

# **Into the Next Room**

**by**

**don't-be-fancy**

**Klaine || AU || PG**

*With the warmth of Blaine's kiss on her cheek to guide her, Maggie has left her earthly home for a new, unknown adventure. And adventure where she learns what it means to be a laughing star, a guiding light, a constant hope for the loved ones she's left behind.*

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*Death is nothing at all,  
 I have only slipped into the next room  
 I am I and you are you  
 Whatever we were to each other, that we are still.  
 Call me by my old familiar name,  
 Speak to me in the easy way which you always used  
 Put no difference in your tone,  
 Wear no forced air of solemnity or sorrow  
 Laugh as we always laughed at the little jokes we enjoyed together.  
 Play, smile, think of me, pray for me.  
 Let my name be ever the household word that it always was,  
 Let it be spoken without effect, without the trace of shadow on it.  
 Life means all that it ever meant.  
 It is the same as it ever was, there is unbroken continuity.  
 Why should I be out of mind because I am out of sight?  
 I am waiting for you, for an interval, somewhere very near,  
 Just around the corner.  
 All is well.*

r13; Henry Scott Holland

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"You're here to stay this time."

Maggie took the offered hands in front of her and smiled at the woman, still only a silhouette against the bright light surrounding them. "Yes. I'm ready now."

"Was your journey peaceful?"

"It was." Maggie released one hand and touched her own cheek as they began to walk together. "I can still feel the warmth of his kiss."

The woman smiled and slowly came into focus. She was – as expected – ethereal, but somehow comfortably approachable. Her hair was similar in color to Maggie's – more auburn than copper – and her nose and cheeks were dotted with the most faint of freckles, where Maggie's were so pronounced, you

could count them from across the street. Her eyes were a shimmering green with flecks of gold, and her smile was gentle, soothing, maternal, even though it was clear she was younger than Maggie, if only by a few years. "You will continue to feel his kiss. Until you see him again."

"I hope that's far, far away from now. He has much to do still."

"And his kiss will remain."

"Are—are you related to me? I'm afraid I don't recognize you."

"Oh no, sweetheart. No. I guess you don't really have anyone here yet?"

"Where *is* here?"

"Here. Where we are. Where I'm taking you."

"Then, I guess no. Grandparents I barely knew. An aunt or uncle I didn't know."

The woman nodded and squeezed Maggie's hand. "So, I'm your guide. I'll help you get settled and show you around. Of course, if you'd prefer to explore alone, you're more than welcome to do that."

"Will I ever discover it all?"

"No. That's the beauty of it. It's as infinite as your life is."

They walked in silence, nothing surrounding them but pure white light. Maggie wondered how it wasn't hurting her eyes, making her want to squint or shield, but it didn't. She didn't. She simply enjoyed the walk, the absence of the heaviness and exhaustion in her legs that had finally stilled her.

"I'm—I'm Maggie, by the way. Or—do you already know that?"

Her guide stopped and smiled. "All I was told was your name. And it is lovely to meet you." The woman pointed to their right and they came to a non-descript portal. Undefined in the washed out brightness, yet somehow clear to the eye.

Maggie couldn't help but to reach out to it and the woman chuckled as the passageway opened before them. "Been waiting awhile, huh?"

Maggie jerked her hand back and blushed. "Yes. Sorry. Should I have—"

"You're fine." The woman gestured for Maggie to proceed, but she stopped herself again.

"Wait. I don't know *your* name."

"I'm Elizabeth. You can call me Lizzie." Elizabeth motioned for Maggie to go in first, pushing her gently at the small of her back when she hesitated. "Welcome home, Maggie."

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Maggie stepped in and the light fell behind her and disappeared, allowing her to see everything before her, around her. Just as she dreamed before she fell asleep one last time, she was in a garden, larger than any imaginable, surrounding her in full. Lush grasses, casually pruned bushes and trees, flowers in more colors, in more patterns than she ever knew possible filled her vision. As she looked on, she saw tall stalks heavy with over-sized lilies, pathways lined with mounds of silver-green leaves, rolling hills dotted with white clover and dandelions, no longer relegated to the life of an unwanted weed, here welcome for their playfulness and color.

"Are we the only two people here?"

"For now."

"Do I have a—house or a place to live or—" She sighed and sat down right where they were, the grass cool and soft on her bare legs. "Oh! My pajamas. Where are my? Where did these clothes come from?"

"Are they acceptable?"

"They're—" She looked herself over and had to smile. They were her clothes. Her favorite outfit even, a gauze cream-colored tank-dress that rested loosely on her body, cinched easily at the waist. Blaine called it her hippy dress. She called it her shut-up-you're-just-jealous dress as it allowed her to be as close to naked as possible. She hadn't been able to wear it in weeks, the fall Ohio weather too cold and, of course, her body too thin to keep the straps up on her bony shoulders.

But, now it fit perfectly, as did the bangle-bracelets that jangled around her wrists, the sandals that she kicked off to feel the cool of the grass. Her fingers were heavy with rings again – all but one on her thumb – and as she lifted her hands to her head, she gasped—

"My hair! Lizzie!" She pulled the tail of her braid forward and smiled as Lizzie sat next to her. "My hair's back!"

"It is. It's beautiful."

"I was always sort of Sampson about it. Losing it—" She pulled the elastic from the tip of the tail and began untwisting the braid. She combed her fingers through the ends and stopped as they got tangled in the silk tail of the scarf that remained securely tied on her head. "Does this look okay if I keep this on, even though I have my hair now?"

Lizzie took over loosening Maggie's hair from her braid with an ease as if they'd known each other forever. "It's beautiful. I love the colors, especially with your hair."

Maggie sighed at the tenderness in Lizzie's touch, familiar like that of a sister or a mother. "Missing them will always be difficult, won't it?"

"Yes, but just like it is for them, it will get easier." Lizzie finished with Maggie's hair and squeezed her shoulder. "There. I think I could play in your hair forever."

"Well, it looks like we have forever, so if you want to..."

Maggie flopped back onto the grass, spreading her arms and legs like a snow angel against the cool blades. She giggled and wiggled, feeling like a little girl again. The beauty of this place, of the peace she felt as soon as she entered was pulling her in, surrounding her and making her feel—"I know why I'm here. I know where we are, but how can I feel so *alive* when all it really means is that I'm—"

"It's a *new* life, Maggie."

"And it's okay if I roll around in the grass?"

Lizzie flopped back next to Maggie and rolled a few turns to the left and then back to her right bumping right into Maggie's shoulders as they laughed. "I sure hope so! Who wants to stop playing?"

"I never stopped there either." Maggie sat up and re-adjusted her scarf with a plaintive smile. "Until I couldn't."

"Well, there is no sickness here. And only *one* rule. But right now, let's take care of the basics. Are you hungry or thirsty?"

"Famished." Maggie grinned again and stood, reaching a hand to Lizzie for a lift up. "Where do we get food?"

"What do you want?"

"Fruit. I'm craving fruit." She followed Lizzie's eyes to a grove of trees she swore hadn't been there before, and started toward it. "Peaches! Would you like a peach too?"

"Mmm yes, please. They're my favorite."

Within steps, they were at the grove. Maggie plucked two perfectly ripe pale-orange globes from the tree and after offering Lizzie one, sunk her teeth into the most succulent, sweet peach she'd ever eaten. "Oh! Oh my goodness. Oh." She slurped and ate and devoured and quite indelicately licked the dripping juice from her arm. "This is sho good!" With one final slurp, she sucked the last bit of pulp from the pit and grinned. "Oh my goodness, that was so delicious, I'm—I'm starting to talk like my mother – who says *oh my goodness* at my age?"

Lizzie laughed and they journeyed on, peach juice drying like water. They walked through thick patches of trees and back out again where rolling hills led them on. As they reached the top of the final hill, Maggie looked out and gasped. "It's—it's a beach!"

"It is."

Maggie took off running down the hill, slowing before she got to the water when she saw a large shaded area near an outcropping of rocks. It was a wall of sorts set apart from the rest of this new world, but clearly still in its midst. "Lizzie?" She approached it slowly, its size and familiarity overwhelming her. "Wait. Is this—is this—my bay window?"

Lizzie grinned, always amused at the different descriptions people had for their window to their loved ones. Movie screen, skylight, picture window, portal, peephole. Everyone had visions and of course, everyone was right. "It's your bay window."

"Why—" she got to the area, feet upon feet taller and wider than she imagined – even larger than the bay window at Shedd's Aquarium – and put out a hand to touch the shade, a non-entity as her hand disappeared into the gray fog covering it. She yanked her hand back and spun towards Lizzie. "Why is it shaded? Blocked?"

"*That's* our one rule. It will be that way for a little while."

"But, I want to see my family."

"And you'll get to. Soon. I promise."

"Why, though? Why can't I see them now?"

Lizzie took Maggie's hand and guided her toward the beach as she talked. "We give them a few days – *their* days as we don't tell time here – before we can peek in."

Maggie walked and contemplated, grinning when she could feel sand beneath her feet, could smell the water as waves gently rolled into the shore. "It's so we don't want to go back, isn't it?"

"Yes. Because as perfect as it is here—"

"We'll want to be with them more. I understand."

Maggie breathed in the ocean air and closed her eyes, listening to the waves, feeling the gentle breeze blow her hair back off of her neck and shoulders. After a few long moments, "Can I meet your family in the mean time?"

Lizzie sucked in a breath and grinned, her whole body alight with it. "No one's ever asked me that before."

"So, is it okay?"

"Yes! Yes! I'd love for you to—" She took Maggie's hand and yanked her back up to the green, taking the lead for the first time since they entered. "Oh yes. Please come meet my family!"

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Maggie gasped as the landscape changed from outdoors to indoors, into a home that seemed endless in its square footage. The ceilings weren't visible yet the sensation of closure from a roof high over their heads was very real. After walking the long entry foyer, Lizzie led Maggie into a room with—

"Endless bookshelves. Oh my g—Lizzie! Is this all *yours*!?"

"It's everyone's honey. Everything you see, have seen, will see, belongs to all of us."

"Even my window?"

"Everything but your window. No one else can use it unless you specifically invite them." Lizzie waited as Maggie spun around the room, head lifted to try to see the top of the shelves – which was an impossibility – and finally chuckled, taking her hand. "Come on, Star Gazer. My family awaits."

Lizzie led Maggie into a glorious family room, complete with comfortable over-stuffed couches and chairs, a properly cluttered coffee table with even more books and magazines – *I wonder how long my Cosmo subscription would take to get here* – and end tables dotted with water rings and mis-matched lamps. It was like home only amplified to *eternal home* proportions. And along one wall, one gloriously humongous wall, were two grand French doors that led onto an enclosed three-season porch.

"You ready?"

"Yes. Is this your—window?"

"This is my window. My porch." With an exaggerated flourish, Lizzie turned the handles on the doors and pushed them open, inviting Maggie in. "Come meet my beautiful family."

Maggie took a seat in a wicker chair, curling her legs underneath herself and looked around the three-sided room, not able to focus on anything specific. On her far right, she saw a city – large and night-lit, bustling and noisy. On the opposite expanse of the porch, a suburban town, zeroed in on a ranch-style home.



"Okay, this is my son, Kurt."

"You left a son?" Maggie's voice was breathy and anxious realizing she had a special connection with Lizzie – beyond the obviousness of her being the only person she knew so far. "

"I did." As Lizzie spoke, Maggie's focus honed in through one of the high rises in the city into a brightly lit office where a man was poring over a drafting table of drawings and sketches. He stood just as they "entered," swiping his phone off of his desk and answering it.

"Oh my word, Lizzie. He's beautiful. He's—I guess I didn't realize he was an adult."

"He is now."

"How old was he when—"

"He was only eight."

Maggie gasped and looked at Lizzie, a new sense of connection washing over her. "My son is four...and almost one half." She clutched at her chest, her fingers scrabbling for the chain that had carried her ring. Their ring. And then, she felt the warmth. "Lizzie."

Lizzie met her eyes and smiled. "Bless his heart. Is that where he touched you last?"

Maggie looked down and smiled. "Yes. That will stay warm until—"

"Until he joins you here. Just like the kiss on your cheek."

"They'd better stay warm for a very, *very* long time."

Lizzie smiled and caressed Maggie's cheek, looking back to the window. To Kurt. "Well. I guess we know why we've been paired together. It's a special journey for mothers of young children."

"I'm sure it is. How old is he now?"

"He's twenty-eight."

"What does he do? Is this New York City?"

"It is. And he's in fashion? I'm not sure of the details, but he works for Marc Jacobs. And has quite a few people under him as well. He seems pretty important there. Has worked there since college."

"Is he kind?"

"The most kind."

"...without a mom."

"He has an amazing father."

Maggie took in a ragged breath and sunk back into her chair, unable to watch anymore, overcome with the missing of her own family.

"Are—are you okay? Is this too much right now?"

"No. No, it's—he's amazing and gorgeous and possibly having a stressful day based on his body language with that phone call and he's successful and all without his mother and that's my biggest—" She took a breath and looked up to Lizzie, smiling sadly. "Adrian has an amazing father too. He's—he's going to be okay."

"He's going to be okay. Is that your husband's kiss you feel on your cheek?"

"My husb—? Oh. No." Maggie blushed and touched her cheek. "He's not my husband, but my best friend."

"Your son's father though?"

"Yes."

At Maggie's questioning gaze, she put it simply. "He's gay."

Now it was Lizzie's turn to gasp and grin, walking to a tea table, grabbing cups of hot water and tea bags as they continued to watch, to meet, to know. "Vanilla rhooibos okay with you?"

Maggie simply chuckled at the offer, slowly becoming immune to the similarities of her daydreams to her new reality. "Yes, please."

When Lizzie returned, she sat with Maggie, sipping her already perfectly steeped tea before speaking. "My son? That beautiful man in New York City? He's also gay."

Maggie stopped mid-sip to stare, the scent of the tea finally luring into a taste she hadn't experienced in weeks. "He, um. Wouldn't happen to be single would he? Surely a man that stunning—"

"He's single. In denial about how lonely he is."

"But in New York."

"Yes." Lizzie patted Maggie's arm when her face clearly fell.

"Do you have a lingering kiss?"

"I do." Maggie touched her forehead and smiled. "Would you like to meet the man who gave it to me – Kurt's father?"

Maggie nodded and Lizzie pointed to the left portion of their view where Maggie's vision focused inside the ranch home to a couple eating dinner. The woman was pointing out the food on the man's plate. He seemed much older than Lizzie would be had she still been alive.

"This is Burt. And that's his wife, Carole."

"He remarried. Was that difficult to watch?"

"The easiest. She's perfect."

"How lovely. Is he—is he unwell?"

"He is. Dementia. It's zapping years from him like pages on a calendar. In fact, I think Kurt is going to have to come home and help out with him for a bit. They're still trying to decide if Carole and her son can do it alone."

"Where is home?"

"Ohio."

Maggie stared at Lizzie again. "Where in Ohio?"

"Lima? You're from...?"

"Findlay."

"Well, I'll be damned. That's only what? Thirty-five miles apart?"

Maggie's gaze went back to New York and Lizzie helped guide her view into Kurt's office again. He was pacing, hanging up his phone and tossing it back onto the desk, irritated if not angry. He flopped himself into an armchair, raking his fingers through his perfectly coiffed hair.

Maggie stood to get a better view, pulled into it as if it were a fabulous new movie. "Oh honey – don't mess up your do!" The moms giggled and then Lizzie sobered, reaching out to him seeing the anxiety furrow itself onto her son's face, seeping into his body. If only she'd been listening to the phone call.

"Sweetheart..."

Maggie watched as Lizzie reached out when Kurt looked up from his chair, his head falling back against the wall with a thunk.

"Lizzie...he's...he's looking right at you!"

"Take a deep breath, Kurt. You can do this."

And Kurt did just that, pulling in air as if it was his last breath, letting it out slowly, his eyes closing, his body relaxing. With another pause, he looked to his mother again and smiled slightly, getting up and gathering his belongings to leave for the day.

"You—you can—we can—we can *talk* to them!? Communicate? Can they? They can't hear us, can they? I mean, that's almost creepy, but...we can *talk* to them?"

"You know that feeling you'd get in your gut sometimes? *Maybe I should go through Lima instead of through Upper Sandusky to get to Columbus this time. Or, say hello to that lady – she's having a lousy day.*"

"Of course – you're saying that's—that instinct is from *us? Here?*"

"Sometimes. Sometimes it's from people we don't know but they know the people we'll encounter. Sometimes it's directly from our loved ones, like you just saw."

"We can't make them *do* anything, though, right?"

"No. We're not gods, Maggie. They will always have to make the decisions."

"But, we can nudge? Guide a little bit?"

"Absolutely. Or, like just now, give them a little breath of peace when they need it."

Maggie sat back in her chair and curled herself up, sipping her tea as she soaked it all in. Her daydreams were true. She wasn't with her family anymore, but she wasn't that far away either. This was more glorious than she ever could have imagined.

"Elizabeth?"

"Yes, honey?"

"Blaine's single." Maggie took another sip, her gaze never leaving Lizzie's. "For the record."

Lizzie put her cup down and took Maggie's from her, clasping her hands and leaning in to press their foreheads together as they grinned. "Is it possible..."

"... that we have our first order of business? You'd better believe it."

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"Kurt, *I don't think we can do this alone. Is there any way you can either come home more often, or—*"

It was Christmas time. And the holiday visit to Ohio wasn't going well. Lizzie was spending more time than usual on her porch, watching, wishing she could be more help.

*"I have no idea." Kurt pinched the bridge of his nose and sat back at the kitchen table, picking up pie crumbs off of his plate with his fingers. "Is in-home nursing a possibility?"*

*"I don't think we can afford it."*

*"I can help with that—"*

*"You absolutely will do no such thing, Kurt. Besides, I'm afraid he'd eat them. He's so damned mean anymore."*

*"We did have one lady at Jacobs who worked remotely while her mother was sick, but that was for a month. We have no idea how long this is going—" Kurt's voice broke and he bit back tears, his father too close in the next room for him to let his emotions unfurl.*

*Carole held his hand and gave him tissues until he gathered himself back together. She tried one last attempt to lure him back, a tease that had entered her mind the other day when she saw the Shawnee Township ladder truck fly by on a run.*

*"You know, you always talked about regretting not working with that rescue group you saw during the Bluffton tornadoes. Maybe if you come back home, you can do that too? Broaden your horizons a bit."*

*He smiled sympathetically at her – she was trying – and stood to rinse their plates. When he got to his father's dish he had to yank to get him to release it.*

*"I'm not finished!"*

*"There's nothing left on the plate, Dad. Let me wash it."*

*"Fine. Take food from your father. See if I care."*

*Kurt rinsed the dishes and loaded the dishwasher under his father's unyielding scowl. "So, maybe you can tell me what to do. Your ideas can't be any crazier than anyone else's."*

*"You should go do your homework, that's what you should do. You have school in the morning."*

*Kurt flipped the towel over his shoulder, lifting his dad's trucker hat to kiss his bald head. "You're right. I'm going to go do my homework."*

*With a wave to Carole, he disappeared into his bedroom – virtually unchanged from when he lived at home almost ten years ago. Carole continued to put a small Christmas tree in the window and it glowed yellow and red in the darkness as he fell onto his bed, starfishing across the expanse of it. "What am I supposed to do? My work is my life."*

"So is your family, sweetheart. Talk to your boss."

Maggie could sense an intimate moment and got up to leave them alone, but Lizzie stopped her. "Stay with me?"

It was the first time Maggie had seen any kind of weakness in Lizzie. She settled back onto the porch, snuggled up next to her on the love seat. "Is it harder when it's Kurt that's hurting?"

"Yes. Sometimes, he's still the eight-year-old I left. I want to kiss his busted knees and send him on his way, but—"

"It wouldn't be that easy if you were still with him either, Liz."

"No. But, as much as I love Carole, and I do Maggie. I really do. I would never ask him to leave New York. It's all he ever dreamed about. And his life there is so, so good."

"You know he'd offer anyway – at least temporarily."

"Probably. Damned kid."

When they focused back into Kurt's room, he was texting someone and began to undress for bed.

"Okay, time to go. We'll check in with him tomorrow."

"So, that actually..." Maggie couldn't hide her ornery grin. "...leads me to ask a question. We can pop in on them any time, right?"

"Well. No. I mean, we can try. But, I've found there are times I can't get the right angle or the lighting is wrong or I simply can't find who I'm looking for."

"So, there's some discretion allowance – somehow."

"Somehow. Yes. And I'm glad because I just do not want to walk in on certain things my son might be doing."

"No. That's—no. Good to know. Especially if we do get these two together."

"Yeah. That'd be—weird."

"And hot."

"Weird, Maggie. He's my son."

"Hot. He's not mine." Maggie grinned and ducked as Lizzie tossed a coaster at her.

"You are *sick*!"

"But you loooooove me!"

"Maybe. But you still can't watch my son *have sex*!"

She wanted to wait until tomorrow to look back on her son, but she couldn't. She arrived as he was crawling into bed. She ached to pet his hair as she did when he was a boy after having been teased by the obnoxious kids that lived down the street. Or, when he was ill. Or late into the night after he'd been asleep for hours and her arms longed to have him in them – the Mommy Pull she had called it. It didn't die with her – it only increased.

And tonight, it ached. Even as Maggie stroked her hair in comfort. It simply ached.

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When not exploring her new world or sitting on Lizzie's porch, Maggie spent much of her time watching her family and learning this new way to communicate with them.



One particular night, she had been watching Blaine and Adrian have a normal evening, dinner, play, bath and bed, but something wasn't right with Adrian. He seemed exhausted, dark circles shadowing his eyes, whiney. After Blaine had tucked him into bed, she watched her son try to sleep, curling up into the sheets, kicking them off again, sitting up, laying back down again. Finally, she had to get Blaine.

He was eased back into his recliner, reading glasses perched at the end of his nose, house slippers and robe covering his naked chest and flannel panted bottom. A young grandpa, but a hot one, to be sure.

"Blaine, go check on Adey, honey. He's sick."

*Blaine stopped reading and rubbed his eyes under his glasses. He tried reading without them and thought better of it, going back to his spot in the book.*

*After a few more pages he stopped again, looking upstairs towards Adrian's bed. He took a swig of beer and tried his book again, but was unable to focus. He finally gave up and dog-eared his page before heading upstairs.*

*When he got to Adrian's room, he could hear him shifting in his bed, uncomfortable and a little whiney. "Ade? You okay, buddy?"*

*"I don't feel good."*

*"Oh, honey. Okay, let me—" He stepped in and felt his son's forehead. "You're like a furnace, Ade. Does anything hurt?"*

*"Ever'thing. My froat."*

*"Okay, how about you come sleep with Daddy tonight?" Adrian nodded and Blaine carried him into his bed, sighing when he realized how tiny he looked there. It was sort of pathetic. "Let me get a penlight and look in your throat, okay?"*

*"You'll come right back?"*

*"I promise."*

*Blaine gathered the penlight and some children's Tylenol and took a look down Adrian's throat. "Ew, Adey. Loads of white stuff. It's doctor time tomorrow."*

*Ade took the children's medicine like a champ, grimacing at the overly sweet taste. "I hate that stuff."*

*"I know. Maybe you'll get the bubble gum medicine at the doctor's, huh?"*

*He slipped into bed and cuddled in close to his son, wondering how he was going to get any sleep with this—*

*"It's not much different than cuddling a just-baked potato still wrapped in its foil, Love. You'll survive."*

*Blaine combed his fingers through Adrian's curls, kissing his temple every few minutes until Adrian settled deep into the pillows.*

*"I miss Mommy."*

*"I know, buddy. I do too."*

Watching them grieve, like this and in so many other ways, was something she wasn't sure she could ever get used to. She was drawn to their need, their crying out for her. Adrian would occasionally act out for attention; Blaine was sometimes silent and stoic as he walked through his days. When he was alone – typically in the shower – he would let everything out with wailing cries, anxious concerns of raising his son properly, even the periodic moaning of, "Maggie, I can't *do* this."

"Yes, my love. You can. You promised because I believed you could."

And he'd find strength to stand – a small smile lifted to the skies – and he would carry on. Afterwards, her boys would often have an underwear party. It was their tradition. Their method of coping. And also, the most adorable thing ever to witness.

Between what the earth celebrated as Christmas and New Year's, Lizzie ran onto Maggie's beach, breathless and excited. "Kurt's moving! He's going back to Ohio. They're letting him keep his job as long as he goes back to New York once a month."

"Are you serious? Is he happy?"

"I—I don't think so right now."

"But it's for the best, separate from our little matchmaking games."

"It is. Burt needs him. I think he might need Burt more than he realizes and Carole definitely needs a break."

"He'll see it was the right thing. In time."

"Yes. I need to go—be with him. I just had to tell you."

"Go on, Mama."

*Kurt tossed his carry-on into the overhead bin and buckled into his first class seat with a sigh. He reclined the chair back until a flight attendant would tell him to sit it back up, but there was still plenty of passengers to board, so he had time.*

*"I'm going home, Mom. Please tell me I'm not going to regret this."*

"You're not going to regret this. I'm so, so proud of you, son."

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As time went on for Maggie's family, it was becoming clear – at least from her point of view – that Blaine's schedule at the station was interfering with his ability to connect with Adrian. To be the authority. To give the boy the consistency he needed.

What was sometimes forgotten, however, was that even in the bliss of their eternal home, earthly miracles were seen and recognized. And a miracle was upon them.

"Maggie, come visit on my porch, would you?"

Of course, she went. Lizzie had the best shortbread cookies she'd ever tasted. And, after meeting so many beautiful people, Lizzie remained her favorite. Her mentor, her friend, her sister, her surrogate mother. And. Shortbread cookies.

"What's up?"

"Check out the headline on the paper on the breakfast table there."

*Beloved Lima City Fire Chief Retires After 35 Years' Service*

"Lizzie..."

"Is Blaine qualified for a chief position?"

"I—I don't know. He's been with the station since he was 16. He's Lieutenant Captain now – and won't ever get any higher. Chief and son take the top two positions, but he leads runs all the time. Runs the station when he works nights."

The women looked at each other and allowed their gaze to follow to Kurt's new apartment where he was cleaning up from fixing dinner, storing leftovers in freezer containers. Not only alone, but also lonely.

Maggie let proper etiquette slide and shoved an entire cookie in her mouth as she put 2 and 2 and Kurt and Blaine and jobs and family together. "Is it possible to kill two birds with one stone?"

"While we don't *endorse* killing here, I'd say we could take out an entire flock with this one." Lizzie grabbed two cookies, handing Maggie another.

Around crumbs and buttery deliciousness, Maggie mumbled, "What's my first step, boss?"

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*"And then, the snake jumped right out of the dune and bit that fox on the neck! The fox, he was strong, Daddy and he flailed and fought and—oh my goodness are you even listening to me?" Adrian huffed as his dad mindlessly stirred the pasta, still dressed in his blues from work, looking harried and exhausted.*

*"Wh—what? Oh, Adrian. I'm sorry. I'm—distracted. Your movie at school. The snake. He got the fox?"*

*"He did! It was AWESOME! Well, it was until the girls in class started screaming and stuff. It's just nature – why do they have to go and act all stupid like that?"*

*"Because sometimes nature is gross – would you like to eat a fox?"*

*"Oh my goodness, no. That is gross. But, I'm not a snake."*

*"I was thinking the fur could be a problem." Blaine drained the pasta and poured in the powdered cheese and milk, hiking Adrian up onto a stool to stir. "You want hot dogs with this, buddy?"*

*"Yes, please. Oh, and I kept watching even though the girls were screaming. The snake won."*

*"I bet he did."*

*As they settled down to their bachelor dinner – as Blaine always called mac & cheese – he asked Adrian something he wasn't sure the child was able to answer. But he'd been wondering. "Ade, you've been saying oh my goodness a lot lately. Where did you hear that?"*

*"It's—it's not a bad word, is it?"*

*"No, no. I'm not upset, I'm just curious. Nana says it, doesn't she?"*

*"Yeah. I guess." Adrian continued to scoop the orangey pasta into his mouth, oblivious of Blaine's concern.*

*"Does anyone at school say it?"*

*"No. Just Nana. And she laughs when I say it. I like when people laugh when I talk."*

*"I like it when you make me laugh."*

*Adrian grinned, his mouth still full of macaroni and Blaine responded as wished – he laughed.*

*And as lovely as their bachelor dinner was, bedtime came and it was, as it had been virtually every night since Maggie's death, a battle of wills with one or both of them yelling or in tears.*

*They fought about the story to read. They fought about how many books to read. They fought about how long Adrian's bath was, what pajamas he was going to wear – which was ridiculous as he'd been wearing old firefighter shirts since he was big enough to not get lost in the them. They fought about the nightlight, the pillows, the sheets and on this particular night, Adrian picked a fight about his curtains.*

*All Blaine wanted was to sleep – that's where he could go where there was no more grief. No more loneliness.*

*All Adrian wanted was to never sleep again – that's where he would see his mother and be unable to reach her, touch her, smell her, feel her.*

All Maggie wanted was to get to them both, knock their heads together, and hold them until they could see the other's grief and *love* each other rather than battle it out like two untrained dogs.

The next night, she heard Blaine again, as if he was in the room with her.

*"Maggie. I need you. I can't do this every night. I'm failing him. I'm failing you. I—"*

She rushed to her window finding him on his knees by his bedside as if in prayer. He was crying, the television roaring loud enough to drown him out as to not scare Adrian. "Lizzie!" She fell to her knees and reached out, aching with want to touch him, feeling completely incapable.

Lizzie came to her side and whispered directions in her ear – directions Maggie quickly followed, chanting encouragement between his cries for help. "You're not failing him. You're both hurting. I'm so sorry I had to go. You can do this. You always said you loved me when I was stubborn. You can do stubborn."

As Blaine slowly stilled, Maggie quieted, Lizzie rocking her gently. "This is a good time to suggest he find steadier hours like we've talked about. It has to help."

And she did, and of course, he didn't respond as it only struck him as a fleeting thought. But he quieted more and stood, looking up to them, his body spent from work, from parenting, from grief.

*"I love you, Maggie."*

"I love you too, Blainey."

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*"It's all desk work, isn't it?"*

*"Yeah, man. You don't want to sit at a desk for eight hours a day, do you?"*

*"No. But, I have to do something for Adrian. These hours aren't working as a single parent. He's spending so much time with Maggie's mom he's picking up her expressions."*

*"What, does she cuss like a sailor?"*

*Blaine chuckled and shook his head. "No. Well. Yes, she does. It's just a silly thing. Oh my GOODness!"*

*"Seriously? That's so damned cute it could cure cancer."*

*"It is pretty fucking cute. But, it just tells me he's with her too much. And at night, he's intolerable. I'm probably worse."*

*"You know...while I'd hate to send you out of here, Lima City's chief is retiring. They're small enough that it's a 9 -5 gig...minus your typical on-call hours. Just like Chief here."*

*"Lima? I thought that dude would be buried with the town at the apocalypse."*

*"He is fucking old, isn't he?"*

*They laughed together for a few moments. Laughter. He hadn't enjoyed enough of it in the past months, trying to be as jovial with Adrian as he could, trying to stay professional and on-the-ball with work, but really genuinely laughing? It didn't happen often enough. And in time, laughing ended, and he sobered again. "So what do you think? Following someone who's been there that long. As Chief? I'm not qualif—"*

*"You are, and you know it. I'm sure you'd have to do some classes and testing, but Blaine. It's not far from here. Give yourself and Adrian a new life. A new start. You'd still be close to Maggie's family."*

*Blaine sat back and considered his friend, a fellow fireman whom he'd volunteered with as a teen, working their way through the ranks together. "A new start does sound pretty amazing."*

*"And hell – get you a new crop of men to date."*

*"Stop. You act like I'm a serial dater."*

*"No, but I think you've already found all ten gay guys in Findlay."*

*Blaine laughed and ran his hand over his face, trying to wipe the foul memories from his brain. "Maggie called them dunderheads."*

*"Maggie always was a smart woman."*

"Did *you* do that? Did you talk to that guy, Mags?"

Maggie beamed and tied a knot at the bottom of the hemp ankle bracelet she was making – a new hobby that made all of the teenagers in her vicinity quite happy. "I did. Are you impressed?"

"Quite. It's hard to get through to people we don't know."

"I caught him daydreaming at the station. Like putty in my hands."

Lizzie grabbed some cord and began her own piece, remembering macramé stitches from when she was a child, trying the knots with the thinner string. "You do know that while we're trying to get our families well, it's still okay if, you know..."

"...if the two hotties in the midst happen to fall in love? Yeah, that was our initial mission, wasn't it?"

"That it was. I just sometimes wonder if my priority really is Burt – or if it's Kurt's future."

"Maybe it doesn't matter. Maybe it all works together."

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Months passed and Blaine started to get settled into his new home and job in Lima. Kurt, having been there for months longer, was already adjusted to his new routine. He not only went on emergency runs with the local C-DRT team as Carole (or, in actuality, Lizzie) had suggested, but he also volunteered a few hours in their offices every week, relieving the over-worked executive director of some of her more mundane duties. It was the perfect break from the tug and pull of his real job and the constant stress of worrying about and helping to care for his father.

That July, Ohio experienced a heat wave like they'd not seen in decades, days upon days of 100+ degree heat scorching every afternoon. And it was on a day in the midst of that wave when Lizzie's call tore Maggie away from her latest book.



"Maggie! Maggie! Oh my GOODness! Come quick!"

Maggie tossed her book aside and high tailed it behind Lizzie, squealing when Lizzie stopped to grab her hand, making her move even faster. "What is it? Oh my gaw—you're going to pull my arm off!"

"Eh, you'll probably just grow another one here. Come ON!" They skidded down the foyer that led to the back of the house and into the porch, Lizzie yanking the doors open and pushing Maggie in. "Okay, don't panic. It's a fire. Blaine's inside."

"Shit. Okay." Maggie settled in to watch and then stopped, gazing slack-jawed at Lizzie. "Wait. How are *you* seeing Blaine's—"

Before she could finish, Lizzie pointed to Maggie's left. "Look what's coming."

In the distance, Maggie could see a white truck slowly crawling through the fire traffic to the scene. On the front and side, she could clearly see the C-DRT symbol. "Oh. Oh! OH! Is he? Is Kurt in there?"

Lizzie simply beamed.

Maggie's attentions went back to the fire, trying to zone in to find Blaine. She finally landed on him, in full gear, hidden by black smoke to the average eye. He was looking around, lifting blankets, peeking in potential hiding places, finding nothing. Maggie left him there and went on a search of her own. In the bedroom across the hall, she saw them. A mother and daughter on the ground, calling for him, unheard over the sound of the fire, his mask, and the weakness of their voices.

"Blaine. Wrong room, baby. Go across the hall. Go! Hurry!"

*And as though he heard her, he gave up his efforts in the child's bedroom and went across the hall, finding his targets. He lifted the child first and scooped up the mother and gave her his oxygen mask for moments as he helped her walk out. She took a few breaths, he took a few, and then he covered the child's face. After taking a few more breaths himself, he started the process over, testing the stairs back down to the ground floor.*

"It's safe. Go on. Get the hell out of there!!!"

*Within seconds, he broke through the back door and handed the two patients off to an awaiting medic, yanking off his mask and helmet. He stumbled to the ground and took off his turnout jacket, waiting for some cooler air to hit him.*

*It never did.*

*He ran his hand through his hair, struggling for breath, for purchase on the moving ground, figuring a medic or another firefighter would see him soon and get him some water.*

"Help's coming. I promise. It's on the way."

*Blaine took deep breaths and lowered his head between his knees, waiting. Hoping. Breathing.*

Lizzie pulled Maggie from her attention to Blaine, smacking at her thigh. "Look! Look! Oh my – Maggie!"

She followed Lizzie's gaze and sure enough, there was Kurt, wearing his red vest and hopping out of the C-DRT truck. They whispered directions to him as he wasted time speaking to the captain and chanted encouragement as he walked around to the back yard where Blaine was waiting for help.

Waiting for Kurt.

*"Chief? You okay?"*

*Blaine didn't move. "Heat sick. I can't get up."*

*"Okay, lemme get some water. Hang tight."*

*Kurt jogged back toward his ERV looking around for a medic, finding none. He grabbed a couple of ice cold bottles and made his way back to the chief. He squatted down in front of him and handed him an open bottle. "Hydrate."*

*Looking up from droopy lids, Blaine grabbed the bottle and drank quickly, water spilling down the sides of his mouth to trail down his neck and soak the collar of his shirt. He wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, summoning a lazy, ash-stained smile.*

*"Mmm. Look at you – an angel in a red vest. Thank you."*

Maggie and Lizzie squealed like two teenaged girls who had just been introduced to the latest pop star.

*Kurt took hold of the Chief's wrist to get a quick feel for his pulse. It was faint and slow and the chief's head drooped forward again. "Chief? Where are your medics?"*

*"Yeah." Blaine took another swallow and capped the bottle. "Two resident injuries. Low man power."*

*"Okay, let's get you into some cool air."*

*"No, no. I'm fine." He tried to open the bottle again and failed, energy left only to swear and huff.*

"Blaine, for the love of all that is holy, let this man help you. Lizzie, I'm going to go back and Zombify his ass."

*"No. You're not." Kurt hooked his hand under the Chief's elbow and tugged. "Come on. Our truck is air-conditioned. This heat isn't safe even in the shade."*

"MAGGIE!!! It's happening. Oh my...it's happening. Did you see the way Blaine *looked* at him? Did you see? My boy. Oh, my boy and your—your boy. Man. Friend. Blaine. Your Blaine. And—did you *see* them!?"

All Maggie could do was laugh. Laugh with Lizzie, laugh as she watched Kurt and Blaine stumble into the ERV, laugh as Kurt tried to very professionally disrobe Blaine all the while turning every shade of pink imaginable. And when Blaine was feeling better and had properly flirted, getting up to leave the truck, she laughed when he took a quick glance to the skies, a questioning grin peeking through his ash-stained face.

*"Damn you, Maggie."*

"I told you, Blaine. I told you he was out there."

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*"Good morning. I thought a more formal introduction might be in order."*

"Lizzie! Oh! There you are. Bring that croissant over here and looky, *looky!*"

It was two days after the fire and Maggie just happened to take a gander by her window on the way to the beach for a morning stroll. She really hadn't expected to see much of anything, just the beginning of a school and work day. What she saw, however, was Blaine standing at Kurt's C-DRT office door.

"That brave little toaster – look at him go for it."

"Shhh...I want to hear this."

*"Well, hello Chief." Kurt stood and reached out his hand only to be politely told to sit back down. Kurt offered the seat across from his desk as he did so. "It's nice to see you with some color."*

*"Yeah, let's just pretend that never happened, shall we?"*

*"I don't even know what you're talking about."*

*"There we go. Wiped off the records." They shared a friendly smile. "Seriously, though. Thank you. For helping. For your discretion. I was an idiot."*

*"You had a PASS device. Why didn't it activate?"*

"Blah, blah, blah Anderson. Ask him OUT!" Maggie and Lizzie were both getting impatient, feeding off of each other's excitement as their men talked. And flirted. "They are flirting, right? I'm not just imagining this?"

"You're not imagining anything. I can't believe how pink Kurt gets when he's flustered."

"You've never watched him date?"

"I've always tried to stay out of it. It feels awkward." At Maggie's judgmental eyebrow lift, she chuffed. "I know. This just seems—it feels so completely different."

"It feels right, is what it feels."

"Yes. It feels right. Oh Kurt, honey..."

*"Are you the director here in Allen County?"*

*"No. No, no, no. I'm just a volunteer-ish...sort of thing. She's out at the moment but should be back before long." Kurt sifted through his desk drawer and pulled out a business card, handing it across the desk. "Here. Dot Morgan. She's hard to catch."*

*"Thank you." Chief took the card and as he settled back into his seat, staring but saying nothing, a softening of demeanor and expression washing over him.*

"Oooh, here we go – fireman face is leaving. Bring on the Blaine-meister!"

"Blaine-meis—"

"Shut up – I'm excited."

*"Is, um...is there something else I can do for you?"*

*"Yes." A blush crept up Blaine's face as he smiled, his eyes darting away from Kurt's gaze and back again. "Kurt, I actually came by for another reason."*

*"Oh?"*

*"I was wondering...if you would like to join me for dinner one night this week."*

"YES!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!! Lizzie!!!!!!!!!! Oh my god oh my god oh my god – are we allowed to say that here? Oh my fucking god!"

Lizzie was too busy holding her breath. She couldn't speak.

*"Sure. That would—yes. I'd—I'd like that."*

*"Good. I'll um...I need a way to contact you?"*

Lizzie did a jig around Maggie's window, grabbing her hand and swinging her along with her, ignoring her when she pulled away, still watching.

"Hang on a second. He's. I know Blaine. He's..." She found him standing against a mailbox near the door to the C-DRT offices, chuckling to himself. He pulled out his phone and smiled when he landed on what Maggie assumed was Kurt's number. "You'd better call him, Buster."

He bit his bottom lip and Maggie saw it. Doubt. Second-guessing. The rewinding of the conversation into something it really wasn't. She had been witness to it again and again whenever a promising cute guy would take notice of him and—"Blaine Devon Anderson, you march your ass back into that office and ask him out for lunch today before you chicken out completely. You promised him. You promised me."

*Blaine pinched the bridge of his nose, squared his shoulders and marched back into the C-DRT offices grinning at Kurt's shocked face when he got there.*

*"Hello again."*

*"Yeah. Hi. So. I wimped out just like I promised I wouldn't."*

*"Pardon?"*

*"Look. I'm not normally this ridiculous, but um..." He stepped in all the way and leaned against the door frame. "You entrance me, Kurt Hummel. What are you doing for lunch today?"*

"THAT's my boy!! Go get 'im, Tiger! Lizzie, are you hearing this shit?"

"Entrance? Really? Was he born in the '40s?"

"Sometimes, I wonder."

"Kurt will eat that shit up like—" She slapped at Maggie's hands. "Wait, wait...Kurt's talking. He'd better say 'yes' because—"

*"So, is this in addition to or instead of...?"*

*Blaine started to answer and stopped. "In addition? I just didn't want to put it off and talk myself out of it."*

*"Is that a habit of yours? Talking to yourself?"*

"No. Yes? Probably." Blaine blushed and stopped talking, looking away. He started and stopped two more times, finally giving up.

"Well, shall I pick you up at the station?"

"No. My invitation; my ride."

Kurt nodded and smiled. "Noon is fine."

"I'll...I'll see you then." Blaine grabbed for the door handle, missed, tried again and succeeded. "And, I won't bother you again until then. Promise."

"You're most definitely not a bother."

And in the skies above, Lizzie and Maggie danced. For the entirety of that earthly day.

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And they danced on and on, sneaking out when the first date became – well, Maggie wanted to stay but Lizzie dragged her out by her bracelets because *we are not watching my son have sex!*

And the dancing continued as Kurt and Blaine continued and it was wonderful and glorious and *oh Lizzie we did it* and on and on until—

"What do you MEAN he hates children!? Elizabeth!!"

Until Maggie got the lesson everyone gets. They can nudge. They can niggle. They can offer peace and comfort and an eternal watchful eye.

But, humans are humans, and all the nudging and niggling and celebrating and rejoicing can fall into a crumbled pile while those at their windows, at their porches, sitting in their movie theaters remain helpless to put the pieces back together again.

"I—I didn't *know!* I mean, he's never *with* children, but I just thought that was...circumstance? It's just not been a priority in his life and—"

"What have we *done*? They're both a mess."

"We've done nothing, Maggie. You've been trying to get Blaine to talk about your son. I sure as hell didn't send Kurt into Mitchell's arms – the fucking dog."

"Elizabeth Hummel. You've been hanging around me too long."

"Yeah, well. This is worthy of a few foul words, don't you think?"

"No. It's worthy of helping these numbskulls get their acts together. Kurt surely wouldn't hate Adrian, would he?"

"No one in their right mind would hate Adrian. No one in their right mind would walk away from Blaine." Lizzie slumped back in her chaise and huffed. "I'm just not so sure Kurt's in his right mind. He was *gone* for Blaine. Toast. Done. Signed, sealed and delivered."

"We have some work to do, Liz."

"I wasn't planning on sleeping. Ever. Where do we start?"

"Maybe we should let them do some of this alone. See what happens?"

"Kurt *did* agree to dinner without any niggling from me."

"And if I can be obnoxious, our story is pretty hard to thumb your nose at."

"Kurt's not made of stone. Surely it will break through his stubbornness."

"Do we trust them?"

"I don't know – they *are* men."

"Who are desperately in love with each other – even if they've never said as much."

And for the most part, that's exactly what Lizzie and Maggie did – they left the men to their own devices. Okay, so Lizzie dropped a phrase into a couple of Kurt's confidants' ears that took him by surprise.



*"I do not date dads. It's just...it's my line in the sand."*

*"Sand shifts, Kurt."*

And Lizzie almost pulled spiritual muscles she never knew she had getting the timing right with putting them both at the market at the same time, but she did it.

*"You know, if you do the sniff test, you'll get perfect peaches every time."*

And, if she had any control over Blaine, which she was realizing she didn't, the puns would have never happened.

*If there was a bi-sexual pride parade, would it go both ways?*

Although, if she had to admit it, they seemed to be working. As were the roses, which were completely his idea. The stud.

But, the most amazing work came unexpectedly, especially to Lizzie's experienced eyes. She dared leave her porch to visit Maggie who was also at her window. Maggie invited her over and as Lizzie focused in, she saw Kurt lifting Adrian up into a child's seat in his car.

"You look positively devilish, Miss James. What have you been up to?"

"Me? What makes you think I have anything to do with this?"

"Because, going by the look on your face, if we actually did wear halos, yours would be strangling you right now. What's going on?"

"Well, for *some* reason, Blaine, who just got called to a multi-alarm fire in another township, can't find a sitter."

"Anywhere?"

"Anywhere."

"I can't *imagine* how that happened."

"I can't either. It's—why it's simply uncanny."

"You are evil."

"You should be fetching us some popcorn because tonight is going down in the history books, my friend."

"Truffle butter?"

"You have to ask?"

And with their truffle butter popcorn, they watched the evening unfold where Kurt fell in love with Adrian. And Adrian fell in love with Kurt. And found they had something important in common with one another.

*"Mine was a gift a long time ago...when my mom died."*

*Adrian gasped and looked back at the picture and then at Kurt again, smiling sadly. "Your mom died too!?"*

"Oh shit, Lizzie..."

And then—

*"Oh my goodness. So, Kurt?"*

*"Adrian?"*

*"I think maybe you and me should be friends."*

*"I think we already are."*

"Oh shit, Maggie..."

"Why is Blaine at a stupid fire? He should be seeing this. He should be a part of it."

"No. I think they had to do this alone. No disrespect to Blaine at all, but—"

"He doesn't share this, does he?"

"No. And that's really okay."

And it really was okay because Kurt had to fight his own battle with bedtime and he had a weapon Blaine would never have. Empathy for the fears Adrian took to bed every night.

*"Read it to me. Like Daddy does."*

In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars will be laughing when you look at the sky at night.

*"Say the last part with me since you know it."*

*"You, only you, will have stars that can laugh."*

*"So...we both have laughing stars, huh?"*

But, even empathy can only go so far. Sometimes, one needs to be clever. And Lizzie knew Kurt could be clever. But, never this clever.

*"Where are we going?"*

*"Outside...but not to play."*

*Adrian rested his head on Kurt's shoulder. "Kurt, I'm not s'pposed to go back outside after I have my 'jamas on."*

*"Well, tonight we're going to break the rules." Kurt settled them onto the chaise. "You cozy?"*

*"Yes. And confused." He squeezed into Kurt tighter, the green spikes of his monster's head popping out from under his chin.*

"I still can't believe that fucking doll. Lizzie, he's amazing."

"They're amazing."

*"Look up. It's a clear night."*

"Oh god. Oh god oh god oh god, Lizzie." Elizabeth pulled Maggie in tight, letting rest her head in the crook of her neck, the bowl of popcorn long forgotten. "Lizzie...he's—oh god, I want to hold him so desperately."

"Kurt has him now. He's okay."

"He is, isn't he?"

*Adrian stayed curled up to Kurt, but looked up at the night sky and sucked in a tiny breath understanding everything with one glance. "Oh my goodn-...which one is Mommy's?"*

*"I think that's up to you."*

"I'm right here, baby. I see you. I love you."

*Adrian looked around, having silent conversations with every star his eyes landed on, moving to another, going back to a previous one and finally settling on one in the eastern portion of their view. There really weren't many visible since Blaine lived so close to the city's center, but there were enough to make this work. "That one."*

*Kurt followed Adrian's finger to the brightest star in the area, figuring that was his choice. "I think that's a good one."*

*"Which one is your mommy's?"*

*"Here's what I'm thinking, Ade...I think since you and I are friends? That your mom and my mom are friends now too. So, what about that softer one nearby?"*

"Hey, love. You have made me so proud tonight. I love you."

*"I think you're right. Do you...do you think they're watching us?"*

*"And laughing. And smiling. And telling all sorts of stories about us."*

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The dance party continued for weeks after that. Watching their boys love and laugh and play and *no, I'm still not watching my son have sex and neither are you!* and live, live, live was glorious. And wondrous. And all they ever dreamed of.

Burt continued to deteriorate, but Lizzie knew the end on earth was the beginning of something beautiful and magnificent. She was present for Kurt in moments of distress, but less than she normally would have been because now he had Blaine and Adrian. His strength was with them and theirs with him.

One afternoon, after one false alarm that Kurt and Blaine had intervened and turned around, Lizzie was jolted out of her jewelry making with a start. "Maggie. Oh my."

"Lizzie?"

"It's Burt. Keep an eye on Kurt? He's going to need—I have to go. Can you stay on my porch until I get back?"

And while Maggie hadn't ever known Lizzie to leave like this, to look like this, she knew. She knew how close Burt had come to joining them only weeks before, but this time—

"Of course." Maggie stood with Lizzie, pulled her in her arms before she left. "You know it's okay. And I've got Kurt. Go get your man."

Maggie stayed on Lizzie's porch as asked in case she heard a call from Kurt, but it didn't come.

And then, Lizzie was back, Burt quickly integrating into their new life. He was a lovely man – no wonder Kurt was such an amazing human being.

"Lizzie, is it—is it gone?" Maggie touched Lizzie's forehead where she'd said Burt kissed her to send her on her way so many years before. Where it had warmed her skin every moment since.

"Yes." Her smile was peaceful, joyful, touching her forehead to even be sure herself. "Yes. He's here now. Just like they promised."

Then, it was time for Burt's first visit to his "window" – a pier, complete with fishing gear and bait – a visit coming sooner than usual because rules were fluid. Timing was everything.

*"Kurt? Do you have our picture memorized? In your pretty words?"*

*"I do. You make me say it every time I put you to bed."*

*"I know; it's like music."*

*Kurt took his cue and began, reaching across the chairs for Blaine's hand.*

Quand tu regarderas le ciel, la nuit, puisque j'habiterai dans l'une d'elles, puisque je rirai dans l'une d'elles, alors ce sera pour toi comme si riaient toutes les étoiles.

*"Now, remind me, which one is your mommy's?"*

*"It's back this way...there, see? And your mommy's is right there."*

*"Yes, it is. And what do you think? See that one above them? Not quite as bright yet?"*

*"Is that your daddy's?"*

*"I think so."*

*"I think so, too. So, now they're all friends. Laughing friends."*

"I don't think I've properly welcomed you home, Burt." Maggie wrapped her arms around Burt's neck and he hugged back with a strength he hadn't had in years.

"We've got quite a family, don't we?"

"The best ever."

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It was months later when Maggie heard a call from Blaine. It wasn't sad or desperate – those never came anymore. But, it was a call of need, none-the-less. Longing, maybe? The boys were in the midst of making decisions on where to live their lives. To stay or to go. To be together or try it all apart. She niggled. Lizzie niggled. Burt giggled at the girls' cajoling. *It doesn't change here, does it? You women are damned nosey.*

She arrived at her window and settled back in the Adirondack chair she'd had a friend from the mountains build for her. Blaine knelt beside his bed again, but instead of clenching the duvet in his hands like he had the nights Adrian gave him so much reason to grieve, this day he was clinging to a blue velvet bag. "I'm here, love. What's up?"

*"Maggie. It's—it's been awhile since—" He lowered his head and chuckled at himself, gently tossing the bag between his hands. "I feel silly, but. I guess I wanted to check in with you. To make sure this is what you want.*

*"You were right, Maggie. About everything, really, but mostly about love. About me finding love. I found him, Maggie. And he's—he's perfect. He's everything you said he'd be and more and damned if you weren't right I'd have to go to him. And now I think I'm going to follow him to New York City. New York, Maggie!! I have to jump through a shit-ton of hoops but if he says yes—*

*"I'm getting ahead of myself."*

*He took a deep breath and emptied the contents of the velvet bag into his hand, slipping the gold ring with three diamonds onto his finger and kissing it tenderly. "I'm going to ask him to marry me today. When he gets back from a fire run. He's on the rescue team here, Mags. And he—he saved me. And then he saved his dad. And, he saved Adrian, Maggie. He's—"*

*Blaine chokes on his thoughts and lets out a weeping gasp, gathering himself quickly and looking up, breathing in deeply.*

*"I'm right here, love. And you're right. He's perfect. The three of you are perfect."*

*"He and Adrian have this thing where they go look at the stars. We even went to an observatory in New York over the holidays because Adey couldn't see the stars in the city and it scared him. They make him feel safe. Like you're watching him.*

*"Are you? Watching? I felt you for so long and—I swear if I reach across the bed right now you're going to be here telling me I'm too old to be on my knees for this long. And I wish you were. You'd—oh, Maggie, you'd love Kurt so much.*

*"I love him so much. He loves me. He loves me like I never thought anyone would love me. And he loves Adrian and Adrian loves him, Maggie. So fucking much, it sometimes hurts the way they are together and—so, I'm going to. Tonight. I'm going to ask him to marry me, and I'm going to give him your ring. Like I said I would.*

*And I just wanted to make sure it was okay. It was what you'd want. That you approve of this man. Of moving Adey away from your mom and into a big city and oh god, I'm terrified, but—*

*"but I really think this is the right thing to do. I know it is. I know it as sure as I feel the weight of the ring on my own finger. But, it's his ring. You were right. He's the rightful owner. We're a trio again and we're okay. Because of you. And Lizzie. And Burt. So, maybe this is more me saying, "thank you," rather than, "can I?"*

*"Yes. Thank you. And, if you are watching, do come with me when I ask him. Because I think I just might piss myself and I'll need you there to laugh at me."*

*Blaine chuckled at the thought and put the ring back in the bag, standing up with a creaky groan. As he put the bag on the dresser, he felt a warmth wash over him, through him, around him.*

*"Maggie?"*

*"I'm here. I love you. I love him. Go make your new family complete."*

*~fin*