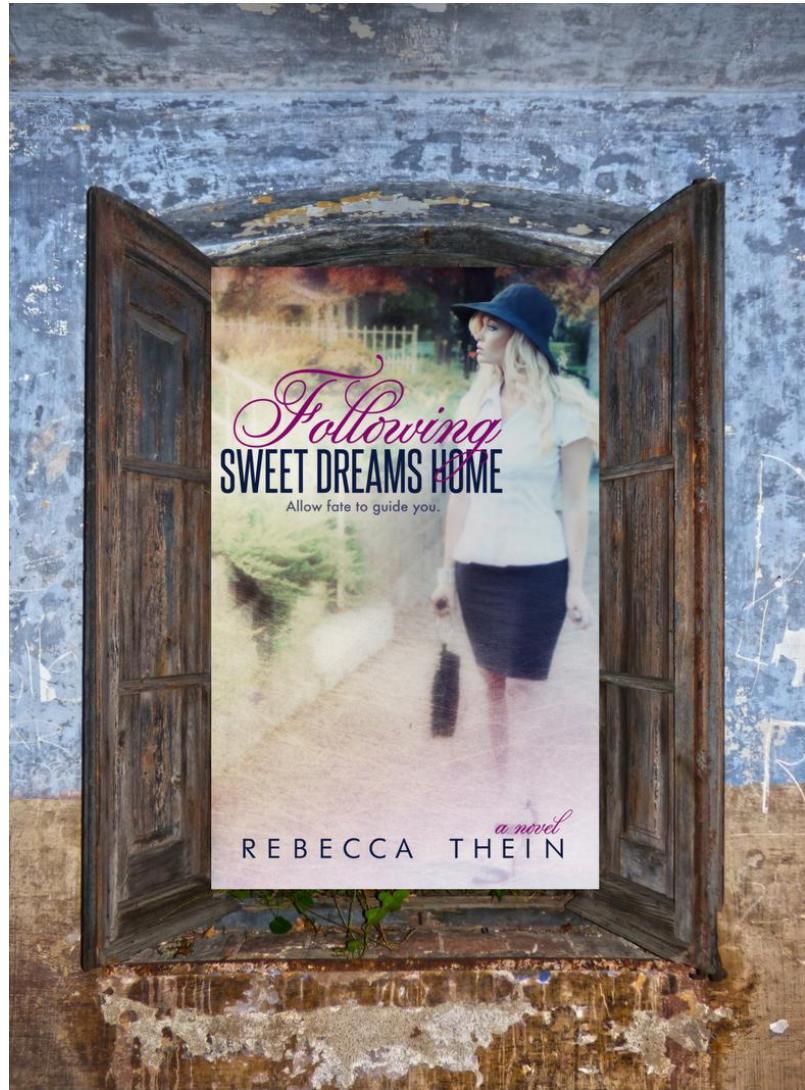


This is chapter Four from the novel  
*Following Sweet Dreams Home*  
A novel by [Rebecca Thein](#)



Author [Kristine Raymond](#) has a YouTube channel called First Pages. She reads the first chapter of a novel. You can follow this link to hear her read the [First Chapter](#) of Following Sweet Dreams Home.

And now I will present Chapter 4 of my novel Following Sweet Dreams Home.

## FOUR

It was four o'clock that afternoon when the intercom buzzed loudly, signaling that someone was at the lobby door. "Hello," Candice greeted cheerfully.

"We have a furniture delivery for Candice Smythe," a deep male voice responded.

"That's me. Come on up." Candice pressed the button to release the lock on the building's main door. She opened her front door and stepped into the hallway, anxiously glancing at the elevator. A minute later, the elevator dinged, its doors opening as it stopped on her floor. "Over here," she called out, waving at the men.

One of the men was on the tall side, with shiny black hair and soft cocoa-colored eyes, as well as a day's growth of a beard shadowing his jaw. He appeared to be in his mid-thirties and very physically fit. Candice could see his bicep muscles flexing as he carried the credenza through the door. The other man was slightly shorter and appeared to be much younger, possibly in his early twenties. He was wearing his baseball cap backward, with baggy jeans hanging low on his hips, revealing plaid boxers. As the men walked toward Candice, she thought she saw something familiar in the taller man. It was something about his eyes.

"Where would you like us to put this colorful credenza?" the taller man inquired in a sonorous voice.

"Out here on the balcony," Candice replied as she slid the glass door open.

"That is not a good idea, the moisture will warp the wood," the taller man responded, setting the heavy credenza down inside.

"Really? Even if I put a plastic cover over it?"

"Yeah, I still wouldn't leave it outside. What are you planning to do with this piece?"

"Well, I thought I'd refinish it. The sales lady at the store said I'd probably find some nice wood under all this paint."

"Oh, you were talking to my grandmother," the man warmly replied. "I'm Shane, by the way, and this is Josh." Josh just nodded without saying anything.

"That's right. I guess it was your grandmother. She said this credenza just arrived at the store."

"I found it not too long ago in a barn. I have a business that deals with clearing out what some people refer to as *garbage*. But often, there are salvageable items. Sometimes there's a treasure like this credenza. I'm pretty sure it's oak. I also do all the refurbishing of items for my grandmother. So, have you ever done any furniture refinishing?" Shane asked, hoping his expertise might be of use.

"No, but all I need is some sandpaper and elbow grease, right?"

"Well, that won't remove all the paint. What you need is a good chemical stripper. It will loosen the paint making it easy to scrape it right off. While you're working you'll need good ventilation, so using the patio would work as long as you bring the credenza in at night." Shane's passion for furniture restoration came through in his detailed explanation.

"I guess you can just put it over there against the wall for now," Candice suggested, pointing to the other side of the room. She had no idea if she really wanted to tackle the credenza's beautification now that she realized how much work it would take.

"I'd be happy to come over and show you how to refinish this to its former glory," Shane offered.

"That would be great. I obviously have no idea what to do." Candice chuckled a little embarrassed.

Shane grabbed his cell phone. "Give me your number, and I'll call you to set up a day to come by." He punched in Candice's number as she recited it.

"So you were saying your business is clearing out houses and properties? That's gotta be fun. Kinda like a treasure hunt every time."

"You wouldn't believe some of the interesting things I stumble upon. Once I even found a 14-carat gold tennis bracelet in the dirt of a basement. Sometimes, when I take down walls, there will be relics hidden between the plaster and studs."

"I used to play in the dirt as a child. I'd bury something and pretend I found a treasure when I dug it back up." Candice smiled, fondly remembering her great childhood adventures

"Yeah, it's cool. I have a reclamation store where I put things like old barn wood, sinks, old lighting fixtures, anything reusable. The furniture and knickknacks I give to my grandmother to sell at her antique store. She loves staying busy and helping her customers, it's what keeps her young."

"I've heard people who stay active live longer," Candice replied, recalling the elderly woman's youthful spirit.

"My grandfather used to say, 'The day I quit working is the day I'm dead, and he died within a few months of retirement.' Shane's eyes saddened at the mention of his grandfather. "So I plan on staying busy every day."

"Well, I would love to go with you sometime on one of your treasure hunts. There's just something about old buildings I love. I guess it's the character and charm. Each house has a story to tell. As you can see, I really have quite the imagination."

"Well, I'm going to Napa tomorrow to scout my next job. If you'd like to go, I'd enjoy the company."

"Sure, I have nothing planned tomorrow."

Josh cleared his throat and interrupted quietly, "Shane, we are double parked out there."

"Right, we'll be back with your table and chairs."

"I'll come down and hold the door. Then you won't have to be buzzed back in." Candice grabbed her keys and followed the men. She watched as Shane ran his hand through his hair, trying to get a curl out of his eye.

Shane carried the bistro table over his head while Josh grabbed both chairs.

"I can carry a chair for you," Candice offered.

"Nah, I got it, but thanks," Josh replied. He was a person of few words.

Candice ran ahead of the men and pushed the *up* button for the elevator. The three of them stood there looking up as they watched the floor numbers light up on each floor the elevator passed.

"This has to be the slowest elevator in San Francisco," Candice commented, knowing that the table had to be getting heavy.

"Well, this is not bad. At least you have an elevator. Sometimes we have to walk the furniture up the stairs. That can be a real challenge," Shane said, as he shifted his weight.

"I never thought of that. What if the piece is too big to make the turns in a stairwell?"

"I always measure before I attempt the stairs. If the piece is too big for the stairs, I see if we can hoist it up to a balcony and through sliding doors, if not, then I offer a refund. My grandmother doesn't always remember to ask if there is a cargo elevator when selling huge pieces. I try to find a creative solution to get the furniture into a customer's home like removing door jams, but there are those times the furniture simply doesn't fit no matter what I do."

"Gosh, I didn't think of that either when I bought the credenza. I just bought it without considering whether it would fit in the elevator."

"It was a tight fit, but we were able to stand it up on its side and then there was plenty of room for us to fit."

The elevator finally stopped, and the door slowly opened. Candice held the *open door* button so it would not shut until they were in the hallway.

"This is a great building," Shane stated.

"Yeah, it was an old warehouse. I love the view from my living room. That's really what sold me on the place. Plus, it has covered parking, although I don't own a car. I figured having parking was great for resale."

"Smart move. Parking is so important in San Francisco. The first place I owned didn't have parking, and my friends hated to drive out and visit because they would have to circle the block twenty times waiting for a spot to open."

Josh did not say anything the entire elevator ride. Instead, he just listened and watched Shane, who appeared smitten with Candice.

They got to the condo and placed the bistro table and chairs in the empty corner of Candice's small kitchen. "Oh, that's so cute there," Candice remarked, delighted with her purchase.

"It does look like it was custom made for this kitchen," Shane agreed, taking a step back to get a broader view.

"Well, thank you so much for delivering it so quickly." Candice reached for her purse to give the men a tip.

"No need for that." Shane held his hand up refusing the money.

"Um, well maybe I can treat you to breakfast tomorrow before we head out to Napa."

"Breakfast sounds good, but I prefer to treat you. There's a great little place in Sausalito. I'll pick you up around eight."

"I look forward to it." Candice's heart began beating a little faster.

"Oh, I almost forgot to tell you, my grandmother said she put something in the top drawer of the credenza for you. She thought you might like it."

"That is so sweet," Candice said, wondering what it could be.

Candice watched as the men walked out her front door. Then she ran to her window to wait for Shane to exit the building. She wanted just one last glance at this rugged man. She decided it was definitely true, this condo had a great view.

Once the truck drove off, Candice went over and stood in front of her new credenza. She wondered if she should just paint it white or put effort into restoring it. The thought of working with harsh chemicals was not appealing. Although having Shane

showing her how to refinish it would make the job worthwhile.

She reached for the top drawer and pulled it open. Inside she found an old recipe book. Handwritten on the cover it read, *Grandma Pela's Secret Recipes*. When Candice picked up the book, several loose recipes fell into the drawer. She opened the book, and the first recipe was *Grandma Pela's Secret Truffles*. Followed by, *Grandma Pela's Over the Moon Yellow Cake*. She turned to the next page, *Grandma Pela's Hard Cherry Candy*. There had to be well over one hundred recipes, probably more. *Grandma Pela sure liked treats*, Candice thought as she picked up the loose recipes and to put them back into the book.

A yellowed newspaper was folded and resting in the drawer. Candice read the year, 1946, then the headline, which jumped out in bold letters: **Grandma Pela Does It Again**. Apparently, her Fluffy Mountain cake sold for a whopping two dollars and the proceeds were going to a charity that helped children.

Then Candice noticed a note written on beautiful stationery. She picked it up and read:

*Ms. Smythe,*

*I found this recipe book inside this credenza. I was going to sell it separately, but I thought that just would not be right. The book belongs with this wonderful piece of furniture. Let me know how the recipes turn out, should you decide to make any of them.*

*Regards, Beatrice.*

Candice tried to push the drawer closed, but it refused to budge. She removed the drawer and looked to see what the problem was. She found an old apron with a bib top and hand embroidered orange flowers decorating the skirt. She shook out the apron to make sure no bugs had decided to make their home in the folds. Then she slipped the bib over her head and tied it around her waist. She looked back into the space behind the drawer where she saw more recipes, old measuring spoons, some sort of ancient kitchen utensil that resembled a small cheese grater, and several photos of an old woman. *Could this be Grandma Pela?* Candice wondered. She placed everything on the top of the credenza and gently replaced the drawer.

Candice gathered the loose recipes from under the drawer, along with the book, and sat down on her couch. Many recipes had exotic-sounding ingredients that she was unfamiliar with, so she turned on her laptop and started searching. Shortly into her quest for knowledge, she decided to see if there was anything about this woman, Grandma Pela.

It did not take long before the search engine returned a tribute that read:

Valeria Pela, better known as Grandma Pela, was a woman who dedicated her life to providing food and shelter to the needy. It was not uncommon to hear about another weary homeless person that was given a place to rest in her home. She had a special connection to orphaned children and volunteered at the orphanage, rocking the newborn babies for hours.

Many of the residents of the neighborhood suspected that Grandma Pela was

herself once an orphan, but there is no confirmation on this speculation.

She was known in her community as a loving and caring woman who could brighten everyone's day with her warm smile and kind words. She loved to bake and delivered treats to hospitals and nursing homes for over seventy-five years. She won many awards for her baked goods and always had at least one entry in every contest in the area.

Her humanitarian efforts fed her soul and kept her young. She celebrated her 103<sup>rd</sup> birthday by making her final cake. The angels called her home two days later on September 3<sup>rd</sup>. There are no known children or relatives, but to her community, she will always be fondly remembered as Grandma Pela.

Under the article about Grandma Pela, Candice saw an obituary.

### **Valeria Pela (1910-2013)** Obituary

There will be a celebration of life for Valeria Pela at **Love for All** nursing home this Friday 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Everyone is welcome to share in this memorial and convey how Grandma Pela touched your life.

*Wow, I guess there really is something to this idea of keeping busy.* Candice printed out the tribute and obituary about Grandma Pela and put them with the recipes.

*Just for fun, I'm going to try to make one of Grandma Pela's treats.* Next to Candice's phone was a pen and a notepad. She jotted down the ingredients for the recipe that looked the simplest: *Kumquat Lemon Drizzle Cookie*. Out the door and off to the market Candice went with her reusable grocery bags.

"Excuse me," Candice politely said, holding her grocery list. The man turned, more than happy to take a break from stacking apples. "Do you have any kumquats?"

"Sure, they're right over here." He walked toward some small orange fruits.

"Oh, these are so cute. Thank you for your help."

"No problem, anything else on that list you need?"

"Nope, this was the last thing I needed." Candice started filling a plastic bag with the five kumquats that the recipe called for. As she made her way to the checkout, she passed the whole-wheat pastry flour and grabbed a bag. *I think that should do it for now.*

Once she arrived back home, she started the process of baking.

Step One: Pre-heat oven to 350°. Candice set the oven control to the instructed temperature. *Where did I put those measuring cups?* She opened each drawer, but the measuring cups were not there. When Candice had a job, she rarely had the energy to cook. She often put in twelve-hour days and even spent a good portion of her weekends at work. She stood there looking at her cabinets as if the cups just might call out, 'Yoo-hoo, over here.' She bent down and reached in to grab a large mixing bowl. *There they are.* She thought looking inside the mixing bowl. *Jazzlene must have stuck them there.* She found

her grandmother's sifter and decided she would give the flour a thrice sifting for good measure. *Couldn't hurt to sift the flour even if the recipe didn't call for it*, she told herself, longing to use her grandmother's old sifter.

Step-by-step, Candice followed the recipe to a tee. The kumquats were a challenge to peel before she realized she misread the recipe. She was supposed to cut them into small pieces with the rind intact. The dough for the cookies was mixed and ready to place on the cookie sheet. She rolled small balls of dough and flattened them with a spatula. While they were baking, she thought she would start on the drizzle. It called for lemon zest. The only grater she had was her cheese grater, and that was not going to work. This meant another trip to the store, but now she had to wait for the cookies to finish baking. She sat down to look at the other items from the credenza. She picked up the old small grater. *Oh, this must be a rind grater*. She washed it and then started to grate the lemon rind. An hour passed, and the cookies were cool enough to drizzle the lemon on top. Now all she needed was a cup of tea.

*Okay, the moment of truth.* She took a bite of the cookie and let out a moan loud enough for the neighbors to hear as the cookie melted in her mouth. Candice picked up her phone and dialed Jazzlene. She knew Jazzlene was working, so she left her a message. "Hey, you have to taste these cookies I made. They're amazing. I'd say better than sex, well that's a slight exaggeration. I will say, you won't be able to eat just one."

Candice went to her desk, found a box of plastic sheet protectors. She gently placed each recipe into a protective holder. Then she saw a binder currently holding her work rules and emptied the contents into her desk drawer. One by one, she put the recipes into the binder. The first one, of course, was the *Kumquat Lemon Drizzle Cookie*. On a sticky note, she wrote; Melt in your mouth delicious, green tea goes well with this cookie. She stuck the note into the plastic protector with the recipe. Candice started reviewing the other recipes. She was going to have to try another one of Grandma Pela's recipes just to see if it was as good as the first.

Eight o'clock and her phone rang. She looked to see who it was. "I see you got my message," Candice said.

"I'm on my way home now though I can stop by if you want. Or can the cookies keep until tomorrow?"

"Yes, it can wait, but I really want you to try one of these cookies while they're fresh. I'm not sure if they'll be as good tomorrow."

"Okay, I'll be there in a few. But then I have to get home, I'm exhausted."

Candice put on the water to boil for the tea. She wanted Jazzlene to experience the cookies with tea as she had earlier.

Jazzlene let herself into the condo with the spare key. "Okay, where are these *better than sex* cookies? Lord knows I need one after the wedding today. And since when do you bake?"

"Just try one and tell me what you think." Candice held the plate up, showing off neatly displayed cookies.

First, Jazzlene smelled the cookie. "Very fragrant, I believe I smell a hint of lemon." Then she took a bite that made her taste buds dance. "Oh, my!" She took another bite. "These just melt in your mouth. When did you learn to bake like this? And where did you get that cute apron?"

Candice forgot she still had on the vintage apron. “Well, see my old but *new to me* credenza?” She pointed to her brightly painted piece.

Jazzlene turned to see this infusion of color that was actually the credenza. “Yes, quite pretty, I can see the potential.”

“Well, there was a recipe book in there, given to me by the lady that owns the antique store. And trapped under the drawer was this apron, some old photos, and this grater. The recipe book has over a hundred of Grandma Pela’s secret recipes. I was curious, so I did an internet search and found an old newspaper article from 1946 and Grandma Pela’s obit which I printed out.” Candice handed the binder to Jazzlene. “I thought I would try a recipe that looked simple. And voilà, here you have *Kumquat Lemon Drizzle Cookies*. Amazing, right?”

“I’ll say. May I have another?” Jazzlene asked, but did not wait for Candice to answer. She just reached for the plate and snatched a cookie.

“My day actually started off even better. Let me tell you about the man that delivered this credenza. Well actually, there were two, but one doesn’t count, he was too young. The other guy, Shane, he looked to be in his mid-thirties. Beautiful brown eyes that just light up his face. Anyway, he looks like he takes good care of himself, rock hard arms. He invited me...oh wait, I think I invited myself, to go look at some property in Napa with him tomorrow.”

“What? You’re going to look at land now?”

“No, he owns a reclamation business. He empties out houses and clears out debris. He’s going to look at a potential job, size up what is valuable, and what will go to the dumps. I thought it would be fun to tag along sometime.”

“Hmm, you really invited yourself?” Jazzlene looked surprised. It was out of Candice’s character to be so forward.

“Sorta. I just said it sounded like fun and I’d love to tag along. He said I could go with him tomorrow. Who am I to turn down a gorgeous man?”

“Take your camera. You may get some great pictures,” Jazzlene advised, an eyebrow raised.

“Good idea.”

“Well, I guess I’d better head home. Tomorrow is going to be a long day. I’ll call you when I get home after the Quinceañera and see how your date went. I mean treasure hunting.”

Candice turned out her light that night and lay in bed, trying to *will* herself to sleep. She wanted to be bright-eyed and bushy-tailed in the morning, but in all her excitement, sleep did not come quickly. ©

I hope you enjoyed getting to learn a little more about Candice. You can purchase a copy of the complete book on [Amazon](#), [Nook](#), [Google Play](#), and various other retailers such as [Kobo](#), [Apple](#), [Smashwords](#), and [more](#).

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