



The House

Ever wonder if the places we have been to miss us as much as we miss them? Seth has had too many of those situations come up where he is told to leave not asked and he has begun to hate them, hate the people they involve too. It is time he takes responsibility for his own life. Learn to be a good man, one who cares about others, for others. This is the last time he will be taken away from a place he loves. The last time.



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“I’m not going! Why do I have to go?! Why did you screw this up again?! I can’t believe you did this. I hope I never grow up like you. NEVER! Where do you expect me to live?” Seth yells to his father.

“Wherever the hell you want. Obviously, I’m not good enough to live with,” his father yells back at him.

“Really?! You’re going to blame this on *my* attitude? Am I the one who lost his savings gambling? Am I the one who stole money from his son to pay the bare minimum to keep myself out of jail?! AM I?? People get a second job, people stop spending on things that aren’t important, like those stupid vacations you took on credit cards you can’t pay! Or the example of when you came home with a new car when there was nothing wrong with the old one. I don’t understand you. Not any part of me can figure you out. And because of your irresponsibility I have to leave the only home we stayed in longer than a couple years. I’m in high school now, I have friends, and I have a good job too. I’ll be fine on my own,” Seth spits on the ground he is so angry.

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“This is my house,” he mumbles as he walks back upstairs to pack his belongings up and find a friend to move in with. Seth slides his hand along the wall on the way up the stairs. He closes the door to his room, locks it and sits down on the floor, rubbing his fingers in the carpet on his floor. The carpet he installed himself. “I’m sorry house. I didn’t know he was hurting you so badly. I would have paid for repairs had I known. I’m so sorry,” Seth finally allows his tears to fall. “You’re my house,” he whispers.

Seth looks around his room. This is his room. They moved in five years ago, when he was ten. The fights started right after that and his mom moved out and away only two years after they came. She no longer has contact with Seth either. He tried to stay in touch, but she said she was done with this part of her life, even him. That was worse than the divorce. His friends always told him divorce isn’t so bad because you still have both parents, only, not at the same time. But for him. He lost his mother completely. Now he is losing his home.

“I’ll be back,” he promises the house. “You’ll always be mine,” he stands and begins to pack. One large duffel, one suitcase. Seth looks down at what he sees. His whole life wrapped up into two suitcases.

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“Hey Wingman, I need a favor,” Seth explains what is going on to his best friend.

“Let me ask my mom, hold on,” Wingman runs to ask his mother. “Hey, ok. So, Mom said you can come but not permanently. I know it’s not what you asked, but while you’re here we’ll look together. Yeah?”

“I’m all packed. I’m going to slip out of my window and bike over, or walk,” Seth says.

“I’ll let Mom know. See you soon. Oh, Seth? This sucks, that house is yours. Everyone knows that,” Wingman says.

“Yeah,” Seth says as he runs his hand on the wall again. Seth hangs up and looks around one more time. He writes a note to his father *‘don’t try and find me. don’t come to school, leave this town, go to your brother but never, never, never, for the rest of your life, come find me. I’ll do all the legal papers I have to, to make sure we are no longer connected. You will never have to be responsible for me ever again. Try being responsible for yourself, grow up a little, will ya?’*

Then he unlocks his door and slides out of his bedroom window, which isn’t so high up, holding his bags, he starts to walk in the dark to his best

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friend’s house. He looks back one more time at his house. “I’ll be back,” he promises the house.

Seth’s walk is full of self-reflection. He was born to the wrong parents. Parents who didn’t understand him, didn’t understand life and how to work within social norms. His first ten years weren’t horrible but he has always known that he was different from them. Definitely different from his father more so. Moving to the house on Pine Drive changed things. The first night in the house, he felt hugged. The house greeted him. Treated him well. Gave him security and a sense of peace he never knew was missing. The stability of those four walls around him, kept him from seeing what was really going on with his parents. Seth felt safe, Seth felt welcomed. His friends would tell him he has a great house. Seth learned to bake cookies from one of his friend’s fathers so that he could repay the house for its comfort it gave him by making the house smell nice. He told his mother this once and she slapped him for being on drugs. He wasn’t, they didn’t understand him. They never understood. But at the same time, he always saw pain in his mom’s eyes. She hadn’t meant to hit him, he knew that, she would never share her pain though, he didn’t know

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what was going on with her, what had her so scared of his words, but then she left.

The headlights of a car are blinding Seth now, the car slows down and a window comes down. “Hi Seth, come on, get in. I figured you’d take this route, safer at night when on foot,” Wingman’s father says.

“Thank you, sir, I appreciate the ride,” Seth walks over to the back of the car and pops the trunk to put his bags in, and he comes around to the passenger’s side and gets in.

“Son, we will call a lawyer tomorrow and see what we can do for you. Maybe get custody in the legal sense but this is as sudden for you as it is for us, I hope you will be patient with us, we will do what we can, that’s a promise,” he says.

“It’s my house, you know. I’m going to get it back one day. I will,” Seth says softly.

“I believe you son, I really do. You and my son have a great attitude towards your studies, that determination will take you far. You’re very creative and you have a good head on your shoulders. But for now, we have to get through today. You two have a big exam this Friday, you focus on that for now,” he tells him.

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“Thank you, sir, I will only stay as long as necessary. I will pay you rent as soon as I get my next paycheck,” Seth assures him.

“We’ll talk tomorrow,” the rest of the drive is quiet.

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Now what is going on? House thinks. He is yelling at my boy again. What? Did he say they have to leave? But this is the boy’s house. I know because I’m it. Oh, good boy, you tell him.

House sits and listens to all that is taking place in his living room. But his heart is pained. The boy, this boy, brought heart to him. He was built so many years ago and until this boy moved in, House had never known what it means to have a heart. His neighbors always tell him about how much warmth they have on the inside, he never experienced that until this boy came.

The boy brings his friends, they laugh, they love, they play. All the while, they make sure House always gets fixed. No lingering water leaks. Now House sees that his warmth will end and it is the fault of the older one inside of him.

Very carefully, House lifts a floorboard ever so slightly and, as hoped, as the man walks into the kitchen, he stumbles and he practically falls on the

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floor. House feels the warmth leaves. He catches sight of the boy sliding out of his window. He is cold already. His insides went from warmth to completely cold. What is going to happen to him now? He asks himself.

The man stomps all through the house, pulling open drawers looking for something. Pushing furniture around and tossing other items around. House does not know what he is looking for until he screams, “Damn, where the hell does he keep his emergency money? Does he expect me to starve too? Stupid, selfish kid!” he screams as he tosses another chair.

Each step across the living room produces a creak in the floor, “I guess I’m getting out just in time, the floor is unsteady,” he says out loud.

It is not the floor that is unsteady, it is House. Creaking floors is House’s way of crying, as the humans say. How can he ever gain that warmth again? It left as soon as the boy climbed out the window. But that man is still stomping around. The warmth being gone, House feels as if his insides are not only cold but ghostly now.

He feels every stomp, every slam of a door, and now he is pained by all of the glass being shattered in the kitchen.

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Seth gets to his friend’s house and calls his uncle. “Hi, it’s Seth.”

“How are you son, you sound down. Everyone ok by you?” Sal asks.

Seth explains what has happened to him and where he is now. “I’m not going back this time Uncle Sal. You can have your brother. I don’t want him. His wife didn’t want him either. You get to have him all to yourself,” Seth says, trying to sound strong but melting inside.

“I’ll run over there. He is probably tearing the place apart right now. Thank you for calling me and being smart enough to find a good place to be for the time being and not simply running on the streets. If you’re going to change your phone number so your father doesn’t call you, can you please give me the new number. I would like to keep tabs on you. No, I didn’t mean that, I want to keep in touch with you son. I’ve always loved you and will always love you, you have a special place in my heart,” Sal says.

“Thank you for understanding Uncle Sal. I’d ask to come to you, but your house is full and I have to stay in school here. No offense,” Seth says.

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“I understand that completely, no offense taken. But I don’t want to lose you as I said before. Your cousins love you and so does your aunt. We will work this out together, I promise you. You’ll never be homeless. You understand that part first and foremost, right?” Sal says hopeful.

“I won’t lose touch with you. I promise. If he is trashing the house, he is looking for my money. He already stole all my money from the bank account he set up for me. But Uncle Sal? I have my own account too. I opened it up with the help of my friend’s father months ago. He said I should learn how to manage my own money now that I’ve been earning my own. The same man is a cosigner on the account so I can’t take out too much and blow it on something stupid. I put in my money from cutting lawns and doing other errands for people. It’s not a lot but it is all mine. Your brother can’t steal this account,” Seth tells him.

“You’ve picked out a great group of friends. I believe I’ve met this father before, yes?” Sal asks.

“Wingman’s father. Yes,” Seth says.

“I should still have his phone number. I’ll call him after I visit with your father. I’m sorry this is happening Seth. I really am. This is not your fault and you should never feel that it is. Never. My

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brother is a jerk when it comes to money and he proves it more and more as life goes on. The older he gets, the worse he gets. I may send him to our sister. She needs to see this for herself and whip some adulthood into him. Almost forty years old and he can’t seem to get things under control. I’m done, I believe it is her turn. I’ll be in touch later. Seth, you will be successful in all you do, I’ve said those words before and I still say them today.” Sal hangs up after giving his nephew a bit of encouragement to carry on.

Seth sits on the guest bed at Wingman’s house. The knock on the door has him looking up. “Hey man. You ok?” his friend asks.

“This sucks, why are adults so selfish?” he asks.

“My dad said the same thing. The next couple of weeks, for sure, you’ll be here with us. You call your Uncle Sal yet?” he asks.

“Yeah. I just hung up from him. He is going over there, said he may send him to their sister. I’ve only met her once in my whole life. She is a mean bitch. Didn’t want a hug or kiss from me or anything. Kept me at three paces away at all times. It was the weirdest visit. But Sal says she is one of those eccentric millionaires who have no tolerance for

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people who use money unwisely. As long as he is away from me, I don’t care where he is,” Seth says. “I’m all alone Wingman,” Seth bows in embarrassment.

“Nah, you have me. You have Carlie and even Chuck. I’m not your wingman for nothing you know,” Wingman says.

“I’ve been calling you that for so many years sometimes I forget your real name is Torrance,” Seth says. “I hope I don’t get in your way here. I’ll leave as soon as I’m a bother to you. I don’t care about your parents as much. If it’s too much for you. I’m out, you hear me? I mean that Torrance. No disrespect to your parents, I don’t want to ruin our friendship over this,” Seth looks at his friend.

“You said my name twice in the past two minutes, I know you’re serious. I get you. But this room is in the basement, you won’t bother me. It will piss off my sister who can’t come down here and make out with her boyfriend of the week though,” Torrance laughs.

Seth laughs too. “Did you study for the exam yet? We should probably spend the weekend doing that. Your dad reminded me about the exam in the car. I need to do well now, even more than before. I have to pull out a scholarship for college or I’ll never

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get to go,” Seth lowers his head. His dream of a college education has been deflated now.

“Ok, but I have a game on Sunday, we’ll use that as our break. I’m headed back up to bed now. See you in the morning,” Torrance leaves the room thinking about all that his friend has lost. It was hard enough when his mom left and then disowned him. Now his father has pulled the rug out from underneath him. As Torrance gets upstairs, he sees his mom and dad talking to each other on the sofa. He walks over to them and hugs them both tightly.

“We’ll make this work Torrance. Mom and I decided Seth has had enough bouncing around. The basement has a den as well as a bedroom. Maybe we can put a bathroom down there too so he doesn’t feel he is invading our privacy. I spoke to his uncle already while you were downstairs. He said he would actually help pay for any upgrade to the basement as his thank you for us taking him in. We will work out the legal part later in the week, Sal has a man we can talk to. Are you ok with this? I know you don’t have your own bathroom yourself,” he looks at his son for his honest approval.

“Dad, you are a man among fools. I hope I take your examples as to how to be a real man with me, when I get older. All I can say is thank you for

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being the best example there is.” Torrance hugs his father again and heads to his room to sleep. His father watches him, feeling very humbled.

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More slamming of doors, more yelling. Oh no, is that blood? House hurts from the inside. There is no warmth, the cold is hurting him. The jostling around that is going on is painful as well. House tries to listen more.

“You’re a fool! You bought a new car instead of paying your mortgage? Are you even employed anymore? You pushed your friends away, and now your son has run from you too. Wow, you’re a real impressive man, aren’t you?” Uncle Sal yells at his brother.

“What do you know of my life? You sit up there on the top of the hill and look down on me always. I’ve never been good enough to meet your friends, never good enough to meet your co-workers, who are you to tell me I screwed up? You can’t even show respect to your older brother,” he yells back.

“You’re kidding right?” Sal takes a swing and his fist lands directly where he aimed it to, right in the middle of his brother’s nose. “I’m sending you to Rita, maybe she can take your stupidity and turn you

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around. I’m tired of always cleaning up your messes. Now I have to find out what to do with this house, it’s not in your name you know. It has always been in hers. You’ll get nothing from the sale of this house, so whatever debt you have is all yours and yours alone.

Get off the floor and pack what you want to take. I’m driving you directly to the airport and putting you on the plane,” Sal says thinking of Seth’s mother. As if things aren’t bad enough, this is going to kill her. He will talk to Rita about how to handle this.

“You can’t talk to me like that. I’ll do what I want,” he says.

“Really, with what money? You have nothing except the money in your wallet right now. If I have to get a court order, I will. I’ll get a police escort to get you the hell out of here. I’m done being your keeper of all things adult. Now get off the floor and go pack. I’m giving you ten minutes,” he pauses, “Now!!” he screams and his brother finally gets up still holding on to his bleeding nose.

House has his floor creaking all over his insides now. The stairs are creaking as the man walks upstairs, stomping his feet along the way. He knows this other man knows where his boy is. If his walls

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could talk, he would ask him to bring the boy back. He wants to feel warm again. He wants to feel needed, appreciated.

While Sal’s brother is upstairs, he calls his sister to tell her what has happened. “I’ll pick him up from the gate to make sure he doesn’t bale from the airplane and go somewhere else. But don’t tell him I’ll be there. I want to see the surprise on his face. Big idiot. How is Seth?” she asks.

Sal tells her how he already has himself set up with a nice family and how Sal offered the father of that house to pay to upgrade the house for Seth. To make him a real apartment. “Good idea, if you need more money let me know. Oh, and Sal?”

“Yes.”

“I have plenty of money. You get Seth into college and I’ll take care of his scholarship, between us. You hear me? That boy is going to make himself a good life, and we have to ensure this happens. I owe this to Hilly,” she tells her baby brother.

“I knew you’d come through Sis. He has two full years left of high school but I know college is a dream of his. I’ll make that dream happen. We will make this happen together. Let’s try and keep our other brother out of jail in the meantime. I have a feeling this time he is very, very close,” Sal says.

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“Not my concern, if he lands there, it will be of his own doing. But I will take him in. You’ve done your fair share over the years with both him and Hilly. We will keep in touch. Love you.” She hangs up and cries, she lets the tears fall. She will not let her brother see her cry, ever. To him she has to be hard and strong. For Hilly too. Always for Hilly.

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Seth and Torrance head to school each day as if nothing has happened. They go through their regular classes and sometimes don’t even return at the same time because they both have different after school obligations. It has been two weeks so far and no one at school has noticed. Although the administration was notified by Torrance’s father that he now has legal custody of Seth. No one asked why. At least to Seth’s knowledge.

The boys are content and Torrance’s siblings didn’t put up much of a fuss. Especially when Uncle Sal provided them with a brand new basement den and a full bathroom down there.

“Seth!” Sal calls out.

Seth looks over to see his uncle in the parking lot. “Hey, Uncle Sal,” he gives him a big hug, not caring what others may think.

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“Good to see you son, how have you been?” he asks.

“Good, really. I’m good. I think I passed that big test last week. We all thought it was the end but it turns out that was only a practice for the bigger final at the end of the year. That’s going to kill me for sure. I don’t know if there are enough hours for me to study well enough,” Seth says.

“Nah, I’m sure you’ll figure out a way to learn all of the information. Are you still working at the library after school, or can I take you somewhere today?” he asks.

“I don’t need to work today, there is some kind of conference going on there and they asked that all students come back tomorrow because they are sure there will be a lot to clean up. So, where do you want to go?” he asks.

“A secret. You ok with that?” he asks.

“Yeah, I’m good. Do we have time to grab some food? I’m starved,” Seth says.

“Sure, food sounds good. I forgot how hungry teenage boys get. My kids aren’t there yet,” Sal laughs.

They get in the car and Sal drives silently to get some food in a restaurant with a drive through pick up, then he continues in silence as he drives out

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to see Seth’s mom Hilly. He glances over and sees that, in typical fashion, Seth has fallen asleep as soon as his belly is full. Sal confirmed this visit with Torrance’s father already, they know where he is taking Seth.

Sal thinks back about the conversation he had with his sister days ago, “Sal. You have to take him. While she still has good days. It’s only fair. Don’t let him think she actually hates him. Far from hate, you know the truth. It’s not fair to both of them,” she told him. “I never told Seth’s father where she is and you better not either.”

“It was hard enough to take Torrance’s father last week. Now you want me to go again? Sis, I’m going to be honest with you, whether you like it or not. You have to let go of her. She married, you stayed single. She had Seth, you haven’t even looked for kids to adopt. She got sick, you haven’t been the same. Stop trying to fool yourself anymore, or me for that matter. You love Hilly, you always have. But pinning for her, still today, is not going to help you or her. So, get over her somehow and get on with your life. I’m positive there is someone out there for you, someone who will love you the way you deserve to be loved. Someone who probably already does love you and you’ve been blind to because you keep

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thinking about Hilly,” he had paused to collect his thoughts.

“Sal, I promised her. Back in school. I was going to become a millionaire and I was always going to take care of her. We laughed about the concept of millions, but when I did achieve my goal, she congratulated me with having Seth on my birthday. She had to be induced and she picked that day on purpose. Our stupid brother never made the connection.

The night before her wedding, we cried together. She told me, almost word for word, what you just said. I swear to you, almost word for word. But I can’t go back on my promise to her. I said I would always take care of her, and I will. Lord knows our brother never did. Please explain this to Seth on your way back from there. Tell him I was always estranged from him because it was too hard for me to see her but I love him to the ends of the earth. I promise you that. I promise him that.

I saw her a few months ago and Hilly and I talked, she was having a good day. She told me she loved me and kissed my cheek. I nearly fell over. Not because I was never kissed but because I knew that she doesn’t even know who I am. She said the same thing to the man who came by to take her to

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lunch. I won’t stop caring for her, however, I do see you’re right. I do have to start caring for me. Sal, you’re the best there is,” she cried softly to him on the phone.

“Aw Sis, I didn’t mean to make you cry. You almost never do, I’m sorry. But I want you to have what I have. It’s not too late. People marry later in life a lot these days and as for kids? Go buy one somewhere. You have a giant heart and any child would be lucky to have you as a mom,” Sal assured her.

“How did the visit go with Torrance’s dad?” she asked trying to get herself back on track.

“She was having a good day. I introduced her to him and he explained what happened. Then Hilly looked at me and said she was sorry. But I quickly changed the subject to talk about the house, that it wasn’t fully in foreclosure but was one missed payment away,” Sal told her.

“But we fixed that, right? You got my money for that, didn’t you?” she asked.

“Yes, and I went straight to the bank to not only pay the debt but pay off the whole house. The man behind the counter doubted me so I told him to check my account to make sure the money was there and then make the transfer, immediately. He had to

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look at it twice, then a manager looked at my account. They had no choice but to accept the money as I already have the power of attorney from Hilly. She knew our brother was a bad financial risk and made sure to have the house only in her name with me a secondary name. Now I put Seth’s name on the title as well. She signed that day in agreement. But what now? He can’t have a house to himself at fifteen years of age,” Sal had explained.

“No, he can’t, but when he is done with college, when he has a job of his own. It will be presented to him. We will rent the house out in the meantime. Make some money from the renters, in case dumb dumb over here decides to do something else we need extra cash for. By the time I’m done with him, he is going to wish he went to jail instead. I have him in financial classes. I have him meeting with a financial advisor going through all of his finances for the past ten years. He hasn’t paid taxes since Hilly left him because she used to take care of that. I’m making him do all the work, no accountant, all him. Thanks for all the paperwork by the way,” she told him.

“Rita dear, you’re ok, you know that?
Despite your rough exterior. Please call Rosemary

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tonight, I think it’s a call long overdue,” he told her hoping she won’t be mad.

“I think that’s a good idea Sal. Did I tell you, you’re the best? Because a good brother is hard to come by. Let me know how the visit goes with Seth.” and she hung up.

Sal turns off the highway as his thoughts came back to the present. This isn’t going to be easy, especially since the nurse said she hasn’t been doing well these past couple of days. “Seth, wake up man, we’re here,” Sal says.

Seth blinks his eyes a few times and looks around to orient himself. He sees they are in a parking lot. But to where? He looks around again. “Um, Sal. I said I was doing fine, why are we at a mental institution?”

“Seth, Hilly. Um. Your mom that is. Well, aw damn it all,” he brushes his hand through his hair. “After Hilly left your dad, she came here. She had the mental capacity to know she was slipping. Before you ask, medication won’t help. It keeps her calm but doesn’t cure the fact that her brain’s neurological synapses are failing her. She has good days and bad. The past two days haven’t been great, but my sister insists you know the truth. That you don’t carry the weight of thinking she left you or

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hates you, through your whole life. I know the story of how you tried to contact her and she yelled at you. Hilly told me about the call right afterwards, that is when she called me and my sister to help her. But she couldn’t call and apologize because she only remembered feeling bad after calling you, but not why. Seth, say something. Please,” Sal asks.

Seth stares at the building in front of him. For three years his mother has been here. His aunt that he hardly knows knew this, his favorite uncle knew how he struggled, so why didn’t anyone tell him?

“You know the answer to that,” Sal says, anticipating his thoughts.

“My father?” Seth asks slowly.

“Yeah, he would have quickly gotten hold of all of her assets, taken hold and lost them. You would have been out of a house much sooner. Or worse, you would have been in the system because he would have been in jail. All he knows is that he received divorce papers in the mail and was asked to sign them. When it said she wanted no alimony, he jumped on the idea before she could change her mind. This is what he told me himself,” Sal is watching Seth’s eyes. Trying to figure out what he is thinking.

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“Can we see her or are you simply wanting me to know the situation. I was young when she left. I wouldn’t have known how to handle this place, I guess. Not sure I do now either. I understand the situation better. I suppose, in time, I’ll figure out more. Thank you, Uncle Sal. You can thank my aunt too,” Seth turns to look out the window.

Sal puts a hand on Seth’s shoulder. “We can go see her today if you’d like, but the nurse said she has had a bad couple of days. Or we can come back another day, when you’ve had a chance to absorb all of this.”

“Uncle Sal? If it’s all the same to you. I’d rather see her on a bad day because, on a good day, knowing she won’t remember me next time, might hurt more,” Seth says.

“Ok son. Let’s go in. I’ll call ahead as we walk up to the building,” they walk in silence. Seth steps closer to his uncle and takes his hand as he would have done as a young child. He isn’t feeling very brave right now, nor is he feeling particularly adult, and he isn’t afraid to show this in front of his uncle.

Sal takes Seth to his usual meeting place with his sister in law. He sees Hilly but she hasn’t seen

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him yet. Seth sees his mom and stops walking. “She lost so much weight Uncle Sal. Is she ok?” he asks.

“Physically? Yeah, she forgets to eat some days and others she forgets why she has food in front of her. They make sure to have someone sit with her now during meals and remind her to finish a certain amount. She is physically healthy, I assure you,” Sal tells him and squeezes his hand that hasn’t left his own since walking in. The nurse walks Hilly over to the couches she likes to sit on. Sal and Seth sit across from her.

“Afternoon Hilly. I brought you a new friend,” Sal says.

She looks at Seth, she stares at him. Seth watches her carefully. This is not the vibrant mother he knew. “Hello Seth,” she says, and then she cries.

So does Seth, she remembered him. At first glance, she remembered him. Seth walks over to sit next to her on the couch, he takes her hands in his. “Hi Mom. You lost some weight. Looks good,” he says.

“I always look good. See that man over there? The one with the brown sweater on? He keeps looking at me with a wandering eye. I don’t like him,” she tells Seth.

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“Want me to tell him to stop?” Seth asks. Hilly sits back into the couch. She smiles at Sal, “Hi friend. Did you bring me chocolate today?” she asks.

“In my pocket. You know I always remember that,” Sal smiles and tosses the chocolate bar over to Hilly. Seth watches as his mother opens the chocolate as if this is the best present she has ever received. She peels the wrapper instead of ripping it open. She smells the chocolate and smiles at Sal. “The good one, you remember that too,” Hilly smiles and begins to eat her candy bar, savoring each bite.

Seth watches, stunned. She recognized him, but then it was gone. First the man who is bothering her and now the chocolate bar. He was sitting there holding her hand and now all she is hugging, is a chocolate bar. Seth watches for a few minutes longer, then he says, “Mom, it’s me. Seth,” he tries to get her attention but all she is looking at is the chocolate bar.

“Hilly used to find solace in eating chocolate. She ate it when your father was an ass, ate when she had trouble in her job, ate it when me and my brother fought even though she always took my side. Hilly’s pounds were all from chocolate, but you know what Seth? It all looked good on her,” he

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watches his nephew a moment or two. “Seth?” he asks slowly.

“Uncle Sal. You heard her, right? She said my name,” Seth was beginning to think he was hallucinating.

“I heard her too, and I saw recognition in her eyes, but that part doesn’t last long I’m afraid. Sometimes we get moments, sometimes minutes. In the beginning she wasn’t like this, she still knew me and my sister Rita,” Sal tells him.

“Is it hereditary? Because if you ever see me like this, take me out to pasture and shoot me. You hear me? She lost her spunk, her eyes no longer shine. How many bad days does she have verses good ones now?” Seth speaks quickly.

“I don’t know how many good days she has any more. I was told by one of the nurses that she used to have more good days only a couple of weeks ago, and now that doesn’t seem to be the case. I’m sorry Seth. But my sister really wanted you to know Hilly didn’t run away from you, your mom thought she was saving you. That much I’d like you to believe,” Sal tells him. “Your aunt loves you, she loves Hilly deeply too, maybe too much,” he says the last part softly.

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“I understand, well not completely, but I understand that the adults in my life thought that. Maybe when I’m older I’ll understand more, as to why they hid her. She can stay like this for years, can’t she? I mean, well, I...” Seth stops his voice because his mind is going places he doesn’t want it to.

“I am not sure Seth. I don’t want to lose my sister in law any more than you want to lose your mother. I always thought of Hilly as a real sister though. Not my sister-in-law. We were very close from the start and believe it or not, she was even closer to my sister. They knew each other in high school,” Sal says trying to set the stage for what he has to tell Seth on the way home.

Seth only nods. This is not his mother. Although it is better than thinking she is out there somewhere hating him. Somehow even this is better than thinking she really hate him. She must have been so scared, realizing this was happening to her and not knowing what to do. “Oh Mom.” He whispers and holds her hand again. She lets him, she smiles at him.

“Can we go now Uncle Sal?” Seth asks, he has had enough for today. “But I’ll come back with you next time you visit,” he states.

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“Sure Seth, whatever you want,” he stands and walks over to Hilly and gives her a hug, she always loves to hug him back. She gives Seth a hug too, even a bit longer than Sal’s. Hugs are what she gives to everyone but Sal takes his to heart because he knows she used to love to hug him when they were younger too.

“Bye friends,” Hilly says smiling.

“Bye Hilly, you take care of yourself,” Sal says as his usual goodbye. The nurse comes over to get her as they leave.

Walking to the car is quiet. Seth sits down and stares at the building. This is better than hating me, he repeats to himself. Much better. Sad, but so much better he decides.

The first couple of miles, the car is silent, then Sal brings himself to say, “I have one more thing to tell you. Are you up for listening?” he asks.

Seth looks to his uncle, what the hell, what could be worse? “Sure.”

Sal explains all that his sister has done for Hilly and why. He also tells him why his sister has always been distant from Seth, how much she actually loves him and what she is doing now, paying for Hilly to be in this facility. Although he does not mention the college scholarship. That, he is

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supposed to remain silent about. Hard as it is, he keeps that one to himself.

Sal finishes talking and lets Seth take in all that he has said today. The boy must be swimming in thoughts right now, but he won’t push him for a response. “Should I take you straight to Wingman’s house?”

“Yeah, that would be fine. Thanks for today Uncle Sal. I mean that. I may have questions later, but for now, thank you.” Seth is trying to reconcile all that he has heard. For some reason he doesn’t hate his aunt any longer. He always thought she was this wealthy aunt who regarded him as beneath her, but now that he thinks about her last visit, those were always his father’s words. Never his mother’s. She always said his aunt was nice. His aunt always brought a smile to his mom when they spoke on the phone.

In some ways he feels sorry for his aunt. All these years, longing to be with his mother and not getting a response or the response she wanted. That is sad, in a way. She should have found another woman to love. Should have been happy. He doesn’t care if she loves women, he only cares that people have love in their lives. These past few years without his mother taught him that having someone to love

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you is more important than anything else. Today’s trip proves that Seth is loved. His uncle took a chance and brought him to see his mother, not knowing whether or not Seth wanted to or could handle what he will see. He took a chance on Seth. He fixed up Wingman’s house so that he could live comfortably in a place that wasn’t his officially.

Seth looks over to his uncle, “I wish my aunt would know how important love is. I hope she finds some one day,” these are the only words he could think to say today.

“Me too,” Sal responds. This is definitely something he will call his sister about later.

~ ~ ~

People have been inside scrubbing and cleaning. His floors have been sanded and polished. Some walls painted, but not the boy’s room. They seemed to have left that room as is. Some new things have been put into the kitchen as well.

All these new people stamping around inside him, House is tired, all these changes have him feeling down. He wants to scream at them. Tell them he will look nicer if someone would simply bring back the boy. He will stand straighter; his floors won’t cry anymore. He wants to tell them. But how?

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One man keeps coming back and checking on things, the one who took away the boy’s man, he was a bad person. Maybe he is moving in? Maybe he will bring back the boy. House tries to think about feeling warm again, but he is so cold inside. He can’t seem to get that warmth back.

His neighbors tell him to hang on, that someone will move in soon. Maybe someone with a boy like before. But he knows, there is no one like him. Only one boy belongs in this house. Only one.

~ ~ ~

Seth and Wingman poured themselves into their studies. The two boys decided that getting into college is the real goal, not scoring in a game, not taking the prettiest girl to a dance, but getting into college. There will be plenty of time for them to get the girl when they are in college and on their way to adulthood.

During the summer, both boys signed up for a special class that will help them prepare for the college entrance exams they have to take for college. Seth knows if he doesn’t at least get some academic scholarship, he can kiss his dreams of college away. He won’t be able to afford having student loan debt and he is afraid that if he does have debt, he will turn

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out like his father, and not be able to handle payments on the important things.

His high school offers financial planning classes and he intends on taking them next semester. He sat with his uncle and with Torrance’s dad and they mapped out a good group of classes for him to take. They set him on his way to be a well-rounded person, to be able to help him decide what he wants to do later in life.

Right now, both he and his best friend are thinking of going into the financial world. Wingman is great with math and numbers and Seth has excellent ideas and creativity. They want to go into business together in some way. The exact thing, they will figure out later. Right now, their job is to keep the goal in line with reality. College is the first step.

“Hey Seth! Where are you man, I’ve been calling you for the past five minutes and you’re staring off into space,” Wingman says.

Seth shakes his head, “Hey Wingman. I need to give you a new nickname. You no longer run around the house thinking you can fly,” he jokes.

“Yeah, that was something when we were kids wasn’t it? But I’ve grown to like your nickname,” he teases.

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“I believe it means something else in college though, so I’ll try to remember to call you Torrance from now on. But be patient with me, I’ve been calling you that since we met,” Seth tells him seriously.

“Ok Seth. Listen, I was trying to get your attention because I had this weird idea. Your aunt has money, you told me, and she built her businesses all by herself. Do you think she would meet with us and talk to us about how plausible our ideas are? I mean, we are teens and we think the world is ahead of us but if we aren’t thinking of things that could actually happen, what’s the use? I’d rather be told now so that we can switch our thinking and we don’t get ourselves too invested in ideas that can’t happen or wont work. You know, chase after a pipe dream, get ourselves in trouble instead of enjoying the success we think we might have,” he looks to Seth. He watches Seth think, he knows he has only seen this aunt a couple of times in his life and now he knows why. Seth told him everything that night when he came back from seeing his mother.

“I’ll call Uncle Sal. I don’t have her direct number. Maybe she’ll come for a visit around the holidays this year. I don’t want to tell her its urgent. I don’t want her to think we are counting on her to

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back us up financially.” Seth wants his aunt to stay in his life, he needs all the family he can get. His mom’s family dropped his mom when she met his father. They never liked him and told her she needed to change husbands or walk away. She chose her husband. Seth can only assume her family wasn’t worth being with, even then. He will have to ask his aunt, she knew his mom’s family. He assumes so anyway based on what his uncle has told him about the relationship of all of them.

“Great. Now, we have only a couple of weeks left to the summer and my family is taking a vote on where to go on vacation, your vote counts. Dad says you’re coming whether you want to or not,” Torrance smiles at Seth.

Belonging, it’s a good feeling to Seth. “What are my choices?” he asks.

“Beach town or popular amusement park,” he states.

“Amusement park for sure. I’m not much for sitting around a beach and playing arcade games. Besides, we won’t want to go to theme parks as we get older, I’m assuming. Your sister thinks she is so old, but she acts like a two-year-old. She probably wants the theme park too,” Seth laughs. Torrance’s sister is in the grade above them and constantly tells

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them how mature she is and yet she hasn’t taken school seriously since the minute she started high school. Now she is struggling to get into college. Her desire to go is so low, to Seth, it seems that she still wants to play at life and not be a participant yet.

“She announced to the family she wasn’t going. She found a school that will help her get her high school diploma finished as well as train her to be a hair stylist. My parents checked the place out, it’s a legitimate school. They aren’t thrilled, although, at least she won’t be involved with the same crowd during her senior year because she won’t be near them. The school is an hour away. They have dorms, stricter than college dorms, only she doesn’t know that part and I don’t think my folks plan on telling her. Not sure why they told me. Maybe to reassure me she wasn’t making some kind of spontaneous mistake. I hate to admit this, but you know, she’s my sister. A guy’s got to take care of the only one you have, right?”

Mom said, this place takes education seriously and try to make sure their students come out knowing about business as well as being a stylist in case they ever want to own their own salon. She is leaving in three days; I was informed of this during breakfast. She seems to think she has it better than

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us, because she doesn’t have to go back to high school,” Torrance explains with some laughter in his voice.

“So, we won’t have to deal with her boy drama next year? That is the best news ever. I’m assuming your mom checked this place out personally. She probably drove up there and toured the place and sat and found out everything there is to know. Without your sister, no less, I’m also sure your sister doesn’t understand it won’t be easy and that she will have to be studying her ass off in all those classes,” Seth laughs some more, his friend joins him. “At the end of the day though, she found what will work for her. I’ll give her that much,” Seth says.

“Yeah, I guess so. It’s a four-year place. She doesn’t realize she will be getting a degree along with her new skills. Mom seemed to indicate they have a couple of choices of skill sets to learn. But the one that drew my sister in was the hair stylist. They all, meaning my family, seem to be on the same page in this, at least that is good. So, amusement park. I’ll tell everyone,” Torrance says as he heads back upstairs.

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With winter upon them, Seth gets news his mother has taken a turn for the worse, medically speaking. He and his uncle are on their way up to see her. “Why did things change so fast?” Seth asks him.

“I don’t know. She wasn’t like this when we saw her a few weeks ago. Or she was, and she was having a good day. In case you’re wondering, I’m listed as her brother and next of kin. So is my sister. The facility doesn’t know any different. Are you ok with that?” he asks.

“Yeah. Makes sense to me. What really happened with her family?” Seth asks, hoping for a real answer now.

“Her father was not a nice man. Not in the way your father isn’t nice, but really not nice. As in, to anyone in his life. He made more enemies than friends, but somehow, he also made a lot of money so people felt they needed to put up with him. Your mom, she hated him. When she met your father, her own father told her not to marry beneath her.

I had heard that her response to him was, she was marrying up compared to her family. That she was marrying into a family that actually cared about each other. Her father told her he wasn’t paying for the wedding and she said she didn’t need his money,

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she made her own. And she did too, by the way. Your mom was one smart cookie in college. She made tons of money on the side because she was so smart, people paid her to correct their papers, she tutored in anything that had to do with writing or literature. She had quite the nest egg saved up by the time we all graduated college. Your parents used her money for the down-payment on your old house. She always kept her money separate from your dad; he never had any access to her accounts. I don’t think he even knew she had any money of her own. I think he thought her father gave them the money for the house.

Anyway, her father found out you were born and came to her insisting you be named after him and she laughed in his face and told him to leave her home. That if he couldn’t be bothered to be in her life up until then, he didn’t get to call the shots anymore. I was there, I saw this encounter myself.

The man was stunned. No one ever stood up to him. No one, really. I don’t think the man was ever told the word no, in his whole life. He stood there not knowing what to do and starting yelling all kinds of not nice things to her. My sister was there and she came forward and let him have a tongue lashing he probably hasn’t forgotten to this day. She

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wouldn’t allow him to say a word. She pushed him out of the house physically and told him to never come back.

When he yelled he was cutting your mom out of his Will your aunt said good, no one wants your illegal monies anyway. She stood with her hands on her hips challenging him to say otherwise. He walked out of the house and never came back. The rest of the family probably heard about what happened from his point of view, and whether or not they believed him, no one would challenge him,” Sal finishes as they pull up to the facility.

“Uncle Sal. My aunt is a pretty amazing woman. I wish I could get to know her. I’m glad Mom had someone in her life always looking out for her. Even if it was from a distance. My dad isn’t a bad guy when it came to her, he probably never knew what to do with her. Maybe he saw her slipping, maybe he didn’t care, he was never mean. Never cruel. I guarantee you that. I think he never grew out of doing life for himself. He didn’t know how to share his life and he damn well didn’t know how to manage his money. I won’t be like that. Torrance and I have been working hard in our finance class. I don’t want to make those mistakes,” Seth opens the car before he finds himself crying.

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Sal watches as his nephew gets out of the car quickly. Aw damn, he is going to get his sister here soon. Seth asked months ago and she keeps finding excuses not to come. She has to now. She has to.

The two of them walk in to the facility in silence. “Sal.” They hear from the side of the lobby. Sal turns to see his sister. Oh no, is he too late. He looks to her with open arms. She comes running into them. They hold on to each other tightly. When they let go of each other, Sal turns to Seth, “Seth, meet your Aunt Rita. Again.”

“Hi Seth,” she says through tears.

“Is she gone already? Did we miss her?” he chokes out.

“No Seth, I simply needed to see her and I’ve been waiting here since yesterday. I told the nurse to call you guys last night. Her kidneys decided to give out. No one knows why. No sign of diabetes or anything. But organ failure is a big deal. They asked me if I wanted to take her to the hospital. I said no. Do you hate me?” she asks.

“No, I don’t hate you. I’m glad you had time alone with her last night. Can we go see her now?” Seth says in a soft voice.

Rita takes them to Hilly’s room. Sal had only been there once. He usually has her brought out to

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one of the common rooms. He never wanted to invade her privacy. Seth looks down at his mom, lying in her bed. She is sleeping. “Is this real sleep or from medication?” he asks.

“A little of both, I think,” Rita says.

Seth bends down and kisses his mother’s cheek. It’s cold. He looks down at her and begins to cry. She is already gone. But at least she is in peace. No more losing memories, no more heartache. She can watch him go to college from above. “She’s gone Rita. Sal. Her cheeks are ice cold,” Seth looks to the adults in the room and they rush over.

Sal feels for a pulse in her hand, in her neck. He looks to Rita. “I was here all night. I cried all I can cry. I went out to wait for you, you told me on the phone last night what time you were coming. I was out there for less than an hour. I’m sorry. I would have called. I didn’t realize,” she says choking back the tears she didn’t know she had left.

“No way to know if she looked like this all night. I’ll get the nurse,” Sal walks out of the room.

Rita looks at Seth, not the first time she wanted to see him. “I’m ok Aunt Rita. I think I’m actually relieved. I never liked her like this, and these past few months with her have given me back hope that I was always loved. It put me in a better place

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actually, I understand I should thank you for that. For all you’ve done for her, I’m assuming you’ve been paying for this place. No one told me, don’t get angry at anyone. They just said you were making sure she stayed here because it’s the best place. Did Uncle Sal call you to say I wanted to speak to you?” he asks still looking at his mom and not his aunt.

“Yes. It’s been hard for me to come back here. I hope you understand that. But that’s my issue not yours. I apologize for that. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?” she asks still having tears fall from her eyes as she privately says goodbye to Hilly.

“I realized that it doesn’t pay to hold on to anger. I’ve never been angry at you. I never really knew you well enough to be angry, and now that I know the truth, there is really no reason to be. But I do want to talk to you with my friend Torrance. Can we work that out?” he asks, also letting his tears fall.

Sal walks back in and sees the two of them standing a few feet apart, both grieving in their own way. “We’ll take care of her Seth. In the right way. Do you want a big ceremony or a private one?” Sal asks.

“Private is fine. We can have us, Torrance and his family. That’s all I have. It’s enough,” he says

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“No other friends from school? Maybe you’d find support from others who have lost a parent,” Sal tells him.

“I’m not sure I want them to know. Maybe, I’ll change my mind, but right now, no. Are you ok with that?” Seth looks at his aunt.

“I’m fine with that Seth. We are the ones who loved her. We will feel her love after too,” Rita reaches out to touch Seth and he walks into her arms. For the first time, she hugs her nephew and the two of them bond over a moment of grief but it is a joining moment.

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The funeral is held right away, no reason to wait, everyone who needs to be there is already here. Seth woke that morning, showers and gets dressed for the funeral. He goes upstairs to see his new family sitting at the kitchen table. Torrance, his siblings and parents are all waiting for him. Torrance walks to his friend and gives him a tight hug. Torrance has spent the whole night talking to his mom. Trying to get all of his questions about life out at the same time.

He needed to make sure she told him everything, and she obliged him. He became worried

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he would lose her. His parents were very patient with him last night, trying to get him through this difficult time in his life. This is the first real loss he has ever experienced. Torrance’s sister surprised them when she came into the room with them and began to cry too.

She came running home upon hearing the news. Surprising them all. She sat with them until late into the night. Now she stands before Seth and opens her arms. He walks into her arms and she holds on for dear life. Seth returns the favor. She always called him a pain in her ass but underneath it all she loves him. This is all Seth needs to know. All he ever wanted, to belong to a family, to be loved. Their other brother hugs him too, with no words, no one has any words for him. Only love and right now, that’s all he wants, all he needs.

Rita and Sal get ready for the day. She has their other brother under twenty-four-hour surveillance, he will be sitting at home all day, contemplating what he could have been instead of the deadbeat he is. He now knows of the death of his wife and her condition of the past few years, his reaction was not good enough and therefore Rita said he was not allowed to come to the funeral. He had screamed at her and hollered all kinds of obscenities

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and threats until Rita reminded him that the alternative place to live, is jail and that she has no problem with turning his sorry ass in. To that, he stopped and slammed down the phone.

Now Rita sits and wonders if she did the wrong thing. “Should he be here Sal? I mean, he is Seth’s father.”

“Did he ask you to bring him in?” Sal asks. Rita shakes her head in the negative. “Then stop beating yourself up about his not being here. Rita, when you told him she died he said to you, ‘so what’. Not a caring man. I don’t know how he grew up in the same house as we did. I suppose this is what the so-called experts mean when they say there is one bad apple in each family’s tree,” Sal hugs his sister. This is really hard on her. The love she could never have is gone.

“I wish Seth had more time with her before she became bad every day. He deserved to be with her. Oh Sal, did we ruin life for him? Did we wait too long?” Rita asks.

“Rita, please. Seth is ok with all of this. He told me so. He said he is barely old enough now to understand what we did and why, so he realizes that years ago he would have been even less comfortable with the situation and possibly angry at the world at

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that time instead of realizing that he needed to do well in school if he ever had a chance at getting into college and away from his father. The boy has a good head on his shoulders, Dad would have loved him. I do, my family does and if you give yourself some time, you will too. Rita your heart is so big, let others in please,” he says, almost pleading this time.

“I’m going to start. I promise,” Rita sniffles as she wipes her eyes. Sal’s wife comes over to hug her and Rita lets her, in fact she welcomes the closeness. Everyone who knew Hilly, loved Hilly. She was one of the best women on earth.

Everyone piles into the car and heads for the cemetery. They decided to do a graveside only service. When they show up, they are shocked to see what they see. Sal and Rita run through the crowd to the front to find Seth and Torrance’s family. Seth is standing in front of an open grave looking around, feeling dumbfounded. Sal turns to Torrance’s father, “What is going on?” he asks.

“For one, Torrance swears he only told one of their friends. Seth wasn’t upset as to whom he told. However, it seems the boys have more friends than they think they do. All of these kids showed up with a parent. I say parent because all of them have lost one, either to divorce or death. They all came to

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give him support and show him he is not alone. One of the school’s counselors is here as well as the administration. The school put their flags at half mast, they showed us pictures and the administration declared this week a no test week at school. Seth is having trouble being the focus of everyone’s attention, more than he is about having people know anything. This is all I know,” he tells Sal and Rita quietly.

Rita walks over to Seth, she puts a hand on his shoulder, “Seth. I wish I had so much support. You may not want this now, in a week or so, you may realize this is a good thing.”

Seth looks up to his aunt. “Actually, I’m overwhelmed. I had no idea so many people were dealing with the same thing. I never talked to anyone about her. About her leaving, about him being a jerk. I kept my home life all inside me because I felt no one wants to know. Torrance has always been my only confidant. Who will be there for you?” he asks.

Before Rita can answer, someone else says. “I am,” Rita turns around to see Rosemary standing behind her. Rita stands in shock for a moment, then she opens her arms and Rosemary walks into them willingly. “You aren’t alone,” she whispers to the woman she has loved for a long time. But she also

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knew that Rita had Hilly in her mind and heart always.

“How did you know?” Rita asks.

“Your butler called me and told me to come and help you out. That man knows you better than you think. I like him,” Rosemary smiles. “You must be Seth. I’ve heard about you since you were born. I’m Rosemary. Your aunt’s other oldest and dearest friend,” she puts her hand out to Seth.

“She needs one now. I live here and so does my uncle. But she promised to come visit me now. I hope you’ll come too. You seem to make her smile. Thank you for coming. I’m sure this is the best I will be all day. The rest I will probably fall apart. But I’m glad I’m seeing you now,” Seth shakes her hand and Rosemary pulls him in to hug him. “I’ll be there for you too,” she whispers.

Seth watches as his mother’s coffin is lowered into the ground. He helps shovel some of the dirt to cover her, then Sal and the rest of the adults finish the job. Afterwards many of the kids from school come over to introduce themselves to him and offer him their phone numbers. Seth takes some of them but not all of them because some of the kids he has never even seen before.

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Everyone sits around for about a half an hour after her coffin was covered. They begin to disperse soon after. Sal sits down in front of the fresh grave and speaks softly to the woman he has always been proud to call a sister. Rita sits down with him and then Seth comes and sits with them. The three of them say what they need to say to Hilly, holding on to each other’s hands. They stand as a group and turn to their waiting family. “I made food for us. Please, come to the house now. I think we all need to be together a little while longer,” Torrance’s mother says.

“Sounds like a good idea. Rosemary?” Rita looks to her friend.

“I took a taxi here. I’ll have to ride with one of you,” she smiles to Rita.

The families walk in silence towards their cars and stay that way mostly throughout dinner. Torrance’s sister speaks finally, “I, for one, think this day sucks. Seth you’re an annoying little brother but you’re a cool kid all the same. You’re the only one who believed I could do well in this new school. It is your gift of confidence that had me growing with a higher degree of self-worth. I’m doing well because of you. I’m going to assume you received all your

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goodness from your mom. I’ve met your dad,” she grins.

Seth laughs a bit. Torrance’s sister came over one night to surprise him with homemade pizza, it was on a night when his father was drunk and mean. Even to her. “Your pizza still sucks,” Seth tries to joke.

Torrance begins to laugh as well. The adults in the room don’t understand these jokes, all they see is that Seth is not reveling in depression. Rosemary speaks next, “Young lady, where are you in school? You don’t look old enough for college yet,” she says quietly. Torrance’s sister explains where she is and why. A bit ashamed. “Don’t ever be ashamed for wanting to change your life around. That is a very mature thing to decide to do. I don’t even know you and I’m proud of that kind of decision,” Rosemary says.

“I second that,” Rita says. “We all make stupid decisions in high school. You realized you were in the wrong crowd and that they would bring you down in life. That is not a simple decision to make. You will graduate in four years with your high school diploma and a degree. That is nothing to sneeze at. If you need a cheerleading team, we’re happy to start one,” Rita says pointing to herself and

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Rosemary. Rosemary squeezes Rita’s hand under the table.

Seth beams at his aunt. Uncle Sal is right, she has a huge heart. Peshy isn’t so bad, she has always been misguided by the group she hung around with at school. Now Seth is wondering what really drove her away. What was the last straw that made her make this decision? Seth looks over at Peshy and smiles, she grins back at him.

Torrance asks, “Ms. do you and Sal have any fun stories to tell us about Seth’s mom?” he looks to them.

“I have tons of them, but I’m not sure you’re old enough to hear them,” Rita jokes.

With this knowledge Seth begins to laugh, picturing his mother doing something dangerous or even slightly off color. “My mom?” he asks still laughing.

Sal begins to tell of the time when Seth’s parents were still dating and Hilly came over to their parents’ house to ask his mother what her son’s favorite recipe was, and their mom told her take-out food. Everyone at the table laughs.

This is how the rest of the night went. Silly stories being shared, laughter and some tears. Seth even began to tell stories that he remembered of silly

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outings he had done together with his mom. Even Torrance told of the first time he went out with Seth and his mom and how embarrassing it was for him when his bathing suit got caught on a door handle.

~ ~ ~

Today is especially cold. House doesn’t know why. His shutters shake in the wind, his backyard tree swaying with the large winds. Telling house something is wrong. Something is wrong, the tree keeps telling him.

The banging inside had stopped a while ago. No more paint on his walls, no more sanding his floors. His insides have been quiet but he knows it will change soon. The last time things were so quiet was right before the boy and his mom moved in. He knows that something will change soon. More people, but not his boy. There is only one of those. Only one true owner of this house.

Only one.

~ ~ ~

Winter semester passed without too much trouble. Aunt Rita came during finals to help keep Seth focused. Rosemary came after finals to celebrate with him and Torrance. Torrance is not flying around the room any more so Seth found he

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can no longer call him Wingman. Rosemary called him Seth’s co-pilot. And that began to stick. Even Torrance’s own mom began to call him Seth’s co-pilot.

Some kids at school thought it was weird, then again, in high school nicknames are common and everybody seems to have them and change them often. So, co-pilot it is. For now.

Seth is happy to have more family in his life. Rosemary has been very good for his aunt. He sees a difference in her when they are together. His father is still working with Aunt Rita’s financial people to dig himself out of his own financial troubles. She told Seth that the threat of jail is the only thing that is holding him and motivating him. He knows that Rita has no problems with calling the right people to make that happen. She also threatened him about how she feels he knew about his wife’s problems and let her leave, instead of helping her; she can’t prove her theory yet, but if need be, she will. Seth’s father might actually come out better after living with her. But only time will tell, and it will take a lot of time just to catch him up. Rita says he has many years’ worth of financials to go through and she is only giving him one month’s worth at a time. He has a studio on her property that is watched by security

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each day. He complains he feels like he is in jail and she continually asks if he wants to make a real comparison.

“Aunt Rita. I know this is a dumb question, but has he ever asked where I am or how I’m doing?” Seth asks on the phone one day.

“I keep him posted. He hasn’t had a chance to ask. I want him to continuously know how well you are doing despite his stupidity. If you want me to stop, I will,” his aunt tells him.

“Maybe he isn’t worth it. See what happens if you don’t tell him anything anymore. But that is not why I called. Did you get a chance to review the papers Co-pilot and I sent you?” Seth asks.

“Yes, my dear, I did. I went over them with one of my finance managers from the retail business I have. He really likes your concept. He said he would like to speak with you two about what you should be taking in college. Or maybe this summer even before senior year, he said there are classes you can find online that will help you put things together more precisely. Are you interested in taking classes this summer or would you like to have fun or maybe continue working?” she asks him with concern.

“Co-pilot and I were thinking of perfecting our business plan. We really think we are on to

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something. If we have the plan perfected by the time we graduate college, we will be set. No looking for work for us, we will make our own future. Do I sound stupid and naive?” he asks after taking a deep breath.

“No son, you sound determined, and without determination, I would never have been able to get to where I am, nor could Rosemary. You know she owns six businesses herself?” Rita mentions proudly.

“But Aunt Rita, I’m not going to college, I need to make sure Co-pilot gets in so we can study together all he learns. I figure I’ll learn through him. We’ll do this business together still,” Seth admits.

Rita sits down in a nearby chair. Her oldest nephew has admitted defeat. How does she handle this? She will call Sal later. “Seth, I want you to keep plugging at your school work. You’ll get your results from your entrance exam soon and you’ll know better about your ability to get into school,” she tells him with concern.

“I may get in Aunt Rita, but you and I both know a person who is on his own will be strapped with debt for many years to come and I think piggybacking on Torrance’s education will be cheaper. But I will let you know what my score is; so, you can be proud of me,” Seth says.

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“I’m already proud of you,” she says. “My finance guy will send you a detailed e-mail about what he feels about your business plan and what he thinks you should do from here.”

“Thank you, Aunt Rita, we will take all the critique we can get. I’ll speak to you next week,” Seth says cheerfully and then hangs up.
~ ~ ~

Senior year came and went quickly. Seth could not be happier to reach graduation. Torrance and Seth applied to the same local college. The boys decided to save even more money by living at home. They both got in and they are planning on which classes Torrance is going to take and what kind of job Seth will get to help them put away money in a special account to start their business right after graduation.

Rita had asked if her brother wanted to see Seth graduate and he declined. He has made a lot of progress in the past year and a half working on his own financial life. However, he is still an undeniably crabby person. Rita has been unable to get him to see how wonderful his son is. He hasn’t spoken to his son since Sal sent her brother out to her. Seth is not crying over the lack of contact, Rita is. If she had a son, she would be showering him with love every

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day. Or any child for that matter. But at least, now she has Rosemary in her life. Sal was right, she is a wonderful part of Rita’s life. A part she has missed for too many years. They are talking about moving in together already. Act like a real married couple.

“Rita? You ok?” Sal asks as he approaches her.

“I want to see my own boy graduate. I want to see my own kids fight over who gets to sit in the front seat of the car, who is using the bathroom first and get homemade birthday cards from them. I want it all Sal. You’re right, I want what you have,” she pulls him in for a hug and Sal gives her a deep hug, full of love.

“You’re only thirty-eight Sis, you can still do this. You and Rosemary will make wonderful parents together. I’m positive you will. Look at me. I’m thirty-four and I have three kids already and an amazing wife. But don’t let your age stop you. You can have all this too. I love you Sis,” Sal says to her face.

“And I you,” she says. “Come, let’s go get our boy graduated. Then we’re going to present him with his first big gift, together.”

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Sal, Rita and Sal’s family drive over to school to watch graduation. Afterwards they will be joining Torrance’s family for a family celebration.

“I can’t believe you’re graduating already,” Peshy says to Seth.

“It had to happen eventually. And look at you! You’ve already completed two successful years of college. I knew you would do well. I really did,” he smiles at her. Nothing could make him be anything but happy today.

“You’re the only one. You take time out of your life to send me all of those encouraging notes and funny sayings. I love the cartoon ones the best,” she laughs.

“It doesn’t do anything unless the message resonates with the receiver,” he says.

“You know Seth, you’re going to make a name for yourself. You’re going to be so big, I can’t wait to see how big you become,” she says softly.

“I’m sure you’ll be around when I do. Family is too important to you now Peshy. It is one thing that you’ve really grown about. To understand how important family is,” Seth says.

“Seth, will you keep in touch with me from college?” she almost pleases.

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“Peshy, I’m going to be right here, you know that. We’ve discussed this a few times already. Torrance and I are stuck together for the next four years. He has to take the classes and then come home and teach me. I’m going to get a job and start saving up; any money I make goes for our business we’re already working on. I’ll be right here and I’ll always be here for you, any time,” he says. “Don’t worry. Hey, Peshy? Is that a tear? Hey, I’m sorry, what did I say?” Seth reaches out to touch her shoulders, one hand on each of her shoulders.

“Seth, you’re the reason I left here. I couldn’t be around you. Sometimes I still can’t. You’re the only guy I’ve ever known that doesn’t glare at me. You are the only one who sees me as a person and not a body with larger than average female parts,” Peshy chokes a bit on her words. “Seth, I probably care for you a lot more than you do me. I had to leave. There was no way I could live in the house with you, but in the end, it is the best thing I have ever done for myself. I’ve grown so much and a lot of that growth came from you,” she stares into his eyes.

Seth leans over and kisses Peshy on her lips. A kiss he had been secretly holding on to since before he moved into the house. He leans back and

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repeats what he said before, “I’ve always believed in you Peshy. I always will.”

“Ok, we will keep this between us,” Peshy says smiling.

“Torrance already knows, he says as long as I don’t kiss you or show affection in front of him, he is happy about us. But you have to finish school Peshy. You’re going to be great at being a hairdresser or anything else you choose. You’ll probably learn how to do all those fancy things people get done for their weddings and such. Or movies. Yeah, you’ll be working on movie sets,” he says proudly.

“I don’t want to disappoint you,” Peshy says.

“I don’t think that is possible,” Seth smiles at her. “Everyone is waiting upstairs, I hear the kitchen chairs moving around.” Before he lets go, he kisses her one more time, this one lasting a bit longer. Yes, this is what he wants.

Seth walks into the kitchen and he and Torrance yell, “Let’s go graduate!!!” at the same time.

Graduations, as a rule, are somewhat boring for those watching, but for Seth and Torrance’s family it was the most exciting day ever. When each of them was called to receive their diploma, the

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family exploded with cheer, not caring if the audience didn’t want to hear them.

When the boys come to find their family, there are cheers again and lots of hugs from everyone to everyone. The cheers don’t stop at home. Rosemary claps her hands to try and get everyone’s attention. The talking finally dies down for a moment.

“I have an announcement to make,” everyone watches her. “This is the most momentous occasion I’ve had the pleasure of being part of since my own high school graduation. I have been so accepted here; the gesture warms my heart. Rita and I have known each other since college, she knew Hilly even longer, and I hope that you boys take that as a good sign to see that good friendships last,” she turns to smile at Rita. A large smile is returned to her, that is all she needs.

“Assuming the role of an additional aunt, an eccentric and rich one at that. I have an indulgent gift to give the graduates,” she pulls out a set of keys and throws them on the table. Seth and Torrance stare at the keys, what could they be for?

“The car I drove here in, is all yours. I’ll be flying back with Rita. You guys will need a reliable four-wheeled drive to get you back and forth in the

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winter. One that can hold all your stuff too and maybe a couple of friends who need a home cooked meal once in a while,” she looks at Torrance’s parents. “Too much?” she asks.

“We wouldn’t expect anything less from an eccentric, rich aunt,,” his father laughs. Neither one of the boys have touched the keys yet. Everyone laughs.

Rita stands to speak next. “Before you rebuttal anything Seth, please listen carefully. I made a promise to Hilly a long time ago. I promised to take care of her always. But since she is not here. I suppose the recipient of that care now falls to you. Thank you for letting me into your life during the tough time and now during this amazing time. We’ve become close and I can’t thank you enough. You and Torrance’s family, and of course Sal and his family have become so important to me. You’ve sparked things in me I never thought possible.

First of all, I think Rosemary and I may look into adoption, we’d like to be parents together, that’s a discussion for another time. The real reason we are all here today is because of you Seth, you have busted your behind to make the most of your high school years. You took upon yourself and Torrance did as well, to begin your adult life with a plan. And a

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very good one at that. However, the plan has one flaw. Seth, you need to go to school. You *will* be going to school on the scholarship of Rita Enterprises. No questions asked,” she smiles at him with a tear running down her cheek.

Seth jumps from his chair and runs to her, he not only hugs her, he picks her up and twirls her around, then he does the same for Rosemary. The whole crowd laughs and cheers once more. Peshy looks at Seth with admiration. She knew he’d get to college somehow. Thank you, Aunt Rita, she thinks to herself. She will thank her privately later. That’s a woman she needs to speak with. The only secret she has kept from everyone, except her mom, because she brought her to the school she is in, is that she isn’t going for hair dressing. She is getting a math degree. She will be able to teach math or go on to school of engineering for a secondary degree. Which, may help Seth and Torrance in their business. She will definitely find time to talk to Rita before she leaves.

She leans over and hugs her mom who is sitting in front of her, she is too overwhelmed to get out of her chair. “He’s going to make it Mom,” Peshy whispers.

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Her mom pats her hand. “Yes, he will. And you will do well by him, I’m most certain.”

Peshy turns her mom’s chair to face her. “A mom knows their only daughter’s first love. I hope it’s your only one like I’ve had. I won’t tell anyone, even your dad. Our secret, I like having those with you,” she whispers.

Peshy looks to her mom with yet even more admiration than before. She hugs her, “You’re the best,” she says.

“Actually, those women over there are, and you should speak to Rosemary, she has the same degree as you will,” her mom says.

“Oh, I thought it was Rita, either way, I was going to walk them out when they leave. Ok?” she asks.

“Good idea.”

~ ~ ~

These new people are not nice. So much yelling, always playing loud music. House is having a hard time dealing with them. So, when things get too much for him, he pops a pipe. They’ve had four of them already but don’t seem to care. One time they simply put some heavy tape on him. It’s so tight and it is squeezing his pipes so hard it is even harder to work with them now.

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When he lifted his floorboards to trip the person who is not behaving well, the man nailed the floor piece down with fourteen nails. If he tried to scare them by flapping his shutters, they pulled them off and put them in the garage. He mourns his boy every day.

It has been four years now since the boy has left and House is getting more and more worn out. He can’t keep fighting with this group of people, he is hoping they leave soon. His neighbors don’t like them either. These people make so much noise they have rattled the shingles on the other houses, they are complaining to him, but he can’t do anything about them, he has tried.

With each passing day, he misses his boy. Where can he be? Why isn’t he here yet? He promised.

~ ~ ~

Peshy’s graduation is tomorrow and Seth and Torrance are driving up in their own car today. Everyone else is coming in the morning. “Do I need to leave you two alone for a while?” Torrance asks.

“No, we are waiting until you and I graduate, when everyone will consider us adult enough to have made this decision. We don’t want anyone to think

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we did this as a rebound of my family situation. Does that make any sense?” Seth asks.

“What doesn’t make sense is that you’re denying yourselves your true feelings,” Torrance says.

“We aren’t denying anything Torrance. I promise. We talk every night. We message each other multiple times a day. And we video chat at least once or twice a week. We probably are closer than most of the people we see on campus that claim to be couples. How are you and Dara doing?” Seth asks.

“I don’t think she is going to work out,” Torrance says sadly.

“What happened?” Seth asks.

“She was looking over my shoulder one night recently, while I was working on our business projections. She asked what it was and I said it is the potential of a business I’m looking into. Instead of being interested in the business itself, she said, ‘oh, looks like you’ll be very rich in the future, won’t you?’ I mean, all I heard was that she is looking for money and not me. That she would never support me in what I’m doing but in what I can give her. Do you think I’m nuts?” he asks.

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“I completely understand how you would see that. Peshy would have asked what kind of business do you think could make that kind of money,” Seth says.

“Yeah, she probably would have. I can’t believe she is graduating. I’m actually proud of my sister. But she asked us to come tonight because she wants to show us something. Do you know what?” he asks.

“No, she said it was a surprise and we had to be here before 5:00. So, here we are, 3:00 on the dot,” Seth says. “I’ll message her that we’re here and ask where we are supposed to drop our bags.”

A couple of minutes later Peshy comes running to the car. Seth grabs her into his arms and the two of them hug tightly. He kisses her cheek. “Oh, my goodness, you’re glowing Sis. I mean, you’re actually glowing. Is that love for Seth or pride in what you’ve accomplished?” Torrance asks.

“You are correct on both accounts, I think. I am so glad you’re early, something came up and they are starting everything an hour early. See that building over there, with the green roof? Ok, that is where you’re going to sleep. You two have room seven. Go there and change clothes for a nice dinner, then meet me over in the castle. You can’t

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miss the place, straight down this block. Oh my, you’re here!” she screams and kisses Seth on the lips and jumps to kiss her brother on the cheek.

“Might as well do as we’re asked,” Torrance says.

When they get to the castle. Seth and Torrance walk in together and what they see first is the banner across the back wall, that reads, ‘Honors Dinner’. “I knew she’d do well. I knew she would,” Seth says standing proudly.

“She pulled it off man, wow. I’m so proud of her. Look, place cards, let’s go find where we are sitting.”

Not only did the friends find out Peshy is graduating with honors, she is graduating with a mathematics degree. Seth and Torrance stood up and cheered when she walked up to receive her special scarf to be worn at graduation tomorrow. They are assuming the parents know and were asked to wait until tomorrow to come.

Graduation is wonderful. Rita and Rosemary surprise everyone and Sal and his family come too. Plus, those aunts and uncles from her family. She is surrounded by more people than anyone else here. At dinner, Peshy stands to thank everyone for coming out for her, “Oh, and one more thing. I have

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a job! The one I interviewed for last time I was home.”

“Congratulations Peshy, oh, you make this old man so proud,” her father says.

“You’re not old Dad, but thank you,” she laughs.

~ ~ ~

Sal shows up to the house to check on all of the complaints he has received from neighbors recently. So far, the same people have been living here almost since the beginning of the time Seth left. That has been six years so far. They always pay rent and don’t complain too much, so he hasn’t had any reason to check the inside of the house much.

Sal always assumed he was lucky to have the same people stay so long. So many of his friends said rentals have high turnovers. But today, he insisted that it was time to check on the house. He is going in with Rita and with a good friend of his, who handles these things all the time.

The neighbors have called four times in the past couple of months saying they are afraid the renters are ruining the house by the sounds they have heard. Saying it has been going on for years.

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As they step onto the porch, the creaking sounds of the steps sound mournful to Sal. “Did you hear that?” he asks Rita.

“Yeah, the house sounds like it is crying. Weird huh?” Rita responds.

They knock on the door and the man of the house opens it to let them in. Sal’s friend immediately starts taking pictures of the items he sees that are wrong. Cracks in the walls, a group of nails on the floor that don’t look right, a ripped screen on the back window.

Sal sees that the house is falling apart. “Why didn’t you tell me things needed to be fixed. It is in the lease agreement that the house is to be kept in the manner in which you moved in. This place looks awful and I’m not even seeing the whole first floor.”

“We didn’t want to be annoying tenants so we fixed things ourselves. We never even charged you for the money we put in,” he says defensively.

“You’ve ruined the house! Who the hell drives fourteen nails into one spot on the floor? What the hell is this spot on the wall?” he wipes it with his finger. “It smells like mint,” Sal says.

“Yeah, I read you can cover holes with toothpaste. So, I did,” the tenant says.

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Sal looks at the wall again, “There are twelve holes? What the hell are you doing to my house!!” Rita comes over to touch Sal’s shoulder to calm him down.

“We should have been checking. Part of this is our fault,” Rita whispers to him.

Sal takes a deep breath. He looks around to his friend. His friend walks over to Sal, “Please leave, let me handle this. Leave. Go to the car. Don’t come out of the car until I tell you to,” he says firmly.

From the car Sal and Rita watch as four men from unmarked cars they hadn’t even seen head towards the front door. Two of them are in full police riot gear. “Oh Rita, what have I done? What have I done?” Sal sighs

“I don’t know. I think we were simply too trusting. We had no idea what to expect, this is the first time the neighbors called us, in all these years. But the house is in such need of repair. We’re going to have to take a break from renting and really look through the house to see where they may have done stupid repairs themselves. I mean, really, who puts toothpaste in a hole in the wall and where the hell did all those evenly spaced holes come from? My friends told me we were crazy for not collecting the rent in person each month, I told them they were

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crazy for suggesting such a thing. But the house has to stay here for Seth. I know it does. I have this feeling that the house misses him. I know you think I’m crazy,” Rita says.

“No, actually I don’t. I think when we walked onto the porch the creaking actually sounded like moans from the house itself, it really did. As if this house is a living being, feeling the pains of all these things these people did. Well, if you’re crazy, I’m in the adjoining room.

Oh no, Rita, look,” Sal points to two police officers dragging out one man. His hands and feet are both restrained. Now comes another woman, also restrained. They look at each other. Those aren’t the two they rented to. Who are they?

Sal’s phone buzzes and he looks down, it is a message from his friend. “*When you told me who you rented to, I recognized the name. They have been hiding from the law for six years here in plain sight. The police are going to have to take over this house for a while and search for evidence of their previous offenses. This may take a while.*

Sal shows the message to Rita. “Tell him we will give full cooperation. I don’t know what else to say.”

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‘We are fully willing to cooperate. You have my number. One question, why didn’t anyone find them sooner?’ Sal says.

‘They are wanted about six hundred miles from here and have been living off of their illegal bounty from all of their offenses. Some bounty, huh? Six years’ worth of living expenses. I guess that’s why they have laid low. No reason to get more. Did he always pay you in cash?’

‘Yeah, always in cash. I usually brought the money straight to the bank. Special account for the house. I brought everything to the one over on Willow Boulevard, often times to the same clerk, her name is Marcy, you can’t miss her. Her hair is blue,’ Sal offers.

‘I’ll let the police know. Maybe some of the bills are still there and can be checked. Thanks. Now, take your sister home. I’ll take over from here,’ he dismisses Sal.

“He said to go home. They will notify us when they need to and when we can get back in to assess the damage,” Sal’s voice is very low. He feels as if he can’t move.

“I’ll drive,” Rita says getting out of the back of the car and sitting in the driver’s seat. “We’ll get through this. We will probably have to use our own

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money for the repairs. All those years of savings is probably worthless, probably have to give it back to the police. Maybe we can keep the interest, but that’s not much. We’ve made a mistake. Both of us, not only you Sal. I never checked on the house and neither did you. We never questioned a thing as long as we were getting paid each month. It’s our own ignorance that has bitten us. I was too emotional to do this as a proper business deal. I’m sorry. This won’t happen again. Now stop sulking. This happened, it’s over, and we will recover, together. It’s what we do. You and me, Sal,” Rita assures him patting his leg with her free hand.

“Have I told you you’re the best sister?” Sal asks smiling at his sister’s composed head.

“Several times, but I love hearing the words each time,” Rita laughs.

House watches as his insides are once again being torn apart. The pain is too great, he feels himself sagging under the large amount of construction going on inside of him and even on the outside. The man who is friends with his boy, comes often. He sits on his porch and pats the steps. He stands in the back doorframe and leans on one side with care. House is beginning to feel some warmth from him each day. House has decided he likes this

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man. This man will help bring back his boy, he is confident. He feels warmth in this man’s touch.

~ ~ ~

With college graduation past them, Torrance and Seth have been working with Aunt Rita’s financial manager to put together their final business plan. They have found financial backers on their own and have had meetings with many potential clients already. Everyone is very excited and ready to have them get started.

Tonight, they are meeting with Peshy and a friend of hers. She says this person can help them out a lot in opening doors for them, so they agreed to have dinner with her. Seth and Peshy have been public with their relationship since she moved back. No one in the family was surprised, in fact, they are all happy for the two of them.

Torrance is driving tonight. They are still using their joint car they received from Aunt Rosemary after high school graduation. “I don’t know why I’m nervous about this meeting tonight,” Torrance says.

“Maybe because all our planning has become real. Aunt Rita said we will be able to officially open our business by the end of the year. How many new

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college grads can say they are opening their own business only six months after graduation? We’re living the dream man. I happen to be lucky that I have Peshy with me, but she is with you too. She loves you,” Seth says.

“She is a great sister and I love the fact that you two are together. If I had to pick someone for each of you to have, it would be each other. I know that doesn’t make sense but you both mean the world to me. I’ll never have that. No one wants the boy who is clumsy, the boy with the scars on his arms and face,” Torrance says a bit solemn.

“Hey, you were my wingman for years, became my co-pilot and now you’re my best man. Your scars came when you were wingman, you felt you could fly, you kept trying. No one faulted you, not even your parents. They are the best people in the world. They’ve always been our biggest cheerleaders. Uncle Sal, Aunt Rita and even Aunt Rosemary, we have it all man. We have it all,” Seth says laughing.

“I guess you’re right. I haven’t seen Peshy in a couple months, she said she has a surprise for me. I hope it’s something chocolate,” Torrance finds himself laughing.

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Seth points to the restaurant they are supposed to go to. Torrance pulls in and they go to find Peshy and her business consultant. Peshy stands when she sees them walk in. Her eyes light up when she sees Seth, Torrance notices this right away. Makes him smile too. His two favorite people are well on their way to a happy life together.

Torrance jumps in front of Seth and grabs the first hug to Peshy. Everyone laughs. “You’re too cute,” She kisses his cheeks, one at a time and then she kisses Seth very tenderly.

“Boys, this is Karyn, best friend in college and forever. Karyn, Torrance and Seth,” Peshy laughs.

“Gentlemen, I’ve heard so much about you for years, nice to finally meet you,” she puts her hand out to shake theirs. Seth shakes her hand but Torrance leans over and kisses her on the cheek very softly and sits down next to her.

Peshy is right, this woman, her best friend, has so many ideas she can’t stop talking. Torrance and her keep running ideas through all possibilities of working and not working. Seth keeps bringing up financial backing and how much they would need or not need and Peshy puts in her expertise that compliments Seth’s knowledge of finance.

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Long after dinner is over, the foursome is still talking. They moved to a nearby park and continue talking. As the chill of the late night hits, Torrance gives Karyn his jacket, takes her hand and walks away, giving his sister and Seth some private time.

Torrance’s phone buzzes, ‘*Hey man, we realized it is already 2:00 in the morning. Where are you guys? Maybe we should head back.*’ Seth writes.

Torrance shows the message to Karyn and she laughs. “Oh my. I suppose we can always tell people our first date was an all-nighter?” she jokes with him.

“Date, sounds like a good idea. Many of them sound even better,” Torrance smiles. He calls Seth. ‘*We’re over by the lake, come join us. Let’s watch the sunrise here. You can’t imagine how beautiful this will be.*’

‘*Great idea. We’ll find you.*’ Seth writes back to him and he and Peshy begin to run over to the lake. The couples sit together on the same bench. They talk, but this time not about the business. It was decided that outside of an office, no business will be discussed, since they are all so close. Talking and laughing go on for hours more and no one notices the time.

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“Oh Seth, the sunrise is beautiful. I have never seen anything so fascinating. I’m going to be exhausted tomorrow, or later today, whatever, but this is so worth doing, at least once.”

“No, I don’t agree. The most fascinating thing to look at is you. We can’t wake up and look at this every day but I’d give anything if I could wake up each morning and see your face,” Seth pulls something out of his pocket, he lays it across Peshy’s leg. A simple gold bracelet with a few pearls on it. “Every day for the rest of my life. I want to see your brilliance.”

Torrance is the first to react. “Oh Yeah! We’re having a wedding!” Peshy looks at her brother who is standing up and screaming. She turns her head to Seth, his eyes are beaming with love.

“Yes,” she says barely getting the word out.

Seth grabs her, pulls her in for a deep kiss. When he releases her he says, “I’ve had that for three months in my pocket. Every day. Waiting for the right moment. I had no plan, this sure seemed perfect.”

“I agree,” Peshy says.

“Well damn, now you’ve made me cry,”

Karyn says. “Maybe it’s the lack of sleep.”

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“Or maybe it’s the idea of witnessing true love shine that has you all teary. It does for me too. Hey Peshy, how about we all surprise Mom and Dad and bring breakfast home with balloons so they will understand why none of us came home last night and no one called to say we aren’t dead. We’ll have to let them assume this was planned. No?” Torrance looks at everyone while he stands with his arm around Karyn’s shoulders.

~ ~ ~

House has been empty for over a year now. So much has been done. Floorboards replaced, whole rooms of flooring replaced, a new kitchen, new bathrooms. The garage added on to his side that has more space. They built on top of it to make the rooms upstairs larger. While he feels he looks better for his age, he is still cold.

All these new items don’t make the house any warmer. He is happy those other people are gone. No more bangs or broken pipes. The noise is gone, his neighbors are happy too.

House sees that his neighbor is being emptied today. He sees that it happens to everyone. But his neighbor is not as sad as he was when his boy left. His neighbor told him that sometimes change is

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good. Sometimes you get someone even better. But House has no one better, his boy is all he wants.

~ ~ ~

The day of the wedding is here and the house is bustling around. Rita and Rosemary have come in with their two adopted children, a ten year old boy and an eight year old girl, brother and sister. They haven’t decided if they are finished yet, but for now, this is a good start. Sal’s kids love having more cousins to play with. Everyone accepted the kids easily as a part of their family.

The children are doing much better knowing they actually have more than two mothers, that they have a whole extended family that love them, unconditionally.

Seth spent the night before the wedding having Torrance with him in the basement to prevent him from sneaking up to see Peshy upstairs. They talked most of the night about the business and how well it is doing in its first year as well as talking about Karyn. The woman who has captured Torrance’s heart from the moment they met.

“Torrance, we’ve had a great life together. I can’t believe how lucky we are to still have each

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other in our lives. We’ve done it all and we aren’t even thirty yet. We’ve done it all,” Seth repeats.

“Yeah. Love, loss, school, we’ve done it all. And our women love each other too. Karyn’s dad said he wants to help us out and get us on the next step quickly because he has confidence in what we are doing. I’m inclined to let him help. What do you think?” Torrance asks.

“Let’s make this happen. We’re going to take over our own part of the world. We have emotional support, we even have financial support. Now we both have personal support. Ok, I’m ready. Let’s get married,” Seth says.

~ ~ ~

House is being prepared for something today. The last group of people moved out a few months ago and now the painting again is coming. The floors are being sanded and sealed. The shutters are being replaced with new ones that remind House of the way he used to look, only newer. He feels comfortable but he doesn’t know why.

The back half of House has been pushed out and the first floor as well as second floor have been extended. The house now has a second floor with five bedrooms and two large bathrooms along with

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an even larger master bedroom made from the boy’s old room.

The first floor now has a banquet sized dinning room, a large den or office as well as a professional looking kitchen. This new enlarged house gives House hope that something great is going to happen. The new design has him feeling good already. Change is in the air. Again. But he still hopes for his boy. He will always hope.

~ ~ ~

Torrance and Seth spend their twenty-fifth birthdays together. No wives, or family. It has been ten years since Seth’s life fell apart.

They have splurged on a fancy restaurant that they would not usually frequent, today is a big day. They have a lot to celebrate. “I can’t believe that the night you proposed is the night I met my wife. Now we are both expecting our first children within two weeks of each other. Life doesn’t get any better than this. So many of the people that we knew back in high school are still struggling trying to find their first good break, many are stuck in no-frills jobs.”

Seth looks over at his friend, “My life may have started out rocky, however, in my opinion, the two of us are rocking adulthood so far. But I’m sure there will be stumbling blocks along the way. Trying

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not to sound too sappy, but Torrance, here is to us,” Seth lifts his wine glass and toasts his friend.

Torrance and Seth enjoy a leisurely meal and during dessert Seth receives a strange message on his phone. *‘meet us at the old house’*

Seth looks up and Torrance is showing him his phone with the same text. “I suppose dinner time is over. But why would my aunt want me to go back there. I haven’t been there in ten years. I never looked back. I never even rode my bike over there, what about you?” Seth asks.

“I don’t know. Maybe to see how far you’ve come. Show you where you came from and all that,” Torrance answers.

“Ok, well, let’s go.” Seth and Torrance leave the restaurant and head over to Seth’s old home. A place of not such great memories, yeah, maybe Torrance is right. To show him how far he has come. His aunt frequently drops in the area lately to make sure everyone stays in touch.

The drive is silent. When they pull up in front of the house, they see everyone. Torrance’s family, Sal’s, the aunts, as they’ve been called in recent years. Even their wives are standing there smiling as they get out of the car. The men walk over to their wives and each gives them a kiss then hold

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their hand and look to the aunts because somehow they both feel this is who is in charge of the night.

Rita speaks first, “Seth. We’ve kept this house for Hilly. She left it in your name. We didn’t want you to have a house at age fifteen, but now, as a man who owns his own business, a wife and a child on the way. Sal and I have been updating the insides along the way. When Peshy got pregnant we decided to do more, the house has been enlarged so you will have plenty of room to grow and grow. Hilly would be so proud,” Rita breaks down a moment and allows herself to miss her old friend.

Rosemary walks up behind her and hugs her. Torrance’s father steps up next. “We all knew Hilly and the way she cared for you Seth. However, since Peshy will be living in that house, I don’t have to worry about providing for her. But Torrance, on the other hand, married outside of the family,” everyone laughs.

“Karyn your folks as well as my wife and I would like to present you and Torrance with the house next door. It is too hard for the two of you to go too far from each other. While it may not be as big or as updated...” Torrance jumps over to his father and hugs him. Karyn is stunned in her place,

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she is not quite sure what to do with this announcement.

A lot of tears and laughter follow. Tonight, both families will be sleeping in their new homes. While at dinner, the movers have already moved all their belongings from their apartments into their new homes. Torrance’s mom kept their wives busy.

As Seth and Peshy walk into the master bedroom, the house sighs. A comfort House hasn’t felt in so many years. He knew his boy would come back. He feels complete. This is his forever owner, he knows now. Peace.

“Did you feel that?” Seth asks.

“Is it weird if I say I think the house just welcomed us home? Is that what you are referring to?” Peshy asks.

“Yeah, we’re home. Our home, forever,” Seth says. He touches the wall of his new room as he remembers doing right before he left.

~ ~

He is home. House no longer has to feel cold, ever.

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