

# New HOME

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It was my last day in Florida — the place I was born and raised. I'd lived my whole life in that tiny one-bedroom, one-bathroom house with my family, just scraping by. Things were always tight. But everything changed when my dad got a job offer in Las Vegas, Nevada. Well, I guess you can't really call it a job offer yet. He was browsing a job search website when he saw a position in Las Vegas. He would be a cook at a restaurant called Komodo Las Vegas. When he saw the requirements and realized he met all of them, he told the family to pack our bags because he had already scheduled an interview for three days later.

He said it would be cheaper to drive because plane tickets were too expensive. That meant I'd be stuck in a cramped car for over a day. I was packing my bags, making sure I had everything I needed. Anything I didn't pack would either get sold or thrown away if it was in bad shape. I was really going to miss my friends. I was about to start ninth grade. My family was leaving early the next morning, so I wanted to get a good night's sleep — even though I hate sleeping during car rides. I don't know why.

The next morning, I took my backpack to the car and held onto it for the whole trip. Cardboard boxes surrounded me. It was the start of August, and the heat in the car with no air conditioning was brutal. When my parents were looking for a car, they only cared that it worked and could get us from point A to point B. They didn't care if the AC worked or if the back seats were ripped up. We had a 2002 Toyota Corolla.

After my parents handed over the keys to the new owners of our old house, we pulled out of the driveway and headed to Las Vegas. Lots of my friends said I was lucky to be moving to such a city. I passed the time on my iPhone 15.

Before you ask, "How do you have an iPhone if your parents aren't rich?" — my dad found it on the sidewalk and gave it to me.

We made two stops, then tried to sleep in the car. Trust me when I say it was one of the worst sleeping experiences I've ever had. The back seats didn't recline, and boxes pressed in on me. My parents could recline their seats, but I couldn't. We woke up early the next morning — 6 a.m. Driving through Arizona and New Mexico was hell. The windows were broken and couldn't roll down — only the front windows worked.

Finally, we saw the sign: "*Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas, Nevada.*" We pulled up to the new house. My parents went inside first, then I followed. The house was nicer than our old home. The blast of cold AC air felt amazing after being in the car for more than a day. I flopped onto the comfy sofa and closed my eyes for a few minutes before falling asleep.

## Chapter 2

I woke up in the middle of the night. It was 2 a.m. I heard revving engines and tires screeching. I looked out the window and saw a black Mustang and a yellow Camaro drifting in circles under the streetlight. Another guy was smoking, sitting on the curb of the sidewalk, watching as the cars drifted. It made me feel uneasy, but I ignored it. Still, it was a warning to keep my head up around here.

I didn't even know where my room was yet. I opened one door and found a nice bathroom — way better than what we had back in Orlando. Another door led to my parents' room, where I heard snoring. One door was left. I opened it and saw a twin-size bed and a study desk with a laptop on it. The floor was covered in gray carpet. My closet was there, too, and a window that gave me a stunning view of the Strip. I'd never seen anything so beautiful — casinos lit up in neon lights. One was brown and yellow with the word *Wynn* written in cursive. Next to it was another similar casino called *Encore*.

I unpacked my backpack and organized my things. I positioned my bed facing the window so I could see the Strip every night before I slept.

The next morning, sunlight poured in and woke me up. I sat up and remembered I was in Las Vegas.

"Nathaniel! Time for breakfast!" my mom called. I ran downstairs and sat at the table. My dad was already gone. I was eating eggs when I asked my mom where Dad was. She said his interview was done and the restaurant wanted him to start that same day.

After breakfast, I went outside. The tire marks from the drifting cars were still fresh on the road. I was expecting to see kids outside, but the heat kept everyone indoors. It was 95 degrees — who wants to be outside?

I went back to my room and looked out the window. Then an idea hit me: what if I just went down to the Strip? My dad's restaurant was inside a casino called Fontainebleau. There was nothing else to do around here.

I asked my mom for \$20 — maybe I could get a meal. She agreed, but told me to use Google Maps so I wouldn't get lost.

I walked out and started my journey. I left Elm Drive, crossed Paradise Road, Desert Inn, and a bunch of other streets.

When I finally reached the Strip, it was packed with people. Some carried shopping bags from fancy stores. I used my navigation app to find Fontainebleau. The casino was huge up close and a beautiful blue color.

I didn't know how to get inside, so I went into the parking garage. The security guard gave me a weird look because I didn't have a car.

Google Maps didn't work inside Fontainebleau, so I wandered around lost for an hour before asking a random guy where Komodo was.

I found the restaurant. The chatter of diners filled the air. I slipped into the kitchen when no one was looking. There was my dad, cooking. I wanted to say hi but didn't want to get kicked out.

I ordered vegetable fried rice and a soda. The food was so good I wanted more, but I ran out of money. I left a dollar tip — that was all I could afford.

The walk back to the apartment took about 35 minutes. It felt longer since the temperature had probably climbed to 100 degrees.

Back home, my mom offered me food, but I wasn't very hungry. When she asked if I'd seen Dad, I said yes — he was cooking.

I went back to my room and noticed a laptop on the desk. Why was it here?

I sat down and opened it. There was a sticky note that said, "Welcome to Elm Drive!" It was probably a gift from the previous owners. I created my own Microsoft account, downloaded Roblox, and played until my dad got home.

Night fell, and I wanted some fresh air since it had cooled down. I sat on the curb near the casino lights shining to my right.

Suddenly, I heard footsteps behind me. Two guys approached. One wore a hoodie with one hand tucked inside the pocket. My stomach tightened.

They were the same guys who had been drifting the night before. I kept my head down, hoping they wouldn't talk to me.

"Hey, homie, who you?" one said in an overly friendly voice.

I didn't answer. Then I whispered, "N-Nigal." It was the first name that came to mind. I hoped hiding my real name would work — it didn't.

My mom called out from the house, "Nathaniel! Time for dinner!"

My face went pale. One guy chuckled.

"Your mommy's calling you for supper, baby boy," he said.

"How dare you lie to me," the other guy said, looking around before pulling out a switchblade. A dragon tattoo wrapped around his arm.

They cut my arm before I kicked one of them in the nuts. He fell to the ground while the other ran off yelling, "I'm not getting testicular torsion!"

I looked down at my arm — fresh blood was dripping. I hurried inside, trying to hide the cut. My mom noticed immediately.

"What happened?" she asked.

I lied, "Nothing. I was climbing a tree and cut my arm on a branch."

She believed me. I cleaned the wound with alcohol, which burned like hell, then went to bed.

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## **Chapter 3**

The burn from the wound lasted about 30 minutes. During that time, I stared out the window at the Strip, thinking I needed to learn to defend myself. Maybe I should get a switchblade, but only to protect myself, not to start fights.

I finally dozed off and woke up at 7 a.m.

I sat at my computer and opened Facebook Marketplace. I searched for switchblades nearby.

I found one with a navy blue shiny handle. It looked sharp. The seller was only 15 minutes away and was asking \$15.

I messaged him. The name on the account was "John Doe," which was obviously fake. When I asked if I could buy it, he told me to go to Molasky Park, leave the money on a picnic table, grab the switchblade, and warned me that if I ran off without paying, I'd get shot.

I walked to the park — about an 18-minute trip — and went to the picnic table. I saw the blade and left the money. I didn't check the table until I was far away, just in case John Doe thought I might run.

The switchblade was beautiful. I slipped it into my pocket, ready to defend myself if needed.

When I got back to Elm Drive, I saw the same guys who had scratched my arm. My hand tightened around the blade's handle, which was dripping with sweat.

Even with the blade, I was still scared. I walked quietly behind them.

When I reached my house, I opened the door slowly, praying it wouldn't creak. I locked it behind me and sat at my desk to examine the switchblade again.

The navy blue handle gleamed in the light. The blade was sharp.

After that, I went outside for some fresh air and sat on the sidewalk curb.

Suddenly, hands grabbed me and pulled me behind a tree. I couldn't scream. Two boys trapped me.

A kid with black hair held a blade to my neck. If I moved, the blade would pierce my skin.

"What gang are you in?!" the kid demanded.

"Gangs? There're gan—" I tried saying, but he covered my mouth with his hand.

"I don't think he knows. He's good," the other boy said.

The kid took his hand off my mouth.

“I’m Thomas, and he’s Newt. Who are you?” Thomas asked.

“Nathaniel. There are gangs?” I said.

“Yeah. We’re starting our own gang because we’re tired of The Snakes,” Newt said.

I noticed their arms had snake tattoos.

I looked up at them. “Let me join your gang, so we can protect ourselves.”

Thomas smirked. “Bet. You’re in. Welcome to The Tribe.”

The name “The Tribe” sounded kind of lame. What did tribe even mean? I didn’t say anything — I wasn’t about to get attacked by two different gangs.

Newt suggested we hang out at the park. We all agreed and started walking.

They asked me questions — where I used to live, if I’d been attacked by The Snakes before, and if I already had a switchblade.

When we got to the park, we sat at the same picnic tables where I’d gotten my switchblade.

We were just chilling, watching people go about their business, when suddenly a black Mustang pulled up. Their tint was so dark I didn’t even know if it was legal.

Four guys smoking cigs walked out. They approached us, walking slowly.

I gulped hard. Four gang members. This was bad. We either get killed or get injured badly right now.

I recognized two of the members; they were the same people who attacked me last night.

They finally reached us.

“What are you, young kids, doing by yourselves?” one said in an over-friendly voice.

“Shut the hell up, why’s your hairline so blown back?” said Newt.

My jaw dropped. How did Newt just say that to some gang members so casually without hesitating?

The guy covered his forehead with his hand. “Oh, you’ve done it.”

He pulled out a switchblade with his other hand.

“Run!” Thomas yelled.

We all got up from the picnic table. I ran behind Newt and Thomas. These members were 16 or 18, and we were about 14.

We ran faster than them; it seems like track was good back in Florida.

Anyway, we hide in the bushes near my house. We stayed still, making no noise. They were so good at being quiet, I didn't even know if they were still breathing.

Suddenly, I heard clicking sounds, followed by slow, careful footsteps. I looked out to see who it was, it was the same guy Newt had insulted was looking for us. He wasn't with his gang; they probably thought we weren't worth it and left him to deal with us.

He cursed us out in a low voice as he looked for us. He ran when he heard police sirens nearby.

Finally, after what felt like ages, we got out of the bushes. We said our goodbyes to each other and split up.

I am lucky that the Snakes don't know where I live; if they did, I would be cooked.

## Chapter 4

It was still the afternoon, and I was bored out of my mind on my bed, staring at the strip, thinking of what had happened hours ago.

I received a knock at my door. I was so paranoid that I grabbed my switchblade, keeping it prepared in case a Snake's member came.

"Who is it?!" I shouted from my bed.

"It's me, sweetie."

The moment I heard my mom's voice, I put the blade away, hiding it in a drawer of my desk.

"Come in!"

My mom came in with a list in her hand.

"Can you go buy me some groceries from the store?" She gave me the list and a credit card. I nodded yes.



She walked out of the room, and I grabbed my switchblade, putting it in my pants pocket. You never know what can happen, and based on my previous encounters with the Snakes, they want me dead.

Anyway, I put on my shoes and left. I had to walk for over an hour. I was kind of happy to be far away, which means I shouldn't encounter any Snakes, but I should still keep my guard up, it should be about 13 minutes driving, which is still close.

The whole time walking, I was paranoid that I would see a black Mustang roll up, with tint so dark you can't even see inside. Every time I saw a mustang, I would clutch my switchblade in my pocket. Then I would feel relief when the car just drove off.

I reached the market. I bought everything on the list. Two Gallons of milk, two Dozen eggs, etc. In total, it was 50 bucks. I paid for it with a card my mom gave me.

Anyway, it was almost 9 and it was getting dark. The sky was dark, the streetlights were on, and cars had their headlights on. I was just about to turn right into Elm Drive when I was approached by a Snakes member.

Luckily, it was only one, so I had a chance.

"Give me what you used to pay for that, or else I'm taking your groceries."

I hesitated for a bit. I need to let go of this fear I have of the Snakes.

**"No,"**

I said. I was holding all the groceries with one hand, and the other one in my pocket. The member made a fist with his hand; he was probably about to punch me. I got a firm grip on my switchblade.

He threw his fist at my face, but I quickly pulled out my switchblade and held it right to my face, so the guy would punch the blade instead of me. The blade pierced right in between his knuckles. He let out a scream.

I pulled the blade out of his knuckle and ran off. I reached my house and unlocked it. I was so scared, I dropped the keys twice in an attempt to unlock the door.

When I finally unlocked it I turned back to see where the guy was. He was rolling on the floor, screaming.

I quickly ran inside the house, locking the door behind me. My mom saw me.

"Why are you in such a hurry?"

"Some guy tried to rob me, but I got away."

My mom took the groceries from me. I went to the sink, washing the switchblade from the guy's blood.

My switchblade was perfectly fine, I was expecting it to be bent but it was as if brand new.

I took a shower and went to bed. I needed to rest. I had just escaped an injury. I took a glance at the strip and went to sleep.

## Chapter 5