

CHAPTER 1

An Alternative Fuel

SIXTY-TWO-YEAR-OLD Willard M. Romney-Trump VI, reference librarian at the Stars Hollow Public Library, leveled a shotgun at the two miscreants.

“Mr. Kanye, Miss Kim, step away from the cart, please.” He jerked the long, double barrel twice to the left a signal to get moving.

Willard’s words were polite, his tone was not. This was an order *not* a request.

And he’d woken up in such a good mood this morning.

TODAY, JUNE 20TH, 2220, was once referred to as the summer solstice; sadly, though, most of the population of Stars Hollow, Connecticut, was too young to ever know summer. They’d seen photos of summer, artwork of summer, videos of summer, and listened to old Beach Boys’ recordings on their Huawei 2300Gs. But to actually have *experienced* summer, that was limited to Willard’s age group. But even to Gen-Geri (Generation Geriatric) summer was a vague memory from childhood. By the mid-22nd Century, Hell hath finally frozen over.

Willard’s day had begun no different from any other day in Stars Hollow. The temperature outside was minus twelve degrees Fahrenheit; it had snowed overnight, but only a dusting, hardly worth sending out the town’s only snowplow. Due to the ice age, by the late 2150s most Americans had fled south into Mexico where *they* were the illegal aliens. For the few hardy and deplorable climate-deniers who had refused to leave their beloved town, travel was by snowshoe for the lower and middle classes, and snowmobiles for one-percenters like Willard. His

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family, the Romney-Trumps, had been members of the ruling class for generations. His fifth great-grandfather had run for president two hundred eight years ago in November, 2012.

Willard arrived at the library at his usual time of eight with his beloved cat, Seamus. The orange tabby was in his carrier; and, as always, the carrier had been strapped onto the rear of Willard's snowmobile.

"He loves to travel," Willard would tell the only person who dared question his love for the animal: Miss Lorelei Gilmore, the children's librarian. Although Seamus would sometimes emerge from the carrier after leaving behind small mounds of poop and vomit, Willard knew that this was better than leaving the cat home. The threat of killer cold seeping into his old Victorian house was always a possibility.

"Freezing to death, that's true cruelty, Lorelei. Besides, Seamus loves the library as much as I do."

True. Seamus would spend the most of the day warming his eighteen-year-old bones on top of one of the library's heat vents. Occasionally, he would patrol the bookshelves looking for unwary rodents. Not that he ever caught anything. Seamus was just too old and feeble.

Willard admired the cat's true grit, though: *He tries. He's dedicated.*

Willard's first chore of the day was to turn on the library's network of Huawei 2290G terminals. They were known in the jargon of library science as 290s. He wished the city council would approve his request and upgrade to 300s (2300Gs). Both the old and new devices were manufactured in aboriginal sweatshops in South Australia. Air pollution in China had caused it to freeze over with glaciers at an even faster rate than in North America and Europe.

After turning on the 290s, Willard sat relaxed in the librarian's office; the library opened at ten a.m. This morning he sipped his morning tea and enjoyed a print picture book about dressage.

"For the life of me, Willard," nagged Lorelei, who shared the office

with him, “why don’t you watch a video about those bouncing horsies?”

“Call me old-fashioned, Lorelei—”

“You’re old fashioned, Willard.”

“—but there’s something about holding a book in one’s hands, the smell of old paper, turning a page.” He knew it frustrated her that he remained so fixated on the ancient technology of bound pages while she was devoted to the technique of *tap & swipe*.

The two librarians had been friends for many years. Both had begun their careers at SHPL. When they were young, they had been more than friends. Neither of them ever married, though, so in a sense the collection served as a substitute for a child they never conceived.

“Mr. Romney-Trump! Miss Gilmore!” called Mrs. Betty Bowers from the reading room. “They’re stealing our semi-precious books from teen fiction!”

The elderly woman was livid. She hated not only the sin, but sinners. There was something quite unnatural about Mrs. Bowers, an ultra-Christian, Canadian from Toronto. She was the library’s circulation clerk. An octogenarian, she had the looks and energy of a woman half her age. She stormed into the librarian’s office huffing and puffing red rage—from indignation not exertion. Mrs. Bowers paused to assemble her thoughts into just the right words. The woman was a pontificate and everything she said sounded like a sermon:

“Two juvenile delinquents are tossing our books into a shopping cart, a cart they stole from Mr. Dolce’s market!”

Willard gave her a comforting smile. “I’ll see to it right away, Betty. Thank you for bringing the matter to my attention.”

“Hope you’re not taking that damn shotgun with you,” Lorelei huffed.

“Of course I am,” Willard replied. He looked at her as if she had asked an equally stupid question: *Does a library book need a plastic jacket?*

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She frowned. “Don’t you think that’s a tad extreme, Willard?”

“Stealing literature is extreme, Lorelei.”

“They’re stealing from Teen Fiction. You hate those books.”

“Even so.”

“Those books might be abominations, Miss Gilmore,” said Betty about to jump into full lecture mode, “but they’re our abominations. They’re under our care, although they must be carefully rationed to our young readers.”

“We don’t ration books in *this* library, Betty,” snapped Lorelei, “we ration heat.”

Willard removed his gray, Patagonia pullover sweater—free arm movement was essential when enforcing library discipline—and went to a file cabinet to retrieve his tool of authority: Skeeter, ancient but well maintained shotgun that had been in his family for generations. His grandfather had used it to shoot clay pigeons. The Romney-Trumps came from a long line of animal lovers, so no birds were ever harmed with Skeeter.

As for miscreants, they were a whole different species.

Willard carefully placed Skeeter on the bottom shelf of a rickety old book cart where it would be out of view but within easy reach. Surprise was everything when it came to enforcing library policy. He pushed the cart out into the large reading room. Early morning light filtered through the ornate floor to ceiling, arched windows. A young man and young woman were fully illuminated doing their dirty deed. They were feverishly shoveling armloads of books into a Dolce’s cart. Hot vapors steamed from their noses and mouths, it had to be at least forty degrees in the reading room. Solar panels on the library’s roof had not fully engaged yet.

A polite but firm, “May I see your library cards, please?” he said to a young man and a young woman. This being an ice age, the couple was

dressed in arctic clothing. Their boots had left slushy puddles of water and snow in their wake. In Willard's mind, an assault on the library's beautiful two-hundred-year-old par cay floor had been strike one. A second strike quickly followed because the young couple was throwing armloads of books from the Teen Fiction shelves into a stolen shopping cart clearly stenciled, "Dolce's Food Market." When Willard dared to confront them about their borrowing privileges, the young man gave the young woman a look that said: *Can you believe this guy?*

"It's freezing out there, catdaddy," the young woman said. "We're heading south to Mexico. We're camping out. We need these books to burn so we can be warm tonight."

The miscreants went back to shoveling teen fiction.

Judging from her elocution, it was clear to Willard that she was of inferior breeding. Obviously, these two came from Bridgeport not Hartford. And as far as burning books to keep warm strike three, game over.

Although appalled by their audacity, Willard's voice remained calm and confident. "Excuse me, young sir and young miss."

"You're excused, Geri," said the young man, a slur on an entire elderly generation. "Get lost."

Willard wasn't going anywhere. "Library's policy is three books per person in a given three week period." Eyeing the cart piled high: "I do believe you have exceeded your limit, sir." He smiled the smile of someone about to make a dramatic statement.

To his girlfriend, "Like, oh great, now Geri thinks we gotta be responsible for these books." To Willard, "The voices in my head told me to do this, so take a hike, old man." To his girlfriend, "Think we got enough, Kim." Then he pumped a fist in the air, "Let's go!"

"I'm so 5000, Kanye! Sooner we be back at camp the better."

Kanye grabbed hold of the cart's handles and began to push.

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Pleasantly, “I’m afraid I can’t let you do that, Mr. Kanye, sir. Those books are the property of the Stars Hollow Public Library.”

Kanye stopped pushing, turned around, and laughed at Willard. “Not no more; they be with us now.” To Kim: “America’s a giant Popsicle and he be worried about a bunch’a books.” To Willard, “The world’s ending, Geri, nobody be needing li-berrys no more.”

“You can’t be ordering my Kanye around like that, catdaddy!” said Kim. “He’s a Christian, genius billionaire!”

If he’s a billionaire, why is he stealing my gosh darn, double ding-dong damn books! thought Willard.

Regardless of Kim and Kanye’s financial status, they had sealed their fate. After trying nicely to get the miscreants to cease and desist, it was time to introduce them to Skeeter.

“Step away from the shopping cart. Slowly,” Willard commanded. His tone was level and so was the shotgun he pointed at them. Given that weapon at this distance, Mr. Kanye and Miss Kim had to know they would be rendered Swiss cheese.

In addition to being the adult services librarian, Willard was also the self-anointed library enforcer. He was short and stooped. He had an old man’s paunch, and his back and shoulders were rounded from too many years spent seated at the reference desk. Yet he spoke with the calm authority of someone protecting what he loved most: *his* books and *his* library. Not to mention, “And look what you’ve done to our floor.” Grim set eyes shown through thick, rimless lenses gave Willard the menacing appearance of a giant bug-eating-bug.

Hands held high in the air, the terrified miscreants side-stepped away from the cart and bookshelves that held Willard’s least-loved books. Such common and disgusting “literature,” was it any wonder that young people had their heads filled with zombies, vampires, and werewolves?

Maybe I should let them burn the gosh darn, double ding-dong damn things?

After a pause, he decided: *No, sets a bad precedent.*

Then Willard noticed Seamus walking on a nearby bookshelf. The orange tabby, with a keen instinct for drama, had perched himself on an upper, recently emptied shelf. The cat laid flat on his belly, his face and one paw hanging over the edge.

Willard ordered the miscreants to step even further away from the cart filled with garbage-lit and the bookshelf where his precious Seamus had made himself comfortable.

“Chill! Chill! Let’s not get excited. Sir,” Kanye croaked. Terror did have its effect.

“But it’s freezing out there,” Kim pleaded. “We be dying tonight without fire!”

Burn books! These Bridgeport barbarians were about to die sooner than that.

Boom! Boom!

Two shots roared as Skeeter spit buckshot into the couple. Their innards exploded behind them like jet spray, and they snapped shut at the waist like books.

Calmly, “Betty,” Willard called, “can you please tell Kirk there’s a cleanup in Teen Fiction.”

When he turned around, Willard saw Lorelei standing outside of the office, arms folded across her chest. Slowly shaking her head, “Willard, Willard, what am I to do with you?”

It seemed that nothing he ever did pleased this woman!

“I can’t just let anyone come in here and take our books to use as fuel, Lorelei. And they didn’t have library cards!”

She waived him off, turned, and walked back into the office.

“She’ll get over it, Mr. Romney-Trump,” said Mrs. Betty Bowers. She’d been standing right behind him, and he knew she would always

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have his back. “You did the right thing. After all, rules are rules. I’ll get Kirk to help remove the bodies.”

Fifty-two-year-old Kirk Pants-On-Fire had been the library’s custodian for over thirty years. Even an un-muscular Willard was an Arnold Schwarzenegger-Trump compared to Kirk. The man had arms with the consistency of cooked noodles. No one knew who his father was, but his mother was the elderly Native American, Sara-Sara Pants-On-Fire. *Her* grandfather, Kirk’s great-grandfather, was Chief Sean Fork-Tongue-Pants-On-Fire. Both were infamous being pathological liars, a pathology that had skipped Kirk. He merely embellished the truth rather than out and out lie.

Willard and Kirk somehow managed to wrestle both bodies onto a large gray canvas, four-wheeled-bin used for garbage. Octogenarian Mrs. Betty Bowers found their struggle amusing. The two “he-manly-men” wheeled the bin to the elevator and took it to the basement. At the delivery bay, Willard pushed a button and a gray metal door rolled open. A stash of unburied corpses had been laid out behind the library. This miscreant dump was a virtual feast for the hardy alley cats that chose to remain in Stars Hollow. They would come and gnaw on the steaming flesh before the corpses froze solid. A large, thriving colony of felines lived among the library dump. Willard smiled; after all he was quite fond of cats.

“Two bodies at once, OK Kirk?” said Willard.

“We can handle it, sir,” Kirk said, rolling his bony shoulders. To Betty, “Please step aside, Mrs. Bowers. This is man’s work.”

“On three,” said Willard. A strained, “*One...*” An even more strained, “*Two...*” That was as far as he got. Willard and Kirk collapsed. Despite their best he-manly-men efforts to tip the bin up and over, it had not been raised even an inch.

“Oh pooh,” said Betty. She grabbed the end of the bin with one hand: “*Three!*” She lifted and pushed, and two more bodies joined the

pile of frozen corpses. Willard had been enforcing library discipline for over thirty years.

Gosh darn, double ding-dong damn that old woman is strong! Willard smiled.
“Well done, Betty.”

Proudly, “I do try, Mr. Romney-Trump.”

Lorelei had been standing off to the side—*watching* not *helping*. “I’m disappointed in you, Betty, taking part in Willard’s nonsense.”

“Oh pooh, Miss Gilmore, stealing books from a library? As I’ve told Mr. Romney-Trump many times, if that isn’t a one way ticket to eternal damnation, *then it should be.*”

Sadly shaking her head, “Betty, Betty, Betty...” Lorelei never, ever let anyone have the last word. She held on to it as if it was her birthright. “Never, ever second-guess the Almighty.”

CHAPTER 2

A Call From the Wild

WILLARD LEANED FORWARD comfortably in his antique ergonomic seat behind his desk in the librarian's office. He was fully absorbed in a print copy of *A Winter's Tale*, written by Mark Helprin and published in 1983. He'd always been a theme-reader. Lorelei sat in her conventional chair at her desk working on a library outreach presentation for 3rd, 4th, and 5th graders. Suddenly, the screeching of two angry women upset the delicate balance of Willard's quiet time. The ruckus came from the circulation desk.

He sighed and snapped his book shut. *Gosh darn, double ding-dong damn!*

"What do you mean I can't borrow another book until I pay a five Yuan fine? I'm a taxpaying citizen of this town! I won't let government deny me my constitutional reading rights! Or my Second Amendment rights, *so be careful, old lady.*"

Without bothering to poke their heads out the door, Willard and Lorelei already knew who the voice belonged to, the most abusive library patron in the state of Connecticut, all of North America, Planet Earth, and perhaps the entire Milky Way Galaxy: forty-six year-old Mrs. Sarah Palin-Trump. The woman was far worse than a mere migraine to the library staff; she was like an ax to the skull.

Lorelei shot Willard a snarky, "Her you can shoot."

The Palin-Trump family belonged to the same social class as Willard, so it went against his ingrained grain to equate them with miscreants; therefore, he could not bring himself to confront them with Skeeter. Besides, they were distant kinfolk — and as far as Willard was concerned the degree of separation between the Romney-Trumps and the Palin-

Trumps was not nearly far enough.

The Palin-Trumps lived in a *hugely big* biosphere called, “The Darkest Tower.” It lay atop Mt. Stephen King on the outskirts of town. Sarah often hinted that the family might one day endow the library with a million Yuan.

When an excited Willard happily passed the news on to Lorelei, she replied, “When hell freezes over.”

He smirked. “I have news for you, Lorelei, it already has.”

“We’ll see, Willard, we’ll see.”

The last word.

Lorelei’s opinion of Sarah Palin-Trump went as follows: “The woman’s a monster, a momma grizzly who hates books, learning, and knowledge in general. She’s the worst enemy any library has ever had.”

Still, duty was duty and despite his personal fear and loathing for the woman, Sarah was a library patron and all library patrons must be served. In a spirit of good will he had once asked her what books she liked to read. “We have one of the largest collections left in Connecticut; perhaps I can recommend some reading material that might interest you.”

She flapped her arms at her sides and replied, “Oh, I read everything, Willard.” When he asked her to be more specific, her reply was pointed: “I read the Bible, Mr. Romney-Trump. And I find your question more government intrusion into my privacy.”

That was Willard’s last attempt at library outreach to Mrs. Sarah Palin-Trump.

It was a quarter to twelve, nearly lunchtime for the staff. Willard knew a library professional should insert *herself* between paraprofessional Mrs. Betty Bowers, circulation clerk, and the momma grizzly. He turned pleading eyes to Lorelei.

As if she could read his mind, “You’re the adult services librarian,

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Willard. Go serve.”

His shoulders slumped. He felt like a Christian — even though he was an atheist — about to enter the arena and place himself in harm’s way, between two snarling she-beasts.

“Rules are rules and must be obeyed!” Betty hollered at Mrs. Palin-Trump. “Your borrowing privileges are hereby suspended until you pay up, young woman!”

To be referred to as “young” suddenly took a bit of the edge off of Sarah’s razor. “I’d like to speak with Cousin Willard, please.”

Sarah Palin-Trump was skilled at playing the family card, and Willard hated being reminded that they shared a common ancestry.

Meanwhile Kirk had stopped mopping up in Teen Fiction and was now crouched, hidden behind a bookcase. Seamus dozed on the counter next to Sarah’s stack of audio-books and DVDs; nothing fazed him.

“And get that filthy creature away from my thingies before I eat him!”

A kinder, gentler Sarah was but a brief moment in time.

Willard smiled apologetically, picked up his cat, and gently placed him on the floor. “Is there a problem, ladies?”

“*You* betcha!” said Sarah.

Sarah’s demented mother-in-law, Mrs. Donelda Palin-Trump, sat in a hover-chair floating next to the momma grizzly. Willard was convinced that the old woman preferred A/V material because she had never read a print book in all her one-hundred-five years. The elder Mrs. Palin-Trump had thinning hair, dyed an unnatural orange color that swirled around the top of her head like cotton-candy. Her coiffure was held in place and stunk of so much hairspray that not even a snow blower could disturb a single strand. And Donelda’s face had been power-lifted so many times that her slits-for-eyes stretched on either side. The next surgery would surely put them behind her ears. After a stint in prison,

her great-grandmother, Ivanka, had divorced her first husband in 2035. He was also sent to prison but his sentence had been much longer. Ivanka then married Stink-Bear Palin the same year. Thus did this peculiar branch of the Trump family tree sprout. The Trumps and Palins had been inbreeding ever since — genetic mutations that had yielded abominations.

Because all members of the Trump Tree had been climate change deniers for over two hundred years — and since none of them spoke Spanish — they stayed behind in the United States instead of fleeing south into Mexico. Thus the Clan Trump, by intermarriage with other hold-out families, had some branches that were tangled messes of dementia, ignorance, and outright meanness like the Palin-Trumps. Other branches, for example the Romney-Trumps, added class, culture and intelligence to their leaves. And yet another branch, the Limbaugh-Trumps, one of whom happened to be the mayor also lived in Stars Hollow, added an autumn tint to its foliage.

A bag of fast-food lay in Donelda's lap. Greedily, she stuffed chunks of hamberger — 5% ground beef, 5% ground turkey, and the rest filler made from coal ash. A steady flow of one freedom fry after another went into a tiny round mouth that resembled a rectum. Her live-in caregiver and mouth, ass wiper, and diaper changer, Miss Michelle McConnell, stood by her side. She held a *Handi-Wipe* ready to move in and mop up. Donelda ate like a bloated orange pig at a trough. Willard always struggled mightily to contain a gag reflex whenever Sarah fed her mother-in-law in the library. Such foul practices should only be performed behind locked doors.

Despite her advanced age, Donelda could multi-task; she was especially adept at eating and tweeting simultaneously on her Huawei 2300G. While her abnormally small thumbs worked, unexpectedly she began another one of her rants. Drool and bits of hamberders and fries exploded from her mouth along with the words: “Witch hunt! Fake news! Covfefe! Build the wall! No obstruction! No collusion! The transcript

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was PERFECT! Corona is a beer not a bug!”

Michelle O’Connell put the *Handi-Wipe* aside, grabbed Donelda’s favorite pink with gold embroidery Mickey Mouse bib, and quickly wiped the crude off the old lady’s face and lap.

Donelda looked up at O’Connell and said, “I’m a stable genius, aren’t I?”

Smiling indulgently, “You certainly are, ma’am.”

Willard’s mouth filled with bile. He quickly turned away and coughed it back down.

A stack of A/V material about vampires, ghouls and goblins ready to be checked out sat on the counter in front of Sarah Palin-Trump. The Library Bill of Rights prevented Willard from asking if the books were for her or her teenagers: sons Billy Barr Bob, Lindsay, and transgendered Ivonker, and daughter Malignia.

Sarah laid it all out for Willard: “This *woman*,” she said, pointing at Betty as if she was a foul stain on an entire gender, “tells me that I have a fine on my record. That’s impossible.”

After spitting out a great glob of chewed hamberders, “Deep state!” screeched Donelda, “deep state!”

“Shut up, Mom!” Sarah snarled.

“Covfefe! Covfefe! Covfefe...” shouted Donelda, thrashing in her hover-chair.

“Do something with her, Michelle,” Sarah ordered.

Immediately, Michelle O’Connell forced an entire hamberder — still in its wrapper — into Donelda’s mouth with the palm of her hand. The old lady nearly choked — not that anyone seemed to care.

Betty stuck her chin out, and with her hands on her hips replied with an assertive, “That’s what the 290 reads, Mr. Romney-Trump.”

“I don’t care what her flippin’ — excuse my French, Willard —

whatever you call that thingie says. I always return my books on time.”

Yet another Palin-Trump lie, something the entire family was infamous for. Word around Stars Hollow was, never ask a Palin-Trump the day of the week without checking a calendar as backup. And unlike a stopped clock which was always right twice a day, the family was never right about anything. As for library fines, Mrs. Palin-Trump had racked up thousands of Yuan in late fees over the years — and never paid any of them. In the end, Willard always caved and forgave her debt.

To Betty, “It must be a mistake, Mrs. Bowers. Please erase the fine.”

Betty growled at Sarah — who growled back — and then did as ordered.

Sarah, flushed with yet another insignificant victory, smiled as if she had just won the Iditarod. She claimed her ancestors had migrated to Connecticut from Alaska. “If you think it’s cold here,” she often bragged, “try Alaska. This is nothing. When my great-great-great namesake was a little girl she used to walk to school in the middle of December in tennis shoes, shorts, and a T-shirt.”

Even today, in the coldest weather, the Palin-Trumps walked the streets of Stars Hollow dressed lightly in jeans, sweaters, and sometimes knitted caps and scarves; further proof in Willard’s mind that the Palin-Trumps had more malformations embedded in their DNA than King Tut.

After Betty had checked out all the A/V material, Sarah stuffed them into a backpack. “God bless you all and have a nice day,” she said. She’d won, so her smile was warm.

“Come on, Mom, let’s get going. We have to stop at the turkey farm and watch them kill a few birds.”

Donelda happily flapped her arms like a baby in a highchair as Michelle O’Connell pushed the *Good to Go* button on the hover-chair and guided it out the door.

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After the Palin-Trumps were gone, Betty angrily asked, “How could you, Mr. Romney-Trump?”

Willard sighed and Kirk popped out from behind the bookcase.

Through gritted teeth: “One day the whole bunch of them should meet Skeeter,” added Betty.

“We can only hope,” Lorelei called from the office. The woman had remarkable hearing.

With Lorelei and Betty on one side and Sarah and her family on the other, they were all like scavengers eager to battle over the same rotten carcass. That surprised Willard given that they all claimed to be Christians. But perhaps their mutual antagonism was due to opposing theologies: Lorelei and Betty were evangelical Protestants while the Palin-Trumps were ultra-conservative Roman Catholics.

Lorelei came out of the office. She stood there, arms folded across her chest: “You let the momma grizzly win again, Willard. When are you going to show some spine?”

“Shut up Lorelei.” He went back into the office and plopped forward onto his ergonomic chair.

Despite her quick, sardonic, and edgy wit, along with a tongue that could slice through steel when she was in one of her moodier moods, fifty-eight-year-old Lorelei Gilmore was like no other woman Willard had ever known. There was a spring in her step when she clacked across the library’s par cay floor in high-heeled boots. Her long shapely legs were as toned as any twenty-something’s. Her shoulder length hair was still black, and she easily passed for a woman in her early thirties. In Willard’s mind Lorelei Gilmore would always be the saucy, young woman who had breezed from library school and into the SHPL — and then straight into his heart. A heart she had butchered right out of his chest and then stomped on with stilettos. Twice she had called off their wedding at the very last moment.

“I have commitment issues,” she’d confessed to Willard the first time she’d left him at the altar, “but I’m trying.” Then a chirpy: “*Maybe next time.*”

When the next time came, the result was the same. Love to Willard was worse than blind when it came to Lorelei Gilmore; it was brainless. Once, he had been a handsome young man, almost as tall as Lorelei. He had a full head of thick, wavy, jet black hair. But that was then; now whenever he looked at his reflection in a mirror, Burgess Meredith stared back at him. He feared that he might even walk like a penguin. What had happened? Where did this old man come from? Despite the ergo-chair, had too many years seated at a desk negated the snowshoeing and cross country skiing he’d done in his youth? Had too much reading thickened the lenses of his eyeglasses such that he could peer into deep space as well as any observatory?

Cheetos, Fritos and super-sized-me’s — although colossal big gulps had been outlawed back in the late 21st Century by Mayor Mike Bloomberg-Trump — once the ice age set in, people ignored the law and ate junk food by the buckets and drank soda from pails; much like Donelda Palin-Trump, but *far* less gross. Not Willard; his palate remained sophisticated. Only the finest, most nutritional food was permitted entry into his gastro-intestinal tract.

But now, in the twilight years in both their lives, Willard’s high-gloss relationship with Lorelei had yellowed like the pages of an old book. She did not find him attractive anymore. Sadly, he didn’t feel attractive anymore, either.

Suddenly a tall man dressed like a lumberjack appeared at the library’s front doors. He held out his forearm and blocked Willard’s attempt to shut them.

“I’m sorry, sir, but we’re closed,” Willard said, smiling. “Please come back tomorrow. We open at ten.”

“It’s five to, eh,” the man growled. “The sign outside says you’re

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open ‘til three.”

Willard looked up at the wall clock. Five minutes until three o’clock. His mind sighed: *Rules are rules.*

He held the door open and let the man pass through. Behind him, Willard sensed Lorelei and Betty scrutinizing the strange outdoorsman. He presented himself at the reference desk. Willard sat down in his antique ergo-chair and smiled up at the stranger. He always brought it out of the office when he “manned-up” reference.

“You look like you’re about to puke, eh?” said the tall stranger.

“It helps my posture.”

“I’m looking for books about climate change?”

“Quite the rage these days,” Lorelei quipped before she ducked back into the librarian’s office.

A pleasant, “Do you have a library card, sir?” Willard asked.

“Yeah.” The man pulled his hood back and removed a blue knitted cap with a maple leaf embroidered on it. He stuffed the cap into his pocket. The man’s wild, brown hair lay flat on his scalp. Three days growth spread between the facial areas that lay between his goatee, mustache, and bushy sideburns. He had a call of the wild look in his eyes.

Cretin, thought Willard.

“It’s hot in here, eh?” Then the man’s right hand searched his rucksack until he found his wallet. He removed a card and gave it to Willard.

Willard walked over to circulation. He looked at the 290G screen as Betty scanned the electronic card. It read: “Neil Young. DOB: 11/12/2084.” That made Mr. Young a very *old* man: one hundred thirty-six to be exact. Willard decided to believe his eyes not a DOB on the e-card. It also listed a current Stars Hollow residence where Canadian transients passing through on their way south stayed. This meant that regardless of how long Mr. Young planned to be in Stars Hollow, he still

had borrowing privileges.

Rules are rules.

Smiling, “Canadian, eh,” said Betty. “So am I.”

A quiet peace settled between these two foreigners.

Willard asked, “Do you prefer print or digital, sir?”

“Print.”

A misanthrope after my own heart. “Follow me, please. We have only a small collection dealing with global warming.”

Mr. Young’s correction was pointed: “Climate change!”

Willard offered his humble apology. Mr. Neil Young frightened him, like the man might jump on him and tear his throat out with bared teeth.

Willard told Lorelei, Betty and Kirk they could go home, that he would attend to Mr. Young. He decided to give the brutish man all the time he needed to find what he wanted. Betty and Kirk left, but Lorelei said she’d stay. “I have some spreadsheets to work on.”

Mr. Young finished gathering up a stack of books that dealt with *climate change*. He laid them on the reference desk, and then asked, “You have movies I can download onto my 300G?”

“Is there a particular movie you’re looking for, Mr. Young?”

“*Mike Pence, The Lord’s Biggest Mistake.*”

“I don’t recall that particular movie, sir.”

“It’s the one where Vice President Mike Pence helps President Donald Trump make America great again. It’s a documentary based on alternative facts.”

Brightly, “*Oh, yes, now I remember.* That movie is over two hundred-years old, but it’s still quite popular in certain circles.”

Wistfully, “That movie works for me on so many levels,” replied Mr. Young.

ELECTION 2220

Willard's smile was loud and proud: "I'll have you know that a direct descendant of President Donald J. Trump lives right here in Stars Hollow; her name is Donelda Palin-Trump."

Mr. Neil Young bared his teeth and growled.

Willard, a severe conservative, and despite his ill feelings towards his distant cousins, was deeply offended; not only on Donelda's behalf, but also for his beloved Stars Hollow. The Palin-Trumps were the town's only claim to fame and that made them a tourist attraction. People in red MAGA hats would make a pilgrimage to Stars Hollow once a year from all over the North America. They gathered to pray at the Palin-Trump's Darkest Tower.

The aggressive young Mr. Young's eyes followed Willard as he downloaded the movie onto his Huawei 2300G. Mr. Young mentioned that he had traveled south from Canada. He arrived in Connecticut less than a month ago. He added that he was a hunter.

Smirking, "I like to stalk and kill," he told Willard. Then he stuffed the library material into his rucksack. As he headed out the door, he suddenly stopped and turned. "When's the next full moon, eh?"

Squinting, "I don't know offhand, but I can look it up for you."

Mr. Young grunted and headed out the door and into the late afternoon cold.

"*After the Gold Rush.*" Lorelei had snuck up behind Willard, giving him a start.

"Beg your pardon. What rush?"

"*After the Gold Rush,*" she repeated. "It's an album recorded by a different Neil Young over two hundred fifty years ago. I have it on vinyl."

"Vinyl? My goodness Lorelei, how 20th Century of you." Willard enjoyed poking at her with that one.

Lorelei shot him a snarky look, but did not reply. She went for her

coat.

They walked down the stone steps leading onto the street. Willard held onto the railing with his right hand and Seamus' cat carrier in his left. Then Seamus released a plop of disapproval for being packed in a carrier.

"Oh, God, Willard, what a stink!" she said, swatting the foul odor away from her crinkled nose. "How can you transport that poor animal in that cage?"

"I can't carry him all the way home in my arms, Lorelei! And how did you know Na Nook of the North's real name?"

"I read it on the office's 290G when Betty scanned his card."

"How clever. And why the sudden interest in that brute? He's too young for you."

"Too young?" Instead of biting his head off, she clapped her hands and laughed in his face. "Mr. Neil Young is too young for me? Why didn't I see that? Such insight, Willard, I'm so glad you brought the matter to my attention."

They faced each other at the bottom of the steps between the two stone library lions. She grinned while Willard stood tight lipped, trying desperately to come up with a retort. When he could not, he turned his back on her and walked away.

She called to him: "He's not my type, Willard, sorry."

"Seems nobody is, Lorelei."

The last word: a small victory that put a small smile on Willard's face.