The Door We Opened

B Alan Bourgeois · Opening excerpt · 1 of 2

Alex Rivera had covered enough anniversary events to know that most of them were funerals wearing balloons.

Someone would stand behind a folding table and tell a room full of tired people how much had changed. Someone else would point at a poster board covered with numbers no one could read from the back. There would be coffee strong enough to strip paint, grocery-store cake with frosting too sweet to swallow, and at least one speaker who said community so many times the word began to sound like a grant application.

Then everyone would clap, take photographs, and go home with the quiet knowledge that the work was still unfinished.

The Open Door Coalition had the cake.

It sat beneath a hand-painted banner stretched across the front wall of the church fellowship hall.

ONE YEAR OF OPEN DOORS

The letters were painted in blue, gold, and a shade of green that had probably looked brighter before someone folded the banner too soon. A little paint had cracked near the word Open. The final S in Doors leaned to the right.

Alex noticed details like that. It was part of the job.

The banner was trying to look celebratory.

Reading sample — continued

The room beneath it was trying to hold together.

He stood just inside the doorway with his notebook tucked beneath one arm and watched three children weave between adults carrying crockpots, diaper bags, paper plates, and stacks of flyers. A little boy in rain boots dragged a plastic dinosaur by its tail across the scratched linoleum floor. A girl with braids sat under a folding table, coloring on the back of a City Council agenda with a purple crayon.

Near the coffee station, a woman with a sleeping baby against her shoulder whispered urgently into her phone.

At the wall beside her, someone had taped up a list titled:

RIDES / CHILDCARE / FOOD PICKUP / COURT DATES / JOB INTERVIEWS / MEDICAL APPOINTMENTS

The handwriting changed halfway down the page.

Alex stepped farther into the room.

The fellowship hall smelled like coffee, fried chicken, lemon cleaner, baby powder, and the faint dampness that always lived in old church buildings after rain. Outside, the sky over Austin had been gray since noon. The parking lot was slick, and every few minutes the church doors opened to admit another gust of wet air and another person arriving late.