

Letting Go of Perfect

THE SISTERHOOD
PIE PACT
—•—
BOOK TWO

JANELL GOODRICH YORK



Scrivenings
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.
www.ScriveningsPress.com

Copyright © 2026 by Janell Goodrich York

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC

15 Lucky Lane

Morrilton, Arkansas 72110

<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-644-8

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-645-5

Editors: Suzie Waltner and Denica McCall

Cover design by Janell York and Linda Fulkerson

Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.® Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

This is a work of fiction. Unless otherwise indicated, all names, characters, businesses, events, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, or actual events is purely coincidental.

NO AI TRAINING: Without in any way limiting the author's [and publisher's] exclusive rights under copyright, any use of this publication to "train" generative artificial intelligence (AI) technologies to generate text is expressly prohibited. The author reserves all rights to license uses of this work for generative AI training and development of machine learning language models.

To the small town I grew up in and the people who welcomed us with open arms.

To my dad for the sacrifices you made, the wisdom you shared, and loving me unconditionally.

*“Sometimes you don’t realize the weight of something you’ve been carrying
until you feel the weight of its release.”—Unknown*

Chapter One



Olivia

The kids hop beside me, talking over one another as I finish filling the tawny-brown woven picnic basket with their dad's favorite meal. Their excitement about surprising him is contagious. Mark's been working late a lot, and tonight is no exception. This is the third night in a row the kids have gone to bed without kissing their dad good night.

Liam, our seven-year-old, came up with the idea to surprise him with a picnic dinner at his office. We've spent the afternoon making Mark's favorite meal—fried chicken, coleslaw, mashed potatoes, and gravy. Mia, our five-year-old, is especially proud of the brownies she made—with a little help from me. I groan inwardly, thinking about all the carbs in the picnic basket, but the pleased expression on our kids' faces dissolves my concern.

Once the kids are belted into their seats in our minivan, I quickly load a quilt and the basket into the back. Mia and Liam throw their hands in the air, chanting, "Let's go see Daddy!"

We haven't been on the highway long before the Gateway Arch looms ahead on our way downtown. We pass a small park across the street from his building. I make a mental note that it might be nice to eat our picnic dinner there, then I steer into the underground parking garage.

Once parked, I shut off the minivan and rotate toward Mia and Liam in the back seat. "Remember, we're trying to surprise Daddy. We have to be quiet in the elevator so he won't hear us coming." Both kids nod. The overhead light of the cabin highlights their broad grins and sparkling eyes.

The company Mark works for removed the offices and cubicles a few months ago. The remodel turned the eighth floor into an open communal space with shared desks. We can't eliminate the ding of the elevator that will announce our arrival, but we can prolong the suspense if he doesn't overhear our voices echoing in the metal shaft on the way up.

"Ready?" I beam at the kids, then hold a finger to my lips. "Remember, shh."

Their seat belts click. I spin back around to unbuckle mine. When I exit the vehicle and step back to open Mia's door, she carefully stretches her toes to the asphalt, hugging the pan of brownies to her chest as she tips her chin high with pride. She wears a pleased smile.

Liam, in true form, bounds out on the other side.

The kids join me as I lift the back hatch. Liam grabs the multicolored patchwork quilt and throws it over his left shoulder. The corner drags across the concrete floor behind him. I almost tell him to pick it up, but then he looks at me, his face beaming with anticipation. I refrain and return his smile.

Slinging my handbag over one shoulder, I lift the picnic basket from the back compartment with my free hand. The kids race to the elevator without saying a word. Once I've caught up, I nod to Liam to push the Up arrow. The metallic silver doors slide open. We rush into the steel compartment. The doors shut, and Liam taps the Number-Eight button. When it lights up, he takes a step back, almost tripping over my prized quilt.

I stare at the lighted ceiling, pressing my lips together to avoid commenting. My stomach drops as the elevator rises.

Mia has tucked her small body behind me, hiding in anticipation of the moment she will jump out and yell, "Surprise!" Liam moves to stand in front of me, wanting to be the first to run to his dad.

The elevator comes to an abrupt stop. Imagining the happy expression on Mark's face when he sees us, my mouth lifts into a bright smile.

Letting Go of Perfect

But then the elevator dings and the doors open.

My smile drops.

In the center of the room, *my husband* sits in an office chair, brazenly kissing a brunette who's sprawled on his lap.

Engaged in the passionate kiss, Mark doesn't notice us.

My stomach lurches like I've been sucker-punched. Bile stings my throat. The buzz of the fluorescent lights hums too loud, and my pounding pulse fills my ears. I can't move.

Liam takes a step forward. "Dad?" he stutters in a shocked tone.

Mark's head snaps up from the brunette's embrace. He blinks rapidly, then darts his gaze to us. Red-faced, he jumps to his feet.

The brunette tumbles to the floor. "What in the world, Mark?" she growls.

He doesn't reply but stands frozen, gaping at us.

The brunette brushes herself off, then rises from the floor. She gawks at Mark for a moment before shifting her gaze our way. A sardonic smile slowly forms on her smudged wine-colored lips.

I gasp, recognizing her. Felicia, his coworker. I'm knocked off balance. A windstorm of memories of socializing with her at Mark's work-related events spins through my mind. Events I never cared for but dutifully attended to help build his career. Felicia had been my only respite. I thought she was my friend.

Something inside me tilts, as if the ground shifted and I didn't notice until now. Tears build behind my eyes. My cheeks sting like they've been slapped, jolting me out of my mental daze. I slam my hand against the Ground-Floor button.

The doors remain open, keeping us exposed and vulnerable. "What's wrong with this thing?" My cry sounds far away.

"Olivia. Wait," Mark yells.

My heart pounds as I watch him rush toward us. Seconds before he closes the distance, the doors shut. A sob escapes me. I cover my mouth quickly.

"Why are we going back down?" Mia asks behind me.

I force myself to move. Setting the picnic basket on the elevator floor, I pull Mia around to my side, then squat to study her. She hugs the pan of brownies. I blink back tears as her sweet, innocent face peers up at me. I swallow hard before replying, "It's not a good time to visit Daddy."

Confusion crosses her face, but she shrugs, seeming satisfied with my answer.

I rise and place my palms on Liam's slumped shoulders. He remains facing the elevator doors, completely still with his back to me and his head bent.

I swivel him around with both hands. His gaze remains locked on the floor. I lift his chin, needing to see his face. Liam winces as he blinks back tears. His amber eyes, usually sparkling and full of mischief, are lackluster and vacant in a way I've never seen. My heart shatters into a million pieces.

Liam loves his father fiercely. He not only looks like Mark, he wants to be like Mark.

Lost for words, I pull him to my chest, wrapping both arms around him. "We're going to be okay." My voice cracks. I need—pray—for this simple statement to be true.

Liam's body stiffens, then he wriggles out of my arms. An imaginary dagger stabs me in the chest when he backs away.

The elevator doors open in the parking garage. Liam hurls the quilt, leaving it on the dirty concrete floor.

The basket falls from my hand before I realize what I'm doing. It hits the ground with a thud, porcelain shattering and silverware clanging. For a second, I stand there staring at the wreckage. All that effort. All that care. For what?

"I'll never cook fried chicken again," I vow to myself.

Mia's eyebrows furrow. She glances down at her container of brownies, shakes her head, then hugs it tighter to her chest.

I give her a weak smile, holding back impending tears. "Don't worry. You can keep the brownies."

Hearing the scrape of the elevator doors shutting, I dart my gaze over my shoulder. My pulse quickens at the lit-up arrow. "He's coming."

Motioning for the kids to scurry along, I rush to the minivan. I can't deal with him right now—or *her*. Fresh anger spirals from the pit of my stomach. A shot of adrenaline pulses down my legs.

After securing the kids into the vehicle in record time, I rush to the driver's side. I glance again at the elevator. The Down arrow lights up.

Diving into my seat, I slam the car door, hit the lock, press the

Letting Go of Perfect

Start button, and shift the vehicle into drive. I plunge the accelerator to the floor, and the tires squeal as we race out of the parking garage.

A block away, we're stopped by a red light. My heart threatens to beat out of my chest waiting for the light to change.

Realization hits me. Mark will rush home. Then what? Will he try to make amends, or tell me he's leaving me for Felicia? Uncertainty and despair gnaw at my gut.

The light turns green. A car horn blares behind me, but I'm frozen.

Home is straight ahead—the house, our life, the version of us that Mark betrayed.

The driver honks again, this time flashing his lights.

Checking my rearview mirror, I notice several cars lined up behind me.

I grip the wheel tighter. We can't go home. Not yet. Not like this.

I can already imagine Mother's disapproving stance at her door, hands on her hips. It won't be easier there, but it's somewhere to land. With a heavy sigh, I turn left.

"I think Grandma and Grandpa would like some brownies," I say, feigning excitement.

Mia yells, "Yay," still hugging the container, the picnic with her father forgotten.

I smile at her in the rearview mirror, thankful she hid behind me and was spared that awful scene.

Liam says nothing.

I shift my gaze to him. He snuffles and covers his face with his hands. Another dagger sears my core.