

NEW YORK TIMES BEST-SELLING AUTHOR

KEN ABRAHAM

no address

A NOVEL



AUDIOBOOK

PERFORMED BY
GRAMMY AWARD-WINNING
SINGER AND ACTRESS

ASHANTI

HOMELESSNESS COULD
HAPPEN TO **ANYONE**

WATCH THE MAJOR MOTION PICTURE

Praise for **no address**

“ABSOLUTELY RIVETING! I wholeheartedly endorse *No Address* the book. It offers a gripping portrayal of life on the streets. Drawing from my extensive experiences serving on nonprofit boards aiding those experiencing homelessness and even sleeping in shelters alongside former HUD Secretary Cuomo, I can attest to its authenticity. My recent visits to homeless encampments and shelters further enriched my understanding and portrayal of the character I play in the motion picture. Through this journey, I’ve learned firsthand the importance of treating every unhoused person with dignity and respect. *No Address* is not just a story—it’s a call to action and compassion that I proudly stand behind.”

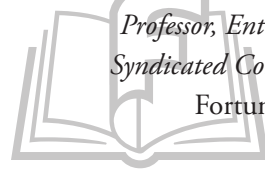
—WILLIAM BALDWIN, *Actor, Producer, Writer*

“THE BOOK DOES an incredible job contextualizing and giving color to the multifaceted challenge of homelessness, which spans the gamut of challenging life circumstances, family dynamics, personal addiction, and the realities of life with no address. If there

is one thing you walk away with after reading, it is that the simple labels and quick fixes we put on homelessness are woefully inadequate and that each of us can be part of the solution in our families, communities, and our nation. Crucially, being part of the solution means amplifying holistic treatment programs for homeless, rather than just focusing on quick fixes such as providing more meals; the latter is helpful for an immediate need, but it just kicks the can down the road.”

—DR. CHRISTOS A. MAKRIDIS

*Professor, Entrepreneur, Adviser,
Syndicated Columnist at Forbes,
Fortune, Fast Company*



Forefront

BOOKS

“HOMELESSNESS IS one of those conversations that feels one way when you’re just talking about an issue, and then it feels totally different when you say, ‘That’s my friend.’ But the question is, what if that were me? Because life can turn on a dime. We don’t know what could flip our circumstances, and we might be the person in need.”

—AMY GRANT

*Singer, Songwriter,
Six-time Grammy Award Winner,
Twenty-two-time Dove Award Winner*

“IN THE BUSTLING streets of life, where the pavement meets the sky, there exists a hidden world—a realm of shadows, courage, and unyielding humanity. *No Address*, penned by the esteemed *New York Times* bestselling author Ken Abraham, invites us into this raw and poignant narrative. In the eyes of the homeless, we glimpse our own vulnerability. In many ways, their stories are our stories—the triumphs, the setbacks, and the unwavering will to survive. *No Address* transcends mere pages; it’s an invitation to view the world anew, to recognize our shared humanity, and to embrace empathy.”

—COMMISSIONER KENNETH G. HODDER
National Commander for The Salvation Army
and COMMISSIONER JOLENE HODDER
National Secretary for Program for The Salvation Army

Forefront
BOOKS

“MY WIFE, Jet, and I lost a friend to the downward spiral of mental illness and homelessness, and the proper resources were not in place to help. Being executive producers of *No Address* is personal; our motivation is to use the power of film to bring awareness and change the status quo. The *No Address* book is an important element in humanizing homelessness—there are too many friends,

brothers, sisters, parents, and loved ones on the street. Connecting with this story and rooting for these characters bring understanding and empathy to the crisis and are critical to turning it around.”

—JOHN LEWIS

*Robert Craig Films Foundation Board
Chairman & Executive Producer of No Address*

“AS SOMEONE deeply committed to understanding and addressing the complex issue of homelessness, I am profoundly moved by the narrative of *No Address*. This book, brilliantly penned by Ken Abraham and inspired by the feature film produced by Robert Craig Films, offers a riveting exploration of human resilience and community in the face of profound adversity. The story’s authenticity and emotional depth highlight the stark realities faced by those without a home, making it a crucial read for anyone looking to understand or combat this pressing social issue. *No Address* not only entertains, it also educates and inspires action, embodying the transformative power of storytelling.”

—KEITH DIEDERICH

*President and CEO
The Gathering Inn and
Production Consultant for No Address*

“KEN ABRAHAM’S *No Address* offers a poignant and powerful exploration of one of our society’s most pressing issues: homelessness. Through vivid storytelling and heartfelt narrative, Abraham portrays the harsh realities faced by those who have no place to call home. With compassion and insight, he delves into the intricate web of challenges and struggles that accompany the experience of homelessness, offering readers an intimate glimpse into a world most of us would prefer to ignore. Raw authenticity sets *No Address* apart. Abraham doesn’t sugarcoat or shy away from the harsh realities faced by the homeless. He boldly confronts the devastating effects of homelessness, shedding light on the human stories behind the statistics. With compelling style, he invites readers to empathize with the individuals who have come face-to-face with this crisis, and not only raises awareness but also inspires action. With uncanny skill, Abraham captures the resilience and dignity of these fictional individuals struggling against homelessness and leads a call to compassion and social change. Anyone with a heart to understand the complexities of homelessness and the need for meaningful solutions should read this book.”

—BRANDAN THOMAS

Director of Leadership for Citygate Network

“THERE ARE TOO many homeless people suffering, and it doesn't have to be this way. I am grateful I could contribute by bringing artists together for *No Address* and the soundtrack to help these touching stories of survival and resilience resonate even more powerfully through music. Like the movie, the *No Address* book shows that anyone can be down on their luck and just need a hand up to change their life. This is the start of something big that will make a difference.”

—GREG LUCID

*Owner of Lucid Creative and
Music Supervisor for No Address*

“KEN ABRAHAM does an amazing job bringing the *No Address* book characters to life in a compassionate and compelling way. His storytelling reminds all of us that homelessness could occur to any one of us, at any time. Every reader will find at least one character with whom they can and will deeply relate, whether it is Lauren fostering out of the system, or the daily challenges of Harris, or even the hard-charging Robert. The story of homelessness within the United States is a critical story that needs to be told in a realistic and compassionate way. Ken does this in a tremendous way, sharing the

daily challenges of experiencing homelessness. Most importantly, the *No Address* book gives us all hope that people experiencing homelessness can recover from being homeless and live a flourishing and meaningful life.”

—ROBERT G. MARBUT JR.

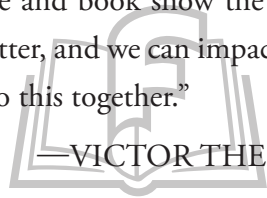
Executive Producer of No Address

“WITH THIS novelization of *No Address*, you are going to interact with characters who are experiencing one of the most-challenging crises in our country today: homelessness. I am grateful for my friends at Robert Craig Films who not only tell meaningful stories like the one in this book, but they also understand the call for believers to live out our faith in tangible ways. This combination of faith and entertainment not only will touch you, it will also challenge you to be part of the solution moving forward.”

—BOB ELDER

*Chief Impact Officer,
Collide Media Group*

“I’VE BEEN ON the streets working with the homeless—helping people get clean and sober, recover from addiction, start jobs, and start their lives again. I see their challenges and know the power of offering support one step at a time—whether it’s recovery from addiction with a ride to the treatment center or new boots so they can get to work. It’s as simple as finding a starting point to help them launch. Being part of *No Address* takes this message to a bigger audience, and I can’t tell you how much it means to have this movie and book show the world that acts of kindness matter, and we can impact so many more lives if we all do this together.”



—VICTOR THE GOOD BOSS

Influencer

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BOOKS

“*NO ADDRESS* exposes the raw truth of homelessness in America, reminding us that our addresses don’t define us. In my opinion, through one specific character’s journey, it reveals the fragile thread connecting us all to the edge of uncertainty. A compelling and eye-opening narrative that challenges us to confront our own vulnerability and the humanity we share.”

—MARK S. ALLEN, *Producer, Writer, Director, p. g. a.*

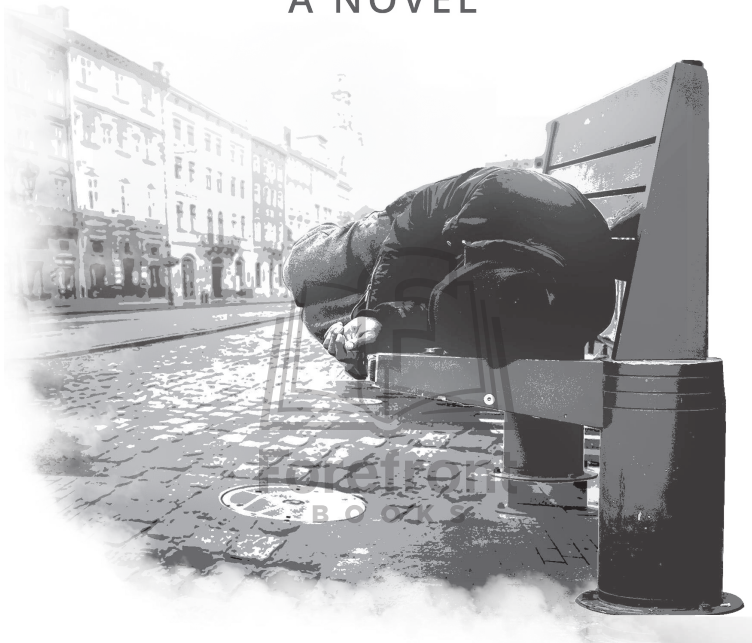
“I AM BLESSED to have been able to spend many years helping people who are facing challenging life circumstances, such as serving as the Goodwill Ambassador for the International Rescue Committee, being a member of the Freedom Corps, and as an ambassador for Save the Children and World Vision. I have also seen firsthand that homelessness can happen to anyone or any family. In *No Address*, the lead character, Lauren, is kicked out of the home by her foster family just as she graduates from high school. With everything she owns in a trash bag, Lauren finds herself “fostered-out” and suddenly living on the streets. Sadly, her story is repeated in real life every day. It doesn’t have to be this way! This book shows us that with the skills and resources of wonderful faith-based and nonprofit organizations there are solutions—and there is hope.”

—MYRKA DELLANOS

Television Host, Journalist

no address

A NOVEL



KEN ABRAHAM

Based on a screenplay by
JULIA VERDIN and JAMES J. PAPA

Additional Materials by David Hyde



NO ADDRESS: A Novel

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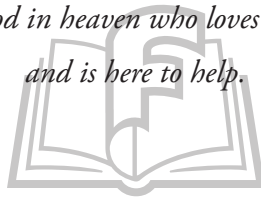
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*This book is dedicated to those
experiencing homelessness in hopes
they will be encouraged, know they are loved,
know there is hope, and know there is
a God in heaven who loves them
and is here to help.*



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BOOKS

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B O O K S

Acknowledgments

WRITING A BOOK is a journey, and like any journey, it's not one you take alone. To those who have walked alongside us on this path, we owe an immense debt of gratitude.

As we reflect on the journey that brought us here, we extend our appreciation to Rebekah Hubbell for her role in forging a connection with the esteemed author Ken Abraham. Ken Abraham's collaboration and insights have enriched every page of this book. His extraordinary talent for crafting narratives that resonate deeply with readers has elevated our project beyond measure. His presence as a leading force has been nothing short of transformative, and we are profoundly grateful for his beautiful humanity. To his beloved wife, Lisa, we extend our deepest thanks for her unwavering support and invaluable contributions.

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Julia Verdin's talents as a screenwriter, producer, and director have served as the guiding light for the film *No Address*. Her wisdom and grace have been instrumental in shaping this book.

We also extend our appreciation to James J. Papa, cowriter of the *No Address* screenplay, who assisted in enriching our narrative with depth and authenticity.

Special thanks to David Hyde for his invaluable support in providing additions to the screenplay for the movie *No Address*.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Alejandro Guimoye, Shaun Lupton, and Justin J. Clare, whose exceptional editing skills and storytelling prowess on the movie *No Address* greatly influenced the narrative of this book.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Additionally, we extend our appreciation to all those who were part of the background cast, whose presence added depth and authenticity to the world of *No Address*. Those contributions, though often behind the scenes, were essential to the film's success.

Our deepest gratitude goes to our fearless leader and founder, Robert Craig, of Robert Craig Films, whose visionary dedication to the *No Address* project has been paramount. He is strengthened by his family and beloved wife, Natascha, who support him in every way imaginable. Robert's unwavering love for the Lord and his boundless kindness toward humanity serve as the guiding light for all endeavors undertaken at Robert Craig Films. His compassion extends even further to those experiencing homelessness, embodying a true spirit of empathy and generosity toward all in need.

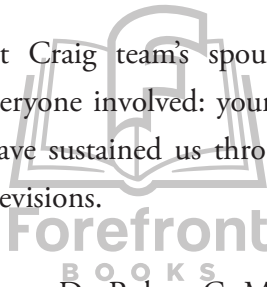
Our thanks go to the exceptional team at Robert Craig Films, whose collective dedication and tireless efforts have been instrumental in bringing the *No Address* project to fruition. Special recognition goes to producers Sally Forcier and Angela Lujan and associate producer Nikki Vogt for their

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

unwavering commitment and invaluable contributions throughout the production process.

We are also deeply thankful to Victoria San Clemente, Christie O'Malior, Kerri Naber, Leigh-Anne Anderson, and Heather Atherton, whose unwavering support and vibrant energy have enriched our team and propelled us forward with renewed enthusiasm.

To the Robert Craig team's spouses and family members of everyone involved: your love, patience, and support have sustained us through long hours and countless revisions.

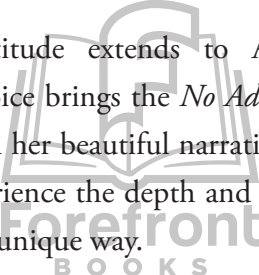


Heartfelt thanks to Dr. Robert G. Marbut Jr. for his invaluable expertise and insights regarding homelessness, which added authenticity to the movie set and seamlessly transitioned into the pages of this book. His dedication to understanding and addressing the complexities of homelessness enriched the narrative and brought depth to the portrayal of the characters' experiences. His contributions have left an indelible mark on the authenticity of *No Address*.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the remarkable actors William Baldwin, Beverly D'Angelo, Xander Berkeley, Lucas Jade Zumann, Ashanti, Isabella Ferreira, Ty Pennington, Patricia Velasquez, and Kristanna Loken, who each breathed life into the characters of *No Address*, we thank them for their unparalleled talent and unwavering dedication. Their captivating performances on-screen not only brought the story to life but also inspired the words that now grace these pages.

A special gratitude extends to Ashanti, whose mesmerizing voice brings the *No Address* audiobook to life. Through her beautiful narration, listeners are invited to experience the depth and emotion of this story in a truly unique way.

The logo for Forefront Books is centered in the background of this paragraph. It features a stylized illustration of an open book with a large, bold letter 'G' superimposed over it. Below the book illustration, the word 'Forefront' is written in a large, bold, sans-serif font, and the word 'BOOKS' is written in a smaller, all-caps, sans-serif font directly underneath it.

To my husband and our production consultant, Keith Diederich, whose unwavering support and profound insights have been invaluable throughout the creation of this project. His guidance has helped so many to understand the depth of love, compassion, and empathy that emanates from knowing individuals experiencing homelessness and their untold stories. Keith's perspective has illuminated the reality that homelessness could happen to anyone, fostering

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a deeper understanding and empathy within these pages.

Lastly, we acknowledge that the *No Address* project is more than just a book or a movie—it is a movement. It is a call to action to break the “no address cycle” that traps so many in our society.

Together with the support of all mentioned here and countless others, may we persist in our pursuit of a world where everyone has a place to call home.

This book stands as the culmination of countless hours of hard work, collaboration, and love. To each and every individual who has contributed, regardless of the scale of their contribution, we offer our heartfelt thanks. It is with profound gratitude that we acknowledge the presence that guided us throughout, knowing that our efforts are empowered by the grace of God.

With gratitude,
Jennifer Stolo
CEO & PRODUCER
ROBERT CRAIG FILMS

Chapter 1

EXUBERANT STUDENTS, most still wearing their graduation caps and gowns, poured out of the high school auditorium and down the steps toward the welcoming arms and beaming faces of parents, grandparents, friends, and other well-wishers.

“You did it!” parents cheered. “We’re so proud of you!”

“Congratulations!” others called out. “You’re on your way. You’re ready to take on the world!” Jubilant voices filled the street as the commencement crowd veered off in various directions, heading to parties, special dinners, or other celebrations honoring the graduates.

Slowly, the crowd thinned until Lauren—a petite, bright-eyed, slender female student, her long brown hair swirling around her shoulders—stood alone on the high school steps. No family members or friends were there to cheer for her. Nobody offered her words of congratulations, bouquets of flowers,

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gift cards, or positive affirmations about her future.

Nobody.

She gazed out at the deserted street, shifted her diploma from one hand to the other, and picked up the shabby backpack sitting at her feet.

Lauren ambled down the steps and glanced around hoping someone—anyone—might show up to be happy with her.

Nobody did.

She swung the backpack over her shoulders and trudged down the street by herself. Still wearing her graduation gown and grasping her cap and diploma, she walked away from the relative safety of the school. About a mile down the road, she turned into a run-down area of the city dotted with old trailers and small, poorly maintained homes and yards.

Lauren headed toward a small house with paint flaking off the window sills. She hurried through the overgrown weeds and past an old, beat-up pickup truck parked at the side of the house, its bed filled with junk. The house's front windows faced the street and were covered with cheap, dirty-looking curtains in various forms of disarray, concealing the view inside.

Lauren stopped cold before she reached the

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front door. The sight that greeted her caused her expression, already sullen, to fall even further. Two large plastic trash bags and some schoolbooks sat piled on the doorstep.

What! What's going on?

Lauren ran up the porch steps and heard the faint sounds of music coming from inside. She tried to open the door, but it was locked, so she banged on it with her fist.

“Why is my stuff out here?” she yelled.

Nobody answered.

She stepped back and looked up toward a window as she thumped on the front door again. “Jade! Jade, I know you’re in there! Let me in!”

Jade, Lauren’s foster mom—a disheveled, haggard woman in her early forties—pulled back the curtain on one side of the window. She peered out at Lauren, then quickly closed the curtain again, blocking her face from Lauren’s view. A few seconds later, the music’s volume increased.

“Come on, Jade! Open the door!” She pounded harder and louder, certain Jade could hear her, even above the loud music. “This isn’t funny,” she railed.

She ran to the side of the house where the gate was usually open.

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It was locked too. Lauren beat on the gate, but it didn't budge. "Jade! Please, Jade! Let me in."

She heard the sound of a window creaking open out front, so she ran back to the front porch.

Jade was still hiding behind the curtain, but she spoke coarsely. "Foster care cut me off. They're done paying me for you, so you're on your own now."

"What?" Lauren said. "No! I— What are you talking about? Where am I supposed to go?"

"Not my problem," Jade said. "You graduated high school. Use your smarts to figure it out. Just grab your stuff and go!" She slammed the window shut. The curtain fluttered and then drooped and hung motionless. Jade was gone.

"No . . . Jade, wait!" Lauren's eyes welled with tears as she banged on the door even harder, rapping her knuckles until they bruised. "I hate you!" she yelled toward the window, knowing Jade could hear her.

"I'll report you!" Her chest heaved as she recalled the abusive treatment Jade had heaped on her. Lauren endured it only because she was at Jade's mercy and forced to obey her foster parent's orders. "I'll tell them how you treated me like a servant. I'm going to go tell them right now!" she yelled, hoping

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her threat might motivate Jade to let her inside. Lauren beat on the door with her palm.

The voice inside the house snapped, “Stop with that noise or I’ll call the cops on *you!*”

It wasn’t that Lauren’s time in Jade’s “care,” her most recent stop along the foster system’s “orphan train,” had been pleasant or even comforting. Far from it. Jade made her do all the dirty work around the house, while she sat watching television. Lauren was used to it. She’d been down that road before, since the time she was eight years old.

She banged on the door one last time, then stepped back, her shoulders drooping in despair. She knew all too well that Jade had the advantage, that the state’s financial assistance ended when a foster child turned of age, and she was on her own. That was just the way the system worked. Many former foster kids were on the streets. She’d heard the stories. Some turned to prostitution just so they could afford food. Others resorted to robbery or selling drugs to survive. Many didn’t survive for long.

“Please, Jade,” she pleaded. “I’m sorry. I’ll do more chores around the house. I’ll do whatever you want. Jade, I’ll do anything. Anything you want. Anything you tell me to do. Please. Please, don’t

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make me leave.”

No response.

* * * * *

Lauren’s mom had given birth to her when she, herself, was quite young and not ready to take on the responsibility of raising a baby. Then her husband abandoned her, and she struggled to make ends meet as a single mother, taking any job she could find. But she loved her daughter and was determined to make a life for them.

Then one day when Lauren was eight years old, she and her mom were baking cookies in their small apartment. Lauren had been capturing the fun by snapping pictures with her new Polaroid camera.

“*Ooh, that’s going to be a good one!*” she’d gushed as a photo developed right before her eyes.

“*You and your camera!*” Lauren’s mom said with a smile.

Lauren moved next to her and held the camera in front of them. She pressed the button, and the camera flashed. A Polaroid selfie.

“*Now we’ll have one with both of us in it,*” Lauren cooed. She shook the photograph to make it process faster, then showed it to her mother. “*I love it! I love*

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you, Mama.”

“And I love you, dear. Come on, now. Let’s have some fun.” Mama set the temperature on the oven. *“What kind of cookies do you want to make?”*

“Chocolate chip?” Lauren pretended to beg.

“Yes, chocolate chip,” Mama agreed. She pulled a large mixing bowl out of the cupboard, and she and Lauren began adding the ingredients—eggs, flour, sugar, vanilla, and chocolate chips.

When everything was mixed up just right, they scooped portions of the cookie dough onto a large baking sheet. Shaping each of the cookies so they would all be the same size, they placed the clumps of dough in neat rows until the pan was full.

“Wait, Mama,” Lauren said. *“I want to get a picture of the cookies before and after, but I need more film. I’ll be right back.”*

She ran upstairs to get more film. That was when she heard a loud crash from the kitchen.

Lauren raced back downstairs, only to find Mama lying on the floor, and the sheet of cookie dough scattered all over the kitchen.

“Mama!” Lauren cried.

But Mama didn’t respond.

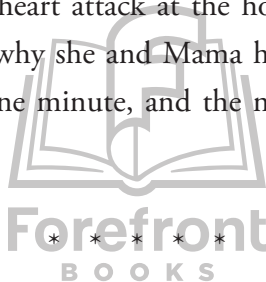
Lauren crouched beside her mother, then

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quickly stood up and stepped back, her eyes wide with fear, as her hands flew to her face. She screamed. *“Mama! Wake up! Mama, please. Oh, God, please help us. Mama, come on.”*

But Mama lay silent on the floor amid the mess of cookie dough.

Lauren picked up the photo of the two of them, her last photograph of Mama and her together. She never found out what had happened to Mama. Someone said heart attack at the hospital, but that didn't explain why she and Mama had been having fun together one minute, and the next, Mama was gone forever.



Following Mama's death, since Lauren had no grandparents and didn't know her father, social services placed her in a shelter, and then another, and another. Eventually, the authorities transferred her to a foster home.

Once she was in the system, Lauren bounced around to a series of foster parents. Most possessed noble motives in trying to help, but Lauren was often unruly and difficult. As she grew into her teens, she

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seethed with anger. She wanted her mother back. She was mad at her father—whoever he was—and at life itself. She often lashed out at the very people who were trying to help her and lost her placement with one set of foster parents after another.

Before long, it seemed the only foster families willing to receive Lauren into their homes were those with questionable motives. They received a monthly stipend from the state meant to help pay for the foster child's needs, including food, clothing, school supplies, and other essentials, but all too often, the adults pocketed the money and the foster kids received little or none of the benefits.

The last few families with whom Lauren had lived treated her as an unpaid babysitter or maid. Some of the adults were verbally or physically abusive. Some scrimped on food, often allowing Lauren to go hungry, especially during the summer when school was out and there were no free breakfasts and lunches provided in the school cafeteria. Even when school was in session, on more than a few weekends, Lauren didn't eat after the Friday school lunch until she returned Monday morning. All the while, her foster parents received money from the state to purchase food for her. Other foster parents insisted Lauren

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wear worn-out, far from stylish clothes. She didn't notice so much during her early teens, but as her body matured, dressing in Ms. Rummage Sale duds was downright embarrassing.

Lauren hated her existence and trusted no one. She had long since closed off her heart to love, choosing instead to keep up her guard as a protective shield to avoid feeling the hurt of rejection again.

As she entered her upper teens, she grew into an attractive, smart, and perceptive young woman. A volcano of anger still seethed behind her pretty face, ready to erupt at the slightest crack in her emotional veneer, but Lauren learned how to play the game. She knew enough to control her temper and that it was best to be quiet and to do what her foster parents demanded. *Go along to get along.* That was the only way to stay out of their sights, to avoid trouble, and to survive.

When she failed to hold to that pattern and expressed her anger or refused to do the demeaning jobs her foster parents demanded, she landed back in the system, waiting for the next “kind soul” to take her in.

That was how she had been placed with Jade, a childless single woman and last-ditch choice by

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the foster system. Jade, too, had learned how to work the system, and Lauren was not her first foster child. She'd had a slew of kids before Lauren—all for limited amounts of time, until she got sick of them, bored with them, or they had rebelled against her oppressive demands. Jade also knew when the money ran out on each child she kept in her home. Her benevolence policy was simple: when the money was gone, so was the kid.

Lauren survived at Jade's house for most of her final year in high school simply by keeping to herself, which was no easy feat when Jade forced her to do so many gross chores around the house, whether it was cleaning the commode, scrubbing the floors, or mowing the lawn when city authorities tagged the house for the grass being too high.

Jade often punished Lauren with forced isolation. *"Just stay in your room and don't come out."* That was one punishment Lauren didn't mind. She actually enjoyed reading and studying. She was a good student and hoped an education might buy her a ticket out of poverty and open a door to more.

But now the doors were locked. All of them. And Lauren was on the outside, alone in front of Jade's house. She backed away and slumped down on

KEN ABRAHAM

the front steps, sobbing uncontrollably. Through her tears, she fumbled in her backpack and retrieved her phone. She pressed a button and the phone lit up. Apparently, Jade had forgotten to close the account so Lauren wasted no time. She texted a friend from school: “Can I stay at your house? Jade has locked me out.”

No response. She texted a couple other people and waited.

Eventually, she tried the front door again.
Useless.

Her eyes searched her phone messages. Nothing. The sun was already going down and the late-afternoon sky was darkening. Lauren stood and, on a whim, walked over to Jade’s run-down pickup truck. She tried the door, and to her amazement, it opened. On the floorboard she saw her ragged stuffed bunny, one of the few comforts that had accompanied her from one foster home to another. She clutched the stuffed animal to her chest, curled up on the front seat, and closed her eyes. Maybe if she could sleep for a while, when she woke up, she’d discover it had all been a bad dream.

Hours later, the sunlight bathed Lauren’s eyelids, its warm rays streaming through the truck’s

NO ADDRESS

windshield. Her eyes fluttered open and she gazed around the interior of the vehicle, trying to get her bearings. Why was she scrunched on the front seat of Jade's truck? Her sleep had been fitful and dotted with nightmares, but she must have slept at least a few hours in the darkness, because she hadn't awakened until morning. Slowly, awareness dawned on her, and she pulled herself up in the seat and slid out of the truck.

As a last futile effort, she banged on Jade's door one more time. She received no response. Lauren looked at her phone. Maybe one of the messages she'd sent the night before had evoked a friendly, welcoming response.

Nothing.

Her fingertips flew on the phone's keys: "Please respond! If I can't stay at your place, can I just leave some of my stuff with you for a while till I settle?"

Lauren removed her rumpled graduation gown. Under it, she wore torn jeans and a lilac-colored shirt. She tossed the commencement cap and gown on the doorstep, then started sifting through the trash bags Jade had put outside the front door. She found a few books and an old pair of sneakers. She swapped her dress shoes for the sneakers, stuck her bunny in her

backpack, then looked hopefully at her phone. Still no response to any of her messages.

Lauren picked up her bags and headed off, awkwardly lugging the bags on each side of her. She trudged across the walkway of a long bridge spanning a wide river, one bag banging against the rail as traffic whizzed past. Looking out across the deep river below with the huge cityscape beyond, she pulled out her phone and pressed the name of another friend she hoped might help her.

The friend picked up but was reluctant to offer help, so Lauren hurriedly explained her situation, concluding, “Okay, look. I’m totally stuck here. Couldn’t I just sleep on your couch? Your floor? Anywhere?”

The phone suddenly went dead. Lauren stared at the screen and shook the phone in annoyance. “Great.”

She looked up toward the graying skies and yelled, “Really?”

Lauren shook her head and stared up toward heaven. “Mom was wrong about you,” she cried. “You really don’t answer prayers, do you?”