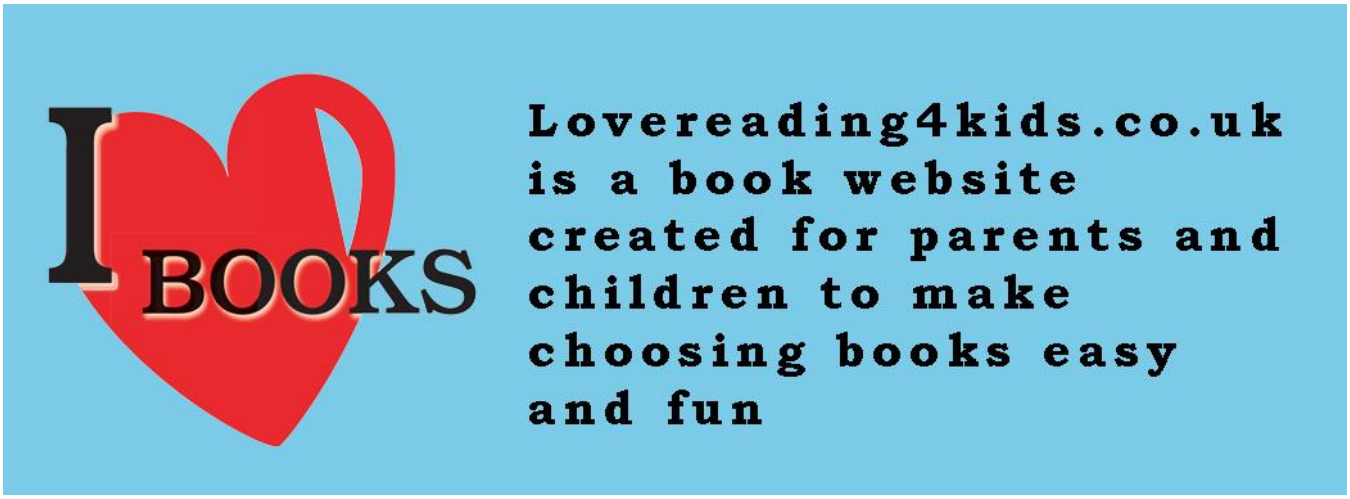


Opening extract from

Waking in Time

Written by

Angie Stanton

Published by

Curious Fox

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Waking in Time is published by Switch Press
A Capstone Imprint
1710 Roe Crest Drive
North Mankato, Minnesota 56003
www.mycapstone.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Names: Stanton, Angie, author.
Title: Waking in time / by Angie Stanton.
Description: North Mankato, Minnesota : Switch Press, an imprint of Capstone Press, [2017] | Summary: Abbi Thorp is a University of Wisconsin college freshman who's mourning the death of her grandmother. Shortly after arriving on campus, she wakes up to find herself in the same dorm room—more than 30 years earlier. That is only her first stop on a trip back in time that leads Abbi to discover secrets of her family's past as well as a handsome boy who claims to be from her future.
Identifiers: LCCN 2016040583| ISBN 9781630790707 (paper over board) | ISBN 9781630790714 (pbk.)
Subjects: LCSH: Time travel—Juvenile fiction. | Family secrets—Juvenile fiction. | Grandmothers—Juvenile fiction. | Man-woman relationships—Juvenile fiction. | University of Wisconsin—Madison—Juvenile fiction. | Madison (Wis.)—Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Time travel—Fiction. | Secrets—Fiction. | Grandmothers—Fiction. | Love—Fiction. | University of Wisconsin—Madison—Fiction. | Madison (Wis.)—Fiction. | LCGFT: Romance fiction.
Classification: LCC PZ7.S793247 Wak 2017 | DDC 813.6 [Fic] —dc23
LC record available at https://lccn.loc.gov/2016040583

Editor: Kristen Mohn
Book Designer: Kay Fraser
Cover photo credit: Shutterstock/Piotr Marcinski

Printed and bound in China.
009973S17

CHAPTER 1

Grandma used to say, "When one door closes, a window opens. And if that doesn't happen, throw a rock and break in." She could always make me laugh, but the door has closed, and there is no window or rock I can use to reach her now.

It's barely been a month, and the mound over her grave hasn't settled yet. Mom and I stand on the thick carpet of damp grass and stare at her name etched beside my grandfather's on gray marble, cold and final. Sharon R. Bailey. How is it possible that I'll never see her again?

"Today's the day, Mom," my mother says. "I'm driving Abbi to Madison, just like you both wanted." Her voice breaks and I squeeze her hand.

My mom wanted me to stay close to home for college, in Ohio, but I always knew that the University of Wisconsin was where I belonged. I don't know how Mom will do with both Grandma and me gone, but it's too late to change my plans now.

"I miss you, Gram." The words slip out as a whisper in hopes she can somehow hear me, but I don't feel her

presence. She's not here. Maybe I'll feel closer to her when I get to campus, a place I haven't even seen yet. Gram's sudden cancer diagnosis caused us to cancel our first visit, and when we tried to make the trip a few months later, she'd taken a turn for the worse. So, I'm going in blind to my new world. My hands twitch with anxiety.

We stand over her grave and try not to cry, missing the woman who could turn an average day into a grand adventure. After a while Mom sighs. "I suppose we should hit the road."

"I love you, Grandma," I whisper, sniffing back tears. I climb into Mom's Murano, stuffed to the top with every can't-live-without item we could think of, and we're on our way to my new life.

* * *

After trading off driving duties, we pull into Madison that afternoon. The GPS guides us onto campus and we're suddenly surrounded by students. I feel swallowed up by the massive buildings, some modern and new with gleaming windows and steel framing, others ancient with stone pillars and grand facades.

Mom creeps along in the car as students dart across the street in front of us and bikers whiz past. "This campus is huge. A private college would have offered a more personal experience," Mom murmurs, biting her lip nervously.

"It's a little late for that argument now." My stomach jumbles with excited nerves at the prospect of how different my life will be here after growing up in a small town.

"I know, but I'm still allowed to worry. Don't listen to

me, though. Everything will be great. I'm sure Grandma was right—this is where you belong." Mom squeezes my knee as she turns onto Observatory Drive. The road is steep and has tight switchbacks that reveal a breathtaking view of shimmering Lake Mendota.

I roll down my window and the scent of freshwater reminds me of summer camp. A warm breeze blows through my hair. "I can get used to this …"

We continue on, taking in every detail of campus from the thick woods on one side of the car to the numerous old buildings on the other. Mom suddenly points. "Look, there's that bell tower Grandma used to talk about."

An impressive stone structure crowns the top of the hill. "The Carillon Tower," I say, remembering Gram's stories of how the bells could be heard all across campus. The tall square building towers high above the treetops with its decorative cornice and parapets.

The road dips down a hill and up another. We pull in front of a massive stone building, named Elizabeth Waters, with wings jutting out from the center core like stacked Legos. We look at each other and then at the imposing building that will be my new home. My nerves bubble over again.

"Ready?" Mom asks, barely masking her own anxiety.

I've lived in the same house since I was four. This is going to take time to get used to, but I'm never one to shy away from a challenge. "Yup. Let's do this."

Inside the airy foyer, a curved wrought iron balustrade leads up to the main landing and office. There is a half-circle nook on either side, each containing a crescent-shaped upholstered bench.

Mom sits and rubs her hand over the fabric. "Look at these old benches—I think they're covered in horse hair. If I didn't know better, I'd say they were original …"

"Mom." I wave her over to help me with the check-in paperwork. After collecting my room key and lanyard, which holds an ID that gets me into the building, we follow the corridor to the next wing, looking for room 4418. We pass bulletin boards bursting with social event notices, club sign-ups, and floor meetings. Each dorm room door has the names of its residents written in thick black Sharpie on a bright orange star.

Students come and go, sidestepping past us to avoid bumping the two pillows in my arms, the oversized duffle over my shoulder, and the giant suitcase Mom is pulling. Some say hi, others avoid eye contact. I try to appear friendly, but not overeager.

"There are so many boys," Mom whispers, smiling at each one as they pass.

"Mom! Stop staring!"

"I can't help it. They're all so adorable. Oh, don't forget the condoms. I put them in your purse—not that I'm condoning what you might do with these …"

I stop short and turn on her. "Seriously, Mom. Please stop talking."

She shrugs and feigns innocence but stays quiet.

We continue on until I find my room. "Abbi" is printed on one orange star alongside one that says "Jada"—the roommate I've only chatted with online a couple of times.

I slide my key into the solid old lock and turn. The door clicks, then swings open as if caught by an unseen breeze, and I'm drawn into my new home. One side

of the room is fully moved in and the shelves are overflowing with snacks, mugs, framed photos, and books. Star-shaped string lights are draped from the ceiling and posters of Beyoncé and Jay Z hang on the wall over the bed. There's a coffeemaker and makeup mirror crowded onto the small desk, and a small TV on top of the microwave. A corkboard above holds pictures and necklaces secured with push pins.

My side of the room mirrors the layout but is in stark contrast with its sad blank walls, empty shelves, and bare mattress.

"Home, sweet home," Mom announces, bringing my monstrous rolling suitcase to a halt.

A minute later, a group of student volunteers appear with a luggage cart containing the rest of my belongings, and I'm soon surrounded by the chaos of unpacking.

Mom's making my bed with new sheets, and I'm unloading notebooks and a reading lamp when Jada walks in.

"Abbi, you made it!" Jada has gorgeous corkscrew hair, wears a tank top and shorts, and has toenails painted bright purple.

"Jada!"

"Hey, roomie!" She pulls me into a hug. "I hope you don't mind that I took this side." She tosses her keys onto her desk.

"Not at all. I love your twinkle lights."

"Look at your cool stuff! All your accessories match. I love the teal and gray theme."

"Hi, I'm Abbi's mom," my mother says.

"Nice to meet you, Mrs. Thorp."

Mom smiles as Jada and I make our first impressions with each other. As an only child, I've always had my own room growing up, so sharing with a complete stranger is going to be new for me.

With Jada's help, I'm unpacked in no time. I've left behind all my high school keepsakes. I'm starting a new chapter of life, and there isn't really any need for pictures of me and my friends cheerleading on our senior trip to Florida. I pin up a pic of me and Grandma at the Grand Canyon a couple of years ago. Other than a handful of family pictures, I'm starting fresh. Looking at how everything fits in, I can see myself spending a lot of time in this cozy little room.

Mom shakes open my quilt, an intricate design made up of old clothing scraps. It lands on top of the sheets like a layer of colorful icing.

"Your bedspread is beautiful. Did you make this?" Jada asks my mom.

"Abbi's grandmother made it." Mom smiles at me.

Jada turns to me with a sympathetic face. "I'm sorry, I forgot that your grandma recently passed." She examines the square patterns. "Some of these look really old."

Mom leans forward and points to a square. "This is from Abbi's baby blanket. And this one's from her grandmother's wedding dress."

A swell of pride fills me. Grandma was hardly the traditionally sweet old lady who knitted and sewed. She was much more comfortable at a dusty dig site in the middle of some remote desert wearing her favorite Peruvian sweater and Birkenstocks, or trudging through mud when she'd take me geocaching in state parks. So when she decided

to make this quilt for me, it was a true labor of love that included pricked fingers and colorful swearwords.

"She also gave me this Badger calendar. What do you think? Is it too much?" I ask, hanging it up.

"It's just enough to show school pride without going overboard," Jada says with a laugh. "Wait till you see Erin and Anna's room down the hall. It's like someone hurled Badger red and white all over."

Mom dusts her hands off on her jeans. "I think that'll about do it. Jada, do you want to join us for a soda and a snack? I'm sure there's got to be dozens of good places to eat around here."

"Thanks, but I've gotta take off for the boathouse. They're giving a crew demonstration today, but Abbi, later we can explore campus if you want."

"Yeah, I'd love to." I'm grateful that the roommate lottery gave me Jada and not some boring stick in the mud.

Jada collects her ID and keys. "You guys should check out the Memorial Union Terrace. My parents and I had lunch there earlier. It's attached to the student union and overlooks the lake. Amazing view."

"Thanks. We will!" Mom calls after her.

After loading all the empty boxes back into the car for Mom to haul home, we explore the building. We follow the steps down from the main entrance of the dormitory. It's like one of the grand staircases from *Gone with the Wind* or something. At the base of the stairs is a large carpeted sitting room filled with outdated furniture. "Antiques," Mom corrects me. Along one wall is a fireplace framed by couches and a large coffee table. There are wall sconces and old-fashioned radiators. Heavy beige drapes hang at

the large picture windows that overlook a balcony and a patio below.

"I bet this was the date parlor," Mom says, soaking it all in.

"What the heck is a date parlor?"

"Gram used to tell stories about how the gentlemen callers would wait for their dates here in the date parlor. Back in her day, guys weren't allowed in the dorm rooms. The boys dressed up in suit jackets and waited for their dates to make their entrance. Isn't that romantic?"

"Let's go eat," I say and try not to roll my eyes.

* * *

The Terrace is packed with people gathered at brightly colored tables with a spectacular view of the lake, and a dozen or so students are catching rays out on the pier. Boats bob in the water, and birds flit near the shore. Cooks at an outside concession area are grilling up burgers, brats, and hotdogs. I still can't believe this is my new home. It all seems too good to be true.

"Oh, honey. You're going to love it here. You were right to pick Madison over a small school," Mom says as we wander through the crowd and find a table with orange sunburst chairs under the shade of an old oak.

"It's like an awesome club I don't belong to," I murmur.

"Give it a few days and you'll be as comfortable as those kids over there." She gestures to a table of girls laughing and talking over sodas and nachos, like they don't have a care in the world. I want to be those girls, and someday I will be. I tell myself that I've got plenty of time.

Mom and I nibble at our food, stretching out our last

hour together, until she reluctantly lays her napkin on her plate. "I hate to say this, but I'd better head out and let you settle in."

I clutch her arm as reality hits. "You don't have to go yet," I say to stall the inevitable.

"The longer I stay, the longer you aren't meeting new friends." She squeezes my hand. "I won't lie. I'm going to miss you like crazy, kiddo, but it's time. Plus I need to get some miles behind me if I'm going to get back for my staff meeting tomorrow."

My nervousness cranks back up. When she leaves, yet another door will be closing on my life. Sure, the giant window of college is opening up before me, but what if I'm not ready? Leaving Mom and home so soon after losing Grandma feels like a roller coaster that won't ever stop dropping.

We walk back to the car in silence.

"Now don't do anything dumb like I did and dye your hair blue. Oh, and no more tattoos. The one is plenty." Mom brushes my hair aside and touches the tiny star on my neck that I got in honor of Grandma. She pulls me in for one last hug. "I love you so much, Abbi. You'll have the time of your life—I promise," she says in my ear.

"I love you too," I whisper, my throat tightening. I know I'll love it here, but it feels like I'm on the precipice of something huge, and I'm scared. I look around at other students, chatting and horsing around. Either this is harder for me than for them, or they're just hiding it really well.

"I'll see you at Thanksgiving." Mom forces a smile as she buckles up.

I nod, not trusting my voice.

"And you can plan on me calling every day, at least for a while."

"Okay," I squeak out.

Mom blows a kiss and pulls away, and my new life begins.