Hi, my name is Nina LaCour, and I am the author of Watch Over Me. Watch Over Me is a modern ghost story about an eighteen-year-old girl named Mila, who has just aged out of the foster care system and has accepted an internship with a family on the northern California coast. She is very eager to be folded into the family, and to become a part of them, but on the first night there, on the farm, she sees a ghost glowing across the field, and soon old memories of her own start to haunt her as well. Over the course of the novel, Mila has to decide whether this place she’s ended up in is the right place for her to be or the wrong one.

I drew on a lot of the same inspirations that I used for my last novel, We Are Okay, in terms of the classic Gothic tropes that I feel very drawn to. Once again, we have a young woman in distress, we have a mysterious location, isolation, secrets, and grief. But this time I allowed myself to lean into those a little bit more and experiment with the supernatural and the unexplainable.

At its core, Watch Over Me explores how the past and the present can co-exist; how even in a new place, our old selves will rise up and demand us to pay attention to them. It’s about self-compassion and self-forgiveness, and about coming to terms with the life we had before—the bad and the good parts of it—in order to accept and fully inhabit the lives that we have now.

The section I’m going to read to you comes from near the beginning of the novel. It is Mila’s first night at the farm and she and Terry, who is the farm’s father figure, are next to each other in the kitchen, and they’re looking out the window across the field to where Mila’s cabin will be.

In the moonlight I saw something outside, glowing and crossing the field, moving closer. And as it came closer, the more it looked like a figure, like how a person would look if a person emanated light.

“I hope you aren’t afraid of ghosts,” Terry said.

I felt gripped around the throat at first. A familiarity. A darkness. My spine went stiff and straight and I made my face blank. I would be impenetrable. I would not give myself away.

The ghost hovered in place on the moonlit field. It lifted its arms to the sky and spun in a slow circle. A girl, I thought, by the way she moved. And, in spite of myself, I was mesmerized.

“No,” I whispered. “No, I’m not afraid.”
I didn’t know if I was telling the truth.

All I knew was that I wanted to watch her spin forever. I wanted to be her. The soft, dark grass on my bare feet. Free of the fears I carried with me. We watched her, Terry and I did, until she had spun herself invisible. What a wonder it was, to stand side by side with someone and watch the same thing. And then all that was left was an open field and a moon and some cabins in the distance.

“Julia and I were warned before we bought this place that there were ghosts here. We didn’t believe it, or maybe we didn’t care. But the first time I saw them, I dropped to my knees.”

I turned toward him, waited for more. But he shook his head as though to break the memory. “Shall we?” he asked.