

Chapter 2

Move On

The snowfall outside was beautiful and comforting, as Shaun watched it drift onto his bedroom window ledge and add to the growing pile outside. Today was the second snow day in this first week of November, but it usually stuck around pretty easily. Shaun wished he could be out there to touch it, but he was restricted to his bedroom chair instead, as he heard the faint noise of something calling for him.

“Shaun...? Shaun...?”

He heard as he tilted his head to the phone he was holding in his good hand. Not looking at it, but acknowledging the sound of his father on the phone.

“Hmm?” Shaun replied.

“Sorry for the wait bud... but we have been packing up a storm over here. We can’t wait to see you in a couple of days.” His father stated.

“Yeah?” Shaun asked, the one-word answer indicating that he wasn’t finding much interest in it all.

He heard his mother chime in, “You’ll have to let us know what needs to be done, so that we can best help you.”

“Is there anything we should bring with us that you need?” His father added.

“A job...” Shaun trailed, giggling with a tinge of sorrow to his voice.

It had been almost a couple of weeks since Shaun had that car accident, but the memory and the guilt plagued him, perhaps for eternity. Not only that, but having a broken leg and broken fingers really made his functionality much more difficult. He was lucky the symptoms of his concussion had subsided a couple days ago, but it only made him more aware of just how bad he messed himself up. Having to use one hand for everything and only being able to move one leg at all. His broken leg completely devastated.

But perhaps the thing that broke the most for Shaun was his will. He needed that job with OWN, and now that he had to wait a year before a possible second chance, he felt stuck. Everyday waking up with that same feeling. Unshakeable, and as far as he could tell, nothing to fix it.

A sigh escaped the phone, as he could tell that his lack of an optimistic demeanor was making an impact on his parents. But he didn't want to look at them. He didn't want his parents seeing just how much of a vulnerable kid he was feeling like now.

"Ohhh honey... are you still thinking about that?" He heard his mother say, "Shaun, I know you really wanted that job... but sometimes things work out for the best."

"Yeah... cause sitting here with no way to get money for myself is much better. Sitting here unable to explore my interests, is thrilling. Sitting here barely able to walk or take care of myself without the constant pain. You might see it as just some job, Mom, but it was much more than that. It was my dream, my goal, the very thing I was setting out to do."

"I never tried to belittle the job Shaun, but isn't it about time to let it all go? You can't change what you did, you can only move on."

Shaun groaned and shook his head, his ambitions completely controlling him as he argued back, “Move on? To do what? Take up some stupid job for a couple months? No, I intend to focus on next year’s trip. I will prepare, and once I am better I will work to be stronger. I can’t move on right now, I really wanted this and I screwed it all up, but I am not gonna screw it up again.”

He heard his dad chime in, “You can’t be sure that you will not screw up again.”

Shaun’s eyebrows furrowed as he took in that statement like a punch in his sore ribs, “Excuse me? What is this? A prophecy of my life? Yeah, cause you understand it so well.” Shaun said with sarcastic venom.

“It is reality, son. I don’t intend to prophesy what you will do. I don’t wish harm, but perhaps after such an accident, it is time to reconsider or at least take more time to think. Perhaps there is something you are missing that you still need to figure out.”

“Yeah... sure. Thanks, Mr. Soothsayer, I can hardly wait to embark on such a journey.” Shaun said, continuing his sarcastic tone.

“We are both about to fly all the way there to help you. I would rethink this attitude you've got!” His dad demanded with a raised voice, before his mom’s softer voice added on.

“You know, we are only trying to help. We want what is best for you, but we also want you to be safe... you are my baby after all. It’s my job to be concerned.”

At this mention, Shaun felt his heart drop in his chest. Hearing this from his mom, and realizing that he was really being much too harsh with them. He had done this to himself, they did nothing. There was no reason to be anything other than thankful for their help. Shaun

dropped his head, shutting his eyes and taking some deep breaths. Before he feels the back of his eyes tinged with tears. As he began to silently cry in his chair. Not even hiding his raw emotions anymore as his parents could see from the other end of the FaceTime call.

His mother's voice ringing through to him, as she said, "Oh Shaun... I know this is so hard on you. It's a lot of weight and a lot of disappointment. But we will be there soon okay? And we are gonna help get you where you need to be darling. Maybe even a new job! How does that sound?"

"G... goo.." Shaun's words failed him as he cried harder. It was all true.

He could still remember everything, and everything about that day that was meant to be the first day of his life, was only just another hurdle. Another obstacle to have to push around, as more and more things clouded his mind and his path. And it was frustrating. But after a few minutes of crying, he could feel his body unclench from his tensed position. His pained bones slightly sore from the anxious crying, but he tried his best to relax. Opening his eyes as he took some deep breaths.

"Good... that sounds really good." Shaun said, as he really did appreciate hearing his mother's voice. The fact that even though he made such a grave mistake, they were still there for him, it really did provide comfort that nothing else could.

"Well get some sleep hon... okay? Cause you look tired and you don't need to get sick on top of all this."

"I'll go to bed then, Mom."

“Good... your father and I are going to continue packing and do some cleaning. But you take it easy, and while you rest maybe consider what you can do differently and what you can do to give yourself something to do. You are too tough to be bogged down like this.”

Shaun genuinely smiled and looked at his mother’s face on the phone, “I will. Thank you, Mom, and thank you, Dad. I’ll talk to you guys soon.”

“I love you, Shaun!” His mom said with a wide, motherly smile.

Before he heard his dad chime in, “Sleep well! We’ll see you soon!”

Shortly after, Shaun exchanged his goodbyes with his parents. He set his phone in the pocket of his good leg and just sat and looked back out at the falling snow. It gave him hope, just like this snow, his troubles would melt away as soon as he took care of himself. He knew the road was going to be tough, and waiting several months for this job was not going to be easy, but he needed to make the most of it.

Shaun felt some air push up his throat as his eyes grew watery and he opened his mouth to a wide yawn. Even though it was only about mid-afternoon, the gray, snowy skies made everything feel darker, therefore making him sleepier. So he decided to get to bed. Luckily, he didn’t really change much out of his sleeping clothes, not wanting to bother messing with his injured body parts.

He reached to grab his crutches and shakily stood up, using his good leg as a balance as he clutches the crutches and began to head towards his bed. The click of the crutches ringing in his tired head, he could feel a slight headache forming, but he knew once he got some sleep it would go away.

He gets to his bedside table and sits down with a pained grunt, reaching for his water bottle, quickly throwing back some medicine to help him sleep, and downing lots of water. With a satisfied gulp of the tangy vitamins, he reaches for his lamp to turn it off and settles into bed, careful of his leg, using his good hand to help himself feel comfy, before lying down fully.

It was not long before medicine worked its magic to help him doze off. The soft atmosphere of the day melted into night, as the snow continued to pile outside. Then a memory played in his head.

He could remember it so clearly, just weeks ago, the rushed breaths, the sweating brow, the red glaring light, and the headlights. All the pain, all the trauma. It shot through him in a jolt as he woke suddenly, his body shaking violently as his hurt joints flared at him.

“Oooooowww...” Shaun whined, as he woke up.

He kept his body still as he just laid there, waiting for the moment to settle down as he looks around his room, taking in the slightly different atmosphere. It was now pitch black outside, and Shaun could see on his bedside alarm clock that it was eleven at night. Part of him knew he needed to just go back to sleep and rest. But he was also tired of the same traumatic flashback. He shut his eyes, tired with fatigue as tears rolled in once more.

He couldn't count up how many times he had cried over this moment. And everyday he woke up with the same injuries, it only made him more distraught, more weighed down by his new reality.

It was then that he remembered his mother's words. *You can't change what you did, you can only move on.* He needed to make the most of the time now, he knew there was no changing the past and no writing the future, only figuring out what happens now.

This thought began to fire up his heart and he no longer felt tired. He wiped his eyes before taking off the covers and carefully moving to grab his crutches and get up. Wobbling as he stood up a little quickly, but huffed, before heading out of his bedroom to his little office. Sitting down in front of the screen, turning it on as the light blasted his face.

Shaun muttered to himself, “What is there for me to do...?”

Shaun knew that his options were limited, as he began to search for jobs in the area that would suit his needs. Environmental science has very specific applications. First he saw some boring spots that would surely call for a desk job, he saw some non-profit rescues, and some bigger locations that were way too far away from him. However, he saw nothing like OWN. No one to intern for, no major international groups, nothing that would take him close to the type of work he would have done.

His hope extinguished about as swiftly as it ignited, but he knew that if he didn’t do something, he would remain a crippled sore depressed loser sitting in his chair and staring at the snow all the more. He could not crawl back into this hole he had dug.

Reviewing his options, Shaun realized that a desk job was not nearly the type of valuable work experience he needed, and he did not feel like dealing with nightmarish traffic to go any place far. So he settled for a non-profit rescue, finding a very well-reviewed rescue. *Harmony of Nature*. It definitely had a nice name to it and the location was less than an hour away, going outside the city.

Despite the late time, and knowing there would be no response this late, he still decided to open up the application forum that requests name, number, and email. He inputted all three, before hitting submit. His heart pumped a little happily at this moment, knowing that even

though it was not the job he wanted. It would be perfect experience to use for when the intern opportunity came back around.

With that settled, Shaun also sent a note to his mom, thanking her for the advice and telling her what he did. He smiled, feeling much more relieved. His mind felt clear as he mustered up the strength to make his way back to bed, settling in the same as before.

Shaun couldn't wait to find out more about this place and felt a strange sense of completeness with it. Soon his body took its toll once more, and he began to grow dreary. Slipping into his peaceful slumber with an optimistic mind.

Despite having slept much already, Shaun's body certainly didn't hesitate to really let him have his shuteye. Feeling the heavy weight of sleep lift, Shaun opened his eyes and stared around his room. He took in the now bright morning daylight shining through his windows, peeking at the massive load of snow outside. It was a wonderful sight.

Then Shaun remembered the non-profit, he quickly reached over with his good hand to grab his phone from the charger on his nightstand, as he yanked it over and saw a notification in his messages.

He quickly opened it to find someone from the place had responded, requesting certain days in the upcoming week to bring him in for an interview. Shaun considered his options, not because he would be busy, but knowing that he had to be careful to show up to the place while still having clear-cut injuries. He decided on a day at the start of the next week, knowing he would hopefully have done enough walking to avoid using crutches and just have a boot on his foot and a brace on his arm. It would hopefully be much less embarrassing then.

The rest of the week flew by, and soon it was the morning of his interview date. He had utilized yesterday to practice walking with the boot and felt pretty comfortable with it. As long as he didn't have to do any serious walking, he hoped it would be okay.

Shaun slipped on his most professional attire that wasn't too dressy, but was not sloppy. He knew how these places acted and knew that not going overboard in any direction was the best option in terms of presentation.

As Shaun smiled at himself in the mirror, he practiced many possible interview questions in his head, considering all the things he could be asked, as he made his way to grab a pouch of Pop-Tarts and head to the car. Luckily, his right leg was fine and was what he used to drive anyways.

He opened the pouch of Pop-Tarts and grabs one out as he began his journey. He would've microwaved the Pop-Tarts, but knew he didn't have time. He bit into the Pop-Tart, savoring the flavor better than the rock solid feel of it, as he drove on, remembering to be very careful and not rush. Hence why he was leaving about fifteen whole minutes before he really needed to. It was funny to Shaun just how much a car accident can change your whole perspective.

He obeyed speed limits, he made sure cars stayed far in front of him, and despite the eating was incredibly focused on the road in front of him. Luckily, he went towards the more rural parts of Washington. But also fighting long snowy country roads.

Soon enough he was nearing the entrance to turn into the conservation site. His eyes wide with how beautiful it looked, the fully natural setting that floored in comparison to any artificial kind. He could imagine the animals loved it in this place.

He follows a couple of wooden signs to a visitor center where he parks in one of a few available parking spots. It seemed the place was busier than he thought, but it was promising for the type of organization this was going to be.

Grabbing his phone, he texted the individual who had been sending him reminders the last few days.

“Hey, I just parked. Where can I meet you?” He texted.

Soon, some bubbles popped up, and then a reply, *“Just go take a spot in the visitor center. Tell them Alec has got you.”*

Nodding from the instructions, Shaun grabbed a beanie and some gloves, before making his way towards the visitor center. Being careful with his boot, not knowing how much ice might be buried under the snow from all the rainfall the state usually receives.

Luckily, he was only met with the deep crunches of the paved snow as he walked into the visitor center, greeted by warm air conditioning. Before turning to the person at the desk.

“Hello, I am here for an interview with Alec,” Shaun stated.

The lady working the desk smiled and gestured to the waiting area. “He will be here shortly, you may take a seat, sir.”

Shaun turned on his heels and went to take a seat promptly. Patting his lap as he looked around the wooden cabin structure, it was very cozy and fit in perfectly to the wintry vibe outside.

Despite having spent many many hours preparing for this, and even though non-profits were usually open to almost anybody, it didn’t stop the usually nervous jitters from becoming

present in a matter of moments. He had barely any idea who this Alec was. Shaun wondered if he was going to be a head honcho or just a veteran employee. He then got another vibration from his phone as he checked it.

“Finishing up a chore, will be there a little late! See you in about ten minutes, my apologies.”

Shaun replied back, *“All good.”*

Setting his phone back down, he noticed there were a couple of magazines and decided to read one to make the time go by faster. Picking up an environmental ethics magazine, with an author telling about the endangerment of certain predators. Although he read these types of articles all throughout his time in university, it never ceased to catch his environmentally concerned heart. It also reminded him what made potential jobs like these so rewarding. It wasn't about getting any money, but about the lasting memories that come with helping animals in need. It felt good to do something.

Light entered the room as Shaun saw the door open with a tall guy with short red hair entering the room. He seemed to be a few years older than Shaun, as he walked over to the desk and talked to the lady, before looking at Shaun and smiling. He strides over and presents his hand.

“Hey there, my name is Alec Schmidt, I am the manager of this little wildlife conservation. I oversee all the animal caretaking here as well as the management of the trees and plants inside our enclosures. You are Mr. Nowakowski?” He asked.

Shaun nodded, “Yes, Shaun Nowakowski. It is a pleasure to meet you.”

The two shook hands as Alec smiled and responded,

“It is wonderful to meet you. We are so happy that you are interested in helping out here as a volunteer.”

Shaun chuckled, “How can I not? I read about what you guys do, and it is exactly what I would love to learn more about.”

“Thank you for your interest. As I am sure you know, this is a non-profit organization, so we really depend on everyone we can to do our best to take care of these animals.”

“Yeah, I understand that. But I care more about the environment than I do the money. It is why I am here!” Shaun explained.

“Well, why don’t we take a walk around? I like to conduct interviews while giving a tour of the place.”

Shaun hissed at the thought, “Ah! Well, how much of a walk is it? Cause I messed my leg up a couple of weeks ago.” Shaun explained, gesturing to the boot.

Alec’s eyes widened, “Woah! How did I not see that? Are you okay? What happened?”

“Pretty bad car accident, but I am recovering well. I can walk a bit, but not too much.”

“That’s alright, the interview won’t take long. Do you need a wheelchair or anything?”

Shaun shook his head, “No, I can walk. Just may need to go slow.”

“I can do that! Now let’s get going before the midday crunch of visitors comes in.”

This was surprising to hear, from what Shaun saw in the parking lot, there already seemed to be quite a bit of guests here, but to know that more were going to arrive was

astounding. Shaun slowly felt better and better about this place. So he followed Alec outside and they began to walk around, walking by an enclosure that had rabbits in it. Who knew how many there could be?

“So tell me about yourself Shaun,” Alec said, carrying a clipboard.

“Well, I am 24 years old. I graduated from the University of Washington where I studied Environmental Studies. After college, I mostly settled into Washington. Even though my family is from Texas, I really liked the place here better. Then I discovered OWN, was going to intern, but because of my injuries I had to miss out on that.” Shaun said, the words tasting bitter off his tongue as he admitted that to Alec.

“Ahhh... so we were the backup job.”

Shaun’s eyes widened as he realized how it sounded, “Oh no! No! Not at all, I really like what you have here-”

Shaun was cut off as Alec pat his back, “I am totally kidding, I understand. Washington can be tough to find good environmentally centered businesses and organizations. But we are glad that you found us.”

“I am glad that I found you too. It...” Shaun sighed, “it was pretty miserable sitting in my bedroom with injuries, and wishing I could do more.”

“But you are here now, that is what counts.” Alec said, to which Shaun nodded, before Alec continued, “Speaking of here, what made you want to come work here?”

“Oh! Well, simply because you guys are extremely successful and popular for a non-profit. From the pictures online to now being here in person, I can’t help but feel more and more called to this wonderful place.”

Alec smiled, “Thank you, we really do our best to maintain ourselves well in this place. It is our pride and joy. Especially, getting to work with the animals. Have you ever worked with animals before?”

“I have, my dad owns a farm down in Texas. I have helped to raise cattle, horses, pigs, goats, and we have a few dogs as well. And then in college I worked at the local zoo for a bit, even though I am not the biggest fan of zoo culture.”

“I see, and do you know what animals we have here?”

Shaun shook his head, curiously looking at Alec, “No, though I can imagine mostly local fauna.”

“Indeed. We have a large assortment of bunnies, weasels, skunks, raccoons, and foxes. As well as some bigger animals, we have elk, wolves, coyotes, lynx, and last year we found a grizzly bear cub. Everyone who works here specializes in either the smaller animals or the larger animals. Very few can do all of these animals. But it is why we appreciate help, these animals are very fun, but incredibly tough to manage.”

Shaun nodded as he heard this information. He was impressed to hear all these different types of animals, many of them he had always been interested in working with. He felt intimidated that they had such big animals like bears, wolves, and lynx. But he trusted that these people knew what they were doing, since they’ve been around for about 10 years, and have been talked about in the news a lot since Shaun came to Washington.

“It sounds like it, but I’d be happy to work anywhere. I am good with animals, and I can assist wherever you need it. I can help with feeding, grooming, and cleaning the enclosures, anything!” Shaun said.

“Well, there are a couple of levels you will need to work up past before you get to work directly with animals, but when you do, we will certainly rely on you to help with it,” Alec stated.

“I am happy to work wherever, I’ll do whatever you guys need.” Shaun said.

“Awesome. Well, I have only one more question.” Alec says as he turned to Shaun.
“What do you hope to get out of this job?”

Shaun stopped and thought for a moment, to be honest he really just wanted to get past this job to get to the internship, but he felt that would seem inappropriate after talking up the place so enthusiastically.

Shaun replied, “I am just here for the experience, I love animals, I want to use my degree and gifts to show nature that I care, by caring for nature. And I do hope that this job will help lead me further in my career.”

“Further, as in, to interning with OWN?” Alec said, with a knowing smile.

Shaun looked surprised at Alec, before sighing and nodding, “Yeah. I am still a bit bitter about it, but if you think that I care about that more than this or that I won’t do as good of a job, that isn’t true. I do really like this place. It is a beautiful mission.”

Alec only laughed, clearly finding the serious panicked rambling a little hysterical. “Oh, Shaun, I don’t care about all that. Many people come to this job to use it as a stepping stone, and

it is a very good one. Many of the people who have been here before you have done the same thing. We care more about helping you. And as long as you do your best, we will be happy to do whatever we can for you.”

“Likewise,” Shaun said, relieved he didn’t have to lie about it. Happy that somebody understood him.

Alec gestured back to the cabin, “Why don’t we head back?”

“Is the interview finished?”

“Yeah,” Alec stated, “I think I am fully prepared to offer you a position here at Harmony of Nature. If you would like it of course.”

“Wow! So quickly?” Shaun asked, his heart elated.

“Absolutely! I can tell you are a smart guy, you know what it takes to be here, and now I just want you to prove me I am right. Personally, I think you are going to fit in with our team easily. So, after seeing a bit of this conservation site during this interview and learning about what the beginning steps will be, will you join us Shaun?” Alec asked.

Shaun didn’t hesitate to respond, “I would love to! It would be a fantastic privilege to be a part of all this.”

“Then let’s head back, and we’ll get some paperwork done, some consent forms and a drug test. Then we’ll brief you on your first day.” Alec explained.

The two headed back towards the visitor cabin, Shaun excited about this offer and Alec telling some stories about the place. As they got to the cabin, Shaun was led to a hallway with some offices and sat in a comfy office chair across from Alec as he went through some

onboarding job procedures. First, he did his drug test, as took a swab to rub along the inside of his mouth so they could use it to test. Setting aside, Alec then explained that his first training day was going to be this Friday and then his first official working day would be the following Monday.

Shaun happily agreed to it all, and signed his name on all the consent forms. Reading information that told him to send in proof of a rabies vaccination shot and a couple of other necessary immunizations.

Shaun scribbled his final signature, and Alec collected the papers and set them in a new file, before turning back.

“Thank you for seeing us today, we will see you on Friday!” Alec said, as he extended a hand and Shaun took it with a shake.

“See you Friday... and... thank you for giving me this opportunity.” Shaun smiled.

“You’re welcome.” Alec smiled back.

With that, Shaun got up, careful of his boot and walked back out to his car. His foot was a bit sore from the walking, but his excitement far outweighed the pain. He started up his car and glanced back at the rabbit enclosure before packing up and heading out.

As he drove back to his home, he felt proud of himself. This place was surely growing on him, and he could hardly wait to do awesome things with Harmony of Nature.

Soon, Shaun arrived back at his apartment. He parked and turned off his car, before heading up to his room. Fiddling with his keys to get in, before walking to his chair in his

bedroom to lie down and rest his foot. He made it back just in time to avoid the next wave of snowfall outside.

He felt his pocket for his phone and pulled it out, dialing up his mom's number, eager to tell her all the good news. As the phone rang, Shaun stared out the window at the falling snow. Smiling with joy in his heart.

The snow really did give him hope, not because it was a burden to melt away, but because it was beautiful to see. And it sparked an even more beautiful feeling. He could relax knowing that there would be no more crippled hopeless Shaun, the past was behind him and now he was stronger, ready to move on and make the most of things. Ready to conquer whatever was ahead.