

"A heroine with spunk and spirit offers an inspiring lesson in perseverance and hope. First-rate." —Kirkus Reviews (starred review)

Waiting for Normal

a novel



Leslie Connor

tin box on a far patch

Maybe Mommers and I shouldn't have been surprised; Dwight had told us it was a trailer even before we'd packed our bags. But I had pictured one of those parks—like up on Route 50. I thought trailers were always in *trailer parks*. I expected a little grass patch out front, daisy-shaped pinwheels stuck into the ground, one of those white shorty fences and a garden gnome.

Dwight crossed traffic and pulled the truck up over the curb. When he stopped, Mommers' head bumped against the window. "What are we doing here?" she asked. I watched Dwight's face for the answer. Dwight is my stepfather. Well, he's really my *ex*-stepfather since he and Mommers split for good. That was two years ago. (It's best to know right from the beginning that my family is hard to follow—like a road that keeps taking twists and

turns.) But Dwight had always told me, there'll be no "ex" between you and me, Addie, girl, and I believed him.

"I *said*, what are we doing here?" Mommers repeated.

"This is the place," Dwight mumbled.

Mommers sat up. She opened her eyes wide and looked out the front windshield. Then she screamed. "Dwight! You've got to be kidding me! This is the *city*!"

Dwight leaned away from her—protecting his ear—and in that quiet way he's got about him, he told Mommers, "Come on, Denise. Let's not go over it again. You know this is all I've got left. You can move in here, or go to Jack's place." He slid out of the truck.

Mommers swung her door open so hard it came back at her. She kicked it and it whined on the hinge. "I can't live with Jack!"

She was talking about my grandfather on my father's side. I call him Grandio. That's his grandpa name, which my father taught me to say a long time ago. That's about all my father had time to teach me; he died when I was barely three. I've always kind of felt as if my father *gave* me

Grandio—or tried to anyway—that he left him to me so I'd have as much family as possible. Thing is, he kind of left Grandio to Mommers, too. I've never seen two people who wanted less to do with each other.

"I hate Jack!" Mommers hollered at Dwight. "And I hate you!"

"I know," said Dwight, as if he had accepted that a long time ago.

I unfolded myself from the back of the cab, where I'd been squashed in the little jump seat, and slipped down to the ground. Dwight lifted our bags out of the back of his truck and handed Mommers a key.

"Go in and have a look. We can work on it some if you want," he said. "And the computer is in for you and Addie." He tried to say all this with a hopeful note in his throat—Dwight always did that.

But Mommers threw the key down hard as she could. It hit the ground with a tiny ringing sound like a little chime. "I suppose you want me to overflow with gratitude!" she yelled. "I get a cruddy tin box for a house and a dinosaur for a computer! Lucky me! What about the duplex, Dwight? You



"Characters as persuasively optimistic as Addie are rare, and readers will gravitate to her. Poignant."

—*Publishers Weekly* (starred review)

Addie is waiting for normal. But Addie's mother has an all-or-nothing approach to life: a food fiesta or an empty pantry, her way or no way. All-or-nothing never adds up to normal, and it can't bring Addie all the way home, where she wants to be with her half sisters. But Addie never stops hoping that one day, maybe, she'll find normal.

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