Willy’s father began to collect his coat and hat, Reginald had offered to watch the youngest boy. This was a proposal, which Wilbur seemed more than willing to allow.

Once the high-strung man had left, the essence of the relaxed and happy household returned to normal. Seconds later, their host turned to fourteen-year-old Simeon and sixteen-year-old Thomas and asked if they would mind keeping an eye on Willy. The two teenagers had reluctantly agreed and the three boys set about to exploring the small house and the grounds that extended straight into the neighboring village.

It was during this time that Thomas discovered that Willy Wonka’s father was actually a dentist by trade. Among other things, that pretty much explained the artificial sweetener that was in the tea. As the years passed by after this initial meeting, Thomas often pondered the irony of how the greatest candy maker in the world actually had a father who was a dentist.

During the time he had spent in the country, Thomas grew from an adolescent boy into a young man. Of course, he was a good eight years older than Willy.

As the years played their game with the two of them, they shared a friendship that seemed rather like that light switch; first on, then off, then on again. Thomas internally knew that if something were to happen to either him or Simeon, that they could always count on Willy to assist them and vice versa. To cite an example, Thomas could still remember the day when the telegram had arrived at the house informing them that their father had been killed on the warfront in Germany. In the wake of this news, the two families suddenly had been thrust even closer together and their friendship was that pearl hidden amidst the wounds of a shattered family.

Today, contrary to the ups and downs of a somewhat chaotic friendship, Thomas Wilkenson knew that Willy Wonka was someone he trusted. The two men were like brothers. In that knowledge, Thomas was able to find healing after his own brother had been unexpectedly killed in an auto accident during the early parts of 1964.

Taking a deep breath, Thomas shook his head as he recalled what hurtled his and the reclusive chocolatier’s lives back together. They had lost touch with one another for so many years. He knew that this happened with many people, not just to him and Willy Wonka. At any rate, Thomas had left the country town where he had stayed during the war and started his studies at Oxford. He never finished, because he received a job offer in America and ended up leaving England for an undetermined period of time. That pretty much ended any contact he had had with his childhood friend; at least that’s what he thought.

Flashback

March 20, 1964
Thomas had just celebrated his forty-seventh birthday, his flat was full of guests and suddenly the phone rang. The call had been placed from London and he figured that it was his brother calling to wish him a happy birthday. Simeon always called and it did not matter where Thomas happened to be at the time. The call was as consistent and expected as the chime of a church bell on Sunday morning.

However, this particular day, he did not expect a call from a stranger telling him that his younger brother had been killed in a hit and run accident. A drunken man had run a red light and plowed into Simeon’s car. The younger Wilkenson had been on his way to an art opening when the accident had occurred.

Thomas had received a telegram from Simeon only a week before telling him that after the opening there was something even bigger that he wanted to share with him. Thomas could not imagine anything bigger than that simply because the art opening was a big deal in and of itself. This would have established Simeon as a legitimate artist in London and not just a hopeful wannabe. It had been his dream and now that dream had died in the hands of an irresponsible man.

The lump that now formed in his throat was indescribable. It was as though from one instance to the next, his life was turned tragically upside down. His throat felt dry, he could not cry, he could simply stare down at the phone after the informant had returned the receiver to the hook and a dial-tone was left screaming in his ear. He turned and looked at his American friends who were sitting on the sofa waiting for him to say something.

When he finally managed to swallow the lump, it was simply to tell them that he had to catch the first flight back to London. He then told them that his brother was dead.

The friends reacted in a way that most friends would, they rang the airport straightaway and got Thomas a ticket that would shuttle him back to England the very next day. They next rang Thomas’ supervisor at work and told him that he had to leave and that there had been a death in the family. They did not say nor imply when Thomas would return, as that was unknown. He figured later that they probably knew that he would not be returning.

His only hope was that he would make it back in time for the funeral. Since Simeon’s friends were taking care of the arrangements in his absence, he had rung them prior to leaving and explained that he would be back in London at eleven the morning after flying out. Since they had offered to attend to the funeral preparations, he had one less thing to worry himself with, although he felt a mountain of guilt building up inside because he had not been there in the first place.

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Thomas was still pretty broken up by the time his plane landed at Heathrow two days later. He had sat in his seat stoically watching the events around him. Sometimes he felt as though he was watching these actions take place in a movie and was not actually living them.

Everything he did was done as though in a robotic and unemotional state. When the passengers finally began to disembark the plane, he felt himself automatically getting to his feet, grabbing his duffle bag, and slinging it casually over his shoulder. He made his way slowly down the aisle and could hear people laughing and talking gaily. After several minutes, they descended the steps from the plane and made their way across the tarmac to a waiting bus. He climbed aboard, the silence engulfing him as though a blanket was covering his sagging spirit.

Thirty minutes later, he cleared customs and stepped out into the large open waiting area. All around him, he could see signs from various people. He finally spotted a dark headed man with long braided hair and a blonde headed woman holding a small sign with the name ‘Tom Wilkenson’ printed
Approaching the man who held the sign, he cleared his throat. “I’m Tom,” was all he could squeak out.

The woman looked up at him and wordlessly she wound her arms around him in an embrace as a soft sob emerged. “I’m Bethany,” she cried. “I was Simeon’s fiancé.”

Thomas took a deep breath, the shock evident in the words that next tumbled out of his mouth. “I’m sorry, but I didn’t know that my brother had intended on getting married.”

Bethany nodded. “I know. He was going to ring you after the art opening had ended and intended on telling you so that you could come back for it, but now…” her voice trailed as her sobs emerged as hiccups. The hippie standing next to her rested his hand on her shoulder and proceeded to pat it gently as if to say ‘now, now, everything will be alright’.

At that moment, Thomas shifted his gaze towards the man, an unasked question looming.

“Sorry, old chap, the name’s Bernie,” he said, his voice a thick Welsh drawl. “Your brother an’ me were mates, we used to hang out at the pub together and we did some painting as well. He was a talented bloke and it really is a pity what happened to ‘im.”

Thomas nodded, there was still so much that he did not know about his brother. He watched as Bernie grabbed his large suitcase and started to carry it towards the way out. He slowly followed, the carry-on bag still draped over his shoulder, and he found himself using his freed up hand to help guide Bethany along. The woman looked completely heartbroken, and while she carried that grief externally, Thomas seemed to be carrying his inside.

Reaching the parking lot, they were led over to Bernie’s beat up VW bus and climbed in. Bernie tossed the suitcase on the back seat and then climbed behind the wheel. Within seconds, they had sped away from the airport in a trail of black smoke.

As they drove, Thomas kept pondering how much there was that he did not know about his brother. All of these things felt as though they were locked up by distance and time. He sighed as he inhaled the scent of musty air; a combination of the pungent odor of the van’s seats as well as the humid London climate outside.

Bernie rolled down the window and casually rested his arm on the door. As the wind wafted into the recesses of the van, Thomas could suddenly feel the mist and wind against his face. “I appreciate you picking me up,” he eventually offered after about twenty minutes of driving time had passed. “I’m sorry I don’t have much to say, but everything has happened so quickly.”

“No sweat, Mate,” Bernie said, his left arm still draped casually over the steering wheel. When he stopped at a crosswalk, he dug in his pocket and eventually extended a half crushed pack of mint-flavored gum to the passenger in the back seat. “Since I gave up smoking, all I can offer you is gum.”

Thomas extended his hand and accepted the offered stick and began the dubious task of removing the wrapper from the half melted piece of gum. As he finished doing so, he stuck it in his mouth and immediately tasted the tanginess of peppermint as it cascaded down his throat.

“No sweat, Mate,” Bernie continued to speak. “Simeon used to say that friends are really like family, you just happen to be both.”

‘Family…’ The word hung in the air and Thomas sighed deeply. He had run away from his family
when he taken that job in the States. Now, his brother was gone and he was left speechless and staring out the dirty window of Bernie’s van.

Seconds later, the feeling of family was compounded when they stopped at another intersection adjacent to the complex of Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory.

For the second time since his arrival in London, a lump suddenly formed in Thomas Wilkenson’s throat.
Chapter 2

Chapter 2: A Familiar Face

Three days later, Thomas arrived at the funeral and gave himself a chance to look around the church where Simeon’s friends and colleagues had arranged the service. The church was small and a bit run down, something that he immediately liked and knew that his brother would have preferred.

On one side of the church was an organ, on the other a baptismal and a simple wooden cross adorned the front. The casket was made of a simple mahogany colored wood and as he approached it, he could feel his eyes tearing up.

Simeon’s casket was closed, thus causing Thomas to ponder to what extent his brother had suffered.

“For some reason, he wanted it closed,” a voice emerged and he turned around and looked into Bethany’s somewhat drawn face.

“Why?”

“I don’t know, he never said, but that’s what he wanted,” she looked at him. “It seems unreal, doesn’t it? It’s as though it should have happened to someone else.”

Thomas nodded and shook his head. “But it didn’t.” He stared down at his hand where a pocket watch rested, the golden object old and dented on one side. Bethany had left Simeon’s watch on the bed in the room of the boarding house where Thomas was staying. The object somehow managed to lull him into another frame of mind. He recalled how he would lay in bed the first night and felt the subtle sounds of the watch casually ticking in his ear.

Seconds later, Bethany’s voice catapulted him back to the present. “We should sit down, the service is about to start.”

Thomas nodded as he seated himself in the front of the church. Several meters behind him, however, the door leading outside had once again opened and a black-cloaked figure entered the sanctuary and took a seat in the back near the door.

No one, not even Thomas noticed that one of the most famous men in England had just joined the congregation of mourners.

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As the service ended, Thomas got to his feet. He watched as Bethany joined a group of her friends at the door and they left the church together. Thomas was now alone. He did not mind that, in fact, he rather preferred it. How he hated to be amidst groups of people he did not know. He was, to say the least, turned off at the prospect of having to exchange formalities with others when all he wanted was to mourn Simeon’s passing in his own way.

He stepped outside and could see that the sun as it was dancing amongst the clouds. The sky was for the most part blue, but the grayness of a fast approaching overcast sky was showing in the horizon. This meant that an early spring shower was evident.

*Typical of London,* he mused softly to himself as he went over and folded his tall frame into the front seat of his small rental car.
At the door of the church, the man who seated himself in the back had managed to remain unseen. Eventually he emerged, his head lowered. He continued to peer out across the parking lot in Thomas’ direction. His blue eyes were filled with sadness as he watched the remaining brother start the car and drive away.

Back at the car, Thomas had not seen the man who was watching him, but instead, he left the church’s grounds and drove off in the direction of the cemetery where the service would commence. Eventually, he turned down a long and winding gravel road and saw Bernie’s VW bus parked along the side. He pulled up behind it and cut the motor. As he was getting out, he noticed that he was now standing along the perimeters of the cemetery. He looked out across the flatness of the place and noticed a group of mourners standing together.

Approaching them, he opted to stand off to one side of the group. The dull hum of their conversations filled his ears, but he said nothing, instead, his eyes seemed to stare at the casket that held his brother’s body.

It was at that instant when he regretted not having any physical similarities to his brother. No one except the people who collected him at the airport even knew who he was. He stood alone and watched the preacher approach the casket and raised his hands ceremoniously.

The crowd quieted and he began to speak, his firm sounding voice giving off the impression that he was connected to a higher power of some kind. “Into the Father’s hands, we commend the spirit of Simeon Patrick Wilkenson…”

The rest of his words went unheard by Thomas; he bowed his head and could feel the tears as they began to stream down over his face. For the first time since learning of Simeon’s death, he finally allowed himself to feel the emotions he harbored. He simply could not keep the grief contained. Perhaps it was because everything felt so final.

He began to rub both hands over his face, his fingers stretching beneath the rims of his spectacles, the tears flowing and meshing between his fingers.

As the coffin was lowered into the ground, he raised his head and watched as the preacher took a handful of earth in his hand. “Ashes to ashes, and dust to dust…” he began as the grains of sand sifted between his fingers and fell gingerly onto the coffin.

Time seemed to stand still as Thomas stood staring at the final resting place of his beloved brother. He turned after several minutes had passed and watched as his brother’s friends started to disperse. Some of them came over and offered their condolences with a handshake or a teary embrace. Bernie and Bethany must have told them who Thomas was. After the crowd had left, he could still hear Bernie asking if they should stay, the feeling of obligation laced in his inquiry.

Thomas refused, but gratefully embraced both of them and watched as they returned to Bernie’s colorful van and climbed inside. As soon as they had driven away, silence once more settled over the graveyard.

Instead of following suit, Thomas walked over to a wooden bench, seated himself on it, and stared out across the graveyard as the first drops of rain began to fall. As he felt the drops of water hitting against the glasses he wore, he removed them and tucked them in the pocket of his coat.

Closing his eyes, he stared down at the ground as the rain began to intensify, the sky now taking on the color of murky dirty water.

“I can’t believe he’s gone,” he whispered to the stillness, his voice cracking with emotion. “It doesn’t
“No, it doesn’t,” a voice emerged causing him to raise his head and stare into a pair of familiar blue eyes. The man who stood before him carried a black umbrella in his hand and he crouched down so that he would be eye level with Thomas, the shelter of the object keeping the rain at bay.

“Will?” he managed to speak, his voice cracking. His first impulse was to jump to his feet and embrace his longtime friend. Sadly, something prevented him from heeding that particular impulse. These feelings were somehow encased by years of insecurities as well as prolonged silence. “What are you doing here?”

“I read about Simeon in the paper,” Willy said, his voice etched in matter-of-factness. “Do you honestly think that I would have stayed away all the while knowing about this?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said honestly. He could not dismiss the surprise he felt upon hearing that Simeon’s death had met Willy Wonka’s ears. Here stood the man whom he had lost contact with all those years ago. He bit down on his lip but waited for the chocolatier to sit down.

“For everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens,” he began to softly sing as he sat down next to Thomas and rested a gentle hand on his friend’s shoulder. “That sounds strange, I know, but that’s exactly what my grandfather said when my mother died.”

Thomas raised his head and looked at Willy for the first time since his arrival. The first thing he noticed was that his friend was not dressed in a flamboyant or splashy style. In fact, he had shown up concealed in a long black trench coat with the collar turned up. Covering his shoulder, a matching shawl was draped. It was obvious that Willy had made every effort to maintain as inconspicuous an appearance as he could.

The chocolatier was connected to the Wilkenson family and Thomas could tell that fame or no, being here was important to him. Willy had done what he could to maintain that no one would recognize or know who he was. Instead of speaking further, he pulled a crisp white handkerchief from his pocket and pressed it into the hand of his friend.

For several seconds, Thomas stared down at it and could see the inner woven initials W.W. neatly embroidered on it. “It was my father’s,” he offered motioning towards the handkerchief. “He used it when my mother died. I always have it with me when I attend funerals.”

Thomas stared at it for several seconds. “Thank you,” he managed to speak as he began to blot the tears away with the corner of the cloth.

“I’ll be right back, I still want to say farewell,” Willy said calmly. He pressed the handle to the umbrella into Thomas’ free hand and started to walk methodically towards the gravesite. As he did, his hand reached into his pocket and extracted some rectangular shaped object. Upon reaching the edge of the grave, Thomas watched as his friend tossed the object he held into the grave.

He remained there for several minutes. “Adieu, parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good-bye that it be morrow.”

Upon hearing the soft utterances emerging from the chocolatier, Thomas suddenly felt a new sadness tugging at his heart. Willy had cited that same line from Shakespeare the day they received word of his father’s death. He had only been nine at the time, but it was so typical of him to recite what he had read or heard. As the words continued to echo in his mind, Willy abruptly turned around and started to walk back over to where he was sitting.
Thomas looked up. “What did you toss in there?”

Willy smiled sadly but shrugged his shoulders. “It was a fulfilled promise, nothing more,” he said softly.

“A promise?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, you see, when Simeon was alive, he said that he wanted to one day hold in his hand the proof of my success, just as I fondly wished to hold in my hand the proof of his,” Willy explained.

“I don’t understand,” Thomas said.

“I know you don’t but in time you will,” the chocolatier said mysteriously. “Maybe we should go, the rain is getting heavier.”

Thomas nodded, but he remained seated, the rain still falling against his face. “It’s my fault, Will.”

“What’s your fault?” Willy asked this time the candy maker’s blue eyes widened with surprise.

“This…” Thomas began, but his voice trailed off as he waved his hand around the area. “…All of this.”

“How can that be?” the abrupt question emerged.

“I never stayed in touch with you. I missed out on seeing my brother become a success that he was. I was too ambitious,” Thomas confessed. “I should have realized what was important; my family and my friends.”

The candy maker sat down next to him, the tails of his coat flying about and not simply covering half of the bench. He said nothing for several moments.

Thomas was about to speak when Willy turned and looked at him abruptly, his eyes bearing down into his own. He had never seen Willy Wonka angry, but yet there he sat looking at Thomas as though wishing to scold an unruly child. “It’s not your fault, Tom, you had a dream,” he said simply, his voice filled with kindness contrary to the anger displayed in his gaze. “I only wish that Scotland Yard had managed to catch that toffee brain that ruined your family, as well as that lovely young lady’s chance at happiness.”

“You knew about Bethany and Simeon?” Thomas asked.

Willy nodded. “I was going to provide the confections for the celebration,” he confessed. “Simeon had sent me a telegram only two days before the accident and said that he was entrusting a great and wonderful family secret with me. He wanted to tell you after he became a successful artist.”

“He was always a success,” Thomas whispered.

“He never really knew that,” Willy said. “There was something inside of him that always felt as though he wasn’t doing enough.”

Thomas turned and looked at his friend. Willy could act like a child when he wanted to, but now there was wisdom embedded in the stance of his friend, and this seemed to surprise him more than anything else. Gone was Willy’s unabridged lack of tact and in its place was a kind and compassionate friend that Thomas was monumentally grateful for.

After several moments of silence had passed, Thomas shook his head. “It surprises me that you
haven’t started to make light of all of this and inundate me with quotations from literature and other anecdotes. You must be losing your touch.” His voice emerged much more sarcastically than he intended, but his surprise mounted when he watched Willy shake his head adamantly.

“Sometimes less speaking is better,” he said calmly as he rested his hand on Thomas’ shoulder and squeezed it reassuringly.

A flood of guilt suddenly washed over him and he shrugged his shoulders, the gentle pressure still there. “I’m sorry, Will, I shouldn’t be so crass.”

“It’s alright. It is usually me who behaves in such a manner,” Willy paused all the while seeming to contemplate his next words. Eventually he took a deep breath. “Simeon was my friend, too and I will miss him as well.”

“I should have died first, I’m older; that’s the way it’s supposed to be. He had so much to live for. His art and Bethany, it all seems so unfair,” he said, his words emerging in more or less a high-pitched squeak.

“Your life is just as important as Simeon’s was,” Willy said firmly. “You were not meant to die in that accident, Tom. You can’t believe for a minute that you were intended to. What you said just now is rubbish, and deep down, you know that as well.”

“It doesn’t matter,” Thomas whispered.

“To me, it does,” Willy responded without missing a beat. “I missed you when you were away and Simeon did keep me informed of what you were doing. Of course, I’m glad you were able to come back, I only wish it was for a happier occasion,” he paused. “How long do you intend to stay?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said honestly. “I had been contemplating coming back home for a while now. I guess I figured that I would check and see if my old flat was to let, and maybe I could move back in.”

“Don’t move into that tiny space,” Willy said firmly. “Come stay at the factory. I have so little space and so many people already staying there…” His voice trailed and he shrugged his shoulders, a light-hearted laugh emerging. “…Strike that, reverse it, thank you.”

“Some things never change,” Thomas said weakly, a small smile tugging at his lips contrary to the somber occasion that had brought the two friends back together.

“Somehow the things that change always stay the same,” Willy said smiling, his blue eyes twinkling. “So, does this mean that you will you be my guest?”

Thomas nodded as he remembered how Willy’s grandfather had opened his home to him when he was younger. “History always seems to repeat itself, doesn’t it, Will?” he asked as they were getting up to leave the cemetery.

“Those who do not acknowledge history are doomed to repeat it,” Willy said matter-of-factly. “But, this time instead of an external war being waged, there is an internal one going on inside of you.”

It took several months of staying at Willy’s chocolate factory for Thomas to realize the gist of what he had implied as well as the truth that was embedded in those words.

Flashback End

July 12, 1971
Thomas drained the last of the coffee that was in his cup. Once he returned the ceramic mug to the table, he reached inside his jacket pocket and removed his brother’s pocket watch. He had carried it in his pocket since his almost sister-in-law had given it to him. “I must have lost track of time, I better get moving or I’ll miss my flight,” he mumbled under his breath as he slung his leather handbag over his shoulder and started to make his way down the corridor towards the gate that would take him from England to Germany.

He had not been on a plane since his return from the States seven years before, so he looked upon this trip with a small trace of dread. Perhaps it was this, which triggered so many lackadaisical memories for him.

Ever since the day he and Willy had sat on the bench in the cemetery and he had agreed to move into the factory, Thomas knew that his life would change. What he did not know was that Willy was on the verge of losing what was most precious to him.

Willy Wonka had been so glad upon his return, but soon after Simeon’s death, tragedy had struck his friend when a group of spies had managed to covertly use their status as workers in his factory and steal some of his most private recipes. Thomas was horrified to see the extent that this heinous act had impacted his friend.

He shook his head as he reached the gate, sat down on one of the plush seats, and waited. His thoughts began to drift as he remembered how his friend had decided to go into seclusion. Thomas had contacted his friends in the States at that time and asked them to ring his boss and inform him of an unforeseeable emergency. He went on to say that it was perhaps best that they find someone new to fulfill his job duties.

He felt dreadfully about leaving his boss in the lurch, but he knew where his loyalties must lie. He had no intention of returning to America, not as long as his friend was in such a catastrophic state. He decided that since Willy had so much trust invested in him that he would eventually have to act as a liaison between the chocolatier and the outside world.

It almost seemed too unbelievable to be real, but Thomas Wilkinson had found himself not only a job but also a life in the greatest and most magical chocolate factory in all of England and perhaps, the world.
Chapter 3

Chapter 3: The Day Everything Changed

“Would all Frankfurt bound passengers please report to the gate? This is final call for boarding,” the
announcement abruptly filled Thomas’ ears. He sat up straighter as the realization hit him that he had
been sitting and daydreaming almost too long. He quickly got to his feet and rushed towards the door
that would lead down a group of stairs, outside, and into the belly of a 737.

As he reached the door, he met the stewardess who was accepting the boarding cards from the
passengers. He handed the card to her and watched as she ripped a stub off and hurried him through
the door.

“You almost missed your flight, sir,” she offered.

“A thousand pardons,” he offered, but picked up his pace and made his way to the door of the plane
in record time. As he reached the doorway and came into the cabin of the plane, he spotted a second
woman, her manner welcoming.

“May I assist you, sir?” she asked.

He showed her the ticket stub. “Oh yes, you’re in 12 C. It’s down the aisle and on your right. The
rows are marked.”

“Thank you,” he said. Once he found his seat, he stuffed his bag underneath the seat in front of him
and managed to sit down. He was grateful for having an aisle seat since he hated sitting by the
window. Flying made him a little uneasy, but he would never have admitted that to anyone, least of
all to Willy Wonka. He knew that his friend was counting on him to fulfill this particular task. He
only hoped that this would not be as difficult as he surmised.

Glancing over, he recognized that a little brown-headed girl who looked to be about seven or eight-
years-old occupied the neighboring seat. Next to her sat a woman with the same wavy brown hair as
the child. They looked to be mother and daughter and when the woman turned around, this affirmed
his assertion. Thomas could not help but notice that although the woman was quite young, she had a
pretty face and kind looking eyes.

She smiled warmly. “Good afternoon,” she greeted him.

“Hello,” he said, but watched as her gaze returned to staring outside through the tiny airplane
window. His attention shifted several minutes later and he could see that the small child remained
silent as she played with her Raggedy-Ann doll.

Thomas found himself smiling as he watched the child try to buckle the doll into the seat along with
her. He could tell by looking at her that she was feeling restless, perhaps this was her first trip on a
plane.

Her tiny hands moved slowly over the face of her doll, her eyes darting around to everyone except
towards the window. Thomas noticed this but said nothing. Instead he sank into his own
contemplations, this time they returned to the day when Willy had closed his gates and disappeared
from sight.

Flashback
June 1, 1965

The sky over the factory was a dismal gray on that particular afternoon. It looked as though there was about to be a cloudburst and the entire city of London was going to be caught in a virtual downpour. Thomas had noticed the workers leaving the factory practically in droves on that fateful Tuesday afternoon. He internally knew that something was wrong and had sensed it for a number of weeks.

He had seen Willy infrequently during those times, but it was the same as it had been since he had come. The two men often met in the evening and would talk over old times. Willy’s behavior had shifted somewhat, he had become aloof and his manner clipped. This, if anything, alarmed Thomas. He knew that although Willy could sometimes convey a tactless stance, the chocolatier was learning to control that aspect of his personality. Before the abrupt change, he had started to behave in a more accepting manner.

Yet, it was during the past days, perhaps weeks, where Thomas had started to grow concerned for the well being of his friend. Willy’s manner had shifted to such a degree that the workers had started rumors about him. The entire place seemed to be on a downward spiral, and the overall atmosphere had become tense and consumed with paranoia.

The workers had gone from a state of slight concern or worry, to a general state of panic. Now that they had lost their jobs, they had no idea where they would be able to find work or from where their next paycheck would come. As a result, their disgruntled cries drifted up from the grounds and filled his ears. They were laced with hatred and condemnation towards Willy for his senseless behavior. Many of them were vowing to seek revenge for unfair treatment. Anger and hostility seemed to permeate the entire factory.

There was no question in his mind; it had been a heartbreaking day for all parties involved. Through this, it was established that Willy was more sensitive about things of this nature than anyone could have predicted. It was for this reason that Thomas could find no fault in his friend for making such a rash decision in the wake of overt devastation.

Instead, Thomas directed his anger elsewhere, and that was towards Arthur Slugworth. Willy Wonka’s competitor was a devious man who was not even present at the factory on this particular day, yet his essence seemed to envelop the entire place. Slugworth had not only managed to tear down a part of Willy’s livelihood, but he also robbed him of his trust and faith in humanity.

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Thomas would never forget that morning when Eliza Bachmann came in to work with a new bar of chocolate in her hand. The chocolate had been dubbed ‘Slugworth’s Island Earth’, but anyone on the inside who happened to see it knew from where the recipe had originated.

Eliza was no different; she was a loyal and kind-hearted Wonka employee. Thomas remembered the day he had hired her. She had practically no credentials and no past experience. He had offered her the job out of compassion because she said that her mother was diagnosed with a rare form of skin cancer and the job was to help finance the cost of her treatment. This was three years ago and although she was much older than the other applicants, Thomas had discussed this case with Willy before trying to find Eliza a place in the factory.

This proved a good move because the woman was hard nosed and refused to take charity from anyone, whether it was from himself or Willy. After finding her a place to work, Thomas noticed that she delved herself fully into it. She did every task assigned to her with pride and determination. For her, this was not just a job, but also a privilege.
When she found Thomas in the break room that morning, she nervously approached him. “E-excuse me, might I have a word with you, Mr. Wilkenson?” Her voice emerged somewhere between intimidation and nervousness.

“Yes,” he turned around and looked down into Eliza’s caramel colored eyes. “You’re Ms. Bachmann, correct?”

She nodded. “Yes, but most people call me Eliza; I’m not much for formalities.”

“All right, Eliza then,” he paused. “What can I do for you?”

For several seconds, the woman remained silent, her uneven breathing the only sounds to emerge. “I don’t wish to be obtrusive, sir, but I must speak with Mr. Wonka as soon as possible, it’s a matter of grave urgency,” she said, her voice cracking.

Thomas took a deep breath. He could internally sense that the woman carried an almost motherly worry towards Willy. Her words indicated this, and he could tell that she was extremely protective of her employer although she had never met or seen the elusive chocolatier at all.

“What is it?” he asked.

She raised her head and looked up at him. “I…I uh…” Her voice trailed, but he looked down and could see the signature blue wrapping of a Slugworth bar clamped tightly in her fist.

“Where did you get that?” he asked.

“This morning, while I was on my way to work, I stopped off at the candy shop. I was looking for some menthol drops for my throat and I discovered it on the shelf…” Her words drifted. The fifty-eight-year-old worker did not know what was going to come next nor did she know what to say. Instead, she looked away.

“Do you know if it was there yesterday?” he asked.

“I don’t know if it was, I don’t generally buy sweets while on my way to work,” she said. “Last evening my mother had her bridge club over for dinner and many of them were smoking. That’s why I had a sore throat when I woke up this morning. I had gone there looking for these drops.” She paused, but then changed the subject. “Several months back I was assigned to help the group with one of Mr. Wonka’s recipes. This looks so similar to what we were working with, that when I saw it, it gave me the shudders. I couldn’t help but recognize the similarities.”

Thomas nodded. “I see, well then come with me.”

Eliza took a deep breath and started to follow him.

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Ten minutes later, they reached the hallway where Willy’s office was located. Eliza was starting to get nervous, her steps becoming slower and slower. Eventually, Thomas turned around and could see that the woman’s hands were starting to tremble.

“Excuse me, but I fear that I must stop and catch my breath before we go in,” she eventually said.

“You’re afraid,” he said matter-of-factly.

“Yes, I think I am,” she nodded. “I have always tried to be a loyal worker here. You see, ever since
the day I was given a chance to work here, I have held Mr. Wonka in very high esteem. It saddens me to be the one to give him this news, as I fear it will destroy him. I know that it is not the same, but I have worked with certain recipes of Mr. Wonka’s, this being one of them. I know that I did not drop that recipe into Mr. Slugworth’s hands, someone else did. Yet, my bringing this to Mr. Wonka’s attention makes me feel as though I have.”

“Eliza, you would never do such a thing,” Thomas said.

“No, I wouldn’t, but Mr. Wonka has never seen me before, he doesn’t know me nor does he know why I sought to have a job working for him in the first place. He probably doesn’t even know my name. I am just another face in the crowd,” she said.

Thomas took a deep breath. “Don’t underestimate him. Mr. Wonka is a very kind individual. Never forget that it was he who gave you a chance, not me. After I spoke with you, I contacted him about your situation and he agreed that you needed this job. That was the reason you got it.”

“He did that for me?” she whispered.

He nodded but instead of speaking further, he tapped softly on the door to Willy’s office.

“Come in,” Willy’s cheerful voice emerged and Eliza felt her body become even more tense.

Slowly, Thomas opened the door and ushered her into the office. As they came inside, Eliza started to look around the strange room, her eyes taking in everything. First she stared at the half clock ticking on the wall, then at the half a filing cabinet that was along the side wall. Everything seemed to be cut in half in this strange place; pictures, mirrors, even the objects that were on the desk. Finally, she glanced over to see that roosted on half a chair sat Willy Wonka.

Thomas closed the door, but the first thing that caught his attention was the framed picture that hung on the opposite wall. It was the only thing in the room that was not cut in half. It had been painted by his brother and to Willy it represented the other half of the promise shared between them prior to Simeon’s death.

On the day of the art opening, and Simeon’s death day, Willy had attended. There he purchased the largest of the paintings and hung it in his office. The first time Thomas laid eyes on it, the shock was more than obvious, and he had come very close to crying. Willy had smiled slightly, but said nothing.

“Mr. Wonka,” Eliza began to speak, her voice bringing Thomas back to the present.

Instead of responding, Willy turned around and got to his feet. As soon as he was standing, he made his way over to her, his blue eyes meeting her brown ones. “What can I do for you, dear lady?” he asked cordially.

“I...” she looked at Thomas, her fear getting the best of her. She bit down on her lip and felt her head growing light and she started to sink to the floor.

Willy acted quickly in response to Eliza’s loosing her stance. He gently grabbed her upper arms and helped her over to the half sofa that was up against one of the walls. “Are you alright now?” he asked once she was seated.

“I’m sorry, sir...” she began.

“...Oh tat, tat,” he shook his head. “You have no reason to apologize to me, I’m always glad to hand a lending help...oh strike that, reverse it...thank you.” He smiled winningly at her and noticed that
through his muddled up statement, she had relaxed somewhat.

“You’re a very kind man, Mr. Wonka,” she began.

Instead of letting this continue, Thomas looked at his friend. “Eliza wanted to see you, I’m afraid she has some rather distressful news that she needs to share with you.”

The woman bit down on her lip. “I do so hate being the bearer of terrible news, sir.”

“You fear that in bringing such un-glad tidings that you will be condemned for it, correct?” he asked.

She nodded.

“You won’t,” he affirmed with a shake of his head. “Now, what news do you have for me?”

Hesitantly, Eliza handed Willy the bar of chocolate that she had purchased that morning. As soon as he held it, he stood up and walked the length of the office, his back now facing them.

For his part, Willy looked down at the chocolate bar that now rested in his hand. “It would seem as though the rumors that have reached my ears are true,” he whispered. He removed the entire wrapper and looked down at the rectangular bar now resting in his hand. The first thing he did was to bring it to his nose and sniff each corner of it.

The varied consistency of the bar seemed to match his prized ‘Around the World’ recipe. He took a nibble of it on every corner, each of the chocolate confections different and carrying a distinctive taste. As soon as he recognized it, he threw the bar of chocolate to the floor in a fit of rage. “It’s mine!” he shouted his blue eyes blazing with anger.

As Willy’s loud voice erupted throughout the otherwise still room, Thomas watched as Eliza cowered against the back of the sofa. Willy turned back around and noticing this, he inhaled sharply as he slowly came over to where she was sitting.

As soon as he reached her, he rested his hand on her shoulder. “I did not intend to frighten you,” he offered, but looked at Thomas, his next words emerging. “Why don’t you see her home? I cannot expect her to work under these conditions.”

With that, he turned away from both of them and stiffly walked back over to his desk his foot intentionally stepping on the chocolate bar and smashing it against the floor.

“Is there anything I can do, Mr. Wonka?” Thomas asked intentionally using Willy’s surname as he always did when others were present in the room.

“No, just go,” he spoke, his voice laced with misery.

It was no secret, Thomas was afraid to leave his friend alone, but eventually nodded and went back over to where Eliza was seated, her head still lowered. “Come, I’ll see you home.”

With his help, she managed to get to her feet, but before Thomas could lead her out of the office, she broke away from him and shyly approached where Willy was sitting. As she reached him, her wrinkled hand came to rest on the back of his shoulder. “I’m so terribly sorry, Mr. Wonka,” she whispered as a stray tear streamed from beneath one of her eyes.

He turned around and looked up at her. As he did, he reached over and gently wiped the tear away. Eventually, he stood up, all the while offering a small and gracious smile to her. “I appreciate that, dear lady,” he said before Thomas led her from the office.
Chapter 4

Chapter 4: Waking from a Dream

The corridor just outside of Willy’s office seemed hollow and empty as Thomas and Eliza came out of the unusual room. The older woman’s head was lowered and it was impossible to see or even assume what thoughts were going through her mind.

Thomas looked around; the colors that lined the hall and the brightness of the corridor completely ignored. He tried to contemplate when the last time he had actually took in the various colors and textures of it, but could not remember. Strange that after so many trips down that particular hallway; he had stopped paying attention.

His mind, like hers, was full of thoughts and impressions, most of which were not exactly good. Of course, he was saddened that one of Willy’s prized recipes had been stolen and used. Yet, what concerned him the most was the sense of melancholy that had descended upon his friend.

There was no question left in Thomas’ mind, he felt a mixture of worry and guilt for having left Willy Wonka alone. He wanted nothing more than to turn around and return to the office and try and speak to his friend. At the same time, he knew that wishes and reality were two distinctly different things.

He looked over at Eliza, and noticed that the older woman seemed to have the very same outlook on things. After several steps, she stopped and abruptly turned around. “I don’t want to leave him like this,” she said, her voice filled with conviction. Before he could even stop her, she turned away from him, walked back to the office, and assertively opened the door without knocking.

Thomas had very little choice in the matter, so he turned around and followed. His eyes were now wide with surprise.

“Mr. Wonka,” Eliza said as she peered around the door and into the office. When she saw him sitting hunched over his desk, she slowly approached him, her hands coming to rest gently on his shoulders.

“I thought you were on your way home,” he said calmly as he slowly turned around.

Thomas closed the door but remained standing next to it as he watched Willy brush a lock of frizzy light brown hair aside and pat it into place. As soon as he finished, he raised his head. Once his blue eyes locked with her brown ones, it was plain to see that there was moisture smeared across the candy maker’s cheeks.

Eliza noticed that as well. “I couldn’t very well go, Mr. Wonka. Not when I am so worried about you,” she began. “It is the same as how you were worried about me three years ago and still gave me a job. You helped me when there were lines of people younger and more experienced out there who wanted to work for you. You hired an old woman who was slower and perhaps more prone to making mistakes than the rest of them put together.”

“That was nothing,” he said, his blue eyes widening somewhat. It was apparent that Willy Wonka had never heard someone, other than his close friends; speak with so much honesty and straightforwardness. He eventually swallowed and looked at her. “Eliza, you are just as capable as the rest of them.”

“No I’m not; at least I wasn’t back then.” She shook her head, but offered him a weak smile. “I don’t
really remember how the job market looked back then, but I can imagine that you had a hundred or more different people who were better qualified for the job than I was. You probably would never have had to train them, as was the case with me. The point is; you gave me a chance. I never even said ‘thank you’ for that. I never had the courage. Not even when I could have said something, I remained silent.”

Willy reached over and rested his hand on one of hers, which was still resting on his shoulder. “You were afraid to talk to me?” he asked.

“I’m afraid that given what my experiences have been, that it is quite my normal response, sir,” she said shrugging her shoulders, “but I’m not afraid anymore, not of you.”

“I can see that,” he said, but looked at Thomas briefly before looking back over at her. “Why did you come back, Eliza?”

“I came back, because it felt like the right thing to do,” she said. Slowly, she moved her hands from his shoulders, the contact now broken. “Somehow, I realized that if I were to walk out of here today and never saw you again, I would regret not having said the words I should have. I would have gone and blown yet another chance.”

“What should you have said?” Willy asked weakly. “I wasn’t really expecting anything else from you.”

“I know, and please believe me when I say that I wanted to thank you long before now,” she said. “I had a chance once, but never found the courage to say anything at all. I realized that I would never have forgiven myself if I were to have left this office without at least having expressed my gratitude.”

Willy reached for her hands and once he was holding them both in his, he stood up. In front of her, he looked down into the aged eyes of the woman, and shook his head. “I don’t know what to say.”

“Just promise me that you won’t give up on your dreams, Mr. Wonka,” she said, the tears now falling freely from her eyes. “If you do, then every person who has ever wished on a star will lose the faith they carry when it comes to holding onto their own dreams. I just know that they look to you for inspiration.”

Thomas listened as he swallowed the lump that had formed in his throat. What Eliza had just told his friend sounded like poetry and yet, he could almost see the silence as it descended on the room.

After about five or so minutes passed, he found his voice and spoke, his words shattering the stillness. “Eliza, I really should get you home.” As these words filled the room, he hoped that the woman’s wisdom would somehow offer encouragement to his friend.

“But just yet,” Willy said as he looked at Thomas. “I still owe her a candy bar.” He cast a fleeting glance to where the Slugworth bar lay in pieces on the floor. Releasing her hands, he turned back towards the desk and opened the drawer. From inside, he carefully pulled out a freshly wrapped candy bar. He turned back around and looked at her, the candy bar now resting in his hands. “I know it’s not the same candy, but I hope that this will replace the one I ruined.”

Eliza accepted it, her voice soft as she addressed the chocolatier. “I actually prefer it. At least it carries the correct name.” As these words hung in the air, she bit down on her lower lip, all the while knowing that if she tried to say another word, she would break down. The tears were already falling freely from her eyes, so it was just a matter of time. She raised her head once again and looked into the eyes of Willy Wonka. “Thank you,” the two words emerged.
“Why do you cry, my dear lady?” Willy finally asked. “It’s only a candy bar.”

Eliza lowered her head, but slid the candy into the side pocket of her purse. Without much success, she tried to conceal the sadness that was now overwhelming her.

Thomas could do nothing, he simply watched as Willy Wonka raised his head and looked at him, his eyes wide. “She feels such empathy for you,” he whispered the words to his friend.

What happened next took all three of them completely by surprise. Willy Wonka reached out, pulled the woman into his arms, and hugged her. His head came to rest against her shoulder.

After several moments had passed, he pulled back and offered her a brave smile. “You must go home now, Eliza, and try not to worry anymore about me.”

She backed up and nodded, but the words going through her mind were simple and concise. This was a task that was clearly easier said than done.

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As they stepped out into the hallway once again, Eliza could feel even more tears slipping from beneath her eyes. Thomas watched her for several minutes; all the while not able to get over how emotionally affected she was by this entire situation. He had never seen a woman, or anyone for that matter; attempt to put themselves into the circumstances of another. At the very least, it had never happened to the extent that it was on that day.

“That poor man,” she whispered more to herself than to the tall man walking alongside her. “It’s almost like stealing someone’s hope away.”

“I know what you mean,” Thomas said. “What is really heartbreaking is how he was holding back, and all because of me. I know that he didn’t cry probably because I did enough for both of us,” she mused.

“I suppose it was not all that hard to tell that he was holding something back,” he said.

“It must be so dreadful for him to not be able to tell anyone how he feels,” she whispered. Thomas looked at the woman, his eyebrows arching in surprise. Before he could say anything to her, she continued to speak. “That somehow makes him seem all the more human to the rest of us. At the same time, he is probably is a lot more vulnerable than any of us could comprehend.”

“Yes,” Thomas said. He looked over at her after several moments and they stopped in front of the door leading outside. “May I ask you a rather unusual question?”

“Of course,” she said.

“When Mr. Wonka got upset, what was going through your mind?” he asked. “You looked positively terrified.”

“I was,” she responded, her voice wavering. “I didn’t really know what was happening, but I always seem to do that whenever men start to yell.”

“Do you know why it is you do that?” he asked.

She nodded. “Yes, my husband used to do much more than just yell. For a moment, I was somehow catapulted back to that time in my life. It was rather like a flashback. Instead of seeing Mr. Wonka, I
“was seeing my husband.”

“In other words, your husband abused you?” Thomas asked.

She nodded, but when her next words emerged, they took on a distanced and unemotional quality. “We all have our crosses to bear, Mr. Wilkenson. That just happened to be mine.”

“You speak as though this is thankfully in the past,” he said.

“Edwin died about two years before I applied to work at the factory. It was strange how during our marriage, he wouldn’t allow me to work. He claimed that a woman’s place was at home raising children. Of course, that concept sort of died off after our son was stillborn. My husband went a bit crazy and blamed me for the child’s death. For a long time, I thought that he was right and there was something wrong with me. I later realized that it had nothing to do with me whatsoever,” she explained openly. “After my husband died, I felt so much relief. I had my life back and could make my own decisions about what I wanted, felt, or believed. After his funeral, I started to feel some traces of guilt for having been happy with him being gone. I know that it sounds very strange, but I was grateful that the pain that he inflicted had finally stopped.”

“I don’t blame you for feeling grateful that he is no longer there, especially since he hurt you. I probably would have felt the exact same way myself,” he said. Instead of speaking further, he opened the door.

Outside, the sky had become even more overcast and it looked as though rain would start very soon. The mass of gray colored clouds seemed to hang there and Thomas wondered if he would manage to get to her house and then back to the factory before the sky opened up.

The entire factory courtyard seemed uncharacteristically empty. It was perhaps because Thomas had never ventured across it at this hour. Generally, he only seemed to observe the masses of workers while they were taking their mid-morning breaks. Some of them would be out for a breath of fresh air, while others stood off to the side smoking cigarettes and drinking coffee. Because it was now vacant, it seemed to carry a very unsettling feel to it.

Instead of concentrating too intently on this anomaly, Thomas simply inhaled. The London air always seemed to carry this stale and humid feel just before a cloudburst would happen. This somehow shifted his attention back to whether or not he would even make it back to the factory before the rains started. Deciding that he did not want to take that chance, he looked at Eliza. “I should probably retrieve my umbrella,” he said.

She nodded as he raced inside, grabbed the black object, and returned outside.

As he reached her side, he noticed that she had stopped moving and was standing stationary, her gaze staring up at the factory as it towered majestically over them.

“It always looks smaller from the outside, doesn’t it?” he asked after watching her stare unmoving at the various buildings for several minutes. He could somehow tell by her stance that she knew what the future was going to hold.

Instead of offering him an answer to his question, she nodded slowly. “I have spent many happy days here, Mr. Wilkenson. Working for Mr. Wonka has been very much a dream for me, although it is something I never really spoke of to the outside world.”

“You didn’t?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, I always felt that my work was something that I couldn’t really talk
“Because of the spies?” he asked.

“Mainly, yes,” she said nodding. “There were other factors involved and they probably had something to do with my personal feelings. I wanted to protect Mr. Wonka’s secrets, at least the ones I knew about. I also feared that if I spoke of this wonderful job to those in the outside world, that it would sound as though I was bragging. I simply opted to not say anything about it, just keep it to myself. I figured that I might one day wake from this dream, and now I think I have.” She started to walk several paces towards the gate, but stopped once again and turned around when his voice emerged.

“You’re speaking in imagery,” he said.

“Not really,” she said. “A dream is that part of me that says that life is easy and fun. I shouldn’t expect or hope that it will remain constant. I learned a long time ago that nothing ever really stays the same, change is always going to be inevitable.”

“You seem very wise,” he said. “You just accept everything that happens?”

“I don’t know if it is wisdom, inasmuch as it is age. Deep inside of me, I know that there is always going to be a choice. I can either accept it or fight against it. Fighting seems to do very little, or no, good, so I simply resolve myself to accepting it.” She offered him a tiny smile, her eyes taking on a strange brightness, contrary to the sadness that encased her.

“Why do you elude to your age?” he asked. “You’re not really that old, you’re just wise. Actually, I am only a few years younger than you are, and I don’t consider myself to be old. Maybe working for Mr. Wonka has helped me in that regard.”

“I would surmise that it has,” she responded, her expression growing thoughtful. “It deeply saddens me when I stop and consider how I never really trusted myself enough to get to know or even approach Mr. Wonka before today. If someone were to have told me that Willy Wonka was going to give me a hug this morning, I probably would never have believed it. In the three years I have worked in the factory, I have only seen him once. Only once, and yet, it still feels like it happened only yesterday.”

“What happened?” he asked.

“I had been working with a group of people in the fudge room. We were tying out a new kind of fudge, and he happened to stop in to check on our progress. Here we sat in a large circle discussing fudge and he walked over to the group. Without saying anything to me, he rested his hand on my shoulder and started talking about the proper amounts of sugar to add so that the fudge consistency would be at its best. I sat there rather enjoying the weight of his hand on my shoulder. It was as though he was silently acknowledging me for my work. I didn’t really know what to do, everything felt new and different at that moment. I suppose you might call what I experienced ‘shock’ or ‘surprise’, but it was a nice feeling. We continued discussing the fudge for about five minutes and I was tempted to stand up before he left the group and just say something to him, but I didn’t. That’s what I was referring to when I told him just now that I was afraid. After that incident and for the longest time, I regretted the fact that I didn’t at least have the courage to make eye contact with him or say something.”

“Today gave you that chance,” Thomas said as they finally reached the gate. He opened it and motioned her to walk through.
She heeded his gesture and stepped out of the complex of the large factory. After several steps, she stopped and turned around, watching as he closed the gate. Her gaze abruptly shifted back to the group of buildings. “I don’t think this will ever happen again, and that is rather heartbreaking for me.”

“Why do you say that?” he asked.

“I somehow have this feeling that my days at the factory are at their end. It’s a pity, but now I fear I must move on.” She took a deep breath.

“Maybe not,” he said. “Maybe Mr. Wonka will take your wise words to heart.”

“I expect nothing of him,” she said as she glanced back in the direction of the factory as they started to walk towards the segment of town where she lived. As soon as the factory was no longer in sight, she turned and looked at him, her next question taking him by surprise. “You are Mr. Wonka’s friend, are you not?”

Thomas abruptly stopped, turned, and looked at her. He was not certain about how he should respond to the woman’s question. He thought about all the honest words that she had spoken with him as well as the things she had said to Willy when they had been in his office. The empathy she had for his friend was something rare and unique. She had confided in him things that even the closest of friends would not often speak of.

He took a deep breath all the while pondering how it was only fair for him to offer her the same sort of honest response. Looking around and seeing that they were, in fact, alone, his confession emerged. “Willy Wonka is my best friend.”
Chapter 5

Chapter 5: An Unexpected Meeting

As these words emerged, Thomas looked at her to make note of her response. When she said nothing, he continued to speak, his voice soft. “Will and I first met when we were children. I never called him Will unless we were alone, but that’s usually how I address him. Somehow, I believed that if I kept my distance, that it might protect him.”

“It doesn’t protect anyone, Mr. Wilkenson it only creates a distance between the two of you. That was why I asked to be called ‘Eliza’. Somehow, I feared that having you or him call me Ms. Bachmann would have made me cower out and not say anything at all.” She took a deep breath and looked over at him. He seemed to carry a contemplative look on his face, his entire stance drifting into a sense of melancholy. “If you don’t mind my asking, what were the circumstances as to how you initially met Mr. Wonka?”

“The war,” he said, his voice cracking. “I was a teenager in London when the first bombs fell. Our mother was dead and my brother and I had become wards of the state after our father was sent off to fight. I don’t remember very much except that my brother and I were put on a train and sent to the countryside to stay with Will’s grandfather,” he said. “I was sixteen when I first met him and he was eight. His father surprisingly, was a dentist and a rather uptight individual, to boot. Anyway, when Dr. Wonka brought his son to the house, we were asked to entertain him while the grown-ups would talk. After about a week of these infrequent visits, we just became friends. Several months after we had come to stay, our father was killed on the battlefield. Upon receiving the telegram, Will told us that we were now a part of his family since we didn’t really have one anymore.” As he spoke, he could feel his eyes tearing up. “He’s been like a brother to me all these years. We lost touch for a while, but then reconnected after my brother died. For some reason, he just stepped in and became a shining example of what a true friend is really supposed to be.”

“It must be tearing you apart to see him in so much pain,” she said compassionately. “Here is a man whom you share a deep and abiding friendship, and he is suffering in ways that neither of us could comprehend.” She took a deep breath as she rested a wrinkled hand on his shoulder. “I suppose I could tell that you were affected by all of this. You didn’t even have to answer my questions and yet I could tell that the bond between you exists.”

“How could you?” he asked. “I never said anything.”

“You didn’t have to,” she said. “I noticed it when you called him, ‘Mr. Wonka’ just before we left the first time. Your voice had altered in pitch, and the question emerged strained. I had this feeling that you wanted nothing more than to address him with his given name instead of using a surname. Not to mention the fact that a simple employee would not generally be able to affirm assumptions about their employer to be correct or accurate, as you have done. I had the impression that you knew one another for a number of years; I just didn’t know the specifics. I remember that time very vividly, as my aunt and uncle also had children coming to stay with them in their country home. When the war had started, I was too old to be forcibly removed, but I did leave London as well. I remembered sitting on a train with children who were crying and very scared. They didn’t understand what was happening and I guess because of my inexperience, neither did I.”

Thomas looked at the woman. He had assumed so many things about her, but somehow could not get over the sheer strength that she seemed to convey. Although she was thin with wavy locks of graying hair, she carried herself in a very calm, almost disciplined manner. “It surprises me,” he
began in the hopes of changing the subject.

“What?” she asked.

“When we were in Will’s office earlier, I figured that you were too upset to take much notice of what was happening either of us,” he said honestly. “You seemed to know more than one might assume.”

She shook her head. “I only started noticing things about him after he said that he wouldn’t hurt me. There was an element of benevolence in his words and I could not ignore it. I had always heard that Mr. Wonka was a very compassionate man, but I had never experienced it. This was affirmed when he asked you to see me home. This was not necessary, but still a very kind gesture and one that I deeply appreciated. You see, although I am upset right now, I knew that I could have handled getting home on my own. I walk this route every day.”

“Eliza, you never told me what eventually happened to your mother. After I interviewed you, we didn’t speak much at all, but I have been curious as to how she is doing. When you mentioned her bridge club, I was left to assume that she was all right. I often thought about asking, but for some reason, I never did.”

“She stopped going in for treatment several months before my father died. Now her health is quickly deteriorating. The doctor has said that it was only a matter of time. She loved my father, you see, and she misses him very much. It’s hard to believe that they were married close to 52 years.”

“I’m sorry,” he said sincerely. “That must be very hard for you.”

She lowered her head as a tear slipped from between her lashes and made a trek down her cheek. “It’s a part of life,” she offered bravely. “The ironic thing is my mother is the only other person who knows what has been done to help us. Since you said that it was Mr. Wonka who decided to hire me, I suppose I lived the last three years assuming that it was you.”

“No, I just told him of your circumstance, he did the rest,” Thomas said.

“But I think it was you who persuaded him,” she said. “I’m grateful to you for that.”

“I would do it again in a heartbeat,” he said sincerely.

She smiled, but continued to answer his initial question. “After I was given the job, the money I earned went to pay for my mother’s treatment. The savings that we had otherwise accumulated were depleted to cover the costs of my father’s funeral. He died during Christmas. Between paying for that and the treatment costs, we had nothing left to celebrate with. None of us wanted to have fun anyway because it was too hard. The extent of my holiday was the party at the factory. I’ll never forget it. Of course, I know that given everything else that has happened, we are now on our own again.”

“Do you really think that Willy Wonka is going to cast you out in the cold?” he asked, “just like that?”

“I know it’s not intentional, Mr. Wilkenson,” she said. “I simply have had this suspicion that he will see no other option. How could he? The poor man has lost something valuable because of thievery. Do you honestly think that he will have the time or energy to find out specifically who were the ones who stole from him?” she asked, her voice taking on an assertive edge.

“I honestly don’t know what he’s going to do, Eliza,” he said.

“No one does, but it is clear that he is hurting, and whatever he decides to do, I will harbor no ill will
towards him. I only hope that you will be there for him and help mend his broken spirit. I know that he will have to do something to protect his life’s work and no one should fault him for that. He is far too good a man to deserve what has happened to him. It does not matter if one is rich or poor, people simply should not steal, but they do. When one is robbed in such a way as this, it takes a great deal of time for them to find their trust again. I worry of what will become of him.”

“But what about you?” he asked. “Who is going to help you?”

“I’ll get by,” she said, her eyes taking on a faraway look. She smiled weakly at him as they reached the intersection that crossed over and led into the poorer segment of town. She continued walking straight ahead, and he followed. The first thing he noticed was that the footpath they had been using had suddenly disappeared and the two of them were now walking along the grassy side of a road.

After about three or four minutes, of walking, the blacktop road they were on suddenly disappeared and a muddy path replaced it. The dirt indentures were separated by green tuffs of grass that sprang up in the very center of the road. Along one side, a wooden fence (in need of a fresh coat of paint) separated the farming community from the impoverished homes on the other side. Across the pasture, Thomas spotted several groups of farmhouses with what looked to be livestock grazing in the meadow. The air that had once been rank and humid had now taken on a different odor, this one consisting of manure and hay.

Along the other side, a number of ramshackle houses were lined, the small, odd-shaped dwellings reminding him immediately of the photographs they used for those large 1,000 piece puzzles. He took a deep breath as he remembered the days of his youth when he and Willy would spend rainy afternoons working on puzzles. This activity had managed to keep the two of them busy for hours.

As the wind began to blow stronger, he could see the trees as they began to sway about. He glanced skyward wondering how much longer the rain would be held at bay.

Eliza glanced skyward but then lowered her head and looked down the same dirt road, her eyes taking in the houses that lined the street. They walked without speaking for several meters until she stopped abruptly and motioned towards the row of houses. To Thomas’ way of thinking, each one appeared poorer and more dismal than then next.

“Most of the people who live here have been in this neighborhood for many generations,” she began, her words emerging before he could even inquire as to why they had stopped. “Everyone knows everyone else’s name. Whenever any of us need help with something, there is always someone who is willing to stop and lend a helping hand…” her voice trailed, and she abruptly released a small giggle.

Thomas looked over at her not really certain as to why she was laughing, as they had been discussing something rather serious. Then a smile abruptly covered his face as he remembered how Willy had messed up that statement back in his office. Eliza seemed to have reminisced on that moment. After several seconds, she shrugged her shoulders and continued to speak. “The truth is this group of people is very much like an extended family. That’s why I said that I would be all right. They seem to care for me as though I am their sister, mother, grandmother, or friend.”

“It sounds like a wonderful place to live,” he said.

She nodded, her eyes shining. “For the most part, it is.” She pointed down the street and as if on cue, a small boy was seen running along the perimeters of the road. The shaggy blonde hair of the child seemed to be bopping along as he ran, a large stick dragging along behind him. The end of the object was jabbing into the dirt, but that seemed not to hinder the energy of the child. Her eyes brightened considerably and Thomas noticed this.
“You know that boy?” he asked.

“Yes, his name is Charlie Bucket,” she said. “I’ve known him since he was a baby and he is the nicest little boy in the neighborhood. He’s five-years-old now, he’s just getting ready to celebrate his sixth birthday. His father died two months ago and he’s been trying to understand why this has happened. How does anyone explain ‘death’ to a child? Whenever I look at him, I remember that my life is really not as difficult as I may have been thinking. Sadly, every time he looks at me, I see his grief, but there is also that innocent wonder that can be only seen through the eyes of a child.”

“His family is poor?” Thomas asked as he continued to watch the little boy. The child was fidgeting and giving off the impression that his clothes were uncomfortable and did not fit right.

“Very. They are probably the poorest of all the people in this neighborhood. I can at least afford to provide my mother and I with fresh vegetables, milk and cheese,” she said. “His mother works for slave’s wages in a laundry house. She never complains, but the work is very hard. They grow cabbage behind their house and that seems to be only food they get to eat. Charlie always complains about having to eat cabbage water, but I know that he would never say such a thing to his mother.”

Suddenly, as though hearing her words, the child turned around and started to come up the road towards the spot where they were now standing. The stick, he discarded. When he recognized Eliza, he broke into a bright smile and waved.

“Hi Eliza!” he said happily. His soft blue-eyed gaze shifted as he regarded Thomas, who stood beside her. It was obvious at that moment that the business suit and tie that Thomas wore, made him stand out like a sore thumb. “Hi,” the child said shyly.

Thomas nodded cordially, but said nothing. Instead, he noticed how the boy was doing everything in his power to keep from staring up at him. The child’s greeting seemed to echo in his mind long after Eliza had crouched down so that she would be eye level with the little boy.

“Hello there, Charlie, you enjoying your last summer vacation before starting school?” she asked, her voice emerging in a forced cheerfulness.

Charlie simply nodded, his blonde hair flopping down in front of one of his eyes. He brushed it aside with the palm of his hand before responding. “It’s okay,” he offered freely, but Thomas could almost sense that there was something in his voice that clearly indicated the opposite. “Why are you here?” he asked innocently. “I thought you would be at work.”

“You’re right, I usually am at work at this hour,” she said freely.

“Yeah,” he said. “Mom says that I have to go to bed at eight, maybe that’s why we don’t see you.”

Eliza nodded. “It’s possible. But you know, when I was your age, I went to bed early too. I liked it because I could have exciting dreams like climbing Mount Everest or walking through a forest filled with trees that had gumdrops hanging from them.”

“I had one last night that was even better,” Charlie said, his eyes brightening somewhat.

“Really,” Eliza asked, “what was it about?”

“Willy Wonka,” Charlie said. “I know it sounds kind of stupid, doesn’t it?”

Thomas concealed an ironic smile upon hearing this, but said nothing. Instead he waited for Eliza to answer.
“No it’s not,” she said with an adamant shake of her head. “Do you know what is nice about dreams?”

“What?”

“You can do anything you want in them. You can meet the greatest dreamer the world has ever known. You know, I think even Willy Wonka started his grand and wonderful work because of his dream. It is through dreams that we catch a glimpse into our heart’s desire,” she said. “Remember, Charlie, nothing is beyond your reach. Now, tell me everything you remember about your dream, it sounds wonderful.”

“Oh it was,” he said, his eyes shining. “Mr. Wonka was really nice to me in this dream. He picked me up in his arms and spun me around the room; it felt like I was flying. We were laughing and he was as happy as I was. I could feel the breeze going through my hair and sometimes when I close my eyes, I can almost imagine it happening in real life. But that’s impossible, just like Grandpa George says.”

“Why is that?” she asked as she reached over and brushed a lock of his hair aside.

“He said dreams are stupid,” Charlie looked at Eliza, his blue eyes brimming with tears.

“Your grandpa is very sad right now, Charlie, just like you are. You see, sweetheart, he’s still grieving and sometimes when grown-ups are sad, we become angry and hurt. It doesn’t mean that we are insensitive or uncaring, it just means that we’re trying to be strong for those we love.” As she spoke, her voice cracked.

Thomas listened as these words emerged and after a few moments of silence, he nodded. “She’s right; everyone grieves in a different way, Charlie.”

The small child reached up and wiped the tears from his eyes. “Sometimes dreams are better, but then the good stuff ends when we wake up.”

“I know, honey,” she embraced the child and felt his tears falling on her shoulder. After several moments in her arms, the child backed up.

“Eliza?” he eventually whispered.

“Yes?”

“Do you think Mr. Wonka would be nice or that he might like me?”

“Well, let me ask you something,” she said. “Does Mr. Wonka inspire great things in you?”

“I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t get a lot of his chocolate, so I’m not really sure.”

“Well, let me ask you in another way,” she said. “Imagine that you are drawing a picture or making up stories and you get stuck on an idea. What do you do? Perhaps go back to the dream that you had the night before. After thinking about it for some time, a new idea suddenly comes alive in your heart.”

“You mean Mr. Wonka can still do that for me even though I don’t know him?” Charlie asked.

“Anyone can inspire you, sweetheart you don’t have to know them personally. Sometimes it is even better when you don’t.”
“You mean it?” Charlie asked.

Eliza nodded. “What do you think of when you think of Mr. Wonka?”

“Magic,” he whispered, his eyes now wide with childlike innocence.

“Yes and his magic changed your sadness to joy. Could you imagine Mr. Wonka as a sad or unhappy person?” she asked.

“No,” the child responded immediately.

“You see, when you meet someone, even someone as unique and special as Mr. Wonka, you may discover the human-like qualities in him, and this could either make you happy or sad,” she said. “When you daydream or fantasize about meeting him, then you have something that you could look forward to, and that gives you joy in living.”

Thomas listened as Eliza spoke to the child and smiled when he heard her overwhelming insight. He was amazed that throughout the conversation, she did not once mention knowing Willy Wonka.

Charlie closed his eyes for a moment before raising his head and looking at her. “You mean it?”

“Yes, I do,” she smiled, this time instead of her smile feeling forced and laced with sadness, it was genuine. She got back on her feet as Charlie’s next question emerged.

“What did you come home? It’s not even lunch time yet?”

“Well, let’s just say that something suddenly came up,” she said bravely, but pulled a yellow colored package out of her dress pocket and offered him one of the menthol drops. “You want one of these? They aren’t as good as those jawbreakers you usually like, but I think they still taste alright.”

Charlie smiled gratefully and accepted a piece of the candy. Instead of sticking it in his mouth, he carefully tucked it in the pocket of his shorts.

“I’m sorry I can’t offer much else,” she said. She cast a quick glance towards Thomas. He simply nodded with understanding in his gaze. He knew that she had no intention of opening or ever eating the candy bar Willy had given to her. There was something in her expression that indicated as much.

“Thank you, Eliza,” he said but turned to Thomas. “She always gives me candy if she has it. But, my favorites are those large jawbreakers that are covered with sprinkles. My very favorite are Mr. Wonka’s chocolate bars.”

Thomas smiled and nodded. “I like that kind too.”

The boy’s eyes brightened, but after several seconds, he could hear the sounds of his mother calling his name. “I gotta go home now, Mom’s waiting with lunch,” he said, but motioned towards the candy tucked away in his pocket. “At least now I have dessert.” His face curled up and he looked at her with a grimace. “We’re probably having cabbage water again,” he said, but eventually nudged her. “You know something, Eliza?”

“What’s that Charlie?” she asked as she stooped down once again in order to be eye-level with the child.

“When I get bigger, I’m going to get a paper route or something and then I can buy bread for my family and then we don’t have to eat anymore cabbage water,” he smiled impishly, his dimples now showing.
“I’ve no doubt that you will one day do just that, Charlie, you have the same ambition that your
daddy had,” she said smiling. “You’d better run along now, I don’t want to be the reason you were
late for lunch, even if it is just cabbage water. Tell your mother ‘hello’ for me.”

Charlie nodded and took off running back towards the house that was at the far end of the road.

“He’s a delightful little boy, and you gave him something to hope for,” he said as soon as they were
alone. “You never mentioned what happened with Will, but you gave that child something to dream
about.”

“It’s only a promise I made to myself. One day I will tell him about my job at the factory and meeting
Mr. Wonka. Until then, he has to keep on dreaming, they are what keeps him happy. Sometimes that
is what gives a person the courage to hang on,” she said.

“He really does want to work and help his family, doesn’t he?”

“He’s repeated those plans to me so many times that I’ve committed them to memory,” she said.
“Strange how all of his grandparents have been bedridden for the last fifteen or so years and his
optimism is still so catching. That’s how come I got to know him and his mother in the first place.
Clara is as kind hearted and loving as her son. We would often see each other just about every
Sunday afternoon when we would go and visit the graves of our loved ones. I sometimes would
bring a Wonka bar with me to the cemetery because I knew that Charlie would be there. We would
sit together, and I would listen while he would fantasize about the factory. Together, we would share
the chocolate.”

“You offered him a little bit of happiness amidst a somber moment,” Thomas said.

“Perhaps, but it has been during the last months in particular that I wanted to tell him that I worked
for Mr. Wonka, but for whatever reason, I didn’t. I always tried to share some of my good fortune
with him. He’s such a good child, and deserves far more than what he has been given. That whole
family does.”

Thomas continued to stare after the little boy but then he turned back to face Eliza. “You seem to
care for everyone; first Mr. Wonka, your mother, Charlie, his family, and even me. Is there someone
you don’t care for?”

Eliza broke into a mischievous grin. “Well, since you inquired, I am not exceedingly fond of Arthur
Slugworth.” As these words emerged, Thomas’ expression changed and he found himself smiling.
Upon seeing this, she nodded approvingly. “I thought you would agree with me on that summation?”

“I do agree,” he said with a nod. “So how much further is it to your house?”

“Just a few more meters and then you will have tended to the task of seeing me back home,” she
said. After several minutes, her smile vanished. “I guess you are wondering why it is I didn’t share
my candy bar with Charlie, aren’t you?”

“Actually, no, I figured that you would take it home and keep it,” he said.

“It seems silly, doesn’t it?” she asked.

“Not really, I have one at home as well,” he said. “Will gave it to me right after I came back to
London. It sits next to a painting that my brother did. I guess those two things somehow represent the
dreams that they both carried.”

“That’s beautiful,” she said but turned and pointed to a small gray colored house. “There’s my house,
the one with the dark gray colored trim and chipped paint,” she said. “My mother kept saying that we should paint it, but neither of us has had the time or the means in which to do so.” She shrugged her shoulders and took a deep breath. “I used to love fixing things up.”

“Maybe one day you can,” he said, but glanced down at his watch. “I really should be heading back though.”

“I figured as much,” she said. “You take care of yourself, Mr. Wilkenson.”

“In the future, please just call me Thomas,” he said. “I will try and come by before the week is out and explain what will be happening during the coming days at the factory.”

“You don’t owe me any explanations,” she said. “I simply figured that tomorrow would come quickly enough and then we would all know what Mr. Wonka intends to do. Of course, you’re always welcome to stop by any time.”

“Thank you. It was a pleasure escorting you back,” he said earnestly.

Eliza nodded, but instead of speaking, she squeezed his hand one last time, and silently walked back towards the house. As soon as she had climbed up on the porch, her hand reached out and pressed down on the lever. The door creaked open and she disappeared inside.
Chapter 6

Chapter 6: The Tears of a Child

Thomas stood motionless as the door closed behind her.

He had never met anyone quite like Eliza, although over time, he had gotten to know a fair number of the Wonka employees. Many of them were nice and friendly enough, but there were others who were quite ambitious and that often contradicted with Willy’s business ethics.

Of course, this sometimes bothered Thomas as well, but ever since his arrival at the factory, he had never really felt it was appropriate to discuss these concerns with the chocolatier. For that reason, he would withdraw from it and deliberately try not to interfere with his friend’s work.

Amidst all of these struggles, Thomas knew that he was very grateful that it was someone like Eliza who had discovered the candy bar and brought it their attention. Both of them knew that if it had been discovered by one of those ambitious types, then they would have used said knowledge to seek Willy’s favor. Over time, Thomas recognized that because of his friend’s position, it had become increasingly difficult for the chocolatier to find true friends. Whenever he had become close to someone, the truth would soon emerge that it was not Willy Wonka they liked, but rather his status.

Thomas’ thoughts were still centered on Eliza as he made his way back towards the factory. He could not forget how kind and gentle she was when she had spoken with his friend. In a rather strange way, she had somehow come across as a sort of surrogate mother to Willy Wonka. Her eyes had been filled with sincerity and it was abundantly clear that she would never use or manipulate another person. After having seen her house and the meager manner in which she lived, Thomas knew instinctively that she could have used whatever help that was offered. It was strange that she never requested it.

Smiling sadly, he glanced skyward, his eyes staring across the horizon. Much of it was dark gray in color, the distanced clouds somehow giving way to an unending rain-shower. A streak of yellowish haze seemed to hang in the distance. This provided a small amount of light, which was cast off by the clouds that were reflecting the sun’s rays.

Of course, even with that minimal amount of light, it was consistently getting darker by the minute. Instead of worrying needlessly about the rain, he simply clutched his umbrella more tightly and continued to walk, his steps now slow and deliberate.

As he made his way, he ran his left hand down the front of his suit, the black fabric almost too thick for the humid summer climate. He liked this suit; it was easy to care for, and it matched his favorite black hat. Today, however, he chose to go without the hat. It seemed a better option because now the wind had started to pick up. He took a deep breath, the air shifting in aroma as he distanced himself from the outskirts of town. Now, all he saw were various houses and businesses that cropped up on either side of the road.

The trip back into town somehow felt much longer since he did not have anyone to talk to. The time alone did not necessarily bother him. Perhaps this was because this gave him the chance to really contemplate where he had been that morning and what he had seen and experienced.

He had never been to that part of town before. In fact, it was probably as strange for him as a royal occasion would be for Eliza. He knew how some of the wealthier people he had met through his friend had displayed characteristics of being tactless and rude, whereas poorer people like Eliza
seemed to treat others in a kind and humane manner. Her optimism was leaving an impact; not only on a poor child like Charlie Bucket, but on Willy Wonka as well.

Thomas curled his lip unconsciously as he thought about the cabbage water that the child was expected to eat day in and day out. This tugged at his heartstrings as he remembered how she had answered the child’s questions without so much as giving away secrets that she felt had been bestowed upon her.

It seemed almost surprising how optimistic she was, even with the vagueness of her future hanging over her head. How could a woman maintain a positive and loving spirit when so much uncertainty loomed?

Flashback End

July 12, 1971

“Excuse me, Sir,” a voice interrupted his thoughts and he raised his head to see that one of the stewardesses was standing next to his seat. Her hand was holding what looked to be a brown wallet. “One of the passengers dropped this when they boarded the plane,” she explained.

Thomas removed the seatbelt and stood up, his hand immediately digging in the pocket of his jacket. When he felt his wallet, he shook his head. “It’s not mine. Wasn’t there some form of identification inside?”

“Actually, no, there wasn’t any, that’s why I’m asking around,” she said. “I know it seems strange…” Her voice drifted off.

Thomas shook his head. “Maybe you should ask the children who are traveling. The parents generally have their tickets and passports on them instead of giving them to their kids. Ask some of the children and you might find out who the owner is.”

“That’s a really good idea, thank you, sir,” she smiled and started making her way back up the aisle, stopping at various points to inquire with the younger passengers. After several minutes, she returned to his side. “You were right, it belonged to a nine-year-old boy,” she said smiling. “Thank you for the tip, I’ll be sure to pass that on to my colleagues.”

“My pleasure,” Thomas said and watched as she went back up the aisle.

As soon as she was gone, he turned his head to see that the little girl next to him was staring. He noticed that her eyes were same color as dark chocolate and her hair was a medium brown and hung in curls down over her shoulders. Her mouth was neither smiling nor frowning; instead it was curled up in the formation of the letter ‘o’. “Hi,” she said softly, when his gaze met hers. “Can I ask you something?”

“Sure you can,” he said. “Ask away.”

“Have you ever flown before?”

“I’ve been on a plane a few times, why?” he asked.

“I never have,” she said. “I don’t know what it’s like.”

Thomas smiled gently at her. “Are you afraid?”

She nodded, her doe-like eyes regarding him. There was something in that gaze that made him
immediately think that there was more going on with this child then a simple fear of flying. He cast a brief glance towards her mother. The woman seemed about as distracted as the child and this made him ponder what was happening in their lives that would instigate such a detached manner. Sighing, he could not help but remember how his friend had done just that the day his recipe had been stolen.

He could fault no one for this, but he still could see how the past events were paralleled to the present moments. Of course, he knew that this behavior served no one at all.

Seconds later, the mother stood up with the intention of leaving her seat. Thomas got to his feet and stepped out into the aisle so that she could get by.

“Thank you,” she said as she walked slowly past him and distanced herself from the seats. He sat back down, his weight falling against the uncomfortable seat. He took a deep breath as he looked over at the little girl.

“You seem troubled,” he said. “You’re not really scared of flying, aren’t you?”

The child shook her head, “not really.”

“Then let me guess, you said that because your mother was here and you didn’t want to make her worry about you,” he said.

“How’d you know?” she asked.

“Well, we haven’t taken off yet, and you’re not trying to strap your doll in. You were doing that when I sat down, but now you’ve stopped,” he said.

“Do you think she knows?” the child asked.

“Knows that there’s something else that is bothering you?” he asked.

She nodded timidly.

“I don’t think she knows, she seemed rather preoccupied just now,” he said, his voice now causing the little girl to nervously giggle. “What’s so amusing?”

“I’m sorry, but you talk kind of funny,” she said.

“I do?” he asked. No one had ever said that to him before, but the words coming from this child made him smile. There was something to be said for simple childlike honesty.

“I don’t mean to hurt your feelings, but I never heard anyone talk like that before. My daddy doesn’t talk to me anymore, but I remember how his voice was much deeper,” she said sadly.

“I suppose that everyone is different, not only in what they say, but also how they say it,” he said. “Your mother seems very quiet.”

“She’s always quiet when she’s sad,” she said shrugging her shoulders.

“I see,” he said, “and why did you say that your daddy doesn’t talk to you?”

The child looked as though she was about to cry, but she wiped her hand over her eyes and smeared away one of the tears that had escaped. “I don’t know. He left a week ago and I haven’t seen him since.”

“He hasn’t rung you at all?” Thomas asked.
“No,” she sniffed but raised her head and looked down the aisle half expecting her mother to return. When she noticed the aisle was still empty, she allowed the moisture to stream down over her face.

“It must be very hard to have your father leave like that and not understand why,” he said. “Did you ever ask your mother about this?”

She shook her head. “I’m scared to.”

“So instead, you ask a stranger on a plane,” he said gently.

“You look nice, and I thought that maybe you’d understand,” she whispered more to herself than to him.

“I do understand, and I wish that there was something I could say or do that might help,” he said sincerely. “I really do think that you should try and talk to your mother about this, though.”

“I can’t,” the child whispered brokenly. “Whenever I mention my daddy, she starts to cry. I don’t like to make her cry.”

“I don’t think anyone likes to make another person cry,” Thomas said honestly, “but, now they’re causing you to cry and perhaps they don’t realize it. Your mother and father should not be making you cry.”

In response to this, the child lowered her head and took a deep breath. She started to turn away from him. “Mommy said I shouldn’t talk to strangers, but I don’t know who I can talk to.”

“It’s alright, but you know, your mother’s exactly right about that,” he said, keeping his voice light. “You really should be more careful about who you share these thoughts with. Not every stranger you meet is going to be nice to you; some may try to hurt you. So you have to be really careful,” Thomas said as his thoughts shifted and he remembered news stories where children had gotten into serious trouble for doing what she was doing. “Will you promise me that in the future you’ll be very careful?”

“I promise,” she said, her voice emerging in a soft whimper.

Thomas nodded. “Good girl,” he said. “You still need to talk to someone, don’t you?” When she nodded, he continued. “Have you tried talking too a counselor at your school?”

“It’s summer vacation time, there is no school,” she said.

“Yes, that could pose a problem,” he smiled gently. “Well, it sounds like you have a lot of stuff weighing you down.” As he spoke, he could tell that there was something very sad, almost helpless, in the little girl’s manner. He knew that he could not just distance himself from her, they were seatmates on a delayed flight, and there was no telling how long they would be in one another’s company.

Taking a deep breath, he realized that he had no choice; he would have to try and help. Digging in the pocket of his jacket, he removed a crisp white handkerchief and shook it out. He leaned over and pressed the soft cloth into the child’s hands.

This was not just any handkerchief; this was the same handkerchief that Willy Wonka had given to him when his brother died. The chocolatier had never asked for it back, and now Thomas carried it around for moments such as these. “It’s clean, you can use it to dry your tears,” he said.

The child began to wipe her face with the piece of cloth, thus exposing the initials W.W., which
were embroidered on one of the corners. “Do you know what a friend of mine once said to someone about your age regarding grief?”

“What?” she asked as she ran her innocent fingers over the piece of cloth. She gingerly wiped it against her eyes, the fabric soaking up the tears.

“Well, she said that sometimes grownups become angry and hurt. It doesn’t mean that they ever stop loving or caring for you. It just means that they sometimes try to hide their true feelings because they want to show or prove to you that they are strong.”

“But she doesn’t have to,” the child whispered.

“I know, but consider that she is probably trying to look after her own feelings as much as she can, all the while trying to protect you,” he said. “Grown-ups can be really strange at times. We hide our feelings from our children because we think that they cannot handle it. Sometimes, a child can handle these things far better than even a grown-up can, because a child is never afraid to cry when they are sad.”

“The boys in my school say that girls who cry are ‘crybabies’,” she whispered as she buried her face in the handkerchief.

“Well having once been a boy, I know that I probably did that myself, but everyone cries. It sometimes takes the bravest of people to show the rest of the world that they can.”

He watched as the tears continued to stream down over her cheeks. Thomas leaned over and rested a gentle hand on her shoulder. Beneath his touch, he could feel it trembling. “It’s alright, just let it out.”

The little girl did not have to be told twice. As she began to weep softly, her tiny voice emerged. “I want my daddy to love me,” she cried.

Thomas nodded. “I know you do, and if your daddy only knew what a special little girl you are, then he would. Of that, I am certain.”

After about a minute of crying, the handkerchief had splotches of the child’s tears across it and he watched as she slowly sat back up, her face now red and puffy. “I don’t even know your name and you’re being nice to me.”

“My name is Tom,” he said.

“Mister Tom?” She whispered. “I’m Molly.”

Without thinking, he chuckled. “No sweetheart, no ‘Mister’, just Tom,” he said. “I’m not very strict about being called ‘Mister’ anything.”

“My teachers always said that grown ups should be talked to in that way,” she said, her face hidden by the handkerchief.

“Generally that is the proper way, but it’s more polite to address people as they wish you to, not always with formalities,” he smiled. “Do you feel any better at least?”

She shook her head, “no.”

“I think it will take some time,” he said.

“I don’t think my daddy really loves me, Tom,” she said.
Upon hearing these words, Thomas could suddenly feel a lump catching in his throat. He could remember the day that he and Willy Wonka had shared a similar sort of conversation. The chocolatier had confided that he had never felt loved or appreciated by his father and that had broken his heart. Wilbur Wonka had never been the nicest person in the world and his attitude towards his son was something that Thomas could not even comprehend.

Now, looking into the innocent eyes of this little girl, he could somehow sense that this tragic history was repeating itself. Taking a deep breath he reached over and squeezed her shoulder. “Maybe he needs to learn about unconditional love from you.”

Molly took a deep breath. “You’re really nice.”

“Even if I talk funny?” he asked with a wink.

“It’s not that funny,” she whispered as she hugged her doll. “Can I ask you something else?”

“Of course,” he said.

She held up the handkerchief. “What do these letters mean?”

Thomas blanched. How was he going to answer that one?

Eventually, he took a deep breath and spoke. “Those are the initials of a very dear friend of mine,” he began. “This is someone who is very wise and caring. He looked out for me when I needed a friend and now I aspire to be as good a friend to him as he has been to me. I always hoped that I could return the handkerchief to him, but he never wished to have it back. So now I carry it in case it is needed, like to help dry your tears,” he said. “You see, when I cry, I always use it.”

“You really cry?” she asked.

“Oh course, everyone cries, it just comes easier for some than for others. The boys at your school probably have no idea what it means to share their feelings because they are taught to be tough and that crying is for sissies. Of course, I think that’s just a bit mixed up, don’t you?”

“Yeah,” the little girl said as she stared down at the cloth. Without thinking she brought it to her face and inhaled the scent of it. “It smells like chocolate.”

“It does?” Thomas asked.

“Yeah, like a scrumdidilyumptious bar,” she giggled as she returned the handkerchief to him. “That’s my favorite kind.”

“I prefer the nougat filled rounds. Perhaps in the future, I shouldn’t put it in the same pocket with the handkerchief,” he said smiling. This caused the child to giggle.

Seconds later, he raised his head and could see that the child’s mother was now coming back up the aisle towards them. “Your mother’s coming back.”

Molly quickly wiped her eyes one last time and looked at him. “Please don’t tell her I was crying,” she pleaded.

“I won’t,” he said, “but you should. You are not the mother here, she is.”

She lowered her head as Thomas got to his feet and stepped out into the aisle so the child’s mother could sit back down. He took a deep breath as his thoughts once more began to drift. Eliza had once
told him that he could talk to children in the same way she had spoken to Charlie Bucket, but he had never really believed it. Perhaps it was this moment that had presented him with the opportunity.

_It’s too bad a child like this could not find one of those five golden tickets_, he thought. It would seem as though little Molly could help Willy Wonka accept the issues with his father. At the same time, he believed that his friend could brighten the spirits of this special little girl as well. Her simple innocence and soft words deeply moved him. Perhaps her yearning for a father was something that Willy, himself, could understand and relate to.

He cast a brief glance over towards her and noticed that she was sitting with her head down, her face now buried against the red yarn hair of her Raggedy-Ann doll. He knew that one simple conversation would not ease the sadness in the child’s heart, but he wondered why it was that the mother seemed so disinterested in her daughter. Instead of speaking of this, he closed his eyes, his last thoughts on the emotional state of this little girl.

Somewhere in the accumulation of memories, his mind returned him to the day that Willy Wonka had learned his ‘Around the World’ recipe had been stolen.

**Flashback**

**June 1, 1965**

By the time Thomas had returned to the factory, he stared up at the sign that blinked on and off the name ‘Wonka’. From where he stood, he could see the large curly letters that hung over the gate. It was opened as it had always been, but Thomas wondered how much longer it would continue to allow the workers access to the factory grounds.

He stood for several minutes, but then looked down at his watch. It was several minutes after twelve and he figured that he could probably stand to go towards the marketplace and look for something to eat before returning to the factory. He was not certain how hungry he was, but he knew that when he would go see Willy, that there was no telling when or if he would find the time to actually have something to eat.

He started to walk away from the factory’s front gates, his eyes now on the road in front of him. As he continued to contemplate what Eliza had told Willy about dreams, he found himself smiling somewhat. It sounded so very much like what his brother had once told him. Thomas knew about how Willy Wonka had always left a positive impact on others, but his own work seemed minute and small in comparison. Eliza had said it; his friend had indeed given scores of other people the power to dream. Perhaps he was among them.

At the present moment, the tall, dark headed man was not exactly sure why she had been so certain of this. It seemed logical to conclude that that little boy had been the reason for her words in the first place. He smiled slightly as he thought about the overwhelming selflessness that emanated everything she had said and done. She had given Charlie something to hope for, and he prayed that someone somewhere would soon return the favor.

It was no secret that he had never considered himself to be a dreamer. In fact, having been forced to grow up quickly during wartime, this was what had snubbed out any ambition to dream that might have developed. At the same time, he could clearly understand what it meant for someone to hold on to a dream. His brother had never given up, yet it seemed as though Simeon was accomplishing in death what he never could in life.

Thomas’ thoughts shifted and returned to the plight of Willy Wonka. Instead of losing his life, his friend was now losing his dream and he could not contemplate which of these was worse.
“We all have a cross to bear,” Eliza’s words seemed to echo in his mind long after he had reached the center of town and was making his way along the esplanade. Seconds later, he reached the small square in the London suburb, his back now completely facing the chocolate factory.
Chapter 7

Chapter 7: Taking the Scenic Route

Thomas raised his head at that moment and from this distance, he could see the grayish colored church in the center of the town. He suddenly could hear the bell as it chimed once indicating the quarter after the hour of twelve.

He smiled weakly as he remembered how the tones of the chimes had helped him to remember the time of day it was. He never was into religion, but he believed that there was something out there that was guiding his life, sort of an invisible force. His gaze remained on the church for several minutes as he recalled how Willy described faith as something that dwelled in the mind and fed the imagination.

Thomas liked that particular analogy, as it seemed so simple and concise. Yet, regardless of all these things that were distressing him, he could not forget the conversation that he had had with the older woman. She had had more challenges than he, but yet she was able to see the best that dwelled in the heart of mankind. Perhaps he was not only experiencing this through his friendship with Willy Wonka, but also through his interaction with others.

He continued to walk around the square, all the while taking in the cars that were parked along the perimeters of the pedestrian zone. As he made his way, he could see Bill’s Candy Shop along one of the boundaries.

The business was small and housed in an old fashioned looking structure. Along the sides and front of it, advertisements for various confections hung. They covered not only the lower portion of the sides, but also were taped to the door.

Generally, the place was filled up with patrons, but at this particular hour, it was completely empty. Perhaps the reason for that was that the shop was closed during the lunch hour.

For whatever reason, Thomas really liked this particular place. It was comfortable and felt rather like stepping into a familiar storybook setting. The other thing about it that struck him was how similar it seemed to Willy Wonka’s factory. Both places, when viewed from the outside, had sizes that were quite deceiving. From the outside, the shop looked to be about the size of a large walk-in closet. Yet, whenever one entered, there seemed to be enough room for patrons to line up along the counters and enjoy their treats.

On this particular day, the tall, thin shopkeeper was standing next to the front of his store lamenting over one of the many wooden advertisements that covered the space just beneath the windows. Most of them were full with Wonka flyers, but this time, he seemed to be hanging one that would entice his customers to purchase a new flavored mint chewing gum.

Thomas watched for several minutes while the proprietor tried to properly position the small wooden plank. As soon as he noticed how Bill seemed to be struggling with it, he spoke. “Raise it about half a centimeter on the left side, Bill.”

The man stopped what he was doing and turned around, the piece of wood falling to the ground with a hollow clang. Instead of getting upset about this, the man in the pinstriped shirt and black bow tie broke into a bright smile. “Hi Tom, you were just the man I was hoping would happen by.”

He turned back around and picked up the piece of wood. “This silly thing won’t hang up properly
and I don’t have the wooden frame at the bottom to help me adjust it into place.” He pressed it against the surface just below the window in the right hand side of the shop. As he began to struggle with it once again, Thomas backed up several centimeters so that he could see the positioning of it.

When he noticed it was too high on one side, he spoke. “Bring down the right side,” he said, but waited as the shop owner shifted the placard somewhat. “A little bit more, maybe a fourth of a centimeter or so and then it should be perfect.”

As soon as Bill had done what he instructed, he nodded approvingly. “Yes, that’s it, now don’t move a muscle, I’ll get the hammer and nails.”

Bill waited as Thomas retrieved the items, walked over to where he stood, and began hammering the corners into the wood panel beneath the window. After the second nail was hammered in, Bill stood up and moved so that Thomas could finish the task. As soon as he was done, he got to his feet and both men inspected the front of the shop.

“Well, that should make Mr. Ripley happy,” Bill said smiling. “He’s been worrying about the sales of his gum since the summer vacation started. Maybe that will help matters for him. Of course, chewing gum generally sells better in the winter because people enjoy the flavors of mint around Christmastime. Come on inside and I’ll treat you to a candy bar.”

Thomas nodded as Bill reached for his key and stuck it in the lock on the door. “I sometimes have to lock the doors when I work outside because I once had an entire box of Wonka bars disappear when I was putting up advertisements on the other side of the shop.” Turning the key, he opened the door, the small chime sounding over their heads as he ushered Thomas inside. Once the two of them had entered the confines of the shop, Bill pulled the door closed and locked it. “I’m on my lunch break right now,” he explained as he pocketed the keys.

“And you’re still working straight through,” Thomas said with a small chuckle. “That sounds like someone else I know.”

Bill laughed quietly, all the while catching on with whom it was Thomas was referring. “I’m not even close to him, I’m afraid.”

Thomas joined in, but also nodded. “I know what you mean, though. I usually have a stack of papers right under my nose during lunch. I have been known to shuffle through them while stuffing down a turkey on rye. If my ‘boss’ knew how much I worked during my ‘breaks’, he’d probably get rather upset with me.”

Bill smiled. “I always thought you were lucky to get to work in that factory on the hill. At the same time, I always thought it was nice how you always took the time to stop in here. You’ve always been a great customer although you could have had your fill up there.”

“The factory’s an amazing place, Bill, but I have always been fond of this little shop,” Thomas said diplomatically, “when I was a little kid, I remember how it was a pharmacy. I loved it back then too; it was so quaint and welcoming. Then, after I came back from America, I stopped in and noticed that it was now this merry little candy store.”

“And actually, I remember when it was a pharmacy too,” Bill said. “The flat where I grew up was several hundred meters away from it and my mother used to buy her medicines here. When Mr. Applegate decided to retire, he had to sell the shop. He couldn’t find a protégé in pharmaceuticals to sell it to, so he sold it to me. I had been considering converting it into a candy store for a long time, because there were so many children roaming around this area of town, especially on weekends when the vegetable market would open. The parents would bring their children and I would make as
big a profit as those who sold fresh produce.”

“The central location is ideal,” Thomas mused. “So whatever happened to Mr. Applegate?”

“He died two years ago, but I remember several days before his passing, he had stopped in and bought a candy bar from me. Today, his widow sometimes comes in. She loves saltwater taffy, and always seems to know when the new shipments come in,” he smiled as he raised a flat piece of wood and slipped behind the counter. Once he was standing next to the cash register, he wiped his hands on a towel, but continued speaking. “Anyway, when I bought it, I got everything, complete with all these wonderful nooks and crannies.”

Thomas nodded, but said nothing about that; instead he ran his hand along the wooden surface of the counter. “I always thought this place resembled what it had been before,” he mused.

“Yes, well, the thought of tearing the place apart probably would have broken his heart. He once told me that he built this place from the ground floor up. After hearing the history of this place, I made a promise to him that I would keep things as they were. There was a sort of legacy he left behind and that was something I didn’t want to see end.”

Thomas looked around the shop and finally spoke, his voice etched with appreciation. “For some strange reason, I always thought that you had bought the stuff individually from him or from another seller.”

Bill shook his head. “A lot of people thought that it was the case, but he said that he had no use for these cabinets and that they belonged to the store. You know, he could have made a fortune on the furnishings alone, but he said I was a young man getting started and needed backing. Of course, the furnishings were pretty old and some was kind of broken down from extended use. My wife, brother-in-law, and I pulled the more damaged pieces, sanded them down, and refinished them ourselves. All I had to do was hire someone to put in the stools and buy the soda fountain.”

Thomas wordlessly nodded. Bill’s explanation seemed to explain the reason why he loved this place as much as he did. It was no secret that the overall sense of caring and devotion that was invested into this place had left the remnants of joy and childhood memories in its wake.

Slowly, he seated himself on one of the brown colored bar stools and spun himself around so that he could take in the latest window display.

“You’ve really managed to utilize the space here,” Thomas said. He was always impressed with the amount of creativity that Bill had with decorating and displaying his wares. The narrow windows had jar after jar of wrapped candies in front of them, but because he had so many different kinds of jars, they gave the old pharmacy a more festive looking feel.

Thomas knew that Bill had always liked these sorts of jars. He seemed to always be combing flea markets in search for various glass jars and containers to use in his shop. One year, he had even given him one for Christmas. All of these things seemed to match the décor of the place to perfection. From a distance, it almost looked as though they were more or less decorations as opposed to being filled with sweets that Bill had intended on selling.

Underneath the windows on either side of the door were a group of shelves with even more sweets displayed. While most of them were in clear glass jars, Bill had a smattering of blue and green colored candy jars as well. From where he was sitting, Thomas could see wrapped sours, various flavors of saltwater taffy, and gumdrops. Next to them, and giving the shop a very festive feel, were displays with large colorful lollipops.
Behind where Bill was now standing, there were countless rows of chocolate bars lining the wall, their colorful wrappers beckoning young and old. The counter extended around one corner of the shop in an ‘L’ formation. Along the side wall, a silver ladder was positioned, which slid along the large cabinets and shelves. By using it, Bill could reach the jars that were on the very top shelves. These contained wrapped and unwrapped candies and other treats. From the ladder, Bill simply had to reach his hand into the various jars to retrieve the candy that his customers desired.

The large soda fountain containing a sweet and creamy drink was at the front and center of all the items that Bill had displayed. Thomas remembered the day Bill first started using it and served him a drink. Of course, it was too sweet for his taste, but to the children it was a big sensation. That silver dispenser seemed to fit into the overall essence of the place and somehow added an even more decorative flair.

“You want the usual?” Bill eventually asked, his voice breaking into Thomas’ contemplations.

“Please,” Thomas said and watched as Bill reached over and grabbed one of the circular shaped chocolate Wonka bars and extended it to him. “It’s funny how chocolate somehow helps when someone is not in the most joyful of moods. I suppose it stands to reason why children like it so much.”

“Well, you should really enjoy this because it is on the house,” Bill said. “Thanks for helping me with that placard outside. It would have probably taken the entire lunch hour for me to get it positioned right.”

“No problem,” Thomas said as he ripped into the candy and started taking it apart. Once he had divided it into pieces, he stuck one in his mouth. As he savored the taste, Bill looked over at him, his expression now earnest.

“You know, that new Slugworth bar is doing pretty well. It’s the first day since it came out and I’m already sold out,” Bill said, his hand arched against his mouth as though sharing a secret. Bill always knew that Thomas worked for Willy Wonka, but at that time, he did not know of the depth of their friendship.

Thomas looked around the shop, but instead of speaking, he shrugged his shoulders. He remembered how Willy had mashed the Slugworth bar into the carpeting in his office and this brought his thoughts back to the welfare of his friend. I really should get back, he thought as he shoveled another piece of chocolate into his mouth.

Bill watched him do this with several pieces and then spoke, his voice conveying his level of concern. “Slow down, Tom, no one is going to take that away from you.”

Thomas nodded, but still managed to shovel another piece nonetheless.

“How’s Mr. Wonka taking it?” Bill eventually asked.

Thomas knew this tactic rather well. Get him to talk and then he won’t eat so fast. He took a deep breath and released it, his expression hardening somewhat. “He’s not taking it very well at all, I’m afraid.” He lowered his hands, the last three pieces of chocolate still resting in the wrapper. “It turns out that it was one of his recipes that had gotten stolen by the spies who had been sent in by Slugworth. As it turned out, the ‘Slugworth Island Earth’ was Mr. Wonka’s ‘Around the World’ recipe. He had worked for over a year on it.”

“I figured as much since the chocolate actually tastes good,” Bill offered freely.
Thomas shook his head. “What compels some people to do such things?”

“I have no idea,” Bill said. “But you know it is the chocolate like Willy Wonka’s that will keep people coming back. The novelty of stolen recipes soon wears off and it leaves other candy makers with the dubious task of trying to top that confection with a newer one. If they have to stoop so low as to steal something in the first place, then they generally get what they deserve, even if it is financial ruin. Take it from me, the next big idea Mr. Wonka comes out with will be what puts him right back on top.”

By this time, Thomas had managed to finish the last of the chocolate and Bill reached over and grabbed the wrapper. “I really hope that you’re right about this, Bill.”

“Well, when you’ve been in this business as long as I have, you learn to see the trends,” he said confidently. “Don’t worry, Tom, I’m certain that Mr. Wonka has already thought of something to counter this. And if he hasn’t, then I am confident that he will. It would be heartbreaking if he simply decided to give up.”

“I’m not really sure at this point,” he mused, but looked into the optimistic eyes of the candy seller. “But, I do agree with you about one thing. It would really be a shame if Willy Wonka gave up because of something like this.”

Bill reached over and touched Thomas’ shoulder. “He won’t.”

“I hope you’re right,” Thomas said as he got up from the stool. “Thanks for the chocolate, Bill.”

“Thanks for the help with that display;” Bill responded as he watched the other man walking towards the door. “Oh, I need to open up, the lunch hour is over.” He came from behind the counter, walked over to the door and unlocked it. “I’ll see you later!” he said as Thomas slipped outside.

Before the door closed, he stopped and turned around. “See you around, Bill, take care.”

With that the door closed before he could hear if Bill had responded.

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These words were still ringing in Thomas’ ears as he made his way back in the direction of the factory. He always knew that people like Bill and Eliza were out there, albeit few and far between. Internally, he knew that he had far more in common with people like that as opposed to those who had stolen from his friend in the first place.

As he walked slowly back in the direction of the factory, he could somehow tell that the task of returning Willy’s faith in people would not be easy. Thomas knew that although the spies and crooked candy makers had not personally affected him, they did leave a drastic impact on Willy and that was enough to upset him as well. He pondered how he would even be able to help Willy Wonka rediscover this since he was on the verge of losing it himself.

His thoughts drifted back to Eliza’s words as the overcast sky began to give way to the first drops of rain. She had said so many things that were laced with wisdom and experience. He would never forget that first conversation with her, and he knew that although it hurt badly, she was probably right. Maybe what Willy really needed was another conversation with her.

The strangest thing was how his thoughts tended to drift back to the plight of Charlie Bucket. That child had witnessed how fate could serve up one crushing blow after another. He probably knew that there were others who lived in regret as well. The child had lost his father at such a tender age and was now living in poverty. Somewhere in all of that, Charlie had managed to maintain a sense of
hope that left Thomas in a state of wonder.

As the rain continued to fall, he removed his spectacles and gently placed them in the side pocket of his overcoat. The world began to swim before his eyes somewhat, but he still managed to make his way back to the factory gates. As he walked, he unfurled his umbrella and held it over his head to block the rain.

After about ten minutes, he stopped just outside the factory gates and stared up at the flashing sign that blinked the name ‘Wonka’ on and off. He stared at it for several minutes and then reached for the handle and quietly pulled it open and entered the factory grounds. As he was walking across the courtyard, a group of workers were coming outside, all of them frowning, while others were openly expressing their extreme dislike towards their employer. As the hostile words filled his ears, he immediately began to wonder what it was that had caused these words of disgruntlement in the first place. More than anything, he wondered where his friend was.

Quickening his pace, he reached the door that led inside. Opening it, he was met by two other men who wordlessly brushed past him, their faces contorted in anger. Dismissing this, he managed to get inside before the rain got even heavier. As he closed his umbrella, Thomas had no idea that things were about to take a turn for the worse.
Chapter 8

Chapter 8: Closing Oneself Off

As the door slowly closed behind him, the sinking feeling remained. He had been carrying this uneasy sensation since meeting Eliza in the break room that morning. Now, that he had returned, he was not prepared for reality to send him into a literal tailspin.

Of all the years that he had known Willy Wonka, he had never seen his friend give up on his dreams. The candy was something that he had put heart and soul into. It was of the finest quality, and the candy maker would not settle for anything less. He always wanted to bring happiness and joy to others, although Thomas knew that he often sacrificed himself in order to do just that.

Perhaps it was now time for those others to return something good to the man who had always given them the benefit of the doubt.

Thomas made his way down the hall in the direction of the break room. He was not certain about what was going to happen, but he was concerned. He also knew that his friend was in the most vulnerable of positions and there was no telling what he was going to do next. Thomas had known since he was sitting at Bill’s Candy Shop that he wanted nothing more than to be there for Willy. It was at moments like these that the chocolatier’s feelings of defenselessness had somehow emerged.

He had indeed fooled the world, but Willy Wonka was no stronger or more confident than the next man. He had hit his lowest point since the day they had met. As he came into the break room, his eyes widened when he saw a large bubblegum colored placard affixed to the wall.

On this piece of cardboard, the following words were neatly written:

‘It is with regret that I announce

that all employee contracts

have been terminated.

The reason, I am closing the factory.

Please clear out your lockers and

leave the grounds immediately.

This is not a joke, gag or tall tale!

I’m sorry.’

The notice was signed by Willy Wonka.

He stared for several moments, the writing literally leaping out and slapping him across the face. The notice was very clear and it looked as though Eliza had been right all along.

The anger that now emanated throughout the factory was also clear; there were those who would seek revenge on his friend. There were people who knew secrets and would ultimately sell the knowledge off to the highest bidder.

Willy’s entire employ had lost their jobs, and now Thomas was left staring at the piece of paper that
had confirmed it. He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat, his silence giving way to the distress that lingered. He quietly left the room, the grumbles of the remaining workers still filling his ears as he made his way towards the candy maker’s office.

It was not that he was necessarily beginning to ponder his own fate or whether or not he would be able to find another job. Instead, his thoughts were centered on people like Eliza who depended on this job for their livelihood. What would become of her?

At the same instant, he was completely certain that if Willy was going to post such a thing, then it meant that he was serious. The only thing Thomas could think of doing was to go and try to talk his friend out of it. Of course, he had never managed to talk Willy Wonka out of anything, so he pondered if this would reap any success at all.

Not only did he wish to talk about the working situation, but he also felt that it would be a good idea to let Willy know that Eliza had gotten home safely. At the same time, he knew that there was something he needed to discuss with his friend about her.

Thomas took a deep breath. He could completely understand why the people were upset. They were worried, but he also knew that there were a number of them who would not hesitate to knife Willy Wonka in the back.

Of course, this also left serious doubt in his mind as to whether or not they would actually be able to find a more honest and ethical employer than that of his friend.

After what seemed like an eternity, he reached the door with the golden writing on it. He hesitated before knocking lightly. Internally, he knew that this was not necessarily about a job, but about the threat of Willy withdrawing from society completely. What would this world do without Willy Wonka?

The question seemed to resonate in his mind and Thomas knew beyond any doubt that he did not want to find out. Of course, he could not stop contemplating that the rest of the world was about to.

He stood waiting, but when Willy did not answer his knock, he tried again. This time, the hollowness of this action seemed to be matched only by the sounds of Willy’s voice when he requested him to enter the office.

As Thomas opened the door, the first thing he noticed was that Willy was sitting at his desk, his elbows resting against it. His head perched in one of his hands, while the other hastened to write something down. From his vantage point, it looked as though the candy maker was hard at work. Of course, Thomas knew his friend far better than Willy probably realized.

He remained silent but his gaze eventually came to rest on the cigar that was sitting in half an ashtray. The ashes from it had surprisingly managed to stay in the strangely shaped object as opposed to falling onto the desk. The smoke from it drifted up and wafted about Willy’s head like a halo.

This, if anything, indicated that his friend was deeply troubled. Willy rarely smoked, in fact, the only times he did was when he was inconsolably upset about something. It did not take an expert to conclude that this was one of those particular occasions. The office now reeked of a strange combination of chocolate mints and cigar smoke. This was a ghastly combination if Thomas had ever heard of one, but he ignored the impact of the smoke and closed the door.

Appearance wise, Willy’s clothing looked wrinkled and strangely unkempt. His purple jacket was tossed on the sofa, as opposed to the coat-rack and his caramel colored top hat was next to it. It was strange for Thomas to behold his friend at that moment. Although the chocolatier often showed up in
a rather flamboyant manner, Thomas knew that untidy clothing was something completely out of character for him.

At that moment, Willy turned around and looked up at him, his green colored bowtie loosened and hanging down over his vest. This was unbuttoned and hanging in a similar fashion as the bowtie. Yet, what caught Thomas’ attention were his friend’s eyes. They carried a dull helplessness that seemed to shoot straight through him and touch the core of his being.

“You can stay, Tom, that memo did not include you,” Willy said before he turned back around and reached for his pen.

“I’m not here because of the job,” Thomas said firmly. When Willy did not turn back around, he inhaled, the smoky air now stinging his throat. “Will?”

“What?” the chocolatier barked, the extent of his annoyance emerging in his tone of voice. Most times, Thomas would have backed off, but this time he bluntly refused. Willy was anything but a hot head, but he seemed to possess an uncanny way of pushing people away when he was upset or hurt. The manner he spoke to Eliza had been case in point. This time Thomas was not about to let his friend push him away.

“Are you alright?” he asked. As he waited for his friend to respond, he realized that his voice was much softer than even he was accustomed.

“I don’t know, it would depend on how you might define ‘alright’,” Willy said sarcastically. He started to reach for the cigar, but Thomas made his way across the room. In one fluid motion, he grabbed it, and mashed it out before the candy maker could take another draw on it.

“Do you remember what happened the last time you smoked?” Thomas asked.

“I lost my sense of taste for close to a month and created something called the mudfuddle,” Willy said, his voice sounding bored.

Thomas nodded. “You remember what it tasted like?”

“Mud,” Willy said dejectedly.

Thomas nodded. “You don’t want to lose that particular sense now, do you?” he asked trying all the while to keep his voice firm. “You’re going to need it, Will.”

“Why, what’s the point?” Willy asked.

“The point is, you’re not a quitter, you never were, and I have seen you rise above more than just this. Listen, there’s a child who lives not too far from Eliza who just lost his father, and the funny thing is, he looks to you for hope,” Thomas said. “He asked when we ran into him out near the eastern border of town if his dream of meeting you was silly. Eliza told him no, but she didn’t tell him that she had spoken with you only this morning.”

“That’s crazy,” Willy whispered.

“If you’d have met him, then you wouldn’t have thought so,” Thomas said. “Eliza told me that she harbors no ill towards you. When I asked her why she cares so much for you, she said that no one deserves to be treated as you have been treated.”

“I fired them,” he said. “I fired her.”
“I know, and she was able to sense what was going to happen. Will, she was aware, for whatever reason, that this was going to happen,” he said. “She’s very poor and her mother is dying, but she still carries your welfare in her heart. She understands.”

“Why would she?” he asked.

“I don’t know, maybe because there’s something of a lost child that she sees in you,” Thomas said. “Even though she has no job, she probably won’t ever lose her faith. She suspected this, but she is still trying to make the best of everything, and through it all; she is still worried about you.”

“What should I do?” Willy asked.

“You’re Willy Wonka for goodness sakes, you can do far more than most people ever could. You can do a far cry more than me,” Thomas said. “Give the woman her job back, Will. Let her come stay at the factory if you have to, but do something. Please, at least offer to help her.”

“I rather liked her,” he mused more to himself than to Thomas. “She seemed quite like the mother I never had, don’t you think?”

“You never told me about your mother, so I wouldn’t know,” Thomas said.

“She died when I was very young,” he said. “I never even knew her name. My father blamed me for her death.”

“That part you never mentioned,” Thomas said.

“I know,” he said. “I struggled for years after he died wondering why my father never loved me, or what was the reason for the conditions he placed on me. It was enough to make me go crazy, but somehow I managed to put it behind me.”

“You have probably had more pain and anguish in your life than anyone could comprehend,” Thomas said. He reached over and rested his hand on the chocolatier’s shoulder. “Will, give it a try. It might be just what you need.”

“But if I do offer, Tom, she might refuse. She is rather proud, and perhaps she might think that I am only feeling sorry for her,” Willy said softly.

“Then you will at least have asked,” he said.

“I don’t know,” he shook his head. “You could always go back and check in on her now and again.”

“I intend to,” he said. “But there is something else that I need to tell you, Will. I did tell her that you’re my best friend.”

“Why?”

“Because it’s the truth and it seemed like the right thing to do,” Thomas said. Willy raised his head when he heard this. It was clear to Thomas that his voice had probably taken on the exact same cadence that Eliza had used when she had been there. “She seemed to read us both like a book. But, Will, if she were to see you right now, she’d be very sad.”

“Sad because my chocolate making days are over?” he asked miserably.

“Yes, that would make anyone sad.” Thomas said with a loud sigh. “Just think about what you are saying. If Willy Wonka’s chocolate suddenly ceased to exist, what confections would people buy?”
Slugworth bars? That doesn’t even sound appetizing, Will.”

“It’s doesn’t matter,” Willy whispered.

“To a lot of people, it does. I mean; the work you do matters to people like Eliza, Charlie, even Bill who runs the small candy shop in the marketplace. To those people, you do matter. It is your dream and what you do is so important to all of them. If you give up, then who is going to inspire them to keep dreaming?”

“You sound like Eliza,” he said as he raised his head.

“Well, one of us should, she’s right. After all, who was it that was always saying: We are the music makers and we are the dreamers of dreams?” Thomas asked pointedly.

“That would be Arthur O’Shaughnessy,” Willy said miserably. “I never wrote anything like that, I just quoted it.”

“I know,” Thomas said. “The first time I heard it, I went, read the poem, and I really liked it.”

“It surprises me that you even listened since I always thought those quotations annoyed you,” he responded.

“I did listen, probably because there was hidden wisdom in those words,” he shot back. “Will, I know that this is your dream, and it is terrible that someone would abuse a dream like this. You and Simeon were the ones who inspired me to take my dreams seriously. Now Simeon is dead, and I know that if you abandoned your dream, then that part of you, who has always believed in them, will die as well. If that happens, you stand to lose far more than just a recipe.”

“How can you expect me to continue when I fired all my workers? There’s no one left here, not even Eliza,” he said sadly, all the while shaking his head. “Tom, I thought about adding a clause under that notice saying that the employees who agreed to live on the factory grounds could stay on. After a few moments of contemplating that, I tossed it. That sort of idea would seem too much like I was a warden in a prison instead of a candy maker. I know that they have families, friends, and lives away from here. Even though chocolate making is my life, I would be foolish to think for an instant that it is theirs.”

He turned and motioned towards the candy bar that was still on the floor. “It’s strange to admit this, but I suspected that my recipe for the ‘Around the World’ bar had been stolen. I had simply held out the hope that my suspicions were inaccurate and that people who worked here were internally good and honest. Now Slugworth owns the patent for it, and I can do nothing to stop him. I worked for nearly a year on finding the different confections that represented the major countries around the world, and it was all a wasted effort.”

“I know that you’re disappointed, I am too, but you can’t quit just because of one setback,” Thomas said.

“You don’t get it,” Willy snapped. “A setback is accidentally adding salt instead of sugar to a confection, but this…this betrayal…how can I go on?”

“How can you not?” Thomas asked. “You have always talked about justice and about being able to make something special and different that no one else could possibly match. Now you’ve lost one recipe and are talking about quitting. Don’t you see? That’s exactly what all of your competitors would want you to do. If they can scare you off and make you quit after this one incident, then they will have won. Now you tell me, what justice is there in that?”
Willy raised his head. “I know you’re right, but every time I hire someone, I’ll have to ask myself what their motivation for wanting to work for me is. There are those who want nothing more than to steal my precious recipes from me. I cannot win, not like this. I will have to come up with something colossal to get my name back on the map now.”

“And I know that you will. You have always come out on top and not by stooping to their level,” Thomas said. “The question is; are you really sure that you want to stop making chocolate? Think about it, there would be no more Wonka bars in the shops.”

“Oh I have enough to tide us over for a couple of years,” Willy mused. “Of course, the latest shipments all went out according to schedule, so we have about a month until we have to get another one ready.”

Thomas knew at that moment that Willy was absolutely serious about following through with his plans of going into seclusion. Instead of trying to persuade him to do otherwise, he decided to humor his friend. “Is there anything at all that you want me to do?”

“The only thing I can think of at present would be for you to keep me informed as to what is going on out there. I want you to bring Eliza back to the factory as soon as possible, I want to speak to her again,” Willy said. “Tom, you’re one of the very few people I can really trust, and if I am going to make something special, then I will need your help in determining what that something is going to be.”

Thomas smiled. “So you’re not giving up like I thought.” He put his thumb up and extended it towards the chocolatier.

“No, I’m not giving up, but since you offered to help me, I will accept your offer and hope that you will be able to help me figure out what it is the public will want. I will give you the secret key to the door below that will lead you off the factory grounds and back again,” Willy dug in his pocket and removed a small silver key and extended it to Thomas.

“You know that I would never betray your trust, Will;” he said.

The candy maker nodded, “I know you won’t because I know that we’re more than just friends; we’re also family.”

He nodded as he reached out and touched his friend’s shoulder. “I only wish that there was another option that we might have overlooked. It just seems so unfair that you would have to live here as a virtual prisoner. I know that you love this factory, Will, but you should not be a captive of your own invention,” Thomas said.

“Perhaps not, but right now it would seem to be a necessary sacrifice.”

It was at that moment that Thomas discovered how secretive his life had suddenly become. Oddly, it was something that his newfound friend, Eliza, had always known.

Flashback End

July 12, 1971

As Thomas was once more brought out of his reverie, he could hear the sounds of the people around him grumbling. He had no idea what was happening, in fact, his thoughts had drifted to such an extent that he had become oblivious to everything going on in the present.

He opened his eyes and realized that he was still on the plane and it was still parked at the gate. He
looked around and could see that the other passengers were standing in the aisles. “I hate these stupid delays,” one man was grumbling.

‘Delay’, the word echoed in Thomas’ mind and he looked down at his watch. He thought for a minute that something was amiss, but his watch read that an hour had passed since he had boarded the plane. If this were going to happen, then he would probably not get to Duselheim until very late that night.

Seconds later, one of the stewardesses came running up the aisle. “Excuse me, miss, but when will we be taking off?” he asked.

“I’m sorry sir, we’re going to be delayed for at least another twenty minutes or so,” she said. “I can assure you that if you miss a connecting flight in Frankfurt, the airline will supply you with a new ticket.”

“I don’t have a connection, but I do have to get a ticket for the train,” he said. “Can you at least tell me what is happening?”

“There’s been some trouble with the baggage transport,” she said, but instead of continuing to speak, she hurried back up the aisle.

Thomas took a deep breath and sat back down in his seat. “It looks like we’re going to be here for awhile,” he said looking at Molly and her mother.

“But I’m hungry,” the child’s voice emerged somewhere between a whine and a simple childlike request.

“I know you are, I am too,” the mother admonished. “If I’d have known that this was going to happen, I’d have at least gotten some chocolates or something to tide us both over.” She reached over and patted the hand of her daughter. “Hopefully it won’t be as long as she implied.”

Thomas took a deep breath and looked over at them. “I brought some food with me,” he offered cordially. This caused the child to turn around and face him. “I wouldn’t mind sharing it with you.”

Upon hearing these words, the child turned back around and looked at her mother as if to ask for permission. When the woman hesitantly nodded, the hopeful eyes of the child returned to him.

“That’d be great,” the child said happily.

“Are you sure?” The mother asked.

“Of course, I’m sure,” he said. “If I wasn’t then I wouldn’t have offered.”

“I suppose not,” the mother said. “My name is Linda and this is my daughter, Molly.”

“I already have introduced myself to Molly,” he began. “I’m Tom.”

Although he knew that he was being sent to Duselheim to put a flea in the ear of the first Golden Ticket holder, he was not quite certain he was ready to call himself ‘Arthur Slugworth’ to someone who was not directly involved in the contest.

“I really appreciate you sharing your food with us, Tom,” Linda said. “I usually bring a little doggie bag or something for us to share but there wasn’t any time. This trip was planned rather quickly and I have been rushing about since early this morning.”
“I understand,” he said all the while remembering how quickly he was forced to pack his belongings seven years ago.

“You’re very kind,” Linda said and released a relieved sigh.

“Well, it’s really no trouble, unfortunately, I don’t have very much with me,” he offered as he retrieved his leather bag and opened it. He began to fish through it trying to find the food amidst all the other things he had packed to bring along. Soon, he clapped down his seatback tray and placed the notebooks and Great Expectations by Charles Dickens on the tiny table. By doing that, he was able to move his hand around and find several apples and three Wonka bars. Will must have put these in my carry on, he thought as he noticed a small piece of lilac colored paper tucked beneath one of the wrappers. He discretely separated the note from the candy bar as Molly sat watching his every move.

“Momma, look he’s got a Wonka bar,” she said with excitement in her voice. Several heads from the other side of the plane turned upon hearing this. “Maybe he will win that contest.”

Linda smiled apologetically as Thomas lowered his head and tried not only to conceal the candy bar, but also the bemused expression that crossed his face. He returned the book and notes to his carry-on.

He smiled all the while knowing that there was no chance of him winning the contest, but he also had learned early on that playing along was a key element to fulfilling what his friend had asked him to do. It was completely obvious that he did not want to ruin a child’s fun at the mere prospect of taking part in the contest.

For whatever reason, he continued trying to conceal the bar of chocolate from the curious eyes of the other passengers. He knew that this could easily blow his cover, but he turned his attention back to the two of them as a sheepish smile covered his face.

“I’m terribly sorry,” Linda offered as she cast a glance back to her daughter. “It’s just that Molly really loves Mr. Wonka’s chocolate the best and we haven’t been able to buy any since this contest started.”

“Why is that?” he asked as he cast a sideways glance towards Molly who was sitting silently while the two grownups conversed. He could not help but notice how her innocent eyes were still on the candy bar resting in his hand.

“The town where we live has been sold out since right after the announcement came down and the contest started. Some bigwig there has a twelve-year-old daughter who is insistent about finding one of the golden tickets. Basically, it means that he has bought the entire supply of Wonka bars from all over town,” Linda said sadly. “Because of that, no one else can take part.”

“How terrible,” he said.

Linda shrugged her shoulders. “Molly and I are trying to make the best of it, aren’t we honey?” In response to the question, the child simply nodded, as Linda continued. “At any rate, we’ve been trying to watch the news every night, all the while hoping that that girl will get her golden ticket so we can at least have our favorite chocolate again.”

As these words emerged, Molly unbuckled the seatbelt and started to crawl over Thomas to go to the lavatory. “Are you going to be alright honey?” Linda asked.

“Yes, Mommy, I’m just going to the potty,” the child turned back around before making her way
slowly up the aisle.
Chapter 9

Chapter 9: The Candy Bar

As soon as Molly was gone, Thomas turned and looked at Linda. The conversation that he had had with the little girl was still fresh in his mind and he knew that the only way he could convince the mother to speak was through the concern for the child.

He could see that some unshed tears were caught beneath the woman’s brown eyes and this concerned him. For one thing, he knew that something was happening in their lives, something that affected the child’s welfare. He pondered if Linda had been the reason the child had not had contact with her father. He knew that divorce was happening around the world and children were being forced to choose between their parents. This issue had far more to do with a town being sold out of Wonka bars.

“This isn’t just about chocolate, is it?” he eventually asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean that candy being sold out in the shops does not generally evoke such an emotional response,” he said.

Linda shook her head. “You’re right, it’s not just the chocolate, but that is a great cover for everything else that’s been happening in our lives.” Instead of speaking further, she offered him a brave smile and turned away from him, her gaze once more staring out the window.

Thomas took a deep breath. It seemed obvious that unlike the daughter, the mother was not intent on confessing what was happening. He pondered how much he could say without betraying Molly’s confidence. “Children are very observant, they know far more than we think.”

She turned around and looked at him, her eyes depicting a deep sorrow, but also a blatant hostility. “What are you talking about?”

“Your daughter spoke to me when you were away and she was very sad,” he said. “She doesn’t want to hurt you, but she is the one who is being hurt.”

“I don’t see how this is any of your business,” she said hotly.

“Perhaps it’s not, but your daughter made it my business when she confided in me. She told me that she had no one to talk to.”

“That’s not true, she has me,” Linda said.

Thomas shook his head. “She’s afraid to talk to you. She said that every time she even asks you about her father, you start to cry. There is nothing wrong with crying, but she doesn’t really know that,” he motioned towards the candy bar that now rested in his hand. “Sometimes things can be so hard that they cannot simply be resolved with candy bars or golden tickets. Sometimes it helps a child to see the best in a situation or to dream of something better, but she already has the best thing. She has mother who loves her and no matter how many strangers she confides in, nothing will ever change that.”

Linda closed her eyes and lowered her head. “I wanted to get her out of England. Take her to a place where her fantasy and dreams could be fed and understood. I planned this trip rather quickly and I
probably needed it more than she did.”

“Did you take her away from her father?” he asked gently.

“No,” she shook her head. “I could never do that to her. I just thought that since she is on vacation, that she might like to see some of these places.”

“You don’t have to explain anything to me,” he said. “I am nothing more than a stranger to you, but Linda, it really looks as though you could use a friend right now. If not that, then perhaps you could use a sympathetic shoulder to lean on. Are you at least going to be meeting someone in Frankfurt when we land?”

“No, Molly and I will be on our own,” she said.

“If you don’t mind my saying so, it doesn’t look as though you are terribly happy about that. You actually remind me of a friend of mine when he got hurt some time ago. He initially wanted to run away from the situation but eventually he had to turn around and face it. I think it was a brave thing for him to do, but ever since that day, I suppose I started to notice in others these very same characteristics.”

“I don’t know what you mean,” she whispered.

“Perhaps you don’t, but your daughter does, she really misses her father or the love that she’s been denied, that’s why I mentioned him just now,” he said. Instead of speaking further, he noticed that her face paled and she looked as though she was about to burst into tears. “Let me show you something.” He pulled the handkerchief from his jacket pocket and shook it out. It was still somewhat wrinkled, but the blotches of moisture were still present.

“Sometimes we forget to grieve the painful times in our lives, and we try to be strong. Often the only thing that a child wants is for us to take them in our arms and hold them. Tell them that we love them and that we wish only for them to be happy again.”

“Molly cried?” she whispered as she reached out and gingerly touched the fabric.

Thomas nodded. “These are her tears.” Without speaking further, he extended the piece of cloth to her.

She accepted, but after several minutes, she raised her head. “It’s damp all over.”

“Yes, it is,” he said. “Molly and I spoke when you were away a little while ago. She asked me not to tell you how upset she was, but as her mother, you need to know how all of this is affecting her. She senses that something is wrong; something about her father.”

Linda bit down on her lip. “She cried in front of you?”

“She felt safe and said I was nice,” he said. “I assure you, I would never have done anything to harm that child, but what she is experiencing is nothing short of tragic.”

Instead of speaking, Linda clenched the cloth and tried unsuccessfully at willing herself not to cry.

“The last time I cried, I was sitting on a bench in a cemetery. I had just flown back from America to attend my brother’s funeral. I remember sitting there and watching as they lowered the casket into the ground and feeling completely cut off from everything and everyone. Then my best friend came over and handed me that handkerchief. He told me that I should just use it. He said that his father used it when his mother died. On that day, he gave it to me so that I could grieve my brother’s death.”
Linda took a deep breath, but shook her head as she wiped her hand over her face. “I don’t want to burden you with my troubles, Tom. You’re a stranger to me and no matter how kind you are; I don’t feel right talking about my problems with someone I just met on a plane. I know that some people might find comfort in doing that, but I’m not prepared to invest that much trust into someone I don’t know.”

“I understand,” he said. “Trust is a very precious thing and is not something to be taken lightly.”

“Trust,” Linda whispered. She kept her head down for the next few minutes, and only raised it when he began to speak.

“I don’t know if this will help you, but the very same friend who gave me this little piece of cloth has been through a great deal during the last years. He has literally lost his faith in people, and now we must work from the ground floor up to help him find people he can trust,” Thomas said. “He came to me several years ago and confessed that I was the only person he could trust. In the wake of that experience, I learned just how precious and special that trust is. It is probably more special or profound than anything you can imagine.”

“It must be nice for you to have a friend who views you in such a way,” she said.

“That it is, but it is sometimes the simple act of trusting another that enables a friendship to blossom, or to even begin,” he said.

Linda thought about his words for several minutes and then took a deep breath. “I don’t really know what to say.”

“Just say whatever feels right,” he said. “I know that you are worried and afraid of something, perhaps speaking to someone who is objective can possibly help you to make sense of things. Going off with Molly to Germany sounds like a nice idea for a vacation, but if I didn’t know any better, it also sounds like you’re running away from something.”

Linda nodded as she stared down at her now barren left ring finger. “I just found out last week that my husband has been cheating on me,” she whispered.

“That is probably the hardest form of betrayal that exists,” he said.

She nodded. “When I confronted him, he told me that he was leaving me for his younger and more attractive lover. Molly doesn’t know anything about this yet, and I’d rather she not know the specifics.”

“That’s understandable, but the child does need her father even though this might be painful for you,” he said.

The woman hesitantly stared down at the handkerchief, but eventually wiped her eyes with it, her tears meshing with those of her daughter. “You probably think me as strange, but I’m afraid to tell Molly about any of this. She’s supposed to love her father, even if I despise him. I don’t know how much longer I can keep this from her.”

“Perhaps the reasons behind you and her father splitting up should not be discussed, but you need to tell her what will happen,” he said. “She already suspects that something is wrong and she misses the connection that she could have to her father. Has he really not rung her since all of this happened?”

Linda shook her head. “He hasn’t called at all, not even once. The truth is I don’t really have that many friends. Ever since I got married, I pretty much abandoned my friends and started hanging around with his friends. Everyone that I knew was someone he knew. It suddenly felt strange for me
to try and talk to these people about this, so I kept everything to myself.”

“You didn’t trust them in other words,” he said.

“I don’t know if that’s the case. Maybe it was and I didn’t fully acknowledge it. I just know that whenever I talked to these people, I always wondered how much of what I said would get back to him. Then less than a week ago, I finally realized what it was I had to do, and that was to confront him. After I did, he said that he was leaving me and not knowing what to do next; I called the travel agency and booked this trip. I wanted to take Molly somewhere so that she would not identify her home as being the place where her mother told her that she and her father were getting divorced. I thought I could take her to Neuschwanstein and see some of the places she’s read about in her nursery rhyme books. We could have some time together and then I would tell her about the changes that will be taking place. I can only suspect that she already has an idea of what is going to happen, that’s why she’s been so restless.”

“Children are very intuitive and generally have a better idea about what is going on around them than we can imagine,” Thomas said.

“I know that, and last night while we were packing she told me that she was starting to grow accustomed to grown-ups letting her down. It broke my heart. I mean; she’s the most selfless little girl and yet she has had more tough blows than any seven-year-old deserves. To top that off, now she can’t even have her favorite chocolate.” Linda wiped her face with the handkerchief. After a few moments, she handed the object back to him and raised her head. “I’m sorry; I really shouldn’t be burdening you with all this.”

He reached over and touched her shoulder, his gentle touch causing her to raise her head. “You told me what you did because I asked and there exists no way that I can betray your trust, since I do not know your husband. Linda, what he did to you and your little girl was absolutely horrible. The only burden that may exist now is the one that may have been lifted from your shoulders. You needed to speak of your feelings just to get them out. At least that’s what my friend would probably have said.”

“Your friend sounds very wise,” she said.

“He’s wise beyond his years,” he said. “I think that I would one day like for you to meet him. There is something very similar between the two of you,” he paused, but before she could speak, he nodded with understanding in his eyes. “Please believe me; I am not the sort of man who would board a plane with the intention of playing cupid. I will admit openly that I do like the prospect of bringing new friends into his world. After all, he is a very kind person, but he is also rather lonely. You might say, he doesn’t get out much,” Thomas said with a nod. “It’s not just young ladies who face their moments of truth with regard to issues of trust.”

“Thank you, Tom,” she smiled despite her sadness. “All the same, I’m not sure I would be very good company for your friend right now. I should probably contend with my own worries and feelings before trying to meet someone new. I also have to think about Molly and how she feels. My greatest fear right now is that I may have neglected her while I’ve been trying to figure this out.”

For whatever reason, he could somehow sense that she carried the same hurt and anguish about her husband’s betrayal that Willy had carried when his recipe had been stolen. This left a very bitter taste in his mouth and he started to think that perhaps it might not be such a bad idea to bring these two individuals together. If for no other reason but to help both find the healing they desperately needed.

Instead of contemplating this further, he smiled. “You’re a good mother, Linda, it shows in the delightful manner in which your daughter carries herself.”
“Thank you.” She looked at the chocolate bar that was still resting in his hand. “You know, it seems unrealistic for me to say this, but I know that Molly dreams of one day seeing Mr. Wonka’s factory. Perhaps when we fly back home we can drive by it and just have a look. Even for her age, she is realistic enough to know that she is just one child among millions of others. At the same time, this contest is something that will occupy her thoughts and daydreams. It seems a better source of contemplation as opposed to questioning why her father left.”

“He really is gone from her life, isn’t he?” Thomas asked.

Linda nodded. “As far as I know; yes. The thing is, I really want my daughter to have a relationship with her father, but if he doesn’t want to contact her, then how can she? I know that I don’t like him for what he did to me, but I am not about to deny her the love she deserves to have.”

“You’re right,” Thomas said softly. As he spoke, he glanced down the aisle. “I hope Molly is alright, she’s been gone quite a long time.”

Linda stood up, leaned around the seats, and glanced down the aisle. “There must have been a line, that’s why it’s taking her so long.”

Tom nodded as he swallowed. “You know, your daughter is really lucky to have someone like you for a mother. My mother died when I was 3-years-old. She had come down with an illness. When the war happened, my father was shipped out and we were sent to live in the country. During that time, my father died, and my brother and I were left on our own. We were invited to stay with my friend’s family.”

“That must have been difficult,” she said.

“Well, it was, but as my father used to say: ‘If it doesn’t kill us, then it will make us stronger’,” Thomas said.

Seconds later, the announcement came over the intercom. “Would all passengers please take their seats and prepare for take off? Thank you for your patience.”

Molly quickly scrambled back to their row of seats and he quickly stood up so she could get back in her seat. Once she was buckled in, he extended the chocolate bar to her. “If you would like, I want you to have this.”

“Thank you,” she said as she felt the chocolate bar being pressed into her hand.

“That is very kind of you, Tom,” Linda offered as the child wrapped both hands around it, her eyes staring down at the brown and orange colored wrapper.

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Less than ten minutes after the announcement was relayed, they were airborne.

Thomas continued to watch as Molly picked at the wrapper, but for some reason the child did not immediately open it. Perhaps she was contemplating what would happen if there was a Golden Ticket inside.

After several minutes of running the bar between her fingers, she looked over at him. “Are you sure you want me to have this?” she asked. “I mean; what if there’s a Golden Ticket inside?”

“If there’s a ticket in that candy bar, then it is now yours,” he said simply. He knew that there would be none in that particular candy bar, but he did not want to squelch the innocent wonder of this little
girl.

“You mean it?” Molly asked weakly.

“Yes, the candy bar now belongs to you,” he said. “But, can I ask you something?”

“Sure,” she whispered, her gaze still on the object that was now resting in her hand.

“What would you do if you found a Golden Ticket inside?” he asked.

Molly looked at him and then shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know. I think I’d go and see Mr. Wonka, give him a big hug, and tell him I think he’s wonderful.”

“That’s what you’d do?” he asked.

“Yes, but I know that it probably won’t ever happen to me,” she said. “But that’s okay, because I always pray for him anyway.”

“Why do you do that?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she shrugged her shoulders. “I guess because I think everyone needs to have someone praying for them.”

Thomas looked at the child and then at her mother. “Her faith is truly remarkable.”

Linda nodded. “She listens to her grandmother a lot. She’s very much a woman of faith.”

“Are you?” Thomas asked.

“Not as much so as my mother is, but I do believe in God, I just don’t always show it as overtly as she does,” she smiled at him, but shrugged her shoulders.

Thomas nodded as he looked back at the little girl. “Perhaps you should eat that and take care of that grumbling tummy of yours.”

Molly giggled, but carefully began to open the chocolate bar, the label she tucked in her backpack and the silver paper she carefully pulled away.

Just as he had surmised there was no golden ticket inside. Still, he watched enchanted as the little girl broke the chocolate into pieces and gave one to her mother. When the seatbelt sign went off, she stood up, turned around, and peered over the seat to see a boy about her age seated directly behind her.

“You want a piece?” she offered and the boy nodded as he got up and accepted some of the chocolate.

“Thanks,” he responded and put the chocolate in his mouth before sitting back down. She turned back around and sat back down.

While Molly was sharing the chocolate with those around her, Thomas’ attention returned to the note he had covertly placed in his shirt pocket. It was the same note that his friend had left in the wrapper of the candy bar. “You would need something sweet for the flight,” Willy had scrawled these words out on what looked to be a piece of nondescript lilac colored stationary. On the back were the words: ‘This paper is edible, eatable, that is you can eat it once you’ve read it.’

Thomas chuckled, Will sometimes talks in the same manner he writes, he thought with a smile. This
was too cute. He carefully stuffed the paper in his mouth and chewed it up. Will was right; the paper had a distinctive blueberry flavor. As he was swallowing it, he realized that Molly had turned and was now staring at him.

“Are you so hungry that you’re now eating paper?” she asked with a giggle. Without waiting for his response, she extended the last piece of chocolate to him. He accepted the offered candy and stuck it in his mouth.

“Actually, the paper was blueberry flavored,” he said, all the while not sure if flavored paper was on the market yet or if he was pushing his luck. He eventually looked down at the empty candy wrapper and took a deep breath. “Chocolate’s all gone? My goodness, you were hungry.”

As he spoke, someone thumped the back of his seat. He stood up and turned around, his eyes meeting the green eyes of the boy seated directly behind Molly. “She didn’t eat it all, Mister, she’s been sharing it with me and my parents.”

“I see,” he said as he turned back around and reached inside his bag and pulled a second candy bar out. This one, he handed to Linda. “This is for your daughter, Linda. Let her have it later. Sometimes it’s nice for someone to have something that is theirs.”
Chapter 10

Chapter 10: New and Old Friends

The flight went pretty quickly after that. Lunch was served and Thomas could tell that since they were now flying over land that they were probably not too far from Frankfurt. After having eaten, Molly tried to get comfortable in her seat before falling asleep. When Linda got up, he had to get up so that she would not have to crawl over him in order to reach the aisle.

After having close to a two-hour delay, Thomas decided that he would have no choice but to call his friend and put Willy’s worries to rest. He reached for the phone that was in the seat in front of Molly’s. The phone was removable through the use of a credit card, and once he slipped it into the slot, the phone gave way and fell into his hand.

He immediately dialed the number to Willy’s office and waited for the line to connect. His intention had been to call his friend that night when he reached the hotel in Duselheim, but that option was quickly dismissed. He figured that since the child was peacefully asleep and Linda was gone, he could probably get away with calling Willy if he did not speak the chocolatier’s name during the course of the conversation.

Once he could hear the telephone’s ring erupting in his ear, he took a deep breath as he listened and waited for the line to be picked up. “Hello? Tom, is that you?” Thomas sighed with relief when he heard Willy’s voice instead of one of the Oompa Loompas. Although he liked the interesting inhabitants of Loompaland, he was not sure how much his credit card could handle trying to explain to one of them that he was calling from an airplane at 30,000 feet. He figured that their technology did not prepare them for that sort of revelation and he was not in the mood to try and clarify it to them.

“Yes,” Thomas responded after taking a deep breath. His gaze remained fixated on the little girl who slept next to where he was seated.

“Are you there yet?” Willy asked. “I’ve been expecting your call. How are things in Duselheim?”

“No idea, I’m still in the plane on the way to Frankfurt. There was a two-hour delay and we’re now about twenty minutes outside of Frankfurt. I sat on the tarmac at Heathrow waiting, so you might say I’m running a bit behind the time,” he began. “I intended on calling you from the hotel like I said, but there is something that came up that I need to discuss, or better said, to ask another favor of you.”

“I’m a trifle deaf in this ear, would you mind speaking up?” Willy asked coyly and Thomas could hear him chuckling as he switched ears. “Okay, what sort of favor do you have in mind?”

Thomas smiled as his gaze remained on the child next to him. She was still sleeping and her arms were wrapped snugly around the doll that was in her lap. “I met a nice lady and her daughter here on the plane. They’ve been kind of down on their luck as of late and I was wondering…”

“If you could bring them to the factory?” Willy finished for him.

“Yes,” Thomas said simply. “We could arrange it after you know what is finished.”

“Tom, I…” Willy began, but his words drifted off when Thomas interrupted.

“I know that you are not all that keen on having a bunch of strange people hanging around, but if you were to meet Molly, you’d be enchanted by her. I know this, because I know you. She didn’t
even know me, but still confided a great many things in me.”

“She’s too young for you know what, isn’t she?” he asked.

“Much, she’s only seven,” he said. “I didn’t want to interfere in what you have planned, but I do know that this little girl needs something to hope for, and who better to share that with her than you?”

“Oh, I get it, Eliza warned me about this, she said that you are notorious for using my empathy on me like that,” Willy said in a teasing tone. Of course, Thomas could hear Willy’s good humor emerging from the other end of the line.

“It’s not just that,” he said. “Do you remember the handkerchief you gave me when Simeon died?”

“Yes, I told you to keep it,” Willy said.

“It’s soaked with their tears, both the mother and her little girl’s,” he said.

“So what you’re basically trying to say is they are good and sensitive people?”

“Yes they are,” Thomas said.

“Can they be trusted?”

“I think they can,” he said as he cast another glance towards the sleeping child. “I haven’t told them everything, and I probably won’t be able to, at least not under these circumstances.” He took a deep breath. “After I found those candy bars you smuggled into my carry-on I gave the first one to this little girl. She was hungry because she hadn’t had lunch yet. But, instead of eating it, she started sharing it with some of the other passengers. It was really quite touching. Her mother, Linda said that she is a selfless child and after seeing that, I believe it. I ended up giving the second candy bar to her so that she could give it to Molly later.”

“You’re too kind, Tom,” Willy said. “You know that I packed those candy bars for you, not for everyone else.”

“I know and I really appreciate it,” he said, but his next words emerged in a conspirator’s whisper. “The note was delicious, by the way.”

“No one else saw it?” Willy asked.

“No one saw the writing on it, but Molly saw me stuffing it into my mouth. She began to laugh and then she gave me the last piece of the candy bar I had given to her. She told me that I must be very hungry because I was eating paper.”

Willy’s laughter emerged once again and Thomas smiled upon hearing it. “Is that all you have to report?” he asked. “You have not been gone a full day and already you have found a sweet child who tugs at your heartstrings.”

“It wasn’t just her; it was her mother as well. Linda is really a lovely lady, she is very kind and caring, but they are both unhappy, and trying to make the best of everything that has happened to them,” he said. “It seems so unfair that so much would happen to them.”

“You can’t tell them, Tom, you know that,” Willy said.

“I know, it would be too dangerous for the both of them to know,” he said sadly as the small girl, in
her sleep, snuggled up to his arm. He looked down at her and swallowed.

“Tom, are you there,” Willy asked.

“I am,” he said, but with his free hand, he stroked the top of the child’s head. “She’s just snuggled up against me. I never had a child trust me so freely as this.”

“She knows you mean her no harm,” Willy said, but taking a deep breath, he released it slowly.

“She’s such a precious child,” he mused. “When I asked her what she would do if she had found a Golden Ticket, she said that…” he cupped his hand over the receiver and whispered the last three words, “…she’d hug you.”

“Hug me?” Willy asked. “The last time I really remember having someone come up and spontaneously hug me was before Eliza left London.” He paused before continuing to speak. “So you really want me to go out on that virtual limb and trust someone else?”

“It’s not just about you trusting someone; it’s about Molly’s mother. I wouldn’t be asking you this if I didn’t think it was important,” Thomas said.

“Alright, then see if you can get their number and we’ll ring them,” Willy said, “and Tom?”

“Yes?” He said.

“You have to be really careful, my friend,” he said. “If everyone knew who you really were, I fear that you would not be safe. There was just an article in the paper today about Slugworth saying that the contest was a publicity stunt and that if he could run it into the ground, he would.”

“What an arrogant man,” Thomas said.

“Yes, but the point is, if he caught wind of this, you could be in trouble,” Willy said, his voice etched with concern. “That’s why I want you to call me the minute you get to Duselheim.”

“I know, and I will,” he said. “Try not to worry. They don’t know anything, that’s why I know that everything Linda and Molly say and do is genuine. If it wasn’t, I wouldn’t have made this call at all.”

“Alright, but don’t tell them anything else about me, alright?”

“I won’t, I haven’t really said really anything about you except to say that you’re my friend,” Thomas said. “What should I do if they ask anything else?”

“Just tell them that you have a contact with someone who can send them some chocolate,” Willy said. “That seems safe enough for now. Call me when you get to Duselheim, alright?”

“I will,” he said and replaced the receiver before retrieving his credit card. He looked over at Molly and noticed that the child had released her hold on his arm, and turned around. When he raised his head again, he could see that Linda was coming back up the aisle, so he quickly stood up and let her return to her seat.

Once he was seated, his thoughts unconsciously began to drift, this time returning him to the day that he had brought Eliza Bachmann back to the factory.

Flashback

June 13, 1965
Thomas left the factory through the secret exit a little over a week after the news of Willy Wonka’s self-imposed seclusion had broke. Willy had insisted that he wait several days before leaving the factory because of the circus that now seemed to surround the story. Of course, he could not forget the fact that he had promised the chocolatier that he would be bringing Eliza back to see him.

He was not sure why his friend insisted on him doing it that particular day, but he figured that he would soon find out.

As he snuck around the side gates, he could see that a number of people had swarmed around the black metal gate at the front of the complex. They had been doing that every day since the news broke, but no one had so much as caught a glimpse of Willy Wonka. The courtyard was completely empty and the gates closed and locked. The only sign of life was the flashing ‘Wonka’ sign that illuminated the place from further inside the large compound.

As he managed to creep out beyond the gates, he carried a small briefcase that hung from his shoulder. Inside were three Wonka bars for Charlie Bucket and his family as well as a note in an envelope that was addressed to Eliza.

It only took Thomas about twenty minutes to get to Eliza’s house, but upon arriving, he could instantly tell that something was not right. The window shades were drawn and the entire place carried an eerie and uninviting sensation.

Taking a deep breath, he walked up to the door and tapped lightly on it. After several minutes of waiting, he watched as the door slowly opened and he was left looking down into a pair of red, swollen, and unhappy eyes. “Eliza, what is it? What has happened?”

Instead of speaking, the woman backed away from the door indicating that he could enter the house.

As he came inside, the first thing he noticed was that the house was uncharacteristically dark, the shades all around it were drawn and no lights were burning. “This is really not a good time, Thomas,” she eventually whispered. “I knew that you wanted to keep your word, but I found out everything when I read the paper. Mr. Wonka fired all of us.”

“You sensed it, Eliza, you knew what was going to happen before it actually did,” he said, his voice low.

“I know, but it was not just that,” she began. “The job is not something that I would wish to dwell upon. Right now I have other things that are occupying my mind.”

“What is it?” he asked.

The woman swallowed as she sat down on the sofa and clasped her hands together. Somehow that simple act seemed to offer her some sort of assurance as her next words emerged. “My mother died last Friday and her funeral was yesterday.”

Thomas took a deep breath. Willy’s assertiveness in wanting him to go and see her on that particular day was now clear. His friend had probably read about her in the paper. He released a pent up breath as he took in the devastation that shadowed her face. “I’m sorry,” he whispered. “Why didn’t you call the factory or get in touch and let me know?”

“You had other things on your mind, and even if I wanted to, I couldn’t, because I don’t have a phone,” she said.

“No one should go through this sort of thing alone,” he objected. “I should have come long before
now.”

“It wasn’t your obligation. Besides, I knew that the media was clambering all over this story because it’s the biggest news to hit in years. The factory was completely surrounded by reporters. I saw how it was the day after it happened. They were talking to former employees and asking all sorts of questions. I went there just to take one last look, but when I saw the people, I got scared and ran straight home. I was afraid to even show up there again, afraid that in one emotional moment, I would have said something wrong, something damaging. There has already been enough of that,” she shook her head sadly. “I wanted to stay there, but I knew I couldn’t.”

“I understand,” he said gently as he dug inside the side pocket and removed the envelope. “I brought you a note from Mr. Wonka, I mean; from Will,” he said as he extended it to her.

“That is very kind of you,” she said, all the while accepting the rose colored envelope. She brought it to her nose and inhaled. “It smells like Strawberries,” she said, but lowered it and carefully pulled out the letter. Between the half folded page she felt a heavy object fall out and land on her lap.

Taking a deep breath, she lowered the still unread letter and reached for the object. It looked to be a large bulky key that hung from a strangely shaped golden keychain. She took a closer look and recognized that the keychain was shaped like a golden top hat, which reminded her of the one that Willy Wonka always wore.

Regardless of what it was, she was not quite sure what it or the key actually meant. She flipped the object around in her hand, but eventually reached for the strawberry stationary and unfolded the affixed note. She stared down at the neat penmanship, but this too, gave her no answers. It was a simple statement, but it seemed to compound the mystery.

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Eliza,

I’ll explain the key when I see you.

W.

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She looked at Thomas. “It says he’ll explain when he sees me. But, how can he?” she asked shaking her head sorrowfully.

Thomas took a deep breath. “It’s obvious that he wants to see you again,” he said. “He asked me to bring this to you as well as accompany you back to the factory.”

“He wants me to come back to the factory?” she asked. “I don’t understand. I was fired, Thomas, this must be a mistake.”

“I don’t think it’s a mistake. Perhaps it is better left for him to explain,” he said simply. “Right now, you need someone to help you, and so does he. What two people are so well matched than a mother who is without a son, and a son who is without a mother?”

Eliza looked away. “I don’t know how to be a mother, Thomas, I just lost mine.”

“I know, but somewhere deep inside of you dwells a wisdom that can capture someone else’s imagination, and somehow that is what has captured Will’s. Now, whether you believe it or not, Willy Wonka needs your optimism and strength, especially now. It would seem as though his entire world is collapsing in on top of him.” As he spoke, he momentarily closed his eyes. “Please, do consider coming with me.”
She contemplated his words for several minutes but then collected the note and key before standing up. “Wait here, I'll get my purse.” She started to walk away from where he was sitting, but his voice stopped her.

“I brought some candy with me for your friend, Charlie,” he said. “Maybe we can drop them off on our way to the factory.”

“Of course,” she smiled. “We can stop by his house and leave the candy with his grandparents. I’m certain they will all be very happy with your gift,” she said as she disappeared into the bedroom and left Thomas alone.

Instead of remaining seated on Eliza’s lumpy gray colored couch, he got to his feet and started to take in the rest of the house. The old furnishings were quite interesting and the artwork on the walls carried an almost Victorian essence. As he continued looking around the house, something that rested on the table suddenly caught his attention.

He approached, his eyes now taking in the papers that were lying there. It looked to be a group of legal documents. The first one was white on top with yellow and pink copies beneath it. *It must be important if it is in triplicate,* he thought as he looked down and read the bold-faced print that was in the center top line of the page. “To file for Bankruptcy,” he mumbled the words soft as he started to read over the various points. When he saw Eliza’s name carefully written inside the box, he shook his head sadly. “Oh no,” he whispered.

Thomas was no dummy regarding matters of this kind; in fact, he had seen it more often than not during his lifetime. During his time in America, he had worked part time at a lawyer’s office, so he knew what all this meant and that alone sent a chill straight right down his spine.

Carefully, he lifted the paper and moved it to one side. Beneath it, there was an eviction notice with the stipulation that Eliza be out of her house by the end of the month. He moved this paper aside and discovered an application for admittance into a woman’s halfway house.

If the woman’s situation was not clear to him before, then it was now. She was on the verge of losing everything she had. Now he knew that the only thing that was going to keep her out of this ghastly situation was for her to accept the offer that Willy intended on making.

He cast a glance back in the direction of the bedroom, but quickly returned the papers to the stack in the order that he had found them. He knew that she would have been very upset if she had caught him digging through her private paperwork. Most people would, he reasoned as he quickly hastened back into the living room and seated himself on the sofa.

The concern was still shadowing his face when she emerged several minutes later, but this time, he said nothing. He noticed that she had changed clothes and was now wearing a denim skirt and a white blouse. Her hair, she had neatly pulled back and affixed with an old-fashioned silver barrette.

Wordlessly, she walked over to the table and picked up the entire stack of papers. These she folded in thirds and slipped into the side pocket of her purse. *She probably figured that she could file all these things at the necessary offices after her visit to the factory,* Thomas thought sadly.

Next, he watched as she approached the bookshelf and retrieved her treasured chocolate bar. This, she slid inside one of the pockets of her purse as well. “I’m ready,” she said once she had turned around and faced him.

Thomas looked at her. “If you don’t mind my asking, why do you want to take the candy with you?”
“I don’t know, maybe it gives me some semblance of strength or luck, which I could use right about now,” she said.

Instead of speaking further, she merely shrugged her shoulders as she started towards the front door. “We should go,” she eventually found her voice. “I still have some errands I need to run this afternoon and figured on doing all of that while in town.”

Her over-emphasized cheerfulness did not escape him. Thomas knew instinctively that this was part of her act. He went over and opened the door before the two of them stepped outside.

After Eliza closed and locked the door, they left the house and started to make their way down the street in the direction of where Charlie Bucket and his family lived. “This shouldn’t take too long,” she said, “but I have to warn you that Georgina sometimes invites me to stay for tea and doesn’t take kindly to refusals.”

“Then why don’t you do that?” he offered. “I’m not really in the mood for tea and I don’t want them to think I am being rude for refusing, so I’ll wait outside. Just tell them that the candy is from a friend.”

“What are you going to do?” she asked.

“I was kind of in the mood to take a little walk since the weather has been relatively nice lately. I won’t go too far, but I can meet you back here in about twenty minutes. How does that sound?”

She nodded as he handed her the three bars of chocolate. He then watched as she walked towards the house.

For his part, Thomas started back down the street in the direction of the intersection where the paved road started. He knew from his previous trip down this road that there was a pay phone situated on one of the corners. Using the time he was allotted, he knew that he could call Willy and fill him in on this tragic turn of events.

Several minutes later, he had reached the small glass room and discretely went inside. Once he had pulled the door closed, he began to dig around in his pocket and retrieved a silver coin. This, he stuck in the slot and began to dial, his fingers drumming nervously against one side of the coin operated telephone. As soon as he finished said task, he waited for Willy to pick up the line.

“Yes?” he soon heard the voice of the chocolatier at the other end of the line. He took a deep breath as he glanced self-consciously around the area. When he noticed that he was still alone, he took a deep breath and spoke.

“It’s Tom,” he said as he took a deep breath and quickly conveyed to Willy what he had seen at Eliza’s house. “She’s worse off than either of us imagined. I thought for a second that I was having a nightmare, but it was there on the table, the words reaching out and slapping me across the face.”

“Are you sure?” the candy maker asked.

“I worked at a legal aid office briefly when I was in the States,” he affirmed. “That’s what it is, an eviction notice, a bankruptcy file, and an application to live in a women’s halfway house. She’s worse off than Charlie Bucket, if that’s even possible.”

“Okay, Tom, calm down,” Willy said. “When you get back, I will have a talk with her. I need to make sure that she doesn’t think that I am trying to do this as some sort of charity case. Maybe I can take her to the Chocolate Room and explain to her that I know more about her situation than I should.”
“Alright,” Thomas said. “I won’t say anything to her about this conversation, but I’m really worried about her, Will. She implied that after she leaves the factory, she would go and run some errands. If you ask me, I think it’s only to file that dreadful paperwork. I didn’t know what to say, but her forced cheerfulness really sent a shiver down my spine.”

“Just get back here as soon as you can, and leave the rest to me,” Willy said.

“What are you going to do?” he asked.

“I don’t know yet, but I’ll think of something,” the chocolatier said.

“I’m heading back to pick her up. She left the chocolate at Charlie’s house, but I will bring her as soon as she’s done,” Thomas said. “I’ll see you when we get back.”

“Ohkay, bye Tom, thanks for letting me know,” Willy said, but Thomas could have sworn that his friend’s voice had cracked.

Once he hung up and heard the coin fall into the belly of the phone, he opened the glass door and started to trudge his way back down the dirt road in the direction of Charlie Bucket’s house.

There was no question in his mind, this day had started out bad, and had progressively gotten worse. The most terrible thing about all of this was discovering what was about to happen to Eliza, but not being able to tell her what he knew.

His thoughts were literally swimming by the time he had returned to the house. As he approached, he could see that Eliza was coming outside. “I’ll see all of you later,” she was saying happily. “Take care everyone and tell Clara and Charlie I said ‘hello’.”

Once she stepped outside, she closed the door and she looked at him. “That was very nice of you to think of him. His grandmother, Josephine, said that he and his mother had gone to the cemetery to visit his father, so the chocolate will be a welcomed treat when the two of them get back.”

Thomas nodded. “I know that all of this is very hard for you to contend with,” he said. “In hindsight, I feel the same way whenever the topic of death is mentioned. I am constantly amazed with how positive and loving you remain even when things are not going as well as they should.”

Eliza nodded. “Thank you, Thomas, that acknowledgement means a great deal to me, specifically because right now things are not going very well at all and I feel lost.”

“For what it’s worth, I do understand. I felt the very same way after my brother died,” he reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder. “The person who helped me through that time in my life is the same person who gave you that key and wishes to see you again.”

Eliza nodded, but kept her head lowered as the two of them walked slowly back in the direction of the chocolate factory.

*This was not going to be easy*, Tom was thinking. In fact, he was not sure how much help Eliza could even offer the reclusive chocolatier, when she seemed to be just as lost and alone as he presently was.
Willy Wonka sat alone in his office, the dead telephone receiver still resting in his hand. He eventually returned it to the hook, his eyes filled with sadness. Thomas Wilkenson had gone to bring Eliza back to the factory, but after that phone call, he was not certain about what it was he was supposed to do.

Near his arm, a crumpled up newspaper rested, the page opened up to the obituary section where a tiny splashed memo was circled with a yellow highlighter. In the circle, the news of Eliza’s mother’s passing was visible. This alone filled the chocolatier with despondency. What seemed to override all of his emotions put together were the feelings of guilt that he knew hung over his head. Eviction, bankruptcy, halfway houses; these words seemed to whirl about in his head as though his brain was filled with the same sorts of bubbles found in the room where the fizzy lifting drinks were made.

Here was a woman who was so full of hope and had so much love and life in her, and yet she has lost everything. He blamed himself for it. I fired her, what sort of human being am I? These thoughts ravaged his conscience.

He shoved the newspaper off the desk, the object floating to the floor until it rested in a heap next to the half a wastebasket that sat next to his half a desk. The woman had lost her job, then her mother, and was now on the verge of losing both her home and her dignity. Willy knew that he would have to do something drastic to keep this from happening.

At the same time, he pondered if everything he intended to do would come too late. He wanted to help just one person, but maybe there were many people in similar positions as she was in. A new flood of guilt washed over him as he ran his hand through his hair.

He had confided in his friend that he would offer her a home here at the factory, but what if she refused? Now, in the wake of Thomas’ other news, he could not help but wonder if she would harbor ill will towards him after all. What would she say to him when she got there? Would she be brave as she had been the day that he had fired her? Or would she overtly hate him as much as he hated himself every time he looked in the mirror?

Taking a deep breath, he could feel the silence as it literally swallowed him whole. If only the two of them would get back, he thought sadly. Then I would at least know where I stand with regard to all of this.

Refusing to move, he sat stoically in the half a chair that was in front of his desk. His hand once more lowered until it was resting against his heart. By this time, it was literally racing as it thumped against the walls of his chest. He was much more nervous than he was willing to admit.

Willy Wonka had learned a long time ago that the man he had found at Simeon Wilkenson’s funeral had somehow become the voice inside his head; his conscience. He brushed his hand through his frizzy blondish brown hair and tried without success to pat it into place.

He glanced around the room, all the while realizing that he had finally managed to remove the bits of
chocolate from the floor and clean things up a bit. Of course, externally, he could clean anything he liked, but in the depths of his soul, he knew that there existed far more heartache than even he could comprehend.

A light tapping sound suddenly filled the silence of the office and he realized that someone was at the door. He slowly got to his feet, his hair forgotten as he walked slowly over and pulled it open.

Standing outside was Thomas and several steps behind him, Eliza stood. He stared at her for several moments, all the while trying to guess what she was thinking or feeling.

For her part, the petite woman kept head lowered. When she eventually looked up, he could see that her eyes carried a very heartrending sadness. The grief seemed to engulf her, but she still found the courage to offer him a brave smile.

After several seconds ticked by, he managed to swallow the lump that was now lodged in the back of his throat. He extended both of his hands towards her and watched as she eventually reached one of her own back to him. As soon as he felt her hand touching his, he gently pulled her into the office. “Hello, dear lady,” he said, his voice carrying traces of remorse.

For her part, she looked as though she was about to fall over. Willy led her over to the sofa and bade her to sit down. Once she was seated, he turned to face his friend. “I would like to talk to her alone if that’s alright. Perhaps you can meet us later at the Chocolate Room.”

The tall man nodded and turned to take his leave. “Alright, I was kind of hoping to get some work done this afternoon.”

“I appreciate you bringing her,” Willy said, his blue eyes filled with gratitude.

Thomas nodded before exiting the office and leaving Willy and Eliza alone. The chocolatier swallowed as he slowly approached the half a coat rack and retrieved his red colored coat. On this particular day he had selected a red coat with a bright blue bow tie. Eliza raised her head only momentarily as he put the coat on and reached for his cane.

He came over and sat down beside her, his gentle eyes regarding her as he nervously brushed his hands against the top of the cane. It was evident that the chocolatier was not certain as to how to broach the subject of her coming to live at the factory.

Instead, he took a deep breath. “Eliza, I asked you to come here for a number of reasons, but one is because there’s something I want to share with you,” he began. “Are you able to walk? I know that you and Tom came from the outskirts of town and that it was kind of far.”

She nodded. “I should be fine. I just needed to catch my breath.”

“It’s not very far to the Chocolate Room,” he mused. “I think that if we take the Wonkavator, then you won’t get winded. It is also much quicker and you don’t look as though you could handle much more walking.”

Eliza shrugged her shoulders, but offered him a brave smile. “I will have to, though. I still have some errands to run once I leave here.”

Willy nodded, but offered his arm to her. She accepted and managed to get to her feet. Once she was standing beside him, she could not help but notice how tall he was. Even without his top hat, Willy Wonka could easily tower over her.

“Bring your key,” he said and she released the hold that she had on his arm. He watched as she went
over and dug around in her purse until she found the small golden keychain and the large silver key.

Once she had it, she carefully placed it in the pocket of her skirt and allowed him to lead her to the strange glass encased elevator, which he dubbed as the ‘Wonkavator’. As the doors slid open, he reached for the handle that opened the glass-covered room. Inside, she could see buttons as well as the glass walls. She took in the glass elevator and waited patiently for him to close the door. Once he did, he quickly deposited his cane in the holder on one side of his seat. He then watched as she leaned up against the side.

“You can sit in here, there are three seats, I’m just used to taking this one,” he said and watched as she managed to lower herself onto the seat.

Once he was comfortable, he reached over and pressed one of the many buttons.

Without warning, the glass elevator jolted to the right and then dropped as though nothing was holding onto it. She unconsciously clamped her eyes shut, but then suddenly felt a steadying hand on her shoulder. Without thinking of what she was doing, she raised her own hand and gripped his with all the power she had. The glass elevator continued to jerk her about and she felt as though she was a piece of cotton in a wind tunnel.

Because her eyes were still closed, she could not see that Willy was now wincing from the pressure of her hand. Instead of immediately speaking, he watched as the elevator stopped its free fall and jerked uncharacteristically to the left.

After several seconds, she managed to open her eyes and look at Willy, who, although still feeling her fingernails on top of his hand, was smiling reassuringly. “Not to worry, nothing is going to happen while you’re here,” he said. “The Wonkavator is just an invention that can go all different directions, not just up and down.”

“You have created many wonderful things, Mr. Wonka…” she began as she released her hold on his hand and reached out to grip the golden railing.

“Please, just call me William or Will,” he said. “Those names are generally reserved for my friends.”

“I shouldn’t,” she began.

“Of course you should,” he said firmly. “You asked Tom to call you Eliza, and even when we spoke, you had become Eliza to me. To be honest, I actually had to check your employment records after you left so that I could find out what your last name was.” He smiled, his blue eyes now shining as he regarded her. “Now, if we are to be friends, dear lady, then you must honor me with the very same courtesy that I bestow upon you.”

She raised her head. “Alright…William, but I was rather taken aback that you would want to be my friend. Of course, you’re right, my apologies.” As these words emerged, the Wonkavator finally slowed to a stop and the outer doors suddenly opened.

“Here we are,” he said as he retrieved his cane. Next he opened the door and made a polite motion with his hand, “ladies first.”

She nodded and stepped outside of the Wonkavator. She looked up at the large black colored door that appeared to be the barrier between them and the Chocolate Room. After several minutes, she turned and looked at him. “I don’t think I’ve ever been to this part of the factory before, Mr. Won…I mean; William.”

He smiled, but offered her a short nod. “Only about four or five percent of my workers were allowed
entrance here. It is the nerve center of the entire factory but I must also admit that it is a great secret. It is one I wish to share with you now.” As he spoke he deactivated the musical lock, opened the door, and motioned with his cane for her to enter.

As she came inside, the light and color seemed to wash over her and this made her feel as though she had somehow become a part of the room. All around her, she could see sweets and confections of every size, shape, and color. It was like stepping from reality straight into a dream. Of course, feeling initially fearful, she hung back for several moments and simply stared at various points around the room.

Willy watched her reaction and uncertain of what to say, he rested his hand on her shoulder. “Do you like it?” he asked.

“Like it?” she repeated. “It’s the most beautiful place I’ve ever seen.” Her eyes continued to take in every detail, the feelings that embodied her, indescribable. Finally, she turned and looked at him, her eyes meeting his as the flood of emotion emerged in her words. “It’s like waking from a dream and finding out that you’re still there.” The tears caught in her eyes as she shook her head with profound disbelief.

From one side of the room, she could see a river and waterfall that seemed to snake around one corner of the room to the other. The soft splashing of the chocolate waterfall filled her ears and broke the silence after they had disembarked the great glass elevator.

Now, she stood at the top of a staircase overlooking something that was nothing short of spectacular. After several moments of silence passed between them, she lowered her head. “I only wish that I could really enjoy this place as was intended.”

Willy looked at her, this time his eyes mirrored with the very same sadness. “I feel the same way, Eliza.”

“You do?” She turned and looked at him and noticed that there was suppressed anguish lurking in his gaze. “Is it because of the recipe?”

“Not entirely,” he shook his head. “Of course that was something that deeply troubled and hurt me, but there are other things that have been on my mind lately, as well.” He paused as he took a deep breath. “I read in the paper that your mother had passed away and I am so deeply sorry.”

“Thank you,” she smiled bravely, but no other words emerged, instead they remained standing, the silence swallowing and leaving them in apt contemplation.

“Tom told me that you had received a great deal of strength from her, and when I saw the mention in the paper, I became quite concerned for you,” he said.

“That’s very kind of you, but there’s something I don’t understand. William, you sent me that note and this key,” she said as she pulled the object from her pocket. “I could not understand why you did that. I mean; what is it for?”

“The key is a master key to the factory,” he said simply. “I wanted you to have it because I know that I can trust you. No matter what happens, I want you to have a way to come back into this place. I only ask that you not share it with anyone else. It is only for you to know of its meaning or use.”

“I understand, but I still don’t know why you gave it to me. You don’t really know me all that well,” she objected. “How do you know if I’m trustworthy enough for such a secret?”

“If you have to ask me that question, then I know that you are,” he said firmly, his smile breaking
through the sadness he carried. “The truth is; I wanted to see you again. After I released everyone from their contracts, I thought about you and wondered how you were doing.”

Eliza heard these words and felt the tears catching in her eyes. Instead of going down the stairs, she simply bunched up her skirt and seated herself at the top of the staircase. Once she was seated, she rested her head in her hands. “I wish I could say that everything is fine, William.” As these words emerged, she managed to raise her head so that she was making eye contact with him. “The truth is, I thought I was going to be alright, but I am not so sure anymore. I seemed to have convinced everyone else that I would survive all of these setbacks. After Mom died, I became uncertain if I ever could.”

Willy watched her, but instead of saying anything, he sat down next to her, his legs stretched out in front of him. To the chocolatier, she looked as though she was willing herself to not break down and cry in front of him. He rested his hands in his lap, his gaze still on the river. He sat this way for several minutes, until he found the courage to look at her. “Is there anything I can do?” he asked.

“You mustn’t do anything,” she managed, but before she could stop them, the tears had started to fall from her eyes.

“I know that, but what if it is something offered freely?” he asked. “I just want to do what one friend would do for another.”

Eliza looked into the eyes of the chocolatier, his face blurred by the tears that were still in her eyes. “I don’t know,” she whispered, still trying to keep herself from crying.

“Have you at least cried?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, not really,” she took a deep breath as her next words emerged. “The truth is, too many things have happened, and God forgive me, but I’m losing my faith in everything. I have no idea what I’m supposed to do next. I always felt strong and certain, but now I feel so weak and insignificant.”

These words hit Willy like a train, perhaps because they were words that he could have said during the past weeks himself, but never did. Instead of immediately responding, he pulled her into his arms, her head now coming to rest against his chest. There, she could hear the sounds of his heartbeat and the odd bowtie he wore now tickling one side of her face. “It’s never easy to take your own advice, is it?” he asked. “You told me not to ever give up on my dreams, Eliza.”

“I said that…” she whispered, her voice trailing.

“Yes, you did,” he said and smiled reassuringly at her. “And your words convinced me not to give up.”

She smiled weakly, her face still streaked with tears. “I’m glad.”

He nodded. “And yet, you question your own trustworthiness.” He took a deep breath. “Now that you know that I trust you, I would hope that you would trust me as well.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Thomas called me before you both came to the factory,” he said. “He told me he saw something at your house that concerned him.”

“What?” she whispered as she pulled her way out of his embrace.
“I will not lie to you. Tom said he saw some papers on your table that worried him,” Willy said, but watched as her face lost its color. This affirmed to the chocolatier that Thomas was speaking the truth. “Why didn’t you tell one of us about what has been happening?” he asked gently.

She lowered her head shamefully. “I don’t know, maybe my pride wouldn’t let me. I didn’t want anyone to feel sorry for me. I figured that I would go and take care of this when I got done here. I didn’t expect either of you to find out or get involved with my problems. You have enough to do without taking care of some destitute woman.”

“Perhaps, but if you have no place to stay, and no income, then this does involve me,” he said sadly. “Eliza, I was the one who fired you, I was the one who took everything away from you,” he said with sadness still in his voice.

“Please, William try and forget about that,” she said.

“I can’t” he admitted, his confession simple.

She bit down on her lip and shook her head. “I didn’t want you to know about this.”

“Why not?” he asked, “if we’re your friends, then we should be able to do what we can to help you through it.”

“I never would have expected that of you,” she whispered.

“I know you wouldn’t,” he said, but took a deep breath. “Eliza, I know that this sounds rather strange to you, but I have a suggestion that I would like to make.”

“What?” she asked.

“Why don’t you come and stay here at the factory?” he asked.
Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 12: The Comfort of a Friend

This chapter continues entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

And it is still June 13, 1965

Willy took a deep breath once his words were out. He watched and waited for them to sink in. Now that he had made the offer, all that was left for him to do was to wait for her to reject or accept it. Deep down, the chocolatier was fearful that she would tell him that he was crazy for even suggesting it. Instead of putting those fears into words, he simply waited, the silence only replaced by the sounds of the waterfall.

She turned and looked at him. “W-what d-did you s-say?” she whispered, her voice literally quavering with each word.

Willy took a deep breath. “I suggested that you come and stay here. I know that you don’t want charity, but I just thought…” his voice trailed, and this was something that very rarely happened with him. He cleared his throat. “…I thought that if you have no objections, it would be nice to have you here.”

She looked over at him and in his eyes she could see insecurity. It was like being with a child who dwelled in the body of an adult. She shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know, William.”

He nodded. “I would never want to force this on you, I know it is something that takes a lot of thought, but you must know that my offer is not because I feel sorry for you. Please don’t ever think that it is.” The chocolatier took a deep breath before he could continue. “You intended to remain strong for the both of us just as you had tried to be on the day the recipe for the ‘Around the World’ idea got stolen. Stimmt’s oder hab ich Recht?” he asked, slipping into an almost fluent German.

“I-I don’t understand,” she managed.

“It’s German and it means ‘Am I right, or am I right?’” he said, a playful smile now gracing his lips. After a few moments, his expression suddenly became earnest. “I don’t mean to intrude in your personal affairs, but I would really like to know what has happened since we spoke. I need to find out so that I can at least do something that might help.”

“What?” she asked, her voice cracking. “William, why am I so important to you?”

“Because you’re you,” he said his voice the epitome of calmness. “Is that a good enough reason?”

She looked at him, but shook her head, a small smile breaking through. “That is not a straight answer and you know it,” she scolded lightly.

The chocolatier rubbed his hands together and pressed the sides of them against his mouth. “If I tried to explain, then you may not understand. It may sound crazy for me to admit it, but I have a hard time trying to figure it out myself.”

She took a deep breath and despite her grief, she smiled weakly. “You’re too much, did you know
“Does that mean ‘yes’?” he asked.

“It’s more of an ‘I don’t know’, she said. “I do trust you, William, but I need a few minutes to digest all of this. I mean; I am someone you don’t know very well, yet you want to take care of me. That’s such an amazing thing when I try to contemplate it.”

Willy took a deep breath. “Well, perhaps it might be better if you tell me what I should do, because right now I am at quite a loss. I could take care of things so that you can stay in your house, or if you would rather, I will arrange it so that if you want to come and live here for a time, you can. You are under no obligation to me, but I don’t want you to be tossed out on the street. To be honest, I would do whatever is in my power to see that that does not happen.”

“I’m not sure,” she said. “This is all unexpected.”

“Do you want to stay in your house?” He asked.

“In all honesty, no,” she said shaking her head.

“Somehow, I can fathom what you are feeling right now. That house holds far too many painful memories for you,” he began. “You want to start collecting new memories, ones that will not hurt you or make you feel as though you are completely on your own.”

She nodded, “yes, but I’m still frightened.”

“I can tell,” he said. “Just tell me why. You said the first time we spoke that you knew that I had no intention of hurting you, and I won’t.”

“It’s not that. I know that you won’t hurt me; you are far too gentle to even try. The problem for me is I have never in my life asked anyone for their help. I don’t even know how to do it,” she confessed. “Although I have lived much of my life trying to get by, I learned early on that I must rely on my instincts in order to survive.”

“I can understand that,” the candy maker said. “I have lived with the same instinct you described for much of my life.”

“Maybe we have far more in common than I initially thought,” she whispered. Quietly, she reached over and took both of his hands in hers. “Believe me, I am grateful to you beyond words for wanting to help me, but how can I accept such a generous offer without feeling as though I am using you somehow? I am so afraid that you will believe me to be like those spies who have used your good nature and kindness for their own selfish benefits.”

“You’re refusing?” he spoke, his voice soft and he pulled his hands out of her hold and stared out across the Chocolate Room.

“I want to accept your offer William, please believe me, I would want to come and live here more than anything, but how can I?”

Willy looked at her, pain etched in his soft blue eyes. “I understand, but will you at least tell me what you intend to do?”

“What is there left for me to do?” she answered his question with one of her own. “I have no choice, I have to go and live in a halfway house.”
Willy considered her words for several minutes. He remembered the time when his father had tossed him out because he did not live up to Wilbur’s expectations of him. This, thankfully, left him in the loving hands of his grandfather. Of course, this did not take away the bigger psychological issue of abandonment, which followed him into adulthood. At this particular moment, he could only imagine what she felt about having to acknowledge being a sociological throwaway.

At this moment, he was desperate for her to stay. He bit down on his lip as his soft words emerged. “May I offer another proposal?”

“I’m open to suggestions,” she said bravely.

“Would you consider coming back to work here? You won’t be doing the same job, as that is not necessary, but I could really use some help in the office. Eliza, if you accept this job, I would hope that you would agree to live on the factory grounds, as it could be considered dangerous for you having to come and go so frequently.” As he was speaking, from behind his back, he crossed his fingers, all the while hoping against hope that she would accept.

She looked at him. “Could I leave to go visit my friends?”

“Of course, that’s why I gave you the key,” he said nodding. “You can come and go anytime you please. You just have to be careful when you do. Tom can show you how the key works and I’ll even show you how to operate the Wonkavator so you can freely go wherever you need to.”

“That won’t be necessary,” she said smiling weakly. “I think I actually prefer walking.”

Willy Wonka looked at her. “Does that mean you accept?”

“You really want this old lady around, don’t you?” she responded with a question of her own.

He nodded. “Yes, but you’re not that old. Your employment record says you’re 57,” he said with a quirky smile. “I sort of had a glance at it when I had to find out your last name.”

“You are truly an extraordinary person,” she said. Instead of speaking further, she simply wrapped her arms around him and gave him a warm hug. “I accept.”

As their embrace ended, Willy looked over at her, his blue eyes evoking the emotions of joy, but then a deep sorrow emerged in his next statement. “I think that just made it all worth it. That felt very nice, almost like I had a mother again.”

“You lost your mother?” she asked as the hug ended, but she kept her arm around his shoulder.

He nodded. “I never knew my mother. She died soon after I was born. I grew up with my father, but I never got along with him. I later found out that he blamed me for her death,” he admitted, his voice low.

If the truth were known, Willy had never told anyone much about his family life, not even Thomas knew to what extent his relationship with his father had suffered. Instead of dwelling on this, as it happened so many years ago, he continued speaking. “That is probably why I wanted you to come and stay,” he confessed. “I haven’t got a mother, and Tom mentioned that you didn’t have a son.”

“I don’t know to what extent he spoke of me, but yes, he was telling the truth,” she said nodding slowly. “I often wondered what he would have been like had he survived. I used to ponder if he had been musical like Mozart, or brilliant like Einstein.” She took a deep breath. “Today, I think I would have liked for him to be smart, resourceful, generous, and loving like you.” She smiled at him, her eyes shining. “If your mother had known you, I think she would have been very proud.”
Willy’s face suddenly lit up and he smiled. It was a genuine, happy to be living kind of smile. “Do you really mean that?”

She nodded all the while realizing that the words that Thomas had said to her were very much the truth. Willy Wonka had many things; wealth, popularity, endless imagination, and creativity, but his life was encased in tragedy. He had only small remnants of a family and his isolation and loneliness seemed overwhelming once he had the courage to let his guard down.

Amidst her own grief, Eliza’s heart truly ached for him. Aside from his friendship with Thomas Wilkenson, Willy Wonka had no one who could embrace the real man behind this self-created facade. This broke her heart, because she knew that he had lost track of what it meant to have someone love him for the dynamic and loving individual that he was.

She raised her head and looked into his eyes. Without so much as a trace of shyness, she reached over and brushed a lock of his curly hair out from in front of his face, “yes, dear boy, I really do.”

Upon hearing these words, and without any sort of warning, Willy Wonka’s defenses suddenly began to crumble. His eyes filled with tears and he lowered his head so that she would not see them sliding down over his cheeks. After several minutes, she reached over and took his face in her hands and tipped it up so that he was looking at her. “It’s okay to cry.”

He closed his eyes, but could still feel the tears slipping between the lids and leaving a stream of moisture along his cheeks. At the same instant, he tried one last attempt to keep her from fully seeing the vulnerability that was starting to emerge. It seemed that any weaknesses he possessed would have been hidden in order to somehow preserve his perfect world. “My father always said that men should never cry,” he whispered miserably.

“That’s not true,” she said, her voice etched with sympathy. “Oh William, it takes a great deal of courage for a man to cry, and you have more reasons than most to do so. To lose something precious and valuable is just as great a loss as death itself.”

Upon hearing this, Willy unconsciously shuddered as he shook his head. It could not compare to the grief she was experiencing. “No,” he whispered, “it shouldn’t be the same, Eliza.”

Instead of immediately speaking, she took his hand gently in one of hers and began to rub it. “Of course, I know it isn’t the same, and your compassionate nature knows that as well. Yet, your feeling of having that part of you stripped away is very much the same as losing someone you love through death. Your recipes and secrets are a part of what makes you the dynamic and wonderful individual that you are. It sometimes takes years for these sorts of wounds to heal, but they do, and it should never stop you from dreaming.” As these words emerged, she continued to rub his hand gently, the touch feather light. “Are you familiar with Henry David Thoreau’s work?”

Willy nodded but was surprised when she began to recite a statement from the conclusion of one of his works:

‘If one advances
confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live
the life which he has imagined, he will meet with a success
unexpected in common hours.’*

Eliza smiled at him. “It means that you will be rewarded for your good works as long as you continue and not let someone else’s dishonesty hamper you.”

“You recite literature?” he asked. “I always thought that I was the only one who did that sort of
thing.”

“You’re not. I have been reading and reciting quotations since I was a little girl. One of the most profound poems to me is called ‘I Am There’.”

“I haven’t read that one I’m afraid,” Willy said.

“No matter, but that means that I will have to find you a copy of it,” she said.

“You know something?” he asked after several minutes had passed.

“What?”

“When we first came in here, I thought I was supposed to be offering some sort of comfort to you,” he said, all the while noticing that her arm was still wrapped reassuringly around his shoulder. “But, it is you who has been consoling me.”

“It’s the way of things,” she said gently. “All of the things that have been given away will somehow be returned. You will discover in time that even when you give of yourself, the good will be returned to you. The problem I see is that you have already given so much of yourself that you feel guilty when you need to take something in return. Sometimes, it’s a matter of surviving, of protecting that part of you that can create and share.” She reached over and placed her hand against his chest, just over his heart. “It is that, which lies inside of you. You could never have created all of these wonderful things without it.”

Willy blinked several times, and looked at her, the tears somehow dangling from his eyelashes. All the thoughts and ideas that he shared through light-hearted dialogue and his citing of literature dissolved at that moment as the first of his tears began to fall.

Eliza silently pulled the unhappy man into her arms. She then reached up to remove the top hat that adorned his head. Beneath it, she could see the curly hair that haloed about his head. Eventually, his weight collapsed into her embrace.

“Just cry,” she whispered as she felt his face burying itself against her shoulder, the tears seeping through the thin fabric of her blouse. Without thinking about what she was doing, she began to recite her favorite poem as she held him in her arms.

‘Even when you feel most alone, I am there.
Even in your fears, I am there.
Even in your pain, I am there’. **

This time, Willy Wonka did not acknowledge the words to the poem; instead, he allowed the depth of his sadness to emerge. In his mind, he could not help but acknowledge how he had found himself in a strange and unfamiliar circumstance.

Here was someone who embraced him as a mother and yet, although doing her own share of grieving, she was selflessly giving more of herself than money could buy.

Thomas has given me far more than I could ever have wished for, Willy thought with gratitude as he held tightly to her. He brought me a mother.

What surprised him most however did not lie in the fact that he was grieving, but that that grief was no longer one-sided. While he cried in her arms, she was crying in his.
Chapter End Notes

Chapter References:

*Thoreau, Henry David, Walden. Chapter 18, Conclusion.
**Freeman, James Dillet, I Am There.
Chapter 13

Chapter 13: The Journey

When Thomas finally returned to the Chocolate Room, he found his friend and Eliza standing amidst the candy cane trees. Willy was showing her the intricacies of the various flavored candies and she was looking on in absolute fascination. As he came down the stairs and was standing on the pathway next to them, he nodded approvingly. From the looks on both of their faces, it seemed as though everything had worked out for the best.

After several minutes, the chocolatier raised his head and looked at Thomas. When he saw his friend, he smiled, his gratitude seemed overwhelming. “Did you get everything done, Tom?” he asked.

“Yes, how are you both faring?” He could see that their faces were somewhat red and blotchy from having cried, but he was relieved that Eliza had made some progress with his friend. There was a new life in Willy’s expression, and this helped to brighten his own mood.

“I feel a little lighter, actually,” Willy admitted. “I didn’t know that I would feel this way after crying, but I suppose I needed it.” He reached over and squeezed Eliza’s hand before giving his friend yet another bright smile. “I think she’s adopted me now.” He leaned over to rest his head against her shoulder. Lucky for her, the hat was still not perched on top of his head. Instead, it was lying on the railing by the stairs where the two of them had sat and talked.

Eliza smiled. “I think it was the poetry that got to him,” she admitted bashfully. “I started quoting literary works to him, and that seemed to have hooked him.” She gave the chocolatier a mischievous smile.

“Well, he’s always been a fan of poetry, he quotes it incessantly. Well, that is when he’s not talking in some foreign language,” Thomas said. “Right, Will?”

“Peut-tre un tout petit peu,” the chocolatier said his face completely emotionless. (Maybe just a little.)

“How many languages do you know?” Eliza asked.

“Yo no se!” Willy laughed. (I don’t know.)

Thomas shrugged his shoulders. “Let’s see, I’ve heard Will speak Latin, French, German and that was Spanish just now.”

Eliza looked at the two men, a smile now on her face. She was no longer worried about her fate, but still the sadness of losing her mother still lurked. “If I can’t understand you, William, then this idea of yours about my working here could get difficult for me. My linguistic abilities do not compare with yours.”

“You cannot leave, because you already given your word,” he said earnestly.

She patted his hand. “I have no intention of falling back on my word, but that means you must behave,” she smiled as she wagged her finger at him.

Willy smiled impishly at her, his blue eyes once more shining and Thomas could tell through this dialogue that his friend was getting back to normal. Well, as normal as Willy Wonka could be.

Eliza nodded. “I won’t leave you, and even if one day I get to Cornwall, then I will always come
back to see you.” She held up the key and shook it in front of his nose. “I now have a way.”

**Flashback End**

**July 12, 1971**

Thomas was abruptly jarred back to the present as the plane touched down at the Frankfurt airport. He pulled off his watch and adjusted the time ahead an hour. Slowly, he turned to see that although Molly had woken up, she was still sighing softly as though half asleep. As she wearily opened her eyes, she started to reach for the doll that had slid from her lap and was now on the floor.

When Thomas noticed that she was struggling to reach it, he leaned over and retrieved the doll himself and handed it to the child. “Thank you,” she said softly as his attention shifted and he was now looking at the child’s mother.

“I know it may seem forward of me to ask,” he began to speak. “Is there a way I can ring you after I return from my trip? I happen to have a contact with a candy provider, and I thought it might be possible for me to send you and your daughter a few bars of chocolate when I get back home.”

Linda nodded. “That’s very kind of you, Tom. Of course, if any arrangements can be made, we’d be willing to pay you for the chocolate or at least for the postage. I don’t expect people to just send us something for nothing. That would not seem right.”

“Not to worry, we can make all the arrangements when I ring you,” he said. “When should you be back?”

“Our return tickets are for Saturday,” she said. “We have to go and arrange our connection flight to Munich one we get out of here. I only hope that the hotel in Füssen will understand why we are getting there late.”

“They should, most hotels do take that into consideration,” Thomas said.

Linda nodded. “I just hope that I remembered to pack their number. It should be in my luggage.”

“Do you at least know the name of the hotel where you’re staying?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, it’s called ‘Hotel Edelweiss’,” she said. “According to the travel agent, it is supposed to be near the train station.”

“Then you can probably find the name in the phone book when you get into the main terminal. Most airports do have a place where you can call if something like this happens,” he said. “I wouldn’t worry too much about it.”

“You’re probably right,” she said. “It’s a pity that you aren’t traveling to Füssen, Tom, your presence there would have been a tremendous help.”

“I’m sure everything will be just fine,” he said, but watched as she began to scribble her and Molly’s name on the piece of paper. As soon as she had finished, she extended it to him as Molly spoke.

“You’re not supposed to eat that one,” she said with a shy giggle.

“No ma’am, I won’t,” he said chuckling as he tucked the slip of paper in the breast pocket of his shirt. “I promise I won’t forget.”

Molly nodded as the plane parked itself at the gate and the ‘fasten seatbelt’ light went off. All around
them, the passengers had been standing up and began to collect their belongings.

He stood up and without thinking, stepped into the aisle so that the two of them could come out. He swung his bag over his shoulder as she looked up at him, her innocence displayed as she gave him a toothy smile. “Are you going to stay with us for a little while?” she asked, her eyes a sea of hope.

Thomas smiled, but shook his head. “I don’t know how long we’re going to be together, but, I’ll be staying with you both until we get out of the customs area and you can go and make your connection. I have to catch a train to a town called Duselheim.”

“Duselheim, where’s that?” Molly asked.

“I’m not exactly sure, if you want to know the truth,” Thomas said with a casual shrug of his shoulders. “Since I’m going there on business, my boss never told me the specifics about where it is. I am pretty much coming out here with little or no idea of what will happen next.”

“What sort of work do you do?” Linda asked, her voice breaking into their conversation.

Thomas took a deep breath. “Do you remember how I said that I have connections with candy suppliers?”

“Yes,” Linda said.

“Well, that’s actually the area I work in,” he said.

“If you don’t mind my saying so, you don’t really seem like a typical businessman to me,” Linda said. “At least not like the ones I’ve met.”

“Have you met many?” Thomas asked.

Linda nodded but no answers emerged, in fact, she seemed to carry a rather haunted look on her face. “We should get going, the line is starting to move,” she said.

As he watched her, Thomas could instinctively tell that Linda seemed to have her own share of private issues to contend with. Her face was filled with the shadows of one who carried as many secrets as Willy Wonka himself.

Instead of pressing the issue further, he simply nodded and the three of them made their way further up the aisle. When they eventually disembarked the plane, their main concerns had abruptly shifted from what Thomas did for a living or his inquiries, to that of trying to make connecting flights or other related issues.

Of course, Thomas had every intention of getting in touch with them when he got back, and he hoped that he could one day invite them to the factory and let them meet Willy. If Linda already had contacts with others in the industry, then perhaps meeting someone like Willy Wonka would be a welcomed possibility.

Thomas had learned early on about the overt nastiness in the industry. He had seen it more often than not and this made him all the more grateful that Willy was not the sort of person who would knowingly bring harm to others. As far as other confectioners went, Thomas was fully aware that Willy was probably the kindest of the lot. Hearing Linda’s words somehow reminded him of an event that happened several years before Simeon’s death.

There had been a huge callback on various American chocolate assortments because the candy makers had tried in every way possible to cut costs on their wares. This involved using expired milk
and other ingredients in their mixtures and this caused several children to get sick. Thomas felt himself disquieted about the whole sordid incident. Imagine using bad ingredients just to have an edge on the market. Thankfully, none of this had affected Willy Wonka’s business, but it was still something that showed Thomas first hand the dangers as well as the sheer callousness of the business.

Shifting his thoughts to more optimistic things, he pondered what the child would do when she came face to face with the chocolatier. The mere thought brought a smile to his face. Both Molly and Linda deserved the good that would come to them. Linda had been so honest and yet she had only known him for a couple of hours. Of course, he knew all too well about keeping the truth from others. He was pretty much doing the same.

It was strange how it felt as though they had known each other for years. Perhaps it was only because of the manner in which they had managed to tug at his heartstrings.

By this time, he had finally managed to get inside, the groups of people were now moving and he found himself herded along with the rest of the passengers. Although he knew that there were things that needed tending once he reached the hotel, he was hopeful that Duselheim would not be too far away from Frankfurt.

The next hour was spent in passport controls and collecting his baggage from the claim area. When he finally was freed up from the issue of customs, he realized that Linda and Molly had managed to get lost in the crowd. What a pity, he never got the chance to say a proper good-bye to them.

Instead of worrying about this, he walked through customs and came out into a somewhat darkened, but large terminal area. There, he could see that people had gathered to meet the other passengers.

For a minute, he thought briefly about Molly and Linda as he made his way through the groups of people and reached the door leading into a hallway. It was there where he abruptly stopped and looked around.

On a large bulletin, he spotted a map and approached it. The map was of West Germany, and he found himself staring at the specifics of it. There were various symbols, with autobahn routes, as well as major cities and smaller towns. There, he could see all sorts of towns with the word ‘heim’ affixed at the end. Towns like: Rüsselsheim, Raunheim, Hochheim, and Oppenheim, but as he studied the map further, he found no trace of Duselheim.

“Entschuldigen Sie, kann ich Ihnen helfen?” A man’s voice abruptly broke into his thoughts and he turned around.

“I’m sorry,” he offered. “I don’t speak German, I’m afraid.” He took in the man’s appearance. He was a tall, about the same height as Thomas, his hair slicked back as though he had been running through the rain. He wore a white shirt and blue blazer with matching trousers. He also had a name badge stuck to the lapel of his jacket and the name ‘Herr Müller’ in black print on a white background.

“I asked if I could be of any assistance to you,” the man repeated, this time in nearly fluent English. “I work at the information desk here at the airport and you looked to be rather lost.”

“Well, yes, actually I am, I’m trying to find the quickest way to the train station and I also need to exchange some money,” he said.

“Oh course,” the man said. “I take it you’re here alone?” Thomas nodded and he continued. “Well, not to worry. First, tell me where are you going?”
“Duselheim,” he said.

“That’s in Bavaria,” the man said firmly. “Duselheim is actually not too far away from my home town of Nurnberg. If memory serves, from there it should take you about an hour to get there by bus. At any rate, I can help you get everything done before you have to get to the train. I am actually on my way home, my shift just ended and I’m heading that direction anyway so it would be no trouble. I live in Hanau, which is the end station for one of the trains that you should be taking in order to reach the main train station.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I was a bit worried about whether or not I would actually get by here not knowing the language. I have a good friend who speaks almost fluent German, but I can’t speak hardly a word.”

“A lot of people here speak English, so that should not be a problem for you,” Herr Müller said. “We learned it in school, and I studied it at the University as well. It’s a hard language for foreigners to speak because of the word usage, but German is not a very easy language to speak either.”

The two men walked from the terminal area towards the underground subway station. Before they went to the platform, Thomas’ companion pointed. “There’s a bank, you can exchange money there. I can wait here with your luggage, that way you don’t have to carry it through the line.”

“Thank you, I’ll try and hurry,” Thomas said as he walked over to the small line and waited. Herr Müller seemed trustworthy enough, so he had no trouble leaving his belongings in the safe hands of this man. He approached the teller window and exchanged a hundred British Pounds to German Mark. Once that was done, he quickly put the money in his wallet and turned away from the window and returned to the man.

“The ticket office is that way,” Herr Müller pointed and they walked towards the glass-encased room. Seconds later, he held a train ticket in his hand and they were able to take the stairs down to the platforms.

“Anything that comes in this direction will take you to the train station,” his guide explained. “Unfortunately, I have to limit my travels to the S9, which goes to Hanau. So if we get separated, just get on the train and then take it to the main train station, or ‘Hauptbahnhof’.”

Thomas nodded, but all the while he really wished that he had Willy with him. For the second time since his arrival in Germany, he pondered how he could really have used the chocolatier’s linguistic abilities at that moment. There was no denying that he felt rather like a fish out of water. Willy would have most definitely been better qualified for this sort of work, he thought. It was truly a pity that his friend still existed as a quasi-recluse.

Of course, traveling and seeing various parts of the world was something of an adventure for him anyway, although he was still not quite sure about his particular task. He simply did not know if the Golden Ticket Contest would reap any positive benefits for his friend, but he was hopeful that it would.

After several minutes of waiting and getting caught up in his contemplations, his companion muttered something that caused him to open his eyes. “Was zum Teufel?”

“I beg your pardon?” he asked.

“Sorry,” he said. “I was just asking what the devil was going on?” he pointed. “Take a look over there. I have seen this sort of thing on television, but I never thought I would actually see it in real life.”
Thomas turned and looked in the direction of where Herr Müller had indicated. There, on the platform, were three boys, one was holding what looked to be a Wonka bar over the heads of the other two. A second boy was hollering something in German as the boy holding the chocolate laughed at his comrade’s discomfort.

“What’s happening?” Thomas asked. “What are they saying?”

“It’s just more chaos,” the man said. “It would seem that the bigger boy took the candy from the other two and now they are trying to get it back. The world has gone quite bananas. It’s been like this almost every day since that contest started. I have stopped counting how many children are getting by acting like little beasts with one another,” Herr Müller said. “I shouldn’t judge them, but I really haven’t seen the likes of this in years. At least not since my wife and I attended the Beatles concert in Frankfurt. That was rather crazy too. Yet for some reason, having only five winners seems a bit antagonistic to me. If there is only five, then you can bet that the selfishness of others will come through beyond anyone’s wildest dreams.”

“Is that what it’s been like here?” Thomas asked. “In truth, I generally thought that all of this was only happening in London. It didn’t really dawn on me that it was happening all over the world until I got here.”

The man shook his head. “It’s like this everywhere, and I will be glad when it’s over. Everyone is acting crazy. Of course, I must say, this man who thought of this contest is probably the most brilliant of the lot. He probably could have easily guessed what would have happened.”

“How do you mean?” Thomas asked.

“I mean; this idea is probably the most financially sound concept since they came out with rock and roll music,” he said. “My son has been buying candy bars for days now looking for a Golden Ticket, but I don’t think he will find one. I think this is rather a sham. What if there are no Golden Tickets? Everyone would have gone mad over nothing. What do you think?”

“I don’t really know what I think,” Thomas said. That was the truth as he really did not know what his thoughts were about the situation. Part of him was just there to put a flea in the finders’ ear. At the same instance, he really did not know what Willy would think if he had seen what was now happening. The children fighting for the candy bar across the way had been nothing short of distressing.

“I do believe that there are tickets out there, and maybe when the first one is found, then people will stop accusing Willy Wonka of being a swindler,” he said

The man nodded. “I suppose it does give children something wonderful to look forward to,” he said as the S9 pulled up to the platform. “Grab your things, this is our train.”

Thomas quickly grabbed his belongings and the two men climbed aboard the train. After pulling the suitcase over to a row of seats, the two of them sat down.

Once he was comfortable, Thomas dug into the pocket of his leather bag and found the third and final Wonka bar. This, he extended to the man. “Here, this is my thanks for your help back at the airport. I probably would not have found my way as quickly if not for your assistance.”

“What if there is a ticket inside?” the man asked with a good-humored smile stretching across his face.

“If there is, then it belongs to you and your son,” Thomas said.
Approximately five minutes later, the train pulled up to the main train station of the large metropolitan city. “This is your stop,” Herr Müller said. “Have a safe journey, and many thanks for the candy bar.”

“It was my pleasure,” Thomas said as he heaved the suitcase off the train and onto the platform. “Take care and thanks again.”

Once he had completely disembarked the train, he took a deep breath and headed towards the escalators that would take him out of the underground. He hoped that by following the masses of people, he would be led upstairs to the main station where he could find the platform to his connecting train.

He was grateful when that was precisely what happened and he was able to reach the platform where the train was already parked. Above his head a sign hung with the lettering that read the name Nurnberg. Before boarding the train, he consulted his reservation card and started to make his way along towards the specific train car that had the number that matched the card.

Since his dialogue with Herr Müller, his thoughts continued to drift about the contest as well as what he had seen and heard back at the airport. The man’s summation had been accurate; the Golden Ticket contest had captured the attention of the entire world. It seemed that there was no one who did not know about it.

Thomas recalled how he had spent a great deal of time outside the confines of the factory watching the way the people behaved. Things had indeed taken a progressively more negative stance since all of this had started. He imagined that every town he would go to, the state of pandemonium would increase after each ticket had been found. It was truly remarkable how quickly a person’s general good will could be cast aside only to leave a bitter and spiteful core in its wake.

Perhaps this was why the chocolatier had decided straight off that the majority of the Golden Ticket bars would be distributed in smaller towns.

Eventually, he managed to seat himself, a small smile shadowing his face as he recalled how Willy had truly planned everything with precision and infallibility.

Glancing to his left, he noticed that an elderly man sat, his gaze centered on the newspaper in front of him. As Thomas shoved his suitcase in the luggage rack over the seat, the man turned and said something in German to him. Not understanding, he shook his head. “I’m sorry, I don’t understand,” he said as the man nodded, smiled, and returned his attention to the newspaper.
Chapter 14

Chapter 14: Vacations and Visions

As the train started moving, his attention shifted towards the window. Since this was his first trip to Germany, he figured that this could be his chance to catch a glimpse of the landscape of this country.

As Frankfurt’s skyline eventually disappeared in the distance, Thomas noticed that it was replaced by lush fields and green pastures. What a beautiful country, he thought appreciatively. It is truly much different than the place I heard so much about during my youth.

After about ten minutes had passed, Thomas grew bored with staring outside and eventually closed his eyes. When he opened them again, he reached inside his leather bag and retrieved the novel. He opened it with the intention of reading a few pages, but then his gaze came to rest on a small orange colored piece of paper that had been slipped inside the book. It looked to be a small card with the date printed on it. He immediately recognized what it was and soon his thoughts started drifting once again.

This time, his reflections shifted and were now centered on the day when Willy Wonka made the decision to leave the factory and travel to New Zealand.

Flashback

August 20, 1968

Thomas had been working at the factory four years and five months on the day that Willy Wonka called him and Eliza into his office and dropped his bombshell. Out of the blue, the candy maker had decided to take a much needed and deserved vacation. His general plan was to get some ideas and flavors for some new candy experiments. This was his ‘official’ reasoning, but to Thomas and Eliza, the rationale for this decision was centered entirely on getting some much needed and deserved rest.

They had been trying for years to get Willy to take some time off, but all of their efforts had reaped little, if no, success. The chocolatier was, to say the least, a workaholic. He seemed to have ideas constantly wracking havoc on his mind at ninety miles a minute. If he was not concocting new ideas for candies, then he was trying to create things that would coincide with his candy making ideas. He seemed to have more projects on the back burner than either of them could consciously imagine.

Willy had, during this time, managed to seclude himself even further into his world of fantasy and chocolate. Although Thomas never said anything about it, his concerns were affirmed through the words of Eliza Bachmann.

It was no secret that the eldest member of this somewhat strangely formed family was convinced that the chocolatier had forgotten what it meant to have companionship with other people. She was also aware of how Willy had managed to isolate himself even further into this strange self-made cocoon and she was starting to believe that the factory had become nothing more than an escape for him.

Thomas recalled the day when Eliza had pulled him aside and confessed that she was becoming very concerned for Willy’s well being.

“I don’t want to aggravate him,” she had confided, “but he doesn’t talk to me, not even when I hug him. He usually just stands there and stares off into space.”
It was obvious that although she had initially managed to break through the reclusive chocolatier’s pretense, there were still various aspects to his character that she could find no resolution about.

Thomas could only nod in concurrence. He had known from the start about what Eliza was referring to, but still, they were unprepared for what Willy Wonka was going to do next.

Today was case in point.

“I’m glad that you are both here,” he began to speak once the two of them had seated themselves in his office. Thomas was seated on the half a chair next to the desk while Eliza made herself comfortable on the sofa. Willy stood in the room, his gaze drifting from one to the other, both expectantly waiting for him to continue. “I’ve been thinking about what you both have wanted me to do, and I have made some decisions.”

“You mean get out of the factory for a while and take it easy?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, that,” Willy said with a nod of his head. “Of course I am not really certain as to how much this will help matters. The sales of my chocolate have taken a serious nosedive since ’65 when the ‘Around the World’ incident happened. I need something that is going to put us back on the map.” As usual, Willy was describing the problem as something that affected all of them, which made both Thomas and Eliza feel as though they were a part of Willy’s extended family.

“What about that Gobstopper idea?” Eliza asked. “The idea of creating a candy for children who don’t have enough money for sweets is truly a brilliant one. I think you should continue with it.”

“Perhaps,” Willy said. “But, regardless of what we decide to do, we need a good deal of help in putting this idea into motion. Some may argue that if I create such a candy, it could revolutionize the industry. Of course, the idea could very well backfire and cause the sales to plummet after the initial craze wears off. Along with that, I still need to build the machine that is going to make them. For a job of that magnitude, there is no way three people would be able to do it. It is completely unrealistic to think that we can continue as we are. We need help, and fast.”

“Does that mean that you are considering opening the factory again?” Thomas asked.

“I’ve been thinking about that for quite some time, but I’m not really sure if I am ready to go forward with that idea just yet,” he said as he looked at Eliza. “That’s why I’ve been so quiet these past few weeks. I’ve been trying to figure out what it is I want to do.” He came over to her and rested his hand on her shoulder. “I sincerely hope that I didn’t cause you to worry needlessly.”

“No more than usual, William,” she said, but he could tell by her expression that she had been worrying about him to excess.

*Just like a mother would*, Thomas thought, but did not say anything.

“The reason I’ve been so lost in thought is because I am really working on finding a way to get this factory up and running again,” Willy said. “I want to do it in such a way that will not put our livelihood at risk. We simply cannot afford to have anymore lapses in security. If we are going to create something that could change the way the world looks at candy, then we must find a way to keep Slugworth out.”

That is how it had been with Willy since that fateful day when Eliza had agreed to move onto the factory grounds. For the last three years, the three of them had become like a close-knit family, the factory’s mechanical aspects continuing to chug along although there were only three humans there to operate them.
As time wore on, Thomas knew that Willy had started to recognize this as being a temporary solution to a longstanding problem. The chocolatier needed workers in case there were mechanical malfunctions.

Thomas remembered with a shudder only three weeks earlier when the marshmallow machine had started to break down. What a mess that was. Out of the blue, the machine started spewing out sticky marshmallow suds and covering the floor of the Inventing Room. This rendered the room out of commission for close to a week. It had taken Eliza close to two full day’s work just to remove the gooey configuration of white sticky guck from the floor as well as the other machines. After that, it took another three more days for them to get the room back into some semblance of order.

At about the same time, Willy had come very close to pulling a muscle in his back while trying to repair the offending machine. Because of this unforeseen situation, his chocolate shipments for the month were sent out several days later than intended.

Thomas and Eliza both realized that their friend could not continue running a business of this magnitude as a sociological recluse. On top of that, the chocolatier seemed to be focused entirely on the question regarding whether or not to hire new workers to run the factory. This question seemed compounded by questions of whether or not said individuals could actually be trusted.

It was obvious that he wanted nothing more than to protect the secrets and work from those thieving candy-making cads who had gone out of their own way to steal his life’s work. They all knew that whatever decision would be made, meant that Willy’s secrets be held as highest priority.

Thomas must have been lost in thought for several minutes because Willy’s voice suddenly brought him crashing back to the present. Although the chocolatier was addressing Eliza, the words made his mouth fall open in astonishment.

“Could you arrange for me a flight?” the chocolatier was asking.

“Where to?” she asked as she grabbed her stenographer’s notebook and flipped it open in order to write down his request. She kept the book on her lap so as to take notes in case something else of importance came up.

“I’ve always dreamt of going to New Zealand actually,” he said, his blue eyes shining.

“You haven’t left the factory’s grounds in well over three years, and now you want to travel halfway around the world?” Thomas asked skeptically.

“Why shouldn’t I?” Willy asked, a smirk covering his lips. “People fly there every day, don’t they?”

Thomas chuckled. “Yes they do, and you know perfectly well that that was not what I meant. What I’m trying to say, and forgive me if this doesn’t come out right, you haven’t left the factory in well over three years. Now you’re talking about taking a trip halfway around the world. I just figured that you would first go to a place that was a bit closer to home.”

“I know,” Willy said. “But, need I remind you that it was you and Eliza who kept telling me that I should get out of here and see the world? Well, that’s a part of the world that I’ve been dreaming of seeing.”

“I know what we said, Will, but when we said ‘see the world’, I was sort of thinking along the lines of Wales or Scotland,” Thomas said. “I’m just wondering if you’re sure about this.”

“I’m positive and you know as well as I, that this is something I really need to do. You also know that I have to figure out what I am going to put out once I get back. This could very well inspire me
to go out on a limb and try something different.”

“Your mean you’re really going to do it?” Eliza asked hopefully. As her words emerged, she tapped her pen against the stenographer’s notebook as she always did when she was happy or excited. Instead of showing either of these emotions, her expression was consumed with hope.

Willy nodded. “Do either of you realize I haven’t really put anything of longstanding significance on the market since the ‘Around the World’ incident happened? That is just too long for me to wait. I need to get my name back out there and make sure that the people don’t think that Willy Wonka has cowered away and faded into obscurity. I wouldn’t want to give Slugworth the satisfaction.”

“I’m so proud of you,” Eliza spoke up, her voice emerging rather soft, so soft that Thomas did not initially hear her, but Willy obviously did.

“Thank you,” he said.

Thomas knew that Willy thrived on hearing positive words and remarks from Eliza, but instead of speaking about this, he watched as the chocolatier released the embrace and backed away. “I take it you don’t want the name Wonka to just fade away to nothingness?” he asked her, his expression consumed with playfulness.

Eliza shook her head as she enthusiastically embraced Willy, notebook and all. “I’ll get right on it. Did you want first class or coach? And how long do you want to stay there?”

“Make it a month, and if you could charter me a private plane, that would be even better,” Willy said still giving them a Cheshire cat grin. Instead of speaking further, he leaned over and whispered something into her ear. She nodded just before getting up to leave.

Once she was gone, he looked at Thomas; the next words that emerged were matter-of-fact. “You’re worried?”

“A little, yes.”

“Why?” Willy asked.

“You want to go to New Zealand, Will. Who’s going to take care of the factory while you’re gone?” Thomas asked. Now that he had no reason to worry about the chocolatier, he was now concerned for the state of the factory.

“You and Eliza, of course,” Willy said. “I trust you both, Tom, you learned everything there is to know about running this place since you came back to London. Eliza knows pretty much the same, except for the use of the Wonkavator, which I think scares the living daylights out of her. I know that I am leaving things in the best possible hands.”

“I’m not doubting what you are doing, Will,” Thomas said. “Perhaps if truth be told; I just doubt my own abilities. Since my first day here, you have always been around to render assistance. Sometimes I think that I am dependant on your presence here. You’ve created everything about this place and it is you who is the life force here. Now that you want to leave, I am worried that something could go wrong while you’re away. I don’t want to let you down, especially after so many have already done so.”

Willy got to his feet and came over to where Thomas was sitting. “I know you’re worried, Tom, but don’t be. It’s called trust, and I do trust both of you to take care of things in the way they need to be taken care of. Don’t think for even a moment that I’m a fool for trusting you.” He paused. “Do you know what I told Eliza the day I gave her the key?”
“What?” Thomas asked.

“I told her that if you have to ask me about whether or not you are worthy of things like trust, then the answer is yes,” Willy said. “I know that you are my friend and I know that neither you nor Eliza would ever do anything to hurt me. If you did, then you would be hurting yourselves as well. The truth is; you and Eliza have become as much a part of the spirit of this factory as me.”

“How can you say that?” he asked. “This is your life’s work.”

“Yes, but who inspired me to continue with it when I was ready to give up?” he asked. “Think about it.”

Upon hearing these words, Thomas suddenly could feel a lump forming in the back of his throat. “I don’t have your integrity Will; I don’t even have a small percentage of your business sense. What if something goes wrong? What I mean is something big like the marshmallow machine incident.”

“What if nothing goes wrong?” Willy shot back. “What if the only thing that is keeping you from seeing your true potential is your fear of failure? Have you really spent the last four years programming yourself to fail?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said.

Willy took a deep breath. “Yes you do.”

“No…Will, I don’t,” he said, his voice filled with stubborn undertones. “I never had a dream, not like you and not like Simeon.”

“Would your brother really want to hear you talking like this?” Willy asked as he started to walk towards the door. He stopped and turned around, this time his blue eyes were filled with a determination that Thomas had not seen the likes of since his brother’s funeral. “You have always talked about dreams, but yet you say you don’t have one. That’s rubbish, Tom. Everyone has at least one; you just haven’t found yours yet. Maybe what’s wrong is you have spent too much time hanging onto everyone else’s and not searching for your own.”

“That’s not fair,” Thomas said.

“It’s life, Tom, and it is sometimes not going to be fair,” the chocolatier said hotly. “You and Eliza have been saying behind my back that I am too reclusive, that I spend too much time in the Inventing Room trying to reinvent the wheel. I know what you are both saying, I may be the youngest here, but I am not stupid.”

“I never said you were, I was just concerned,” Thomas said.

“Then stop being concerned, I don’t need another father, I need a friend who is going to support what it is I want to do. You can’t expect me to crawl under a rock because you’re scared of an exploding marshmallow.”

Thomas looked at his friend, a small smile emerging despite his friend’s choice in wording. “Will, I’m sorry. Maybe you’re right and I’m just being selfish,” he said.

“The question is, why?” Willy asked.

Thomas cringed. His friend had always been good about pegging his emotions, and this time was no different. When he said nothing, Willy looked at him, his gaze never faltering. “Tell me the truth.”
“In my entire life, no one has ever entrusted me to watch over their dream. I never had a dream of my own. All I had was this idea that a dream is a precious and wondrous gift. Yet, this factory remains your work and vision. To be entrusted with it, even for a short period of time, is such an honor and responsibility,” he paused for a moment trying all the while to collect his thoughts. “I would be lying if I said that it didn’t scare the life out of me. I am terrified at the mere prospect of taking control of this factory even for a day and trying to go about business as usual while you’re away,” he admitted.

“At least you’re now being honest,” Willy said. “Have you ever contemplated what it is you really want to do with your life?”

“I never thought much about it,” Thomas said.

“Maybe my vacation will give you adequate time to think about what is important to you,” Willy said as he removed the hat from his head and stood for several minutes holding the object in front of his chest. “I don’t want you to just live off of my glory, Tom. Nor do I want to believe that your entire existence centers only on this factory. I want to see you reach for the stars.” As if to emphasize his point, he placed the hat on his friend’s head. “But, the first thing you need to do is trust yourself as much as I trust you.”

Thomas reached up and felt the silkiness of the hat that was now resting on his head, but after several seconds, the hat shifted until it fell down over his forehead and tapped against the top of his spectacles. He turned his head and looked into the mirror that was on the opposite wall. “I look completely ridiculous.”

“I know,” Willy said with a smug smile. “That’s just case in point as to how absurd it is for you to try and live only for my dreams.” He removed the hat. “I am entrusting my dream to you for a month. Through it, I hope that you will realize the significance of your own desires. Maybe, if nothing else, the time will inspire you to acknowledge that you are far more important than just the best friend of a chocolatier.”

Thomas raised his head. “You’re wise beyond your years, Will.”

He smiled as he went over and grabbed his cane. As he turned back around, he held up the object as though drawing a sword, the end of the object brushing against Thomas’s chest. “Are you willing to accept my challenge, Mr. Wilkenson?”

Thomas took a deep breath. “I haven’t heard you call me that in years.”

“Oh you’ll one day hear it again,” Willy said smugly. “Now answer my question!”

“I’ll do my best,” he said.

Willy lowered the cane. “That’s good enough,” he paused, “for now.”

Thomas looked around the office. He was still uncertain as to what to say in response to Willy’s assertions. He knew that the chocolatier was right and perhaps the vacation was more than just the candy maker getting away for a month, but it was also a chance for Thomas to prioritize his own life.

He remained silent as Willy moved back over towards the sofa. After several minutes, he spoke, his single word filling the room. “Will?”

“Yes?”

“I really am sorry about what I said earlier. I know that from where you’re sitting, my reaction was rather weak and silly, at best,” he said.
“I’m not sitting,” Willy said with a smirk.

Upon hearing these words, it seemed perfectly obvious that whatever hard feelings the chocolatier may have harbored seemed to have dissolved during the course of the last five minutes. “Let’s see,” he mumbled as he sat down on the sofa and looked over at his friend who was still seated at the desk. “Now I can plan my trip without having to worry excessively about you and Eliza. I’m not as worried about her as I am about you.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll figure it out, somehow,” Thomas said. “I just don’t know what my dreams are supposed to be at this point.”

“At least you’ve finally acknowledged it,” Willy said with an approving nod.

“I don’t follow.”

“Well, I’ll spell it out for you then,” Willy began. “I know that you have felt as though you have lived in my shadow for a very long time. You never knew what I thought or how I viewed you, but I think you are very lucky.”

“How do you mean?”

“You can go out and see what is truly out there. I envy that and today I realized that I need to get out for a time and experience what you keep telling me about. I am now curious about the world beyond these walls.”

Thomas nodded. “It was more Eliza than me that was telling you.”

“True, but my life has literally felt as though it was flowing about me like the river in the Chocolate Room. Yet, even still with that knowledge, isn’t it a grand idea to go out and explore, all the while knowing what one can return home to? I have always known that the factory is a part of me. But amidst all of the philosophy and quotations I could render, I discovered that there is indeed something missing in my life and that is something that I haven’t yet figured out. Once I am able to find it, then I will know with absolute certainty.”

As these words filled his ears, Thomas took a deep breath and eventually, he nodded.
Chapter 15: Confessions and New Ideas

When Willy said nothing further, the dark headed man looked around the office before turning his attention back to the chocolatier.

Several minutes passed with neither of them speaking. Thomas could not stop thinking about what Willy had just said. Not only that, but he could not get over the haunted look that seemed to cross the chocolatier’s face.

“Is something else the matter?” Thomas eventually broke the silence.

“Why would there be?”

“I don’t know, you just look as though you’ve got something besides a vacation on your mind,” Thomas said.

“I guess I do,” he conceded, but no further words emerged. In fact, it looked as though Willy Wonka was determined to tackle whatever ghosts that were haunting him all by himself.

That is so typical, Thomas thought sadly. He had noticed a shift in his friend’s demeanor since the marshmallow machine had given out. Perhaps it had proven how vulnerable the chocolatier was to what was going on around them.

He took a deep breath, all the while his thoughts still on whether or not he was capable of doing what Willy asked. “I sort of have this feeling that you intend on closing the Inventing Room while you’re away, but Eliza and I should be able to handle things. At least that’s what you implied when you were feeding me the riot act just now.”

“It wasn’t the riot act!” Willy said indignantly.

“Maybe not, but you were upset,” Thomas said.

Willy sat down on the sofa and for several moments, nothing emerged. In fact, for all Thomas knew, his friend could have easily fallen asleep. After what felt like an eternity, the chocolatier spoke, his words abruptly shifting from his charming, happy-go-lucky persona to someone that was like a stranger. His blue eyes were filled with earnestness and his mouth carrying a somber frown. “None of us can go on like this, Tom.”

The confession out, the chocolatier covered his face with his hands and shook his head. “I keep considering the fact that we have a rather unsatisfactory decision ahead of us. We either must close indefinitely or risk letting spies back on the factory grounds.”

“That’s why you’re going on vacation, to think all of this through,” Thomas said with a nod.

“It’s funny, but the only people that have ever seen me vulnerable are you and Eliza. Tom, do you know why I didn’t close down completely?”

“No idea, you never told us, you simply said that you hated the idea of the shops no longer selling your candy,” Thomas said.

Willy walked over to the filing cabinet and pulled out a piece of white paper with blue writing
splashed across the top. He handed the undated letter to Thomas. “Here’s your answer.”

Thomas stared for a moment down at the ‘Slugworth Chocolates’ letterhead, but instead of speaking, he read, then lowered the paper. “When did he write this?” he asked.

“It was delivered several days after I initially opened the factory,” Willy said.

“You mean soon after I left England to take the job in the States,” Thomas asked.

Willy nodded. “I didn’t take his initial letters seriously because I figured that it was part of what competition was about. It wasn’t until I heard about the immense callback on chocolate from Hudson Candies that I became a trifle concerned. What if that had happened to me? I asked myself. I eventually started to feel that the letters from Slugworth could have been construed as threats.”

Thomas nodded as understanding washed over him. “Let me guess, the threats gave rise to paranoia and that gave rise to your reaction after the ‘Around the World’ recipe was stolen. Now everything makes sense. But, why didn’t you at least tell me? I am your friend, you know.”

“You are my best friend, but I didn’t know what to say, and you were already working in the States when all of this was happening. When you came back, I knew that it would have been selfish of me to burden you with my problems. You were grieving Simeon’s death, that was enough,” Willy said. “What good would it have done if I had said that I was getting hate mail signed by Arthur and Owen Slugworth?”

“Owen Slugworth?” Thomas asked.

“He’s the next in line at Slugworth Chocolates. I never met him, but his reputation precedes him. He’s the one who goes into the trenches so that his Uncle Arthur doesn’t have to,” Willy explained. “Based on what I know of them, they would do anything and everything they can to monopolize the industry. This is why I was so insistent about keeping the factory at least in half production after I had to let everyone go. I know that it seems a rather weak argument, but I just couldn’t bear the idea of giving up and letting this sick self-made prophecy of the Slugworth family come about.”

“Wasn’t there anything that could have been done to stop them?” Thomas asked.

The chocolatier shook his head. “Nothing, my lawyer told me to keep a file of all the letters I received, but he said legally we could do nothing since they were simple statements.”

Thomas nodded. Willy was right about one thing, the Slugworths seemed to know exactly how to word it to keep from breaking the law. “Are you sure that your lawyer really said that there was nothing you could have done? It seems a long shot, but you could have done something.”

The chocolatier shook his head. “If there was something, then my lawyer never told me what. So, I kept all of this to myself. I have always known that this industry is not just filled with laughter and fun. When you figure in people who would want to destroy another at all costs, then it can become dangerous. The problem is, the press doesn’t see or even want to see that this is happening. Sure, they could have easily labeled me as a weakling or incapable of handling the world of big business, but I’m a realist and I do know what is going on under my nose. I suppose in hindsight, I figured that up until now, it seemed too big a risk to take.”

Instead of responding, Thomas stood up and returned the letter to the filing cabinet as he momentarily felt guilt washing over him like a warm summer shower. “I had no idea this was happening, Will.”

“You weren’t supposed to,” Willy said simply.
“But, how did we manage to keep going this long?” Thomas asked. “Most people would argue that a chocolate factory being run by three people is suicide.”

“The sheer magnitude of one’s determination can do a great many things,” he said casually. “Of course, the machines did most of the work. I guess the hardest thing was to get the shipping company to keep up with their contracts.”

Thomas looked at his friend with a newfound respect. Contrary to all the things that had been happening, Willy truly loved what he did for a living, although it was obvious that he needed a break.

“That leads me to something else that I wish to discuss with you,” Willy abruptly said, his voice bringing Thomas back to the present.

“Is this about the trip, or the letters?” Thomas asked.

“Neither,” Willy said. “It’s about Eliza.”

Thomas nodded, his friend’s thought patterns seemed to be working at ninety miles a minute. “What about her?”

“I’ve been thinking about how much she’s done for the factory and for me since she came here to live. I want to help make her dream come true now, specifically the one she’s carried since long before we met,” Willy said.

“You mean the one she’s had about visiting Cornwall someday?” Thomas asked.

Willy nodded. “Yes.”

“What do you have in mind?”

“Well, what do you think about us letting her leave the factory to go and live there? She’s closing in on 60 and needs to slow down. She works so much here that I am growing worried that she is overdoing it.”

“Like you have been known to do?” Thomas asked with a smirk on his otherwise serious face.

“Perhaps, but that dear lady puts in sixteen hours a day, eight doing the bookkeeping, and eight helping us with the functioning part of the factory,” Willy argued. “She really deserves something nice for all her help.”

“So, you’re just going to send her to Cornwall to live?” Thomas asked. “You know she probably won’t accept the offer, Will. Do you remember what you went through to get her to move into the factory? To her, she would construe that as a form of charity. Besides, why are you mentioning this now? You could have said something at any time.”

Willy sighed. “I know, but the other day my lawyer called and said that the place needed tending. He said that if we don’t fix it up by the end of this year, he will recommend selling it. I though that if we could ask Eliza, she might be willing to move there so that I can hire someone to renovate and do the landscaping work and still have someone I trust on the property. Once all of that is done, then she would have a nice place to call home. That means the house would be in her name and she could be our contact person if one or both of us happen to be away from the factory.”

“That means you are going to give her the house,” Thomas said.
“Perhaps, but the point of all of this is, if we are going to get the Wonka name back on the market, that it would be ideal for us to get Eliza out of the line of fire. You know about the negative side of the industry, but she doesn’t, and I don’t want her to know. She is such a sociable person that it could be too easy for her to become a target for Slugworth. It’s hard enough for you to be dealing with this imposition, but I cannot force that onto her any longer.”

“You’re a very selfless man, Will, but perhaps you should tell Eliza about the letters. Give her a chance to decide,” Thomas said. “If she knew you were keeping a secret as big as this from her, she’d probably not take too kindly to it. I think you should tell her what you told me. Give her the chance to decide objectively if she is willing to go.”

Willy looked over at the filing cabinet and for several minutes, his entire stance was unmoving. It was as though the candy maker was deep in thought about what Thomas had just said.

For his part, Thomas knew that he could not go and tell Eliza what Willy had said, but still he hoped that the chocolatier would eventually confess everything to her. Knowing the truth may compel her to choose against leaving the factory, but this was an issue of trust versus manipulation. “Will,” he eventually spoke. “If you don’t tell her the truth, then everything could easily backfire in your face. She could get angry with you, and her trust in you could be completely shattered. You should tell her everything and let her decide.”

“What about the house?” Willy asked. “I keep thinking about how many wonderful things my grandfather had there. There were pieces that could be sold to a museum, but I’d never do it. I guess because the visits to his house were the positive and happy parts of my childhood.”

“Why don’t you just tell Eliza about everything when you get back and let her decide?” Thomas asked. “Sometimes, when you give others the chance to see your hopes and dreams, then they will decide that their dream coincides with it. The point is, you have to let her decide and not through manipulation. That is simply not fair.”

The chocolatier took a deep breath. “I’m only trying to protect my family.”

“I know, but families are bounded together through mutual trust,” he said.

“Okay, you’re right, I’ll tell her,” Willy said with a nod, “I guess it’s only right.”

“How do you figure,” Thomas asked.

“If she does decide to go to Cornwall, then her knowledge of Slugworth’s letters could benefit her,” he said.

“You know the old saying ‘knowledge is power’.”

Eventually the chocolatier drew a deep inhalation of breath. “Please, don’t mention any of this to Eliza though. I need to figure out how I’m going to broach the subject with her.”

“I won’t,” Thomas said.

Willy got to his feet and went over to his friend. “Thanks.”

“That’s what friends are for,” Thomas said. “Your heart is in the right place, but we have to consider whether or not Eliza would enjoy it leaving under these circumstances. You do recall how she has always calls us ‘her boys’.”

“I know,” Willy said honestly as the room once more grew silent. After several minutes passed he
looked at Thomas, his blue eyes suddenly shining. “So what do you think of them being red, blue, yellow, white, orange, and green, and look like a funny little star-shaped crystals?”

“What?” Thomas asked.

Willy nodded. “The Gobstoppers of course, what else did you think I was referring to? Truly, Tom, you really should pay better attention.” He smiled impishly.

Thomas chuckled, but watched as the chocolatier grabbed his ‘Candy Ideas’ notebook. Opening it to the first blank page, he began to draw little sketches across it.

Thomas got up to leave the office but stopped and turned around to face his friend. “It sounds like you already know what you want to do, but tell me something. Do you honestly think that you’re going to be able to go a full month without talking about candy?” he asked with a grin.

“Oh I don’t know, but something tells me we’re about to find out,” Willy said with a smirk.

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Upon leaving Willy’s office, Thomas’ mind was confronted with ideas ranging from him and Eliza running the factory, to Slugworth, back to Eliza’s situation and going full circle on his inability to hold onto a dream. He had never in his life felt as much confusion as he did at that moment.

Instead of dwelling on this, he made his way down the hall towards the room where Eliza worked. Willy had asked him not to mention his plans and affirmed that he would talk to Eliza. This time he hoped that Willy would be honest with her and not try to lie as a means of protecting her. She had never spoken to him about leaving the factory, although her words when she moved in seemed to imply that it was not going to be a permanent arrangement.

Maybe Willy Wonka knew something that Thomas did not.

He tapped lightly on the door, but could hear her speaking on the phone from the other side. Instead of initially going in, he waited for several minutes until she had hung up the phone.

“Come on in, Thomas,” her voice eventually emerged.

He pressed down on the lever, pushed his weight against the door, and entered the office.

The first thing he noticed once entering her workspace was that everything was whole. Only one thing was cut in half, and that was a small bluish colored vase that Willy had given to her with some fake lilac colored flowers inside. The decoration sat next to the framed picture of her mother on a makeshift mantle along the side wall. From the looks of the place, it seemed as though she had filled it to capacity with mementos and other comforting things.

Next to the strange vase, he noticed the three-year-old candy bar leaning against the wall, the wrapper looking as new as the day the chocolatier had given it to her. The furniture from her old house had also been used to decorate the office and this reminded him of the day that he had brought her the key and escorted her back to the factory.

Contrary to his disquietedness, Thomas felt a strange sense of warmth in the room. He looked around, but eventually went over to the couch and seated himself on it. “Is everything taken care of?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said. “My nephew, Alex, works as a flight instructor out at the Kensington Airfield, and he has been a big help.”
“When can he fly out then?” he asked.

“I would say in two weeks. That is, at the earliest I can arrange. I tried to schedule in an earlier date, but the plane was already reserved,” she said. “William can go right after the chocolate shipments get sent out for next month.”

“I still can’t believe that he is excited about going to a country stuck in the dead of winter,” Thomas said with a slight shake of his head. “I think I would have preferred Hawaii.”

“Maybe he wants to take up skiing,” she said with a slight giggle. When he did not join in, she took a deep breath and looked at him. “Thomas, what ever is the matter? You usually laugh when I say something silly like that. After all, the idea of William wearing a top hat and tails with skis on his feet is rather an amusing image.”

“Sorry,” he mused. “I’m just worried about what will happen here is all.”

“For William, we can handle it,” she scolded lightly. “After all, we’ve been trying to convince him to go for a long time. Now that he is, we should be happy.” As she spoke, she grabbed the notebook from off her desk and walked over to the bookshelf in order to return it to its place. “Consider this, if he trusts us to handle it, then perhaps we can,” she said wisely.

“Trust,” Thomas whispered the word, his thoughts returning to his conversation with Willy. Instead of saying anything about that, he looked at her. “You’re not worried about running the factory.”

“No,” Eliza said. “I figured that if we could handle the sudsly marshmallow catastrophes, we could handle just about anything.”

“It’s kind of funny, but ever since I came here, Will has always been around and I could ask him questions and other things, and now he won’t be here. I just have this strange feeling about it.”

“Maybe that’s the way it should be,” she said.

“What do you mean?” He asked.

“I mean; your feelings probably stem to your being too dependent on him,” she said. “Do you realize that this time will enable you to find your own identity?”

“He said the same thing, but was a little bit blunter about it,” he said.

“Yes, and the time away will do you both some good,” she said firmly. “Once William helps us get the monthly shipments out, then everything will run like clockwork. We know his business aims, and neither of us would do anything to undermine them.”

“That’s true, but what about the machines and the experiments?” Thomas asked.

“There won’t be any experimenting going on while he is away, so all we have to do are the rudimentary checks and make sure that the shipments match the inventory lists that we have here in this office. It won’t be too big of a problem and if we happen to get behind or something happens, we can call the place where he is staying and let him know. As for the general running of things, you and I can do that with our eyes closed.”

Thomas looked at her. “So you think we can handle it?”

She smiled. “I think we can, but for the record, we should write down a list of troubleshooting concerns and give them to William before he leaves. He can tell us what we have to do for each
problem, and then we can check the various rooms for the specifics.”

“That’s a good idea, but you do realize that this is going to take close to forever for us to get everything done,” he said.

“Why is that?”

“Because you don’t like to ride the Wonkavator,” he paused, this time a mischievous smile spread across his face. “Maybe this would be the ideal time for you to learn how to use it.”

“You know that thing scares me to death,” she whispered.

“I know, but running the factory by ourselves scares me to death,” Thomas said simply. “So now, I guess we’re even.”

Flashback End

July 12, 1971

“Your ticket please,” the German conductor suddenly brought Thomas out of his reverie. He opened his eyes and rubbed them as he groped in his jacket pocket for the requested item.

“I’m sorry, I was lost in thought,” he said as he handed the man the ticket. “That seems to be happening a lot lately.”

The man nodded but stamped the ticket before returning it to him. “Thank you.” He moved further up the aisle and continued stamping the tickets belonging to the other passengers.

“You’re from England, aren’t you?” the man seated next to him asked.

He turned and found himself looking into a pair of dark brown eyes. He was surprised that based on the man’s earlier reaction that he spoke no English. Somehow, his initial assumptions had been inaccurate. “I live in London actually,” he offered freely.

“Oh London, that’s quite a lovely city,” he said. “My daughter and son-in-law live in Birmingham. That’s actually how I learned to speak English.”

“I thought when I sat down that you didn’t understand anything I said,” Thomas admitted.

“I was reading; I generally don’t talk to too many people when I read. I just read an article about baseball,” he said with a shrug of his shoulders. “Interesting sport, although I prefer football match, or even handball, as it has more oomph.”

“I don’t really follow sports all that much,” Thomas admitted. “My friend Bill, he loves two things though; candy and football.”

“Sounds like my kind of guy,” the man said laughing. “My wife won’t let me eat too much candy. She says that it’s not good for a man my age. Of course I can sometimes sneak me a bar or two when she’s out visiting her sister.” He chuckled. “You married, son?”

“No sir, I’ve never been married,” Thomas said. “Never really was interested in the dating scene.”

“You’re young, you still got time,” the man said. “It sometimes takes a bit of time before finding the right one, but once you do, you hold onto her. That’s what I did anyway. My wife and I have been married close to 50 years.”
“And you’re traveling alone?” Thomas asked.

“Yes,” he nodded as he covered his mouth with a wrinkled hand. “She’s at her knitting club and I spent the last few days in Cologne to watching a football match. My brother lives there and he sent me a ticket for my eightieth birthday.”

“Sounds like fun,” Thomas said.

“It was, but my favorite team lost,” he smiled broadly. “I drowned my sorrows by eating two Wonka bars, but I didn’t find a Golden Ticket.”

“Everyone seems to be following this contest,” Thomas said. “It doesn’t seem to matter in the slightest how old the person happens to be.”

“Pretty much anyone with kids is paying attention to it,” he said. “My grandniece opened about twenty chocolate bars, and that was just while I was there. I used to work as an accountant and I have never seen the likes of this in my life. I just checked the stock market and if Mr. Wonka actually had stock in his company, then they would have jumped through the roof by now. Makes me wish I could invest in his company and not do it by consuming a couple of chocolate bars. It’s truly amazing what is happening and that’s just from a financial perspective.”

“I can imagine,” Thomas said.

“So, do you follow the market?” he asked as he took in Thomas’ suit and tie.

“About as much as I follow football, I’m afraid,” he said. “The company that I work for keeps me too busy to follow anything of that nature.”

“Now that is surprising,” the man remarked. “So where are you heading?”

“I’m on my way to Duselheim actually,” he said.

“It’s a nice town, I’ve been there a few times, but it’s a bit small for my tastes. I live in Munich actually, because I’m used to a lot more action,” he said with a chuckle. “Imagine that, eighty years old and still acting like a teenager. At least that’s what my wife says.”

“I hope I’m like that someday,” Thomas said appreciatively.

The man nodded. “It’s a good philosophy to have,” he paused. “Anyway, the train will stop in Nurnberg and then you can hop on a bus and after about an hour, you should be in Duselheim.”

“How far are we from Nurnberg?” Thomas asked.

“About an hour,” he said. “If you need to get some rest, I can always wake you before we get there.”

“Thank you, I am feeling rather tired. I was stuck on a delayed flight this afternoon for close to two hours,” he said. “That’s not generally a fun way to spend one’s time, if you know what I mean.”

“Then get some rest and I’ll wake you when we get to Nurnberg,” the man said.

Thomas closed his eyes and felt himself drifting off to sleep.
Chapter 16

Chapter 16: Willy Wonka’s Departure

About a half an hour later, Thomas slowly opened his eyes. He was still seated next to the older man on the train. The man had pulled a small paperback book from his belongings and began to read. Thomas retrieved the novel he had brought along and did the same.

After twenty minutes had passed, the man turned his head and looked at him. “Nurnberg is the next stop, son,” he said. “You’ve still got about ten minutes to collect your things, but I figured you might want to get to the doors before the train stops. That way you won’t have to wait in a line to get off.”

Thomas nodded and started to collect his things. “Thank you for the nice conversation,” he offered as he swung his leather bag over his shoulder and retrieved his suitcase.

“My pleasure, enjoy your trip,” he said smiling, his attention returning to the book as Thomas made his way up the aisle towards the exit. Once he reached it, he waited as the train started to slow down.

Just as the man had predicted, he was glad he had heeded the suggestion because the other passengers had filed in behind him.

Once the train stopped, he disembarked and started to follow the groups of people down a set of stairs and into the hub of the station. This place seemed to smell of stale beer and cigarette smoke, both odors unappealing to him. He looked around and found a sign that said ‘Ausgang’ (Exit). A small picture of a bus was next to this word, so he followed the directions. As he came outside, the busses were parked at several of the platforms and he had to consult his schedule for the correct bus number.

Once he had found the bus carrying the number he was looking for, he started to climb on board. “Does this bus go to Duselheim?” he asked, all the while speaking slowly.

The driver turned and looked at him. “Duselheim?” he asked.

“Yes.”

The man smiled and offered a reciprocating nod. “The ticket to Duselheim costs fifty Pfennigs and the trip takes about an hour.”

He paid and the man gave him a ticket. Once he had thanked him, he made his way down the aisle, found a seat near the back, and made himself comfortable. As the bus roared to life and the driver was pulling away from the curb, Thomas looked around the bus and noticed that besides him, there were only four or five other passengers.

Although he liked speaking with people, he hoped that the last leg of his journey would be quiet and uneventful.

Of course, hopes and reality were often two distinctly different things.

As the bus rolled out of the parking lot, Thomas could feel himself suddenly being jarred from his seat. As it moved along, he somehow was left to feel like he was a rock inside a large tin can. The state of the street seemed to be about the same as the state of the old bus, and from the feel of it, this was not saying much.
Thomas took a deep breath and reached for his book. The food that had been placed in his bag had long since disappeared, and he suddenly realized how hungry he was. Internally, he wished that he had kept one of Willy’s chocolate bars to tide him over, but he knew that there was no sense worrying about that now.

Instead of contemplating this, he concluded that his friend would have thrown an ‘I told you so’ right back in his face. He decided that it was best to think about something besides his appetite.

For whatever reason, his thoughts once more drifted back to the day when Willy Wonka had left the factory to go on his vacation.

Things had been difficult during that time, but he also recalled how much the time alone had come to mean to him. Willy had been right about his mental and emotional state and Eliza had been accurate about the two friends needing a break from each other.

Thomas smiled slightly as he recalled how happy he had become after that driving force that connected him to his brother had been returned to him.

With a smile still shadowing his face, his mind began to drift.

Flashback

September 3, 1968

The day that became marked in both Thomas and Eliza’s mind as ‘Willy’s departure day’, quickly arrived. After having spent the last two weeks working on learning to run the factory without having the chocolatier around, they were both about as ready as they could be for this new challenge. Thomas had gone over the paperwork with a fine-toothed comb and Eliza had actually started to overcome her fears long enough to learn to operate the Wonkavator.

As she was learning, she found herself not only on an emotional rollercoaster, but she was physically being batted about the glass compartment like a ball in a batting cage. On the day Willy was scheduled to leave, she had a dark bruise on her left wrist. This had happened the very first time she had been whizzed off to the Taffy Pulling Room. Another bruise was on her side after a mishap getting her to the Fudge Room.

In the wake of all that, Thomas was fully aware that she was not exactly certain how well she would do with zooming about the factory in Willy’s prized invention. Of course, for the chocolatier’s sake, she tried to keep a cheerful disposition throughout the lessons. Thomas was quickly becoming convinced that Willy was more than aware of the injuries she had sustained.

By the time the morning of the candy maker’s departure arrived, the woman had white gauze covering her left wrist, which was covered by the sleeve of her favorite sweatshirt. It looked as though she was determined to keep Willy from seeing what had transpired.

At that moment, both of them were waiting for Willy to emerge from his quarters in order to say good-bye. It seemed rather strange that Willy Wonka was leaving, yet, that was exactly what was about to happen.

After waiting for about ten minutes, the door to his quarters abruptly opened and the chocolatier emerged. Next to him, two suitcases stood, both of them black and inconspicuous in appearance. Thomas almost laughed the first moment he saw Willy standing in the doorway.

Gone was his trademark hat and waistcoat, and in its place, he wore bellbottom pants and a paisley
shirt. A pair of love beads hung from a simple chain around his neck with a peace sign rapping against his chest. He was the truest depiction of a hippie, and it seemed as though the candy maker had been indulging himself in rock and roll music, movies, and other forms of entertainment. This was all in preparation for this one pending event.

Today, his costume looked as though it had been taken straight from an anti-war demonstration. His youthful style seemed so terribly out of character, but at the same time, it made him blend in with the chaos that seemed to have taken hold of the real world. His curly hair, instead of being tamed down was completely out of control and this gave off the impression that he was a singer in a folk band. No one would be the wiser that one of the most famous men in England was now walking amongst them dressed as a flower child.

Deep inside, Thomas wished that he could see how Willy would interact outside of the factory, but that was a wish he decided to keep to himself. Of course, he did find the idea to be rather amusing. He did not add that he could barely recognize his friend through these strange clothes. Of course, that was probably the chocolatier’s intention in the first place.

“Will?” Thomas spoke with obvious amusement in his voice.

The chocolatier smiled and nodded. He eventually looked over at Eliza and waited to hear her reaction. She had known that he was doing research on the latest styles, but nothing had prepared her for what she was witnessing. She seemed to recover before Thomas and spoke, her voice filled with evident appreciation. “You look wonderful, William. I simply adore that look on you.”

“It’s great for Halloween, isn’t it?” Willy asked as he nudged Thomas with his elbow.

Thomas began to laugh. “It would make for an interesting costume, no question. I’m still pondering if you are really sure that you want to go out into the world looking like that? I initially thought your favorite purple waistcoat was rather shocking, but this beats all.”

“It is just as strange for me as it is for you, Tom. This morning when I looked in the mirror, I did not recognize the man staring back at me at all. In fact, I laughed when I saw my reflection. From what I have been able to find out, everyone else seems to be rather fond of dressing in this way, so perhaps it is a good disguise after all.”

“A good disguise, or a cure for depression,” Thomas continued to chuckle.

“Well, the main objective here is for me to get off the factory grounds without others knowing or even discovering that I am not here. If anyone affiliated with Slugworth or my other competitors were to discover that I had left, then it could put you both in harm’s way. At this point, I would put nothing past old Slugworth and you both know that he might misconstrue it as being open season on this factory. That’s why; I don’t want either of you to tell anyone that I am not here. If anyone calls or inquires as to my whereabouts, then tell them that I am unavailable.”

“That was what we had intended, William,” Eliza said, her eyes bright contrary to her wanting to cry. Instead, she dug in her pocket and produced a plum colored package with small silver streamers hanging from it. This, she extended to the chocolatier. “Thomas and I bought you a little going away gift.”

“You shouldn’t have,” Willy said. It was clear to both of them that the candy maker was moved by their thoughtfulness. “I will be coming back in four weeks. Don’t think for even a minute that you have gotten rid of me for good.”

“We know that, dear boy, but we wanted to do this as a way of letting you know that everything
would be alright while you’re away,” she said. “It’s not much, but we figured that it would be something that would remind you of this place and I suppose of us as well.”

Thomas nodded as Willy accepted the offered package and opened it. Once he had managed, a broad smile crossed his face as he stared down at the small object that rested inside.

It was a golden pin that was about half the size of his fist. The object seemed to be made of simple gold and was formed in the shape of a curvy, capital letter ‘W’.

Willy ran his hand over the object and smiled, his blue eyes shining as he took in the gift. “I love it!” he said excitedly as he pulled it from the box and with one hand and attempted to affix it to the collar of his shirt.

Instead of watching him struggle with it, Eliza reached over and tapped his hand gently with her own. “Let me,” she said as she took the pin and affixed it to the top of his shirt just beneath the collar. “There, it looks perfect just like that,” she said. “Perhaps, if nothing else, it will help you to adapt to your new clothing style.”

Without warning, Willy embraced her, his face he pressed against her shoulder. “Thank you, Mum.”

“It wasn’t just my idea, it was also Thomas’,” she said.

As soon as the chocolatier’s embrace loosened, he turned around, and reached for a pair of square shaped hippie-styled sunglasses. Seconds later, his familiar blue eyes disappeared behind the dark brown glass of the strange accessory. “Well, my bags are packed and I’m ready to go, I’m standing here outside your…er my door,” he began to recite song lyrics as Thomas shook his head. “Some things will never change,” he said.

Willy smiled, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” He laughed, but after several minutes, his face grew earnest. “You’ll be alright without me here, won’t you?”

Thomas embraced his friend. “I think so, especially since you waited a few days before leaving so that we could get those end of the month shipment orders taken care of.”

Willy smiled. “It was a good idea, wasn’t it? Now, I think I can leave in a better mindset knowing that that was taken care of. I’ll try and be back in time for the next one,” he said. He reached for the handle to one of his suitcases. “It’s time for me to get going otherwise I may change my mind and not go at all.”

Thomas shook his head. “After everything you put Eliza and me through with all of this, you’d better go or I’m likely to pitch a childish temper tantrum right here and now.” He smiled, but extended his hand to his friend. “Be careful out there, Will.”

“Don’t worry, Tom, I’ll be back real soon. Don’t get any strange ideas and try to steal my hat,” he said with a wink as he looked over and could see that Eliza looked as though she was about to start crying right there on the spot.

Willy returned the suitcases to the ground and turned towards her. “Please don’t cry, it’s not ‘good-bye’, dear lady, it’s ‘I’ll see you later’,” he said. “I’ll be back real soon you just try to be careful whenever you ride in the Wonkavator. A good tip for that is to sit down before pressing the buttons.” He reached over, took her hand in his and slid up the sleeve before planting a kiss against the gauze covering her bruised wrist.

As he did this, she had to bite down on her lip to keep from breaking down, but still managed to
reach into the pocket of her dress in order to fish out a handkerchief. “I know you’ll be alright, William, but I still worry about you.”

He smiled but embraced her once again. She immediately felt her face pressing against his hair, the uncooperative coils of hair tickling her nose. “I’ll miss you,” he said and without another word, he released her, picked up his suitcase, and disappeared outside through the door.

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Once he was gone, Eliza began to cry openly, her face now disappearing behind the handkerchief. “That was the first time he ever called me ‘Mum’,” she whispered amidst her tears.

Thomas wound his arm around her shoulder. “I know, but you’ve got to admit, he hardly looked like the Willy Wonka we know and love in that strange attire.”

“He just didn’t want to be recognized,” she said. “I don’t care how he dresses, Thomas, I am still going to miss him terribly. The factory will seem such an empty place without him.”

“Well, he did say he’d be back, so all we can do right now is to just maintain things here until his return. The Inventing Room is pretty much shut down now, but Will did ask me to check in the room to make sure nothing was overlooked,” Thomas said, but inside his thoughts were still centered on Willy’s challenge. Contrary to the chocolatier’s absence, he still had no idea what his dreams were supposed to be, but he had four weeks to find out. Instead of dwelling on this, he looked at her. “Why don’t we go ahead and check the Inventing Room before lunchtime? It might actually get our minds off all these sad good-byes.”

“Alright,” Eliza said as she blinked back the last of her tears. With one final swipe across her cheek, she returned the handkerchief to her pocket.

Thomas offered her his arm and they walked down the hall until they reached Willy’s office.

“The Wonkavator should be parked inside,” Thomas said as he motioned with his hand, “After you.”

Eliza entered the office, but she immediately sensed the emptiness of the place as they walked through the sliding doors that opened to reveal the Great Glass Wonkavator. “It’s strange to be in this room when he’s not here,” she said sadly.

“I know what you mean,” Thomas said as the two of them climbed into the glass elevator and Eliza took the seat to the left, and Thomas took the one on the right. “Okay, you get the honors; to the Inventing Room,” he said.

Eliza nervously raised her hand and pressed the button.

This time the Wonkavator jolted to life as it made its way towards the desired room. Neither of them knew that when Willy Wonka returned from his trip; that he would not be returning alone.

Flashback End

July 12, 1971

Thomas was jolted out of his daydreams when the voice of the man driving the bus shouted out in broken English. “Next stop: Duselheim.”

Five minutes later, the bus stopped. Wordlessly, he collected his things and got off.
Chapter 17: Arriving in Duselheim

After what seemed like an eternity since his plane had landed, Thomas had finally arrived in the small German town. Because it was late, the town was blanketed in darkness. He got off the bus and started to walk away from the bus stop in the direction of a sign that read ‘Hotel Duselheim’.

The sign led him straight towards a small three story structure. Large metal blinds covered the windows making it look as though the place was closed down. As he reached the glass door leading inside, he smiled when the light from inside beckoned him.

From outside, he could see through the door and into a small, cozy looking, lobby. He took a deep breath, knowing that this was his moment of truth. It would be the first time he would pretend to be Arthur Slugworth, and deep down, he hoped that it would work as Willy had predicted. He extended his hand to the door, pressed down on the lever, and entered.

Once inside, he smiled as he took in the quaint atmosphere of the hotel. One part of it looked to be somewhat run down and he pondered how well their business generally went. It did not seem to have much action going on, but it also carried a relatively friendly ambiance.

He approached the desk and noticed that a young woman sat, her nose stuck in what appeared to be a long novel of some kind. Instead of immediately interrupting her, he turned and noticed a small sofa placed in a sort of ‘waiting area’. An old-fashioned table was in front of it with magazines and brochures spread out across it.

The scent that filled his nose was a strange mixture of citrus and rose flavored potpourri. Looking around, he noticed another hallway that extended away from the lobby and he figured that it must lead to a stairwell.

He turned back around, almost regretting interrupting the woman who seemed so engrossed in her book. He cleared his throat.

As if in response to this, she abruptly raised her head, laid the book, print down, onto the desk, and smiled warmly up at him. “Guten Abend,” she began.

“Hello,” he spoke. “I have a reservation under the name ‘Slugworth’.” As his last word emerged, his could feel the lump suddenly catching in his throat. How he hated to pretend that he was someone he so utterly despised.

“You don’t speak German?” she asked in well-practiced English. There was a mark of skepticism in her voice and her smile abruptly vanished, but he was too tired to take notice of that.

“I’m sorry, no I don’t,” he said apologetically. “This is my first trip here.”

She nodded, but although the skepticism remained, the welcoming smile suddenly emerged once again. “It’s alright. My English will have to suffice.” She began to dig through the files, her eyes constantly sneaking glances at him, but nothing was said. When she found a blue and white colored card, she placed it on the desk. Before she could say anything about it, she yawned.

“Have you been waiting all this time for me to get here?” he asked.

“Yes, I suppose I have. Usually the desk closes at nine, and now we have twenty past ten,” she said.
“It shouldn’t take too long to get everything done, though.”

“I probably should have called from Frankfurt, the flight was delayed by two hours,” he explained. “Sometimes these delays cannot be helped.”

“You must be exhausted after such a trip,” she said. “Then let’s get this paperwork taken care of and then you can go get some sleep.”

“Actually, right now I’m more interested in getting something to eat. Seeing as I haven’t eaten anything since I was on the plane, I really should do that first. Do you know if there’s a restaurant or something nearby that’s still open?” he asked.

“Yes, the Gloop Metzgerei is, but you’re going to have to hurry because they close at half past eleven,” she said. “They have the best food in town, and they are generally the place that stays open the longest.”

“Thank you,” he said. “I take it that this place is in the center of town?”

“Yes, it is not too far from the marketplace, if you go back in the direction you came and just keep walking, you’ll reach the marketplace in about five minutes.” She paused as she pulled a piece of paper from the one of the drawers and slid it across the desk towards him. “Fill out your address here,” she pointed, but eventually moved her hand. “And sign the bottom, here.”

“Why?” he asked.

“In case some towels go missing or you accidentally take the key with you. Even if you forget something, then with a contact address and we can at least post it back to you,” she explained.

Thomas nodded as he accepted the piece of paper and began to fill out the boxes that she had specified. Instead of using the factory address, he used the address to the house in Cornwall. His only hope was that the address would not have to be used by the people there.

Scribbling a barely legible signature on the paper, he slid it over to her.

As she glanced down at the writing, she spoke, her voice filled with awe. “You live in Cornwall? That must be so lovely.”

“You know the area?” he asked.

“I’ve wanted to visit England since I was little. I always thought it would be neat to see a musical in London, or walk through Piccadilly Circus and watch the street musicians try and render some off key version of ‘Penny Lane’ or ‘Hey Jude’,” she sighed.

“You seem to like big cities, but yet you live here in such a small town,” he said.

“My parents own the hotel; it’s sort of our family legacy. I suppose one day I might be able to get to England and see all these wonderful places,” she smiled as she held up the novel she was reading. “This book’s plot actually takes place in Cornwall, so in my fantasy, I can go there anytime I want.” She smiled as she reached for the form he had filled out and separated the two copies. The first, she extended to him, the second, she folded in half and stuck in a drawer. Once she had done that, she got to her feet, walked over to a row of keys that hung from various hooks, and removed one.

She returned to where he was standing and extended the key as well as the small blue and white information card to him. “Here you are. You’re in room 211. If you have to call someone, dial nine to get an outside line, and we will include all telephone costs on your final bill. This card contains
general information about the hotel as well as services we provide.”

Thomas smiled and nodded. “Thank you, I hope that you can get to England someday, and if you do, maybe you can stop in for a quick visit.” He knew that she may not find him at the address, but she would most definitely find Eliza since she was now living at the house. He only hoped that by leaving the address as a contact place, that no one in Duselheim would be able to trace it back to Willy Wonka.

He remembered before the Golden Ticket contest had even started that Willy had contacted his lawyer and had the deed changed to read Eliza’s name as the holder of the house. In fact, Thomas was still surprised that she had so readily agreed to move into the house in the first place. Ever since the day he had met her, she had always construed help as a strange form of charity.

Somehow, Willy had managed to persuade her to accept his offer and move beyond the factory walls. Thomas later realized that all Willy had to say to her was ‘Cornwall’ and Eliza instantly got stars in her eyes. Needless to say, she had been happily living there since January 1969.

“Thank you,” the hotel receptionist said, her voice bringing him back to the present. “One day maybe I will. Enjoy your stay, Mr. Slugworth, and do make sure you hurry so you can at least get something to eat.”

Thomas nodded and picked up his belongings. “Is there an elevator?”

“No, but the stairs are down the hall to your left. You’re on the second floor, that means you have to go up two flights of stairs,” she smiled. “I get asked that a lot and people get lost thinking that there is a first, second, and third floor. This is called the ground level here.”

He nodded and made his way down the hall. As she instructed, he quickly found the stairs and climbed up the two flights. When he reached the second floor, he made his way down the hall in the direction of his room.

It was a really quaint looking hotel and he surmised that the people who ran it took the same pride in it that Bill took to his candy shop. He stuck the key into the lock and turned it slightly. When it clicked, he pushed the door open, and entered the room.

Closing the door behind him, he turned on the light and took in the room. It was perhaps not as nice as one of the suites at the factory, but it was clean and comfortable looking. He placed his suitcase on the rack and tossed his leather case onto the bed as he reached for the phone. He quickly dialed the number to Willy’s office and waited for the chocolatier to answer.

When the line was eventually picked up, he smiled when he heard Willy’s familiar voice on the other end. “Yes?”

“Hey, it’s Tom,” he said. “I just got into Duselheim about ten minutes ago.”

“How is it?” Willy asked.

“Kind of spooky if you want to know the truth. The place looks to be a ghost town, at least at night,” he said honestly. “Perhaps tomorrow, I’ll have a more objective perspective on things. Right now, the whole town reminds me of a graveyard. It took close to an hour to get here by bus. I’m going to leave in a few minutes and see about getting something to eat. The lady in the reception area said that there would be a restaurant open in town, so I figured I’d go and see what it has to offer.”

“Did you manage to get Linda and Molly’s phone number?” Willy asked.
“Yes, Linda gave it to me just before we parted company in Frankfurt, I can give it to you now,” Thomas said.

“That might be a good idea, because I think you should destroy any contact names and addresses that you might accumulate.”

“Alright,” Thomas said. “You got a pen?”

“Yes.”

Thomas gave his friend the number. “What are we going to do for them?” he asked.

“I haven’t decided yet,” Willy answered. “But, I don’t want you to put any of them at risk, particularly not a seven-year-old child.”

“So, I take it you are just going to call them, right out of the blue?”

“You asked me about it on the plane, so it must be important, right?” he asked. “Besides, ever since we spoke, I had this strange feeling that you didn’t tell me everything about them that you could have.”

“I couldn’t tell you there because I didn’t want to betray their confidence,” Thomas said with obvious worry in his voice. “Will, Linda is very much like you, except she doesn’t have anyone to stop her from running away from her problems.”

“Like you did with me?” he asked.

Thomas nodded, although he knew that his friend could not see his actions, but did eventually respond. “Yes.”

“I’ll call her,” Willy said. “That’s a promise, Tom. Try not to worry.”

“They are going to be here in Germany, at least until Saturday. Linda said that she wanted Molly to see Neuschwanstein,” Thomas said.

“Do you know when they will return home?” Willy asked.

“I don’t know if they are going straight home. I only know that Linda wanted to drive by the factory and let her daughter see it,” Thomas said.

“It’s that important to her, isn’t it?” Willy asked.

“Yes, apparently it is,” Thomas said. “Molly’s given up hope on her father and even Linda said that her daughter had stopped believing in other grown ups. I wanted to tell you what happened to them earlier but I couldn’t. It really breaks my heart to think that two very nice people are suffering like that. I want to help them, Will, but I don’t know how.”

Silence met those words and after several minutes, he could hear the chocolatier’s uneven breathing. Eventually, Willy spoke, his next words bringing a smile to Thomas’ face. “I want to give that child the feeling of being a part of the contest, even if she doesn’t win it.”

“I think she’s won far more than just a contest, Will, she’s found a friend in you without even knowing it,” Thomas said.

“Perhaps,” Willy admitted. “Although I must say that you were quite vague about everything regarding them.”
“I had to be, as we were on a plane when I called and the walls do have ears,” he said. “Anyway, whatever I tell you must stay between us.”

“You know that it will,” Willy said chuckling. “After all, who would I tell; the Oompa Loompas?”

Thomas took a deep breath. “Linda said that her husband walked out on her last week and Molly hasn’t been able to speak to him since he left. Initially, I thought that it was perhaps because Linda didn’t want her daughter to see him, but somehow I have this strange feeling that there is more to their story than what Linda confided. I know I sound really paranoid, but I really believe that there is far more happening than what we already know.”

“How could this happen to a child?” Willy asked.

“It happens,” Thomas said, but after several minutes, he took a deep breath. “Will, are you alright?”

“This just makes me very sad,” the chocolatier said, his voice cracking somewhat. “I know that you broke a confidence in telling me all of this. It’s a good thing that you did though. I do have every intention of doing what I can for them.”

“So that means that we’re going to eventually tell them the truth,” Thomas said hopefully.

“You feel as though you lied to them, don’t you?” Willy asked.

“In a way,” he said. “The other people, I probably won’t ever see again, but these are two people that I know we’ll get to see.”

“If you see them again before you come back here, tell them the truth, but make sure you are alone, Tom, for your own protection as well as for theirs,” Willy said.

“What about the contest?” Thomas asked.

“It will continue as planned.” He paused. “Oh and Tom, don’t use this number again, I’m going to have the Oompa Loompas disconnect it. There’s a backup number in the side pocket of your carry-on. The number is the one you can use until you come back to London. Just don’t call from that phone again. They do keep records of the numbers that are placed from each room.”

“I won’t,” Thomas said, “anything else?”

“I have the second town name for the second Golden Ticket winner. It will be found here in England and the area is called Buckinghamshire.”

“When will I have to be there?” Thomas asked.

“A week from tomorrow,” Willy said. “It shouldn’t take too long. You can probably drive there and get back the same day. We’ll have to check on the specifics when you get back from Germany, though.” He paused. “By the way, Eliza called after we spoke this afternoon.”

“How’s she doing?” Thomas asked.

“She seems to be doing fine, but said that Cornwall was going crazy for Golden Tickets. She told me that she met someone, a retired plumber slash dance instructor named Elmsworth. That’s his first name, Tom, I’m not kidding. Now, if you ask me, it sounds rather like the name of a buttered toffee bar. When I told her that I could create an Elmsworth Toffee Bar, she told me to behave myself and stop making mischief. Me? Can you imagine?”
Thomas began to laugh. “I wouldn’t want cross you while you’re in such a mood and I’ve known you for years.”

The line went silent for several seconds, but soon Willy’s voice emerged once again. “You haven’t heard the best bit, Tom. Eliza said that her new beau dresses as flamboyantly as I do. Then she said that ever since the day we met, that she had a thing for ostentatious men in frock coats and top hats.” By this time, Willy’s laughter had had gotten even stronger.

To Thomas, hearing Willy’s amusement was like music to his ears.

“Anyway, she promised to send us a picture. Oddly enough, she has yet to mention to Elmsworth who her ‘son’ is. I did tell her that after the contest was over that she could bring him to the factory and then we could find out officially whose hat is the funniest,” Willy said.

“That sounds like fun and could definitely prove interesting.” He waited for his friend to speak further, but guessing that Willy was tired, he decided that the best thing for him to do would be to wrap up this call pretty quickly. “Listen, I still need to get something to eat before I retire. Seeing as I have been trying so hard to get here, I have pretty much neglected all the other things I have needed to do, like eat.”

“Well, then I’ll talk to you soon,” Willy said. “Do be careful, Tom.”

“I will.” Thomas said and after saying good-bye, he returned the phone to the cradle. Next, he retrieved the piece of paper with Linda’s telephone number and flushed it down the toilet. He hoped that Willy would follow through and call them, but one thing about Willy Wonka that was a given, he always did what he said he would.

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As soon as he had finished in the bathroom, Thomas grabbed his trench coat and left his room. Locking his door, he made his way down the hall in the direction of the stairwell.

Downstairs, he made his way to the front door and stepped outside.

The sky above him was now strangely bright and the moon seemed to hang like a pearl on black velvet. Because the town was dark, there was not a great deal for him to see. The metal blinds covering the windows of the various houses, separated him from the inhabitants, but that seemed not to matter. The essence of the town was dark, the only light that originated around him, came from various streetlamps. He continued to walk towards the middle of town in the same direction as the bus stop.

Glancing down at his watch he noticed that it was now close to eleven. The young receptionist said that the restaurant would be opened for another half an hour, so all he had to do now was find it.

Within minutes he had reached the center of town, the small marketplace beckoning him. All around the area, darkened shops with display windows for boutiques, accessories, bars, and other businesses could be seen. The windows were all dark, which indicated that the shops were now closed. After taking in the area, he smiled when he spotted what looked to be a restaurant located at the end of the long boulevard.

He approached and noticed a blue and white-checkered sign hanging above the doorway. The entire restaurant was white in color with small blurs of what looked to be blue paint. Stepping closer, he could now read the sign, or at least make out the words somewhat. It was obvious that there was an element of southern German pride in the decorations as they matched the Bavarian flag that hung
from small flagpoles in front of various businesses.

Across the sign, cursive lettering graced the center while a picture of a man in lederhosen and a woman in a dirndl framed either side of the writing. The words that were situated between the strange figures read:

_Gloop Metzgerei und Restaurant – Inh. Thorston & Margarete Gloop_  
(*Gloop Butcher shop and Restaurant – Owners Thorston & Margarete Gloop*)

Lucky for him the word ‘Restaurant’ was universal and he smiled when he realized that he had found the place he was looking for. He approached the entrance and managed to pull the heavy wooden door open. He entered the restaurant and allowed the door to close behind him.

The dining room was much brighter than he had anticipated. Perhaps it was because it was a direct contrast to the darkness outside. The lights shone from lanterns overhead and along the walls, antlers and other hunting trophies were placed. This gave off the impression that among the owners, an active marksman resided. Arched ceilings and wooden doorways seemed to hover over numbers of tables, which were neatly decorated with matching tablecloths and candlesticks. The dining room looked as though it had been renovated, but at the same time, still maintained an almost medieval feel.

Thomas continued to take in the room as a young woman approached him. She seemed to be a part of the wait-staff, as she was dressed in a dirndl similar to the picture he had seen on the sign in front of the establishment.

“Guten Abend,” she spoke, but seeing his confused expression, she waved her hand towards one of the tables and then began to pantomime the act of eating.

Thomas nodded and allowed her to lead him over to a large table. As soon as they reached it, she took the menu from the center, waited for him to seat himself, and then handed the laminated object to him.

Opening it, he halfway glanced down at the writing, but also continued to take in the restaurant. There was not a lot going on, the place was practically empty and he guessed that it was because of the late hour. Three or four men sat playing cards; their laughter and the loud slapping sounds could be heard as they slammed the cards down on the table. In another corner, three others sat nursing large steins of beer.

Diverting his focus, he began to look down at the menu, some of the names of the dishes easily decipherable, while others did nothing but confuse him. This place seemed to specialize in all sorts of meat dishes, as there were pictures of a cow, pig, lamb, and various forms of poultry.

Awkwardly, he tried to study the menu somewhat, but did not understand the various items that were listed. Some of the offered meals like ‘Wiener Schnitzel’ were pretty common, but others, like ‘Rolladen’ and ‘Frikadellen’ were completely unknown to him. After several minutes, the girl returned to the table, her blue eyes seeking his. Not knowing what to say, she motioned with her hand as though taking a drink of something.

Thomas nodded; she seemed to want to ask what he wanted to drink. He thought for a moment. “Beer,” he said, the word, although spelled differently in German, was pronounced in the exact same way as in England. He had thought about asking for a tea, but figured that the caffeine would keep him awake.
The girl nodded and walked away. Seconds later, she returned with a large gray colored stein that was filled with beer. This thing even had a large silver colored lid on it. She placed the object on the table and looked at him expectantly, waiting for him to give her his food order.

Instead of ordering something that he had no clue about, he simply said, “Wiener Schnitzel.”

The girl nodded and scrambled back towards the kitchen, all the while leaving him to stare down at the porcelain mug that now was on the table. He turned and watched as the other men were pressing down on the metal caps on their steins and the tops lifted. They then took a sip. He followed their example and had his first real taste of German beer. The bitter tasting drink ran down his throat, and although he never was a fan of bitter drinks, this tasted remarkably well. *It stands to reason*, he thought as he swallowed another gulp, *the Germans made the best beer in the world.*

Seconds later, the door swung open and he glanced up to see that a heavyset (bordering on fat) boy had come inside and was making a beeline straight to a corner table.

A number of heads turned, including his, but nothing was said. Instead the men returned their attention to their card game, while the beer drinkers returned their focus to their drinks. His attention shifted from the boy to the bag he was carrying.

The beige colored cloth bag looked to be packed full of groceries. He watched as the boy took it and dumped the entire contents onto the table. Bar after bar of Wonka’s chocolate could be seen from across the room, the familiar brown and orange colored wrappers obvious to anyone present.

Of course, the boy did not pay much attention to the stares; instead, he seated himself at the table like a king on a throne and reached for the candy that was closest to him.

Thomas swallowed as he watched the boy rip into the first bar and inspect it for a Golden Ticket. When he did not find one, he stuffed a wedge of chocolate into his mouth and reached for a second.

Taking a deep breath he tried to divert his attention away from the boy. He had never seen an individual with that many candy bars in his life. For some reason, when he considered the boy’s size, he had no choice but to conclude that the child had probably eaten a ton of chocolate in the hopes of finding a ticket. With Thomas being in Duselheim, the prospects of this boy finding the ticket was almost a given.

At that moment, he watched as the waitress came over to the table and placed his food in front of him. A large piece of schnitzel with fries and a salad adorned the plate. The food looked good, and he welcomed this particular distraction to watching the boy consume the chocolate at an ungodly rate.

Seconds later, the girl walked over to the boy and spoke, her voice too soft for Thomas to make out, but then watched as the boy pressed an already opened bar of chocolate into her hand. She tucked it in the pocket of her skirt and disappeared in the kitchen as the boy continued to eat.

Thomas diverted his focus back to the schnitzel and began to cut it into bite-sized pieces. After a few pieces had been cut, he forked himself a bite, and ate it. *The food is quite good*, he thought as he captured a second bite. Within ten minutes time, he was completely full, and his plate was now empty.

All that was left for him to do was enjoy the beer, pay his bill, and leave. He decided to savor his drink and enjoy the atmosphere of the restaurant before returning to his empty hotel room.
Chapter 18

Chapter 18: The Arrival of the Oompa Loompas

Thomas remained at the restaurant until his beer mug had been emptied and because he liked it, he ordered a second. Once the woman had brought the second stein, he began to sip the beer. Although he did not drink a great deal of alcohol at home, he did enjoy this cultural taste of diversity. The general taste of English beer was not all that great, although he had been to a few Irish pubs in his day, and they all seemed to have very strong ales.

He rested his chin on his hands and took in the restaurant where he was sitting. It was a nice dining area and he truly enjoyed the historic and rustic essence of it. He could make out the mixture of wood and beige colored walls that somehow gave off a very relaxed atmosphere.

He took a deep breath, his eyes slowly closing as he remembered the day when Willy Wonka had returned to the chocolate factory with the Oompa Loompas in tow.

Flashback

October 1, 1968

The call announcing that their friend was going to return to the factory had come three days before. Both Thomas and Eliza had anticipated it ever since the day Willy Wonka had left. Between them, they had managed to handle the general running of the factory as well as getting the latest chocolate shipments shipped before the deadlines. They were monumentally relieved that the chocolatier was now scheduled to return.

There was something excruciatingly empty about the factory with Willy not being present. The overall essence of the place seemed to have lost its energetic drive without the one who created it. Thomas knew that although they had managed to push things through; he was ready to return the reigns of control to his best friend. He had also realized that he did have some ambition left in his life after all, albeit something that was considered rather small and insignificant. Still, this had somehow given him a new lease on his own life.

During these past weeks, he had spent every free minute he could studying Morse-Code so that he could eventually get his radio operators’ license. This seemed to be something he enjoyed, and his quarters were now filled with pieces of radios and other electronic equipment.

He had found himself a goal, and that was to build his own radio and use it to make and send signals over the air-waves. Thinking about this new project had somehow changed things for him, and even Eliza had started to notice that he was now much happier. All that was left for him to do was to manage getting a transmitter antenna built amidst the smokestacks of Willy’s factory.

Eliza’s mishaps with the Wonkavator had healed, and she was filled with joy about her ‘son’ coming home. Oddly enough, during his call, Willy had sounded somewhat vague about what would be happening. He insisted that once the plane landed in Kensington, that he would require the largest helicopter available in which to transport some people from the airstrip to the factory.

This, if anything, left her and Thomas both consumed with curiosity as to what was about to happen. Along with that, they were contemplating the fact that Willy was arriving on the back lot of the factory grounds just after midnight.
In response to that request, Eliza immediately placed a call to the Kensington Airfield and asked her nephew to take care of all the arrangements. Next, Willy spoke to Thomas about working alongside the Immigration Department at filing several hundred applications for residency. Thomas had, since that call, been on the phone arranging it, but he still had very little idea of about what was going on.

This had left them consumed with an unresolved mystery. They knew that Willy intended to return to the factory in the very same mode that he had departed; in absolute secrecy, but nothing would prepare them for the grand entrance Willy Wonka was about to stage.

It was close to eleven in the evening when Thomas left his room to go and join Eliza. The woman was sitting on a bench and waiting, her wrinkled hands cupping one another in an almost nervous sort of anticipation. The older woman was dressed in an oversized trench coat, but her gaze seemed fixated on the wall opposite where she was seated. Of course, she would not say as much to him, instead, she looked at her watch, then back towards the wall and finally, back over at him.

The hour passed in such a fashion until Thomas stood up and rested his hand on her shoulder. “It’s almost time for him to arrive,” he said, as he started to make his way down the winding and twisting corridor.

“Oh course,” Eliza said as she got to her feet and began to follow. As she walked, she began to grope at the buttons of her trench coat in order to close it. Having lived much of her life in London, she knew that the city during the month of October was two things; wet and cool, especially at night.

“Did Will say anything to you about what would be happening tonight?” Thomas finally asked, not sure if he could curtail his curiosity much longer.

“Nothing besides what he or I might have told you,” she said. “At least that was just before he spoke with you about the legal paperwork.”

“I guess we’ll know soon enough,” he mused.

“It will be so good to see him again,” she responded, but affirmed his words with a nod of her head.

“Well, the helicopter should be here soon,” he said, “that is if all goes according to schedule.”

“Will there be enough space for such a large helicopter to land?” she asked as they reached the door that would lead outside.

“It should, he has room behind the factory for about ten of them. He always thought that if he ever expanded, that he wouldn’t have to buy more land for it,” he said as he unlocked the door and opened it. Motioning, he waited for her to walk through. Once she had cleared it, he followed, the door closing firmly behind them.

As they came outside, the coolness of the moist autumn air seemed to be blowing right through them. Eliza shivered slightly, but Thomas was only taken by the overwhelming darkness that the city emanated. For a moment, he contemplated how it felt like standing in a graveyard; the foggy air drifting about them as though they were consumed in dry ice.

The lights that flashed the name ‘Wonka’ on and off were the extent of what they could see.

Willy had requested that the lights be kept off during the evening hours so that the media could not monitor their comings and goings. Of course, these instructions did not include the landing of an aircraft. Thomas knew that some small bit of light would be required so that they could land on the factory grounds.
Eliza and Thomas instantly realized standing outside that not only were they consumed with darkness, they also were unable to differentiate between colors. They reached the end of a group of buildings and Eliza found a bench, sat down, and silently waited.

For his part, Thomas could not help but ponder why it was Willy was coming back in this sort of fashion. This was getting very strange indeed.

Several minutes later, they could hear the sounds of an approaching helicopter, the propellers’ sound ripping through the air and replacing the stillness of the silent evening. The lights from the aircraft abruptly filled the courtyard and momentarily blinded them. As the two of them looked away from it, it landed and the motor was abruptly cut.

Once silence had descended on the courtyard, Thomas and Eliza stood up and started to make their way towards the aircraft. When the side door opened, Willy Wonka stepped down and made his way across the courtyard towards them.

“Tom, Eliza, it’s so wonderful to see you again,” he said with a smile as he reached them. As soon as he was close enough, Thomas noticed that Willy was dressed in the same hippie clothing he had worn the day of his departure. The swirling letter ‘W’ pin that they had given him had been carefully pinned to his shirt and was now reflecting the small traces of light that still existed in the area.

In his hand, he carried a travel case of some kind, but placed it on the ground once he had reached them, his arms now freed up so that he could greet them properly.

“How are you, dear boy?” Eliza asked as she felt herself engulfed in his embrace, her eyes seemed to be depicting the shared happiness at having the chocolatier back with them.

“I’m doing well,” he said happily. “I wanted to wait and spring my surprise on you both when I got back. Trying to explain everything over the phone is not always easy.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“Well, perhaps we ought to sit down first,” he said and motioned towards the bench where they had been waiting prior to his arrival.

“What is it, Will?” Thomas asked, but obliged his friend and seated himself. Eliza followed suit.

“I was quite surprised when I received your call several nights ago,” she began. “I know that you are one to keep secrets, but this has all been very strange. You were awfully vague about everything except that you were finally coming home.”

“Well, there’s a great deal more to this story, but I also have a few things that must be tended to this night,” Willy said. “Tom, have you contacted Immigration like I asked?”

“Yes, I have about four hundred applications in your office,” he said. “I left them on your desk so that you could find them when you got back. It should not take too terribly long for you to get the papers filled out and sent in.”

“I see,” Willy said. “This should not be too difficult since the island where these applicants hail is still part of the Commonwealth. Of course, the authorities will probably want specific details about them, which should not be that difficult to provide, since they are seeking sanctuary here.”

“They are seeking sanctuary?” Thomas muttered under his breath, his thoughts instantly on Quasimodo hanging around the cathedral at Notre Dame.
“Tom, the people may be considered strange by the general population here, but it is for that reason that their presence is going to have to remain a secret.” He turned and motioned with his hand while Thomas and Eliza had to strain in order to see the movements that were now emerging from inside the helicopter.

Eliza watched for several minutes and then took a deep breath as a short looking man started to walk towards them. Behind him, several of the other people stood, their appearance blocked by the darkness. The man who came closer was dressed in a ragged looking native costume. Seeing his frail and sunken in features caused the woman to gasp. “William, w-who are they?”

“They’re my new workers,” he said as he motioned with his hand, and a short man, one who wore a necklace that depicted him as the leader, approached.

“Will, don’t tell me that you are resorting to slave labor,” Thomas whispered.

“I would never do such a thing,” Willy assured him, his voice indicative that he was oblivious to their alarmed expressions. “They are here freely, Tom.” When Thomas did not respond, Willy waited until the man had reached them. “Tom, Eliza, this is Omaya-Kal, he’s the leader of the Oompa Loompas.”

“Oompa what?” Thomas looked at the new arrival skeptically before turning and facing the chocolatier. The thoughts going through his mind were quite simple. He was starting to ponder whether or not Willy Wonka had completely lost his mind. “Will, what’s going on?”

Omaya-Kal looked at Thomas, his eyebrows arching but instead of responding to the horror that crossed their faces, he spoke his voice simple, but matter-of-fact. “Please do not respond in anger,” he began. “Your friend saved my life. I was being chased and nearly attacked by a Snozzwanger and he protected me from harm. It is our custom that when someone saves our life, then we are in debt to them.” He crossed his hands over his chest and bowed slightly.

“That’s all fine and good, but why are you here?” Eliza asked. “You mustn’t give up your home and family for the sake of a debt.”

The Oompa Loompa smiled. “In part you are quite accurate. Yet, I feel I must explain. My people and I are in his debt, yet he has promised us sanctuary and that is a gift beyond measure. You see, in our country, the world is a dangerous place; fierce beasts roam and hunt us for food. We were on the verge of extinction when your son offered all of us a place in which to live and prosper. He said he had many rooms in his palace and could offer us a safe haven from the cruelties of everyday existence.”

“Yes, your brother has told us great things of your country, of your people; but he has also sadly confessed his need of trustworthy assistance. This is the best rationale for our presence here. Upon hearing of his troubles, I took it upon myself to meet with the leaders of our high counsel and it was unanimously decided that we would journey from our dangerous home to this place of harmony and peace. Here we shall help our brother, as he has helped us.”

“You mean; you are going to help William run the factory?” Eliza asked.

Omaya-Kal nodded. “It is our honor to assist our friend whom we have given the name, Nunguserak Nanganartok.”
“Excuse me?” Thomas looked up.

“It means ‘Candy Marvel’ in the Inuit language,” Willy supplied, a slight blush tingeing his cheeks. “The Oompa Loompas speak a dialect of it, and have been trying to teach me some words, but I’ve not adapted well to their language, I’m afraid. It is for that reason that they are learning to communicate with me through our language. Omaya-Kal is one of few who can speak fluently in English.”

“You left your home like that?” Thomas asked. “That must be terrible for you.”

Omaya-Kal nodded. “Do not be sad for us as it is no great sacrifice to our people. We shall survive and thrive instead of running and hiding. That is no existence for any people, regardless of what race one is referring to.”

“How many of you are there?” Thomas asked. “Even Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory does have its limits.”

“Everything has limits, Tom,” Willy said breaking his silence, “but these people have simple wishes and desires, and require very little to be happy. I have a group of rooms in mind for them. It is my opinion that having been to Loompaland myself, we can recreate their home environment minus those dreadful beasts.” He handed Thomas a second key. “Use this key to reach the east side of the factory. This is where the Oompa Loompas can spend the night. We must get everyone inside before dawn, otherwise those outside the factory gates will know that they are here and that could prove more deadly than a wangdoodle.”

Thomas nodded as he motioned with his hand. “How many of your people are in the helicopter?”

“We have managed to bring about one hundred with us,” Omaya-Kal said. “Your brother has assured us that the others shall be brought here this night.”

“Then you must have them disembark and come inside,” Thomas said as Eliza went over to the door and silently opened it.

Willy remained with Thomas for several minutes as the Oompa Loompas emerged, one after the other, from the large helicopter. “I’m going to fly back with Ingo-Eia, and collect the others. Lucky for us, several of the Oompa Loompas can fly. They are highly intelligent and can manage with just about any mechanical device,” the chocolatier said. “It is strange, what given their culture, but any culture is prone to surprise. At any rate, we must hurry as darkness will not last forever.”

Thomas nodded as the group of people came towards him. “This way please,” he said and feeling like the pied piper of Hamlin, he led the people through the side door and into the confines of the factory.

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Several moments after they had entered the factory and his eyes were able to adjust to the light, Thomas discovered that the people were not dark skinned as was implied. Instead, they were, shockingly, walking about with orange faces and green hair. He was not quite certain what to make of this strange race that was about to take up residency at Willy’s factory. Of course, he trusted his friend, but it still felt strange for him to take these creatures as seriously as his friend was capable of doing.

Willy had managed to obtain their trust and it was starting to look as though the concerns they had had prior to his trip to New Zealand had finally been resolved. Based entirely on what Omaya-Kal
had said, they were completely prepared to work the factory under Willy’s instruction.

After what seemed like forever, Thomas managed to sit down in the corridor outside of the Oompa Loompa temporary quarters. He had disbelief still written across his face, but managed to catch his breath during this time. It was no secret that he was concerned and Eliza’s face was drawn with an almost mirrored state of anxiety. It appeared as though she wanted nothing more than to retreat to her quarters in order to think things through.

He could understand this sentiment all too well, but when he heard the sounds of the nearby doors opening and closing, he could tell instinctively that the Oompa Loompas were now sleeping. That was understandable as their trip from New Zealand back to England had no doubt been a monumental one. He watched as the final grouping of small orange faced people were coming down the hall, two tiny ones holding both of Eliza’s hands.

As they went into the room, they released her hands and she closed the door lightly. Once she was finished, she went over and sat down on the bench. “Where’s Will?” he asked.

“He’s taking the helicopter back to the airfield with one of the Oompa Loompas,” Eliza responded. “He wants you to drive out there and pick them up. He said that you would know which car to bring and what must be done.”

Thomas nodded. “Alright, and you should probably go to bed, you look worn out. The Oompa Loompas all seem to be sleeping anyway, so once we get Will and his pilot back here, and then everything should be fine. I think it will take me years to figure out how we managed to pull that one off. Sometimes I am amazed that everything has worked out as well as it has.”

Eliza nodded, but instead of speaking, she got up and started to walk towards the group of doors that would lead back in the direction of her quarters.

Once she was gone, he got up and walked back down the twisted corridor until he reached the door that headed back outside and slipped quietly out into the night.

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From the factory, it only took him about twenty minutes to get to the airport to pick up Willy and the Oompa Loompa pilot. Given the time of year that it was, the nights were thankfully longer. As he drove towards the airfield, he contemplated how intense this night had been for all of them.

He reached the airfield just before Willy and Ingo-Eia had landed. The only light that seemed to be around him was situated at the tower, which reminded him of a lighthouse. He got out of the car and tightened the belt of his trench coat and waited, his hands clasped in front of him.

About a minute had passed before the helicopter appeared and landed. Willy emerged and came over to where Thomas was standing while the Oompa Loompa pilot went to finish the task of returning the key to the control tower. “What will happen when they see him, his skin is definitely different than ours?” he asked.

“Not to worry, Tom,” Willy said with an impish smile. “Eliza’s nephew is on duty, and he saw the Oompa Loompas before we flew them back to the factory. He has promised to keep everything a secret. He went on to say that he would do whatever he could to help us. Word is, after the ‘Around the World’ incident, Slugworth tried to bribe one of their pilots to fly over the factory and see if they could find out why I closed it up. He said that the airfield would not take to spying.”

“What about the logbook and the radio information from air traffic control?” Thomas asked. “I mean;
in some places, even radio communications have to be logged. It’s the law.”

“That’s true,” Ingo-Eia said as he approached where they were standing. “Most of the communications that happen between the tower and pilot have to be logged, even when on a typical pattern flight over the airfield. Unless the factory actually had a tower or a flight controller monitoring things, no one in Kensington could know where we were going since in my communications I indicated that we were simply flying to central London.”

“Tom, what have you been doing while I’ve been away?” Willy asked his voice etched in curiosity.

“Nothing much, I’ve just been studying radios as a form of communication,” he said. “I decided to start reading up on it so that I can prepare myself for a test in a few weeks to get my amateur radio operator’s license. I also started building my own radio too. My living quarters are full of pieces to this three-dimensional jigsaw puzzle.”

“You build electronics?” Ingo-Eia asked.

“It’s sort of my new hobby,” Thomas said with a casual shrug of his shoulders. “So how did you manage to get a pilot’s license in Loompaland? It seems rather strange that someone like you would be able to fly.”

The Oompa Loompa scowled, and Willy took a deep breath. “Tom, Ingo-Eia is a very good pilot. He got the clearance to fly from Eliza’s nephew, Alex. Keep in mind that people learn to fly every day. Just because Loompaland happens to be dangerous for them does not mean that one is not capable of learning or reaching beyond their assumed limitations.”

“Of course,” Thomas said sheepishly, “my apologies.” He glanced towards Ingo-Eia in the hopes that the man was not offended. When the Oompa Loompa offered a reciprocating nod, he released a pent of breath.

He said nothing else, but it was no secret that he had a hard time taking them seriously. This will not be easy, he thought. It seemed obvious that every time he asked a simple question, he ended up offending them. Slowly he opened the car door and climbed behind the wheel. Willy crawled into the front seat, while Ingo-Eia climbed in behind them. He started the car and drove away from the airfield.

Within ten minutes of driving, the silence seemed to overwhelm them. Eventually, the Oompa Loompa leaned towards the front of the car and tapped Willy’s shoulder and spoke, his voice firm. “Oh yes, Nunguserak Nanganartok, tomorrow we must send a box of chocolate to the airport.”

“Why?” Thomas asked.

“Because we promised him to do that after he checked Ingo-Eia out on the helicopter,” Willy said. “He’s a nice guy, must run in Eliza’s family.”

“Did you tell him that his aunt was living at the factory?” Thomas asked.

“No, but something tells me that he already knows,” Willy said smiling. “It would have been close to impossible for them to not have put two and two together. Alex is a very smart individual.”

“I guessed,” Thomas said as they drove through the back gates of the factory and parked in the garage. As he got out of the car and walked towards the side entrance, he exhaled slowly.

Instead of waiting for Willy and Ingo-Eia, he walked alone.
“Entschuldigung, wir schliessen,” a voice emerged and Thomas raised his head. This time, instead of seeing the young female waitress, he saw a heavyset woman with curly dark hair. She looked friendly enough, but her dark eyes sought his and she began to speak to him in German, her voice bringing the waitress over.

“Frau Gloop, er versteht uns nicht,” the waitress said. (Mrs. Gloop, he doesn’t understand us) “Ich glaube er ist Engländer.” (I believe that he is from England.)

The woman nodded, but looked at the Waitress and gave her a simple nod. The young woman handed the older woman a piece of paper and walked slowly away. “I’m terribly sorry sir, but we are closing,” she said. Thomas figured that this was simply a translation of the German phrase he had just heard.

He drained the last of the beer from his mug and stood up. “My apologies,” he said as he dug in his pocket for his wallet. “I was rather lost in thought. May I have the bill please?” he asked as the dark headed woman handed him the slip of paper.

Thomas pulled out some money that was purplish in color and extended it to the woman.

Once she had given the change to him, he dropped it on the table and got to his feet. He would have to get back to the hotel, as morning would come quickly enough. His gaze returned to the boy at the table with the candy bars and he swallowed. Three or four empty candy wrappers were now on the table and the child seemed not to have grown tired of stuffing his face.

As he walked out of the restaurant, Thomas had very little idea that he would be returning to this same place the very next day.

He walked slowly in the direction of the hotel, his eyes feeling all the more heavy. It had been a long day and he was truly ready to get some rest.
Chapter 19

Chapter 19: The First Golden Ticket

July 13, 1971

Thomas woke up to the sounds of hoopla going on outside. He shoved the covers aside before slowly crawling out of bed, and approaching the window. Reaching for the metal lever situated on one side of the window, he managed to open it and could hear the sounds of excited townspeople below. He did not have to speak a word of the language to know that something was happening.

Outside, a man was running down the road that extended alongside the hotel. He was shouting up to the people who were leaning out from their windows. The excitement seemed to carry down the street as though a parade was about to come through town.

“Augustus Gloop hat ein goldene Eintrittskarte gefunden!” the man was shouting, his German words filling Thomas’ ears. (Augustus Gloop found a Golden Ticket!)

There was that name again, Gloop, he thought. It sounded familiar, but he was still trying to figure out what the man on the street was saying. The words seemed to sound like ‘Augustus Gloop, blah, blah, blah, and gold’. He took a deep breath as he rubbed his face and closed the window. Turning away, he decided against calling Willy. He figured that the chocolatier was watching everything on television and would probably know far more than he presently did.

After several minutes, he remembered the names that were written on the sign in front of the restaurant where he had eaten dinner the night before. It must have been that boy, the one with the bag full of Wonka bars, he thought. He must have found the first golden ticket when he was gorging himself on chocolate the night before.

Thomas took a deep breath, went over to the suitcase, and pulled out a white shirt and matching pants. If Augustus was the son of the restaurant owners, then maybe the way he could reach the boy would be through their business. From that point of view, it would be utterly foolish for the parents to close the establishment on that day. They could easily have done a great deal of business because of all the people who were expected to flood into Duselheim. Thomas figured that once the news had reached beyond the town’s perimeters that this place would become as big an attraction as Disneyland.

The question that remained was how he could slip into the restaurant undetected, talk to the boy, and get out again.

He figured that if there were a number of people hanging around there, then his presence would, no doubt, go undetected.

When he emerged from his shower several minutes later, he was dressed in the white shirt and pants. He dug around in his suitcase until he pulled out a matching jacket, and black bowtie to complete his look. With this outfit, he would look about as inconspicuous as they come, and would probably be able to move around the place as though a waiter by trade. He guessed that the boy’s parents would be so caught up in his instant fame that they would not notice an extra waiter moving about the restaurant.

Of course he was concerned that the dress code might actually be as it was the night before. Since he did not see any men working there, he was not completely certain if his wardrobe option would even
be plausible. He recalled how the two women had been wearing dirndls, and he pondered if the men wore lederhosen as depicted in the sign outside. Hopefully, their daytime attire would be inconspicuous at best and the cultural attire would be reserved for the evening. Regardless of that, Thomas hoped that everyone would be so distracted by the presence of the international press that they would pay him little mind.

Packing the rest of his things in the suitcase he closed it before retreating back into the bathroom to shave. He knew that in order to keep his cover, he would have to go and have breakfast with the rest of the guests before heading back through town in the direction of the restaurant. As he finished the task of shaving and brushing his teeth, he went and grabbed his dark gray colored trench coat, and pocketed his room key before leaving.

He made his way down the stairs and managed to locate the breakfast room without any problems. He entered and found a table where he could sit down. In front of him, a plate as well as a cup and saucer with blue and white patterns across it had been placed. He reached for a bread roll that was in a basket on the table and began to cut it through the middle.

As he was doing this, a man emerged from the kitchen and placed a small pot of coffee on the table. “Thank you,” he said as he momentarily dismissed the bread and reached for the small canister. The man smiled and nodded and left as Thomas poured a generous amount of coffee into the cup. He then picked up the small porcelain creamer and added some to his cup before taking a sip.

At the next table, a small group of young adults was talking in excited voices. Of course, as with the events at the window, the only words he could comprehend were ‘gold’ and ‘Augustus Gloop’. The rest of their words were buried amidst cries of excitement about being on vacation in the town where a Wonka Golden Ticket was found. It seemed as though Wonkamania had hit Duselheim and even the hotel guests were excited.

He slowly ate his breakfast and then got to his feet. By then the other guests were getting up as well and leaving the room. He made his way down the hall in the direction of the front door.

“Mr. Slugworth?” the voice hit him like a ton of bricks and he turned around to see the girl at the desk was waving at him. He approached and made eye contact with her. “Did you hear? One of our local boys just found the first Wonka Golden Ticket!”

“Yes, I sort of picked up on what was happening,” he said all the while clearing his throat. “It would seem that he is a very lucky child indeed.”

“After I heard about it, I figured that this was probably why you were here, to come and check things out. It seems rather coincidental that another candy maker would show up one night before all of this happened.”

Thomas cringed. “I didn’t really know about it,” he lied. “I simply heard that you had a nice little town here and I was just passing through. I’m ah…on my way to Munich, actually. I thought this would be a place to get a little peace and quiet. I’ll be checking out later today and catching a bus south.”

The woman nodded. “I’ll get your bill together then.” She paused. “Listen, if you need a ride, some of the local guys from the nearby college are heading that way later this afternoon. They will be meeting at the bus station and then carpool from there. It may not be the most comfortable way to travel, but it does save time, and one of the guys is a friend of mine. All they require is gas money.”

“That sounds like a good option,” Thomas said. “Thank you.”
“Don’t mention it,” she said. “I just happened to hear from other customers that although the bus is an alright way to travel, it takes a long time to get there.”

“I’ll think about it, but I may take you up on that offer since the bus trip here was rather long and drawn out.”

“Great, I’ll call Erich and let him know that you may be coming along. He and his friends are kind of wild, but they’re really nice guys. Anyway, they generally leave by mid afternoon, so try not to be too late getting back. You should have enough time to at least see the town. Don’t forget to stop by the church; they have a wonderful glockenspiel there. I walk by it every day at eleven and it sounds just wonderful.”

“Thank you for the tip,” Thomas said. “I’ll be back before noon.” He offered the girl a smile before backing away from the desk. He was deep in thought by the time he reached the front door and stepped outside. There was no question in his mind as to how meticulously he and Willy had planned the trip, but this still did not prepare him for the events of that morning. He was a bit stunned by the fact that the golden ticket had been found so quickly, but he was also unprepared as to the extent of pandemonium that ensued once it had happened.

There were already people gathered on the streets and the further he got away from the hotel and closer to the Gloops’ restaurant, the more people he saw. It was complete madness. He smiled slightly when he thought about how empty the town had been the night before. It was as though the entire country had started its descent on Duselheim.

He walked quickly towards the restaurant and managed to squeeze his way through the crowd and into the interior of the now familiar building. Unlike the night before, it was full; waitresses were now dressed in a similar style as he was. These ladies were rushing about with cake and other pastries in their hands. It was as though the Gloop family had prepared for this well into the night. The amount of cake and other foods made the place seem rather like a smorgasbord.

As Thomas made his way to the coat rack, he deposited the jacket and began to move through the restaurant as though he belonged there. A man came over to him and placed a stack of plates in his arms and pointed to a table where four or five people were seated. He nodded and started to walk in that direction.

It had proven to be a great idea for him to dress as a waiter as the people paid him very little mind. Not only that, but they seemed to be giving way so that he could reach the famed table without difficulty. En route, he bypassed a German reporter who was getting ready to give what looked to be an international broadcast. As he began speaking, his voice filled the room and several of the patrons quieted. For his part, Thomas briefly glanced over towards the reporter, but nearly dropped the plates he held when he saw that directly behind the man, one of the hunting trophies was mounted to the wall. It looked as though the reporter literally had antlers growing out of either side of his head. Trying to ignore this amusing image, Thomas continued on his intended path. He half-listened to the reporter’s words, but watched as the man walked over towards the table, all the while still talking.

At that moment, Thomas managed to catch a glimpse of the boy. It was indeed the same child he had seen with the bag full of Wonka bars the night before. Augustus was sitting with his parents, his pudgy hand gripping a fork and he was stuffing what looked to be sauerkraut into his mouth. Both of his parents were also eating, so it seemed to be the pastime of the entire Gloop family.

As Thomas stood watching all of this with bemusement, he began to wipe a towel over the plates and set them on the table in front of the people. As he assumed, no one noticed that anything out of
the ordinary was taking place. The family seemed to be eating up everything in their wake, including the attention.

Perhaps the white outfit Thomas was wearing was helpful in giving him a more inconspicuous of an appearance. Whatever the case, no one said a word to him as he continued the task of distributing the plates. As he did this, he listened attentively as the reporters addressed Augustus.

“How does it make you feel to be the lucky finder of the first Wonka golden ticket?” the man was asking, his microphone now situated somewhere between the plate of sauerkraut and sausages and the boy’s mouth.

“Hungry,” emerged the answer between bites. Thomas cringed as he finished the task with the plates. He took a deep breath, all the while grateful that he did not intend to eat anything. Just watching the boy and his parents was enough to spoil anyone’s appetite.

“Any other feelings?” the reporter pressed, trying all the while to divert Augustus’ attention from the food to the interview.

“I feel sorry for Wonka, it’s going to cost him a fortune in fudge,” was the response from the boy. The reporter’s attention eventually shifted to the boy’s father.

“Mr. Gloop, would you care to say anything?” the reporter asked and watched in shock as the man bit off the top of the microphone and shoveled it into his mouth with a forkful of sauerkraut. Thomas nearly laughed out loud, but managed to conceal his amusement by reaching for a plate where a large pile of sausages had been placed.

As the reporter’s focus shifted and he began to question Mrs. Gloop, Thomas grabbed the fork and stabbed it into one of the sausages and began moving them one after the other to the boy’s plate. Leaning over, he began to whisper the prepared speech.

“I congratulate you on finding the first Golden Ticket, little boy,” he smirked at the wording. Augustus was perhaps a child with many attributes; but little was hardly a descriptive word for the stature of this child. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Arthur Slugworth; I’m the president of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated. Now, I want you to listen very carefully because I am going to make you very rich indeed. Mr. Wonka is currently working on an invention, the Everlasting Gobstopper. If he succeeds, he’ll ruin me. What I want you to do is acquire one Everlasting Gobstopper and bring it to me so that I can find out the ingredients. Your reward will be riches beyond your wildest dreams. Consider this, and do not forget the name, Everlasting Gobstopper.”

As he finished the practiced speech, he noticed that the reporters were still speaking with Mrs. Gloop. Instead of sticking around, he backed slowly away from the boy and disappeared into the crowd.

Before completely leaving the restaurant, he retrieved his trench coat and pulled it over his clothing. Trying to act as inconspicuously as possible, he managed to get outside before anyone could stop and speak with him.

The warm July sunshine washed over him, but he knew that it was now imperative for him to put as much distance between Augustus Gloop and himself as humanly possible. His message was now delivered and he could enjoy the next three days before having to fly back to London.

As he made his way along the road, a feeling of relief filled him as he reached the church. There, he waited for the hour to strike eleven so he could listen to the glockenspiel.
The lady at the hotel had been right, it was definitely a sight for him to behold. Instead of heading back to the hotel, he decided to take a short walk around the marketplace, his first intended stop, the old church in the center of town. He figured that this would enable him to calm down somewhat.

Stepping into the confines of the small church’s sanctuary, he noticed that this was a typical Catholic church. It was filled with icons, statues, and figures, which adorned the altar. There seemed a darkness that encased the small sanctuary, but somehow it was made up with the amount of color that emanated from the stain glass that covered the windows on either side of the room.

He remained quiet, all the while noticing that several people were kneeled and praying. It was such a beautiful place and he knew that had there not been Golden Tickets, he would probably never have actually seen it. Standing there, he suddenly felt an uncanny sense of gratitude wash over him. This town, although small, seemed such an ideal place for good fortune to be bestowed upon it.

Taking a deep breath, he walked back towards the doors and stepped outside. People seemed to be arriving at the Duselheim marketplace in droves. The parking lot that surrounded the small church was now completely full. Thomas knew that there was no way that they would ever find enough space to accommodate all the visitors that were now filtering into the town.

He quickly made his way back to the hotel. He wanted to get out of Duselheim. Since he had told the girl he would be back by noon, now seemed to be the right time for him to make himself scarce.

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As he made his way back to the hotel, he was shocked to discover that there were people crowded around the doorway seeking access. He managed to squeeze his way inside and noticed that an older man and a woman were trying to accommodate the vast number of guests they now had. He started to make his way past the desk, the man’s voice interrupting him.

“Sie müssen warten,” the man said, his eyes regarding Thomas with skepticism. (You must wait)

“Papa, nein, er ist schon ein Gast hier,” the girl’s voice emerged and she raised her head from the filing cabinet. (Papa, no, he’s already a guest) She looked at Thomas, and spoke, her words now in English. “I’m coming off duty, just wait for a minute, alright?”

Thomas nodded and backed towards the door that led down the hall. It appeared as though this was the only freed up space in the small lobby. The hotel otherwise had people packed in tighter than sardines.

After several minutes the girl came over to him. “I knew this was going to happen,” she said happily.

“You mean the mob scene outside?” he asked.

“Yes, but do you know what?” she asked, her voice literally bubbling with excitement. “I think we all owe Mr. Wonka a great deal of gratitude.”

“How do you figure?” he asked.

“We were on the verge of going broke, that’s why I said that I could only go to England in my imagination, not in real life. All the money we had was put into this place. This is the last hotel in the entire town and if we had to close then that would mean that Duselheim would have no more tourism to speak of. Even those people who passed through would have to drive all the way to Nurnberg just to get a room. Either that or they would have to stay in one of those pricy autobahn hotels. Can you imagine driving into a town and not being able to find a place to stay, but instead having to go an hour by bus just to get accommodations?” she asked.
“It seems rather sad to me,” he said. “But how can one assume that a Golden Ticket created all of this?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “The fact is, this town usually has nothing really happening; no concerts or events, but yet our hotel is full for the first time in over ten years. During the summer when tourism is supposed to be at its peak all over southern Germany, there is nothing happening here; it somehow has become a forgotten place. With a Golden Ticket being found here, people are actually starting to remember that our town exists.”

“Well, you’re right about one thing, the marketplace parking lot is completely full,” he said.

“That’s a first. In all the years I have lived here, I have never seen it more than half full. Usually that only happens when the local fair comes to town,” she said with a melancholy smile on her face. “Don’t you see? This doesn’t just bring money into Mr. Wonka’s bank account, but it wakes up the economy of this entire town. It gives a shout to the rest of the world: ‘Duselheim, Germany is still around, it still has life left in it’.”

“You love this town, don’t you?” he asked.

“I love the people here; they are good, honest, and hard working. Most of them I’ve known since I was little. The businesses here don’t try to rub each other out of existence; they don’t steal ideas and try to pass them off as their own. They just accept and help each other even during those times when we are left to ponder why we even try.”

As she spoke, he could detect the tears that were brimming from beneath her eyes. “My parents’ business will probably be saved because of these Golden Tickets. The bank here has been very good to us, but I know that they can only do so much. When I look around this room and see it filled with people; I know that this is the most wonderful thing that could possibly happen,” she said. Instead of her expression being filled with hope and optimism, she was regarding him through confused and somewhat hostile eyes.

Thomas looked at her for several seconds, all the while not fully understand these mixed signals he was receiving from her. She looked angry, but yet relieved. “What’s your name?” he eventually asked, all the while trying to ignore that pang that was ordering him to leave immediately.


“Can I ask you a question?” he asked.

“Sure, if I can ask you one as well.”

“You really believe that Mr. Wonka is the reason for your family’s business being saved?” he asked. “Couldn’t it have been hard work and dedication that your family has put into it?”

She shook her head. “No, we’ve worked hard for the last ten years trying to keep this place open. My parents put everything they had into it; we put ourselves in debt trying to keep it.” She waved her arms around as though indicating the groups of people who were packed inside the lobby. “You know last night I told you that my dream was to go to England?”

“Yes, I remember,” he said.

“I think right now, I would trade that dream for a chance to tell Mr. Wonka that I’m grateful to him for what he has done,” she said. “That sounds silly, doesn’t it?”

“Not as silly as you might think,” he said. “Tina, do you really believe that Willy Wonka is the
reason for your good fortune?”

She nodded. “I overheard my parents talking several nights ago, and they were saying that if business did not improve; we would not be able to stay open much longer. The profits were not coming in and the number of people who were coming to this town had dwindled. I figured that by Christmas there’d be nothing left for any of us. Now that a Golden Ticket has been found, we’ll probably be full until after Christmas.” She smiled despite the tears that were streaming down her face. “This is better than anything that could have possibly happened.”

“I’m glad it happened here then,” he said. “Now I’m ready to answer your question.”

Tina looked around the room, but feeling somewhat awkward, she shook her head. “I would rather not ask here,” she said. “Could you come with me? I know where we can talk and there won’t be so many people around.”

Thomas nodded as she led him through the hotel and up the stairs. As they reached the first floor, she led him down a hallway until they reached a meeting room. Using the key she carried, she unlocked the door, and they went inside.

The room itself was a large rectangular area, which Thomas guessed held close to a hundred chairs. In the center near the back wall, a table was placed. On it was a rotary telephone, which reminded him of the one in Willy’s office. The room was bright and cheerful, the sunshine drifting in from outside and filling it with light. At that precise moment, she turned around, closed, and locked the door before walking over to him, her eyes neither accusing nor hostile. Instead they regarded him with obvious confusion. When her next words emerged, he gasped.

“You’re not really Arthur Slugworth, are you?”
Chapter 20

Chapter 20: Tina’s Saving Grace

Thomas’ face registered first shock, but that was soon replaced by an uncanny lack of enthusiasm. Eventually, he offered her a slow, but defeated, nod. “No, I’m not,” he said trying to smile, but failing miserably.

As he looked at the young woman, he could clearly see that she no longer looked confused or hostile. In fact, there seemed to be traces of understanding lurking in her eyes. Although she still did not speak, her nod seemed to indicate to him that an explanation was in order.

Several moments of awkward silence passed and he took a deep breath. “How did you know?” Although his voice sounded tired, it was clear that he was taken aback and was left to ponder how a young woman could have so easily read through him. Had she somehow managed to listen in on the phone call he had placed to Willy the night before?

When she still did not speak, he took a deep breath, his throat now feeling dry and worn. It was as though his entire mouth suddenly felt the same sort of parchedness that came the morning after excessive drinking. “Tell me how it is you would come to ask me this question,” he eventually spoke. He inhaled sharply, his face taking on a whiteness that would have put a bed sheet to shame. He had no idea what her response was going to be. He only knew that there was no easy way out of this particular situation.

“You don’t have to worry, I won’t tell anyone,” she said, her expression neither smiling nor frowning. “You want to know how I managed to read through your act; correct?”

He nodded.

“Several years ago my older brother, Max was enrolled at the Berlin Institute for Business Studies. While he was there, he met Arthur Slugworth several times.” She looked away from him, her face now shadowed with sadness.

“He met Slugworth?” Thomas asked, but his question sounded more like a statement than an inquiry.

“Yes, Max was studying Market Research and Mr. Slugworth had signed on as a guest lecturer. They were conducted in the German language and there was no translator. Mr. Slugworth speaks fluent German. My brother would sometimes call after these lectures and tell our parents that he was so disgusted that he wanted to quit school and then would come straight home. He said that if that was what it took to run a business, then there was no point in our family paying for that kind of education.”

“He was willing to throw everything away because of one class?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, he said that Mr. Slugworth was the most arrogant, self-centered, and egotistical man he had ever come in contact with. As soon as the seminar had ended, he came home and started telling us about how this man was simply not nice and that he would stoop to any level to sell chocolate, even if it was illegal. Needless to say, after that, I never touched his wares again. His ethics were questionable and his attitude towards Willy Wonka, his most earnest competitor, was just loathsome.”

“I suppose I am not much of an actor,” Thomas mused.
“No, but be grateful for that,” she said. “The first thing I noticed when you came in last night was how you were nice to me. I was really scared that you would talk down at me or treat me like a peasant, but you didn’t. Later, I figured that you weren’t really Mr. Slugworth, because you behaved nothing like what I had heard.”

“You knew all this time that I wasn’t really Arthur Slugworth and yet you played along with this charade,” he said. “Why?”

“I don’t know,” she responded. “Maybe I was afraid of how you might react to what I knew. I mean; there’s always a chance that Mr. Slugworth could have gone through a personality transformation. I guess I didn’t want to push it, but I had a feeling that you weren’t really Mr. Slugworth because he speaks German.”

“Well there are other Arthur Slugworth’s out there, aren’t there?” he asked.

“Maybe, but when that Golden Ticket turned up here in town this morning, it did not take a genius to figure out the reason you were here,” she said. “Putting those factors together, I guess it became sort of a mystery to me. I wanted to find out who you were, so I tried to help you as much as I could. Of course, your response as to why you were here was weak, at best. You see, the real Arthur Slugworth would never have come to town by bus nor would he have agreed to carpool his way out of here once the Golden Ticket was discovered.”

She went over and pulled a chair off the stack and placed it on the floor. She then pulled a second and turned to look at him, all the while motioning towards the two chairs. “I’ve got plenty of time, so tell me truthfully who you are and why you’re even here.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “My name is Thomas, or Tom,” he confessed. “I’m sorry for deceiving you, Tina, but that’s all I can tell you.”

“Why is someone as nice as you going around impersonating such a dreadful man as Mr. Slugworth?” she asked.

“I don’t think you’d believe me if I told you, and this is something that is so important that it has to be kept a secret,” he said.

“I can keep a secret. I think I’ve proven that already,” she said. “Keep in mind that I haven’t exposed you to anyone, not even to my parents. You can trust me.”

He took a deep breath. “Maybe I better explain all of this, but I will need to use the phone, because I need some help in the matter.”

“Who could possibly help you to explain?” she asked.

He took a deep breath. “Willy Wonka.”

Tina’s skepticism suddenly turned to anger. “I don’t believe that,” she began. “After all the stuff we’ve talked about, you’re actually telling me that you know Willy Wonka?” When he nodded, she shook her head. “You know; I expected to hear a lot of responses from you, but that was one I did not anticipate at all. Who are you trying to kid? I’m not stupid, you know.”

“I never said that you were, and I am not playing a game here, I am being very serious,” he said as he took a deep breath. “Tina, I do know Willy Wonka, and he’s the reason why I’m here. I know that it seems hard for you to believe or even grasp, but everything I have told you has been the truth.”

Tina nodded as she lowered her head for several moments. “You really want to call Willy Wonka?”
she asked. “Fine, call him, but I’m not leaving. I’m not going to be the one you and your friends laugh about.” Without waiting for a response, she stood up and walked over to a table. He simply got up and followed her.

As soon as they reached the phone, he took a deep breath. “I just remembered that the number is in my room, and I need to get my belongings out of there. That way your staff can get it ready for the next guests,” he said apologetically. “Why don’t I go and do that and then we can place the call?” he suggested.

Tina looked at him skeptically. “You’re not going to do that, are you? You’re just going to leave without explaining.”

He shook his head. “No, I have every intention of keeping my word,” he said. “I will be leaving Duselheim today, but the problem is, the number I need is upstairs in my room. I don’t have it with me and I don’t have it memorized yet.” He paused, but after a moment, continued speaking. “Trust me; I will not leave without you knowing at least some of the answers you seek.”

She nodded as they went to the door to the room and she unlocked it. As she opened the door, he turned and faced her. “Wait here, I’ll be right back. You have my word, Tina.”

Instead of speaking, she closed the door while he slipped quietly out of the room. What he did not see were the hot tears that were now streaming down the young woman’s face.

As Thomas climbed the stairs, he contemplated what Willy would say. His friend would no doubt be disappointed in his cover having been blown. Not to mention the fact that his connection to the chocolatier could prove damaging to the overall project. He took a deep breath, this had turned out to be the one instance where Willy’s full-proof plan was not one hundred percent full-proof.

He reached the room, unlocked the door, and slipped quietly inside. Quickly, he changed clothes and was now wearing gray pants and a light blue shirt. He folded the rest of the clothing and placed them inside the suitcase. Casting a final glance around the room, he made sure that he had packed all of his personal effects and then closed and locked the suitcase. Just before leaving the room, he dug in the side pocket of his leather bag, found the card with the number on it, and slipped it into his pocket. The handkerchief with Willy’s initials, he pulled from the trench coat pocket and carefully put it in the pocket of his pants. The trench coat, he swung casually over his arm.

Grabbing his luggage, he went over to the door, opened it, stepped out into the hallway, and closed it firmly behind him. Picking up his belongings, he made his way back in the direction of the stairwell.

It took him a little longer to get the suitcase back down the stairs, but at the base of them, he walked back down the hall to the room where Tina was waiting. Tapping lightly on it, he spoke. “Tina, it’s me, open the door.”

The young woman must have been hovering over it because she immediately pulled the door open and motioned for him to come inside. “Do you have everything?” she asked as she closed and locked the door once again.

“Yes, I checked the room this morning before I went to breakfast and made sure that everything was packed,” he said as he dragged his luggage over to the wall. The trench coat he tossed over the top of it. He rubbed his forehead with his hands and then looked at her. “I have the number now.”

Tina nodded, but once more checked the door before following him over to the table where the
phone was kept. She watched as he picked it up and dialed the number that was printed on the card. Instead of standing and waiting, she went over and dragged the two chairs over to the table. She remained standing, but watched as Thomas seated himself, his fingers now lightly drumming against the wooden surface.

Several moments passed before Thomas took a deep breath and spoke. “It’s Tom.”

A relieved sigh filled his ear. “I’m so glad you called, I heard the first ticket was found and the news has been all over it,” Willy’s voice emerged. “That kid is really a human vacuum cleaner, isn’t he?”

“You’re not kidding and his parents are just as addicted to food as he is. I did deliver the message, but there’s a problem,” he said and cast a wary glance towards Tina.

For her part, the young woman grimaced, her eyes now depicting her level of hostility. She was most certainly not a problem, even if she was smart enough to read through all these silly games.

After several moments of silence passed, Thomas took a deep breath. “I don’t mean a problem, problem, but my cover has been blown here by a very kind, but at the same time, very skeptical and perceptive young woman.”

Tina’s frown disappeared at that moment and she felt a shy smile replacing her initial reaction. Thomas noticed this but said nothing further.

“What happened?” Willy asked.

“Arthur Slugworth speaks fluent German, and I don’t speak any, my cover was blown from the moment I stepped into this hotel,” Thomas said. “Tina knew this because her brother attended lectures by the real Slugworth in Berlin. She’s been playing along with this since last night, but everyone’s patience has a limit and she finally confronted me about what my real name was and why I am here.”

“Did you tell her?” Willy asked.

“Not everything, but enough,” came the response as Thomas began to wind the phone cord around his hand.

“Is she there with you now?” the chocolatier asked.

“Yes, she’s standing right beside me.”

“Let me talk to her, Tom.”

Thomas untangled the cord from his hand, but turned to Tina. “He wants to talk to you.”

“To me, but I don’t understand. Why?”

As the soft utterances emerged from her, Thomas could tell that she was nervous at the prospect of having the phone shoved into her hands. Yet, there she stood, her knees unconsciously beginning to knock. It was starting to look as though he was not a swindler after all. “Who is it?” she asked her voice meek.

“I think you know who it is, but he’ll introduce himself to you anyway,” he said as he extended the telephone receiver towards her.

She accepted it and nervously put it to her ear. “H-hello?”
“Is this Tina?” Willy asked.

“Yes.”

“This is Willy Wonka,” he said.

Upon hearing the introduction emerging from the man who seemed to possess a very pleasing tenor voice, the telephone slipped from her hand. In a split second, she covered her face with both hands and sank into the chair. “Oh mein Gott!” she whispered as she shook her head. (Oh my God!)

Thomas reached over and picked up the phone only to hear that Willy was now frantically calling out her name, all the while not knowing what was happening. “Will, it’s me, she’s a little bit taken aback,” he said.

“Is she alright?” Willy asked.

“I think so; she’s just a little bit surprised. I don’t think she was prepared for that,” he said as he cast a glance towards the young woman who was still shaking her head in disbelief. “Here, I’m going to try and put her back on, but she’s still quite overwhelmed. At the very least, she didn’t pass out, so that’s a plus.”

He reached over, took Tina’s hand in his, and placed the phone into it. “It’s alright,” he coaxed. “Just relax, Tina, he’s a normal person who happens to have an extraordinary job that he loves.”

Tina bit down on her lip, but nodded. With her hand still trembling somewhat, she raised the headset to her ear.

“Tina, are you there?”

Without thinking, she nodded. When he said her name once again, she swallowed and this time her voice emerged as a squeak. “Mr. Wonka is that really you or is Tom playing a really cruel trick on me?”

“Yes, it’s really me and no, Tom would never do such a thing,” he said, a soft chuckle emerging. “Who else would it be?”

“I-I don’t know, I’m sorry, I…” she began, but after a moment her voice failed her.

“…Are you alright?” he asked.

“I think so,” she said nervously.

“You’re a little surprised that I’m Tom’s friend, aren’t you?” he asked.

“Y-yes,” she managed all the while trying to swallow the numerous lumps that constantly seemed to get lodged in her throat. Her breathing remained uneven and she looked at Thomas, but no words emerged. Instead, Willy spoke.

“Take a few slow, deep breaths,” he said kindly.

Tina smiled slightly upon hearing these comforting words and began to inhale and exhale slowly. “That’s it, now just try and calm yourself down so we can talk.”

Tina nodded, somehow surprised that instead of hearing the words of an arrogant businessman, she was hearing a voice that seemed to match that of a friend. “That’s easier said than done, I’m afraid,” she eventually spoke, her voice laced with weak laughter.
“I don’t know, you’re laughing,” he said and it was clear that he was using this particular tactic to divert her focus from her apprehension.

“I always do that when I get nervous,” she responded. “What do you do when you’re nervous?”

“I eat something sweet,” he said. “It keeps me from grinding my teeth.”

“Well, you probably have enough of that around,” she said freely.

“Yes, so it would seem,” he chuckled. “Do you, at least, feel any better?”

“I’m still nervous, but my heart’s not racing anymore,” she admitted.

“Tina, you have absolutely no reason to feel nervous or on edge with me,” Willy said. “It’s just like Tom said; I happen to be someone who loves his work.”

“I am too,” she said softly. “I never thought I would have admitted it, but I really do.” She paused, her next words emerging as she felt herself starting to relax. “You’re very kind, Mr. Wonka.”

“Thank you,” he said, and inhaled before continuing. “Tom told me that you figured him out, that you’re quite smart and observant. You seem to pay very special attention to details.”

“I don’t think it’s a great credit to me actually, I just remembered what my brother had told me about Arthur Slugworth,” she said.

“What did he say?” Willy asked.

“Which time?” she laughed. “There were so many.”

“Pick your favorite,” he said.

“Max told me that Arthur Slugworth was a pompous egomaniac,” she said. “He said that he would go over bodies to get what he wanted. He even said that stealing from people like you was no big deal as long as the profit margin was met. Max was pretty repulsed by him and that sort of wore off on the rest of our family. None of us like him at all now.”

“It must have surprised you when you got a call saying that Slugworth was coming to Duselheim and wanted to stay at your family’s hotel,” Willy said.

“Yes,” Tina said her voice cracking. “I didn’t want to admit it, but the prospect of this man coming and staying here scared me to death. Not just because of what Max had told me, but also the things I had heard about him from other people that Max knew.”

“You were really scared?” he asked.

“Yes, I was glad when he arrived and couldn’t speak German. It affirmed to me that the man I had met wasn’t that Slugworth I was thinking of. Then the Golden Ticket was found and I spent all morning trying to figure out who he really is and what was going on. Somehow, I realized that there must be a reason for everything that has happened. I didn’t know what it was, but I knew that something felt wrong, so I confronted Tom about it.”

“And that was when he told you that his name was Thomas, correct?” Willy asked.

“Yes, but then he dropped your name and I was…” her voice trailed off.

“…Surprised?” the chocolatier supplied.
“Maybe a little bit, but I was also very angry,” she confessed. “I started telling him that I wasn’t stupid.”

“No, you’re not stupid,” Willy said. “But, why were you angry?”

“I don’t know,” she hedged.

“Well, there must be a reason, as anger is generally something that is caused by some outside force. You’re not just angry to be angry,” he said. “Tell me why you were angry.”

“I guess because I felt for you, I felt badly that people were so hateful towards you. But, like a dummy, I dismissed the possibility that someone else could be friends with you.” She took a deep breath. “I’m sorry.”

“No reason, but perhaps Tom now understands what you are experiencing with this,” he said. “You are a very empathic person, and such people are those whom anyone would be honored to call a friend.”

Tina helplessly looked at Thomas, her eyes filling with tears as she lowered her head so that he would not see the emotion that had overwhelmed her. Normally, she never showed others her emotions, but yet here she was, a nineteen-year-old girl crying for what she believed to be no reason whatsoever. “T-thank you.”

“You’re welcome, but there is something that we must discuss before this conversation ends,” he said.

“I hope that you will explain some of this to me, because I-I really don’t understand why all these things have been happening,” she said.

“I know you don’t understand, but anymore knowledge than that, which you possess, could pose a threat to you. It is for that reason that I ask you to trust me,” he said. “I know that it is not easy to put your trust into a voice on a telephone, but that is what I’m asking of you.”

“I trust you, Mr. Wonka, but please don’t ask me why, because I really don’t know the answer,” she said. “Most would consider me to be crazy for believing or trusting, but I do.”

“I had that feeling,” he said.

“Is there anything else you want me to do?” she asked.

“No, you’ve been very kind to both of us. I am grateful to you for that. Be very careful with your knowledge, though. I would not wish for you or your family to get implicated in any way because of my actions,” he said.

“How could I?” she asked. “That seems almost impossible.”

“Believe me, it’s not,” he said. “Anyone who knows that Tom is connected to me can get hurt by my enemies. I just want you to be careful after Tom leaves. Will you promise me that?”

She looked at Thomas and then down at her hands. She closed her eyes as her next words emerged. “I promise.”

“I’ll hold you to it,” he said.

“How will you do that?”
“I have my ways,” he said, this time he was chuckling. After a few seconds passed, his voice grew earnest. “Tina, please don’t mention this call to anyone, alright?”

“I won’t. It’s the least I can do since my family owes you so much,” she whispered.

“My dear, how in the world do you figure that?” he asked.

“After that Gloop boy found the Golden Ticket, our business got saved. Just during this morning alone, people have been flocking into Duselheim from all over the world. Our hotel is the only place that offers lodging here. Now, for the first time since my parents opened it, it’s completely full,” she said. “You have become our saving grace, Mr. Wonka. We can finally pay off the loans and stay in business. If it weren’t for one of those Golden Tickets turning up here, then we would have lost everything.”

“I’m really glad that I could help,” he said. “I never thought that this could help other people to stay in business, but I’m glad that it has served your family as well as it has.”

“I am too,” she smiled.

“You take care, Tina,” he said.

“You too, God bless you, sir,” she said and handed the phone back to Thomas.

As soon as he had it, he spoke, “are you still angry that I told her?”

“No,” Willy said, “she’s delightful.”

“Yes, she’s a young, ambitious, and dedicated lady,” Thomas said with a nod. After a few moments of silence, he changed the subject. “Will, I’ll be heading to Munich once I leave here. Tina said that she knew some people who are carpooling down there and I figured that I could take the rest of the time in Germany to enjoy some sightseeing. My flight from Frankfurt will leave in three days and I should be getting back to London on Friday.”

“Yes, it’s probably smart of you to get out of Duselheim as soon as possible,” the candy maker said. “Make sure you ask Tina for a business card. I want an address.”

“I will,” he said with a cheeky grin. “But what happened to your advice about destroying contact addresses?”

“Just bring it,” Willy said.

“I will, and I’ll try and call you once I get there,” he said.

“You do that,” he paused. “Be careful, my friend, and give Tina my thanks.”

Thomas hung up the phone and looked over at her. Her face was unusually white and she sat with her body hunched over. For whatever reason, she seemed to be staring down at the toes of her shoes.

“He wanted me to offer his thanks to you,” he said.

“This all seems so unbelievable,” she said, all the while shaking her head. Eventually, she raised her head and looked at him. “I’m sorry if I was so rude to you earlier. I was just surprised. It’s not every day I get to talk to someone as famous as Mr. Wonka. He is a very kind man.”

“Yes, he is, and I must also apologize to you for not having been honest with you,” he said.
“What’s going to happen now?” she asked. “Are you really going to leave?”

“I have to, my work here is finished and it’s time for me to move on,” he said. As these words hung in the air, he looked at her, his dark eyes intent. “Tina, you’re going to have to be very careful at least until after the first of October. That’s the official end of the Golden Ticket contest.”

“I will. Mr. Wonka warned me that I could get into trouble if I say too much,” she said. “It made my day that I got the chance to thank him for helping us.”

“I think that made his day, too,” Thomas said. “It was an aspect of things that he didn’t consider when all of this started.”

“It just feels like I’m in the middle of some wonderful fairy tale,” she smiled as she pulled a slip of paper out of her pocket and unfolded it. “And now all that’s left is for you to pay the piper.”

He nodded. “It’s not a bad idea; we should take care of this before we forget.” He extended to her the key to his room. “Incidentally, he’d like to have a business card from you. I don’t know what he has planned with it, but I think Will wants to know about all the nice places I’ve visited and the wonderful people I’ve met.”

“Will?” she smiled slightly as she dug in the pocket of her jacket and produced a card. “You must be very good friends to call him that.” She handed the card to him.

As he accepted it, he smiled. “We are.” Next, he reached into his pocket and pulled out his wallet. Glancing down at the numbers that were printed on the page, he counted out the money and handed it her. The business card, he tucked securely in his wallet before returning it to his pocket.

“I guess it’s time for us to leave, huh?” she asked. “My friends should be getting together at the bus stop right about now. I wish we could talk some more though.”

“Maybe one day when you make that trip to England then we can take tea and talk. You don’t ever know what the future may bring,” he said.

“Well, before you came, it seemed almost established, but now it’s unexplainable,” she said as they stood up and left the room.
Chapter 21

Chapter 21: Coincidences and Other Concerns

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s Point of View

As he hung up the phone after his conversation with the girl in Germany, Willy smiled. She had called him her ‘saving grace’. He had been called many things in his life, some of which were not good or kind, but he could not recall having someone call him something as special as this. He would never deny that he liked the way that sounded. Tina had indeed been very kind.

In the back of his mind, with everything that was happening in London, he had pondered whether or not the Golden Ticket idea had actually been a good one. Now, he could not deny the overtly positive benefits of it.

He had watched the news and could not help but notice how Augustus Gloop sat at a table and was completely fixated on the sausage and sauerkraut. Of course, he had paid far more attention to Thomas who was behind the boy balancing plates. When he saw his friend leaning over, just before the reporter turned to Mrs. Gloop, he had smiled. The bait had been set.

The other question that hung in the air was how the boy managed to pack away so much food. The chocolatier had not even been present when the boy was interviewed, or better said, eating, and he still felt sickened at the sight. How could a child eat that much, and why on earth would they even want to?

Rubbing his hands together, he got to his feet and stretched. The factory felt completely empty without his closest friends there. Sighing, he remembered how he had sent Eliza to live at his grandfather’s house in Cornwall several years ago. She had always come back to visit, but now since the contest had started, her visits had ceased.

He really did not wish for her to leave, but he knew that with all that extra publicity; it would have been close to impossible for her to come and go, as she had grown accustomed. He knew that if there was going to be a contest at all, then sending her away would be the only feasible option. He sorely missed her, but he knew that it was important to make the best of things. He also made a point to call her every day.

He was quite happy that Eliza had met someone. Just from hearing her voice on the phone, he could tell that she was happier than she had been in years. He was also fully aware that living in Cornwall had been a dream of hers and he was gratified in knowing that he had a part in helping her dream to come true.

As for Willy, he had spent months on end preparing for this contest. He was closing in on his forty-fifth year and although some may call it a mid-life-crisis, he was realistic enough to know that nothing lasted forever. He knew it would all eventually end and because both Thomas and Eliza were older than him, it would mean that he needed someone to pass the factory on to. The future of the Oompa Loompas depended on it.

Both Thomas and Eliza knew how he wanted the factory to be run, but Willy understood that he would need to find someone who was younger than him. His hopes were to find another person who understood the power of these dreams. To Willy Wonka, that was the most important thing of all.

It had been Eliza and Thomas who had inspired him to send out the tickets in the first place. “Hold a
contest,” Eliza had suggested. “You could hit two birds with one stone.”

He smiled as he remembered having asked her why he would want to hit a bird. She had laughed and called him a ‘silly boy’, but explained that this would not only help him find a protégé, but it would also put his name back on the map. Of course, the more he thought about that particular idea, the better it sounded. With the help of his two friends, he fashioned the five tickets and slipped them into the candy bars.

His next task was centered on devising the specific tests that each of the children would go through before he made his selection. He was not exactly fond of letting strangers into the factory, but desperate times called for desperate measures. He knew that if he was careful about it, that they could easily pull it off. Here was where Thomas’ contract had come in. If each of the children were to sign the contract upon entering the factory, then he would not be liable if something were to happen to them. Thomas’ background with legalese seemed to be just what he had needed in this regard. Unfortunately, most children didn’t read the fine print on things, but that was why their parents were present.

Now, after having watched Augustus Gloop on television, he swallowed the lump that formed in his throat when he heard the words: ‘I feel sorry for Wonka; it’s going to cost him a fortune in fudge’. From the way the boy spoke and ate, it was obvious that he was not just whistling ‘Dixie’.

It seriously looked as though this boy’s appetite could, and perhaps would, turn his beloved Chocolate Room into a travesty in five seconds. This was not good, and Willy felt a sense of impending doom as he thought of what the Gloop boy had said. Even with that idea looming over his head, Willy could not help but contemplate what Tina had said only moments ago.

As he had watched the interview on television, he was slowly becoming convinced that the Golden Ticket in Duselheim had actually been a mistake. At the end of his conversation with her, he found himself feeling grateful that he had sent the ticket to that particular location after all.

They are good people and deserve to have their life’s work saved, Willy thought with a sly smile. After all, they must be nice people since they detested Arthur Slugworth as much as he did. He was still concerned about this turn of events nonetheless.

If Tina had figured out Thomas’ façade, then there stood a chance that others could as well. This meant that their plan had not been as solid as he initially thought.

His thoughts shifted to the real Slugworth and what he was saying about the contest. Willy had been in business long enough to know the reputation of his malicious competitor. He was fully aware that there existed a risk factor, even if others did not see the threat. It was for that reason that Willy tended to worry about the safety of his friends whenever they were out beyond the walls of the factory. He knew that Thomas could take care of himself, but people like Linda and Molly, or even Tina, caused his concerns to be heightened. At the same instance, it seemed odd for him to worry himself over people he did not even know. Sure, he had spoken to Tina on the phone, but Linda and little Molly were two people he had never even met.

It surprised him that he would feel this much concern and compassion for two people he had never even seen before. Was all this happening because of Thomas’ presence in their lives? he asked himself, but the answer to his question never came.

His thoughts abruptly shifted as he got to his feet and walked over to the Wonkavator. Pressing a button, the doors slid open and he pulled the glass elevator door open before stepping inside. As the outer doors slid closed, he pressed the button for the Chocolate Room and waited out the three or four minutes until it stopped.
As soon as it did, he glanced down at his watch. It was nearly time for the daily creaming and sugaring. The Oompa Loompas were always punctual about this task and they took it very seriously. Of course, Willy knew that they were the most trustworthy workers he had ever had. They were also quite entertaining as they sang songs and danced around the containers while pouring the mixtures into the chocolate river.

On this day, the door to the Chocolate Room stood open. It stood to reason since there was no one else but him and the Oompa Loompas in the factory.

He slowly made his way down the stairs and started to walk along the path, the large balls filled with chocolate, he carefully kicked aside. The room was his masterpiece and something that was so special to him that he could not fathom someone like Augustus Gloop even coming inside. In fact, the mere thought simply made him shudder. *The things I must do in order to find someone to one day continue in my place,* he thought.

He continued further down the path in the direction of a small crop of plants. They looked to be about the same size as a tiny rosebud, but they were yellow in color and shaped like tiny Victorian style teacups. These confections seemed to be growing from green stems that were planted into the ground. The sweet syrup that came from these confections was his favorite. Whenever he would sit in this room, he always enjoyed the solitude of sitting amongst them and enjoying the sweet nectar that came from them.

Sitting down on the ground, he removed his hat. Reaching for one of the budding cups, he carefully picked it up, brought it to his lips, and took a sip. A flavor that was very much like a sweet lemon cream slid down his throat and he sighed with contentment. The taste could not have been more perfect.

As he finished drinking the liquid inside the small cup, he brought it to his mouth and took a bite. It was delicious, the tingling of citrus, but still different than the taste of the nectar. It was like eating a piece of citrus flavored candy. The sugary confection was wonderful. *Too bad I cannot easily bring some of these ideas into the market,* he thought for what seemed to be the umpteenth time. Even with all of his magic, Willy knew that some things were simply too difficult for him to package.

His mind began to drift. Thomas was in Germany, perhaps taking a few days off to recuperate until he was due to travel to Buckinghamshire early the following week. Willy pondered if he would have better luck with that child. It seemed to him that Thomas was meeting delightful children and young people on his travels, but these were not the types of people who were finding the Golden Tickets. *I wanted them to play fair,* he thought, but every time I turn on the television or read the paper, I see more and more reasons why I gave up on humanity in the first place. He got to his feet and started to walk towards the river, his eyes now on the clear plastic tubes. These were stuck in the chocolate liquid, would suck it up, and, like clockwork, send it to the various stations around the factory.

As he stared up at these tubes, he could not help wonder just how far Augustus would come. Could the German boy become his protégé? Was there a chance that a boy who loved chocolate could pass the test that he intended to unleash? The chocolatier did not wish for anything horrible or tragic to happen to the children who would eventually come here, but he wanted to test them, to see if they were really noble in spirit.

“Remember William, no one is perfect,” Eliza’s wise words suddenly filtered through his mind.

“I know that,” he had responded. “You know that I don’t want anything terrible to happen to any of them, Eliza. But, the truth remains that I am not getting any younger and I will one day be unable to go on. I will need to find someone who can continue where I will ultimately have to leave off. I also
need to have someone who will be able to look after the Oompa Loompas.”

“But you still have plenty of good years left in you, William,” she had scolded him lightly, her voice filled with that ever-present wisdom.

After that conversation, Willy knew that she possessed a wisdom that only a mother could have. Contrary to their past arguments, he knew that she not only believed in him, but she also trusted that what he was doing was right.

Somewhere deep inside, Willy knew instinctively that the one who would one day fulfill this dream would be a child. A child knows instinctively what was right, and he hoped that the children who would come would be old enough to understand, but also young enough to learn. He did not intend to change these children, not in the least, but if he was ready and willing to give his entire factory over to a child, then they would have to be honest and loving. It would also help matters monumentally if the child in question was as excited about candy making as he was.

He started to walk out of the Chocolate Room, it was now empty and the Oompa Loompas had long since finished the task of creaming and sugaring. Upon completion, they had now retreated to their rooms to have lunch with their families.

Reaching the door, he opened it and stepped out into the corridor where the Wonkavator was still waiting. Perhaps this whole idea was a brilliant marketing strategy. It would enable him to sell a million candy bars, but at what cost? He was not sure about the emotional costs that such an undertaking could conjure up. Of course, one thing was clear, the world was immersed in it and even if he wanted, it was too late to back out now.

Willy was fully aware that this contest could very easily backfire on him. Nothing was ever going to be full proof, nothing at all, but he still hoped that, somehow, his plan would work.

Stepping inside the great glass elevator, he made his way back to the office in record time.

Approaching his desk he noticed the slip of paper resting with names and numbers scrawled across it. At the top of the page was the name Eliza with the number in Cornwall.

For several minutes he stared at the phone, his thoughts drifting. Finally, he reached over and retrieved the telephone receiver and dialed the number to Linda’s house. He knew that they would not be home, but he figured that it would do no harm to call and ask about Linda and Molly and when they would be returning. Maybe there would be someone there who could tell him where they were staying.

“This is ridiculous and dangerous,” he muttered under his breath, but after a moment, he sat waiting as the line was picked up.

“What?” a stranger’s voice filled his ear. The cadence seemed to emerge from an older Scottish sounding gentleman.

“Good afternoon, sir,” Willy began. “Have I reached the home of Linda and Molly?”

“That you have,” he said. “This is Linda’s father, Patrick, who may I ask is calling?”

Willy swallowed, he remembered the last time he had given his name over the phone and Tina had reacted in a rather intimidated manner. He took a deep breath and this time, instead of saying ‘Willy Wonka’, he decided to give the name that Eliza had always used when addressing him. “My name is William.”
“Are you by chance a friend of my daughter?” he asked, “or perhaps one of my granddaughter’s school teachers?”

“Sadly, I am neither,” he said. “I’m calling from London, but I promised my friend, Tom that I would ring them after they returned home. Tom was seated with her and Molly on the plane when they flew to Germany yesterday afternoon. They gave him this number and I wanted to contact your family and see about fulfilling a promise on Tom’s behalf.”

“Oh thank heavens,” Patrick abruptly shouted, his outburst coming as a complete surprise to Willy who was left pondering what exactly had just happened.

“I beg your pardon?” he asked.

“Forgive me,” the man said in a rush, “but knowing the current state of my daughter, I suppose this reaction would seem rather peculiar to you and I can completely understand why. You see; I had no idea where she went.

Perhaps you might be able to enlighten me.”

“She didn’t tell you?” Willy asked; the surprise etched in his own voice. “I cannot imagine a young lady going on a trip and not telling her family where she is going.”

“I know,” he said, his voice emerging strained and worn out. “She just said that she was taking Molly on a trip so that they could resolve some things. Otherwise she did not mention where she was going or what she intended to do while there. I have pretty much been waiting by the phone since they left Buckinghamshire late yesterday morning.”

“You live in Buckinghamshire?” Willy asked.

“Yes, is that of any consequence?” Patrick responded with a question of his own.

“I’m not really sure,” the chocolatier said honestly, “perhaps not.”

“If you know where specifically they have gone, then please tell me,” Patrick said, this time his thoughts seemed rightfully consumed with the hope of finding the precise whereabouts of his daughter.

Willy took a deep breath. “Tom said that Linda and Molly were on their way to Munich. I don’t have anything specific about where they are staying. All that I have is what Tom said to me in a brief phone call yesterday afternoon as well as a conversation from last night.”

“Sounds like the proverbial needle in the haystack, doesn’t it?” Patrick asked.

“Yes,” Willy responded. “I must admit that I am quite surprised that someone would do that.”

“Well, I suppose it stands to reason,” Patrick said.

“I’m sorry, Patrick, but with all due respect, I see no rationale for someone to do this sort of thing,” Willy said. “You seem a very loving and caring father. I would think that Linda would consider herself lucky to have you.”

The line went silent, but Patrick soon cleared his throat and spoke. “Thank you, William, but I don’t blame my daughter for running away. She has, you see, lived her life in a very isolated and lonely existence. She withdrew from both her mother and me right after she got married.”

“That doesn’t sound very promising,” the chocolatier remarked.
“Well, God forgive me for saying this, but her whole outlook changed after she met and married Owen Slugworth about ten years ago. Don’t get me wrong; I am not the sort of man who would wait for the first opportunity to put down his son-in-law. However, it had quickly become apparent that she had become helplessly dependent on him. For the most part, Linda lost most of her contacts and friends. After having sacrificed everything for her husband, she was left pretty much alone. This man is a vicious cad for doing what he did, but now all I can do is try and help her pick up the pieces.”

“You said, Owen Slugworth? Is he per chance, any relation to Arthur Slugworth, the confectioner?” Willy asked his voice now etched in hostility. It would seem that the Slugworth family was out to haunt him at every turn, and this latest scenario was case in point.

“From what I understand, Arthur is Owen’s uncle, but I figure that both of them are equally as bad. Linda mentioned that his uncle raised Owen. She went on to say that Arthur hoped that Owen would one day take over ‘Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated’. When Owen married my daughter, the uncle demonstrated overt opposition to his ‘charge’ getting married to anyone. Just before the wedding, the man simply disappeared and none of us ever heard anything from him. There were rumors circulating that Arthur and Owen had been in touch, but nothing conclusive. It suddenly became clear to all of us that the Slugworth family looked down at us. Somehow, they probably figured us to be using this as a method of worming our way into inheriting the factory.” Patrick snorted, “the very idea.”

“I’ve heard a great many stories about them,” Willy said dryly. “So nothing that you say about them truly surprises me.”

“Most people aren’t surprised, their family is as bitter as the candy they produce,” Patrick said. “All I know is that Arthur Slugworth has never met my daughter or even visited his grandniece. The irony about this whole thing is that he hates children. Can you imagine that a chocolatier would actually hate children? Isn’t that their target for making candy in the first place?”

“It should be, but for some, it’s sadly all about business and the bottom line,” Willy said openly. “Some will go out of their way to steal or harm their competition in any way they can, but they have completely forgotten the joy that their confections are supposed to bring.”

“Those were exactly my thoughts,” Patrick said. “Strange how one of the most ruthless men in the chocolate industry is my little Molly’s great uncle.”

Willy nodded sadly. Thomas had described her as such a precious little girl, and now he felt torn at the mere mention of the child’s name. She should not be to blame for her family, but yet, he had been scared deeply by the Slugworths himself. This left a very bitter taste in his mouth indeed.

“Are you still there?” Patrick’s voice suddenly emerged and broke into Willy’s thoughts.

“Yes,” the chocolatier managed to speak, but nothing further could emerge. Instead, there was an almost unsettling silence that swallowed him whole. He did not like himself for judging Molly, but at the same instance, the competition between the two confectioners had been long and very bitter.

“William?” Patrick suddenly spoke his name and brought him crashing out of his reverie. “I’m sorry to go on about all of this. I just love my granddaughter so much, and she is a really a very sweet child. Perhaps I should add that she loves Willy Wonka far more than any member of the Slugworth family. It is truly an ironic twist of fate, is it not?”

Willy swallowed. Hearing those words made the lump that had been lodged in his throat grow from the size of a pinball to that of a basketball in a matter of seconds. To hear that Molly loved a perfect stranger more than members of her own family seemed strange to him. “How can a child love
“Aye, it’s possible for a child,” Patrick said. “She used to collect wrappers from chocolate bars and keep them in a small notebook. It was a charming thing that she did, but after some time, she abruptly stopped doing it. When I asked her why, she said that her daddy was upset with her for collecting them. Perhaps it was because there were more Wonka wrappers in her collection than Slugworth ones. Who really knows?”

“A child should not be forced to eat something strictly based on loyalty,” Willy said firmly. For some reason these words made his blood run cold.

“No, but that is how the Slugworth clan operates,” Patrick said. “Right after Owen and Linda got married, everything seemed to be alright, but then I started noticing things that were happening with her, things that showed clearly that they were not the happiest or most perfect couple.”

“What sorts of things?” Willy asked. When he heard that Linda’s father had hesitated, he continued speaking. “Please, I already know more than I really should, and although I cannot really explain why, I think your daughter needs help. She should have someone who is going to stand by her and her little girl during this difficult time. I want to help them both if I can.”

“I can tell just from talking to you that you really do want to help, but I am simply not certain if telling you what I know is actually going to do that,” Patrick said honestly. “Ever since Owen walked out, she has been walking around the house in a daze. After that, she called me to say that she and Molly were leaving to go on a trip. I knew almost instinctively that she was running away, but there was very little I could do to stop her. She’s a rather determined young lady. She takes after her mother in that regard.”

“I know several people who are like that,” Willy said, but it was obvious that the chocolatier’s concern was growing by leaps and bounds. The longer he spoke with Patrick, the more panicked he became.

There was something that remained abundantly clear in his mind and that was that if Slugworth was willing to stoop to any level to steal his recipes through spies, then his nephew could resort to physical violence in order to push his will upon another person. Finally a question emerged that surprised him beyond recognition. “Did Owen abuse her or Molly?”

“Funny you should ask because a few times I wondered if he had abused her,” Patrick said openly. “Linda claimed that she had fallen down stairs or walked into doors. You must understand, William; my daughter is many things, but she is most certainly not clumsy. I have seen how she had bruises on her that could not simply be explained away.”

Willy took a deep breath. “I am going to help you find your daughter,” he affirmed his voice marked with strange determination contrary to his own reclusive nature.

“How can you?” he asked. “You only know that she’s in Munich, although I think that there stands a chance that she could have gone to King Ludwig’s castle. She has always been fascinated with it.”

“Well, Tom called me this morning and is on his way to Munich. When he calls later, I will tell him to get on the next train to Füssen. That way maybe he can intercept them and get them to call you.”

“Why would you or your friend go through all this trouble for the sake of finding my daughter?” Patrick asked. “You don’t know me, you don’t even know her, but you are telling me that you are going to try and find her. I am not quite certain I can believe that you have noble intentions in mind. What if you are one of Arthur’s cronies who have been hired to take my granddaughter away from someone she’s never even met? Is that even possible?” he mused more to himself than to Patrick.
our family?"

“I can assure you that I would never do such a thing. I have absolutely no intention of hurting your
daughter or granddaughter and I certainly would not ever do anything that could expose them to
danger. The reason I want to help lies more in the fact that I know of the tactics of the Slugworth
family first hand. I have been impacted by their dealings and actions for quite some time, and so I can
see the legitimacy of your concerns.”

“What do you mean?” Patrick asked. “How exactly were you affected by Arthur Slugworth?”

Willy took a deep breath. “I was affected very profoundly by this man and his company because I
too am a candy maker and many of my inventions and ideas have been stolen by people like Arthur
Slugworth.”

Patrick was silent for several moments, and it seemed as though he was trying desperately to piece all
of this together. Eventually Willy could hear his voice on the other end of the line, the single word

As soon as he heard the man mumble his given name, all Willy could do was patiently wait until
Patrick had figured out with whom he had been freely speaking.

When Patrick’s voice eventually emerged, the chocolatier smiled. “You’re Willy Wonka?”

“Yes,” Willy said simply.

“Well, my goodness! Why didn’t you just say so?” Patrick asked. “I’m a relatively open minded kind
of guy, and you really gave this old mind here a run for its money. I was thinking that…oh never
mind what I was thinking.”

“Perhaps I should have introduced myself straightaway,” Willy said softly. “The truth is, the last time
I introduced myself with that name, the young lady with whom I was speaking dropped the phone
and started whispering ‘oh my God!’ in German. It just seemed easier to offer you my given name as
opposed to the one I market. I also did that because Linda and Molly do not yet know that Tom is
connected to me in any way. They just think he is someone they met on a plane.”

“I can understand your concern, but, Willy, I mean; William, this only increases my concern for both
of them. The media circus that is surrounding your contest will no doubt make whatever you try
difficult for all parties involved,” Patrick said. “The other thing; what if Owen happens to catch wind
of all of this? Blood is thicker than water you know, and he would no doubt go straight to his uncle
with whatever he manages to find out.”

“I haven’t any idea, I’m afraid,” Willy said. “Do you think that Linda and Molly would be safe at
home?”

“I don’t know, I haven’t really considered this,” Patrick said. “But, my guess is that we’re going to
have to find them first.”

“Tom will,” Willy said confidently. “He’s very good about finding things and people. That’s why
he’s out there doing the leg work.”

“I won’t ask why,” Patrick said, a chuckle emerging.

Willy took a deep breath and with a nod, he made a decision. “Patrick, I’m going to give you my
number, please put it in a very safe place. If it falls into the wrong hands then I will have no choice
but to change it and then you won’t be able to contact me at all.”
“Alright,” Patrick said and Willy gave him the direct line to his office. Willy could hear these strange sounds of a pencil to paper as the older man wrote. “I’ve got it. You will call me if you hear anything?” he asked.

“Of course,” Willy responded, “you have my word on that.”

Several minutes later, the call ended and Willy hung up the phone.

Now, all he could do was sit and wait for Thomas to arrive in Munich and relate to him what he had been able to find out. His only hope was that everything would be all right. At this point, he was starting to feel an unbelievable concern for Linda and Molly, and this was very strange since he had never been introduced to either of them.

*Molly is a Slugworth,* he thought with foreboding, *but she loves me, and that precious child doesn’t even know me.*

At least not yet!
Chapter 22

Chapter 22: A New Journey Begins

Less than an hour after his conversation with Tina and their call to Willy, the young woman led Thomas across the street in the direction of the bus stop. “You know, I had sort of hoped that you would have been able to stay for another day.”

“I figured as much, but I can’t, it’s better that I go,” he said, but eventually stopped walking, turned, and looked at her. “May I ask you something rather personal?”

“Sure,” Tina said. “What is it?”

“When I returned from my room, your face looked wet, as though you had been crying. I couldn’t really understand why that was the case, but you had a very unhappy look about you. It seems as though you were genuinely afraid that I was going to leave without explaining, weren’t you?”

“Yes, I was,” she said with an unhappy nod. “I know that it’s rather silly for me to cry over such things. I’m sorry.”

Thomas reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder. “It’s not silly, but there was a reason for it, wasn’t there?”

“Yes,” she began. “I don’t know why I am telling you this, but maybe it will clarify the reason why I behaved as I did. You see, I once had a sister, her name was Trisha and she was five years older than me. I completely adored her. She was beautiful, intelligent, and everyone in town seemed to love her. This was when I was ten-years-old and she had this dream of becoming an actress. I remember how she used to argue with our parents about wanting to do an internship at a theater company. My father later told me about how they had had a terrible argument and she ended up running away. I never really knew the truth about her except that she wanted no contact with any of us, and perhaps that is what makes it so painful. It’s one of those horrible family things that no one dares ask about, but everyone knows of.”

“What about your brother, Max, did he ever tell you about anything?” Thomas asked. “Since he studied and is older, perhaps he might have remembered.”

She shook her head. “I don’t really know because after he finished with his studies, he settled in Berlin. The only one left is me and I don’t dare ask my parents about it.”

“I see,” he began. “I’m really sorry if I opened up any painful memories for you.”

“No, you didn’t,” she said. “Of course, I would like to one day know the truth about my sister. In very much the same way, she promised me that she would come back, but she never did.” She paused, but started to walk once again. “I’m sorry this story is not only depressing, it is also very hard. Every so often I am reminded of these events and I must face them over and over again. But how do you call it when you are going about your business and certain words send you catapulting back to that moment; back to that time?”

“It is rather like being stigmatized,” he said. “I reminded you of her when I promised that I would return. I intended to keep that promise, but you had no way of knowing whether or not I was sincere about it.”

Tina nodded. “I told you it was stupid.”
“Not if it reminds you of a moment in your life that cannot ever be replaced,” he said. “It was never my intention to open up old wounds for you.”

Tina took a deep breath. “It’s alright. I guess I should be over it. I mean; it happened nearly ten years ago.”

“No one ever fully gets over it,” he said as he touched her shoulder. “I lost my brother several years ago, so I can understand what you must be feeling.” Instead of elaborating on this point, he moved his hand and rested it over the pocket where the hotel’s business card was carefully tucked away.

“Perhaps we ought to focus on happier things,” Tina said. “Like how happy I was to meet you and to speak with your friend. I’m only sorry that my attitude put you off.”

“You did nothing of the sort,” Thomas said. “The pleasure was entirely mine. If for some reason you do happen to get to England then perhaps I can show you around.”

“That would be wonderful, but not very probable,” she said. “I spent most of my life here in Duselheim and am probably one of those people who will stay here until I go to meet my maker.”

“Maybe not,” he said. “One never really knows what good fortune will come next. Just as you didn’t know what was going to happen this morning after that Golden Ticket was discovered.”

“Perhaps that’s just a miracle that we should simply embrace,” she said.

“May I ask you another question?” he asked. “I promise this one won’t be as painful as the last one was.” When she nodded, he continued. “If you have lived your whole life here, then how did you learn to speak such good English?”

“I learned in a special school, but I also have pen pals from all over the world. Now that I’m almost twenty, I try to use my knowledge to help with our business,” she said. “I like the language, and absolutely love the music.”

Thomas smiled. “I’m afraid my musical tastes are rather limited. My brother was a pretty big Beatles fan though.”

“I’ve always been a Beatles fan,” she said. “I don’t think that will ever change, not even when I’m sixty.”

Thomas smiled, but instead of responding, he looked around where they were walking. The sky was blue overhead, and the narrow streets had cars parked along one side. The entire town seemed to emanate European simplicity. “This is truly a beautiful little town,” he remarked.

She nodded. “I love living here, even if sometimes it feels small and insignificant.”

“It must not be all that insignificant if a Golden Ticket ends up here, Tina,” he said. “It is a nice little town. I enjoyed seeing the glockenspiel and was reminded of something rather important; like having fun and making new friends.”

Tina laughed. “You take time out for fun, that’s nothing like your namesake, you know.”

Thomas chuckled as they reached the bus stop and Tina waved to a group of young men who were standing alongside a large gray colored VW bus. “Hey, Erich, this is Art, he’s the guy I told you about earlier when I called. He’s agreed to go with you and the guys to Munich,” she called out in English.
The young man with the long wavy blonde hair came over to Thomas and gave him the once-over. He smiled as he took in the young man’s outward appearance. He looked to be several years older than Tina, and although he appeared a bit rough around the edges, he seemed to keep himself neat and orderly. His eyes were a bright green color and he was dressed in a tie-dyed t-shirt and bell-bottomed pants. A couple of his friends were standing around smoking, but he seemed disinterested in that.

He smiled as he regarded the two of them. “I don’t have a problem with carting you there, Art,” he began, his voice emerging in a strange cross between California surfer and Greenwich Village folkie. “I just hope you can handle the Hendrix, dude.”

“I think I can,” Thomas said. “I actually used to play the guitar, but that was a long time ago, and my abilities don’t compare with Jimi’s, I’m afraid.”

Erich nodded and looked at Tina appreciatively. “Did you cue him in on the gas money thing?”

“Yes, I did,” she said smiling but looked at Thomas. “Erich is my brother’s best friend. They went to college together in Berlin. In case you haven’t noticed, he’s not from around here. In fact, he’s spending his last summer here before heading back to San Francisco. You asked me earlier about my English and why it’s so good, well Erich is part of that reason. Of course, for proper English, I’d have to rely on you or your friend.”

Thomas nodded his attention now on Erich. “It’s nice to meet you,” he said but looked over at Tina. “I suppose it is time for us to say good-bye.”

“I suppose,” Tina repeated, but without warning, she reached out and embraced him. “Take care of yourself, and have a safe trip home.”

“You too, and maybe some day we’ll meet again,” he said as he hugged her.

“Until we meet again, may God hold you in his hand,” she said as their embrace ended.

“That’s an Irish blessing,” he said.

She smiled as Erich’s voice interrupted them. “Hey, you sure you don’t want to come with us, Tina?” he asked. “We got loads of space, and can wait while you go and pack a few things.”

“I wish I could come along, but with all this Golden Ticket stuff going on, my parents would kill me if I split town on them now. The hotel is completely full and we’ve even got a waiting list. I’m afraid I have to stay here and do damage control.”

“It would seem your prayers were answered then,” Erich said, but looked at Thomas, a smirk shadowing his features. “Well, Garfunkel, I guess that’s it, you’d better climb on board, we’re gonna hit the road. You can ride shotgun.”

“Garfunkel?” Thomas looked at him.

“Yeah, you know, your name’s Art, and that’s half of the duo,” one of Erich’s friends laughed. “Haven’t you ever heard the ‘Sounds of Silence’ or ‘Scarborough Fair’?”

“Of course, I actually saw Simon and Garfunkel when I was in America about eight years ago,” Thomas said.

“That’s cool, they are so great,” Erich said. “My nickname is Simon, because I enjoy Paul Simon’s music. Cool, huh?”
A second of Erich’s friends turned and looked at Thomas’ somewhat dazed expression. “We all have weird nicknames; I’m called ‘Kohlkopf’ (cabbage-head), because I eat more sauerkraut than anyone in this town. That’s Jude, because he’s always imitating John Lennon, and then Frankie, because he just can’t get enough of the Four Seasons. Now you got one too.”

Thomas smiled. “I always thought I was too old to hang out with young people,” he said and looked at Tina.

“Age is a state of mind, dude,” Erich said. “Okay everybody; put out your stogies and let’s get going.” He reached for Thomas’s suitcase and put it in the back of the van. The three smokers mashed out their cigarettes and climbed in as well.

As they did this, Thomas turned and looked at Tina. “Go on back, I don’t want us to drive away and leave you standing here all by yourself.”

“Have fun in Munich,” she said as she walked away from the van. He watched until she rounded a corner and disappeared in the distance.

“You like her, dude?” Erich asked.

“I think that she is a very nice young lady,” he said smiling. “But, to answer your question, I don’t like her in the way that you implied. For one thing, I am much too old for her. She needs a younger man who is much closer to her in age. I’ll settle on just one of those good old-fashioned platonic friendships.”

“Oh, okay because, I’m gonna tell you a secret, I’ve been in love with her since day one,” Erich said with a smile. “I stopped smoking for her, and now I don’t allow it in my van. Of course, there’s that other incident with my having to knock your lights out for flirting with her.” He laughed and punched Thomas’ shoulder lightly.

“I wouldn’t flirt with her, Erich,” he said and got in the passenger seat.

Once he had buckled himself in and closed the door, Thomas remembered very little after that. He closed his eyes and although he could hear the loud guitar music filling the van, his thoughts started to drift. He was no longer remembering all the small minute details of the first years with the Oompa Loompas, instead, his thoughts drifted back to the day that Willy had told him about the Golden Ticket contest.

Already, the tickets were leaving rippled effects on towns like Duselheim, but he could not help but ponder if Willy had even known what sort of a Pandora’s Box he had opened with regard to it.

**Flashback**

May 20, 1971

Thomas knocked lightly on the door to Willy’s office. “Come in, Tom,” abruptly emerged. It sounded as though the chocolatier was in relatively high spirits as his voice filtered out into the hallway.

He slowly opened the door and peered around it before coming inside.

“I got your memo, what can I do for you?” he asked as a greeting. As soon as he had flashed the reddish colored paper, Willy came over and snatched it out of his hand. Instead of saying anything, he watched as the chocolatier wadded it up and stuffed it in his mouth. As soon as he had swallowed it, he started to lick his fingers.
“Mmm, strawberry,” he said, “not bad, if I do say so myself.”

“The paper is candy?” Thomas asked.

“Just about everything around here is, I even managed to make some pens into licorice, but that comes later,” Willy said. “Take a seat, the dance is about to begin.”

Thomas smirked, but instead of saying anything in relation to those words, he looked at Willy. “What’s on your mind?”

“Well, I just finished the Golden Tickets for the contest,” Willy said as he handed a small notebook to Thomas. Inside it were five pieces of shimmering gold paper. With the words ‘Greetings to you the lucky finder of this Golden Ticket’, etched across the top. As the older man studied the intricate writing on them, Willy continued speaking. “Now don’t eat these, they’re not eatable,” he instructed.

Thomas nodded as he finished reading the ticket on top but soon handed the notebook back to Willy. “They look great, Will, but what are you going to do with them? You’ve been talking about having a contest for months, and I can’t help but wonder if this is the great secret you’ve holed yourself away to work on.”

“In a way it is. Between this and the Everlasting Gobstoppers, I know that this is going to be the event that will get my name back on the map. In fact, I think this is going to be the biggest news to hit since the invention of the mini-skirt.” He smiled mischievously. “Now, you can call me mad as a hatter, if you’d like.” He leaned closer and pointed to the notebook resting in Thomas’ hand. “This is how we are going to find the perfect child to one day take over and become my successor and run the factory. I’m going to need your help with regard to putting the wheels in motion on this.”

“How do you…” he began as the chocolatier arched an eyebrow. “…I mean; how do we intend to do this?”

“Each of these tickets will be hidden inside the wrapper of a candy bar, and we will ship them, in equal intervals to various points around the world. That is, except for the last one.”

“What are you going to do with it?” he asked. “I’m kind of surprised that you are doing that one differently than the others, especially since I thought it would be luck of the draw.”

“Don’t be so surprised, Tom. It still is going to be luck of the draw,” Willy said. “After the other four tickets are found, I will send the box with the fifth ticket some specified location here in town. There’s no point to sending all of them outside of the city, we should have at least one in this neighborhood,” Willy said.

Thomas nodded. “I understand what you mean, but how do we intend to keep track of each of the candy bars with the tickets inside?”

“That’s easy, since Hjon-Lui is an expert with computer technology. He managed to put a small tracer in each of the tickets. Through that, we can keep track of where each of the candy bars go. It’s a much more advanced technology, but they are implanted inside the paper as well as the codes on the back of the wrapper. That means that the tickets cannot be copied or reproduced in any way. That is how we can keep track of each of them until all of them are found.”

“But why do all of this if we already know where they are going?” Thomas asked. “What’s the point?”

Willy Wonka raised his head, the curly blondish locks of hair sporadically peeking out from amidst the rim of his caramel colored top hat. “You know how quickly things can get run out proportion.
You know from your experiences that what is planned and what happens are two different things. What needs to be established is that we will open the factory to the five winners on the first day of October. This means as soon as we announce the contest, the first shipment of chocolate will have to go out. About a week after that, you will be leaving as well.”

“I will?”

“Yes, but you won’t be traveling in a carton, we have to arrange your flight to each of the four places,” he said smiling mischievously.

“In other words, you want me to show up in the location of where each of the Golden Tickets is scheduled to arrive or be found?” Thomas asked.

Willy nodded. “That’s right, and after you are able to locate each of the five finders, you will introduce yourself to them as Arthur Slugworth, President of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated. No one would dare contemplate that this is a test, especially since you look just like old Slugworth.”

“Perhaps, but it still seems rather risky,” Thomas said. “What about the real Slugworth? He would surely offer a rich reward for the Everlasting Gobstopper as well. You know that they will most likely revolutionize the candy industry. If you give any of them to a child before they’re marketable, then that could ruin you.”

“I know, but I have already thought of that,” Willy said matter-of-factly. “The gobstoppers I am going to give to the children will dissolve exactly one week after they leave the factory. Not to mention, exposure to the sun will cause a shift in the ingredients. Why else do you suppose I have the machine covered? Outside light will ruin them, but no one knows that except you and me.”

Thomas nodded, Willy had indeed thought of everything. “You don’t leave any stones unturned, do you?”

The chocolatier shook his head. “Not when it comes to my secrets; I suppose I don’t.”

Thomas watched as Willy’s eyes took on that typical faraway look. “Will?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you think that this insanity you’re about to unleash is going to help you find someone to one day run the factory?” Thomas asked.

“I don’t know,” he said, his face breaking into a broad grin. “But, it should be a great deal of fun finding out.”

Thomas shrugged his shoulders, but offered his friend a broad smile before getting up to leave. “Okay, you’re the boss. I was just wondering if you had any idea regarding what is about to happen.”

Willy nodded. “We needed something that would get my name back out there, and I think that is just the ticket, if you’ll pardon the pun.” He reached into the pocket of his jacket and retrieved a small flute.

After playing a tune on it, someone knocked at the door and he went over and opened it. There, standing on the other side was an Oompa Loompa. “Maya-Li, could you take these tickets to the packaging room and put them in five bars of chocolate and then bring the five candy bars back to me?”
Once the Oompa Loompa nodded, he handed her the tickets and she left. Once they were alone, he looked at Thomas, his blue eyes filled with happiness. “I don’t think old Slugworth is going to know what hit him.”

Thomas nodded. “Maybe not, but Will, I don’t think the rest of the world is going to know what hit, either. This is going to turn the entire planet upside down.”

Flashback End

July 13, 1971

“Hey Garfunkel, are you hungry?” Erich’s voice suddenly broke into his thoughts and he found himself hurled back to the present.

“Yes, actually I am,” he said. “What time is it?”

“Nearly four and we’re almost to Munich,” Erich said. “We got some sandwiches packed. Hey Jude, could you toss a couple up here?”

The young man nodded and passed up two wrapped sandwiches. Once Thomas had them, he handed one to Erich and watched as he unwrapped it. Seconds later he pulled the sandwich out of the plastic bag and took a bite. Surprisingly, it tasted even better than he had anticipated.

As he was eating, Erich cast quick glances towards Thomas before looking back at the stretch of highway that lay out before them. “You must have been really zoned out because you didn’t say a word for the last hour or so.”

“I was kind of lost in thought,” he admitted, but noticed that the music had stopped. He closed his eyes for a moment as he remembered sitting in another van similar to this one several years ago. He could not help but remember his brother’s friend, Bernie, and wondered how all of them were doing. It had been so many years and he had gone and lost contact with them. “You know, I probably didn’t mention this, but my brother’s friend had a bus like this. They seem to be rather popular.”

“Yeah, they are, probably because you can pack just about anything you want inside of them,” he took a deep breath. “So where do you want me to drop you off when we get to Munich?”

“I have no idea,” Thomas admitted. “I just had to get out of Duselheim. It was a little bit crazy back there.”

“Yes,” Erich said with an adamant nod. “The funny thing, I know the entire Gloop family. They’re pigs the whole lot of ‘em. The couple’s trying to raise their kid to grow up and take over their business. I guess it stands to reason, they only have him. Of course, their food bill probably couldn’t have handled another one like him. My friend Hans actually got Hausverbot there.”

“Hausverbot?” Thomas asked.

“Yeah, it means that he’s not allowed inside,” Erich said. “I think his getting drunk one night, climbing up on a table, and making pig noises at Mrs. Gloop did it. She was not amused, so I guess she spoke with her husband and they decided to make sure that Hans could never come back. It was pretty stupid, but no matter, we stopped eating there and started hanging out at the pizzeria in Berching. At least the guys there have a better sense of humor.”

“Do you always make fun of people?” Thomas asked.

“If they’re rude and pretentious then yeah, they’re free game. If they didn’t do anything to deserve it,
then no, we won’t go there. My friends are smart alecks Art, but they aren’t cruel,” he said. The two
of them sank into companionable silence until Erich’s voice once more emerged and broke into
Thomas’ thoughts. “Do you know what bugs me?”

“What?”

“That a lot of these parents are letting their kids be cruel to one another just for the sake of showing
the world that they are better. That’s not better, it’s just mean.”

“You seem to really care about the kids in town,” Thomas said.

“Yes, well last night when I was in town, I had gone to the deli and they had a small display of
Wonka bars there. I’m not a huge fan of chocolate, but wanted to buy a couple of them just for kicks.
Anyway, there was this little girl there who could barely reach the top of the counter. The guy
behind it was pretty much ignoring her until Augustus Gloop came in and told him that he wanted
the whole display. The little girl looked at me, and then looked down at the money in her hand and
then told the man that she wanted one bar. Do you know what that deli owner said?”

“What?” Thomas asked.

“He said she should have spoken up, that the entire display had just been sold. Well, we know what
side of the bread his is buttered on. I looked at him and said I wanted a couple of bars too. He looked
at me, shook his head and said, ‘sorry punk, but we’re sold out’. As I was leaving the deli, I could
see the little girl crying. She wanted one candy bar, and that was it. It makes me sick when I stop and
think that in one of those packages was a Golden Ticket. I swear; I would have preferred anyone in
Duselheim getting that ticket, but not one of the Gloops. It just seems as though fate has a way of just
shoving irony straight down our throats.”

“What happened after that?” Thomas asked.

“Augustus walked out of the deli with that bag of chocolate bars and his nose in the air. I had never
seen anything like it, and I was pretty sickened by the whole business. You know, I would give up
even trying for one of the Golden Ticket if I could actually see someone who is nice getting one. Of
course, I’m seeing this sort of stuff all over the place. People like that whale with 50 Wonka bars are
shoving these kids who really deserve a Golden Ticket to the curb. I guess this morning I finally got
my answer about people really getting what they deserve.”

“Did you see the little girl again?” Thomas asked.

“Yeah, this morning after the news got out that Augustus had the first Golden Ticket. She was sitting
on the curb not far from the church crying her eyes out,” he said. “I went over to her and told her that
if I had a bag of money, I’d buy some Wonka bars and if I found a ticket, then it’d be hers. I don’t
need a lifetime supply of chocolate, but it seems as though people get rewarded for deceit and cruelty
instead of getting their just desserts.”

“Do you think Willy Wonka did a bad thing in sending out those tickets?” Thomas asked.

“No way man; he went and gave those kids something nice to hope for. I know that the chances of
me finding one are next to none, but they have sort of become symbolic of the hope that may still be
out there. Of course, there will always be those who abuse the good ideas of others.”

“True,” Thomas said, “but for people like Tina, one doesn’t have to have a Golden Ticket to see
what the impact of their presence is.”

“Yeah,” Erich nodded. “You know, Art, you’re pretty cool.”
“Thank you,” Thomas said. “So tell me, how did you end up meeting Tina’s family?”

“I was studying in Berlin at the university as a sort of exchange student,” he said. “Max was trying to decide what to study and he happened by the Chemistry Lab where I was working. We got to talking and ended up hanging out together. After about half a year, we moved into an apartment with one another and the rest was history. Max chose a major and started studying that boring business stuff while I spent my days playing Dr. Frankenstein in the science building.”

“Sounds rather like you enjoyed yourself immensely,” he said.

“Yeah, I did,” he said. “I was really psyched about taking all those science classes.” After several minutes he took a deep breath and ran his hand through his hair. “Any idea where I should let you out, we’re getting closer to Munich. I figured that you would probably prefer being let out on the outskirts of the city as opposed to trying to find lodging in the city center.”

Thomas nodded. “That might not be a bad idea. Where are all of you heading?”

“Actually, we were thinking about driving through to Füssen, that’s where Neuschwanstein is and some of us actually wanted to see it. I thought it would be kind of fun to take it in. You interested in that, per chance?”

Thomas thought for a moment. Smaller towns seemed much more appealing than trying to make his way through a large city. “Count me in,” he said spontaneously. For him, it seemed not to matter where he was going to be let out, just as long as he made his flight in Frankfurt on Friday.

“The bad news is that since you’re older, you can’t stay at a hostel with us, but I am sure there are some places where you can hang your hat while you’re there. Given the way you’re dressed, money doesn’t seem to be an object anyway.”

Thomas took a deep breath, “It would be hard to get to Füssen from Munich anyways, wouldn’t it?” he asked.

“Not really, but it is kind of a pain,” he said. “If you intend to go anywhere in Europe besides Füssen, then you would have to go back to Munich to get there.”

“That’s good to know,” he said. “Thanks for the information.”
Chapter 23: Putting the Pieces Together

By the time they had arrived in Füssen, it was close to four in the afternoon. Erich found an adequate stretch of curb where he could let Thomas out before he and his friends would be heading to the hostel. As the older man was undoing his seatbelt, Erich looked at him. “I know we probably won’t ever see each other again, but I really enjoyed meeting you. Hope you don’t mind us letting you out here.”

“Not at all, one I have my stuff then you guys can be on your way again,” Thomas smiled as he dug in his pocket and pulled out a fifty-mark note. “I hope that this will be enough to cover the expenses.”

“I was only expecting twenty,” Erich objected.

“Perhaps, but I would feel much better giving you and your friends a bit extra for the effort that you’ve made on my behalf. Maybe after you fill the tank, you can have a pint or ask Tina out to dinner or something.” He offered a sly smirk as he disembarked and collected his belongings from the back. As soon as he had closed the door, he returned to the front of the vehicle, offered a casual wave, and watched as Erich drove away.

Once the van had disappeared in the distance, Thomas started walking in the direction of the bus stop. As he made his way, he began to look around the area for a hotel. He was now on his own, and was not certain as to what to do next. All around him, people seemed to have swarmed in from everywhere and the sounds of spoken French, Spanish, Japanese, English, and German could be heard almost all at once.

The people who were not talking were standing around taking pictures. He waited for several moments until a bus pulled up to the curb. As the doors opened, he could hear the excited squeals of small children and the chatter of adults as everyone piled into the bus that was heading to the base of a mountain, which would lead up to King Ludwig’s famous castle.

After one stop, he opted to getting off the bus and heading in the direction of the main square. He was glad that he had made it out of Duselheim, but now he wondered why it was he felt compelled to come to Füssen in the first place. He decided that the best option was get to a hotel, secure a room, and drop his stuff off before going out and finding something to eat.

“The hotels are that way,” a man’s voice emerged and he turned and noticed one of the tour guides standing nearby. He pointed down a street and Thomas started walking in the direction that he had indicated.

After about ten minutes of confusion, he spotted a large building with flower boxes along numerous balconied windows. The sign above a rustic four storey building read: ‘Hotel Edelweiss’. Instead of concentrating on what felt familiar about it, he stepped towards the door and entered. The lobby itself was large but seemed to carry an essence that only the very well to do could afford to stay there.

He approached the receptionists’ desk. “Welcome to Hotel Edelweiss,” the man said in English.

“How did you know that I was an English speaker?” he asked.

“That’s easy, as most of the guests who stay here are,” the somewhat snappish response emerged.
“Do you have a reservation?”

“Actually, no I don’t,” Thomas said. “But I am looking for lodging. Do you have any vacancies for a couple of nights?”

The man checked and nodded. “We can accommodate you for tonight, but tomorrow we’re full.”

“That’s quite alright,” Thomas said with a nod. “Then, I’ll take a room for one night.”

“The room we have is a non-smoking room,” the man said.

“Sounds great,” he smiled, but when the gesture was not returned, he pulled a credit card from his wallet and slid it across the counter. “You can charge the room to this account.”

The man nodded, ran the credit card through the machine and then once Thomas had signed the form, the man spoke again. “Will you need a bellboy to assist you with your luggage?”

“No, I can carry it up myself,” Thomas said. Although he knew that the people at the hotel were perhaps trustworthy enough, he did not like the idea of some stranger handling his belongings. “It isn’t that heavy,” he added as an afterthought.

The man looked at him somewhat skeptically, but instead of commenting on this, he handed him a card to fill out. This time, instead of using the Slugworth name to register for the room, he opted to using his own. Being far enough away from Duselheim, he figured that it was all the better for him to use it since the real Slugworth spoke German.

“Here is your room key, Mr. Wilkenson,” the man said. “Breakfast is served between eight and ten in the morning. If you require anything further, you can call the desk and put in your requests.”

Once he had a room key, he turned away from the desk and started towards the elevator. Before he had reached the mirrored like doors, a familiar voice emerged and he turned around and looked down into a pair of innocent brown eyes.

“Tom, is that you?”

“Molly?” he asked as he recognized the child who had addressed him. “What are you doing out here all by yourself? Where’s your mother?”

“Mommy told me to wait here,” the child said bashfully.

Thomas nodded. “I see, well, are you both staying here at this hotel?”

“Yeah,” she whispered, her voice filled with sadness. “We went to see the castle today, and while we were there, Mommy told me something really sad.”

“She did?” he asked, but deep down he could almost tell what the child was about to say. He got down on his knees so that he could be eye-level with her. “What did she tell you?” He could still remember their conversation from the plane, and could see that the little girl looked tired. He rested his hand on her shoulder and smiled gently at her. “It’s alright sweetheart, you can tell me anything you want.”

Molly looked up at him. “She said that she didn’t love my daddy anymore.” As these words emerged Thomas could almost sense that this news had torn the little girl apart. She lowered her gaze and stared down at her feet. “She said that it was okay for me to love my daddy though, but…”
“…You don’t, do you?” Thomas interrupted.

She shook her head, “I hate him.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “Hate is a very powerful word,” he said.

Molly nodded. “I know, but he’s so mean to me.” She wound her skinny arms around herself and for a moment, he thought she was going to break down and cry right there in front of him.

Before he could offer her some semblance of comfort, Linda approached from behind, her eyes now fixated on her daughter. Moments passed before it became clear that she could not see or even recognize that it was Thomas who was talking to her daughter.

“Molly, how many times have I told you that you should not talk to strangers?” she scolded the little girl. Before the child could answer, she started to pull her away from Thomas, her expression more or less showing signs of fear.

Thomas raised his head and turned around. When Linda failed to see him, he spoke. “Hello, Linda,” he said with a small smile on his face. When she did not reciprocate the gesture, he took a deep breath but said nothing further.

“What are you doing here?” she eventually asked, her voice emerging as more a demand than anything else. It was obvious that she did not trust him, and he kept asking himself why that was the case. “I know that there are such things as coincidences, but this is a bit much even for me to take.”

“I know, but I had forgotten that you were staying here until Molly said my name,” he said.

“Yes, we are here until tomorrow when we go back to Munich. I have arranged for us to stay the remainder of our trip there,” she said. “But, that doesn’t explain why you are suddenly here.”

“I finished what needed to be tended in the other town and decided to use the last of my days touring around. Since I was only given one night here, I figured that I would take the train back to Munich tomorrow before heading back to Frankfurt. I wasn’t planning on coming to this part of the country at all, but when I was able to get a ride to this place, I took it. I remembered that you said that you wanted to see it. I figured that I would do the same. Our crossing paths with one another is purely coincidental, I assure you.”

“Coincidental?” she muttered under her breath, “and for a minute, I thought you were spying on us.”

“Excuse me?” he asked.

“Oh, n-nothing,” she managed. “Molly, why don’t we take a little walk around town? I’m sure Tom wants to get up to his room and relax.”

The little girl shook her head. “I wish we could stay together,” she said softly, her voice filled with the same childlike innocence that he remembered hearing on the plane.

“Well, actually, I was thinking about looking for a place to eat, I’m pretty hungry,” he said. “Why don’t we meet in about half an hour and find something together? I would understand if you would rather not.”

Linda offered a stiff nod after seeing the hopeful expression shadowed in her daughter’s innocent face. “I see no harm in that.”

Thomas nodded. “I’ll meet you back here in about half an hour.”
The mother and daughter nodded.

As they walked away, Thomas could not get over how strange it was that the two of them seemed to have different impressions about this meeting. Linda looked somewhat panicked whereas Molly seemed to be quite content with the idea. Well she was about as happy as a child could be considering her parents getting divorced.

Once alone, he summoned the elevator, and when the doors opened, he stepped inside and rode up to the floor where his room was. Unbeknownst to him, several meters away, two men in business suits stood staring at where they had been standing and talking.

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Several minutes after leaving the elevator, Thomas reached his room and unlocked the door. He swung it open, entered and then closed the door firmly behind him. Once he had seated himself on the bed, the first thought that ravaged his mind was to call Willy. Now that he had gotten away from Duselheim, it was safe enough for him to contact the chocolatier.

Lying down, he reached over and gripped the telephone receiver in one hand and began to dig for the number with the other. Eventually, he had to sit up so that he could see the instructions for the use of the phone. Upon finding the card, he managed to dial the number to Willy’s office.

Once the phone started to ring, he took a deep breath. “Will?”

“No, it’s Omaya-Kal,” emerged the voice. “Who is this?”

“It’s Tom Wilkenson, is William there?” He asked using Willy’s given name instead of trying to figure out what name the Oompa Loompa would accept. After several moments if silence, he found his patience wearing a bit thin. “Omaya-Kal, do you have any idea where Willy is?” he asked, purposefully using another name.

“He asked me to take the phone in case you called,” the Oompa Loompa responded. “He was hoping that you would contact him. He’s been worried about something, although I am not sure what that is specifically as he has yet to tell me anything. When I asked, he said that it did not pertain to us and did not wish to make me worry.”

“That does sound like him,” Thomas said. “Listen, I am supposed to meet a couple of people for dinner. I figured that since I have a few minutes before doing that that I would check in and let him know that I managed to get out of Duselheim without any problems.”

As these words emerged, he could hear a door opening and closing. “Wait,” the Oompa Loompa’s voice came through the line. “Nunguserak Nanganartok has returned, and I must be off. Take care, Mr. Wilkenson.”

Thomas waited and within seconds Willy’s voice emerged. “Tom?”

“Who else would it be?” Thomas asked. He did not suppress the smile that had no doubt emerged in the cadence of his voice.

“That’s not as important as what I have to tell you,” Willy said, worry literally dripping in his words.

“What’s the matter?” Thomas asked. “Does it explain why you are out of breath?”

“In a way, yes,” Willy said. “Tom, you have no time to lose, you have to get to Füssen immediately.”
“I’m already there, Will,” Thomas said. “Why is it so important? Did one of the Golden Tickets get shipped there by mistake?”

“No, I wish it was that simple,” Willy said. “It’s about Linda and Molly, Tom. You have to find them.”

“Why, what happened?”

“I called the number you gave me earlier today and spoke to Linda’s father, Patrick. I promised him that we would help him find Linda and Molly. It seems that the two of them ran away from some sort of problem.”

“You mean, you promised him that I would find them, right?” Thomas asked with a merry smile. “Well, the search is over, because I did find them. Or better yet, Molly managed to find me. We’re staying at the same hotel.”

“I wish that this was a time for us to make fun, but there is something serious going on. You have to convince Linda to call home,” Willy said. “Patrick is beside himself with worry. He seems to think that something is amiss. Based on what he told me, he thinks that they are being trailed.”

“Well, that could explain why it is Linda was nervous when I showed up,” he mused. “What specifically did her father tell you, Will? You’re usually not this worried unless there’s a very good reason for it.”

Willy took a deep breath and after several seconds of silence, his words emerged. “Patrick said that Linda left Buckinghamshire to go to Germany with her daughter without telling anyone from the family where they were going. One thing was abundantly clear, however, something was not right. I think Linda and Molly are in some kind of danger and we have to help them.”

“I’m not quite sure I follow any of this, not even after having spoken with Linda at length on the plane,” Thomas said.

“Did she happen to tell you what her last name was?” Willy asked.

“No,” Thomas said. “They just said that their names were Linda and Molly, why?”

“Thomas,” Willy said intentionally using his given name instead of calling him ‘Tom’ like he usually did. This was an indicator that the chocolatier was about to drop a major bombshell on him.

Thomas swallowed and waited. When Willy eventually began to speak, Thomas could feel the intensity of the words literally bowling him over.

“Linda’s soon to be ex-husband’s name is Owen Slugworth. He’s Arthur’s nephew and apparently next in line for the business,” Willy said solemnly. “Tom, that little girl you told me about is Slugworth’s granddaughter.”

Thomas opened his mouth and closed it, no words emerging. Instead of speaking, he shook his head, but still no words emerged. Eventually, Willy spoke. “Tom?”

“I’m here,” he eventually said, his voice weak. “Are you sure about that? I mean; Molly didn’t act like a Slugworth on the plane.”

“I know, and believe me, based on what you told me, I was pretty surprised myself. I spent about half an hour on the phone with Patrick and he told me everything he knew about their situation. I told him that I would stay in touch with him and let him know what was going on or what we were able
“Does he know who you are?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, he knows. I had to tell him because he thought I might have been acting on his son-in-law’s behalf,” he said with bitter, but also ironic, amusement. “The point is; we have to get the two of them back to England as soon as possible. Patrick seems to think that Owen has the intentions of taking Molly away from Linda.”

“But I thought that he wanted nothing to do with his child. That was what Linda seemed to indicate,” Thomas said.

“I don’t doubt her sincerity, Tom, but when people are afraid, they will say or do whatever they can to protect themselves,” Willy said. “I think given this particular instance, her reactions and words were quite normal. I don’t think that Linda is a bad mother, but she is stuck in a very difficult situation. You sensed that they needed help from the start.”

“So, what can we do?” Thomas asked.

“Well, according to Patrick, Owen did everything he could to isolate and keep her alone. Now that she is, she has no idea who she can turn to. This is a terrible situation and little Molly is being dragged straight into it.”

“Will, should I at least tell Linda that you are now involved in all of this?” Thomas asked. “It just seems rather strange for me to know their story without them knowing ours.”

“I can imagine that, but I am not quite sure if that is such a good idea as of yet,” Willy said diplomatically. “Try to get them to talk to you but be careful if our connection happens to come up.”

“What does Patrick think we should do?” Thomas asked.

“I think he’s at a loss if you want my honest summation of things,” Willy said. “What I think is that you have to try and handle this as delicately as humanly possible. They are very fragile at the moment and Patrick believes that Linda has been physically abused by Owen.”

“Yes, I can imagine that he is concerned, but Will, I’m really not sure if I can do anything without telling them everything I know. Considering their connection to the Slugworth family, it would seem rather risky for me to do anything,” Thomas responded. “I guess I should probably head downstairs and meet them. We said that we would meet after half an hour, and that is nearly over.”

“Would you call me afterwards and let me know what happened?” Willy asked. “I’ll be in here for a while working on some paperwork.”

“I’ll call you before turning in.”

After saying good-bye, he hung up the phone and started towards the door. This was not going to be easy at all, he thought. Now that he knew some of the things about them that he clearly should not even be aware of, he knew that whatever he did would scare Linda far more than she already was.

Stepping outside, he closed the door and made his way down the hall in the direction of the elevator.

As he came out into the hotel lobby, he spotted Linda and Molly standing and waiting for him. The child looked relatively happy, but the mother seemed more or less apprehensive. She kept looking
around where they were standing, half expecting someone to jump out and yell ‘boo!’.

Thomas, although now aware of the reason she was worried, took it in stride when she raised her head. “Hi,” she said simply once he had approached them. Molly reached for his hand and allowed the two grown ups to lead her from the lobby towards the door leading into the restaurant.

When they reached it, Thomas stopped and looked at Linda. “I think we should go somewhere else, there is so much smoke in there, and it might make Molly sick.”

Linda nodded. “Where should we go?”

“I don’t know, but this restaurant does not earn any brownie points with me,” Thomas said.

“Yeah Mommy, it’s yucky!” Molly offered.

“Why don’t we let Molly pick the place where we can grab a bite to eat?” Thomas suggested.

The little girl seemed to like that idea, as she released her hold on both of their hands and clapped hers together.

Linda eventually nodded and they walked through the hotel lobby and stepped outside. She seemed to relax somewhat when she noticed how the promenade was filled with visitors. The nearby café’s and restaurants had tables outside on the street and it looked as though the entire area was full. Eventually, Molly pointed to a small restaurant with a colorful atmosphere. “Let’s go there,” she said. “I like the colors.”

Linda and Thomas nodded as they went into the restaurant and found a table. Once they had sat down, he looked at them. “It was really a nice surprise for me to find the two of you here,” he said.

“I still think that this was an awfully strange coincidence,” Linda said. “It would seem as though you have been following us since we landed in Frankfurt.”

“No, I can assure you that I have not,” Thomas said shaking his head. “Why is it you are so worried about being followed?”

“I don’t know,” Linda said.

“I think you do,” he said calmly. “Linda, I can tell that you’re worried and you know that not everyone you meet is going to be a friend. Many times, the people that you might come across only wish to be a friend. I am not here to bring harm to you and I can assure you that I would never even consider that an option. You and Molly are both safe in my company.”

“We don’t really know that,” Linda said as the waitress approached and handed them each a menu. It appeared that she was grateful that the woman had come along and distracted them from where this conversation was going. “We’d like two orange sodas,” she said and watched as the woman wrote down the order.

“I’ll have a cola,” Thomas said.

The woman nodded and left. Once she was gone, he looked at Linda, his gaze intent. “You seem very secretive, Linda, rather like Willy Wonka himself.”

“I am not so sure I would compare myself to him,” she said, all the while lowering her eyes and staring down at the table.
“Why not?” Thomas asked, “after all, a secretive and withdrawn personality seems to mirror both of you.”

“I’d be like Willy Wonka,” Molly said confidently, her expression filled with the same childlike innocence that had also captured Thomas’ imagination on the plane. “I think he’s wonderful.”

Linda took a deep breath and stared down at her lap. “It would seem that I am outnumbered in that regard. But, since none of us even know this man, it would seem ridiculous to continue talking about him.”

“What makes you so sure?” Thomas asked after several seconds. “Even famous people like Willy Wonka might have a friend or two wandering about.”

“Yes, but Molly and I don’t know him, and I have serious doubts that you would even know him,” Linda said.

Thomas took a deep breath upon hearing these words. Instead of responding to them, he rested his elbows on the table, his chin in the palm of his hand as he peered meaningfully across the table at her. “Tell me truthfully, Linda, what do you really think of Willy Wonka?”

“I’m supposed to hate him,” she said softly, all the while shaking her head.
Chapter 24

Chapter 24: An Unexpected Turn

Thomas looked across the table at the young woman. “You’re supposed to hate Willy Wonka?” he asked, his voice etched with traces of skepticism. “Why?”

Linda looked away, the discomfort lining her face. “Can we please talk about something else?”

As these words emerged, Molly got up from the table and started to walk away, her head lowered. The child seemed to be just as affected, if not more so, by this particular topic.

The sad irony was that neither mother nor daughter seemed to be able to communicate with each other. At the same time, Thomas found it to be rather ironic that the one point of contention that seemed to exist between this mother and her daughter was centered on the chocolatier.

Thomas watched these actions and looked at Linda. “What was that all about?”

“I don’t know,” Linda said helplessly, but it was obvious that the woman felt torn. Torn between going and consoling her daughter and trying to explain something to Thomas that could possibly clear up what had just happened.

When Linda sat unmoving, Thomas finally stood up and started to walk slowly away from the table. “Where are you going?” she asked.

“I’m going to talk to her,” he said, but Linda’s voice eventually made him stop.

“What can you possibly say that is going to help her?” she asked. “It was your strange line of questioning that made her leave in the first place.” As the words emerged, they were laced in biting sarcasm. Throughout this exchange, however, Linda had kept her eyes on Molly’s retreating back.

“I don’t know what I can say, but something tells me that she should not be alone right now.” Upon hearing these words, the woman nodded and watched as he went over to the little girl.

Molly had stopped several meters from the door and found an empty table and seated herself there. She sat staring down at the table top as he approached. He watched as the tears fell and landed on the tablecloth.

“Molly?” he spoke her name, and she turned her head so that she could look up at him. “What’s the matter, sweetheart?”

“I always knew that Willy Wonka would hate me,” she said, her voice filled with sadness and regret. “Even if I were to find a Golden Ticket, he’d probably think that I’d steal from him just like my uncle did.” Her voice broke as she slapped her hand over her mouth, the tears streaming down over her face.

“Tell me what you mean by that,” Thomas said.

“My last name is Slugworth,” the little girl confessed, her face hidden by her hands.

Thomas sat down in one of the chairs and inched it over so that he was next to her. “You know, my father once told me something very important.”
“What?”

“He said, ‘Thomas, a name will never fully define who you really are,’” he said comforting. “You are not to be judged or condemned by the actions of your uncle any more than he should be by yours.”

“But I am,” she whispered.

“No you’re not. Do you know who I think of when I look at you?” he asked.

“Who?”

“Well, in some ways, I think of Willy Wonka,” he said. “You have a great deal in common with him.”

“I do?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said simply. “You have spent much of your life sad and lonely. You have had more than your share of tragedy to contend with. Yet, what affirmed this for me was when I watched you share your candy with the other passengers. I knew that I was in the presence of a wonderful and selfless little girl. I know you carry the name Slugworth, but in the ways that matter, you are not like them. You have been taught to care for and embrace others without prejudice or hatred. That is such a precious gift, Molly.”

“But, I…” she began to object, her voice cracking.

“…A name defines your roots or where it is you come from, but what defines who you are, is recognized through the deeds you do for others. You are not like your uncle,” he said, “and I think Willy Wonka would say the very same thing if he were sitting here with you.”

“But I’m still a Slugworth, and I hate myself for it,” the little girl began to cry in earnest.

“Don’t ever hate yourself, you are far too valuable,” he said. “You have so many wonderful gifts, things you share with those around you. Do you know how special that is?”

“My daddy says that our biggest enemy is Mr. Wonka,” she whispered. “But I still like him. I mean; if he makes such wonderful candy, he can’t be a bad man, can he?”

“I don’t think so,” he said honestly.

“My daddy is so mean and he hurts my mommy and sometimes he even hurts me,” she said softly. “Mommy doesn’t know, but I’ve seen it happen to her. When I asked him why, he hit me too. Then I started having nightmares after my daddy made me tear up my collection.”

“Your collection?” Thomas asked.

“I had a wonderful collection of all the wrappers from candy bars I ate,” Molly said softly. She carefully pulled the wrapper to one of the bars out of the pocket of her dress and showed it to him. “Most of them were Wonka bars. I always liked his chocolate better,” she sniffed. “I must be a terrible person because I don’t like my uncle’s chocolate; it tastes awful.”

Thomas sat and listened to the honest words of the child. She seemed to know what her uncle was like even though she had never met him. Chances are she shared the candy bar on the plane to make up for what she felt was an unforgivable truth that dwelled deep down inside of her.
At that moment, everything had suddenly become clear. Both Molly and Linda had been brainwashed by the Slugworth family. Perhaps the danger that they had been exposed to was real and maybe Linda had been trying to keep Molly from being exposed to it.

He took a deep breath and pulled Willy’s handkerchief from his pocket and shook it out, the cloth wrinkled somewhat from having been previously used. At that moment, it had dried out, but the creases in the fabric remained. Using it, he reached over and began to blot the child’s tears away. “Molly, I can guarantee that Willy Wonka would care very deeply for you regardless of what your last name happens to be.”

“What makes you so sure?” she whispered.

“Because I know him,” Thomas said.

“You do?” she asked.

“Yes, and my proof is this handkerchief, it once belonged to him,” Thomas said. “You asked me on the plane what these two letters stood for, and I didn’t tell you. Now I’m going to. These two W’s here stand for William Wonka, that’s Willy’s given name. He always said that the handkerchief belonged to his father, but to me it has always belonged to him.” He held up the object so the two W’s could be beheld by the small child.

“It’s really his?” she whispered.

Thomas nodded. “Yes, but don’t tell your mother just yet, I don’t think it would make her very happy. She seems to have set feelings about this particular topic right now.”

Molly sadly shook her head. “No, she says that since my daddy left; that Wonka bars are our favorites, but she doesn’t eat very much chocolate.”

“I see,” Thomas said. “Molly, Willy Wonka was the person who comforted me when my brother died. He also gave me that lilac colored blueberry paper that I ate on the plane. It was a new kind of candy that he had come up with. He is the very same friend who gave me those candy bars that I gave to you and your mother.”

Molly nodded as he wiped the last of the tears with the cloth. “Is he nice?” she eventually asked.

“Let me ask you something,” he said in response to her question. “If someone can make your favorite chocolate in such a way that you enjoy every single bite, then is that nice to you?”

The little girl nodded, “yes.”

“Then there’s your answer,” he said with a smile. “Molly, Willy Wonka is a very nice person. Now, regardless of what your last name happens to be, I am certain that he would like you. Trust me on that, alright?”

The little girl nodded. “I’ll try, Tom, but it’s hard, my mommy is so unhappy.”

“So are you, but I have something in mind that might make you a little bit happier,” he said. “How would you like it if I arranged for you to meet Willy Wonka?”

“You’d do that for me?” she asked her voice filled with awe.

Before he could answer affirmatively, the doors to the restaurant swung open and three men dressed in suits and ties rushed inside, their loud voices breaking the conversational level of the
establishment.

Thomas looked up at that moment and noticed that one of them was making a beeline straight towards him and Molly.

“I found her,” the first man shouted as he reached where the little girl was sitting. Unconsciously, she backed away and looked to Thomas for help. “Come over to me, Molly,” he said, his expression, a hateful sneer. “You know me sweetheart; I’m a friend of your daddy’s. He wants you to come home.”

The child shook her head as she reached for Thomas’ hand. When he felt her tiny fingers wrapping around his hand, he turned and looked at the man. “I’m not so sure she really wants to go with you,” he said calmly. “If her father wanted to see her, he would have picked up the phone and called her like any decent parent would do.”

“What do you know, creep?” the man lunged towards Thomas. “Get out of the way.”

Thomas shook his head, but when the man’s cohorts started pushing their way through the restaurant, he looked at the waitress who was standing frozen at the bar. “Call the police,” he instructed.

“I wouldn’t advise that if I were you,” the second man piped up as he turned and looked at the girl at the bar. “You make even the slightest move; you will destroy an entire operation. This is not about a father kidnapping his child, but about relieving her from a woman who is mentally ill.”

“He’s lying,” Linda spoke up. “They all work for Arthur Slugworth, and they all believe themselves to be above the law.” She looked at the woman hoping that she would do as Thomas instructed. Instead of speaking or even acting; the waitress stood frozen and stared at the events that were playing out.

The man who was closest to Molly reached out and grabbed the child’s arm. “Come on Molly,” he said gruffly. “Be a good girl. Your daddy is waiting outside and wants to see you.”

“No,” the child screamed as the man tugged even harder on her arm. “Let me go!”

Thomas retained his hold on Molly’s hand, but that did not last for long. In a split second, the man managed to pull her roughly out of his grasp.

Molly screamed, but soon even that became muffled when the man plastered his hand over her mouth. “Shut up, you little brat,” he muttered.

“Someone please call the police,” Thomas started towards the man, his sole intention, to get Molly away from the three men. He hoped that someone would finally heed his instructions, but every person in the restaurant remained stationary. “Can’t you people see that what these men are doing is just not normal?”

Without thinking, Linda started towards them, her fists clenched as she tried to attack the man who now held her daughter. “Let my daughter go,” she shouted, but soon found herself trapped in the hold of the third man. His arm was now wound around her neck, the air now being cut off.

She tried to fight against his hold, but being unable to breathe left her defenseless. After several seconds, she squirmed her way out of his hold and was left gasping for air. “How did you find us?”

The man chortled. “That wasn’t so hard, sweetheart. The wench at the airport could be paid off easily and so when we asked, she sang like a canary. All we had to do was put two and two
together. As soon as she said ‘Germany’, Owen knew exactly where you had jetted off to. Do you honestly think that you could run away from your family and not have someone come looking for you? Molly is a Slugworth and belongs with that family, not this crop of losers. Her daddy and uncle have great things planned for her.”

“Of that I have no doubt,” Thomas said crossly. “What you don’t seem to comprehend is the fact that this little girl may not be the person whom her father believes her to be. She may be a Slugworth in name, but I can attest that that is where the similarity ends. Now, let her go.”

He reached out towards the child, but suddenly found himself falling over a table, his right eye throbbing. Thankfully he was not wearing his spectacles or else the glass would have easily cut his eye. Linda stumbled over to where he had landed as Molly’s shrill scream pierced the air.

“Mommy!” she cried as soon as the man’s hand had slipped from her mouth. As his hold on her tightened, the child was left whimpering feebly in his arms.

Without so much as a word, the second man pulled a plastic bag from his pocket and opened it. From inside, he pulled out a piece of cloth and handed it to his cohort. Roughly, this was pressed it over her nose and mouth. This left everyone watching in horror as Molly was forced to inhale the chemically soaked piece of fabric.

Her body immediately sagged in the man’s arms and he picked her up like a sack of potatoes and tossed her callously over his shoulder. “Let’s get out of here,” he said as he headed towards the door.

The second man followed, but Linda started after them, her cries now filling the air. “Someone please stop them.”

After what seemed like an eternity, several men at one of the tables stood up and started to walk towards the door in order to take after the men. At that moment, the third man drew a gun and aimed it at them.

“Don’t try to play the hero here, boys,” he said, his hand still tightly holding the hammer of the weapon. He cocked it and stared at the group at the table. “I have enough rounds here to waste every last one of you. Now, before you do something stupid, I would think long and hard about the consequences of your actions.”

The men slowly lowered themselves back into their seats. There was no way that they would be able to take such a risk for a stranger.

“We’re all on the same side gents. We’re just here to take this little girl back to her daddy. Now, why don’t you and your friends go back to what you were doing?” The man said as he backed his way towards the door.

“We just don’t think that taking a child out of here like that qualifies as doing the right thing,” the man said.

“Well, if the brat had come nicely as she was told, then none of this would have happened,” the man said. “Mr. Slugworth has put out a generous reward for her recovery. The woman who brought her will have formal charges filed against her the minute she gets back to London. We’re going to make sure of that.” He looked at Linda, his eyes filled with contempt. “Enjoy your holiday, Mrs. Slugworth. It will no doubt be your last. If your husband has his way, you will be committed for life after this escapade.” He laughed evilly and flung what looked to be a legal document onto the nearest table before drifting out of the room.
As soon as they had exited the restaurant, Thomas could hear the roaring motor of a car drifting in from outside. *That was probably how they would manage to get out of the area so quickly,* he thought as he glanced back over towards the bar and could see the woman reaching for the telephone. “You had your chance to notify the authorities before they could take the child, but you blew it.”

Instead of continuing to hurl accusations, Thomas went over to where Linda was sitting, her body now trembling on the floor. “Molly!” she repeated her daughter’s name, “my poor, sweet, little Molly.”

For his part, Thomas reached up and gingerly touched his eye, the skin now throbbing from where the man’s fist had impacted his face. “Oww!” he muttered.

The girl at the bar disappeared into the kitchen only to emerge with some raw steak wrapped in a piece of plastic. “I’m sorry I couldn’t do more for you, or for the child,” she whispered, “but here, that should help your eye.”

Thomas accepted the item, but raised his head to see one of the men approaching the paper that was now on the table. “Don’t touch it,” he shouted. “The police at Scotland Yard will need to dust it for prints. For what it’s worth now that they are gone; the German police won’t be able to do anything for Linda or Molly, either. Those thugs are no doubt taking her to the airport and will be transporting her back to England as we speak.”

The men backed up and he pressed the steak to his eye. Once he had secured it, he slowly walked over to her and rested his hand on her shoulder. “Linda,” he whispered.

She raised her head, her face completely contorted in agony. “I-I didn’t know,” she whispered. “They mean what they said, Tom. They are going to force Molly to do their work and I…”

“…You will get her back, you just need a little help,” Thomas said. He helped her off the floor and bade her to sit down in one of the chairs. He then looked at the waitress. “Could you get her a hot tea with honey, please?”

“Of course,” the woman said and returned to the kitchen.

“Now, you stay here, I’m going to see what they left behind,” Thomas said. He reached into the pocket of his trench coat and removed a pair of black gloves. Pulling them on, he made his way over to the paper, leaned over, and picked it up. After reading the writing on it, he turned and looked at Linda. “I think we need to have a little talk about this.”

Instead of the waitress emerging with the tea, the restaurant manager came out. “What is the meaning of bringing those hooligans into my establishment?” he demanded.

Thomas took a deep breath. “With all due respect, sir, I did not bring anyone in here. Those men came in after we arrived and it would seem as though they have been trailing Linda and her daughter since they left London. Apparently you were not around to see that they abducted her little girl and not one person in this entire restaurant had the gumption to contact the authorities and put an end to this. If you have any further grievances about what happened here, I would suggest that you address said complaints to Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated and not to either of us. After all, she and Molly are the victims here, not the culprits.”

He turned back to Linda. “Let’s get out of here; it’s obvious that the people here are not willing to offer us any assistance in the matter.”
She nodded and started to stand up, her legs literally shaking.

Thomas pulled the rest of the cash he carried out of his pocket and dropped it on the table. “That should at least cover some of the damages,” was all he said as he wrapped his arm around Linda’s shoulder and helped her to stand up. The paper that the men had left, he stuffed into his pocket.

With that, he gently led Linda outside. After they were several meters away from the restaurant, Linda raised her head. “What does that document mean?” she asked, “that I am ready for a padded cell?”

Thomas shook his head. “I worked in a law firm during my years in the States, and I have never seen anything like this. This form, is basically chocked full of legalese and mumble-jumble. It makes very little, if no, sense. Those thugs apparently used it as a way to keep the other restaurant patrons from getting involved, and their plan worked. Not one of those people even bothered to get involved, and they managed to make it look as though you had abducted Molly instead of the other way around.”

“But I didn’t,” Linda whispered. “I suspected that Owen would try and take Molly away. That’s why we left. Tom, you have to believe me; I didn’t want to implicate you or anyone else. I just had no other alternative.”

“I believe you, but right now you do have another alternative,” Thomas said. “I’ve got a friend who wants to help. I already told him about you and Molly, and he is willing to do what he can for both of you.”

“Why?” she whispered.

“Because contrary to your mindset, there are people out there who really do want to help you. You just have to allow them to do just that,” he said. “They may not hurt Molly yet, but we are not going to take any chances. It’s obvious that they think Molly will become a future mouthpiece for their business, but I know they are vastly mistaken. Now, I have a friend who wants to help you, and between us, we will get her back. What you have to do is trust us.”

“It’s not easy,” she whispered. “For Molly it is, she’s just a child, but for me…”

“…You’ve been hurt too many times, and now you don’t want to trust anyone at all,” he said. He put a gentle arm around her shoulder. “You finally have people you can trust. Now, come, let’s get back to the hotel, I still have to contact my friend. Through him, we should be able to get immediate passage back to London.”

“But the threats,” Linda whispered.

“We won’t let that happen,” he promised. “Try not to worry, Linda. Now, have you any idea where they might have taken Molly?”

Linda nodded. “Those three men work for my husband, or better said, for Arthur Slugworth. They have often been sent to do Arthur’s dirty bidding. I never met Arthur, but his reputation somehow goes beyond knowing him. When I married Owen, I didn’t know about the things that the Slugworths were doing, in fact, everything was kept a secret from me. Then one night, I overheard Owen talking to someone on the phone and he said something about contaminating 2,000 shipments of candy bars by the Hudson Chocolate Company in the United States.”

“Yes, I remember that,” Thomas mused. “There was a huge callback on the chocolate, and the Food Administration had opened an investigation on the company. I was living in the States at the time when the story broke. Just before I left to return to London, the Hudson Company had to file for
bankruptcy. They were still in criminal and bankruptcy litigation when I left.”

Linda nodded. “I had overheard everything, but then Owen looked up and saw me standing in the doorway. He got up and walked towards me, his face angrier than I had ever seen before. He looked as though he was ready to kill me. After beating me black and blue, he threatened to plant me six feet under if I so much as uttered a word to anyone about what he had said…” her voice trailed off and she started to shake her head in denial, the tears slipping from beneath the lids and falling down over her cheeks. “…I didn’t say anything because I was too scared.”

“It’s okay,” Thomas said.

“No it’s not,” Linda cried. “They have my baby.” She collapsed in his arms. “We have to go after them.”

“You know we can’t do that, and most definitely not in the state that you’re in right now,” Thomas said. “There is no telling how many weapons those men have on them. I know that your daughter’s life may be at stake right now, but I also know that your life would not be worth a plugged nickel if you tried to be Molly’s hero. If you even show up anywhere near the Slugworth family, they would have absolutely no aversion to killing you. You saw what happened back there and right now, Molly needs you alive, you’re her mother and she loves you.”

“Love,” Linda whispered. “When we first came here, I was trying to protect her from you.”

“I know and believe me, I am more than aware as to why that is the case. You are afraid to trust anyone because it could hurt you. Right now, you have no choice but to trust someone, even if it is only a stranger on a plane. I know of someone who can help us get your daughter back but you have to trust me.”

Linda shook her head, “you don’t understand.”

“Then tell me so that I will,” he said. “I know that you’re afraid, but for God’s sake, you’ve got to stop running.”

“I don’t know how,” she whispered.

“Start by telling everything you know about those men,” Thomas said.

She inhaled, but released it in a staggering breath. “I don’t know much, I simply managed to figure out that they were following us,” she began. “That’s why I didn’t tell anyone where we were going. My father doesn’t even know where we are, and I feel so badly about deceiving him. He’s a good man and he’s always been there for me when I needed him. Now I know that I need someone, but I’m too afraid to ask for help. I keep hoping that if I got Molly out of England, that we would be beyond their reach, but now I know that there is no place on Earth that safe from Arthur Slugworth.”

“There is one place,” Thomas said, “and it is where they would never think of looking.”

“Where is that then?” she asked.

“A special place in London,” Thomas said. “It is a place that seems more like a dream than reality.”

“You don’t understand, the Slugworths have lawyers in their pockets and they can finagle their way out of anything. We’re just small potatoes in comparison,” Linda objected. “When all this started, I thought that they only wanted Molly as leverage to hurt me, but now they seem to have other motives and it terrifies me.”
“What I find strangely ironic is that you actually wanted your daughter to have a relationship with this man,” Thomas said bluntly. “Excuse me for saying so, Linda, but that’s insane.”

“I didn’t know what else to do, I just wanted Molly to be happy,” she said defensively. Contrary to the warm evening, there was a certain chill in the air and this caused her to shiver uncontrollably. “I thought that children should be able to have a relationship with both their parents, not just one.”

“That’s true, but if abuse and neglect are involved, then there should be a line drawn,” he said.

“Maybe I should just go,” she said angrily. “You seem to think that I did everything wrong.”

“I didn’t say that,” Thomas said. “I merely question the fact that you want your child to have a relationship with a father who brings harm to her. I may not know very much about parenting, but I would never force a child to be in contact with someone who is abusive towards them.” He reached out and rested his hand on her shoulder. “We are on the same side, Linda.”

“You know that we are powerless to stop them,” she whispered, but stopped and turned around.

“Perhaps not as powerless as you may think,” he said. “Right now, we have to get you out of Germany tonight.”

“How?” Linda asked.

“Through the same means in which those three are probably traveling, by helicopter,” Thomas said. “Before we arrived in town, I noticed a glider plane landing nearby. That means there must be a small recreational airport in the vicinity where a helicopter could land. We can go back to the hotel, I’ll place a call and then we can arrange a meeting time to intercept a helicopter that could take us back to London.” He started walking again.

“How are we going to get us a helicopter, Tom?” Linda asked as she felt herself being gently led down the street.

Thomas said nothing instead; he continued to lead her back in the direction of the hotel.
Chapter 25: A Midnight Departure

About five minutes later, they had reached the glass doors that led into the hotel lobby. Thomas opened the door and ushered her inside. They made their way quickly across the room in the direction of the stairs.

Looking around and seeing no one in the area, Thomas quickly pulled the door to the stairwell open and they ascended the staircase up the three flights to the floor where Thomas’ room was. Once they reached the correct floor, they entered an empty hallway. Down the hall and around a corner, they reached a second door, which he unlocked. Once he ushered her inside, he spoke. “In case they come looking for you, we should stay here.”

“You still haven’t said how we are going to get a helicopter, Tom,” she said, each word cracking with emotion.

“I know, but this is where trust comes into play.” He closed the door and locked it from the inside. He bade her to sit down while he went over to the phone and picked it up. He dialed the number to Willy’s office and waited for the chocolatier to answer.

“Tom?” Willy’s voice emerged after two rings.

“Yes,” he spoke.

“How was dinner?”

“What dinner?” Thomas asked sarcastically. “All I got was a raw steak to my eye.”

“What do you mean?”

Thomas inhaled sharply, but slowly exhaled as he began to explain. “A group of men who work for Slugworth came crashing into the restaurant and abducted Molly. One of them punched me when I tried to help the little girl get away. Needless to say, they left with her because no one had the gumption to call the police. Even the restaurant manager acted like a coward. At any rate, these men were waving around a piece of paper with a bunch of legalese printed on it. The other patrons did not get involved at all. It was terrible.”

“The Slugworths,” Willy said his voice emerging completely laced in hostility.

“Yes,” Thomas said as he motioned with his hand for Linda to lie down. Instead, she remained seated on the side of the bed and was half listening to his side of the conversation. “Linda’s here with me and she’s not doing very well at all.”

“Her daughter’s been kidnapped, we cannot expect her to be completely alright,” Willy said. “Did you tell her about me?”

“No,” Thomas said. “We need a helicopter to get us back to London tonight. Can you get Ingo-Eia to fly to the airport closest to Füssen? We can get a cab to take us out there since there are taxis all over this town.”

“Ingo-Eia?” Linda whispered her eyes half closed. “What sort of name is that?”
Thomas ignored the question, but waited for Willy to respond.

“Yes, I will summon him,” he paused. “Tom, I want to come as well.”

“Is that safe?” Thomas asked.

“Perhaps, perhaps not, but what choice have we got?” Willy asked. “That little girl has been taken away from her mother. I will not sit idly by and watch a child get harmed by the likes of Slugworth. You think I should call Patrick and tell him about this?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said but turned to Linda. He noticed that she had finally laid down on the bed, her face pressed against one of the pillows. “Perhaps we should wait until we get Linda back to London, then we can call him from there.”

Willy said nothing.

Instead, Thomas could suddenly hear a small tune emerging over the line. It sounded as though it had emerged from the silver flute that Willy carried in the pocket of his waistcoat. He was apparently paging the Oompa Loompa to his office.

“Ingo-Eia is on his way, but is Linda alright?”

“Considering everything that has been happening, I’m not really sure,” he said. He cast a quick glance towards the woman on the bed. “I’d let you talk to her, but I don’t think she’s up to talking to anyone.”

“Understandable,” Willy said as the door to his office opened. “Just a minute, Ingo-Eia has just arrived. We have to have a look at the flying charts. Good that he has his instrument rating. Hold the line.”

After what felt like an eternity for both of them, Willy’s voice once more emerged. “Tom, we’re going to fly to the Fussen Airfield tonight. He’s already mapped the course and it should be a direct flight from London. He has also calculated that the flight time will be about five and a half hours. That means if we leave the factory in the next ten minutes, we should be arriving in Fussen between one thirty and two tomorrow morning your time.”

“Alright,” Thomas said. “Where are you going to get a helicopter?”

“Well, if you haven’t forgotten, Eliza’s nephew works at the Kensington Airfield, so we’ll get there with one of the factory cars,” Willy said. “After bringing in the Oompa Loompas, this should be as easy as blueberry pie.”

Thomas chuckled, “Still haven’t got that three course meal gum finished, have you?”

“No, and with the way things have evolved here, I probably won’t be getting around to it in the near future,” Willy said. “I did manage an antidote for it though, so the Oompa Loompa that volunteered to test it is now back to normal, thankfully. His wife almost killed me for that little mishap.”

“Three course meal gum?” Linda whispered upon hearing Thomas’ words. “What does this have to do with rescuing my daughter?”

Thomas took a deep breath. “I should let you go so you can get the flight plan done and get out here. We’re going to sleep a few hours and then we can be rested up for the trip back.”

“Alright,” Willy said. “I’ll see you soon.”
Thomas hung up the phone and looked at Linda. “We have to get everything out of your room and bring it back here. I don’t want you to be alone in that room tonight, it may not be safe. You can try and get some sleep here. In the meantime, I will go down and take care of the bills for both rooms. At about one tomorrow morning, we can take a cab to the airfield. We have to be careful until we get out of the country.”

“Your friend is really going to fly us out of here?” she asked.

“That’s what he said, now let’s go and collect your things. What room are you in?” he asked.

“Our room is downstairs and around the corner from this one,” she said weakly. “Molly…” her voice trailed off.

“We’re going to get her back,” he said.

“How can you be so sure?” Linda asked. “My husband comes from a very powerful family; they can do just about anything to get people to do what they want. To them, I’m nothing more than an ant waiting to be squashed.”

“Linda, there’s something you need to know,” Thomas said as he reached into his pocket to retrieve the handkerchief. He pulled it out and showed it to her. “My friend, the one who is going to help us, is Willy Wonka. He knows the situation and he and one of his workers is going to pick us up later. I know that this seems hard for you to believe, and perhaps we should wait until they get here so that he can explain everything to you in person.”

“You’re saying that Willy Wonka actually wants to help me?” she whispered. “But I’m a Slugworth; he should hate me…and Molly.”

“Perhaps, but you are also a woman who has been forced to live in an unbelievable circumstance. You cannot expect a man whom you’ve never met to hate you for the things that have happened. Today, he called the number you gave me on the plane and talked to your father. For whatever reason, he was concerned for you and wanted to do something that might help. If not for him, then I would probably have never suspected what was going on before we went into the restaurant. I would have been so surprised upon hearing your last name, that I would have been unable to do anything.”

Linda stared down at her lap. “Tom, I’m scared.”

“I know, and there exists so much that Will and I need to tell you, but the most important thing is that you will be safe at the factory. He’s not going to cast you out on the street; he wants to be your friend.”

“Mr. Wonka wants to be my friend?” Linda shook her head. “I said some dreadful things about him, and he still wants to help Molly, even with the knowledge of who we are.”

“Yes, he harbors no ill towards either of you. His battle, you see, is with Arthur Slugworth, not you and, most certainly, not Molly,” Thomas said. “Linda, do you remember when we talked on the plane?”

She nodded.

“I told you about a friend of mine,” Thomas began. “I said that he has been through very similar circumstances as you have. He knows how hard it is to trust another person. The person I was describing was Will. I was with him when he decided to close the factory and I helped him during the years that he had lived in seclusion.”
“Why did he do it?” she asked.

“He was disappointed in those whom he offered his trust. He was betrayed in ways that perhaps mirror the betrayal you now feel. He could have run away, but he didn’t, instead he silently retreated. The point is, he understands you, which perhaps explains why it is he wants to help you and your little girl.”

Linda took a deep breath. “Molly really loves him.”

“I know, and I think that although they have not yet met, Will has a soft spot in his heart for your daughter as well,” he said.

“Why?” Linda asked. “They don’t even know each other?”

“I think to Molly, Willy Wonka represents the feeling of security. Owen has tried to convince her that Will is horrible, but at the same time, he has abused her. Since Molly is seeing her father as the villain, she has no other alternative but to see Willy Wonka as a polar opposite. It’s a sort of reverse psychology. The only trouble is; Owen thinks that her fantasies are born out of innocence and childlike whimsy, but in fact, he is propelling your daughter even further into her beliefs about Will being the story’s hero. The trouble is; he doesn’t seem to realize that that’s what he’s doing.”

“You asked me earlier what I thought about Willy Wonka,” she whispered.

“Yes, I did,” Thomas said.

“You didn’t get angry when I said that I was supposed to hate him,” she said.

“Why should I?” Thomas asked. “You were told what to think and believe; I cannot fault you for that. But Linda, what do you really feel?”

“God forgive me, but I wanted Molly’s beliefs about him to be true,” she said. “Now it seems as though they are actually being realized.”

Thomas rested his hand on her shoulder. “Come, let’s get your things and then you can get some rest. I know it may not be easy for you to even sleep, but it’s going to be a long night for both of us.”

Linda nodded and allowed him to help her stand up.

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Several hours later, Linda and Thomas disembarked a cab at the vacated airfield. The place was dark and gave off an eerie Halloween-like sensation. Thomas sighed with relief when he noticed that they were, in fact, alone.

He inhaled slowly, the air smelling like a mix of freshly cut grass and livestock. Instead of contemplating this, he turned and looked at Linda. Contrary to what was happening, she seemed more or less in control of her emotions, even though she looked rather worn out. Instead of having slept, she spent much of the evening hours tossing and turning, her worried cries erupting in the stillness.

For his part, Thomas had simply sat at the desk counting down the minutes until they could leave and taxi out to the airfield.

Now they were standing in darkness and waiting. It was closing in on two in the morning. The helicopter was still not in sight, but Thomas’ eyes remained on the sky.
“Where are they?” Linda eventually whispered.

“I don’t see them yet,” he said softly. “But they should be along soon.”

After about twenty more minutes had passed, the first lights of the approaching helicopter could be seen. As soon as the sounds of the craft filled the distant air, Thomas pointed. “There they are.”

Linda nodded and watched as the lights grew brighter and brighter. Within minutes it had landed and Thomas picked up her suitcase and started carrying it towards the aircraft. This left Linda to carry his luggage and Molly’s doll. With her arm still wrapped tightly around the rag doll, she began to trudge her way in the same direction.

She stopped several meters from the door, but watched as Thomas reached out and embraced the man who had disembarked the craft.

The man looked to be wearing a suit and tie, but because it was rather dark where they were, all she could see was the fabric from the jacket as it flapped in the breeze and the shadow of the hat that graced his head. “Will, it’s so good to see you again. Thanks so much for coming,” Thomas said as a greeting.

Willy nodded as the embrace with his friend ended and he looked over at Linda, who awkwardly stood, the bags now sitting at her feet and the doll wrapped securely in her arms. “Is that her?” he whispered, knowing fully, by her stance that it was.

“Yes, she’s pretty broken up,” he said but watched as his friend went over to where she was standing.

As he reached where she was standing, he spoke. “Don’t be afraid, Linda, I’m here to help you.”

“No one can help me,” she mumbled. Instead of raising her head to look into Willy’s eyes, she kept her face meshed amidst the red yarn of the doll’s hair.

“No one is beyond help, dear lady,” he said comfortingly. “Now let me take the luggage for you so we can get you out of here.”

She surrendered everything but Molly’s doll and raised her head warily to watch as he stowed the luggage away. Seconds later, the chocolatier returned to her side and rested his hand on her shoulder. “It’s alright, come, you can sit in the back with me. Tom is going to help up front with the radio; he has more experience with it than I do.”

Linda nodded numbly but not knowing what else to do, she allowed this stranger to help her climb into the backseat of the helicopter. As soon as she was seated, Willy carefully helped her to buckle in while Tom climbed in the front next to the pilot.

Willy watched the woman for several minutes, her arms securely wrapped around the doll, the tears streaming from her eyes. She looked completely brokenhearted, he thought as he resisted the urge to take her into his arms and embrace her as Eliza had often done with him.

Instead, he carefully pulled a small bottle out of his pocket and opened it. Inside the bottle was a mixture of lemon and cherry flavored drops. This was an invention of his that induced peaceful slumber. On the package was a label with the words: ‘Wonka’s Sweet Dreams’ carefully etched across it.

He removed one of the small candies and reached for her hand. “Here, take this, it will help.”
“Nothing will help,” she mumbled.

“This will,” he said gently. “I know you’re scared and worried, Linda, but you’re not alone now. I’m going to put one of these in your hand.” After several seconds, he managed to capture it and then placed the candy in her open palm.

“What is it?”

“Just eat it,” he said. “You can trust me, dear lady. I would never do anything that would bring harm to you.”

Hesitantly, she gingerly put it into her mouth. The tangy citrus flavor suddenly emerged and she allowed it to dissolve on her tongue. When he heard her swallowing, he nodded approvingly.

At that moment, Ingo-Eia took off.

“What was that for?” she whispered after several moments had passed.

“To help you sleep,” he said.

“But I can’t,” she whispered, “I’m afraid.”

“I know, I can tell,” he said. “Now, you have no reason to be. Tom and I are here now, and we have every intention of helping you get Molly back.”

“How?” she asked as she closed her eyes and he could see that the tears were glistening in the darkness.

He reached over and touched her cheeks, but with a gentle finger, he brushed the moisture away. “I haven’t figured that part out yet, but somehow I always find a way,” he said gently, his voice etched in almost arrogant confidence. “Just get some rest now.”

“My baby, she…” her voice trailed off and she allowed ‘Wonka’s Sweet Dreams’ to take effect.

Seconds later, Linda’s exhausted body sagged against Willy’s side. He smiled faintly, his arm still wrapped around her. As he felt her calmed breathing against one side of his face, he released a pent up breath. “She’s finally asleep, and should remain so until we reach the factory.”

“She didn’t sleep at all while we were in the hotel, she cried much of the time,” Thomas said.

“I figured as much,” Willy said. “I could tell that she was afraid from the moment I saw her. She doesn’t trust anyone, does she?”

“She’s been like that since the beginning, Will. Keep in mind, she’s been brainwashed by the Slugworths, and now I can imagine that they will try to do the same with Molly. I don’t think it will work all that well, though,” he said.

Willy looked down at the woman who slept against him. “It seems as though she has been strong for such a long time, and now she’s experiencing her own embedded weakness.”

Thomas nodded. “Will, how are we going to get Molly away from the Slugworths?”

“I don’t know yet, but we will have to find a way and until we do, Linda is going to have to stay out of sight,” Willy said as he gently stroked the sleeping woman’s brown hair.

“You may not be able to convince her of that,” Thomas said. “She was ready to charge after those
men. It took all the strength I had to stop her.”

“Well, considering the knowledge that she has about the industry, it’s understandable. Sooner or later, she will have no choice but to accept the danger that is involved.”

“We have to find a way to get Molly back,” Thomas said.

Willy looked down at the sleeping woman. “For both of their sakes, I hope we do, and soon.” As these words emerged from between his lips, Linda shifted in her seat, her head still resting against him, one of her arms now draped over his lap.
Chapter 26

Chapter 26: The First Lights of Dawn

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

July 14, 1971

As the helicopter landed in the courtyard of Willy Wonka’s Chocolate Factory, the chocolatier slowly opened his eyes. He had fallen asleep as well, but upon feeling the light of the new day streaming across his face, he blinked and looked down to see that Linda was still beside him, her body leaning up against his.

He looked at Thomas once the aircraft’s motor had been shut off. “I’m going to take her to her room. Can you two handle bringing in the luggage as well as returning the helicopter to Kensington?”

“Of course,” the Oompa Loompa answered as Willy carefully unbuckled his safety belt and then that of the sleeping woman. Linda was still holding her daughter’s rag doll tightly in her arms, but that seemed not to matter. As he stood up, he began to move her towards the door of the aircraft. Once he had disembarked, he managed to pick her up in his arms, carry her across the courtyard and into one of the doors leading inside.

Luckily for him, the lights of the dawning morning indicated that it was closing in on six. That meant that from the street, the likelihood of anyone seeing him carrying her inside was next to none.

He waited at the door for Thomas to come over and open it so that he could enter the building without shifting her about. When he did, the chocolatier stepped inside and walked slowly down one of the many corridors. As he reached the end, he rounded a corner and entered one that was considerably brighter. She is such a pretty lady, he thought as he passed his office and made his way through a second group of doors.

Further along the corridor, Linda shifted and moaned all the while indicating that she was about to wake up. Instead of stopping, Willy continued until he arrived at another door, his hand reaching out and pressing down on the lever and allowing him access to the room. As the door swung open, he entered.

The room was large and spacious with a living area as well as sleeping room in one corner. It was decorated in various shades of violets and purples and carried a distinctive fragrance of lavender. Instead of paying it any mind, Willy carried her over and attempted to pull back the duvet before gently laying her amidst the blankets and pillows. Once she was comfortable, Willy seated himself in a chair next to the bed and waited for her to wake up. He knew that if he had left the room, she would have probably woken up in an absolute panic.

Moments passed and she wearily opened her eyes. As her eyes adjusted to the room, she backed herself up against the pillow and tried in some way to keep her wits about her. “W-where am I?” Her trembling words emerged as her frightened gaze met his sympathetic blue eyes.

“Do you remember anything about last night?” he asked. “Perhaps the airport, or the flight back to London?”

“W-we’re in London?” she whispered as she abruptly sat up on the bed.

“Yes and I can assure you that you are in a very safe place,” Willy said, trying to keep his voice soft.
“Tom and I brought you here so that you’d be out of harm’s way.”

“Where’s Molly?” She asked as she started to frantically look around in search of her daughter. When she did not see anything familiar, she looked at Willy. “It happened didn’t it?”

“What happened?”

“T-they took my daughter.” her voice emerged soft, almost inaudible.

Willy nodded and spoke with traces of defeat in his voice. “Yes, they did.” He knew that he had wanted nothing more than to find the two of them before something had happened, but he had failed. Tragically, Slugworth’s men had found them before Thomas could manage to get them out of the area.

Before he could continue, she started to crawl off the bed with the intention of leaving.

Willy reached out and gently, but firmly grabbed one of her arms, his actions hindering her intentions. “Linda, you can’t leave.”

At that moment, she became panicked and tried to pull her arm out of his hold. “But you don’t understand, I have to find her,” she cried, all the while not knowing what she was doing. With her arm suddenly flying about, she struck one side of his face.

Cringing from the impact of the blow, Willy reached over and captured her flailing arm, his hold now strong as he gripped both of her arms up near the shoulder and resisted the urge to shake her.

Instead of speaking, she continued to struggle against the man who was keeping her there. After several minutes, her energy gave out as the realization hit her that this strange man could now do with her as he pleased. She lowered her head and covered her face half expecting him to strike her.

Willy watched her actions with absolute heartbreak. All that he could remember was the conversation he had had with Patrick about Linda’s situation. This was far worse than even the confectioner could have fathomed; Linda was terrified of him. He recalled how he had asked if Owen Slugworth had struck his wife and now the affirmative answer was sitting and trembling before him.

“Please d-don’t hurt me,” she eventually managed to speak, her voice meek and defenseless.

“I would never do anything to hurt you,” he tried to keep his voice calm, but released his hold on her and backed away. As this was happening, he watched as she slowly raised her head, the tears brimming from beneath her eyes. “I won’t hurt you,” he repeated these words and waited. After several moments, she wrapped her arms around herself but managed to offer him a feeble nod.

“I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong impression or triggered something traumatic,” he began. “I just know that you cannot possibly go to the Slugworths and single-handedly rescue your daughter. You’re half asleep and deeply distressed. There is no way that this action will reap any positive results.”

“But, you don’t understand, they have Molly,” she broke down, her body trembling as her agonized cries emerged. “I have to help her…”

Willy took a deep breath. “…I know you do, but running to them with that intention will expose you to even more danger. If you get hysterical about all of this and try, then you will not help your daughter, instead you will only complicate things. We have got to find a way to free her without either of you getting hurt.”
“She’s all I’ve got,” she whispered brokenly.

“I know, and I intend to do everything in my power to help get her back, but I cannot do anything if you decide to act in haste,” Willy said calmly.

“Please, tell me who you are,” she whispered.

Willy took a deep breath. It was obvious that she could not remember the events of the night before. It stood to reason, the *Sweet* Dreams candies did tend to relax the mind to such a degree that it caused the user unforeseen lapses in memory.

Instead of dwelling on these particular side-effects, he pacified her, his voice filled with patience and understanding. “My given name is William; you can call me that or Will or even Willy, whatever you prefer.”

Linda took a deep breath. “Y-you’re Willy Wonka?” she whispered, trace of fright still lingering in her voice.

“Yes, that is the name I market,” he said calmly. “You have no reason to be afraid of me, Linda.”

“I’m n-not,” she lied.

Taking note that she was unconsciously trembling, Willy took a deep breath. “Please don’t lie to me, if there is one thing I cannot tolerate, it is people who knowingly speak an untruth,” he said as he reached over and lightly touched one of her hands.

Linda licked her lips, but lowered her head. “I’m sorry.”

He nodded as he took another deep breath. “Is there something else you wanted to ask?”

“I was just wondering why you are being so nice to me,” she mumbled.

Willy arched an eyebrow, the question catching him completely off guard. Several seconds ticked by before he inhaled slowly and spoke. “Why wouldn’t I be?”

“I hit you,” she said.

“I’m not upset with you for that,” he said. “You were no doubt frightened and reacted as you saw fit.”

“You’re not angry?”

He shook his head. “Of course not; I’m only angry with those people who caused you to be so afraid.” He reached over and touched one side of her face. Initially she tensed up, but then she relaxed when she felt the gentleness of his touch. “You see, not every man you meet is going to cause you undue pain.”

“But you’re supposed to hate us,” she whispered and lowered her head. “I mean; you’re Willy Wonka and I’m…a, Molly is, that is we’re…Slugworths.”

The chocolatier shook his head. “I don’t hate either of you. I knew of your situation before Ingo-Eia and I flew to Füssen to pick you and Tom up. If I were to have harbored any ill towards you, do you think that I would have made the effort to do even that?”

“No, I suppose you wouldn’t,” she whispered. “But, why did you?”
“That’s easy, Tom asked me to,” Willy said. “There is another reason and perhaps now is as good a time to mention it as any. Yesterday afternoon, before we flew to Füssen, I spoke with your father on the phone. Through that, I realized that both you and your daughter were in need of help. Naturally, I figured that someone in my position might be able to render assistance far better than someone who felt they had no voice whatsoever,” he said.

“You view us to be weak?” she asked.

“You are not as weak as you perceive yourself to be,” he began. “I only know what I have observed and experienced. You do know that both Owen and Arthur Slugworth are viewed as giants in this business. They could use whatever influence they have to push their own personal interests. This renders them stronger than both you and your daughter. The fact that they approved all of these things to happen is of great concern to me. You see, my dear, this is no longer just about who can make the best candy; this is about a child’s future and a mother’s peace of mind.”

“But I’m one of them,” she whispered brokenly, this time she found herself unable to even make eye contact with him.

Willy shook his head. “You may call yourself by that name right now, but you’re not one of them, you probably never were,” he offered her a slight smile, just enough that his dimples were showing. When he noticed that she was not even looking at him, he reached over and touched her shoulder. This simple action made her raise her head and look at him as his next words emerged. “You’re a kind and selfless woman who did everything she could to protect herself and her little girl.”

As she felt the light touch of his hand against her shoulder, Linda raised her head and looked at him. “I didn’t want anyone to get involved in my problems…” she managed to speak, but her voice trailed off.

“…I could tell, but isn’t that what friends do?” he asked. “They listen to your hopes, share in your sorrows, and remain beside you during those difficult moments,” he paused before continuing. “In being my friend, you will see me at my best and perhaps also at my worst.”

“Your friend?” she whispered.

“That’s what I said,” he said simply. “If I ever get so angry I cannot think, then I will leave your company for a time and collect my thoughts. You see, it is my opinion that a man who raises a fist and harms a woman is no man; he is, in fact, a coward.”

Linda looked at him. “I would try not to make you angry.”

“Anger sometimes makes people seem real,” he said. “It doesn’t mean that you’re a terrible person for reacting to things that cause you pain or heartache, it just means you’re human.”

“What I know of anger is not very nice,” she said honestly.

“I can well imagine that,” he said. “Perhaps the emotions that you really need to see are the positive ones; like happiness and joy. It must be terribly difficult for you to only see the negative emotions and not the positive ones. Maybe during your time here with us, we can change that around a bit.”

“Where are we?”

“Where do you think we are?” he asked.

He nodded. “Now, I think that before I leave you to get some rest, there is something else I wish to say.”

“What is it?”

“Well, because of the situation with the Slugworth family, I have come to realize that these issues have become quite personal in scope.”

“Then perhaps I should go,” she said.

Willy shook his head. “No, you mustn’t go anywhere. In fact, it could prove detrimental if you were to leave the factory grounds. I cannot tell you what to do, but I can ask you to consent to staying here while we try and help you and Molly.”

“But, why?” she asked.

“The answer is simple; this is the safest place for you to be,” he said simply. “I know that you have more reasons to feel embittered towards the Slugworth family than I do, but Linda, I can assure you that we are both on the same side. As long as you are here, then I would know with clarity that you are safe. But, in making this offer to you, I must make a simple request of you.”

“What?”

“Aside from staying on the grounds until after the Golden Ticket contest is over, I must ask that you please stop condemning yourself for who you are,” he said. “That means that you should never imply or state that I am a fool for trusting or believing in you.”

“You’re no fool, Willy,” she whispered.

“I would most certainly hope not,” he said. He reached over and touched one side of her face and smiled when he noticed that this time she did not tense up. She was starting to trust him, and this filled him with relief. “Then all that is left for me to say is ‘welcome’.”

“Thank you,” she whispered.

“Do you at least feel a little bit better?” he asked.

She shook her head. “I probably should, but I don’t.”

“I understand, and although it may seem odd for me to say, but I am as worried about Molly as you are.”

“Really?” she asked.

“Yes,” his answer was simple.

“Molly thought that you had to be very kind,” she whispered. “She always said that the man who made such wonderful chocolate would have to be nice.”

“That is because she holds the simple faith of a child,” Willy said as he reached over, took her hand gently in his, and squeezed it reassuringly. “Rest assured, dear lady, the fears you have about me are unfounded. I have yet to toss you out of here and I simply refuse to do so. You have nothing to be afraid of.”

“I’m grateful,” she whispered as she took a deep breath.
Willy smiled at her. “I do what I can, but it is my hope that you will at least feel comfortable here.”

“W-where are we?” she asked. “I mean; I know we are inside your factory, but what is this place? It smells like lavender.”

“That’s because it is. This room is called the ‘Lavender Room’ and I picked this color because it is one of my favorites. You see, most of my guest rooms have a color or flavor for their name instead of something more creative. I tend to save my real inspirational ideas for my candy. This room is in a central location so that if you need assistance, you can find it quickly.”

Linda looked around the spacious room appreciatively. “It’s beautiful. Molly should be able to see it one day. We wanted to come by and look at the factory when we came home, but…” her voice trailed.

“…She will be able to see it, but not just from the outside,” he affirmed.

“What if we never see her again?”

For a fleeting moment, Willy had the same thought cursing through his mind, but instead of speaking of this concern, he tried to offer her some semblance of encouragement. “You mustn’t talk like that, Linda.”

As she felt herself pulled into Willy’s arms, she began to weep softly, her body shaking like a leaf as her tears fell from beneath her eyes and dampened his floral colored vest. “I’m so scared,” she repeated over and over. “Oh God, please help me.”

In response to this, Willy tightened his hold on her, his arms now rocking her as he ran his hand gently through her hair. As her sobs became softer, he released his hold on her so that he could take her chin in his hands and tip it up so that she would be looking at him. When his blue eyed gaze eventually met hers, she closed her eyes.

“Open your eyes, Linda,” he said softly. Once she did, he spoke. “Everything will be alright, we will get Molly back, and I will make certain that the people who are responsible for this will answer for it. You have my word on that.”

“But you don’t really know me,” she whispered more to herself than to him. Instead of backing away, she remained in the sanctuary of his embrace.

“I know Tom, and I know that he would not bring you here unless it was absolutely necessary. I trust him with my life and my existence,” he said all the while trying to stifle a yawn.

“You’re tired?” she asked.

“Yes, and I think that right now, you’re pretty worn out yourself. Perhaps now would be a good time for me to leave you so that you can get some sleep. Would you like another of my ‘Sweet Dreams’ candies?”

“All I want is my little girl back,” she said wearily.

“I know, and we will get her back,” he said. “Do you trust me, Linda?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

He smiled and nodded, but instead of elaborating, he reached into the pocket of his coat and fished out the small bottle with the candies inside. He slowly removed the lid and poured one of the candies
into his hand before placing the bottle on the table. “I want you to take another one of these. It should help you to sleep without having any nightmares.”

“My life is a nightmare, Willy…” she mumbled but allowed him to give her the candy.

Once she had accepted it, he watched as she chewed and swallowed it. He then retrieved the bottle, replaced the lid, and put it back in his pocket. “Now, if you need anything at all, push the yellow button right next to the bed. It will sound in my office, which is where I can usually be found.” He glanced down and noticed that she was still wearing her sandals. “Let’s get your shoes off and tuck you in.”

Linda nodded wearily, but kicked off the shoes and stood up so that he could more fully draw back the covers. Once the duvet was shoved aside, she lowered herself onto the cold sheets. Without being coaxed, she laid back down, her head collapsing against the pillow as he covered her with the blanket. “Are you comfortable now?”

Linda nodded, her eyes feewing heavy, but she watched as he got to his feet. “Thank you, Willy,” she mumbled.

He smiled and nodded but watched over her until she had drifted off to sleep. He knew that the candy he had given to her would ensure that she would sleep soundly for the next few hours. Perhaps this would give him an opportunity to catch up on sleep as well.

He went over to the door and stopped before turning around. From there, he cast one final glance back at the woman on the bed, but inched his way out of the room and closed the door gently behind him.

With weighted steps, Willy walked down the hall in the direction of his office. She’s lost all hope, he thought sadly as he finally allowed himself to yawn. He had been awake for much of the night, helping Ingo-Eia with the radio on the flight to Germany and only sleeping off and on during the return trip. He was unwilling to admit it, but at that moment, he was exhausted.

As he reached the door to his office, Omaya-Kal, the Oompa Loompa leader, was standing in front of the door.

“How’s the girl, my friend?” he asked.

“Not good, I’m afraid, and I have no idea of how we’re going to rescue her daughter,” Willy said. “I have always had good ideas, but now I’m stumped, Omaya-Kal. I don’t know what I’m going to do.”

“What we’re going to do, you mean,” he said. “Come inside and sit down, you look as though you are close to fainting. That shall not do the young lady any good and you know that.”

“Yes,” Willy said as he heeded the Oompa Loompa leader’s suggestion. They entered his office and he closed the door. Instead of seating himself at the desk, he went over and sat down on the sofa. “But I must ask you and your people to stay out of sight until I am able to tell her about you. I would not wish for anyone to react in fear.”

“A wise decision,” the orange faced man said. “However, it is from my experiences that something else weighs heavily on your mind. Is that not so, Nunguserak Nanganerok?”

“Please, just call me ‘Willy’ or even ‘Mr. Wonka’,” he said. “I never know how to respond to being
called ‘Candy Marvel’ in any language, whether it is in yours or mine.”

“As you wish,” Omaya-Kal said with a respectful bow of his head. “You are a good and humble man, Mr. Wonka. You mustn’t believe otherwise.”

The candy maker rested his head in his hands but shook it regretfully. He was not quite certain that he was egotistical enough to actually believe the words of his faithful worker. “Thank you, but right now, I am still quite uncertain.”

“You care for her, do you not?” the Oompa Loompa asked.

“Yes, she is fragile, but also quite lovely. I have only met her today, and yet it feels as though I have known her much longer. I wish only that she would trust me as I have bestowed that trust in her.”

“When she is awake, then show her your magic,” the Oompa Loompa wisely suggested.

“You mean the Chocolate Room?” Willy asked.

“No, I mean that, which dwells in the depths of your heart. You have spoken of your concern, now show it,” Omaya-Kal suggested wisely. He started to turn away, but Willy’s voice suddenly stopped him.

“How?”

“That is sadly, a talent that you must find within yourself,” Omaya-Kal said.

“You are very wise, it does not surprise me that your people view you as their leader,” Willy said.

“The act of leadership is not just in the ability to lead, but to listen and understand the needs and hopes of those being led. Perhaps it lies in the ability to accept and embrace that part of you that carries human compassion and understanding to those around you,” Omaya-Kal said. “You showed that when you brought my people to your factory and entrusted us with your amazing genius. You showed it again when you brought that poor lady into your home.”

Willy stood up and walked slowly over to the Oompa Loompa. Standing before him, he reached out and rested his hand on the shoulder of the shorter man. He bowed his head as a sign in their culture of equality and respect.

“I am deeply honored that you are here,” he said, his actions bringing a smile to Omaya-Kal’s otherwise stern looking face.

“My people look to you with that same honor, my friend,” he said as he returned the gesture.

Several moments of silence passed as the chocolatier and the Oompa-Loompa backed away and Willy took a deep breath. “Do you know if Thomas and Ingo-Eia have returned from taking the helicopter back to Kensington?” He asked, all the while deciding that a change of subject was now in order.

“Not yet, but when they return, shall I have them report here?” he asked.

“No, I’ll see them later, right now I think what I need is some sleep,” he glanced briefly down at the pocket where the ‘Sweet Dreams’ candies rested. Instead of retrieving them, he removed the jacket and hung it on the half a coat rack. His hat, he placed on the hat stand.

“Then I bid you a pleasant sleep and when they return, I will inform them that you inquired of them,” he said. “Of course, I believe that Ingo-Eia will require some extra time in his home to recuperate from the work of the last evening.”
“Of course, I am in his debt for his assistance,” Willy said.

“I shall inform him of that, but not to worry, Mr. Wonka, he shall have a day of rest before he returns to his tasks,” Omaya-Kal said. “I bid you a good rest.” He bowed and left the office, the door he closed behind him.

As soon as the Oompa Loompa was gone, Willy returned to the sofa, but stopped at the desk and turned off the lights in the room. The only light to be seen now came from the crack beneath the door leading out into the hallway.

Once the room was adequately darkened, Willy returned to the sofa and laid down on it. For a fleeting moment, he thought about calling Patrick, but quickly dismissed the idea. The man would probably be sleeping at this hour and he figured that the news would be shared soon enough. Right now, all he wanted to do was get some much needed rest. Once he was awake and alert, then he would be able to talk to Patrick rationally about what sorts of options they might have to consider.

Sighing, Willy allowed his body to relax until he fell into a deep slumber.

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Several hours after he had fallen asleep, an ear-piercing sound emerged and abruptly the chocolatier bolted upright on the sofa. The clock on the wall was ticking away, and he noticed that the short hand was now on the one, and the long hand was at about the nine position as it hovered over the barren wall. The chocolatier had slept close to six hours and now he was being summoned back to Linda’s room.

He quickly got up, but left his hat, jacket, and cane behind. He threw open the office door and made his way down the hall towards the Lavender Room. As he reached it, he tapped on the door. “Linda, it’s Willy, open the door.”

Slowly it opened and he noticed that she was peering outside from around the half opened door. “I…” she stammered when she noticed that his curly hair was ruffled and his top hat and waistcoat were now gone.

“Yes, dear lady, the yellow button does work,” he said with a smirk as she backed away from the door so that he could enter.

“I’m sorry if I disturbed you,” she said. “Have you at least heard anything?”

“Not yet, but as you can see, I just woke up myself,” he admitted. “Last night literally took the wind out of my sails.”

“But, what about Molly?” she whispered. “You said that you were going to help me get her back.”

“I know what I promised and I intend to fulfill that promise,” Willy said sternly. “But we all needed to get some sleep, Linda. Not just you and Tom, but Ingo-Eia as well as myself. We were up all night last night, dear lady. Even a miracle or two needs respite.” As these words emerged, he smiled weakly at her. “Now, come, before we make any plans, we must call your father. He is not yet aware of this and we should probably inform him straightaway.”

Linda nodded numbly, the shame washing over her as she recognized the truth in all of his words. “I’m sorry, I should have known better.”

“I understand,” he said. Instead of elaborating further, he ceremoniously offered his arm. “Come with me, we can call him from my office.”
Linda accepted his offered arm and allowed him to lead her out of the room and down the hall. She kept her head down the entire time, although she seemed to like the stable hold he exerted on her arm.

“May I ask you something?” he asked after several minutes.

“I guess,” she said with a shrug of her shoulders.

“I’ve been thinking this over and was wondering if you knew whether or not the Slugworth family would consider making a sort of business trade in exchange for your daughter’s return,” he said. “I mean; are they the sort of people who would put business ahead of the welfare of a child?”

“Maybe, I don’t really know,” she whispered. “Why do you ask?”

“What if I went and offered one of my most private recipes to them?” Willy asked. “Do you think he would take it in exchange for Molly’s safe return?”

“They probably would, they aren’t doing well with their own ideas. That’s why they’ve been stealing from so many others,” she said. “But, why ever would you want to do that?”

“Because Molly is worth it,” he stopped and turned to face her, the surprise at her question obvious. “I know that her life is much more important than a candy recipe, and if I have to sacrifice something that is mine so that you can have your daughter back, then I would do it in a heartbeat. I just needed to know for certain if they would accept such a proposal before I try and go through with it.”

Linda bit down on her lip, her eyes swimming in tears. “You are the most eccentric and unselfish person I have ever met in my life.” With that, she threw herself into his arms.

Willy smiled, but wound his arms around her as well. “We don’t know if it is going to work yet. I just can’t think of any other way to get Molly away from them. This would mean that you and Molly would have to go into hiding for a while. Do you think that she would mind living here for a while?”

“Molly would simply love it,” she said softly.

“I suppose our next step is to call your father and inform him of what has happened. Then I will have to discuss this with Tom before we call and pitch this proposal to Mr. Slugworth,” he said assuredly.
Chapter 27

Chapter 27: Willy’s Gamble

Twenty minutes later, Linda was standing in Willy’s office with the phone in her hand. Thomas had returned from his own room and was now sitting on the sofa and waiting to see what would happen after she finished her call. Instinctively, he knew that something was happening to his friend in the way that he was watching Linda as she spoke to her father. He had that hidden look in his blue eyes that seemed to speak volumes.

As Thomas watched her actions, he knew that he would have to say something to Willy about his observations. Although he had not had too much experience with couples and relationships, something was so blatantly obvious to him in the manner in which his friend was behaving. Perhaps it was because Willy had never been in a relationship of this kind with anyone, and Thomas had always figured him to be somewhat naïve.

“What did he say?” Willy asked once she had hung up the phone.

“He thinks that the Slugworths would take the recipe in exchange for Molly, but I wish that there was another way. They don’t deserve it,” she said softly. “I just wonder how someone could place so little concern on human life and so much emphasis on stealing another person’s ideas.”

“It’s business, Linda, nothing more. To the Slugworths and many others like them, the bottom line is the most important. Tom, do you remember what Tina related to us about her brother being in Arthur Slugworth’s seminar?”

“How could I forget? She was pretty upset about it,” Thomas said nodding. “I can only guess that she was relieved when the truth was realized. She was afraid of having to contend with his arrogance.”

Willy nodded, but instead of elaborating on this, he looked at Linda. “Some people are like that; they have lost what it means to truly care for another person. They love their business or their work, but to open their heart and allow someone like Molly into their world is just not possible. It took me a long time to learn that I could let others in, but it was only through people like Tom that I was able to realize the benefits of it.”

Linda swallowed. “I had no idea that people in this business really cared.”

“Some do, some don’t. It pretty much depends on who it is you are describing. Some behave as though nothing, not their very life or their family, is of any importance. At the same time, there are those who feel as though the love of others is most sacred.” Willy rested his hand on her shoulder. “Perhaps your knowledge of the sort of people we are dealing with conveys the real reason why it is you sensed that something was wrong and fled with Molly to Germany.”

“I didn’t know what else to do,” she said helplessly. “I had no friends left to turn to and I didn’t know how to ask for help.”

“She sounds very much like Eliza,” Thomas said.

“Yes,” he said with a nod as he looked at Linda. “Eliza is the person who helped me to realize that trust and acceptance are important. I had given up on people after one of my recipes had been stolen and she reminded me that there still existed others who are good and noble in the world. You will
eventually meet her though because she is in constant contact with us. At any rate, I do have a picture of her somewhere on my desk. As you can probably tell, it is not the most organized part of the factory.”

He was right; his desk was anything but organized, and aside from the fact that everything was cut in half, the desk looked a mess of paperwork, scrawled out notes, pens and paper. Linda stared at it for several moments until his voice broke into her thoughts.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Just about what you just said,” Linda said smiling as she looked up at him.

“About my lacking in organization?” he asked.

In response to this, she shrugged her shoulders. Instead of responding to his question, however, she asked one of her own. “Willy, are you really certain that you want to sacrifice one of your ideas to save my daughter?”

The chocolatier turned and looked at her, his expression earnest. “I am absolutely certain. If I wasn’t, then I would never have pondered the idea.”

Linda took a deep breath. “Tom said last night before we went to the airport that you were going to help us.”

“And?”

“I believe it,” she said.

“I’m glad,” he said with one of his typical smirks. “Trust makes living in the same vicinity so much easier.”

“Perhaps, but it’s sometimes hard.”

“I know, but the important thing right now is getting Molly back, and I think if we play our cards right, we should have that done before Tom has to leave for Buckinghamshire next week,” Willy said.

“Sounds like a plan,” Thomas said. “Oh, speaking of traveling, I have a message for you from Eliza’s nephew.”

“You mean the fellow from Kensington Airfield?” Willy asked.

“Yes, he wants a few candy bars for rendering his help last night,” Thomas said.

“How many candy bars is a few?” Willy asked.

“Oh his price went way down from the last time he helped us out. Instead of a box, he wants about twenty,” Thomas said.

“That’s economical,” Willy said with a chuckle. “Nice to know he’s not being greedy or anything. Otherwise I think Omaya-Kal would have to compose a song for his friends to sing about pilots and whether or not they can still fly after the consummation of a crateful of chocolate.”

Thomas smiled slightly. “I guess he figured that with the Golden Tickets driving everyone to the edge that he would go light on us.”
“How nice of him,” Willy smiled but looked at Linda. “I think we should go ahead and make that call.”

“You know, Will, I think I have to side with Linda on this one. I don’t think that it would be a good idea at all to use your recipes as collateral for Molly. There has to be another way, otherwise it might send out the wrong message, as though you are giving in to the demands of criminals,” Thomas said. As he spoke, he studied the facial expression of his friend. Willy seemed to carry an almost mad look on his face and he sighed. “You know, when you get that look on your face, I immediately think that you have become Dr. Frankenstein and that you are holing yourself away in the Inventing Room waiting to create a new monster.”

“Could there be another possible way?” Linda asked, completely ignoring what Thomas had said. “Perhaps it is something that we have all overlooked.”

“There isn’t, the only thing we can do is try and bargain with him through something he wants. If I had something that could blackmail him, then I would use it, but it seems to me that there is nothing substantial that could back him into a corner,” Willy said. “He’s got something very valuable to all of us and this must be the ransom.”

Thomas turned and looked at his friend. “Will, I know that this seems strange, but we’ve never done this kind of thing before. How do we know it will work? Giving into them isn’t going to change anything.”

“I know that, but the hostage in question is a child, and we have to take her welfare into consideration here. If we put the Everlasting Gobstopper ahead of Molly, then we will be no better than Slugworth himself,” Willy said. “This may be the only way that we can get Molly out of harm’s way.”

“What about calling Scotland Yard about that paper they left at the restaurant in Füssen?” Thomas asked.

“We could send that form to them, but they will only go after the three henchmen. They will not go after Arthur or Owen at all. They may be the masterminds behind the caper, but they have been in this business long enough to know how to cover their footsteps,” Willy said.

“This could destroy everything you planned with regard to the Golden Tickets,” Thomas said.

“I know,” Willy said somewhat agitated. “Do you have to remind me of that?”

“The only reason I’m asking is to find out if you really want to risk it,” Thomas said.

“Look at her,” Willy said as he waved his hand over towards where Linda was sitting. The woman was listening to this exchange, but had said nothing. “Tell me truthfully Tom, do you honestly think we have a choice in the matter?”

“I don’t know,” Thomas said. “I just don’t know if going and offering the gobstopper idea is going to help matters. It may very well send a message that encourages said behavior.”

Willy took a deep breath, but came over and sat down next to Linda. “I made you a promise, didn’t I?”

She raised her head, but not knowing what to say, she remained silent.

“I promised you that I would do what I could to help Molly get away from the Slugworths, and I have every intention of at least trying,” he said. “We need to do it now before they can do anything
else to hurt her."

Thomas took a deep breath. "Will, are we going to be able to continue things as planned?"

Willy shrugged his shoulders. "I don't really know, but I do think that we should at least try."

Linda looked at him, the confusion shadowing her face. "I don't understand. Why is this contest so important to you?"

The chocolatier took a deep breath. "It's important because I am trying to find someone who may one day take over this factory. Thomas is part of the test I have arranged for the five children who find the tickets."

"A test?" she whispered, "that sounds rather cruel."

"It's not," Willy said. "I have no children of my own, no rightful heir. I need someone who can run this factory when I can no longer do so."

She lowered her head. "I couldn't imagine taking on such a responsibility," she whispered honestly.

"You've been harmed by this industry for a long enough period of time, and I would not wish to push that responsibility on someone like you or Molly. After everything that has happened to her, she will probably be haunted by it for the rest of her life," he said. "No, I have to go through with this contest and see if there is someone out there with the strength of character who could one day take my place."

He went over to the desk and began to scrounge around until he found a small notebook and opened it. Inside were some of his most valuable recipes and Thomas immediately knew what was about to happen. Willy was serious about sacrificing some of his work for the sake of the child. As he found the page he was looking for, he laid the book back on the desk.

"You're really going to offer that man one of your greatest inventions, aren't you?" he asked.

"I have no choice," Willy said. "Do you remember what I told you about them before the announcement came down?"

"You said that when you give them to the children, you are not sure if the tests would be complete or that they would even handle being out in daylight," Thomas said. "But, Will, you're putting everything on the line here."

"I know, but as a candy maker I am in this for the children," he said firmly. "All my ideas, all the inspiration I somehow get, should be targeted to the children. If one child is in danger because of the work that I do, then there exists no recipe in the world that will be too valuable or more important than the safety of that child. We have to do this, Tom."

"You may be putting yourself in danger," Thomas said.

Linda closed her eyes as Willy's words washed over her. She raised her head as a tremor of fear cursed through her. If anyone had told her two days ago that she would be scared for Willy Wonka, she would have laughed, but now she was terrified for him. "Just be careful, Willy, those men are brutal."

Willy nodded. "I will," he said, but turned and looked at his friend. "Tom, find the number to Slugworth's office, there is no time like the present to put the flea in his ear."
Thomas nodded, stood up, and walked over to the filing cabinet. Opening the half door, he pulled out a folder and flipped through some pages until he found the letter Willy had shown him several years ago. The words still seemed to spring out and hit him in the face. Instead of commenting on this, Thomas handed him the piece of paper and watched as Willy got to his feet. Before he reached the phone, he turned to Linda. “I want you to stay quiet during this phone call. Right now, this is the only way I can ensure your safety.”

She nodded and watched as he picked up the phone and dialed.

After two rings, someone picked up the line. It was Slugworth, and Willy could instantly tell that he had reached the right number simply from tone of the man’s voice. Instead of immediately speaking, he pointed to Thomas and watched as the man pressed down on a button next to the phone.

“Arthur Slugworth here,” the man said.

“Hello, Slugworth, I’m surprised that your secretary didn’t patch through the call,” he said, his voice filled with icy undertones.

“Who is this?” the man at the other end of the line demanded.

“Oh, do you mean after all these games you have played over the years that you have no idea who this is?” Willy asked. “Tisk, tisk, tisk, Slugworth, you’re losing your touch.”

“I’m not in the mood for silly games, who is this?”

“This is Willy Wonka,” emerged his swift retort. “I wouldn’t want to cause you to hang up just because you haven’t the ear for voices. Of course, right now there happens to be something that we need to discuss.”

“What could you possibly have to discuss with me, Wonka?”

“What do I want to talk to you about?” Willy said his voice laced in sarcasm. “Well, let’s see, for starters, I happened to have found out that some of your associates were hanging around a restaurant in Füssen last night and they kidnapped a seven-year-old child. I suspect that this fiasco was arranged by you and your beloved nephew. It was rather dim-witted of your friends to kidnap a child in a crowded restaurant, by the way. Of course, I always figured your people to be much smarter than that, but then again, suppositions reap very little result, do they not?”

“What’s your point?”

“It’s quite simple, the child in question should be returned to her mother unharmed.”

“What makes you so sure that I was involved in such a charade or that I even have the kid, Wonka?” Slugworth shot back. “I’ve been here in my office for the last three days enjoying Havana cigars that my cousin brought back from his trip to Cuba. I would suggest that you waste someone else’s time with your fantasies.”

“Oh really?” Willy asked calmly. “You’re playing stupid, but I know you’re anything but. You know precisely what incident I’m referring to. But, since you seem to have forgotten, I’ll spell it out for you. One of my contacts saw your version of the three stooges come barreling into the restaurant last night and force a little girl to come with them. According to this person, when your friends could not convince her to come and visit her daddy, they resorted to forcing her to inhale some drug and taking her by force. Now, from what I understand, the child’s father is your nephew and he seems to be hiding behind you and your company again. Most people in the business already know that he is generally the one who gets his hands dirty so you won’t have to.”
“I have absolutely no idea what you’re talking about,” Slugworth retorted. “It sounds to me like you have been taking a few too many hits with my famous ‘Slug Dust.’”

As crude laughter filled the room, Willy took a deep breath, his gaze shifting from Thomas to Linda. The woman looked afraid, but instead of commenting, she bit down on her lip as hard as she could to keep from saying anything. Thomas watched her, all the while figuring that since she could no longer cry, she was trying to remain silent.

For his part, Willy motioned towards Thomas, his movement indicating that he should go and sit down next to her. There was no denying that the chocolatier was concerned. Thomas did as his friend indicated.

At that moment, Linda leaned over and nudged him. When he turned to face her, she began to whisper in his ear. “Tom, you have to tell him what I told you last night about Hudson Chocolates. Maybe that’s the bargaining tool we could use to save Willy’s recipe.”

Thomas nodded and got to his feet. In lieu of words, he casually made his way over to the desk, picked up a pad of paper, and began to scribble a hasty note to his friend.

By this time, however, Willy’s patience was wearing very thin. “You may think that sending out your goons to kidnap a defenseless child is a laughing matter, but I can assure you that it is not. It will do neither you nor your business any good. Sooner or later, all of this is going to catch up with you, and I have a feeling that it will be sooner as opposed to later. I know more about your nephew than you probably realize. I also know that you have gone out of your way to make people’s lives miserable for the sake of making money.”

“Oh come now, Wonka, are you still on that six-year-old grudge?” Slugworth shot back.

“Why would I be? The ‘Around the World’ recipe is nothing compared to the Golden Tickets,” Willy said. “The latest sales figures show that my chocolate is selling very, very well. I just sent a shipment to the Queen just two days ago.”

“Wait until the rest of the world figures out that it was just a scam,” Slugworth sneered.

“A scam you say! Well, one of the tickets in that ‘so called’ scam turned up just yesterday in Germany, so some might just assume that your predictions about it are completely invalid,” Willy snorted.

As he spoke, Thomas handed him a slip of paper and he quickly read through the words and smiled. “This is interesting,” Willy mused. “My friend just gave me something that might be of some consequence to you, Slugworth. It is, in fact, something that you would probably give your false teeth to have someone keep a lid on.”

“Oh really?” he snapped, his sarcastic question louder than even Willy could have anticipated.

“Yes, according to this, the reason that Hudson Chocolates went out of business several years ago was because their wares had been contaminated by an outside force.” Willy turned and smiled at Linda, but did not say anything further. Instead he waited for his competitor to respond.

“What are you talking about?” Slugworth took the bait.

“I’m talking about someone who apparently overheard a conversation between your nephew, Owen, and someone who was working for you in the United States. From what I understand, this happened about six years ago. This person heard him making some underhanded business deal about
contaminating a shipment of chocolate and their testimony could help to solve a huge mystery. All we would have to do is contact a lawyer and have them go into the records at the telephone company and find out the specific dates and times in which that call could have been placed," Willy said.

“All you have to go on is hearsay, Wonka, you can’t peg that fiasco on me,” Slugworth said confidently. “You know how business is; it’s ‘kill or be killed’. If you can handle that, then maybe you should never have started in this industry at all.”

“Oh, don’t even try to second guess what my business tactics are,” Willy said firmly. “I may be a lot of things, but I am most definitely creative enough to come up with my own ideas without stealing them or sabotaging my competitors. So, in light of the information I now have, I could very easily come out of seclusion and turn every last bit of it over to Scotland Yard.”

“What sort of information do you have?” Slugworth asked with challenging undertones in his voice. It was obvious that Willy had gone from sitting on the defensive to taking the offensive.

As the chocolatier smiled, both Thomas and Linda knew that that he had finally gotten Slugworth’s attention. “Well, let’s just say that I happen to have someone right here in my office who would be willing to go to the authorities with a great deal of information about your company as well as about the abuse your nephew has inflicted to keep certain individuals quiet. Along with that, this same associate of mine has also obtained a piece of paper signed by Owen Slugworth with a bunch of ill-founded mish-mash about a certain lady’s mental capacity. Now, in case you haven’t realized yet, I do have my ways of contacting every last person in that restaurant in Füssen. You can either risk that or you can return the child to me unharmed and we can forget about me contacting Scotland Yard,” Willy said calmly. “Of course, I’m certain that by the end of this week that you and your beloved nephew might find yourselves behind bars and perhaps cellmates with the three stooges that you sent to Füssen.”

“Linda is there, isn’t she?” Slugworth bellowed so loudly that everyone in the room could hear. “I should have had her rubbed out long before now.”

Upon hearing this, Willy cast a sympathetic glance towards where Thomas and Linda were seated. He hoped that she would remain calm, but that seemed almost impossible as she looked as though she was about to jump out of her skin. If she had been nervous before, then it was nothing compared to the petrified expression that shadowed her face now. He took a deep breath but continued to speak.

“Yes, your nephew’s wife happened to find sanctuary with us and I would suggest that if you and your nephew are smart, you’ll turn over the child to me tonight. Either that or I will take Linda and we will go straight to the police and ask them to contact the police in America so that the investigation on Hudson Chocolates can be reopened. I am certain that the people you single handedly ruined would at least be pacified with a complete confession from you as to how you managed to destroy them and still manage to keep your hands clean.”

“Forget it, Linda wouldn’t have the courage to do anything like that, not while I have her kid,” Slugworth said cruelly, the words out before he could even stop them. “And if she so much as steps out of that factory of yours, I’d make certain that she’d be dead in five seconds or less.”

As soon as these words emerged, Willy glanced over to Tom. “Okay, I think I’ve heard enough. Shut off the tape recorder,” Willy said with a trace of intentional arrogance that was easily detectable by his competitor.

The man at the other end of the line simply grunted as the machine clicked loudly. “Did you honestly think that I would call you without having myself protected?” Willy asked, all the while waiting for
Slugworth to say something.

Thomas removed the tape from the recording device and looked at his friend. Contrary to the concern he had for Linda, Willy still carried a smug look on his face that indicated how much he was enjoying himself.

“Okay, Wonka,” Slugworth eventually said with ice in his voice. “You win this time. You bring the tape and we’ll bring the kid. She will be at Bill’s Candy Shop in the marketplace at seven sharp tonight. We’ll come alone, you do the same. If I even see so much as one cop around, she’s dead. If I see anyone besides you lurking about, then the deal’s off.”

With that, he hung up.

Willy nodded. “Tom, why don’t you go and see Bill and inform him of what will be going down tonight? If he can stay open for a little while longer, then at least we will know that Molly will be safe inside the shop. I don’t trust Slugworth as far as I could throw him, but we have to do things his way.”

“That means you will go and pick her up?” Linda asked weakly.

“Yes, with the tape,” Willy said.

“Let me come with you?” Linda pleaded.

“I can’t let you do that, and it’s foolish for you to even ask,” Willy said sternly.

“But she…”

Willy’s expression softened. “…Linda, It’s too dangerous and I simply cannot allow it. You heard him; I have to come alone. I have to do this by myself.”

Linda lowered her head but bit down on her lip. “What if they get you too?”

The chocolatier smirked. “They wouldn’t want me.”

Thomas chuckled, but looked at his friend. “Linda’s concerns are valid, Will. Maybe we should make a copy of the tape so that if something does go wrong, we won’t be on the defensive.”

“Good idea,” Willy said. “Do we have the technology to make a copy?”

“I do in my room, the radio receiver I built, it has the capacity to make recorded copies,” Thomas said smiling.

“Will it be safe to do that?” Linda asked.

“It is far safer for Will to have a backup copy as opposed to handing everything over to a man he doesn’t trust,” Thomas said.

“I don’t know if this arrangement is going to make me feel any better,” Linda said softly. She raised her head and looked at the chocolatier. “What if he tries to hurt one of you?”

“I will do everything I can to keep Molly safe, and I will also do what I can to keep out of the line of fire,” Willy said. “I think you know that Molly is now being used as leverage to keep Arthur Slugworth out of jail. What old Slugworth doesn’t know in making this suggestion is that Bill is a friend of Tom’s. He has been in contact with Tom for a number of years and he would never allow anyone to hurt a child, specifically not in or around his shop.” Willy reached for her hand, and when
he captured it, he squeezed it gently. “Linda, you amazed me just now. When you spoke the truth, you saved my recipe and I am deeply grateful to you for that.”

The woman glanced down and stared at his hand as it held hers. “I wasn’t sure if that information was of any consequence,” she admitted. “I only wanted to help.”

“The information is of no consequence?” Willy asked with disbelief. “My dear lady, I happen to know that there was an investigation going on in the United States about this very thing five or so years ago. Tom was there when the story broke and it was pretty intense even then. Those poor Hudson Chocolate people have been to more court and bankruptcy hearings than you could imagine. I happen to know that even without this tape and if you still have the courage, you could help put a number of people from the Slugworth camp behind bars.”

Linda looked at him. “I know it seems selfish, but I don’t want to think about that right now. Maybe I will say something once we get Molly back.”

The chocolatier nodded. “I understand. Well, I seem to have gotten my appetite back, albeit a little, but that’s better than nothing. Why don’t we adjourn to the cafeteria and have something to eat?” he smiled, but offered her his arm. Once she accepted the three of them left his office.
Chapter 28

Chapter 28: Making Plans and Loving Hands

Just as Willy had suggested, right after lunch, Thomas ventured beyond the gates of the chocolate factory and went into town to meet with his friend. This time instead of walking, he drove a nondescript brown colored sedan.

By the time he reached the marketplace, the area was filled with cars and shoppers were lining the streets. Instead of being dressed in his typical business suit and tie, he was now clad in jeans and a polo shirt. A baseball cap covered his thinning hair and his eyes were concealed by Willy’s hippie eyewear.

As he parked the car, he could see that children were on the sidewalk in front of the candy shop, their happy laughter filling his ears. Upon seeing them, he hoped that Bill would be there and would be able to take some time off so that the two of them could speak in private. He knew that Bill’s wife, Margaret, sometimes helped to run the shop during the afternoon hours, and he hoped that that would be the case during this particular day.

Entering the shop he approached the counter and saw that both Bill and his wife were present and actively waiting on the children who were seated at the counter. Margaret was working the soda fountain, filling funny shaped glasses with the sweet liquid and Bill had his back turned and looked to be retrieving a bar of chocolate for one of the boys.

After several minutes, the customer paid and was soon ripping into his candy. As Thomas watched, he could feel relief washing over him as he approached the counter. “Bill?”

The candy seller broke into a broad grin as soon as he had turned around. “Hey Tom, it’s been a long time. What brings you by?” he asked. “I almost didn’t recognize you in that strange getup. Are you working under cover or something?”

“Bill, I need your help with something,” Thomas began. “Is there somewhere we can go and talk in private? It’s rather important.”

“This sounds serious,” Bill remarked.

“It’s very serious,” Thomas said with an affirmative nod of his head.

“Well, I still need to run down the street to the cleaners and pick up some stuff,” Bill said. “It’s not one hundred percent quiet out on the street, but it probably is more private than here. We’re rather in the middle of the mid-afternoon rush.” He smiled but turned to his wife. “Maggie, can you handle everything for about twenty minutes?”

“Sure,” she said as she placed a drink in front of one of the children. “Just try and get back before four, that’s when the next rush comes in.”

“Allright honey,” Bill said as he removed the apron he wore before hanging it on the hook near the counter. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Thomas inched his way over towards the door and waited for Bill to come out from behind the counter and join him. As soon as he did, he raised his head and noticed a young boy about eleven or twelve peering in through the glass from the outside front window of the shop.
The boy looked familiar to him, his blonde hair hanging down over one of his eyes, his mouth curled in an almost longing expression as he stared inside the shop.

For a split second, Thomas’ mind was suddenly filled with other thoughts, and the situation with Linda and Molly was momentarily shoved aside.

He stepped outside of the shop and watched as the child approached the newsstand and accepted several newspapers as well as two or three silver coins from the man behind the kiosk. After several moments of staring at the child’s retreating back, the realization suddenly hit him; that child was Charlie Bucket.

He remembered the inquisitive five-year-old child he had met out on the eastern sector of town all those years ago. It seemed like yesterday when the child was dreaming of taking a paper route in order to help support his family. Now he was doing exactly what he said he would do. “What an admirable little boy,” he mumbled.

“I beg your pardon?” Bill asked as he joined him at the front of the shop, a green drycleaner ticket stub in his hand. The candy seller started to walk in the direction of laundry that was on the far end of the square.

“That little boy, I’ve seen him before,” Thomas said. “It was a long time ago, and on the same day that the ‘Around the World’ recipe incident happened. He was a small child back then, and now he’s all grown up.”

“I’ve seen him just about every day hanging around the shop,” Bill said. “He’s such a skinny lad. He would stand at the window and peer inside, but he never came in. He just stands there looking.”

“His name is Charlie and he probably can’t come in because he doesn’t have the money to buy candy,” Thomas said. “I met him about six years ago. I remember him talking about one day taking a paper route to help support his mother and grandparents. His friend Eliza said that he talked about doing that all the time and this happened rather soon after his father had died. It was a tough break for such a young child.”

Bill nodded. “Sounds like it.”

“Anyway, he seems to have done exactly what he set out to do all those years ago because I just saw him picking up papers from the fellow at the newsstand. The child was very kind back then, and I imagine that nothing has changed since.”

Bill nodded. “Well regardless of who he is, I have this strange suspicion that Charlie is not the real reason you wanted to get together and chew the fat. What’s going on, Tom?”

Looking around to insure they were alone, Thomas spoke, his voice filled with earnest undertones. “Willy Wonka needs your help.”

“He needs my help?” Bill asked the traces of skepticism etched in every word.

Thomas nodded and quickly related the information he had found out that morning to the candy seller. As he finished telling him what was about to happen that evening, he looked at Bill. “I don’t know why it is that Slugworth picked your shop as the drop-off point, but that’s what he did.”

“Perhaps because he figures me to be neutral,” Bill said. “I may not like selling his wares, but I have to. He probably figures me to be the most neutral shop in London. Not to mention that since I usually close the shop at six, he thinks there would be no one around.”
“I’m guessing that as well,” Thomas said. “Look Bill, I wouldn’t be asking you to do this if it wasn’t important. The truth is; Mr. Wonka thought that it would be safer for Molly if you were to let her into the shop this evening so that the Slugworth people can’t try something underhanded.”

The two men stopped and Bill looked around. “I could entertain Molly for a time, but who will be picking her up after the Slugworth boys let her out?”

“Willy Wonka,” Thomas said. “He has already planned to come in some sort of disguise so that people on the street won’t recognize him. I know that this all sounds twisted and crazy, but I really didn’t want him to do this in the first place.”

“It sounds dangerous,” Bill mused.

“It is dangerous, but a child’s life is at stake,” Thomas said.

“I would not have expected less from Mr. Wonka than that,” Bill said honestly. After contemplating the proposal for several minutes, the candy seller nodded. “Tell Mr. Wonka that I will do whatever I can to help him and the child.”

“We really appreciate that,” Thomas said.

“Do you have any idea why Slugworth wanted Mr. Wonka to come?” Bill asked.

“Not really, but the fact that Slugworth demanded that Mr. Wonka be the one to retrieve the little girl has me a bit nervous. After what I witnessed in Füssen, I am seriously afraid that they are going to do whatever they can to get both the tape and Molly. That’s why he asked me to come here and talk to you about it. If they try to do something of this nature, then at least someone on our side can help to get Molly out of the line of fire in case something goes wrong.”

Bill nodded, a smile crossing his face. “Something tells me that I am really sticking my neck out on this one. You owe me.”

“I’ll tell Mr. Wonka,” Thomas said. “He would probably be willing to accommodate you in any way he can.”

“You can pay me back by not mentioning any of this to Maggie. If Slugworth doesn’t end up killing me tonight, she will if she finds out about what you are planning. I simply cannot believe that someone who caters to children like those in the candy industry would have the audacity to put a child in harm’s way like this. It seems low and dastardly to kidnap a child anyway, but to use them like this,” Bill said shaking his head.

“I know and one of Slugworth’s men gave me a black eye when I tried to intervene,” Thomas said. “Thankfully I got a raw steak for it, and was able to conceal it with these strange glasses.” He removed them and Bill could see the bruise that covered Thomas’ right eye.

“They got you good, didn’t they?” he asked. “Might I suggest that you stay out of the espionage capers from now on?” A smirk crossed Bill’s otherwise earnest face.

Thomas sighed but returned the smile, “very funny.”

Bill stopped walking just outside the cleaners. “You know, there are some things that people should not do, and manipulating children goes way beyond even my level of patience or comprehension.”

Thomas nodded. “I can’t help but agree.”
“I’ll be right back,” Bill said and disappeared inside the building only to return several minutes later, his arms loaded down with a plastic bag full of clothing. “I guess you better get going. I still have some things to do before the showdown, and you probably want to get back and let them know that everything been discussed and agreed upon. I’m not going to leave you or Mr. Wonka hanging, please assure him of that.”

“I know,” Thomas said. “In all the years I’ve known you, you’ve never let anyone down, it would be too out of character for you.” He looked down at his watch. “I’ll see you around Bill and thanks again.”

He stepped off the curb and started to make his way back towards the car. As he got in and started the motor, his thoughts were literally going in circles.

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Less than an hour after his meeting with Bill, Thomas returned to the factory and parked the car in the back lot behind a crop of buildings. He made his way inside and immediately headed to Willy’s office. He figured that the chocolatier would be inside, as he had said that he would be waiting there for Thomas to come back after his talk with Bill.

As he came down the hall, he could hear Willy’s voice drifting out into the hallway. He must be talking to Eliza, he thought, he always calls her during this time of day. He tapped on the door and waited for Willy to summon him inside.

When the door was opened from the inside, he entered the office and could see that Willy was sitting at his desk; a pen was being used to drum against the wooden surface. “I will be careful,” he was arguing into the receiver. “Yes, I know that what I am doing is dangerous. You don’t have to remind me, but this is about a child.”

Thomas put a hand over his mouth trying to keep from laughing. He continued to listen as Willy defended his actions to what appeared to be a rather irate mother on the other end of the line.

“I promise you, I’ll be careful,” he was saying, but turned around to see that Thomas had closed the door. “Tom just got back from Bill’s candy shop and I’m certain that he’s going to help us get through all of this. Right now, we have to do what we can because there is a seven-year-old child’s life at stake. We have to make sure that she doesn’t get harmed because of someone else’s animosity and callousness.”

After a second, Willy stood up and motioned for Thomas to come over to him. Thomas walked over to the chocolatier only to have the phone shoved in his hands. “She wants to talk to you,” he said. Thomas accepted the phone. “Hello Eliza,” he said simply.

“Thomas,” she said sternly, and he cringed. Here it comes. Although he knew that Eliza was only a few years his senior, he was about to get fed the riot act. “Do you have any idea what William is planning to do?”

“I do, because I have been helping him arrange it,” he said.

“I know, he told me,” she said sternly. At this moment, Thomas could sense that she was about to start scolding him. “You know that you are older and should know better.”

If not for the earnestness of this situation, Thomas would probably have laughed out loud. He could clearly recall the days of his youth when his own father would scold him whenever Simeon had made mischief. Now he was the child again, and Willy was his younger sibling. He began to chuckle
despite himself. “I am not kidding, Thomas,” she snapped indignantly. “This is no laughing matter!”

“I’m sorry, but I just had a flashback to my own childhood,” Thomas said. “Everyone used to say such things when Simeon and I were kids. It just makes me laugh.”

“Be that as it may,” Eliza said. “William is stepping into danger, and I’m worried.”

“We know what we’re doing, Eliza,” Thomas said. “Will has been dealing with this sort of thing for years and we just have to trust that he knows exactly what he’s doing. Besides, there is a little girl involved who needs our help. Her mother is already here and she is about as close to a nervous breakdown as one can get.”

“If anything happens to you or William, I will have a nervous breakdown,” Eliza said, her voice cracking with emotion.

“We’ll be careful, Eliza, and when he gets back tonight, I promise, I’ll call you,” he said. Within seconds, he handed the phone back to Willy.

“Try not to worry, Mum,” Willy said and after several minutes, he hung up the phone. “She’s really scared to death about all of this,” he said as he stared at the phone for several seconds. “She even wanted to come back to London today, but I told her that it was safer for her to stay where she is.”

“I can imagine,” Thomas said. “Where’s Linda?”

“Right after lunch, I took her back to her room. She’s been there since just before you left. She told me that she really needed some time to herself. I ended up telling her that I would stop by before I go to pick up Molly and see how she’s doing. She’s surprisingly strong in the face of all of this; I just hope that it will last. She’s been through so much during the last twenty four hours, hasn’t she?”

“It’s probably been going on much longer than that, Will,” Thomas said. After studying the chocolatier’s face for several seconds, something suddenly clicked with him and he took a deep breath. “You care for her a lot, don’t you?”

“I don’t know her well enough to say for certain,” Willy hedged. “I have only been around her for less than a day, but I do feel rather protective of her.”

“No, that’s not what I meant and you know it,” Thomas said. “Will, attraction is attraction, sometimes it can hit you like lightning and sometimes it builds and grows over time. Regardless of how it happens, it can still be difficult to contend with. You wouldn’t be willing to sacrifice everything for just anyone. I know you, and I know that there must be feelings involved for you to have done what you’ve done for her. I mean; you not only flew to Germany in the dead of night, but you talked to her this morning and then you confronted Slugworth because she couldn’t.”

Willy sighed deeply. “Tom, I know what I did and I did it because it was the right thing for me to do. Can’t we just drop this line of questioning?”

“No, we can’t,” Thomas said. “Will, I know you probably better than anyone else in the world. We’ve been through thick and thin together, but you have never experienced the emotion of love in this way. It’s not wrong to feel an instant attraction to another person.”

The chocolatier took a deep breath. “Look, I know you mean well, but I have to get ready to go and pick up Molly. I would be lying if I said I wasn’t just a little bit nervous about having to do all of this.”

“I’m not trying to make you feel uncomfortable here,” Thomas said.
“I know, but regardless of what I may feel for her, I cannot very well pursue anything right now,” Willy confessed. “For all practical purposes, she is still a married woman and off limits to any man. Yet, from what you have told me, she was pretty broken up about what her husband had done. It would be extremely unethical and immoral for me to even try.”

Thomas looked at him. “Ever since the day we met, you have never had any feelings for a woman that went beyond a platonic friendship. To have feelings for another person is normal and it is something that you cannot turn on or off like the eggdicator. You and I both know that Linda is a lovely lady once you break through her initial shell of mistrust.”

“Yes, she is a lovely lady with a massively huge problem as well as psychological traumas to contend with.” Willy shook his head sadly. “Anything that I may feel for her would not serve her emotionally at this point, Tom. She doesn’t need to have a relationship end with one chocolatier only to start one with another. She’s been hurt and needs time to get past the pain. Besides, with her present emotional state, one could very easily conclude that my feelings for her are born solely out of pity or empathy. All of that will require time and effort to sort out. She cannot be expected to jump from one situation straight into another.”

“You may be right, but I’m afraid that that decision will not be entirely yours to make, Will. It is ultimately going to be something that Linda will have to decide for herself as well,” Thomas said firmly. “For now, she knows that you care for her simply because you wanted to sacrifice one of your recipes for her daughter. I happen to know that this sacrifice was proposed to make Linda happy even if it would ultimately serve Molly. Linda was the reason that you had the idea in the first place. You’re going to have to face that possibility sooner or later.”

Willy nodded. “I know you’re right. Ever since you called me from the plane and told me what was happening, I have felt drawn to both of them. I relate to Linda and her fears and uncertainties. I simply know that I want to do what I can to make her happy again.”

“What about Molly?” Thomas asked. “Where does that leave her in all of this?”

“I honestly don’t know, but I do know that I want to get to know Molly and talk with her. I’m not just trying to help Linda out of a dreadful situation, Tom. I know internally that I really do want to do what I can for Molly as well. You told me all those really delightful things about her, and now I just know that my heart hangs on both of them.”

“You’ve already gone and proven that tenfold,” Thomas said.

The chocolatier nodded, but instead of speaking further, he turned away from his friend and walked over to his desk. “I still need to get changed and would like to go and see Linda before leaving here.”

Thomas nodded, but instead of speaking further, he followed Willy out of the office and the door was closed behind them.
Chapter 29

Chapter 29: A Chocolatier’s Intentions

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy was dressed in a paisley shirt and bell bottom pants when he arrived at the door to Linda’s room. It was an hour before he was scheduled to meet his competitor at the specified location. He was nervous, but it was no longer about going to pick up Molly, he was worried about seeing and talking to the child’s mother before leaving the factory.

He fiddled with the pin that was affixed to the collar of his shirt as he walked. Ever since he had left to go on his trip to New Zealand, he had worn the broach whenever he did not wear his suit and hat. He loved it, but it was probably because of the sentimental value that was affixed to it.

It was essentially one of the most precious gifts Eliza and Thomas had ever given to him. “It will always remind you of who you are,” Eliza had told him that fateful day. Somehow there was a calming effect to those words, even now, nearly three years later. He continued to fiddle with the object, all the while pondering whether or not its presence would calm his nerves. He suddenly felt like he was stuck in the role of a negotiator instead of being what he actually was, a chocolatier.

For the longest time, he stood in the hallway uncertain about what to do. He knew that he would have to try anything he could to help Molly get away from the Slugworths. At the same time, he was terrified at the prospect of failing. The child’s life could easily hang in the balance. Of course, his conversation with Thomas was still ravaging his mind and he pondered if he was nervous about having to help Molly, or facing Linda.

His heart was hammering so loudly in his chest that he thought it would surely explode. Instead of speaking, rhyming, or singing, his hands seemed to be in constant motion, whether touching his broach or brushing his hands through his blond coils of hair. By the time he reached the door to the room, he pondered how much in disarray he now looked.

Taking a deep breath, he lightly knocked on the door and was surprised when it immediately opened. Linda’s appearance now seemed to match his own frazzled one. At that moment, her hair was hanging in clumps down over her shoulders.

For a split second, Willy thought about how pretty she was, but said nothing to that effect. Instead, he simply stood stationary and smiled nervously. After several moments of silence passed between them, he looked into her eyes, all the while noticing the brave expression that lurked in them. He started to ponder if this was her being courageous or if she was deeply embedded in a façade of her own.

He watched as she silently backed away from the door so that he could enter the room. “I never thought I would see you dressed in something besides a top hat and suit,” she said softly. “It seems strange and unfamiliar.”

“I know,” he said. “I felt rather like one does on Halloween the first time I dressed in this way. At least that’s what Tom said, although the more I wear this outfit, the more accustomed I become to it. It doesn’t feel so strange to me anymore.”

Linda nodded, but instead of saying anything further, she closed the door and turned away from him, her eyes closing as she wrapped her arms around herself. From where he was standing, he could tell
that she was about to say something completely unrelated to his mode of dress.

“It’s not working…” she whispered brokenly.

“…What isn’t working, Linda?” he asked softly.

She turned around as the tears began to stream down over her face. “I’ve spent the last hours trying to calm myself down about tonight. I’ve been saying to myself over and over that you won’t let anything bad happen to Molly. Even after all that, I’m still scared, Willy. I don’t want anything bad to happen to her, but I’m also scared for you.”

“It won’t, we’re both going to be fine,” he said softly.

“How do you know?” she asked. “You’re one of the most amazing people I’ve ever met, Willy Wonka, but you don’t know that for certain! You have absolutely no way of knowing what will happen the moment you leave this place.” As these words emerged, she raised her head and looked up at him.

“No, I don’t know what will happen, but I do have a choice. I can either be an inconspicuous coward, or I can go out there and do the right thing,” he said.

“You’re not just Molly’s hero; then. You’ve somehow become mine as well,” she said as the tears continued to stream down over her cheeks. He could tell that she was doing everything she could to keep from completely breaking down.

Instead of speaking, he came over to where she was standing and wrapped her in his arms. Without warning, the woman collapsed into the hold and buried her face against his chest.

“Please, Willy, tell me everything is going to be alright,” she implored.

“I cannot say that it will, because I don’t know,” he confessed. “Linda, I’m just as nervous and afraid as you are. I’ve never done this sort of thing before. All I can tell you is that I would rather have something happen to me as opposed to Molly. I don’t want to let either of you down.”

“You could never let me down, Willy. Perhaps that’s why I’m so afraid.”

“Are you still afraid of me?” he asked.

She shook her head adamantly. “No, I consider you a friend, but there is a tiny trace of fear remaining.” She backed away from him, her eyes closing for a moment. “Whenever I look at you, I see someone kind and generous, not the person I was always told to see. Please forgive me for that, but I am trying to release the judgments and prejudices they convinced me of. I am at the threshold of wholeheartedly believing everything you say.”

Willy thought for a moment of what Thomas had said about her having been brainwashed. Now those words seemed to ring more true than anything he could have imagined.

Instead of speaking, he waited for her to continue. “I am not accustomed to being held in a loving manner by a man I barely even know, yet I feel that every time you touch me. I know that there are other people in the world who are as loving and kind as you, but I do feel guilty in all of this.”

“Why do you feel guilty?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she confessed, “maybe because I feel like a fool.”
“You’re not, Linda, that’s why it is called being brainwashed,” he said. “There exists absolutely nothing whatsoever for me to forgive.”

“You’re not just saying that, are you?” she asked.

“No, I mean it from the bottom of my heart,” he said. “I have never been angry with you nor would I start after you have been so honest and straightforward with me.”

“It’s funny,” she said.

“What is?”

“The very first time you held me, there was this strange little voice deep inside that was telling me I was safe and secure right where I was. Part of me wondered if it was done out of pity, but the other part of me just hoped that that feeling would never end.”

Willy nodded. “I realized a long time ago that pity was not generally a sign of a true friend. Pity is just something that hinders both parties.”

“That’s true,” she smiled weakly. She reached up and touched his face in the exact same place where she had slapped him earlier that same morning. “This morning when we spoke, I was trying to keep you at a distance because I didn’t want to get hurt again.” She took a deep breath, but when her next question emerged; it surprised him to hear these words coming from her. “Willy, what you did for me wasn’t pity, was it?”

He reached for her hand and once he held it, he gave it a reassuring squeeze. “When I first saw you, I did feel a great deal of empathy towards you. It was a very profound emotion, one of the strongest that I have ever encountered,” he admitted. “I wanted to be that knight in shining armor and help you battle those evil dragons single-handedly. Everything Tom had told me about you made me feel as though I had known you for much of my life. Yet, the more I talked to you, the more I discovered that you didn’t need a knight. What you needed was something far more important.”

“What?” she whispered, clearly captivated by his words.

“You just needed a friend who would stand by you. Perhaps you wanted to find someone who could help you to fight the evils of your world. You sought a person who would not fight out of pity, but rather because the battle that existed was between right and wrong. When I realized that my empathy would do neither of us any good, I discovered that a real and genuine emotion dwelled beneath it. It was one that said that I want to be here for you, I want to be your friend, without condition or expectation.”

Linda looked down and saw that his hand was still holding onto hers, yet she seemed unwilling to let the hold loosen. “You do?” she asked, her voice sounding much younger than she actually was.

“Yes.”

She released his hand at that moment, her eyes filled with sadness. “I’m still confused. I know that I should be thinking about Molly, and I’m ashamed to say it but I am thinking about other things too.”

“What have you been thinking about?” he asked.

“Everything,” she said softly. She raised her head and looked into his eyes. “Mostly I have been thinking about how Molly had been right all along. You really are one of most extraordinary people in this world. I really should have listened to her.”
“Maybe what you need to do is learn by listening to your heart,” he said as he leaned down and kissed the top of her head. “Take your time,” he whispered as he carefully took her face gently in his hands. Tipping it up, he looked down into her eyes. “Sometimes what you feel is going to be the most important thing there is. Perhaps what it is you must do is that which is in response to what you feel.”

“I’m learning that,” she smiled bravely as he lowered his hands and backed away from her. “Thank you.”

“It’s time for me to go now,” he said as he started towards the door. “I have to go pick up Molly.”

“Willy?” she whispered, her single word causing him to stop and turn around.

“Yes, Linda?”

Without saying anything, she came over to him and threw her arms around him. “Be careful,” she whispered as she kissed his cheek.

“I will,” he said. “I’ll be back as soon as I can.”

Linda reached up and removed the silver locket that she wore around her neck. This she pressed into his hand. “You’ve never seen her, but her picture is inside this. If you show it to her, then she’ll know you’re a friend.”

Willy nodded as he accepted the object and opened it. When he saw the face of the child staring out at the world through the photograph, he smiled. “She looks just like you, Linda. I should have no problem finding her at all.” He gently placed the object in the pocket of his pants and started towards the door. There he turned around and with one last smile and a casual wave of his hand; he stepped out into the hallway.

As soon as he closed the door to Linda’s room, he could not help but smile. She seems to have her own feelings to contend with, he thought. Perhaps once the guilt was taken care of, she would be able to face him as well as speak openly about these feelings. Maybe there was some semblance of hope after all.

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It was dusk when Willy left the factory and headed to Bill’s Candy Shop. He had no idea what was about to happen, but he was also feeling ill at ease because the weather seemed to add to the insecurities about that fateful meeting.

Thomas had agreed to stay at the factory, but for some reason, and against all logic, he wished that his best friend was now with him. The chocolatier was well aware that if Thomas and he were seen together in public, then the entire Golden Ticket contest could be blown wide open. There was an element of importance in the concept of the two men staying separated.

It felt odd for Willy to be out in the city, since this was his first real outing since he had flown to New Zealand three years ago. It not only felt strange to see the world in broad daylight, but it felt odd for him to be amongst the world while it was caught up in the contest he had instigated. He smiled as he pulled the car into a spot adjacent to the marketplace and cut the motor.

The overcast sky made it look dark and uninviting, but he ignored this and got out of the car. Locking it, he pocketed the keys as his gaze drifted down to his watch. He had ten minutes until the Slugworths were scheduled to arrive.
He touched his pocket and could feel the small tape that rested there. Thomas had managed to make a copy, which was stashed away in his office. His main objective now was to insure that Molly would be safe. He knew that if something went wrong, they would have to get the police involved, and that extra tape would probably be the only bargaining tool that they would have.

Reaching the door to the shop, he opened it and slipped quietly inside, the bell jingling over his head. Looking around, he noticed that the shades were lowered so as to turn away any possible customers. Willy was impressed by the fact that this Bill had prepared himself in advance. The candy seller made the shop look as inconspicuous as possible.

“Mr. Wonka?” Bill asked his question emerging in the form of a greeting. There was a childlike essence in the way the man spoke, but there was also a trace of concern. “It’s an honor to meet you; I just wish that the conditions could be different.”

“Hello Bill,” Willy said with a nod.

“Tom told me about everything that happened,” he said. “I hope that my being here can at least help. At any rate, I am at your disposal.”

“I think your presence will help immeasurably,” Willy responded. “When they get here with the child, I will try and get her to come inside the shop. Once she is in here, you must lock the doors. Don’t let anyone inside.”

“What about you?” Bill asked.

“I will knock twice and then you can let me in. The Slugworths know better than to try something with me. Right now, I am beyond angry with them,” Willy said. “From what I have been able to ascertain about them, they seem to be more interested in the tape than in anything else. As long as they get their hands on that then nothing else will matter to them, not even the child.”

“You’re very brave to be doing this,” Bill said with admiration in his voice.

“More like crazy,” Willy said with a slight smirk.

“No, Mr. Wonka, I said ‘brave’, ” Bill said adamantly. “I am not sure I could follow such an example.”

Willy looked at him. “I’m doing this for a child, Bill. It’s the reason I got into this business in the first place.”

Bill nodded. “My respect goes out to you then. Be careful.”

The chocolatier nodded as he got to his feet and stole his way over to the door. When he opened it, he peered outside, and upon seeing that the parking lot was still empty, he slipped back outside and stood waiting several meters from the shop.

Right at seven, a black limousine pulled up and from across the marketplace, a church bell chimed. Well, there’s something to say for Slugworth, he thought cynically, at least he’s punctual.

He continued to watch as the motor was shut off and the driver disembarked only to turn around and open the door. As the passengers got out, Willy took a deep breath. He cast a brief glance around the area and sighed with relief when he saw that there were no people in the vicinity.

Slugworth had kept his word and left his thugs at home. The chocolatier would never have stood a chance if he was put to battle against these henchmen.
From his vantage point in front of the shop, he watched as the tall man with thinning hair and spectacles got out. The man was dressed in a dark colored suit, his eyes scanning the area and stopping when he saw Willy standing in front of the store.

Willy knew from his work in the industry that this man was Arthur Slugworth and although he had some resemblance to Thomas Wilkenson, there was a coldness that seemed to permeate the air in his presence. He remembered Tina’s words about Slugworth’s egotistical stance, and it was more than obvious that Willy’s competitor wore this arrogance like a cheap suit. Taking a deep breath, he watched as a second man got out and this time reached into the car and practically dragged a brown-headed child out of the backseat.

“Hurry up,” he snarled and the child began to struggle when he grabbed her arm and half dragged her over to the older of the two. As the eldest of the Slugworths grabbed Molly’s arm, Willy could hear the child beginning to whimper.

Feeling outrage fill him, he momentarily glanced towards the driver. This man seemed, if anything, disinterested in what was taking place. Instead of getting involved, he stood off to one side and began to roll himself a cigarette.

As the two men came closer, the child’s soft cries filled his ears. Instead of speaking of this, he simply watched and waited.

It was then that he noticed that the second man looked to be much shorter and younger than Arthur. Willy immediately knew who that this man was Owen, the child’s father and Linda’s soon to be ex-husband. His hair was as black as midnight and his eyes seemed to match. He did not look all that strong, but that seemed to make up for it in the fact that he looked angry. His face was screwed up with indignation as they approached.

“I want that tape,” Slugworth said as a greeting.

Willy raised his head. “And you will have it, but first you and your nephew let the child go.”

“I know that trick,” Slugworth snapped. “I let her go and you run away with her. I have been in business long enough to know a scam when I see it.”

“You should know, Slugworth, you invented it,” Willy said calmly.

“Don’t patronize me,” Slugworth snapped.

Molly raised her head at that moment, her eyes meeting those of the stranger who had joined them. The chocolatier could see that the little girl was terrified. He could also tell that she had no idea what was happening, much less, what her role in all of this was. This made him very sad, but he extended his hand. “Let her go,” he said his voice now filled with no-nonsense undertones. “Molly’s a little girl and should not be used like this.”

Upon hearing her name emerging from the strangely dressed man, the little girl struggled against the hold that her uncle had exerted on her. When he nearly lost his grip, he looked down at her, his expression glowering. “Stop that,” he snapped. Raising his hand, he intended to slap her, but Willy reached out and grabbed his hand by the wrist.

“I said that she should be returned unharmed.” Without immediately continuing to speak, he pulled the tape from his pocket. “You want this tape, Slugworth? Go get it.” With that, he threw the object across the parking lot as far away from them as he could. He watched as the elder of the two took off after it. Instinctively, Owen reached out and grabbed the child’s other arm the second his uncle had
Molly’s face suddenly contorted with agony and she began to cry. “It hurts, daddy, let go.” She struggled against the hold and looked at Willy.

For his part, the chocolatier reached out and grabbed the man’s arm in very much the same fashion. When Owen gasped, Willy’s frown deepened. “You’re not so tough now that your uncle is no longer here, are you, Owen?” he asked hotly. “You seem to get your strength by bullying women and children around.”

“What do you know?” he growled.

“I know plenty, now, let her go,” Willy said angrily as he tightened his hold on Owen’s arm, his fingers digging into the skin.

Seconds slowly ticked by and Molly managed to squirm her way out of her father’s hold. Owen tried to reach out and grab her, but Willy pulled him out of her reach.

“Go wait in the candy shop, Molly. There’s a nice man inside who will take care of you,” he said.

The child started to run away from them just as Arthur returned, the tape clenched in his fist. When he saw that Molly had gotten away from her father, he shot past Willy in the direction of the door leading into the small shop.

Molly ran even faster, and reached the door, which opened and closed behind her. At that moment, Arthur Slugworth reached the door. A resounding click emerged from inside the shop and before he could pull the door open, he found himself locked out.

He turned away from the door, his gaze first on Owen and then on Willy, his eyes now menacing.

“I want her back,” he snapped.

“I’m sure you do,” Willy said matter-of-factly. “It would seem to me that you both have left a lasting impression on her. To any onlooker, she seemed rather terrified and ran away from you both like a scared rabbit. The question that remains is why?”

“You’re not the only one with a trick up your sleeve, Wonka,” Owen snapped. “All I have to do is go to the police and tell them that you kidnapped my daughter.”

“Oh, I see,” Willy said casually with a nod of his head. “Was this before or after you both planned on taking her away from her mother? Or is the only reason you are angry because I managed to out trick the two of you? I’m actually surprised that you didn’t bring your three henchmen along for the ride, but I figure that they probably didn’t want to have criminal charges filed against them for taking out a child in a crowded restaurant.”

“You can’t prove a thing,” Arthur snapped.

“Conveniently, I can,” Willy said hotly. He was grateful that the child was no longer standing next to him, as he was bordering on rage at that moment. “How is it that Molly came to be in your custody after she was abducted from a restaurant last night in plain view? What would the police say if I managed to contact the people who were there last night and ask them about it? You underestimate me, Slugworth, you both do. I could very easily ask if it was true that a man in your employ pulled a gun on the people so that they could take a child from a mother whom you consider ‘emotionally unstable’. Seems rather a weak claim if you ask me, specifically since everything on that so called ‘legal form’ is nothing more than a crop of nonsense with a bit of habeas corpus thrown in for good
Arthur looked at Willy. “If you don’t release the child into my custody, Wonka, I will have my men blow holes in that shop before you can count to three. You will not win this time.”

“Oh but I think I will,” Willy said. “You would indeed go over bodies to get what you want, and how convenient it would be for you to have both the child and the tape. Of course, what neither of you realized was that I knew that there was a dirty trick afoot, so I asked a friend to help us. Threatening to kill your grandniece is a real piece of evidence. There were three witnesses in my office when you said that, so it could be an interesting tidbit for one of London’s many tabloids. It could even offer me a bit more publicity when even more Golden Tickets get found.” He paused, his gaze never faltering as he continued to address the two men. “Now, if you don’t want to spend the night behind bars, I’d suggest that you both get out of here, pronto! I can imagine that when or if your men arrive here on the scene, the police may already be here. After all, the word on the streets is you hate kids, Arthur. It would seem rather odd for you to be this up in arms about a seven-year-old child now, wouldn’t it?”

Slugworth looked at his nephew. “Let’s get out of here,” he said.

“But Uncle, he’s got my kid,” Owen objected.

“Yes, and that kid, like her mother will not be harmed by your abuse any longer,” Willy said. “If I wasn’t a gentleman, I would give you a taste of your own medicine, you coward. Now get out of here before I decide to scrap the whole gentleman notion and give you one across the face.”

Owen looked up at Willy. It was clear that the man was intimidated by him, and he had every right to be since the chocolatier was a good ten centimeters taller than he was. After several seconds, he backed away from where his uncle stood and started to make his way back towards the parked car.

The older Slugworth eventually walked away, and Willy released a pent up sigh. “This isn’t over, Wonka,” he said between gritted teeth, but based on the defeated tone of his voice; it clearly was.

Seconds later, he watched as the two men got into the limousine and the vehicle pulled away. The area was once more quiet. “Just as I thought, they’re cowards, the both of them,” he muttered as he walked back over to the door of the candy shop. He tapped twice on the door. “Bill, it’s me, please open the door.” He waited until the door abruptly opened.
Chapter 30

Chapter 30: A Shared Victory

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As soon as he had entered the shop, Willy took a deep breath and glanced around the room. The shades were still drawn and Bill had refused to go and pull them up as he feared for Molly’s well being.

Taking a deep breath, the chocolatier watched as Bill once more closed and locked the door. He waited for Bill to finish and when the candy seller had joined him, they both glanced over towards the little girl who was sitting against the wall, her head bowed and her skinny arms wrapped around her legs.

The child’s entire body was trembling.

Willy, seeing this, swallowed but looked at Bill. “Does she know who I am?” he asked. “Did you tell her?”

Bill shook his head. “I didn’t say a word. As soon as she came in here, she crawled into the corner and sat down. She did not even cry. In fact, her stance seemed more stoic than it probably should have been. I suppose, all I can do is wait for the moment when she breaks down; the poor little thing.”

The chocolatier nodded but walked over to the child and got down on the floor beside her. He sat there for about a minute, no words emerging. When the child ultimately raised her head, she looked at him.

Sensing this, he turned his head. “Don’t be afraid, Molly, I won’t hurt you,” he said.

The child remained silent, her gaze shifting until she was staring down at her lap. He could tell that she did not want to cry, but something inside of him wished that she would. The ache that she must be feeling was too much for an adult, much less a child. She needs to cry but she refuses to, he thought all the while fearing what would eventually happen when the child’s adrenaline normalized.

He pulled a cloth handkerchief from his pocket and began to unfold it. Wordlessly, he brushed it gently over her damp cheeks. “You’re safe now,” he said.

She shrugged her shoulders, but when she raised her head again, her eyes were a depiction of absolute terror. “I want my mommy,” she whispered as she backed slowly away from him.

“I know you do, sweetheart,” he said. “I have every intention of taking you to her just as soon as it is safe for us to leave here.”

“You know my mommy?” she asked.

He nodded as he suddenly remembered the locket that Linda had given to him. He began to dig around in his pocket until his fingers brushed against the object. “There’s something I need to show you. Perhaps it might convince you that I’m telling the truth.”

“What?” she asked, but her head once more lowered.
“Well, you have to look up in order to see it,” he said. She raised her head, her brown eyes meeting his blue ones as he held up the small object. “Here have a look,” he said as he gently allowed the silver piece of jewelry to dangle from his fingers. “Your mother asked me to bring this to you. She said that she misses you and wants to see you again very soon.”

“Where is she?” Molly whispered. “Not with my daddy?”

“No, most definitely not with him,” Willy said. “Your friend, Tom has been helping her stay away from them. Now, they are waiting for you and want you to be safe.” As he spoke, he took the locket and affixed it around her neck, “so do I.”

“But you don’t even know me,” she whispered.

“I know enough about you that it is almost the very same thing,” he said.

“You do?” she asked.

He nodded. “Sure. I know that your name is Molly, and you are seven-years-old. I also know that you like chocolate and your favorite toy is your Raggedy Ann doll. I also found out that you share your candy with other kids.”

She bit down on her lip. “Do you know that I hate my name?” she eventually whispered.

“Yes,” he nodded. “Do you want to tell me why?”

She said nothing. Instead she glanced nervously towards the door.

“Can I ask you something?” he asked.

She nodded.

“If you could pick any name in the world, what name would you choose?”

The little girl raised her head. “I don’t know; I just know that I wouldn’t be a Slugworth.”

Willy nodded, but instead of continuing with this line of questioning, he looked at Bill. “Could you bring us a candy bar?”

“Sure can; which kind do you want?” Bill asked.

“What’s your favorite candy in the world, Molly?”

The little girl raised her head. “Scrumdidlyumptious.”

Bill smiled and nodded as he went to retrieve the requested candy bar. When he returned, he handed it to Willy. “Aren’t you going to tell her?” he asked, his voice a barely audible whisper.

“I will when the time is right,” Willy whispered as he handed the candy to the little girl. “Here you go sweetheart, you do the honors.” He watched as Molly carefully pulled the outer wrapper from the bar.

Once she had removed it, she placed the candy on her lap before carefully tucking the wrapper in the pocket of her dress. Once it was securely put away, she reached for the candy that was still wrapped in silver paper and started to carefully open it. As soon as she had noticed the first bit of chocolate, she began to inspect it for a Golden Ticket. Finding none, she broke the end of the candy off and offered it to him.
Willy accepted the offered sweet and took a bite, all the while watching as the little girl broke off some and ate it.

For the next few minutes, this was how it was. Molly would eat a bite of the bar, then she would offer him some and when the bar was finally gone, she looked at him. “Thank you,” she whispered.

“What ever for?” he asked.

“For being nice to me and helping me to get away from those bad men,” Molly said with a shrug of her shoulders. As an afterthought, she motioned towards the now empty wrapper.

For some time, neither of them spoke, but instead sat in companionable silence.

“Do you think they are still outside?” she eventually asked him.

“I really don’t know,” he said. “They may have left or some of their friends may still be lurking about. It’s hard to tell.”

Molly closed her eyes. “One of them is my daddy, but he’s so mean to me.”

“I know,” he said. He reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder. “I’m going to get you out of here, Molly.”

“How?” she whispered.

He looked at Bill. “Could you check and see if they are still outside?”

“Sure,” the candy seller said as he made his way towards the door. He raised one of the blinds as light seeped into the shop. Several minutes passed as he turned away from it and looked at Willy. “They seem to be gone. The entire parking lot’s empty.”

Willy nodded and offered his hand to the little girl. “Then we should leave before they come back.” When she accepted it, he helped her to stand up. Once she was on her feet, he led her towards the door.

Bill nodded, the key to the shop still in his hand, but he regarded the two of them. “That might actually be a good idea.” He carefully unlocked and opened the door. “Be careful,” he said as they stepped outside.

On the street, they could hear the door closing behind them. Molly began to frantically look around where they were standing, her teeth biting down over her lip. Several steps away from the door, she stopped unable to move. “T-they might come back,” she whimpered as she buried her face against Willy’s arm.

“There’s no one out here,” he said softly. “You have nothing to be afraid of.”

“But I am,” she whispered. “Like today when I woke up and…” Instead of speaking further, she tightened her hold on his hand.

Seeing this, Willy leaned down and picked her up in his arms. “…Everything is going to be alright, I got you away from them and intend to keep you away from them,” he said as he ran towards the car and unlocked the door for her. “Lock the door and don’t let anyone in,” he instructed as he put her back on her feet. Opening the door, he helped her into the passenger seat and closed it. When he heard the resounding click, he rushed around the car and unlocked the driver’s side before sliding behind the wheel, closing, and locking the door as well.
As soon as he had fastened the safety belt, her innocent question emerged. “Where are we going?” she asked. “I want to go home.”

Willy took a deep breath. “I know, but sadly, they will look for you there. I have to take you somewhere else. How would it be if I took you to my home? That’s where your mother is.”

“I’m scared,” she said, but lowered her head dejectedly. “You’re a stranger and…”

“…Molly, your mother told me what the significance of the necklace is and she said that it is a sign that I am a friend. You have nothing to be afraid of, I do not work for those men, nor would I ever consent to your going back to them,” he said gently.

When the child nodded, he started the motor and listened as the car roared to life. Once he shifted the car into gear, he pulled out of the parking lot, and drove back in the direction of the factory.

Molly nodded, but several minutes later Willy stopped the car near the front of the factory grounds. From where they were sitting, one could see the blinking light flashing on and off the name ‘Wonka’. Molly’s head remained lowered and he knew that she could not see anything except the hair that framed either side of her face. When she did not look up, he reached over and touched her shoulder. “There’s something I want to show you,” he said gently.

“What?”

“Look up,” he said. “Go ahead Molly, maybe you’ll be happy with what you see.”

The child did as he said and when she saw the sign, she suddenly felt the tears catching in her eyes. She wiped them with the sleeve of her dress.

“I didn’t show you this to make you cry,” he said.

The small child raised her head. “I know, but Mommy said that we could come here and look at the factory on our way home and now...” her voice trailed off.

“...I see, and this represents the promise she made to you, doesn’t it?” he asked as though reading her thoughts. “She really wanted to let you see it?”

Molly nodded her eyes staring at the smokestack, where the shimmering name could be read. “Yes.”

“Did you ever wonder what it was like inside?” he asked.

“All the time,” she sniffed, “but I haven’t got a Golden Ticket. Even if I did, Mr. Wonka probably wouldn’t like me anyway.”

Willy’s eyes widened. The child truly has no idea, he thought sadly, but this wasn’t the place to tell her that she was wrong. He had to get her inside. “Molly,” he eventually spoke, his voice filled with sincerity. “What would you say if I were to tell you that this time you won’t need a Golden Ticket?”

When she did not respond, he drove further down the street and around the corner to the side gate of the factory. He had to get her out of the area before the Slugworth’s managed to trace their whereabouts. He did not put anything past his competitor and after what Thomas had told him about her abduction, he did not want to take any chances at this point.

The entire side wall of the complex looked to be a giant sturdy metal like gate that rose above them about ten meters high. He watched her as she stared up at the wall as high as it would go.
Without speaking, Willy leaned over and pressed what looked to be a button on the car’s radio.

For an instant, the child thought that he was going to play some music, but after several seconds, the gate suddenly shifted and instead of seeing the metal wall, she was left staring into the side courtyard. As the opening became larger, Willy drove through the gates and inside the factory grounds. Once they cleared the entrance, he pressed the same button again and the gate once more closed.

Instead of speaking about what had just happened, he parked the car in a garage and cut the motor.

The child’s eyes were, by this time, the size of saucers. Never in her wildest dreams did she think that she would get rescued and brought to her hero’s factory, but that was exactly what had happened.

She swallowed and licked her lips. “You’re…”

“…I’m?” he asked, his blue eyes shining, all the while loving the mystery that seemed to envelop the child’s unhappy world. She touched her dress where the wrapper was resting, but then leaned over and lightly touched the broach that rested against his neck. Her tiny fingers began to trace along the contours of the shimmering letter W, her surprise still evident. Soon, she felt one of her hands captured by both of his. “We need to get you inside, your mother’s waiting,” he said.

“But I…” the little girl began, her voice catching in her throat.

Willy could tell instinctively that Molly was torn between trying to figure out his identity and going to see her mother. He smiled at her. “You want to figure me out first, don’t you?”

She nodded numbly.

“Well, I’d like to tell you, but you should see your mother first so that she will know that you’re alright, and then we can talk for as long as you’d like,” he said. He got out of the car and closed the door.

Molly followed suit and once she reached him, he extended his hand to her and she accepted it.

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As they came inside, they ran into Thomas who had come out to check to see if they had gotten back. He smiled when he saw the little girl with his friend. “Molly, you are definitely a sight for sore eyes,” he said as she looked up at him.

“Hi,” she whispered, but her voice seemed weak at best, and Willy guessed that between her experiences with the Slugworths and now being inside the factory, the child was rather overwhelmed.

“How’s Linda?” Willy asked.

“She’s in her room waiting,” Thomas said. “More like pacing the floor, but she seems to be doing alright, all things being considered.”

Willy nodded. “Then perhaps it would be wise for me to take her to her mother and then I will leave them and go change. I figured that after that, I can meet all of you for dinner.”

“That sounds great, because I still need to call Eliza and let her know that everything has worked out for the best,” Thomas said. Willy and the little girl watched as he disappeared down the hall. Once he was gone, she looked at him.
“You know him?” she asked.

Willy nodded. “I met him many years ago. I was probably about your age the first time Tom and I met. But, I think you’re ready to go and see your mother, aren’t you?”

The child nodded and once they reached the Lavender Room, Willy tapped lightly on the door. He did not intend for them to wait a second longer. It was time for the brokenhearted mother to be reunited with her child.

He knocked a second time and waited for the door to open. When it did, Linda found herself face to face with her daughter. “Mommy!” Molly cried her shrill cry filling the hallway and Willy backed up several steps. He could see the excitement that crossed both of their faces and he knew at that moment that it had all been worth it.

“Molly!” Linda cried out as she dropped to her knees and engulfed her daughter in a back breaking embrace. “Oh my little angel.”

Willy continued to watch as the two of them held tightly to one another and then smiled. “Linda, I’m going to leave you and Molly alone for a time so you can catch up. I’ll meet you here in about half an hour.” Linda nodded as he leaned over and whispered in her ear. “Don’t tell Molly about who I am, I would rather tell her myself, okay?”

She nodded. “I’ll try not to,” she whispered, but took a deep breath. “How can I ever thank you for all that you’ve done?”

“You already have,” he said. “I’ll see you in a little bit.”

Linda nodded and closed the door. For his part, Willy walked down the hall as he began to whistle. He felt really good and he knew that Thomas was probably relieved about the whole escapade now being behind them. He took a deep breath and headed towards his quarters. It was time for him to change back into the clothes that were more familiar to him. His only question now was whether or not Molly would understand everything when the time came for him to tell her the truth.

Despite all these difficulties, Willy Wonka was feeling good. With the next Golden Ticket’s discovery on the horizon, he wondered how long these positive feelings were going to last.
Chapter 31

Chapter 31: Molly’s Discovery

After Thomas left the chocolatier and the little girl, he headed straight for Willy’s office in the hopes of fulfilling the promise that he had made to Eliza earlier that day. He was quite glad that he could call her and tell her that everything had turned out positively and that she had no need to worry. He went over to the desk and sat down. “Will probably knows how Father Christmas must feel now,” he mumbled under his breath as he dialed Eliza’s number.

She must have been waiting for his call because she literally pounced on the phone after one ring. “Hello?”

“How’s William?” she asked, her question emerging more or less as an exhalation of breath.

“He’s fine, he got back about ten minutes ago,” Thomas said. “He managed to get the little girl out of harm’s way, too. Right now, he’s taken her back to her mother and is going to meet us for dinner in about half an hour.”

“Thank God for that,” she said. “I lit a candle for all of you this evening when I stopped off at the church.”

Thomas smiled. “I’m sure that helped monumentally,” he said, but paused before speaking again. “I just wanted to let you know that everything is fine here. I will be driving to Buckinghamshire as scheduled to look into the second Golden Ticket Monday morning. I have to arrange a room at the hotel, and thankfully I won’t have to pretend to be someone who speaks fluent German, when I don’t speak a word.”

“William told me about Tina, she sounds like a delightful young lady,” Eliza said.

“Oh, she was, but if she wasn’t then there would have been a problem,” he said. “Of course, she was just happy that the ticket was found in Duselheim. If it hadn’t have been, then things would have been vastly different for her family and their business.”

“It’s ironic and a bit fortuitous that all of these issues with Linda and Molly did not affect the contest. Isn’t it?” Eliza asked.

“That’s very true, and the best news is that Will’s Gobstoppers are thankfully safe and sound. Linda found the courage to tell him about what she overheard Owen Slugworth saying several years ago when the Hudson Chocolate story broke,” he said. “It is starting to look as though we will be digging about that story in the coming days or months.”

“I seem to recall hearing something about it some time ago,” Eliza admitted. “Perhaps it was from you boys because you tend to talk about this stuff quite frequently. Anyway, I somehow I had this feeling that there was more to this story than just the workers in a company wanting to destroy their own livelihoods. This could not have simply been caused through simple negligence. There had to have been more to it than what the papers said about it.”

“You’re right, it was Slugworth and his band of cronies,” Thomas said. “According to Linda, they somehow managed to use their contacts in the States to ruin the company in the same way the spies stole Will’s ‘Around the World’ recipe. One day when I go back there, I will make sure that someone
gets their hands on the information we have been able to gather about that particular situation. It could be considered as ‘too little too late’, but at least their ethical reputation can be salvaged.”

“It’s dreadful nonetheless,” she said, her voice soft. “It never ceases to amaze me as to how much negativity exists in the internal operations of this industry.”

“True, and lucky for all of us, little Molly is safe. Will is not about to let her out of his sight,” he said. “Of course, one thing is overtly clear.” He chuckled despite himself.

“What’s that?” She asked.

“This will not be the end of Slugworth’s troubles, it may, in fact, be just the beginning.” Thomas said. “Will said that once the contest is over, we’re still planning to go to the police. The hardest part of this entire situation is that Molly and Linda will have to stay here in seclusion until it’s over.”

“What about William’s protégé? Is this really fair to him or her?” Eliza asked rationally. “It would seem to me that for a child to be thrown unbeknownst into all of this would be rather unfair.”

“I know what you mean,” Thomas said. “Will is concerned about that, but seems to think that if we can put the Slugworths out of commission, then it should not be a problem for someone to be trained to one day take over here at the factory. Although, I do trust his judgment in this regard, I sincerely hope he’s right.”

“Thomas, he does know what he’s doing,” the older woman said firmly. “You just be careful with all this traveling about. Just because William is no longer pretending to be a spy out on some sort of espionage caper, does not mean that I automatically stop worrying about you boys.”

“We know,” he said. “I suppose right now I should probably get going. I’m supposed to meet them for dinner in about ten minutes. Do you want me to have Will call you?”

“No, dear, that’s not necessary, he has guests to contend with, and I can imagine that that child will want his undivided attention tonight,” Eliza said, and he could tell that there was laughter in her voice. “Just call me tomorrow and ask William if he wants us to drive to London soon. I would like to see you both.”

“You do realize that he may not like that idea, don’t you?”

“Perhaps not, but I really do want to see all of you again,” Eliza said stubbornly. “Elmsworth and I have talked about driving there for weeks now. Perhaps we can do so when the school holidays end. I do still have my key to the side gate, and as far as I know, William hasn’t had any locks changed in the last months.”

“It might be better if you talk to him about that before you leave Cornwall,” Thomas suggested. “If anything were to happen while you’re roaming about, Will would no doubt go completely out of his mind. You know how he is.”

“Alright, we’ll wait on doing that, but you’re really asking a lot of me,” she said. “I really do miss you both.”

“We miss you too, Eliza, but we will see you soon,” he said, “take care of yourself.”

“Bye Thomas, and thank you for calling,” she said and hung up.

Once the call had ended, he returned the receiver to the cradle and stood up. It was time for him to go and meet Will, Linda, and Molly for dinner, and this was a dinner he was not about to miss.
Molly and Linda were standing outside the door to the Lavender Room and waiting when Thomas arrived. He smiled as he greeted the two of them. “It’s wonderful to see the two of you together again,” he offered as a greeting.

Linda nodded and smiled, her arm still wrapped around her daughter’s shoulder. “I was so scared that something was going to go wrong.”

“But it didn’t and now you’re both safe,” Thomas said.

Molly took a deep breath but looked up at Thomas. “It was because of that nice man with the strange hairdo. He helped me, but Mommy won’t tell me who he is. He said that I could figure him out later.” She looked up at Thomas. “Will you tell me?”

“I can’t tell you anything,” Thomas said.

He watched as the child stamped her foot impatiently but backed several steps away from her mother. “Oh come on,” she pleaded with them. “I think you know and won’t tell me. Pretty please! Won’t you at least tell me something?”

“Oh alright,” Thomas conceded and exchanged a good-natured smile with Linda. “I will tell you that we both think you will be very happy once you know his name,” he said mysteriously. “But, Molly, that’s all I can really tell you.”

“Could he be Mr. Wonka?” Molly asked shyly, the mention of the chocolatier’s name causing her to bashfully look down at her feet.

“It’s possible since we are now safe and sound here at his factory,” Linda said. “Perhaps you should wait until you see him again and then ask.”

“OK Mommy,” Molly reluctantly conceded. “The thing is, he was so nice to me and we shared a candy bar. He promised me that he wouldn’t let anyone hurt me.” She closed her eyes and felt the tears brimming beneath them. “I don’t care who he is, I just felt so safe with him. When’s he coming back?”

“He said he would meet us for dinner, sweetie, just try and be patient,” Linda said.

Molly once more looked at Thomas as a small pout covered her face, but she still allowed him and her mother to lead her down the hallway. “He doesn’t want me to know his name, does he?” she eventually mused, the tears starting to stream down her face.

It was clear to both Thomas and Linda that the little girl was quickly becoming discouraged by them not telling her anything.

Eventually, Thomas broke his silence. “Molly, I can’t tell you anything because he wants to tell you himself. We can’t ruin his fun, now, can we?” he asked as they stopped outside the door to Willy’s quarters.

“I guess not,” the little girl mused, but looked at the other two adults who, instead of knocking, simply waited for the door to open and Willy to join them.

After about a minute of waiting, the chocolatier opened the door, came out, and joined them. His eyes bright as he regarded each of them in turn, but still said nothing.
This time, instead of being clad in his hippie clothing, Willy was once more dressed in his top hat as well as his favorite purple coat, vest, and white shirt.

It was clear to all of them that the clothing was vastly different than what he had donned for the meeting at Bill’s. It was also for that reason that it was not surprising that Molly did not recognize him. Even the broach that she had touched in the car was no longer present; instead a green bow-tie was bunched at the top of his shirt.

Instead of speaking, he gently touched the shoulder of the little girl and watched as she turned around, her eyes widening as she stared up at him. “Hello Molly,” he spoke, but could tell instinctively that there was no recognition on the child’s face.

“I’m Mr. Wonka.” Her words were barely audible, but when he offered a slight nod, she gasped at the fact that her assertion had been accurate.
Instead of speaking, Molly shyly stepped closer to him, her hands trembling slightly. It looked as though she was halfway fearful that he was going to get up and distance himself from her. When he remained seated on the floor, she lowered her gaze and stared down at the ground.

Willy continued to look at her with the same gentle smile was still tugging at his lips. Instead of speaking; he reached over and touched the side of her face. As he stroked her cheek gently, she raised her head until her gaze locked with his.

At that moment, he shifted his attention only for a second so that he could hand his hat to Thomas. Once he had been relieved of the object, his gaze shifted back to Molly.

For her part, the bashful little girl inched her way even closer to him. In one hand she still held the candy bar wrapper, but soon the child’s other hand was enfolded between Willy’s hands. “You can call me Willy,” he said softly.

Upon hearing this, Molly’s eyes widened but she managed to dully nod her head. She stared down at where Willy’s hands had sandwiched hers between them.

Thomas watched this, but exchanged glances with Linda who looked as though she was about to start crying herself. Willy seemed to be as affected by the child as Molly was by the candy maker.

After several moments, she raised her head, her eyes now sneaking glimpses with those of her hero. It was obvious that she did not know what to say or do. She simply stared at him in surprise, all the while keeping the same expression of childlike innocence on her face.

Her gaze shifted yet again back down to the wrapper that was gripped tightly in her free hand. Somehow, it had become completely clear to all of them that when the little girl had selflessly shared the chocolate, she had absolutely no idea with whom she had been sharing it with.

Without warning, she pulled her hand out of his so that she could throw herself into his arms. Her face, she buried against his chest as the candy wrapper drifted slowly to the floor and soft sobs suddenly filled the air.

By this time, it was apparent that Willy’s expression was consumed with surprise, but eventually it faded away to leave an enchanted man in its wake. Slowly, he wrapped the child lovingly in his arms and held her as she softly wept.

As soon as the little girl felt the chocolatier holding her, her sobs became more intense. “Y-you don’t hate me…” she cried. As these words emerged, she buried her face against him; her words muffled as the tears washed down over her face and dampened his vest.

“…No, my dear girl, I could never ever hate you,” he said.

“But my name…” she raised her head once again, the shame still evident in her words. Without speaking further, she once more buried her face against him.

“…Your name is beautiful, Molly,” he interrupted her. “Did you ever notice how the last three letters of your name are the same as mine?” These words caused her to raise her head and back out of his embrace. As she did this, Willy pointed to himself. “I’m Willy, and you’re Molly. What’s not to like?”

“The Slugworth part,” she whispered brokenly.

Willy took a deep breath but reached over and took her face in his hands. He tipped it up and smiled once he was looking into her eyes. “Do you know what I told your mother only this morning when
she arrived here?” he asked as he lowered his hands. When she shook her head, he continued speaking, his voice soothing. “I told her that I didn’t hate either of you, and I most certainly would never judge you.”

Thomas smiled as he heard those words. These were similar words that he had told Molly in Füssen just before she had been abducted. Now she would have no choice but to believe it. Instead of speaking, his attention shifted and he watched as his best friend spoke to the child.

“Do you remember how we shared that candy bar?” Willy was asking her. “You did that before you even knew who I was.”

The little girl’s head remained lowered. She was not sure what to say; instead she waited for him to continue speaking.

“I’ve known your full name since the first time I spoke to your grandfather,” he said gently. “And look, here I am, sitting here talking to you. Is that something that a person would do if they hated you?”

“I don’t know,” she sniffed but wiped the tears away with the palm of her hand. “Grown ups are sometimes hard to understand.”

Willy nodded, but instead of immediately speaking, he pulled a soft handkerchief from his pocket and shook it out before wiping the moisture from the child’s face. “I know what you mean.”

“You do?” she asked.

“Yes, sometimes instead of saying that we are afraid or worried, we hide it behind self-importance or dishonest reactions,” he said as he wiped the last of her tears away.

“Why?” she whispered sadly.

“I don’t really know,” he said thoughtfully. “I think it might be that we’re a little bit afraid of letting people see us for who we truly are. Since we don’t want other people to see our weaknesses; we try to hide them.”

“Do you?” she asked.

“I try not to, but I suppose at times I do as well,” he said honestly.

“It’s sometimes scary,” Molly admitted. “I don’t know who to trust.”

“I know,” Willy said. “But do you know what is most important thing I could say is?”

“What?” she whispered.

“That you know that I don’t hate you,” he said sincerely. “I never did.”

The child raised her head. “Y-you don’t?”

Willy nodded, a gentle smile touching his lips. “I mean it, honest and truly.” He made a cross over his chest in the form of a large letter ‘x’. “Cross my heart.”

“You’re really as nice as I hoped you’d be,” Molly spoke her words truthful and authentic.

Willy smiled. “So are you.”
Upon hearing these words, Molly felt herself being drawn once more into his arms. Instead of speaking, the child rested against him, her eyes momentarily closing.

Willy remained where he was with Molly as Thomas looked at Linda.

“It’s just like I said,” he whispered to her. “Will’s feelings are very real and genuine, aren’t they?”

Linda nodded the tears streaming down her cheeks as she watched the chocolatier as he spoke soothing words to her daughter. “Yes. I never thought that I would see this, but it is the most beautiful thing in the world.”

Thomas nodded, and it was clear that they had all been deeply moved by the kindness Willy was bestowing on the little girl. They watched silently as Willy managed to stand up with her still wrapped securely in his embrace. Instead of loosening her hold, she continued to hold tightly to him, her face buried against his chest.

“Do you feel any better now?” he asked her softly.

“Mmmm,” she mumbled. It was obvious to Thomas that the little girl had found heaven wrapped in the arms of his friend.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’,” Willy said with a chuckle as she raised her head for a moment. “Let’s go have some dinner. Rescuing fair damsels in distress gives me an appetite.” He chuckled but started back down the hall leaving Thomas and Linda staring after them. “Afterwards, I’m going to show you the Chocolate Room, and there you can pick out something nice for dessert.”

Molly giggled, but once again buried her face against him. “You smell like chocolate and mint,” she whispered.

“That’s what you might call an ‘occupational hazard’. I’m afraid that there are some things you will just have to get used to if you are going to hang around with me,” he chuckled. He turned around at that moment and began to laugh when he noticed that neither Linda nor Thomas had even moved. “Aren’t you two coming? The sooner we eat, the sooner we get to the dessert part of the menu.”

“Come on,” Molly said as she turned her head and looked at the two of them.

“You heard the little lady,” Willy said, a smirk now shadowing his face.

After the two of them exchanged bemused glances, they started to follow them down the hall towards the dining room.
Chapter 32

Chapter 32: Dessert in the Chocolate Room

*This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view*

After dinner, Thomas got up from his chair and started towards the door. “Will, I’m going to turn in. Is there anything I need to do before I go back to my quarters?”

“Nothing that I know of,” the chocolatier responded. “You did call Eliza, didn’t you?”

“Yes,” Thomas said with a nod of his head. “She was relieved that everything turned out alright with Linda and Molly, but she wanted to see about coming to visit us.”

“I’m not sure about how safe that would be,” Willy mused.

“I know, that’s what I told her,” Thomas said, “but I thought that since I promised, I’d mention it to you anyway.”

“I’ll think about it,” the chocolatier said noncommittally.

Thomas started to walk towards the door, but stopped and abruptly turned around before returning to the table and leaning over to ruffle the little girl’s hair. “Do you remember what I told you in Füssen, Molly?”

“You said that he’d like me,” she whispered back to him, her voice loud enough so that Willy could hear.

“And?” he asked.

“He does,” Molly said, her tiny voice cracking. “He really does.”

“Yes, you see, I wouldn’t lie about something as important as that,” Thomas said. “Sweet dreams, little one.”

“Bye,” the child waved as the older man turned to leave.

The chocolatier raised his head and smiled. “Good night, Tom.”

Once Thomas had left, Willy glanced over to see that Linda had finished her food and wordlessly pushed her plate away.

“Was the food alright?” he asked.

“Of course, it was wonderful,” she smiled at him but looked over at her little girl. Molly was finishing the last bites of her dinner. As soon as she had swallowed, she began to yawn and stretch herself out as though doing imitations of a cat.

Willy surmised that after her horrible ordeal, that she was physically, as well as emotionally, exhausted. “I think we should go for dessert before Molly nods off. We’ll make a quick trip to the Chocolate Room, and then I’ll take you both back to your room so you can get some rest. Does that sound like a good idea?” He got to his feet, but waited for Linda to respond to his suggestion.

Instead of the mother answering, the child spoke. “But, I’m not sleepy…” she objected, but then her
words were soon muffled by a yawn that she could not suppress.

“I see, so you’re just not getting enough oxygen to your brain, right?” Willy asked lightly as he reached for the child’s hand. As Molly surrendered it, he gave it a light squeeze. “You are very sleepy, I can tell.”

“I am not,” she said with a tiny pout.

Despite himself, he chuckled. “It’s alright to be sleepy, little one. Did you ever hear the story of the Sandman?”

Molly shook her head. “No, tell me.”

Willy rubbed his hands together. “I’m afraid I’m not the world’s greatest storyteller.”

Linda smiled upon hearing these words, but Molly seemed unfazed by the chocolatier’s professed shortcomings. Instead, she spoke, her soft voice a plea. “Please, Willy, tell me the story.”

Willy smiled but sat back down at the table. Soon, the child had seated herself on his lap, her head coming to rest against his chest. After several moments had passed, he began to speak. “E.T.A. Hoffmann wrote the original story about a little man who travels from place to place and sprinkles sand into the eyes of children so that they will go to sleep at night.”

“What does your heart tell you?” Willy asked. “Or is he a myth like Father Christmas?”

“I don’t know,” Molly said. “My grandma says that God exists, but I can’t see Him.”

Willy smiled. “You should always believe in whatever you feel is right. No one should ever have the authority to tell you to stop believing in something.” He paused, but cast a brief glance in Linda’s direction before his attention returned to the child. “Do you want me to tell you a little secret?”

The little girl nodded but leaned closer to him so that her ear was closer to his mouth. As soon as she was close enough, he began to whisper in her ear. As he finished telling her what he intended, she raised her head and looked at him.

“Really?” she asked her eyes wide.

He nodded as he reached for the child’s hand. “Come it is time for us to be off. Time is running short and I want you to see the Chocolate Room before you get paid a visit by the Sandman.” He helped her down from off his lap before standing up.

“Are you really going to show us the factory?” she asked all the while attempting to suppress another yawn.
Willy took a deep breath. “There are lots and lots of rooms and places for you to see, and I will show you whatever you like, but because my factory is so big, and you are so tired, I cannot possibly show you everything in one evening.”

“Why can’t we?” she asked.

“Well, because not only would you fall asleep, but I would become quite drowsy as well,” he said, his blue eyes dancing merrily. “Let’s go and retrieve your dessert and then we can tour the factory another day.”

Molly nodded as Willy motioned towards Linda, who got to her feet and started to follow them out of the room.

Once they had left the cafeteria, they followed a brightly lit corridor. After several minutes they passed the Fizzy Lifting Drink room and made their way down the hall with lickable wallpaper. All of this would have to be shown to her later, he thought as he watched the slow steps of the child.

Perhaps we should have taken the Wonkavator after all, he thought as they continued to walk. Several minutes later, they reached the strangely shaped hallway that led into the Chocolate Room.

As they approached it the two adults had to stoop somewhat, which amused Molly.

Regardless of the child’s soft giggles, Willy smiled. “What I want to share with you is a greatest secret I know. Only a few people have actually seen it, and aside from that, it’s a very special place to me.”

“You trust us enough to want to share it?” Linda asked hesitantly.

“Yes, and Linda, neither of you should ever have to second guess that trust. My dear lady, it is present and you have not indicated to me that you are anything but trustworthy,” Willy said firmly. Instead of elaborating on this point, he looked down at the little girl. “Are you ready?”

The little girl nodded happily as Willy deactivated the musical lock and the door slowly opened. Molly entered the room first, with the two adults coming in behind her.

As they took in the magical room, both mother and daughter’s faces were mirrored depictions of wonder and delight.

Instead of moving towards the sweets as they felt inclined, both of them stared, their uncertainty making the chocolatier smile. They really are exactly as Thomas had described them; enchanting.

He took a deep breath and spoke, his voice filled with lightheartedness. “Come, I’ll show you one of my favorite treats.” He led them down the stairs, through a path and stopped in front of the citrus nectar confections. “These little cups are filled with lemon flavored nectar. Do you want to try one?” As Linda nodded, he leaned over and picked one of the confections before extending it to her.

Linda hesitantly accepted the small yellow colored teacup. She waited for him to pick a second before bringing it to her lips and sipping the sweet tasting confection. “Oh Willy, it’s wonderful,” she said as she swallowed the nectar.

“The cup is eatable, uh edible as well,” he said smiling. He looked down at the little girl. “Molly, would you like to try one?”

The little girl shook her head and started to walk slowly away from them, her steps deliberate and slow. It was obvious that she was trying to take in everything at once, which proved exceedingly
difficult.

Linda watched her, but eventually turned back to face Willy. “She doesn’t like lemons. She tried some in tea several months ago and I ended up having to drink it for her,” the woman said. She watched him sip the lemon nectar and then take a bite of the cup. As he was chewing it, she brought the, now empty, cup to her lips and bit into it. A sugary citrus taste abruptly filled her mouth.

“Do you like it?” he asked.

“It’s wonderful,” she said once she swallowed. “But, I think perhaps we ought to look for something for Molly that she might like.”

“Leave that to me,” he said. “Just make yourself comfortable and enjoy. We’ll be back in a little bit.”

Linda nodded and seated herself on the ground amidst the buttercups. She watched as he started down the path, but soon her attention was abruptly diverted back to the confections and despite the fact that she had already had one, she reached for a second.

For his part, the chocolatier stopped for a moment and turned around to see that Linda was sipping the nectar and was, otherwise, occupied. He broke into a big smile, but continued to follow Molly towards the large balls that were strewn haphazardly along the path.

To the eye, these objects looked to be about the size of large basketballs. They were distinctively different in that they were smooth to the touch, but carried the colors that one might find if they stepped outside on an autumn day. The objects were covered in various shades of browns, oranges, yellows, and reds. Because of their smooth texture, it was close to impossible for Molly to capture one in her arms.

Willy watched her for several minutes with a bemused expression on his face, but eventually noted her frustration and approached where she was standing. As one of the round objects slipped out of her grasp and bounced away, the small child was left staring after it in bewilderment.

By this time, the candy maker could tell that this was not all that easy for her as the ball looked to be about the same size as she was. “Here Molly, let me get it for you,” he eventually spoke as he captured the object and started towards the side of the path where she now waited for him. “Come on, let’s sit down here and I’ll show you how to open it.”

“You can open it?” she asked.

“Of course you can. These balls are filled with some of my finest chocolate,” he said smiling. With expert hands, he pulled the small lid off one end of it. “You see? Now, here let me hold it for you.”

She watched with confusion as he turned the opened end of the object towards her and she was left staring into it. “What do I do with it?” she asked shyly.

“Just stick your hand inside and scoop it out,” he said. “It’s very much like your Halloween pumpkin, but instead getting yucky pumpkin seeds, you’re getting a handful of chocolate. Like this.” He dipped his hand into the object and pulled out some chocolate and began to lick his fingers. “Try it, it’s delicious.”

Molly pulled the sleeve of her dress up to her elbow and hesitantly dipped her hand into it and pulled out some of the gooey mass of chocolate. Tasting it, the child’s face broke into a bright smile. “It’s even better than the icing from my last birthday cake,” she said as she licked the chocolate off her fingers.
“What did I tell you?” he asked with a now smug expression on his face.

Molly smiled but continued to lick the rest of it off her hand and had reached inside the object for more. After a moment she offered it to him and watched as he followed her lead.

They continued doing this for several minutes until he finally replaced the lid. “I think that should be enough for now,” he said once he shoved it away and looked at the child. Her face had small smudges of chocolate on it, but to him, she looked positively charming.

When she started to lick the skin around her mouth in an attempt to get the rest of the chocolate from her face, he began to chuckle. After several minutes, her next words emerged, and thus ended his amusement.

“Why can’t I have more?” she asked as she tried to smear the rest of the confection away with her fingers and stuck them into her mouth. “It’s so good.”

“I know,” he said smiling. “But do you what happened the last time I ate too much in one sitting?”

“What?”

“I got a tummy ache,” he said as though a conspirator sharing a great secret. “A really bad one, too.”

“You did?” she asked.

“Yes, and they’re no fun, are they?” he asked, his face the depiction of earnestness.

“I guess not,” she said, her gaze still on the ball.

He pulled a handkerchief from his pocket, shook it out, and offered it to her. “Here, this is clean; you can wipe the rest of the chocolate off your fingers. Then we’ll go collect your mother before she eats all the teacups.” He watched as she accepted the offered piece of cloth and did as he suggested. “I can take you back to your room, and then you can get some rest.”

“But Willy, I’m not tired,” she yawned.

“I know you said that earlier, but you keep yawning, and that is generally a sign that you want to go to sleep. Either that, or I’m about as exciting to listen to as your math teacher giving a lecture on fractions,” he said with a smirk.

Molly shook her head. “You’re not,” she said earnestly. “My math teacher last year was really boring.”

Willy’s smile broadened. “I’ll tell you what. Tomorrow first thing, I’ll bring you back here and then you can see more of the room and try some of the other candies. How does that sound?”

“You promise?” she asked shyly.

He nodded. “I promise.”

The little girl looked down at the handkerchief that was resting in her hand. After a second passed, she looked up at him. “I love you,” she whispered.

Willy took a deep breath. He had no idea that a child would ever say these words to him, much less one who did not know him so well, as was the case with Molly. Linda had said that the child considered him to be her hero, but these simple words seemed to have surprised him beyond measure. There remained no questions left for him to ponder; the little girl had touched him in such a
profound way.

Taking a deep breath, he suddenly remembered how Eliza had always gotten on to him for keeping his distance from people. Now, he was looking into the eyes of a child who had every reason in the world for being afraid and yet she wasn’t. Her simple declaration shook him to the core and left him speechless.

After several minutes, he took a deep breath and spoke, his words soft, but he could feel their truth washing over him. “I love you, too, Molly.”

As soon as these words were out, the little girl crawled closer and he suddenly felt her hugging him. At that moment, Willy Wonka’s thoughts were literally careening out of control. He had always known that children were honest and their hearts were in the right place, but Molly’s simple manner had left him to wonder why he was looking for a child to take his place when he had one seated right there in front of him.

It was also perfectly clear that as Willy looked down at Molly, he knew beyond any doubt that he could not imagine her not being there. He also felt an overwhelming gratitude for having actually found the courage and drive to keep this precious little girl from harm.

Several minutes passed, before he started to get to his feet. She followed suit, but reached for his hand. Once they were both standing, he began to lead her back in the direction of where her mother was sitting.

After about a minute, Molly raised her head and looked at him. “We can really come back here tomorrow?” she asked innocently.

“Of course we can, I made you a promise, didn’t I?” he asked. When she nodded, he continued. “I’ll even show you my boat if you’d like and we can go for a little ride.”

“You have a boat?” she asked.

“M-hum,” he nodded. “It’s a beautiful blue and white colored boat with red seats. It can sail right through this very room and into that tunnel over there.”

Molly looked towards the tunnel, her eyes growing wide. “It looks dark and scary in there,” she said but lowered her head. “I don’t like the dark, it scares me.”

“Don’t worry, when we take this boat ride, I’ll be right beside you,” he said smiling. “You have nothing to be afraid of.”

Molly nodded but instead of responding to those words, she looked at the river. “Why does the water look like mud?” she asked.

“Because it’s not water and it’s not mud,” he said smiling.

“What is it?” she asked.

“It’s chocolate,” he said. “Come over here and I’ll show you.” He led her over to the edge and retrieved a small scoop. He then released her hand and crouched down so that he could fill it. “No one should touch the chocolate, as that could contaminate the entire supply and that would be really bad. That is why I have this. If you drink from it, there should not be any danger of that happening.” He stood back up and handed her the scoop. “Just take a little taste. I don’t want you to get sick from overdoing it.”
Molly sipped the contents of the small container but grimaced. “Why does it taste so bitter?” she asked.

“Well, it still needs to be creamed and sugared,” he explained. “This is how my dark chocolate is made. When we add the cream and sugar to it, then it gives the milk chocolate variety that you’re probably accustomed to.”

She handed him the container and watched as he placed it in a nearby receptacle. “Now, I really think it is high time for me to take you back so you and your mother can get some rest.”

Molly said nothing, she simply allowed him to lead her back up the path. When they found Linda still sitting amidst the lemon nectar candies, Willy broke into a broad grin. “It looks as though I may have to make some more of these. I seem to have some competition for them,” he said as Linda raised her head. Traces of sugar lined her mouth and she tried without success at wiping it away.

“I couldn’t resist, Willy, they really are delicious.” She slowly got to her feet, her attention now on her daughter. “So, Molly, how was your dessert, honey?”

“It was good,” the little girl mumbled, but yawned.

“I suppose we really should be heading back,” she said. “You’re tired and it’s been a long day for all of us.”

The chocolatier nodded and led them out of the Chocolate Room.
Chapter 33

Chapter 33: A Heartfelt Moment

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Linda was smiling by the time they reached the Lavender Room. She could not help but notice that the room where Willy had arranged for them to stay was not too far away from the Chocolate Room. She wondered if the chocolatier had planned things that way.

Molly’s adrenaline was, by this time, quickly running out and the little girl looked as though she was about to fall asleep on her feet.

Instead of letting her slow them down; Willy stopped, picked up the exhausted child, and carried her back in the direction of their room.

“You’re so wonderful with her,” Linda said as they reached her and Molly’s room. She opened the door and watched as he carried the child into the room. As he had done with Linda that very morning, he brought Molly to the bed and laid her amidst the blankets. Reaching over, he grabbed her doll and placed it within the child’s reach.

As soon as she was lying there, she curled herself into the fetal position while he grabbed a blanket and covered her with it.

As he and Linda went over to the sofa that was on the opposite side of the room, he smiled. “She’s a very special little girl,” he said as he sat down.

“You said that you care for her, and it really shows,” Linda said as she lowered herself onto the sofa next to him. They sat for several moments until she spoke again, her voice breaking into his thoughts. “Willy, my daughter ashamed of having the name Slugworth and yet, you’ve been so kind to her.”

“I would not have done otherwise,” he said calmly. “Molly is not at fault for the actions of her father or uncle. She’s a very honest and caring little girl.”

“We both feel so torn about all of this,” Linda said softly. “Willy, I know about the earnestness of the rivalry between you and the Slugworths, but what you did tonight for Molly was so wonderful.”

Willy reached over and took Linda’s hand gently in his. Once he offered it a reassuring squeeze, he spoke, his voice firm. “Molly’s plight is not about business or rivalry, Linda, and for the record, neither is yours. You have to understand that this situation is centered on a number of things; least of which are about business or competition.” He inhaled sharply. “I am a chocolatier and I have been in this industry much longer than you think. I do know the distinctions between matters of the heart and actions I must take in order to stay in business. These are the distinctions, Linda, and what I have done for you and Molly have absolutely nothing whatsoever to do with my business practices.”

Linda lowered her head, but soon raised it when he touched her shoulder. “I cannot, in good conscience, punish you or that child because I don’t like Arthur and Owen Slugworth.”

She nodded, the tears catching in her eyes. “Owen somehow managed to make it into a business issue though. How can I stop myself from doing it as well?”

“I don’t know, I can only reaffirm how I view it and what you do with that information is purely up to you,” he said. “The point is; you are much more to Tom and me than just some business deal.” He
cast a glance back over towards where Molly was sleeping. “I realized that the first moment I saw you at the airfield last night. Then it was reaffirmed when I saw Molly sitting inside it Bill’s Candy Shop earlier this evening.”

“I cannot forget who I am, nor can I overlook what has happened,” she whispered.

“My dear lady, no one expects you to,” he began.

“But Willy, I…” her voice trailed.

“…Let us speak of this one last time, and I will sincerely hope that we will not touch this issue again. I will, not now or ever, feel animosity towards you or Molly because of your name. I know it, but I don’t give a wangdoodle about it. I see two people who have been caught up in a cutthroat industry. I can see clearly the extent that you have suffered as a result of it. I cannot constantly reiterate that I harbor no ill towards you, please don’t try to convince me that I should. I think I’m clever enough to know when someone is trying to pull the wool over my eyes.” He looked at her intently. “Linda, I do know and I can tell when people are being honest with me.”

Instead of speaking, she looked away. “Maybe I did do everything wrong.”

“You tried to protect your child and there is nothing wrong with that. Now you have to learn to trust yourself,” he said softly.

“It’s hard,” she mumbled.

“I know and I understand that probably better than most,” he said honestly. “Tell me; is the issue of trust the real reason why you and Molly ran away?”

Linda nodded. “In part, but the other reason is because I was afraid for my own safety. I was worried that if I told my family about what had happened, that Arthur and Owen would target them next.”

“Would they really do that?” Willy asked.

“They would, and I was afraid that because my father is so vocal about his feelings, that he would find himself on their hit list,” Linda shook her head. “You know them as competitors, but they really act like they are part of a mafia with Arthur as their boss. If they don’t like you then they can make anything happen. You already know that they have enough people working for them. The Hudson Chocolate thing is only the tip of the iceberg.”

“Perhaps your father’s concern was for a good reason,” he said.

“I don’t know, I just am a little bit surprised that he told you so much about me,” she said.

“Maybe he knew that he could trust me,” he said as he reached over and touched one side of her face, his soft fingers stroking her cheek gently. “Perhaps, we should be grateful to him for telling me the truth because something tells me that you wouldn’t have been able to tell me a thing.”

Instead of speaking, she simply nodded.

“So you see, I was right to trust you,” he said. “It was through your words that we were able to put the Slugworths on the defensive, and that enabled us to get Molly back. Her safety is the most important thing in all of this. I’m just glad that we acted as quickly as we did.”

Linda looked up at him. “I don’t know what to say, except that you’ve been so kind to us. Ever since the first moment we met, you’ve done everything you said you’d do.”
“I only did what I thought was right. If I had turned away from you, then it would have been cruel and inhumane. I couldn’t have done that, my conscience wouldn’t allow it,” he said.

Linda closed her eyes. “My father always told me that when it came to people, I should follow my instincts about them.”

“And what do your instincts tell you now?” he asked.

“That you care about us and that all of this is really happening,” she whispered. “Sometimes it’s hard to believe the good when one hears so much of the bad. Through the years, I listened to a lot of rubbish from Owen and it became easier for me to believe him over people like my father.”

“In other words, you allowed Owen to cause your self-worth to falter?” Willy asked. “That’s very sad, Linda.”

“My father always told me once that love should not be a power struggle between two people, but it should enable both of them to thrive and flourish. Perhaps that was the reason why Owen hated my family as much as he did, my father made me feel worthy when my own husband did not.”

“That could be the crux of the problem. If self-worth and acceptance are given freely in a relationship then both things can also be reciprocated,” Willy said honestly. “If there is none, then how can you find that, dwelling inside of you?”

“Tom was right when he said that you are very wise,” she said.

“Where is wisdom, in the heart or in the mind?” he asked with a tiny smirk. “You see my dear, wisdom is only a sign of experience. When you consider all the mistakes that you have made in your life, then you hold a piece of wisdom in yourself as well because you learn. Samuel Smiles once said: ‘We learn wisdom from failure much more than from success. We often discover what will do, by finding out what will not do; and probably he who never made a mistake, never made a discovery.’.”

Linda nodded, but without thinking about what she was doing, she inched her way closer to him, her head coming to rest on his shoulder.

In response to this, the chocolatier carefully wrapped one arm around her and allowed her to rest leaning up against him. They remained seated in this manner for several minutes, his hand lightly brushing through her hair and she eventually relaxed into the gentle touch.

“I think the hardest thing for me to accept is the fact that I have it much easier than my daughter,” she admitted.

“How do you figure?” he asked, his movements abruptly stopping.

“Once I find a lawyer who can help me get the divorce settled, then I can go back to using my maiden name,” Linda said. “Molly cannot. This is a name that she was born with, and it would be difficult for us to change it.”

Willy nodded. “It shouldn’t make any difference, Linda.” He took a deep breath and released it slowly as his next words emerged. “I know that it does and I can see that you’re still afraid. I recall what Tom told me about you and when I look at you, I see so much truth in his words.”

“About me?” Linda asked. “W-what did he say?”

“Please understand, Tom did not wish to break any confidences, but he conveyed that you were
terrified at the prospect of your words eventually getting back to Owen. Neither of us even knew the extent of the fear you harbored, but we could tell that they were present. When we made the decision to bring you here, it was done to not only assist you but also to insure your safety."

Linda took a deep breath. “You saved Molly’s life, and probably mine as well.”

“Tom and I only did what we felt we had to,” he said. “You and Molly have both been very brave throughout all of this.”

Instead of speaking, she cast a glance towards the child sleeping on the bed. “You gave Molly your trust and acceptance and I know that that was exactly what she needed. She has carried so much fear and anxiety inside because she was scared of what you would think of her.”

“It surprises me because we had never met,” he mused.

“She always believed you to be her hero,” Linda said. “I know it probably seems rather superficial for me to talk about you in these terms. I mean; you are famous and all that she could possibly have known about you were things that she heard through the press. I can well imagine that all of the things that have happened here have been rather like a fairy tale to someone like Molly,” as she spoke, she tried to read the expression that had manifested itself in the chocolatier’s face. When his expression remained unreadable, she took a deep breath and released it slowly. “Please don’t take this the wrong way, she’s only seven, and all her thoughts and dreams were a sort of affirmation that she does deserve something better than what she has had.”

“I know all of that Linda,” Willy said. “I seem to recall how Molly and I had spoken after dinner and she conveyed the sad reality that she had given up in her belief in Father Christmas.”

“Does this have anything to do with what you whispered in her ear?” Linda asked.

The chocolatier nodded. “I told her that I still believed in Father Christmas.”

“Do you really?” she asked.

“I believe in the concept, yes,” he said. “Somewhere, out in this world, there is someone who emanates the traits of goodness and honesty. They then proceed to go out and share that with children who, in turn, convey those very same traits. The reason I told her this is because I somehow got the impression that the adults in her life have tried to persuade her to stop believing in the fantasies that go along with being a child. Children are told from an early age on what they believe, and it is very rare for an adult to tell a child to simply believe in what they believe for the sake of doing so. A very dear and wise friend of mine once said, ‘Willy, believe to believe, and don’t ever try to justify it, just believe it.’ Something that sounded so complex was really quite simple and profound. This is what I told Molly, perhaps in a much more simplistic way, but the meaning was the same.”

Linda looked at him. “Maybe you’re the personification of the person you described, the one who is good and honest who looks for goodness and honesty in others.”

Willy smiled weakly. “I’m not so sure about that.”

“Now, you’re showing signs of modesty,” she said, a slight smile shadowing her face. “I didn’t think that was a trait in the great Willy Wonka.”

“What should I say then?” He chuckled as the question emerged. “Ho, ho, ho perhaps?”

She laughed softly, but after a few moments, her expression became earnest and she closed her eyes.
“It’s strange.”

“What?”

Linda took a deep breath. “You can take me away from my worries through just being here and a few simple words. You know maybe, like Molly, I have always believed that you are good and kind.”

“Because of Molly?” he asked.

She shook her head as she reached for her purse and began to dig around inside it once she had it on her lap. “Several years after I got married, I made a discovery.” She pulled out a small silver tin and opened it. Inside the nondescript tin were two dozen candies that were shaped like three tiny grapes on a vine.

“Those are my ‘Snozzberry Fruit Drops’, aren’t they?” he asked.

Linda nodded. “Yes, I always kept the candies in this tin. It once belonged to my grandmother, and it acted as good camouflage for my keeping some of your fruit candies stashed in here. The Slugworth variety of this candy is not of the same quality as what you created.”

Once she had handed the object to him, he smiled but soon returned it to her. “That must have driven them crazy.”

“I don’t know if they ever really knew about it,” Linda said. “I showed it to Molly and she thought it was great. Of course, she has always viewed you as someone special and extraordinary.”

Willy took a deep and staggering breath. “It would seem as though to Molly, I live a charmed sort of existence. I’m not a hero; I’m just someone who loves what he does for a living. If I had known when I got into this industry how cutthroat it really was, I may have found myself deterred from it.”

“But, you are a hero, Willy,” she objected her eyes closing momentarily. “You did something very heroic tonight.” As these words emerged, she wrung her hands together. “It terrifies me to think about what Molly must have gone through during the last twenty-four hours. I realized the moment I opened the door and saw her standing there that if it weren’t for you, her suffering would have been prolonged. I’m not saying that you are a hero because of your fame; I’m saying it because of what you risked to help my daughter. Perhaps the emotional attachment that Molly initially carried towards you was born from her love and admiration of your work, but now that she has met you, it has been magnified by the fact that you helped to get her away from the abuse.”

“When we were in the Chocolate Room earlier, Molly told me that she loved me,” Willy confessed. “I must admit that her words took me rather by surprise.”

“How?” she asked. “Hasn’t a child ever told you that they loved you before?”

“No, at least not that I recall,” he said honestly. “You see, in my life, the whole emotion of ‘love’ is somehow hidden by make-believe or anticipation. It has been rather hard for me to resolve whether or not people love me or what I do.”

“In other words, what you do doesn’t completely define who you truly are,” she said.

“Not always, no.” He reached over and touched one side of her face, his fingertips lightly brushing against her cheek. “Sometimes, it’s nice to know that there is a difference between reality and a façade.”
Linda raised one of her hands and covered his so that it would remain against her face. As she did this, she closed her eyes and felt his hand slowly wrapping around her own. “You are such a loving and caring man. I cannot imagine what it must be like for you.” She took a deep breath and opened her eyes. “It’s strange how I only met you today and feel as though I’ve known you for years. You are truly a brilliant and valiant person, Willy.”

After some moments passed, he brought both of their hands away from her face before giving hers a loving squeeze. “I didn’t do anything that was out of the ordinary. I went to pick Molly up because I realized that I was the only one who could safely find her. As for what happened in the Chocolate Room, it was really nothing exemplary. I shared something with her that would perhaps ensure her a few pleasant dreams. She needed something that could offer a semblance of optimism or hope,” he said. “Based on what you and Tom have told me about her, I figured that there were things in this factory that could prove beneficial to her.”

Instead of speaking, Linda backed away and looked down at their joined hands. After several minutes, her gaze shifted until she was looking into his eyes. She slowly licked her lips before leaning closer to him and kissing his cheek. “Thank you,” she whispered as she drew away. “Thank you for my daughter.”

The chocolatier released her hand and smiled. They had slipped once more back into the awkward formality, and he could tell instinctively that it would take a few more conversations with her before that pretense would completely crumble.

“It was my pleasure,” he said. They were soon consumed in silence before he dug in his pocket and pulled out a small bottle. This, he pressed into her hand before standing up.

She looked down at the object and swallowed. “Are these for Molly?” She asked as she read the words ‘Wonka’s Sweet Dreams’ on the bottle.

“They’re for both of you,” he said. “Since Molly doesn’t like lemon flavored candy, be sure to give her a red one if she has a nightmare.”

“Why?”

“The yellow ones taste like lemon, the red ones are cherry flavored,” he said. “No matter what you do, only give her one. More than one could have diverse effects on her because she is so small. They are weak enough that one should not bring any harm to her.”

Linda nodded. “Thank you,” she said as he started to walk over to the door with the intention of leaving. Before he could reach the door, she spoke. “Good night.”

“Good night, dear lady,” he said. Just as he opened the door, he stopped and turned around to see that she was still standing somewhat awkwardly in the sitting room.

Suppressing the urge to return to her and take her in his arms, he stepped outside and closed the door firmly behind him.

Once out in the hallway, he remained standing for several minutes, a small smile covering his face. He knew that he now carried some rather strong feelings towards Linda and based on the way she reacted to him, she seemed to be carrying similar feelings as well.

_It’s too soon_, his conscience was hollering at him and he knew that these rational words were true. Linda was going through something horrible and needed the support of her friends, not a lovesick man hanging at her every word.
It would have to take some time for all of these things to happen at their own pace.

He started to make his way back down the hall, but abruptly stopped when Linda’s earsplitting cries suddenly pierced the air.

Stopping, he whirled around and took off back in the direction of the room. When he reached the door, instead of knocking, he rushed inside.

As he came through the room, he spotted Linda seated on the edge of the bed, her arms wrapped around her daughter, who was now dressed in her pajamas. The woman’s face was filled with distress.

Without thinking about what he was doing, he approached, but noticed how her body was shaking like a leaf. “What is it?” he asked, his voice resonating louder than her cries. “What has happened?”

Without immediately speaking, Linda pushed up the sleeve of her daughter’s pajama top to reveal a small group of abrasions on the skin. “Willy, what in God’s name did they do to her?” she asked, her voice trembling uncontrollably.

He sat down and pulled the child’s still body into his arms so as to have a better look.

Upon seeing the injuries, he took a deep breath. “Slugworth,” he whispered, his voice filled with animosity.

“What is it?” Linda asked her voice etched in panic, “what did they do?”

“It would seem that while Molly was in the care of her father and uncle, they were preparing to brand her somehow,” he said after staring at the injuries for several moments.

“Do you mean like people do with cattle?” Linda asked.

“Yes, something akin to that, but the cuts are in the shape of a rectangle, so they could have planned to do something like implanting a flat object beneath the skin. It would seem as though we managed to get her out of there before they could follow through with it.” He took a deep breath. “Try not to worry; the wounds should heal up in a few days. We just need to make sure that she doesn’t scratch them or else they will leave scars or get infected.”

“How could I have married someone like Owen?” she whispered. “I must have been out of my mind.” She began to wipe a wisp of her daughter’s hair out from in front of her face.

“You can’t blame yourself for this,” Willy said gently, but with the child still in his arms, he stood up. “Go ahead and pull back the covers so we can tuck her in.”

“I don’t think Molly would mind sleeping in your arms,” Linda mused, but did as he instructed.

“Maybe, but it is not the best way for anyone to sleep, specifically a child who is in such dire need of rest as Molly is. If she were to sleep this way, she would no doubt wake up with her back and neck feeling quite sore,” he said as he laid the child amidst the pillows.

Once she was tucked in, the two adults left her to sleep and returned to the living area, Willy started to make his way back towards the door, but Linda reached out and touched his arm. “Please don’t go yet.” When he stopped and turned around, she lowered her head. “I’m sorry; I don’t mean to sound forward…”

“…You’re not, but it’s really late and you should get some sleep as well.” He cast a fleeting glance
around the room, before continuing to speak. “If you are lacking anything here, let me know and I will do what I can to get it for you, alright?”

“I think we have everything we need,” she said honestly. “I know this probably sounds childish and stupid, but I do feel much safer knowing that you are here.”

“Rest assured, dear lady, you have absolutely nothing to be afraid of. You and Molly are both safe here and I won’t let anything else happen to you. I know you said last night that your life is a nightmare, but even the worst dreams that one might have, can change and become something new, positive, and even beautiful.” Smiling he walked towards the door. “I bid you a good night, and pleasant dreams.”

With that, he walked out of the room and closed the door firmly behind him.
Chapter 34

Chapter 34: Heroes of Old and Young

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

July 15, 1971

Willy arrived at the dining room close to ten the following morning to find Thomas, Linda, and Molly eating. The little girl was devouring chocolate pancakes while her mother was enjoying an omelet.

Thomas looked up from his cup of coffee and smiled. “Late night, Will?” he asked as the chocolatier went into the kitchen and retrieved a cup of coffee before coming over to the table.

Once he sat down, he looked at Thomas. “Not so much as late as busy. I was trying to narrow down where ticket five should go.”

“You haven’t really told me much about tickets three and four yet,” Thomas said. “I think the only thing I heard was that you planned to ship them to America. I guess not only will I get to see the world, but will have the case of jetlag to show for it.”

Willy nodded, but smiled. “Why else do you suppose I’m sending the fourth ticket to America as well? It’s all a trick to keep you from having to endure long exposures of jetlag.”

“So, basically the fifth is all that is left,” Thomas said.

“I am looking at having it delivered somewhere here in London. I have even thought about having it sent directly to Bill’s Candy Shop. After what happened in Duselheim with the first ticket, I think finding it there would do wonders for his business,” Willy said as he added a generous spoonful of sugar to his coffee and reached for the cream.

“How can you know where the tickets are going to show up?” Linda asked curiously.

“No great miracle there, we can simply trace the candy bars through the UPC codes as well as though some special coding that Thomas and one of my workers perfected,” Willy said with a casual shrug of his shoulders.

“Amazing,” Linda said but cast a glance towards her daughter. It looked as though Molly was now eating faster since Willy had come in. Apparently, she wanted to finish so that she could spend as much time with him as was allowable. Of course, Linda had other thoughts and worries on her mind, but she still reached over and touched her daughter’s shoulder. “Slow down a little, sweetie, you don’t want to get the hiccups from eating too fast.”

The little girl nodded and took another bite of pancake as Willy reached for the newspaper and started flipping through it. “So what have you three got planned for today?” he asked casually.

“Well, Linda and I made an appointment early this morning with Mr. Gregory before you came in,” he said casually dropping the name of Willy’s lawyer. “I’ll be taking her to see him after we get done with breakfast. He is considering taking Linda’s case and I think she stands a very good chance of getting this finalized over the course of the next few weeks.”

“I don’t know if he handles divorces, but he’s very good at what he does nonetheless,” Willy said. “I
figure that if he doesn’t then he could send you to someone who does.”

Linda looked at him. “The world’s most famous recluse has a lawyer?”

“Of course, I think everyone has a lawyer for those ‘just in case’ moments,” Willy said smiling. “I also have a dentist, a doctor, and a barber. Of course, the barber can’t tame down my hair to save his life.” He smiled broadly at her and returned his attention to his coffee. After taking another sip, he continued. “Try not to worry, Linda, Claude Gregory has been taking care of the legal issues of my family for well over thirty years. After my grandfather passed away, he took me as a client, and has represented both the factory and myself ever since. It seems Mr. Gregory likes working on my case since I’m withdrawn and quiet; often considered the perfect client.” He chuckled, but looked over at Linda, his laughter dying when he saw the extent of her nervousness. “So when did he manage to pencil you in?”

“Eleven thirty,” Linda said, but looked at the chocolatier. “Willy, would you mind looking after Molly while I’m taking care of things this morning? If you have other, more pressing things to do, then I could take her with me. I’m just worried about leaving her alone after everything that’s happened.”

As she spoke, the little girl raised her head, but nothing emerged, instead, it looked as though they were both waiting for Willy to respond. It was clear that the little girl was hoping that the chocolatier would say ‘yes’. She did not mention that the thought of leaving the factory scared her to death, but something in her stance indicated that she was frightened.

“I see nothing wrong with this plan, but you should be careful nonetheless,” he began. Linda nodded. “We’ll be careful, and Tom did say that he would drive me.”

“Alright, and as for Molly, I have no objections to watching out for her if she doesn’t object to hanging around with me.” He looked at the child with amusement literally dancing in his eyes. “What do you prefer, Molly? Would you like to go with your mother and Tom to the lawyer’s office where all you get to do to pass the time is read boring magazines in a stuffy waiting room?” He paused. “Or do you want to come with me to the Chocolate Room?”

The little girl looked at him. “I want to stay with you. Is that okay?” She asked shyly.

Willy nodded. “Of course it is.”

“Would it keep you from anything pressing?” Linda asked.

“Not at all, it would be my pleasure,” he said smiling. “Besides, I promised Molly last night that we would take another trip to the Chocolate Room first thing this morning, and since it’s now that time, I have to fulfill my promise.”

Molly jumped up and began to clap her hands happily as Thomas got to his feet and started towards the door.

“Then I suppose that settles it,” Linda said, but it was obvious to Willy that she probably had more on her mind than just going and discussing her divorce. She took a swallow of her coffee and pushed her plate away.

Willy reached across the table and touched her hand, which caused her to raise her head and when their gazes locked, he spoke. “Everything will be alright, Linda.”

She nodded as she got to her feet. “I hope you’re right.” She started to walk towards the same door
that Thomas had exited. “I’ll be back soon. Molly, you mind Willy now, okay?”

“Yes Mommy,” the child said obediently.

As soon as Molly was alone with Willy, she looked at him. “I think she’s afraid,” the child said softly.

“What makes you say that?” he asked as he drained the last of his coffee.

The child shrugged her shoulders, “I don’t know. She looked kind of scared.”

“You seem to know your mother pretty well,” he said.

“I know that she cries more than she used to,” she said honestly. “I kept thinking that maybe it was because I did something bad.”

“What could you have possibly done that was bad?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” Molly whispered. “My daddy said that they had to hurt me because I’m always bad.”

“Your father said that to you?” he asked.

Molly nodded. “Yeah, and then he said that Mommy was sick and couldn’t take care of me anymore. I didn’t believe him, though. When I said that I loved my mommy, he…” her voice trailed off and she rubbed her upper arm in the same place that Willy had seen the injuries the night before.

He reached for her hand and once he held it, he stood up, the coffee forgotten as he gently pulled her to her feet. “Come with me, I’m going to get some medicine for your arm and then once you’re bandaged up good, then we can talk about anything you like.”

Molly allowed him to lead her from the dining room. Further down the hall, they reached a second set of doors and using a large golden key, he opened the door.

The little girl soon found herself in another section of the factory that very few people had ever seen. Along one of the walls was a panel that was covered with black frames and countless newspaper clippings. Along the other side were various doors, which led into what looked to be private living quarters.

Molly started to look around the corridor, a question looming, but instead of speaking, she followed him until they had reached a door with the word ‘pharmacy’ etched across it in gold script.

Willy opened the door and ushered her into another room.

Instead of the place being white and sterile, it was filled with color and seemed almost like a continuation of the Chocolate Room itself. Lollipops seemed to cover the walls and cabinets were covered with pictures of what looked to be various rooms around the factory.

While Molly took in her new surroundings, Willy began to search through the drawers until he found a package of gauze as well as a tube of salve specially made for cuts.

The little girl’s attention shifted from these now unique and strangely beautiful surroundings to Willy as he finished his search and joined her. “Is this where you see a doctor?” she eventually asked.

“Yes,” he said. Instead of elaborating on that, he reached for her hand, but offered an encouraging smile. “Now, let me take a look at your arm.”
Molly nodded as she accepted his offered hand. He helped her up onto the examination table and once she was comfortably seated, he gently pushed the sleeve of her shirt up until he could see the injuries. The child cringed when she felt the coolness of the air touch her skin.

“It hurts pretty badly, doesn’t it?” he asked.

Molly inhaled sharply, but nodded.

“This should help then,” he said but stopped everything he was doing when he noticed her body had tensed up. Tears were brimming from beneath her eyes. “Molly, are you afraid?” he asked.

She nodded. “It might hurt.”

“I see, well, I’ll tell you what. While I put some of this salve on, you look over towards the wall there and try to think of something that makes you really happy.”

The little girl nodded and did as he suggested while Willy smeared some of the medicine on her arm. She sniffed when she felt the coolness of it against the skin, but otherwise did not indicate that the attention hurt too much.

Willy next retrieved a gauze compress and placed it on her arm. Using another piece of gauze, he wound it gently around her arm and affixed it with medical tape. “There,” he said. “That didn’t hurt too much now, did it?”

Molly shook her head, but for several minutes, she said nothing. Instead, she looked at her arm and then at him.

“You were very brave,” Willy said.

“Not really, I was just thinking about something nice like you said,” she said.

“What were you thinking about?” he asked.

“Last night when we shared the chocolate,” she confessed. “It was the happiest moment of my life.”

“Do you mean when we were at Bill’s?” he asked.

Molly shook her head. “No, the other time.”

“In the Chocolate Room?”

Molly nodded.

“That was your happiest moment?” he asked. When she nodded again, he continued. “You know, I always thought that a child would be happiest on their first day of school or when they would learn to write their name for the very first time. You really would prefer sitting on the ground eating chocolate with me to all those things?”

“You’re my hero,” she said in a barely audible whisper. “You saved me from my daddy and that mean man.”

Willy took a deep breath and looked earnestly at the child. “Molly, do you want to tell me what happened while you were with your daddy? It seems as though you have been keeping an awful lot of pain locked up inside since last night when you arrived here.”

She rubbed her hands together. “I can’t.”
“Because of your mother?” he asked. “You don’t want her to know what happened because you’re afraid it will hurt her.”

Molly looked at him as though he had just admitted to performing magic tricks. After several minutes, she reluctantly nodded. “You won’t tell her, will you?”

“No if you don’t want me to, but sweetheart, you really do need to talk to someone about this,” he said. “If your mother knows what all happened, then she can better protect you.”

“But I’m scared,” the little girl admitted. “I keep thinking that maybe something bad is going to happen and everyone’s gonna hate me.”

“No one will hate you,” Willy said gently.

“They won’t?” she whispered.

“No, of course not,” he said but reached for her hand.

Once she surrendered it, she spoke, her voice breaking. “I’ve never been so scared before,” she confessed, as the tears streamed down over her face.

“I understand what it feels like to be afraid,” he said. “I also know that you’re trying really hard to be brave for everyone else.”

Molly shrugged her shoulders as she looked around the room.

Willy, noticing this, nodded. “Come, let’s continue this conversation in the Chocolate Room, that way you will at least be in a place where you feel more comfortable.” He helped her down off the table and led her out of the room.

As they made their way down the hall, she raised her head and looked up at him. “Willy?”

“What is it, sweetheart?” he asked, but turned his head and looked down at her.

“You won’t let anything else bad happen to us, will you?” she asked weakly; her voice tugging at the chocolatier’s heartstrings.

“No, I won’t,” he promised. “You’re completely safe here, Molly.”

As these words hung in the air, he led her back down the hall and towards the entrance to the Chocolate Room. When they reached it, she watched as he opened the door and they slowly entered. The room was exactly as she remembered it the night before, only this time, instead of her mother being with them, they were alone.

The chocolatier looked down at her. “What do you want to do first?” he asked.

“I-I don’t know,” Molly said as she shook her head.

Instead of speaking, he led her down the stairs and when they reached the base of it, he reached into one of the trees and removed a candy cane. “Here, try this.”

Molly accepted the candy and sat down on the ground. Taking a bite, she immediately tasted raspberry juice. “It’s good,” she whispered.

Willy seated himself beside her, his hand resting on her shoulder. When she raised her head again, he could see that the tears brimmed from beneath her soft brown eyes. It was now just a matter of time
before the child would cry.

After several minutes, she still had said nothing, but instead took another small bite from the candy.

“Molly?” he eventually spoke, his single word breaking the sounds of the waterfall splashing in the distance.

She raised her head.

“I know you’re frightened,” he began.

“I’m not,” she said all the while trying to sound brave. “I’m…” her voice trailed.

“…Sad, worried, perhaps a little bit angry,” he interrupted gently. “You have every right to be. So many people have let you down. They’ve betrayed you, and damaged the trust you carry deep down inside.”

“I don’t know what to do,” the child whispered. “If I cry, then I upset my mommy and my daddy hits me.” She could feel the tears as they slid down her cheeks. “What would you do?”

“I don’t really know, sweetheart,” he said. “I suppose I would cry.”

The child tried without success to wipe the moisture off her cheeks with the back of her hand. What she didn’t expect was for her hero to reach over and take both of her hands in his.

“You have every right to cry, and if any man tries to hurt you for doing it, then he will have to get past me,” he said with fierce determination.

Molly raised her head and looked into the eyes of the chocolatier.

“Now, tell me what happened while you were with your father,” he coaxed gently. “When you woke up, where were you?”

Molly closed her eyes and shivered. “I-I was in this scary room and there was this man standing over me. He looked like Tom, but I knew it wasn’t Tom, because he was mean. Then Daddy came in and he looked so angry. He had a candy wrapper in his hand.”

“The same one that Tom gave to you?” Willy asked.

Molly nodded, but her next words emerged in a waver. “H-he said that it was in the pocket of my dress. He started yelling at me for having it and kept asking me why I was eating your candy and not theirs.” Her voice broke and she shook her head trying to block out the memories. “H-he said that I wasn’t a good Slugworth and that I should be sad about it because I betrayed my family. Then my daddy hit me because I said that I liked your candy better…” Her voice trailed off and she covered her face with her hands. “…T-then after that, my daddy held me down and that mean man hurt my arm. He had these large needles…”

As her voice trailed off, Willy could feel the anger as it began to overwhelm him. *How could anyone do this to a child?* He asked himself, but instead of immediately speaking, he pulled Molly onto his lap and held her tightly in his arms. “It’s alright, you’re safe now,” he crooned softly. “I won’t let anyone else hurt you, Molly.”

Instead of immediately speaking, the little girl kept her face pressed up against him, her arms wrapping around him and holding on with all her might. Eventually, she swallowed and spoke her voice soft. “L-last night, I had a scary dream and now I’m afraid to go back to sleep.”
“And you’re exhausted,” Willy deduced. In response to these words, Molly shook her head as though in denial. He rested his hand against her hair. “You’re very tired, I can tell.”

“I don’t want to see my daddy ever again,” Molly whimpered. “He’s so mean.”

“I know and I understand how come you’re afraid,” he said. “I would be too.”

“Really?”

The chocolatier nodded. “Do you know what I think?”

“What?”

“I really think that you should tell someone else besides me about what happened. You could tell your mother, or Tom, or even Mr. Gregory.”

“I just want to forget,” she sniffed.

“I know you do, but if someone else knows, then they could help your mother help to keep you away from these mean people,” he said softly.

“But Willy, I’m scared to,” she whispered.

“I know and it’s alright for you to be afraid,” he responded.

Molly took a deep breath. “I wish you were my daddy,” she murmured softly.

Willy simply held her in his arms and rocked her gently. After several minutes passed, he brushed a lock of her hair out from in front of her face and spoke. “Did you know that I didn’t have a very nice relationship with my father either?”

“You didn’t?” she whispered.

“No,” he admitted. “I even cried in this room like you did just now. I had been feeling very sad about it.”

“But you’re a grown up,” she whispered. “Grown ups don’t cry.”

“Of course they do, I sometimes cry,” he said, a mischievous smile now lining his face. “Shall I show you?”

“It makes me sad when people cry,” Molly said as she shook her head. “Mommy sometimes cries, and it always scares me because I think I did something wrong.”

Willy nodded with understanding in his expression. “It’s an emotion like any other, little one. You should never try to force yourself from experiencing it.”

“How do you mean?” she asked.

“When you try to keep yourself from crying, it’s like having a lump in your throat, and you try to swallow it down and you can’t. It just stays there, and you cough and do whatever you can to get it to go down, but nothing helps. Then when you are able to cry, it’s like that annoying lump evaporates and then afterwards, you start to feel a little bit better because it’s no longer there.”

“Is that what happened when you cried?” she asked.
He nodded. “That’s exactly what happened.”

“You cried because your daddy didn’t love you?” she whispered. “If he didn’t, then he must be stupid. I mean; you’re so nice and huggable. I can’t believe that anyone would not love you.”

“Truthfully, I don’t really know if he did or not,” Willy said honestly. “Some might say that in his own way, he did. Today, I feel myself inclined to believe that. I suppose I often remember how much time I spent asking myself why he didn’t accept me for who I am or support the dreams I carried in my heart.”

“I would have,” she said as she raised her head.

“That is what makes you so special and unique,” he said. “You see, when you have a dream, you just hold onto it as tightly as you can. It just so happens candy making was always my dream. It was something that I wanted to do, perhaps to make children like you happy.”

The little girl smiled. “Maybe that’s why your candy’s so good.”

“I often thought about that, because I can’t really create new things when I’m unhappy or sad. I learned early on that the first rule of candy making was to make candy when I am in a really good mood,” he said. “The last time I tried to make something while unhappy, I ended up making something called a ‘mudfuddle’.”

“That sounds gross,” she said bluntly.

“Yes, it does sort of sound yucky, doesn’t it?” He shrugged his shoulders and gave her one of his typical grins.

“Why did you make something like that?” she asked.

“Well, several days before I made it, I had been really, really sad and started smoking cigars and lost my sense of taste,” Willy admitted. “Do you remember last night when you said I smelled like chocolate and mint?”

Molly nodded and as if to emphasize that point, she leaned towards him and inhaled. “You still do.”

“Well, imagine adding cigar smoke to that mixture,” he said.

“Yuck!”

“Yes, well, this is how Tom knows that I have been doing things I shouldn’t have been doing. My clothes and hair take on that weird combination and then I lose my ability to invent or create new things.”

Molly closed her eyes and lowered her head. “You shouldn’t smoke, it could give you cancer.”

“I know,” he said. “And I promise that the next time I get really upset, I’ll let you know and then you can help me find a better way to deal with my sadness.” Willy laughed quietly as he reached over and ruffled her hair. “You know something, Molly?”

The little girl looked up at him, not really sure about what he was going to say next.

“I think that I am in the mood to make something,” he said. “Do you want to be my assistant?”

“Me? Really, you mean it?”
“M-hum,” he smiled. “How would it be if we made some teacups with another flavor besides lemon? What’s your favorite flavor?”

“Butterscotch,” she said licking her lips. “My teacher used to give us these candies when we did well on our homework.”

Willy nodded and started to stand up. “Come on, let’s go to the Inventing Room and see what we can put together.” He reached for her hand and when she accepted it, he pulled her to her feet. They walked across the path towards the door that led out of the Chocolate Room. As soon as they had exited the room, they found themselves walking down a rainbow hallway.

“What about the boat ride?” she asked.

“Well, there’s always another time for that,” he said. “What do you think about staying here at the factory for a while? Then I can show you everything.”

“You mean it?” she asked, her eyes a sea of hope.

“Of course,” he said smiling. “I would never have made the suggestion if I didn’t.”

Molly looked up at him, but nodded.

“Good, so let’s get on, there’s a new confection to be created,” he said.
Chapter 35

Chapter 35: Butterscotch Candy

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

By the time Willy and Molly had reached the Inventing Room, the chocolatier’s thoughts were running a mile a minute. Let’s see, he thought, butterscotch ripple, water, some butter extract… The new confectionary idea seemed to be going through his mind before they had even reached the location where he generally started mixing ingredients together.

Molly watched him for several minutes, his stance growing almost concentrated as he pondered these new ideas. “Willy?” she eventually whispered his name as he unlocked the large door that led into the Inventing Room.

Pulling the door open, he turned and looked at her. “Yes, what is it?”

“What is hair cream?” she asked. “It says that on the wall over there.”

“It’s a creamy mixture made with egg whites and other things,” he explained. “It’s supposed to make your hair soft to the touch and manageable.”

“You don’t use it, do you?” she asked, her question taking him completely by surprise.

With wide eyes and feigned astonishment, he turned and looked down at her. “Hey, now wait a minute, what’s that supposed to mean?” As these words emerged, the child began to giggle, her hiccup-like laughter filling his ears.

Trying to keep a stern look on his face, he regarded her through bemused blue eyes. It was no question that after all the pain and sadness this child had endured; it was good to see her laughing and smiling. Deep down inside, Willy knew that he would have to play that bit for all it was worth.

After all, what other part of the factory would be the ideal place for something like that to play out than in the Inventing Room? “That’s not funny,” he eventually spoke.

“Then why are you smiling?” she asked innocently, her hand still covering her mouth trying all the while to conceal her laughter.

“Let me get back to you on that one,” Willy said, a merry smile now plastered across his face. Wordlessly, he steered her into the room before running his hand through his unruly hair and patting it into place. “Is that better?”

Molly turned around and looked up at him. Instead of speaking, she raised her hand in order to touch the hair that was not concealed by his hat. Seeing this action, he crouched down so that she could touch it.

As soon she felt the smooth texture of Willy’s hair, she smiled. “It feels soft like cotton candy.” Without thinking about what she was doing, she stuck her nose in his hair and inhaled. “But it smells like chocolate.”

“Are you surprised by that?” he asked.

“A little,” she said as she allowed one of his locks of hair to wind around her finger. “I like your hair
though, it’s pretty.”

Willy smiled, but instead of moving, he allowed the child to continue what she was doing. As she continued to fiddle with his curly hair, he spoke. “I remember once how the granddaughter of one of my friends braided it, and how I had all these little, tiny braids in my hair. I looked very strange.”

Molly loosened her hold on his hair and backed up. “You’re not strange,” she said, her voice bordering somewhat on defensive. “Nobody should call you strange.”

“Not even me?” he asked with mischief lurking in his voice.

It was obvious that although he had been quite serious in the pharmacy as well as in the Chocolate Room, he was now in his element. It looked as though he was ready and willing to bring this child head first into his world. “What am I, Molly?”

“I don’t know,” she mumbled.

“Well, give yourself some time to get to know me a bit better,” he chuckled. “Then you can decide if I’m ‘strange’ or not.” He paused. “Now then, shall we have a look around before we start making our candy?”

The child nodded and they began to weave their way between the various caldrons and machines towards a large table that extended along one of the walls in the back of the room. Before reaching it, they stopped.

“What is all that stuff?” Molly asked, her wide eyes taking in the room. “It’s messy.”

“I don’t usually bring people in here, especially critical ones, if you catch my meaning,” he said arching his eyebrow and looking at her intently.

Molly, sensing the humor in his words, did not respond, but instead pointed. “What’s that over there?” She asked as they walked over to a small display with various pieces of purple and greenish colored candies on top of it.

“That’s exploding candy,” he said as he picked up a piece. “It still needs something before the experiment is perfect. I’ll be testing it again in the coming weeks.”

“Exploding candy?” Molly mumbled, but instead of contemplating his response, she backed away from it and went over to the bicycle that was built with two different mixing bowls. She stared down at the larger of the two. “What’s this?”

Willy approached. “This is my exercise bicycle. I use it as a mixer. Shall I show you how it works?”

Molly nodded and watched as he climbed up on it and started pedaling; the mixers began to mix the confections. After several moments, he started to sing. “In spring time the only pretty ring time birds sing, hey ding-a-ding a ling time…”

After several minutes, she spoke. “Do you know ‘Puff, the Magic Dragon’?”

The chocolatier chuckled. “I don’t do requests.”

“Why not?”

“Because I don’t know that song,” he said as he climbed down from the bicycle. Instead of elaborating on this, he led her over to another invention, this one a large tube that looked rather like a
toothpaste dispenser that squeezed out fruit flavored candies. “Now, these are a brand new invention of mine. I was able to perfect it just before your mother and you arrived here. Do you want to try one?”

Molly nodded as Willy placed the confection in the palm of her hand. “Here you go,” he said, a mysterious smirk shadowing his face.

She accepted the small round candy in the shape of a cactus flower and put it in her mouth. Seconds later, she spit it out, the piece flying up against the colorful Gobstopper machine and setting off the siren. Willy’s laughter suddenly filled the room.

“Sauer macht lustig,” he said between chuckles.

The little girl looked at him, her eyes wide. “That’s not funny, you shouldn’t laugh at people; it’s mean.”

“Oh come now, Molly do you know what I said just now?”

She shook her head.

“Well, I said in German, ‘a sour taste gives a funny face’. Your face looked really funny when you tried the candy. Let me show you,” he said as he popped a piece of the same candy in his mouth. “Now, look at me.” As these words emerged, his lips curled and his face began to stiffen. Eventually, he spit the candy into a waste basket. “You see? It’s funny.”

“Why do you make yucky candy?” Molly asked trying all the while to get the strange taste out of her mouth.

“It’s not yucky, it’s just sour. I’ll be releasing them next year for April Fools,” Willy said. “I call them the ‘Chuckle Sour Drops’. Neat idea, huh?”

Molly giggled, “maybe you are strange, Willy.”

The candy maker smiled. “Come on; let’s go see what we can make today.” He led her over to the long table. It had a sink, oven, hot plate, as well as large rack where hordes of candy ingredients lined it. Behind it, large bags of sugar were placed as well as bottles, which looked rather like they had come out of a chemistry lab and not a candy factory.

Willy rubbed his hands together. “Now, before we get started, you need an apron, and we have to get your hair out of the way so as to not get it into the confection.” He pulled open a drawer and started pulling things out. “That should do it,” he said as he closed it again. He then extended the apron to her.

Molly put it over her head while Willy checked to make sure that it did not drag against the floor. Satisfied that it did not, the chocolatier tied it snugly behind her. Next, he produced a small green colored bandana. “This is for your hair.” Carefully, he pulled her hair back and held it while she tied the ends under her long brown hair. He then handed her a small matching band and watched as she wound it around her hair in a ponytail.

Nodding approvingly, he removed his coat and draped it over a nearby chair. His hat, he placed atop the coat and reached for what looked to be a hairnet. Pushing his hair back from his face, he managed to trap his flyaway hair so that he could work. Next, he unbuttoned the sleeves of his shirt and pushed them up to his elbows. Finally, he reached for the apron that he had placed on the table and put it over his head and tied it in the back.
“Next, we have to wash our hands,” he said and pointed towards the sink. “We don’t want to get dirt in our candy.”

Molly watched as he went over to the tap and turned on the water. He motioned for her to stick her hands under the tap. Once she had done this, he picked up a strangely shaped object and squeezed some caramel colored liquid on her hands.

“It smells like candy,” she inhaled the fragrance from the liquid.

“I wouldn’t recommend eating it because it’s not candy, it’s just colored soap. I made all different colors of it, I thought that it would be nice for kids who don’t like bath day,” he said. “We just use it to wash our hands.”

She nodded but began to rub her hands together and then stick them under the water. As she finished she smelled them and noticed the distinctive flavor of caramel. “That smells good.”

“Each color has its own flavor,” he said as he finished washing his hands and turned off the water. Reaching for a towel, he shook it out and handed her an end. He took the other and they simultaneously dried their hands.

Next, they moved over to where two chairs were placed. He pulled it over and seated himself next to the counter. “Go ahead and sit down,” he said.

“Do we need a recipe?” she asked. “My grandma always cooked with this big book.”

“We don’t need a book, that’s someone else’s idea,” he said smiling. “You see, this is our experiment and it is how I come up with new ideas.”

“Really?”

Willy nodded. “Yes, and now we want to make Butterscotch Teacups, right?”

Molly nodded.

“So, what we will probably need is the butterscotch ripple,” he reached for a bottle and removed the lid. Sniffing it, he nodded. “Ah, yes, this is the right stuff.” He poured a small amount into a teaspoon and took his finger and touched the liquid and tasted it. “Strong, but that will be perfect for what we need. You want to try some?”

Molly nodded and followed his example. She stuck her finger into the liquid on the spoon and tasted it. “That’s yummy. At least it tastes better than those sour candies you tricked me into trying.”

“My dear girl, I never tricked you, you took the candy yourself,” Willy said as he wiped his hands on the towel before handing it to her. As soon as she had discarded it, he motioned towards a large, plastic mixing bowl. “Now, grab the bowl, we’re going to make some magic.”

As soon as she did as he had instructed, together they poured a small amount of the butterscotch flavored liquid into the bowl. He then took a deep breath. “Now, how did I do the lemon confections?” he mused.

“I thought we were doing butterscotch,” Molly said.

“Oh, we are, but I have to remember the other confection so that I can replace the lemon with butterscotch,” Willy said. He thought for a minute and then smiled. “What I think we need is glucose, and perhaps some thick syrup, gelatin…”
“That sounds gross,” Molly said. “Mommy always gives me lime flavored gelatin when I’m sick.”

Willy nodded. “If I used that kind, the candy would taste terrible. So, the gelatin I use is colorless and tasteless, all it does is make the liquid a little bit thicker.” He took a small spoonful of the gelatin powder and added it to the liquid. He then pushed the bowl over to Molly. “Now, you stir that together and we’ll see what else we need to add to it. You realize that it may turn out much differently than what we initially intended.” He reached for a small notebook and while she was stirring the mixture, he began to write down what they were using as well as the amounts.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Well, we’re making something new, so I’m writing down exactly what we’re doing,” he said. “If it is different and turns out really good, then we can give the candy a name, a design, and then make it really unique.”

Molly looked at him. “You mean; you’d use my ideas?”

“Would you allow me to?”

The child nodded without any sort of hesitation.

“Then yes, I would,” Willy said, and without warning the bowl slipped from Molly’s hand and landed on the counter. She lowered her head and started to wipe the back of her hand over her eyes.

The chocolatier noticed this and reached over and touched her shoulder. “What’s the matter, little one?” he asked, the playfulness momentarily gone from his voice.

“N-nothing,” she whispered as she reached for the bowl and once again resumed stirring the contents.

Instead of speaking, he stopped everything he was doing and took the bowl gently out of her hands. “Come on, you can tell me. If you’re sad then our candy won’t turn out any good. Do you remember what the first rule of candy making is?”

“Not to make candy when you’re sad,” she whispered.

“That’s right,” he said smiling. “Now, tell me what’s on your mind.”

“It’s just that my daddy never wanted to make candy with me like this. I asked him once and he said that he didn’t have time for my childish games,” she whispered.

“That’s rather foolish,” Willy said bluntly. “Candy making carries a small part of being a child inside along with it. If they don’t know that, then it’s no wonder their confections are all terrible.” He took a deep breath. “Do you like making candy?”

“I don’t know, I never done it before,” she whispered.

“But you know what you like, right?” he asked.

Molly shrugged her shoulders, “yeah.” She glanced over at the bowl where their confection sat. “Willy?”

“What is it?” he asked.

“Would you hate me if when I’m big, I decide not to make candy?” she asked weakly.
“Why would I hate you for pursuing your dreams?” he asked.

“I don’t know.” she lowered her head.

Willy reached over and touched the top of her head, thus causing her to raise it. “Tell me what you want to be when you grow up,” he said softly.

“I always wanted to be a dancer,” she confessed. “I never told anyone, but I love the pretty dresses and the music.”

“Do you know how to dance?” he asked. “Have you started learning?”

“My grandpa taught me a little,” she said.

Willy offered her his hand. “Show me.”

“I’m not very good,” she said but accepted his hand and slid off the chair. “I can only do the easy steps.”

“Everyone has to start somewhere, that’s why they call it the beginning,” he said as he bowed to her. “May I have this dance?”

The child nodded but bit down on her lip. Once they had distanced themselves from the table, she could suddenly feel one of his arms coming to rest on her shoulder. She put her right arm around his waist, and soon felt her left hand being held by his.

Following his lead, they began to move in a small box-step around the cluttered Inventing Room. Of course, the steps had to be small, as they would have rammed into some of the inventions otherwise. Molly seemed not to mind as she was now focused on Willy’s soft singing. “Come with me, and you’ll be in a world of pure imagination…”

After several minutes, Molly stopped moving and lowered her head, the tears were now streaming from beneath her eyes and she sniffed. Willy abruptly stopped singing and watched as the little girl once more began to cry.

He took a deep breath but pulled a handkerchief from his pocket. Her happy mood had once more returned her to the traumas that she carried. Instead of speaking of that, he pressed the cloth into her hand and watched as she began to wipe her face with it.

As her weeping subsided, he spoke. “Do you feel any better?”

“A little,” she whispered.

“That’s good. I would hate to think that our coming here made you sad,” he said smiling.

Molly looked at him. “But it didn’t, I mean; everything’s better since I met you,” she said earnestly.

Willy smiled, but began to ruffle her hair. “The same holds true for me, sweetheart. And you know what?”

“What?”

“One day, you’re going to be a lovely dancer,” he said.

“You mean it?” she asked.
“You bet, I do,” he said. “You don’t have to do the things I do to make certain that I will love or care for you. The truth is, I will always love you and I will be there for you if ever you need me. It doesn’t matter what you decide to do with your life as long as you are happy with what you choose. You’ll do very well as long as you put your heart and soul into it. After all, it’s a lot easier to be successful at something you love than to fail at something you don’t.”

The little girl looked at him. “Can we finish our candy now?” she asked.

“I don’t see why not,” he said, “you in a better mood now, right?”

She shrugged her shoulders.

“Well, let me at least see you smile,” he said.

Molly gave him a very big and toothy grin.

“Well, I guess that will have to do,” he said with a smirk. “Then let’s get busy. Perhaps we will have something to share with your mother when she gets back.”

“A sour candy?” Molly asked giggling.

“Perhaps not,” he said as they returned to the counter.

Molly immediately washed her hands before grabbing the bowl and resuming with her stirring. Within minutes the two of them had added a vast number of various ingredients to the mixture. In went sugar, glucose, honey, and even more of the butterscotch flavor.

As they were adding the mass they had created to a pan on the stove, Willy looked at her. “You see, this started out at Butterscotch Teacups and turned into small candies.” He set their confection to heat and soon it was bubbling away.

Once it had finished cooking, he measured the temperature of the liquid and then looked at Molly. “Take some of the oil from that bottle over there and smear it over the surface of the work area.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Well, because we have to pour this hot mass onto it and then cut it into pieces. If there’s no oil, then the candy will stick and instead of eating the candy, we’ll have to lick the counter top,” he said but smiled broadly as he handed her a paper towel.

Molly did as he instructed and once she was finished, she watched as he poured the hot candy mixture on top of the surface of the work area. As soon as that was done, he took a knife and began to cut the mixture into various bite-sized pieces.

“When can we try it?” she eventually asked.

“Well, the candy has to cool down a little before it can be eaten. Right now, it also has to solidify and that means about an hour of cooling time,” Willy said. “Why don’t we go back to the Chocolate Room for a little while? We can check back later and start wrapping the pieces. We can also test a few of them as well.”

Molly nodded as she removed her apron.

Willy watched her for several moments as he removed his apron, unrolled his sleeves, and pulled the hairnet out of his hair.
Before leaving, the chocolatier retrieved his coat and hat.

Ten minutes later, they had returned to the Chocolate Room. As they made their way down the candy path, Molly looked at the chocolatier. “You think our candy’s going to taste alright?” she asked.

“You felt better as we were making it, didn’t you?” he asked.

“Yeah, I guess,” she whispered. “I was happy watching you.”

“Do you know who Mark Twain was?” he asked, but when Molly shook her head, he continued. “He was a great American writer, and he said: ‘Whoever is happy will make others happy, too.’ I think that our candy will be wonderful because you gave me enough happiness for both of us.”

“How come?” she asked, “I mean; I was sad.”

“Well, you trusted me with something very special,” he said. “Anyone who is given the chance to hear someone else’s hopes and dreams is rather like being given a reward of indescribable worth or value.”

“Is it like when you told me that you believed in Father Christmas?” she asked.

“I think so,” he said nodding.

Seconds later, the gentle peals of a bell could be heard ringing in the distance. “What’s that?” Molly asked.

“That’s the Wonkatania,” he said smiling. “It’s the boat I told you about last night. It looks like we made it back here just in time to go on that promised boat ride. Would you like that? It will take us back to the Inventing Room and by then the hour will have passed and we can check on our candy.”

Molly nodded as the Wonkatania’s bell once again sounded and the Oompa Loompa crew docked it at the edge of the river. She took in the brown and white outfits as well as the green hair and orange faces of the skipper. “Willy?”

“Yes?”

“Who are they?” she asked. “Their faces and hair are different.”

“Well, in their culture, that is completely normal. They are Oompa Loompas, and they come from Loompaland.”

Molly climbed on board the boat and approached the crewman at the helm. “What’s your name?” she asked.

The Oompa Loompa said nothing. Instead, he shook his head and looked at Willy.

“He doesn’t speak, Molly, he’s mute,” Willy explained. “He can understand you though. His name is Pauli-Rai.” Anticipating her next question, he pointed to the two who were working the rudder in the back. “Those two are brothers, and they are named Thio-Eris and Theo-Ires.”

“Do they talk?” she asked.

“Not when they are working,” Willy said. “They stay very concentrated and focused on their work.
Come and sit with me so we can move along. They will not start rowing until you are seated. They don’t want you falling overboard or anything.”

Molly sat down next to him and immediately felt the boat starting to move. She leaned up against him and rested her head against his arm.

When Willy made note of this, he raised his arm and wrapped it around her.

“What was it like in Loompaland?” she eventually asked.

“It was interesting, but also rather scary,” Willy said honestly.

“Scary?” Molly asked. “You got scared?”

“At one point, yes,” he nodded. “Everybody gets scared once in awhile.”

“I thought it only happened to me,” she admitted.

“No, everyone gets scared, even I get scared,” he said as he reflected on the trip. It had indeed been a life-changing experience and for the most part, very uplifting. The chocolatier recalled how exciting everything had been from the moment the plane had landed in Auckland to when he had returned to London with the Oompa Loompas in tow.

“I can’t believe that you got scared,” she said.

“I did, there was this strange beast called a Wangdoodle, it flew over my head and wanted to eat me.”

Molly looked at him, her eyes now as wide as saucers. “What’d you do?”

“I ducked and it flew right into a tree. Wham, purple blood splattered everywhere,” he said.

“That’s gross,” she said.

“Yes, it was,” he nodded. “Anyway, there were some rather exciting parts about the trip, and I can’t remember ever having that much fun outside of the factory,” he said. “Of course, in Loompaland, that was the most interesting, even if it was scary and gross.”

“Tell me about it,” the child pleaded.

Willy smiled and nodded. “Alright; but where should I start?”

“Tell me how you met them the first time,” Molly said her eyes still on the mute Oompa Loompa at the helm.

Nodding, he offered the little girl a smile as he took a deep breath. He then began to relate the events that happened when he had been in the forest that surrounded the Oompa Loompa village.
Chapter 36

Chapter 36: A Life Changing Meeting

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Flashback

September 22, 1968

It had been two and a half of the most tremulous weeks of his life, but Willy Wonka had enjoyed the time outside of his factory. The allotted time for his vacation was winding down and rather quickly. Although the Island of New Zealand was currently experiencing the end of winter, it had, for the most part, been a rather mild one when compared to what he had been accustomed to back home in England.

The main difference there was the air that surrounded him. It often felt rank and humid against his skin. Mosquitoes seemed to thrive on this sort of temperature, and if it had been the dead of summer, the chocolatier would have been served up as the main course at an insect buffet.

During this time, Willy discovered that he was quite content with being dressed in paisley and bell bottom pants as opposed to dressing in his usual suit and tie. It was often cool in the factory, so the manner of dress he was accustomed to was quite alright. Out here, on the other hand, it would have been anything but appropriate.

The strange thing about all of this was the fact that although it was not quite springtime, he was experiencing one of the hottest days of the year. There was no snow on the ground, not even in the hills.

On this particular day, he now sat in a rented boat with nothing but a driver and him. He had asked for someone who could help him to explore the various small islands and had been given a guide named Mark. Although the man had been freely willing to assist, it was clear that he had no idea why it was Willy had these particular objectives in mind.

“How can I tell you what my intentions are when I don’t even know them myself?” the chocolatier had asked during their initial meeting. The guide, in turn, gave him a strange, almost bewildered look, but no words were exchanged until they climbed aboard the boat and set out for open seas.

As Mark stopped the boat momentarily after they had lost sight of land, he turned and faced the chocolatier. “So, where specifically did you want to go, Mr. Wonka?” he asked.

Although Willy had introduced himself as William Wonka, the man seemed to not have grasped the idea that he had come face to face with a world famous chocolatier. Of course, Willy was quite alright with not being pegged as a celebrity. This had actually given him far more mobility then it would have been had the press been informed of his presence.

Willy pointed towards a small speck on the map, his blue eyes filled with adventure. “What’s that island over there called, Mark?”

“It doesn’t really have a name,” the man said as he looked out across the calm sea and shrugged his shoulders. “I saw a number of these islands when I was just a lad, but my father never wanted us to dock at any of them. I guess when I got older, instead of still retaining my childhood curiosity, I
simply lost interest.”

“How could someone just loose interest?” Willy asked skeptically as he stared down at the small pieces of land that cropped across the navigational chart. “There are so many of them out here that it completely mystifies me. It seems so ironic that even adults are not amazed by what’s out there beyond their own back doors.”

“I guess that’s the difference between you and me, Mr. Wonka,” the skipper said casually as he cast a glance down at the map and then raised his head. “I’m not really an adventurous spirit, I suppose.”

“It seems strange for me to hear someone who navigates a boat to say that,” Willy said. “One of my favorite books as a child was Treasue Island. I read it probably every chance I could get. It was one of the few books that I had that was dog-eared so that I could go back and reread certain parts of it. Did you ever read it?”

“Yes, I think most boys who grew up near the water did,” Mark said. “So, your love of this book is what has sparked your love of adventure?”

“Perhaps,” Willy said.

“So, contrary to any warning I could offer up, you still want to go out to that island, right?” he asked.

Willy nodded as Mark veered the boat to the right and headed due east. “How long should it take for us to get there?”

“Not long, we have perfect visibility and I don’t imagine that it will take more than twenty to thirty more minutes for us to reach it. Might I suggest that you get yourself prepared if you intend to explore the island?”

“What do you think I am going to need?” Willy asked.

“I would say that you’ll probably need some rubberized boots that at least go up to your knee. That way, while you’re exploring the island, you won’t get your feet wet or get bit by something,” Mark said. “I cannot pull the boat directly up to the land because we could risk running aground and then we’ll be like Robinson Crusoe, to cite another literary example.” He offered the chocolatier a hesitant smile.

“That shouldn’t be a problem,” Willy said chuckling, but reached for the large rubber boots and started to pull them over his shoes. The rubber of the boots seemed to hug tightly against his feet and he smiled, all the while figuring that this would not cause any monumental problems for him when exploring the island. Of course the question that seemed to filter through his mind was whether or not he would be able to run in these shoes if the need arose.

After several minutes had passed and he managed to put the boots on, Mark turned and looked at him.

“You know, I really can’t understand why you are so insistent about going out there. There is nothing of interest on those islands. They are all completely uninhabited,” Mark said.

“Just call it natural born curiosity,” Willy said. “You said you lost interest, but would you mind telling me why? What happened that made you stop asking questions about it?”

The man pulled up the sleeve of his shirt. There across the skin was a large scar that extended from his elbow straight down to his wrist. “I guess you could say that I sort of lost it when I had gone exploring unarmed and got attacked by a bug that was about the size of Volkswagen Beetle.”
Willy looked at the scar and took a deep breath. “When did this happen?”

“Back when I was about thirteen or so,” Mark responded. “Every so often I get reminded of it, but those islands scare me to death today, because it was on one of them where it happened.”

“What sort of bug would leave such a scar as that?”

“Not a very nice one, obviously,” Mark said, but pulled his sleeve back down and pointed towards a small crop of land that appeared on the horizon. “Look, there’s the island. You see those strangely shaped trees?”

Willy looked up and once he saw them, he nodded. From where he was sitting, they looked to be the shape of large mushrooms. “What are they?”

“They were once called ‘Toadstool Trees’ because of the shape, although I don’t know the biological name for them. I used to hear stories that people actually lived in them, although today I seriously have my doubts,” Mark said. “Most of these stories came from my granddad. He did a lot of research on native cultures. Of course, among other things, he was also a masterful storyteller.”

“So you don’t think his stories are true?” Willy asked.

Mark shook his head. “My granddad had a tale for every day of the week. He could keep us all thoroughly entertained with his stories. Of course, after I was attacked, I stopped trying to hear about these fantasies.”

As he spoke, the boat drifted closer to the land and the chocolatier could see that the branches now hung down, making the trees look more like large, odd-shaped umbrellas than mushrooms.

After several minutes, the boat stopped and Willy stood up with the intention of disembarking. “Would you like to come?” he asked.

Mark shook his head. “No thanks, I think I’ll stay here,” he said, but pulled what looked to be a large sword from beneath one of the seats and extended it to Willy. “You may need this, though. Getting through the woods may prove difficult, but you’re also going to need something to protect you from those bugs.”

Willy nodded and accepted the object. It was kept in a worn out leather covered sheath. “I’ll be back in a few hours,” he said as he climbed over the side of the boat. Once he felt the water inching up his legs, he started to splash his way towards the shoreline.

The minute he reached the coastline, he could see all kinds of strange vegetation on the ground that extended away from the black sand of the beach. After closer inspection of these strange plants, he realized how some of them were rather reminiscent of his days in Biology class back when he was in school.

He made his way slowly up the beach, his eyes coming to rest on various things that looked new and strange to him. He pondered if he would find any new flavors for candy in this strange new environment, yet, not being versed in the landscape, he was hesitant about trying anything. Some of these plants could prove to be poisonous. It was too bad that Mark opted to staying in the boat, although he could understand the man’s fears. He wondered if the guide could have helped him to decipher the poisonous from the nonpoisonous.

Dismissing this, he started to make his way through the underbrush in order to take in the landscape further in from the beach.
The more he distanced himself from the coast, the more the trees and vines would crop up in front of him. Some of these were about the size of skyscrapers in a metropolitan city, while others were small, as though smashed into the ground by rocks or boulders.

*This place is truly amazing,* he thought, but continued to walk until he had reached a clearing. As he reached it, his ears could suddenly detect a faint buzzing sound that seemed to emit from several hundred feet above his head.

He raised his head and looked, but gasped when he saw what appeared to be a giant bug, the very same as Mark had described, swooping down over his head. It had a large stinger, making it look rather like it was yielding a sword. Without thinking about what he was doing, the chocolatier instinctively allowed his body to hit the ground. As soon as he had ducked, the bug flew right over him and slammed into a nearby tree. A glob of purplish ooze splattered about and he closed his eyes and felt some of it land on his arm.

Leaning forward, he sniffed it and cringed. Whatever this thing was, its guts were about as disgusting as it was. The sounds of buzzing could still be heard in the distance, so he opted to stay low to the ground, and crawled along for several hundred meters until he was concealed among the trees.

 Apparently, Mark had logical rationale for not wanting to hang around this place, Willy thought as he felt his heartbeat literally exploding against his chest. These bugs were, among other things absolutely terrifying, but they were also intimidating. Like many predators, they seemed to not be very selective of who they had attacked. Anything or anyone was free game as far as they were concerned.

Seconds later, the chocolatier raised his head in surprise as an orange and green colored blur passed by him and a terrified sounding word pierced the air. “Ikajunga!” (*Help!*)

Without thinking about what he was doing, Willy turned around to see the second Volkswagon Beetle sized insect flying towards the defenseless man. Without contemplating what he was doing, he quickly drew the sword from the sheath and blindly swung it.

The buzzing abruptly stopped and he opened his eyes to see that the large bug was lying on the ground in a pool of the same purple colored blood that the other bug had experienced when it rammed into the tree.

Willy stared for several seconds and shook his head. *Oh my God, I think I’m going to be sick to my stomach,* he thought. The smell that filled his nostrils was anything but appetizing. In fact, it seemed to have done an adequate job at producing nausea.

Seconds passed and he suddenly felt someone tugging on the sleeve of his shirt.

He lowered the sword, turned around, and looked down to see what that blur had been. It was a man, his height about a meter high, his face was orange and he had emerald green hair. Adorning his body, he was dressed in a shift of some sort, which seemed to be made from leaves and woven together with leather and animal skins. He carried a stick that was about his height and a long oddly-shaped medallion hung from around his neck and rapped against his chest.

The man bowed his head towards Willy as a sign of respect. “kappiataitok.”

“*I’m sorry,*” Willy offered the language strange to his ears. “*I don’t understand.*”

The man waved his hands in front of his face, but then pointed to Willy, his hands trembling somewhat but then spoke, his English broken. “*Brave … kappiataitok.*” He then pointed towards the
dead beast and back to the bloody sword that still rested in the chocolatier’s hand.

“I’m not brave, I just acted quickly,” he said as he dropped the offending weapon and stared at the mass of blood and guts that now covered the ground. “What was that thing?”

“Wangdoodle,” the man said and pointed. “Take weapon.”

“What is a wangdoodle?” Willy asked, but obediently retrieved the sword and tried to clean it in the grass. “It looks just like a gigantic mosquito.”

“Wangdoodle,” the man pointed at the fallen beast, but then smiled at Willy, his white teeth emerging from between two orange colored lips. This made him look rather like a Halloween pumpkin. Willy opted to keeping that observation to himself.

Instead of speaking, he listened as the man spoke again, another strange word emerging. “Kappianartok!” (awful). Of course, Willy could not understand anything that was being said. Initially, he thought that since this new word had a similar root that the other word did that it was some sort of compliment.

He said nothing until he felt the man nudging him along and concluded that he wanted Willy to follow him. He watched as the man wove his way between trees, his head ducking and stooping as he crawled under the leaves and branches. These, Willy had to climb over, as he was much too tall to even duck beneath them. It seemed more than clear to him that this man had lived in this forest for much of his life.

Eventually, after what seemed like an hour, they reached one of the umbrella shaped trees and the orange-skinned man began to climb, one hand over the other.

“You live in the trees?” Willy asked but watched as the man wordlessly continued to climb.

For several seconds, the candy maker stood somewhat surprised that the man was ignoring his words. Soon he turned around and motioned with his hand once again for Willy to follow. Taking a deep breath, he began to climb.

As the rough wood of the trees scraped against his hands, the chocolatier wondered when, or if, they would ever reach their destination. The trees were much higher than he had thought when he was sitting in Mark’s boat. In fact, the overall essence of the place seemed so much larger up close than from a distance. After what seemed like hours, they reached the top of the tree and Willy looked around.

The tree house was not very spacey, in fact, it was rather cramped quarters, even for men that came up to his stomach. “Please sit,” the man said and Willy obliged.

“How much English do you know?” he eventually asked.

“Enough to get by,” the man said. “First, my name, Omaya-Kal, I am leader of Oompa Loompas, and you?”

“William,” he responded.

“That all?” Omaya-Kal asked. “You have strange names, it would seem.”

“No, my last name is Wonka,” he said. “I generally introduce myself as William or Willy.”

“I see,” he responded.
For his part, Willy was starting to wonder if this man really did see or understand anything.

This day, which had started out as adventure, had quickly turned into a mystery as well as a sort of nightmare. How could someone actually live in such a dreadful place? he pondered. And why would they even want to? Instead of raising that question, he decided to keep things simple.

“What is this place?” he eventually asked.

“You are in our home, Loompaland,” the answer emerged.

“I’m sorry, but I’ve never heard of that place,” he began, “the guide who is still out on his boat said that these islands were uninhabited.”

“Understandable,” Omaya-Kal said. “But, that may soon transpire.” As he spoke, he ran an orange colored hand through his hair and then touched the silver colored medallion that he wore around his neck.

“What do you mean, ‘soon’?” Willy asked. He shuddered as he remembered how the giant insect had attacked them in the forest. He simply could not believe what had happened.

“You saw a wangdoodle, they generally eat us, but the worst of these terrible beasts are the snoozwangers or hornswagglers,” the Oompa Loompa leader said. “I lost my sister and one son in an attack. My people are on verge of dying off.”

“That’s terrible,” Willy said. “Isn’t there some safe place where you could go?”

“None that we know of, and we know pretty far,” Omaya-Kal said, his eyes taking on a mystical look.

“Then that means that you must continue to fight to keep from going extinct,” he mused, his voice now laced with concern.

Flashback End

July 15, 1971

“What does extinct mean?” Molly’s voice broke into his story.

Willy’s eyes opened and he took a deep breath. “Extinct means that there would be no more of them left. Those horrid creatures would eat all of them up and they would be gone from this planet entirely.”

Molly shivered, but looked up at him. “So you saved them and brought them here.”

Willy nodded. “After several days of getting to know Omaya-Kal, I made the suggestion of them coming to live in peace here. They accepted and with Mark’s help, we were able to bring them off the island, and eventually got them to the factory. Between then and now, Omaya-Kal has been teaching his people our language and they have come to see this place as their home. It has been a struggle for all of them, but they have adapted to things very well. I will admit that it was not easy at first.”

“They were sad?” she asked.

“Yes, many of them felt as though I was robbing them of their way of life or their culture. Perhaps there existed some truth to that, as I had come to accept that I had, in fact, stolen a part of their
livelihood from them. It was a very sad time for me to acknowledge that,” he said.

“You were sad?” she asked.

“Yes, I was, but not anymore,” he smiled gently at her. “You see, today, the Oompa Loompas understand that I only had their welfare in mind and now many of them are my friends and Omaya-Kal is rather like a guide or a guardian to me and not just to his people.”

“Can I meet him?” she asked.

“I can introduce you to him, he’s very kind, and I am sure you would get along famously with him and his family,” Willy said.

Molly nodded but eventually looked at Pauli-Rai. “Is he happy?”

“I think he is, as he has not indicated otherwise, but he does enjoy navigating the boat, so that is the job he does. He keeps the boat in perfect working order, and takes a great deal of pride in it,” he said smiling.

Molly watched the Oompa Loompa for several moments and then turned and looked at the chocolatier, her next words completely unrelated to the Oompa Loompas. “I think my mommy is starting to trust you,” she said, the blunt honesty of her words filling Willy’s ears and he turned and looked at her.

“Sorry?” he spoke, his single word very much like a typical ‘I beg your pardon’.

“Is that a bad thing?” Molly asked. “I mean; s-she didn’t before.”

“No, it’s not bad,” he said. “I was just wondering how it is you would reach this conclusion since we have been talking about the Oompa Loompas.”

The little girl shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know, you said something about friends and trust, and I just remembered hearing her say your name last night. After I had another nightmare, I woke up and didn’t want to go back to sleep. That was when I heard Mommy talking. I thought she was awake, but when I called out to her, and she didn’t answer. It hurt my feelings, because I thought she didn’t want to talk to me.”

“I see,” Willy said with a slight nod of his head. “She was probably talking in her sleep. That shouldn’t hurt your feelings, sometimes people do that.”

“Do you?”

“I don’t think I do,” he said honestly, but did not add that he had always slept alone. “What I understand about people who talk in their sleep is they don’t even know they are doing it and soon wake up unaware that it had even happened. I don’t think your mother would do anything to hurt you, sweetheart.”

Molly looked at him, her next question emerging and somehow surprising him. “Do you like having us here?”

“Yes I do, very much actually,” Willy said with a nod of his head.

“Really?”

“Yes, and no matter what happens, Molly, don’t ever believe otherwise, alright?”
The little girl nodded as the boat slowly entered the tunnel.

As they were swallowed up in darkness, Molly’s body tensed up. “W-Willy?” she spoke his name and it was clear to him that she was frightened. She had told him that she was scared of the dark, and the sound of her quavering voice was case in point to that.

Instead of immediately speaking, Willy started to ponder whether or not the boat ride would be too scary for the Golden Ticket winners once October the first had arrived. Although, he had fun piecing together the scary film segments for the tour, he was still not all that certain.

He reached over, wrapped her in his arms, and pulled her into his embrace. “I’m right here, Molly.”

Instead of responding to these words, she buried her face against him, the images that covered the walls of the tunnel now hidden from view. All that she seemed aware of was that the chocolatier was stroking her hair. “When will Mommy be back?” she whispered her voice muffled, but strangely enough, he could understand each word.

“She should be back pretty soon, perhaps in an hour or so,” he said. “From the Inventing Room, I can summon the Wonkavator after we check our candy. We can then head back to my office and wait.”

Molly nodded as the boat began to move faster and she tightened her hold. She kept her face buried against his chest and held on for dear life.

Willy looked down at the child in his arms and smiled. She was indeed frightened, but soon the boat would stop and they would be able to get off at the Inventing Room. When it did, they disembarked and he led her back into the room.

As they came inside, the smell of butterscotch filled them and Molly looked at him. “Is that our candy?” she asked. “It smells yummy!”

“I think it is,” he said. “Now then, why don’t we test it and see how it turned out?”

Molly nodded and they walked over to the table and he reached for a small object and began to scrape it beneath the candy, which caused the pieces to move from the surface of the table. As they flipped up, Willy took a piece and handed it to her.

“Go ahead and try it,” he said smiling.

Molly stuck it into her mouth as a smile spread across her face. “It’s perfect.”

Willy took a piece and stuck it in his mouth. As he tasted the piece, he briefly closed his eyes and smiled. “You’re right, so what should we call it? And what shape should it have?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered, but yawned.

“We’ll brainstorm that later, I think I should take you back to my office and let you get some rest,” he said. “Does that sound alright to you?”

“I don’t want to be by myself,” Molly whispered.

“I know you don’t, and you won’t be,” he said. “Once we get back, then you can rest, and I’ll find something to occupy myself. I do still have a mountain of paperwork that should keep me busy for a while.” As he was speaking, he wrapped two or three of the candies in clear plastic paper and stuck them in his pocket.
Offering her his hand, the two of them left the Inventing Room and he locked the door before leading her down a series of corridors. When they reached the end of one of them, he pressed the button that was at waist level on the wall.

Several minutes passed and the Great Glass Wonkavator arrived and the doors slid open. The chocolatier pulled the second door opened and ushered the little girl inside. As Molly sat down beside him, Willy reached up and without even looking at the control pad, he pressed the button for his office and the elevator took off in the specified direction. “Hold on tight,” he instructed.

Molly nodded and gripped the small bar that was adjacent to where she was seated. In absolute fascination, she watched as the various rooms of the factory whizzed by them, but when it finally stopped, she looked at him. “That was kind of neat,” she said shyly.

Willy smiled as they got off and soon found themselves in his strangely decorated office. As they came out, the little girl went over to the sofa and sat down, another yawn emerging as she closed her eyes briefly.

“You can lie down if you would like,” he said. “It’s been a rather long morning, and you could probably stand to get some more sleep.”

“I don’t want to sleep,” she whispered. “I’m afraid I’ll have another nightmare.”

“Would you like a piece of candy that will ensure you very nice dreams?” he asked.

“You have something like that?” she whispered.

“Of course, I started making it some years ago, but it’s never been marketed,” he went over to a drawer on his desk. He pulled out a small bottle and removed one of the cherry flavored drops. “Now, hold out your hand,” he said.

Molly did as he said, her tiny fingers curled up as though making a bowl. He placed the candy in her hand and smiled at her. “Now, eat it.”

“What is it?”

“It’s a Sweet Dreams candy,” he said smiling. “It tastes like cherries. You like cherries, don’t you?”

“Yes,” she yawned, but with complete trust, the child ate the small piece of candy. “You won’t leave me alone will you?” she asked as she stretched herself out on the sofa, the pillow at the end of it acting as a cushion for her head.

“I promise, I’ll be right here with you,” he said. “I won’t go anywhere and if you start having bad dreams, I will hear you and will wake you up.”

She stretched herself out on the sofa and closed her eyes. As promised, Willy watched over her until she had fallen asleep. He took off his waistcoat and instead of hanging it on the rack; he covered her with it and looked down at her, a gentle smile now tugging at his lips.

For a fleeting instant, he pondered canceling the Golden Ticket contest and inheriting the factory to her, but when he thought about what she had confided in him, he shook his head. Several minutes later, he cast a glance towards the desk where the confirmation rested that Molly was not the child he was looking for.

Amidst the piles of papers stacked on the desk, the first of many threatening letters from Slugworth lay. Molly was many things that he hoped his successor would be, but it was clear that she was too
young and fragile to be burdened with the responsibility of running the factory.

There was no denying that although Molly dearly loved the factory, she needed something that would not bring her harm and sadness the way this industry had already done. She wanted to be a dancer, and Willy Wonka wanted that for her as well. She had already been tainted by the wants and expectations of the Slugworth family. It would be far too selfish for him to burden her with the very same expectations.

Besides, what Willy knew he needed was an older child, someone who is a bit stronger than this precious little girl. Instead of contemplating it further, he leaned over and pressed his lips against her forehead. “Sweet dreams, my little sunshine.”

He got to his feet and returned to his desk and started to work. Periodically, he would turn around and watch over her as she slept.
Chapter 37

Chapter 37: Anonymous Friends

While Willy was entertaining Molly at the factory, Linda and Thomas arrived at a large building in the industrial sector of London. Once he had managed to find a parking place, he pulled into it, cut the motor, and started to get out of the car. When she did not move, he eventually turned and looked at her.

“Are you alright?” he asked.

“I’m a little bit nervous,” she admitted, her voice trembling ever so slightly, her hands running along the several pieces of paper that she intended on giving to Claude Gregory.

“It’s going to be alright, you’re perfectly safe,” Thomas said.

“I know that you wouldn’t bring me to a place if it wasn’t safe,” Linda said more to herself than to him.

Thomas nodded, “Will wouldn’t have stood for it.”

“Do you think it is logical for me to be afraid?” she asked.

“I don’t know, because I’m not in your shoes. I can’t say that your reaction is realistic or not. After what I saw in Füssen and heard in Will’s office, I do believe that your concerns are valid.”

“You know that they intended to try and kill me the minute I left the factory,” she shuddered as she self-consciously looked around. “Tom, would you promise me something?”

“What?” he asked.

“If something happens to me, I want you and Willy to take care of Molly,” Linda said. “She loves you both, and I know that she would at least be safe and happy at the factory.”

“What makes you so certain that something is going to happen to you?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered, but lowered her head.

“Look, we’re not going to let anything happen to either one of you…” he began.

“…Just promise me,” she interrupted, her voice etched in desperation. “None of us have any idea about what is going to happen when we get out of this car, but the Slugsworths have their people everywhere.”

“I seriously doubt that they would be here, this building is pretty safe,” Thomas said. “Try not to worry.”

“I’m afraid that’s easier said than done,” Linda mumbled more to herself than to him.

Thomas took a deep breath. “I understand that you’re afraid, but Linda, I do come here rather frequently to get things notarized for Will and the building has tighter security than at Heathrow. They probably keep it that way because of the vast number of government employees who do business in the various offices here. Not only that, but several government organizations are housed here as well.” As he was speaking, he opened the door with the intention of getting out of the car.
As he closed the door, he turned around and watched as she slowly got out of the car, locked it, and closed the door. As soon as she was standing next to it, Thomas locked the car and then came around it to join her. Gently, he took her arm and started to lead her into the building.

As they came inside, the first thing they saw was a security desk that was situated directly in front of the hallway where the elevators were. A man was seated at the desk and as they approached, he raised his head and Thomas regarded him with a smile.

For her part, Linda began to rub her hands together, but listened as the man greeted Thomas as though addressing an old friend.

“Good Morning, Tom,” the security officer at the desk offered as they approached. “Back again I see. What’s it this time, is that boss of yours still keeping you busy?”

“This time, no, this is Linda Slugworth. She has an appointment with Mr. Gregory for eleven thirty. We called his office this morning, but you can check with his legal assistant, Yvonne Richardson, to verify that everything is on the up and up.”

The security officer nodded and reached for the phone and dialed a three digit number and listened. “Yes, Ms. Richardson, Linda Slugworth and Thomas Wilkenson are here. Shall I send them up?”

He listened and nodded before replacing the receiver. “Alright, you’re cleared, but I still need so see two forms of Identification before I can let you go up, young lady. That’s general procedure.”

Linda nodded as she pulled her identification card and a driver’s license from her wallet and handed it to the man. Once he had checked it, he nodded and handed them back to her. “Alright, everything looks in order,” he said as he waved them through.

As they started to make their way around the desk, the man’s voice stopped them. “Oh and Tom, would you mind telling your boss that I really appreciated that chocolate cake he sent for my birthday. That was really a very nice surprise.”

“No problem, Stuart, I’ll let him know. Happy belated,” Thomas said as he and Linda started towards the elevator.

Once they were inside the small square shaped enclosure, Thomas pressed the number for their desired floor as Linda looked at him. “Willy’s been in touch with a lot of different people, hasn’t he?”

“He’s got a lot of friends here but he doesn’t seem to realize just how many are out there supporting his work. Most of the people here know him by sight, even if he’s dressed inconspicuously.” He smiled. “The nice thing is they all respect his privacy; that’s why I get on so well with them.”

“I’ve never really seen him ‘inconspicuous’,” Linda mused. “He’s always seemed so flamboyant, but that was always on the surface. When I was able to get past his showy exterior, I found someone who is very unassuming.”

“Sometimes, but contrary to all his good qualities, Will can sometimes be quite arrogant. I’ve known him for years and at times that tendency of being overconfident sometimes makes him seem distanced from the rest of the world. It does not mean or imply that he isn’t a loving person; it just means that after a while you get to learn about his positive and negative character traits equally. Of course, you can still accept him and look beyond the things you don’t particularly like,” Thomas said honestly.

“I wish I could be that way sometimes,” Linda said. “When I watched him confront Arthur
Slugworth on the phone, I envied his boldness and courage. Maybe it’s because I’ve always been meek and afraid of everything and everyone."

“Are you just seeing what Owen Slugworth perceived, or were you really like that before you got married?” Thomas asked.

“I don’t know,” Linda said shaking her head. “Maybe I’ve always been that way. My mother has always been someone who had made me afraid of the world. One of my friends once said that it is no wonder I married such a beastly man, because my mother always treated me poorly.”

“Did she ever hit you?”

“No, not really,” Linda hedged. “She always made me feel less than worthy with her words. My real ally was my father; he always listened to and understood me. Willy does the same, even when he gets upset, I can still sense that he cares.”

“Yes, he does, sometimes too much. I mean; he’s been hurt a lot in his life, but it doesn’t stop him from doing nice things for others,” Thomas said.

“You mean like his sending a cake for that man’s birthday?”

“In a sense, but Linda he does far more than just that,” he said. “I remember about five years ago, a letter from a London Hospital came to his office and they were trying to raise money to research Leukemia, specifically in cases involving children. Will has always felt a bond to children, perhaps that’s why he hit it off with Molly. Anyway, without even thinking about what he was doing, he called the bank and withdrew about two thousand pounds from the factory’s accounts. He asked me to go and pick up the money and take it to the hospital and put it in their mailbox. I asked him if he wanted a receipt for it, that the donation could be tax deductible. He looked at me like I was crazy, and said ‘no, this is between me and the kids’. That was it, the hospital got the donation, the action was anonymous and the factory just kept churning along.”

“But, there must have been some sort of story about it, I mean, two thousand pounds is a lot of money.”

“Oh there was,” he said. “Two days later, the story broke in the papers, but no one knew who this anonymous donor was. They never found out, but Will and I both knew, and we watched as children were getting treated for Cancer and emerging as survivors. That was the reward in it all.”

“Why does he do all these kind of things anonymously?” she asked.

“I think it’s because, if everyone knew that Willy Wonka was doing this for one group, then every other group would come out of the woodwork asking him for help. Everyone has limits, Linda, and even Will has his, even if he sometimes doesn’t want to admit it. That’s just one of the many things about him that no one really knows.”

“He’s a wonderful man,” Linda said.

“He’s a good friend, the best,” Thomas said as they reached the door to the lawyer’s office. Before he could knock, Linda spoke.

“Tom, do you think Mr. Gregory is going to take my case?”

“I don’t see why he wouldn’t,” Thomas said as he lightly tapped on the door with the name embossed at eye level:
Linda took a deep breath. “It would seem that maybe he does represent people in divorces,” she mused. “Well, let’s get this over with, shall we?”

“Do you want me to come in with you?” Thomas asked.

“I was rather hoping that you would,” she said.

Instead of responding, the door opened and they were left looking into the blue eyes of a heavyset young woman. “Mr. Wilkenson, hello.”

“Hello Yvonne, this is Linda Slugworth,” he said.

“Nice to meet you,” the woman said and extended her hand to Linda who accepted it. Once they had released the handshake, Yvonne continued. “Please come in and have a seat. Mr. Gregory will be with you in a few minutes.”

Thomas nodded and allowed the woman to lead them down the hall to the small waiting area. Once they were in the room and Yvonne had left them, Linda sat down and stared at the wall, her nervousness clearly evident.

Thomas said nothing. Instead he was left to his own contemplations. These seemed to be centered on the years when he had worked in a similar office in the United States. He often wondered what would have happened if he had not started working with his friend. Perhaps he would be doing a job similar to Yvonne’s. He inhaled as he looked around the room.

“What are you thinking about?” Linda eventually asked him. It was clear that she was trying to make small talk so as to keep her thoughts distracted from where she was and what was about to take place.

“I was just remembering how I used to work as a legal aid in America before my brother died,” he said. “This was close to eight years ago. I sometimes ponder what would have happened had Simeon not died. I’d probably still be over there and my life would have been much different than it turned out to be.”

“You mentioned him on the plane, but you didn’t say very much besides that,” she said as she rubbed her hands together. “I never really knew what it must have been like to have brothers and sisters. I was an only child.”

“Like Will,” Thomas said.

“He was?” she asked and when Thomas nodded, she continued. “I suppose you’re right about one thing; I really don’t know very much about him. I mean; I would like to learn more about him, but he seems to be a very private person. He doesn’t talk about himself, unless it’s something about candy or his work.”

“That’s pretty normal for him though,” he said simply. “Will is going to let you into his world when he’s ready, it’s best not to push him. He can be quite the hot-head when pushed.”

“How did you meet him?” Linda asked.

“This was back when Simeon and I were kids. I was sixteen and Simeon was fourteen. It was during the war and we were sent out of London to live with Will’s grandfather Reginald. He was a very nice old man, but instead of spending excessive amounts of time with us, he pretty much left us to
our own devices.”

“Like the Professor in the Narnia stories?” Linda asked.

“Yes, very much like that. If we needed him, he’d help us, but generally we just did our own thing. Of course, we helped out when we could and I remember the day we met very well. Reginald had come in during breakfast and informed us that is son, Wilbur, was coming to visit. He went on to say that we should make sure that our teeth are clean and that we had flossed.”

“Flossed?” Linda looked at him.

“Yes. I know it sounds very strange, it did to us as well, but in his family it wasn’t out of the ordinary. You see, Wilbur Wonka was a pretty well known dentist and he took his job very seriously,” Thomas said. “He brought his son with him that day, a little eight-year-old tyke named William, or Willy. That’s what everyone called him back then, little Willy Wonka, a curly headed kid with the curiosity of one hundred cats, and the ability to get into more trouble than a barrel of monkeys. This kid was supposed to grow up and become a dentist like his father, but that was not going to happen and both Simeon and I knew it. Even at that age, we knew that there was no way that this scrawny little kid was going to grow into some disciplined doctor.”

“You really knew?” she asked.

“Oh yes, he was just too full of fantasy to even consider it. I mean; even as an eight-year-old kid, Will was someone who could use his ingenuity and somehow find the best results. That was not ‘dentist material’ and even his grandfather knew it. In fact, Reginald pulled us aside and told us that the chances of Will growing up as his father had intended were about as likely as the old man running off and joining the circus. It wasn’t going to happen.”

Thomas took a deep breath and continued speaking, his words laced in amusement. “Will had so many other things going through his mind, even back then. I still remember those boring rainy summer days when we had nothing to do. Will would go into the kitchen and start pulling out the pots and pans. ‘We’re going to have a symphony,’ he would announce excitedly. He proceeded to stack all these pans on the floor and then looked around for spoons and other utensils to beat them with. He had this idea that he could bring his fantasies to life just by talking about them. He always had a way with music and emotion that most boys never had. In fact, while he was thinking about these things, other boys were getting into things like football or rugby.”

“Maybe that’s part of his genius,” Linda said.

“Could be,” he said. “I never really contemplated or questioned why he is the way he is, I just admired his strong belief in spreading joy. The thing is, Will not only became a candy maker, but he learned early on how to market and sell happiness without caring or being concerned about profit. It’s an amazing gift and I have heard people even describe what he does as being like magic. Maybe it is, but I don’t think even with his overabundance of boldness, that he would describe it as such.”

Linda closed her eyes. “It makes sense though, Tom. I mean; maybe that’s why the Slugworths have failed, they never seemed to care about things like happiness.”

“You may be right,” Thomas said.

Seconds later, the door to the waiting area opened.
Chapter 38

Chapter 38: A Mindful Collaboration

As Thomas and Linda heard a cheerful voice emerging, they turned around and looked up to see a man that looked to be in his mid sixties with a full head of gray hair and a mustache standing in the doorway. He regarded them through friendly green eyes, but looked from one of them to the other and offered a cordial smile. “Hello, I’m sorry to keep you waiting, I’m Claude Gregory and you must be Mrs. Slugworth?”

Linda nodded. “I hope not for long,” she said as she nervously got to her feet and extended her hand to him.

“I understand that,” the lawyer said smiling cordially. “Mr. Wilkenson, it’s nice to see you again, and it’s especially nice that you have no work for me to do.” He chuckled as he ran his hand through his straight graying hair. “He’s always bringing me things to do, and today seems to be a bit different in that regard. So, how’s William?”

“He’s fine,” Thomas said.

The lawyer looked at Linda. “I remember when he was just a little boy.”

“Willy said that you represented his family,” Linda said.

“Yes, for a time, he was quiet, but now he’s giving me lots of work to do,” he chuckled and motioned with his arm. “This way, please.” He led them down a hall and into what looked to be a cluttered office. “Mr. Wilkenson, there’s a chair under the research desk over there, you can retrieve it. That is if you have no objection to him being here.”

“I would prefer it, actually,” Linda admitted.

“I figured that, since you look pretty out of sorts,” Mr. Gregory remarked.

Linda nodded as she seated herself in the chair on the other side of his desk. The first thing she noticed was that his desk was completely covered with files and the shelves were stacked with books. On one wall volume upon volume lined it, some of which were thicker than Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*. Others looked to be about the size of general travel pamphlets. Claude Gregory retrieved one of the mid-sized books before making himself comfortable at the desk.

Claude Gregory licked his fingers and began to flip through the pages as Thomas managed to get the chair moved over in order to sit down next to Linda.

“All right, then let’s get started,” he began to speak once he had found the page he was looking for.

“Mr. Gregory, do you handle divorces?” Linda asked as he reached for a ballpoint pen, clicked it a few times before positioning it over a blank piece of paper.

“I’ve done a few, although in this day and age, they are not all that common, but I’m quite adept at getting them through quickly,” he said. “Now then, you want a divorce and full custody of your daughter, is that correct?”

“Yes,” Linda said. “I also wanted to ask you if it was possible for me to get her name changed.”
“One thing at a time,” he said as he looked down at the book. “It would seem as though that it would be harder to change her name now simply because you haven’t been legally granted full custody yet. My suggestion would be to take things one at a time. You have three goals in mind here. You want a divorce, you want full custody of your child, and both of your names should be changed. What would be the name you would change it to?”

“McKenny,” Linda said. “That was my maiden name.”

“Now you realize that that’s going to be harder, the legal system often treats children as objects or possessions as opposed to people. Sometimes parents do as well,” he said honestly. “Not to mention the fact that your husband, no matter how estranged he may be, is a powerful businessman. He may very well do what he can to keep all of this from happening.”

“That is perhaps true, but he did send three goons to Füssen to abduct the child while they were on holiday,” Thomas said as he handed the plastic covered page to the lawyer. “My experience in legal matters is minute compared to yours, but this should indicate to you the sorts of people we are dealing with.”

“Where did you get this?” the lawyer asked as he tried to read through the plastic cover and make out the writing.

“They left this ‘paperwork’ on the table at the restaurant where Molly was abducted. They actually tried to justify their actions through it,” Thomas said.

Claude Gregory took the offered page and started to read over it. “This is absolute rubbish; holds no legal foundation whatsoever.”

“That’s what I thought,” Thomas said.

“Alright then,” he turned and looked at Linda. “Now you tell me, Mrs. Slugworth, in your own words, what exactly what happened on the night when your little girl was abducted?”

Linda took a deep breath and staggering breath. “There’s not much to tell, these three men came into the restaurant and kidnapped my daughter. They said that Owen wanted her back and when I tried to get to her, one of them grabbed me from around the neck. When I eventually did get away, he started telling me that they had trailed me from England and that if I knew what was good for me, that I not interfere. By then, Molly was terrified and started screaming for me and saying that she didn’t want to go. When Thomas tried to intervene, they assaulted him.”

“They assaulted you?”

Thomas nodded, “yes, one of them gave me a black eye.”

“What happened next?”

“The man that held Molly used some sort of drug induced cloth to make her lose consciousness. Once she had passed out, he swung her over his shoulder and left. As they were leaving, one of the men stopped and said that I should enjoy the rest of my holiday because if Owen has his way, then I will be put away for life in a psychiatric ward,” Linda shuddered. “That’s when they threw the paper on the table.”

“It took me some time to convince Linda that it would not happen and that Owen had no legal ground to do it,” Thomas took up the story. “Of course along with being concerned about her own situation, Linda was also worried about her child. This is how twisted this whole situation is.”
Linda looked at the lawyer. “I know that my husband is very powerful, they are protected by their business, but if they have their way, I will never see my daughter again. I can’t let that happen. If no one will help me, then I will take Molly and run.”

“Then you would be accused of kidnapping,” Claude raised his head. “You know perfectly well that you cannot run away from this. You have to let the system work.”

“But I am nobody,” she objected. “Mr. Gregory that is what they have indicated.”

“Perhaps what you are saying holds some validity; but William Wonka should never be considered a ‘nobody’. Having him in your corner could be all the help that you will ever need. Additionally, Mr. Wilkenson’s words about what happened also hold some validity.”

“He’s right, Linda, and keep in mind that I not only got punched, but I saw one of these men pull a gun, and Will was there to rescue Molly. He saw what happened with Arthur and Owen, and his words have as much legitimacy as Owen Slugworth’s do.”

“Let me ask you a question. Over the course of all of these events, did the police get involved?” Claude asked.

“No, when we were at the restaurant, the people who worked there wouldn’t call them. Finally, the manager of the place came out and started to throw accusations around,” Linda said. “I was so angry that no one did anything. They just stood there like idiots and let these men take my daughter away. Mr. Gregory, that’s how they work, in groups, and if we tried to get the police involved, they would have hurt my daughter. The Slugworths won’t get their hands dirty if they don’t have to, but Arthur Slugworth is the mastermind behind everything and Owen is his puppet. Now, they want Molly to be the next in their line of coercion. If they can make her do their bidding, then she would one day be forced to take over the company and carry on doing business in the very same way.”

Claude nodded as he continued to write down the information. After several minutes he stopped writing and started to click the ball point pen several times before looking up at her. “Mrs. Slugworth, give me a little bit of background on your husband. What’s he like?”

“As a person?” she asked.

“Yes, it’s very clear to me that you’re afraid of him, but you’re going to have to tell me everything you can so that we will have a case against him. If we’re going to push all of this through, then you’re going to have to tell me why you want a divorce, and the reasons you believe he is a negative influence on your child.”

Linda swallowed, and sensing the truth in his words, she nodded. “He’s abused both of us on more than one occasion and he’s used his status with ‘Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated’ to push his will with just about anyone he can. I have often overheard phone calls where they have blackmailed people or planned things that brought long-term suffering to others. The biggest that I know of offhand is the Hudson Chocolate bankruptcy case that happened in America several years ago.”

“I’m not sure I know about that one,” he said. “I generally don’t represent those in corporal bankruptcy cases.”

Thomas took a deep breath and looked at him. “We’re not completely sure that this is all going to make very much of a difference, but Will’s been trying to find out some possible names and addresses of those in America whom we can pass our information on to. Linda overheard some pretty incriminating phone calls with regards to that situation. That’s why Will has her and Molly at the factory. I heard Arthur Slugworth on the phone saying that he should have had Linda killed off
before now. They’re dangerous people, I can’t emphasize that enough.”

“Well, you’ll have to keep me posted on that particular situation, of course,” Claude responded but turned and looked at Linda. “You really believe that they are trying to preen your little girl to come in and take over the company, don’t you?”

Linda nodded. “I think that’s what they want, and I know that Molly has other dreams. She doesn’t want to be a candy maker, she dreams of something else.”

“I still don’t understand what they could possibly want from her, she’s only seven,” Thomas said.

“Arthur is the president of the company, he’s my husband’s uncle, Molly is an only child, and so is Owen. No matter how strange we believe it to be, they view forcing Molly into becoming a chocolatier as being completely normal. But like I said, that’s not what she wants.”

“It isn’t?” Thomas asked, his thoughts immediately shifting to Willy. He could not help but wonder if his friend was aware of this new information.

Linda shook her head. “As much as Molly loves Willy, she has so many hopes and dreams locked up inside of her. I know that they are there, but she is afraid to share them with anyone else. I don’t know my daughter very well because she never talks to me about the things she hopes for. She only seems to depend on me for safety and security. What I can tell you about her is that if she were to become a candy maker, then she would try to emulate Willy Wonka in every way she can and not Arthur Slugworth. The problem with that is her father would have a complete fit if that were to happen. This entire industry has tainted her, and even though she loves Willy with all her heart, the fear of it remains with her.”

“Is she being forced into this?” the lawyer asked.

“I think so,” Linda whispered. “My daughter dreams about a place where there’s no pain or sorrow. She wants to be a child and not have to cope with the issues that are being forced onto her. It’s difficult to put into words what I don’t fully understand myself, but Molly is someone who carries the pain of rejection around with her.”

“Do you think Owen Slugworth would hurt his daughter if he knew of her feelings about William?” Claude asked.

“I think he would,” she began. “I think he has, but only she can tell us and I have this feeling that she won’t. Would her telling you something make a difference?”

“If we could get a judge to listen and an appeal to be made then yes, it would make a very big difference, but Mrs. Slugworth, I don’t know very many people who would believe it. I say this simply because children tend to say and do whatever the grownups tell them.”

“She’s been abused by her father, Mr. Gregory. Last night after she had fallen asleep, I was putting her pajamas on and I noticed these abrasions on her upper arm. There were about eight of them, small holes in the skin in a rectangular formation. She never indicated that she was in pain, but somehow I could tell that her arm was hurting her. I started to cry and then Willy came in and looked at it, and said that it looked like they were trying to brand her like livestock. I wondered what was wrong with me or how I could have allowed such a thing to happen. I thought that I was in a bad movie or something, but there it was, on my baby’s arm.”

Thomas looked at Claude Gregory. “You can help her, I know you can,” he said.

“I’ll take the case, but I am going to have to insist on coming to where you are and seeing your little
girl. You and Mr. Wilkenson will not be enough in this case, we need to talk to the child and find out what happened while she was in her father’s care,” he said.

“Perhaps you’re right, but she hasn’t told any of us about it,” Thomas said.

“Well, let me play devil’s advocate here and ask you where she is right now,” the lawyer said.

“She’s at the factory,” Linda said.

“With William?”

“Yes, he said that he would watch out for her while we were here,” she said.

“You know that among other things, William is quite good with children, he can speak on their level and help them to step out of their comfort zones. He’s had this ability for a very long time. I recall a day about ten years ago, where he demonstrated this quite readily. It was just after he had opened the factory. There was a young boy standing outside the gates staring up at the smokestacks. William said that the child had come by there for a number of weeks and that he would just stand there staring up at the buildings. Later, he told me that once we got inside, he was going to come back out and try to engage the boy in dialogue. This was before William decided to withdraw from society, but still it was something I will never forget. I told him that I wanted to come with him and watch as he talked the boy. He said that that was fine but that I should conceal myself in the shadows so as not to frighten the child. I agreed and we both came outside.”

“What happened?” Linda asked.

“William did exactly as he said he was going to do, he came out and walked over to the child as though nothing out of the ordinary was happening. Here was Willy Wonka, the greatest confectionary genius that England had to offer, sharing a dialogue with a simple, ordinary little boy. He reached out, rested his hand on the boy’s shoulder, and smiled down at him. ‘What do you think of when you look up at the factory?’ he asked the boy just out of the blue. He didn’t expect any sort of response, but the little boy turned and looked up at him.”

“What did he say?” Thomas asked.

“He said, ‘I’m waiting for a miracle’,” Claude took a deep breath. “It was just like that. No one expected it and no one knew what was going to happen next, but it was almost as though William did. Instead of responding immediately, he bunched up his waistcoat and sat down on the ground next to the child. I listened as he spoke, his question filled with kindness, but his words were also encased in so much childlike understanding that I realized what an extraordinary person I was dealing with. ‘What does a miracle look like?’ The child closed his eyes and even from my hiding place, I could see the tears streaming down his face. ‘I don’t know,’ he answered. I watched as William dug in his pocket and frowned. He had forgotten something and looked over at me and said, ‘I need a handkerchief, I seemed to have forgotten mine’. So I came out of my hiding place, dug in my pocket and handed mine to him and told him that he could keep it. I continued to listen as William took the object and wiped the tears from the boy’s soiled face.”

“So did you find out why he was crying?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, his mother had cancer and had just died. The child was no more than six or seven-years-old. It was a terrible tragedy but because of William, he seemed to retain the semblance of optimism that tends to dwell in the heart of a child. The boy believed that miracles did not exist, but he never realized that Willy Wonka was sitting right there next to him trying to break into his heartbroken little world and tell him that they did.”
“Where is he now?” Linda asked.

“He left London with his father soon after that and moved to Canada,” the lawyer said. “He sent me a postcard from Vancouver several years ago and told me to tell my friend ‘thanks for everything’. He never forgot, and today he’s a teenager getting ready to start his senior year of high school. I don’t think he ever realized who had given him that handkerchief, but somehow I got to thinking that perhaps it didn’t really matter.”

“So basically what you’re saying is that Molly will be able to talk to Willy or tell him what happened?” Linda asked.

“I think there stands a very good chance that she could in fact find a confidant in him,” the lawyer said nodding. “Let her spend time with him, maybe this will enable us to find out what she’s been through.”

Linda nodded but started to stand up. “You’re really going to help us then, aren’t you?”

The lawyer stood up and extended his hand to her. “That’s exactly what I’m going to do, young lady. I’m going to need a detailed list of every time your husband abused you, whether physically, mentally, or emotionally. It will have to have specific dates and times if you can remember them. I will also require the very same for Molly, and that may be harder for you to obtain, but I think that with William’s help, we should be able to find out some of that information. Mr. Wilkenson, it might also be a very good idea for you to take her back to the factory and help her with this little project. I’ll be in touch with you all during the coming days and I will be arranging an appointment where we can all meet there at the factory. I have the feeling that you coming here may not be as safe as you would prefer.”

“Thank you,” Linda said softly, but handed the small stack of pages she carried to the man. “This is some of the information that might prove helpful.”

He looked down at the papers and nodded after several minutes had passed. “We’re going to see this through,” he said encouragingly as they were getting ready to leave the office. “Just see what you can do to get Molly to talk about what has happened. It may be painful for you both, but it could prove the only way to insure that your child will not have to return to her father’s care any time soon.”

Linda nodded as she and Thomas got up. She shook the lawyer’s hand and the two of them left the office and stepped out into the hallway. Neither of them spoke, but it seemed more than clear that there was a great deal for them to think about. It would be a long few days, and she probably would have to work very hard to remember all the times and instances as he had indicated. Right now, all she felt building up inside of her was dread and apprehension.

“Tom?” she spoke his name.

“Yes?”

“Do you think that Willy is going to be able to help Molly talk about what happened?” she asked.

“If anyone can do this, then it’s Will,” Thomas said gently as they left the lawyer’s office and made their way back down the hall towards the elevators.
Chapter 39

Ten minutes later, after checking out through the security desk, Linda and Thomas walked into the parking garage and got into the car.

Morning had faded into afternoon as Thomas pulled out of the parking garage and they drove through the center of the city. The excitement that filtered in from Piccadilly Circus could still be heard as they drove off in the direction of the sector of town where the factory was located.

It seemed as though Linda was determined to get through all of this, but there was also an essence of nervousness that encased her. Thomas was left to wonder if her uncertainty was because of the divorce or if she had other things occupying her mind. She looked as though she had no idea about what to say or do next.

After several minutes of silence, she eventually looked over at him. “I just wanted to thank you for coming with me today,” she said softly. “I wasn’t expecting Mr. Gregory to be as accommodating as he was.”

“I was pretty confident that he would try and help in any way he could,” Thomas said. “I was just not that certain whether he was qualified to take on a divorce case. You know all those times that I had been to his office I have never noticed the words that were just outside his door. It’s strange, but true. I guess it’s that way because Will doesn’t have a history of divorce in his family. That and I was not acquainted with any of Mr. Gregory’s other clients. Of course, I don’t think that he expected your case to be as high profile as this. I suppose in hindsight, anything that involves Will or his friends would most likely fall into that category anyway.”

Linda nodded her gaze still lackadaisically shifting back to the goings on outside. “I was very wrong about Willy,” she eventually spoke, her confession filled with shame. She lowered her head, but continued speaking. “It was silly for me to make such blind assumptions about him. But, I did and now I feel ashamed of myself for it. Tom, Willy is truly nothing like I expected.” As she spoke, he could hear her voice cracking.

“You were brainwashed, Linda, and Will knows that,” Thomas said. “I hear that sort of thing is rather like being in a sect or cult, where you are told what to think and how to feel or believe. There is no difference, it’s still emotional abuse.”

She turned and looked at him. “But I let it happen, I allowed their hate to dictate what I did and said. I’m a grown woman, and that shouldn’t happen.”

“But it did,” he said calmly. “They went after someone they perceived as weaker, but you showed a strength of character when you went in there and told Claude Gregory the truth. There exists no reason whatsoever for you to blame yourself for this any longer.”

“What about Willy?” she whispered. “I mean; he said he didn’t blame me, but I do. Since the first moment I met him, he was kind and generous with me; and then with Molly. How could he not blame me, at least a little, for my careless stupidity?” As these words emerged she shook her head, but could feel the tears as they brimmed from beneath her eyes. “He probably had every reason in the world to throw us out of his factory…”

“…But he didn’t,” Thomas interrupted her bitter flow of words. “Remember Linda, he denied
himself a whole night’s rest to come and pick you and me up in Germany. He didn’t have to do it and chances are if you were to ask him why he did it, he would say something like, ‘it was the right thing to do’. Do you remember when we talked at the hotel in Füssen? It was right after I called Will and asked him to send someone for us.”

“I don’t remember very much, I’m afraid,” she admitted. “My mind was in a virtual haze after Molly had been taken away.”

“Well, when I told him about what happened and asked him to send someone, he said he would come himself. The truth is, very few people would have done that sort of thing for another, specifically someone they had never even come face to face with. It is not a fallacy on his part; it was a completely normal response. He knew that you were in trouble, he had dealt with people like Slugworth in the past, and so what he did was completely normal given what I know of him. Trusting and believing in another person is not stupid, Linda, it’s sometimes the epitome of goodness.”

“That’s why I feel so ashamed,” she whispered.

“But you shouldn’t feel that way,” Thomas said adamantly as he pulled up to a red light and turned momentarily to look at her. “How were you to know that I was friends with Willy Wonka?”

She took a deep breath, “I didn’t know.”

“There you go. All of this came about because you had been open and honest with me. This is not some chance event that just happened out of the blue,” he said as the light switched and they started moving again. “There was a reason for it.”

She lowered her head. “Last night when we were standing in the corridor with him, I was listening as he spoke to Molly. She was so scared that he was going to push her away, but he didn’t. He held her as though she was his own child and then he told her that she was special and unique. Later, I watched him tuck her in, and thought about how much I wished that she could have always known someone who made her feel that way. He gave her something that I couldn’t even offer.”

“You give her far more than you even realize,” Thomas said. “You’re her mother, and she loves and depends on you. You’re the first person she calls out to when she’s afraid. It was you who she called out to for help when she was being abducted.”

“True, but now that she knows Willy, things may change for her.”

“Not the fact that you are her mother, that will never change,” Thomas said with a smile. “Don’t ever deny that part of your relationship. People may come and go in her life, but your presence will always be constant for her. You are her home, her family, and she needs you.”

“Maybe, but Willy has always been her hero, especially now since he has pulled her out of harm’s way,” she whispered. “I cannot put into words how moved I am when I watch them together. I only wish that I could somehow correct the mistakes I’ve made.”

“Molly isn’t a mistake, Linda,” he said. “She’s a miracle.”

“I don’t mean it that way,” she said. “I just wish that her father could have been someone like Willy instead of Owen.”

“I understand, but don’t forget that families are defined in many different ways. For some, they are the parents and close relations, but for others, they are the dear and trusted friends that we find along the way. Not everyone is going to look upon their parents with fondness; some will have no choice
but to acknowledge that sense of resentment, sorrow, and even anger that could exist.”

“Like what Molly feels whenever she says that she hates her father?” Linda asked.

Thomas nodded. “She has to learn to view her parents in the way that is right for her. She cannot be pressured to love or hate one of her parents by the other. That choice must be entirely left up to her.” He paused before continuing to speak. “I think that this is probably a very difficult task for a grownup to watch a child strive to create or destroy a relationship that has either helped or harmed them.”

“Did you ever deal with this sort of issue yourself?” she asked.

“No, but Will has,” Thomas said. “I spent many days listening to him speak of the heartache and regret that he has in relation to his past. It became clear that he believed that he never was able to live up to the expectations that his father had of him. I began to understand those feeling when I met Dr. Wonka on several occasions before he died.”

“It must have been hard for him to live in the shadow of a man who wanted one thing for him, while he wanted something else,” Linda raised her head.

“That sums it up. Dr. Wonka knew a great deal about his profession, but he had absolutely no idea of what it meant to be an unconditionally loving parent,” Thomas explained. “Linda, the balance that gave Will his confidence, conviction, drive, and intelligence was probably because he had grown up more or less around his grandfather. That was where the influence lies. You see, soon after this man had died, Will decided to follow his heart and open the factory. Several years after that, my own brother died and I came back here and Will asked me to stay. Since then our friendship has flourished.”

“That must be very special for both of you,” she said.

“It was and still is,” Thomas said as they reached the outer boundary of the factory. From this point, they could see the smokestacks rising between the buildings and Linda stared at them while Thomas continued speaking. “Will and I have both helped each other through some difficult times. You see, contrary to everything that has happened in his life, there’s always been an element of hurt in him because he wanted nothing more than to gain his father’s favor. When this did not happen, he began to harbor guilt and resentment about it. He worked hard to prove himself, and always thrived on people telling him that he was good at what he did and that they were proud of him.”

“But doesn’t he already know that?” she asked. “He always seems so confidant, and like you said at Mr. Gregory’s office, that tends to sometimes border on arrogance.”

“Frankly, I think that’s just his way of trying to keep from getting hurt,” Thomas said. “You’re just starting to get to know the real Willy Wonka. You have always known the façade or what you have been told, but there is a real person amidst that pretense. Give yourself some time to really know the man behind the fame. You have only begun to scratch the surface, Linda. He is a very good and kind man, but he is not infallible. When you look beneath all of the things that lie on the surface, you will see a man who has many similarities to you.”

“I thought I was getting to know him, though,” she whispered.

“You are and you like that realness that embodies him,” Thomas said nodding. “As with anyone, you both need time to grow accustomed to one another’s presence.”

“I’m confused,” she whispered. “I feel something for Willy, but I don’t know if what I feel is right.
Maybe in all this confusion, I have to accept that my feelings are all wrong.”

“Are you falling in love with him?” Thomas asked as he stopped the car several meters from the gate.

Linda swallowed, the bluntness of his words somehow hitting her like a freight train. “I-I don’t know,” she whispered brokenly. “I only met him two nights ago and like you said; I don’t really know him,” she paused and took a deep breath. It was clear that she was trying to get her thoughts straight. “Maybe I am just infatuated with the idea of someone like him who is kind and gentle.”

“Let me ask you something hypothetically,” he said. When she nodded, he continued speaking. “Let’s just say for the sake of example; if you were looking for ‘kind’ and ‘gentle’, is it possible that you could have developed these same feelings for me?” he asked. “I am asking this not out of arrogance, but because on the plane you told me that I was ‘very kind’.”

Linda looked at him, but then lowered her head, and shook it sadly. “Tom, you have been more like an older brother to me. I don’t have those feelings for you. I mean what I feel towards you is different.”

“That’s alright, since I’m almost old enough to be your father anyway,” he said smirking. “The reason that I asked you that question was to help you sort out what you might be feeling for Will.” As he spoke, he pressed the same button that was next to the radio and watched as the doors started to slide open. Driving through, he looked at her. “Sometimes, objective thoughts and ideas are what people need the most,” he said as he pressed the button again and the door slid closed.

“Perhaps, but I still don’t know where Molly fits into all of this,” she whispered. “Tom, I love my daughter more than anything, and I want to do what is right by her. Even if I do pursue a new relationship, how will I know if it is right, or if it will leave a positive impact on her?”

“You don’t know,” he said. “Because Molly is rather young, you have not yet found out if what you do will leave a positive or negative impact on her. You aren’t perfect, Linda, you just have to do your best with what you have.” He reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder, his dark eyes filled with kindness. “My father left me with a strength of heart that endured troubled times and heartaches, but that was all he was able to give me. Most of my family is dead, Linda, I learned of my brother’s death on my forty-seventh birthday. I didn’t know how much I had missed out on until after he was gone. Later, Will became my family and he pretty much adopted me as a brother. I would have been completely lost if he hadn’t offered to take me in and give me the motivation to keep living and not give up. A true family is not always made up in blood kin, but instead of people who care for one another without condition. The chosen family will be the ones you meet in the most unusual circumstances, but they can also become bonded to you in ways that you cannot even begin to fathom. Molly is, through the pain of her father’s rejection, beginning to learn this, and she is finding people who care for her in the way that her father and uncle never will.”

“And I tried so hard to help them stay in touch,” she whispered. “It was such a stupid thing for me to do.”

“You did it because you care and wanted her to be happy,” Thomas said. “Sometimes, the noble effort that parents make on behalf of their children will not be the best option; especially when abuse is involved.”

Linda nodded. “Molly said that she was afraid of her daddy, but she’s not afraid of Willy. She loves him and views him as her hero.”

“He only wants to be her friend, though,” Thomas said. “I knew from the start that he cared for her.
Will grew up in the shadow of a father who resented him and considered him to be the reason for his mother’s death. Although he is eccentric in nature, Will is good, kind and generous. He has a loving spirit, and he has started to show that to you and Molly.”

“I’m confused.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know,” she said. “Maybe I’m just not used to someone being as nice to me as Willy has been. I want to know why it is I feel this way, but yet I am concerned that my feelings are there because his manner and kindness is so new and different to me.”

“Perhaps,” Thomas said as he parked the car in the garage. “Although some may say otherwise, there is such a thing as love at first sight.”

“Have you ever experienced it?” she asked.

“I think once,” he said. “I was living in the States at the time, and met a woman from my job. She was very beautiful, but it turned out that she was engaged to another. I never pursued her and never realized if I was infatuated with her or not. I respected her position and we became friends. I even attended her wedding and saw that she was truly in love with him and today I don’t regret having kept my distance from her. What I’m trying to say is that I don’t think it is easy for a person to determine whether or not what they feel is love or infatuation.”

“Could I be infatuated with Willy?” she whispered.

“You could be, but there stands a very good chance that you could also be in love with him,” he said bluntly. “The other night when we were coming back from Germany, I kept looking back at you and Will. You were both sleeping, your body was leaning up against his and your arms were holding tightly to him. I cannot say with certainty that you were consciously aware of what you were doing, but it seemed very clear to me that you felt very safe with him.”

“That’s not the same thing,” she whispered as he cut the motor and they got out of the car.

“No, it’s not the same thing, but chances are, there is absolutely nothing that I could say that would convince you one way or the other,” Thomas said. “Love involves risks and oftentimes not even you know what the results of that are going to entail.”

Linda took a deep breath. “You know that it was partly your words that convinced me to believe in him. There was something very real and comforting in the way you spoke of him. Then when he talked to me, there was so much truth in his words. Even when I was half asleep and couldn’t consciously remember his name, I still felt protected. Maybe the only reason I got scared yesterday morning when Willy brought me to our room, was because Owen had said some awful things about him. He told me that Willy Wonka was a beast; that he was cruel, heartless, and unkind.” As she spoke, the tears began to stream from beneath her eyes. “But he wasn’t…he’s not.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “Maybe you should try telling Will these things. Give him the chance to know you and your circumstances a little bit better. This is never just going be up to you, Linda. It will be up to him as well. The only advice I can offer is for you to let him decide what his feelings are and if it is something that he would want.”

“Would he?” she whispered. “Knowing who I am and what my background is?”

Thomas took a deep breath. He knew what Willy had told him the day before, but this was something that he was not at liberty to discuss. “All you can do is try talking to him, Linda.”
“What if it’s too soon?”

“What if it’s not?” Thomas asked. “What if the only thing that is keeping you from being truthful is fear? You could be afraid of rejection, but that is something that only you can determine. I can’t do it for you. I can help you with whatever is happening, but what you are experiencing can only be explained or rectified by you. I cannot decide what you feel, only you can do that.”

“I’m afraid that the only thing that is keeping me from telling him how I feel is the fact that I filed for divorce today. Is it too selfish of me to tell him how much my life has changed since he’s become a part of it? What if Owen tries to use that to take Molly away? What if Willy gets implicated in this somehow?”

Thomas locked the car door and started to walk towards the door leading inside. Linda slowly followed and when they reached the door, he motioned for her to enter. Once inside, he turned and looked at her, his dark eyes earnest.

“When the truth comes out that Owen approved Molly being kidnapped, then it will not matter what your relationship issues are. Will saw Owen and Arthur Slugworth with your daughter last night, and I saw the ‘three stooges’ in Füssen take her away. The only thing a judge would have to do is put two and two together and then he or she would realize that the Slugworth family was involved in some way. There is no way any court will turn your daughter back over to them, especially not when you have Mr. Gregory representing you. He’s a good lawyer, and I have not seen or heard tell of him losing very many cases. All of these factors should make you feel better and more confident, not worse and afraid.”

Linda looked at him, but instead of speaking, she embraced him.

He smiled, but returned the gesture before closing and locking the door behind them. “Linda, I will have to leave the factory in three days to go to Buckinghamshire and soon after that, I will no doubt be leaving to fly to America. I will be away from here for a while, but perhaps during that time, you and Will can find the time to talk about all of these things.”

She bit down on her lip. “I don’t know what I should say.”

“Just tell him the truth,” he said. “You really have nothing to worry about. After all, both you and he will know what to say when the time comes to say it.”

Linda nodded, but it was clear to Thomas that she was afraid. There were so many things that were transpiring in their lives and so many events that would need resolution. Thomas had also been quite certain that contrary to the Golden Ticket contest that seemed to have consumed all of their lives, Linda’s confession would add even more dimension to it.

Soon, they reached Willy’s office and he tapped on the door. “Come in,” Willy’s voice emerged from the other side and Thomas opened the door and they entered.

Once the door was closed, Linda could see that Molly was lying on the sofa with Willy’s purple waistcoat draped over her. The child’s eyes were closed and the soft sighs were emerging from her.

“How is she?” Linda asked as she approached where her daughter lay.

“She laid down right after we got back here and within minutes, had fallen asleep,” he said.

“Did she have anymore nightmares?” Linda asked.
“No, but she’s only been asleep for about an hour,” he said. “I didn’t leave her side once, I’ve been pretty much doing desk work while she’s been resting.”

“No, but she’s only been asleep for about an hour,” he said. “I didn’t leave her side once, I’ve been pretty much doing desk work while she’s been resting.”

“Is there anything new on the Golden Tickets?” Thomas asked.

“Good that you mention that because I have pinned down the specific locations for tickets three and four. They will both be in the United States; the third is in Miles City, Montana, the fourth in Marble Falls, Arizona.”

“Sounds like you got a lot done while we were gone,” Thomas said.

Willy got to his feet, walked over to Thomas, and handed him several pieces of paper. “This has the specifics about both locations mapped out. What you need to do is get your flights arranged. I have made it so that the tickets will be found within five day intervals of each other. That means you should have to only make one trip overseas instead of two.”

Thomas nodded. “Did you talk to anyone over there about the Hudson Chocolate thing?”

“No, but I did call information and get a telephone number for a former representative from that company,” Willy said. “His name is Jonathan Kinsley and his present place of residence is Phoenix. I would bet that given what we know about the situation, he would be willing to talk to you while you’re there.”

“You still want to go through with all of this?” Linda asked.

“It’s the right thing to do,” Willy said, a casual smirk lining his face. “Besides, given what the Slugworths did to Molly, it’s their just desserts.” He handed Thomas another piece of paper, this one with prospective airlines listed on it. “See if you can get on a flight that leaves around the tenth of August.”

“How long will I have to be over there?” Thomas asked.

“I would say about fifteen days at the most. I figured that you could get to Montana about two days before the ticket is due to be found, and then you leave for Arizona around the thirteenth or fourteenth. The rest of the time, you could be getting the information to the Hudson people. I think that this will, at the very least, save their reputations. At least they deserve that.”

“Alright, so the dates of these shipments are listed and the days I can travel are listed as well?”

Willy nodded. “Yes, I have everything noted underneath the city names. I have also made notations of the codes for where the candy bars are sold, that is what shops they will both end up at. What you need to do is check the shops in both places and given that they are smaller towns, we can narrow it down as to more specific locations when you get there. Otherwise, I think that you will be able to manage everything just fine,” Willy said.

“Then I suppose all that is left for me to do is get my reservation for the flight, hotel and rental car agency done,” Thomas said. “I’ll get on that right away.” He cast Linda a brief smile before leaving. “Take this chance to talk to him. After all, all he can say is ‘no’,” he whispered to her just before leaving the room.
Chapter 40

Chapter 40: The Sunset Room

*This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka's point of view*

Once Thomas was gone, Linda was left standing and looking at the chocolatier somewhat awkwardly. “Babysitting wasn’t any trouble, was it?” she eventually asked, her voice weak, but traces of nervousness remained.

Willy laid down his pen and turned around. “None at all, she was a delight. At least until she fell asleep then I ran out of excuses to keep from catching up on all this paperwork.” As he spoke, a coy smirk plastered itself across his face, his blue eyes shining brightly.

“If you had so much work to do, we could have taken her with us,” she said. “I didn’t intend to put you out.”

“You didn’t, Linda, in fact I rather enjoyed her company,” he said. “We made candy, and that was a lot more fun for both of us than paperwork or sitting in Mr. Gregory’s waiting room.”

“You and Molly made candy?” she asked.

He extended a small wrapped piece to her. “Try it; I think you’ll be surprised.”

Linda pulled the wrapping off the candy before sticking it into her mouth and nodding. “Butterscotch, that’s Molly’s favorite flavor.”

Willy nodded as he cast a glance down at where the little girl slept.

“I don’t think I realized how tired she was,” Linda whispered.

“It is more than clear to me that she is exhausted. One does not overcome such traumas after only a short span of time. Sometimes it takes days or even weeks for things to get settled.”

“You’ve been helping her and I don’t really know how we will ever be able to repay your kindness,” she said.

“Please, don’t worry yourself,” Willy said as he stood up. Instead of looking at her, his gaze came to rest on Molly. “I expect nothing from you, except perhaps that whatever you see here at the factory, you keep to yourself.” As he spoke, he ran his hand through his curly blondish locks of hair, but eventually looked back over at her.

“I would never betray your trust,” she said sincerely.

“I know,” he said as he looked at Molly while she slept. “Just look at her, she looks just like a little angel.”

Linda nodded. “Yes, but what about your coat? It could get all wrinkled if she uses it as a blanket.”

“Don’t worry yourself about that. Most of my clothes are starched to such an extent that they couldn’t possibly wrinkle,” he smiled smugly. “Of course, it is nice to see that Eliza’s theory about the couch being comfortable enough to sleep on has been proven by someone other than me.”

“Is Eliza your girlfriend?” Linda asked her question causing him to raise his head. The shock that
creased his brow somehow caused her to turn away. She looked embarrassed, but this only made his smile broaden.

“No,” Willy said simply. “I have not been in a relationship of that kind in a number of years. It may sound as though I am rather naïve, but the truth is, I have always been sort of married to my work.” He laid one hand on Linda’s shoulder the touch feather light. “Why do you ask?” As these words emerged, the chocolatier cocked his head to one side, his gaze still locked on her.

She lowered her head all the while refusing to look at him. “I shouldn’t be asking such questions,” she offered apologetically. “Forgive me.”

“There’s no reason to seek my forgiveness as it is a perfectly legitimate question,” he began, his voice filled with a strange mix of gentility and mischief. “After all, there must be a reason for you to have asked.”

Linda glanced over to where her daughter was sleeping, her own eyes closing. The only thing she seemed to be remotely aware of was Willy’s close proximity.

Instead of speaking, he reached for his purple colored coat and dug in the pocket before producing a small silver colored flute. Bringing the object to his lips, he played a quick melody and waited for the door to open. When it did, he smiled. “Omaya-Kal, would you mind terribly watching little Molly while her mother and I go for a walk?” he asked.

“Not at all,” the Oompa Loompa leader said with a nod. “Perhaps you should wake her briefly so that you can tell her that you are leaving. When she wakes up and sees that you are not present, it might frighten her.”

“That’s a very good idea,” Willy nodded, but leaned over and gently shook the child. “Molly?”

“Mmm,” the child mumbled, but wearily opened her eyes.

“Sweetheart, your mother’s back and we’re going for a walk. Omaya-Kal is here and he is going to watch over you,” he whispered as he brushed her hair out from in front of her face. “If you have any nightmares, you tell him and he will help you, alright?”

“Okay,” she whispered before snuggling down amidst the folds of his coat and allowing herself to drift off to sleep.

Linda watched this exchange in surprise, but soon regarded her daughter’s new babysitter fearfully. “W-what is that?” she managed to whisper, but Willy turned and looked at her, his expression stern.

“My dear lady, Omaya-Kal is a ‘who’ and not a ‘what,’” he scolded. “He is perhaps different than we are, but he is a very good and trusted friend. He will not allow harm to come to your daughter.”

“I’m sorry,” Linda whispered as she nervously backed away.

Instead of acknowledging her words, Willy turned back to his orange-faced friend. “If she has a nightmare, you can give her another ‘Sweet Dreams’ candy. Only give her one since she has already had one. Also, please make sure that she doesn’t take a yellow one since she doesn’t like lemons.”

“Of course,” the Oompa Loompa said kindly, but turned and looked at Linda before offering a respectful bow. “On my honor, I will not let anything happen to her.”

Linda simply nodded, her eyes closing as she bowed her head slightly so as to acknowledge his words. It was clear to both Willy and Omaya-Kal that the woman was not yet certain as to whether
or not she could trust the Oompa Loompa leader with her daughter. “I’m sorry,” she repeated her
apology for a second time.

“It’s quite alright, you are afraid, and there is no reason for you to feel shame for having these fears,”
Omaya-Kal, said graciously. “All is forgiven.”

Linda nodded as Willy turned and offered her his arm. Once she had accepted, he led her towards
the Wonkavator. “She really will be alright, won’t she?” she whispered her voice low. “I mean; he
won’t let anything happen to her, will he?”

“No, Linda. I would stake my reputation on that,” he said. At that moment, the doors in front of the
Wonkavator slid apart and he pulled the second glass door open before ushering her inside. “Trust
me, dear lady, I would never ever allow anyone in her vicinity if they intended to put her in harm’s
way.”

Linda lowered her head, but remained standing in the small glass enclosure. Seconds later, Willy
deposited his cane into the holder and looked at her. “You really should sit down, otherwise you
could get hurt. This is not your average elevator.”

“I am starting to think that nothing in this factory is ‘average’,” she said. Noticing that there were two
vacated seats on either side of him, she nervously crossed the small, closet sized space and lowered
herself in the seat to his right.

When he pressed a button, the glass elevator shifted to the left which caused her to slam right up
against his side. “Oh God,” she managed as the elevator stopped moving in that direction and
suddenly dropped as though in a freefall. Linda could feel a scream that was literally stuck in her
throat, but instead of crying, she buried her face against Willy’s shoulder.

The chocolatier chuckled softly. Although he knew that she was terrified, she was doing everything
in her power to conceal it. He wrapped a tender arm around her shoulder. “We’re almost there,” he
said.

Linda nodded, but did not move out of this embrace until the Wonkavator had stopped. When it
eventually did, she raised her head. “I’m sorry, Willy, I didn’t know I was going to do that,” she said
wearily.

“I understand,” he said. “You weren’t the first person to ever get scared riding in the Wonkavator. It
took several years for Eliza to get accustomed to it.” He paused, but looked at her and saw a cross
between sadness and disappointment lurking in her eyes. Eventually, he began to speak. “Linda,
Eliza is my adopted mother. She’s been living in Cornwall for the last three years. Before she left the
factory, she had to learn how to use it while I was away on holiday. She was quite terrified of it at
first, but somehow got the hang of it. You will too, I am certain of that,” he paused, but retrieved his
cane. “Now come.”

The woman nodded and watched as he opened the door and stepped out. She followed, but kept her
head lowered.

Once they reached a second corridor, which led through a maze of various passageways, Willy
stopped and turned around. He half expected her to catch up with him, but instead noticed that she
had stopped walking, her hands now covering her face. “Linda?” he spoke her name and although
she remained motionless, she slowly raised her head. At that moment, he took the incentive and
walked over to her. “Are you sure you’re alright?”

She shook her head. “I don’t know. I was scared back there.”
“Of Omaya-Kal?”

“It wasn’t his face or hair that frightened me, it was…” she said with an obvious tremble in her voice.

“…It was the fact that he’s a stranger to you,” Willy finished.

She nodded her gaze still on the ground. “I didn’t want to hurt his feelings.”

“He knows that,” Willy said. “He reacted earnestly when he said that all was forgiven. Try not to worry about it too much. You know, it would seem as though I am not the only person who does not trust others. You still have a great deal to learn about that as well.”

“Maybe,” she whispered.

“Is there anything I can do to help you realize that the people who work for me can be trusted?” he asked.

“It takes time,” she said, “but I do trust you.”

Willy squeezed her shoulder gently. “I’m glad, because I not only want to help you and Molly, but I also want to be your friend as well.”

She raised her head somewhat. “You’ve done far more than just that,” she said as she wrapped her arms around herself. “You have been more than just a friend.” Biting down on her lower lip, she shook her head. “I owe you everything.”

“Dear lady, you owe me nothing,” Willy said firmly, but looked at her, his gaze intent. “You should not offer anymore gratitude to me, it is truly unwarranted.”

“It’s not just that,” she whispered. “Oh I don’t know what it is, I’m so confused.”

Without responding to her words, he reached for her hand. When he held it, he offered a comforting squeeze before wordlessly leading her towards a door several meters from where they had been standing. As they walked, he managed to pull a key from his pocket, stick it in the lock on the door, and turn it.

Pushing the door open, he bade her to enter.

As she did, Linda’s eyes widened as they came into the room. She looked around it and noticed that it seemed to be filled with the soothing shades of purples, blues, oranges, whites, and greens. Amidst this warm lighting, there were crops of candy plants placed throughout the room, but also had, what looked to be, a soft grassy meadow. The room’s ceiling looked like a sky right at dusk with the hues of the various colors blending together and giving off the feeling of being in the English countryside.

“What is this place?” she asked all the while taken aback by the beauty that was now surrounding her.

“I call it the ‘Sunset Room’ for obvious reasons. It’s very much like the Chocolate Room, but it is, you see, much smaller. I always come here when I need time to think about my feelings or even about what options I have available to me. I suppose in hindsight I should probably have invited my other friends, but they all seem to appreciate the Chocolate Room far more because of the amounts of sweets that are there. I thought perhaps you would appreciate this.”

“I do, it’s so beautiful,” she managed to speak, her voice consumed with awe. “Like something straight out of dream.”
“Yes, the room is quite stunning to the eyes, but there is not very much that is eatable,” he paused, a slight smirk covering his lips. “I mean, of course, edible.”

Linda walked further into the room with him beside her. “You are a remarkable man, Willy, truly by far the most extraordinary person I have ever met.”

The chocolatier smiled as he sat down on the grass and waited for her to seat herself next to him. Once she did, he took a deep breath. “What are you thinking about?”

She bit down on her lip. “I was just remembering everything that has happened since you found us.”

“I didn’t really find you,” he said smiling. “I only told Tom that he should try and find you both when he got to Füssen. The rest is history.”

“If all this started only two days ago, then why does it feel like I’ve always known you?” she asked.

“Maybe because deep in our hearts, we’ve just been waiting for the right moment,” he said. “Sometimes things don’t happen immediately.”

“Last night, I told you that I was afraid for you,” she said. “It was before you went to pick up Molly.”

“I remember,” he said. “I thought that was a very loving sentiment.”

“I was worried about my daughter, but…” she raised her head and looked at him. “…Willy, I was so scared last night. I didn’t know what was going to happen.”

“None of us did,” he said gently. “You were not the only one who was concerned. I think in hindsight, we were all a bit worried. No one ever knows what the future will bring, and perhaps not knowing is the most frightening aspect of all.”

“It’s strange, but you have always acted so confident,” she mused. “I sometimes wish I had that trait in myself.”

“I think you do, Linda,” he said. “Just don’t ever mistake confidence for arrogance.”

“Are you arrogant? Tom said that…” her voice trailed.

“…I can imagine what Tom said,” Willy snickered. “Perhaps there’s some element of truth to it.”

“Do you consider yourself to be arrogant?” she asked.

“I think a little,” he said honestly. After several moments had passed, his expression changed and he looked at her, his blue eyes earnest. “It is not always a positive trait to have, but it shows that none of us are perfect or without flaws. Tom has gotten on to me about how arrogant I can sometimes behave, but every time it happens, I am somehow reminded that I am also human.”

“I would prefer to be arrogant over being a coward,” she said. “I was scared of you at first.”

“But, you’re not afraid of me anymore, are you?” he asked.

She shook her head. “No, because later, I realized how strange it was for me to be around someone who made me feel as safe as you do.”

“That’s good,” he smiled as he reached for her hand. Once she had surrendered it, he pressed it gently between both of his. “I would never want you to be afraid of me.”
Linda looked down at where their hands were joined. “Haven’t you ever been afraid, Willy?”

“Yes,” he admitted with a slow nod. “I’m not sure if you noticed, but I was afraid last night before I went to pick up Molly. Then I was a bit nervous when we were sitting in the Lavender Room talking after that precious child had gone to sleep.”

“If all of that scared you so much, then why did you go through with it?” she asked.

Willy took a deep breath as he released her hands and tried to collect his thoughts. “I went to pick up Molly because it was the right thing to do. To have backed out on you and her would have made me no better than Arthur Slugworth. I couldn’t do that, and I would never want you to think that all candy makers are like that.”

“You’re nothing like them, Willy,” she whispered.

“Yes, well, it seemed strange for me to philosophize about right and wrong during such moments, but that was what motivated me. You see, several years ago, right around the time I closed the factory, I asked Eliza why she came back to talk to me. It was in the wake of my having behaved so poorly in her presence. She looked at me and said that it was the right thing to do. I didn’t fully understand what she meant at the time, but now I do. Of course, there are always events that are going to remind me of her. Your experiences always send my thoughts back to her. She was abused by her husband as well, and that truth came out the day I got angry and destroyed a candy bar.”

“I don’t understand,” she whispered.

“Maybe it would be easier if I told you what happened that day. I am not exceedingly proud of myself for my actions, but it is probably what ultimately brought the two of us together. You see, right after she told me about how one of my recipes had been stolen, I got very angry and lost my temper. I was yelling, not necessarily at anyone specific, but rather, at the situation. My anger affected her in a way that I could not even begin to understand. She was absolutely terrified and I felt shame for having frightened her. I didn’t fully understand why she reacted as she did.” As he spoke, he offered a timid smile, but the words were laced with regret. “I started seeing so many parallels between that time and today.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“Well, just before I left my room last night, I realized that facing Slugworth was nothing compared to facing you. I had all sorts of insecurities screaming at me. ‘What if I fail?’ ‘What if I can’t get Molly away from them?’ and ‘What if I let you down?’ I couldn’t grasp the possibility of giving up without trying.”

“But you didn’t fail.” she whispered. “Molly’s safe because of you.”

“Perhaps, but I didn’t know that at the time,” he said honestly. “I was afraid that you would think that I didn’t care for you or the safety of your little girl. This wasn’t just about a recipe or trying to outsmart Arthur Slugworth. It was about the fact that I have been concerned for you both since the day that Tom called me from the plane and told me about you.”

“He called you from the plane?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said nodding. “He said that you were both very sad and had been through something rather horrible. He went on to say that Molly had sensed that something was wrong, but did not go into detail about it. It was at that moment when he asked me for the allowance to have you and Molly come here. I told him that I would see what I could do, but requested that he get your number and
assure you that he would be in touch. I truly had no idea that I would be seeing you this soon after that conversation had taken place.”

“But you didn’t even know us, and he never said anything about it,” she whispered.

“I asked him not to,” Willy said. “I did eventually tell him to let you and Molly know that he had contact with a candy provider. That was all that I really felt safe about doing. I didn’t wish to implicate you with any of this. Then after I got your number, I called it and spoke to your father and discovered that you already were. It suddenly became abundantly clear to me that the issues with the chocolate did not just involve one child having to have a Golden Ticket, but that there was much more happening in Buckinghamshire than just that. You knew it as well, didn’t you?”

Linda nodded and lowered her head. “It seemed like a good answer,” she confessed. “I figured that if Molly was distracted by the Golden Tickets, then she wouldn’t know what was really happening in our lives. I was trying to make sure that she would not be as afraid as I was.”

“But she is now,” Willy said. “A lot of things happened to her when she was with her father and uncle.”

Linda raised her head. “D-did she tell you?”

“She told me a little, but I told her that she should tell you what happened. She’s terribly frightened, Linda, and will need time to overcome all of this,” Willy said softly.

“Why won’t she tell me?”

“I don’t know, but I think that she is keeping a lot of things locked inside to protect you from the pain she carries,” Willy said.

Linda closed her eyes. “When we were flying to Germany, I was so afraid that we were being trailed. I kept looking outside the window of the plane because I was frightened and alone. I didn’t want to force that fear onto Molly.” She shivered and soon felt his arm wrapping around her. “Willy, you know that Owen has contacts everywhere and he could have found out where I was going. I was so scared, but I didn’t want Molly to know how frightened I was.”

“You didn’t tell anyone about this,” he said. “Not even your father.”

“They would have gone after him if they suspected that he knew something,” she said. “I was trying so hard to keep him in the dark for a reason. Now I fear that you’re going to tell me that everything I did was wrong.”

“No, I’m not,” he said. “You were just fortunate to have met Tom when you did.”

Linda nodded. “He barely knew us, and after we landed in Frankfurt, I did what I could to lose him. Molly asked me why, but I couldn’t tell her. I eventually used the crowd as rationale in trying to get away from him. When we saw him again in Füssen, I was wondering why it was he was so insistent about us spending time together.”

“Perhaps because he saw some of me in you,” Willy said honestly. “Sometimes, we find a friend in the strangest places.” As he spoke, he reached over and carefully stroked her face, his velvet like caress somehow drawing her closer. Unconsciously, she leaned into the gentleness of his touch. “Linda, Tom catalyzed something rather remarkable here. He brought all of us together, and through that he managed to somehow help us face our fears and tell each other the truth.”

“The truth?” she whispered brokenly. “The truth is I’m getting a divorce, and I cannot deny what I
feel for you. It’s such a powerful sensation, and yet I’m still frightened.”

“I know that this feels out of the ordinary for you,” he said softly. “It is also a different set of experiences for me.” As he spoke, he continued to stroke her face gently, his probing fingers now touching her lips. “Linda, I want nothing more than to be there for you if ever you need me.”

“What about Molly?” Linda asked.

“Like you would ever need to ask me about that?” he asked his voice laced in sincerity. “Molly is a very special little girl, and I have already promised her that if she needs me, I’ll drop everything to be there for her.”

“You know I have to think about her,” she raised her head and looked into the depths of his eyes. “I have to think about what she wants.”

“I know,” he said as a loving and sincere smile covered his face. “I feel very close to both of you.” Moments slowly passed and she could feel him tipping her chin up so that she could look into his eyes.

Instead of immediately speaking, she stared into the loving eyes of the chocolatier. “Willy…” she eventually mumbled his name.

“It’s alright,” he whispered. “I will not let you down, Linda.”

“You couldn’t,” she managed to speak, her voice cracking. “I realized that the first time you held me.”

A smile covered the chocolatier’s face as he slowly cupped her face in his hands and leaned towards her and gently pressed his lips against hers, the kiss hesitant and sweet.

Linda slowly brought her arms up and wrapped them around him, her eyes closing as she felt the soft and loving pressure of his lips against hers. Without warning, she broke down and began to weep softly as the kiss broke.

“Is everything alright?” he asked as he briefly backed away and looked down at her.

Instead of immediately speaking, Linda continued to cry, but she allowed her body to once again collapse against him, her arms still holding tightly to him, her face now pressed against his chest. “I think…” she began her voice cracking into nothingness.

“…What is it?” he asked, thus causing her to raise her head. “Perhaps I should not have done that. Maybe it was too sudden.”

“No,” she whispered as she took a deep breath, their lips now a mere centimeter apart. She carefully raked her tongue across her lips until she found her voice. “Willy…I think I’m falling in love with you,” she confessed, her gaze now on her lap and she lowered her arms. “I think I may have known it since we met, I just didn’t consciously realize it.”

Willy reached over and touched her face, his fingertips meshing with the tears that were now making a steady trek down her cheeks. “It still feels a bit sudden, doesn’t it?” he asked his blunt question literally shattering any thought that might have been present.

Linda nodded sorrowfully, “a little.”

Instead of pressing the issue, he reached for her hand and pressed a gentle kiss to her wrist. “Then
we’ll take everything very slowly and at a steady pace. You should not ever be afraid of my rejecting you or Molly because it will simply not happen,” he said. “We’ve got all the time in the world and we’re both patient people.” He reached over and brushed a lock of brown hair out from in front of her face. “Just let me know when you’re ready.”

She nodded as she felt herself drawn once more into his loving embrace. “It’s strange, but I was so afraid that you wouldn’t understand.”

“I do understand, Linda. For what it is worth, I have carried the exact same feelings in my heart as well,” he said with a trace of mischief still lurking in his eyes. “I will give you all the time you need. Do you know why?”

“No, why?” she asked.

He smiled coyly at her, “because that kiss was sweeter than all the candy in the world.”

She looked down at her lap, a blush creeping up her cheeks, but when she looked into his eyes, what she saw was the embodiment of honest sincerity. She felt her body once more falling back into his embrace.
Chapter 41

Chapter 41: Nightmares

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

July 19, 1971

The days that followed his confession of love to Linda, proved to be very difficult for Willy Wonka. Not only had he unintentionally tried to conceal his affections for her from the child, but Molly herself was dealing with something that seemed to span far beyond anything he could have expected. The night following his and Linda’s conversation in the Sunset Room started a string of sleepless nights for all of them when Molly would wake up screaming.

It was now three in the morning, and Willy sat in the Peach Room his back leaning up against the wall, his knees folded against his body. He had taken up temporary residency in the room next door to Linda and Molly’s. It was not his budding romance with Linda that brought him there; instead it was the nightmares that seemed to consume the little girl. This ultimately rendered something in the child’s mother that resembled helpless panic.

Willy had witnessed this terror first hand in both mother and daughter and this had somehow made the decision for him to try to do whatever he could to render assistance.

In addition to all of these things, the news that Thomas had given him from his lawyer was also quite unsettling. Willy was not certain as to how to go about talking to Molly about what she had experienced and he feared that to try would possibly risk pushing the child further away. Instead of dwelling on this, he asked several of the Oompa Loompas what their thoughts were, and they all suggested that he speak with Omaya-Kal about it, and see if their leader could assist him.

The chocolatier’s only wish now was to do whatever he could to protect Molly from these hellish nightmares that consumed her. He was grateful that Linda had agreed to them bugging the room, although he was not quite certain as to how much taped screams would help Molly free herself from the Slugworths or the ordeal she had been through. Willy figured that if he had a tape recording of her words, that it would serve Linda’s case against the Slugworths. It was true that no one could deny the authenticity of the child’s pain filled cries, yet, hearing them literally tore Willy’s heart to bits.

Raising his head, he could see the light from outside streaming in from between the curtains covering the windows. It was a beautiful night and the stars were visible despite the lights of the city.

Willy remained seated, his gaze on the sky as he remembered the stories from his youth. “First star to the right, and straight on till morning,” he mumbled under his breath as he recalled his grandfather telling him, Thomas, and Simeon the story of ‘Peter Pan’.

Where has the time gone? he pondered as the stillness washed over him. He remained seated on the bed, his back up against the large pillow, which separated him from the wall. He inhaled, but reached over and turned on the light, the whiteness of it filling the room and he reached for the book that was on the bedside table.

The book was several centimeters thick, the slip of paper sticking out about twenty pages into the novel. He had truthfully not gotten very far with his reading, but he figured that it was probably
because of all the events that had taken hold of his life. He opened the book to the page and pulled the slip of paper out before starting to read, the words leaping out from the page and lulling him into the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.

More than any other kind of reading, Willy loved fantasy stories, perhaps because it was one of the things that enabled him to tap into his creativity at will. It was also no secret that he used these stories as a means in which to drown out the reality that otherwise kept his thoughts preoccupied. These sorts of stories somehow held a magic in them that inspired him to continue making candy.

As he turned the page in his book, someone tapped lightly on the door, the sounds bringing him out of the story and back into the real world. He returned his bookmark to the spot where he had stopped reading and closed the book before getting to his feet and walking over in order to open the door.

Once it was opened, he immediately looked down to see that Omaya-Kal was standing in the threshold, a Victorian style candle holder and burning candle in his hand. The scent that emanated the object was a cocoa bean flavor. The Oompa Loompa leader was dressed in a long sleeping shift, which looked rather like a pair loose-fitting overalls. On his feet, he wore brown and white striped socks and slippers with the typical cotton-like balls atop them. Instead of speaking, he felt himself getting lulled into staring at the light that came from the strangely shaped object in his friend’s hand.

The Oompa Loompa bowed slightly and watched as Willy returned the gesture before backing away from the door and allowing him access.

“I see you’re still awake,” the Oompa Loompa said as a form of verbal greeting, although it was clear that based on the expression the shorter man carried on his face, he half expected Willy to be awake. He was smiling up at the chocolatier, but the bushy white colored eyebrows over his eyes were arched, this showing his concern.

Entering the room, the shorter man walked over to the sofa and seated himself comfortably. He waited for several moments for Willy to walk over and seat himself next to him. The chocolatier still held the book in his hand, but this was soon discarded as he regarded Omaya-Kal through tired blue eyes.

To the Oompa Loompa it was evident that Willy was exhausted and no matter how hard the chocolatier tried, there was no hiding his fatigue, not even through the indifferent look that lined his face.

“You cannot fool me, my friend,” Omaya-Kal eventually spoke, his voice etched in matter-of-fact certainty.

“What makes you think I’m trying to fool you, Omaya-Kal?” Willy asked.

“I know you, I have known you already close to three of your summer seasons, and when you are sad, it is quite evident to me. I do not say this to unnerve you, but I do say it out of friendship and concern.”

Willy nodded, his gaze faltering and he looked down at his lap. At that moment, he started to yawn, but slapped his hand over his mouth in an attempt at concealing it. As he allowed his mouth to close, he lowered his hand, his eyes closing wearily. “I’m completely at a loss.”

“Heard your dreams have gotten worse, have they not?” Omaya-Kal asked. “They are now affecting you on an emotional level.”

“Yes,” he confessed. “I don’t know what to do.”
“Several days ago when Molly and I were together in your office, she woke up crying and was terribly distressed. We spoke for a time, she told me that she was frightened, and I immediately thought that she was hoping or wishing for her mother’s presence. I know that she is a deeply sensitive child, William, and you have become the beacon in her darkened night. Sometimes being a hero to a lost soul is quite a task for anyone, even for you.”

Willy nodded. “I have spent the last days trying to make the Sweet Dreams candy stronger. The formula is now too weak for Molly and she needs something that is going to insure her a good night’s rest.”

“You require such a candy as well,” Omaya-Kal said firmly. “You have denied yourself these things because you’re worried. Generally when you are worried, you either read books, or pace the floor.” He motioned towards the book lying at Willy’s side. “I do not think that King Arthur will render assistance to you in this matter, my friend.”

“I know that,” Willy said shaking his head. “This is not easy for any of us, not for Linda or Tom, and especially not for Molly.”

“Your lawyer seems to believe that you have something that can provide this child with hope and optimism. You must accept that you have given her optimism in a world full of pessimism.”

Willy shrugged his shoulders. “I care for her; I care for them both.”

“I know, I knew that when you asked me to watch over the child that day so that you and her mother could go off together and discuss what you feel and how to resolve it,” Omaya-Kal said. “For the first time in your life, you have chosen against talking your way out of feeling something for another. It is not a weakness in you; it is the simple act of falling in love.”

“Yes,” Willy nodded, the confession emerging in a single word. “But, we have decided to take things slowly.”

“Perhaps it is better that way, not just for you, but also for the young lady,” the Oompa Loompa said as Molly’s screams once more pierced the air.

“Oh no, not another nightmare,” the chocolatier whispered.

“You’re exhausted, too many nights have passed where you have received no respite,” Omaya-Kal said, but watched as Willy crawled off the sofa, tied the belt of his dressing gown around his waist, and started to walk towards the door. “Shall I come with you?”

“I think I’d like that,” Willy said as they left the room, made their way down the hall to the door leading into the neighboring room. The child’s screams were getting louder, but when they opened the door, they both were forced to cover their ears. Further into the room, they could see that Linda was now standing over the bed, her hands trembling as she tried to wake her daughter.

“Leave me alone,” the child was screaming, “Daddy don’t….”

The words were muffled through the agonizing sobs of pain that filled the air. Willy’s face turned a strange shade of green, but ignoring the heartbreak that consumed him, he made his way slowly towards the bed.

As he came closer, he suddenly heard Linda’s pleas emerging. “Molly, honey, please wake up.”

Willy approached where she sat on the bed, her body now hovering over the child’s, but her focus was completely on Molly. Linda did not seem to notice that Willy was present until he had seated
himself on the other side of where the hysterical little girl was lying.

“Take her hand,” Omaya-Kal instructed as he came over and stood next to where Willy was now seated. “Let her know that you are present. If she sees you in her mind as she sleeps, then she will feel safe and will awaken knowing that you are there for her.”

Wordlessly, Willy obeyed the suggestion and took the child’s hand in his own, his long fingers snugly wrapping around that of the child, the soft words of the Oompa Loompa still ringing in the air. After several seconds had passed, he looked at Linda. “Take her other hand Linda. She needs to know that you’re here for her.” He smiled encouragingly but watched as she reached for the hand of the little girl and looked down into Molly’s innocent face.

“My baby, what sort of pain do you have still locked away?” she whispered, her gaze coming to rest on the child’s arm. The bandage was still covering the upper part of her arm, but the wounds beneath it had started to heal. At that moment, however, Linda’s attention seemed to be concentrated on the sweat covered face of the frightened child.

Willy said nothing, instead, he began to softly sing, his soft tenor voice filling the room, the breathy sounds of his words consumed with worry and pondering if this would even be enough to help.

“Come with me, and you’ll be in a world of pure imagination…”

As these words drifted through the air, Molly’s pressure on his hand tightened, and he watched as she started to pull herself out of the dream world in which she had been meshed. As her eyes slowly opened, he could see the tears as they glistened on her eyelashes, the moisture streaming slowly down her face.

Omaya-Kal backed slowly away from the bed and nodded as the child started to take in the room where she now lay. It was abundantly clear that she remembered the events of her dream and Willy released her hand so that she could rub the sleep out of her eyes.

“Mommy?” Molly whispered as she turned and looked into Linda’s concerned face. “W-what happened?”

“You were having another nightmare, sweetheart,” Linda whispered as she began to stroke her daughter’s face. “Do you want to tell us what it was about?”

“Us?” she turned and looked at Willy and then at Omaya-Kal who were still on the other side of where she was lying.

“We’re here with you,” Willy said smiling when her brown eyes met his.

“He was really bad,” the child nodded. “It was Daddy, and he hurt me real bad, Mommy.”

“I know, honey,” Linda said brokenly as she felt the child weight as it collapsed into her arms. “He hurt me, too.”

Willy exchanged glances with Omaya-Kal, but no words emerged, instead he slowly backed away from the bed. He did not want to impose on what was happening between mother and daughter, yet at the same instant, he was tempted to take both of them in his arms and hold them with all the strength he could muster.

Slowly, he started to walk over to the sofa in order to sit down, but Molly’s voice suddenly emerged.

“Willy, I’m so scared,” the child’s tiny voice called out to him. He turned around and could see that
she was looking up at him, one tiny hand extended towards him. The tears continued to stream from beneath her eyes, the fright tugging at his heartstrings.

The chocolatier went over to where the child sat and he lowered himself onto the edge of the bed, one of his hands accepting her outstretched one. “I’m right here, sweetheart,” he crooned softly, his free hand brushing lightly through her hair.

She raised her head from the confines of her mother’s gentle hold and looked at him, her wordless plea making him continue. “I’m not going anywhere, I promise.”

Linda looked from the candy maker to the Oompa Loompa and took a deep breath as her daughter crawled into Willy’s arms. “What can we do?”

“You’re both doing it,” Omaya-Kal said gently as he rounded the bed and came over to where Linda was sitting. As his hand came to rest on her shoulder, he continued speaking. “Your presence is helping her.”

“But there’s got to be more,” she said helplessly.

“No, my dear, the love that you both share for this child is enough, it may seem not to be sufficient, but it is that which will give her courage in the days to come,” Omaya-Kal said. He squeezed Linda’s shoulder gently. From her sitting position, she was at direct eye level with him. “I know you’re still afraid that there are others out there beyond these walls who would wish to do this child undue harm, but there are those here who will stand by her and help her as well.”

Linda looked over at Willy and received a reciprocating nod.

“Yes, your newfound friend will help her, but my people would also be at your disposal, Thomas Wilkenson is nearby, and you are here. You are her mother, and it is said that you are the closest thing to the heavens that she can attain here on earth.”

“I don’t know what to do,” she whispered, her words cracking. “Sometimes I think we are like Anne Frank hiding in the Netherlands during the war.”

Omaya-Kal nodded. “Yes, I know, you feel as though you are keeping yourselves quiet, but you mustn’t stay silent, and you have every right to say what has happened to you. You will be protected, Linda.”

The man’s child-sized hand reached out and placed it atop hers. As he held her hand, he smiled. “Now turn around, and take a look.”

Linda did as Omaya-Kal suggested and when she turned around, she smiled despite the sadness that seemed to encase her.

Lying on the bed was her daughter, the child’s body nestled up against the chocolatier’s. She was fast asleep; her hand had fallen away from his grasp and now lay draped over her exhausted body.

For his part, Willy sat looking down at Molly, his curly crop of hair falling down over the sides of his face making him look the part of an oversized cherub.

Linda smiled. “Are you still awake, Willy?”

“Yes,” he said, his response emerging as an exhalation of breath. He rubbed his face with his hand, but continued to stare down at the sleeping child.
“You are in a very uncomfortable state, my friend,” Omaya-Kal said. “Shall we leave you to sleep?”

“I should get up,” he said and started to shift, but when Molly felt this, she inched her way so that she would lie even closer to him. He stopped moving and released a pent up breath. “Linda, it would seem that Molly wishes me to stay.”

“What do you think we should do, Omaya-Kal?” she asked wearily.

“I think that given what has happened during the course of the last days, your daughter would require William’s presence,” he said. “He would never hurt her as he has become rather like a father to this child.”

Linda nodded. “I remember when I was little and I would have nightmares, and I would go and crawl into bed between my parents. My mother wasn’t very fond of it, but my father always held me and we would sleep that way until morning. I always wished that Molly would have a father who would do for her what mine often did for me. I know that children can be abused in such situations, but Omaya-Kal, I don’t think Willy would ever do anything to hurt her.”

“No, he would not, and anyone who would choose to bring such harm to a child would not get past his anger or wrath. Rest assured that he is quite protective of children, not just those like Molly, but he also shares a fondness with my granddaughter Cristy-Kai.”

Linda looked at the chocolatier and when she saw him offer a weary nod, she closed her eyes. “Willy, y-you don’t mind staying with her, do you?”

“Not at all,” he said, but instead of speaking further, he watched as Linda pulled the blankets up and covered Molly.

When the chocolatier did not move, but instead stretched out on top of the blankets, Linda began to search the room for a pillow as well as a blanket. When she found the items, she brought them over to him and first handed him the pillow, and once he had placed it behind his head, she covered him with the blanket.

As soon as he had managed to get comfortable, he propped his head up on his hand and looked down at the little girl as she slept. While lying in such close proximity of the child, the chocolatier could not sleep. In fact, he simply watched over her as though he was her own personal guardian angel.

No more words were spoken, but for Willy Wonka the night would pass very, very slowly.
Chapter 42

Chapter 42: A Child’s Pained Confession

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As the morning sunshine filtered into the room several hours later, Willy shifted his weight and wearily opened his eyes. His back was stiff and as he moved his arms, he immediately noticed that he was covered with a bunch of blankets and Molly’s doll was leaned up against him.

As a contented sigh emerged from between his lips, he moved the doll to one side and started to shift his weight around so that he could see what time it was. He was guessing that given the brightness of the light that shone in through the window that it was about eight. Taking a look at the clock, he groaned when he realized that it was half past nine.

He would have liked to have stayed in bed, but knew that there was no time for laziness. He had a full schedule that day and it was important for him to get started. This was specifically why he was annoyed, he had intended on getting up at seven and being in the Inventing Room by eight.

Instead of grumbling this misfortune, he began to look around for Molly, Linda or even Omaya-Kal. He could not remember when the Oompa Loompa had left the room but concluded that it was probably soon after he had fallen asleep the night before.

As for Linda and Molly; neither of them were anywhere to be seen. In fact, from the looks of the room, Linda had already left. After several seconds, he suddenly could hear water running in the bathroom and concluded that one of his guests was in there. The little girl had apparently awoken, found him asleep, and tried to cover him to the best of her abilities.

It was no secret that while he felt honored to have been able to watch over the child, a part of him felt strange for having spent the night in such close proximity to her. He would have never admitted it to anyone, but this was a very strange and different experience and it left him feeling somewhat unsettled. He had never known what it was like to be considered a father figure to anyone, much less to such a remarkable little girl as Molly.

His thoughts shifted as he tried to crawl out of bed. He was still tired, perhaps in need of his general morning, extra charged, cup of coffee. Instead of going towards the door, he stood up and stretched himself, his hands rubbing against his face. After several minutes, he once more seated himself on the edge of the bed. His entire stance showed that he did not even need the words of Omaya-Kal to affirm that he was completely exhausted.

Seconds later, the bathroom door slowly opened and Molly came out. He turned around when he heard the sounds of her walking slowly over to where he was seated. What made his heart skip a beat was the puffy redness that surrounded the little girl’s eyes. It was apparent that she had been crying, but now was trying to conceal that beneath an almost forced cheerfulness.

She came over to the bed and crawled across the blankets towards him. When she reached him, she wrapped her arms around him from behind, her tiny hands barely touching as she embraced him. She said nothing, instead she pressed her face against his back, her head now turned to one side against the softness of the chocolatier’s dressing gown.

“Good morning, Molly,” he said, his words soft as he took her hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. He waited for her to release the hold so that he could turn around and look down into the
child’s innocent face.

“Did you sleep?” she asked him.

“A little, what about you?” he asked. “Did you have anymore bad dreams?”

“No, I think you scared them all away,” she said, the words filled with over-emphasized happiness.

“Did I now?” he asked, a smile breaking through as he gently ruffled her hair.

She lowered her head, but nodded shyly.

“So what time did you get up?” he asked.

“Mommy woke me a little while ago, but she said that I should leave you alone so you could sleep,” she said. “I covered you up real good because you looked cold.”

“That was very nice of you,” he smiled gently at her, but watched as she started to crawl off the bed.

“Molly?”

“Yeah?”

“Why don’t you come over here and sit with me for a few minutes?” he asked. “I’m still not completely awake and it usually takes me a little while to fully wake up in the morning.”

The little girl nodded, but crawled even closer to where he was sitting, her head now leaning up against his side.

They sat in companionable silence until he began to speak, his question solemnly hanging in the air.

“What do you remember about last night?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “I had another bad dream, but then you and Mommy were there with me.” After several seconds, she continued, her words much softer. “Willy, do you know what I wish?”

“No, what?”

“I wish that you were my daddy,” she whispered.

“I don’t know how to be a daddy, I’m afraid,” he confessed. “I never really learned.”

“Yeah you do,” she said, her voice filled with a childlike wisdom that took Willy aback. “You hug me when I’m sad, you sing to me, and take away my bad dreams. You’re nice to me even if I don’t deserve it.”

“Don’t deserve it?” Willy looked at her. “Sweetheart, you deserve all the good that exists in this world.”

“But my daddy said…” her voice trailed.

“…He was wrong, Molly, and he must be such a miserable, unhappy man to tell you such dreadful things. None of those horrible things are true. I can’t even find the words to express how sad that makes me feel.”

“I don’t want to make you sad,” she whispered.

“I know you don’t, but you should never believe that. Do you know that when you came here, you
brought a ray of sunshine right into this factory and into the lives of all of us who live here?”

Molly looked at him. “I did?”

“Yes, you did, and there is nothing bad at all about that,” he said smiling at her. “Don’t ever believe that you deserve bad things to happen to you, because you don’t.”

She lowered her head. “I just know that you’d never hurt me.”

“No, I wouldn’t, not ever,” He reached into the pocket of his dressing gown, pulled out a handkerchief, and shook it out before lightly wiping her face with it. As he did this, he could see her tears as they meshed into the cloth and left small traces of moisture on it.

The little girl took a deep breath, but instead of speaking, she tried without success at offering him a brave smile.

“Molly, can you tell me exactly what happened to you when you were with your daddy and uncle? If you can, then we’ll make sure that nothing like that ever happens to you again.” As he spoke, he pressed the handkerchief into her hand.

When she still said nothing, he reached over, gently took her face in his hands, and tipped her chin up so that she would be looking at him. “I would never be angry or upset with you for telling me the truth. I think you know that I will do whatever I can to help you. Just tell me what happened when you were separated from your mother.”

“But I told you already,” she whispered.

“No, sweetheart, you didn’t tell me everything, otherwise you wouldn’t be having such terrible nightmares,” he shook his head. “They’ve gotten worse for you in the last days and I’ve noticed it. You’re afraid to go to sleep at night, even though you’re perfectly safe here.”

“I’m just trying to forget,” she whimpered softly.

“I know, and normally I would tell you to do whatever you can to forget all about them, but I realize you can’t. There’s so much pain locked up inside of you,” he said. “I can see it whenever I look at you, Molly.”

She buried her face amidst the folds of the handkerchief. “I’m scared to.”

“I know,” he said gently. “Just try.”

Molly looked at him and took a deep breath. “Mommy said that she went to see a man and told him that she didn’t want to be with my daddy anymore. She said that she was trying to do all these things that would make things better. But, she said that my daddy may not want it and that he might try to stop her. I thought maybe he would try to take me away again like he did before,” she cried.

“And that’s why you’re having these bad dreams, you think that your mom cannot protect you from him,” he said.

“I don’t know,” she said as she shook her head. It was clear that she was trying to block out the experience. “He was so bad to me, he hurt my arm and let that other mean man hurt me, too.”

Willy took a deep breath, his heart now feeling as though it was about to explode in the confines of his chest. Did he really want to hear all of this? Casting a brief glance in the direction of the equipment that was in the room, he knew that he would have to. It was heartbreaking, but necessary
to help both mother and daughter. “Tell me everything that happened, Molly. I’m right here, I won’t let anything happen to you, and I will always love you no matter what you say or do.”

“Y-you love me?” she asked her eyes filled with wonder.

“With all my heart,” he said with a nod. “If I had to prove it, I’d try and pull down the moon for you just so that you’d have its light on those nights when you’re most afraid.”

Molly bit down on her lip but eventually spoke. “He hurt me, Willy. He beat me up real bad after he found the candy wrapper in my pocket. THEY took this thing with needles and pressed it into my arm and it hurt so much. After they did that, they kept saying that my mommy was sick and bad and that she needed a doctor. That mean man said that they wanted to help her, but I didn’t believe him.”

Willy could feel unshed tears brimming from beneath his eyes. Instead of acknowledging that, he looked at the child. “Molly, do you remember them saying or doing anything else?”

“Daddy said if I told anyone about what had happened that he’d go after Mommy and kill her. That’s why I didn’t say anything, because I was scared. If they did it, then it would be my fault.” Molly’s face was, by this time, streaked with tears and her agonizing words hanging in the air.

Without saying a word, he drew the child into his arms and held her tightly as she wept. After several minutes had passed, he brushed his hands through her hair as she continued to cling to him.

In the back of his mind, he wondered if this was enough information to at least undo Owen Slugworth. Even if it was not adequate grounds to send him to prison, perhaps Claude Gregory would be able use the information to keep Molly away from the Slugworth family as well as grant Linda the divorce.

His attention diverted once more to the child as she continued to weep in his arms. After several moments, he spoke, his voice filled with gentility. “I’m so proud of you.”

“Y-you are?” she raised her head as she tried to wipe the remaining tears from her eyes.

“Yes,” Willy said with an adamant nod. “That was a very brave thing you just did, and I know that you were really, really scared to.”

“Y-you said that you wouldn’t hate me,” she whispered. “Even though I caused so much trouble?” “You didn’t cause me any trouble,” he said. “You did what you needed to do and maybe now you will start to feel better because of it.”

“Will the nightmares stop?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but I think that they will not be as horrible as they were last night. You were pretty frightened,” he said. “Do you want to know a little secret?”

“What?”

“Your mother and I were frightened, too,” he said. “We sat next to you not knowing what to do.”

“But I woke up and you were there.”

The chocolatier nodded. “I’ll always be there for you, little one.”

“And you said earlier that you don’t know how to be a daddy,” she said softly. “I think you do.” As she spoke, she wiped her eyes with the corner of the handkerchief.
“That’s very sweet of you,” he said smiling despite the sadness that seemed to embody the room. Eventually, Molly leaned over and kissed his cheek. “It’s the truth.”

Willy smiled, the moisture from the child’s kiss still on his cheek, but instead of wiping it away, he allowed it to stay.

As silence once again fell over the room, Molly remained in his arms. After several minutes she spoke. “Willy?”

“Yes?”

“You don’t think I’m bad for being scared, do you?”

“Oh course not, everyone gets scared now and again,” he said.

“I guess.” she whispered with a shrug of her shoulders but looked off in the distance and closed her eyes. The silence once more swallowed them up until her stomach began to growl and the chocolatier chuckled.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

“Nothing except it sounds like someone here is a little bit hungry,” he said still laughing. “Why don’t we go to the dining room? Your mother is probably already there, and Tom will no doubt be waiting for us to come and say good-bye. He’s leaving us today to go on a little overnight trip.”

“Where’s he going?” she asked.

“Buckinghamshire, but he should be back tomorrow evening some time,” Willy said.

“I want to go too, my grandpa is there,” she whispered. “He always said he liked dancing with me.”

“Well, why don’t I see if Tom can bring your grandpa back here?” Willy asked. “He might be able to do that because it’s not a good idea for you or your mom to show up there right now. What do you think? Then you could practice with him.”

“Would you dance with me, too?” she asked shyly. “When we got to dance before, it was really nice.”

“Yes it was, but did you know that a lot of really good dancers start to learn with multiple partners?” When she shook her head, he continued. “Not every dancer is going to only dance with one partner. If you learn some with your grandpa, then some with me and then you take a class and learn with some of the boys your age, then you’ll have lots of different ways to become really good at it. Once you learn all the different steps, then you can establish who the best partner is, and then you move on to competitions and things with that one partner.”

“You know about that stuff?” she asked.

“I’ve done my fair share of reading about it, and when she was living here, Eliza and I used to watch the ballroom dance competitions on television. Sometimes we’d talk about them afterwards,” he said. “I think she was as fascinated with it as you are.”

“Could I one day meet her?” she asked.

“Of course, the next time she comes for a visit you can. I’m sure you’ll just love each other. She’s a really nice lady, too.” He smiled gently at her. “So, now are you ready for that double helping of
chocolate chip pancakes?"

“With chocolate syrup?”

“Anything you want, my little sunshine,” he said smiling, but tried without success at stifling a yawn.

“But you’re still tired,” she objected.

“Maybe just a little, but you don’t have to worry about me,” he said.

The little girl stood up and waited for him to do the same. Once they were standing, she reached for his hand and they walked slowly towards the door. Willy opened it and they stepped out into the hallway.

“You’re still in your pajamas,” she remarked.

“So I am,” he said. “Well, since I have been spending most nights nearby, I can go into my room and change. Would you wait for me?”

“Uh-huh,” she said.

“I’ll be right back,” he said and went quickly into his room.
Chapter 43

Chapter 43: Cocoa Beans and other Secrets

*This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view*

Five minutes later, Willy came back out of his room and found Molly leaning against one of the walls and tracing patterns along the floor with a single finger. Instead of immediately speaking, he watched the little girl for several moments as she delved her way into her fantasies. This was something that was nice for him to see contrary to the heartbreaking experiences that she had related to him in the Lavender Room.

He smiled as he ran his hand down over his clothing. He was now dressed in a forest green colored jacket, matching vest, beige pants, shirt, and purple bowtie. All that was missing were his hat and cane, which he had left back in his office the night before.

As he looked down at her, he smiled, all the while his thoughts literally consumed with candy making ideas. Contrary to the general worries that dwelled inside of him, he knew that there was no way for him to cease with his confectionary ideas. Of course, at that particular moment, he was starting to wonder if his testing the exploding candy might actually succeed in waking him up once and for all.

Deep down inside, he knew beyond any doubt that his candy making priority was to continue working with the *Sweet* Dreams candy. He had to make it just a little bit stronger so that Molly would sleep through the night.

“Are you ready?” he spoke as she raised her head and got to her feet. Extending his hand to her, he watched as she accepted it, her tiny fingers winding their way around his larger hand. Wordlessly, they started to slowly walk down the rainbow colored corridor.

At that precise moment, Willy was trying to figure out a gentle means in which to convey to the child the necessity of his working on his own that day. He wanted to call Claude Gregory and ask his lawyer if there was enough evidence against Owen Slugworth that would put him out of commission for a time. Not being very well versed in legal matters, the confectioner was still at a loss as he contemplated what Molly had confessed.

As luck would have, Thomas had provided a great deal of the legal information they needed right down to taking the heartbreaking photographs that visually showed the abuse that both Molly and Linda had sustained. Willy would never have been able to do this himself, and was grateful to Thomas for his assistance in that particular matter.

Since he had spent the last days in the company of the little girl, he was now starting to wonder if there was a feasible way for him to divert her focus long enough so that he could go and take care of the things that needed to be tended to.

Perhaps Molly’s fascination with the Oompa Loompa culture would help him to do his work without feeling guilt or remorse for not spending the day with her. Willy was certain that Omaya-Kal would agree to help him by keeping Molly busy. This was perhaps the best option since Linda, too, was starting to trust their wise and patient friend. If he could pull this off, then he would not be distracted by the charming brown eyed, freckle-faced child who had captured his imagination.

Several moments of silence passed before Molly looked up at him. “Willy?” she spoke his name thus
bringing him out of his reverie.

“What is it, sweetheart?”

“Are you mad at me?” she asked.

“Of course not, whatever gave you that idea?”

“You just seem so quiet,” she whispered.

“I’m just a little bit tired is all,” he said as they reached the door leading into the dining room. He extended his free hand and opened it. “Once I have some coffee, I should be as fit as a fiddle.”

The little girl nodded as they entered the room.

Linda was seated at the table, her chin resting in one hand while the other held a fork and was using it to poke around her food. The chocolatier was not certain as to how long she had actually been sitting there, but he could tell that she was consumed with worry and concern.

“You know, that omelet will do more good in your stomach than on that plate,” he said as she lowered the object and turned around.

When she saw the chocolatier and her daughter, she offered them a watery smile, but watched as he led Molly over to the table. Next, he pulled a chair out so that she could sit down. As soon as the child was comfortably seated, he went over and rested one of his hands on Linda’s shoulder. “Good morning, dear lady,” he said smiling down at her.

“Good morning, Willy,” she began, but soon her attention diverted away from the chocolatier and back to her daughter. “Molly, you didn’t wake him, did you?”

“No, Mommy, I was in the bathroom the whole time,” the little girl said. “I was brushing my teeth, see?” Without any sort of warning, Molly gave her mother a large, toothy grin.

Willy chuckled. “She was nowhere to be seen when I woke up. In fact, I was completely covered with blankets. I would say that Molly took very good care of me while I was asleep. Didn’t you, little one?”

Molly nodded proudly.

For his part, Willy gave Linda’s shoulder an extra squeeze before retreating into the kitchen and finding a fresh pot of coffee waiting for him. Grateful that someone had brewed some, he poured himself a cup. Glancing over at one of the counters, he spotted a plateful of pancakes. Knowing that these were intended for him and Molly, he retrieved them as well as a second plate.

Coming out of the adjacent room, he brought the plates, pancakes and cup of coffee over to the table. He almost started chuckling when the little girl began to rub her hands together enthusiastically.

“Oh yummy!” she said, but watched as he divided them onto the two plates and placed one in front of her. As soon as she had her helping, she reached for the chocolate syrup that was in the center of the table and poured a generous amount of it on top of the chocolate chip pancakes.

Diverting his attention from Molly, he looked at Linda. “Thanks for making the coffee. I think it’s just what I needed.”

“I didn’t make it,” Linda said. “Omaya-Kal and his sister came in right after I did. He said he was
looking for a box of cocoa beans. He told me that his daughter-in-law needed some for a cake they were making for a birthday party,” she said. “I didn’t know what specifically they were doing, but he somehow managed to get the coffee made while she helped me with the omelet and pancakes.”

“Yes, Rini-May does make very good pancakes,” Willy said. As if to emphasize this point, he shoveled a forkful into his mouth. Once he swallowed the bite, he continued speaking. “How’s the omelet?”

“It’s good,” she said. “They both saved us all because I’m not very good in the kitchen.”

Willy nodded. “They probably showed up here because Omaya-Kal was worried about all of us. He didn’t say as much last night, but I could tell. I suppose you live around the Oompa Loompas long enough; you start to figure out when they are worried.”

“How?” Molly asked, and this time her mouth was full of pancake.

“Well, they start to pace about, and then they eat more cocoa beans than they should. Omaya-Kal is known to overdo it with eating them when he gets really upset or worried,” Willy smiled. “I remember right after they came to the factory and how we would both sit together and literally inhale them together.”

“I can’t even imagine,” Linda said. “They taste too bitter to me.”

“They do, but the Oompa Loompas love them and I actually like them now and again myself. At any rate, in their culture, these are considered to be a great delicacy and I do whatever I can to make sure they have enough of them on hand.”

“That’s very nice of you,” Linda said.

“Well, they’re not just my workers, they’re also my friends. They adopted me into their family after they came here to live, and they made me feel like a son, a brother…” his voice trailed as the last three words emerged. “…and a father…”

“...See, I told you,” Molly spoke up, her tiny voice interrupting him.

“What did you tell me?” he asked, his voice soft, but laced with teasing undertones.

“That you’re a good daddy,” Molly said confidently, “but you didn’t believe me.”

At that moment, unspoken gratitude filled the chocolatier’s eyes upon hearing the child’s affirmation. It was no secret that he felt himself too choked up to speak and his face’s temperature felt as though it had risen close to twenty degrees. Instead of trying to think of any sort of response, he cast an imploring glance towards Linda. He hoped that she would do or say something that might actually change the subject.

Understanding this, she smiled as Willy disappeared behind his coffee cup. “I’m really starting to see that the Oompa Loompas are very good friends to all of us. Last night Omaya-Kal was very kind,” she said, her words trying to somehow pacify the chocolatier.

Instead of speaking, Willy reached towards the sugar bowl to add a generous amount of the white substance to his coffee.

Linda, seeing this, picked it up and handed it across the table to him, their fingers brushing briefly. Instead of commenting, she continued speaking. “Oh yes, I nearly forgot. Omaya-Kal asked me to tell you that you’d better not forget the birthday party tomorrow afternoon. If you forget, then you
will catch grief from his granddaughter.”

“Ah yes, Cristy-Kai is supposed to turn eight tomorrow. She wanted me to get her a recording of some kind. I think Molly knows the song she wants, but I’m not really sure.” He looked over at the little girl. “What was that song you asked me about in the Inventing Room the other day? It was the one about the dragon.”

Molly thought for a minute and then smiled as she forked herself a bite of pancake. “You mean, ‘Puff, the Magic Dragon’?”

“Yes, that’s it. Cristy-Kai said that she heard it on the radio several weeks back and loved it. She’s been hinting about me giving it to her for her birthday,” Willy said. “I have no idea where I can find it though. Of course, I do get a lot of requests from the Oompa Loompas for music; mostly John Denver and the Beatles, though.”

“How ever do you manage to get all of these special requests fulfilled if you never leave the factory?” Linda asked.

“It’s not always easy, but I think that this is one that I will somehow have to fulfill. It’s a birthday wish,” he said, but looked at Molly meaningfully. “Those are especially important.”

“Maybe we can help you with that,” Linda said. “Molly has the record with her. It’s back in our room.”

“Yeah,” the little girl said. “You can have it if I can come to the party.”

“Well, that would mean that you have to meet the birthday girl before the party,” Willy said with a smile. “How would it be if Omaya-Kal were to take you to meet his granddaughter today?”

“Would you come too?” Molly asked softly.

“I’m afraid that I’ve got other things that need tending, sweetheart,” he said regretfully. “But, I’m sure that Omaya-Kal will watch out for you and that you’ll have a wonderful time with him and his family.”

“I think that’s a really good idea, honey,” Linda said looking at her daughter. “That way Willy can get some much needed rest.”

Molly raised her head and looked over at Willy. As if on cue, the chocolatier yawned, but the little girl remained silent as she considered the idea. After a moment, she looked at him and spoke, her words taking him somewhat by surprise. “You’re not trying to get rid of me, are you?”

“Of course not,” Willy said softly. In the back of his mind, however, he knew perfectly well that she had pegged him and that this was exactly what he was trying to do.

“Molly, sometimes grown ups have to work,” Linda said.

Molly said nothing, but it was clear that the little girl was on the verge of crying.

Willy took a deep breath upon seeing this. He knew that he had to be honest with the child, but at the same instance, he knew that she was developing a sort of dependency on him. Molly did not want to let him out of her sight, she was frightened, and if truth be known, he was somewhat reluctant about the pending separation himself. Eventually, he began to speak. “Molly, there are some things that I need to contend with on my own, and they are kind of secret.”
“I won’t tell,” she whispered as she pushed the half-eaten pancake plate away.

“I know you wouldn’t, sweetheart,” he said. “But they are boring grownup things that would be uninteresting for you. I think that given the fact that you like Omaya-Kal, you would probably enjoy spending time with him over listening to me ramble on the phone about chocolate shipments.”

“Okay,” she whispered the dejection evident in her voice. Instead of speaking further, she got up from the table and took her plate into the kitchen.

Once they were alone, Linda looked over at him. “You’re not very good at this, are you?” she asked bluntly.

“I beg your pardon?” he asked.

“You’re grasping at straws, Willy,” Linda said. “You don’t want to tell her about what you really intend to do.”

“How can I? That tape that was made last night and then this morning was pretty incriminating. I don’t know if it is enough to send her father to prison, but between that and the pictures, it could do some serious damage,” Willy said. “I have to call Claude Gregory as soon as I get to my office this morning and ask him to come see us here. Linda, Molly told me what really happened and it breaks my heart. Her words could help you get a divorce pushed through, no questions asked. But, my God, what she told me was dreadful.”

“Then we have no choice, we have to use the tape,” she said. “Molly doesn’t have to know about it; at least not yet.”

“Yes, she does,” he said, his gaze never faltering. “Linda, we can’t just keep her from knowing the truth about her father. He could end up in jail because she trusted me enough to confide what she’s been through.”

“She trusted you, but why didn’t she trust me?” Linda asked.

“Because she’s trying to protect you,” Willy said. “She’s such an unselfish little girl, and she loves you so much that she would never want you to get hurt because of her.”

Linda lowered her head, her eyes closing. “She won’t ever tell me, will she?”

“Perhaps not, but there’s a reason, Linda, and even if I wanted to, I cannot betray her trust. It’s one of the few things that she has left. She’s such a fragile little girl.”

“She said that you are like a father to her,” Linda whispered.

Willy nodded. “I told her that I didn’t know how to be a daddy.”

“No one does,” Linda said as she reached across the table and touched his hand. “But, you’re a natural at it.” She smiled at him, her brown eyes filling with tears. “You seem to know beyond any doubt what it entails.”

As these words filled the room, Molly emerged from the kitchen. She was wiping her hands down the front of her clothes, but silently went over to her chair and sat down.

Willy looked over at her. “Molly?”

“Yeah?” she whispered.
“Are you alright?” he asked.

“Sure,” she whispered, but kept her head lowered.

Willy reached across the table and touched her head. This simple action caused her to raise it and when she looked at him, his blood went cold. Her eyes were just as red and puffy as they had been when he had spoken to her in the Lavender Room. The little girl was anything but okay and this left him wondering if leaving her alone that day would be a good idea at all.
Chapter 44

Chapter 44: Eminent Departures

At the same time Willy, Linda, and Molly were planning their day, Thomas was standing in his room and looking around trying to decide what he should be taking with him on his trip. Going to Buckinghamshire would only take him away from the factory for the night, and he was grateful that he would not be gone for too long. Of course, in about two weeks, he would be leaving for America, and that would be an even longer journey.

Although Thomas knew that everything was going to be alright, for some reason he did not feel as though this trip was going to go as smoothly as they all anticipated. With the second of the five Golden Tickets looming over the horizon, it looked as though this was something that held far more significance than just a contest to find Willy Wonka’s heir. This was creating a phenomenon that he had not seen the likes of since ‘Beatlemania’ gripped the world.

Of course, this did very little to curb the overwhelming and seemingly horrid feeling that permeated his entire stance. Now, for whatever reason, the trip to Buckinghamshire simply could not have come at a worse time.

Thomas was aware of the fact that Linda had spoken to his friend about her feelings, as the chocolatier seemed to have an uncanny spring in his step during the last few days. At the same instance, there was a strange secrecy that drifted around the factory, and this left him to ponder what was specifically happening between Linda and Willy. His conversations with Eliza the night before did not help matters all that much because Willy had not mentioned anything to her about his feelings for Linda Slugworth.

Although he concluded that he was going to Buckinghamshire to fulfill his promise to Willy, there was that small feeling borne of instinct that argued that he was the one that was running away. Amidst all of the events that were taking place, he had arranged himself a room at the local bed and breakfast, packed his overnight case, and made himself ready to leave the factory that morning after breakfast. No one but him knew that his heart was simply not in it.

Of course, the greatest assistance in that matter had been Linda. Surprisingly enough, she knew where specifically the second ticket was due to turn up and had arranged him a contact. She had, after all, been living in Buckinghamshire when the Salt Nut Company had gone and purchased all the Wonka bars in the entire town. It stood to reason that Henry Salt was the man behind everything that had happened there. Linda also knew this because her cousin, Regina Harris, worked at the factory in the stockroom.

Through this information, they had managed to contact and ask her to help smuggle Thomas into the factory so that he could speak with the Golden Ticket ‘finder’ once the ticket had been unearthed.

Although initially reluctant about taking part in this charade, Regina had ultimately agreed and a meeting between her and Thomas was set up for that evening. It was no secret; he was overtly discontented at the prospect of having to go to a place where chocolate bars had been literally horded away in such a manner.

“Well, maybe that’s why it will be found at a nut factory,” Willy had quipped, and Thomas found himself, amidst his skepticism, amused by his friend’s blunt words.

He would have to go as Willy was not about to stop the contest that he had started. It was clear that
they were now in too deep to call the whole thing off anyway. Contrary to everything that was happening with Linda and Molly, they would still have to fulfill what it was the chocolatier had initially intended.

Looking around, he could see that his electronic equipment, instead of being scattered about the room, the pieces were neatly stacked in the corner with one of the books flipped open beside it. It felt as though it had been months since he had actually worked on his projects. Perhaps when all of this is over, he could once again use that Radio Operator’s license that he had worked so hard at getting.

He placed a creased pair of trousers on top of the clothing that he had packed. Next, he pulled the flap closed before zipping it up. Using a silver lock, he secured his belongings, and carefully pulled the overnight case off the bed.

Dragging his suitcase over to the desk, he retrieved a set of keys. These were for the car that Willy was loaning him for the trip. He knew this car rather well; it was a sleek black colored Mercedes that seemed to fit in with the whole ‘Slugworth essence’ that he was trying to emulate. Of course, Thomas felt an eerie sense of foreboding at having to use that particular car. He could not put his finger on why that was the case, but at the same time, it was too intense a feeling to simply ignore.

He pocketed the keys before picking up the suitcase and bringing his luggage to the door. Opening it, he picked up his belongings and carried them out into the hallway before pulling the door closed behind him.

The corridor was empty as he came outside. He figured that his friends would all be in the dining room having breakfast. Willy was no doubt nursing a cup of coffee and staring at the headlines of the local paper, while Linda was eating an omelet and Molly was enjoying her favorite chocolate chip pancakes. In such a short time, he was starting to see the budding of a small family in the three of them and this caused a smile to turn up the corners of his mouth.

He carried the suitcase several meters down the corridor until he reached the door leading into the dining room. Leaving everything there, he opened the door and came into the room and smiled when he realized that his assumptions had been completely accurate. The three of them were indeed sitting at the table. Willy’s nose was meshed in the newspaper, while Linda carefully cut her omelet into bite-sized pieces and Molly was wiping the last of her breakfast from her mouth with a napkin.

“Do you really think Omaya-Kal will let me come to the birthday party?” Molly was asking, but her eyes were still on Willy, who started sipping his coffee.

“I’m certain that he will not object, Molly,” he said. “The Oompa Loompas are really nice, aren’t they?”

“Yeah, but so are you,” she whispered. “I wish we could spend the day together just like we did yesterday?”

“I’d really like that, too, but you know sometimes I do have to do other things,” he said. “I can’t spend all my time just having fun.”

Thomas smirked upon hearing this. One thing about Willy Wonka was clear, his job was fun, and he enjoyed every single aspect of it. Why he had said this was not yet clear to him, but seeing the look on Molly’s face seemed to provide the answer he sought. Instead of speaking, he listened as Willy continued.
“I guess the truth is, I really do need to get some rest, but I also have several new ideas that need testing.”

“But I could test them,” Molly said confidently.

Upon hearing that, Linda raised her head, a bemused expression stretching across her face. Her daughter definitely loved every moment she spent with Willy. It seemed apparent to anyone observing that the tired chocolatier was not fully able to keep up with the child’s energy level.

“I don’t know, the last time someone tested that particular experiment, they got purple spots,” Willy said. “I don’t think purple spots would go so well with brown hair and freckles, do you?”

“Oh come on, Willy,” Molly pouted.

The chocolatier looked at Thomas, a tired smile replacing the look of earnestness that had been previously there. “Do you remember what happened the first time you tested one of my experiments?”

“How can I forget? I was singing protest music in the middle of the Chocolate Room. It was probably the only time in my life that I had actually worn paisley,” Thomas said with a chuckle. “It’s not that bad,” Willy said with a smirk. “I actually look rather dashing in it.”

Molly giggled and Linda raised her head. It was very clear that the woman had come very close to spewing her sip of coffee across the table.

“Will, remember your modesty,” Thomas said with a chuckle.

The chocolatier looked at Molly, but smiled. “What do you think?”

“I think you didn’t answer my question,” Molly crossed her arms over her chest as someone knocked lightly on the door.

“Saved by the door,” Willy said with a typical smirk as he got up, went to open it, and smiled when he saw that Omaya-Kal was standing on the other side. “There was something I wanted to talk to you about, but I also wanted to say that you just saved my life,” he said as a greeting.

“This makes the twenty-seventh, or was it twenty-eighth, time?” the Oompa Loompa asked, his white eyebrows rising and falling as though in rhythmic motion.

“It was twenty-eight, Omaya-Kal,” Thomas shouted from across the room as Willy shot him a mocking glare.

“Whose side are you on Tom?” Willy asked.

“The winning one, of course,” Thomas said, his dark eyes twinkling.

“Mine,” Omaya-Kal and Willy said simultaneously and this caused Linda’s laughter to intensify.

Instead of continuing on this line of questioning, Willy looked down at his friend. “Omaya-Kal, would you be willing to…” his voice drifted off and he cast a glance towards Molly.

“I’d be happy to,” he nodded and walked over to where the little girl was sitting. By the time he reached her, he rested his gloved hand on her shoulder. This caused her to turn around. “Molly, how would you like to come and spend the day with me in our village? My granddaughter told me that she would love to meet you.”
“What about Willy?” she asked shyly. “I was sort of hoping that we could spend the day together.”

“I know you were,” he said and shot the chocolatier a knowing glance. “I was thinking that perhaps we could get better acquainted today and you could meet Cristy-Kai. She’s heard so much about you and is excited about seeing you.”

“Maybe,” the little girl said, but instead of agreeing with the Oompa Loompa’s suggestion, she lowered her gaze.

“What is it?” Omaya-Kal asked. “Does that make you sad, Molly?”

“No, it’s nothing,” the child whispered.

Willy took a deep breath. He knew this tactic well; he had often used it himself during his youth. “She’s sad because I won’t let her help with the exploding candy. You remember what happened to Hugo-Rae during the last group of tests?”

“Oh yes, and you’ll be happy to know that the purple spots have faded considerably,” Omaya-Kal said with an affirming nod.

“Purple spots?” Linda whispered as she listened to the chocolatier and the Oompa Loompa speaking. “Sometimes I think you’re doing mad science in there, Willy.”

The chocolatier smiled, “perhaps.” Instead of elaborating, he wrapped a comforting arm around Molly. “Am I forgiven?”

The child raised her head. “I guess, I just want to…” her voice trailed.

“…She wanted to spend time with you,” Omaya-Kal finished for her, but removed his hand from her shoulder. “Is that not right, Molly?”

The little girl said nothing.

Willy nodded. “You believe that if you are allowed to help me with my experiments than you will be safe, is that it?”

She raised her head, but kept her teeth biting down on her lower lip to keep from crying. After several moments passed, she hesitantly nodded.

“Oh my dear, sweet little one,” Willy said with traces of fatigue in his voice. “If you want to spend time with me then we can, but I have to balance everything out with my work and other tasks.” He paused trying all the while to gather his thoughts. When he finally did, he continued speaking. “You see, if I don’t try and figure out those candy recipes, then there won’t be anything new for you to enjoy come Christmas. Please believe me when I say that nothing is going to happen to you. Sweetheart, you’re going to be perfectly safe with Omaya-Kal.”

Thomas listened to these words, but he could tell almost instinctively that his friend carried slight frustration in his stance. Willy was exhausted, but eventually, he reached over and touched the side of Molly’s face. “Do you want me to stop working?”

“No,” she whispered. “I just got scared.”

“I know, and during the last days, you’ve been so brave,” he said. “I noticed that you were afraid, but you are safe here. No one can get in here without our knowing about it.” The little girl nodded as the chocolatier continued speaking. “You know, I would love to spend lots and lots of time with you,
but I can’t. I’m a boring grownup and sometimes I have to work.”

Molly nodded as she wiped her hand over her cheeks and smeared the tears from her face. After several minutes she wrapped her skinny arms around him.

Willy smiled from within the embrace, but eventually looked at the Oompa Loompa and nodded slowly as the embrace loosened. Backing up, his blue eyes sought her brown ones. “Tomorrow, I’ll take you to some of the more interesting rooms here. How does that sound?”

“You promise?” She asked.

“I promise,” he said gently. “You have my word.”

Molly smiled slightly, but reluctantly allowed him to help her to her feet and started to walk over to where Omaya-Kal stood. As she reached him, the Oompa Loompa wrapped his arm around the little girl’s shoulder and started to lead her from the room. He then turned and looked at Linda. “My sister shall come in about ten minutes to retrieve you.”

“Thank you,” Linda said as she watched as Omaya-Kal led the child from the room. She turned back around and looked at the chocolatier once the door had closed behind them.

“Willy?” Linda spoke as soon as she knew that her daughter could no longer hear them.

“Yes?” He asked as he returned to his chair and allowed his body to collapse into it. He reached for the mug of coffee and took a sip.

“Do you think that Omaya-Kal’s people will be able to help my daughter?” she asked. “I mean; it may seem rather silly of me to ask, but I have no idea what just happened with her. She looked as though she was afraid to let you go.”

“She is afraid,” he began. “Her dreams and experiences have become just too real for her. She wakes in the morning thinking that she is with her father and uncle and it turns out that she is here with us. It’s going to take a great deal of time for her to grow accustomed to being away from the Slugworths and feeling completely safe.”

“Will’s right, Linda,” Thomas offered. “Right now, Molly seems to view him as the only one who can really protect her. It’s not a shortcoming in you; it’s just that Will was the person who got her away from them in the first place.”

“But Tom, she’s only seven,” Linda whispered.

“I know, but somehow, she feels as though spending time with others exposes her to danger, but it is probably the very best thing that could happen to her. Once she is able to accept that she has other friends besides Will here; then she can work towards overcoming the painful experiences.”

“But Tom, she’s only seven,” Linda whispered.

“I know,” he took a deep breath and looked at Willy. “For what it’s worth, I think you handled that very well.”

Willy cast a glance back towards the door. “It wasn’t really me, it was a façade. The truth is, I wanted to spend the day with Molly, but I know that she needs time away from me and the company of others.”

“You also need rest, Will,” Thomas said rationally. “You look as though you’re about to drop.”
The chocolatier took a deep breath. “There’s no time for that, I have too much work to do.”

“But, you won’t be able to do anything unless you’re well rested,” Thomas argued. “After I leave, go to your office and have a lie down. If you fall asleep them you fall asleep, it’s probably better for you anyway. Linda, you or one of the Oompa Loompas could come by your office at three to see if you’re awake. That will give you close to five hours to get rested up. After she wakes you, then you could start working. Let’s face it, Will, you’re not going to be able to do much of anything when you’re this tired.”

“I have to call Claude Gregory, and Eliza, she has to know what is happening,” he said.

“Then do those two things, but as soon as you take care of all that, then go to sleep,” Thomas said.

Willy looked over at Linda as the door opened and Omaya-Kal’s sister, Rini-May peered around the door. “Hello everyone,” the Oompa Loompa said cheerfully, a happy smile gracing her orange face.

“Rini-May, good morning,” Thomas offered. “Will you join us?”

“I’d love to, Mr. Wilkenson, but I am afraid there is way too much to do. I have to help make a cake for my grand niece’s birthday. Linda, would you please assist me with that? Your height is rather a novelty for me and you can reach the ingredients that Mr. Wonka has so conveniently put on the top shelf.” She flashed a smile at the chocolatier as a tingling laugh emerged.

Willy smiled sheepishly at her but leaned over and whispered to Linda, “Rini-May is afraid of heights and she doesn’t even like climbing onto chairs.”

“And you put everything on the top shelf?” she asked. “That’s not very nice.”

“It was unintentional and it happened several years ago. She just never let me live it down,” Willy said grinning. “I argued that it was a force of habit that traced back long before the Oompa Loompas came to the factory, but I don’t think she believed me.”

Linda nodded, but looked at Rini-May. “Let me finish my coffee and I’ll be along to help you,” she said. “I think baking a cake will provide a great distraction for me, but I have to warn you, I am a terrible cook.”

“I shall gather the bowl and other things that we will need. I will be back in a few minutes,” Rini-May nodded and with a practical skip in her step, she retreated into the kitchen.

Once the three of them were alone, Linda looked at Willy. “I only hope they can help her,” she repeated the words she had said earlier.

“I don’t know if they will succeed or not, but I do trust them, and right now all we can do at this moment is wait and see what happens next. Based on what the recording equipment picked up, it may prove to be easier for her to get away from the Slugworths once and for all,” he said.

“I’m still worried,” Linda said. “Somehow I am starting to believe that we should consult a child psychologist.”

“It is your decision, dear lady, as you are the child’s mother and her responsibility,” Willy said gently. “Contrary to what Molly has said, I’m afraid that I’m not all that versed in being a father figure to anyone.”

“If you ask me, it’s because you’ve had a hard time being something to someone that you never really experienced yourself,” Thomas said. “I remember your father very well and although he was a father; he was never really a ‘dad’. Not the dad that you’re obviously being to Molly.”
“No, my father was not a model dad,” Willy said, but looked at Linda. “You do know that we all have Molly’s best interests at heart, though. You also know that I will do whatever I can to help no matter how you decide to deal with this.”

Linda reached across the table and took his hand, her fingers intertwining with his. “Thank you.”

Instead of pressing the issue, Willy retained his hold on her hand, but looked at Thomas. “When were you planning to leave, Tom?”

“As soon as I finish eating,” Thomas said. “I want to get there early, check in at the bed and breakfast, and then this evening I can try and contact Regina.”

Willy returned his attention to Linda. “Your cousin has been very helpful with all of this. I am grateful to you.”

Linda nodded. “I guess she has, but when I talked to her, she said that she wouldn’t be able to get Tom into all the places in the building.”

“That’s not necessary anyway, just as long I can get to the room where they are shelling the candy bars,” Thomas said. “Since there aren’t any other Wonka bars in that town; it’s pretty safe to assume that the ticket will end up there. The only good thing about that is that it will be a lot easier for me to locate the finder than it was when I was in Duselheim.”

“That reminds me, I should probably contact Tina and see how things are going with her,” Willy said as he folded his hands and looked down at the table top. He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “In all honesty, that’s not the way I planned all of this. I was hoping that children like Molly would find the tickets, not people who would try and horde the entire supply. That really takes all the fun out of it.”

“I agree, and I won’t even mention the fact that it’s a waste of perfectly good chocolate,” Thomas muttered. “That stuff doesn’t get eaten; it just gets tossed in the rubbish bin. It just seems unfair to the children who could actually enjoy it.”

Willy took a sip of his coffee, but nodded as he replaced the cup. Seconds passed and he found himself glancing over towards Linda. It was abundantly clear what was going through her mind as she stared at the door.

“Molly is going to be alright,” the chocolatier said. “During the last few days, she has gotten to know Omaya-Kal. She needs to be around others her own age.”

“But Willy, Omaya-Kal is older than Thomas, he could be her grandfather,” Linda objected.

“True, but his granddaughter is about Molly’s age,” Willy said smiling. “After her meeting with him, she will be able to spend some time getting to know Cristy-Kai, and I am certain that the two of them will have a delightful time together. The last time I spent time with their family, Cristy-Kai braided my hair. It took about a week for Eliza to get all those tiny braids out.” He smiled at the memory.

“I remember that,” Thomas said with a slight chuckle. “You looked like a white, short haired, Bob Marley. I wonder what she’ll come up with now that Molly is here. Two girls around the same age; it could prove to be very interesting.”

Willy nodded, but patted Linda’s hand gently. “Don’t worry none of them will be venturing beyond the factory grounds. Aside from that, the Oompa Loompa village here is so large that it will take days for Molly to learn her way around it.”
Linda looked at Thomas, her next words completely changing the subject. “Is it possible for you to check in with my father after you get to Buckinghamshire?” she asked. “I know that it seems an odd request, but I’ve been worried about him. I’m also a bit worried about my mother, even though she can be a very complex person at times.”

“I was going to ask about that too, since Molly really misses her grandfather,” Willy said.

“I could try, if it would be safe for me to do so,” Thomas said. “Will, you’ve been in touch with him during the last days, haven’t you?”

“Yes, I have,” the chocolatier answered with an affirming nod. “He said that he would welcome a visit from you, but still seemed a bit nervous when we spoke.”

“Understandably so, he knows about what happened and how I ended up here,” Linda said.

“Do you think that the Slugworths might have been able to find out more from your parents?” Willy asked.

“I don’t think so, that’s why I didn’t tell them anything,” she said. “I figured that the less they knew, the safer they were.”

“Perhaps,” Willy said. “Since Molly mentioned her grandfather, I am starting to get the impression that they would probably be very wise to leave Buckinghamshire for the time being and perhaps come here for a couple of days if they have no other alternatives.”

“Papa may leave, Willy, but Mum won’t. She spent her whole life in Buckinghamshire and I don’t think there’s anything that is going to change her mind about that. The chances of her leaving are about as likely as my becoming a chocolatier.” Linda said with a casual shrug of her shoulders, her eyes closed momentarily before she opened them once again and looked at him.

“I don’t know,” Willy said, his blue eyes twinkling. “It could happen.”

Linda looked at Thomas. “Not very likely,” she mused. “You do recall what I said when Rini-May mentioned baking a cake. I can’t even boil water.”

“It can’t be that bad,” Willy said.

“Oh yes it can,” Linda shot back. “The last time I tried to make anything, I almost set fire to the kitchen.”

“Then I suppose it is a good thing that I know how to cook,” Willy said coyly. “I am not just the greatest candy maker in the world, but I can also cook rings around some of the world’s best chefs.”

“Okay, Will, I’d like a plateful of modesty with a side of humility,” Thomas said as he nudged his friend.

Despite the earnest discussion, Linda found herself giggling as Willy blushed.

After several seconds, Thomas stood up. “I should probably get going. I have to get the car gassed up before leaving town.”

“Have a good trip, Tom, but be careful,” Willy said.

He started towards the door leading outside. “I’ll be back in a couple of days,” he said smiling as he left the room.
Chapter 45

Chapter 45: The Loving Friend

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Once Thomas had left, Willy found himself alone with Linda. She was still seated at the table, the coffee cup, she had shoved off to one side and her head was lowered. After several moments of silence had passed between them she found the courage to look up at him.

“I didn’t want to mention this while Tom was here. I know that he worries about Molly as much we both do,” she began, her voice unusually soft. “Willy, you were so wonderful last night when you sat and sang to her. I realized at that moment just how much she needs you.” She paused as she nervously began to wring her hands together. “I guess what I’m trying to say is; I think I need you, too.”

Willy stood up and walked around the table. “I’ve never felt needed like that before,” he admitted his voice soft. “It is strange, but also a very comforting thing to know.”

“I would never have believed that you would view yourself unable to be a good father to her,” she whispered as she felt his arms wrapping around her from behind. His chin came to rest on her shoulder and she felt the softness of his curly hair against one side of her face. Despite her worries and concerns, she smiled.

Instead of speaking, the chocolatier moved his hands until they rested against hers, his fingers wrapping around each of her hands. He remained in this stance for several moments, until she raised her head and could see his soft blue eyes staring down at her. At that moment, he returned her smile, but released one of her hands so that he could touch her face, his fingertips soft against her skin. “You have no idea how scared I was,” he confessed.

“You were scared?” she whispered.

“More like terrified,” he nodded, his expression now laced with his own brand of tenderness. “I thought that maybe my presence was unnecessary. Then she called my name, and I turned around and saw you and her holding onto each other. I didn’t want to intrude in your moment and somehow ruin that bond that you both share. You’re Molly’s mother, I-I’m just trying to be a friend.”

“Just trying?” she asked, tears catching in her eyes. “Willy, you’ve been more than just a good friend to us; you’ve been a hero. My God, you’re like the daddy that she needed and never had...” her voice trailed as she covered her mouth with her hand and allowed the tears to escape from beneath her eyelids.

As they made their way down her face, she continued to speak, her voice now cracking with more emotion than even she believed she possessed. “I watched you take care of her last night, and after you both fell asleep, I thought I was going to cry my eyes out.”

Instead of allowing her to remain with her back to him, Willy slowly pulled her out of her chair and into his arms. Without warning, she suddenly felt her face pressed against his chest, the tears that fell from her eyes now dampening his vest. “I was afraid to hope for anything, Linda,” he whispered honestly as he bowed his head and meshed his lips into her hair. “I really was frightened.”

“Y-you?”
“I’m not always strong and secure as I may seem. Oftentimes it’s rather like a façade used as a way to protect myself from getting hurt,” he said as he brushed his hands gently through her hair.

“Why didn’t you say something?” she asked.

“Maybe for the same reason you didn’t,” he responded.

“But I had a reason to be afraid,” she whispered.

“So did I; you just didn’t know what the basis for it was,” he smiled weakly, but his next words tumbled out, their cadences unlike anything he had ever spoken of before. “I’m not a charmed man; I’m just as fallible as you are. I know that you may have a hard time believing or accepting that but it’s the truth. I don’t know how to be a father to a child when I know how my own father rejected me.”

“Why?” she whispered.

“Because I decided to do what I wanted with my life instead of what he had planned for me,” he said earnestly. “You see, the biggest fear that I harbor in my life is that people who say they love me can’t because I don’t live up to their expectations. Perhaps the only thing he managed to pass on to me was uncaring indifference.”

“No he didn’t pass that on because that is not what you are, Willy,” she whispered. “You’re more wonderful than you could ever know.” As she spoke, she once more buried her face against his chest.

For his part, he continued to run his hands through her hair, his touch soft, but insistent. “When you came into my life, it took me some time to realize that I was trying to behave in a different way. I didn’t want you to see my fear and uncertainty. You knew me from what you had heard in the press, and that felt safe enough for the time being, but then things started to change. I started to realize that you were seeing far more of me than I initially wanted. There was far more present than just what was on the surface.” He took a deep breath. “I know that all this sounds rehearsed and silly, but it’s the truth.”

She raised her head and looked at him. “It doesn’t, it just sounds sincere.”

“I wasn’t sure how you would take my honesty,” he said softly. “When we were in the Sunset Room, I could tell that you were afraid, that’s why I backed off. I suppose I am accustomed to pretense when it comes to dealing with other people.”

“But honesty suits you,” she said as she hesitantly raised one of her hands and touched the hair that lined one side of his face. As she withdrew her hand, she continued speaking, her voice etched in earnestness. “Tom told me that I should give myself the chance to really know you. He said that you were not all the pomp and circumstance that seems to surround you. I was scared because of what I had heard about you. They were so many horrible things that were said, but none of them were even true.”

“I can only imagine what they must have told you,” he said trying to sound casual, but deep down inside, he felt a tinge of defensiveness and hurt about what she had repeated.

Linda closed her eyes for a moment, but shook her head. “They were so wrong, because you really are the most wonderful man I have ever met in my life. Sometimes I feel so guilty because I was afraid to trust in you, but now I know that I can, that I do…” her voice trailed.

Without initially speaking, he cupped her face in his hands and tipped her chin up so that she was
looking deeply in his eyes. “Linda,” he whispered as he leaned towards her and allowed his lips to brush against hers. “I love you.”

“You love me?” she whispered, but allowed him to touch her lips lightly with his. As though entranced, she leaned into the softness of his lips, her eyes closing. As the tears continued to stream down her cheeks, he could suddenly taste their saltiness. As he backed away, all he heard was her soft utterance. “Oh Willy…”

The words drifted off into nothingness as their embrace tightened. When he felt her body melting in his hold, he carefully ran his hands up until they were once more meshed into her hair, the softness of it stroking his fingertips. As he cradled the back of her head in both of his hands, he allowed his lips to gently touch hers again.

After only a second, he could feel her returning the kiss, her arms clinging to him as though he was her life raft. This same sensation soon washed over him as well and he tightened his hold as their lips parted at almost the exact same instant.

Willy nearly burst with happiness when he suddenly felt the softness of her tongue lightly stroking his. There was no more room for guilt or remorse. Despite his overwhelming exhaustion, he felt joy welling up inside of him.

The kiss lingered for several moments until they withdrew.

Linda was blushing profusely by this time, but from somewhere, it looked as though she was digging deep inside of herself in order to find the courage to speak. When she eventually did, Willy’s world suddenly changed as the four simple words emerged from her. They were soft, but they were filled with so much sincerity that he felt the undertow of elation swallow him whole.

“I love you, too.”

He had told her that he loved her, but he did not know or expect that this special lady had fallen in love with him as well. He did not dare to even hope for this, but it was now his reality and that was the most special and beautiful feeling he had ever known.

Impulsively, he allowed himself to cry out in elation, his words emerging inaudible. Instead of repeating anything, he picked her up in his arms. As if propelled by adrenaline alone, he swung her around the room, all the while, that same delighted euphoria emerging from him as happy tears washed down over his face.

For her part, Linda kept her arms wrapped around him and held onto him with all her might. “Willy…” she cried out his name as he returned her to the floor. The hold that they had on one another remained. Instead of releasing her, Willy’s hold tightened as his lips once more captured her own in a passion filled kiss.

As soon as he withdrew, her soft words filled his ears, the giddiness emerging with each syllable. “I probably shouldn’t feel this happy.”

“But you are,” he said, his eyes shining. “You’re smiling for the first time since we met. Linda, you’re really and truly smiling and I positively adore it.”

“But what about Molly?” she asked.

“Maybe what Molly needs most of all is our love and understanding. If she has that, then perhaps everything else will just fall into place, just as it is doing right now,” he smiled down at her.
“Love,” she whispered, her gaze still locked with his.

“Well, look at what it did for us,” he said, but leaned down and allowed his lips to once again brush against her own. “If Molly knows about the power and wonder of love, then she will overcome all the things that have hurt and held her back.” He paused, but continued to lightly stroke her face. “I think that if the recording device worked as was intended, then we can give it to Claude Gregory and put everything in his hands. Through his influence, perhaps something can be done about Owen Slugworth and his vile threats once and for all. That will help you, and it will also help Molly.”

“Do you think so?” she asked.

“It can’t hurt, and if she is aware that her father is in a place where he cannot have the opportunity to hurt her again, then chances are no one will object to you getting the divorce,” he said. “Perhaps this can be a turning point for all of us.”

Linda smiled, but reluctantly, she backed up, her gaze locked on his. “When should we tell Molly?”

“About us?” he asked. When she nodded, he continued, “when you’re ready and not a moment sooner. She needs to know the truth, though, but it should be done delicately so that she doesn’t get scared.”


Willy flushed. “I don’t really know how children react to one of their parents falling in love with another person. In this case, Molly has come to see me as a friend, and this is going to change that dynamic a little bit. She’s going to have to ease into idea that says we mean a great deal to one another, but she needs to know that my feelings for her won’t ever change. I love that little girl and want to be there for her whenever she needs me.”

“I could tell, I think you were rather taken by her from the start,” she said.

“Perhaps, but I was first taken by her mother,” he smiled impishly. “Do you know when I started to believe that you were the most special person in the world?”

“When?”

“The night when we were returning to the factory from Germany,” he smiled. “You were lying in my arms and I was looking down at you. I thought that there was never a person whom I wanted to protect as much as you.” His expression shifted and he offered a coy smile. “Then later, when we were in the Sunset Room, I discovered that you truly are sweeter than candy.”

“That sounds so cliché,” she mumbled.

“It’s only the truth, you are my sweet Linda,” he teased her, his nose nuzzling her cheek and she giggled.

After a second the door opened and Rini-May peered around the kitchen door, the Oompa Loompa’s hands loaded down with mixing bowls and other things that would be needed for baking.

Linda backed slowly away from the chocolatier as they were joined by the Oompa Loompa. After several seconds, she smiled at him. “You should go get some rest, Willy. Something tells me you’re going to need it.”

“Alright, I’ll do as you suggest, but only until two,” he said, but turned to face Rini-May. “Would
you come by my office at about two this afternoon and make sure I’m awake.”

“Of course,” she smiled. “We should have the cake finished by then.”

“Thank you,” he said, but stood watching as Linda and Rini-May left the dining room. Eventually, he collected the dishes that were on the table, carried them into the kitchen, and put all of them in the sink.

*I’ll take care of the clean-up after I get some sleep*, he thought as he stepped out of the dining room, summoned the Wonkavator, and made his way back to his office.

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Five minutes later, Willy was softly humming when he reached his office. He was too happy to lay down and sleep. His adrenaline seemed to be going full force with him and he could not help but smile at the prospect of seeing Linda again.

At the same time, he knew that he had several phone calls that he wanted to make before lying down on the sofa and taking a nap. The coffee had barely done anything to keep him awake. In fact, it had proven to be about as useful as his half a typewriter that was sitting on top of the half a filing drawer there in his office.

Before going and sitting down on the sofa, he walked over and picked up the phone as he seated himself at the desk. Dialing the number to the lawyer’s office, he waited for someone to pick up the line. When it eventually happened, he recognized the woman’s voice at the other end.

“Claude Gregory’s office; this is Yvonne Richardson, may I help you?”

“Hello, this William Wonka, calling,” he began. “I need to speak with Mr. Gregory as soon as possible. Is he available?”

“I’m very sorry, Mr. Wonka, but he’s not here right now. He’s in court, but he should be back later this afternoon. Shall I leave a message and tell him to call you when I see him?”

“Thank you,” he said. “I’m going to be busy until after two, so if he can call me then, it would be greatly appreciated. I have to make a few more calls. The line might be busy when he calls back, just ask him to keep trying, it’s very important that I speak with him.”

“What should I tell him?” she asked.

“Just tell him that I have some information that I need to pass on to him regarding Linda Slugworth and her daughter, Molly.”

“Of course,” she said. “I’ll be sure to leave a note on his desk.”

“If his desk is anything like mine, make sure it’s on brightly colored paper,” he said with a soft chuckle.

She laughed. “Of course, I’ll be sure to write it on that edible paper that you sent to our office last Christmas. That should catch his attention. Does that sound alright to you?”

Willy chuckled. “Raspberry was always his favorite flavor, and yes, I think it will work just fine. Thank you.”

Once he hung up the phone, he looked out across his desk and found a small business card that
rested against one side of it. For the life of him, he could not understand why it was he wanted to call the small hotel in Duselheim.

He remembered his last conversation with Tina and how she had said that her brother had taken classes with Arthur Slugworth. Why this was of any consequence was beyond him, but Willy Wonka was not a man who ignored his intuition. Right now, it was screaming at him to call Tina and check in with her.

Without so much as hesitating, he picked up the phone and dialed. As the call was being connected, he began to tap the small business card along the papers that lined his desk. When the person at the other end answered with the family name, ‘Schröder’, he spoke.

“Ist Tina da?” (Is Tina there?)

“Ich bin es,” came the answer. (Yes, speaking) “Wer ist da?” (Who is this?)

As these words filled his ears, Willy could detect an almost foreboding in the voice. His intuition had been right, yet, it sounded as though the girl at the other end was completely terrified. “Tina, this is Willy Wonka calling from London.”

“H-how do I know you are who you say you are?” her whispered response emerged in the form of a question.

“Ask me a question about the first time we spoke,” he said.

“W-what did I call you when we spoke before about the Golden Tickets?” she asked.

“You called me your family’s ‘saving grace’, although that is rather a description that I have never had before,” he said honestly.

As soon as he had spoken, a small gasp emerged from the other end of the line. When the girl did not speak, his concern mounted. “Tina, are you there?”

“It really is you,” she said, her voice cracking. “I-I thought I’d never hear from you again.”

Was it his imagination or was the young woman crying? Her voice sounded broken and it seemed as though something was wrong. “I wanted to call and see how you were doing,” he began. “It’s been some days since the Golden Ticket was found there, and I did promise that I would stay in touch.”

Instead of hearing her respond, the room was suddenly consumed in silence. At that moment, Willy knew beyond any doubt that sleep would have to come at a later time.

“Tina?” he spoke her name hoping that she would say something to indicate that she was still present. Instead, all he could make out were the sounds of crying emerging from the other end of the line.
Chapter 46

Chapter 46: Tragedy In Duselheim

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy waited several minutes. When she did not say a word, he spoke instead. “Tina, are you there?”

“Yes,” her single word emerged as though a strange mixture between an exhalation of breath and a gasp.

“Something’s happened,” he spoke. “Tina, tell me what’s the matter, maybe I can help.”

“It’s my brother,” she whispered, her voice cracking. “Last night…”

Willy took a deep breath and waited for her to continue speaking. Deep down, he was hoping that she would be able to tell him more information about the times when Arthur Slugworth had taught her brother, but what happened next took him completely by surprise.

“Max is…” her voice trailed off, but seconds later, the last word emerged. “…Dead.”

Willy took a deep breath. “Tell me what happened.”

“Last night the police called and they said that Max killed himself,” she was, by this time crying openly. “My parents left Duselheim immediately to drive to Berlin to take care of everything. The hotel is closed for the week because of this.”

“The police said that your brother committed suicide?” he asked. “Was he suffering from depression?”

“I—I don’t know, he never told us anything about that being a possibility. Even if he did, I didn’t want to believe it. Max was always so strong and he wouldn’t, I mean; he couldn’t have. Then this morning something happened and I found out the truth,” her voice became more emotional with each word she spoke.

“What truth?” he somehow felt compelled to press each word out of her.

“Mr. Wonka, it was Slugworth all along, it was him.” By this time, her voice was about as close to hysteric as one could get.

“Tina, I want you to calm down and tell me exactly what happened,” he said.

“This morning, a special delivery package arrived from Berlin. It had been sent here before we found out what had happened. I went to bed last night thinking that it was a mistake and that Max was alright. Then the package came and there was a letter was inside. He explained everything and now I’ve been waiting here all morning for my parents to call so I could tell them about the package, but they haven’t yet, and I’m frightened.”

“Who is with you right now?” he asked softly.

“I’m alone,” she said.

“You shouldn’t be alone,” he said. “Tell me about the package, what is inside?”
“About seven or eight large sound reels. There’s also notebooks filled with a bunch of numbers and figures. It looked like tax declarations or something. We have the sorts of books here at the hotel, but these are different somehow. All I know is that they look really important.”

“Did the letter give you any indication about what all of it meant?” he asked.

“Not really, just that he thought that I should try and get them to you. I don’t know why he said that, I mean; I didn’t tell him that we spoke. I kept my word, I swear I did.”

“It’s alright, Tina, I know you wouldn’t do anything to betray me,” he said patiently. “Did he say anything else?”

“Yes, he said that you would know what to do with them and that I should try and get all this information to either you or the police.” As she spoke, Willy could hear her staggering breath on the other end of the line.

“You mentioned to Tom that your brother was in a seminar with Slugworth, correct?” Willy asked. “But that was several years ago. Why would he have done this now?”

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “Max kept all of us in the dark about what he was doing as well as the extent of contact he had with Mr. Slugworth and his company. I had no idea what was going on with my brother, but Mr. Wonka, there was more and I’m afraid to tell you.”

“What happened?” he asked. When she hesitated, he took a deep breath. “Tina, I won’t harbor any ill towards you for being honest; just tell me.”

“I-it was a lie, it was all a lie,” she managed to speak.

“What was a lie, the fact that he was taking the class?” Willy asked.

“Yes,” she began. “After the semester ended, Max never mentioned the fact that he had maintained contact with Slugworth and I was afraid to pry. I remember this one instance where we got into a fight about it, and we were yelling at each other and he said that I shouldn’t ask so damn many questions because it’s not safe. I was asking about the class not an espionage caper, but that was his response. Slugworth was never mentioned again, at least not until I received the letter today. I had pretty much forgotten all about it.”

“Did you contact the school about any of this after you got the package?” he asked.

“Yes, I called their offices as soon as I read the letter and tried to find out about whether or not Mr. Slugworth had even conducted seminars in their business school. After I asked, everything went silent.” she paused, and he could hear the sounds of her gasping for air at the other end. “Mr. Wonka, the only reason I had called them in the first place was because I was curious as to why Max even mentioned your name in the letter. As far as I knew, he had never even spoken to you.”

“No, he didn’t. Even if he had spoken to me, I would have remembered it when we spoke last week,” he confirmed.

“That’s what I thought,” she said. “Anyway, Max never talked about candy unless it was to discuss his studies, and that was just business stuff.”

“What did the school tell you when you called them?” he asked.

“T-they said that he never had taught any seminar at all, that he had never even applied for the job,” she whispered. “But, I remember…Mr. Wonka, I remember him telling me about the kind of man
Mr. Slugworth was. He talked about how cruel he was to other people and that he had no objection to hurting them if it served his purpose. Max described these classes in such a way that I thought for certain that I was sitting and listening in myself.”

“Let me get this straight, Max talked about the seminars when he came home, but then the college told you that Arthur Slugworth was never even on staff there? So that means these classes your brother claimed to have taken during his studies were basically consumed in lies.”

“Y-yes,” she sniffed.

“What did Max know about Owen Slugworth?”

“Who’s that?”

“He’s the second in command at Slugworth Chocolates,” Willy said. “He’s also Arthur’s nephew. I cannot go into explanations right now, but who did you ask about when you called the school?”

“I asked if there was a Professor Slugworth, and they said they never had anyone by that name on their payroll,” she said.

“What specifically did your brother’s letter say?” he asked.

“It’s all in German,” she whispered.

“Well, you can either give a rough translation or just read it,” he said. “I do speak and understand German quite adequately.”

Silence filled his ear, but after a second, he could hear her clear her throat. “I’m afraid to,” she whispered after several seconds. “What if someone’s listening in?”

Willy took a deep breath. “Alright,” he conceded knowing that that could be an adequate concern. “This is what we’re going to do. I’m going to send someone for you. You should not be alone right now and I want you to bring the letter with you when you come to the factory.”

“T-to the factory?” she managed to speak.

“Yes, you need a sanctuary and right now you should not be alone,” he said. “I can perhaps understand your parents wanting to go and tend to this on their own, but they should never have left you there alone.”

“You make it sound like it’s dangerous,” she whispered.

“I think you may be in danger,” he said honestly. “You do know a great deal about what is happening and it might be more than enough to concern the Slugworths.”

“But, what about the hotel?” she asked.

“You said it was closed for the week. We can have all the calls patched through here and if your parents call then we can tell them what happened and why you’re here. You just lost your brother and you really need some time to sort through all of this,” he said gently. “I want you to stay next to the phone. Once I call Eliza and arrange your passage, then I’ll call you right back with that information. Is that alright?”

“Why are you doing this?” she asked weakly. “You don’t really know me.”

“I know you well enough, and you are Tom’s friend and that means you’re my friend too,” he said.
“I just ask that you understand why it is I cannot come personally. Tom is on his way to Buckinghamshire and the only ones who can offer their help at this moment are Eliza and her friend Elmsworth.”

“Elmsworth?” she whispered as an unhappy giggle emerged. “That sounds like a candy bar.”

“That’s what I said too, but keep that under your hat,” he said.

“Mr. Wonka, what should I do with the package?”

“I want you to call the police in Duselheim as soon as we hang up here. Tell them that the information contained in that parcel should be shared with the police here as well and that because my name was mentioned in the letter, I want to see it before we turn it over to them. If it’s what I think it is, then it could prove to be dangerous for you to have it in your possession. If anyone knew that you had it, then they would surely try and get it back. You remember when we talked before and how I said that I wanted you to stay safe?”

“Yes,” she managed to speak.

“Well it still stands.”

Tina once more grew silent, but after several seconds, she began to speak, her soft voice filling his ear as her German words emerged. “Ich habe solche Angst,” she muttered without realizing that she was speaking another language. (I’m so scared.)

“Ich weiß,” he responded (I know). After several seconds, he continued speaking, his words once more emerging in German. “Ich wünschte es gäbe etwas das ich für dich tun könnte um dir zu helfen. Alles was ich sagen kann ist, dass du Freunde hast, Tina, und du bist nicht allein.” (I wish there was something more that I could do to help you. But you do have friends; Tina and you’re not alone.)

“T-thank you,” she said as a small sniffle could be heard over the line.

“Lock the doors to your room and stay put, alright?” he instructed her gently. “Don’t go out alone, but do call the police and let them know what is happening.”

“Okay,” she whispered. “Please call me back soon.”

The chocolatier took a deep breath. “I will.”

As he returned the receiver to the cradle, he took a deep breath. This was not the rest that his friends anticipated him getting, but now another of the very few people he considered to be his friends was in trouble. At that moment, he knew that he could not conceal the concern that washed over him. In fact, he was more worried than ever before. Worse still, it all seemed to tie back to his problems with the Slugworths.

He inhaled slowly as he reached for the phone and dialed the number in Cornwall. He waited for several minutes until Eliza picked up the line. “Yes?”

“Eliza, it’s me,” he said, his voice feeling the extent of deflation that one has when bad news is about to be shared.

“William?” her soothing voice filled his ear.

“Yes,” he said, but yawned.
“My dear boy, you sound exhausted. Shouldn’t you be asleep?” she scolded him gently. Somehow he could tell that she was always there for him, and yet her manner and kindness seemed to dominate everything. After several minutes he took a deep breath.

“Mum, I need your help,” he confessed.

“Tell me what the matter is,” she said. “I’m here.”

“It’s just that there’s so much happening, and sometimes it feels as though the Wonkavator is out of control,” he said.

“You need to calm yourself down and start from the beginning,” she said, her voice the epitome of gentility. “It’s obvious that you haven’t been getting the rest you need, and I can only hope that you will take some time for yourself when all this is taken care of.”

“I don’t have a lot of time,” he confessed, his voice soft. “I have to call Tina back and I don’t know what I’m supposed to say. I know that she’s in trouble and it all seems to fall back on what the Slugworths are doing to Linda and Molly.”

“Maybe you should now consider getting the police involved,” she said.

“I know you’re right, but it’s not just that,” he hedged.

“You’ve mentioned Linda’s situation to me,” Eliza began. “How are she and the little girl getting along? The last time we really spoke, you had just brought the child to the factory.”

“Yes, and they’re both fine,” Willy said, a small smile covering his face despite the trouble that had come about when he called Tina. “Linda and I…”

 “…You’re in love,” Eliza finished for him.

“Yes, I do love her dearly, Mum. I never thought that something like that would ever happen to me,” he confessed openly.

“I did, after all, chocolate is an aphrodisiac, you eat enough of it then you feel as though you are in love,” she said trying to lighten his mood. “I figured that it would have a positive effect on you sooner or later.”

“No, this is even better than chocolate,” he mused.

“This coming from Willy Wonka,” she said with laughter in her voice. “That’s ironic.”

“Stranger things have happened, Mum,” he mumbled, but after a moment, he took a deep breath. “Could you and Elmsworth do me a favor?”

“We’d do whatever we can for you, I think you know that,” she began. “What is it you need us for?”

“Is there a chance that you could fly with Ingo-Eia to Duselheim and pick up Tina Schröder?”

“Duselheim?” She asked.

“I know it sounds strange, but I don’t want her to be alone, she just lost her brother and like I said a few minutes ago, this all seems to tie back to the Slugworths and the problems Linda has been having with them,” Willy said. “I think we need to bring her to the factory.”

“We’d be happy to help you William, but you are going to have to tell her about the Oompa
Loompas and let her know that one will be piloting the aircraft,” she said. “Should I have something with me to indicate to her that I am a friend?”

“Yes, take one of my candy bars with you,” he said. “I’ll tell her when I call her back that you and Elmsworth will greet her with a candy bar.”

“Alright, then we’ll drive to the Cornwall Airfield and you have him fly to pick us up,” she said. “And William?”

“Yes?”

“I think that you’re starting to realize that you cannot always keep your distance from people. Sometimes the friends you have are there for a reason,” she said.

“But should I be inviting everyone I meet to the factory?” he asked somewhat nervously.

“Everyone who needs you will come and it will always be your suggestion that brings them there. If they were to suggest it, then perhaps they are not really the friends you had in mind.”

“I know you’re right,” he said.

“Of course I am,” she laughed softly. “Now tell me about this girl in Germany.”

Willy took a deep breath. “Tina’s nineteen and her family owns the hotel where Tom stayed when he had tracked the first Golden Ticket. I talked to her after she figured out that Tom wasn’t Slugworth. She confronted him and then he called me and we spoke. Now, it turns out that her brother, Max, was somehow involved with the Slugworths and had sent her a bunch of information about them through the mail.”

“And you called her today, that’s coincidental,” she said.

“Perhaps it is, but I had been pondering how she was doing, and for some reason I just made the decision to call her this morning. Now, I have no idea what I should do.”

“All you can really do is call the police and get them involved,” she said gently.

“I told Tina that she should turn over the contents of the package to the police there. I explained that I wanted to see the letter since Max mentioned me in it,” he said sadly. “They can probably work together with Scotland Yard to uncover what is going on.”

“Then that’s all you can do,” she said rationally. As these words hung lazily in the air, Eliza eventually spoke again, her voice now filling the chocolatier’s ear. “How’s Thomas taking all this?”

“He doesn’t know yet, I just called Tina after I got back here. He had already left for Buckinghamshire and I probably won’t hear anything from him until tonight once he gets there,” he said. “I will tell him what happened as soon as he calls. He knows Tina far better than I do, so this is something that will probably leave an impact on him.”

“Just do what you can to let him know,” she said. “And get some rest, you sound terrible.”

Willy nodded. “I have to talk to Ingo-Eia and call Tina back first, but I am going to lie down in a little while.”

“You do that,” Eliza said. “I do worry about you because I love you like you’re my own son, William.”
“I love you too, Mum,” he said, but once he returned to receiver to the hook he took a deep breath and pulled the small silver flute from his vest pocket and played a short tune on it. He never stopped to contemplate how it was that the Oompa Loompas were able to hear when he played it, but they did, and seconds later, a light tap on the door indicated that Ingo-Eia had arrived.

“Are you up to taking a flight, my friend?” he asked as a greeting.

“Of course, where to this time?” The Oompa Loompa pilot asked, a smile breaking through his otherwise earnest face.

“First to Cornwall to pick up Eliza and Elmsworth, and then to Duselheim, Germany,” Willy said. “I know it is kind of short notice…”

“…I understand, Nunguserak Nanganartok,” the Oompa Loompa said with a smile. “I would be happy to go on a flight,” the shorter man said, his voice indicative that he was quite content with the proposal. “After all, Miss Eliza said that I must fly at least three flights a year to keep my license updated.”

“No, that was her nephew, Alex, who said that,” Willy corrected him.

“Perhaps, but he was right, and I wanted to ask you if I could before the year was out,” he said, but instead of remaining stationary, he started to back his way towards the door. “I’ll retrieve my maps and call Kensington Airfield immediately. Perhaps Alex can come and pick me up.”

“That would be great if he could,” Willy said. “Be careful, my friend.”

“I will,” the Oompa Loompa said just before leaving the office.

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As soon as he was once more alone, Willy picked up the phone and called Tina’s number again. When the line was picked up and her familiar voice said her surname as a greeting, he spoke. “Tina, it’s me; Willy.”

A relieved breath could be heard at the other end of the line. “Hi.”

“Did you call the police like I told you to?” he asked.

“Y-yes, t-they said that they would come and pick up the package,” she said. “I also called Erich, he’s Max’s best friend. H-he said that he would come and keep me company until your friends get here,” she said weakly.

“I’m glad that you won’t be alone,” he said. “Now, this is what is going to happen. One of my workers is a private pilot, and he’s going to borrow a plane and fly Eliza and Elmsworth to where you are.”

“How will I know them when they get here?” she asked.

“My worker has an appearance that sort of sets him apart from everyone else, but Eliza is a gray headed woman, she will greet you with one of my candy bars, and she will be with her boyfriend,” he said.

“I’m afraid,” she whimpered.

“You have nothing to be afraid of. Once you get here, we’ll see what we can do to help you through
all of this. Tina, I will do everything I can to insure that nothing else happens to you.”

“You know, I-I always wanted to come to England,” she whispered.

“I know, and under these circumstances, I can see why you are not exceedingly happy about the trip,” he said.

“Mr. Wonka, I-I don’t know what to say,” she began.

“Well, for starters, you can stop with this ‘Mr. Wonka’ stuff; my name is Willy, or William or even Will, but usually Tom is the only one who calls me that,” he smiled. “It seems only right that we speak on a first name basis since I have always called you ‘Tina’ and not ‘Frau Schröder’.”

Tina laughed softly. “Thank you, Willy.”

“It’s alright,” he smiled when he heard this. “I need to get some rest, it’s been a very trying few days,” he paused before continuing to speak. “I don’t remember if I gave you my number here, but I want you to write it down, keep it in a very safe place, and if you need me for anything, just call, okay?”

“I will,” she whispered but waited for him to give her his number.

Once she had repeated it back to him, he nodded. “Now, I’ll see you very soon, Tina, and don’t worry, everything will be alright.”

Seconds later, he returned the phone and rubbed his face. He was tired, and there was no question remaining. He needed to lie down and get some much needed sleep. Tina would be arriving at the factory by late that evening.

Wordlessly, he pulled his flute out and played another melody. As soon as the Oompa Loompa arrived, he smiled. “Thanks for coming so promptly, Pauli-Rei.”

The mute Oompa Loompa smiled and nodded.

“Would you please ask Halle-Tal if she could help you get the Strawberry Room ready for a guest?” he asked.

Pauli-Rei nodded, but looked at the chocolatier strangely. Willy could instinctively tell that his friend was concerned, so many guests in such a short span of time. “Yes, I know this is quite unexpected, but the young lady in question is a friend of Tom’s.”

Pauli-Rei nodded and smiled as he walked over to the chocolatier and took his hands firmly in his own. He squeezed them and nodded, the sign of true friendship in the Oompa-Loompa’s silent language now understood and Willy smiled.

“Could you tell Rini-May that I will need to sleep until three and not two?” he asked.

Pauli-Rei nodded affirmatively and with that, he left the office and closed the door behind him.

Once Willy was alone, he removed his jacket and hung it on the coat rack. He then placed his hat on the hat stand that was on the shelf above his desk. Next, he went over to the sofa, removed his shoes before stretching out across it. Adjusting the pillows, he stretched out and closed his eyes. Within seconds, the chocolatier had fallen asleep.
Chapter 47

Chapter 47: A Brother’s Love

At about the same time Willy was arranging for Tina to come to the factory, Thomas, unknowingly had left the grounds and was now on the second leg of his journey. It was no secret that he was trying diligently to shrug off the incessant uneasiness that encased him. Now that he was alone, his nervousness seemed to literally swallow him whole.

It had been that way from the moment he got into the car, started the motor, and drove off the factory grounds.

It was nice to be outside again, although he really felt more at home in the factory with his friends as opposed to being out on his own. He liked solitude, but there was something very strange about this extended exposure to it. Without really contemplating this further, he found his thoughts shifting back to Willy.

It was clear to Thomas that Willy was starting to feel himself connecting to Linda. If truth were known, he liked the young woman and he felt that her influence on his best friend was a positive one. Of course, it also helped that Molly was just the most precious child in the world and he, himself, had grown rather fond of the inquisitive little girl.

Thomas did not know when his longstanding friendship with Willy had shifted to that of brotherly love, but over the years, they had done just that. As he drove beyond the city limits his thoughts continued and he contemplated how he would do everything in his power to help the chocolatier if need were to arise.

The road that led to Buckinghamshire seemed rather full at that moment. Drivers were no doubt making the morning commute from the city to the townships where they worked. It seemed as though the highways leading to and from the metropolitan city were filled to capacity.

Above him, the sky was blue and he found himself smiling slightly. He figured that with Willy’s attention to detail, the orders with the chocolate shipments had no doubt already arrived in Buckinghamshire according to schedule. Now, all that he needed to do was to call Linda’s cousin and arrange a meeting point as well as contact Patrick.

It seemed as though this would probably be one of the easier aspects of his journey to the Golden Ticket winners. Of course, he was smart enough to know that sometimes the easiest of things had their way of turning out to be the hardest or the most complicated.

The intercity traffic soon became a distant memory as Thomas found himself reaching the city limit sign. With each breath he took, he could somehow feel a new sort of life filling him.

As he drove, he reflected on what it would be like for him and Willy to just jump into one of the factory’s many cars, and take a drive up the coast together. Thomas thought that to spend that sort of time with Willy would confirm the essence of brotherly love that the two of them shared.

He could not help but recall how people often spoke of how special a friendship was that was shared by two men. They described it as being out of the ordinary and Thomas could not help but agree. He took a deep breath. Once the Golden Tickets were all found, he and Willy would have to make that trip.
As much as he loved the factory, he knew that Willy had been cooped up in there for far too long. In the back of his mind, he wondered if Willy Wonka could devote his time to something else besides just candy making.

His thoughts shifted to Linda and he smiled despite himself. She had proven to be the most perfect distraction for his lonely friend. She had managed to find her way into Willy’s heart, and Thomas couldn’t be happier for both of them. After all, he was thoroughly convinced that Willy would do her and Molly about as much good, as Willy had done him after Simeon’s death.

At that moment, his thoughts shifted and he remembered that the cemetery where Simeon was buried was not too far from Buckinghamshire. Maybe with the traffic being what it was, he could take a quick detour and stop off to visit his brother.

He put on the turn signal and pulled off the highway. Away from there, he drove in the direction of the churchyard. It would not hurt him in the slightest if he were to take some time off to do this. After all, he truly needed some time for himself.

It had been well over a year since Thomas had managed to get away from the hustle and bustle of those everyday things in order to go and take in his brother’s gravesite. It seemed to be the most perfect opportunity for him to stop in for a visit since he was in the area anyway.

After several minutes, he reached a small dirt road that wove its way towards the parking lot that paralleled the cemetery. He stopped, cut the motor, and got out of the car. Locking it, he pocketed the keys and started to walk slowly towards the large gray colored gate that separated the gravesite from the parking lot. He opened the gate, walked through and began to wind his way through the graveyard until he reached the stone that signified where his brother was buried.

He took a deep breath as he stared at the stone. The border of the gravesite was neatly trimmed although Thomas figured that Simeon’s resting place would be consumed with undergrowth and weeds. Someone had come in and taken it upon themselves to maintain the grave and keep it in pristine condition.

He stared at the birth and death dates of his brother and swallowed. He remembered that he was forty-seven when the call came and informed him that Simeon had died. His brother had only been forty-five.

He removed his spectacles and lowered his head. “Hello Simeon,” he spoke to the stillness. Since the grave was at the end of a row, he was able to reach over and rest his hand against the stone. From beneath his touch, he could feel the coolness of it against his bare fingers. “I guess you’re wondering why it is that I’ve taken so long to come back and see you.”

Silence greeted these words, but not caring, he continued to stroke the stone, the gentle wind whistling all around him. “I always seemed to have something else going on as opposed to coming here, slowing down, and saying ‘hello’. You know how I am. I always seem to have more to do and less time to do it in.”

He inhaled the crisp air and noticed that the container where the flowers were kept carried several dead ones inside. He removed them and started to look around for a garbage receptacle. That’s what I forgot, he thought, to bring some flowers. He took a deep breath as he found a garbage can and tossed the dead blossoms into it.

He returned to the grave and found himself staring down at the writing. “It sometimes surprises me when I stop to think that you died seven years ago. To me, it seems as though it all happened yesterday.”
As he stood staring down at the stone, a woman approached and when he heard the crunching of leaves beneath her feet, he turned and regarded her. She looked familiar and after several moments, her name emerged from the recesses of his memory. “Hello, Bethany,” he said, his soft words acting as a greeting to Simeon’s fiancé.

Instead of immediately speaking, she smiled warmly at him. “I didn’t know if you would remember me,” she confessed. “I hadn’t really seen you since the funeral.”

“Seven years is a long time,” Thomas said as he regarded her. The first thing he noticed was that in her hands, she carried a large bouquet of fresh flowers. Most of them were white carnations, which had once been their mother’s favorite. Simeon must have told her about that, he thought as he recognized how these were the flowers that dominated the bouquet.

Wordlessly, she leaned over and carefully placed the flowers in the canister that was placed at the base of the gravesite before straightening out. “You look like you’re doing well.” She motioned towards the parking lot as though indicating the black Mercedes that was parked next to the gate. “I don’t know too many people who drive a car like that who aren’t.”

“It’s not mine,” Thomas said, “I borrowed it.”
She nodded and closed her eyes. “It’s William’s car, isn’t it?” she mused. When he nodded, she continued. “The last time I heard, you were still working for him, although I did actually hear several stories about him firing the workers and withdrawing from society. I pondered periodically what had happened to you since we all knew that your family and his were close.”

“Actually, he never said that I worked for him, instead he always commented on how I worked with him,” Thomas said smiling weakly. “He took me in after…” As his voice drifted off, he motioned towards the grave. “…You know.”
Bethany nodded. “…Yes, I know.” She took a deep breath. “I remember seeing him at the funeral.”

“Did he say anything to you?” Thomas asked.
She shook her head. “No, but he looked at me and I think we both realized that words weren’t really necessary. In hindsight, I don’t think he really knew what to say. He was riding on top of the world, and…mine had just ended.”

“It’s been over seven years since Simeon died,” Thomas said. “You’re still not over it, are you?”
She shook her head. “I don’t suppose I ever will be,” she admitted. “He was my one true love, Tom. Who really gets over that?”

“I’ve never been in love so I don’t really know. I’ve only experienced infatuation and that probably doesn’t even count. I can’t even attest to knowing how you feel, because I really don’t,” he shrugged his shoulders, but reached over and touched her shoulder. “How are the others faring?”

“I don’t really know; I haven’t seen Bernie in well over five years. The last thing I heard about him was that he moved back to Wales and got married. I only hear from him and his family at Christmas. I guess we all just sort of drifted apart,” she said. “What about you? The last thing I heard you were still in London.”
Thomas nodded. “I decided to stay and have been living at the factory.”

“I figured as much,” she said. “No one really spoke of you after you moved there, and everything about you was based on hearsay.” Pausing she began to take in his appearance. “You haven’t
changed very much since Simeon’s funeral.”

“I don’t know if that’s a good or bad thing,” he said honestly, but watched as she turned away. It seemed abundantly clear that Bethany was not happy, but she also looked to be increasingly insecure. “Is there somewhere I can take you?”

“No,” she raised her head and smiled bravely at him. “I came by means of my bicycle and aside from that I don’t live very far away from here. I decided after Simeon died that I would leave the big city life and move back home. This town is where I grew up.”

“You never got married or anything?” he asked.

“No, I got involved in a relationship for a time, but it felt wrong, so I told him the truth and left,” she said. “It’s strange, but everyone I love is buried here. My parents are two rows down from here, and my grandparents are on the other side.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

Bethany looked at him, but shrugged her shoulders dismissively. “It’s okay. I guess I should finish up here and get going. I still have to go to the market.” She paused and looked up at him. “It was really good seeing you again.”

“You too, Bethany,” he smiled. “Maybe we should try and stay in touch.”

“Maybe,” she said, but after several moments of silence, she smiled despite her sadness. “Do you want to know what is rather amusing?”

“What?”

“I thought that maybe today I would cross paths with someone I hadn’t seen in a long time, and here you are,” she said. Instead of speaking, he nodded and smiled gently, but started to walk away. What he didn’t expect was for her to speak again, her words now filling his ears. “Would you do me a favor?”

“What?” he asked.

“Could you give William a message for me when you see him again?” she asked.

“Sure,” he said. “What is it?”

“Just tell him that I really appreciated the Christmas cards and the chocolate he sent,” she said. “I always wanted to respond to him, but I never knew what to say.” After another pause, she continued. “I guess it’s funny, but after all this time, I still don’t. It’s funny because I know that he’s never really forgotten about me.”

“He’s that way, I guess, but if you ever wanted to, you could come to the factory and visit any time. I’m sure Will would be happy to accommodate you,” he said. “We are still family, even if there isn’t a certificate that says so.”

“I never had a brother before,” she confessed with a trace of courage in her voice.

“I never had a sister,” he said and smiled down at his brother’s fiancé. “We orphan siblings have to stick together, don’t we?”

She nodded and wrapped her arms around him. “Thank you for coming here.”
Thomas nodded. “Thank you for being here and for bringing Simeon the flowers. You’ve been far better at honoring his memory than I have.”

Bethany started to walk away, but stopped and turned back to face him. “It was great seeing you again.”

“You too, take care,” he offered. “Maybe we can meet and have dinner or something some time and catch up.”

“That sounds really nice,” she said before walking over to the rack and retrieving her bicycle.

Once she was gone, Thomas looked back down at the grave and stared at the now fresh flowers that Bethany had left. “You had great taste, Simeon. She’s really a very special lady,” he smiled despite the bittersweet sadness that seemed to consume him.

He remained at the grave of his brother for several more minutes before leaving the cemetery and walking back the way he came.

Unbeknownst to him, three people were seated in a beat up tan colored car that was parked not too far away from the graveyard entrance. Their eyes were following each and every movement that Thomas Wilkenson was making.

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Thomas’ thoughts were consumed as he left the cemetery and drove back in the direction of the highway. Sensing that he needed to stop at the service station, he gassed up the car, paid the attendant, and left.

Several kilometers down the road from the station, he began to slow down when he spotted a beige colored car parked along the esplanade of the road. A strange sensation cursed through him, but when he saw the girl trying to flag down drivers, he started to slow down.

As he heard the crunch of gravel beneath the tires of the car, he stopped. Listening to his intuition, he pulled the key from the ignition, got out, locked the car, and pocketed the key.

Approaching, he spotted a girl in a dingy dress and flyaway brown hair. She immediately reminded him of Linda, which was perhaps the reason why he had stopped in the first place. Coming close, he noticed the troubled expression on her face.

Thomas took another deep breath and ignoring the instinct that told him to get back into his car and leave immediately; he came even closer. As he reached the side of the car, he noticed that her boyfriend appeared to be standing and leaning over the open hood as though trying to determine what was wrong with it.

Consumed by memories; Thomas recalled how Simeon had often worked on cars and fiddled with anything that had a motor and could run. He wondered how much assistance he would be able to render, but figured that an attempt was better than nothing at all. Since he had just left the service station, he also concluded that the least he could do would be to drive her there so they could get a tow truck to come and retrieve the car.

“Hello,” he called out to the couple, the girl leaving her perch next to the car and walking towards him. “Is there something the matter?”

“We don’t know,” the girl answered, her voice laced with nervous undertones. “Do you know anything about cars, Mister?”
“Not very much, I’m afraid, what seems to be the problem?” he asked.

“It just cried ‘uncle’ and stopped running,” the young man spoke as he raised his head from his position at the front of the car.Seconds slowly ticked by and the youth backed away with the intention of making room so that Thomas could have a look.

As he came closer, Thomas’ gaze took in the smoke that was rising up from under the hood. He then leaned over in order to get a better look.

Without any warning, a painful blow hit him from behind. The last thing he saw before everything went back was the face of the little boy who was sitting in the back seat of the couple’s car.
Chapter 48

Chapter 48: Ensnared

When Thomas opened his eyes once again, he could hear the sounds of one of his assailants furiously yelling at the other. Although they were standing several meters away from where he was lying on the ground, each word could be deciphered. The boy’s voice was filled with about ten times more hostility than even the famed chocolatier was capable of serving up.

Instead of pondering what was happening with the two kids, he painfully moved his head only slightly so that he could see how the older boy was trying to jimmy the lock on his car. His gaze returned to his present location, but he could make out nothing, not even the small boy he had seen just before passing out.

His concentration was abruptly shattered when the boy was left with no other alternative but admitting defeat in the form of swear words and kicking the ground with the toe of his worn-out tennis shoes. For whatever reason, the youth did not seem keen on bringing harm to his car, and Thomas guessed that it was because they intended on selling it and pocketing the profit. Basically, this entire fiasco had been nothing more than a set-up and he had fallen for it; hook, line, and sinker.

It seemed apparent that this young couple had no interest in him or his plight whatsoever; they just wanted the car. This caused a trace of relief to briefly cross his face. Of course said thing would be short-lived. If the two of them could not break into the car, they would no doubt take out their frustrations on him.

Swallowing, Thomas resigned himself to trying to remain on the uncomfortable ground without moving. He could tell from the feel beneath his hands that he was lying on the graveled border of the street. The beige car was nearby, thus indicative that he had not been moved since his assault.

His head was still throbbing, which proved difficult in his trying to remain still. His fists unconsciously clenched as rage began to build up inside of him. No matter what the rationale for this act was, he knew that it was wrong. He had come too far in his life to go down a victim of a hot-headed teenager.

Of course, he was relieved that the car had proven to be less an easy target than he had been. Deep down inside, and contrary to what may happen to him, he hoped that the lock would not give way. After all, that car did have the means in which to access Willy Wonka’s factory in London, and in the hands of these kids, who knows what could happen? It had been force of habit, mixed with a strange foreboding that convinced him to lock the car in the first place.

Although his head felt as though it was about to explode, he was glad that he had listened to his conscience in that regard. Shifting his weight slightly, he started to listen as his two assailants continued to argue, their voices reaching a fevered pitch.

Shifting back into his initial stance, Thomas continued to watch them through heavily lidded eyes. Although he was conscious, he was monumentally dizzy from the blow he had sustained. If he had gotten up and tried to get away from them, he knew that in this state, he would not have gotten far.

As he continued to listen, he concluded that the girl did not seem to be all that dangerous, but the boy had a temperament that bordered on violent. In the back of his mind, Thomas could not help but wonder if Bethany was still in the area or if she had seen what had happened. One thing was blatantly clear, neither of them knew that he was awake and he intended to keep it that way until the
“Damn it,” the boy grumbled as Thomas listened as the door handle of the car was being pulled up several times. “Of all the rotten luck; the old buzzard must have locked it when he got out.”

“What about the window?” the girl asked innocently.

“Don’t be stupid,” the boy snapped. “If a repair shop had the likes of us coming into their establishment with a fancy Mercedes, they might get suspicious and investigate where the car initially came from.” As the boy spoke, he cast a glance in the direction of where Thomas was lying on the ground.

*Keep talking,* Thomas practically willed his dark headed assailant. The longer they stood around swearing and yelling, the better his chances would be of getting out of this situation in one piece. As of that moment, it looked as though help would not be there soon, as they were conveniently in the middle of nowhere. These kids were obviously quite good at conning people with some sort of sympathy angle. The use of the girl had been rather effective in that regard.

Thomas was in pain, his head hurt, but he willed himself not to touch the back of his head. The pain was excruciating, and he hoped that the blow did not break the skin. He had no idea what was going to happen next, but given the exasperation that encased the ill-tempered boy, he could only imagine.

Notwithstanding, the question that seemed to ravage his mind was centered on the child he had seen just before passing out. Who was the little boy? Did he have something to do with this con-job that he had been unwillingly brought into? The child had looked terrified, but he had not said anything at all. In fact, his eyes had been the size of saucers and his mouth curved into the shape of a small circle as his gaze had locked with Thomas’.

“You have to get the key from him,” the boy’s words emerged as he started to walk over towards the other car. Thomas could detect that the gravel beneath the boy’s feet was crunching as well as getting louder with each step until he felt the tip of the youth’s tennis shoe nudging his side roughly.

Trying to keep from cringing, Thomas listened as the boy turned and spoke to the girl. “Didn’t you hear me, Stacey? I need your help.”

“Why me?” she asked.

“That’s your part of the action,” the boy said curtly. “I was certain that he was going to leave the car unlocked like all those other naïve suckers did.”

“I guess he’s not as naïve as you thought,” the girl said. “Think about it, Wayne, if you were driving around in such a fancy car, would you risk losing it to stop and help two strangers?”

“Well, then it looks like you’re just going to have to find the keys so we can get the hell out of here,” Wayne sneered. “You know our old jalopy can’t outrun the fuzz.”

“What are you suggesting; that I strip search the guy?” the girl asked hotly.

“Do what you have to do, I want that car,” Wayne said matter-of-factly.

“Then you’ll have to do it, because I want no part of this. It’s icky and I don’t care if you beat the crap out of me for it,” she said.

As he listened to her speaking; Thomas started to wonder if the girl had at least some semblance of a conscience left. She seemed to be opinionated enough to go against what her friend was proposing,
but at what cost?

Before he could continue contemplating the situation, the girl continued speaking. “It’s bad enough that you knocked the poor guy out. Let’s just get out of here before someone happens by.”

“You are such a bloody coward, probably the biggest one I’ve ever seen,” Wayne said, his anger evident. “If you won’t try and get to the keys, then I will and I don’t care what happens to this guy. The fact is; we could make a killing on a car like this.”

“If that’s the case then where’s my half from all those other times?” she asked. “You know that I need the money for Matty’s treatment.”

“All in good time, baby, all in good time,” Wayne shot back. “For now, we have to get his wheels.” He crouched down next to where Thomas lay on the ground and started feeling the pockets of his trench coat for the keys. When, for some reason he could not find them, he started to kick Thomas’ body so that it would roll over until he would be lying on his back.

“Stop it, Wayne,” she eventually found her voice. “If you keep doing this, you could prolong his suffering and he might die. You know what happened to that last lady. I will not have anymore blood on my hands.”

“You know what’s going to happen if we don’t get the keys, though, don’t you? Your sweet little Matty is going to die and it will be your fault,” Wayne hissed. Without speaking further, he got up and waited for the girl to sit down beside Thomas. As he felt the breeze of her movements, he suddenly felt her hands groping his pockets for the keys.

For his part, Thomas allowed his head to slowly shift so that it rested on one side. From there, he could see that she was leaning over him, her scraggily brown hair brushing against his shoulder. “I’m sorry, Mister, this wasn’t supposed to happen this way.”

“Hey, stupid he can’t hear you, and besides he’s probably got three other cars like this one at home. He won’t even miss it,” Wayne said. “Now get the damn keys and stop pretending you actually have a conscience.”

Right at that moment, an abrupt siren pierced the air, and Thomas could feel his heartbeat quickening. He remained still, but because his head was now turned, he slowly opened his eyes and could hear as well as see the approaching vehicles. A relieved look crossed his face as help seemed to be coming closer.

Seconds passed and Thomas could suddenly hear the sounds of plodding footsteps and he guessed that the boy had taken off running. The bushes were shifted as the sounds dissipated in the distance.

At that very same instant, the girl must have noticed that her accomplice was running away. She withdrew her hands and started to get to her feet in order to follow her fleeing boyfriend into the underbrush.

Although he could not see what was specifically happening, Thomas knew that the boy had no doubt gotten away. If he did not act fast, then his accomplice would as well and right now Thomas was angry at them both. There were questions that had not been answered, his sledgehammer headache was their doing and he was not about to play the passive victim at this point.

Without so much as a thought, Thomas impulsively reached out and grabbed the girl’s ankle in a vice-like grip as she was starting to get to her feet.

“Not this time, young lady,” he said, his voice emerging much harsher than he intended. He opened
his eyes fully and watched as the girl was tripped up, her body falling to the ground a scream
emerged from her. A feeling of victory came over him, but he did not pause to enjoy it. Instead, he
regarded how she lay on the ground like a freshly felled tree.

At that moment, it seemed to dawn on her that she was not going to get away. Thomas watched as
fear washed over her, the voice that suddenly filled the air made him almost smile in spite of himself.

“Oh my God, you’re awake,” the girl cried as the police sirens were getting louder and indicating
that they were getting closer.

“So it would seem,” Thomas said, his voice never losing its firmness.

“Let me go, please.” She continued to pull on her foot, but Thomas’ grip only tightened. “I’ll do
anything.”

“That seems to be what you are very good at doing, ‘anything’. Breaking laws and sacrificing
yourself for the sake of someone who abuses you like this Wayne character was doing,” he said with
a shake of his head. “You allow that boy to force you to take part in such a charade, all the while
trying to discover if you even have a conscience. How many more deviant acts can people convince
you to take part in?”

“You don’t understand,” she whispered, her voice still frantic and the more she struggled the tighter
his hold became. “You’re just some rich guy who can do anything you want. You have no idea how
the other half lives.”

“Perhaps I don’t, but I am one person who will not let you run away from the consequences of your
thievery,” he said matter-of-factly. “You need help.”

“No I don’t,” she managed to speak, her struggles continuing, and Thomas knew that any moment
his energy was going to give out and she would squirm her way out of his hold. The question that
remained was would it happen before or after the police arrived on the scene? If it happened before,
then Wayne would not be the only person they would be chasing after.

“Who’s the little boy?” Thomas asked.

“What boy?” she managed.

“Don’t play dumb, Stacey, you know perfectly well what boy I am referring to,” he said firmly.
“There is a child in the backseat of your car. Tell me who he is.”

Defeated, the girl raised her head and cast a weary glance in the direction of the car. “He’s my
brother, Matthew. What’s it to you anyway? I’m taking care of him just fine.”

“If you’re teaching him how to be a criminal, then I would say you are doing just fine at that, but this
way of life is not going to help anyone, not him and most certainly not you,” he said and closed his
eyes. “Why did you do this to me? I thought you were in trouble and needed help, and then what
happens? You turn around and assault me.”

“I-I didn’t,” she argued. “I-I couldn’t.”

“But you did…” he said, his grip still holding tightly to the girl’s ankle. At least she had stopped
struggling and soon the police would be there and take her into custody. As he heard them get out of
the car and rush towards them, he released his hold on her ankle as one of the officers on the scene
stared down at him.
“You Okay, Mister?” one of them asked.

Before he could answer, he closed his eyes. He was tired, so tired, and now the world was spinning out of control. He no longer cared that Stacey’s brother had gotten out of the car and was running away or what Stacey’s excuses were, he just wanted to sleep. Seconds later, that was just what he did.

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The next time Thomas opened his eyes, he could feel a large bump forming on the back of his head where he had been hit. Thankfully, the skin was not broken, but the bump on his head was bad enough. At that moment, his vision was somewhat blurry, but otherwise he was alright.

The realization came rather quickly that he was no longer on the road, but instead lying on something much softer and more comfortable than the ground. He wearily opened his eyes, all the while trying to make heads or tails of where specifically he was.

As he began to focus, he could make out that he was in a room that seemed to be painted white. Covering him was a matching sheet and blanket. Where am I? He asked himself, as he tried to sit up. What happened after that was he felt someone’s hand resting against his shoulders and forcing him to lie still. At that moment, Thomas’ confusion mounted and he allowed his eyes to fully open.

Above his head, he could make out a light fixture that illuminated along the wall. Instead of focusing on it, he cast a quick glance to the left and right. To his right, a window was visible, the trees from a garden and a parking lot his only view. To his left, the person who had insisted that he remain lying down was seated. The man looked to be a few years his senior, but nothing emerged from him; instead he seemed to be waiting for Thomas to get his wits about him before speaking.

Thomas began to rub his eyes only to recognize a plastic armband that encircled his right wrist. This confirmed for him that he was now a patient in the hospital and no longer in any physical danger.

A relieved sigh emerged from him as he turned back to face the man in the white lab coat. The name Dr. A. Henderson was stenciled across the front pocket of the coat in blue. A clipboard was resting on his lap, but instead of immediately speaking, he flipped up the file and pulled the lid off a ballpoint pen.

“Mr. Wilkenson?” the man spoke leaving him to ponder where or how he had managed to find out his name. Thomas wearily nodded, all the while wondering if he even had his voice, or at the very least, if he was actually capable of using it.

“I’m Dr. Alfred Henderson, I’m the physician assigned to your case,” he explained.

“My case, I don’t understand,” Thomas said wearily.

“Yes and I must say that you’re one lucky man. What happened to you this morning could have been a lot worse than it was,” the doctor began. “You were found by the police after a lady called the emergency number from the service station out on Mills Road. She said that she had spoken with you before you had gotten assaulted. We found your name in your wallet when you were brought in. How are you feeling?”

“I guess I’m alright, notwithstanding a sledgehammer headache,” Thomas moaned.

“I’m afraid that’s normal in a circumstance of this kind,” the doctor responded.
“What exactly happened to me? The last thing I remember was talking to this girl out on the road, I heard the sirens, and then was out like a light.”

“I’m afraid you are the latest victim of the ‘Madison twins’, Mr. Wilkenson,” the doctor explained.

“I don’t understand,” Thomas moaned. “I’m not from around here; I was on my way to Buckinghamshire from London.”

“I’m afraid I cannot tell you very much about what happened to you while you were out there but I can affirm that this sort of situation has been going on for a number of months now. What specifically happened is something that only two, or perhaps three, other people might actually be able to shed some light on,” he said.

“Did they catch the boy?” Thomas asked. “The girl called him ‘Wayne’.”

“No, but thanks to your quick thinking, they did get the girl,” the doctor said. “It would seem that her little brother is one of the patients in our burn unit and now we’re going to have to see what will happen to both of them since she’s been taking care of him and is under the age of eighteen.”

“She said something about trying to get money for his treatment,” Thomas said. “But, I don’t know much besides that.”

“I cannot tell you anything as I am not the boy’s doctor. I can tell you that the police brought him back after you were attacked. He’s going to be released into foster care once we are able to get his condition stabilized.”

“Stabilized?” Thomas asked. “Where is he?”

“He’s upstairs. I hear the morning’s events took a great deal out of him, but he should be fine,” came the quick answer. “From what I understand, the child tried to run away after his sister was taken into custody, but he was not able to get away and the police brought him here.”

“What about me?” Thomas asked.

“Slight concussion,” he said after consulting the clipboard. “I’m guessing that they figured you for an easy caper.”

“An easy caper?” Thomas asked. “What kinds of things are happening around here?”

“These kids have been playing games with people for a number of months now. They use the girl to play on people’s sympathies and when some good meaning person stops to help; they knock them out, and steal their car. There are a number of groups who do buy stolen cars and a number of people who have been assaulted have lost not only their health, but also their vehicles in these sorts of con jobs.”

“And they thought that they could get by with me, right?” Thomas asked.

“Apparently, their easy getaway turned out to be not quite so easy. Anyway, once the police had arrived, they contacted an ambulance and had you transported here. If you have any questions about the investigation, then you can ask them later. I told them to check back sometime this evening to see if you were awake and then they could take your statement.”

Thomas looked down at the hospital shift that he now wearing and took a deep breath. “Dr. Henderson, where are my things?”
“My guess is they are still in your car and that was towed to the police station,” the doctor explained.
“That’s not too far from here, in fact, you could walk there in the morning and pick it up. If you would allow me to, I can take the key to the police and they can bring your belongings when they come later. I take it you do intend to press charges against the girl and her friend?” he asked.

Thomas nodded, “of course.”

“Good,” the doctor said with an approving nod. His gaze shifted and he began to consult the clipboard once again. “Alright, as for your physical state, what I can tell you is as follows. During the assault, you sustained a minor concussion, but thankfully nothing was broken. This is quite surprising because the last case that we had, the woman sustained more serious injuries and is still in a coma.”

“Well, my brother always said that I had a hard head,” Thomas mused. “That was why I had gone out there in the first place, to see my brother. He’s buried at the Shady Meadows Cemetery.”

“Yes, well as I said earlier, you’re very lucky that it wasn’t more than just a concussion. I will be recommending that you stay the night for observation and I will prescribe you some pain medication in case you get more serious headaches in the days and weeks to come. A lot of patients do tend to get migraines after hitting their head, so you can take them as needed. You should refrain from eating solids for about twenty-four hours. It would be advisable for you to only take liquids like gelatin, bullion, and tea for at least three days. If you want something solid, then crackers are a good thing to have around.”

Thomas nodded. “That won’t be too difficult since the thought of eating anything solid right now makes me feel rather sick to my stomach. I probably wouldn’t be able to keep anything down anyway.”

“That should eventually pass, but if it doesn’t after you are released, then I would recommend you notifying your family physician,” the doctor instructed. “While you were out and given the circumstances in which you were found, we ran some tests and you seem to be fine otherwise. Right now, you just need to get some rest. If you have no objections, then I will sign your release form tomorrow morning first thing.”

“I was supposed to stay at a bed and breakfast tonight, I had a reservation there,” he said.

“Give me the number and I’ll have someone call them to cancel for you,” he said.

“The number is on a card in my wallet,” he said.

“We’ll get everything taken care of,” he said. “Is there anything else you might need while you’re here?”

“Well, actually, you keep saying here, but I don’t know where ‘here’ is,” Thomas said.

“You’re at Buckinghamshire General Hospital,” the doctor said. “If you want to contact your family, there’s the phone next to your bed.”

“Thank you, Doctor Henderson,” Thomas said, and watched as the doctor walked over to the door.

Before leaving the room, he stopped before turning back around. With his hand, he pointed to a red button that was next to the bed. “If you need anything, just press the call button and a nurse will tend to you.”

Thomas nodded and waited until the doctor had left before picking up the phone and dialing the
number that patched him through to Willy’s office.
Chapter 49: The Phone Call

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy awoke to the sounds of the telephone ringing in the distance. He slowly crawled off the sofa and rubbed his face before making his way over to take the call. Still feeling rather worn out, he picked up the receiver, nearly dropping it, before bringing it to his ear.

“Hullo?” his voice emerged. He figured that it sounded about as close to death being warmed over without actually confessing to being dead.

“Will?” the voice emerged from the other end of the line, loomed in an even more tired sounding greeting.

Willy immediately recognized the caller to be Thomas, but he was somewhat confused by the cadence of his best friend’s voice. The older of the two men sounded about as bad as the chocolatier, himself, felt.

“Yes?” he mumbled.

“It’s Tom.”

Willy swallowed. “I know, but you sound like I feel.” Before he could continue speaking, he began to rub the tiredness out of his face with one hand, while the other kept the strangely shaped half receiver pressed against his left ear. “What happened?” he asked after several seconds of silence passed between them. He allowed his body to practically fall into the half chair that was in front of the desk. As soon as he was comfortable, the fingers of his free hand began to drum nervously against the wooden surface until Thomas’s voice once more emerged.

“I guess I sound bad because I feel rather bad,” the elder of the two said. “I’m in Buckinghamshire, Will, but on my way here, I was assaulted and am now in the hospital.”

“The hospital?” Willy asked, the shock now shadowing his handsome features. “What exactly happened to you?”

“I can’t really say for certain, because everything seems sort of hazy at the moment,” Thomas began.

Willy listened, but it seemed almost apparent that he would ultimately have to coerce the story out his friend. “Just tell me what you can,” Willy said as he stopped his drumming and began to wind the telephone cord around his free hand.

“I stopped off to visit Simeon and ran into his fiancée, Bethany. After I spoke to her for a while, I left the cemetery drove a couple of kilometers, gassed up the car, and started to drive in the direction of Buckinghamshire. It happened on one of the country roads leading away from the cemetery. I spotted these two kids on the road, a boy and a girl. They appeared as though they were having car trouble. Against my better judgment, I stopped in order to offer my assistance. Well, the long and short of it is that action left me easy prey.”

“Let me guess, they pretended to need help, but really didn’t,” Willy said.

“Yeah, and after one of them knocked me out, they tried to make off with the car; but didn’t succeed.
I had locked it and had the keys on me the whole time. Anyway, Dr. Henderson said that the car is now parked at the police station. One of the two kids, the girl, was arrested.

“What’s the name of the hospital you’re at?” Willy asked as he groped around his desk for a piece of paper and pen. Finding a long, skinny pad on one corner, he ripped off the top page and waited for his friend to respond.

“Buckinghamshire General,” Thomas said. “The doctor said that he wanted me to stay the night as a precautionary measure. I think the terminology he used was I was to be placed under observation. Sounds lovely, does it not?”

Willy smirked. Leave it to Tom to say something like that, he thought. After a moment, his smile vanished, and he spoke; his voice laced with concern. “So can you at least tell me what exactly happened?”

“I don’t remember very much at all, Will. That’s just it. I was sort of in a daze when I left the cemetery. I guess you could say that I had a lot on my mind. Bethany asked me to thank you for the chocolate and for remembering her at Christmas. I think in hindsight, she probably saw what happened and notified the police.”

“How do you figure?”

“She was the only person I had actually seen on that road, well, besides the kids that is,” he said.

“Well, when you see her again, tell her it was my pleasure, but do ask her if she was the one who helped you,” Willy said. “If she was, then we owe her a great deal it seems.”

“I’ll be sure to ask her.”

“What did the doctor say about your condition?” the chocolatier asked. Deep down inside, he was completely horrified that such a thing could even happen. Of course, given the blows that they had received from the Slugworths, it was almost a surprise to him that this particular incident did not have that family written all over it.

Instead of pondering this further, Thomas’ voice suddenly brought him back to the present. “The most obvious thing is that now I have a knot on the back of my head. The doctor said that I was pretty lucky that it didn’t turn out to be far more than that. I’m supposed to file a report with the police later today, but they probably won’t have very much to go on except that I managed to grab the girl’s foot and trip her up before she could get away.”

“Why would someone do something like this?” Willy asked.

“No idea, but it sounds to me like they did it because the girl needs help for her brother. From what I was able to piece together, desperate times call for desperate measures. I think the girl needs money and this is the only way she thinks she can get it. From what I was able to pick up when I overheard them arguing was that she had not seen any of the money at all. The boy was holding all the cards and this girl is rather like his marionette…” Abruptly, he stopped speaking, the sounds of his yawning abruptly filled Willy’s ear. “…Sorry.”

“No problem, Tom,” Willy said, but it was clear that his friend was exhausted, perhaps more so than when he had placed the initial call. “You probably should get some sleep, though.” Instead of speaking further, he began to run his hand through his tousled hair. As he lowered his hand, his appearance looked rather like that of a mad scientist.

“Okay,” Thomas said. “Just so you know, the doctor said that tomorrow I can get out of here and
take care of everything as we had planned.”

“That’s good to know, but all the same, I’m going to drive up,” Willy said with surprising conviction in his voice. He was not at all certain as to why he was proposing this idea in the first place; but his concern for Thomas overrode everything else. Instead of going into further detail, he took a deep breath and waited for Thomas to respond.

“You can’t do that, it’s not safe for you,” he objected, his voice much louder than even he intended. “You’ll be driving straight into the hornets’ nest. You do remember the Slugworths are from this area, don’t you?”

“I know that, Tom, but for me to sit around here wondering how you’re doing is not something I really want to do,” Willy said. “If I leave in the next half hour I should be there before rush hour starts. Besides, wasn’t it always you who said a nice drive in the country would do me a world of good?”

“You’re twisting my words and I really hate it when you do that,” Thomas grumbled.

“I know, why else do you suppose I do it so much?” Willy smirked despite the concern that he carried. After a moment of silence passed between them, he continued. “Listen, I’m only coming up to see you and then I’ll be driving straight back to the factory. Besides, there’s something else that I really need to discuss with you and I’m not sure if the phone is the best place to do that.”

“What is it?” Thomas asked.

“It’s about your friend, Tina,” he said.

“Tina?”

“Tom, does the name Tina Schröder ring a bell?” Willy asked.

“You mean the girl from the hotel that you talked to when I was in Duselheim?” Thomas’ words emerged much softer than he probably intended. “What about her?”

“She’s not doing well and it would seem that she’s in some kind of trouble,” Willy began. “I called her this morning and asked how she was doing since the Golden Ticket was found. She initially sounded very suspicious.”

“She was that way when I met her, too. It would seem as though that’s really nothing new with her,” Thomas said.

“Well, after I was able to prove to her that I was who I said I was, I found out why she was so afraid. Soon after speaking with her, I had to arrange for Eliza and Elmsworth to go there and pick her up. As we speak, they are probably on their way back here.”

“How can they just pick her up if she’s in Germany?”

“Ingo-Eia is flying them over; he left this morning at around eleven to fly to Cornwall to pick them up. Then they would fly to Duselheim,” he said. “She should be here by tonight, and I’m guessing that they will probably be arriving after I get back.”

“What if they get back sooner?” Thomas asked. “If she’s as upset as you say then it would be best for you to stay there. If Tina arrives and you’re not present, then she may not handle it very well.”

“No, I’m coming. I figure if they get here earlier than I am anticipating, I can give Linda a key and so
she can let them in and show her to her room. Ingo-Eia has a key as well, but I am not sure how she will react to the Oompa Loompas.”

“Why are you doing all of this?” Thomas asked. “I mean; it would be easier if you stayed there, wouldn’t it?”

“Maybe, but you’re my best friend,” Willy said. “If Eliza knew about this, what do you think she’d say?”

“She’d expect you to be here, but Will, I’m not Eliza. I know that you have other responsibilities and obligations, one of which is Tina,” Thomas said rationally. “What are you going to do about her?”

“I’ll be back in time,” Willy said confidently.

“What makes you so sure of that?” Thomas asked. “This was supposed to be an easy task, and now I’m in the hospital. I mean; what if something happens to you and the whole thing busts wide open? What if the Slugworths catch wind of this?”

“They won’t, and before you ask, Linda and Molly will not be leaving the factory at all. I know that Linda will have a fit when I tell I’m going, but don’t worry, I can handle it,” he said.

“Alright, since I obviously can’t talk any sense into you about this, do be careful,” emerged the response. “Will, what should we do about the Golden Tickets?”

“Let it play out as it will,” Willy said. “If it happens that we cannot get you to the places where the tickets are to be found, then the finders will just have to undergo the test here at the factory.”

“At least here it shouldn’t be a problem since I’m getting out tomorrow,” Thomas said. “That’s why I am still not sure why it is you want to come here in the first place.”

“You’re my friend, Tom, and I haven’t very many of those,” Willy said earnestly.

As these words loomed in the air, Willy waited for several minutes for Thomas’ response. When it emerged, it was filled with resignation. “Alright, you win,” he paused. “You know, at times like this, you’re probably the most stubborn person on the planet.”

“I know, but that’s what makes me so endearing, right?” Willy asked smugly.

“You’re impossible, Will.”

The chocolatier’s smirk did not leave his face, in fact, it melted away and he found himself chuckling. When his laughter ceased, he spoke. “I should be there by five. I’ll let Linda know what has happened.”

“Whatever you do, keep your word and don’t bring them here, that could prove fatal,” Thomas said. “You know we are going to be playing hopscotch in the Slugworths’ backyard.”

“I know,” he said in an exhalation of breath. “They will be alright as long as I leave them in Omaya-Kal’s capable hands. Molly seems to like him quite a bit, and Linda is starting to get to know other members of his family. After Molly’s nightmares last night, it would seem that he has finally won Linda over.”

“Just be careful, Will,” Thomas said, his exhaustion now showing. “You know I really don’t like this.”
“I know,” Willy said with his typical panache. “Don’t worry Tom, I’ll be fine.”

“Then I guess I’ll see you when you get here, don’t stop for anyone on the way like I did,” Thomas said, but at this point, his energy was completely spent.

Willy listened as the line went dead and he returned the phone to the cradle.
Chapter 50

Chapter 50: Willy’s Determination

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As soon as he had finished with his phone call, Willy took a deep breath before pulling the drawer to his desk open and retrieving a leather pouch. This was full of money, which he rarely carried. In fact, the last time he had the pouch on his person was just after his trip to New Zealand.

He placed the object in the pocket of his jacket and inhaled sharply as someone tapped lightly on the door and he walked over to open it.

Standing on the other side was Rini-May and Linda. They had come to wake him, as it was now three in the afternoon. “You’re awake, that means we can return to the village,” the Oompa Loompa said smiling up at him.

Willy nodded, but his gaze immediately shifted until he was left looking at Linda. “Actually, not just yet,” he said as he looked from one of them to the other. “I need to talk to Linda about something rather important. Would you mind leaving us, Rini-May?”

“No at all,” she said as she turned towards Linda, the smile never leaving her face. “I’ll see you later, Linda.” Once the woman had nodded, the Oompa Loompa approached the chocolatier and rested a gloved hand against Willy’s arm.

He looked down at her and smiled weakly as she exerted a gentle squeeze on it before releasing the hold and backing her way towards the door.

Once she had left the office, Linda came completely into the room and gently closed the door behind her. She began to rub her hands together, but looked up at him. “They really do care about you, Willy,” she said. “After spending time with them, I have come to realize that they see you as a sort of extension of their own family.”

He nodded but instead of speaking, he tried to conceal the overwhelming worry that consumed him. Of course, his thoughts seemed to be giving him away completely.

When nothing further was said, she glanced over towards the sofa where the chocolatier had opted to taking his nap. The pillows were flat and the small afghan was spread out across it, the edges hanging over the side and dragging against the floor. This seemed to affirm to her that he had gotten some rest, but her next question emerged nonetheless, her inquiry breaking into the silence that consumed them.

“Did you at least get some rest?” she asked as she rested her hand against his. When he nodded, she continued speaking. “I’ve been worried about you.”

“What for?” he asked his eyebrows arching somewhat ironically. “Linda, as you can see, I’m quite alright.”

“No you’re not,” she shook her head. “Your overconfidence is showing again and you’re acting the same as you did when we were in the Sunset Room.” She lowered her hand, but her eyes remained locked on his, her next words somehow breaking through his resolve. “Please, trust me enough to tell me what’s going on. I mean; when you opened the door just now, you looked as though you were afraid of something, and now you’re trying to hide it from me.”
The chocolatier took a deep breath and releasing it slowly he offered her a slow nod. He reached over and touched one side of her face, his fingers lightly tracing over the contours of her cheeks. Finally, he brushed her long brown hair away from her eyes. Lowering his hand after a moment, his soft words emerged as more or less a sigh. “It’s very uncanny, how quickly you’ve been able to see through me.”

“I just know when something is wrong,” she said as she covered his hand with her own. After squeezing it, she backed slowly away, the contact now broken. “I guess I could sort of sense it,” she mumbled as she self-consciously closed her eyes.

“Then that means that I cannot hide anything from you. What you see is what you get, is that it?” he asked his voice resigned.

Linda shrugged her shoulders but watched as his hand gently took hers. “I guess,” she whispered as he led her over to the sofa.

Once they had reached it, he lowered himself onto soft cushions and waited as she seated herself next to him. Once she was comfortable, she leaned over so that her head could rest gently against his side. In response to this, he wrapped a reassuring arm around her shoulder.

“Just tell me what’s wrong,” she whispered. “I can handle it, you said yourself that I’m not as weak as I look. If you really believe those words, then let the proof be in the pudding.”

“Interesting analogy,” he mused, but turned away, his gaze drifting.

After several moments of silence passed between them, he sat staring across the room at the half desk that was up against the other wall. He exhaled slowly as he turned and looked at her. “There are two things that I must tell you.”

“What?” she asked, her simple inquiry encouraging him to come clean.

“Something happened to Tom while he was on his way to Buckinghamshire,” Willy said, his words simple, but the fear in his blue eyes unmistakable.

“An accident?” she raised her head and looked at him. Upon seeing the shadow that lined his face, her own lost much of its color.

“No, Linda, it was something else,” Willy said softly. “Right before you and Rini-May arrived Tom had called me from the hospital. It seems he was assaulted and nearly robbed this morning. He’s expected to make a full recovery, but he has still suffered a minor concussion as a result. The doctor wants to keep him there overnight for observation.”

“He’s going to be alright, isn’t he?” she asked.

“He should be,” Willy said, but after a second, a characteristic smirk replaced the worry that lined his face. “You know, his brother, Simeon, always said he had a hard head. This must prove it beyond any shadow of a doubt.”

Linda swallowed, but pulled away from him. “This is not a time for making jokes, Willy,” she scolded, her voice weak. “I know you’re just trying to make light of the situation, but it’s not going to work with me this time. Tom’s our friend and…”

“…I know,” Willy interrupted her flow of words. “I was just remembering something from when we were kids. After they had a fight, Simeon came and told me that Tom could give stubborn lessons to a mule.”
Linda lowered her head. “Maybe he could, I remember how determined he was to protect Molly and me when we were in Füssen.”

“You know that he wouldn’t have done it any other way.” He paused before taking a deep breath and continuing. “That’s why I’ve decided that I’m going to leave the factory and go see how he’s doing,” Willy said firmly. “Now, before you tell me that I’m crazy for wanting to do this, you have to understand that Tom and I have been through everything together. He’s like the brother I never had.”

“Y-you’re really going to leave?” she whispered, this time the fear inched its way into her eyes and she bit down on her lip.

Upon hearing these words emerging from her, Willy nodded slowly. He could tell that she was frightened, and he knew of the uncertainties that were connected to the prospect of her not having him nearby. It seemed ironic, but Linda was now reacting to his news in the very same manner as her daughter had done when it was proposed that Molly spend the day with Omaya-Kal and his family.

The chocolatier took a deep breath and looked away, the fright in Linda’s face practically tearing him to bits. She did not say a word; instead she simply sat there, her eyes wide and her body beginning to unconsciously tremble.

Trying to collect his thoughts, Willy once more pulled the woman into his arms, his eyes staring down into her face. “It won’t be for very long, just until tonight. Linda, I have to find out what happened to Tom after he left today.”

“Why?” she whispered brokenly as she leaned into his embrace.

“It’s like I said, he’s my best friend and part of my family,” Willy responded. “I have to do this.”

“Does this have anything to do with Owen?” she asked weakly.

“This time, thankfully not,” Willy said with a sigh of relief. “Tom was assaulted when he left the cemetery where his brother is buried. He said it was a couple of kids who did this, and based on what he conveyed, they seemed to be hard up for money.”

“Is it safe for you to go?” she whispered.

“It should be as long as I stay low profile,” he said as he brushed the back of his hand along her cheek. “I know all about how to go about doing that. I pretty much did it when I went to New Zealand on holiday. I’m not as much a recluse as you may have heard, my dearest.”

“I’m still scared for you,” she confessed.

Willy nodded as he released his hold on her. “I can tell; I seem to read you rather well, too.” Before he continued speaking, he got to his feet, walked over to the desk, and opened one of the drawers. He began to dig around inside until he retrieved what looked to be a set of keys. “While I’m gone, I’m going to need your help with something.”

“What?” she whispered as he returned to her side and sat down next to her. Instead of immediately speaking, he began to fiddle about with the strangely shaped object before pressing it into her hand. “What is this?” she asked, her voice etched in confusion as she regarded him.

“It’s a key to the factory,” Willy said. “And before you ask me if you are worthy of my trust; I will tell you that you are, perhaps more so than you presently believe. I trust you with far more than just a key to my life’s work; you hold the key to my heart as well.”
Linda looked down at the keys, the tears catching in her eyes. “You don’t know how much that means to me.”

“I think I do,” he said, smiling gently at her. “There’s a reason for my giving this to you now, and not at some other time. I may need you to let Eliza and her friend, Elmsworth, inside when they arrive here with Tina,” he said.

“Who’s Tina?” she asked.

“She’s a teenage girl from Germany,” he began. “Tom met her when he had gone to Duselheim last week. I called to see how she was doing when I should have been sleeping earlier today. She told me that her brother, Max killed himself.”

“Suicide?” Linda whispered.

“It would seem, and right now she’s in need of a great deal of support. I’m not really sure if I can explain this very well as I am still rather uninformed. Tina said that he apparently was working in some capacity with the Slugworths.”

“Max,” Linda whispered, all the while trying to put two and two together. “Could Max be a shortened version of another name?”

“It could be, we’d have to ask Tina about the specifics when she gets here,” he said. “What I do know about him is that he lived in Berlin and was supposedly a student there. That was what I found out when I spoke to Tina last week. Today, I discovered that Max’s studies had been a sort of cover for the connection that he had to the Slugworth family and their business. I’m starting to think that his entire situation had been made up of false fronts and lies. That is going to be a very difficult thing for his little sister to contend with when the truth comes out. She loved her brother dearly, and I fear that this will be devastating news.”

Linda contemplated his words, but took a deep breath. “You’re probably right, and right now I’m starting to realize that I didn’t tell you everything I knew. I only hope that you don’t hate me for having held anything back.”

Willy took a deep breath. “You can tell me anything, and I will not hate you for it,” he affirmed softly. “You know that the truth needs to come out, and the more we know, the better.”

She nodded. “You’re right, and I should have said something about this sooner, but I honestly didn’t think that it was of any importance. Since you mentioned Tina, I should tell you that I know for a fact that Owen had been doing some business in Germany with someone named Maximilian, but I was not permitted to get involved with it. Of course, no one ever said much to me about it anyway, but what I was able to overhear involved some kid in Berlin who was quite ambitious, but also rather naïve. Owen seemed to think that for the right price, this kid would do just about anything.”

“Did he say anything else?” Willy asked.

“Well, from what I could pick up, Owen seemed to not care all that much about Maximilian, but instead had his sights set on his friend. He said that the boy was an American who had studied chemistry at another branch of the school. Owen said that this kid figured out a means in which to taint shipments of chocolate without anyone suspecting that the candy had even been tampered with. I don’t know any of the specifics, but it sounded like Owen was trying to coerce this kid’s friend into doing something with the chocolate shipments of his competitors. He went on to say that the guy’s name was Erich something or other.”
“Erich,” Willy mused, his thoughts literally racing. “Max and this Maximilian that you described just now must be the same person. When I talked to Tina, she said that her brother’s, best friend, Erich, was coming to sit with her while she was waiting for Eliza and Elmsworth to arrive there. It’s got to be the same person.”

“But, what if it’s not?” she asked. “What if this is all just a bunch of hearsay and strange coincidences?”

Willy shook his head. “It’s not hearsay. I know it seems strange that the Slugworths are so close to Hudson Chocolates, and yet, they are also connected to a kid who could ‘supposedly’ destroy other companies through the use of chemistry know-how. It seems to me that whatever it was that Max sent to his sister, it must be of a great deal of significance,” he paused. “The only thing I don’t really know is whether or not Erich is an American. Tina didn’t say anything about it when I spoke to her, but I’m certain she would be able to confirm or disprove it.”

“I’m getting scared,” Linda confessed.

“I know, and yes, I am starting to feel rather uneasy myself. It is as though I went to sleep as William Wonka and woke up as some quasi ‘James Bond,’” he said smiling weakly. When she did not return the gesture, his expression grew serious. “We’re going to get through all of this, and perhaps the key to Owen and Arthur Slugworths’ undoing lies in the parcel that Max sent to Tina before his death. She turned it over to the German police. If we call Scotland Yard, they can probably contact the Duselheim Police Department and request that the parcel be sent to their offices here.”

“Would they?” she asked.

“If Tina requested it, then I can only imagine that they would have to work together on this,” he said. “At least now we know that the fear that Tina is presently carrying is very, very real. Based on what you have said, it’s also quite justified.”

“You mean Owen and his uncle could go after her?” Linda asked.

Willy nodded. “Yes, and right now, it’s a good thing that she is going to come here. We can only hope that she will be able to tell us more information. Quite frankly, I don’t think the Slugworths even know about the package or Tina as of yet. Of course, that doesn’t mean that I want to give them the time in which to find out.”

“I can understand how she must be feeling right now,” Linda said truthfully. “Willy, do you know what was in the package he sent?”

“Tina described it as being filled with sound reels and notebooks. There was also a letter from Max addressed to Tina stating that she should turn over the contents to the police or to me. I was somewhat confused because I had never met her brother before. At any rate, I told her to give the package to the police, but asked her to bring the letter with her since my name was mentioned in it. She’s agreed to bring it with her to the factory,” he said, but paused before his next question emerged. “Linda have you any idea what these other things might be?”

“No, I’m not sure at all, but if it is something that Owen knows about, then anyone who has it could be in trouble,” Linda said. “Tina turning it over to the police was the smartest thing she could have done. If Maximilian had used its contents as a means of blackmail, then Owen could have very easily arranged to have someone go after him and make his death look like an accident. If that’s the case, then they probably already have men in Berlin searching for it as we speak.”

“In other words, Tina’s parents could get caught in the middle of this since they had left for Berlin
last night,” Willy surmised.

Linda nodded. “Maybe, but they won’t kill anyone unless they have to. If they don’t find the parcel in Berlin, then they will probably be able to trace it to Duselheim.”

“So it was logical for us to bring Tina here,” he said.

“Yes,” she whispered. “Willy, this issue is probably why Owen wants me out of the way, because of what I know.”

“I’m not going to let anything happen to you or Molly, just trust me.”

She nodded. “I trust you with my life, that’s why I don’t want you to leave. I know it’s selfish, but I am frightened. They didn’t want to stop with Hudson Chocolates, Willy, they want to wipe out every competitor in the industry, and that phone call that I overheard…” her voice trailed.

“...It was about them wanting to destroy me, wasn’t it?”

Willy watched her actions, but at the same time, he could tell that she felt deeply ashamed at having withheld this information. Instead of verbally assaulting her, he reached over and took her face gently in his hands. Tipping it up, he looked deeply into her eyes, his gaze unassuming. “They were scheming to contaminate my chocolate and make it look as though I had done it myself. Is that not it?”

She bit down on her lower lip, but offered him a defeated nod. “Owen and his uncle figured that since you felt betrayed after your work had been stolen, that it would be a justifiable action. They both figured that you would seek revenge on the cruel people who had hurt you,” Linda whispered. “They wanted to make it look like you had willingly done this and then they could watch your factory get closed down. They decided that that wasn’t enough. They wanted you to stand trial and go to prison for something that they had done.”

“A frame-up,” Willy mused. “Did you believe what they were doing?”

She shook her head the unhappy words literally stuck in her throat. “I never did, but I can still remember that night when they had tried to put this plan into motion. The missing link was Maximilian’s friend, Erich. I remember it as though it all happened yesterday. Owen was so angry, he was screaming at me and Molly as though we were the ones responsible for their diminishing sales figures. His anger against you was monumental, partly because of the issue with the business, but I think it was also because Molly admitted to liking your candy more than theirs.”

Willy took a deep breath, and looked at her. She looked as though she was beside herself and he figured that after everything she had been through, it was completely justified. Somehow he could tell by the way she was regarding him, that she was trying to gauge his reaction. He reached over and took one of her hands gently between both of his. “Nothing will change between us,” he affirmed softly.

She took a deep breath, her eyes filling with tears, but she nodded as she continued to relate these events. “It was that same night when he called Berlin and wanted to, in his words, ‘put a fire under Maximilian’s butt’ I had to get Molly safely upstairs to bed before I was able to sneak back down the stairs and overhear what he was plotting. I could hear him shouting into the phone from the kitchen. He kept trying to intimidate this kid into doing his bidding. I tried to shut it out, but when I heard Owen slam down the phone, I knew that trouble was coming. He stormed into the kitchen and his eyes were filled with so much fury and malice that I immediately got scared.” She shook her head. “Oh God, Willy, he was so angry that night that he...” Her voice trailed as she looked away.
“…What did he do, Linda?” He asked.

“H-he broke my wrist, and then before I was taken to the hospital, he said that if I breathed a word of this to anyone, he’d have no qualms about killing me,” she whispered. “For the first time since I had married him, I realized how serious and capable he was of doing exactly what he said. It was then that I realized how terrible my life had truly become. All of this happened about three months before we ran away to Germany.”

Instead of speaking, he reached over and touched her face, his hand cool against her skin, the softness of his touch forcing the tears to begin falling from beneath her eyes.

“Is this part of the reason why you are so afraid of my leaving?” he asked softly.

“It’s silly, I know,” she whispered.

“No, it’s not silly at all, and if it wasn’t Tom that was in trouble, then I wouldn’t be leaving at all,” he responded in kind as he buried his face against her hair. “I promise I will be very careful while I’m away and when I get back here, but I will always be here for you and Molly. I will not let you go through this alone.”

“Shouldn’t we call Mr. Gregory?” Linda asked.

“We will, once Tina is here and can confirm everything that we have been discussing,” he said. “It would seem that Owen and Arthur are slowly, but surely backing their way into a corner. All that will be left for us to do is contact Scotland Yard and watch them throw the book at those two cowards.”

“You aren’t angry with me?” she whispered.

“Yes, it is silly at all, and if it wasn’t Tom that was in trouble, then I wouldn’t be leaving at all,” he responded in kind as he buried his face against her hair. “I promise I will be very careful while I’m away and when I get back here, but I will always be here for you and Molly. I will not let you go through this alone.”

“Isn’t silly, I know,” she whispered.

“No, it’s not silly at all, and if it wasn’t Tom that was in trouble, then I wouldn’t be leaving at all,” he responded in kind as he buried his face against her hair. “I promise I will be very careful while I’m away and when I get back here, but I will always be here for you and Molly. I will not let you go through this alone.”

“What are we going to do, Willy?”

“We’re going to do what we have to do, aside from the obvious, we will find out how all of these things tie in with one another,” he said. “It would seem that you and Molly are not the only people who have been hurt by the dastardly dealings of this family. Perhaps if we can find out what is happening with Tina and her family, we can unravel everything, including what happened with Hudson Chocolates several years ago.”

“I didn’t expect any of this to happen,” Linda said nervously as she rested her head on Willy’s shoulder.

“I know,” he said softly. “I am a bit unnerved at the prospect of leaving, but you know that it is the right thing to do.”

“You’re right, it is important,” Linda said, her head still resting against him. “Please take me with you.”

“I can’t do that and deep down inside, you know that as well,” he said. “I would rather die than to put you into any situation where you could get hurt.”

“But Willy…” she whispered, her voice trailing off.

“…Listen to me,” he interrupted her. At that moment, his voice was no longer filled with harsh undertones. Instead, it was laced in desperate honesty. “I know it sounds cruel of me to say this, but I
don’t want you to leave the factory until we know for certain that it is safe for you to do so. I don’t know what I would do if something were to happen to you. I don’t even want to contemplate it at this point.”

“If I’m with you, nothing will happen,” she objected.

“Perhaps not, but I don’t want to take that chance. Molly needs you, you’re her mother and she loves you. If we both go and something does happen, then she’ll have no one left.” He smiled at her, the familiar overconfidence once more lurking in his eyes. “It doesn’t mean that it will, but I don’t want us to try and test fate right now.”

Linda nodded, but she looked up at him, her eyes filled with fear. “I’m afraid for you, Willy. I don’t want to lose you.”

The chocolatier took a deep breath. “You’re not going to lose me, Linda. As much as I really hate bringing this up, I’m far too much of a prominent figure right now for them to even try something underhanded. They may hate me, but they know that if they did anything to me, it would no doubt backfire in their faces.”

“Are you trying to make me feel better?” she asked.

“No, actually, I’m trying to make me feel better,” he smirked at her, his blue eyes shining brightly. “Listen, I know how to handle things inconspicuously. No one will think to look for me out there, because no one really believes that I would venture out beyond these walls.” He smiled gently at her, all the while knowing that he could not continue to make light of the deeply embedded fears that she carried.

When she said nothing, he continued speaking, his hand still resting against her cheek, his fingers wiping away the tears. “I’ll come back to you as soon as I can. I have given Tom my word. I will be back here later tonight, my dear, I promise.”

Eventually, she leaned into his gentle touch. “I won’t sleep until you are back here safe and sound,” she whispered.

Willy smiled. “Is there anything you want me to do while I’m out there?”

“C-could you bring my parents?” she whispered. “My mother’s not the easiest person in the world to deal with, but I’m so worried about them right now. Besides that, ever since Molly heard about Tom leaving for Buckinghamshire, she’s been asking about her grandfather.”

Willy nodded. “I’ll do whatever I can, my dear. Now, I must be off, I have to drive there now and I may be meeting up with rush hour if I don’t leave immediately.” He paused and took a deep breath as he looked into her terrified face. “I’ll be alright, just trust me to do what is right.”

Reluctantly he could feel her letting him go. With the keys in her hand, he watched as she slowly got to her feet. Before leaving, she stopped and turned around. “Willy, I love you.”

“Je t’aime, ma chérie,” he whispered as she left the office. (I love you, my darling.)

As soon as she was gone, Willy took a deep breath. It was time for him to go back to his rooms, get changed, and leave for Buckinghamshire. It seemed as though everything that was happening was just compounding on top of him. The chocolatier had believed that Tina’s plight was all that would transpire that day, but it seemed to not be the case at all.

Ten minutes after his conversation with Linda, the chocolatier was changed and ready to leave. As
soon as he got into a car and was driving off the factory grounds; the only thing that he could think of was the promise he had made to her.
Chapter 51: The Eyes of a Child

When Thomas opened his eyes again, instead of seeing a doctor, he was looking into the innocent green eyes of the same little boy he had seen out on the road. One side of the child’s head was wrapped in white gauze, while the other revealed piercing eyes and a turned down mouth.

The child was looking down at Thomas, his expression unreadable. The only movement that seemed to emanate from him was a small white gloved hand that grasped the metal frame of the hospital bed.

Thomas blinked a few times, but he eventually spoke, his voice weak. “Hello.”

The child lowered his gaze, but he remained where he was standing, his eyes never fully leaving Thomas’ face. In fact, the underlying emotion that seemed to emanate him was hostility. It was that action alone that left Thomas to conclude that this child was, in fact, the boy that the girl had referred to when they had briefly spoken to one another just after he had been assaulted.

After several minutes had passed, the door abruptly opened and he shifted his gaze to see that Willy had arrived and was coming into the room. He smiled slightly as he watched his best friend casually close the door before turning back around and starting to make his way back over towards the bed.

Relief washed over Thomas at seeing that the chocolatier had safely arrived. Perhaps I ought to put more faith in him, he thought as he took in his friend’s outward appearance.

Willy, instead of being dressed in hippie clothes or his typical eccentric style, was clad in a simple white dress shirt and beige colored pants. A matching lightweight jacket was added, which gave him a much more conservative look. Of course, in keeping with his emotional attachment to the W-shaped pin that Thomas and Eliza had given him, he wore it, albeit concealed beneath the folds of the jacket. His curly hair was tamed down and silhouetting his face, which carried an unhappy smile.

Thomas offered a slight wave from the bed as the chocolatier crossed the room. As Willy seated himself in a chair next to the bed, the older of the two men glanced over towards the clock that was on the table not far from where the child was. When he realized that it was half past five, he could only conclude that after his phone call with Willy, he must have fallen asleep.

He smiled as the recognition washed over him that Willy had done exactly as he had promised. Of course, in the back of his mind, he was still worried about why it was his friend had made such a rash decision in the first place. It was clear that the chocolatier still looked tired, his face was drawn and his eyes seemed to have dark rings around them.

Contrary to the fact Thomas still felt overwhelmingly exhausted; Willy seemed to be doing his very best at trying to keep an optimistic look on his face. This appeared to have failed miserably, but he tried to conceal it nonetheless.

Thomas rubbed his eyes, all the while trying to ignore the fact that the child was still between his bed and the window. The child had, since Willy’s arrival seemed to have grown tired and had sat down in the chair.

Instead of speaking of his awkwardness, Thomas simply looked at the confectioner, his gaze somehow willing him to speak.

Eventually, Willy obliged him and spoke, his voice emerging in a forced cheerfulness. “How are you
“I guess I’m alright,” he responded. “Thanks for coming.” He wanted to say even more, but because of the child’s presence in the room, he opted to say nothing further so as to protect the candy maker’s identity. The last thing he really needed was for this child to discover who Willy truly was.

Instead of speaking further, Thomas simply allowed his words to hang in the air. He turned his head slightly and cast a cautious glance towards the child. Instead of contemplating or reacting on his disquietedness, he ultimately returned his attention to Willy.

For his part, the chocolatier cast another questionable glance towards the boy as well. It seemed clear that neither of the two men could openly speak while this child was present in the room.

When no one else said anything, the chocolatier eventually returned his attention to Thomas and tried to keep a casual look on his face. His discomfort mounted considerably upon further study of the menacing glare that lined the youth’s face.

Noting this, Willy finally spoke. “So who’s your little friend?” He intentionally emphasized the last word, his eyebrows arching slightly as he cast another brief glance in the direction of the child. Shifting his attention after a second or two had passed, he looked back over at Thomas, all the while trying to act naturally. It was clear at this point that the chocolatier’s acting abilities still needed work.

“No idea,” Thomas hedged. “When I woke up just now, he was sitting here and staring down at me.”

Willy nodded, but raised his head, his blue eyes meeting those of the child. “What’s your name?” he asked.

“None of your business,” the sulky retort emerged.

Willy took a deep breath. “Alright, fair enough; what are you doing here?”

“None of your…,” the boy lowered his head.

“…Business,” Willy finished, his voice indicative that he would have to take on another tactic. “Well, you know that particular answer is getting a bit dry for my taste. Now, in case you haven’t realized it yet, my boy, I am not overtly amused. For the record, I am making it my business.”

The harshness in his tone made the child raise his head, but no words emerged. He simply looked at Willy through mystified eyes.

Ignoring the look that crossed the child’s face, Willy continued. “Now then, as if it’s not obvious enough, my friend needs rest, not a constant companion who simply stares at him with daggers in his eyes.” He got to his feet and Thomas watched as he walked around the bed and literally stood over the child, his stance blocking the boy’s means of escape. Without warning, he reached out and rested his hand on the boy’s shoulder. “Now, just so you know, no one likes to be treated like a freak.”

“I’m not a freak,” the boy said defensively as he looked up at the chocolatier. It was clear that Willy’s words had struck a nerve with him. Thomas watched through concerned eyes as the boy backed away from Willy, but still stared up at him not knowing what to expect next.

Perhaps the child’s indignant response could somehow explain the gauze, Thomas thought as he watched the boy try and stand his ground against his best friend.

“I didn’t say you were,” Willy said patiently. “But your behavior is perhaps making Tom feel rather 
like one,” he paused, but taking a deep breath, his next question emerged. “Do you want to tell us what this is all about?”

“No,” the boy muttered.

“Do you want to at least tell us your name?”

Instead of responding, the boy shook his head.

Willy decided that there was nothing he could do except to be brutally honest with the child. He inhaled slowly and began to speak, his voice neither raised nor accusing, instead it was soft, almost meticulous. “You know, when you’re sick, the things you need most are peace and quiet. That’s what Tom needs right now. He does not need a smart mouthed child staring at him and behaving like ‘Frankenstein Junior’. I’m generally a very patient man, but your behavior is pushing even that element of patience. Now, aside from the fact that this is rather unorthodox, I think you’d better start answering our questions and stop talking like you have a chip on your shoulder. We did nothing to harm you, yet your presence here is unsettling to both of us.” He turned and looked at Tom. “Perhaps you should use the call button. A doctor or nurse will be able to tell us a name, and perhaps they could even enlighten us as to why he’s here.”

The boy balked upon hearing Willy’s words. “Okay fine, I’ll tell you, just don’t call them; I could get into trouble again.”

“Again?” Willy asked, this time his expression shifted to reveal a sarcastic smirk. “Don’t tell me, are you the kind of boy who would switch a bedpan for a tub of wet pages dipped in glue?”

“No,” the boy said sullenly.

The chocolatier released a pent up breath. “Okay then start by telling us what your name is.”

“Matthew,” the child said.

“Matthew what?” Thomas asked.

“I can’t tell you that,” he said all the while shaking his head.

“You can’t or you won’t?” Willy asked. When the boy said nothing else, he took a deep breath. “Alright, so we’ll just call you Matthew. So, tell us what you are doing here and why you are giving Tom such murderous glares.”

The boy shrugged his shoulders, but after several minutes, he somehow found the courage and looked at Thomas. “Please don’t let them lock up my sister,” he pleaded his voice weak.

Thomas nodded as understanding washed over him. “My assumption about you was correct. You’re the boy who was sitting in the backseat of the car while your sister and her cohort gave me this knot on the back of my head.”

The child nodded.

Instead of responding to the boy’s confirmation, Thomas turned and looked at Willy. “It would seem that this girl was one of the thugs who assaulted me. The two of them probably arranged to have this child come and soften me up as part of some scheme.”

“No they didn’t,” the boy snapped indignantly. “Wayne’s nothing but a jerk who forced her into it. I don’t care what happens to him, but you can’t let them take my sister away from me. She’s all I got
That may be, but your sister should know better than to hit people,” Willy said calmly, but looked at Thomas, as he rubbed his hand lightly over his mouth. Lowering it again, he nodded as though in concurrence with his own thoughts. “It sounds as though you know more about this child’s situation than you really should, Tom.”

Thomas looked at the boy, all the while trying to stay firm. “It would seem, but Matthew; my friend’s right, your sister made a decision and now she’s going to have to live with the consequences of it. I have to tell the police what happened. If I don’t then I’m no better than Wayne. Ultimately, it’s out of my hands.”

“No it’s not, you grabbed her and then let them take her away,” the boy shot back. “It’s your fault.”

Thomas cringed upon hearing these words, but looked at Willy. “He’s right, I did.”

“Tell me what happened, Tom, or at least what you remember,” Willy said.

“I was lying on the ground, the boy and girl were arguing and she was demanding that he pay her the money for the boy’s treatment,” Thomas related. “After several moments, I could feel the boy kicking me around all the while, trying to find the keys to the car. The girl tried to get him to stop; she was saying that she didn’t want anyone to die or get even more blood on her hands. I don’t really know what else happened, but when I heard the sirens approaching, I reached out and grabbed her ankle, and that tripped her up. She fell to the ground and was trying to squirm her way out of my grasp, but I wouldn’t let her go. I held on as tightly as I could until the police arrived. Her friend had already run away and seemed not to care about what her fate was going to be. Soon after that, everything went black and I woke up here.”

Matthew shook his head and looked at Willy. “They can’t lock her up,” was all he said.

“Where are your parents, Matthew?” Willy asked.

“Dead,” the boy whispered.

“Is this a ploy for sympathy?” Willy asked, his voice still carrying the harsh undertones.

Thomas could tell that his friend was deeply troubled by what he had heard, but instead of reacting to Willy’s discomfort, he simply shook his head. “I don’t think it’s a ploy of any kind,” he said as he cast a glance towards the boy. “The doctor said earlier that they would be sending him to live in foster care after his treatments are done.”

The boy looked at Willy. “You see, no one gives a shit about me.”

Instead of responding to Thomas, Willy turned and looked down at the child. “Watch your language!” he snapped, his voice sounding more abrupt than usual. It was more than clear to Thomas that the chocolatier did not like swearing, especially when it emerged from a young child. “I will not tolerate profanity and I don’t care how angry you are. Such words do not make you grown-up, Matthew; they make you out to be a frightened and selfish little kid.”

The boy cringed, but before he could even respond, the chocolatier continued. “Now, it would seem to me that you are simply chocked full of attitude and spite, but it is directed towards the wrong people. Tom did nothing to deserve your words; he should not be left to feel guilt or remorse for something that he is a victim of. If we’re going to find any resolution to the existing problem, then we must strive to keep our language civil.”
The boy raised his head and looked at Willy. “It doesn’t matter,” he said as he got to his feet and tried to bypass him so that he could make his way towards the door.

Impulsively, the candy maker reached out and grabbed the boy’s arm, his hold tight enough that the child could not leave, but loose enough that he would not be inflicting any pain.

“Let go,” the boy cried as he tried to pull his arm out of the chocolatier’s grasp.

“Not until we talk,” Willy said tersely. “Now, tell us about your sister.”

“Why should I?” Matthew asked. “You’re not going to help her; you’re just mad at her and are taking it out on me.”

“He’s right,” Thomas conceded. “Perhaps I am doing that, but I am angry and I think that I have a right to be.”

“You do, Tom. I wouldn’t argue otherwise,” Willy said. “But perhaps this child should not be targeted for it. Perhaps we should all take a deep breath and calm down.”

“You don’t understand,” Thomas argued. “You weren’t there; you don’t know how scared I was.”

Willy nodded, but began to speak, his voice laced in defeat. “I can only imagine how frightening this must have been for you; that’s why I wanted to come. I know that you told me that it was not the wisest decision that one could make, but it was something that I had to do. You are my best friend, and that’s what friends do, isn’t it?”

Thomas cringed at the truth in the chocolatier’s words, but after a moment he took a deep breath and began to speak. “When I stopped to help Matthew’s sister, it was during a moment of weakness. I was feeling empathy for another person and their situation. It makes me angry to think that my good intentions landed me in the hospital.”

Willy nodded, but instead of speaking, he waited for his friend to continue.

Thomas took a deep breath and released it, his honest words coming forth. “It really infuriates me to think that I’m supposed to feel guilty for filing charges against these kids as well as for doing what is morally right.” He turned his head and looked at the boy. “Matthew, this may sound harsh to you, but have you even thought that your sister and her friend could have killed someone? Knocking someone out with the intention of stealing their car is serious business. It’s not just fun and games. People do get hurt when others are callous and selfish.” He paused as silence descended on the room. “I could very easily be angry with you, but I’m not. Yet, did it occur to you that having you come in here and try and stare me down like this could make me a bit resentful?”

“I guess,” the child shrugged his shoulders.

“I cannot find it in myself to harbor any sort of empathy for your sister or her friend right now. I can also imagine that the other victims of their actions would be as unable to do so as I am. Your sister did something terribly wrong, and she must be held accountable for it,” Thomas said rationally. “Now, according to the doctor who has been treating me, they have been doing this sort of thing to quite a few people around here, and one of them lies in a coma as a result.”

“But she did everything for me,” Matthew said sadly. “She had to do something because no one else would help us.”

“That is not an excuse, my boy,” Willy said firmly. “No matter what the motivations might have been for these actions, it is wrong. I can well imagine how difficult, perhaps even impossible, it is for
people like Tom to forgive after having been assaulted.”

Thomas nodded as the door opened and the doctor entered the room.

“What are you doing in here, Matthew?” he asked when he saw the child in the room with Thomas and Willy. “How many times do we have to go over this? These people do not deserve to have you doing this sort thing to them.”

Instead of speaking, the child quickly pulled his arm out of Willy’s hold, bypassed the chocolatier before running to the door and disappearing out into the corridor.

Once the boy was gone the doctor turned and looked at Thomas apologetically.

“I’m really sorry about that,” he began as he approached the bed. “Matthew’s been doing that to all of his sister’s victims since she was arrested earlier today. It is probably no great surprise that he would come here, as well.”

“Does this have anything to do with why he wears that gauze on his head?” Thomas asked.

The doctor nodded. “His family was in a fire about a month ago, and he was severely burned on his face and hands. That’s why he has to wear gloves. The gauze was actually ready to come off about a week ago, but he didn’t want it taken off. The whole right side of his face was burnt pretty harshly and he’s had to go through a great many treatments in our burn unit since then. It’s a very painful procedure, and from what I have heard, he’s been taking it like a trooper.”

“Matthew said his parents were dead,” Willy said.

“Yes, they were both killed trying to save his life the night of the fire. Today, he’s been in his sister’s custody, but after all the trouble she’s caused he will probably be turned over as a ward of the court and placed in foster care. It’s a pity really, but that’s how the system works in cases like these,” the doctor explained. “It’s a messy situation, but that can only be expected since Stacey Madison got involved in criminal activity earlier this year.”

“You called them the ‘Madison Twins’ earlier,” Thomas said.

“That was just the nickname that many people here in town have dubbed them with. Based on what I do know about them, there is no real relation, but since the girl and boy are always together, they have been dubbed as ‘twins’.”

“That explains why Matthew reacted so negatively about the boy,” Thomas said. “He called him a ‘jerk’.”

The doctor nodded. “I could very well imagine as the boy is a bad influence on the girl and Matthew senses it. Now, it doesn’t excuse the things they have done together, but it does explain why the child is trying to protect his sister.”

“Perhaps if we knew why it was the girl was taking part in this charade in the first place, we might actually be able to understand the whole situation a little bit better,” Willy mused.

“I’m afraid I can’t help you with that, but if you want to take it on, be my guest,” the doctor said as he started to walk back towards the door. “I’ll see to it that Matthew does not come back in here and disturb you.”

“Don’t worry about it, if he does come, I’ll try and talk to him,” Thomas said.
The doctor nodded. “That’s very nice of you, Mr. Wilkenson,” he paused. “Oh and I took the liberty of calling the bed and breakfast, and they said that the cancellation was alright and they wish you a speedy recovery.” With that, he left the room.

As soon as he was gone, Thomas looked at his friend. “Well, I guess that’s one positive thing that’s happened amidst all of this chaos.”

Willy shrugged his shoulders as he seated himself next to the bed. He clasped his hands together and rested them against his mouth as Thomas sat up straighter in the bed and regarded him. “Will, could you do something for me before you head back home?” he asked.

“What’s that?”

“Could you go to the police station and see if you can talk to the girl?” Thomas asked. “Something feels very strange about this entire situation.”

“I had the same exact feeling when we were talking to Matthew,” he said. “It’s abundantly clear that the boy is frightened.”

“I can imagine,” Thomas whispered.

“I do need to talk to you about something else before I leave. As I told you on the phone, I called Tina after you left this morning.”

“What happened to her?” he asked.

“I don’t know how much I can tell you here, but she’s been through something rather traumatic and her parents are in Berlin trying to contend with it all,” he began. “Tom, I’m deeply concerned not just for her, but also for her family. This has actually come about because of some things that Linda confided in me.”

“Linda knows them?” Thomas asked.

“She knows of them,” Willy said. “Linda remembered that Tina’s brother’s name was mentioned when she was living at home. It was a rather topsy-turvy situation and perhaps it’s best that I not go into detail about it here.”

Thomas nodded, but raised his head, his gaze never faltering. “Will, how is security at home?”

“What brought this on?” Willy asked.

“I don’t really know, but with all these people coming to visit, it seems strange that we haven’t really discussed it. I’m just starting to wonder how safe it really is. I can only hope that it is as secure as we assume it to be.”

Willy nodded. “Well, when the contest started, I did go and ask Ingo-Eia and Juni-Wei to check and enhance the security system in and around the factory. They have been checking on things each week, and then have reported to me that security has been heightened since Linda and Molly had arrived. I have to tell you that I did give Linda a key, though.”

“She’s probably not ever going to use it,” Thomas said.

“I don’t expect her to, and I intend to be back by the time Tina, Eliza, and Elmsworth arrive tonight,” he said. “I think that her knowing that I trust her is enough. Yet, at the same time, she was really terrified at the prospect of my leaving today.”
“Do you blame her?” Thomas asked. “She knows better than any of us about what Owen Slugworth is capable of.”

Willy took a deep breath. “I know, and I realize that my coming here was a risk.”

“We can be lucky that Matthew didn’t find out who you were,” Thomas mused. “I mean; can you imagine the pandemonium that this would cause if he were to find out?”

“Well, you want me to go see the girl, so I am guessing that by the time the smoke clears, he will discover the truth,” Willy said. “Perhaps it would be best that he find out after I’ve left.”

“Maybe, but if you want my opinion, it sounds like when it rains, it pours,” Thomas mused. “Is there anything else I should know about?”

“No, but did you manage to call Linda’s cousin, Regina?” Willy asked.

“Not yet,” Thomas shook his head. “I suppose I should call her and arrange for us to meet here tomorrow morning when I get released as opposed to her driving out to the bed and breakfast,” he said. “As long as she can meet me, then I should be able to get everything done that we planned to do before driving back.”

Willy nodded. “Could you also call Patrick and ask him if he and Linda’s mother could meet me at the police station a little later this evening? Maybe you can give me an hour since I think that is about how long it should take. I was thinking that it might be prudent for them to come to the factory for a few days. Perhaps you can persuade them to see reason.”

“The police station is not far from here,” Thomas said. “The doctor said it was within walking distance of the hospital.”

Willy nodded. “Alright, then I’ll go and see about talking to the girl. You get some rest and try not to worry. I’ll see you tomorrow when you get back. Maybe then I can explain what exactly is going on with Tina without feeling as though someone’s listening in. You know with Matthew roaming about, the last thing we need is for him to catch wind of all of this. After all, he is just a child.” He took a deep breath and exhaled slowly. “I wish that I could tell you far more than just this, but I’m afraid to.”

“I know and believe me, I understand,” Thomas said, but watched as Willy stood up and started to back away from the bed. When his next words emerged, the chocolatier stopped. “Just do me a favor, Will and be careful. You know if anyone catches wind that Willy Wonka happens to be roaming around Buckinghamshire, then I cringe to think what could happen.”

“I know,” Willy said. “Once I take care of everything here, I will head back to London. As I said, Linda is presently in a panic. She said that she didn’t want anything to happen to me and she’d get no sleep until I returned.”

“She really does love you,” Thomas said smiling slightly.

The chocolatier nodded. “Yes, and I love her as well. At the same time, I have come to realize that I cannot continue to live as a prisoner to my own invention. If I have to go out, then I will.” He reached over and patted Thomas’ shoulder, “just as I did today.”

“Just be careful getting home,” Thomas said. “Regardless of what you have told me, please do ask the workers to increase security as a precautionary measure. I’ll come back as soon as I get done at the ‘nut factory’,” he chuckled despite himself.
Willy smiled. “Just make sure you call Patrick and let him know where I’m going. When we meet, I can probably get him and his wife to the factory so they will be safe. I don’t trust the Slugworths as far as I could throw them at this point, and I wouldn’t put murder beyond them.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “I’ll tell him. I just hope that he takes us seriously.”

The chocolatier handed a slip of paper to Thomas before walking towards the door and opening it. “Call me at my office before you leave.”

“I will, have a safe trip home, and thanks for coming,” he said.

Willy nodded as he exited the room.
Chapter 52

Chapter 52: Confrontations

Once Willy had closed the door behind him, Thomas reached for the phone and dialed the number that the chocolatier had given to him prior to taking his leave. It was clear that although hopeful, he was also somewhat skeptical. He was fully aware that while the chocolatier had spoken to Patrick on several occasions, he, himself, had never actually made contact with Linda’s father.

The concern that seemed to be wracking on his conscience was whether or not he would be as warmly accepted by this family as Willy had apparently been.

Thomas knew that to these people, he was a stranger, and as such, he would probably be forced to prove his moral ethics to whomever it was that picked up the phone. The questions that remained were centered entirely on the consequences of this. Would they be the ones that he and his friend hoped for?

As he heard the sound of the telephone ringing at the other end of the line, he was abruptly brought back to the present. He waited apprehensively for someone to answer, all the while, grateful that Willy had made the suggestion about them meeting at the police station. Realistically, this could perhaps remedy the issues of trust, which he had been contemplating.

When the line was eventually picked up, he could hear the sounds of a Scotsman greeting him with a simple word. “Hello?”

He took a deep breath before speaking. “Is this Patrick?”

“Aye it is,” the answer emerged. “Who might this be?”

“My name is Thomas Wilkenson; I’m a friend of your daughter and granddaughter.” He kept his voice low in case someone was listening from outside the room. He closed his eyes slightly as he continued speaking, his voice a mere whisper. “Willy Wonka asked me to call you.”

“I see,” the man said, his voice neither curt nor accepting, but it was emerging as though meshed somewhere in between the two.

Thomas took a deep breath as he tried to find the words he wanted to say next. Patrick did not seem to be exceedingly trustworthy. Of course, given the situation that he and his family lived with, it seemed rather logical for him to respond in this manner.

Eventually, he managed to formulate his words and began his explanation. “Will asked me to call and let you know that he is presently on his way to the police station here in Buckinghamshire. It’s the one that is not too far away from the hospital,” Thomas said, all the while not really certain if what he was saying actually held any sort of relevance. He pondered if he would even be believed at this point.

“I’m sure you know of it,” he said after several seconds of awkward silence had passed between them. “I’m presently a patient there.”

“Ah yes, I was a patient there meself a few years back,” Patrick offered freely. “Would you mind if I ask you how it was you ended up there?”

“I was mugged this morning while on my way here. I seemed to have become the latest victim of the
‘Madison Twins’. It happened after I left the cemetery on the outskirts of town. Anyway, Will drove up to see me and left several minutes ago, but not before giving me your number.”

“What were you doing out at the cemetery?” Patrick asked curiously. “I hear it’s pretty much deserted.”

“I suppose it is, but my younger brother, Simeon, is buried there and I stopped off to visit him,” Thomas said and as though anticipating his next question, he continued. “He was killed seven years ago by a drunk driver.”

“I’m sorry,” Patrick said, his voice emerging sincere. “I know I shouldn’t be asking such troubling questions.”

“It’s alright,” Thomas responded. “It was a long time ago, but if you don’t mind, I’d feel better if we could get back to the present situation.”

“Of course, how are my daughter and granddaughter?” Patrick asked.

“They’re fine,” he said. “From what I understand, Molly really misses you. She speaks of you quite often.”

“I miss the wee girl too,” Patrick answered softly. “So William wants us to come to the factory now, does he?”

“I think he figures that the factory would be the safest place for you, and that’s why he asked me to call you. He told me that he would be willing to meet you and your wife at the station after he takes care of some business.”

“He’s at the police station?” Patrick asked curiously. When Thomas did not respond, he took it as his cue to continue speaking. “You did mention the ‘Madisons’, I heard tell of them. They’re pretty bad news, but if you ask me, I think they just need to have someone turn them over their knee. So what specifically happened to you?”

“It was nothing extensive, just a knot on the head. I’m going to be fine, but I asked Will to go there and find out exactly what happened because I have no recollection of it. The girl who was arrested probably does know, so maybe she will swallow her pride and tell him something.” He paused for several seconds, but when he continued, his focus was back to their well-being. “The question is: would you be willing to come and stay a few days at the factory?”

“William seems to be of the mindset that we’re in some kind of trouble, correct?” Patrick asked. “That’s probably why he is making this suggestion in the first place.”

“I would guess that given the history that we’ve had with the Slugworths, it would seem a valid conclusion to reach, yes,” Thomas said. “I know that your family has already been targeted by them once, and we are concerned that it could happen again. I know that Will must have told you about my meeting Linda and Molly on the plane as well as what specifically happened when we were together in Füssen.”

“Aye, he did,” Patrick confirmed.

“Well, with that being the case, I cannot help but inquire as to whether or not Will made you aware of the earnestness of the situation.”

Several seconds of silence passed before Patrick spoke, his voice emerging in an exhalation of breath. “He did tell me and I was inclined to not believe him. After having spoken with Linda several
days ago, I cannot help but change that stance. But, how do you know about all of this?"

“It’s like I told you, I know what happened because I was there.” Thomas took a deep breath.

“Patrick, I understand that you may not trust or believe that I’m speaking the truth, but it is perhaps
the reason why Will suggested the police station as a meeting point. My guess is that he figured that
to be a safe enough a place for you to go. I can imagine that the Slugworths would not try something
stupid while you’re there. Of course, I would not put very much past them, but that’s another story,
I’m afraid.”

“Perhaps it was a logical one though,” the older man confirmed. “My wife is not all that keen on
leaving her home, but I believe that I must insist upon it this time. I will do as you have suggested
and we’ll meet William at the police department in about an hour. That should give us adequate time
to pack our belongings. Now then, what sort of person should we be looking for? Perhaps you might
describe him a wee bit.”

Thomas smiled. “Will’s a pretty tall man with curly blond hair and blue eyes,” he began. “He’s
presently dressed in a white shirt and beige colored pants with a matching jacket. I am not quite
certain if he has it, but perhaps you might see a curvy letter ‘w’ at the neck of his shirt. He tends to
wear that when he is out and about, as it was a gift. Otherwise, I don’t think there is much of a
chance of you missing him.”

“Alright; if you speak with him prior to our meeting, just let him know that we’ll be coming. I don’t
suspect anything to go wrong, although it may take us a wee bit of time to get our things in order,”
Patrick said.

“That sounds fine, and if Will calls me back, then I’ll tell him to keep an eye out for you. I don’t
really expect him to call until he gets back to the factory, though,” Thomas said. He took a deep
breath and began to rub his face tiredly. “I’m just curious, but are there any indications that the
Slugworth family intended to harm you or your family?”

“Well there have always been rumors that have filtered around town for several days now. I am not
exactly certain as to what they mean, or imply, but given everything that has happened, I can well
imagine what may be going on,” Patrick’s breathing became somewhat haggard as he spoke. “I think
we should be off now.”

“Alright, but do be careful, Patrick,” Thomas said.

“I will, and you get well soon. I suppose we’ll finally meet up in London, but until then, I hope you
feel better,” he said before hanging up the phone.

As soon as that particular phone call was finished, Thomas dialed the number to Regina Harris.
Although the woman had not been at home, he was able to leave a message with her husband stating
that she could meet him the following day after his release.

Several minutes later, Thomas returned the telephone to the carriage and leaned back against the
pillows at the head of his bed. Closing his eyes, he allowed his thoughts to drift. Soon, he had fallen
into an exhausted slumber.

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When Thomas’ eyes slowly opened about twenty minutes later, it was to hear the sounds of
movement over near the door. Instead of speaking, he rolled onto one side so that he could see the
door. He was not sure what to expect, but soon the door had opened wide enough for him to
recognize that Matthew was standing in the doorway.
Taking a deep breath, Thomas watched and waited as the boy came out from around the door and allowed it to close behind him. Instead of carrying a hateful expression on his face, the child looked as though he was ready for a confrontation.

Thomas watched his actions and soon discovered the reason for his overconfidence. In the boy’s gloved hand, he carried an empty water glass clenched tightly in his fist.

Sighing deeply, Thomas waited for the boy to approach the bed and sit down. He knew that Matthew had used the glass as a means in which to eavesdrop. All he could do now was wait for the boy to verify what specifically he had picked up on. Thomas figured that his telephone call with Patrick might be at risk, but the question that seemed to wreck havoc on his nerves was how much Matthew knew about Willy. Somehow, he figured that he was about to find out.

Instead of verbally acknowledging his presence, Thomas simply arched an eyebrow and looked at the child, his questioning gaze matched with a look of smugness.

Taking a deep breath, he regarded the child, his expression stern. “Matthew, what are you up to now?”

“Your friend went to yell at my sister, didn’t he?” he asked his expression unchanging. In fact, instead of remaining standing, he placed the glass on the bedside table before seating himself next to the bed and crossing his arms over his chest.

Thomas shrugged his shoulders noncommittally. “I don’t think ‘yelling’ is an accurate word for what he has done, but yes he did this as a favor to me. So now would you mind telling me how much you overheard?” Thomas pointed to the glass. “Something tells me you aren’t here for a drink of water.”

Matthew nodded, but clasped his hands together before speaking. “I heard you say that your friend’s name is Willy Wonka.” The child’s response was somehow reminiscent of the calm arrogance that the chocolatier often displayed.

Thomas stifled a slight smile at the comparison, but took a deep breath before releasing it slowly. “I see,” he began. “So, what makes you so sure that the man who paid me a visit is the world’s most prominent recluse?”

 Matthew nodded, but clasped his hands together before speaking. “I heard you say that your friend’s name is Willy Wonka.” The child’s response was somehow reminiscent of the calm arrogance that the chocolatier often displayed.

Thomas stifled a slight smile at the comparison, but took a deep breath before releasing it slowly. “I see,” he began. “So, what makes you so sure that the man who paid me a visit is the world’s most prominent recluse?”

“I heard you say his name, just before he left,” the boy said.

Thomas took a deep breath. “Let me guess, you figure that you can force me to do your bidding in exchange for your silence. Is that it?”

The boy nodded.

“You really think that you can blackmail me, don’t you?” he asked, his expression filled with unhidden amusement.

This seemed to aggravate Matthew all the more. The boy eventually raised his head and it looked as though he was bound and determined to try. “I may be just a kid, Mister, but I know what I heard and the question is: how willing are you to keep it under wraps?”

Thomas nodded as understanding washed over him. “You know, Matthew, my friend is gone and it is highly unlikely that he will even be back. So even if you were to tell these stories, you probably would not get what you want. In fact, the people whom you tell would probably laugh it off.”

“But, he’s Willy Wonka,” the boy stammered. “I-I could go to the press, you know.”
“Perhaps you could,” Thomas said calmly. “But, you know, Matthew, you can’t go around blackmailing people to get what you want from them. I’m still going to have to press charges against your sister.” He paused as the child’s face contorted and he regarded him with unhidden resentment.

“You can’t,” he whispered, his voice breaking despite his attempts at keeping it filled with confidence.

Instead of allowing Matthew to voice his agitation, Thomas reached out and touched his arm. When the boy did not look at him, he spoke, his voice soft. “You know life doesn’t always work in the ways you might wish for it to.” When the child’s expression did not change, he took a deep breath. “No matter how desperate you may be; you cannot expect other people to play along with these silly games, and I adamantly refuse to.”

The child said nothing; he simply looked at Thomas, his gaze never faltering. After several minutes of stony silence, the boy eventually spoke. “What does it matter anyway? I don’t have anything to lose, since I’ve already lost everything anyway.”

“What about your self-respect? No matter what happens, that should still be intact,” Thomas said, but took a deep breath. “Matthew, what would happen if you were to go outside this room and tell another person that you saw someone who might be Willy Wonka hanging around the hospital?”

“They’d believe me,” the child whispered, but when he looked at Thomas, he could see that the older man was shaking his head. It was suddenly clear to them both that the child was losing his footing rather quickly.

Instead of getting angry, Thomas decided to negotiate through logic. He clasped his hands together and looked at the boy before speaking, his eyes completely level with those of the child. “Do you think that other people would believe that someone who is professed to live his life locked away in a chocolate factory has come to Buckinghamshire to visit a patient in a hospital? All they would have to do is come in here and ask me if the most celebrated recluse paid me a visit today.”

Matthew said nothing. His silence had somehow given Thomas the leeway to continue speaking. “Now, grant it, I could say ‘yes’ but then what would happen? Perhaps they would believe it, as everyone needs friends, but they also might conclude that I got hit much harder than they thought. Doctor Henderson could come in and order me up a psychiatric evaluation, which could turn into a great deal of trauma for me as well as for you; my main accuser.”

“You’re just trying to confuse me, but I heard it, I know I did,” Matthew objected as he cast a quick glance over towards the glass before looking back over at Thomas. “Perhaps you did hear something, but do you think that eavesdropping is really going to make you seem more important or significant here?” Thomas asked. “You want someone to help your sister, it’s a noble enough cause, but it’s not going to help you in the long run to blackmail someone in order to do it. If people want to help someone else, then the willingness to do so must come from their heart; not from guilt, regret, or remorse.”

“It’s pointless,” the boy muttered.

“What do you mean by that?” Thomas asked. “Nothing is pointless, Matthew, there just happen to be certain things that are improbable.”

Instead of speaking, the child began to pull the gauze away. Layer after layer of the white fabric fell away. When the last of it was gone, Thomas swallowed but kept his gaze on the little boy. Crops of brown hair were visible on his head, but one side of his face was red, the skin burned and leaving
him disfigured.

At that moment, it became very clear to Thomas that the child probably wore the gauze to conceal his appearance. This, in turn, prevented others from using his deformed state as rationale for pity.

“Matthew, do you want to tell me what happened to you?” he asked. Although he knew some of the child’s situation from his dialogue with the doctor, he wanted to hear them from the child.

“I got burned the night that my parents died,” the boy whispered. “There was a fire at our house and they tried to get me out. It was my fault that they died, and my sister and her boyfriend never let me forget it. They said that I had to do whatever I could to make sure they stayed out of trouble in return for their pardon. Stacey wasn’t so bad about it, but Wayne was, he always seemed to force us into doing these really bad things. She wasn’t scared of him at first, but then after a while, I found out that she did these things because he had threatened to hurt me.” He turned away from Thomas, his eyes now concealed in shame. “I wanted to help her without you feeling sorry for me.”

“I see, and that’s why it is you didn’t want the gauze removed,” Thomas whispered. “Am I right?”

In response to these words, the boy nodded, but kept his gaze on his lap.

Thomas reached over and touched the child’s shoulder, thus causing the boy to raise his head. “Matthew, if you had just been honest, you would have received the help you needed without lies and blackmail.”

“You mean; it’s too late,” Matthew whispered.

He watched as the child started to get up, but instead of letting him leave, he reached over and rested his hand on the boy’s arm. “I think you and I need to have ourselves a little talk. Come on, sit down.”

Matthew nodded and obediently, he lowered his body onto the chair. “Why do you want to talk to me?” He eventually asked. “Is it because you feel sorry for me?”

“No, actually, because I remember a boy very much like yourself who always sought to make other people happy, sometimes sacrificing his own self worth for the sake of doing so. Such people do, in fact, exist in this world. Perhaps in trying to be like one of them, you are trying to find your place.” He paused, his hand remaining on the boy’s shoulder. “I want to understand how you are feeling, Matthew, but, in doing so, you have to truly be honest with me. If you are not honest, then there is no way that I can act in your best interests or even that of your sister. I don’t want you to lose more than you’ve already lost, but in this particular case, you are not your sister’s keeper.”

“What does that mean?” Matthew asked weakly.

“It means that what your sister does is her choice, and she must take responsibility for her own actions, not force you to answer for them based solely on one event,” he paused. “I will freely admit that what has happened to your family is absolutely the most tragic thing I could imagine hearing. This could have easily destroyed your sister, but don’t let it destroy you. Let us help you, but in our way, not in the way of blackmail and secrecy.”

Matthew raised his head and looked at him. Thomas could see the agony in the boy’s stance, and taking a deep breath, he realized that Willy had been right. He had reacted to Matthew in a spiteful manner and now he deeply regretted it.

“Mr. Wilkenson?” The boy’s voice eventually filled the room.
“Yes?”

“I-is your friend really Willy Wonka?” Matthew asked his voice cracking. “I-I mean; d-did I really talk to him?”

“Yes he is and you really did talk to him,” he said with a slight nod. After several minutes, he paused, but looked at the child, his voice filled with urgency. “My admitting it to you is an act of trust and it does not mean that you are supposed to have the right to blackmail me for it. Will would like to do what he can to help both you and your sister through the situation you have found yourselves in. That means that the only way he will be able to help you would be if you were to keep his identity a secret.”

“H-he really cares about us?” Matthew said softly. “Stacey always said that…” His voice trailed off and he lowered his head and stared at his lap.

“What did she say?” Thomas asked.

“Just that no one thinks about a kid like me,” Matthew said. “S-she said that people in big companies don’t care, but that she does.”

“I cannot say specifically what Will has in mind, but I can tell you that if you listen to me and you discover that he trusts you, then there truly is such a thing as magic. That is his trademark. But, Matthew, if everyone outside of this room were to find out that Willy Wonka was, in fact, here, then they would come out of the woodwork expecting him to help them as well. They would concoct any sort of story that they could find as a way of coercing him to give them something.”

The boy’s eyes were wide as Thomas finished speaking. “Really?”

“Yes, you see, I know this to be true because we’ve been friends ever since we were children,” Thomas nodded. “Through our friendship, I have come to embrace the fact that no man is an island.”

“What does that mean?”

“It means that no matter how much he may wish for it, he cannot thrive and prosper all alone. He needs other people to give him the motivation to do good works and be a good person. Yet, even in that knowledge, he knows that he cannot do everything people expect of him. He has his moments of weakness, just as you and I do.”

“But even when he was mad at me, he seemed so great,” Matthew whispered.

“He’s human just as we are,” Thomas said. “You see, if you and I give him the leniency to do what is right, then he will, but if we push him, he will withdraw.”

“Does that mean that he can’t help everyone even if he wanted to?” Matthew asked as the tears began to stream down his cheeks.

“That’s exactly what I mean. If the media were to discover this, then it could end up consumed in chaos,” Thomas explained. “As with anything, there is a risk involved. Now grant it, I didn’t believe it at first, but over time, I have come to discover that there are bad people out there who will try and hurt you in order to find out what it is you do know. That’s why you have to be really careful, Matthew. Don’t tell people everything you know.”

“If I did, then Mr. Wonka wouldn’t like me, would he?” Matthew whispered.

“I don’t think he would stop liking you,” Thomas said shaking his head. “But, he would have to
withdraw to protect himself. If you protect him, then rest assured that he will be able to use his influence to help you and your sister.”

“Did he really go see Stacey?” Matthew asked.

“Yes, he did. He said that he would go there before leaving to return home,” Thomas said. “I am certain that in time we will know exactly what is going to happen, but you have to trust that he will do what is right. That’s what true friends do.”

Matthew looked at Thomas. “Do you want to know the truth?”

Thomas nodded, “if you want to tell me.”

“I’m scared,” the child whimpered more to himself than to Thomas. “If Stacey gets taken away from me, then I’ll be all by myself and no one wants a kid like me if they can have someone perfect.”

Thomas took a deep breath as he reached over and gently touched the boy’s face, his fingers wiping away the tears. “Listen to me, Matthew, neither Will nor I would ever want you to be alone and now that you know us, you’re not going to lose us that quickly.”

“Really?”

“Yes really, and whatever happens to Stacey, there is going to be someone who will look out for you, and perhaps it won’t be a stranger at all like you think. Maybe it will be someone you’ve already met,” he smiled gently. “Like me, perhaps?”

“You like having me around?” Matthew whispered.

“Sure I do,” Thomas nodded. “You reminded me of something very important about forgiveness and understanding today. Maybe the silver lining to this whole sordid mess is that I got to meet you. Sometimes things do happen for a reason, even those things that we don’t always understand.”

“E-ever since the fire, people have called me a freak,” the child confessed.

“Well, then there is something that you do have in common with Willy Wonka, then,” Thomas said smiling gently.

“I do?” Matthew whispered.

“Yes, the children we grew up around always called him a ‘freak’ or ‘weirdo’,” Thomas said. “It really hurt him, but it also made him stronger.”

“It did?”

“Yes, Will’s had a pretty rough go of things, but he became a friend for life, someone that one could trust and confide in. He’s a good man, and he will help you, but maybe it is because he understands you far better than you think.”

Matthew bit down on his lip and lowered his head. “I made him mad when I said bad words.”

“He knew that you were afraid,” Thomas said. “That is not going to change the fact that he wants to help. If it makes you feel any better, then when you see him again, then you can tell him how you feel without being scared that he is going to get upset with you.”

“You think so?” Matthew whispered.
“I know so,” he smiled. “Just remember, no matter how strange you feel about yourself, there is someone in this world, someone who is quite extraordinary, but who also knows from personal experience how hard it is. And just look at what he has become.”

“You mean, I could grow up and be like Mr. Wonka?” the child sniffed.

“You could grow up and become anything you want. Of that, I have absolutely no doubt in my mind,” Thomas said, his words coercing an insecure smile from the child.
Chapter 53

Chapter 53: Truth and Consequences

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

At the same time Thomas and Matthew were talking, Willy was making his way to the police station. He figured that driving was safer than walking and the distance was less than five minutes by car anyway. He parked the vehicle in the public parking area, cut the motor, got out, and started to make his way towards the intimidating grey glass colored building.

Reaching the doors, he entered, his eyes taking in the cold essence that met him. Along one wall a set of chairs were bolted to the ground, while on the other, plaques and other awards hung. Adjacent to that was a long desk that was separated by what looked to be a glass bullet proof enclosure. About three meters away and behind this transparent substance, a woman was seated. Her head was lowered and her eyes seemed to be staring down at some paperwork that covered it.

What a dismal looking place, he thought as he reached the desk. Noting a small bell that was bolted to the desk next to where he stood, he rang it and waited for her to raise her head, slide the glass window to one side, and acknowledge him.

When she eventually did, her eyes met his and a question emerged. “Good afternoon, may I help you?”

“Yes, I think you can,” Willy began. “I know that this may seem unorthodox, but I need to speak with someone who was arrested earlier today. It was a young woman who was out on the highway during an assault and mugging. The victim, you see, is my friend, Thomas Wilkenson.”

“Oh yes, I heard about that,” she said. “How is he doing? Has he woken up yet?”

“Yes, he woke up several hours ago and called me in London. I drove up this afternoon and just left the hospital where he is now a patient. While I was there, he asked me to come here and have a few words with the young lady on his behalf.”

“It is quite irregular for a victim to confront an assailant so soon after their attack, especially in such a way as this,” the woman said honestly. “Most people actually go years without ever facing them.”

“I can understand why,” Willy nodded in concurrence. “Sometimes facing the one who has done undue harm to another reaps painful, sometimes concealed, emotions.”

“Well, I would love to help you, but we generally don’t allow visitors in to speak to the prisoners unless they are a lawyer or are directly involved in a case somehow. You see, although we are a secured station, it’s not the safest option for people to take,” she explained.

Willy nodded. “I understand, and I would be willing to sign a form releasing your station from any liability if I could just speak with her for about fifteen minutes. You can take any necessary precautions you need, as I do understand that you have rules and bylaws that must be followed.” He took a deep breath. “Thomas asked me to come here as a means to find out what the rationale for her actions were. It would seem that this does involve the welfare of a child. The young woman in question has a younger brother named Matthew who is currently undergoing treatments in the hospital’s burn unit.”

“Is she the child’s legal guardian?” the policewoman asked.
“I believe she is, yes,” Willy responded.

“That seems a bit strange since the girl is not of legal age yet,” the woman said. “It is stated in her file that she is seventeen, and not old enough to be able to be guardian to a dependent child.”

“If she was emancipated, then she would be,” Willy said. “Has your department looked into that? Perhaps she was granted legal guardianship after their parents were killed a month ago.”

The woman took a deep breath, but looked down at the file that was lying in front of her. “It would seem that maybe she was. Perhaps we can allow you to see her on Mr. Wilkenson’s behalf, but under no circumstances will I be permitted to take you to the cell block. She will have to be brought into one of the interrogation rooms,” she explained as she dug in a drawer and produced a small form. “We can draw up the necessary paperwork for you to sign, but do you have any form of standard identification?”

“Of course,” Willy said as he pulled out the tiny leather pouch he carried. He pulled out the requested item and extended the small laminated identification card to her.

She accepted it, and looked down at the name as she read it aloud. “William W. Wonka?” She raised her head only to see Willy nodding. “Is this thing real or are you stringing me along?”

“I can assure you that I would do no such thing. My name is William Wonka, and this card, you can check it for authenticity if you’d like. I did have it renewed several months back in London,” Willy said. “I suppose that in my defense I could simply verify that I am not as reclusive as the press has indicated.”

“You mean you’re telling me that the world’s most famous confectioner is standing right here in front of me and requesting to speak to a petty criminal?” she asked skeptically.

“Yes, I suppose that’s precisely what I am doing,” Willy said, but instead of elaborating, he cocked his head to one side and smiled. He then dug in the pocket of his jacket and pulled out a small wrapped piece of candy before handing it to her. “Does this help?”

“Are you trying to bribe me with candy, now?” she asked coyly.

“No, I can assure you that I would do no such thing,” he said firmly. “I am merely trying to tell you that I am who I say I am.”

The woman laughed as she accepted the candy. “I didn’t mean that, Mr. Wonka, I just can’t believe that you’re here. It may seem strange but this sort of thing does not happen in the real world. This really is no joke, is it?”

“No, this is no joke,” he said. “I am here as a favor to Thomas Wilkenson.”

“Well, I guess I should be handling this a bit more seriously or at least professionally than I am doing, it’s just not everyday someone famous walks through those doors.” She paused. “I hope you’ll pardon me for saying this, but I’m rather surprised.” Instead of elaborating, she returned his identification card to him before un-wrapping the candy.

“Perhaps I should be handling myself more competently as well,” he began. “You see, it was quite a shock to me today to hear that my best friend was the victim of such a crime. This is the reason why I am here, simply as a favor to him. This young lady, you see, is the only person who can really tell us what really happened when Tom was assaulted. He wants to know, as do I and it is for that reason that I’m here.”
The woman nodded as she stuck the candy in her mouth. “This is good. I mean of course; the candy, not what happened to your friend.”

“Thank you,” he said as he returned the card to the pouch and returned it to his jacket pocket. “Do you need anything else from me?” he asked. “I can show you my driver’s license, and I seem to have a credit card in my pocket here somewhere, although I have not used it in well over five years, and for all I know it could be expired by now.”

“No, no, that’s okay, I believe you,” she said as she pulled up the piece of paper and started filling in the information. After several minutes had passed, she stopped and looked at him. “Is this girl really the reason you’re here, Mr. Wonka? I don’t mean Buckinghamshire, I mean here.” As if to add emphasis to her point, she motioned with her hand as a means to indicate the police precinct.

Willy nodded. It was clear that she was still in a state of disbelief. “I will admit that it is not a very easy task for me to undertake, but yes, she’s the reason.”

The woman got up from the desk. “I can understand why you want to find out what happened, but I cannot make any guarantees. Stacey Madison is many things, one of which is extremely stubborn. Although you may have good intentions, she may not reciprocate that with cooperation.”

“I have had more than my share of experiences with stubborn individuals,” he began.

“Perhaps, but please don’t go into this thinking that it is going to be easy. There is a great deal of attitude in this girl. I saw it when she was brought in, and I can tell that you will have a great deal of work ahead of you,” she said. “Of course, with this knowledge, I can still take you to the room. There, you can sit down and sign the paperwork before I bring her along.”

“I understand,” Willy said. “Thank you.”

“Well, then let us proceed,” she said as she came around the desk in order to open the side door. She motioned with her hand for him to enter. As he did, she handed him a metal bowl. “You need to put all metal objects into this bowl and empty your pockets,” she said once he had walked through it and the door was closed behind them.

Willy nodded and began to remove the requested objects from his person. As he finished, his gaze came to rest on the ‘W’ pin that Thomas and Eliza had given him prior to his trip to New Zealand. He touched it, all the while uncertain as to what to do.

“Don’t worry,” the policewoman’s voice suddenly emerged. “I’ll lock your things in a drawer and give them back to you when you leave.”

Willy nodded and still reluctantly, he carefully removed the pin.

Once all of his belongings, sans a handkerchief were out of his pockets and inside the bowl, he watched as she locked them away.

Next, he found himself following her into the back recesses of the station.

Seconds slowly ticked by and he found himself walking down a narrow hallway. On one side, the walls were lined with filing drawers and on the other with rooms that had metal doors as well as glass panels. From where he was walking, Willy could see inside the various rooms.

It was like this for several meters, first he passed a door, then a pane of glass, then another door, then another pane of glass. It remained consistently so for some time until he was unable to take much more of this and eventually broke his silence.
“Do you ever feel depressed working here?” he asked her curiously.

She turned around and looked at him. “I guess your workplace is a bit more colorful, than this, isn’t it?”

“Just a bit, it has more color and the smell doesn’t seem reminiscent of sweat socks mixed with double-bubble-burp-a-cola.” he smiled impishly and she laughed.

“My husband would have loved that analogy,” she said. “He spent many days working out at the gym. I suppose in defense of it, I had never really contemplated whether or not that was actually what it smelled like.”

“You’re used to it in other words,” he said simply.

“Yes, I suppose I am,” she said with a nod.

“Would you mind terribly if I inquired as to your name?” he asked.

“Not at all, I’m Karen Davis,” she said.

Willy nodded, but said nothing further.

Seconds later, she stopped at a door and turned around to face him. “In case I don’t get a chance to say this, I wanted to you to know that I’m really honored that I got a chance to meet you. I mean; it would have been nicer had the circumstances been a bit better.” With a spare set of keys, she unlocked a door and motioned for him to enter. Once he had gone inside, she came in behind him and closed the door.

The room itself was as barren as the rest of the place except for a table and several chairs that were placed around it. Wordlessly, they seated themselves at the table and she handed the chocolatier the form as well as a ballpoint pen. Once he had affixed his signature to it, the woman accepted the piece of paper and looked down at the signature, before getting to her feet. “Wait here and I will bring her along,” she said. It was clear that she wanted to say something else, but no words emerged.

Willy watched as she left and closed the door leaving him in this strange room. He began to take in the rest of it, but quickly realized that there was very little he could accurately make of this place. The walls were pale beige in color, somehow reminding him of the interrogation rooms that came straight out of old movies. Sinking into his contemplations, he conjured up the image of police detectives with cigarettes dangling from their lips asking questions like: ‘Where were you on the night of October 1, 1968?’

He shuddered at the thought, but remained seated at the table. His fingers began to nervously drum against the cold surface, his gaze constantly shifting. Contrary to Karen’s positive nature, this place still seemed to emanate a very unsettling sensation.

As time slowly droned on, he could not help but ponder what Thomas’ assailant was going to be like. In his mind, he conjured up a tough looking person with a harsh and tactless demeanor. What sort of life had she had that resulted in her violent manner and stubborn disregard for her fellow man?

His thoughts were abruptly shifted back to Thomas. His friend had always been a shining example of what a true friend really was. He wondered how it had come to pass that he would get hurt trying to help another person. It reminded him of the rationale he had used all those years ago when he had distanced himself from others to keep from getting hurt.

No matter how much he contemplated this, a bitter sense of hostility began to well up inside of him.
Willy hoped that he would be able to keep this at bay long enough to find out what this girl’s motives had been. At the same instance, seeing his best friend in a hospital bed somehow did conjure up unsettling emotions that he had no idea he possessed. *It must be this place*, he concluded, *it’s making me feel monumentally disheartened.*

At that moment, the door abruptly opened and he turned around to see the policewoman escorting a skinny, brown headed girl into the room. The girl was cuffed, but it looked as though the silver braces could have very easily slipped from her wrists and landed with a clatter on the floor. “Due to regulations, the handcuffs have to stay on,” the policewoman said as she led the girl over to the table and pulled out a chair. She bade the prisoner to sit, and knowing she had little choice in the matter, the girl promptly obeyed.

“I will leave you two alone,” she said before leaving the room, but Willy figured that the policewoman would sit outside the room and make sure nothing unexpected were to transpire.

Once the woman was gone, he raised his head and watched the girl for several minutes. Neither of them spoke, instead, he simply used this time to take in her appearance. She was dressed in a ragged skirt and blouse, the brown hair that hung down over her shoulders was greasy and unkempt. When she eventually raised her head, he could see that her eyes were the same color as her brother’s. In fact, her anger and contempt seemed to mirror that of the child he had met at the hospital. Strangely enough, the girl also seemed to have a striking resemblance to Linda.

Dismissing that, he took a deep breath and remembered how the boy had behaved. He concluded that this girl’s behavior was the only example that Matthew had to go on when interacting with other people.

Instead of immediately speaking, the girl continued to sneak curious glances at him. When their gazes did eventually meet, Willy could not help but realize how accurate Karen had been. There was simply nothing that resembled empathy or understanding about this girl. If anything, she appeared to be completely consumed with her own sense of hostility and anger.

At that moment, it became overtly clear that not only did she seem to not care, but she probably had no idea of what to make of him anymore than he had any idea of what to make of her.

“Are you my lawyer?” she eventually asked.

“No,” Willy said his voice unusually stern. “I came to see you because my friend, Thomas, was your latest victim.”

Instead of immediately speaking, she shrugged her shoulders, but glanced towards the door. After several seconds awkwardly passed, she spoke her voice completely void of emotion. “I have nothing to say to you.”

“Well, I have plenty to say to you,” Willy said. “And believe me you may not want to hear any of it. Perhaps, by the time I get done, you might actually have found your conscience amidst that spiteful disposition.”

“Don’t hold your breath,” she groused.

“Oh, I don’t intend to,” Willy said. “I thought you might actually be interested in the fact that I met your brother.”

Upon hearing these words, she raised her head and regarded him, her expression a strange mixture of surprise and concern. “Did he get away?”
Willy’s eyes widened only slightly upon hearing these words. It seemed noticeably odd to him that she could shift from no emotion whatsoever to actually being concerned for someone else in a matter of seconds. “No,” he said, his response was simple and concise. As they sat consumed in silence, he waited for her next question.

When it finally emerged, the words were somewhat shy and meek. “How is he?”

“He seemed worried,” Willy said. “He knew that you had gotten caught and yet he wanted to help you. This is quite a burden for one so young. How old is he? Nine, ten, eleven?”

“He’s twelve,” she said. “He just looks younger because of his size.”

“Perhaps his appearance gave off that sort of essence because he looked half-starved,” Willy said bluntly. “Who takes care of him?”

“That’s not any of your concern,” she shot back.

“Perhaps not, but I am here for answers and I have no intention of playing mind games,” he said sternly. “I want to know who’s responsible for him.”

“I am,” she said and raised her head, her green eyes filled with hate. “He’s got no one but me, okay?”

“And how old are you?” he asked.

“That’s none of your business,” she snapped.

“Well, young lady, I’m making it my business, and right now, I am not in the mood to deal with an adolescent with an attitude problem,” he shot back in the very same tone of voice she had used. “Now, are you going to tell me, or shall I ask the police for this particular information?”

“I’m seventeen,” she said, her voice low.

“I would have taken you for younger, as you look the same as him; malnourished and half starved. It’s quite easy to tell that you’re his sister,” he paused. “But, you’re still a child yourself.”

“I’m not a child,” she said, her voice emerged in a practical shout.

“If you’re not a child,” Willy shot back with equal intensity in his voice, “then I want to know what you were thinking when you and your friend assaulted my friend. Mature people do not act like savages, my dear girl.”

As these words hung in the air, Willy simply regarded her, his gaze laced in hostility. He could simply not fathom what she was thinking and her overt disregard for others had somehow caused him to get upset. For whatever reason, he could tell by her body language that his presence intimidated her, but at that moment, he did not care. He watched as she lowered her head and allowed her hair to fall down over either side of her face.

Eventually, he took a deep breath, but instead of continuing to yell at her, he simply leaned over the table and touched her shoulder. “Whatever you are, you must now accept the consequences of your actions as an adult would. Thomas Wilkenson intends to press charges against you because of the injuries he sustained.”

“I could go to jail,” she whispered dully.
“Yes, you could,” he said with an affirmative nod. “Perhaps a few months behind bars will help you to recognize how precious freedom truly is.” Although the chocolatier was not yelling, his voice emerged in the same emotionless fashion as hers had been upon entering the room.

He waited for a moment, but then he took a deep breath. “You must accept that your actions were why these things have happened to you. If you are an adult, as you so overtly claim, then it is clear that you recognize that there are limits as to what you are allowed to do. To expect others to answer for your foolishness is selfish and uncouth.”

“What do you care?” she asked.

“About you?” he asked, and when she nodded, he continued speaking. “Truthfully, I don’t. In all honesty, I only care about my friend. The one you and your friend mugged so that you could go joyriding.”

“If you don’t care about what happens to me; then why did you come here?” she asked.

“To find out what exactly you were thinking when you and your friend decided to brutally attack my best friend,” Willy’s frank words emerged. “Your actions were not on anyone’s top ten list of how to win friends and influence people. Of that much I can assure you.”

“You wouldn’t understand, you’ve probably never been in this sort of situation before,” she said.

“Perhaps not, but I would never do something that would bring harm to another person. What you and your friend did was nothing more than an inhumane and selfish act. You want people to look upon and regard you with empathy or compassion, but the reality is, when you go and hurt others, the only thing they feel towards you is revulsion or disgust.”

“But I do have feelings,” she objected.

“That I seriously doubt,” Willy said bluntly. “You have done all these things to hurt other people and you have disregarded the impact that it will leave on them. I heard that there is a woman in a coma because of you and your friend. How can you possibly try to reconcile that with your conscience? She no doubt has friends as well as loved ones. Does she deserve what you’ve done simply because you felt that the rest of the world did not understand or emphasize with you?”

She raised her head and looked across the table at him. Her rude resolve appeared to be crumbling right before his eyes. Eventually, the next words emerged from her in the form of a soft plea. “Please Mister, I didn’t hit anyone; I swear it.”

“If that’s the case, then why don’t you tell the police exactly what happened this morning?” he asked. “If you did not do anything to hurt another person, then what is keeping you from telling them the truth?”

“I’m scared,” the simple response emerged.

“I see, so being afraid is the rationale for everything that you’ve done,” he started to stand up. “I can only say that my assertions about you must remain. You are a young, immature, unfeeling, child, who has used her lot in life as an excuse to do horrible things to another person. As far as you’re concerned Thomas Wilkenson and others like him are just free game.” He made his way towards the door. “I think coming here was a mistake.”

She raised her head but turned around before he could leave. “Just tell me what you expect me to do,” she cried.
“I expect nothing,” Willy said. “I just can’t help but wonder if you really had to resort to criminal behavior to get people’s attention.”

“I didn’t do anything to you,” she shouted. “Why are you yelling at me?”

Willy looked at her, his expression laced with a mixture between sarcasm and frustration. “You obviously don’t get the fact that I’m trying to get through to you. When you say nothing, then you are telling me blatantly that you don’t care about the people you hurt. That’s just as bad as holding the object that was used to bring them down. You don’t give a wangdoodle about any of them. Yet, Thomas Wilkenson seems to believe that there is hope for you. Perhaps that was why he asked me to come and talk to you.”

“Wang…what?” she asked.

“Don’t try to change the subject,” Willy said irritably. “Ever since you came in here, you have been trying to justify your actions. You have yet to give me any sort of rationale for them and I am trying to truly understand you. In hindsight, it seems rather pointless as you seem to have your heart consumed either in self-pity, or weak attempts at trying to justify having assaulted someone else.”

He stopped speaking for a moment, but could feel the extent of his hostility rising inside of him. “You are trying to tell me that there is nothing whatsoever wrong with giving my best friend a concussion. You have absolutely no conscientious feeling about the mess you’ve created. I’m not just talking about my friend; I’m talking about the people who are still in the hospital and suffering psychological damage because of your insufferable greed and selfishness. These people don’t deserve what happened to them and you know it. Yet, you want to sit here and tell me that you are an adult. Well, my dear young lady, I beg to differ. Adults generally know what their limits are and abide by them. It is the selfish and immature who do not embrace them.”

“I didn’t want to hurt anyone, I…” she whispered, her words trailing off as she broke down and started to cry.
Chapter 54

Chapter 54: A Change of Heart

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy abruptly stopped his trek to the door before turning around and staring over at the girl. From one moment to the next, his anger washed away and he was left uncertain as to what to do next.

He knew that coming here would be hard, Thomas had said as much, and even the policewoman had affirmed that for him as well. Yet, nothing really prepared the chocolatier for what had happened. He hated to see people suffering, and worse still, he despised being the cause of it.

Instead of leaving the room, he took a deep breath before returning to the chair he had occupied. He sank into the chair, all the while closing his eyes and rubbing his hands over his face.

Moments later, he opened them again and looked across the table and watched as the girl continued to weep softly. It was clear that her fright and insecurities were now bursting forth, but instead of raising her head and facing him, she kept it lowered. All the chocolatier could see was that her hair was now softly brushing against the table. Instead of uttering so much as a sound, she remained where she was, the sounds of her weeping growing somewhat softer but still present.

Willy was completely taken aback by this overt display of emotion. He pondered if it was forced, but soon dismissed that assertion entirely. He had come to this place half expecting to deal with a strong-willed and stubborn young girl, but instead, what he found was a heartbroken and grieving child who was concealing her fear through an angry disposition. Based on what he could understand about children, they tended to react offensively when backed into a corner and perhaps he had done just that.

As his own harsh demeanor and resolve melted away, he sat staring at her, his stance rather that of a deflated balloon. His expression was dominantly encased in profound disbelief and sorrow, but at the same instant, he could not hide his overwhelming heartache at seeing her in so much pain.

Instead of speaking of this, the chocolatier waited for her to recover from her emotional outburst and say something. When she finally did manage to speak, her words were cracking with emotion. “I was…”

“…You were?” Willy asked his voice soft and unassuming.

This seemed to surprise her and she raised her head and regarded him through teary eyes. “I was trying to raise the money for my brother’s treatment,” she confessed brokenly.

“What do you mean; for his treatment?” Willy looked at her.

“It’s expensive, and we have nothing,” she said as she wiped her eyes with the sleeve of her blouse. Willy watched this but eventually pulled out the handkerchief and extended it to her. He watched as she accepted it and without unfolding it, rubbed it across her wet face.

“How can committing crimes have any sort of impact on your brother’s well being?” Willy asked softly.

“You wouldn’t understand,” she said.
"Try me," was the almost automatic response. "Nothing else you have said here has made much sense to me. Perhaps a little bit of old-fashioned honesty could serve you well." He reached across the table and touched her arm. "I know that perhaps you don’t know why I’m here, but Tom asked me to come and talk to you, so here I am. I know that the police probably had adequate reason to say ‘no’ to my request to come in here and talk to you, yet they allowed it. Maybe they could see that there was some hope left for you."

"Hope?" she whispered.

Willy nodded. "Yes, hope."

"What does one do when they have none left?" she asked.

"I don’t know," he said softly. "I can try and remember when I had lost my hope and how Tom was there to help me find it again."

"He’s really a good friend, isn’t he?" she asked.

"The best," Willy said. "I suppose I was angry with you because he is a good friend to me, and he didn’t deserve to go through the trauma he was subjected to."

"I wish I had a friend like that," she whispered.

"You do, you have your brother. He loves you, contrary to all the mistakes and false pride that you display," Willy said softly. "My dear girl, you are so very lucky to have what you do have. You just need to know that there are people out there who want to help you figure out where to find that sense of hope again. I don’t know if it will make any difference, but it might help you to come to grips with what has happened and what your role in all of this is."

"Are you going to help me get out of here?" she asked.

"I can’t do that," he said. When he saw her crestfallen face, he kept his hand on her arm, but offered it a comforting squeeze. "It would be wrong of me to help you avoid the inevitable, but I can try to help you in another way. That is, by getting you a lawyer as well as looking out for your brother while you are handling this dreadful situation." He pulled his hand away and clasped both of his together before resting them on the table top. "Sometimes, the help you receive is nothing, unless you strive to help yourself."

"What should I do?" she asked.

"Tell the police what happened out on the highway today. If what you say is true and you did not assault anyone, then they would have no reason to lock you up. You could be facing a probation charge, that is you would have to do some community service or something, but at least you won’t be sitting on a highway hurting unsuspecting people," Willy said. "At any rate, you will do yourself a greater service by being honest. You should not be forced to protect some heartless scoundrel. You speak out against him, and then you won’t be separated from your brother."

"How can I?" she asked. "No one will listen to me they all think I am beyond hope."

"Well, tell me something," Willy said as he rested his elbows on the table and looked over at her, his expression meaningful. "Since you said that you did this to help your brother, have you received any of the money in which to do so?"

She shook her head. "No, Wayne promised that he would give me the money I needed for Matthew, but he hasn’t yet."
“When did he make that promise to you?” Willy asked.

“Three weeks ago, but he said he would.”

Willy shook his head. “Well, my dear naïve child, he hasn’t yet, has he?”

“But he promised,” she whispered.

*Well, there’s still politics,* the chocolatier thought sardonically. Instead of sinking even further into the sarcastic thoughts and contemplations, he looked over at her. “You need to understand that assaulting and stealing from people is simply wrong. This Wayne person may have pocketed these ill-gotten gains, but it is you who is left hanging. It is you who is behind bars while he’s running free,” Willy said.

The girl looked at him and it was clear that she was trying to process everything he had said. Instead of speaking though, she listened as he continued.

“If your brother is really as important to you as you say, then perhaps you should have tried to find a legal way to help him without making such underhanded deals with people like this Wayne character.”

“I didn’t know what else to do,” she objected. “Before I met him, I had written letters to companies and other people asking them to sponsor my brother. I told them about what had happened to our parents, and that I was trying to finish school. On top of that, I had to take care of Matthew and we had nothing. When the declining responses started to come in, I gave up. No one really cared.”

“Who all did you write to?” he asked.

“I wrote to every company in Buckinghamshire, I even wrote to Slugworth Chocolates and Salt’s Nuts, the two biggest companies here. What I got back from both places were nasty letters saying that they didn’t support peasants,” she said. “You tell me that what I did was not mature, but I really did try. Matthew was getting sicker, he needed his treatment, and no one wanted to help us. I tried to handle this as an adult would, but it didn’t do any good. The only help anyone wanted to offer was to take Matthew away and put him in foster care.”

“Which may happen anyway,” Willy mused but took a deep breath. “So I take it, you then met this Wayne person and he told you that he would help you support your brother. He made you all these promises, and although he has withheld the money from you, you still seem insistent on staying loyal and protecting him by not telling the truth.”

“I didn’t know what else to do. Wayne said that I would either have to go into prostitution or help him with this carjacking stuff. The sicker Matthew got; the more desperate and afraid I became,” she shook her head. “After everything that happened, it somehow became clear to me that these big companies don’t care. They are comprised of suits and other rich snobs, but nothing more.”

“Did you ever consider writing to some of the companies in London?” Willy asked. “Many of them do offer corporate sponsorships for cases like Matthew’s. Helping children is part of the reason they exist.”

“No, I figured that they would have reacted the same way Salt’s Nuts and Slugworth Chocolates did?” She said brokenly. “Besides, now that I’m in this crummy situation, no one is going to want to help my brother. You basically implied that yourself.”

“Many would not, but there are some out there who do have a conscience, you just have to find them,” he said. “Don’t limit yourself to just one or two places here in town. Allow yourself to seek
out help in other places, through other means. You do have more support than you think.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know if I can believe that,” she whispered.

“You can,” he said. “Now, tell me your name.”

“Stacey,” she said.

“Well, Stacey, my name is William, and my friend Tom and I are here now and we’re going to help you and your brother. The only catch to all of this is we want you to tell the truth about what happened. Once you do that, then perhaps you will be let out of here, and then if you need a place to stay, we’ll arrange something for both of you. The important thing is get Wayne off the streets so that he can’t do what he has already done to other people. This means that you have to be brave and honest with the people here. Contrary to what you may think, they really do want to help you.”

“Why are you suddenly being nice to me?” she asked. “You were angry when I first came in here. You were yelling and telling me that you didn’t care. I’m confused.”

“I know, and I was angry with you because of what you did to my friend,” he said. “But, Stacey, when you let down your guard, I was able to see the hurting child in you. I know from experience that the world can be cruel and terrible place at times. Perhaps, a little understanding is what you needed the most,” he said, his voice never losing its sternness. “Now, grant it, I don’t condone what you’ve done.”

“I didn’t want to,” she whispered.

“Why did you?” he asked, his gaze now resting on her. When he noticed that she could not make eye contact, he continued to speak. “What sort of human being is this Wayne anyway? Any person who puts these kinds of conditions on a young girl is lower than low.” He got up from the table and went around it so that he would be standing behind her. He rested his hands on her shoulders as though he had taken it upon himself to protect her single-handedly. “You won’t have to do that, and you won’t ever have to do something unethical as long as you get away from him. Part of the deal is, you must testify against him as well as try and put all of this behind you.” As he spoke, she looked up at him.

“How?” she asked.

“I don’t know, but I truly would like to see you get back on your feet and live a life that you can be proud of. Of course, that means you have to make an effort and not just talk about turning over a new leaf, but actually doing it. You’re not proud of what you’ve done, that’s obvious, but Stacey, you do have a chance to turn everything around.”

“What if it’s too late for me, William?”

“My dear child, it’s never too late,” he said. “I’m going to help your brother you have my word on that.”

“But, the treatments, they cost a lot of money,” she objected.

“I’ve got far more than you think,” he said smiling secretly. “Stacey, I’m not just some drifter who happened by. I am…” his voice trailed off as the door suddenly opened.

From around the door, he could see Karen standing in the doorway and peering into the room. “Excuse me for interrupting, Mr. Wonka, but there is a man and woman at the front who said they are supposed to meet you here. I told him that I’d let you know that they had arrived.”
“Thank you, we’re just about done, give us another five or so minutes,” he said.

Karen nodded and once the door had closed, Stacey turned around and watched as he made his way back over towards the table. As he came closer to where she was sitting, he could see that she was now staring at him. “Y-you’re Willy Wonka?” she eventually whispered her voice cracking.

It seemed more than apparent to Willy that the girl was going to start chastising herself for having confessed about having written the letters seeking corporate help for her brother. He inhaled slowly, his single word response emerging with a slow nod. “Yes.”

“W-why are you here?” she asked weakly as she bit down on her lip.

“I’m here because my friend asked me to come and because I made a promise to your brother,” Willy said.

“You said you met Matty,” she whispered. “D-does he know who you are?”

“Only if Tom told him,” he said. “Your brother is really worried about you, Stacey. After he was escorted from the room, Tom made the suggestion that I come see you. He’s my best friend, and it was quite easy for me to agree with him.”

“What about the car?” she whispered.

“The car belongs to the factory, Tom borrowed it to drive up here on business,” he said. “I’m sorry, but that’s all you really need to know.” He started to walk over to the door.

“Wait,” she cried out, and it was clear that she wanted to reach out to him, and had her hands not been cuffed, she would have. “I-if I had written to you…” she began, her voice trailing off.

“…I would have looked into Matthew’s case, and done what I could to help him,” he said. Instead of maintaining this distance from her, he crouched down so that he was kneeling in front of her, his eyes now level with hers. “Not every person who owns a business is an uncaring individual, Stacey. When I fired my workers, I did it because of issues of trust, but I still tried to help the community whenever I could. Perhaps you do not realize this, but I did start looking into ways that I could give something back during those times. It wasn’t a choice between what my conscience was telling me and what was right, it was an effort I was willing to make. I did not want to make good people suffer along with the bad ones any more than I would want a young girl like you to feel as though she has no way out.”

She lowered her head as the tears began to slide down over her cheeks. “I’m sorry, I’m so sorry.”

“I know,” he said gently. “Just tell me something. Do you want to make everything up to Tom as well as those other people that you hurt?”

She nodded. “Y-yes.”

“Then tell the police the truth about what happened. It will always be your choice, but don’t turn away from the help being offered to you right now. This may not make your journey any easier, but it will ease your conscience,” he reached over and brushed a strand of hair out from in front of her face. “Don’t sacrifice your brother’s well-being for the sake of a man who tells you that you have to sell yourself to get the help that Matthew needs. That’s degrading and now you know it’s simply not necessary.”

“But I’m still scared,” she managed to speak.
“I know,” he said. “Sometimes doing the right thing is going to be scary, but there is no reason to not do it. It’s a part of life and you are standing at a crossroads that will either turn that life around or leave it stagnant.”

“Y-you’re really going to help me?” she asked her voice cracking.

Willy got to his feet, but nodded as he took one of her arms and helped her to stand up. As soon as they were both standing, she looked at him. “I told you the truth, I really didn’t hit anyone; I just helped to distract them. Wayne tried to get me to help with the rest of it, but I couldn’t…I couldn’t…” she lowered her head.

He rested his hand on her shoulder. “Tell the police that, Stacey. You’re not going to be alone with this anymore. I know that this seems hard for you to believe, but I also know that you are a very capable young lady and you will be able to help your brother in the right way.”

“I will, t-thank you,” she whispered as the door opened and Karen came inside.

“It’s time for you to go back,” she said.

Stacey nodded, but looked up at Willy and when he offered an encouraging nod she turned and looked at Karen. “I want tell the truth. Is there a way I can do it today?”

“Of course,” Karen said. “I’ll get the arresting officer back here and we can put this in motion for you.”

Instead of speaking, she looked at Willy.

“Good girl,” he said with an approving nod, but watched Stacey being led from the room. As soon as she was gone, the chocolatier took a deep breath. He could not help but wonder what specifically was going to happen next.

After several minutes of waiting, Karen returned to the room. “Mr. Wonka, I don’t know what you said to her, but Stacey Madison really does want to tell us what happened out on the road this morning. Not only that, but she’s ready to come clean on everything.” She smiled at him. “I knew it was a good idea to let you go in there. That’s generally not procedure.”

Willy smiled. “Then all I can say is that I’m glad I came today.”

“I am too,” Karen said. “Maybe we can hire you to help with other cases around here. You seem to have the knack with troubled people.”

“I don’t know, I think I’ll stick to candy making,” Willy smiled smugly as he shook his head. “But thank you for asking anyway.”

Karen smiled. “You’re really an amazing person.”

“One compliment is enough,” Willy smirked. “So, can you keep me posted on how Stacey is doing? I did make a promise to her that I would really like to keep.”

“I don’t know if I can do that, because you’re not her lawyer,” she said.

“I intend on getting her legal representation when I get home. I’m only hoping that my lawyer will be able to represent her or find someone who can,” he said. “You know, it’s very strange, but once upon a time, he told me that he liked me because I was quiet. After everything that has been happening, he may eventually have to retract that statement.”
The policewoman took a deep breath, but looked at him. “Mr. Wonka, why do you care so much? Stacey Madison helped her friend assault your friend and now you want to help her.”

“Sometimes in order for people to find their own sense of peace, they need to find forgiveness. Before they can find it in themselves, maybe they have to hear it from another person,” Willy said. “Now, I really must be off, as I still have other things that require my attention before I head for home.” He extended his hand to her. “It was a pleasure meeting you, Karen. Thank you for all your help.”

The woman nodded, but smiled as she accepted his hand. “Thank you for coming here, it was a very compassionate thing you did. Believe me, around here we see so very little of that.”

Willy nodded as he walked back down the corridor he had come. Once he retrieved his items from the bowl, he affixed the pin onto his shirt and replaced the things in his pocket before stepping out into the lobby.
Chapter 55: Complications

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As he emerged from the back room, the first thing Willy saw was a gray headed man and a woman with dark brown hair and glasses seated in two of the seats that were bolted to the ground. He immediately recognized Linda in the woman, but instead of speaking to her, he approached and spoke to the man. “Patrick?”

“William?” the older man spoke with a slight nod of his head. The familiar Scottish lilt seemed as consistent with the man as the coat he wore. Of course, this left the chocolatier to feel the element of relief at having discovered that Linda’s parents were safe.

Instead of speaking of this, the chocolatier simply nodded, his expression encased in a broad smile as he extended his hand to the man and they were able to warmly shake hands. “It’s really nice to finally meet you,” Patrick began. “You look just like the person Tom described when we spoke on the phone.”

Willy smiled. “Unmanageable curly blond hair and blue eyes, right?”

Patrick nodded. “He didn’t exactly put it that way, but he was pretty close.” He motioned towards the woman. She remained seated, but only raised her head slightly in acknowledgement of her husband’s words. “This is my wife, Marjorie.”

“Hello, it’s nice to meet you,” Willy offered the woman a cordial smile, but could do nothing when the gesture was not returned. Instead of immediately speaking, he watched as she stood up and regarded him as though she was a vulture making ready to jump on its prey. In fact, if he did not know any better, her eyes seemed to convey that element of catlike skepticism that took him somewhat aback.

As was the case in the interrogation room, Willy was left with a strange uncertainty encasing him. As was the case with Stacey, he was not exactly sure about what he was supposed to make of her. She seemed to carry a very strict essence, which left the chocolatier to conclude that the reason Linda had rarely spoken of her mother was because of that particular idiosyncrasy.

Somehow, all of this reminded him of his own father and he tried to divert the focus away from his own awkwardness back to the couple whom he was now greeting.

Instead of trying to figure Linda’s mother out, he simply offered a slight smile. “I’m glad to see that you both made it and are alright. Linda will be relieved, I’m sure.”

“How is our daughter?” Marjorie asked.

“She and Molly are both fine,” he said, all the while emphasizing the child’s name. He was not quite certain as to why, but her question somehow left him to feel extremely awkward. Generally grandparents acknowledged their grandchild, and yet, Marjorie seemed only interested in mentioning their daughter. Instead of making mention of this, he continued speaking. “The two of them have been staying at my place in London for the last few days and although physically they are alright, we’ve been increasingly worried about Molly. She’s been having some rather frightening dreams and has not been getting proper amounts of sleep…”
“…I’m sure we’ll figure that out without your lengthy elucidations,” Linda’s mother interrupted, her harsh voice cutting off the candy maker’s attempt at an explanation. “How long should it take for us to get there?”

“Well, since it’s now rush hour, it will probably take us a little while to get back,” Willy said as he led them outside.

Once they had exited the building, Willy watched as the couple went over to their car and started to unload it. Willy approached his car, which was conveniently parked next to theirs, and opened the trunk.

The chocolatier watched as Patrick brought over two large suitcases and put them in the back of his car. “My niece said that she would pick up our car tomorrow some time after she gets off work. With that being the case, I have already spoken to the friendly lady inside about it, and she confirmed that we could leave it here until Regina comes to get it. Luckily for us, our niece already has the spare set of keys.”

Willy nodded and once everything had been deposited in the back, the chocolatier unlocked the door and opened it so that Marjorie could climb into the backseat.

For his part, Patrick went around and climbed into the passenger seat as Willy got behind the wheel and started the car. As soon as the doors were closed and everyone was buckled in, Linda’s father broke the silence.

“Why did you come to Buckinghamshire, William?” he asked.

“Tom called my office earlier today from the hospital. It would seem that he was accosted by a young couple earlier today. I drove up to visit him and before I left to go tend to the business at the police station, I asked him to call you. I figured that perhaps you could meet me at the police station because it seemed safer than anywhere else. Because you didn’t know him, I gathered that you were pondering whether or not he was trustworthy,” he said. “I know that given this particular circumstance, you can perhaps understand the rationale for us making this awkward proposal in the first place.”

“Awkward doesn’t do justice to any of this,” Linda’s mother piped up from the backseat. “I would say that it is far more than just a slight discomfort. We don’t know your friend and we most certainly don’t know you or your intentions.”

“I know him, Marjorie,” Patrick said as he turned around and looked back at his wife, his eyes speaking volumes.

“I would not say a couple of telephone calls would qualify for knowing someone, Patty,” she shot back.

Patrick took a deep breath, his agitation apparent as he continued to regard his wife. “Marjorie, we’ve already been over this countless times. While I think that you’re right about the fact that we are meeting one another face to face for the very first time, I do know William better than you think. I would also like to believe that given the fact that he did save little Molly from Owen and his unscrupulous uncle, that he is someone we can trust.”

“You are just too good, Patty, you see all the good in people even those who don’t deserve it,” Marjorie said, her voice indicative that she was ready to continue debating the chocolatier’s noble gesture.
Luckily for Willy, her husband did not seem as willing to continue along these same lines of discussion as she. Abruptly, the Scotsman grew silent.

For several minutes, nothing was said until Willy eventually felt the need to speak up in his own defense. “You know, there are good people out there. Although I am not quite certain where I fit into that mixture, it does not mean that my motives are without moral or principle.” His focus diverted back to the road.

Eventually, Patrick spoke. “William, I have never doubted your sincerity. In fact, when I spoke to that lady back at the station, she told me what you were doing. I couldn’t believe what I was hearing. After all, this girl did assault your friend, but I guess you have a rather remarkable capacity in the art of forgiveness. Perhaps it could be an example for the rest of us.” He cast a knowing glance towards his wife.

“Owen Slugworth is not someone who deserves forgiveness,” Marjorie said stubbornly. “I will not fault either of you for having that viewpoint, but I am a mother and I have seen my daughter with one too many black eyes and unexplainable injuries.”

“I think that this is not really the issue, dear lady,” Willy said. “We all know that Linda has had a very difficult time with this and that Owen Slugworth degraded and abused her. Whatever it was that she has been through should not be compared to my talking to a seventeen-year-old girl who needed guidance. In both cases, both Linda and Stacey will have to contend with the issues in the best way they see fit. But, I am, by no means, pardoning Owen for his cowardly behavior.”

“Well, if truth were known, I have always suspected that Linda has just had very poor judgment when it came to men,” Marjorie said firmly. “She’s still very much like a little girl and I can imagine that she needs special looking after.”

“Perhaps she is much more capable of looking after herself than you think,” Willy said bluntly. “After all, she should be able to come back to her family when she needs support and not have someone belittle her through judgments and critiques.”

“What do you know about family?” Marjorie asked skeptically. “You’re just a typical famous person who everyone fawns over. I cannot even imagine that you, in all your glory, have ever had any sort of idea what it means to be a part of a family. Even if you did have one, you probably shoved them all away like you did when you went and fired all your workers.”

Willy took a deep breath, his hands gripping the steering wheel so tightly that his knuckles were turning white. He was so ready to lash out at this woman, but thinking better of it, he inhaled several times trying to keep his temper at bay. When he finally did speak, he managed to keep his voice controlled and level.

“My family situation is really none of your concern. Based solely on what I do know of Linda’s experiences, I can see why she was afraid the first time we met. If I were to be constantly faced with skepticism of this kind, I would be rather unnerved about meeting another person myself,” he paused before continuing to speak. “She is perhaps viewed as a terribly fragile person, but beneath all of those things that you criticize about her; there lies a very strong, courageous, and caring woman. She has dealt with a great deal of trauma in her life; perhaps not just stemming from her experiences with the Slugworth family.”

“That is true, but I would still like to believe that her experiences and feelings are not a result of the actions of that family,” Patrick said.

Willy said nothing in response to these words in fact; his implications were the last thing he could
think of to say. He was tired of being verbally confronted by Linda’s mother and while he believed that she meant well, he pondered what sort of abuses the woman he loved might have endured in the hands of her overbearing mother. Instead of speaking, he bit down on his lip and kept his gaze locked on the highway.

Marjorie shook her head in denial of what the chocolatier was implying. Instead, she regarded her husband. “Patty, we have done nothing but try and support her these past years.” Her gaze shifted and she looked at Willy. “The fact that she apparently has let you into her world seems more or less a surprise to me. Might I add that it is a very strange one?”

“I don’t know if it is as strange as you seem to believe, Marjorie,” Willy said. “To others, perhaps it may seem as though she is being pushed into something, but I can assure you that she is not. The truth remains that she had been brainwashed to think the worst of me, and perhaps to think the very same of her family.”

“You do worry about her, don’t you?” Marjorie asked, her stern voice softening only a fraction.

“Yes, I do,” he said honestly.

“Well, that seems rather obvious,” Marjorie responded, her voice once more taking on its normal edginess. “Please understand though that our daughter is still a married woman, and has been raised to behave ethically, if you catch my meaning.” Arching her eyebrows tellingly, Marjorie turned away from him. After several minutes, she closed her eyes and laid her head against the headrest of her seat.

Willy said nothing in response to these words, but a strange feeling of impending doom washed over him at the prospect of having Linda’s parents staying at the factory. Patrick was nice enough, but Marjorie was one to be taken in small dosages, if at all.

Instead of dwelling on this, he allowed his thoughts to shift back to the situation with his friend. He was hopeful that Thomas would be fit enough to meet with Regina and find his way into the nut factory the following day. Now that he was on his way back to the factory and would soon be greeting and playing host to Tina, he realized that the day was still far from being over.

With his eyes completely fixated on the road, Willy continued to drive in the direction of London, his thoughts freely drifting. Things were going to get harder before they got easier, and his relief would be very short lived. Of course, a small semblance of relief was that Marjorie had finally fallen asleep in the backseat of the car. This left Patrick staring at the passing scenery while Willy tried to distract himself by casually humming.

Eventually, the Scotsman turned back around and looked at him. “It would seem that since Marjorie has gone to sleep, you’ve become rather quiet,” the older man observed. “Perhaps you are taking a break from her incessant game of twenty questions.”

“I suppose I haven’t very much to say,” Willy admitted. “I don’t always speak a great deal while in the company of others. Instead, I tend to observe what is going on around me.” He did not add that he was somehow starting to feel as though he was being constantly confronted from all sides.

“Yet when you were confronted, you were quite vocal,” Patrick said honestly. “I do suppose that you have observed the worst part of mankind since making your presence re-known to the rest of the world.”

“You mean with regard to the Golden Tickets?” Willy asked.
“Well, not just that, but there seems to be a lot of other factors involved in all of this insanity; the situation with Linda as well as the gobbled-gook from the press. All of these things simply indicated to me that you are much kinder and more understanding than people would assume,” he said smiling weakly. “I am only sorry that my wife is so confrontational towards you. She is generally a very loving person and means well, but that’s how she acts out her fears. She tries to control them in any way that she can. Sometimes, that makes her very hard to understand by most rationally-minded individuals.”

“I don’t wish to judge her, Patrick, I simply have a great deal on my mind besides the fact that Marjorie has made it quite clear that she does not like me,” he said softly. “I am still rather surprised by what has happened to Tom.”

“He said that he was assaulted when he called, but did not go into too much detail,” Patrick said.

“He didn’t really know how to contend with it,” Willy said. “I suppose, if anything, it reminded me of how I ought to hold off judgment until I know someone a little bit better. That’s why I went to see the girl. I needed to find out what her motives were, and when I did, I felt horribly for having judged her as harshly as I did. I am not proud of myself for my reactions, but I was thinking more or less about Tom.”

“Well, you can’t really know everything, William,” Patrick said wisely. “I know that you would like to. For the record, I do know that it is a general trait among people to want to know and control everything that is going on around them. Of course, I have noticed that oftentimes the act of getting upset catalyzes something rather extraordinary. Perhaps, what you experienced back there could tie into it. You see, I sometimes respond to things that I never imagined myself responding to. Somehow, in the wake of all of this, I have come to realize that perhaps I ought to play closer attention to details.”

“Maybe, but this is something that is so new to me,” Willy admitted. “I mean; this girl tried to handle things as an adult would, but she had more than her share of reasons to give up the effort. Now that I know what has happened to her, I discovered that I didn’t want her to be prosecuted as an adult. Not when she has no idea about how to behave or react as one. She’s just been forced by society to be one for the sake of her brother who is dependent on her to do what she can to help him. At any rate, before I left, I could tell that she was terrified about going back to that cell. I was trying to be optimistic for her, but in that place it seemed rather impossible.”

“I know what you mean. The place does give off the essence that is reminiscent in those old films, doesn’t it?” Patrick asked.

“Yes, and I even had images of detectives from these films going through my mind while I was waiting for them to bring her,” he shook his head. “Everything felt so final and morbid in there. Yet, this remarkable policewoman somehow managed to shut that aspect out. She was able to remain happy all the while having to work in such an oppressive sort of place. It truly surprised me.”

“Not everyone works in a self-made paradise, William,” Patrick said contemplatively. “You have a wonderful advantage that the rest of us can’t even begin to comprehend. Before I retired, I worked in a similar place as that police station. It was a company that built large computers. There was no bulletproof glass or chairs bolted to the floor, but there was a similar energy to the place. When we came into that building earlier, I noticed that there were these filing drawers and the depressing gray tables and chairs that were exactly the same. There was this drab feeling that permeated the entire place, and it reminded me of where I worked for many years.”

“You worked in a place like this?” Willy asked.
“Most people in the real world actually do,” Patrick chuckled. “It’s not paradise, that’s why it’s called ‘work’, if it was a wonderful essence, then they’d have to go and call it something else now, wouldn’t they?”

Willy smiled at the man’s wording, but took a deep breath. “I must be incredibly naïve, because all I have been able to think about since we left is how alone and isolated Stacey must be feeling right now. She has no one left who could really look after her. It would seem that the only people she has met who even tried were those who have taken advantage of or hurt her. It is deeply disturbing.”

“Well, now it would seem as though she now has you on her side,” Patrick said.

“I don’t know if I have the energy to save her or her view of the world, not when I have so many people depending on me now,” he said with obvious defeat in his voice. “Tonight, Eliza and Elmsworth are arriving at the factory with a girl named Tina. She’s a young lady from Germany whom I became acquainted with when Tom went to Germany last week. Her brother opted to ending his life, and now everything seems to be snowballing on top of me.”

“Perhaps not so much as you think,” Patrick said. “William, the only thing out of the ordinary that is happening here is that you are slowly re-learning what it means to have friends who are beyond your factory walls. You are being dealt with an unbelievable opportunity to discover that the real world is not a candy-coated delight. Of course, that’s disturbing for you, but maybe your presence here right now is a gift to those of us who have been in the real world for a bit too long. I know that this sounds rather like a bunch of psychological hocus-pocus, but maybe that’s why it feels so horrible to you.”

He paused and when Willy did not respond, he took a deep breath. “So, tell me a little more about this girl you just visited.”

“It’s like I said, her name is Stacey Madison and she did all these things because she has a younger brother named Matthew who’s twelve. I met him briefly when I visited Tom. The boy walks around with white gauze covering his head, and an attitude that doesn’t quit. Through his circumstances, she’s gone and made some rather tragic mistakes while trying to look out for him. Now, she is being forced to face the consequences of her actions. The thing that breaks my heart is that these two kids lost both of their parents in a fire and no one has offered to help them.”

Willy shook his head. “The thing that makes it hard for me to contend with is that she said that she wrote letters to various companies around Buckinghamshire seeking help and not one of them wanted to render assistance. That’s why she went and helped her friend assault people on the highway, she saw no other way out.”

“And now you want to help her?” Patrick asked. When Willy nodded, he continued speaking. “That’s very admirable.”

“Maybe,” Willy shrugged his shoulders.

“Not ‘maybe’, William, it is,” Patrick affirmed. “When Tom called the house earlier and told me that you wanted to meet up with us, I was surprised, but when he said that you were at the police station, I became somewhat skeptical. I suppose in hindsight, I thought that this was a scheme and that he was one of the men after Molly.”

“I’m just glad he was able to reach you,” the chocolatier said honestly. “Perhaps I am acting a trifle paranoid, but I have had this strange feeling that it was important for us to get you and Marjorie out of Buckinghamshire immediately. Perhaps the phone call with Tina triggered all of that,” he paused and took a deep breath. “The honest truth is I don’t think I will feel any better until everyone is safely at the factory.”

“Since you are being so honest with me, perhaps it would be prudent for me to do the same. William,
I was half-expecting something to happen,” Patrick began. “I spoke to my brother, Rick, two days ago and he said that if we could get out of town, then we should. He seemed to be hearing a crop full of rumors that implied that the Slugworths had been on the warpath ever since you managed to rescue Molly. Apparently one of my brother’s mates saw Owen at the local tavern several nights ago. He went on to say that Owen was getting drunk and making cheap threats.”

“What exactly did he say?” Willy asked.

“I’m not exactly certain, but based on what my brother said, his friend overheard Owen talking to some of the regulars there about hiring out an assassin to go and do away with Linda,” Patrick shook his head and shuddered unconsciously. “Rick figured that Owen was just saying that because he was three sheets to the wind, but after he called, I got to wondering if he was able to arrange it. Another story seemed to imply that they wanted to set fire to the house as a warning to anyone in our family from getting involved in their business. It just seemed as though everything that has been said about Slugworths being upset was true. At any rate, Rick rang us last night and told me that we should get out of town as soon as possible.”

“That’s what people in Buckinghamshire are saying?” Willy asked.

“Yes, and I can well imagine that since you helped Molly and Linda, that they would be trying everything they could to get revenge on you as well as other members of our family,” Patrick said. Willy motioned towards the backseat where Marjorie slept. “Does she know about any of this?”

“I think she suspects that something is awry, but given how paranoid she can get, I have actually opted to not tell her everything I know. Part of it is selfish and perhaps unwise, but I don’t want to make her needlessly worry. Marjorie tends to get panicked about things like this rather easily,” Patrick said. “When Tom called this afternoon, I was trying to arrange us safe passage out of town without trying to rile Marjorie’s worries or suspicions. I even went as far as to suggest a holiday, but I was not sure where we could have gone.”

“What would you say to going and spending a few weeks in Cornwall?” Willy asked abruptly.

“That would be nice,” Patrick said.

“Well, I do have a house on the outskirts of a seaside town there. It’s in the name of a friend of mine, so there’s no real way that this could get connected back to me. It may be a perfect place for you and Marjorie to have that proposed holiday. You could probably stay there until the Golden Ticket contest is over and once things can get back to normal for all of us, then you can return home,” Willy said. “I’m almost certain that Eliza and her friend would be delighted to have you both come and spend some time there.”

“What about Linda and Molly?” Patrick asked. “Do you think it would be safe for them to go there as well?”

“I don’t know; I’m not really sure. It was established quite violently that they were not safe in Füssen,” Willy said as he took a deep breath. He did not elaborate because he did not want to confess any of the feelings he had towards Linda and Molly. It was true that he had grown rather accustomed to having them with him at the factory. At the same instance, he also knew that they probably should be with their immediate family, and based on Marjorie’s earlier remarks, it was easy for him to conclude that this did not include him.

Eventually, he took a deep breath. “They can decide for themselves when we return if that is what they wish to do. If they decide to go, then I will respect their wishes. Of course, I must say that Linda
is in the process of filing for divorce and her lawyer may need her in town in order to sign the papers once everything gets finalized.”

Patrick nodded. “Maybe you’re right; we can discuss everything with her when we get there.”

The chocolatier swallowed but did not say anything further. After Linda and Molly had fled to Germany, it seemed only natural for her parents to have her with them. At the same time, he could not help but ponder what would happen between the two of them if she were to decide to leave.

With an impending separation on the horizon, Willy feared that he would be lurching back into the lonely existence that he had endured after sending Eliza to stay at his grandfather’s house. Of course, he was aware that Tina would be there, but how long the young German girl would be at the factory remained to be seen.

He exhaled slowly, his thoughts literally encasing him as his contemplations returned to Linda and Molly. *This is about their happiness*, he thought grimly, *not mine.*
Chapter 56: A Family Uprising

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

The drive continued slowly and by the time they had reached the perimeters of the factory, Marjorie had opened her eyes and was staring at the complex with unhidden fascination. “Is this where we’re going?” she asked as the candy maker reached towards the radio and pressed the button that would open the side gate.

“Yes,” Willy said simply, but then added in a halfhearted attempt at being cordial, “welcome to the factory.” He drove the car into the courtyard but pressed the button a second time so that the gate could once more be closed and locked behind them.

“Is that like one of those automatic garage door openers?” Patrick asked.

“It’s very similar, yes,” Willy said. “I have them installed on all the cars so that when Tom or I need to, we can leave the factory grounds and get back in without fumbling around with a set of keys or having to get out of the car.” He drove into a large garage and parked the car.

Cutting the motor, he removed the key from the ignition. He could not help but ponder if they would recognize how his words felt somehow forced and unnatural when addressing Marjorie, but at the same time, relaxed when addressing Patrick.

“I hope that you will both enjoy your stay here,” he eventually offered, his words once more emerging in very much in the same stilted fashion as they had been when he had welcomed them to the factory. He sighed as these awkward words hung in the air. It seemed as though neither of Linda’s parents took any notice to the changes in his tone of voice and this came as a relief to him.

“I’m sure it will be fine, just as long as we can spend some time alone with our daughter,” Marjorie said assertively as she got out of the car and waited for the men to disembark. She turned to face the chocolatier as her next question was raised. “Are you taking us to see her now?”

Willy nodded, but internally, he cringed. Once again, it seemed as though Marjorie was ignoring the fact that her granddaughter even existed. This broke his heart when he thought of the child and how she would most definitely feel the brunt of rejection by her grandmother’s cold words. Sighing, he inhaled and tried to keep the anger out of his response. It was bad enough that his words felt forced, but antagonizing things with this particular woman was not something he really wanted to do.

“Linda and Molly are staying in one of my guest rooms,” he began. “I’ll take you both to their room so that you can say ‘hello’. Please follow me and we will be there in just a few minutes.” He began to pull the suitcases out of the trunk and carried one of them over towards the door.

Patrick picked up one of the bags and started to follow Willy through the garage to the door that would ultimately lead them inside. When Willy stopped at the door and turned around, he could see the excitement lining the eyes of the Scotsman.

He smiled cordially as he recognized the childlike essence in the other man’s eyes. In fact, this made Willy decide to take them the longer route to the Lavender Room by way of the Rainbow Passage. This seemed a nice means in which to welcome them to the factory, not just making a straight shot to
He motioned towards the suitcases and looked at Patrick once he had managed to unlock the door and usher them inside. “Just leave the suitcases here in the doorway and my workers will bring them to your room.” He turned away from them before Marjorie could so much as utter a sound.

At this point, it was clear that the chocolatier was not interested in any further dialogue with her. Instead he closed the door and led them into a long corridor that was filled with light and color. Various shades, mixed with colored light met their eyes, and Willy watched as Linda’s parents regarded the passageway that they were walking in.

As he anticipated, the Scotsman seemed utterly delighted by how much color and light seemed to be dancing off the walls. He stopped walking and stared as bits of light cascaded over him. Turning, he regarded Willy through eyes laced with respect and appreciation. “This is positively awe inspiring,” he said. “You managed to create this effect on your own?”

Willy nodded, but within seconds, Marjorie had ruined the moment as her critical words pierced the air. “Seriously Patty,” she said snappishly as she turned to face her husband. “It’s just a wall with a bunch of color and light. We see the same things every year at Christmastime.”

“Perhaps, but Marjorie, you know that I absolutely adore Christmas,” Patrick said as he nudged Willy and smiled. “So tell me about this place, William.”

“There’s not much to tell, this corridor is one I call the ‘Rainbow Passage’,” Willy said without missing a beat. “It leads into the room I named the ‘Promise Meadow’. I can show this to you later, that is, if you would like to see it.”

Patrick nodded. “If it’s no trouble,” he said trying to keep his enthusiasm at bay. Willy could almost tell instinctively that Linda’s father was ready, willing, and able to look at every last nook and cranny of the factory that he was willing to share. There was an almost childlike eagerness that embodied the man and this made all the grief he had with Marjorie worth it.

He smiled at the prospect of giving this man a tour and watching how he would enjoy the things in his factory that others might call ‘run of the mill’ or ‘humdrum’. It also seemed blatantly clear to Willy that this was one person who would eat up every last detail of the place, whether it was the mechanical workings of the most intricate machines or the simple colors and light that danced across a rainbow colored passageway.

Patrick looked over at Willy, a smile gracing his lips and although no words emerged, the candy maker could tell instinctively that Linda’s father was as fascinated with his world as Molly was. This was a good man, and despite his earlier misgivings, Willy could not help but smile at the image of Molly and her grandfather waltzing across the Chocolate Room together.

Instead of voicing these thoughts, they reached the final corridor that would take them down the same hall as the door leading into the Chocolate Room. Instead of going there, Willy led them through a second doorway that was closer to the psychedelic room than to the magical door that led to the factory’s nerve-center.

“How much further is it?” Marjorie asked after they had gone through about the seventh doorway. “If I had known it was going to take this long, I would have put on my track shoes.”

“It’s not far now,” Willy said as they passed through a corridor that was filled with long hallways and even more doors that were on either side of it. “We’re almost there actually.” He figured at this point that he best hurry now, as Marjorie’s impatience was becoming even more apparent. Aside from that, he was now more than ready to see Linda again. After some moments had passed, he
figured that their little impromptu tour of the passageways and corridors was enough to aggravate Marjorie a little bit. That alone seemed to cause a tiny smirk to turn up the corners of his mouth.

After several moments, they finally reached the door leading into the room that Molly and Linda shared. Now that Willy’s thoughts were somewhat collected, he tapped lightly on the door. When it opened, he was looking down into the eyes of a very happy and relieved Linda.

“Oh Willy, thank God you’re back,” she cried out as she practically shot out of the room and straight into Willy’s surprised arms. Wordlessly, she buried her face against his chest as he raised his arms and wrapped her tightly in his hold.

Inhaling the sweet scent of chocolate and mint that emanated him, she raised her head and planted a kiss on his cheek before drawing back and taking a deep breath. “I was so worried,” she whispered, all the while not realizing that her parents were even present.

Patrick watched his daughter through bemused eyes and he felt himself smiling as he watched her embrace the chocolatier. It seemed perfectly obvious to the Scottish man that Willy Wonka was now the man who held the heart of his daughter in the palm of his hand. As his gaze met Willy’s all that he was able to do was to offer the confectioner an approving nod.

Linda remained wrapped in the sanctuary of Willy’s loving embrace until her mother spoke, the words emerging like ice. “Linda dear; now I think you really you should know better than to be behaving this way. It’s rather unbecoming of a married woman to be throwing herself at another man. Grant it, Owen may not be a very good man, but you are still married to him.”

Linda’s body unconsciously stiffened in Willy’s hold and this did not go unnoticed by the chocolatier. Instead of speaking, Willy tightened his hold, this action offering a sense of comfort that went unnoticed by both her parents. Seconds passed before the couple backed away from one another.

Willy offered Linda a weak smile, but it was clear that her face was now flushed with humiliation. This, if anything, made him want to toss manners and ethics to the wind and wrapping her lovingly in his arms and planting the most passionate kiss to her lips that he was capable of mustering.

Instead of immediately speaking, he reached for her hand and when she offered it, he allowed his fingers to wrap casually around it. After several moments of silence, he raised his head and looked down at Linda. “Has Tina arrived yet?” he asked trying to ignore the embarrassment that lined her face.

She shook her head. “I haven’t heard anything yet,” she offered. “I guess I can give you the key back, now that you’re home.”

He held up his hands in negation. “Keep it,” he said simply. “We can contend with all of that later.”

Linda nodded as she turned and looked at her parents. “Molly will be very happy to see you, Papa,” she said softly. She cast a glance at her mother, who was still standing next to them with her lips curled in a cold sneer. Sighing with defeat, she looked back over at Willy.

As her eyes met his, it suddenly became overtly clear to him that Linda knew that Marjorie did not accept her granddaughter.

This alone seemed to mount his confusion about the child’s role in this particular family. She loved her grandfather dearly and Willy remembered her mentioning him teaching her to dance the day they made butterscotch candies in the Inventing Room. He also recalled how Molly had mentioned the
book of recipes that her grandmother had. He could not help but wonder why it was that Marjorie
did not love this child. At the same instance, her relationship with her grandmother seemed to
awkwardly mirror the relationship that he had had with his own father.

He took a deep breath as Linda’s next words practically forced him out of his reverie.

“I-how did you find my parents?” she whispered the strange discomfort somehow emanated in both
the younger woman and the chocolatier.

“William met us at the police station in Buckinghamshire, honey,” Patrick explained all the while
trying to ignore everything his wife was doing. He approached his daughter and wrapped her in his
arms. “How are you doing, my dear?”

As Linda was enfolded in her father’s loving arms, she released the hold she had on Willy’s hand.
She held tightly to her father for several moments before backing away and looking up at him. Willy
could somehow tell that her brown eyes were silently seeking her father’s approval. It seemed
pointedly clear that based on Patrick’s earlier reaction that he had witnessed the electricity that had
passed between herself and the confectioner upon their return.

“I’m alright, Papa,” she said softly as she buried her face against his shoulder. “You were at the
police station?” she asked as a tremor cursed through her.

As Patrick released the embrace, Willy smiled down at her, “no, it was nothing about Owen, Linda.
I’ll tell you everything that happened a little bit later.”

Instead of speaking, she simply nodded as Patrick took up the story. “We got a call from your friend
Tom earlier today from the hospital. He said that William had invited us to come here for a few
days,” Patrick began his eyes shining with excitement.

“More like demanded,” Marjorie said spitefully.

“That’s not true, we were invited, and I felt that it was a good idea for us to take a break from
everything that has been going on back home,” Patrick responded, but cast an apologetic glance
towards Willy before shifting his attention back to his daughter. “It actually worked better than I
could have calculated.”

“It would seem so,” Linda said, but looked at Willy. “How’s Tom? Is he going to be alright? I’ve
been really worried about him.”

“He’s going to be fine,” Willy said clearly relieved. “The doctor says that he should be released
tomorrow morning sometime.”

“I’m glad,” Linda said. “I know that you were concerned about him.”

“Speaking of concerns, where is my little Molly?” Patrick asked.

“She’s with a friend for the afternoon,” Linda said. “She and Cristy-Kai went exploring. They
wanted to get better acquainted before tomorrow’s birthday party. She said that she’d be back in time
for dinner. Cristy-Kai said that they wanted to go to a place called the ‘Candy Cane Forest’,” she
said as looked at Willy. “I figured that since I hadn’t seen her since before you left, I wasn’t able to
mention to her that you had gone. I guess it was better that way though. I know that your going away
would have scared her. One of us being frightened is enough, I think.”

Instead of responding to Linda’s words, Marjorie’s face took on a look of indignation. “What sort of
place is this ‘Candy Cane Forest’?” she asked.
Willy arched an eyebrow. That was the first time Marjorie had even asked a question about Molly, and he could not help but ponder what the motivation behind the question was. Did this woman really care about her granddaughter or was she trying to monopolize the dialogue again? He said nothing, but instead waited for Linda to answer.

“As far as I know, Omaya-Kal said that it was of the back recesses of the factory. He did assure me that it would be alright to go there and that you would have no objections.” She turned and looked at Willy.

“No, it’s a very safe place, and I trust that Omaya-Kal would not have allowed them to go if it was otherwise,” Willy said smiling. “I trust that Molly is having a wonderful time. Hanging around with Cristy-Kai means that there is no telling what the two of them are up to. The last time I spent time with their family, Cristy-Kai spent much of the time on my lap. She started calling me ‘illamar’, which in their language means ‘friend’.”

“Sounds like truly a delightful child,” Patrick said. “I’m sure Molly is enjoying herself immensely. How could she not? This place is no doubt like a dream come true to for her and I really envy her having the energy to do all of that.” He paused as he leaned his weight against the wall. “Right now, I think I am in need of a place to sit down and a little shut eye before dinner. Do you have a room for us by chance, William?”

“Of course, I had my workers prepare the Lilac Room for you both. The room is down the hall and around the corner from this one. I just thought that you both would like to see Linda first,” Willy said. “I can show you to the room now, if you would like.”

“Why can’t we just stay with our daughter?” Marjorie asked. “It would seem reasonable. I would guess that all of your rooms here are probably the same size as your average condominium.”

At that moment, Linda cringed, but exchanged a wary glance with the chocolatier. Upon seeing this he shook his head but spoke, his voice filled with diplomatic undertones. “With all due respect, your daughter is a grown woman, and she and Molly need their own space, just as you and Patrick need yours.”

“Why can’t we just stay with our daughter?” Marjorie asked. “It would seem reasonable. I would guess that all of your rooms here are probably the same size as your average condominium.”

“Well, you mustn’t be so rude about it,” Marjorie said hotly.

“I can assure you that I was not,” Willy said assertively.

“It would just seem to me that given these present circumstances, our daughter really needs extra looking after,” Marjorie shot back, all the while ignoring the fact that Linda was still standing in the corridor and listening to this exchange.

“Mother, please, if you don’t mind, you’re talking about me as though I am six, and I can attest to the fact that aside from not being a child anymore, I do not need you as my babysitter,” Linda said, the anger etched in her voice.

Instead of responding, Marjorie looked at Patrick, who took a deep breath. “No one is trying to be rude here, Linda. You know that Marjorie was just trying to look out for you.”

“Perhaps, Papa, but ever since you arrived, she has been nothing but offensive to our host and condescending towards me,” Linda said as she looked over at her mother. It was clear that she was not finished speaking yet. “Now, I do have a voice in all of these plans you are making, and I do not want you to stay in this room with us. My daughter has been having nightmares; she needs quiet and not incessant arguments. She got enough of that with her father. Now, if you would all please excuse me, I have a headache and would like to sit down and have some peace and quiet before dinner.”
She looked at Willy, but before disappearing into the room, she leaned over and rested her head against his shoulder. “Will I see you later?” she whispered into his right ear.

When Willy did not respond or react to these words, she became somewhat confused when he exerted a simple pat to her shoulder. Seconds later, he turned his head and looked at her, a gentle smile crossing his face. “Linda, I don’t know if I told you, but I’m almost completely deaf in that ear.”

Linda took a deep breath, but nodding, she leaned over and repeated her question in his left ear.

“Yes, I’ll stop by once your parents are settled,” he whispered back to her.

Once she nodded, she walked slowly back into the Lavender Room and closed the door behind her. Marjorie stood staring after her daughter, her eyes filled with hostility. It was clear that the actions of both young people had put her out.

At that moment, Willy simply did not much care. Instead, he exchanged looks with Patrick and started to lead them back down the hall and around the corner towards the Lilac Room.

“This way please,” he managed to force out of his mouth as they made their way down the hall. The chocolatier, after seeing what had happened between Linda and her mother seemed to have the answer to the questions that he had contemplated on their way here. She would probably not be leaving his factory to go to Cornwall at all. From the looks of things, that option would mean nothing but endless arguments and hostile words. Then again, the mere thoughts of Eliza and Marjorie being in the same room with one another for an extended period of time also seemed a license for disaster.

He was not sure, at this point as to what was going to happen next with his guests.

Sighing, he was left feeling rather worn out at the prospect of pushing Marjorie onto anyone. Of course, he could not deny that he felt that, among all his other worries, he now had that one to contend with.

_How ever did Patrick put up with this?_ he asked himself. She had been here less than an hour and the chocolatier was now feeling as though he was ready for a padded cell.
Chapter 57

Chapter 57: To Be Oneself

*This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view*

As soon as he had shown Linda’s parents to their room, Willy left them alone and made his way back down the hall towards Linda and Molly’s room. Upon arriving at the door, he reached out and knocked lightly. “Linda, it’s Willy, may I come in?”

The door was slowly opened as Linda looked up and into the candy maker’s eyes. Nervously, she waited for him to enter the room, the door slowly closing behind him. He could see that she was nervous; the confrontation with her parents had somehow caused her to back away from him.

Instead of speaking, Willy extended his hands towards her. “Your parents are far enough away that they cannot disturb you at every turn. Just relax, Linda.”

“Maybe, but I still seem to evoke the most negative responses from my mother. I shouldn’t have expected more than that reaction from her, I just hope that her attitude doesn’t evoke the very same responses in you.”

“I will never treat you the way your mother does,” he said with a gentle smile. “You know Linda, you really are not responsible for her cynicism or the way she treats me.”

“I know, but I guess I was half expecting it,” she whispered. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad that they are safely here, I guess I just need some time off is all.” She paused, but looked up at him. “My mother’s a real piece of work, isn’t she?”

“I generally try to hold off on judgments until I get to know someone better,” he said smiling gently. Deep down inside, he could not help but wonder if Linda was able to read through these words. He waited, and soon discovered that she was more than capable of it.

“You’re lying, you think my mother is just as obnoxious as I do,” she smiled despite the seriousness of their conversation. “I can tell, Willy, I can tell when you’re telling the truth or when you’re lying. It has taken me some time, but I’m actually starting to get better about figuring you out.” As she spoke, she wrapped her arms around him, her body completely relaxing against his.

“How ever do you manage?” he asked smugly as he returned the embrace. “You know, I have always prided myself on keeping my motives a secret.”

Linda smiled, but raised her head so that she could look into the depths of his blue eyes. “I can tell when you’re lying because you don’t look at me. And when you don’t look at me, then you start using fancy or foreign words or expressions.”

“Is that really what you are thinking, ma chérie?” he asked.

“Perhaps, or I’m just thinking about how much I love it when you call me ‘darling’ in French,” Linda smiled despite the trepidation in her gaze. After several minutes had passed, she could feel her playful demeanor crumbling and she buried her face against his chest and breathed in the scent that emanated him. “Molly’s right, you do smell like chocolate and mint.”

“Linda,” he spoke her name as he ran his hands over the back of her head, the smoothness of her hair tickling his fingertips. “What is it, Love?”
“I’m just glad that you got back safely,” she whispered.

He tightened his hold. “I promised you that I would handle this, didn’t I?” he crooned softly as he backed away so that he could cup her face in his hands. He lowered his head and pressed his lips gently against hers.

After several moments, the kiss intensified and Linda soon felt the softness of his tongue as it wound around hers. The hold they had on one another seemed to depict two people who wanted nothing more than to become one.

Before they could take this passionate kiss to another level, the chocolatier backed away, his lips now carrying a smirk. “And now that your parents are down the hall, you can relax.” As he spoke, the sarcasm in his voice made her giggle.

“You sure know how to ruin a romantic moment,” she whispered, but took a deep breath. It seemed clear to them both that Linda, although wanting to continue the passionate kisses with him could not. After several moments, she inhaled slowly. “I’m sorry, but the words ‘relax’ and ‘my mother’ is an oxymoron.”

“Shall I lock the door?” he asked with a quirky smile on his face. “Or perhaps, we should sneak off to my room. Would that make you relax?”

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discover the truth.”

“Don’t worry. We can keep it a secret for as long as we need to. This is, after all, not any of their concern,” he said with an adamant shake of his head. “I believe that your mother does mean well, she just happens to have the stance of a wangdoodle in a thunderstorm.”

She smiled. “What on earth is a wangdoodle? You make references like that quite a lot and I don’t understand. It’s…a mystery.”

“It’s a dreadful creature from Loompaland, but the reference is actually a saying that the Oompa Loompas have whenever there is something considered unstable or uncontrolled,” he said softly.

“Just like my mother,” she said smiling weakly. “Oh Willy, I wish that she wouldn’t try and control everything that I do. She’s never really accepted me and I wish that for once she could just be proud of me, or at the very least be proud of Molly. She’s such a wonderful child, and my mother is denying herself the chance to really know her,” she shook her head. “I know that I asked you and Tom earlier about them, but I still wonder how I’m going to handle them being here. Everything has suddenly gotten very complicated.”

“You and I both know that they are here because you feared for their safety and because Molly has been asking about her grandfather ever since she found out that Tom was going to Buckinghamshire,” Willy said. “I’m guessing that your parents wanted to see her as well. Molly said that Patrick taught her how to dance, and that she wanted to be a dancer when she grows up.”

Linda lowered her head. “In other words, I’m being selfish, aren’t I?”

“No, I can fully understand how you feel on edge with your mother, I feel the very same way,” he said. “When you hugged me earlier, it was the most wonderful feeling in the world. Then when she spoke, it was as though the moment had been shattered for both of us. It seemed as though she was saying that we were both misguided for being happy to see one another again.”

“That’s what I mean,” she said. “I walk on egg shells whenever my mother is around. Everything I do or say gets scrutinized. You know, when things started to fall apart with Owen, my mother tried to tell me everything that I was doing that was wrong. It was as though she was defending him, instead of supporting me. She has always tried to dictate everything I have ever done and I suppose at a certain point, I decided that I wouldn’t let her do it. I already know I’m not perfect, but I don’t need her to tell me that I have no scruples.”

Willy tightened his hold on her, this time her face came to rest against his chest. She could hear his heartbeat, the soothing sounds of it slow and steady in her ear. “You are most certainly not what your mother says or implies. I know that you are doing your best, you don’t need to justify anything with me.” He brushed his hand through her hair, “alright?”

Linda nodded. “I just wish that there was a way that I could be myself around my parents.”

“You know, I often felt the same way for many years with my father,” he said with a gentle smile still on his face. “We are so very much alike, Linda, yet, neither of us seemed to realize it until the night we met.”

“I remember that night, sitting in the helicopter with you holding me in your arms and how I felt so safe there. It was as though I knew deep down inside that you would never hurt me,” she looked up at him. “I’ve never felt this safe anywhere. Being here inside your factory is like stepping into a dream, and my biggest fear would be that you would one day decide to send us away.”
“Does that really frighten you?” Willy asked.

She nodded. “It sounds over-dramatic and stupid, but yes, it does.”

“I won’t ever send you away,” he said softly. “To do so would be to deny myself of two of the most wonderful people I could ever hope to have met.” He brushed a gentle hand through her hair, his eyes staring down into hers. “I won’t ever turn away from you.” He paused for a moment and began to speak, his next words filling her ears. “There is something that I do need to tell you before your parents show up here and mention it, though.”

“What is it?” she asked.

“It’s about an idea I have, which I think is rather good,” he smirked. “At any rate, it stems from a conversation that I had with your father while we were driving here. I told him that if they wanted to, I could arrange for them to go and stay in Cornwall with Eliza.”

“That sounds nice, I’m sure my parents would like that, my mother’s always dreamed of going to Cornwall,” she said. “That’s a wonderful gesture; I just hope it won’t inconvenience Eliza.”

The chocolatier smiled. “I’m sure it won’t, but there’s more and I think that you need to be aware of what all of this entails. Among other things, I figured that they’d be safe there, and would not feel as restricted as they would if they were to decide to remain here at the factory. Patrick said that you and Molly should consider this as an option as well. Of course, I told him that I think you are old enough to decide for yourself and your daughter what is best.” He paused for a moment and when she said nothing, he continued. “I will accept whatever option you choose, but I thought it would be a good idea for me to mention this to you first. Knowing how your mother is, I guess I reached the conclusion that you would perhaps feel confronted if the proposal was made without you having the chance to consider it.”

Linda closed her eyes. “‘Confront’, yes, that seems like the most perfect wording, because that is exactly how I would feel. My mother still believes today that all my decisions should be decided for me.”

“Yes, I sort of picked up on that,” he said as he took her hand in his and squeezed it gently. “Linda, this is an option, and I will not impose my will on you regarding it. Think about what you and Molly really want to do and know that I will respect and support your wishes. I hope that when considering this as an option that you will remember that it may not be completely safe for you to go away from here.”

He paused and released a pent up breath as his next words emerged. “As you probably know, I have always tried to maintain the harmony even when the information that I must share seems contrary to that.” His gaze remained on her and he watched as she began to process his words.

“I suppose we should probably go with them then, but…” she began to speak, her voice trailing off.

“…You don’t want to,” the chocolatier finished for her. It was no secret that he was relieved by what she had said, but he could also tell that she still felt torn. Despite the earnestness of the situation, his blue eyes began to shine when she nodded her head adamantly in response to his words.

“No, Willy, I don’t. Call me disloyal or petty, but I don’t want to go there, not under these circumstances,” she confessed softly. “I mean; aside from constantly being reminded of all my shortcomings and mistakes, I would be so afraid each time I walked out the front door. Afraid that Owen’s friends would show up like they did in Füssen and take Molly away from us.” She shook her head. “I would rather stay here with you and my daughter than to go anywhere else. At least being here, I know that I can spend my time with you without feeling guilt for it.”
He smiled and nodded. “You know, I must admit that I am quite relieved with your choice. I would have been very lonely here without you and Molly.”

Linda rested her head on his shoulder. “I would have been lonely, too.”

Willy smiled. “Then we have to tell your parents what your decision is. I am not quite certain if your mother is going to approve, but it is your choice and that should be respected. I think we can perhaps arrange their passage with Eliza and Elmworth when they return in a few days. Of course, I do believe that Patrick deserves to have at least a few days to spend with his granddaughter. In doing it this way, then it won’t seem so obvious that we’re trying to get rid of them.”

“You really plan everything to perfection, don’t you?” she asked.

“I suppose I do,” he said softly. “After all, when it comes to the people I care for, I have to.” As these words emerged, his fingers began to gently stroke her face, the softness of his touch drawing her closer to him.

“Thank you for not making us go away,” she whispered.

He pulled her gently towards him, but stopped when they were several centimeters apart. “If I were to do that;” he began, his voice a husky whisper, “then I would be denying a part of myself the chance to experience true happiness and joy.”

“That’s so beautiful,” she whispered.

“It’s only the truth,” he kissed her but as he drew away, his words continued. “We really should still give Molly the option. She may actually want to spend the extra time with her grandparents in Cornwall.”

“She won’t go anywhere, not without you,” Linda said shaking her head. “She adores you, Willy. She even told Omaya-Kal that you’re her best friend in the whole world. I don’t think she will be all that willing to leave, especially with the nightmares she is still having. She believes that you can protect her from anything. I’m starting to think that maybe she’s right, and you can.”

Willy smiled, but he looked at her, his eyes filled with more intensity than she could have even imagined. “I am not a hero, Linda, I’m just a man.”

“A truly wonderful man,” she corrected, a smile now gracing her lips.

He moved his hands so that he could cup her face gently. Wordlessly, he leaned towards her and captured her lips with his own. After several seconds, they simultaneously allowed their lips to part and were able to deepen the kiss. As he felt her tongue brushing against his, he could feel the passion of the moment taking hold of him.

After several moments had passed with her wrapped comfortingly in his embrace, he suddenly picked her up and stood up with her wrapped securely in his arms. Once again, he sat down with her body now draped over his lap, the kiss never breaking.

Seconds later, it broke and he was left looking down into her eyes. “God, I missed you,” he whispered just before he captured her lips once again. This time the chocolatier’s kiss was no longer tentative, but instead, it was filled with a distinctive passion that belonged solely to Willy Wonka.

Without contemplating anything, he suddenly felt her arms wrapping around him, her body pressing up against him, the emotions somehow filling her and causing her to feel the more primitive urges overtaking her. Soon she raised her hands until she was holding the back of his head, her fingers
now feeling the softness of his hair.

Seconds later, he withdrew, but could still feel her hands running through his soft wayward coils of hair. He smiled weakly down at her. “Forgive me for that, but my impulses were taking me down a rather rebellious path just now.”

Linda began to slowly rake her tongue over her lips, but she could now feel his haggard breathing against her face. “I don’t mind,” she eventually confessed as a feeling of giddy laughter suddenly encompassed her. “This is all rather reminiscent of being in the backseat of a car on prom night.” She continued to giggle as she stared into his eyes, her arms still holding tightly to him, her face pressing up against his chest just under his chin.

Inhaling, she could suddenly make out the smell of his aftershave mixed with the distinctive fragrance of chocolate and peppermint. This made her lean even closer to him. “At least I know that my mother’s attitude brings out a whole other side of you, one that I didn’t know existed, but one that I really like.”

“In other words, I shouldn’t be apologizing for what I did just now,” he whispered coyly, his eyes now filled with unmistakable mischief.

“No, don’t even think about apologizing to me for that,” she nodded as she once again buried her face against him. As her hands stretched over his chest, her fingers began to probe along the collar of his white shirt. “You’re the most wonderful man I have ever known. I had no idea that I could feel as though I am a real woman and not just someone’s plaything. You make me feel real, Willy. It is almost as though I am not just some porcelain doll that needs to be protected from the tempests of the world. Oh God, this probably sounds so strange to you, but I like to be rebellious and I like to feel the love and the tenderness that you share, but I also like to be a bit reckless. Somehow it reminds me that I’m just as human as everyone else.”

Willy took a deep breath, but smiled as she raised her head and tried to initiate another kiss. He inched closer to her and suddenly felt her lips sliding over his cheek until they reached his mouth. Feeling this, he dug his hands into her hair and allowed himself to give her everything she wanted.

As their kiss broke, he looked down at her and noticed that the tears were streaming down her face. “It’s alright, Linda,” he whispered as he began to brush the moisture away. “Don’t cry.”

She licked her lips and smiled weakly at him. “It’s not that I’m sad, Willy. It’s just that when you kissed me just now, I knew that for the first time in years, you made me feel as though I could truly be myself. It was like I was somehow realizing that I was still able to be a real woman again.”

Willy took a deep breath, but instead of allowing her to rest her head against him once again, he drew her back so that he could look into her eyes.

Instead of speaking, he covered her lips with his, the kiss filled with the very same passion and urgency that he felt in the core of his being. He tasted her lips and soon discovered that she tasted even better than lemon drops and sugar. In fact, it was as though the night when she has sat in the Chocolate Room eating his favorite teacups, the flavor had lingered, thus leaving a sweet aftertaste on her lips. Now he could taste that tangy sweetness in his own mouth, and this seemed to come from the simple act of kissing her.

He began to tighten his hold on her, his arms holding her firmly. As his eyes closed he could feel her body reacting to his touch. It was as though thousands of tiny sparks had ignited inside of each of them. As their kisses became even more passionate, Willy tried to suppress the urges that unconsciously filled him.
Seconds later, the couple felt the undertow of emotions filling them, but before they could continue down the path they had started, someone abruptly knocked on the door.

Willy groaned softly. “We’ll continue where we left off right after I get rid of whoever is out there.”

She nodded and smiled weakly before releasing him so that he could stand up and go answer the door.

As soon as he reached the door, he pulled it open to see that Rini-May was standing on the other side, a small smile on her orange colored face.

“Excuse the interruption, Nunguserak Nanganartok,” she began with an almost knowing smile in her wise face. “Ingo-Eia and his passengers have arrived and have landed in the courtyard. My brother requested that I come find you and inform you so that you can go and greet them.”

Willy nodded and offering a slight smile, he turned and looked over at Linda, who was coming towards where he was standing. When he reached out and took her hand in his, he offered it a comforting squeeze. “I’ll be back very soon,” he whispered to her.

She nodded, but watched as he stepped out in the hallway. Smiling, she watched as he tried unsuccessfully at patting down his hair. With his back now to her, she raised her hand and lightly touched her lips. Once he had left the room and disappeared down the hallway, she closed the door.
Chapter 58

Chapter 58: Tina’s Arrival

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

After reluctantly leaving the Lavender Room, Willy made his way down the hall towards the door that would lead outside. Reaching it, he quietly emerged from the factory. The door, he allowed to softly close behind him. Above his head the overcast sky had completely blocked out the sunlight and he figured that the first drops of rain could start falling at any given moment.

Crossing the courtyard, he made his way in the direction of the small helicopter that had landed about a hundred meters away from the door. Presently, it was parked in the center of the large open space.

He smiled as he watched Eliza and Elmsworth disembarking the craft. Where’s Tina? He asked himself, as he waited for the two of them to come over and greet him. He figured that he would find out soon enough the precise whereabouts of the young girl he had sent them to pick up.

His attention shifted to the man who was now walking alongside Eliza. He was the spitting image of the man that Eliza had often described. He wore a similar top hat on his head and carried a cane in his hand. This tapped lightly against the ground in a steady rhythm. As the two of them came closer, Willy noted that the other man had a sharp silvery gray mustache that grew under his nose and a head full of wavy matching hair. His eyes were a merry grayish blue and his lips curved upwards in an accommodating smile.

He really does look like an older version of me, Willy thought with a chuckle as the couple came closer and he extended his hands towards Eliza. As she grasped them, he pulled her into his arms and buried his face against her shoulder. The scent of her rose flavored perfume abruptly filled his nose and a contented sigh emerged from him.

“Hello Mum,” he whispered. Now that she was present, he could relax. Eliza seemed to have the opposite effect on him that Marjorie did, and for that, the chocolatier was monumentally grateful.

“My dear William, how good it is to see you,” she said softly as she rubbed her hands along his back. As the embrace loosened, she backed away so that she could inspect him a bit closer. “You look wonderful, albeit a bit tired. You really need to get more sleep.”

“Yes, Mum,” he said with a soft chuckle as he looked down into her loving eyes. “You look so great.”

“Well, considering the long flight going both ways, I’m feeling quite well,” she said as she extended her hand towards the sharply dressed gentleman in her company. “William, this is Elmsworth Hendricks, Elmsworth, this is my son.”

“Jolly good to meet you,” Elmsworth said with a smile. “Eliza has told me a great deal about you. Good things of course.” He released his hold on her before carefully hanging the curved end of the cane over his arm just before extending his hand to the chocolatier.

“Jolly good to meet you,” Elmsworth said with a smile. “Eliza has told me a great deal about you. Good things of course.” He released his hold on her before carefully hanging the curved end of the cane over his arm just before extending his hand to the chocolatier.

“Yes, I can truthfully attest to the fact that she has spoken rather positively of you as well,” Willy said cordially and accepted Elmsworth’s outstretched hand. Releasing it, he looked at Eliza. “Why don’t you both go inside and I’ll see to Tina? How is she by the way?”

“The wee girl is quite exhausted, William,” Eliza said as she cast a glance back towards the
“Did you have any trouble finding her?” he asked.

“No, none at all, but you should keep in mind that she may not be like the person you spoke to over the phone. She’s is a lot more fragile and reserved than any of us might have anticipated,” Eliza said. “Go to her and be her friend, something tells me that she really needs a friend right about now.”

Willy nodded, “is she asleep?”

“She was when we landed in Kensington,” Elmsworth offered with a nod. “I had to carry her to the chopper because she headed off to dreamland somewhere over France.”

“Well, I really appreciate you both going and picking her up like this,” Willy said.

“It was our pleasure,” Elmsworth said, but nudged Willy’s side with his elbow. “Eliza tells me that I might actually get a tour for my troubles.”

“Of course,” Willy said smiling happily. “Mi fabrica es tu fabrica.” (My factory is your factory.)

Elmsworth smiled and nodded, but looked at Eliza. “You said that he was an intellectual of sorts; now I believe it.”

“I’ll see you both inside,” Willy said with a chuckle, but looked at Eliza. “I take it you already know the way to your room?”

“How many years was this factory my home?” Eliza asked as she reached for his hand and offered it a firm squeeze. “Don’t you worry about us, we’ll manage just fine. You go take care of that little girl and we’ll see you later for dinner.”

“Thanks, Mum,” he whispered.

“Oh, I so love it when you call me that,” she giggled as she leaned over and pinched his cheek lovingly. He then watched as she accepted Elmsworth’s offered arm and the two of them went inside.

Willy remained in the courtyard, but still chuckling, he started to walk towards the helicopter. Once he reached it, he climbed inside.

There he found Tina still seated, her head resting against the back of the seat, her hands holding tightly to a small rucksack. He smiled as he looked over towards Ingo-Eia, who was checking the dials and controls for the aircraft. “Did she see you?” he asked as a greeting.

“Briefly, I believe, but I am not quite certain as to how much she will remember,” the Oompa Loompa said honestly. “She seemed to have far more on her mind than any of us could have anticipated.”

Willy nodded. “That’s what Eliza said. It actually reminds me of when Linda initially arrived here.”

The pilot nodded. “Yes, well, once we get the luggage taken out, I can return this to Kensington.”

“Would you let Andy know that I really appreciate his assistance with all of this?” he asked. As the Oompa Loompa nodded, he continued. “Tell him that I will be sending an extra box of chocolate bars, free of charge, to the airport in the coming days.”

“He’ll enjoy that, I am certain,” Ingo-Eia said smiling.
For his part, Willy seated himself next to the young girl and started to undo her seatbelt. “Tina?” he whispered her name as he carefully began to shift her from the seat and into his gentle hold. “Are you awake, my dear?”

Instead of responding, she moaned softly, but after several minutes, she started to wake up. Raising her head, she looked over at where his voice had originated and gasped as she tried to recall where specifically she was.

The moment she felt that someone was holding her, she swallowed, but her body became tense as she began to rub the sleep out of her eyes. “W-wo bin ich?” (Where am I?)

“Du bist in London und jetzt liegt deine Reise hinter dir,” he said. (You are in London and your journey is now behind you.)

“W-Willy?” She whispered his name as she began to lick her lips, the dryness catching in her throat.

“M-hum,” he responded with a slow nod as he helped her to sit back up. There was no question remaining in his mind, she looked as though she was about to burst into tears. All that he could do was to simply wait for the inevitable to happen.

Willy could still remember how she had been when they had spoken on the phone. The person he now saw was vastly different than the confident and gracious young woman whom Thomas had given the phone to. Her stance was encompassed in shyness and intimidation, right down to the manner in which she wrapped her arms around her body.

When she said nothing, he reached for her hand with the intention of helping her to stand up and disembark the helicopter. “Come, we have a room ready and if I didn’t know any better, I would say that a little rest before dinner would do you a world of good.”

“I s-should get my things,” she whispered before casting a wary glance towards her belongings in the back. She started to reach for them, but his voice stopped her.

“Not to worry,” he said gently. “My workers will bring your belongings to your room.”

“B-but, t-the letter,” she whispered as she gripped the rucksack and started to stand up. Once she did, she turned and started to make her way towards the exit. “I-I have to give you that letter, but I’m afraid to.”

“There is no reason for you to be afraid, Tina,” he said, smiling gently at her. “I know that these reassurances don’t always help, but they are the truth. Trust me when I say that everything is going to be all right. You are not going to be cast out because of the words contained in a letter.”

Moments later, they stepped outside and the cool London breeze wafted gently through their hair. Willy turned and looked at her, a smile stretching across his face. “Welcome to London…and to my factory.”

She smiled weakly as a bitter sweet feeling encompassed her. “I never thought…” her voice trailed off as she turned and could see the high smokestacks rising behind her. Turning back around, she could once again see the large iron style gate that extended along the front of the large factory complex.

For several moments, the nineteen-year-old German girl simply stared at it. The front of the grounds seemed to capture her attention as she looked intently at the wavy lettering that practically hung over the top of the gate. From one end to the other, she could make out his surname, but instead of reading it as ‘Wonka’, what she was seeing was ‘aknoW’. Somehow, seeing it in this way, gave emphasis to
the fact that she was there. Instead of this being a dream, it was her present reality.

Instead of speaking, she turned her head and looked at Willy, all the while wondering if he could even understand the feelings and emotions that she now carried. She knew that she was seeing something that everyday people could not, and yet the words seemed locked away amidst grief and heartache.

Swallowing, she stopped walking but extended her hand in the direction of the curly interwoven lettering that was at the far end of the courtyard. Remaining stationary, she turned and stared up at the man who was now standing beside her.

Willy had stopped walking as well. Without initially speaking, he reached out and rested his hand gently on her shoulder. When his gaze met hers, he noted the surprise that seemed to encase her. “Are you shocked about this being real?” he asked with as much understanding in his words as was possible. He sincerely hoped that she would not interpret his inquiry as a statement of arrogance.

“Uh-huh,” she nodded, the sounds of her voice somehow failing her and emerging as a high-pitched squeak.

He moved his hand so as to support her upper back, and bade her gently towards the door. “Come, we need to get inside.” He glanced skyward, the overcast sky showing signs of a pending downpour. “It would not serve you to get wet or sick.”

Nodding, Tina allowed him to lead her towards the building.

As they came inside, she found herself being led down one corridor after another. She watched as his expert steps and movements indicated that he had gone down these halls perhaps a hundred times. Having him leading her made her relax, if but only slightly.

After making their way down what looked like the same, empty corridor, she bit down on her lip and tried to somehow orient herself. She was nervous, and for whatever reason, the unending corridors, hallways, and doors only added to her apprehension.

After about five minutes, she spoke, her voice a soft murmur. “Everything around here looks the same.”

“It’s not, it only seems that way,” he said. “Once you get settled in, you’ll come to discover that there is a way to navigate these corridors and passageways.”

She lowered her head, a slight nod the only indication that she had even heard his words. One thing was clear; speaking to him on the phone was one thing, but now standing in his presence felt strange and different to her. She raised her head and felt the gentle brush of his arm against hers. Now he was right next to her, three dimensional, live and in person.

Willy, still noticing her disquietedness eventually turned and faced her. “Once I show you your room and you get some rest, then perhaps we can meet and speak at length with one another.” These words somehow hung lazily in the air, but after several minutes had passed with no response, he started to ponder if bringing her to the factory had even been a good idea at all. She was so fragile.

Eliza had been right, talking to her on the phone was a far cry different than standing here speaking face to face. She was like night and day, her insecurities somehow not matching the young woman that Thomas had met when he had been in Duselheim.

After several minutes, and not able to take much more of this, he finally turned and faced her. When she still did not respond to his words, he carefully reached over and with both hands, gently captured
the girl’s shoulders and turned her so that she would face him. His eyes were intent and his expression was filled with earnestness as he began to speak.

“Please, Tina, don’t do this. I want to help you, but I cannot if you act as though I am your enemy and not your friend.” He lowered his hands, his gaze still locked on hers, but an almost helpless essence seemed to hang in the air like a pendulum. “You have no reason to be afraid.”

He continued to stare into her eyes, but he could somehow sense that her rock-solid resolve was about to break apart. Rather than speaking again, he simply waited.

After several moments had passed, the blocked tears began to freely stream down over her cheeks. “I just kept hoping that this would all be nothing but a dream,” she whispered “I prayed that I would wake up and Max, my parents, and I would all be at home together. I wanted him to be home. I wanted to believe everything was going to be alright, but it’s not…”

She turned away from him, her stance now next to one of the side walls of the corridor. Her fists unconsciously clenching as she suddenly began to beat against it, the sounds resonating around the empty corridor like a kettledrum beating at four quarter time. “Ich wollte, dass er nach Hause kommt…” (I want him to come home.) she cried, as she pounded her fist once, twice, then a third time against the wall. “…Das muß nur ein Traum sein….ein verdammter schlechter Traum.” (It must only be a dream…a really bad dream.)

She stopped everything she was doing, her body standing rigid as she clasped her hands together, the anguish filling her as the next words emerged. “Ich soll nach Hause gehen. Er wird da sein…ich bin ganz sicher.” (I must go home, he’ll be there… I just know it.) Her words hung in the air as she gasped for breath. “Lieber Gott, das darf nicht wahr sein…” (Dear God, it can’t be true.)

Willy stood staring as Tina sank to her knees, her body trembling like a leaf as the tears burst from beneath her eyes. The grief that she had tried to conceal had now found its way out through the heartbreaking German words that she spoke.

Internally, the chocolatier wished that he could not understand a single word of the German language, but he could, and even still, her body language was enough for anyone to understand the misery she carried. “Bitte, lass ihn nicht tot sein!” (Please, don’t let him be dead!)

Willy got down on the floor beside her as he carefully pulled her into his embrace, the girl’s face coming to rest against him as her fists beat against his chest and her loud sobs filled his ears. He touched the top of her head, his fingers brushing lightly through her hair as she wept. “Lass es einfach raus, kleines,” (Just let it out, sweetheart.) he managed to speak. “Du bist nicht allein, Tina, ich bin bei dir,” he said softly. (You’re not alone, Tina. I’m here with you.)

“H—he was my brother, Willy, and I…I l—oved…him,” she whimpered softly, her face now pressed against his chest and her fists releasing until she was left gripping the softness of his shirt.

“I know you did,” Willy said as he continued to stroke her hair gently. “I could tell. You feel the exact same loss that Tom felt when his brother was killed. You have so many questions, but not very many answers.”

She nodded as she continued to hold tightly to him, her weeping somehow drawing Marjorie out of the Lilac Room and was left standing and staring down at them. No words emerged, she merely stood and stared as Willy Wonka sat on the floor and was consoling the grieving teenage girl.

The older woman rubbed her hand over her mouth and listened to their dialogue, her eyes widening as the English part of the conversation washed over her. Instead of speaking, she watched as Tina
remained wrapped in the chocolatier’s arms, her body still trembling. “Verzeih mir…” she pleaded as she backed out of his embrace, but remained where she was seated on the floor.

“There exists no reason for me to forgive you, Tina,” he said softly, the English translation of her plea now filling Marjorie’s ears. At that moment, she backed her way into the room and lightly closed the door behind her. The last thing she apparently wanted was for the chocolatier to hear that she had witnessed any of this.

“B-but there is…the letter, it explains everything,” she managed to speak, her voice cracking with emotion.

“No matter what that letter says, you are still my friend and that is the way it will remain,” he affirmed. “I don’t want you to feel anymore guilt or remorse for what may have happened. I know that you are not at fault for any of it.”

“How can you say that?” she asked.

“Easy, I just did because it’s the truth,” he smiled. “My dear girl, I am just so grateful that you got here safely, and that nothing further has happened to you.”

Instead of immediately speaking, she slowly rubbed her hands together. “T-they were very nice to me; y-your mother and her friend.”

“Yes, they are wonderful and very trustworthy people,” Willy said with an affirmative nod. “It may come as a surprise to you, but there are people in this world that you can trust.”

“Like you,” she whispered. “T-they were there, just like you promised. I was so scared, but they were really there and they were so nice to me.”

“I would never have sent someone who was not nice,” Willy said as he reached for her hands and helped her to stand up. “Contrary to all of that, you are still a little bit afraid of me, aren’t you?”

She raised her head, but nodded slowly. “People sometimes sound different on the phone then they are in real life.”

“That’s true, but contrary to everything that has happened, you have no reason to be,” he smiled as they reached the door to the Strawberry Room. “I do appreciate your honesty though.”

She smiled slightly, but no further words emerged.

Instead, he motioned towards the door. “This is your room, and if you need anything at all, then you let me know, alright?”

“Y-you’re leaving?”

“No if you wish for me to stay,” he said gently as he reached over and opened the door to the room and motioned with his hand for her to enter.

“Could we maybe talk a little more?” she whispered as she stepped inside the room.

“Of course,” he said with an affirmative nod. “Do you like the room?”

Tina started to take in the room, and when she noticed the soft hues of reds, pinks, and greens, she nodded. “Red is my favorite color,” she said, but turned around and faced him. “I know that this seems silly of me to say, but I can’t believe that I’m actually here. It’s so beautiful.”
Willy smiled. “Close your eyes.”

“Why?”

“Just close your eyes and inhale,” he said.

She did as he said and after several seconds, a small smile appeared on her face. “It smells like strawberries.”

Willy smiled and nodded, but instead of commenting, he dug in his pocket and pulled out a small bottle. Inside of it were several of the Sweet Dreams candies. “When you’re ready to take a nap, you might consider taking one of these candies. The yellow ones are lemon flavored and the red ones are cherry.”

“Why?” she whispered as she hesitantly extended her hand and accepted the bottle.

“It’s an invention of mine,” he said. “The candies induce sleep, but they also keep you from having bad dreams. Contrary to the fact that Elmsworth said that you slept most of the way here, you still look rather fatigued.”

“I am,” she whispered brokenly.

“I can understand that. Tina, I think you know that you can trust that I would never give you anything if I knew it would bring harm to you.” He reached over and touched her face gently. “You have nothing to worry about, you’re perfectly safe here.”

The teenager raised her head and looked at him, her eyes closing momentarily. “I know that, but I’m still afraid that you may not like me very much after you read the letter Max sent.” she said, her voice cracking. “That’s part of the reason why I didn’t want to read it over the phone; I was afraid that it would upset you.”

Willy took a deep breath, but leaned over and rested his hand gently on her shoulder, his words soft as they emerged. “You mustn’t worry yourself about that any longer. Once you’re well rested, then we can talk about the letter as well as anything else that may be on your mind. There will be plenty of time for all of that once you get settled.”

Obediently, she nodded as she looked over at the strawberry shaped pillows that were stacked at the head of the bed. After several seconds, she reached for one of them, and pulled it to her chest before turning around. “T-thank you, Willy; you have really been very kind.”

Willy walked over and pulled her gently into his embrace. “You’re so welcome, Tina,” he said with a gentle smile. “In a little bit, we’ll look into calling your parents and seeing what they have managed to find out.”

The teenager nodded as she felt his embrace loosen and she sat down on the edge of the bed. Once she was seated, she felt her body falling back against the pillows. In her hand she still held the small bottle he had given her. She opened it and carefully fished out one of the candies. With it now in her hand, she put it in her mouth and began to chew it up before replacing the lid and crawling under the covers.

Willy watched over her until she had fallen asleep and smiled gently. “Träum was schönes,” he whispered before walking towards the door. (Sweet dreams)

As he reached the doorway, he stepped through it, and closed the door firmly behind him.
Chapter 59

Chapter 59: Three Generations

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

After leaving Tina’s room, Willy came down the hall, his hands rubbing his face tiredly. He had thought about nothing more than trying to spend several minutes alone before going back and facing everything that was happening. The entire drama seemed to fall completely onto his shoulders. Now that he had seven different guests under his roof, he felt as though his head was positively spinning.

As he walked, one of the doors to the many guest rooms opened and he raised his head to see that Marjorie was coming out of the room. “I saw what you did for that girl,” she said, her voice was neither filled with positive nor negative intonations. Instead it seemed to be her way of trying to dig for information.

“What did?” he asked.

“I heard someone knock, and opened the door,” she said. “She was screaming in some foreign language.”

“It was German, and the young lady is grieving her brother,” Willy said, his blue-eyed gaze level with hers. “She was hitting the wall. I’m sorry if that disturbed you.”

“Oh but it didn’t, it simply looked to me like you were being quite affectionate with her,” she said, her voice taking on a sort of snappish cadence. “Of course, it doesn’t surprise me that you would be this affectionate with all kinds of women. I guess fame does that to a person, makes a man well in his thirties act like a two-bit gigolo.”

Willy opened his mouth to object, but instead of getting angry, he simply turned with the intentions of leaving. Before he could instruct his feet to walk away, he found himself turning and looking back at the woman. “I’ll have you know that I did absolutely nothing that could be deemed as inappropriate,” he said, all the while trying to keep the anger out of his voice. This proved difficult, he soon discovered as his next words emerged. “That young lady is grieving a terrible loss, Marjorie, and I will not stand by and allow her integrity to be dragged through the mud by such spiteful and unfeeling words.”

“You tell her, son,” a voice emerged and Willy turned around and saw that Eliza was coming down the hall. It was clear that she had heard what Marjorie had said. At that point, she was regarding Linda’s mother with absolute hostility.

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“Mum, it’s really nothing,” Willy said.

“Nothing?” Eliza looked at the chocolatier, her eyes filled with anger. “Let me make one thing perfectly clear, my dear lady. Nobody calls my son a ‘two-bit gigolo’ and gets away with it. Now I want to know why you, a guest in his home, would say such a thing about him or, for that matter, make rude implications about a young lady who came here because she needs her friends to help her cope with grief that you obviously have no idea about.”
Despite the earnestness of the situation, Willy smirked. He had no idea that Eliza could be this aggressive. In fact, what happened next completely took him by surprise because Eliza turned and looked at him, her gaze laced in disapproval. “I am not amused by this at all, William, and you should not be either.”

“Sorry Mum,” he mumbled as he bit down on his lip to keep from laughing. This did not stop the fact that his blue eyes were literally dancing. Never in his life had he seen Eliza so angry that she would go out on a limb to defend him. In fact, this was something he simply could not imagine. Marjorie was overtly accusing him of having done something that was morally and ethically wrong. His thoughts shifted back to Tina, who was luckily still in her room resting.

He looked at Marjorie. “I will not subject Tina, or any of my friends to your abuses, Marjorie. Yes, you are a guest here, but so are they.” He waited for Marjorie to say something, but instead of doing so, she walked away from them.

Once she had rounded a corner, she started walking towards the door leading into the Lavender Room. As soon as she was gone, Eliza looked at him. “What was that all about? And why is that toxic woman inside your factory, William?”

“That’s Linda’s mother,” Willy said meekly. “Tom and I thought that it would a nice idea to have her and Patrick come and visit the factory for a few days. Patrick said that there were rumors flying about that could put them in danger with the Slugworth’s and I immediately thought of Linda.”

“I take it that she does not know the extent of danger she’s apparently in,” Eliza cast another glance down the hallway.

“No, according to Patrick, she doesn’t,” Willy said.

“I see, well, you’re just too good a person for this world it would seem,” Eliza said affectionately. “It seems hard for me to believe that someone like Linda would have a mother like that. How could she go and say such dastardly things to you.”

“Let’s just forget it, Mum,” he said.

“In all honesty, I can’t,” she said honestly. “Such words should not be said. Adults and young people can be friends; it should not grant someone like her the right to say such terrible things.”

“I know,” he said. “I’m just trying to keep the peace…or better yet keep myself from going crazy.”

“How’s Tina doing?”

“She finally cried, but I left her to get some rest,” Willy shook his head. “She feels so much guilt about the letter her brother sent to her before his death, and I’m just trying to tell her that there is no reason for her to even feel that way. On top of all of that, I have to contend with Marjorie’s cruel accusations.” He glanced down the hall in the direction of the Lavender Room.

“That’s all you can do, William, just keep telling her that she has no reason to feel guilt until she actually believes you,” she smiled at him. “She will eventually see that you are telling the truth, simply because you are one of the most loving and caring people I have ever known. Look at all the people you have brought here, and the impact you are leaving on each one of us. Don’t dwell on the painful parts of it.”

“It’s hard not to,” he took a deep breath. “I still keep asking myself how I managed to get myself into such a mess.”
“It wasn’t your will that got you there, William, it was a nasty, conniving person named Slugworth. His jealousy and hatred towards you is what brought all this on, as well as a great many new people into your life. Do you realize that his actions catalyzed all of this? You met me because of his thievery. Then you met Linda and Molly, and then her parents, and that poor child in there who lost her brother. All of these people have been hurt by that family. I ask you, who do they have as their voice in all this chaos?” She reached for his hand and gave it a comforting squeeze. “They have you. Such a shining example of kindness and love, and you bring all of us into your home just like that.”

At that moment, an excited squeal pierced the air and a blur of orange and green shot from one end of the hallway straight to where he and Eliza were now standing. “Willy!” Suddenly, he could feel the wind being forced from him as Molly flew straight into his arms. “I missed you so much,” she cried out happily.

“I missed you too,” he said as he kept the child in his arms, but managed to swing her around. Once he had managed to lower her to the ground, he backed up somewhat and still regarded her through amused blue eyes. “You sound like my little Molly, but you also look like an Oompa Loompa. Now how can that be?” He scratched his chin as though trying to figure her out.

“My Cristy-Kai had this little idea, I’m afraid,” the Oompa Loompa leader said with a chuckle. “I’m afraid that they used all of your orange and green experimental soap colors to do it though. Now, our little one here smells like a peppermint flavored orange.”

Willy smiled, as he looked down at the little girl who was now wrapped in his arms. She was covered with orange and had green streaks in her straight brown hair. Instead of speaking, he looked questionably at Omaya-Kal.

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Willy smiled, as he looked down at the little girl. She looked happy and seemed to have had the time of her life with the Oompa Loompas. Despite his unease, he smiled as relief washed over him. She had had fun that day, and she did not need him to do so. At the same time, it felt monumentally good to have been missed. He brushed his hand through her hair and nodded. 

Seconds later, Eliza’s words suddenly brought him back down to earth. “Well, I think you look precious,” Eliza said smiling down at the child.

Molly raised her head and smiled brightly, “really?”

“Of course, you’re the cutest little girl I’ve seen in a quite a long time,” Eliza said smiling. “What’s your name, sweetie?”

Instead of speaking, the child turned and looked at the Oompa Loompa leader and shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know how to say it,” she said with a small giggle.

“You don’t know how to say ‘Molly’?” Willy looked at the child in his arms, and began to mouth the word at her. She giggled as she buried her face against him, the orange soap smearing across his shirt.

Seconds later, Omaya-Kal interjected. “She asked me to give her a name in our language.”

“What a wonderful idea,” Eliza said. “What name did you give her?”

“Well, it did not take me very long to find the proper name for this adorable child,” he said with an
approving nod.

“So, what is the name?” Willy asked.

“Serdlerk Sikrinaktok,” the Oompa Loompa responded, his voice taking on a formal tone. It seemed clear to Willy that this had become an official name for the child, and he could not help but to smile at her obvious enthusiasm at that.

“What does that mean?” Eliza asked.

“‘Little Sunshine,’” Omaya-Kal said smiling. “This little girl is a great treasure to our people because she has such a loving essence. This is something that makes her a shining example of courage, love, and hope.”

“Yes, and her mother, Linda, is the shining example of those very same qualities,” Rini-May said smiling. “We are very pleased to have them both in our village and our home.” She rested her hand on Willy’s arm. “You are a very fortunate person, you know.”

“I’m starting to believe that,” he said, his words simple.

“How is Tina doing?” Rini-May eventually asked. Her voice, as opposed to carrying its cheerful undertones, was now etched in concern.

“As far as I know, she’s asleep,” he said. “I brought her to the Strawberry Room before meeting all of you. She seems to be getting some much needed rest now. I did leave some of the milder Sweet Dreams candies with her though, and told her to only take one if she cannot sleep.”

“That is good to know,” Omaya-Kal said as Molly went over to embrace him. He seemed not to mind, he returned the embrace although the color was smearing across his clothing as well. “I wish you pleasant dreams Serdlerk Sikrinaktok,” he said with a loving smile as he brushed his gloved hand through her still green hair.

As their embrace loosened, the little girl executed a respectful bow to the Oompa Loompa leader. “Bye Omaya-Kal and thank you for the wonderful day.”

The wise Oompa Loompa nodded and reciprocated the bow of mutual respect before he and his sister disappeared down the hall and left Willy, Eliza, and Molly alone.

Once the Oompa Loompas were gone, Molly looked up at Willy, her eyes thoughtful as she regarded the chocolatier. “You’re really not mad at me for using up all the soap colors?” she asked softly.

“Of course not,” he smiled down at her. “You had fun, didn’t you?”

“It would have been more fun had you been with us, even Cristy-Kai said so,” Molly said softly.

“Yes, well, it would seem as though regardless of my presence or lack thereof, you were both quite busy today,” he said trying to hide his amusement. “They gave you a beautiful new name.”

Molly smiled and nodded, but looked up at Willy. “What’s your name?”

“I thought you already knew that,” Willy said with a coy smirk, which brought a small giggle from Eliza.
“No, silly, I mean, what is the name they call you?” she asked.

“Nunguserak Nanganartok,” Willy said, his embarrassment showing. “It means ‘Candy Marvel’. That was the name they gave me several years ago right after we met the first time, but I asked them some days ago to stop using it. I suppose the name got reinstated because it has already been used several times today.”

“Why did you ask them not to call you that, William?” Eliza asked. “The name is lovely, and very fitting to you. After all, truer words were never spoken, and I think Molly here agrees, don’t you honey?”

“Yeah, I like it, even if it’s hard to say,” Molly said.

“Perhaps I didn’t really feel like one at the time I made the request,” he said with a shrug of his shoulders. “You weren’t here with us at the time, Molly, and there was an emptiness looming because of that.”

“But I’m here now,” the child said logically.

“Yes, you are,” he said smiling.

“Willy?” she whispered as she inched her way closer to him and wrapped her arms around him. Without speaking, he wrapped her snugly in his embrace as she continued to speak. “I missed you today, but you were right, I really did have fun with Omaya-Kal and Cristy-Kai, but I really wanted to see you, too.”

“I know, but you know that sometimes I have to work,” he hedged. There was very little point to his telling her that he had left the factory and slept much of the day. Work was, at that moment, the last thing on his mind.

“No dear, he’s trying to be sly with his answers. The truth is, he had to get some sleep, and lately our William has not gotten enough of that,” Eliza said gently as she reached over and ruffled Molly’s hair, the greenness of the soap now on her hands. She did not seem to mind this; in fact, she still carried a warm and loving smile throughout the dialogue. “You know, I think that now would perhaps be a good time for you to go and clean up. You don’t want to get any of that soap in your eyes and it will be dinner time soon.”

“What’s for dinner?” Molly asked as she began to smack her lips together.

“As far as I know, the chef today is preparing extra cheesy lasagna,” Willy said. “Does that sound like something you would like?”

Molly looked at Eliza. “I don’t know,” she whispered, but leaned towards the older woman and whispered in her ear. “What’s lasagna?”

Eliza smiled. “Lasagna is a sort of pasta with large noodles, ground beef, tomato sauce, milk sauce, and cheese. The chef here makes it very well, and I am wont to say that I eat quite a bit more of it than I should,” she said as she reached for the child’s hand and watched as the little girl abruptly accepted it.

After a second had passed, Molly tuned around and looked up at Willy. “Is she your mum, Willy? I think she’s as nice as you are.”

Eliza blushed slightly, but listened as Willy responded to the child’s question.
“She’s my adopted mum, Molly,” he said smiling. “And you’re right, she’s very nice, just as long as you don’t go and make her angry.” He flashed a demure grin.

“William lost his mum at a very early age, honey, and since I wasn’t able to have children, we decided many years ago to adopt one another and he became my son,” Eliza explained.

Willy nodded. “That’s right, and now she’s here to visit with us for a few days and I’m so happy that you both have finally gotten the chance to meet one another. Mum, Molly here wants to be a dancer when she grows up, and I told her that you and I used to watch these competitions rather frequently and talk about them.”

“Can you dance?” Molly asked.

“A little,” Eliza said, “but that was a long time ago. My friend, Elmsworth, he’s quite a dancer. He used to teach ballroom dancing back in his younger days. Now’s he’s retired from it, but I’m sure that he might be persuaded to show you a little.”

Willy took a deep breath as he looked down at the little girl. “I think right now, you might want to clean up before we talk about dinner and dancing. At the very least you don’t have to worry yourself with applying the soap; you seem to have quite enough there.”

As they made their way down the hall in the direction of the Lavender Room, the door to the Lilac Room opened and Patrick peered out into the hallway. The older man’s hair was somewhat ruffled from having taken a nap, but his eyes were filled with happiness as he came out. “Did I just hear my little Molly’s voice out here?” he called out.

Upon hearing his voice, Molly turned around. “Grandpa!” She cried out before running over to him. “I missed you so much.”

“How much did you miss me?” he asked playfully.

“This much,” Molly spread out her arms as wide as they would go.

This gave Patrick the reason to get down on the floor and wrap the child in his arms. “I missed you too, honey. How are you doing? From the looks of things, I would say that you managed to go and find yourself a whole lot of fun.”

“Oh Grandpa, I had the most fun since coming here,” she said happily, all the while still holding tightly to him. “Willy showed this really pretty place full of candy, and I made some friends, and it’s been the best time in my whole life,” she said as she buried her face against his chest.

“Well, that really sounds like a great time has been had by all,” he said. “You think you can get me in to see one of those really nice places?”

“Maybe,” she giggled.

“So tell me, what’s your favorite part?” Patrick asked.

“These really slippery chocolate filled balls. They have really pretty colors and they’re filled with the yummiest chocolate in the whole wide world. The Chocolate Room has all this eatable stuff in it too,” she babbled on happily. “Then Willy made candy with me, and it was my favorite flavor. Then he danced with me and it was just like you sometimes do…” her voice trailed off, and she looked up at the chocolatier. “…I didn’t give away any secrets, did I?”

“Of course not,” he said smiling.
“Well, I’d say that does sound like a whole lot of fun,” Patrick said smiling. “Maybe I can see this Chocolate filled paradise and taste some of those things you describe.”

Willy smiled and nodded, but after several seconds one could hear the sounds of movement at the other end of the hall, followed by the sounds of someone clearing their throat.

Molly raised her head, but backed up as she regarded the new arrival. “Hi Grandma,” she whispered, but instead of going to hug her grandmother in the same way she hugged Patrick, she simply regarded Marjorie through intimidated brown eyes.

Instead of even speaking a kind word to the child, Marjorie spoke, her voice laced in disapproval. “Why are you so filthy, Molly?”

“I’m not filthy,” she objected. “It’s only soap, it’ll wash right off.”

“Perhaps, but why are you roaming around with an orange face?” Marjorie asked skeptically.

“I was playing pretend with my friends,” Molly responded. “They were teaching me a new language and showing me pictures of forests and trees. We found this soap and were using it to paint our faces. It was really fun, but we ran out of the orange soap.” She looked at Willy apologetically. “I’m sorry I used it all, Willy.”

“Oh that’s alright, you can help me make some more later,” the candy maker said with a bright smile. “Maybe we can even come up with some new colors.”

“So this soap is how you ended up with orange skin and green hair?” Marjorie asked.

“She said she had fun, must you get on to her for that?” Eliza asked. When Marjorie did not respond, she went over and rested her hand on the child’s shoulder. “I’m going to bring you to your room and then you can get cleaned up. Don’t worry, you’ll see Willy later, he’s not planning on going anywhere else, are you?”

“No, Mum, I’m home to stay,” he said nodding.

“Okay,” Molly said as the two of them started to make their way down the hall. Instinctively, Willy began to follow, but Marjorie’s voice made him stop.

“Let’s get something perfectly straight here, you may be a hero to that little girl, but you are most assuredly not her father,” she said arrogantly.

“Perhaps not, but I would prefer to leave her with a positive impression as opposed to what you are doing,” he said.

“And what am I doing?” Marjorie snapped.

“You may be her grandmother by birth, dear lady, but you are most certainly not behaving as a grandmother should. You have not said one nice word to that child since you’ve been here. You have been cruel to her and behaving as though she is your mortal enemy. Now, if you’ll excuse me, I am going to check and see if Linda has any shred of dignity left since I know you were in her room just now.”

With that, he walked away and left Marjorie and Patrick standing and staring after him.
Chapter 60

Chapter 60: Standing One’s Ground

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

When Willy arrived at the Lavender Room, he tapped lightly on the door and waited for it to open. When it finally did, he could see that Eliza was standing in the threshold, but she reached out and rested her hands on his shoulders. “Since you’re here, I’m going to head back to my room and see if Elmsworth has managed to read all the books on the shelf yet. I’ll see you in the dining room for dinner.”

“Thanks, Mum,” Willy said. “I really appreciate you standing up for me just now. I honestly did not expect you to react to all of Marjorie’s accusations and words in the way that you did.”

“You’re used to defending yourself, and not having someone else do it for you,” she patted his hand. “I know you.”

“Perhaps better than most,” he whispered as he leaned over and kissed her cheek. “I’m so glad you’re here.”

She smiled but nodded as she motioned into the room. “She really needs your support right now, William.” With that, she left.

Once he was standing alone in the doorway, he reached over and closed it before walking over to the sofa where Linda was sitting. “You okay?” he asked as he sat down beside her and rested his hand on her shoulder.

Linda raised her head and looked up at him, a brave smile touching her lips. “Not really, but I’ll survive.”

“It would seem that your mother should be taken in small dosages, if at all,” he smiled as he wrapped her gently in his arms. As soon as he felt her face against his chest, he began to run one of his hands through her hair, the softness of it tickling his fingertips.

“Maybe, but I should have warned you about my mother’s antagonistic attitude towards Molly before now,” she said softly. “It probably came as a surprise to you that she behaves in that way. I never mentioned it because somewhere deep inside of myself, I had rather hoped that nothing like this would happen, but it did. It really shouldn’t surprise me, but all the same, I’m really sorry that I put you in such an awkward position with her. It wasn’t my intention.”

“It’s not something that you can change, but perhaps it does clear up why it is that Molly was frightened the first time we met,” Willy said. “If her own grandmother doesn’t like her, then how can she expect me or anyone else to embrace or accept her?”

Linda closed her eyes. “I tried to show her that it didn’t matter, but how does a little girl get beyond the whole Slugworth issue?”

“It’s hard, but Molly is not like them, and for what it’s worth; neither are you.”

“Yes, but still, I’m really sorry, Willy.”

“You should not be apologizing to me. I do understand your family dynamics perhaps better than I
should and I know that it’s not easy for you,” he said. “At the same time, I hope that you will not worry excessively about this. After all, I did sort of take note of it when we were driving here. I realized that Marjorie is not as kind-hearted as you and Molly are and maybe the kindness factor skipped over a generation.”

Linda smiled slightly as she rested her head against his shoulder. Instead of speaking, Willy moved his hand and began to gently stroke her face.

Seconds later and without so much as a warning, the door to the Lavender Room swung open and the chocolatier lowered his hand but turned around and watched as Marjorie and Patrick came into the room.

As the door was quietly closed behind them, Willy managed to get to his feet. Linda remained seated on the sofa. When the chocolatier spoke, his expression was unreadable, but his words were direct and to the point. “Do you generally make a habit of barging into someone else’s room without knocking?”

“You see, Patty, I figured that he would be here,” Marjorie said before her husband could even respond to Willy’s inquiry.

“I said I was coming here to see how Linda was doing as well as to see if you left any shred of dignity with her the last time you were in here,” Willy said somewhat defensively. Instead of waiting for Marjorie to respond, he suddenly could hear the sounds of the water being turned on in the adjoining bathroom.

The chocolatier’s eyebrows unconsciously arched as he exchanged questioning glances with Patrick. Linda’s father clearly knew what was going on and he was about to learn something else about this particular family. Willy knew that he would have to ask Molly about this when they were alone because something told him that the child was far more aware of what was happening than the grown ups realized.

Linda got to her feet, turned, and looked at her mother, her face etched with aggravation. “The people I choose to spend my time with, is really none of your concern, Mother. Now, I know you mean well, but let me make something perfectly clear here. Molly is a little girl, she likes to have fun, visit her friends, and should not be expected to live up to some unwritten code of conduct that you have for her.”

“Did the child say that?” Marjorie said skeptically.

“No, Willy’s mother did, and I happened to believe that she was right,” Linda said hotly. “Now, I would really appreciate it if you would not be so critical of my daughter. If you do not like her it’s your loss, but Molly should not be made to suffer simply because of your rejecting her.”

“I am not rejecting her, I am only looking out for her well-being,” Marjorie said. “You seem to let her get away with more than she should.”

Linda took a deep breath but eventually spoke, her words laced with frustration as she tried to stare down her mother. “Whether you are looking out for her remains to be seen, but she is my daughter, and I’m a grown woman. I don’t need you to make matters worse by telling my daughter what to do. She’s a very mature child. She has to have been to deal with everything she’s been through.”

“You should not use her experiences as allowances for her to misbehave,” Marjorie said firmly.

“I do no such thing,” Linda said. “Unlike you, I don’t have to control everything she does. I just
know that my daughter does not misbehave as you so often imply. She is a little girl and she should not have to endure growing up with the same insecurities as I did.”

“This isn’t about you,” Marjorie snapped.

“Sure it is! Who else could it be about? You hate everything I do, because it takes the control out of your hands. You have hated Owen since the first day you met him, and since she is his daughter, you have decided to hate her as well. That’s what this is about, you are passing judgment and having prejudices against a seven-year-old child because she isn’t the person you wished for,” Linda said firmly. “Right now, it seems to me that you’re never going to be happy with the way I do anything, so I see very little point to even trying to discuss these issues with you at all.”

Marjorie stared at her daughter with rage shadowing her face. She started walking towards Linda, her hand being raised as though she intended to strike her. In fact, if Willy had not thought quickly and captured her hand when he did, then Linda would have surely been slapped across the face by her mother.

Willy retained his hold on Marjorie’s wrist, and when she relaxed, he released the hold but positioned himself between them so as to protect the woman he loved. “I will not stand for any further abuse in my factory,” he said as he released her hand. “It makes me ponder how often you have struck your daughter to get your will enforced with her.”

Linda bit down on her lip as she looked up at Willy, her eyes wide with surprise. This seemed to be the very first time that a man had ever stood up and physically defended her against someone else’s onslaught. She closed her eyes, but opened them to see that Marjorie had retreated somewhat.

This did not stop Willy from speaking his mind with the hardened woman. Instead of attacking her physically, he did so with his words. “I can see clearly why it is that Linda ended up marrying such a cowardly man as Owen Slugworth. Perhaps she was latching onto something that was familiar to her, physical and emotional abuse.” He turned and looked at her, his next words emerging. “How many times has your mother hit you, Linda?”

“I’ve lost count,” Linda whispered honestly as she lowered her head, the shame washing over her like a warm spring rain shower. He reached over and took her hand gently in his and offered it a comforting squeeze.

“Were you aware of this, Patrick?” Willy asked.

The Scotsman shook his head. “Marjorie always said that they had heated arguments, but I had never known them to become physical.” He looked at Linda, “why didn’t you ever tell me, sweetheart?”

Linda shook her head, her gaze now on the toes of her shoes. “It was my word against hers. Besides, it didn’t occur to me that I was marrying myself into an abusive situation until after it had happened.”

“You couldn’t possibly believe that, Patty,” Marjorie whispered.

“I don’t know what I’m supposed to believe anymore, Marjorie? My daughter is afraid of her own mother and my sweet little granddaughter doesn’t even know what a hug from a grandmother actually feels like,” Patrick looked at his wife, his face etched in hostility. “How could you do such a thing?”

Marjorie took a deep breath. “You see what you’ve done?” she shouted at Willy. “You have ruined everything.”

“I didn’t ruin anything that was not already in shambles. It would seem to me that everything
between you and your daughter was already destroyed before Linda even met me,” Willy said firmly. “This time, I think you need to know the truth about what happened and not just sit around here making false assumptions about what you think is right and good here.”

Patrick looked at the chocolatier, “the truth? William, you can’t be serious.”

Linda looked at her father. “We have to tell her Papa, maybe she’ll get a clue about what has happened.”

Willy nodded, “it’s the reason I was so insistent about you coming to the factory in the first place.”

Marjorie took a deep breath. “I don’t believe anything you say. You’re just like all the others.”

“All the other what?” Patrick asked.

Marjorie said nothing. Instead, she sat down on the sofa and with her elbows on her knees. Wordlessly, she rested her chin in the palms of her hands.

“Perhaps all of this stems back to the fact that you have not had the chance to really look fear in the face,” Willy said, his words angry and cold. He took a deep breath as he got to his feet and went to tap on the bathroom door. The water could still be heard running, and he inhaled slowly. “Molly?” he called out the little girl’s name.

After several seconds, the water was shut off and the door opened and the child peered out from behind it. She was now clean, her hair wet, and she was dressed in a pair of blue pants and a long sleeved shirt with butterflies splashed across the front. As soon as she emerged, she could see that he was standing in front of her, his eyes now looking into hers.

“Are you alright, Sweetheart?” he spoke softly, but crouched down in front of her, his voice only audible to the little girl.

She nodded, but after several seconds, she shook her head. This simple action indicated that she had heard much of what had been said. “Willy, I’m scared,” she whispered.

Willy took her hand in his and offered a comforting smile. “I want to show your arm to your grandmother. May I?”

She looked down at her arm but shook her head, the shame washing over her. “She’d say I deserve it.”

“And I will tell you without hesitation that you don’t,” he said firmly. “Do you trust me, sweetheart?”

Molly bit down on her lip, but nodded, “yeah, because I love you.”

“I love you, too, and I promise that I will not let anyone hurt you,” he said but watched as she shyly began to pull the sleeve of her shirt up so that her upper arm was visible. At that precise moment, he turned and looked at Marjorie, the gentility that had covered his face abruptly vanishing.

“You want to see fear? Then take a long look at your granddaughter. You really think that people deserve what they get? This child is seven-years-old.” As he was speaking he carefully removed the bandage so that the child’s arm would be exposed. As the warm air touched her injury, Molly inhaled sharply. “Look at what they did to her when they had her with them. She does not deserve this, Marjorie. She deserves to be loved as a child should be loved.”
Molly closed her eyes upon hearing the chocolatier’s compassionate words. Instead of speaking, she turned her head and buried her face against Willy’s chest, the tears dampening his shirt. Seconds slowly ticked by as Marjorie stared down at the little girl’s arm.

Willy covered the back of Molly’s head with one of his hands and stroked her hair in the same fatherly way as he had done after her nightmares. “Molly knows a great deal more about what has been happening than you do, Marjorie. Children should always be protected from such dastardly individuals as the Slugworths. Neither she, nor her mother, should be hit, or injured by bullies and others, but they should be cared for and protected from harm.” He continued to hold the child in his arms, but carefully pulled the sleeve of her shirt back down and drew back from her. “You know to me you’re always going to be my brave little Molly.”

“She’s not yours,” Marjorie snapped.

Instead of speaking, the little girl buried her face against him, her tiny arms winding their way around him. This was her silent way of acknowledging the validity of his words.

He took a deep breath. “Sweetheart?” he spoke and she raised her head. “I’m going to have a long talk with your grandparents about this.”

Molly cast a wary glance towards Marjorie. “She doesn’t like me, Willy.”

“I know, and I’m going to find out why,” he said.

“I know why,” she whispered. “I-it’s because my name.”

“Is that why you were afraid that I wouldn’t like you?” he asked. When she nodded, he continued speaking. “You know, when we first met, I could tell that you were scared of that possibility. Now you know that nothing anyone says is going to make me hate you. I don’t care who your father is, sweetheart, what I do care about is who you are. So, now you know that I love you very, very much and no harsh and cruel words will ever change that,” he smiled at her, but tapped her nose with his forefinger. “I promise.”

“I thought you didn’t want me around,” she whispered.

“Oh, I do want you around,” he smiled as he took her tiny face in his hands, but leaned over and planted a kiss to her forehead. “You are a part of this place now, Molly, and a part of my world.”

Molly wrapped her arms around him. “I want to stay with you forever and ever…” she whispered, her voice filled with authenticity.

Willy smiled, but before he could respond to these words, Marjorie abruptly broke her silence, and it had become clear to both Willy and Molly that they had forgotten that the older woman was even present.

“I think I’ve heard quite enough of this nonsense,” Marjorie said as she turned and looked at Linda. “We have decided that we are going to leave this…this fun house, and go to Cornwall for holiday and you and Molly will come with us. It’s about time that child got her head out of the clouds and back into the real world where it belongs.”

Linda turned and looked at her father, shock now shadowing her face. “Is that what this is about?” she asked. “Even after seeing what sort of abuses my daughter has been subjected to, you have decided to make a decision without even consulting us. I can imagine who made this decision, and it was not Papa, it was you. It’s always been you. You want to decide for us what we do and not give us any say in the matter. Well, the answer is ‘no’.”
“No?” Marjorie asked her expression filled with antagonism.

“No,” Linda said. “N-O! Now, whether you like it or not, I’m an adult and this is about our lives, not yours. Wherever we decide to go on holiday should be left entirely up to us, not to you. I will not be subjected to anymore of your control issues, Mother,” she looked at Willy. “Would you please take Molly to your mother’s room, Willy?”

The chocolatier nodded as he picked up the child and they left the Lavender Room, the door closing behind them.

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About twenty minutes later, Willy returned to the Lavender Room. This time he was alone, but instead of having a small child with him, he was carrying the paperwork that he intended to show to Marjorie and Patrick.

As he reached the door to the Lavender Room, the door across the hall leading into the Strawberry Room opened and Tina emerged.

“Willy?” she shyly spoke his name. He stopped walking and turned to face her, his expression softening as he looked into the eyes of the young woman. “Did you get some sleep, Tina?” he asked. “You don’t look as tired as you did when you first arrived.”

She nodded. “I did, thank you.”

“Do you have the letter with you?” he asked.

“It’s in my room, s-should I go get it?” she asked.

“Yes, go ahead and do that, I’ll wait for you,” he said, but watched as she entered the room and emerged several minutes later, the letter in her hand, and her eyes seeking his.

“I still need to call my parents about this,” she said softly.

“Yes, I know, and we’ll do that as soon as we have a talk with Linda and her parents,” he said with an adamant nod. “I’ll even speak with them and let them know what has happened.”

“But they don’t speak English…” she began.

“…You forget that I speak German,” he smiled. “Try not to worry, Tina. Everything is going to be alright. Tom will return to the factory tomorrow and you’ll have some time to visit with him before he leaves for America.”

She nodded as he reached over and tapped on the door to the Lavender Room and waited for Linda to answer it.

When she eventually did, Willy was quick to make the introductions. “Linda, this is Tina, our friend from Germany,” he began. “Tina, this is…my girlfriend, Linda.” The last part was spoken so softly that only Tina and Linda could hear these words, but they made Linda blush charmingly.

Willy noticed this, but watched as Tina extended her hand to Linda. “Hi, I’m pleased to meet you,” she said shyly.

“Likewise,” Linda said as she backed away from the doorway so that they could enter the room.
“Come on in.”

Willy motioned with his hand for Tina to enter, and once she had gone into the room, he followed her and the door was closed behind them.
Chapter 61: The Truth Emerges

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As soon as the five of them were seated inside the room, Willy looked at Marjorie, his voice somewhat softer than what it had been during their earlier confrontation. “I want to make this perfectly clear,” he began. “What has been happening has had a dramatic affect on all of us. There is no one here who has not been hurt, whether directly or indirectly, by the actions of the Slugworth family. Most of you know Tom, at least by his name or connection to me. Right now, he’s in the hospital and although it may surprise you, it is perhaps he who has catalyzed all of these events to happen. He knows what all of you have been through, and it was his friendship and loyalty that brought you here, not me.”

“Now you sound like you’re running for public office,” Marjorie said snappishly.

Tina looked at the woman, the teenager’s offense at her manner clearly showing. “Perhaps you ought not be so critical of him, especially when he’s just being honest.”

“And perhaps you should learn to speak to your elders with more respect,” Marjorie shot back.

Tina flushed and it was hard to tell if the young woman was going to laugh or cry. “I would,” she eventually spoke, “that is, if I could find one who is worthy of respect.” That said, she got to her feet and crossed the room, her arms wrapping around herself as she reached the window and stared outside across the London skyline.

At that moment, Willy looked at Marjorie. “Perhaps now is the proper time for you to know the truth about what has been happening and what your daughter has been through. Perhaps in knowing what has transpired can enable you to accept the fact that respect is a two way street. One doesn’t earn it simply because they are older; they earn it because they know how to reciprocate it.” He touched the notebooks that were on his lap.

Patrick looked at Willy and then at his wife. “Linda and I kept a great deal from you, Marjorie, and all these things William knows because he’s been tossed head first into the thick of it for a much longer duration of time than we have. There have been threats made that do concern all four of us.”

“What about the child?” Marjorie snapped. “It is you who seems to delight in telling me not to forget her, and now you have.”

“No he’s not,” Linda said. “Owen wants Molly to one day take over the business and become an industrial bigwig like him. The only thing standing in his way is the fact that Molly doesn’t want to do that.”

“What does she want to do then?” Marjorie asked.

“She aspires to be a dancer,” Willy said as he looked at the older woman. Before he could speak further, Tina did, her voice soft, but filling the room with blunt undertones.

“A really loving grandmother would know that,” the words filled the room, but her back was still facing them.

“This is none of your concern,” Marjorie shot back. “Perhaps you ought to mind your own business, little girl.”
Inhaling slowly, Tina began to make her way over towards the door that would lead out of the room. Willy watched, all the while feeling himself inclined to get up and follow her.

What surprised him was that Patrick did follow her. When the door closed behind them, the chocolatier looked at the woman, his eyes filled with anger.

“Somehow I think that it is not going to matter in the slightest what we say to you. You have already made the choice to look upon every person here with snobbish disdain. That young lady just lost her brother, now that may not mean anything to you, but it sure means something to the rest of us.”

“I don’t need a sermon,” Marjorie snapped.

“Oh, well, you definitely need something, because things cannot continue here as they have been,” he said, his blue eyes staring into her brown ones with meaning. “You have not done much of anything that could even earn my respect, much less that of a nineteen-year-old girl who is grieving a monumental loss right now. Do you honestly believe that arrogance is going to resolve the issues that we are all subjected to facing right now?”

“First you talk like a politician, now you’re acting like a bloody therapist,” she said.

Willy took a deep breath as he ran his hand through his hair. “How do you expect me to behave?” He asked. “You have concocted this idea that Linda is supposed to be loyal and dedicated to Owen, but he has done nothing but hurt her. You believe that she will always hold some sort of moral obligation to that family, but they are nothing more than a mafia like organization, contaminating the rest of the industry with their poison and lack of regard for others. That same behavior has somehow managed to contaminate you, even if it was never intended, you are no better than Arthur and Owen Slugworth at this point.”

“I am better,” Marjorie said her voice breaking.

“Prove it,” he said calmly.

“I can’t, it’s not the way I am,” she said as the door opened and Patrick and Tina returned to the room. Tina, instead of speaking returned to the window, her body unmoving and her gaze staring outside.

Willy got to his feet and went over to where she was standing. “Are you alright?”

She nodded as she raised her head and looked at him. “I’m sorry if my leaving caused you to worry.”

“It’s alright, I know why you did it,” he said. “Now then, why don’t we sit down and try and resolve this?”

“Alright,” she conceded and allowed him to put a gentle arm around her and lead her over to the couch. Once she was seated, she began to run the envelope between her fingers. “I have to translate this.”

“What is that?” Patrick asked.

“That’s why you wanted me to bring it, isn’t it?” she said as he offered a reciprocating nod.

“It’s a letter from her brother,” Willy explained. “It was written before he died, and perhaps it will explain what has been happening in a better means than I am capable.” He looked at her and nodded,
his actions a direct indication that the floor was now hers.

Tina took a deep breath as she unfolded the pages and began to translate the uneven German script that covered them.

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My dear Tina,

This is my last farewell to you, my beloved little sister. With this letter is your knowing that I am no longer here to tell you the truth about my life and the things that I have done. By the time you read these words, I will be gone. Mother and Father will no doubt be notified of my passing and you will be consumed with questions about my life and why I kept so dreadfully much from you.

The bitter truth is that I never finished my studies; I did not even begin. Several months after arriving in Berlin, I was feeling more isolated and alone than I could possibly have imagined. I eventually developed a terrible addiction to betting and soon after I had lost every last pfennig I had, I began attending meetings about compulsive gambling. It did not take away the problems and the debts that I owed, but it succeeded in helping me to get away from the tracks once and for all.

Several weeks after that, I encountered a man who introduced himself to me as Arthur Slugworth. He said that he was the President of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated and that he could do something to help defray my gambling debts if I were to go to work for him. He mentioned having seen me on campus at the college, but claimed to have also witnessed seeing me out at the tracks, where my debts had accumulated. He claimed that he was looking to find what he called ‘new blood’ for his company, but did not go into extensive detail nor I did I feel too terribly inclined as to inquire.

While he made it sound rather appealing, he kept me in the dark about his true intentions. I was naïve and did not realize how I was behaving until I was too far into this mess to do anything about it. To him, I was nothing more than a person to control, like a pawn in a chess game. I was to him, completely nonessential.

Being somewhat immature, I signed a contract and began working for him. The job was easy, I would go from store to store and observe what candies were being bought and sold and which kinds were the most popular. I was given a clipboard and suit as well as an official looking identification. Through this, I was able to keep track of the ‘necessary statistics’. It seemed legitimate and harmless enough, but I did not find out what specifically was happening until several months later. This was after I had managed to get my gambling debts paid off. With the extra money, I could afford to live a more lavish lifestyle than that of an ordinary student.

Soon after that, it became clear that the Slugworth Candies were not doing so well in the shops. In fact the only way that I could think of to even out the odds a bit, was to skew the statistics. Of course, after a time, I realized that doing that did not reap the desired results either. Several weeks after starting to nudge the numbers, I was sent several sound reels and notebooks for safe keeping.

These contained private information about how they intended to do away with Wonka Industries and see to it that Willy Wonka was to be caught in a frame up and end up in prison. They had a very elaborate scheme set up, starting with Hudson Chocolates in the United States. This, they had managed to pull off without any problem whatsoever. By using their contacts there, they were able to break into the shipping rooms of the company and destroy countless amounts of chocolate and other assorted candies. These were then sent out without any sort of knowledge of what had transpired.

On these sound reels, there is information listed as to the number of cases of sick children as well as
phone calls where the Slugworth people were trying to cover their footsteps. Several kids even died from the consumption of the poisoned candy and after discovering this, I realized that I wanted out. Unfortunately, I was already in too deep and there was no way for me to back out without getting carried out. Tina, the entire situation had turned into murder and cover ups. I was unwittingly stuck right in the middle of it.

Soon after that, it became pointedly clear that the Slugworths would stop at nothing to get someone inside of Mr. Wonka’s factory and do the very same thing. They not only wanted to put him out of business, but they wanted to destroy his integrity, just as they had done with Hudson Chocolates.

Mr. Slugworth then approached me soon after and informed me of his plan as to how we could infiltrate Mr. Wonka’s factory. He invited me to come to Buckinghamshire, England and meet with his nephew, Owen, and start helping them to plan for Wonka’s demise.

I ended up at the Wonka factory several days after that and had somehow managed to sweet-talk my way inside. The cover was a façade, as I was disguised as a worker for the city. I was to give him a notice about a gas leak. For some reason, it had worked and I found myself inside a storage room where countless shipments of candy were awaiting transport. I fiddled with the thermostat a little, but seconds later, a man who resembled Arthur Slugworth in appearance only, managed to catch me in the act and had me forcibly removed from the factory grounds.

It had been enough, though, because I knew where the shipping room was and was able to go back to my employer and disclose that information. Soon after that, I discovered that Arthur Slugworth wasn’t interested in me at all; he wanted my best friend, Erich, for the job. By some cruel twist of fate, he had found out that Erich was working towards a Masters degree in Chemistry, and he would have been able to help the Slugworths go through with their plan without even messing with the thermostat inside the Wonka factory. Unfortunately for them, Erich carried a high moral standard and wanted no part of it. He even tried to convince me to go to the police.

I didn’t want anyone else to get involved in this mess and I knew that what I had done could have landed me in jail. I actually tried to help Arthur Slugworth destroy Willy Wonka. Even after that incident, neither the man who caught me nor Mr. Wonka ever filed charges against me. Perhaps they had no real proof, but I have no idea at this point.

Several days later, I returned home and took the notebooks and the sound reels and hid them in the far corner of my basement. When I started getting threats of bodily harm from Owen Slugworth for my insubordinate behavior, I got scared. Not knowing what to do next, I went and found the stuff, boxed it up in order to take it to the post office, and with this letter, I am mailing it to you. I didn’t know what else to do, and I feared that if Mr. Wonka were to know what I had done, that he would never have listened to me anyway. The Slugworths are dangerous, and I would not put murder past them.

Tina, I am sending you these things in the hope that you will either get them to the police or find a way to get them to Willy Wonka. I am completely certain that he would know what to do with them if he had them. I know that any chance of his believing in me is remote, but I remain hopeful that he will see the sincerity in your words and actions.

Please believe me when I say that I didn’t want any of this to happen.

I was living a double life for so long, and I had no idea how to get out of it. Perhaps my death is the only way that I will actually be able to make any sort of difference here. The truth is not a nice thing to know, but neither is the prospect of innocent kids being caught in the crossfire. Today, I am nothing more than a puppet on a string, and if there is a way for me to break free of that, then let this be it.
Checkmate, Mr. Slugworth.

Love,
Your Brother,
Maximilian Schröder

As she finished the letter, she looked at Willy, her eyes filled with tears. “He didn’t mean any harm…” she whispered as she dug in her pocket for a tissue.

When she could not find one, she suddenly felt a handkerchief abruptly being pressed in to her hand and when she opened her eyes, she could see that it had come from Willy. As her gaze met his, she could see that he was regarding her through those same empathetic blue eyes.

“I know,” the chocolatier said, his heart feeling as though it was a lead weight beating in his chest. He could see so much insecurity in the young German woman and knowing that she was not guilty for what her brother had done, he tried to find the words he wanted to say next. “It was brave of you to tell us what was in that letter.”

“You’re not angry with me,” she asked as she handed the letter to him and watched him slip it into the small stack that still rested on his lap.

“No, I’m really proud of you for having the courage to do what you just did,” he said. “The police now have the sound reels and notebooks he mentioned in the letter, and I can well imagine that when this letter is officially translated, Slugworth will find that his days of freedom might actually be numbered.” He looked at Marjorie, but instead of speaking, the woman was looking down at her lap. He was somewhat relieved by the fact that she was, for once, remaining silent.

Patrick got to his feet, and looked at his wife. “I kept a great deal from you, Marjorie. It was because I was trying to protect you, but I don’t think you need protection anymore. Perhaps some of the people here need protection from your tactless words and actions.”

Marjorie raised her head and regarded the man who was now seated next to her. She took a deep breath as her next words emerged. “No one here thinks very much of me, I can tell.”

“Perhaps we would think far more of you if you would at least thank William for his hospitality, apologize to this young lady for your behavior towards her, and hold off on judging our daughter,” Patrick said firmly. “You have a lot of explaining to do regarding the abuse you have subjected Linda to. I will not renege on this, Marjorie, and I think this time you know that.”

“Are you going to leave me, Patty?” Marjorie asked.

He shook his head. “No, but when all this is over, you’re going to need help and this is something that I will adamantly insist upon.” He looked at Willy and received a reciprocating nod.

The chocolatier nodded. “I agree, but I want to emphasize that when I started in this business, I had no idea that I was going to be targeted or eventually find myself tangled up in a web of deceit.”

“Should we call the police?” Linda whispered.

“I think that’s perhaps the prudent choice,” Willy said as he patted the papers that were now resting on his lap. “Now that we have all these things, it would be wise for us to do something.”

“Shouldn’t we wait for Tom to get back before we do anything?” Linda asked. “He’s in
Buckinghamshire right now, and if we act, it could put him in mortal danger.”

“Ridiculous,” Marjorie muttered.

“Actually, it’s not,” Willy said with a nod of his head, but stood up with all the items in his hand. He cast a glance around the room, and looked at the four people who were seated there. “Tom was the man who caught Tina’s brother in the shipping room, and I do remember that day. We didn’t file charges against him, and it was because he was a kid in trouble, and we both knew it. Of course, our shipments were safe, but in the future we always called the city for verification before letting professed workers beyond the factory gates.”

Linda looked at him. “I remember Owen talking about it after it happened. He was so angry that I thought he was going to explode from absolute rage. I also remember hearing him on the phone talking with his uncle about trying to blackmail this American kid living in Germany.”

“Erich?” Tina whispered.

“It could have been, I don’t really know. I never heard a name being mentioned, but I do remember him getting pretty angry about it,” Linda said.

“How would you know all of this?” Tina whispered.

“She knows it because she’s married to Owen Slugworth,” Marjorie said.

Tina took a deep breath, but instead of finding the words to speak, she simply nodded.

“Listen everyone, I’m going to take these things back to my office, and then in a little while it should be time for dinner. Tina, perhaps now we should go ahead and contact your parents so they won’t worry about you.”

Awkwardly, Tina stood up, her gaze meeting Willy’s as she started walking towards the door. He followed her to the door and opened it before they stepped out into the hallway.

Once the door closed, he looked at her. “I’m grateful to you,” he began.

“Why?” she asked.

“You made it easier for me to explain what was happening to Marjorie and Patrick,” he said.

“What’s the story with that old woman?” Tina asked. “Pardon me for saying so, but she’s not a very nice person at all.”

“She’s not very cordial to anyone,” he said. “She’s Linda’s mother and I don’t think she likes me very much either. In fact, she doesn’t even know that her daughter and I are…” his words trailed.

“…dating,” Tina whispered.

“Yes, although we have not really been on an official date yet,” he said honestly. “Linda is in the process of divorcing Owen Slugworth and we’re trying to keep our feelings under wraps, if you will.”

“Maybe everything will work out,” she said with traces of doubt in her voice. “I think Linda is very lucky to have you, though.”

Willy smiled. “Thank you, Tina. That means a great deal to me.”
She shrugged her shoulders, but after a while, she spoke. “Willy?”

“Yes?”

“Did you know that Linda’s mother had come out of one of the rooms when…” her voice trailed off. “…I remember how she was standing there and looking down at me.”

“Was that when you were crying?” he asked.

“Yes. The thing is, I looked up and saw her briefly standing there. I think she thought that you were my boyfriend or something,” she shook her head. “I guess she doesn’t think that men and women can be friends without, what’s the English word for a… romantische Beziehung?”

“A romantic relationship,” he translated.

Tina nodded. “That’s it. Anyway, what I want to say is I like that we’re friends.”

“I am too,” he said.

“Would you think me wrong for saying that I’m sort of afraid to call my parents and tell them where I am?” she asked after several moments of silence passed between them.

“No, I wouldn’t,” he said shaking his head. “But, something tells me that you are not just afraid of calling them, but of what might happen when you do.”

She nodded. “What if the Slugworths go after them because of the package?”

“If that happens, then we’ll do whatever we can to stop them, Tina,” he said.

“How?” she asked, but looked up at him, her face now streaked with tears. “How many more people have to die before this nightmare is over? After we talked on the phone, I was so scared of being alone. Every thing that happened today has felt like something out of a movie. I don’t know what more I should do.”

Willy took a deep breath. “You can’t do anything more than what you’ve already done, my dear.”

She closed her eyes for several moments but allowed him to lead her towards his office.
Chapter 62

Chapter 62: A Coward’s Way

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

As soon as they had entered the office, Willy immediately went over to the desk and retrieved the phone. “Do you have the number to the place where your parents are staying?” he asked.

Tina nodded as she dug in the pocket of her skirt and retrieved a slip of paper. Instead of staying at Max’s apartment, the young girl’s parents were staying at the nearby bed and breakfast. Willy dialed the number and handed the receiver to Tina. As she placed it against her ear, she could feel her body sinking into the chair that was next to the desk. Seconds later, the phone was picked up.

“Ja, schon guten Tag,” she began to speak. “Ich möchte mit Heinrich oder Elly Schröder sprechen.” (Yes, good day. I would like to speak with Heinrich or Elly Schröder.)

Willy watched as the young woman began to softly drum her fingers on the wooden surface of the desk as the person at the other end responded. Seconds later, the drumming stopped as she turned to face the chocolatier, her eyes wide with surprise. “Was?” she eventually cried out her single word causing Willy’s steady breathing to cease. “Sind Sie sicher?” (What? Are you certain?) After another pause, she began to speak once again. “Nein, ich weiß nur, dass sie wollte dort übernachten.” (No, I only know that they wanted to stay the night there.)

“What is it, Tina?” Willy asked when he saw the agitation overtaking her. He watched as she began to bite down on her lower lip.

“Ja, danke, wiederhören.” (Yes, thank you, good bye.) She hung up the phone, her face completely washed-out and her expression laced in fright.

“What did they say?” he asked.

“They said that my parents never arrived,” she whispered. “I don’t know what’s happening, but they should have been here by now, it only takes about three or four hours to drive from Duselheim to Berlin. What if something’s happened to them?” she asked, as she wrapped her arms around herself. “Only last week my life was completely normal…”

As her hysterical words reached a fevered pitch, Willy rested his hands on her shoulders and turned her around as he leaned over so that he would be eye-level with her. “…I want you to stop and listen to me for a moment.” Once she had become quiet, he continued. “I know that you’re frightened and this is a huge thing to contend with, but you’ve got to pull yourself together. Something is happening, yes, but it could be something as simple as them having car trouble.”

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “Maybe you’re right, and they just went to Max’s flat before they checked in. Maybe we should try Max’s number.”

“That may not be a bad idea,” he said. Once she gave him the number he dialed it before handing the phone to Tina. When someone eventually picked up the line, she spoke. “Papa?”

Silence filled the room and Willy watched as Tina’s expression shifted from resigned to terribly frightened. After several seconds, she spoke, her voice once more etched in panic. “Wo sind meine
Eltern?” (Where are my parents?) As these words hung in the air, Willy reached over and carefully took the phone out of Tina’s trembling hand and placed it to his own ear.

“Hallo?” he spoke, his voice firm. (Hello?)

“Wer sind Sie?” the gruff, but familiar, sounding voice filled his ear. (Who are you?)

“I think we both know who this is, and introductions are really not necessary.” Willy said, his voice etched in a strange mixture between hostility and anger. “Where are the girl’s parents?”

“Wonka? What are you doing with the girl?” The sound of Arthur Slugworth’s voice emerged and Willy remained where he was, his hand still resting on Tina’s shoulder.

“It surprises me that you even know who this is,” Willy said calmly. “What are you doing inside the boy’s apartment, Slugworth?”

“I would guess that you know perfectly well what I’m doing here,” he said smoothly. “I’m looking for something that rightfully belongs to me. Or are you trying to play savior of the world again like you did last week with my grandniece? You know that sort of thing does grow rather tiring, and quite quickly at that.”

“Where are the girl’s parents?” Willy repeated his question, his voice filled with no-nonsense undertones.

“Oh they’re just fine, we’ve been spending the evening getting to know each other, and it would seem to me that you are not in the position to make any demands right now,” Slugworth sneered. “Accidents can happen, you know.”

“With you I am wont to call them something else, like that which was intended.”

“Be that as it may, the facts remain that I have something that you want and you have my paperwork.”

“No, I don’t have your paperwork, Slugworth, I haven’t even seen your paperwork, but I can well imagine that it would make for very interesting reading,” Willy snapped. “I would say that you should let Maximilian’s parents go, they know nothing of this. All of this rubbish is between you and me.”

“Don’t play coy with me, Wonka, I happen to know that before Maximilian went and jumped off a bridge and splattered his guts on the pavement below that he sent his little sister, Tina, a package. I can also surmise what the contents of that package happened to be. I simply did not know that you had somehow managed to get involved. It would seem to me that you are dead set on thwarting all my plans, but this time you’re not going to get away with it.”

Willy took a deep breath. “What makes you so certain that I’m not recording everything you say, Slugworth?”

“Because you’re not that smart and you wouldn’t have the balls to use the same tactic twice,” the even retort emerged. “I know about the way you work, Wonka, I know that you are not one to take the same path twice. Perhaps it is how you’ve managed to work in this industry for as long as you have.”

“Let’s cut to the chase, then,” Willy said. “I have neither the time nor inclination to continue arguing with you. I know how you operate as well, and I know that nothing is sacred unless you get your way.” He paused. “Tell me something, what would you have done with this girl if you had managed
to find her? Murder her and make it look like an accident? How am I to know that that was perhaps what happened with her brother?” He cast a glance over towards Tina and noticed that her face was now as white as a sheet. Instead of continuing down that line of questioning, he protectively put an arm around her shoulder and exerted soft pats to it as he waited for his foe to respond.

“I did not murder anyone, it was suicide and we both know that,” he said. “The girl’s parents have affirmed as much during our little talk.” He paused. “Now, I want that package, and I will not renege on that like I did with Linda’s brat. If you don’t get the package back to me in the next forty-eight hours, then I’ll make sure that far more gets destroyed than just a Duselheim hotel. Now, when you get it, I want you to send it special delivery to Buckinghamshire and I don’t want anymore tricks or that girl will be an orphan by next week.”

“Let me talk to her parents,” Willy said earnestly.

“Why?”

“Well, how do I know that you’re not bluffing?” he asked his voice laced in contempt.

“Very well, five minutes,” Slugworth said as Willy heard the sounds of the phone switching hands. After several seconds had passed, a man’s voice emerged, the cadence filled with exhaustion.

“Ja?” (Yes?)

“Herr Schröder? Bitte, bleiben Sie ruhig, hier spricht Willy Wonka,” he said. (Mr. Schröder, try and stay calm, this is Willy Wonka.)

“Wo ist Tina, ist sie bei Ihnen?” the voice emerged soft in Willy’s ear. (Where is Tina, is she with you?)

“Ja, sie ist hier und in Sicherheit, das kann ich Ihnen bestätigen,” he said. (Yes, she’s here and is safe, that is something I can guarantee.)

“Mein Gott, wir dachten sie war in dem Hotel als es in den Luft gespringt. Diese herzlose Menschen haben unser Existenz zerstört,” Tina’s father said with emotion in his voice. (My God, we thought that she was in the hotel when they set fire to it. These heartless people destroyed it.) “Wir hatten uns gefürchtet, dass Tina entführt wurde, genauso wie es mit uns passierte.” (We were afraid that they had kidnapped her, just as they did with us.>)

“Nein, Tina ist in London. Wir sind in meiner Fabrik,” he said. (Tina is here in London. We are all together at my factory.)

Nothing emerged, but Willy could hear the soft breathing at the other end of the line. “Herr Schröder, ich gebe Ihnen mein Wort, ich werde sie schützen.” (Mr. Schröder, I give you my word, I will protect her.)

“Danke sehr,” he whispered (Thank you.)

“Nichts zu danken. Hier ist Ihre Tochter.” (No reason, here’s your daughter.) Willy handed her the phone and watched as she put it to her ear.

“Papa? Bist du das?” she asked weakly. (Papa, is that you?)

The chocolatier listened for several moments as the teenager spoke to her father, the tears streaming down her face as her words filled the room. After about a minute, she extended the phone back to him.
Willy instantly put it up against his ear. “Ich bin es wieder,” he said. (I’m back.)

“Bitte, Herr Wonka, pass auf unser Tochter auf.” (Please, Mr. Wonka, look out for our daughter.)

With that, the phone line went dead.

Slowly, Willy replaced it before looking at Tina, her face now wet with tears. She kept her head lowered and her arms wrapped securely around herself. “Papa…” she whimpered softly.

Willy took a deep breath as he wrapped her carefully in his arms. “Shhh,” he whispered.

“I hoped that my father would answer the phone, but that man, h-he sounded like he was mocking us.”

“I don’t wish to make light of anything here, but this man tends to mock everyone, that’s how many members of the Slugworth family operate, I’m afraid,” he said softly.

“Tom warned me about him,” she whispered. “He said that he was dangerous.”

“Yes, he is very dangerous, Tina,” he began. “Your family has been dragged into this situation and it is going to be up to all of us to try and get it rectified.”

“Why did this even happen,” she whispered.

“They found out that your brother sent you the package. I didn’t anticipate it to happen this quickly, but it did. Based on what Slugworth said, it sounded as though they knew exactly where to go and when. Sadly, I am left to assume that your family’s hotel has become a casualty in all of this.”

“Why, I mean; what did he say?” she asked, her voice soft.

“He said that he didn’t want even more accidents to happen,” Willy said. “Your father seemed convinced that if you hadn’t have come here today, you would no doubt have been abducted because of the things your brother sent to you. The important thing for you to do now is to remain calm. Slugworth will get the papers back that he wants. We just have to explain what happened to the police.”

“What are we going to do, Willy?”

“We’re going to have to go to the police tonight and try and sort this out,” he said. “I will contact Scotland Yard straightaway and we’ll go see them right after dinner.”

Tina looked at him. “You’re going to go out?”

“It’s been done before,” he said smiling.

“Y-you saved my life,” she whispered more to herself than to him.

“I don’t know about that,” he said.

“B-but you did,” she insisted. “If I had stayed home….” her voice trailed as Willy took her hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. Lowering her head, she could feel the tears streaming down over her face. She tried to hold back her grief, but she couldn’t. “…Jetzt bin ich total allein,” she whispered (I’m completely alone.)

Willy shook his head, but wordlessly, he pulled the heartbroken girl into his arms, and felt her collapsing into his embrace. “No, sweetheart, you’re not,” he affirmed softly.
“What if he kills my parents?” she whimpered.

“We’re not going to let that happen, Tina,” he said, all the while trying to sound more confident than he felt.
“I don’t know what to do, I want my mother…” As her voice trailed, she tried without success at stifling the yawn that seemed to emerge from between her lips.

Willy began to ponder if he would now be up all night watching over her as he had done with Molly during the past few nights. *One of these days, this not sleeping thing is going to catch up with me,* he thought.

“Did you at least get some sleep earlier?” he eventually asked.

“A little.”

“Yet that is what you need the most,” he said as a small smirk broke through. “I suppose I’m not one to talk, I’m exhausted.”

“You are?”

He nodded. “Mm-hum, I haven’t slept much these past few nights,” he said as he looked at her. He could tell that, although she was now seated, she looked as though she was absolutely beside herself with worry and intimidation. “Tina?” he spoke her name after several moments of silence had passed between them.

“Yes?”

“We are going to help your family through all of this. I will not turn my back on any of you,” he said. “I will not let Slugworth win in such a dastardly way. If this means anything to you, I will also make certain that your family’s business is back up and running again soon.”

“How?” she asked. “If it got destroyed…”

“…Look at me,” he said softly.

Tina raised her head, but somehow found the courage to do as he requested, her eyes filled with tears.

When she did not move or speak, Willy took the incentive and inched his way closer to where she was sitting. “Do you know what Eliza always does for me whenever I’m sad or at a loss and don’t know what to do?”

“What?”

“She takes me by the hand and reminds me that I am not alone until I can’t hear it anymore. She then affirms to me that everything is going to be alright.” He gently pulled her into his arms, this time her body literally collapsing into his embrace.

There, wrapped in the sanctuary of his embrace, she began to weep softly, the grief emerging in her tears.

“That’s it,” he whispered, his voice laced with gentle overtones. “Just let it out. You’re not alone, and you most certainly do not have to play along with some crazy façade here.”

“You must think I’m a hopeless wreck…” she whispered as her words trailed off.
“…No, I don’t. You’ve been through so much and you don’t deserve any of it. You were afraid that I would hate you because of the letter, but I don’t. Now your parents are in trouble and we have to find a way to help them out.”

“But my brother said that he tried to break in here…” her voice broke.

“…Whatever he did, you must know that his actions are by no means a reflection on what my perception of you is. No matter what your brother did, Tina, I will not punish you for his actions. You are still my friend.”

She raised her head. “I am?

“Yes, now there is only one question that remains.”

“What?”

“You know that I am your friend, are you my friend?” he asked.

“I hope I am,” she whispered.

“Then know that no matter what words were written in that letter, you must never worry yourself that my feelings of friendship towards you will change.”

“Max really messed up, though,” she whispered.

“Everyone does now and again, but you are not responsible for his messing up,” Willy said. “I think that what you need to know is that contrary to his lapses in judgment, you are not at all responsible for his actions.”

“You really are as kind as Tom said,” she whispered.

Willy smiled despite his exhaustion. “I have never believed in guilt by association and perhaps during the last hours I have had more than my share of experiences with this. You know, a little boy named Matthew reminded me that getting angry with another person in that way is wrong. Now, with that said, I really do not wish to say anything that will taint your memory of your brother. I know that you loved him and that should never change regardless of who you are friends with.”

As these words hung in the air, the sounds of someone else tapping on the door could be heard. Willy got to his feet and went over to open it. When he did, he was surprised to see Patrick standing in the threshold.

“I saw light under the door and was wondering how the wee girl is doing,” Patrick said. “Marjorie was not exactly nice to her earlier today.”

“No, she wasn’t, but Tina and I were just talking and something else seems to have come up,” Willy said. “Why don’t you come in and we’ll tell you all about it?”

Patrick nodded as he came into the office. When he saw Tina sitting on the sofa, he smiled. “I hope I’m not interrupting anything. Are you feeling any better, young lady?”

“Not really,” Tina whispered. “I should probably get directions and go back to my room.”

“You don’t have to leave on my account. I actually wanted to see how you were doing,” Patrick said. “Telling us about the letter was a noble thing you did.”

“Yes, it was,” Willy affirmed. “I’m sorry I haven’t formally introduced you two.”
“We talked out in the hallway briefly,” the Scotsman affirmed.

“Yes, well, her name is Tina Schröder and she’s a friend of ours from Germany. Tom met her when he was visiting the town last week,” Willy said.

“Ah, Germany, such lovely country,” Patrick said smiling warmly. “I was there several years back and truly loved it.” He paused. “I’m Patrick McKenny.”

Tina nodded but offered him a watery smile. “I’m pleased to meet you, Mr. McKenny.”

Patrick smiled. “Likewise, Ms. Schröder.”

“Could we please suspense with the formalities?” Willy asked with a trace of frustration laced in his words. “Of course, but she started it,” Patrick said with a good-natured smile. “All kidding aside, I do believe that this is a part of the young lady’s culture, is that not so?”

Tina nodded, “Actually it is, but Mrs. Schröder is my mother,” she whispered, but after several seconds, she shyly looked at Willy.

“Then perhaps I ought to call you Tina then,” Patrick said. “You can call me Patrick. Perhaps that will not give William the feeling of being the ringleader of a circus.”

“I don’t know,” Willy quipped, “I still do feel rather like that.” He paused. “So enlighten me as to how you found your way here?”

“I went to the same school of navigating as most of the ladies in my family,” he said. “I got lost you see.” Patrick chuckled as he looked at Willy. “I hope that you aren’t put out with this, William, but I am someone who likes to take little strolls before dinnertime. It helps me to collect my thoughts and it gives me a wee break from Marjorie’s constant nagging.”

“If her nagging bothers you then why are you still together?” Willy asked.

“She can get on my nerves at times, but I do love her,” Patrick said honestly. “When she is not behaving like a bull in a china shop, she can be a very good person. Sometimes one must look beneath the fact that her recent behavior has been rather that of a bat in a belfry.”

“Sounds like my aunt,” Tina mused. “She has no patience whatsoever.”

Patrick nodded but looked at Tina. “It’s my experiences that there is one in each family. Three in mine, my brother, his father-in-law, and Marjorie. If you were to get all three of them into the same room, then you will have more excitement than a Boxing Day football match.”

Willy smirked. “I told Linda that I try to hold off on judging others until getting to know them better, but with Marjorie, it was rather difficult for me to hold my tongue. Especially since I believe Molly must have overheard everything that happened when she was supposed to have gone into the shower.”

“I sort of figured that,” Patrick said, but looked at Tina. “So would the two of you be so kind as to tell me what happened? Tina here looks as though she is ready to pass out.”

“Arthur Slugworth is holding her parents hostage,” Willy said softly.

“Blimey,” Patrick sighed. “That’s not good news at all.”
“No, and he’s demanding the return of the sound reels and notebooks, which we have already turned over to the police,” Willy said.

“But, does he know about the letter?” Patrick asked.

“No, I don’t think he does,” Willy said.

“Then give that to Scotland Yard, and see about getting the sound reels and notebooks back,” Patrick said.

“Will the police return it?” Tina asked.

“I don’t know, but it may be our only option at this point. We have to find a way to get your parents out of harm’s way,” Willy said. “I think that given what we do have on the Slugworths, we may be able to put them away for a time.”

Patrick took a deep breath. “Would it be prudent for any of us to leave the factory at the present time? William, I’m concerned about our going to Cornwall. I honestly don’t even think that your mother and her friend would be keen on leaving at the moment either.”

“Cornwall?” Tina’s eyes lit up. “You’re going to Cornwall?”

“That was what we intended on doing, but now it would seem that the plan is not going to come to pass,” he hypothesized.

“It was always my dream to one day go there,” she said wistfully.

Willy looked at her. “Oh, I think that one day you will get there of that I am absolutely certain.”

She shrugged her shoulders, but instead of speaking, she simply bit down on her lower lip and looked away.
Chapter 63

Chapter 63: Willy Wonka’s Determination

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

At that precise moment, Willy got to his feet and went over to the cabinet and opened it. He started to dig around inside the files for several minutes and then pulled the first letter that Slugsworth had written in the wake of his opening the factory.

Turning back around, he regarded both of them. “It is no secret; both your families have been dragged into a very bitter circumstance. This industry, although designed to bring joy into the lives of people everywhere, is in reality, a very cold and hardened one. It has been rooted in jealousy and hate for many years. Perhaps for as long my candy has been out in the market, this has been going on.” He paused and took a deep breath. “The reality is, I will not surrender or be defeated in this way. I will be honest and tell you that I never imagined when I started in this business that I would find myself doing battle with individuals pent on destroying me.”

Tina stoically listened all the while realizing why Max had deemed it absolutely imperative that she get those tapes to the police or Willy Wonka. Now that their parents’ safety hung in the balance, the teenager felt as though everything that happened was because of what her brother had done.

A deep rooted bitterness began to build up inside of her. Contrary to what Willy had told her earlier about not being angry with her brother, she still was. If Max had not been so ambitious and weak, then none of this would have happened and her brother would, today, be alive and well.

While Tina was stewing about all of this, Patrick read through the letter, his eyes widening. After several moments, he raised his head. “He actually threatened to kill you.” His words were straightforward as they filled the room. “You should not give up, and if I were you I would do everything I could to put an end to this once and for all.”

Somehow things had become crystal clear to Tina during that one brief moment. Willy had persevered and he was now doing what he could to help her. Sighing, she took a deep breath and looked at him. “I don’t want you to give up, either. I’m just afraid that my parents are going to get hurt because of all of this.”

Willy went over to her and kneeled down in front of her. “We’re going to get them out. We just have to have all our cards on the table. I know that for a long time I’ve been working and trying to keep the police out of it. I thought, if anything, this whole thing was my personal war against the Slugworths. Now, I realize that I have to come out and tell them about the conspiracies and the threats. It’s not just about me anymore, and perhaps Tom has been trying to convey this message to me for all these years and I didn’t want to listen. Now, I have to, because it’s about you and your parents, Linda and her parents, Molly, and the people at Hudson Chocolates. It’s no longer a personal vendetta.”

“But the Hudson people were your competition,” Tina whispered.

“They are also human beings, and their existence was rubbed out by greed and selfishness. I would not want that to happen to anyone. You see, I want to be the best confectioner, but in the fairest and most honest way possible. If I ignore my conscience, then I would be no better than Arthur Slugworth. Would you want me to do that, Tina?”
She shook her head. “No, I wouldn’t.”

He nodded as he stood back up.

“How do you intend on fighting back, William?” Patrick asked.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I don’t want anyone else to get hurt, but if I give in to one of their demands, then who’s to say they will not hang several more over our heads? At this point, they could use Tina’s parents as a means to accomplish more than just obtaining a bunch of reels and notebooks. They might try and get Molly back, or put Linda’s life in danger and I don’t think we should risk everything by giving in to tyrants.”

Tina raised her head and looked at him. “Then don’t, Willy, you should know that I trust you with my life, and my parents trust you with theirs.”

“How can you be so sure of that?” he asked.

“Easy, that’s what Papa told me just now on the phone. He said that I should do whatever I can to help you, but that regardless of what happens to him or my mother, the authorities should be involved, and we must do whatever we can to put an end to this.”

“How could he have said that if Slugworth was in the room?” Willy asked. “Slugworth does speak German almost as well as I do.” He smirked at his overconfident words.

“Yes, he speaks High German, but he doesn’t speak Schwäbisch,” Tina smiled weakly.

“What is Schwäbisch?” Patrick asked.

“It’s a dialect of German, spoken by people in parts of southern Germany. It’s a hard dialect for foreigners to understand, but I’ve been using it since I learned how to talk. Although I live in Bavaria, my grandparents came from Baden Wuttenberg, where this dialect is commonly spoken,” Tina explained. “When we spoke on the phone, my father used it and I responded in High German so that Willy could understand my side of the conversation.”

“That’s sneaky,” the Scotsman said.

“It’s brilliant,” Willy said appreciatively. “Did your father say anything else to you that I should know?”

“He said that we should notify the Berlin police and that there’s a hostage situation at my brother’s address,” she said. “I don’t know the number to the police there though, but I think we can find out.”

“Why didn’t you tell us this before?” Willy asked.

“I don’t know,” Tina whispered. “I guess I was sort of scared of the risks in following through with it.” She looked away, her head bowed in defeat. “Willy, I’m scared.”

“I know,” he reached for her hand and when he held it, he offered it a comforting squeeze.

“Then I suppose our only option is to find the number and call the police in Germany,” she said softly. Although she sounded convinced, both Willy and Patrick could tell that she was still afraid.

“Are you sure?” he asked.

She nodded. “It’s the least I can do.”
Willy nodded and picked up the phone.

Five minutes later, Tina had the number to the Berlin police department in her hand. She took a deep breath, but nervously looked at Willy. “Could you dial the number for me, please? I’m still a bit nervous.”

Willy smiled and nodded as he picked up the phone and dialed the number. Once it was ringing, he handed the receiver to Tina.

Moments after the second ring, the line was picked up and Tina spoke, her voice steady and even. “Guten Abend, mein Name ist Tina Schröder und meine Familie wurde gegen einundzwanzig Uhr gestern Abend benachrichtigt, dass mein Bruder Maximilian Selbstmord begangen hat.” (Good evening, my name is Tina Schröder and my family was notified yesterday at around nine in the evening that my brother, Maximilian committed suicide.)

She paused and waited for the person at the other end of the line to acknowledge her words.

“Unsere Eltern sind heute Morgen dorthin gefahren, um alles zu regeln, aber jetzt ist etwas Furchtbares da zwischen gekommen und die beiden stecken in Schwierigkeiten. Einen Mann namens Slugworth ist jetzt in Maximilians Wohnung und er hat meine Eltern als Geisel genommen. Er bedroht, dass er sie Töten wird.” (Our parents drove there this morning to take care of everything, but something terrible has happened and they are in trouble. A man named Slugworth is presently in Maximilian’s apartment and he has taken my parents hostage. He’s threatening to kill them.)

She paused and waited until the person on the other end spoke. “Ja, ich sage Ihnen die Wahrheit. Bitte, ich weiß, dass alles hier wie im schlechten Film klingt, aber es ist die Wahrheit. Wenn Sie mir nicht glauben schenken, dann schicken Sie jemanden zu der Auerbachstraße sieben,” she pleaded. (Yes, I’m telling you the truth. Please, I know that it sounds like in a bad movie, but it’s the truth. If you don’t believe me, then send someone to Auerbach Street seven.)

She became quiet, but after several moments, she continued speaking, her voice laced in relief. “Sie werden es tun? Ich danke Ihnen.” (You will send someone? Oh thank you.) she paused. “Woher ich Sie anrufe?” (From where am I calling?)

Willy offered a slight smile contrary to everything that was happening. “Tell them, but they may not believe it.”

Tina nodded. “Sie werden mir wahrscheinlich nicht glauben, aber ich bin in der Schokoladen Fabrik von Willy Wonka in London. Meinen Eltern wissen Bescheid, und die Gegenstände, die Herr Slugworth unbedingt haben möchte, sind bei Ihrem Kollegen in Duselheim versteckt. Herr Slugworth glaubt, dass ich etwas habe, aber es stimmt nicht, und alles, was ich bei mir habe, ist der Brief der Max mir geschrieben hat, bevor er starb.” (You may not believe me, but I am in London at the Chocolate Factory belonging to Willy Wonka. My parents know about this, and the things that Mr. Slugworth wants are with your colleagues in Duselheim. Mr. Slugworth believes that I have something that I don’t. All that I have is the letter my brother wrote to me before he died.)

Seconds later, she gave them the direct number to Willy’s office before hanging up the phone. She then looked at Willy. “They’re sending a car to the address. I don’t think they believe me, but they will do what they can to help my parents get out of there if this is a hostage situation like we think.”
“That’s good news,” Willy said.

Patrick nodded. “Let me ask you a question, Tina. Would your parents have told you to do that if it was too dangerous?”

She shook her head. “No, they’re not risk takers, so I don’t think they would. I don’t know if any of Slugworth’s men are in Berlin right now, but from what Papa said, the only one that was there was him.”

“That stuff must be very valuable to Arthur Slugworth for him to fly to Germany and try and contend with it all by himself,” Patrick said.

“I agree,” Willy nodded. “He was probably trying to handle everything inconspicuously, which is just like him.”

Tina looked at the chocolatier. “I guess all we can do now is wait.”

Willy nodded as he reached for the telephone and picked it up. “Yes, that and, I have a call to make,” he said as he dialed the number to the nearest police presidium, his eyes closing slightly as he waited for someone to answer.

“Hello,” he said once they did. “Yes, my name is William Wonka and I want to report a kidnapping.”

“You’re William Wonka,” the skeptical sounding voice emerged from the other end of the line. “We haven’t got time for games, sir.”

“I’m not playing any,” Willy said taking a deep breath. “I am Willy Wonka, and if you would like, I can come to your station and prove it if that is what you prefer. I had rather hoped that we could contend with this issue like rational adults, though.”

The man at the other end of the line began to laugh, and Willy looked at Patrick, but covered the receiver with his hand and whispered. “He’s laughing.”

Patrick stood up and went over to the phone, the letter forgotten as he snatched the receiver out of Willy’s hand and placed it to his ear. As soon as they could all hear the loud laughter, he spoke, his voice more stern than ever before.

“I fail to see humor in this situation, my dear sir.” He spoke sharply, and abruptly, the officer’s laughter had ceased and the office grew quiet. “The man who was speaking to you is Willy Wonka, and as a taxpayer in this city, he has just as many rights as the next citizen. Now, I suggest that you take heed of his words and listen with a serious ear. He could very easily make your precinct house the most famous one in the entire United Kingdom.”

He handed the phone back to Willy and sat down on the sofa and watched as the chocolatier returned the phone to his healthy ear. What he heard at the other end, aside from the officer clearing his throat, was absolute silence. Taking a deep breath, he exhaled slowly, thus giving the indication that someone was waiting.

“Mr. Wonka?” the simple question eventually emerged.

“Yes,” Willy responded trying to keep the edge out of his voice.

“This is Constable Theodore Simmons. I apologize for my earlier behavior, sir. It will not happen again. However, you must know that many people call here claiming to be prominent or well known individuals. Since I cannot see your face, I was led to ascertain that you were one of them.”
“It’s alright, you are not the first person whom I have encountered that did not believe me when I introduced myself and will most assuredly not be the last,” Willy said.

“What may I do for you?” Constable Simmons asked.

“Well, you see, I have this letter and have acquired a great deal of information that might link the two heads of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated to a string of criminal activity here in the UK as well as beyond. Without going into too terribly much detail, one involves the downfall of Hudson Chocolates in the United States, while the other involves a young man named Maximilian Schröder in Berlin, Germany. I know that both of these situations are out of your jurisdiction, but I also know that the Slugworth Headquarters is stationed in Buckinghamshire and two men involved are Arthur, the Chief Executive Officer of the company, and his nephew Owen Slugworth.”

“Do you have anything besides hearsay to back up these claims?” the officer asked.

“Yes, I do,” Willy began. “Aside from the fact that Owen Slugworth’s estranged wife and daughter are here at my factory as we speak, I can put you in touch with my lawyer, Claude Gregory, who is overseeing her divorce, as well as her parents, one of whom has already spoken to you. The other person who may hold some leverage here is a young lady named Tina Schröder whose parents are presently being held captive in Berlin by Arthur Slugworth. We have already contacted the police there about that particular situation.” He took a deep breath before continuing to speak.

“Tina arrived here this afternoon, just before her family’s business was destroyed while the Slugworths were looking for some sound reels and notebooks that her brother had sent prior to his suicide.

“I know that you are looking for concrete evidence,” Willy continued. “I would be willing to give you an entire file of information that has been collected here during the past several years. I can also give you the letter written by Maximilian Schröder and posted to his sister in Duselheim. This must be translated from German into English, though. Although both Tina and I are fluent in both languages, I am guessing that you would want to obtain an official translation from a reputable firm.”

“I will send someone over to the factory tonight to take your statements as well as to pick up the evidence, Mr. Wonka,” he said. “We will also need to contact our colleagues in Buckinghamshire.”

“I understand, I did speak to a police officer there earlier today, her name is Karen Davis,” Willy said. “Unfortunately, I did not mention what was happening with the Slugworth family because at the time I was there, the information I had was not conclusive, but I am certain that she would be able to affirm that I am telling you the truth about our contact.”

“If it was not in relation to this, then why were you in contact with them?” Simmons asked.

“I had gone to the precinct house in the hopes of speaking with a young lady named Stacey Madison. This was done as a favor to my friend, Thomas, after she and her friend had assaulted him earlier today. Are you familiar with a couple who were dubbed as the Madison Twins?’”

“We had heard tell of them, but from what I have come to understand about them, they seem to be nothing more than a couple of petty thieves,” he responded.

“Stacey was arrested after they had assaulted my friend earlier today,” Willy explained. “So, I drove there to visit him and he asked me to stop by there and see her. In essence, all of us are quite relieved that Thomas was not dragged into this situation at all. He is presently a patient at Buckinghamshire General Hospital, but should be released tomorrow morning sometime.”
“Is there anything else?” Constable Simmons asked.

“There is, but I would prefer to put it into a formal statement,” he said. “Please, Constable Simmons, if you intend to send someone then please do so straightaway. I will come to the side gate to meet your colleagues when they arrive.”

“Give us about twenty minutes,” he said before hanging up the phone.

Once Willy had returned it to the receiver, he looked at Patrick. “Thank you for helping me to get this man to see some sort of reason. He thought I was playing some kind of silly game with him.”

“My pleasure,” the Scotsman responded. “But I suppose for him to hear someone on the phone introduce themselves as William Wonka does not happen everyday.”

“That’s true,” Tina said. “The first time we spoke, I was sort of shocked that you would want to talk to me, but still, I would never have laughed at you.”

“I know,” Willy said nodding. “At any rate, Constable Simmons informed me it would take about twenty minutes for someone to get here.” He started to collect the items from the file and place them on the desk.

Patrick looked at the chocolatier. “Do you think we would be able to speak with the police without Marjorie being present?”

“Perhaps, but we should at least go and ask Linda to join us,” Willy said. “I am wont to say that Molly should come too, but I am rather afraid that she would not be able to handle this. After all, regardless of how much I loathe Owen Slugworth, he is still the child’s father.”

“I feel sorry for her,” Tina whispered, “to have a father like that. Willy, they really did threaten you, didn’t they?”

Willy rested his hand on her shoulder, but nodded. “They wanted to destroy me, Tina, and they tried to use your brother to do just that. I must admit that the notoriety has been something of a benefit to me in this regard. To people like you as well as to Linda and Molly, the fear that the Slugworths present is very real. It is for that reason that you are here, and why I want to help you. My mother seems to believe that I give you a voice in all of this.”

“I don’t understand,” Tina whispered.

“It is perhaps because of the factory and my work. This is not by my own choosing, but I think that it shows that the notoriety has granted me a stronger voice in all of this,” he said as he took a deep breath. “I don’t mean to sound arrogant, but you, Linda, and Molly feel as though you have no one to help you contend with these events. Although the battle waged by the Slugworths is targeted at me, you are considered by society to be rather like a pawn in this very obscure chess game. You are expendable and of very little use to it. However, to me, you are absolutely vital and of the utmost importance. It is, perhaps for this reason that Slugworth is angry. He did not like the idea of you connecting with me because it gave your voice more validity.”

“Then you really are a hero,” she said softly.

“No, I’m just a candy maker,” he smiled at her before his attention shifted and he was left looking at Patrick. “It’s becoming clearer to me that people like Marjorie do not fully recognize the severity of the situation. Instead of being kind to others, they speak in cruel tones and heartless words.

“I can see why you are concerned for her. I can also affirm to you that I am not angry with her, and I
embrace the truth that she is not usually like this. She’s a terrified woman, and I see that each time she lashes out. She’s wants to be in control of the situation and is afraid to lose that. Perhaps that is the reason she abused your daughter, and why she is trying to manipulate me. I somehow am starting to believe that she feels as much like a statistic in all of this as her daughter does. That feeling of being lost in the shuffle is very real, and Slugworth is using Tina’s parents to bind us all, but he will not succeed. I will not let them destroy another family. Enough is enough!"

“From the way you are talking, I’m starting to suspect that you really do care for my daughter. Is that not so?” Patrick asked, his question emerging out of the blue, and yet, as these words were spoken, they somehow hung lazily in the air.

Willy shrugged his shoulders, but this time nothing emerged from him.

Instead of waiting for the younger man to respond, Patrick continued speaking. “My guess is that Linda doesn’t want to leave the factory at all, because she does not want to leave you.”

“That is partially true, I do care for her,” Willy said. “I think Linda chose not to leave because she thinks that she is just another statistic; a nameless and faceless image of no importance. Here she is finding her voice and discovering her internalized strength. She did this when she defended herself against her mother’s onslaught.”

“You didn’t answer my question,” Patrick spoke as he crossed his arms over his chest. “Now, stop talking to me like you’re some slippery politician. Just tell me truthfully, are you in love with my daughter?”
Chapter 64: Truthfulness and Tension

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy took a deep breath and nodded. He was not certain how Patrick would take the truth, but he was not willing to lie. “I have never loved anyone the way I love Linda,” he whispered, his head somewhat lowered.

Patrick nodded. “Then my assertions were accurate.”

The chocolatier nodded. “Yes. I ask simply that you believe me when I tell you that I am not doing all of this as a means to justify my feelings for her. I’m doing it because it’s the right thing to do, and because none of us deserve to be bullied about by the Slugworths any longer.” He paused. “Aside from Eliza and Tom, I have no real family to speak of, but it has been during the short time that I have known Linda and Molly that I have felt very much like I was a part of one.”

Tina listened to these words and could feel the lump forming in her throat. He had built a family from nothing, and yet while she still had a family, she was pondering how much longer that would be the case. She had already lost her brother, but now she was on the verge of losing both of her parents. The teenager looked away from them as the hot tears caught in her eyes as the dialogue between the two men continued.

“You do have family, William,” the older man said with a nod, a sly smile slowly spreading across his face. “Sometimes a family embraces you in the strangest of ways, but they also hold you in their hearts and it is through their actions and love that you come to discover that you are never quite the same.”

“You won’t say anything of this to Marjorie, will you?” Willy asked. “I fear that she will construe it as my ‘flirting’ with Linda.”

“No, she does not need to know of these things just yet. I realized from the start that you are a good man and worthy of my daughter’s affections. The reality of this is that the two of you and Molly just need time to process all of these things that have taken hold of your lives,” Patrick said honestly. “All the same, I am still very sorry about what Marjorie has said to you, William. It was wrong and not just from the standpoint of us being your guests, it was simply not the most polite thing for her to have said.”

The chocolatier nodded. “You must not apologize any longer, Patrick.”

As soon as these words emerged, the phone rang, and Willy went over to pick it up. He listened for several seconds and then turned around. “The police are here, and waiting outside the west gate. We should go and let them in.” He looked at Patrick. “Perhaps you ought to go and ask your daughter to meet us back here. Tina and I will go meet the police.”

Patrick nodded as they left the office.

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Once they stepped out into the hallway, Willy led Tina through the corridors towards the doors that led outside.

As they walked, she kept her head lowered, all the while not really certain as to what to say. After
several moments had passed, she eventually raised her head. “Willy, what’s going to happen when all of this is over?”

“You’re going to grieve your brother’s passing, and life will go on. It’s like Robert Frost once said, ‘There is one thing I have learned in life, it goes on’, he said simply.

She nodded. “I’m trying, but he was my brother.”

“I know,” he said softly. “And I do understand how you feel. You see, Tom lost his brother many years ago, and it was very hard for both of us. Soon after it happened, our friendship became stronger than even I could have anticipated. His brother’s painting hangs over the sofa in my office, it’s the only thing that was never cut in half,” he said.

Tina lowered her head, but eventually, she offered a slight nod. She wanted to inquire as to his strange décor, but instead simply remained silent.

“You know, it’s going to take some time for you heal from all of this, but you will,” he said. “One day you’ll be able to remember the good times and happy moments that you shared with Max.”

“It just seems hard to believe,” she whispered as they reached the door. Willy opened it and they stepped outside. As the cool breeze wafted through her hair, she raised her head and looked at him. “I mean; sometimes it feels as though I’m just dreaming.”

“Belief consists in accepting the affirmations of the soul; Unbelief, in denying them,” he said as they reached the side gate and he extracted a set of keys from the pocket of his jacket. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Opening the gate, he came face to face with three men. One of whom was his lawyer. “Mr. Gregory, what are you doing here?”

“Constable Simmons called me right after speaking with you on the phone and he wanted me to accompany these two gentlemen. This is Constable Benjamin Green, and Constable Michael Henderson.”

“Thank you for coming, gentlemen, I’m William Wonka, this is my friend Tina Schröder, she’s visiting us from Germany,” he said as he backed away from the gate and allowed them access to the courtyard.

Once they were inside, he closed and locked the gate as they started to walk back in the direction of the door leading inside.

As they walked, Claude looked at Willy. “How’s my other client doing?”

“She’s doing fine,” Willy said. “How is everything going with the paperwork?”

“Owen Slugworth is contesting the divorce on the grounds of Mrs. Slugworth’s ‘mental competence’. It would seem that he is playing that card simply to keep his wife under his thumb, or perhaps to keep her from testifying against him,” Claude whispered. “Between you and me, that guy has a lawyer who is as slippery as an eel. Have you been able to find out anything else about this situation?”

“Well,” Willy smirked. “It might explain why these gentlemen are here, but we have had a great deal of action around here during the past few days.”

“We should save the discussions of official concerns until we get inside and get everyone’s
statements,” Constable Green said formally.

Willy nodded but looked at his lawyer. “I guess it is rather transparent that I’m not accustomed to this sort of thing.”

Claude rested his hand on his shoulder. “No one ever is, William.”

Tina watched this exchange, but said nothing. Instead she silently followed them back inside and through the halls until they reached the door to Willy’s office. Patrick and Linda were standing and waiting for them when they arrived.

“I need to get the paperwork and then we can go to the board room down the hall,” Willy said as he opened the door and stepped inside the office.

As soon as he entered the phone rang. He went over and picked it up. “Hello?”

“Guten Abend, hier spricht Manfred Zimmermann von der Berliner Polizei,” came the voice over the line. “Mit wem spreche ich?” (Good evening, here this is Manfred Zimmermann from the Berlin Police. With whom am I speaking?)

“Hier spricht William Wonka,” he said. (This is William Wonka.)

“Herr Wonka, ist die Frau Tina Schröder zu sprechen?” the man asked. (Mr. Wonka, is Ms. Tina Schröder available?)

“Ja, warten Sie einen Moment und ich hole sie,” (Yes, please wait a moment and I’ll get her.) he said as he laid the phone on the desk and rushed to the door. “Tina, the police in Berlin are on the phone, they want to talk to you. It sounds urgent. Maybe they have news about your parents.”

The teenager nodded as she rushed into the office and picked up the phone. “Hier ist Tina Schröder.” (This is Tina Schröder.)

Willy watched as she seated herself in front of the desk.

“Was!” (What!) She cried out after several moments of explanations had passed. A second later, she turned and looked at Willy, tears of relief now catching in her eyes. “My parents are safe, and Arthur Slugworth has been arrested on two counts of kidnapping as well as other charges. The men who set fire to the hotel are linked back to Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated and they were hired by Owen Slugworth to follow through with it.”

Seconds later, Willy went to the door and spoke to the group assembled out in the hallway. They were all deep in conversation, but the confectioner cleared his throat nonetheless. “Excuse me everyone, but I have some news. Arthur Slugworth has been arrested and perhaps you gentlemen should come in here and speak with your colleague in Germany.”

“Can he speak English?” Green asked.

“We’d have to ask him,” Willy said, “But, if not, we can set the speaker phone and Tina and I can translate for you.”

The two men nodded as the group moved back into the office. Linda seated herself on the sofa with her father while the two policemen went over to the desk. “Could you ask the gentleman if he would be willing to speak with us?” he asked the teenager.

Nodding Tina repeated the request in German to the man at the other end of the line. After several seconds, she nodded, thus indicating that the German policeman was in agreement.
Willy reached over at that moment and pressed a series of buttons on the phone. Within seconds, the
voice of the policeman in Berlin filled the room.

“Entschuldigung, Herr Zimmermann, aber sprechen Sie englisch?” Tina eventually asked. *(Excuse me, Mr. Zimmermann, do you speak English?)*

“Ja, I mean; yes I do,” his answer emerged.

“Sir, we are now on Mr. Wonka’s speaker phone and before we speak, my name is Constable
Benjamin Green. My associate, Michael Henderson and I are heading up the investigation for
Scotland Yard.”

“I’m Officer Manfred Zimmermann of the Berlin Police, and I am overseeing the charges against Mr.
Slugworth here. I have already spoken with Heinrich and Elly Schröder regarding what had
transpired with them. Our department is also overseeing the unanticipated passing of Maximilian
Schröder. We have already been to the young man’s flat and this evening we recovered the tapes and
notebooks that Ms. Schröder turned over to the Duselheim Police Department earlier today.”

“Officer Zimmermann, is there anything you can tell us about the hotel that the Schröder family
owns? What specifically happened with regards to it?” Willy asked before he could stop himself.

“There is not much I am at liberty to report, I’m afraid. As I told the young lady just now, the three
men responsible for setting fire to it have been apprehended and face deportation on this as well as
suspected kidnapping charges.”

“Kidnapping?” Willy asked as confusion lined his face.

“Yes, the three men in question have been identified as Jeremiah Peterson, Malcolm Withers, and
Bradley Cantu,” he began.

“They were the three men who took Molly while we were in Füssen,” Linda began. “I remembered
hearing their first names mentioned when Owen would make plans. They were sometimes referred to
as his Uncle Arthur’s fall guys. I realized that evening that they must have been sent by Owen or his
uncle, I just didn’t realize that they were still in Germany.”

“Yes,” Zimmermann’s words emerged. “We discovered that several witnesses from the Thomas Inn
in Füssen stepped forward right after this strange incident took place on the evening of July 13.”

“What else can you tell us about them?” Green asked.

“Well, according to several statements handed over to us from the Füssen Police Department, these
same three suspects were seen taking a small child out of a restaurant on the evening in question.”

“So, in other words, someone did do something about what happened that night,” Willy said.

“I thought no one cared,” Linda shook her head.

“Oh they cared alright, half of the customers from the restaurant stormed to the police station within
an hour after the incident demanding that the officers on duty do something to help recover the child.
When our colleagues tried to find out the whereabouts of the mother or her friend, it became clear
that both of them had disappeared without a trace. The only name they had was Slugworth, so they
started a follow up investigation. My question is: how did you get involved in all of this, Mr.
Wonka?”

Willy took a deep breath. “The man from the restaurant, Linda Slugworth’s friend, is my friend
Thomas Wilkenson. After the child was taken away, Thomas took it upon himself to bring Linda back to London and we started trying to find a way to get Molly back from Owen and Arthur Slugworth."

"Why didn’t you inform us about this?" Henderson demanded.

“We were afraid of putting the child at risk, so using my friend’s radio equipment we were able to trick them into releasing Molly to me. She’s been staying here at the factory since the evening of her release on the fourteenth. She’s a very fragile little girl, which probably explains why she is not present at the moment.”

The two officers from Scotland Yard seemed pacified by this response, and instead of continuing with this line of questioning, they allowed their colleague to continue.

Once Officer Zimmermann had cleared his throat, he spoke. “Soon after all of these coincidences started coming out, it became clear to us after taking Mr. Slugworth into custody that all of these things seemed connected somehow. This was further confirmed when we found a small bottle of a liquid commonly known as Chloroform on the three suspects. This same bottle carried Arthur Slugworth’s fingerprints, which linked the child’s abduction back to the company. Now, as far as the tapes and paper work are concerned, we will be releasing them to your presidium in the coming hours as well as obtaining the documentation for the deportation of the four suspects in question.”

“Can you tell us about the reels and notebooks that Mr. Schröder apparently sent to his sister prior to his suicide?” This time the question emerged from Patrick.

“I’m sorry, Sir, I am not at liberty to say, but I must emphasize that due to the legal relevance of these items in question, they will not be released to the public, nor will they be turned back over to Ms. Schröder.”

“I don’t want them anyway,” Tina said. “They’ve already caused us enough trouble.” Taking a deep breath she continued. “Officer Zimmermann, has anyone in your department been in contact with Erich Summers? He’s my brother’s best friend, and he said that he was contacted indirectly by the Slugworths to do some work for them.”

“No, but his statement may be construed as hearsay if they did not contact him directly,” the German policeman responded. “I’m afraid that’s all the information I can offer from here at this time.”

“Thank you for your assistance,” Henderson said. “Our office will be in touch with yours in the coming days.”

With that Officer Zimmermann hung up as Green looked at the chocolatier and his guests. “In light of this new information, we should probably get started. From the looks of things, we will have a great deal to go through in the next few hours.”

Willy nodded and led them out of the office and down the hall to the board room. “If they need to contact us again, then the call will be dispatched directly here,” he said as he reached over and turned on the light as the rest of them stepped inside.

Like Willy’s office, the room was decorated in the same style, even the table at the center of the room was cut in half and the chairs, although whole and intact, seemed to carry the same sort of essence as the furnishings in his office. In the center of the table, a small pencil cup was placed with pens and pencils that were in the shape of candy canes. Next to them, a notebook filled with bluish purple colored paper was placed.
Wordlessly, the chocolatier went over to his usual place at the table and motioned for Tina and Linda to seat themselves on either side of him. Patrick seated himself on the other side of his daughter, while Claude seated himself next to Tina. Once everyone was seated, one of the policemen spoke.

“Now then, Mr. Wonka, why don’t you start by telling us anything you can think of that might help us get to the bottom of what the Slugworths have been up to?” Green spoke as he pulled a tape recorder out of the satchel he carried and started fiddling around with the buttons.

As soon as he had managed to place the object on the table, he pressed the play and record button and waited for Willy to begin speaking.

“I will turn over every last bit of correspondence that I have had with the Slugworths since going into business. I was reluctant about doing so at first because I feared before the Golden Ticket contest started that I did not have applicable proof as to the sorts of individuals we are dealing with. As we have recognized during the past hour, these two ladies are more profoundly affected by the actions of Arthur and Owen Slugworth then I have been. I have, over the course of these past few years, grown quite accustomed to the arrogant means in which the Slugworths do business.”

The policemen each nodded but reached across and accepted the stack of papers that were now being offered to them.

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It was close to two hours later when the two officers had gotten up and left the factory. After having shown them out, Willy had returned to the board room to find his lawyer and friends in active dialogue.

From the looks of things, Claude Gregory was standing and listening as the others spoke of speculations as well as other legal ramifications. He slipped quietly inside as Linda’s words filled his healthy ear.

“You think that this will help get Owen off the street, Mr. Gregory?” Linda was asking.

“Well, legally, he’s in a great deal of trouble and it looks as though Scotland Yard might be able to have him up on accessory charges for all those things that the German police have uncovered,” Claude said. “The mastermind behind all this trouble is Arthur Slugworth, though, so it would be hard for me to ascertain whether or not Owen Slugworth could be in as much trouble as his uncle. According to the officer in Berlin, the younger of the Slugworths could face deportation to Germany to face criminal charges as well. Aside from that, I really should not speculate any further, because at this point that will do us very little good. The one who poses the biggest threat to us is not Arthur, but rather, Owen. Now, as William’s friend, I can truthfully say that we have made some steps in the right direction…”

“…But it’s still not over yet,” Tina said breaking her silence.

“That’s a good way of putting it, young lady, but I would say that for the most part, your worries are behind you,” Claude said. “Your parents are safe, and because of his actions, Arthur Slugworth is now behind bars. I think that given the notoriety of the Slugworth family, they will do whatever they can to keep this entire situation under wraps. However, there does remain a chance that they may be able to get their boss out on bail. I will contact the prosecutors first thing in the morning and see if they can derail that particular plan, though.”

Willy nodded, his thoughts abruptly shifting to the Golden Ticket contest as well as the reason his best friend was in Buckinghamshire in the first place. Perhaps this would go off without a hitch,
regardless of the legal ramifications that the Slugworths now faced, he thought, but Tina’s response abruptly brought him back to the present moment.

“My problems are not over,” the teenager said adamantly as she looked from the lawyer to Willy, her eyes filled with an uncanny determination. “I do have friends here, and their welfare means something to me as well.”

Patrick nodded. “That’s well stated, Tina.”

She shrugged her shoulders, “thank you, Patrick.”

The Scotsman nodded and smiled. “You know, most of my friends just call me Pat, or Patty,” he said, “Why don’t you pick one of those?” He looked at Willy, “the same holds true for you, Son.”

Willy smiled and nodded as he extended his hand to Linda’s father and felt him accepting it. “I am glad to count you among my friends, Pat, and please if you would like, you can call me Willy, that’s a pretty common means of address for me. I think the only ones who call me William anymore are Mr. Gregory and Eliza.” After several moments, he shifted his attention back to Tina. The teenager had seated herself once again at the table and was resting her head in her hands. Seeing this, Willy started back over towards the table, but before he reached it, Patrick spoke.

“I think this young lady has the right idea. I am going to navigate my way back to our room and get some shut-eye,” he said. “I bid you all a good night.”

Willy nodded as he glanced over towards his lawyer. “Would you like to stay the night, Mr. Gregory?”

“That might not be a bad idea. Perhaps I can speak with Molly tomorrow morning first thing before heading back to my office,” he said. “Can I stay in the Vanilla Cream room?”

“Of course, I know it’s your favorite,” Willy said with a smile. “You know the way?”

“How many times have I visited you here?” the lawyer asked.

“Touché,” Willy smirked. “Then I’ll see you in the morning. Help yourself to anything you need.”

Once the two men were gone, Willy looked down at Tina, who was resting uncomfortably against the table. “I think I should take her back to her room.”

“The poor girl looks exhausted,” Linda whispered as she brushed her hand through the teenager’s tousled hair. “She is, and it stands to reason. After everything that’s happened to her today, it is abundantly clear that she is completely worn out,” he said softly. “Can you help me move her back to her room?”

Linda nodded as he picked the teenager’s limp body up in his arms and carried her out of the room.

Outside in the hallway, Linda closed the door, but continued to regard the gentle manner in which Willy carried the girl. “You seem to have a positive effect on females of every age,” she mused as they reached the Strawberry Room. As they did, Willy motioned towards the door and Linda nodded. Opening the door, she watched as he carried the teenager into the room and over to the bed.

Once he had laid her on it, he covered her with the blankets. “Thank you,” she eventually whispered to him.

“My pleasure,” he smiled. “Now, it’s been a long day, and you should have no trouble sleeping. But,
if you do, the Sweet Dreams candies are next to the bed.” he said gently as he backed away from the bed. “Contrary to some of the things that were said earlier today, I am really glad that you’re here.”

She nodded and watched as he started towards the doorway.

Stepping out in the hallway, he found himself looking into Linda’s eyes. She was nervously looking up at him, her concerns for the girl evident. “Is she going to be alright?” she asked.

“I think so, she will have to go through some healing, but her parents are safe and things seem to be alright for her now. It was a bit scary earlier today, but I’m quite relieved that’s finally resolved,” he said, but took a deep breath, his next words changing the subject. “Linda, I think I should let you know that your father now knows of my affections towards you.”

“I could sort of tell,” she smiled slightly. “Back in the board room, he was sort of looking at us as though he knew something, but refused to allude to it.”

Willy nodded as he leaned over and touched her face just before they reached the door leading into the Lavender Room. Opening the door, he stood waiting for her to enter. When she did, she stopped in the doorway before turning around to face him. “Would you like to come inside?”

“I would, but I think that we all need to get some rest, myself included. Morning is going to come quickly enough,” he said, but leaned towards her and gave her a good-night kiss. “I’ll see you tomorrow, Linda. If you need me, I’m just down the hall in the Peach Room.”

“You’re staying nearby?” She asked softly.

“Yes,” he said as he backed away and looked into her eyes. “‘Adieu, adieu, parting is such sweet sorrow’. (Shakespeare) With that, he slowly started to make his way back down the hall.

“Good night, Willy,” Linda whispered. “Maybe you should consider sleeping late tomorrow.”

The chocolatier smiled and nodded. “I may just do that,” he said softly just before reaching his door and opening it.

Life had definitely not stopped just because of the Golden Tickets. Willy also knew that in the coming days, the rest of them would be found and the search for his heir would continue according to schedule.

At that moment, the chocolatier knew that he had no regrets, but he also realized that once Thomas had gotten back from Buckinghamshire, things would start to happen rather quickly before his friend was due to travel to America.
Chapter 65

Chapter 65: Fixed in Stone

At the very same time Willy and his friends were speaking to the police back in London, Thomas opened his eyes again. He did not know anything about Arthur Slugworth having been arrested in Berlin nor did he know of the drama that had somehow taken hold of all of their lives. All that he was aware of was that Matthew was lying next to him on the bed.

The child’s head was comfortably resting against Thomas’ chest, and his arm was draped casually over his upper torso. To anyone observing, it looked as though Thomas had become the only element of reassurance in the lonely boy’s existence. Seeing this literally broke his heart, but instead of dwelling on it, he haphazardly reached for a blanket and pulled it over the child’s body.

As he did, he recalled the time in his life when he had been a teenager and Willy had gone to him for some semblance of reassurance amidst a war torn reality. All of these events had come about during the time when the events of the war had terrified his best friend. The memories of his being able to provide comfort brought a smile to his face. He closed his eyes and allowed his mind to sink into his contemplations.

*We’ve both come such a long way since those days, he thought, and it seems as though we have quite a journey ahead of us still.*

After about ten minutes of just lying there, he reached towards the phone, all the while trying not to shift too suddenly or wake the boy. It was time for him to get in touch with Linda’s cousin and put the ball in motion on the second Golden Ticket. This just went to prove that life did not stop because of the situation with Matthew and Stacey. For better or worse, he would have to go through with what had brought him to Buckinghamshire in the first place.

Picking up the phone, he managed to dial the number to Linda’s cousin whom he was supposed to have met earlier that day. He hoped that she would understand why it was that he had gotten so dangerously sidetracked.

He waited until the line was picked up and he could suddenly hear the sounds of an out of breath woman at the other end of the line. “Hello?” she spoke, but it sounded as though she had just returned home and was now in a race to answer the call.

“Is this Regina?” Thomas asked.

“Y-yes, who is this?” her question emerged more as a demand and less as an inquiry. If Thomas wasn’t mistaken, it sounded as though there was a strange catch in her voice.

This was something that he was not quite certain he should have expected, but it was there nonetheless. *Please don’t tell me that something else is about to happen,* he thought as a feeling of powerlessness enveloped him. If there was trouble, he was barely in a position to do all that much about it.

“My name is Thomas Wilkenson, I was supposed to meet you this evening at the bed and breakfast on the outskirts of town,” he began. “Unfortunately, I couldn’t make our scheduled appointment because I’m sort of in the hospital.”

“Sort of in the hospital?” she parroted back to him.
“Well, yes. Perhaps that wording is not quite right,” he said. “The fact is, I am in the hospital, but I should be released by tomorrow morning.”

“What happened to you, Mr. Wilkenson?” she asked.

“I was assaulted earlier today on my way here,” he responded. “It’s nothing serious; the doctor just wanted me to stay the night for observation. I will be able to leave tomorrow morning. I’m sorry; I probably should have called you sooner.”

“I wouldn’t have been at home. I just got back about five minutes ago,” she said. “There was a sort of family emergency going down. At any rate, one of her neighbors called me at work earlier today and told me that she saw some strange men wandering about the neighborhood. She did not go into too much detail, but my husband and I suspected immediately that they were sent in to snoop by Linda’s estranged husband.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “I wouldn’t be to terribly surprised if that were the case. Did anything else happen?”

“Nothing except a little bit of fear and adrenaline,” Regina said releasing a somewhat nervous laugh. “I suppose I ought to be grateful that Linda is no longer here, as this could have been a dangerous situation for her. Living in the Slugworth’s backyard is definitely no picnic.”

“I can believe that,” he said casually.

Regina released a slow sigh. “Would you answer one question for me, though?”

“If I can,” he said. “What would you like to know?”

“How exactly did Linda and Molly end up at Mr. Wonka’s factory?” she asked. “I mean; there’s no denying that Linda is or was married to Mr. Wonka’s sworn enemy. That would generally not present her an open invitation if you catch my drift.”

“That’s a very long story, but I would say that it started a week ago when I met Linda on the plane flying to Frankfurt, Germany,” he began.

“You went there because of the Golden Tickets?” she asked.

“Yes, you see, on my way there, I met Linda and Molly on the plane. They were seated next to me. It’s very strange, I know and it all seems so long ago. We were parked at the gate for close to two hours and then after that, we talked throughout the flight. Later, I called Will and mentioned the two of them to him. I figured that it would not hurt since Molly seemed so unhappy about the state of things with her parents.”

“Will?”

“I’m sorry, that’s generally what I call Willy, I have always called him Will, that’s just habit from when we were growing up around one another,” he explained.

“You don’t have to give me a detailed history it’s just strange for me to actually hear of Mr. Wonka being like a normal person. I suppose I have always thought that he was sort of typical business tycoon.”

“If you’ll pardon me for saying so, there is really nothing typical about Will,” Thomas said loyally. “But I will say that he’s rather different from most people you might come in contact with.”
“I guess I’ll have to take your word for it,” she began. “So I take it, Molly’s really happy that she got to meet up with him.”

“She was pretty ecstatic when she discovered who he was and I think he was pretty enchanted by her as well,” Thomas said with a slight smirk. “It was one moment that I will probably never forget.”

As these words emerged, a sigh emerged from the other end of the line. “Somehow I wish we could have more of these happy moments.”

“What do you mean?” he asked.

“Well, things haven’t been remarkably grand with my aunt and uncle as of late, and Linda’s situation sort of compounds that whole thing,” she confessed. “I don’t know if you are aware of this, but my Aunt Marjorie is not overtly fond of Molly, and she makes that point rather known to the rest of us. Having them together could mean that all hell is going to break loose under Mr. Wonka’s roof.”

“I wasn’t aware of this,” Thomas said.

“No, it’s not generally the greatest of ideas to air such sentiments about one’s family,” she said. “I suppose I did that because Uncle Patty called me this afternoon at work and told me that he and my aunt were going to London. He didn’t want me to worry, but somehow I had this strange feeling that things here had gotten a bit too dangerous for them. I kept hearing rumors in town and what I was hearing was just not good. Amidst all of that, I heard that the Slugworth family wanted to hire someone to set fire to the house. Someone else said that Owen wanted to have someone stake out the factory and kill Linda. The thing is, they’re like a mafia, they can do anything they want and get away with it. If they don’t get their way, then they will find a way to go above the law in order to attain it. It’s such a terrible situation and I can’t help but admire you and Mr. Wonka for getting yourselves involved in it.”

“It would have been wrong for us not to,” Thomas said as he cast a quick glance down at where Matthew lay. The child was still fast asleep. “Regina, how much do you know about Owen Slugworth?” he asked after several seconds had passed.

“I know enough,” she said. “I met him once, and he’s a complete and total creep. He cheats on Linda every chance he can get and even tried to flirt with me. I’ve been married for close to ten years, and that behavior simply made me ill. Along with that, he is pretty much the puppet of his uncle. I mean; talk about feeling powerless. He would beat up Linda, and instead of being supportive, my Aunt Marjorie would either turn the other cheek or blame her for getting herself into the situation in the first place.”

“How could a mother conscientiously do such a thing?” Thomas asked. “I thought parents were supposed to support and help their children.”

“Generally they are, but Marjorie doesn’t subscribe to that ideological base. That’s why she hates Molly.”

“She hates Molly?” Thomas asked. “Why?”

“I don’t know if she really hates her,” Regina said. “I just know that she definitely resents her and every time she even gives the child the slightest bit of attention, it is to scold her for something stupid. I’ve seen them together at parties and family gatherings. Molly would be acting like a normal child and Aunt Marjorie would just go off on her and tell her to sit still and stop whatever it was she was doing. Nothing that she did was right or good enough.” She paused and he could hear her taking a deep breath.
“The hardest part was trying to figure out why Marjorie was like that. My father once told me that she doesn’t know how to be a good person, and simply has to work at it. That seems a rather silly commodity, though. Of course, the one who really suffers from all of Marjorie’s stupid behavioral problems is Molly.”

“True,” Thomas said.

Regina took a deep breath. “I think before we get into the idiosyncrasies of my family and making me feel crazier than I already do, perhaps we should plan what will happen tomorrow.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “That may be a good idea.”

“Alright, when I talked to my uncle, he told me that Mr. Wonka was going to drive them to the factory. That means that I would have to walk to the police station tomorrow and pick up their car. Since I live several streets down from it, I figure that that part will be easy. I have to be at work by nine, the dress code is general suit and tie, but since it’s sometimes cold, you might need a sort of trench coat of some kind, which I have for you. Mr. Salt is rather particular about all of these specific things. Of course, I am guessing that the sooner we arrive at work, the better.”

“Sounds fine with me,” Thomas said. “I’m sure Dr. Henderson will be able to release me well before that allotted time.”

“Great, and if you don’t mind my asking, why is it you want to be there specifically? I mean; this is really nothing at all exciting about any of this. In fact if you want to know the truth, it really is quite dull.”

“Perhaps,” he mused. “Will said he spoke to you about it, and that you know why we are doing this.”

“Our conversation was very brief and even then, he was rather ambiguous about it,” she said. “I don’t know or understand what your motives are because he did not go into any extensive detail. I didn’t want to bother him with technicalities or details, so I didn’t ask. Of course, I’m still confused as well as a bit curious. Mr. Wonka said that you needed to be in there to talk to the Golden Ticket finder, but there has not yet been a ticket found and I’m starting to wonder if there ever will be. I mean; we’ve been stuck in there shelling chocolate bars since last Monday and he’s now talking about having us work through the weekend.”

“That’s all you’re doing?” he asked, “Just opening candy bars?”

“Let me tell you a little bit about what’s going on at that factory and how it all fits together,” she began. “The man who runs the company is named Henry Salt, and although he is alright, as far as employers are concerned, he has a serious problem.” She took a deep breath. “Henry and Henrietta Salt have a daughter named Veruca and their little princess gets everything she could possibly want. All she has to do is say the word and the parents jump.”

“She’s named after a wart?” Thomas asked skeptically.

Regina began to laugh heartedly, the tension somehow lessening at that moment. “No, the wart is written with two r’s, not one. But, between you and me, she’s an even bigger pain than a wart.” Thomas could hear her inhaling as her next words emerged. “What Veruca wants; Veruca gets. Last year she asked her father for a pony, and she got it no questions asked. Then she wanted a dog, then a cat and got those too, and now she wants a Wonka Golden Ticket. Because she has her parents wrapped snugly around her little finger, she’s probably going to get that too. There’s nothing worse than going to work and feeling as though one is under the thumb of a twelve-year-old girl.
“Anyway, some of the other ladies are pretty angry about this whole thing, I mean we spend all our time doing this so that this spoiled child can have yet another thing that she wants. She doesn’t care that there are other children in the world who deserve Golden Tickets more than she does, she has the power in her corner and she uses it.”

“That sounds horrible,” Thomas said bluntly. “Not at all like the child that Will is looking for.”

“Mr. Wonka is looking for a child?” Regina asked. “Why?”

Thomas cast a glance down at Matthew who released a soft snore. Figuring that it was safe for him to continue speaking, he did. “He’s looking for someone who could one day become his successor. From the sounds of it, little Miss Salt is not the ideal candidate.”

“Well, if this is a test, then all you have to do is tempt her with something she might want and you’ll see the girl’s true colors immediately.” Regina said. “So, where should we meet tomorrow?”

“I’m on the third floor in room 311,” he said.

“I’ll find it,” she said as the door to his room opened and two uniformed police officers walked in.

“I have to go, the police just arrived here, and they probably want to get my statement about what happened earlier this morning. I’ll see you tomorrow, Regina, and thank you so much for your help.”

“You and Mr. Wonka can thank me by watching out for Linda and Molly,” she said meaningfully before hanging up the phone.

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Thomas unconsciously nodded before returning the phone to the cradle and looking over at the two officers who were now in the room. Seconds later, Dr. Henderson came in behind them. As soon as he closed the door, he approached the bed and regarded the child who was sleeping against Thomas’ chest.

Instead of initially speaking, Thomas shifted himself on the bed, the movement somehow causing the boy to wearily shift and groggily open his eyes.

“The boy should not be in here for this interview,” one of the officers said, as he turned to face the doctor. “We need to speak with Mr. Wilkenson alone.”

Thomas looked over at the two men, a skeptical look now shadowing his face as they seated themselves next to the bed. “I’ll take the child back to his room,” Dr. Henderson said as he crossed to the opposite side of the bed and started to shift Matthew’s body.

The boy refused to move and instead of speaking, he raised his head and eyed the two policemen warily.

“Let him stay,” Thomas said, thus causing the doctor to stop everything he was doing.

“I beg your pardon?” the doctor looked at him skeptically.

“This involves him, let him stay,” Thomas said simply. “I’ll assume responsibility for him.”

The doctor straightened out. “As you wish,” he said stuffily as he made his way over to the door and within seconds, had quietly slipped out of the room. Once the door had closed behind him, he turned and looked at the two men.
“Mr. Wilkenson?” the dark headed policeman spoke as he produced his identification and showed it to him. “My name is Mark Kinsley and this is my associate, Raymond Hicks.”

“Are you here about my statement?” Thomas asked.

“Well, yes and no. Now the statement about the girl may help us, but perhaps we should have a talk about what happened after you were brought here,” Officer Kinsley said.

“What do you mean?” he asked, and by this time, Matthew was regarding him with unhidden interest.

Instead of addressing the question, Kinsley looked at Hicks. “Perhaps you should take the child out of here.”

“I want to stay,” Matthew whined, his hand reaching for Thomas.

“I’m afraid that’s not a good idea,” Kinsley said earnestly as he looked at Thomas. “I know that you want to look out for the boy, but there are some things that we cannot say in the presence of a child. Please Mr. Wilkenson, you must consider this in the boy’s best interest. You seem a good sort of man to look out for him as you are doing, but we have to ask that you trust that our intentions do parallel yours.”

Thomas looked at the boy. “Matthew, perhaps they are right. Why don’t you go with Constable Hicks and maybe he’ll take you for an ice cream.” He cast a glance towards the other man and when he received a slight nod, he continued. “Go with him and when we’re done here, I will tell you whatever I can about Stacey, I promise.”

“But, I don’t want to,” Matthew’s face shifted and he started to cry. “I want to see Stacey.”

“I know you do,” Thomas said softly. “I’m going to talk to Constable Kinsley about this and see what I can arrange that might help both of you. You wanted someone to help you, and now Will and I are going to just that, but you have to trust us completely in this matter. Let us do this for you.”

“I don’t want to,” Matthew whispered as he looked at Hicks.

“I know, it’s terrible how grownups do this sort of stuff to a child, but trust me, okay?” Thomas said. He watched as the boy slowly started to stand up. Instead of going and joining Hicks, the child bolted towards the door and fled from the room. Once he had cleared it, the door closed firmly behind him.

“That’s one messed up kid,” Kinsley muttered.

“No, he’s just had too many people turn their backs on him, and he’s afraid that I might do the same,” Thomas said. “Please try and understand that he’s a very frightened little boy.”

“You handled him very well, though,” Kinsley said.

“Perhaps,” Thomas said, the guilt stabbing at him like a dagger through the heart. “So, what was it that you wanted to tell me that could not be repeated in Matthew’s presence?”

“The man who accosted you was shot this evening on outskirts of town. He was trying to resist arrest and ended up sustaining an injury to his left arm as well as his side. He’s now two floors down from you,” he said.

“Is he awake?” Thomas asked.
“Yes, he came around about half an hour ago,” the man said. “Once his condition gets stabilized, he will be transferred to the county jail. He’s quite a nasty character, which surprises me that you didn’t have more injuries than you did. At any rate, when we tried to talk to him, he kept saying that he didn’t do anything wrong and that it was all Stacey Madison’s fault.”

“I have a very hard time believing that, just from hearing their dialogue earlier,” Thomas said bluntly. “Since you mentioned Stacey, is there anything else you can tell me about her? Is she still incarcerated?”

“Our colleague Karen Davis said that she was working through the paperwork to have Stacey released. After she left us her statement saying that Wayne had pushed her into this twisted game, Karen called the local halfway house and tried to find Stacey a residency here in town as opposed to keeping her locked up.” he said. “We feel that that is a good alternative, but if you intend to file charges against her for assault, then it is quite possible that this alternative could be tossed. How much involvement did she have during the situation this morning?”

“She didn’t hit me, it was the guy she called Wayne, he was the one who did everything,” Thomas said. “Not only was he cruel to me and kicked me in the side, from where I was lying, it seemed as though Stacey was doing everything she could to protect me from getting hurt. I am wont to say that she even put herself in the line of fire to do so.”

“That’s what she said when we spoke to her earlier. We didn’t really believe her, but then we checked the earlier statements by the other victims and they paralleled,” the policeman said with a nod.

“So what’s going to happen to her now?” Thomas asked. “I mean; if Stacey helped Wayne carjack those other people then she could still be facing some legal ramifications as well. Of course if she was forced into it, then maybe there could be a way for her not to go to jail, but instead go on probation.”

“True, and that’s what we’re hoping for,” Kinsley said with a nod. “The point is, most of the people whom we have spoken to have said that the girl was terrified and did not want to do it. We can’t very well lock up a person like that, even if we would like to. She is an accessory, but no one has filed assault charges against her directly. It’s also quite clear that she didn’t actively take part, but instead tried to protect the victims from the older boy’s volatile temperament.”

Thomas nodded. “So that’s it, you don’t need anything else from me.”

“No, but there’s another issue we need to discuss with you, I’m afraid.” The man inhaled slowly and then released it. “We ran the tags on the car that you were driving and discovered that instead of it being registered in your name, it was registered to Wonka Industries.”

“Yes,” he said nodding. “I work there.”

“You work there?” the man’s voice was laced in skepticism.

“Yes, William Wonka is a friend of mine, and I borrowed the car from the company to drive up here on business,” Thomas said.

Accepting this, the policeman continued speaking. “Our colleague informed us that Mr. Wonka had come by the presidium several hours ago in order to speak with Stacey Madison on your behalf. Is this true?”

“Yes, I asked him to go and speak with her about what had happened this morning. I couldn’t very
well go myself, so he went in my place,” he said honestly.

“I don’t know if you realize what a good thing that was, because through Mr. Wonka, Miss Madison did tell us exactly what happened. She not only came clean about the events this morning; but she also confessed to several other incidences as well.”

“Well then that’s good,” Thomas said.

“Yes, it is, but there is more to it than just that. Mr. Wilkenson, I don’t know if you even realize this or if you are aware of this, but you could pass for a double of Arthur Slugworth.”

Thomas squirmed. “So I’ve been told,” he muttered with disdain in his voice.

“I take it that does not please you?” the officer asked.

“No, it does not,” Thomas said bluntly, “Arthur Slugworth is literally a thorn in our side. If you were to speak to Willy Wonka about him, then you would know that this man is not simply running a business, but that he would do whatever he could to push his weight around. It surprises me that you have not said that he has had several bouts with your department.”

The policeman shrugged his shoulders. “It’s not professionally sound for me to mention other cases, but I think I can freely tell you that we have had several arrests and have discovered that they were, in fact, associated with Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated. Now, we have yet to ascertain whether or not it goes up the chain of command. The problem is they have lawyers in their pockets, and it is quite difficult to contend with someone who is considered to be a corporate giant. You perhaps understand this because of your interaction with Mr. Wonka.”

“Of course,” he said. “Perhaps you should look into the actions of Arthur Slugworth’s nephew Owen.”

“From what I understand, his nephew is just a boy,” the policeman said.

“No, he’s not ‘just a boy’, he’s a man and he’s got a daughter and a soon-to-be ex-wife who are positively terrified of him,” Thomas said. “Perhaps I should give you the number to her lawyer in London and let you call him. His name is Claude Gregory, and he is representing her petition for a divorce. There is something quite foul is in the air and it’s not just the candy that comes out of the Slugworth’s factory. Please forgive me if it sounds as though I am feeding fire to the rumor mill, but I have been involved in this situation for close to eight years, and Will has since he opened his business.”

Kinsley nodded. “We’ll have to have a look into that, but from what you have said, it sounds rather interesting to us and perhaps your words might help things along.”

Thomas nodded as he settled back against his pillows. “That would be a prudent idea, and perhaps after you talk with Mr. Gregory, you might look into the name of Hudson Chocolates and see what you might dig up in relation to it. I was in the United States when that story broke, and Hudson Chocolates was in and out of bankruptcy trials because of chocolate contamination and children being poisoned from it.”

Once the policeman wrote down the name, he got up. “I will have someone contact this Mr. Gregory in the coming days, but I will leave you my card and if anything else comes up, don’t hesitate to call me.”

Thomas nodded but watched as Kinsley and his partner left the room. Smiling weakly, he leaned back against the pillows and closed his eyes. He figured that he would have a great deal of
information to pass on to Willy the following day.

Of course, he was fully unaware that Willy would as well.

Contrary to everything that was going on; this was proving to be an exciting, but also very exhausting day.

Soon, he fell asleep, his last thoughts centered on Matthew and Molly. He remained hopeful that the two children would be alright.
Chapter 66

Chapter 66: The Second Golden Ticket

July 20, 1971

Thomas woke early the following morning, his eyes scanning the room until they came to rest on the woman who was seated next to his bed.

“Hello, Mr. Wilkenson,” she spoke, her voice laced in assertive undertones. “I hope I didn’t startle you, my name is Regina Harris, Linda Slugworth, soon to once more be McKenny, is my cousin. We spoke on the phone last night.”

“Yes,” he said nodding weakly, albeit the sledgehammer headache he now had. “Thank you for coming.”

“My pleasure,” the dark headed woman said. “I seem to owe you and Mr. Wonka a great deal of gratitude. I will admit that I was rather nervous about the prospect of bringing you into Mr. Salt’s company, though. His business tactics do come under fire quite often, and for that reason, he has very strict rules about allowing outsiders inside the confines of his company.”

“I understand perhaps better than you think,” he offered freely. “Will actually affirmed that the ticket was sent to Buckinghamshire, and from what I could understand, Linda mentioned that every candy bar in this town is probably at Salt’s factory as we speak.” Unwillingly he raised his head and looked at her. “If you don’t mind my asking; why are you helping me? As I said, I can understand your hesitancy, but what was it that changed your mind exactly?”

“You don’t know what happened last night, do you?” Regina asked. “When we hung up, I assumed that you knew everything that was going on.”

“I’m afraid I don’t,” Thomas said regretfully. “Once I had given the police my statement, they left and I fell asleep.”

“My parents got a call from the police at around three o’clock this morning. The house where Linda and Molly were living caught fire at around midnight last night. The police think that it was arson, but nothing has been confirmed as of yet. Everything is gone, Mr. Wilkenson. All of Molly’s toys and Linda’s possessions, they’re gone. I fear that if my aunt and uncle had actually stayed at that house one more night they would probably have died from smoke inhalation. I think Owen is behind it, but as of yet, nothing has been proven.”

“Is your family alright, Regina? I mean; should we arrange something for them?” he asked.

“No, as far as I know, everyone is fine, the Slugworths don’t know very much about our part of the family, which is good. That doesn’t mean that they won’t try something if it benefits their purpose, though. My husband and his family have offered my parents a place to stay for a time while the police investigate what happened. I was so relieved that Mr. Wonka offered to allow my aunt and uncle to stay at the factory. If not for him, I can’t even imagine what would have happened.”

“It was a smart move on his part and it would seem that if the Slugworths are your enemies, then nothing you can do will protect you from their wrath,” Thomas offered sadly.

“Perhaps it would be a good idea for you to go to Salt’s Nuts, do what you have to do, and then get out of Buckinghamshire as soon as humanly possible. If anyone thinks or even believes that you’re
linked to Willy Wonka then your life may not be worth a plugged nickel.”

“You might be right,” Thomas said. “Let me get dressed and we can go find the doctor and let him sign my release.”

“Make sure you dress in slacks and a tie. Like I said last night, they have a dress code at the company, even though most people would not pay you any mind. Try and hurry though, or we’ll be late for work and Mr. Salt would have a fit.”

Thomas nodded as the woman left the room. Once the door closed behind her, he crawled off the bed and went over to his suitcase and unlocked it.

Heeding her suggestion, he found an appropriate change of clothes and got dressed. His head was still hurting, but he knew that he would have to put that aside and do what he came here to do. Regina was his ticket into the Salt Nut Factory, and he was going to take full advantage of this particular contact. After all, Willy did depend on him to take care of his end of the deal, and that meant doing the footwork.

Finding a dark colored pair of pants, he slipped them on and dug around until he found a white dress shirt and a gray colored tie. Dressed, he went over to the door and opened it.

“Regina?” he spoke her name and once she turned around, he continued, “is this alright?”

“It’s perfect, and I have a trench coat that you can borrow,” she said. “We need to go, though. I have to be there at nine, and we only have twenty minutes.”

Thomas nodded, collected his belongings, and went to see the doctor who would sign his release papers. He was, to say the least, quite relieved about getting out of the hospital and getting back to the factory. He was ready for some of the chef’s lasagna and knew that the first thing he would have to do was fill his best friend in on what had happened since they had spoken the day before.

As they came down the hallway, a voice filled the corridor and he stopped and turned around to see that Matthew Madison was standing at one end and was looking up at him. “Where are you going?” The boy’s echoing voice could be heard throughout the long, and presently empty, hallway.

“I have some errands to run before I leave to go home,” Thomas explained.

“You’re just going to cut out, just like that, aren’t you?” the child asked indignantly.

“No, I intended to come back here, pick you up and bring you to London with me,” he said honestly.

“I don’t believe you,” the child shouted, his voice disrupting several people. Instead of approaching him, Thomas watched as Regina took a deep breath and went over to the boy.

“Tom and I are late for work,” she said sternly. “We have to get going or else we could get into deep trouble.” She took a deep breath as one of the nurses came down the hall and rested her hand on the boy’s shoulder.

“Go ahead, miss, I’ll take care of the child,” the nurse said as the boy broke loose and ran over to Thomas, his hand grasping the sleeve of his shirt and pulling until he nearly choked.

Thomas looked down at Matthew, but grabbed his hand and tried to pry his shirt out of the boy’s grasp. “I will come back here, Matthew. But right now, I really do have to get going, time is running short and if Regina is late then it could cost her a job.”
The boy stuck his lower lip out as he regarded Thomas through unhappy eyes. “You’ll never come back,” he whispered.

“I will come back, I said that I would and that’s a promise,” he said. “Come now, the sooner I get there and take care of this, the sooner I can get back and we can try and see what more needs to be done here. I’ll be back and tonight you’ll have dinner in a place that is beyond your wildest dreams.”

Matthews’s eyes filled with tears, but reluctantly, he released his hold and lowered his hand.

At that moment, Regina had the necessary leeway to pull Thomas down the hall and in the direction of the door that would lead them outside.

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Once they had exited the large glass building, Regina led him over to the small car that was in the parking lot. Unlocking the door, she climbed in before grabbing a beige colored trench like jacket and tossing it to him. “You can get through security with this jacket. My friend loaned it to me while he’s on vacation. Just make sure you don’t rip it or get any stains on it. Ron could get into trouble if something happens to his jacket. In case you haven’t noticed, Mr. Salt does run a very tight ship.”

“I understand,” Thomas said. “Thanks for all your help with this and I also have to offer my gratitude for your help with Matthew. He’s such a frightened little boy.”

“I could tell,” she said. “Kids like him are probably quite accustomed to people making promises and not fulfilling them. He’s probably used to others being nice to him, only to run away without so much as looking back.”

“I’ve got every intention of going back,” Thomas said. “His sister’s in trouble, and right now, we’re trying to help both of those kids.”

“It’s very good of you to do that,” Regina nodded. “Anyway, what I wanted to say is that once you get inside, you just try not to look too conspicuous. You get caught roaming about in there and the Salts would not think twice about putting you in jail. I don’t think you need anymore encounters with thugs, if you catch my drift. Along with that, it would seem as though I could end up in trouble since I gave you Ron’s jacket.”

Thomas nodded but became silent as she drove the car through the winding streets of the town.

About ten minutes after leaving the hospital, they pulled into the employee parking lot and got out of the car. Regina motioned with her hand towards a small gate that led into the factory’s complex. Thomas took a deep breath, but followed her trying his best to conceal his nervousness.

Once they reached the gate, the guard standing duty looked at them. “Hello Regina,” he said, but cast a skeptical look at Thomas.

“Hi Leo, this is the new guy,” Regina said.

“You’re starting today, huh?” the man asked.

“Yes,” Thomas offered freely.

“Fine,” the guard said as the two of them slipped inside. Instead of waiting around while Regina had small talk with him, Thomas went further down the hall until he reached a vending machine that was stationed next to a second door. When it opened, he casually turned towards the machine and started counting out change in order to buy a canned drink.
As Regina finished her conversation with Leo, Thomas opened the drink and began to nurse it, the bubbles from it tickling his nose. By the time he was nearly finished with his drink, she came over to where he was standing.

“That was a good maneuver,” she remarked as he took a final sip and cast the empty can into the receptacle that was next to the machine. “Come on, time to get to work. We have to do this in the nut sorting room.”

Thomas nodded as he followed Regina down a set of stairs and into a large room.

As they entered, he could not hide the overwhelming sight that greeted him. Along one wall, at least two hundred boxes filled with Wonka bars were stationed. Several women were seated at their stations. Thomas guessed that there could probably fit at least twenty or so of these women at each of the four long tables that filled the room. Garbage bins were stationed at various places around the room, but the tables were full of opened candy bars and wasted chocolate.

Thomas remembered what Linda had said on the plane about all the stores being sold out of Wonka bars. Now he was seeing the truth in her words. The entire town had been completely depleted of Willy Wonka’s chocolate.

As the whistle blew announcing that it was nine in the morning, the women dressed in blue uniforms and matching bandanas had sat down and began unwrapping candy bars. Hordes of chocolate bars were being stacked on the tables and the women, as though robots, were shelling candy bars one after the other.

This seemed to go on for hours. Thomas watched as the piles of paper and wasted chocolate started to stack up higher and higher, one box being replaced by another. The only sounds that could be heard were the sounds of chocolate bars being opened.

Thomas continued to watch, his disgust growing at the sight of these women being forced to open candy bars as though in some sort of hypnotic trance. His heart not only went out to Regina, but to all these ladies who were subjected to opening candy, none of which were even for them.

This was most definitely not what Will wanted, he thought bitterly. This is like slave labor.

“Hey, grab another box of candy bars, mate,” a man’s voice emerged and broke into his contemplations. “Table three in the back is running low.”

Thomas nodded and went over to retrieve a large box and carried it down an aisle until he reached the group of women at one of the tables. Lucky for him, he could actually see a table number amongst the masses of orange and brown wrappers, silver foil, and wasted chocolate.

Will would be heartbroken to see his candy being used like this, he thought as the window at the top of the stairs suddenly opened and a balding man appeared and started yelling at the women. Great, just what they need, he thought, as he dropped the box on the table and started to make his way back up the aisle towards the back of the room.

“Come along, come along, you girls; put a jack into it or you’ll be out on your ears, every one of you! And listen to this, the first girl who finds a Golden Ticket gets a one pound bonus in her pay bucket! What do you think of that?” The window closed, but Thomas’ eardrums just about burst from the sounds of cheering that emerged after the man’s announcement.

Well, at least I can’t call this slave labor after all, Thomas thought bitterly as he covered his face with his hands. My God my head feels as though it is about to explode, his thoughts continued as he
felt himself blending in with the boxes that were situated directly behind him.

At that moment, a woman jumped up. “I got it! I got it, Mr. Salt! Here it is!” she shouted and started waving a piece of golden paper around.

This was his cue.

Thomas raced up the aisle, grabbed the woman’s hand and took off in the direction of the stairs. The other women were shouting and screaming all the while beginning to throw candy bars around as though confetti. He could clearly understand why. They were probably overjoyed that they could now return to their usual tasks and not have to open anymore candy bars.

They reached the stairs and he began to climb. A child dressed in a yellow pullover and brown skirt, emerged from the office and started to race down the stairs in order to meet them. Her blond hair was flying about behind her as her hands extended towards them.

“Give me that ticket,” she said rudely as she snatched the golden piece of paper out of the woman’s hand without so much as a ‘thank you’. To add insult to injury, she them proclaimed. “It’s mine, I found a Golden Ticket.”

*She found a Golden Ticket,* Thomas thought skeptically. Instead of stopping to contemplate what he was doing, he went up to the girl and wrapped a friendly arm around her shoulder. He cast a brief glance back towards the woman, who basically stood there trying unsuccessfully at understanding what had just happened. He leaned over so that he could whisper in her ear.

“Congratulations in finding the second Golden Ticket, little girl,” he said, but still in the back of his mind, he was cursing the irony of it all. *She didn’t find it, that nameless female employee found it.*

Inhaling slowly, he continued speaking all the while trying to conceal the disgust he carried at this whole sorted mess. “May I introduce myself, my name is Arthur Slugworth and I’m President of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated. Now, I have a proposition for you that I think you will find very interesting. Mr. Wonka is currently working on a new invention, the Everlasting Gobstopper. If he finishes it, he’ll ruin me. So what I want you to do is get your hands on one of them, bring it to me so that I can figure out the secret ingredients. You will be rewarded for your help, and that could come in the form of anything you could imagine. Think it over, dear girl, you could have anything your heart desires and you wouldn’t even have to always ask your parents for it. It would just be given to you straightaway. Consider it, but don’t forget the name, Everlasting Gobstopper.”

By the time he had finished his practiced speech, he made his way back down the stairs and through the groups of celebrating women. Now, all that was left for him to do would be to disappear from this insane factory and get back to London.

No one seemed to pay him any mind as he was leaving, but just before he reached the gate where Leo worked, Regina came running after him. “Hey, wait up!”

He stopped and turned around. “I’m sorry, but I had to get out of there, my head is literally cracking.”

“Did you get everything done that you needed to do?” she asked.

“Yes, thanks for the help,” he said.

“Look, I have to go back and pick up my uncle’s car at the police station, maybe I can run you back to the hospital,” she offered.
“What about your work?” he asked.

“They won’t know I’m gone, besides now that Veruca has her Golden Ticket, I doubt anyone is really going to care about what I’m doing. Besides, my boss already knows that I have to run some errands today, and he promised me that if the ticket was found, that I could take off and do them. In all honesty, I didn’t expect it to go that well at all. I figured that you would be hanging around there for days on end just waiting for it to show up.”

“Are you relieved?” he asked.

“More than you know, but that kid, she actually said that she found the ticket.” Regina said shaking her head in disbelief. “That takes a lot of nerve, especially since the woman who found it also does volunteer work at the children’s burn unit here in town. She sees kids like your friend, Matthew, all the time. Her name is Marianne and talk about your cruel irony.”

Thomas nodded as they got into the car. “I know what you mean. But, you know, sometimes, things don’t always happen the way you think. When I was in Germany, I met a girl and discovered that her family’s business was saved thanks to these strange twists of fate. She feared that her family’s hotel would go out of business and then suddenly the Golden Ticket was found and everything changed for them. Maybe something like that will happen to Marianne. Think about it, sometimes good things do happen to good people.”

“You’re right,” Regina said nodding. “Could you do me a favor, Tom?”

“What’s that?”

“When you get back, would you please tell Mr. Wonka about the hospital’s burn unit? That boy we saw, he’s the kind of child that Marianne comes in and looks after. It’s really those kids who deserve a Golden Ticket, not Mr. Salt’s brat.”

“I know and I can’t help but agree with you on that point,” Thomas said taking a deep breath. “Since Will has said that he intends to keep his word, maybe we can arrange for him to come and see those kids. But, until that day comes, Regina, see if the Salts will donate the remainder of their Wonka bars to the children’s hospitals in this area. After meeting kids like Matthew, I am almost certain that this would be a good idea. We just need someone to help head it up. Talk to Marianne about the idea, and I will see what I can do from my end.”

“You’re really a good man, Mr. Wilkenson,” Regina smiled as she pulled the car into the hospital parking lot. “Even if it doesn’t work, the suggestion is a good one.”

“Call me Tom,” he said casually as he reached for the door handle with the intention of opening it.

“So, what are you going to do now?”

“I’m going to go and pick up Matthew, and then get my car at the police station and take your advice and go home,” he said, but reached over and patted the woman’s hand. “Thank you so much for helping me to get in there and deliver the message.”

“You’re a mystery, Tom, but I think a good sort of mystery,” Regina smiled at him. “I’m glad I met you. Have a safe trip home, and don’t stop until you get there.”

“I’ve definitely learned my lesson in that regard,” he chuckled as he got out of the car.

He started to cross the parking lot, but watched as she pulled away and disappeared in the distance.
Once she was gone, he started to walk across the parking lot in the direction of the glass doors leading inside.
Chapter 67

Chapter 67: Coincidences

With a feeling of having accomplished something great, Thomas walked into the large waiting room of the hospital. Taking a deep breath, he approached the counter where the on duty nurse sat. “Excuse me, but can you tell me which room Matthew Madison is in?”

The nurse raised her head, but took a deep breath. “Are you family?”

“No, I’m not, I’m just a friend,” Thomas said. When the nurse’s expression shifted to that of skepticism, he continued speaking. “I was brought in yesterday as a patient. It was after I had been assaulted by the ‘Madison Twins’. After I woke up, I discovered that Matthew had found his way into my room. He was sitting on the bed just staring at me. After we spoke for a time, I told him that I would see about taking care of him. This morning after Doctor Henderson signed my release, I left to run an errand. I promised Matthew that I would come back, but I don’t think he believed me.”

Accepting this response as adequate, the nurse nodded before starting to dig through some piles of papers that were stacked on the desk. After several minutes of sorting, she raised her head once again, her eyes seeking his. “Matthew Madison’s older sister came by early this morning at ten and insisted that her brother be signed out. Going completely against Dr. Carmichael’s orders, Matthew was released into his sister’s care.”

“Wait a minute, are you telling me that the same child that my doctor said was going to be turned over to foster care was released to his under-aged sister?” he asked, “just like that?”

“I’m afraid so,” she said. “It went against protocol, but the girl insisted that she was going to see to it that the boy received proper medical care in London.”

“I see,” Thomas began, but took a deep breath before continuing to speak. “If the doctor was opposed to her taking the child, then why did the staff here even let him go? There could be legal ramifications here.” He ran his hand through his hair, but his gaze remained locked on her.

“I don’t really know, sir, I just know that the doctor was initially against Matthew’s release,” she said.

“What do you mean, initially?” Thomas asked skeptically.

“Just what I mean,” she said. “It’s no secret that the Madison family is not endeared around these parts. My guess is that it came as a great relief to many members of the staff to see the boy go. After all, a number of the patients did file complaints about him sneaking into their rooms as well. As my supervisor once said, ‘we run a hospital, not a kindergarten’.”

“Can you describe the girl?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, she was a bit shorter than you with long brown hair and eyes. If you ask me, she looked as though she had seen better days. She claimed to be in a hurry and was insistent about them leaving immediately,” she said.

“Did she really say that she was taking him to a hospital in London, or are you just hypothesizing?” he asked.

“Perhaps a little bit of both but based on what I understand, the two kids were planning on going to
“I think I know who they were going to see,” Thomas mused. “In fact I’d stake my life on that.”

“Then why didn’t they just wait for you to come back?” she asked.

“My guess is that the boy didn’t think that I would be returning here, so the two kids struck out on their own,” he said honestly. “What else can you tell me?”

“Not very much, I was instructed to call the police just after they left. I spoke to a female officer and she told me that the girl was not supposed to leave town at all. Aside from that I can’t say too much. Do you have any ideas as to why she might have been so insistent?”

“Not really. When the police came by to see me last night, they said that they had apprehended her cohort and that he was now a patient here,” Thomas said.

The nurse shook her head. “I don’t really know if he is, but aside from the rumors that drift around this place, it would be hard for me to assume too much about any of them at this point.”

“It would seem to me that not only were they orphaned by this hospital, they have also been treated as though they are guilty until proven innocent by society,” Thomas said bluntly. He took a deep breath as guilt washed over him. “I should have gotten here sooner,” he muttered under his breath.

“I’m sorry?” she asked.

“Nothing,” he said.

“Is there anything else I can do for you, sir?” she asked.

“No, thank you for your time,” he said as he walked back towards the exit.

At this point, he had no idea what to do. Matthew and Stacey were both gone and it was as though the two kids had just disappeared off the face of the earth. Whatever it was that was happening with them, he could only surmise where it was they had opted to go.

Regina’s comments about the Slugworths being rumored to staking out the factory grounds in London made Thomas’ blood suddenly run cold. What would happen now that these kids were on the run? he asked himself. If Matthew and Stacey were to show up at the factory, they could both be in danger simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

According to the nurse’s somewhat vague responses, the two kids were on their way to London and now he knew that he had to get back there as quickly as possible.

Taking a deep breath, he broke into a run. The first thing he would have to do was get to the police precinct house and pick up his car. With a little luck, he would perhaps be able to intercept the two kids before they reached London.

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After about ten minutes, Thomas had reached the door that led into the police department. His head was throbbing like nobody’s business at this point and he wondered if he should, at least, get to a pharmacy and fill the prescription that his doctor had given to him when he had signed him out. The pain in his head was getting worse by the minute.

Now, after all the events of that day, Thomas pondered what he would do the minute he got back to
the factory. Right now, sleeping seemed to be high on his list of priorities.

Of course he also knew that there was no way he would be able to sleep simply because there were far too many things happening. Now that the second Golden Ticket business had been taken care of; he was just ready to make some distance between himself and Buckinghamshire.

Opening the door, he entered the noisy station. As the door closed behind him, he began to take in the various sounds that filled his ears. These somehow made his head hurt even worse.

The hollowed out sounds of phones ringing and filing cabinets slamming shut were the most obvious. Feeling as though his ears were about to explode, he brushed his hand through his hair and seated himself in one of the chairs that lined the wall closest to the door.

He remained there for several moments until a woman’s voice emerged and he raised his head to see a policewoman standing over him.

“Excuse me?” she spoke, her dark eyes meeting his. “Sir, are you alright?”

“I think so,” he said. “It’s just been one of those days.”

The woman police officer nodded, but cast a quick glance back over towards the desk where one of her colleagues was hard at work. “Hey Dobson, I’m going off duty, can you take care of the rest of the paperwork I started?”

“Sure Davis, see you tomorrow,” he called out as she sat down next to Thomas on one of the yellow colored seats.

“Now then, am I right in my assuming that you’re Thomas Wilkenson?” she asked, a slight smile shadowing her features.

He raised his head, all the while not really certain as to what to say. How in the world could this woman possibly know who I am? Before he could contemplate this further, he watched as she stood up. Motioning with her arm for him to follow, he slowly got to his feet and started to follow her towards a door leading into what appeared to be a conference room of some kind. Once they had entered, she made another similar motion with her hand and he approached the table and sat down while she closed the door.

Turning away from the door, she looked at him. “Am I right?” she repeated her question.

“Yes,” he nodded weakly. “But how did you know?”

“I met your friend yesterday,” she said breaking into a bright smile. “My name is Karen Davis.”

Thomas nodded as he brushed his hand over his face and removed the spectacles he wore. These he placed on the table before speaking. “I see…” he mused. “…Excuse me if I seem rude, but I’m exhausted and I’m just here to pick up my car.”

“I can tell…I mean about the exhaustion part,” she began. “If you’ll pardon my being presumptuous, you don’t look at all well. Maybe I should call a doctor for you.”

“No,” he said with an adamant shake of his head. “No more doctors, I just want to go home. The truth is, I stopped off at the hospital to see Matthew Madison and that seemed to have gone up in smoke.”

“Madison?” Karen asked. “Did your friend tell you about what happened yesterday when he was
here?"

“No, I haven’t spoken to him since just before he came here. But, I did meet Matthew after his sister and her friend assaulted me yesterday,” he said. “Why?”

“Stacey Madison was released with the stipulation that she would move into a halfway house this morning,” she said.

“I heard she was released, but that’s not what happened,” he said. “I just got here from the hospital and the on duty nurse said that she somehow managed to force the doctor to release her brother into her care. Now, the two kids are rumored to be on their way to London.”

“London?” Karen looked at him. “I told Stacey specifically that she should stay in Buckinghamshire. She gave me her word that she would. Are you absolutely certain that she was intending on going to London?”

“Yes, at least that’s what the nurse said. She also told me that Stacey said something about visiting friends in London,” he said. “I can only surmise where specifically they went.”

“To the factory,” Karen whispered.

“Yes, and with the trouble that we have been having lately with the Slugworths, you can imagine that those kids are probably stepping straight into trouble,” Thomas said.

“Alright,” Karen said. “I’m about to go off duty, maybe we can sit down and talk about all of this.”

“There’s no time for me to get into anymore extended dialogues, Constable Davis, I’m going home. Maybe I can find the kids and see what I can do from there. The point is, I’m not going to cover any ground sitting here and talking about what I know, when I’ve already discussed that in detail with your colleagues,” he said, as he touched his forehead. “I don’t want to stay another minute in this town if I don’t have to. Please don’t think ill of me for doing what I have to do.”

“But you can’t just drive off in the state that you’re in. You look like you’ve been through a meat grinder,” she said assertively. “You could not only put yourself at risk by doing so, but you could also put other motorists at risk as well. In good conscience, I cannot allow you do that.”

“What do you recommend then?” he asked his voice laced in impatience. “The more we sit around here talking, the further Stacey and Matthew will get from us.”

“Let me drive you back. I need to explain a few things to you and perhaps it would be prudent for Mr. Wonka to be present when I do,” she said.

“Does this have anything to do with Stacey and Matthew skipping town?” he asked.

“In part, yes, it does, but there is more to the story than just two kids trying to make off with someone else’s car,” she said. “There’s another case involved.”

“Alright,” Thomas conceded. “Then my next guess is that perhaps that other case has something to do with the fire that was set last night.”

“You know about that?” she asked.

“Yes, Regina Harris told me about it this morning when we met at the hospital. She said that there had been rumors flying around town that the Slugworths were on the warpath,” he said casually. “From what I know of this situation, there is nothing new there.”
Karen nodded “I don’t know if you know about any of this, but it’s no rumor. There are presently three men in a holding cell here at the station. They have sworn to rub out anyone who so much as comes in contact with Willy Wonka. They really mean business, Mr. Wilkenson, and they say that they have people on the outside who are going to follow through with those plans. The person who is sitting at the top of their list is a woman named Linda Slugworth. I had never heard of her, but I did some research and it turns out that she lives here in town and is the estranged wife of one of the Slugworth honchos. The house that was set fire to was in her name. I didn’t mention anything about it yesterday to anyone, but I was afraid that Stacey might catch some trouble because she did speak with Mr. Wonka. The point is, and part of the reason she was released is because inadvertently, she could have been added to their hit list. Those three men stand accused of arson and chances are, they could be up on more counts of God knows what.”

“So basically you released Stacey for her own safety, is that it?” Thomas asked.

“I told her not to leave town, but I guess she panicked and did just that. I told my superiors that I would take full responsibility for her and now regardless of what you decide to do, I have to drive to London and find her. My guess is she ran straight to the factory.”

“Then Will was right,” he muttered. “It was good that we got Linda’s parents out of here when we did.”

“You mean her parents are the two older people who came in last night and were looking for him?” Karen asked.

“…I imagine so,” he nodded. “For whatever reason, Will either expected or suspected that something was about to happen. So after he left and came to talk to Stacey, he had me call and arrange for them to meet him here and they drove back to London last night,” he said.

“This is quickly turning into a very big mess,” Karen mused.

Thomas looked at her and nodded. “It is and if you don’t mind my saying so, you seem rather interested in big messes. Perhaps you’re wondering how this particular one is going to play out.”

“Are you kidding?” she grinned despite herself. “This beats all. Now you know that part of the reason I became a policewoman in the first place is because I live for a good mystery. My brother once said that it will one day be my ‘Achilles’ Heel’.”

“Well, if you want to drive me back to London, then I suppose I will have to give you these.” he handed her the keys to his car.

Karen accepted them. “Wait here, I’ll go change and then meet you in the front lobby,” she said as she quickly got up and disappeared through a doorway.

Thomas got to his feet and the two of them left the station.

Outside, the two of them started to walk over to the car that Thomas had used for his trip.

“You always drive such fancy wheels?” Karen asked.

“Not generally,” Thomas said honestly. “Will suggested it as a way to divert the focus, but I guess the kids figured that they were getting something good in trying to steal it.”
“Locking the door was a clever maneuver. I heard that this was what caused Stacey to get caught in the first place. From what my colleagues also reported, the boy was swearing a blue streak about that last night after he woke up.” As she spoke, she unlocked the door and climbed behind the wheel. Thomas got into the passenger side and closed the door. “I suppose that too many people would not have thought to do that. They would have just left the door ajar and got out.”

“In most cases I probably would have, but I felt rather strangely about doing even that, so I locked it. It was as though I sort of knew that something was going to happen because my intuition was telling me so. Perhaps I was more concerned about the things on the seat, rather than the car itself.”

As soon as they were buckled in, she started the car and drove out of the parking lot. “I suppose this has been quite a strange visit to our humble little town. I am wont to admit that it has been weird for me as well. Who’d have thought that I would go to work to file general paperwork and meet up with someone like Willy Wonka?”

Thomas nodded. “He didn’t plan on driving up here last night at all. He only came because I had gotten hurt.”

“He sounds like a very good friend,” she said.

“He is,” Thomas said. “We both thought that everything would quiet down after Will got Linda’s daughter back from the Slugworths last week.”

“Got her daughter back?” Karen asked. “You realize you’re going to have to explain that bit to me. So, that’s four people at the factory?”

“Actually no, try seven,” Thomas said. “There’s a young girl from Germany visiting as well as Will’s adopted mother and her boyfriend.”

“It seems hard for me to believe that a man who is known to be a sociological recluse would be hosting so many people in his home at once,” she said. “That sort of dashes the whole notion, doesn’t it?”

“So it would seem,” he said with a slight chuckle. “Will actually told me last night that he intends for all of them to stay at least until the end of the week, but something tells me it might end up being longer.”

“Lucky them,” Karen said. “So you said that you got her daughter back. Is this a child?”

“Yes, her name is Molly and she’s seven. Last week she was kidnapped from a restaurant in Füssen while I was there on holiday,” Thomas said.

“And you didn’t contact the police about this?” Karen shifted her attention away from the traffic in order to give him a somewhat skeptical glance.

“Will came up with a plan to get her back,” Thomas said casually. “Besides that, Slugworth threatened to kill the child if we got the police involved. We ended up following through with the plan once we had managed to entrap him with one of his own threats. It worked out and now both the child and her mother are safe at the factory.”

“And what if that plan had failed?” Karen pulled the car to the side of the road and turned to face him. “You know, the police are here for a reason. Willy Wonka is a wonderful person, and he makes great candy, but he’s also a civilian. When I see him, he’s getting a piece of my mind to feast upon for that point alone.” She clenched the steering wheel tighter, and he could see that her knuckles were now white from agitation.
“This wouldn’t have involved your department at all,” he said. “Everything happened in London.”

“Perhaps, but if a child was kidnapped, particularly in a public place, then it does involve the police. Once the child is released, she would have to be checked over by a doctor and then we’d have to take a statement from her outlining what all happened. After that, we would have to see to it that she would be sent to a place where she would be safe. That’s protocol.”

“I understand, but Slugworth clearly said that if we got the police involved, they would hurt Molly. Besides that, with all the issues that we are contending with, do you honestly expect Molly to leave the factory?” Thomas asked. “That prospect alone would absolutely terrify her.”

“But that’s what the police are for, we are bound by our duty to protect the people,” Karen said hotly. “You can’t expect us not to react.”

Thomas took a deep breath. “The only way you might actually understand why we acted as we did would be for you to meet Molly after we get back. That is, after we find Matthew and Stacey. The little girl feels safe there. It’s become her sanctuary and whatever happens next will remain to be seen.”

Karen took a deep breath and released it slowly. “Perhaps the factory is the safest place for her, but if Molly was kidnapped, specifically under the direction of her father, then something could be done to keep him from further contact with her. The police would be needed for that.”

“Well, whatever anyone decides to do would have to be decided between you and Will. There is very little point to you getting upset with me about it,” he said.

“I’m not upset, just a little exasperated,” she said.

“Same thing,” Thomas mused.

“No, it’s not,” she responded.

“I think it is,” he said firmly.

Karen sighed. “Can we be honest?” she asked defeat etched in her voice.

“That would be a good start,” Thomas said.

“I went into the police academy twenty years ago and spent two years in training for it. I chose this profession because I wanted to help people,” she looked down at the gold band that covered her left ring finger and shook her head. “I met my husband at the academy. He and I were two of a kind; we loved self-defense, enjoyed learning the ropes, and were both massively ambitious. Soon after we graduated, we got married, and moved to London to live and work. Last November, he was shot and killed by a woman who was using some strange form of self-justice to protect her child from an abusive boyfriend. Instead of allowing someone who was trained in this field to help her, she got scared one night after the neighbors placed the call to the station and accidentally shot my husband.”

“I’m sorry,” he said.

“Yeah, well, soon after that happened, I was taken off the beat and sent to work shuffling papers in Buckinghamshire,” she said. “I sometimes talk about my husband as though he’s still here, but he’s not. Like yesterday when Mr. Wonka came into the place. I mentioned my husband after he asked me about the smell of the station house reeking of a mixture of sweat socks and double-bubble-burp-a-cola. It reminded me immediately of when Ray would come home after a work out and he would smell like sweat. He would proceed to tell me how much he was able to bench press. Anyway, after
Mr. Wonka left, I went off duty and found myself at the gym, just parked there, and staring at the door leading inside.”

She ran her hand through her curly hair and shook her head. “I’m sorry to unload all this on you, it wasn’t my intention, and in hindsight it does sound a tad bit unprofessional, but that’s how I am.”

“Perhaps you have a right to be,” he said as he took a deep breath. “I’m sorry if what I said upsets you. It wasn’t my intention.”

She shrugged her shoulders. “No big deal,” she said bravely as she pulled the car back out on the street.

Thomas rubbed his face with his hands. “You know, I do understand how you feel, I lost my brother because some drunk couldn’t handle his alcohol intake. I realized that it sometimes takes a while for people to get over these kinds of losses.”

She nodded. “No kidding.” Instead of elaborating, she stopped at an intersection and turned to look at him. “So, I take it if you had known how I was going to react you probably never would have told me about all of this, right?”

“I didn’t say that, but I probably would have touched on it a little bit more delicately than I did,” he said honestly. “You’re not the only person that I have met who feels this passionately about their work. I suppose that it happens in all fields, not just the one that I am currently involved in.”

“Thank you for being so honest, Mr. Wilkenson,” she said with a weak smile.

“My pleasure, Mrs. Davis or should I still use your rank in address?” he asked.

“No, I’m off duty, if you don’t mind, maybe you can just call me Karen. I never was big on formalities anyway,” she shrugged her shoulders.

“Alright, then turnabout’s fair play, you can call me Tom,” he said. “Contrary to everything that was just said, I really do appreciate your help.”

The policewoman smiled as she shifted her attention back to the traffic. “My pleasure. Besides, you are right about one thing?”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“I am someone who tries to follow the word of the law. I guess sometimes I do forget about the human aspect of it,” she said. “I guess it’s a flaw in my character.”

“I wouldn’t call it a flaw, but I am wont to say that it has a great deal to with your experiences in life. Besides, I do understand the issues regarding rules and things that people must abide by. Without them being in place, things could get rather chaotic.”

“You do seem to understand protocol rather well,” she mused.

“Well, it was because I worked for about six years in the United States as a legal aid, I learned a great deal about that system while I was there,” he said.

“Were you happy?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he said honestly. “Will once asked me if I was but I couldn’t really answer him. After my brother died, I realized that I was absolutely miserable there. I had friends, but they were
more like acquaintances. I mean; I could count on them to help me out, but I haven’t heard from any of them in years. I suppose my only family now is Will, and most people who meet me find our friendship hard to understand. Somehow, he personifies the brother I lost and he once said that I was the brother he never had. I remember when Simeon died and how I could not make heads or tails of anything in my life. I had never really done the things that most people my age would probably have done countless times. It just all seemed so pointless.”

“You mean things like falling in love?” she asked boldly.

“Yes, I suppose that was one of the things that I can’t boast about,” he said.

“When that lady one day happens by, hold onto her, Tom,” she said. “You’re a good man, and based on the things I have seen in my line of work, it’s a rarity.”

“In your work, you’ve probably encountered a great deal of the contrary,” he mused.

“More often than the good ones, I’m afraid,” she said with a slight smile.

The rest of the trip passed in silence.
Chapter 68

Chapter 68: Another Discovery

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

At the same time Thomas was in Buckinghamshire and putting the flea in Veruca Salt’s spoiled rotten ear, Willy wearily opened his eyes. He discovered that by some miraculous twist of fate he had managed to sleep peacefully through the night.

Contrary to that, his dreams had somehow consisted of running through Loompaland with Arthur Slugworth chasing him with a sword made from a dead wangdoodle while sporting a beige colored trench coat and bright red football sneakers. This image was still in his mind when he woke up, and despite himself, he chuckled as he began to rub the sleep out of his eyes.

Needless to say, it had been a very strange dream indeed, but still it proved that the confectionary genius had actually been able to go to sleep.

Despite the odd imagery that careened through his mind, his body still felt rather tired. This had somehow proven to him that he had not yet caught up on his sleep and that it would take some time for him to recover from the excitement of the past few days.

The factory temperature was now somewhat higher than usual and this meant that the days were getting hotter as the month of August approached. Willy crawled out of bed and went over to the thermostat that was in a small transparent encasing next to the door. He turned a couple of knobs and allowed some fresh air to filter in through the room.

Enjoying the coolness that surrounded him, he took a deep breath and turned the knob so that the setting would read eighteen degrees Celsius, a comfortable compromise for him as well as his workers who thrived on the warm almost humid temperatures of their native home.

This brought his thoughts back to the dream he had had. Arthur Slugworth no longer posed any threat to him, the police in Berlin said that he was behind bars for having kidnapped Tina Schröder’s parents and there would, no doubt, be more to come. Willy knew that Owen, the more dangerous of the two, was still at large, and that meant keeping their security at the highest possible level.

As he got dressed, the events of the night before were still churning about in his mind. He knew that regardless of the news his friend was going to bring, he and Thomas would have a good deal to discuss about later that day.

Smiling, the confectioner adjusted his velvety red colored bowtie and smiled at his reflection in the mirror. Very trendy, he thought with a smirk as he regarded his almost Edwardian style. Not bad if I say so myself, his thoughts continued as he reached for a comb and began to tame down his curly locks of hair.

Finishing that task some five minutes later, he reached over and picked up a golden pocket watch. Flipping the cover up, he realized that it was close to ten in the morning. That late? he asked himself as he crossed the room and pulled a forest green colored waistcoat from the coat rack. Carefully, he pulled it on before running his hand down the velvety texture of the jacket before casting a final glance in the mirror.

If things had actually gone as according to plan, the second of the tickets should have been found by
now, he thought. *That meant that Thomas must have already left his message and was making ready to return to London.*

It was no secret that Willy now looked forward to their pending conversation once Thomas returned safely to the factory. He still feared for his friend’s safety and he could not help but wonder how much time would pass before the news of the elder Slugworth’s arrest would come to light.

Internally, because of the work he was doing with the contest, Willy sincerely hoped that they would be able to keep this news from slipping to the public. Of course, he had already started to devise a backup plan in his mind if something did get leaked. If the Golden Ticket winners were to discover that the person his best friend was impersonating was behind bars, then it would not only wreck all of his plans of finding his heir, but could also legally get Thomas into a load of trouble as well.

As Willy tried to dismiss these thoughts, he emerged from his room and closed the door firmly behind him.

The hallway was relatively quiet, until he rounded the corner that led to the Lavender Room. Even from out in the hallway he could hear that a heated dialogue was taking place, which left his first priority to find out where Molly was. The last thing that child needed was to be exposed to even more hostility. She had clearly been through enough.

Instead of immediately going into the room, he walked down the length of the hallway to the Peppermint Room, where Eliza and Elmsworth were staying.

Tapping lightly at the door with his cane, he waited until the door opened. “Good morning, William,” Elmsworth’s voice emerged as the man with gray hair and mustache offered a cordial half salute. “Nice to see you this fine day.”

“Likewise,” Willy returned the smile as well as the gesture. “Do you know where Mum is, perchance?”

“Yes, as far as I know, she is still at breakfast. She so enjoys not always having to cook,” he said with a wry chuckle. “Seems she and the little girl have gotten on famously.”

“Molly is with her then?” Willy asked.

“Yes and that lawyer fellow too,” Elmsworth said. “Nice fellow. You know him long?”

“He took care of my grandfather’s estate after he passed on and has been taking care of the legal issues with the factory since I started in this business. I guess you could say I’ve known him since I was a boy,” Willy said freely.

Elmsworth smiled. “That rather takes away the notion that you are a recluse, doesn’t it?”

“Well, the media has a tendency to exaggerate at times,” Willy said, shrugging it off, but the smile never left his face. “I have heard so many assertions about myself from them that it would make your head spin.”

“Well, good to know that Eliza’s ‘son’ is a good and well balanced sort of individual. I must admit that when she told me that her son was a great confectionary wizard, I had all sorts of thoughts going through my mind about you,” Elmsworth chuckled. “It’s good to know that my imagination did not get the better of me.” He took a deep breath. “If you’ll excuse me, I have an appointment with a Dickens’ classic and a cup of tea.”

Willy nodded. “Enjoy the books and I’ll check in the cafeteria in a little bit to see how things are
shaping up in there. Right now I need to get to the Lavender room and see if my girlfriend has any shred of dignity left.” He offered his mother’s boyfriend an unhappy smile.

“She’ll be well taken care of as long as you are there,” Elmsworth said smiling. “You’re a true gentleman, William. Don’t let that old ‘battle-axe’ convince you otherwise.”

The chocolatier could feel a soft chuckle building in his throat. Not necessarily because of the truth in Elmsworth’s words, but the manner in which he conveyed them. He nodded and with a final wave, he started to make his way back down the hall in the direction of Linda and Molly’s room. Reaching the still opened door, he could hear the sounds of Marjorie’s voice as it filtered out into the hallway, the antagonistic tones abruptly filling his healthy ear.

Taking a deep breath, he quietly, but casually, entered the room.

From the doorway, he could see that Marjorie was standing on one side of the sofa, her back facing the door, but her hands were on her hips and she was regarding her daughter. Linda was on the opposite side of the sofa, her eyes practically staring holes into her mother.

It was clear that the two women were discussing the events of the night before when the police had come to speak with Willy, Linda, and Tina about the Slugworths latest moves. It was also clear that Linda’s mother was highly offended at not having been included in the proceedings. Her hostile words seemed indicative of that.

“What were you discussing that was so important that you couldn’t bring yourself to at least talk it over with me?” Marjorie was demanding as Willy came into the room.

He stopped dead in his tracks when he heard the question. Ignoring his natural inclination to walk over to where Linda was standing, he simply stopped everything he was doing – even breathing.

Despite his own misgivings, he glanced across the room in the direction of where the younger of the two women stood. Her eyes were glazed over and he could read the hostility that somehow encased her. Sensing that she had either not seen him or was ignoring his presence, he waited for her to respond.

“If Papa opted to not telling you what all had happened, do you honestly think that I would want to discuss it with you myself?”

Willy smiled upon hearing the assertiveness in Linda’s words, but he knew well enough that Marjorie would not be put off. Taking a deep inhalation of breath, he allowed his tall frame to lean casually against one of the mahogany colored bookshelves that lined the side wall of the room.

“I would think that you would willingly tell me,” Marjorie began, heir voice hard and cold. “That is unless you really do have something to hide.” Instinctively, she crossed her arms over her chest.

“I have nothing to hide, but perhaps these issues would be better taken care of if fewer people actually knew of them,” Linda said.

Marjorie rounded the sofa and started to approach her daughter. Willy watched in sadness bordering on horror as Linda backed several steps away from her mother’s onslaught. It seemed abundantly clear to him that Linda did not like her mother being in close proximity to her. He guessed that given their history, this was completely understandable.

“Is this about your plans to stay here instead of joining your family in Cornwall?” Marjorie’s snappish voice suddenly filled the room. “It was your friend who mentioned this in the first place. Do
you think that he would merely bring it up or is it possible that his intentions with you were less than moral?” She paused as her next words filled the room. “Must I remind you again that you are still married, Linda?”

The younger woman’s face flushed as she looked at her mother. “My intentions and morals are none of your business. Regardless of what I choose to do, I will happily concede that Willy has made a wonderful and very honorable suggestion for you and Papa. Just because I do not wish to leave does not mean that I am behaving like a whore.”

She took a deep breath and continued speaking, her voice etched in attitude. “The point is; you have never once asked me what I really wanted. You have always assumed that you knew better. You seem to think that you’re better at everything. When Molly and I were at your house, you were telling me how to raise my daughter, what I should do about Owen, and how to handle that horrible situation. For a long time, I listened, but when I decided that it was my life and I wanted to take control of it, you got angry. What you fail to see is your only granddaughter is scared to death of you, and you reminded me of when I was growing up and how you treated me the very same way. This situation was not because of me.”

Before Marjorie could respond, Linda continued. “Somehow you figured that I would do everything you say because of that old adage of ‘blood being thicker than water’ and that whole outdated issue of ‘honoring my parents’ when one of them beat me as a child and now refuses to respect my rights as an individual. The point is, it is my life, and Molly and I are going to stay here, and nothing you say or do will change that.”

“Nothing?” Marjorie asked. “Perhaps I ought to contact my lawyer and try and get custody of that child since you are obviously unfit as a mother.” She paused as horror crossed her daughter’s face. “I’m sure that someone with a higher ethical standard would understand my oppositions. After all, I know perfectly well that you are staying here so you can flirt with your host.”

Willy’s face flushed, but he said nothing, instead he simply continued to listen.

“Molly is perfectly fine in my care,” Linda snapped. “If you so much as try to take her away from me, then I will tell them about the bruises from when I was eleven. I am certain that the hospital does keep records of my being taken there. I could tell them that I didn’t fall down the stairs, but that I was pushed. It will not look good for you, Mother, and if I had my way, you would not come out unscathed.” She paused. “Now, you may or may not believe this, but I’m not about to go from one relationship of being abused and mistreated straight into another.”

“I’m glad that at least you see some reason,” Marjorie said quietly. “It would seem awfully wrong for you to get involved in another romance with a sweet talking candy maker.”

Despite his wanting to jump into this verbal onslaught, Willy looked over at Linda and when she spotted him standing in the room, her face flushed with pain and embarrassment. Willy was not supposed to hear these insults fly about, but yet he had, and now she was once more embarrassed by the uncouth behavior of her mother.

At this point, Willy had had it with trying to understand Marjorie’s behavior. He could no longer excuse it, especially her threatening to take Molly away. That was the cruelest thing that he could imagine, and he was more than determined to help Linda and Molly get away for all the abusers in her life and this did not just mean Owen Slugworth. He was about as close to lashing out at her as Linda now was.

He clenched his fist, and looked away, yet there was a place deep inside of him that wished Eliza was now present to defend his honor just as she had done when they were standing out in the
Instead of speaking to Linda, he looked at Marjorie. “I know that you do not like me. Or perhaps you do when it serves your purpose to do so. So, to answer the question as to why we did not inform you of the proceedings last night, the answer is clear, we did not want to. Now, if you are thinking that you can take Molly away from Linda, then you are vastly mistaken.”

Linda looked at him, her eyes wide as he continued speaking. “I have more money than you can imagine, and I would be willing to put it all on the line to fight for the rights of that child.”

“You’re not the child’s father,” Marjorie snapped. “For you to do that would be like charity.”

Willy arched an eyebrow. “Perhaps, but you speak of ethics and morals, I have to ask you this. Would an ethical person try to abduct a child from her mother to prove a point? Does someone who preaches such things have the right to judge when they have freely abused their daughter and granddaughter in the past?”

Linda nodded in concurrence with his words. “He’s right, I wasn’t even referring to Willy when I spoke of abuse; I was alluding to you. It was your pressure that kept me from telling anyone about what had been happening with Owen. You may not wish to believe this, but your abuses and his were pretty much the same. Sometimes, they were even more debilitating, because they were emotional in scope and not physical.”

“How dare you say such a thing to me?” Marjorie shouted. “I am your mother and you really should hold your tongue.”

Linda put her hands on her hips, her body slightly trembling, but her gaze never faltering. Instead of paying attention to the fact that her father had quietly entered the room, she kept her gaze on her mother and spoke.

“How dare I?” she took a deep breath, the irony practically dripping in her words. “Alright, since you don’t seem to accept anything I say, then I will spell it out for you. If you had your way, I would be living under your control on a permanent basis. I would be under your roof, constantly being told what the ‘right’ way to live my life as well as how to raise my child. You may have already threatened to take Molly away from me…” her voice trailed off.

“What?” Patrick’s voice emerged.

“She did,” Willy said softly. “She told Linda that she would contact her lawyer and file a petition saying that Linda is an unfit mother.”

“This is positively absurd,” Patrick said, but turned and looked at his wife. “If you so much as try, then I will be the next one filing for divorce. I may have been an utter pushover in the past, but I will not give into your control games any longer. Nor will I be party to your terrorizing our daughter and granddaughter.”

“Patty,” Marjorie shouted, but the Scotsman shook his head.

“I said ‘no,’” he said firmly.

Linda looked at her father with newfound respect before shifting her attention and looking at her mother. “It’s not fun being on the receiving end, is it? You wonder why I ended up with someone like Owen, well that’s why. I stupidly thought that that was what love was. But, now I know it’s not.”
As these words hung in the air, she went over and put her arms around Willy and rested her head against his shoulder. Her entire body was trembling as she felt him return the embrace.

Patrick nodded. “Linda, I think there are a great many things I failed to tell your mother. It was done to protect you, Marjorie, but now you need to know the truth about Owen. You have judged our daughter without fully understanding and instead have resorted to idle threats. Willy did save both Molly and Linda’s life.” He turned to Willy. “My sincerest apologies, Willy. Having seen both my daughter and granddaughter in your presence, I think they will be very well provided for here.”

“Thank you, Papa,” Linda whispered.

Instead of speaking further, Patrick walked over to them and put an arm around both Linda and Willy, his attention now on the chocolatier. “You will take good care of both my girls, won’t you? After all, I am putting their security into your hands. From what I have seen, it is the safest place for both of them to be right now.”

Willy nodded. “It will be an honor, Pat.”

“Good, now that’s settled and if no one has any objections; I would really like to have some breakfast. In fact, Molly mentioned to me something yesterday about chocolate chip pancakes.” He smiled impishly as he looked at Willy. Once the chocolatier nodded, he gave their shoulders another light squeeze before looking at the confectioner. “Lead the way,” he said with a smile.

“It’s not too far from here,” Willy said. “When you leave the room, go down the hall, then take a left, and then a right. The dining room has the initials PBJ written at the top of the door. It’s the only double door in that corridor.”

“Peanut Butter and Jelly,” Patrick said with an approving nod. “I like that; it’s a very clever idea indeed.”

Willy smiled as Patrick went over and grabbed his wife’s hand and started to lead her out of the room. Once they had exited, Willy smiled at the older man’s enthusiasm of having the factory’s, now semi-famous, chocolate chip pancakes.

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Once they were alone, Willy pulled Linda gently into his arms before feeling her head coming to rest against his shoulder. As he regarded her, he could see that she now carried an almost contented look on her face. This alone made him smile.

For several minutes, neither of them spoke, in fact, they seemed to enjoy the silence of the moment.

When it eventually did break, Linda’s voice filled his healthy ear. “I’m so sorry about all of this, Willy. I know that my mother is not the easiest person in the world to deal with, but subjecting you to her judgment calls and threats is not what I counted on. I figured that my father would have told her what had happened, but he didn’t. I suppose being left alone with her leaves me to ponder who is really the lesser of two evils; her or Owen.”

Willy nodded. “Try not to worry about it, Linda, you are not responsible for the things that she does. If she even tries to take Molly away from us then I will talk to Mr. Gregory and see what he can do for her. Elmsworth said that Mum and Molly were in the dining room talking.”

“You said ‘us’?” she whispered.

The chocolatier nodded as he touched her face lightly and slowly moved his hand until it was left brushing through her hair. “Yes. You and Molly are like family to me now. Whatever affects you,
affects me.”

“You would do all of that?” she asked, but when he nodded, she could feel a lump unconsciously lodging itself in her throat as she rested her hand atop one of his. “Oh Willy.”

He touched her face lightly. “I don’t want you to worry, Linda. Everything will be alright.”

She nodded numbly. “Yesterday when I heard Tina out in the hallway, I knew that you were the most special person in the world. You’re not just wonderful at what you do, but you give hope when people think that it no longer there. Just look at Tina and what you did for her yesterday.” As she spoke, she shook her head as the tears streamed effortlessly down over her cheeks. “I didn’t even have to speak her language to know that she was in terrible pain.”

Willy nodded as he reached over and tried to brush the tears away. “Yes, and even though I do speak German, there is a part of me that wished at that moment that I could not. She’s so heartbroken about her brother and contrary to the mistakes that boy made, she did love him. That’s truly the way it should be. The fact that the Slugworths have been trying to use her parents as leverage to get those documents back is lower than low. Perhaps I am putting way too much emphasis on this, but it just breaks my heart.” He took a deep breath as his next words emerged. “Linda, I am so hopeful that her meeting people like you will help her through the inevitable grief that she is now enduring.”

“She’s already found some pretty special friends in you and Tom,” she said. “I will be so glad when he gets back here later today. I couldn’t stop thinking about him last night. Does he even know what happened here?”

The chocolatier shook his head. “No, I refrained from calling there last night because I feared that it might put him in a rather unstable situation. Tom’s got a hard head and can usually handle anything that gets tossed in his direction, but still I do feel concern for him.”

“It’s strange, but he has done absolutely everything he said he was going to do,” she whispered.

Willy nodded but after several moments of silence, he broke into a small smile. “There was something else that I wanted to tell you.”

“What?” she asked.

“Well, among other things, I thought it was amazing how you handled everything. Not just yesterday, but also this morning. Sometimes, I am not always the world’s greatest when it comes to handling situations of that kind with tact. You see, I do care so deeply for you and Molly. I think that my getting involved might have caused you even more trouble than what you have already contended with.”

“I don’t know,” she whispered, her hand still resting on his. “You handled my mother just fine. But, you know that I hate the way she treats you, don’t you?” He nodded and she continued speaking. “I guess I sort of got tired of a lot of things. I just hate it when children are treated like objects instead of people, and both Owen and my mother seem to have gone to the very same school of parenting.”

“Well, if you want my honest opinion, I think you got rather fed up with the way she was treating you as well. You defended not only yourself, but you also stood your ground regarding Molly, and me,” he said. Releasing her, he crossed the room. Seconds later, he reached the door and closed it firmly.

Returning to her side, he continued speaking, his voice soft. “I will freely admit that I was taken aback by her threats. It’s very rare for me to find myself in a situation where I am literally struck
speechless.” He wound his arm around her and pulled her into his hold. As she raised her head, she noticed that a quirky grin had replaced the otherwise earnest look that was generally spread across his face. “Of course, you’ve never flirted with me, at least not without my doing the same.”

Upon feeling his nose against her cheek, Linda leaned against him, her eyes closing as she returned his gentle embrace. “Willy, I was initially terrified at the prospect of allowing myself to be swept away by emotions. We are so different, yet, sometimes I think we are very much alike.”

“Ever since the first time we spoke, I realized how we do have a great deal in common with one another,” he said smiling. “But those people who are often perceived as opposites do sometimes attract…rather like a magnet.”

She smiled slightly but buried her face against him as the fragrance of chocolate and mint encompassed her. As she rested in his arms, she touched the bow tie that was bunched at his throat. “You know, if someone had told me two weeks ago that in a virtual instant, my life would change and I would end up feeling this way, I would have figured them for crazy. Maybe in the wake of everything that has happened, I did think it was too fast when we were in the Sunset Room. I remember saying that I thought I was falling in love with you, but I didn’t know it was real until yesterday morning after breakfast.”

“I simply wanted to give you time,” he said softly. “But, I think deep down inside, I always knew. It was as though there was something very powerful happening with me, and at the time I had no idea how to go about contending with it.”

As he was speaking, she reached over and felt one of his curly locks of hair as it casually wound around her finger.

In response to this, the chocolatier allowed his hand to brush through her wavy brown hair, his touch feather light. “I want to kiss you, but I’m afraid that if I do, then I will not be able to stop myself from doing more than just that,” he confessed, his words soft.

Without warning, a small gasp suddenly emerged from him when he felt her lips hungrily pressing against his own. From beneath the pressure, Willy found himself smiling, even after the kiss had broke. Laughing somewhat nervously, he spoke. “Oh what was I saying?” he mumbled, but pulled her closer and captured her lips once again, the kiss warm and loving.

Without thinking about what she was doing, Linda lowered her arms so that they could wind around the chocolatier’s neck.

They were so involved in what they were doing that neither of them heard the door opening until a young sounding voice emerged.

“Oh yuck!”
Chapter 69

Chapter 69: A Child’s Wish

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Abruptly, they broke apart and Linda blushed as Willy glanced over to see that Molly was standing in the doorway. Eliza was standing next to the little girl, her hands resting gently on the child’s shoulders. The two had returned from breakfast during Linda and Willy’s conversation and the little girl was watching them through mystified brown eyes.

“Mommy?” she whispered, the soft cadence of her single word emerging and practically filling the room with her own brand of innocence.

As the utterance dissolved into silence, Molly found herself looking away from them, her eyes concealed. It was as though she was half expecting them to either start kissing again or one or both of them turning around and yelling at her for seeing something that she was not supposed to.

Instead of getting upset at having been discovered, Linda took a deep breath and regarded her daughter, her expression laced with hesitancy. “Molly, how long have you been standing there, sweetheart?”

“Long enough,” the little girl muttered, but after several moments of silence had passed between the four of them. Eventually, she looked over at Willy and the chocolatier could see the tears that were caught in her eyes. Still, no words emerged.

Wordlessly, he continued to watch the child, her actions indicative that she was fearful about what was going to happen next. Willy understood this fear very well and concluded that Molly would justifiably interpret his kindness towards her as a means of obtaining Linda’s approval and good graces. Oh what now? he asked himself. What must I say to assure Molly that my heart is truly in the right place?

“You like my mommy?” she eventually whispered, the question soft, but meshed in those words, a small waver was detectable. Willy could tell that the child was experiencing disillusionment and alarm at what she had discovered.

Slowly, he started to walk towards her.

As he reached her, he crouched down so that he would be eye level with her. He then started to reach out in order to touch her shoulder. Before he could initiate any contact, the little girl backed away from him, her body tumbling right into Eliza’s arms.

Not knowing what to say, Willy took a deep breath. “I like your mother very much,” he confessed. “I only hope that you have no objections, my Little Sunshine.”

Instead of speaking, she lowered her head, but no words emerged.

“Molly?” he eventually whispered her name, half expecting her to say something, but not fully knowing what was going to happen next. As insecure as the child now was, the chocolatier had the very same emotions cursing though his own mind.

Something was dreadfully wrong.
Within seconds, Molly had completely backed away. The moment she reached the door, she fled from the room as a tiny sob emerged from between her lips. As soon as she had disappeared out into the hallway, Willy got to his feet and stared after her.

“We have to go after her, she could get lost,” Linda was the first to speak.

“She’ll be fine,” Eliza said calmly, “William, you need to go and rectify this with her.”

“But, I’m…” Linda began but Eliza abruptly cut her off.

“…You’ll have plenty of time to talk to her about all of this, Linda. I know that you are worried about your daughter, but she sees William as her hero and right now, that hero has fallen off his gallant steed.”

“I didn’t mean to hurt her,” Willy whispered.

“I know you didn’t, but right now she believes that you only like her for the sake of her mother. None of us really know what is locked in the depths of that little girl’s heart.”

“Mum, I…” Willy stammered.

“…Go find her, William,” Eliza said firmly, “You are the one she needs. Once she knows that you still love her, then all will be set right again.”

“I don’t know anymore,” he whispered softly. “Sometimes I feel like the world is trying to run me down.”

“Then the best thing for you to do is stop and take a deep breath,” Eliza said wisely.

“What about Molly?” Linda asked softly.

“I’ll go find her,” Willy whispered with some traces of defeat in his voice. “She’s fast, but she’s not that fast.”

Linda nodded as Willy stepped out into the hallway and closed the door firmly behind him.

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Out in the corridor, Willy started to make his way down the hallway in the direction of the Oompa Loompa Village. He concluded that since Molly had enjoyed her day with them, she was probably going out in order to search for Omaya-Kal.

He slowly passed the Strawberry Room and pressing his healthy ear against the door he could make out that Tina was still sleeping. Nodding his head in approval, he decided that he would check in on her later. Quietly, he continued to make his way further down the hall.

Apart from trying to find Omaya-Kal, there was one other place that Molly might have been able to find her way to, and that was the Chocolate Room. Since both locations were along the same route, he could only conclude that he was going in the right direction.

As soon as he reached the end of the hallway and rounded a corner, he stopped. A small smile suddenly curved up his lips when he realized that he would not have too terribly far to go.

Molly was sitting on the floor several meters from the entrance into the Chocolate Room. Her legs were folded up beneath her body and her face resting in her lap. Tiny sobs were emerging from her and upon hearing such overwhelming emotions; the chocolatier felt indescribable sadness filling him.
Instead of immediately speaking, he approached where she was sitting and sat down next to her, his body slouching somewhat as he rubbed his hands over his face and allowed them to brush silently through his unruly hair.

“Am I still your friend?” he asked her, his voice unusually soft.

She raised her head and looked up at him, her eyes filled with tears. As the moisture eventually escaped from beneath her eyelids, a trail of dampness slid down the contours of her face. Willy watched as she bit down on her lip but offered him a silent nod.

“If that’s the case, won’t you at least look at me?” he asked, all the while trying to keep his voice level. Molly bit down on her lip as his next words emerged. “I can’t really know what I’ve done that might have hurt you unless you tell me.” He reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder.

Instead of speaking, she tried to smear the moisture from beneath her eyes with the back of her hand. Once the tears were wiped away, she turned her head and looked over at him. After several seconds had passed, she found herself unable to maintain eye contact with him and lowered her head once again.

“Something tells me that you’re too scared to tell me what it is you’re so afraid of,” he whispered. “Molly, I know that you’re frightened, but I don’t know why. If you tell me then I can try and make things better.”

The child responded with a simple shrug of her shoulders. Her head stayed lowered, but it soon became clear to him that she was willing herself not to cry.

“Molly?” he whispered her name. “Are you afraid to tell me how you feel because you think I’ll be angry with you?”

“No,” she whispered, all the while shaking her head.

Willy took a deep breath. He could tell that she was not speaking the truth at all, but instead of scolding her for lying, he took a deep breath. “Will you tell me what’s wrong?” he asked, all the while trying to keep his voice as soft and gentle as possible.

“You like my mommy,” she whispered with a resounding sniff.

“Yes, I do like her very much, Molly, but that doesn’t mean that I like you any less,” he said as he wrapped his arm around her shoulders and pulled her closer. “Do you really believe that the only reason I love you is because of your mother?”

“I don’t know?”

“I think you do know,” he said softly. “If you don’t tell me what I did that was wrong, then there is no way for me to try and make it right again. Please tell me why you’re so upset.”

“I’m scared,” she whispered brokenly, as she buried her face against him, her arms winding around him, her face now pressed up against his chest.

He could feel her trembling beneath his hold. Inhaling, he leaned over and kissed the top of her head. “Why are you scared, little one?” he asked, all the while knowing that he would have to draw the story out of her.

“Y-you’re going to love my mommy and forget all about me and won’t be my friend anymore,” Molly whimpered softly, her voice muffled with emotion.
“I see,” Willy said as he took a deep breath. He could see so much of himself in this child at that particular moment. Perhaps that was the reason he had warmed up to her presence as quickly as he had. He could actually see his younger self in her. The insecurities of his youth flooded over him as he took a deep breath and allowed his hand to brush lightly through her hair. “Is it possible that you could be wrong in that assumption?”

“No,” she whispered.

“So, does that mean that if I were to tell you that I love you with all my heart, that you’d think that I am lying to you?” he asked softly. He reached over and touched her tiny face, his fingertips trying to brush the tears away.

“I don’t know,” she whimpered.

“Molly, remember when you first came here and I told you that you brought so much joy and sunshine into our lives here. Do you really think those words were not true?”

The little girl raised her head, but after several moments she lowered it again, her lips now trembling.

“They were true,” Willy said, his voice now cracking with emotion. “Molly, I’m so deeply sorry if I did or said anything that might have made you feel as though I wasn’t being honest with you. It was never my intention to hurt or make you feel as though you were not loved or treasured.”

Instead of speaking, Molly shook her head, but after several seconds, she regarded him when she heard his voice once more emerging. “I’m guessing that our actions confused you a little bit, correct? Perhaps you believe somehow that I could ever stop loving you because of how I feel about your mother.”

Molly nodded. “I think you like her more than me.”

“Oh my dear, precious, little Molly,” Willy whispered shaking his head adamantly. “As much as I care for your mother, I also care for you. It’s just…shown in a different way.”

“Different?” she asked meekly.

“Yes, different,” he said as he pulled a handkerchief from his pocket and shook it out. “No matter what happens, you will always be my ‘Little Sunshine’, Molly.” As he was speaking, he gently wiped the cloth over her wet cheeks.

“I was so scared,” she whispered.

“I know.”

“When we were at breakfast yesterday, I thought you didn’t like me anymore,” she sniffed. “You kept talking about work, and I thought you only wanted Omaya-Kal around so that he could get me out of your hair.”

“I should have been really honest with you, huh?” he asked.

Molly took a deep breath, “yeah.”

“Do you want to know the truth?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” she nodded.

Willy looked down at her. “I’m completely and utterly exhausted, Sweetheart. That’s the only reason
we didn’t spend the day together yesterday.”

“It was because of me, wasn’t it?”

“No sweetheart, it was just me,” he said softly. “I need more sleep and yesterday when I tried to make something up so that I could retreat to my room and get some rest, things just kept happening. I wasn’t prepared to talk about it; I just used the boring grown up excuses about work so that it wouldn’t scare you.”

“I was more scared because I thought you didn’t like me anymore,” she whispered.

Willy pulled her gently onto his lap and wrapped his arms gently around her. “I’m sorry I made you afraid. I should probably have told you everything, I just wasn’t prepared to. I know that you’re a lot stronger than people think.”

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she asked, and for a split second the child sounded much older than she truly was. The only thing that made him realize that she was a child was the haphazard attempts she was making at wiping the tears away.

“I wanted to protect you,” he said. “I remembered the other day when we talked and how you wanted to see your grandfather. I thought if I could arrange that, it might make you happy.”

“You did that for me?” she asked meekly.

Willy nodded. “Yes, I did and that was one of the many tasks that I had to contend with yesterday. You see, my dear, this factory cannot run all by itself, it needs me to help keep it going.”

“But, I thought Omaya-Kal and the others helped you with that,” she whispered.

“Oh yes, he and his family help immensely whenever they can,” he smiled affectionately at her, “but, there are also tasks that I must fulfill. Omaya-Kal can do a great many things, but negotiating is not one of his stronger suits.” When she did not respond to these words, his expression grew earnest. “I know that lately my actions have been kind of confusing for you, but it wasn’t what I intended. It would break my heart to think that I did something that made you unhappy.”

“Really?”

He nodded, “yes, really.”

Molly closed her eyes and nodded but no words emerged. It was as though she wanted to say something, but did not have the courage to do so.

Willy reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder. When she raised her head and her gaze met his, he spoke. “Am I forgiven for having hurt you?” he asked gently.

Molly bit down on her lip, but said nothing. It seemed clear that the child was not accustomed to grown ups asking her to forgive them. Generally, it was she who ended up pleading with them to forgive her for whatever it was she had done that was bad. She continued to chew on her lip as she processed his question.

Willy reached over and touched her lip. This made her release it. “You shouldn’t bite your lip; that can really hurt.”

“Sorry,” she whispered but looked away.
Willy took a deep breath as he moved his hand so that he could brush it gently through her hair. “It was never my intention to hurt you.”

She looked up at him, her eyes filling with tears. “You’re afraid that I’d be mad at you?” she asked. When he nodded, she could feel the moisture suddenly streaming down over her cheeks. “Y-you’re my best friend in the whole wide world,” she whispered as she tried to wipe the tears away. After several seconds, she looked down at her lap, but somewhere in the depths of her sadness, she found her voice and spoke. “Willy?”

“What is it, sweetheart?”

“I kind of like that you like my mommy, but I’m afraid you won’t want to spend time with me anymore,” she whispered.

“Is that why you ran away?” he asked.

“Uh-huh,” she sniffed.

The chocolatier nodded as understanding washed over him. “Please don’t ever run away from me, Molly,” he whispered earnestly. “Just tell me when you’re scared and I’ll do whatever I can to help you not be scared anymore.”

“I’ll try,” she whispered as she inched her way closer to him. “Is Mommy mad at me?”

“No, she’s just worried,” he said. “When we get done talking, I can take you back to your room and you can talk with her about anything you want. But, I think she understands what you’ve been dealing with.”

“You think so?” she asked.

“Yes, I do, in fact, I know she understands,” he said, but paused for several moments before his next words emerged. “I have an idea.”

“What?”

“Well, if your mother has no objections to the idea, how would it be if after I have some breakfast, we go and explore a new room together before we have to be at the birthday party? I have lots of different rooms here, and you can pick one and we can explore some of the more fun parts of the factory.”

“That sounds great, but what about Cristy-Kai’s present?” she asked.

“You still have that song, don’t you?” he asked. “You know the one about the dragon?”

Molly nodded.

“Then we’ll do something with that, but I still have another question for you,” he said as though sharing a great secret with her.

“What?”

“I was wondering if you would be my escort to the party this afternoon?” he asked.

The little girl looked up at him, “me?”

“Of course you,” he affirmed. “I don’t think your mother will have any problems with that.”
“Maybe she’d get jealous,” the little girl giggled.

“I’m not sure if she would be jealous, I think she’d be happy that we worked everything out,” he chuckled softly, but his expression grew earnest as his next words emerged. “Molly, I want you to have fun while you’re here and not worry about whether or not you are loved, because you are the most precious people I know.”

“Not by my grandmother,” the child whispered. “She doesn’t like me at all.”

Willy nodded. He had seen the way Marjorie treated her granddaughter, and that simple statement affirmed to him that Molly was fully aware of what was going on as well. *Children are intuitive,* he thought to himself, *and this observation has proven that assertion tenfold.* “I don’t think she really knows you,” he offered diplomatically.

Molly shook her head, “no, but it’s okay because she doesn’t like you either.”

“How do you figure that?” he asked, all the while trying to keep the surprise out of his voice.

“I don’t know,” she whispered. “I just think she hates everyone but Grandpa.”

“You heard the arguments yesterday, didn’t you?” Willy asked his voice unusually soft. “I noticed that as soon as the people started yelling, the water was abruptly turned on.”

“You could tell?” she asked.

“Yes, I could.” He said, but he noticed at the same instant that Molly seemed to be distracted by something else as she was looking around the corridor where they were seated somewhat apprehensively. “Is something else the matter?” he eventually asked.

Molly nodded, but continued to glance expectantly around the empty corridor. “Can we go somewhere else, please?” she eventually asked.

Willy took a deep breath and nodded, “how about we go and sit inside the Chocolate Room?”

“Okay,” the little girl said. Once he helped her to her feet, he stood up and they walked the last ten meters to the door leading into the factory’s nerve-center.

Once Willy had deactivated the lock, they went into the room, and he closed the door firmly behind them. “Now, we’re completely alone and you can talk with me about whatever you like.”

Molly nodded as they went over to the stairs and sat down at the top of them. She cast a final glance around the room before speaking, her words only slightly louder than the waterfall as it splashed in the distance. “I used to turn the water on when the grownups would fight. They always thought I was showering or brushing my teeth, but I wasn’t. I could always hear them yelling at each other. Then my daddy would hit my mommy,” the child confessed. “Willy, no matter what I tried to do, I could always hear her crying.”

“She has no reason to cry now,” he whispered gently. “You’re both safe here.”

“But, I still wish that I didn’t hear it, especially when Grandma says such mean things about me or my mom,” she whispered. “Why does she do that?”

“I don’t really know,” he said honestly. “Your grandmother seems to be trying to protect you, but doesn’t really know about how to go about doing it.” Willy knew that for the sake of the child, a diplomatic approach was most important. “Do you remember when we were making candy and you
mentioned the big recipe book that your grandmother has?”

“Yeah,” she whispered.

“Well, imagine this. Your grandmother wants to make something and she doesn’t know how to do it, so she looks in a book to find the way to do it. Well, I guess cooking is a lot easier than being a grandmother. You see, there is no ‘how to’ book; she has no other option except to wing it.”

“But, I still don’t get it,” Molly whispered.

“Your grandmother does not have a recipe on how to be an ideal grandma. Maybe her grandmother was strict and unkind to her, so that was all she had to go on. I guess it’s the same as being a father or an uncle or even having siblings,” he smiled. “Either one knows how to go about it, or they have to try different things and hope for the best.”

“Like Eliza does,” Molly whispered. “She’s really nice, and I wish she could be my grandma.”

“Yes, she’s a very kindhearted lady, and she’s a real natural at it, isn’t she?” he asked with a gentle smile.
Molly nodded. “Yeah, but you know what I really wish?”

“What’s that?” he asked.

“That my real grandma would hug me and not be so mean to my mom,” Molly whispered. “It felt nice when your mother hugged me, and it felt like…like when I hug my grandpa.”

“I’m not sure I follow,” he said softly.

“I know my grandpa loves me because he hugs me a lot, but my grandma has never hugged me. I don’t even know how she smells or what it is that makes her that way,” she whispered. “Your mommy smells like roses and you smell like chocolate.”

Willy smiled. “Your grandmother doesn’t know what she’s missing, because your hugs are wonderful. The first time you hugged me, I was positively elated.”

“What’s elated mean?” she asked.

“It means that I was really, really, really, happy,” he said smiling.

“You were happy because I hugged you?”

“Oh yes, and I would be willing to bet that if your grandmother were to hug you, her coldness would just melt away, just like the wicked witch in The Wizard of Oz,” he smiled at her.

“I like that movie,” she said, but lowered her head once again. “But, Willy, there’s something else.”

“About your grandmother not hugging you?” he asked.

“No, it’s the mean things that she said to you. I heard her telling you that she was going to take us away from here,” she said sniffing. “I don’t want to leave. I want to stay here with you forever.”

“You know, something tells me that you’re going to get to stay here anyway,” he said gently as he reached over and began to ruffle her hair. “Your mother won’t let your grandma take you away from here if that is not what you want. In fact, Linda seems rather insistent about you both staying.”

“Because she likes you?” she asked.
“M-hmm,” Willy nodded. “But, she also knows that you like being around a strange and oddball character like me.”

They sat for several minutes before Molly looked over at him. “Can I tell you a secret?”

“You can tell me anything you want,” he said. “I will hold it in strictest of confidence.”

“Does that mean you won’t tell anyone?”

“Yes,” he chuckled, “that means; I won’t tell a soul.”

“Sometimes I wonder why Grandpa’s so nice and Grandma isn’t. I mean, he lets me dance with him, but she doesn’t like me. Do you think it could be my name?” As she was speaking, she lowered her head.

Willy took a deep breath as he recalled how Molly had been scared that he would hate her because of her name. It now seemed clear from where that particular fear was born. He knew that he could not lie to her, and yet, he could not affirm those words was undeniable truth either. The fragile heart of the child would crumble beneath the answer to this question and as he looked down at her nestled in his arms, he found the words he wanted to say.

“I am not sure if that’s entirely the case, Sweetheart. I think your grandmother just doesn’t understand how afraid you are. She has not had the chance to look fear in the face as you have done.” Willy watched as the unhappy tears streamed down over her face. Instead of continuing to speak, he reached over and with the handkerchief, he wiped them away.

“I’m glad that she doesn’t know anything about it,” she whispered innocently.

“I know, and even though it makes it hard for the rest of us, I am too. But, you know, I think deep down inside, your grandmother does love you, she just has a hard time trying to show it,” Willy said thoughtfully. “Sometimes, I think it really hurts us to think or believe that the people we love can’t or don’t know how to love us back. It is rather like you being afraid that because I care for your mother that I didn’t have enough love in my heart left for you. But, I do have it, Molly, and I do love you very, very much.” he smiled gently at her.

Molly looked at him. “You won’t forget me like my grandma has?”

“Never in, say, centillion years,” he said smiling.

“Is that a lot?” she asked softly.

“Indeed it is. Let’s see, it more than a million, and quite a bit more than a billion too,” he said with a casual smirk. “A centillion is a one with about six hundred zeros behind it.”

“That’s a lot,” she affirmed as she brushed her face against his shirt, but found herself touching the ‘w’ pin that was affixed to the lapel of his Edwardian style jacket. “That’s so pretty.”

“Yes, it is,” he said softly.

“Where’d you get it?” she asked. “You had it on that day at the candy store.”

“Yes, I did,” he nodded. “Several years ago, just before I met Omaya-Kal and the other Oompa Loompas, Tom and Mum gave it to me as a going away present.”

“You left?” she asked.
“Only for about a month,” he said. “I went away on holiday and they took care of the factory for me while I was gone. Before I left, they gave me this pin and told me that it would remind me of who I am. Let me show you something.” He removed the ‘W’ pin from his jacket and once it had been removed, he turned it over so that it would look like the letter ‘M’. “You see, you turn it over, and instead of a ‘w’ for Willy, it becomes an ‘m’ for Molly. Here let me pin it on.”

“But it’s yours,” she objected.

“Well then let’s share it, you wear it today and I’ll wear it tomorrow,” he said and smiled. “Agreed?” Molly smiled shyly and nodded as he pinned the golden object to the collar of her dress. As soon as he finished, he backed away and nodded approvingly.

“It looks lovely,” he said smiling.

“Really?” she asked as she looked down at the pin that was now on her dress. With a tiny hand, she touched it.

“It looks like an ‘M’ too, doesn’t it? You see, that’s another really nice thing about our names,” he said.

“Maybe, but I still wish you were my daddy.” As soon as she had spoken, she lowered her head.

“Shall I adopt you?” he asked. “Like I did with Eliza? I call her my mother, even though her last name is Bachmann and mine is Wonka. Maybe I can call you my daughter. The only problem is, I don’t know really how to be a father, but you’ve been teaching me.”

“I don’t know,” she said with the innocent wisdom that could only come from a child. “Maybe you’re a natural like your mom is.”

“Yet, I never really learned because my father was about as strict with me as your grandmother is with you,” he confessed.

“He was?” she asked.

“Yes,” he nodded. “In fact, your grandmother really does remind me of him in a lot of ways. Do you remember when I told you the other day about how my father didn’t want to support my dreams?”

“Yeah,” she whispered. “But, you didn’t tell me what he wanted you to do.”

“I didn’t?” he asked.

“No,” she said but instead of backing away, she tried to cuddle her way further into his arms. “Willy?” she whispered his name after several moments had passed.

“What is it, Sunshine?” he asked.

“What did your father want you to do?” she asked.

“He thought I should follow the old Wonka tradition and become a dentist just like him,” Willy admitted. “He, along with a number of my uncles and cousins, were all dentists. He probably figured that I would grow up and continue that particular family tradition. What he didn’t realize was that in a way I was helping them along by doing my own thing.” As he spoke, he smiled gallantly. “You see, if you eat too much candy, you could very easily require the services of your local dentist.”

“I always thought dentists were scary,” Molly giggled. “You’re too funny to be scary.”
“I hope that I never scare you again,” he said softly. “I know that when I get really upset or hurt, I unintentionally scare the people that I care the most for. I’m not perfect, Molly, and there is a side of me that you haven’t seen, but it is one that I hope you will never see, because it’s something that I don’t really like about myself.”

“I don’t like the idea of you being mean or scary,” she mused.

“I know, and you’ve probably had more ‘mean’ or ‘scary’ than any little girl deserves to experience,” Willy said.

They sank into companionable silence, but after awhile, she broke it, her shy words suddenly emerging. “Willy, do you think it’s bad of me to not tell my grandma and grandpa that I saw you kissing my mom?”

“That’s your choice,” the chocolatier said honestly. “But, do you want to tell me why you want to keep this a secret?”

The child shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t know I’m just afraid that Grandma will get mad and try to make us go with her and Grandpa and I don’t want to.”

“I think your mother and I would understand why you don’t want to tell her this information,” he said honestly. “Given what I do know about Marjorie, it is a very wise choice. Perhaps now would be a good time for you to tell me how you really feel about your mother and me.”

“You mean; am I okay with you liking her?” she asked.

Willy nodded. “Could you imagine my spending time with her?”

“I guess,” she whispered, but after several seconds, she shyly looked away, “I just got scared because I didn’t want you to not like me anymore.”

Willy reached over and touched her face. “I know that you sometimes feel afraid, but now you have nothing to worry about. My feelings for you will not ever change because I like your mother. You know, if something scares you, then you can talk to your mother, your grandfather, Eliza, Tom, or even me.” He took a deep breath. “I know that you’ve had many changes take place during the past few weeks. I also know that you’re going to need some time to adjust to all of them.”

She nodded, but closed her eyes as she allowed herself to rest cradled in his arms. “Did you really mean it when you said that we could still do stuff together?” she asked softly.

“Of course anytime you want,” Willy said as he ruffled her hair. “This will not change nor will my feelings towards you ever change. I promise.”

“They won’t?” she asked.

“No, because you’re my daughter now,” he said smiling. “Just don’t be afraid to talk to me, alright?”

“I will,” she whispered as she closed her eyes and remained wrapped in his arms. “Willy?”

“Hmm?”

“Do you remember when you asked me what name I would pick if I could pick any name I wanted?” she asked.

“Yes, I distinctly remember you saying ‘any name but Slugworth’,” he said.
Molly shyly raised her head and found herself looking into the blue eyes of the chocolatier. “If you marry my mommy, then I could have your name, right?”

Willy’s eyes widened in surprise upon hearing Molly’s innocent question, “you could have my name, if that’s what you really wanted,” he said sincerely. “Now, shall we go back to your mom and let her know that everything is okay? She’s probably worried about you and I know if I was in her shoes, I would be, too.”

Molly nodded as they got up. “Can we come back here later?” she asked.

“Absolutely,” he said smiling as they left the room and made their way back down the long corridor in the direction of the Lavender Room.
Chapter 70

Chapter 70: Secrets and Lies

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

The trip back to Linda and Molly’s room did not take long, but as they walked, Molly looked up at him. “Willy?”

“What is it sweetheart?” he asked.

“I was just wondering something,” she whispered. “You really love Mommy, right?”

“Yes, I do, and I know that all of these changes can be kind of scary and hard for you, but I’ll always be there to help you. I also know that actions do speak louder than words,” he said gently. “Sometimes it’s hard though because grown ups say one thing and often do something else. I don’t want to do that with you or with your mom.”

“I’m glad you love her,” she whispered as the tears caught beneath her eyes. “She needs someone who is going to be nice to her.”

“You both do,” he said as he got down on his knees in front of her. “I want to always be there for you.”

Molly wrapped her arms around him and buried her face against his chest. “Just don’t hurt her like my daddy did.”

“I promise,” Willy said as he brushed his hand gently through the hair of the little girl. “I won’t hurt either of you; ever.”

“Oh isn’t this sweet?” A voice emerged as Willy raised his head and was looking into the cynical brown eyes of Linda’s mother. “You making even more promises to the child that you probably can’t even keep.”

In his arms, Molly tensed up and Willy looked up before refocusing his attention on the child. “I’m going to take you back to your mother so that you two can talk, alright?”

As Molly nodded, she turned her head and looked at her grandmother, her expression lined in fear. “Why are you so mean to me? Is it because your grandmother was not nice to you?”

Before Marjorie could so much as utter a sound, Willy released his hold on her so that he could lead her down the hall in the direction of the Lavender Room. Reaching it, the two of them entered.

Linda and Eliza were still seated on the sofa talking. As Linda turned, she found herself staring as they entered. Crossing the room, the child’s mother smiled weakly when she noticed how her daughter was walking beside Willy, her tiny hand encircled in his bigger one. This was a far cry different than what she had expected when the child had abruptly left close to half an hour earlier.

“Mommy, look,” Molly was smiling as she showed the pin to Linda. “Willy let me borrow it.”

Linda smiled as she looked at her daughter. “Then you must make certain that you take extra special care of it, honey.”
Molly nodded. “I will. Mommy, Willy said that he still cares about me. That was why I got so scared, but he said that my being scared was okay.”

Linda looked at him and he nodded. Despite herself, she spoke, her voice etched in an affirmation. “He’s right, sweetheart, and whatever happens you know that he will always be there for both of us.”

As the little girl plopped down on the sofa between Linda and Eliza, Marjorie peered around the door and looked into the room. When her eyes met Willy’s, she started to turn away.

Catching this, the chocolatier took a deep breath and started back towards the door. “I’ll leave you alone for a time, but I will be back later to collect you for Cristy-Kai’s party.”

Molly nodded, but watched as he left the room.

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Outside in the hallway, the first thing he noticed was that Marjorie was standing near the door to Tina’s room. Her arms were casually crossed over her chest as she regarded him.

This time, Willy was determined to find out what was going on in this woman’s mind. He was not about to allow her to wreck more havoc than she had already done. With Thomas’ eventual return planned for later that day, Marjorie’s bitterness was the last thing all of them really wished to contend with.

Molly had found the courage to confront her with blunt words, and for whatever reason, the older woman had been struck by the brutal honesty of the child’s simple observations.

Eventually, he took a deep breath, as he spoke, his voice depicting the level of anxiety that this woman somehow presented. “What is it, Marjorie?” he asked. “I figured that after confronting Molly, you would have gone off with Pat.”

“No, he went exploring with that teenager,” she said as her gaze locked on his and did not falter. Eventually she looked at him, but eventually started to back away. “Please excuse me.”

Instead of allowing this, Willy took a deep breath and spoke, his voice firm. “This time, I will most assuredly not excuse you,” he paused. “There’s something that I would like to show you and as your host I will insist that you see it.”

“Why?” she asked.

“Perhaps as a way to make peace between us,” he said formally. “That child should not be exposed to anymore negativity, she’s been through enough. Of that assertion, I am certain that Tom, as well as others, can attest to. Besides that, I think I have a right in this case,” he said, and with his hand, he grasped hold of her elbow and started to steer her back down the hallway. As they came through a group of colorful corridors, Marjorie found herself being taken straight to the Chocolate Room.

As they walked along the path, she released a pent up sigh when they finally reached their destination. She watched as Willy released his hold so as to deactivate the lock and allowed the door to slowly open.

After several moments had passed, he waved his hand and invited her to enter the room. He watched and waited for Marjorie to say something about what she was seeing, or at the very least to inquire as to what would happen next.
When she did not speak, he led her over to the stairs that led down into the candy filled paradise.

“This is where Molly and I spoke just now,” he began. “She mentioned you.”

“What did she say?” Marjorie asked with a trace of curiosity.

“Not very much that I am at liberty to repeat, but I can tell you that she was very sad about the fact that you do not like her,” he said bluntly.

“I never said I didn’t like her,” Marjorie objected.

“Perhaps not verbally, but children are receptive, they pick up on things that we, as adults, often overlook or fail to see. Molly did reach her own conclusions about your behavior rather quickly and accurately. I could tell instinctively what she was feeling about your actions without so much as saying a word.”

“How could you possibly know?” she asked. “You’ve never had children. Or is this overwhelming knowledge stemming from the fact that you cater to kids. Perhaps you have professed yourself to being some sort of expert on the matter.”

Willy shook his head. “I don’t have to be a confectioner to know what is on Molly’s mind or in her heart. Much of what she has chosen to share with me relates to the idea that she trusts me with her hopes and dreams. If she trusts another, then she will be more than happy to share that part of herself with them. She demonstrated that when she spoke with Tom. Now, contrary to what you may be thinking, she did the very same with me. After we were able to get her away from her father, we ended up speaking in detail about what Owen Slugworth and his uncle had done to her.”

“I already know that Owen is not a very good man, you must not elaborate that point with me,” Marjorie said softly.

“That surprises me to hear you say that,” Willy said casually. “You seemed rather staunch about defending him, even to the point of disgracing your daughter.”

“I was never defending him,” she whispered.

“Then why did you act as though he was ‘husband of the year’?” Willy asked pointedly. “Couldn’t you see that he was mistreating your daughter as well as your granddaughter? Or did you simply opt to not caring because Linda has become free game for you throughout much of her life? That bit of information did come out only yesterday, you know.”

“That’s not it at all,” she said defensively.

“Then what is it?” Willy asked. “Why do you act as though Linda is the fool?”

“I never said that she was, and even if I did, you shouldn’t be eavesdropping on other people’s conversations,” she shot back.

“Maybe I would not consider doing so if I felt that it was safe for them to be in your company. The honest truth is, I did not feel exceedingly inclined to listen in, but I was worried about Linda,” he said. “I won’t excuse my having eavesdropped, but I do ponder why it is I felt the necessity for doing so in the first place.”

“You will not apologize to me for doing so, I take it,” she said.

“No, I won’t, it seems rather silly for me to even try, when I am not the least bit apologetic for having
taken up for her,” he said. “Sometimes people abuse others because they appear weaker. But, I can assure you, dear lady, that Linda is anything but weak. Perhaps it is her strength that keeps her wanting to protect you instead of the other way around.”

“What do you mean?” she asked.

“I mean; yesterday just before I went to see Tom in the hospital, Linda asked me if I would bring you and Patrick here to the factory. She had been worried about you, and based on the information we exchanged last night with the police, as well as with Tina Schröder, it would seem to me that Linda had viable reason for being afraid for your safety.”

“Was Linda really that worried about us?” Marjorie asked.

“Yes, I think that was why she asked me to bring you here. She figured that this was the only place where you would be safe and she knew what her ‘soon to be’ ex-husband was capable of,” Willy said as he started to descend the staircase.

Marjorie, seeing this, began to follow him, her eyes taking in the various confections that were placed around the room. Her expression was completely unreadable, and Willy could not even figure out what specifically was going through her mind.

Instead of commenting on that, he continued speaking. “I could understand you being angry, but none of us wanted to deal with the negativity that you have emanated, and I find myself feeling quite happy that my best friend is not here to witness it. He cares for your daughter as much as I do and Molly is like a ray of sunshine to all of us.”

“Why are you saying this?” she asked.

“Because as much as you would like to deny it, your daughter and granddaughter have others who love them,” he said. “It is through a loving bond that people become family, and sometimes that is of much more significance than ties of blood. That was why your words about me not being Molly’s father were true, I am not her real father, but I love her as if I were. It was people like Tom, Linda, Molly, and Eliza who taught me about what love truly is. For as long as I have been working in this industry the events centered upon it can sometimes cause a great deal of trauma to another. This has, sadly, been the case over the course of the past couple of days.

Marjorie looked at him, but instead of speaking, she waited for him to continue.

“The reason we did not wish for your presence last night was because your daughter needed to be able to talk with the police about what had happened without feeling as though she was being pegged as a perpetrator. We have been trying to make you understand that your daughter is a victim of a tragic and horrible circumstance and should not be made to feel guilty for anything that has transpired.”

In response to these words, her eyes took on an almost distanced sort of essence. “So, why did you bring me here?”

Willy took a deep breath. “I already told you, you’re here so that you and your husband can be safe.”

“No, I don’t mean bringing us to the factory. I mean to this room,” she said.

“I don’t really know,” he said honestly.

“Yet you did,” the dull sounding response emerged.
“Yes, I did,” Willy said. “I probably did so because of something that your granddaughter said earlier. It wasn’t something that she directly said, but there was something in her words that convinced me to try and bring you here so that we could talk about it.”

“Are you trying to solve my family’s problems now?” she asked.

“No, because I know that I cannot do that,” he said. “I’m a candy maker, not a psychologist.”

“Could have fooled me,” she mumbled under her breath.

“I beg your pardon?”

“Nothing,” she took a deep breath and looked around the room. “So, this room, does it have a name?”

“It’s called the Chocolate Room,” he said with a slight wave of his hand. “Everything here is edible.”

“Better make sure the ‘dietary commission’ doesn’t hear about this place,” she mused, but her eyes somehow shielded a look that clearly said that she was impressed with the vastness of his work. Taking a deep breath, she looked at him, her next words emerging somewhat formally. “William, I am overwhelmed by the extent of your creativity.”

“Coming from you, I will take that as a compliment,” he smiled. “Thank you.”

They walked several meters and she stopped in front of a tree that had various candy canes hanging from it. She extended her hand and touched one of them, her eyes taking in the vast color of it.

“You can take it,” he said. “Generally, once a confection is touched, then it belongs to the person who touched it.”

She hesitated, but turned to look at him, her brown eyes meeting his blue ones. “I don’t want to mess it up.”

“You won’t,” he said. “Don’t put so much emphasis on appearances, Marjorie. Life is to be enjoyed, embraced, not to stand and stare at it.” He reached for the candy cane and removed it from the tree before handing it to her. “Here, take it.”

Marjorie closed her eyes but accepted the offered candy. “Very few people know this, but back when I was about your age, I was an artist. I had left home when I was eighteen and went off to school. I aspired to be as great as Michael Angelo or Leonardo DaVinci.”

“Used to, as in past tense?” he asked. “What happened that made you stop?”

“I don’t really know, I just remember one day waking up and realizing that my life felt as though it had been going nowhere. It was just after the war, and I had to take a job where I could get it instead of doing what it was I really wanted. Everyone I met seemed to have that sort of internal drive, and somewhere along the line, I had lost mine.” She looked down at the candy that was now in her hand.

“When I was a child, I had this sort of fantasy, rather like Molly’s,” she whispered. “I could read a book and then draw a picture of places and things in the story. I remember how people would come up to me and say ‘Marjorie, you are one of the most creative people I know’. It made a difference to me, but soon after Linda was born, and instead of people actually seeing me, they saw Linda as the only one with that kind of potential. I suppose through that, I grew to resent all of the things that she could do, or even be, because she was young and had so much life in her.”
“You resented her, even when she was a child?” Willy asked.

“I couldn’t help it,” she said, her words defensive. “I wanted to be the center of everything, and basically what I did was push my own daughter away through that desire.”

“How did your family come in contact with the Slugworth family?” Willy asked.

“I’d rather not say,” she said, but looked away.

“You know that old saying about the truth setting you free?” he asked, and when she nodded, he continued. “Something tells me that you seem to hold several of the answers to this particular puzzle in the palm of your hand.”

Marjorie nodded. “Maybe I do, but not even Patty knows about them because some of it happened way before we got married, or Linda had met Owen.”

Willy sat down on the grass and removed his hat. “Please sit down,” he motioned towards the patch of grass next to him and watched as Marjorie lowered herself onto it.

Once she was comfortable, she looked at Willy, her eyes closing slightly. “The reason I have been playing ‘devil’s advocate’ here is because Arthur Slugworth has been oppressing me for more than three decades. That was how Owen managed to sink his hooks into my daughter in the first place.”

The chocolatier’s eyes widened. “Are you saying that Linda became a pawn for you and Owen because of his family oppressing you?”

She nodded. “Basically yes, that’s what happened. Arthur Slugworth plays the oppression card like an addicted gambler plays the tables. It was one of the things that he passed on to his dear nephew.”

“How did you find this out?” he asked.

“I was his secretary for close to fifteen years,” she said. “It was common knowledge. I heard that there were about as many stories under the table as over it. Soon after Patty and I met, he helped me to get away from the Slugworth family, but he had no idea what had happened during the time when I worked for them and I never told him. In fact, after we got married, I refused to discuss this with anyone.”

“You never even told your husband?” Willy asked.

She shook her head. “No, and I don’t know if you were aware of this, William, but just about every person who holds down a job in Buckinghamshire were either employed at Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated or Salt’s Nuts. Those were the two main industries there. The other thing you have to know about the Slugworth men is that they are skirt chasers, the whole lot of them.”

“Did any of them ever try to hurt you, Marjorie?”

She took a deep breath but after several moments, she reluctantly nodded. “Not Owen, but his uncle most certainly did. To him, women were nothing more than toys to be used, manipulated, and discarded like wasted tissues. I was thirty years old when he tried to assault me the first time, and this was just before I found out I was pregnant with Linda. That was why Patty and I got married in the first place, to conceal my pregnancy from his family. Before you even ask, Patty is Linda’s father, but in those days, an unwed and pregnant woman was in line for all sorts of trouble, ranging from prostitution to a sinner against God.”

As she spoke, Willy watched her and could see that a stray tear had slipped from beneath her eye and
was making a steady trek down over her aged cheek. Ignoring it, she continued speaking. “Soon after all of that happened; I submitted my resignation and prepared myself to go and file criminal charges against him. Yet, somehow, before I could follow through with that, he managed to get me right where he wanted me.”

“How do you mean?” he asked.

“As I told you, I was his secretary, and there were tons of letters and things that passed over my hand in a day’s time. Somewhere amidst all the trouble and anxiety, I had found an envelope with bribe money from ‘Fickelgruber’s Candy Company’. I didn’t really think much of it, but since I was responsible for opening the mail, I opened the letter and found close to a thousand pounds cash inside. I figured that since he had assaulted me, that a fifty pound note would suffice for my not going and filing charges, so I tried to pocket it. Arthur caught me in the act and just about beat me black and blue. He went on to say that whatever I did in the future would be cause for my answering back to him or else I would go to jail for theft. I insisted that it was only a small amount and that I had only done it as an act of desperation in a moment of weakness. That did not matter to him in the slightest.”

“Your mistake aside, you could probably have gone to the police about this anyway. Oppression, no matter how great or small is still a crime,” he remarked.

“I was afraid to,” she said. “Arthur Slugworth had put the fear of God into me and I knew that there was nothing that I could do about it. Anyway, two days later, several of his henchmen grabbed me from off the street, and took me to this place that I will dub simply as their ‘secret lab’. In that horrible place, they did this to me.” As she spoke, she removed her jacket and gripped the sleeve of her blouse and pulled it up to reveal a scar that resembled a strangely shaped ‘s’ that was indented into her skin.

Willy swallowed the moment he saw it. “That was what they tried to do to Molly,” he whispered.

Marjorie nodded. “It doesn’t surprise me, because to Arthur Slugworth, this is like a symbol of ownership; a sign that the person in question is nothing more than a slave to that family. They are like a mafia, William, a scary bunch of criminals who are above the law and can do whatever they want. When Linda met Owen, it was because Arthur was insistent about continuing the Slugworth line and he thought I had the ‘right look for it’ except I was too old. Several years after I quit working for him, he found out that I had a daughter and that clinched it as far as he was concerned.”

“You practically sold your daughter to those vultures,” Willy shouted.

“Perhaps I did, and I’m not proud of what I did, but Owen was the only boy that could continue that family name, so it was important to marry him to the right person for that reason. They wanted to have their cake and eat it too. After Owen got his hooks into Linda, he forced her to cut off contact with us and made sure that our family did not catch wind of what their family was doing. Whatever the case, soon after that, Molly was born and when it came out that she was a girl, the Slugworths were absolutely mortified. It was like the story of ‘Henry the VIII’ in a modern equation.”

“Why didn’t you mention any of this when you came here?” Willy asked as she rolled her sleeve back down and put her jacket back on.

“I didn’t know if I could trust you,” she admitted. “I’m not happy with the way things are, and I’m also not pleased with how I handled them, but I’m only human. How could I tell anyone in my family about the things I have done? It’s simply not something I am comfortable talking about.”

“Yet, you told me,” he said.
“I didn’t want you to think anymore ill of me than you already do. Patty was right about one thing, you have offered us your home. I haven’t been a very gracious guest about it, but I do appreciate the fact that you are trying to protect my family. Of course, anymore I don’t think anyone can, the Slugworths are just too powerful.”

“Marjorie, I appreciate your honesty, but you know that you haven’t protected your family with these actions, you have forced them into the middle of a huge mess. You practically sold your daughter into a life of servitude that she didn’t deserve, and you blamed her for the mistakes of your past. I don’t know what it is I’m supposed to think of you at this point, but I do know that objectively, that this is something that you’re going to have to contend with on your own. I can’t really help you anymore than what I have already done.”

“But you helped everyone else,” she objected before she could stop herself.

“I did only what my conscience instructed me to do,” he said firmly. “How can I extend my hand to another person when that other person has refused to accept my offer? You have not been cordial towards your daughter. You blamed her, and in turn blamed your granddaughter. I have tried to be as objective and fair as I could, but after talking with both Molly and Linda, I have reached the conclusion that you have only pushed them away. They deserve better than what you have given them. If you want to make everything up to them, then perhaps you could start by hugging your granddaughter.”

He got to his feet, but not before reaching for his hat. “It truly surprises me that someone who has never exchanged a kind word to with that child would be so concerned by what I think of them,” he took a deep breath and started to walk away.

As he was making his way down the path, the door to the Chocolate Room abruptly opened and Omaya-Kal rushed inside, the Oompa Loompa out of breath.

“William,” he spoke, all the while ignoring the skeptical look that Marjorie was giving him. In fact, his eyes were filled with about as much fear as it did when the Wangdoodle was chasing him that first day of their meeting.

Willy stooped down so as to be eye-level with the shorter man. “What is it, my friend?”

“You must come immediately, something dreadful has happened,” the Oompa Loompa leader spoke, his words completely shutting out the fact that Marjorie was standing and staring at him. “Thomas has returned, but you must hurry, I sense that something dreadful is about to transpire along the perimeters of the factory. Your presence will be required.”

Willy turned and looked at Marjorie but, instead of speaking further with the woman, he nodded as he took off his hat and started towards the door. Reaching it, he pulled it open. “Is he in the courtyard?” he asked.

“Yes, and Juni-Julo said that he is not alone, there is a woman with him, but that is not the problem,” he said as he raced up the stairs and over to where Willy was now standing.

“What is the problem?” Willy asked.

“There are two young people outside the back gate, and our weapon detection sensors indicate that they are not alone. I fear that something is about to happen. You must do what you can to stop it.”

Willy nodded, all the while knowing that Omaya-Kal would not simply show up without adequate reason. Instead of responding, he raced down the hallway until he reached the door that would lead
out into the courtyard. As he emerged from the quiet confines of the building, a shot rang out in the distance.

Before he could so much as head back in the direction of where the sound had originated, he watched as the black colored Mercedes drove through the area and into a nearby parking garage.

Thomas was back, but the question loomed as to what specifically was about to happen. Would his best friend’s return somehow mark even more bloodshed than that which had already transpired?

With Marjorie’s words still echoing in the recesses of his mind, Willy started to walk with weighted steps in the direction of the garage.
Chapter 71

Chapter 71: London Bridges

By the time Thomas had reached the outer perimeters of Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory, the sunshine had given way to an overcast sky. From where he was seated, he turned for a brief moment and looked over at the woman who was driving before shifting his gaze back to the massive structure.

“Do you really think that the kids will be here?” she asked.

“I don’t know where else they would go,” he said honestly as he took a deep inhalation of breath. It was clear that he was relieved that the two of them had gotten back to London without any mishaps. At the same instant, his concern was heightened based on what the nurse at the hospital had said as well as the information Karen had related.

“So where am I supposed to park this chariot anyway?” she asked, her words breaking into his contemplations. He turned and immediately noticed a good-humored smile on her face.

“Drive straight ahead, and when the street runs out turn right,” he said. Once she had followed these instructions, he continued. “Alright, you can stop right here. I need to activate the door that will lead inside.”

She nodded as her eyes began to shine. “Do you mean to tell me that I’m actually going to drive onto Willy Wonka’s property?”

“Only if you want to,” Thomas said with a fleeting smile on his face. “If you would prefer, then you can get out here. I won’t stop you and I can probably drive the rest of the way without hurting someone. My headache seems to be a bit better now and perhaps it is because I’m used to this wonderful polluted London air.”

Karen looked at him. “Are you kidding? I wouldn’t miss this for anything in the world. I would even trade a front row ticket to a Beatles show for this opportunity.” With an impish smile, she continued speaking. “So where’s the gate?”

“You’re looking at it,” Thomas said as he leaned over and pressed the button on the radio that activated the electronic door. “This is, by the way, why I locked the car yesterday when I got out to help the kids. I didn’t want them to inadvertently gain access to the factory.”

“I see, well, regardless of the toys on this gizmo, it was a very smart move,” she said as she drove through the gate and onto the grounds. Once they had cleared the large metal gate, Thomas leaned over and pressed the button a second time and the doors once again slid closed behind them. Moments later, they reached the garage and she parked the car before cutting the motor and getting out.

“This is totally amazing,” she said, her voice laced in awe.

“I don’t know, it’s the same as any other garage if you ask me,” Thomas said smiling impishly. He went around to the back and retrieved his belongings and joined her on the other side of the car. “Come on, I’ll take you inside and there you can be amazed.”

“Perhaps that will be an understatement. For now I think I should probably go and see if I can find
Matthew and Stacey since London is such a huge place. Something tells me that it might be a tad bit difficult for me to actually find them. Just reassure me again that you are absolutely certain that the kids came here.”

“Well, from what I was able to gather last night when I spoke with Matthew, this would probably be the very first place they would have come,” he said. “Perhaps we ought to tell Will about what is going on and he can help us in the search. After all, three sets of eyes are better than two. Maybe his ingenuity might enable us to figure out what move the kids will make next.”

“That’s probably not a bad idea,” she said as she took a deep breath.

Before he could say anything further, a loud popping sound suddenly filled the air. He turned his head in the direction where the noise had originated, but shook it despite the sinking feeling that suddenly encompassed him. “Please don’t tell me that that was what I think it was,” he muttered under his breath.

“Well, it could be one of two things,” Karen said logically. “A car with a very bad muffler issue, or there is someone in the vicinity with a gun.” She grew silent for several moments before raising her head and looking at him. “This isn’t usually a high crime infested area, is it?”

“Not usually, it’s worse near the main train station actually,” he said honestly. “Perhaps we should go and check and see of someone’s having car troubles along the perimeters of the property.” As if on cue, the same sound suddenly shattered the stillness for a second time. Before she could say a word, he looked at her, his eyes wide. “That was no car.”

“You’re right, it wasn’t. Something is going down and I’m going to find out exactly what,” she said as she started to dig around in her purse and soon extracted a pistol. With the weapon in her right hand she looked at him and literally started to bark out orders. “I want you to go inside and call Scotland Yard.” It was clear that she had shifted from off duty policewoman to an active crime-fighter in the blink of an eye.

“Wait a minute,” Thomas objected. “If there is something, as you said, ‘going down’, I’m not going to make you face it alone. Besides, I know my way around here better than you and I happen to have key to the outside gate.”

Karen looked at him. “You do realize that this could be dangerous, Tom. I’m trained to deal with these kinds of situations.”

“Perhaps you are, but I still know my way around the factory grounds rather well, and I know how to reach the back gate without being seen. I’ve had years of practice with that sort of thing,” he argued as another round of shots was fired. “Besides that, we don’t really have time to argue these points.”

“Agreed,” she relented, “but I think we should hurry.”

Nodding the two of them started to run towards the door that would lead out of the garage and into the open courtyard.

As they emerged from the safety of the building, Karen’s eyes were wide as she spotted several darkly dressed men standing along the back side of the gate. From where they were, Thomas could tell that they were armed to the teeth.

Karen motioned with her hand for him to hide amidst the shadows so that his body would be completely concealed from view. Her expression grew serious when she realized that the men
seemed not to notice that they were being watched.

Thomas figured that they would be able to play this for all it was worth since he could instinctively tell that Karen was better equipped at protecting herself than he was. He remained where he was as the sound of several voices filled the area.

“We got her Owen. She won’t cause you anymore trouble.” The man closest to the gate was saying, a smoking revolver still in his hand. As if on cue the other men began to slap his shoulder as though they had made a goal on a football pitch and not shot someone in cold blood.

One of the shadowy figures lowered his head and shook it, distaste shadowed across his face. “That’s not Linda, you morons. Does that look like a broad in her mid-thirties?” a shorter man snarled.

“We couldn’t tell, Mr. Slugworth. It’s dark back here and every broad looks the same,” he said.

“Stake out the area, I want her dead,” Owen said. “I know that she’s inside being protected by Wonka, but maybe we can lure them out.” He looked down at the ground where a woman lay bleeding, but instead of reacting as though one had made a mistake, he simply stepped over her body and started to make his way down a back alley and following several of his henchmen.

Thomas stood watching, but also staring at their retreating backs. “Oh my God, Linda,” he whispered as he started to run mindlessly towards the back gate.

“Stop where you are,” Karen snapped, her voice causing him to freeze dead in his tracks. “If you haven’t noticed yet, we’re overtly outnumbered here and if they so much as see you lurking about, they’ll shoot first and ask questions later. If that happens, you could end up putting Willy Wonka’s life in jeopardy.” She took a deep breath as her words continued the sounds a dull hiss. “Look, I know that this is scary, but if they suspect that witnesses are nearby, they will not take it as a sign of being in the wrong place at the wrong time.”

“But Karen, that’s Owen Slugworth, he’s the mastermind behind all of this. My guess is he is taking orders from his uncle,” Thomas whispered.

“No he can’t be,” she said, her voice low and she shook her head. “Look, there’s no conceivable way that that could be the case.” As she spoke, she continued to stare in the direction of the back gate.

“How could you be so certain?” he asked.

“I follow the information from the police radio and I know what happens sometimes before the public does. I’m sure that Mr. Wonka probably knows as well, but I am not sure if he told you.”

“I haven’t spoken to him since before he left for your precinct house last night,” Thomas said.

“Well, several hours after he showed up there, I went off duty, but not before finding out that Arthur Slugworth was arrested in Germany on various counts of kidnapping, arson, and God knows what else. This is a dangerous family we’re dealing with, Tom. This isn’t a game, and neither you nor Willy Wonka is going to stand a chance of winning if you act in haste. Now, I happen to know that Owen Slugworth is far more dangerous than even his uncle.”

“What can we do?” Thomas asked.

“We have to wait it out,” she said logically.
“But if someone was shot, then they could die right here on the spot and we would be responsible for their death,” he argued. “Sometimes human life is more important than ‘waiting it out’.”

“I know,” Karen said as she reached over and rested her hand on his arm. When he turned and looked at her, she continued. “You know this is not easy for me either, but we have to wait for them to leave before we go over there.”

“You don’t understand my brother is dead because no one bothered to call an ambulance after he was hit. If a woman dies behind the factory because we didn’t do anything or react quickly enough, then that would be just as bad as Simeon’s death.”

“Don’t you think I know that?” she asked, her voice snappish. “I know about how people waited and I even though I hate to see this sort of thing happen, we cannot put our own lives in jeopardy to prove a point. If it were up to me, I’d round up every last one of those hooligans and string them up by their toes.”

“How can we round up those men, we’re only two people?” he said.

“You don’t understand anything about this, but at least I do. This is part of my job,” she said angrily as three shots rung out.

Thomas pulled her into the shadows and looked at her, this time his expression lined in hostility. “If you do that one more time, you may find yourself a dead hero instead of a living woman.”

Karen closed her eyes as the sounds of something falling over could be heard. “Did they get in?” she eventually asked.

Before Thomas could offer even an answer, Willy raced over to where they were now hiding. “Don’t worry it’s only me,” he addressed the woman as he looked at Thomas. “Tom, what in God’s name is going on?”

“We don’t really know. We haven’t been able to get close enough to find out. All we can tell you is after we got here; we heard several shots being fired. Apparently they managed to shoot someone, because we heard one of the men saying something to that effect,” Thomas said. “Will, where’s Linda?”

“She’s safely inside,” Willy said. “I was talking to her mother when Omaya-Kal had come into the Chocolate Room and said that something had happened out here.”

“Then I’m guessing that they got someone who looks remotely like this Linda,” Karen mused, thus breaking her silence. “Mr. Wonka, someone needs to call the police.”

“My workers have already taken care of that,” he said. “Scotland Yard should be on their way here to round up those hooligans,” he said. In the back of his mind, he could not help but ponder what Karen had just said. Owen Slugworth’s men had shot someone who ‘looked like Linda’.

At that moment, the Chocolatier’s face went completely white. “Tom, where is Stacey Madison?”

“Stacey?” Thomas asked.

“Yes, the very first thing I thought when I came into the interrogation room back at the police station in Buckinghamshire was how much she resembled Linda. It was uncanny and it looked as though the two of them could have passed for sisters. Stacey has the same dark hair and eyes as Linda.”

Thomas looked at Karen, who took up the story. “Stacey was released from custody early this
morning after three men were taken into custody in Buckinghamshire late last night. She was supposed to go to a halfway house to get help, but she didn’t. The nurse at the hospital told Tom that she and her brother were on their way here. When he showed up at the station house and told me this, I decided to come here with him.”

Willy nodded as his fists unconsciously balled up in absolute anger. “If they shot that poor little girl, then God help them, I will bury them myself.”

As Willy was speaking, Thomas peered casually around the corner, only to notice that the area surrounding the back gate was now empty. “It looks like the coast is clear, maybe we should go over there and see what happened now.”

Karen surveyed the scene for several moments and nodded. The men were now gone.

As they came closer to the back gate, an ear-splitting cry suddenly emerged and filled all three of their ears. Exchanging concerned glances, Willy, Thomas and Karen knew that the situation was far from over.

Instead of seeing his nemesis at the gate, Owen was no longer present. Instead they approached to see the body of a young girl was on the ground and a little boy was hunched over it and crying. They all stopped dead in their tracks, none of them daring to do anything except to stare down at the weeping child.

Karen eventually turned and looked at Tom, the shock still lining her face. “Open the gate,” she commanded her voice shrill and filled with anger. When Thomas did not immediately move, she spoke again, hoping that her next words would jolt him back to the present moment.

“Open the God damned gate, now!” she cried as the little boy raised his head and regarded the three people through tear-filled eyes and quivering lips. Thomas obliged as Karen looked at the two men. “You both stay here and wait for help, I’m going to catch those bastards myself,” she muttered.

Thomas numbly nodded as he pulled the keys from his pocket and numbly unlocked the gate. Once he had managed, he and Willy watched as Karen shot through the gate and down the street like a jackrabbit in the middle of a race.

With the two of them left behind, Willy and Thomas walked over to where Matthew was sitting, his head now resting on Stacey’s chest, the blood from her wound seeping against the child’s deformed face and smearing its way along his cheek.

Willy swallowed the lump in his throat as he stared at the dark headed girl lying in a pool of blood on the ground. “Stacey, wake up!” the boy was pleading.

Not knowing what else to do, the chocolatier got down next to where Matthew was seated. Thomas seated himself on the other side of the girl’s prone body, but reached over and touched the boy’s shoulder. “Matthew?” he whispered the child’s name and watched as he slowly raised his head. “What on earth are you doing here?”

“S-Stacey,” he whimpered, “is she going to be alright?”

“We don’t know, but we have notified the police and they will make sure that someone comes to help her,” Willy said trying all the while to sound braver than he felt. He leaned over so that his cheek would be against Stacey’s half opened mouth. When he felt her faint breath against his face, he spoke, his voice a soft whisper. “Stacey, can you hear me, sweetheart?”

She moaned, a soft gurgle emerging from between her lips. “Help me…” she mumbled, her words
practically inaudible. “…It hurts…”

“I know, sweetheart, I know,” Willy whispered as he ran his hand gently along her hair. “Just try and stay awake.”

Stacey licked her lips as she clamped her eyes shut, the pain overwhelming. “Matty?”

“I’m here,” the boy whispered. “Stacey, please don’t die.”

“It’s…not your fault…Matty,” Stacey whispered. “Mum and Dad…it’s not your fault.”

“Stacey…” Matthew whimpered as he looked helplessly at Thomas and Willy. Eventually, his gaze returned to that of his older sister. “I don’t care about that, you can’t die, Stacey. If you die then I won’t have anyone left. Mum and Dad are gone, and…” His voice broke off as he tried without any success at getting his emotions in check. “…You just have to be alright.”

“M-Mister Wonka?” Stacey spoke, the two words slurred together as she felt the chocolatier taking her hand.

“I’m here,” he whispered.

“…Please, don’t be angry with me,” she pleaded weakly.

“Why would I be angry?” he asked.

“I failed,” she whispered.

“No, you didn’t fail, don’t ever believe that, Stacey,” he said, his voice cracking with emotion. “I know that you and Matthew came here because you thought that it would be safe, didn’t you?”

She nodded slowly. “I tried to do what was right…but now I’m so tired…”

“No, don’t fall asleep, sweetheart,” the chocolatier pleaded softly. “Try and stay awake. Look at me, I’m here and we will get you through this.”

“I did everything wrong,” she whispered.

“No one blames you, Stacey,” Willy whispered.

“Promise me…” her voice broke.

“…Anything,” Willy said softly.

“Take care of Matty,” she pleaded.

“No, Stacey, you can’t die,” the boy pleaded.

As these words filled the hollowness of Willy’s world, the chocolatier watched as Matthew raised his head seconds later and looked at Thomas. His eyes carried a somber dullness that Thomas Wilkenson would never forget as long as he lived.

Seconds later, Matthew Madison began to cry, his sobs breaking through as the words filled their ears. “Mr. Wilkenson, please you gotta do something.”

“I can’t,” Thomas whispered as plodding footsteps could suddenly be heard from several meters away. As their resonances became louder, almost deafening, Willy raised his head as a sadistic
sounding voice emerged.

“Well, isn’t that sweet?”
Chapter 72: A Shattered World

As the resonance of these words filled the area, both Thomas and Willy turned around. The shadow of Owen Slugworth was literally oozing its way closer and leaving tension in its wake. This would soon be compounded when the shorter man spoke.

“You know, all this time I thought you were a recluse, Wonka.” Owen broke into a cockeyed smile, which caused his eyes to narrow into catlike slits. These words made Willy want to lash out and smack that ever loving grin off his nemesis’ face.

Instead of responding to these words, however, he remained stationary, his hand still grasping Stacey’s. He cast a wary glance over towards Matthew, who was still on the ground, and seemed oblivious to everything that was happening around them. The boy’s head was still resting against his sister’s chest.

Willy was brought back to this tense reality when Owen’s next question emerged. “What on earth happened here?”

As the sardonic undertones washed over him, Willy took a deep breath as he raised his head and regarded the younger of the Slugworths through livid blue eyes. “You know perfectly well what happened. You already know the answer to that question,” he asked his words soft, but completely even.

“You already know the answer to that question,” Owen snapped.

“So you really believed that Linda would actually have come out here?” he asked shaking his head. “She wouldn’t, she was too afraid. Seeing what you are capable of doing, perhaps she had very good reason.”

“She should have stayed out of it,” Owen said.

“Why?” Willy asked. “She knew everything that you were doing, but you bullied her, broke her wrist and God only knows what else. You had her right where you wanted, running scared and catering to your every need because your uncle blackmailed her mother.” He stared blankly into the eyes of the other man. “How could you even call yourself a real man when you beat up women and shoot innocent young girls? Do you honestly think this sort of mafia-like tactic is going to help your credibility? Is that it?”

“I don’t have to answer to you,” Owen sneered.

“Well, you’ll have to answer to someone, and by God I’ll make certain of that.” Willy released Stacey’s hand as Thomas inched closer, and seated himself next to the dying girl. It was clear that he was checking for a pulse, and Willy wondered how much longer she would hold out before help would arrive.

He turned back around and looked at Owen, his expression laced in malevolence. “Arthur Slugworth is now in prison, and all of his deeds and actions are like a noose that is tightening its way around your scrawny little neck. If I have any power whatsoever, then I will see to it that you will never make another candy bar as long as you live. Instead, you’ll be pounding iron with a hammer in a cell block. Perhaps you could even arrange to be cellmates with your dear uncle.”

“You’ve done it again, Wonka,” Owen shot back. “You’ve gone and underestimated me.” He
paused before his next words emerged, their coldness filling the area. “Do you honestly think for even a moment that I really give a shit about that old coot? He’s never given me the time of day except to make me do his bidding or treat me like slime. ‘Owen, do this’, ‘Owen, do that’…” The shorter man shook his head mockingly. “…Well, not anymore. Now, that I have him out of the way, the company legally reverts over to me. I am the new CEO of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated and now that it’s mine, I’m going to do something that my poor decrepit uncle never had the balls to do – destroy Wonka Industries once and for all.”

As he spoke, he pulled a gun from the pocket of his trench coat. As Owen regarded Willy through sadistic black eyes, he smirked when he noticed how his competitor’s eyes had widened slightly. It was then when he continued speaking. “Did you honestly think that I would show up here unarmed? I made that crucial mistake when you got your hands on my kid. This time you don’t stand a chance at stopping me from mopping the street with you.”

Before Willy could so much as respond, he cocked the hammer of the gun and stared at the chocolatier, his eyes squinting up as though he was about to fire the weapon. Seconds seemed to pass in slow motion as his finger inched its way closer to the trigger.

Before anything else could happen, Willy took a deep breath. He had nothing to lose at this point. If Owen was stupid enough to kill him in broad daylight, then he was, at least, going to get his last word in.

He cast an anxious glance over towards Thomas. This look clearly said that he should do whatever he could to get Matthew out of the area. Of course, with Stacey injured and lying on the ground, there was no way that this was ever going to happen. Matthew was not going to leave his sister anymore than Thomas was going to leave Willy to face the danger alone. Instead of speaking, Thomas moved his hand from Stacey’s wrist and inched his way so that his body would act as a shield between Matthew and the gun.

Willy slowly inhaled as he regarded his enemy, his expression and eyes unreadable. This, if anything, made it clear that none of them, not even Owen Slugworth, knew what was going to happen next.

Playing off on this uncertainty, Willy spoke. “You’re going to have to do a lot more than wave a gun in my face to get me to concede to you, Slugworth.” He knew that although he was frightened, he would not give in to a bully. Of course, a quick glance confirmed that he was playing Russian Roulette with not only his own life, but also that of his friends.

With all of these feelings and emotions still cursing through his mind, Willy Wonka knew that he would have to resort to a bluff that might perhaps buy him some time.

“You also know that if something tragic were to happen to me, your name would most assuredly be raked through the muck to such a degree that you’d suffocate. You realize that you would be the prime suspect to it all, Owen.”

Thomas took a deep breath. What is he doing? He asked himself. He continued to watch as the two confectioners tried to stare each other down, their gazes only shifting momentarily to regard the gun that was still in Owen’s right hand.

Regardless of the concerns Willy had for all of their well-being, he continued to speak, his voice laced in indignation. “If you kill anyone here, then you will no doubt become a fugitive for the rest of your natural life. There is something to be said for the fame that I have attained. With three Golden Tickets still looming on the horizon, I’m pretty much the center of everyone’s attention right now. If you kill me, then you will no doubt be subjected to very the same scrutiny I have lived with since I
started in this business. It could very well destroy your company, as I am certain that people would boycott anything you make if they heard what you had done.”

“This is just another bluff,” Owen said scornfully.

“Perhaps it is, but are you willing to risk it?” Willy asked. “After all, I have already turned over the letters sent to me by your uncle and endorsed with your initials at the bottom of every page. It would no doubt be adequate evidence against you, even if it is only circumstantial. The overt threat to commit murder is punishable by jail time in most westernized countries.”

Before Owen could respond, Willy continued. “I clearly have nothing to lose, whereas you, on the other hand, could stand to lose everything: your freedom, your company, and your credibility in this business.”

Owen took a step towards Willy. “You think you’re so bold, Wonka. You think that because of those Golden Tickets that you can do anything you want, but this time you can’t. You lose because I’m the one holding the gun.”

“Perhaps what you say is true,” Willy conceded with a casual shrug of his shoulders. “But you forget that regardless of what happens to me, there is still a woman and a little girl inside my factory who would be willing to testify against you in a court of law. They know what you have done, and now that they are safe, they can speak openly about it. I can well imagine that through their testimony, and through that of her parents, we can find out specifically the number of dirty deals that you and your precious company have been involved with during the past few years. Why just today, I heard that you and your dear uncle were, among other things, resorting to oppression. I figure with that alone, we could move in on to your chemical conspiracy plot against Hudson Chocolates and work our way onwards. I am also certain that a young American chemist would be willing to help put you away based on his interactions with your people and all of this would be based on what his best friend, Maximilian Schröder, wrote in a letter addressed to his sister just before his tragic death. Along with the events in Berlin just last night, the rap sheet against you is growing by leaps and bounds.”

“You can’t prove a damn thing,” Owen snapped as he looked at Willy through hate-filled eyes. “The kidnapping of the German couple was my uncle’s idea.”

“Yet you knew about it,” Willy said calmly.

“So what if I did?” Owen asked. “That doesn’t prove a thing.”

“I think it does,” Willy said. “Along with the Schröder couple being kidnapped, you also gave the orders to burn down their hotel in Duselheim.”

“So what if I did?”

“Well, their daughter is safely away from there, and she has conveniently brought the proof that we need to put you away.” He paused, his voice rising in anger. “You abused your ex-wife, tried to abuse your daughter, and thusly demonstrated that you have, in fact, very little regard for human life. Now you have clearly resorted to attempted murder…”

Thomas raised his head at that moment. He had been trying everything he could to keep Stacey awake, but it was clear that he had failed. The girl lay unmoving on the ground. Matthew’s eyes were now staring dully down at his sister’s form as Thomas tried to initiate contact with him.

“It’s not attempted murder anymore,” Thomas whispered brokenly, his soft words filling Willy’s
healthy ear. “It’s murder…”

Willy momentarily turned away from Owen see that Thomas was still seated on the ground, his hand holding Stacey’s wrist as he was trying to feel for a pulse. It had gone from weak to nothing in the matter of moments. He inhaled slowly as his breath constricted in his throat. “…Will, she’s gone.”

Despite not wanting this, Willy could feel the tears catching in his eyes as he turned back to see that Owen was still standing there. Instead of speaking, the man’s eyes conveyed coldness as he squeezed the trigger and the gun went off.

As the sounds of the shot filtered throughout the area, Willy forcefully rushed towards Owen and, with all his might, he pushed his competitor to the ground. Watching the smaller man hitting the ground like a freshly felled tree, Willy’s mouth curved up ever so slightly. That soon vanished as the adrenaline rush wore off and he felt a searing pain shooting through his body. This revealed the harsh reality that the top of his shoulder had been scathed by the bullet.

With his free hand, he applied direct pressure against his shoulder and winced as he felt the stickiness of blood smearing between his fingers. Tightening his hold on his injury, Willy shook his head adamantly. “Enough people have died because of you,” he spoke, his voice emerging between a pain filled gasp and uncanny matter-of-factness that was strange and unfamiliar even to him. “I’m going to see to it that you never see the light of day again. The paperwork that your uncle tried to obtain while in Germany has already been turned over to the Berlin Police. The letter that young Mr. Schröder wrote to his sister has been translated and will be used as evidence against you.”

“You’re bluffing.” Owen seethed as he tried to scramble after the gun. As he reached out for it, he abruptly felt the pressure of something bearing down on his wrist. Raising his head, Owen noticed that he was now trapped on the ground. His hand was held captive by Thomas’ sized ten dress shoe. The other man had left Stacey’s side in order to come to the aid of his best friend. Now, the man with spectacles and thinning black hair was standing over him, an unreadable look on his face. Behind the eyewear, Thomas regarded Owen as though he was a disobedient dog.

“I don’t think so,” Thomas abruptly said as he exerted even more of his weight against the fallen man’s wrist. This caused Owen to groan as though in pain, but it also added to his determination to free himself from such an embarrassing stance.

“Where is that little tramp?” he eventually demanded.

“I don’t think you’re in any position to make such demands or call other people names,” Willy said ironically as Thomas exerted yet again force on his hold of Owen’s wrist.

“She’s still my wife and belongs to me,” Owen snapped.

“Linda is not your property,” Willy shot back. “And she is getting a divorce.”

Angrily, Owen turned away from Willy, all the while trying to move his wrist out from beneath Thomas’ stronghold. After several moments of struggling, he managed and Thomas was thrown backwards as Owen scrambled after the gun.

As if by sheer will alone, he managed this and turned around with the weapon once more in his hand. His expression seemed reminiscent of one who knew when they had obtained the upper hand. “I will give you an option, Wonka. Either you give me Linda, or I’ll pump that brat’s body so full of
lead that you’ll be cleaning his guts up off the street.”

By this time, Thomas had managed to move over to where Matthew was seated next to his sister. With his body once more shielding the child, he regarded at Owen, who was now towered over him as well. “If you want to shoot anyone else, then you’ll have to shoot through me first,” he said evenly. “I’m not going to give in to the threats of tyrants or murderers.”

“Oh really,” Owen snickered as he approached where they were standing. He raised the weapon yet again and aimed it at Thomas’ chest.

Just as he was about to discharge the weapon a second time, another shot rang out.

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Several seconds later, Thomas slowly opened his eyes; his breathing now caught in his throat as silence descended on the entire area. Rubbing his eyes he could not help but notice a shadow in the distance. He turned his head to see that Willy was still standing, the chocolatier holding his injured shoulder, but staring transfixed at where Owen had been.

Just as Owen was about to fire the gun, a bullet entered his body from behind. The gun he held abruptly slid out of his grasp and hit the ground with a loud clatter. As this happened, the younger Slugworth crumpled to the ground.

Willy inhaled slowly as he tried to figure out what had just happened.

“Oh my God,” Thomas whispered under his breath as he raised his head to see that Karen Davis was standing some twenty meters away with a weapon in her hand and her arm extended. For a split second the weapon was still pointed but soon lowered.

Behind her, several of her colleagues from Scotland Yard had arrived on the scene and were in the process of rounding up the remainder of the Slugworths’ henchmen. Other uniformed men and women were standing around as well as marking off the crime scene.

Karen stood for several moments, her eyes scanning the area as she stared down at the gun that was still in her hand. Owen was dead, of that she was almost certain. Her days at the firing range had assured her of that beyond any doubt.

Briefly, she turned away to see that her colleagues were practically carrying the remaining henchmen towards the police cruisers that were now parked at the other end of the esplanade. With relief etched on her face, she put the safety on before returning the gun to her purse. She started to make her way towards where Thomas and Willy were standing her expression laced in a mixture of sadness and shock.

It was clear that both men looked as though they were about to pass out. Willy was still holding his shoulder, the blood seeping through his white shirt in a dramatic red. Neither of them could so much as utter a sound. The words that they wanted to speak seemed to be completely stuck in their throats.

“A-are you guys alright?” Karen eventually asked once she had reached them. She stepped over Owen’s body as though dodging an obtrusive object.

Willy nodded as he rubbed his hands against his face. “I-I think so. But, I may need a doctor or a Wonkavite.”

“A what?” Karen asked, her expression briefly shadowing confusion.
“Never mind that. Perhaps when all this is over I’ll explain,” he said sadly as he looked at Thomas. “How’s Matthew?”

“Still in shock, I’m afraid,” Thomas said as he looked at Karen. “What about you?”

“I’m fine, just another day of work,” she smiled weakly as she looked down at Matthew. The child was still hovering over Stacey’s body, the shock emerging in his pleas as he tried to get his sister to wake up.

Karen exchanged unhappy glances with Willy and Thomas as she sat down on the ground beside Stacey’s body. She closed her eyes as the tears welled from beneath them. “I wanted to help you, you foolish girl. Why did you go and run away like this?” She reached over and closed the girl’s eyes with the palm of her hand as she shook her head and clasped the piece of jewelry that was dangling from around her neck.

“She didn’t deserve this,” she whispered. “She’s just a child.”

“We know,” Thomas said as he wrapped his arms around her and pulled her into his embrace.

Without warning, the tough policewoman turned and buried her face against his shoulder and began to weep helplessly in his arms. “I tried to help her, Tom, I really did.”

“We all know that, Karen,” Thomas said as he practically rocked her in his arms.

“A lot of good that did,” she whispered as she regarded the frightened little boy who had witnessed everything that was happening. After several seconds had passed, she raised her head and regarded the child. “I’m so sorry Matthew. I really am.”

Instead of responding to her words, Matthew laid his head against Stacey’s chest and began to whisper softly. “Stacey, please wake up.”

As these words emerged, the paramedics finally arrived on the scene and came rushing over to where Stacey’s body lay on the ground. As they expertly began to move her onto a stretcher, Matthew tightened his hold on her.

“No, I don’t want you take her away from me,” he began to cry in earnest, his heartbroken words tugging at Willy, Thomas, and Karen’s heartstrings. As the loud cries of the child filled the air, several other men had loaded Owen Slugworth onto a stretcher as well.

As they covered his body with a white colored sheet, Willy looked at one of the men. “I need to go with you,” he said as he watched the man extract the little boy from his sister’s body.

At that moment, Matthew looked up at Willy. “She saved me from those men. They were going to kill me, but she got in the way just before the gun went off. He kept saying that she was a tramp and stuff, but she wasn’t. She was my sister.” The child’s words emerged as he felt himself being held in the chocolatier’s healthy arm. “She really did love me.”

“Oh yes, she did,” Willy whispered, “she loved you so very much, Matthew. Everything she did was out of love for you.”

“W-what’s going to happen to me now, Mr. Wonka?” the child asked softly.

“Thomas and I are going to take care of you just as I promised Stacey we would,” he said gently. He motioned towards the waiting ambulance. “You want to come with me to the hospital?”
The little boy nodded as Willy took his hand and led him over to the waiting vehicle. Once the paramedics climbed in, the door was closed behind them.
Chapter 73: Relaying Events

As soon as Willy and Matthew were gone, Thomas watched as the police came over and began to section off the area. Talking to them and giving statements would be a long and painful process he feared, but it was something that would eventually have to be done. There was no question in his mind about that.

As he had watched everything that had happened that day, Thomas realized to what extent Owen Slugworth’s toxicity had encompassed so many people. That became even more evident as he watched the manner in which the paramedics had carted the younger Slugworth’s body away. Ever since the events had ended, Thomas could not help but ask if Willy Wonka’s nemesis was really dead.

Was this nightmare finally behind them? He asked himself. What would become of the Golden Ticket contest? Will I still have to go to America and put a flea in the ear of the third and fourth finders? What was to become of Willy’s mega-huge empire after all of that?

His rampant questions seemed abruptly tossed away as the policemen who had appeared on the scene approached him and he was tossed back into the harsh reality of the situation. It was now time to relate what had happened.

In the back of his mind, Thomas wanted nothing more than to retreat to his room, and go into seclusion. There was a great deal for him to think about and from looking over at the woman who was now standing next to him, the feelings seemed mutual.

After relating everything that had happened to the police now on the scene, they told him that it was alright for him to return inside. What had actually felt like hours was only ten minutes and soon he had reached the gate and was silently pushing his way inside and away from the chaos outside. Instead of locking the gate, he waited for Karen to follow him.

Once they were safely inside and had distanced themselves, he turned around and saw that she was standing about two meters away from him, her head lowered and tears streaming down her face. At that moment, Thomas reached over and rested his hand on her shoulder. “It feels as though I’ve somehow lost my brother all over again,” he confessed as the tears caught in his own eyes. “I thought I was over his death, but watching Stacey die right here in front of me made me realize just how helpless I am. For the last seven years, I have told myself that if I had been in London when Simeon died, that I could have done things differently, but I couldn’t. I sat there next to that child and knew that I couldn’t do a damn thing to help anyone.”

“I know what you mean, Tom,” Karen said softly.

“You saved our lives,” he said.

In response to these words, she shook her head, her gaze still on the ground. Instead of waiting for her speak, he did. “Will was trying to buy us some time, bluffing Owen Slugworth along the way. I didn’t know what was going to happen.”

She nodded sympathetically. “You can’t imagine what was going through my head when I saw him fire the weapon at Mr. Wonka. Part of me felt so powerless, but another part of me was engulfed in
“Anger?” Thomas took a deep breath.

“Yes, anger – anger that his family has been allowed to bully others for as long as they have without someone defending the ones they had been pushing around. You remember what we spoke of in the car and how my husband died trying to protect someone?”

Thomas nodded, “yes.”

Karen offered him a watery smile. “It was a similar story as with the Slugworths and when the investigation was opened at the precinct house in Buckinghamshire, I kept remembering my husband and how he gave his life to protect another person. It was the same thing here, except instead of seeing Ray’s last moments playing out all over again, I was watching a child who I failed to protect…” her voice trailed.

“…You didn’t fail, Karen, you did what you could. Stacey made the decision and that cannot be turned back,” he said softly as the first drops of rain began to fall. “Perhaps we should continue this conversation inside. I’m sure the others would like to know what happened and that Will and Matthew are alright.”

Karen nodded and instead of speaking further, she began to follow him towards the door that would lead back inside the confines of the large factory. Before reaching the door, Karen cast another glance back between the vertical steel bars of the gate to where the police were still casing the area. “They will probably want to talk to us again about what happened,” she said softly as they reached the door and Thomas fumbled with his keys and stuck one in the door’s lock.

As he opened the door, she took a deep breath. “Will Mr. Wonka be able to get back inside?”

“He carries keys to the main gate around with him,” he said with an unhappy smile. “He’s not as much a recluse as people think. I’m guessing that he’ll be back very soon.”

Sympathetically, Karen nodded. “I figure on that. Gunshots to the shoulder are not extremely dangerous, but they are rather painful.” She paused as they entered a long hallway. “Tom, are you sure you’re alright?”

“I have to be,” he said casually. “The strange thing about everything that happened is after you took off; everything was just a blur to me. I couldn’t help but remember when Molly was kidnapped and how helpless Linda must have felt during that time. I can now understand her fears and concerns better than I thought was even possible.”

Instead of speaking further, they headed in the direction of Willy’s office.

As they rounded several passageways, they were soon met by Linda. Her eyes were filled with concern as she approached where they were standing and it seemed clear to him that she was scanning the area looking for Willy. Not seeing him with them, her expression shifted from concern to fear.

“Tom, what happened? My mother suddenly showed up in our room and said that Omaya-Kal had come into the Chocolate Room while they were talking and informed Willy that something was happening outside.” When Thomas simply nodded, Linda’s brown eyed gaze shifted from Thomas to Karen and back to Thomas. “W-where’s Willy?” she asked, her voice wavering.

“He’s at the hospital,” Thomas said as he took a deep inhalation of breath and regarded the woman’s worried gaze. “There’s something that we have to tell you. It’s about what happened outside, and
we’re not sure where exactly to begin.”

“Just tell me,” she said. “Is it Willy? Did something happen to him?”

“Willy’s fine, he’ll probably be back here later tonight,” he said as Molly ran up to the group in the hallway. She was dressed in a pink knee length dress her hair pulled back in pigtails, her excitement somehow fading when she realized that Willy was not with them.

“Where’s Willy?” she asked softly as she stared up at Thomas’ tired gaze. “He said that he was going to take me to Cristy-Kai’s birthday party.”

“I know sweetie,” Linda said as she looked at Thomas. “Omaya-Kal stopped by our room earlier and told us that something suddenly came up and Willy would be back as soon as possible.”

The child’s face fell. “He’s not coming,” she whispered dejectedly.

Linda looked down at her daughter. “When he gets back, I’m sure he’ll join you at the party,” she said softly. “Something has happened Honey and he will be back when he gets it taken care of.”

Molly nodded as she wiped her tiny hands over her eyes, “he’s okay, isn’t he?”

Karen smiled down at the little girl. “He’ll be fine.”

“Who are you?” Molly asked innocently.

“My name is Karen Davis, I’m…”

“…She’s a friend of ours, sweetheart,” Thomas explained as the group grew in numbers when Patrick and Tina abruptly joined them. It seemed as though everything that was going on in the factory was now centered on where Willy Wonka was keeping himself.

Thomas took a deep breath, this had been a hell of a day and now he had to explain everything to Willy’s guests and friends.

Oddly enough, his earlier throbbing head was now the furthest thing from his mind. It was time for him to tell them what had happened outside. The only trouble, he did not want to tell the little girl that her father was dead. His imploring gaze drifted across the group until it rested on Patrick.

The Scotsman, understanding the silent communication looked down at his granddaughter. “Perhaps you and I should go back to the cafeteria and see about getting some cookies for you to take to the birthday party,” he suggested.

Molly nodded and accepting her grandfather’s offered hand, the two of them walked away leaving Tina and Linda waiting for Thomas to start explaining what had happened outside.

“Tom, Molly and my father are no longer here, so would you mind telling us what specifically happened?” Linda asked her voice etched in nervousness.

“Owen Slugworth is dead,” Thomas whispered his confession out.

“Dead?” Linda whispered, her voice depicting the overt surprise at hearing his words. “Is this a joke?”

“No,” Thomas shook his head. “He got shot outside the gate when he tried to shoot Will. That’s why Will’s at the hospital; he has to get his shoulder stitched up. Once that gets done, then he’ll come home.”
“How did it happen?” Linda asked as she regarded Karen, her gaze laced in mistrust.

Karen took a deep breath but began to speak, her voice soft. “It’s a very long story. I suppose it is easier to say that sometimes things like this happen in the most obscure places and for the strangest of reasons.”

Thomas nodded as he took up the story. “He wanted to kill Will, and then he wanted to take me out and harm Matthew. Linda, he had already killed Stacey Madison.”

Linda looked at Karen, “who?”

“Stacey was a teenage girl who was hanging around the back gate of the factory with her little brother. When Slugworth and his henchmen showed up, we were inside the courtyard and overheard them calling the girl ‘Linda’,” Karen explained.

“In other words, they showed up and thought Stacey was me,” Linda whispered, her face growing increasingly whiter.

Thomas nodded, “Will recognized that similarity in your appearances from the start. In the shadows, it would have been hard for anyone to tell the two of you apart. She looks exactly like you minus fifteen or so years.”

Linda nodded. “I see, but if Owen was the one who had a gun, then how did he end up dead?”

“I shot him,” Karen said, her words simple. “I’m a police officer from Buckinghamshire and I came back here to find the two kids. I suppose the moment I realized that we were too late; I tried to chase down the wrong man. Then when I got far enough away from the factory, I noticed that Mr. Slugworth was making his way back over towards the gates where Thomas and Mr. Wonka were trying to revive the girl.

“I could hear him speaking to them as I came closer and I stopped momentarily when he pulled the gun. In hindsight, I could instinctively tell that they were trying everything they could to disarm him.”

“I don’t understand,” Tina broke her silence. “Are you saying that he was going to kill Willy?”

“It’s rather clear that that was his intention,” Thomas said. “At first I thought that he was just there to gloat about taking over his uncle’s business, but then we discovered that he wanted to kill Will just as was threatened in the various correspondences that his uncle had sent. While Arthur seemed rather intent on keeping these threats to paper, his nephew was rather insistent on actually carrying them out.”

“I knew that Owen didn’t like Willy, but I never would have thought he would have wanted him dead,” Linda whispered.

Thomas rested his hand on her shoulder. “I know this is hard for you, but during that confrontation, Will did say something that I didn’t even know.”

“What?” Linda asked.

“He said that Owen Slugworth had endorsed the threats that were made on Will’s life after Wonka Industries had opened. In fact, Will seemed rather certain that Owen knew all along that Arthur had threatened him and his knowledge gave us the time we needed until Karen and her colleagues had shown up. But, that was, sadly, not before someone got killed.”
Tina looked at him. “You mentioned a Stacey Madison, but who is she? Was she involved like Max?”

“No, she was never involved in anything. That’s what makes this so tragic; she was just an innocent bystander,” Thomas said. “Unfortunately, both she and her brother were dragged into it for the simple crime of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. I met the two of them while on my way to Buckinghamshire yesterday. The circumstances behind that meeting were rather strange because Stacey and her accomplice had tried to steal the car that I was driving. I managed to keep her from getting away, but after everything got sorted out, Will stepped in with the intention of helping the two kids. Unbeknownst to any of us, they ended up leaving Buckinghamshire and coming here. That’s why Karen is here; she and I drove back here to find the two kids. They had decided to come to the factory instead of a halfway house.”

Linda took a deep breath. “So what’s going to happen to Matthew?”

“I’m going to take care of him,” Thomas said sadly. “One thing this whole experience has taught me is that after the Golden Ticket contest ends, I’m going to move out and get on with the rest of my life.”

“Why?” Linda asked.

“Because it’s important and deep down inside, it’s something that I have to do. I have come to realize that is what Simeon would have wanted me to do,” Thomas said softly. “I know that it seems rather strange to hear me say this. I figured that I would stay here for good, but I can’t. I don’t want to live in Will’s shadow any longer and now I know that he doesn’t want me to do that either. Perhaps that was why it was such a good thing that Eliza moved to Cornwall when she did. I had thought about finding a flat here in London so that I could always be nearby if my friends needed me.” He paused. “It’s rather strange, but several years ago, Will challenged me to go out and find something that makes me stand out. I never really knew what he meant until now.”

Linda took a deep breath. “I guess I had sort of thought of that too. What would I do once Owen no longer posed me any danger? What will become of Molly and me?”

Tina looked at her. “You really don’t know?” she asked softly.

“Know what?” Linda asked.

“That Willy loves you,” the young German woman responded. “He will help you figure that bit out.”

Thomas nodded. “She’s right, Linda. I could tell the first time he saw you that he really cares for you. For whatever reason, I have come to believe that you’re part of the reason I can now move on. Will is always going to be my best friend and I will always work with and help him out. That part will perhaps never change, but he’s happy with you in his life. He now has what he’s always yearned for.”

Linda looked at Thomas, her eyes brimming with unshed tears. “Me?”

Thomas nodded as he smiled at her, a single word emerging. “Love.”

Tina rested her hand on the young woman’s shoulder. When Linda turned around, she offered her a reciprocating nod as Thomas led them to Willy’s office in order to wait.
Chapter 74

Chapter 74: A New Found Family

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Upon arriving at the hospital, Willy and Matthew were ushered into the glass covered building. Instead of leaving Matthew alone, Willy insisted that the child be kept with him until he was called in to get his shoulder checked and stitched up.

After about an hour had passed, the chocolatier was able to leave the hospital with the stipulation that he not overdo it. Before he could inquire as to what ‘it’ was, he had been left alone and ultimately was able to rejoin Matthew in the waiting room.

Upon stepping out into the large open space, the first thing he saw was the forlorn expression that shadowed the boy’s face. If it had not yet been made clear, then at that moment it was. The dejection that lined the youth’s face seemed to speak volumes; specifically regarding the overt sadness at not being allowed to go and stay with his sister’s body.

Willy was left to ponder whether or not it would be better for the child to find some semblance of closure as well as how to actually go about it. Of course, this did not make things easier or better, instead, there was a sense of fear and worry in the child’s overall stance.

“Matthew?” he spoke the child’s name as he came over to where the boy was seated. A sling was draped over his body, his left arm resting in the fabric of the dark blue colored object. This seemed to match better with his purple colored waistcoat than the generic white that they usually used.

As he came closer, the chocolatier could make out the overwhelming heartbreak that encased the child. Through this, he was immediately reminded of Thomas’ stance after Simeon had passed on. In fact, Willy figured that these events were the mirrored reminders of his best friend’s past.

Taking a deep breath he released it slowly as he sat down next to the boy. “I know how you feel,” he whispered as a greeting.

Matthew raised his head, “you do?”

“Yes,” Willy said nodding. “I remember when Tom’s brother died. He was like an extension of my own family. When he died, I think I lost a part of myself. It took a great deal of time and effort for me to find it again, but I did, and so will you.”

Matthew raised his head slowly, his gaze ultimately meeting the concerned blue eyes of the chocolatier. “It should have been me,” he whispered, his voice taking on a distanced, almost distracted, essence.

“Why do you say that?”

“Because my life isn’t worth anything, much less saving,” he said sniffing.

“Stacey didn’t believe that, Matthew, and neither do I,” he said as he watched the child haphazardly wipe his hand over his face.

“She saved my life,” Matthew whispered.
“Then she must have seen the potential that you hold,” Willy said softly.

In response to this, Matthew turned away from the confectionary genius. “What does it matter? I’m nothing more than a mistake anyway.”

“No you’re not,” Willy said firmly, “why in the world would you say such a thing?”

“Because it’s the truth,” he whispered.

Wordlessly, Willy shook his head as he clasped his hands together and sighed. Taking a deep inhalation of breath, he allowed his healthy shoulder to rise and fall in steady rhythm with his breathing.

Eventually, he released his hands before running both of them over his face and into his curly masses of hair. As he did this, his eyes momentarily closed.

After several moments had passed, Willy wearily allowed them to lower once again, his head turning until he regarded the youth. “Deep down inside, you know that that’s not true,” he said.

At that moment, the child turned and looked at him. “But it is. I mean; I couldn’t even say the right things around you. I just got angry and made everything worse.”

“Do you mean yesterday when we met and spoke at the hospital in Buckinghamshire?” Willy asked gently.

“Yeah,” Matthew whispered as he dug the toes of his worn out tennis shoes into the linoleum tiles that were below his feet. “I said a bad word and made you mad.” As these simple words emerged, Willy inhaled slowly as Matthew started to stand up and distance himself from him.

Instead of allowing the boy complete these intended actions, Willy reached out and gently, but firmly, captured the child’s upper arm, his simple action preventing him from leaving. “I think perhaps now is the time for us to clarify a few things right here and now.”

“But it won’t bring Stacey back…” the boy whimpered as he pulled his arm from the chocolatier’s hold before allowing his body to sink to the floor. After several moments had passed, he raised his head before continuing to speak. As his words filled the room, they were much louder than Willy could have anticipated. “…It’s my fault.”

“No, Matthew, it’s not,” Willy said as he got down on the floor next to the child and pulled him into a gentle embrace.

“But it was my idea to come to the factory in the first place,” he whispered.

“Perhaps it was, but you had no way of knowing that this tragedy was going to happen,” Willy argued, his voice much softer than that of the child.

“Yes, I did,” Matthew whimpered as he shook his head. “Mr. Wilkenson told me last night that I had to act like it was a secret or else you couldn’t help us. That’s what I told Stacey when she came to get me earlier. She said that we would come to London and see you. She thought it would help me if we came because I wanted to talk to you.”

“Maybe it was your idea to come, but you still shouldn’t blame yourself for what happened outside the factory gates,” Willy said gently. “You weren’t the one holding the gun, you didn’t do anything wrong, Matthew. Don’t try to convince yourself that you did.”
“B-but I wanted to see you again. I wanted to say I was sorry for being so mean to you. I thought…” his voice trailed.

“…You thought that if you came to the back side of the factory, that you would be able to be inconspicuous about it, correct?” Willy finished the child’s statement.

Matthew nodded as the tears streamed down his face. “It’s my fault. Please don’t be mad at me.”

“Why would I be?” he asked. “It was me who let you down, not the other way around.”

Matthew raised his head and looked at Willy, his lips trembling as he bit down on it to keep from crying. “But, I made a mess of everything.”

“No, you didn’t,” Willy said firmly. He took a deep breath and released it slowly. “Look, I don’t want you to ever believe, not even for an instant, that you are to blame for what happened back there. It was a tragedy and nothing more.”

“But I can’t help it,” the boy began to cry softly. “It should have been me. They shot the wrong person.”

“Tell me why you believe that,” Willy said gently. “What did you see before Tom and I showed up?”

“Stacey and I were standing at the back gate, but it all happened so fast. We were alone and then I heard some guys coming over to where we were standing. They were big and strong, like those mean bullies from movies. One of them said that they found someone called ‘Linda’. Another guy told him that he should waste her. That was when I t-turned around and s-saw another man holding a gun in front of me. I w-was gonna to tell them that we didn’t know any Linda but they didn’t care. Right before I was going to tell them that Stacey was not Linda, s-she pushed me to the ground and told me to stay there. Then t-the gun went off.”

Willy nodded as the heartbreaking words of the child continued. “S-Stacey f-fell to the ground and I t-thought she was gonna be alright, that she would get up again, but she didn’t. That m-man was gonna shoot me too, but then he suddenly heard a siren and ran off.” As he spoke, he clamped his eyes shut and trembled as his next agonizing words emerged. “Even after I begged her to, Stacey wouldn’t get up. S-she wouldn’t get up and now I’m alone.”

Before the boy could continue speaking, Willy did. “You’re not alone, Matthew,” he affirmed softly. “No matter what happens, there will be people around to make sure that you will never be alone again.”

“Please, Mr. Wonka, can’t you make everything better?” The boy whispered brokenly.

“I wish I could,” he said softly. “If there was a way, then I would.”

“Did y-you really go and see Stacey yesterday?” the child asked.

“Yes I did,” he said nodding.

“W-why?” he asked.

“Tom asked me to and because it was the right thing for me to do,” Willy said. “I suppose he saw something in Stacey that merited hope and forgiveness. It was later affirmed to me when I met her and saw to what extent she loved you.”
Matthew looked into the sincere blue eyes of the confectioner and shrugged his shoulders. “She did?”

Willy nodded.

“Even though I was angry,” he whispered.

“Even then,” the chocolatier said. “You see, she knew you were afraid.”

“Did you?”

“Yes, I did. I could tell, even when you were being rude to me.”

“And now you’re being nice to me.” As the boy spoke, he could feel the tears stinging the corners of his eyes. “I’m really sorry, Mr. Wonka.”

“You have no reason to apologize to me,” he said. As if the emphasize this point, he pulled the child into his uninjured arm and held him in a half embrace as the boy began to struggle his way out of the embrace. Cringing from the impact of the blows, Willy could feel the small fist of the child as it rammed against his chest. “You’re not alone,” he repeated these words as he tried to clumsily rock the child.

After several moments, the boy ceased with these actions and became still. From there, he rested his head against Willy’s chest. “I’ve got no one left,” he mumbled to himself.

Willy took a deep breath. “You have Tom. He’s going to be there and look out for you.” He paused but after several moments of silence, he continued. “For what it’s worth, you also have me.”

“It’s only because you feel sorry for me,” the child cried. “I’m a freak…and…” his voice trailed.

“…You’re not a freak, Matthew,” Willy objected as he watched Matthew shake his head in denial.

“How do I know that you’re not just saying that? For all I know you could just be here because you feel sorry for me.”

“Perhaps you ought to simply trust me,” Willy objected as he touched the redness of the child’s face. “I felt badly for you, but I never felt pity for you. Instead, I felt sadness for those who chose to hurt you. They were the ones who missed out on knowing someone truly extraordinary.”

“Me?”

“Yes, you,” he nodded.

“Mr. Wonka, I want my sister back,” he said.

“I know you do, and I wish I could bring her back, but I can’t. Everyone has limits, and right now I am limited on how much I can or cannot do,” he said sadly.

“What’s going to happen to me?” he whispered.

“You’re going to grieve all the losses you have endured in your life, and then once you do, you’re going to heal. At the same time, we’re going to see to it that the promises that were made to Stacey get fulfilled,” Willy said firmly. “I’m not going to let anything else happen to you.”

Matthew looked at him, but instead of speaking, he shrugged his shoulders noncommittally.
Willy took a deep breath. “I’ll take that as though you are in agreement with this arrangement,” he said as he stood up and offered his healthy hand to the child.

Wordlessly, Matthew accepted.

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It was close to two hours later, when they took a taxi to the front gate of the large factory complex. Once Willy had paid the faire, the two of them disembarked and the taxi drove away.

Willy looked down at the boy, his stance only described as being stoic. He stood motionless, his hands digging in the front pockets of his worn out jeans.

Matthew had not spoken so much as a word since they were at the hospital and for that reason alone Willy was growing increasingly concerned for the welfare of the boy.

Of course, the chocolatier’s own emotional state felt rather like being stuck on a runaway train. Deep down inside, he knew that he would have to do everything possible to conceal those emotions from the child.

Instead of speaking, he dug in the pocket of his waistcoat and extracted a keychain. Fumbling around with them, he unlocked the front gate and ushered the boy into the now quiet courtyard.

Before crossing the grounds to the side building, Willy locked the gate. As they crossed the courtyard and reached the door that would lead into the building, Willy stopped and began to shift his keys yet again. Unlocking the door, the two of them entered before allowing the door to close firmly behind them.

“I imagine that everyone is waiting for us in my office,” he said to the still silent boy.

As these words filled the corridor, silence descended on the pair as they wound their way through the hallways until they reached the door leading into his strangely decorated office.

Reaching the door, it suddenly swung open and Linda came out into the corridor and saw Willy with a bandaged up shoulder and a boy in his company. “Willy?” she spoke his name, all the while waiting for him to clarify what had taken place.

“Where are Tom and Molly?” Willy asked softly.

“Tom’s in your office waiting, and Molly went to Cristy-Kai’s birthday party with my father after they had retrieved a few things,” Linda whispered.

Willy nodded. “Before we speak of anything that happened, I really need to talk to Tom about something important.”

Linda offered a weary nod and disappeared inside the office. Once she was gone, Willy and Matthew waited until the door had once more opened and Thomas stepped out into the hallway.

As he recognized that the chocolatier was back from the hospital, he spoke, his voice laced in relief. “Will?” he spoke the name as though it was a question. “Thank heavens you’re both alright.”

Willy motioned with his hand and led them down the hallway to one of the smaller rooms. Entering a different room than the one they had occupied the night before, Willy raised his head momentarily as they closed the door and walked across the small room without so much as uttering a sound.
Eventually, Thomas spoke, his words soft. “Karen and I told Linda and Tina about what happened outside.”

“Did any of you tell Molly anything?” Willy asked.

Thomas shook his head. “I couldn’t really find the words. I thought perhaps it was better if you were to tell her.”

Willy nodded as he cast a weary glance towards Matthew before turning back to face his friend. “Perhaps, you’re right and I should tell Molly everything that happened out there.” He nudged his friend and watched as Thomas took a deep breath and glanced over towards where Matthew was now standing.

As they sank into silence, Thomas slowly crossed the room until he was standing next to where Matthew was. By this time, the child had found a seat in the corner of the room and had lowered himself onto it.

Thomas slowly took a deep breath. “Matthew, I’m really very sorry that we couldn’t do more to help you and Stacey.”

The child, instead of speaking, allowed his shoulders to rise and fall in a half-hearted shrug. It seemed clear that he had given up hope on grown-ups, and was just waiting for more bad news to be dumped on top of him. For several moments, he remained unmoving, his elbows resting against his knees.

After several moments of silence passed, Willy decided that it was time to take control of the situation. He looked at Thomas, and spoke, his voice shadowed in weary exhaustion. “I suppose we should ask Rini-Mai if she can arrange Matthew a room.”

“Not for an extensive period of time,” Thomas whispered as he raised his head.

“What are you saying?” Willy asked.

Thomas took a deep breath. “I think you and I both know what is perhaps going to be happening once the Golden Ticket contest is over. Perhaps you were even more aware of it before I was. I think this knowledge went as far back as when you had gone to New Zealand on holiday and had challenged me to find something for myself. The thing is, you gave me the time I needed to find myself as well as to overcome the process of having lost my brother and make amends with it.”

“Perhaps, but tell me truthfully; what does this have to do with what we are discussing now?” Willy asked.

“I think it has everything to do with it,” Thomas said. “This isn’t just about the future of this little boy, but it is about my future as well.”

“Then, perhaps you ought to tell Matthew what it is you are planning to do and not be so clandestine about it. After all, no one likes to be left in the dark.”

As if on cue, the child raised his head curiously.

“Alright, Matthew, he’s right, I should not be covert about it as this does involve you in a very profound way. What I would like to do is file a petition to adopt you. That is I’ve already called and spoken to someone about it and they seem rather positive about the idea. That’s what I was doing while the two of you were taking care of things at the hospital. The social worker I spoke with seems to believe that it would be good option, but that I would need to get a place for us to live that is a bit
closer to the hospital than the factory.”

Matthew looked at Willy, but then looked over at Thomas. “You mean; I’d get to stay with you?”

“If you want,” Thomas said nodding. “I don’t want you to accept just because Will is going to help with your treatment. The thing is, if you really want to give it a go with me, then we can talk to the authorities in a few days and we can start looking for our own place.”

“I wouldn’t be alone anymore,” he whispered brokenly.

“No, you won’t ever be alone Matthew, no matter what you decide,” Willy said softly. He went over and rested his hand on the boy’s shoulder.

Instead of responding to Willy’s words, the child raised his head and looked at Thomas. “You really want to have me around?”

Thomas nodded. “Absolutely, but you have to consent to this arrangement and not think that because you’re twelve that you have no voice in the matter. Would you be willing to become my son?”

Hesitantly, the boy nodded, but not before he found himself wrapped in Thomas Wilkenson’s arms.

As Willy watched his best friend embracing the child, he silently stood up and slipped out of the room. As he stepped out in the hallway, a watery smile inched its way across his face as he spoke to the stillness.

“Simeon, it looks like that brother of yours is finally finding the courage to handle things on his own.” As he spoke, he nodded affirmatively. This was indeed the silver lining to the horrible dark cloud that was still looming over their world.

Perhaps in time, Willy will see the good that was to come out of this. After all, he had never doubted Thomas’ ability with contending with things, and now maybe he would finally accept the fact that he was just as capable at weaving magic as Willy Wonka was.
Chapter 75

Chapter 75: Bonding

This chapter is entirely from Willy Wonka’s point of view

Willy made his way back in the direction of his office. It had been a long day, and something told him that it was not over yet. Reaching the office, he slowly opened the door to see that Karen, Linda and Tina were all seated in the room. Tina was perched on the half chair in front of the desk and Linda and Karen were seated on the sofa. Instead of speaking to one another, they seemed to be waiting for him to return.

As he entered the room, Linda stood up and came over to him. “Is everything alright?” she asked somewhat nervously.

“Yes,” he said softly as he felt her wrapping him in her arms. After several moments had passed, he continued speaking. “Why wouldn’t it be?”

“I don’t know. I was just under the impression that something was not quite right. I suppose I reached the conclusion that now everything’s been resolved, Molly and I would have to leave,” Linda said as she looked away from him, the hurt evident in her expression. It seemed abundantly clear to everyone in the room that the young woman was concerned as to what would happen next.

“Perhaps, but the thought of asking you to leave never crossed my mind,” Willy said honestly. “Linda, I…” his voice trailed as he slowly walked in the direction of the door leading out of the strangely decorated room.

This, if anything, indicated that he needed to speak with her alone. Tina and Karen nodded as they exchanged glances with the confectioner. They watched as he walked the length of the corridor and disappeared in the distance.

Linda got to her feet and followed him. As soon as they were both out in the hallway, she closed the door. Moments later, they reached a second doorway and Willy stopped walking and reached for the handle.

This gave Linda the time to reach where he was standing. Several seconds later, she felt his hand encircling her own before leading her into the room. As soon as they had entered, the scent that filled her was that of chocolate mint. Inhaling several times, she grew quickly accustomed to the fragrance and watched as Willy went over to a group of chairs and allowed his body to collapse into one of them.

Once he was seated, he raised his healthy hand and covered his face with it, all the while shaking his head. It looked as though now that they were safely alone, he was free to let his guard down and allow the emotions to do with him what they would.

Linda seated herself next to him, her arm raising slightly so that she could wrap it comfortingly around his healthy arm and pulling him into a half embrace. “I was so worried about you,” she whispered after several moments had passed between them.

As these words filled the emptiness of the room, Willy nodded slowly as he continued to haphazardly wipe his hands over his face. Seconds slowly ticked by as the chocolatier’s emotions crumbled and he began to weep bitterly.
Linda’s eyes widened when she recognized how his emotions were becoming all the more intense. At that moment, she tightened her hold on him. It seemed abundantly clear to her that Willy Wonka was finally able to allow them to emerge. As she watched his healthy shoulder beginning to shake uncontrollably, she realized why it was that he had not done so before. It seemed blatantly clear that he did not want to express wayward emotions in front of Matthew Madison.

“We’re alone now, Willy, just tell me what’s wrong,” she cajoled him softly.

“Stacey was just a child…” he whispered as the tears washed down over his face. “…and I was going to help her – to help them both. It was my intention to be there for them.”

Linda nodded, but after several moments had passed, she pressed her face against his chest. As if by instinct alone, she could feel her own tears as they began to stream down over her face as well.

She knew that she could not express further how she had been afraid for Willy’s safety, nor could she comment on her reactions to Owen’s death. Luckily for her, Willy had yet to inquire, although it was clear that the news of her ex-husband’s passing had left her encased in confusion, relief, disorientation, and pain. To Linda, this was an inappropriate moment for her to even mention it, so instead she remained quiet and continued to comfort him the best way she knew how.

Eventually, Willy spoke. “You know, Stacey wanted me to help her and Matthew, and I wanted to as well,” he began to verbalize his internalized trauma. “I swear; I was going to do everything I could do to help.”

“I know, Willy, and I think both of these kids knew that as well,” she whispered. “You should not believe for even an instant that you cannot follow through and help them as you had intended. That little boy is going to need someone to take care of him.”

Willy raised his head. “Tom is going to take care of Matthew, not me. You don’t seem to understand the extent of what happened out there.”

“Then tell me,” she whispered. “Do you think I can’t handle it?”

“I don’t know if I can,” he whispered. “Maybe it’s not at all about my faith in you, but the fact that Owen and the men who worked for him were the ones who murdered Stacey Madison. They thought Stacey was you and they did not think twice about pulling that trigger.” He paused as the emotions once again got the better of him. “Oh God, whatever would I have done if it had been you who had gotten killed? What if it had been Molly?”

Linda took a deep breath. “So they really were there to get me.”

“Yes, and after meeting Stacey for the first time, I could understand why they had made this mistake,” Willy confessed. “In the shadows, you and Stacey could have passed for sisters. At the hospital, Matthew told me about what had happened just before Stacey had gotten shot, they had said your name and Matthew was trying to tell them that his sister’s name was not ‘Linda’.”

“But contrary to that, they shot her, no questions asked,” Linda whispered. “Willy, what is going to happen now? I mean; what are we going to do?”

“I don’t really know, but one thing is clear, the traumas of the past days are now behind us,” he began. “I know that while all of this was happening, I could not stop thinking about you. I love you and Molly as though you are my family. The mere thought of losing one of you would be like tearing my heart out.” He lowered his head, the shame washing over him at having her see him in such a vulnerable emotional state. “I have always been strong…” he whispered.
Linda took a deep breath as she gave him a watery smile. “...You still are. You don’t have to prove that to me, Willy,” she whispered. “You can cry and feel weak as much as you need and I will never abandon or think any less of you for doing it. No matter what happens, or what the future may bring, I won’t ever leave you.” As she spoke, she took his face in her hands and felt the tears streaming from beneath his despondent blue eyes and meshing against the fingers of both of her hands. When he did not speak, she continued, her words a soft croon. “I’m here for you, Willy, and I’m not going anywhere, not if you don’t want me to.”

“But, what if I can’t protect you?” he asked weakly.

“Who’s to say that you have not already protected me? You saved both Molly and me from Owen. Now, he’s dead, and won’t ever be able to hurt us again,” she said softly. Leaning in, she began to kiss the moisture that covered his face, her lips tasting the tears as they meshed against them. “Besides, there is no place else that is safer than being here at your factory, right?”

Willy nodded, but continued to hold tightly to her, his face now pressed against her shoulder. “You’re the most amazing person I’ve ever known,” he said, his voice emerging as a soft mumble.

“It takes one to know one,” she responded in kind.

He raised his head and looked at her. Out of the blue, his next question emerged. “Do you think that contrary to all the insanity that have overtaken our lives these past days that we can perhaps become a real family?” he asked.

Linda took a deep breath. “We can if you’ll have us. But, you already know that to love me is to love my daughter.”

Willy nodded with an affirmative smile shadowed across his face. “Then I will love you both with everything that is inside of me.” He paused for a moment as he tried to collect his thoughts. When he finally did, he continued. “Molly told me that if you and I were to get married, she could have my name.”

“She could, and if we did, then I wouldn’t have to go back to being Linda McKenny,” she whispered as she captured a lock of Willy’s curly hair in her hand and began to twist it around between her thumb and forefinger. “Perhaps it means that I could have your name too?”

Despite herself, she smiled as he wrapped her in his healthy arm before capturing her lips in a passionate kiss.

As their kiss intensified, both Linda and Willy knew that this would somehow become the affirmative answer to all of their questions.

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Ten minutes later, a soft knock could be heard at the door and Willy disentangled himself from her arms before going over to open it. Once he had pulled it open, he noticed that Patrick and Molly were standing in the threshold. “Tom and Matthew came by the party and told me that I ought to bring Molly here.”

Willy nodded. “Thank you, Pat. I mean it sincerely, too, thank you so much for everything you’ve done.”

The Scotsman wordlessly nodded as he offered the confectionary genius a reassuring smile before stepping away from the doorway and leaving Molly in Willy and Linda’s care.
For her part, the little girl wordlessly remained where she was standing, her doe-like brown eyes staring up at Willy's disheveled appearance. After several seconds had passed, she spoke, her words encased in a mixture of innocence and courage. “Omaya-Kal told me at the party that you were sick and couldn’t come,” she whispered. “I gave Cristy-Kai my record and told her it was from both of us. She said that she was sorry you couldn’t come but hoped that you would feel better soon.”

“Thank you, sweetheart. I really appreciate you taking care of all of this for me,” Willy whispered as he got down on the floor until he was eye level with her. “I’m so sorry that I let you down and couldn’t escort you to the party. Will you forgive me?”

“Uh-huh,” Molly nodded as she reached out and touched the side of his arm. When he cringed slightly, she pulled her hand away, but her eyes remained fixated on the dark blue colored sling that kept his arm still. “What happened?” she eventually found her voice and asked.

Willy inhaled slowly as he cast a wary glance towards the object that had attracted Molly’s attention. The bandages covering the wound were still visible beneath the fabric of his dress shirt. “Molly, there’s something that your mother and I have to tell you. It’s about your father.”

“What is it?” she asked.

Linda took a deep breath as she looked at her daughter. “Perhaps Thomas and his friend should have told you this earlier, but I think he felt that it was important for Willy and me to explain everything to you.”

“What happened?” Molly asked. “Is it about you getting hurt?”

Willy nodded, “yes, unfortunately it is, and the only way I can think of to tell you this is to say that you will not have anymore nightmares about your father.”

“I won’t?”

“No, because he will never be able to hurt you again,” Willy said softly.

“He won’t?” she asked.

“No, he won’t,” Linda whispered.

“Why not? I mean; what happened to him? Is he in jail? Or did he leave again?” Molly’s innocent questions emerged one after the other.

“No, little one, nothing like that,” Willy said with an adamant shake of his head. “You see, Owen was outside the factory gates earlier this afternoon when the police were there.”

“He did something stupid, didn’t he?” Molly asked bluntly. This caused Willy and Linda to exchange knowing glances. Molly was indeed much more knowledgeable than other kids her age. This left a bittersweet impression on the chocolatier.

Instead of affirming or denying the child’s assertions, Willy took a deep breath. “They wanted to arrest him for all the things he had done to you and your mother, but he didn’t want to go with them.”

“So what happened to him?” Molly asked.

Willy took a deep breath as his next words emerged. “He got shot, Molly.”
“You mean, he’s not in jail, but instead, with God?” Molly asked hesitantly.

“Yes, Sweetie; that is what Willy is trying to tell you,” Linda said trying to keep the irony out of her voice.

At that moment, Willy could clearly see the look of skepticism that crossed the child’s mother’s face. Instead of speaking, he remained silent as he waited for Molly to process everything that he and Linda had been saying.

After several moments, the child spoke, her voice laced in unfamiliar bluntness. “He doesn’t deserve to be an angel or be with God, Mommy. He should go to that other place.”

“That’s not for us to decide, honey,” Linda said gently. “Right now, the important thing for both of us to remember is that Owen cannot hurt either of us ever again.”

“What about that other mean man?” Molly asked.

“He’s in jail and won’t be able to hurt you either,” Willy said.

“Is it wrong for me to say that I don’t care?” Molly asked. “I mean; I really hate all of them.”

These soft words struck Willy, and he exchanged glances with Linda before extending his hand to the little girl. As soon as she had accepted it, she felt him pull her into a half embrace with him. “It’s alright to feel what it is you feel, sweetheart,” he said gently. “Neither of us would ever judge you for doing so.” As he was speaking, he began to brush his healthy hand against her hair, the softness of it caressing his fingertips.

Seconds later, she rested her head against his chest and allowed her tiny arms to wind around him. As she relaxed in his hold, she spoke, her next words addressing her mother. “Mommy, what’s going to happen to us now?” she asked. “Do we have to leave the factory?”

“No, honey, we don’t,” Linda said softly. “Willy has asked me if we would like to stay here with him and perhaps we could become a family.”

“You mean you guys are really going to get married?” Molly asked.

“If you don’t object to that, sweetheart, then yes we will,” Linda said.

Molly raised her head and looked at the chocolatier. “You would become my daddy for real?”

“If that is what you would like, then I would be honored,” Willy said with an affirming nod. “I will give you both my name, Molly and I would adopt you and make you my daughter.”

“That was my wish the first time we met,” she whispered softly. “But, you won’t be mad at me if I decide to be a dancer and not make candy when I grow up?”

“Of course not,” Willy said with a gentle smile. “You are going to one day be a lovely dancer, my dear.”

“What about the factory?” Molly asked.

“The factory will be taken care of,” Willy said softly. “Just leave all the worries with that to me. You just concentrate on your dancing.” He glanced over towards Linda and felt her drawn into the embrace, her arms winding around both of them.

“You’re not upset with us?” Linda eventually asked her daughter.
Molly shook her head as she allowed her body to relax into the hold of her newfound family. “No, I’m just happy,” she whispered as she raised her head and looked into the eyes of Willy Wonka. “I love you, Papa.”

As these words filled Willy’s ears, a small smile graced his lips as he nodded as he kissed the top of her head.
Chapter 76

Epilogue: The Future is Bright

The days and weeks leading into a London autumn passed quickly for Willy, Thomas, and all of their friends. In the wake of Stacey Madison’s tragic death and amidst his trip to America, Thomas applied to become a foster father to Matthew.

With help provided by Claude Gregory, the application was approved almost immediately. It became apparent that for the first time since his parents’ and sister’s tragic deaths; Matthew was given the chance to have a normal life with some semblance of stability to it.

During this time, Thomas had also managed to enroll his son in school and Matthew was able to start making friends with kids his own age. Along with that, his treatment was going well and the doctors were estimating his making a full recovery.

It was during the early part of September that Thomas Wilkenson moved into a small flat several streets away from the factory. It was close enough to Matthew’s school as well as the hospital, but also they selected it so that they could visit Willy regularly as well as continuing to work for Wonka Industries.

It was during that time while Thomas was in America that Matthew began to reconcile with Linda as well as extend the olive branch to Molly.

Thomas smiled every time he thought of Willy’s surrogate daughter. She was now in the second grade and taking dance classes. More importantly, for the first time in her young life, she was truly happy. It was strange that whenever he thought of this precious child, his thoughts always shifted to the welfare of her mother as well.

Soon after Willy’s impromptu proposal the day that Owen Slugworth had died, Linda had set about to finalizing all the legal issues that needed tending. With a great deal of help, she was able to change her and Molly’s surnames back to McKenny. As for the Slugworth family, they did not know or care of this intention. Willy often joked about them being so caught up in their own legal issues that it did not matter at all.

Linda later confided in Thomas that she wanted to get officially engaged without having shadows of the past looming over her head. She had sought his assistance in making Willy aware of these wishes.

Thomas smiled as he recalled how he had told Willy that to get married as well as try and train his new heir would result in stress and chaos, to which they had already had their fair share of. He went on to say that if it was meant to be, that waiting would be prudent at this stage of the game. Willy eventually concurred with this logic and the wedding date was set for September 30, 1972.

Through all of this, Willy’s newfound family had a year to heal and recover before taking that final step. Thomas knew that Willy’s hesitancy also had something to do with Marjorie. Finite points of her past were emerging each day, and it was becoming clear that she was now in a position to make amends. The relationship between mother and daughter was slowly starting to find healing, but trust would be something that would take many months, if not years, to obtain.

Soon after the announced wedding date had emerged; Eliza, Elmsworth, Marjorie and Patrick left the factory for Cornwall. It was now safe for them to return to the house that had once belonged to
Willy’s grandfather.

That same week, Thomas had boarded a plane bound for America. The trip, after all the excitement in their lives had proven pretty uneventful. The highlight of it had actually been the finding of the third and fourth Golden Tickets. Once the news of Violet Beauregarde and Mike Teavee’s findings became public, Thomas was able to deliver his messages and leave both places unobserved.

Upon his return to London, he realized how grateful he was that the final moment of playing Slugworth was quickly approaching. Once he had fulfilled his obligations to Willy, he would be able to concentrate on his own life.

It was no secret that the chocolatier was disappointed in what he had to report upon his return. It seemed abundantly clear that he was internally hoping that at least one of the children would have Molly’s disposition and kind nature. Seeing that the third and fourth ticket winners had similar vices as the first two, he continued devising his tests to find the child who would one day take his place.

One thing that Thomas remained grateful for was the lack of exposure that was being sent to the Slugworth camp. Very few people cared about whether or not Arthur Slugworth was caught up in legal escapades or not. For whatever reason; the yellow press in London seemed focused on other things; like Willy Wonka and Golden Tickets. To them, the CEO of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated being tied up in litigation in Germany was about as interesting and fascinating as the neighbor’s laundry. Both Thomas and Willy had figured that by the time Arthur got himself out of trouble, the Golden Ticket tour would be a thing of the past.

Tina Schröder returned home, but Willy had made her promise that she would come back to London under much nicer circumstances. Within a month, the Schröder family hotel was once more standing and, as everyone surmised, business was booming. In her last letter to him and Willy, Tina was excited at the prospect of coming back to visit in the spring.

It was clear that both his and Willy’s attention were now focused on other details of their private lives. Of course, contrary to all of the events taking place, he knew that Willy was concerned about the legacy of his work.

September 30, 1971

As the day before the first of October dawned, Thomas stopped by to see Willy at his office and could not help but take in the fact that the chocolatier was worried about the fifth Golden Ticket. It was almost a given that the chocolatier would be welcoming four instead of five children to the factory. It was for this reason that Willy had asked Thomas to make a last ditch attempt outside of Bill’s Candy Shop.

Not far away from the entrance to the shop, a newsstand stood. He had never really noticed much about it before, except that he could purchase newspapers and magazines whenever he felt like. On that day, the area was filled with people.

On the other side of the kiosk, he could hear the man saying: “Take it easy, one at a time…” The words were repeated over and over.

Thomas was left to wonder if all of the people standing around somehow knew that something was about to happen. He continued to watch the small crowds of people, their words filling the area with skepticism as well as unsuppressed anger.

“Can you imagine the nerve of that guy, trying to fool the whole world?” One man’s voice filled his ears, the inquiry filtering about the crowd. Thomas continued to watch as the groups of people grow
as though a silent answer to the man’s bold statement.

It was strange that Bill had actually commented earlier that day as to how Thomas looked distinctly like an actor out of the West End production of ‘My Fair Lady’. Of course, Bill had no idea what was behind Thomas’ attire nor was he aware that Thomas was trying to pose as someone else.

All that the candy seller was aware of was the inventory for his shop as well as waiting for school to let out so that the kids would be filtering in to buy his wares.

Thomas, on the other hand, knew that this was where he had to be, as the latest shipment of Wonka bars that Bill had in his possession contained the last of the five Golden Tickets. This had been done as a way for the chocolatier to thank the candy seller for all his help during Molly’s abduction.

He smiled slightly as he recalled how Willy had conveniently let it leak to the press that no Golden Ticket had even been sent to Paraguay and that the information had been based on a lie. The erupting sensation was precisely what they both had expected and now it was playing out in front of the nearby newsstand.

Although, Willy had planned this right down to the last minute detail, there was no way for them to gauge whether or not the ticket would be found that day. This was the only detail that was completely out of his or Willy Wonka’s hands.

All that Thomas could do now was to wait.

After what seemed like an eternity, the sharp cry of a woman split the air, the sounds of the voices at the newsstand dulled as she called out to the crowd and practically dragged a blonde headed boy over to the masses of people that were hording about Mr. Jopeck’s stand and demanding newspapers.

“Hey, you’ve got it! You got the last Golden Ticket!” the woman’s words triggered Thomas into action as the rest of her statement faded into obscurity.

Thomas remembered almost instantly that he had seen this child before. He was the boy standing at Bill’s shop staring inside several months ago when he had stopped in to seek the candy seller’s assistance in planning Molly’s rescue.

He recalled how Bill had spoken of the boy. Of course, what struck in his mind was not the child of today, instead, he recalled an impoverished little five-year-old whom he had met while standing in front of Eliza’s old house just before she had been invited to move into the factory.

Mr. Jopeck’s words suddenly filtered into his ears. “Run for it, Charlie. Run straight home and don’t stop till you get there.” Turning around, he watched as the child took off running. Without thinking, he started backtrack through several darkened alleyways in the direction that he knew the child was going in.

Thomas realized at that moment that the element of surprise would ultimately be what was working to his advantage, and this was now the moment of truth. Perhaps this child would become Willy Wonka’s heir.

At this stage in the game, it was a hard call for him to make, but this child seemed to most certainly be the best of all options he had seen thus far. He seemed to be everything that Augustus, Veruca, Violet or Mike was not; humble, kind, and hard working.

He was also a child who genuinely loved Willy Wonka’s candy.
This might be just the person Willy was looking for, and irony of ironies; he was right under their nose all the time.

A smile spread across his face as he dashed through the streets of London in the hopes of intercepting the boy. *Money might be his vice since he’s poor*, he thought as he ducked in an alleyway and waited for the child to race through the tunnel towards his home.

As soon as the boy was close enough and he could hear the plodding footsteps getting closer, he stepped out from his hiding place and just about scared the boy to death.

Instead of pardoning himself for this, he stared for several seconds down at the boy as a slight smile curved his lips upward. He had already delivered the speech four times, but now, this time, he was giving it a final run. For whatever reason, this time around it was proving to be even more a challenge than the four other times before.

“I congratulate you, little boy. Well done. You found the fifth Golden Ticket. May I introduce myself? Arthur Slugworth, President of Slugworth Chocolates Incorporated. Now listen carefully because I’m going to make you very rich indeed. Mr. Wonka is at this moment working on a fantastic invention: the Everlasting Gobstopper. If he succeeds, he’ll ruin me. So all I want you to do is to get hold of just one Everlasting Gobstopper and bring it to me so that I can find the secret formula. Your reward will be ten thousand of these.”

As he was speaking, he extracted a large stack of money and began flipping through the bills. He then returned them to the inside pocket of his jacket before continuing to speak. “Think it over, will you? A new house for your family, and good food and comfort for the rest of their lives; and don’t forget the name: Everlasting Gobstopper.”

He started to walk away without even bothering to turn around. Seconds later, he stopped and listened as the sounds of the boy’s footfalls disappeared in the distance.

It seemed rather apparent that the child was afraid of him, perhaps more so than the other four kids had been. They all seemed to contemplate what was in it for them whereas this boy seemed only interested in seeing the factory and meeting his best friend. *Perhaps this would be the diamond in the rough*, he thought with a sigh.

He removed the hat and began to run his hand through his thinning hair. *It’s finally done*, he thought. At least his part of the deal was over. All that was left for him to do was to show up at the factory gates at ten the following morning and see what would happen next. Of course, the rest would ultimately be up to Willy Wonka.

Much to Thomas’ relief, his part of this charade was now over and perhaps his life could become what it was he wanted instead of what was somehow expected.

One thing was clear, watching Willy, Molly, and Linda become a family somehow gave him the right incentive to get out and take the biggest bite out of his own life that he was capable of.

For what it was worth, Eliza and Elmsworth had done it as had Tina and her parents. The only one left was Thomas Wilkenson.

With a smile still gracing his lips and a newfound spring in his step, Thomas was finally freed from the ghost of his brother, which had haunted him all these years. He now had a son who needed him and he had friends who were like an extended family.

He was finally happy.
Life is going to be great again, he thought. Just as Willy’s life had gotten better with the start of his own family, Thomas had found joy. Today, there was something even more profound to his existence than just radio kits.

As he walked, he knew that whatever would happen to Willy or his factory, the chocolatier would always find what he needed. Perhaps while Thomas had been looking for it as a means to help Willy, he had actually been trying to find it for himself.

Perhaps that was the very same legacy as what Willy Wonka had so often spoke of. He only had to look within himself to find it and now he had the rest of his life to continue on this new journey.

The End.

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