

*Summer in Chicago; there's nothing hotter*, she thought as she looked out over Lake Michigan for what would be, if not the last time, at least the last time in a very long while. *Nothing hotter. With the possible exception of summer in Iowa.* That last thought brought a rueful smile to her lips. *Going from the frying pan into the fire. Nothing new there, old girl.* The early August sun was intense in both its heat and brightness, and, reflected in the cloudless sky off the lake, it seemed to be giving her a last, cheerful farewell. She was glad of it; a dreary, rainy day would have been far too cliché for her liking. Far too Hemingway. She thought of herself more as a Jane Austen character: the capable girl who could manage everyone's life but her own. Her record of late would certainly seem to prove that.

She glanced down at her watch. Time to get home and finish packing. In less than twenty-four hours she would be on her way, west on the tollway to Interstate 80, a route as familiar to her as the brief drive from her apartment to her office at the university. Her colleagues had given her a going-away party yesterday, replete with the requisite tearful goodbyes and we'll-miss-yous and good-lucks and don't-forget-to-writes. She had sneaked back briefly early this morning when she was sure the office would be empty to clean out her desk. Now nothing was left but to seal up the last of the cartons, load everything into the rental van, and close the door on the last decade of her life.

With a sigh, she turned away from the lakefront and started toward her car, telling herself for the ten thousandth time that this wasn't because of him. It wasn't, really. She was ready for a change; too much time in one place, at one job, was making her feel that she was beginning to stagnate. Which was not to say that the breakup hadn't taken its toll on her. Why it had taken her until she was nearly thirty to fall in love was one of those questions she had chosen not to ponder, but when it ended – when *he* ended it – she began to suspect that she simply wasn't meant for the whole domestic thing, the husband and children and house in the suburbs with a fenced-in backyard. This naturally led her to consider that she would never have a family of her own other than the family that she already had, her parents and brothers and sisters and in-laws and numerous nieces and nephews, all waiting for her back in Iowa. Which eventually led her to decide that it was time for her to go home. Which inevitably led to all sorts of philosophical speculation about what, exactly, made one place or another home: is it where you come from, where you live, where you're going? Where the people you love are? Where you want most to be?

In those moments of greatest honesty, she was able to admit that she wasn't sure where she wanted to be. She only knew that, despite her friends and her students and a job that she loved, a lot of the luster had worn off her life in Chicago. She would never admit, to herself or anyone else, that her decision had anything whatsoever to do with him. But everything comforting and comfortable, everything that defined her, that nurtured and sustained her, seemed to be beckoning her from her hometown. And so that was where she was going.