



# Letters from the Heart

Haskell and Kirk are the best of friends, their lives become intertwined with an unexpected twist. One day the two of them had an assignment to write a special letter. They did. What unfolds from those letters will change their lives forever.



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Haskell and Kirk have been best of friends since Kirk moved in two years ago. They were drawn together when they noticed that they each only have a mother in their family. While Kirk’s parents are divorced, Haskell has never known his biological father. Both boys are home sick today, they stayed at Haskell’s house because this is the day his mom has cleaning help come and she agreed to stay around extra hours to watch the boys until one of the mothers gets home. A friend comes by to bring them each a balloon and an assignment.

“We did this today, teacher said she thought you might want to participate. Here is the paper we filled out, you put it in an envelope and tie it to the balloon and watch them fly. She said not to worry about other homework, we didn’t do much today. See you tomorrow,” Geni, their neighbor and friend, says.

“Great, thanks Geni, you’re the best. What did they serve for hot lunch? We’ve both been eating soup all day and my mom says I’ll be eating it again tonight unless my stomach gets better,” Haskell groans.

“Worms and rubber balls, otherwise called spaghetti and meatballs. I took the salad and ate my roll which I brought from home for such an occasion. I have to get home to help the babysitter with the little ones. Feel better guys,” she calls to them and walks down to her own house. Geni has three smaller siblings, she is the oldest one, and at ten years old, she has a lot of responsibilities but she doesn’t mind. Sometimes Haskell and Kirk come

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over and play with her brothers for a while after school, that usually helps her a lot.

Haskell looks at Kirk and says, “Hey let’s do this before our moms get home. They won’t want us doing this, probably think it’s a useless assignment and consider letting the balloons go as littering. I can tell by the paper Geni gave me. Take a look at the assignment,” he hands one to Kirk.

On the top of the page it says, “If you could write to a person in heaven what would you say?”

“It seems kind of dumb Haskell,” Kirk says.

“But at the same time, we, at least, don’t have the teacher looking at ours. We can write to whomever we want, say what we want. Whoever finds this might help. Come on. Let’s do this. I promise not to look at yours and you can’t see mine. We can say whatever we want, anything at all,” Haskell looks to his friend.

“Ok, yeah, let’s get things from our hearts off of our chest for someone else to think about. Either they will think we are crazy, or not, but who cares. It will be out of our heads for a while. OK, I’m in,” Kirk walks into Haskell’s kitchen and grabs two pencils from the drawer. “Here,” he says and they both sit at different ends of the room and begin to write.

Haskell knows exactly who he is writing to, his father. The words come easy, he gets up and looks in a drawer for a picture he is thinking of. He finds one easily and adds on a picture of his mother as well as himself.

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Dear Dad,

You don't know me, my name is Haskell. I'm ten years old now. Mom says I was born after you died. Actually, she says after you went away, but we all know what that means. Here is my picture, you can see me. I think I look good. I'm tall and I'm strong, she says I get that from you. My blue eyes are from her.

I'm doing ok, I have a great friend named Kirk. He lives down the block. It's Mom that is having a hard time now.

You see, I had a step-father for a while. But then one day right before bed time, a man came to the door with an envelope. He gave it to Mom and said goodbye.

In the envelope was papers that said he is not coming back. Said he was not going to give her money. He gave her the house we live in and said that is all.

Mom told me after school that day that she has a baby in her stomach. The step-dad doesn't even know, she was going to tell him that night, made all his favorite foods too. She said now we have to keep the baby a secret. She said now she is all alone. Again.

She doesn't talk much to me anymore about serious stuff like she used to. She yells at the baby inside her all the time. She says things like; 'you better be a girl and look like me'.

Here is her picture, my mom is beautiful. I want her to be happy again. If you can see her, please send her your happiness from when you made me with her. Mom said that was always a happy time in her life. That I was made from pure happiness and love. Two hearts that merged to make me. That is what she says to me. Always from love.

She needs happiness. She needs a friend like Kirk. I think we should get the moms together, they could use each other. Yeah, I'll do that from here. I think this will help. You do what you can do from there. We will work together.

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Thank you for listening.  
Haskell

Haskell finishes his letter and seals the envelope the teacher gave, he ties the letter to his balloon. He looks over at Kirk who has just finished tying his too. “You ok?” he asks.

“Yeah, I poured my heart out, did you?” Kirk asks

“Yeah, isn’t that weird? But you know what I decided? I think we should make our moms meet, they could use a good friend and seeing that we are such good friends, maybe it will help them to have someone to talk to as well. Let’s make that happen tonight,” Haskell tells him.

“Ok, I’ll call my mom and tell her to come here for dinner. Your mom said we are eating at 5:30 tonight, my mom was going to eat at home alone. Let’s do this!” Kirk says with a renewed sense of enjoyment. Something is going to turn around, he can feel goodness inside of him.

The boys prepare dinner instead of waiting for Haskell’s mom to come home. They’ve been feeling much better since they wrote their letters; they pulled out some noodles to make as well as some frozen breaded chicken pieces. Haskell even cut up a salad with the items he knows his mom likes best.

Haskell’s mom comes in the house to the smell of food, she walks into the kitchen thinking her cleaning

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woman is making dinner and sees the boys. “Hey, what is going on?”

“We were feeling better, we washed our hands a lot before we started cooking. We are tired of soup and Geni gave us our homework and we finished everything already. I promise, you can ask Rosalie, she left already by the way. Maybe you can help me study for the spelling test again though, that is always on Thursdays. Oh, and we invited Kirk’s mom to join us, she will be here soon. How was your day? How do you feel today?” Haskell asks looking at his mom’s belly. She isn’t showing yet, but he knows she will soon, he has seen Geni’s mom pregnant.

“Wow, Haskell, I don’t know what to say. I’m sorry I haven’t been there for you lately. I’ve been working hard, you know that, right?” she looks to her son who is growing up before he has to.

“I know. I’m working hard too. I keep watching all those cooking shows to learn how to help you in the kitchen but tonight, I opened up already made chicken from the freezer, is that ok? The pasta and salad are fresh though,” he smiles, he is happy to see his mother smile, it has been a long time.

“Haskell, you’re one in a million. Well, you too Kirk. What time is your mom coming?” she asks again.

“5:30 Maám. Um, she isn’t quite as strong as you are. But she could sure use a friend these days. She and my dad keep fighting. I don’t want to live with him. His house is weird and his wife is creepy. They eat fancy food

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and some of their food is slimy and inside seashells. Yech,” he looks at Haskell’s mom.

“Oh my, that doesn’t sound too good, does it now? Ok, let me freshen up. Haskell, my dear. I’m fine by the way. We’re going to be fine. I promise. I’m good now,” she pats his head and ruffles his hair before she leaves.

Twenty minutes later, Kirk’s mom is at the door, looking rather frazzled. “Hello, maybe this is a bad day for me to be here, but the kids asked so sincerely, and I try not to disappoint him. He has enough disappointments in life,” Kirk’s mom says to Haskell’s mom.

She puts her hand out to shake Haskell’s mom’s hand, “Velvet, and you?” Haskell’s mom asks

“Really? Lotus, as in the flower. Sorry for the lousy mood. Exes, you know?” she grins.

“I’m kind of in the middle of that myself. Let’s eat, when the kids go play, we’ll have a glass of wine and talk. I think we should get to know one another since the boys can’t live without each other and we live down the block from each other,” Velvet says.

“Sounds good. But I can’t drink wine, I had alcohol poisoning as a young child and it still affects me funny to this day. Thirty-two years old and I can’t even drink a social glass of wine,” Lotus says in exasperation.

“Well, in actuality, I probably shouldn’t be drinking it either,” Velvet rubs her belly. “We’ll find

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some good tea and pretend its wine. I’ll even pour it in my good glasses.” Velvet laughs and so does Lotus.

Haskell and Kirk give each other a thumb’s up seeing how easily their moms get along with each other. Maybe this is what Mom needs, Haskell thinks to himself. Someone to talk to, someone to share the things she can’t share with him. An adult friend.

~ ~ ~

“So, that’s me, in a nutshell. Ever since the car accident, my husband dubbed me unworthy of looking at, so now he is suing for full custody of our child, because he doesn’t think Kirk should be subjected to looking at me every day,” Lotus says.

“Wow, that’s a load of crap. If you look like this after an accident, you must have been drop dead gorgeous beforehand because what you have left over is more than what I’ve ever been, even on my best days,” Velvet tells her.

“Thank you for that. But sometimes the scars are hard. My own mom doesn’t visit much because she always refers to how I was. I tell her I’m still her daughter, same as always. It’s like everyone has moved on. My boss loves me, because he knows his biggest clients won’t work with anyone else, so he is stuck with me. I think he is also afraid that I could leave and go out on my own and they’d all follow me. The boss knows they will, one of them already threatened to pull me away and work with him exclusively, if my boss didn’t shut up once. I don’t want

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the responsibility of my own office. I’m an accountant by the way. I do well enough that I don’t need my husband’s alimony. But I do need him to pay the mortgage. We live in the smallest house on the block, but when we first bought, our money was already being very stretched. Now that he has made his money and then some, in a quick turn of events in business and the stock market, he wanted to move up, then the accident happened. He could buy and sell the house four times over if he wanted and not miss a dime.

Ever since the divorce he and Edna have been together. He likes to blame this on the accident but it was awfully convenient for him that the accident happened when it did, don’t you think?” Lotus asks.

“I think a lot about that, but, Edna? I thought that name went out in the early 1900s,” Velvet laughs. “Ooo, I’m sorry that was mean, and I can’t even blame my lack of inhibition on the wine,” Velvet laughs some more and so does Lotus.

When she calms down Lotus says, “His lawyer doesn’t know that my ex has sent me things via text or email. I have in writing what he said about my not being worthy to look at. How he thinks it’s a form of child abuse to make Kirk see me every day. And the best one is when he said, and I quote, ‘You know I always get what I want, so you’d best just hand him over. I’ll win, any judge looking at you will have sympathy on me and Kirk. Edna says he needs to be far from you, like boarding school far, I’ll get him. He is mine, not yours. My house, my

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children,’ I swear to you that is what he said,” Lotus says softly, no longer feeling confident. “And he does, you know. Always get what he wants,” she says even quieter afterwards.

“Lotus, do you have a good lawyer? If not, my uncle will take him on in a heartbeat and beat his ass to the ground. Both in and out of the courtroom if necessary,” Velvet says trying to smile at her new friend.

“I can’t afford the kind of lawyer who could do that,” Lotus says.

“You have his words in writing, but if your lawyer won’t put this on the table, it is irrelevant. Please. Can I call my uncle? At least speak to him on the phone. You said you’re going to court tomorrow, let him guide you, in case your lawyer doesn’t do right. Please?” Velvet is pleading. She has to help. This can’t go through, her son would be devastated, and Kirk would never survive a stuffy boarding school. Edna simply wants no part of him and wants his father to herself and probably his money too but she’ll forgo some of it to ship poor Kirk away. But she can’t say that right now, the woman, her new friend, is too fragile to hear that.

“Ok, I guess one conversation can’t hurt,” Lotus says softly.

“I’ll be right back,” Velvet walks out of the room to make the call. She is back quickly. “I couldn’t stop him, he is on his way over. He is a steamroller when he needs to be. He is the best of the best. Do you know your husband’s lawyer’s name? He had asked me,” Velvet says.

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“I’d best run home then, and get all my papers I’ve been printing out, plus all the other stuff I have. Are you sure? We’ve only met but I feel like we’ve been friends a long time,” Lotus says.

“Yeah, like our boys do. Go. I’ll give them some snacks, it seems they are truly feeling better. We can let them sit in the basement with a movie; that will buy us enough time. My uncle is only fifteen minutes away. Go,” Velvet shoos Lotus out the door and walks to the den where the boys are.

“Hey you two, listen Haskell, Uncle Wyatt is on his way over, I think he can help Kirk’s mom with her ex-husband. I hope you don’t mind. But can you two go downstairs and watch a movie? Stay out of earshot. I’m not sure you should hear any of this. Even Kirk, ok?” she asks

Haskell jumps out of his chair and into his mother’s arms. “I knew you’d help. I knew you would,” he whispers. “I love you for all the world to see,” he says out loud.

“Thank you,” Kirk says softly. Velvet puts a hand on Kirk’s shoulder for a second before they proceed downstairs. She then takes a deep breath because what her son said to her means more to her than he will ever know. Those are the same words his father had said to her so many years ago. The same exact words, she thinks to herself.

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Lotus walks herself into the house with a large folder of papers. She puts them down on the dining room table and says, “This is all I have.”

Velvet looks at her, she has found a friend. Maybe helping Lotus out will help herself as well. Being needed without the responsibility of dependency, a welcome change. The knock at the door has her running to the door.

“I’m going to kill him myself. Who is his lawyer, don’t tell me, maybe I know him and I really will kill him. Sit down young lady, we have a lot of work to do and not a lot of time. Velvet? Any strong coffee in the house?” he asks as he spies the folders and is already going through them.

Velvet and Lotus watch as her uncle scans through all the paperwork one page at a time, then he goes to the front of the file and starts organizing the papers in some kind of order. He asks a question here or there then refiles something differently. Jots notes down on the side of the folder when questions are answered. When he finally takes a break he looks at Lotus, “He is trying to screw you over big time. He no more wants the responsibility of taking care of his son as he’d want a hole in his head. Although I’m pretty sure I can arrange a hole or two,” Wyatt shakes his head, “He is looking for ways to get back at you. For what? I don’t know.

Maybe for not looking as bad as he makes you out to be, so he can ease his own conscious about having an affair with Edna for six months before you had the

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accident. Yeah, I can tell, one of my many gifts. He is trying to paint you as the bad guy. He will never get custody of Kirk as long as I’m alive, but he could take your home away. Claim it was his and his alone, he could pull some nasty crap like that and make you move to an apartment or something. How are you doing financially?” he asks.

Lotus looks completely scared out of her mind now, lose the house? Where would she go? They only moved in two years ago. Her own family won’t look at her scared face and arms. What were they thinking would happen when you’re pushed through a windshield? She is grateful she lived. They don’t seem to be. Not all of them, her mom still talks to her all the time, but seeing her in person is hard. She keeps taking deep breaths.

Velvet speaks up. “What would happen if she offered to give up the house tomorrow? Then asking him to walk away from his son whom he doesn’t want anyway. Not saying where she will live to him because if he is no longer paying her housing, and no longer responsible for her son, he has no needs to know,” Velvet pauses, “What if, instead of living on her own, she moves into this huge house with me? I mean we’re only two people living in a giant six bedroom home, our kids are best of friends and this house is paid for by a man who felt giving me a home is equal to paying child support for eight years. She and I will split some electric bills and food, Lord knows her son practically eats here every day anyway. Not that I care, I don’t, but what if?” she looks at her uncle then to Lotus.

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“Hold that thought,” he says and walks away on his phone.

Lotus looks at Velvet, “Are you crazy? I could be some psycho who will make your life a living hell. How do you know I don’t have crazy habits? I could be as crazy as my ex says I am,” she looks to Velvet.

“Not with a boy like Kirk you can’t. Lotus in the cosmic world of coincidences, the reason we met tonight is definitely big. We will fight as roommates, our boys will fight as brothers do. We may not even speak for days, but you will have a roof over your head, no obligations towards your ex at all. You might be able to completely walk away from him this time. Isn’t that worth something? If it doesn’t work out in six months, you can look for something else. But complete freedom, no strings attached? Has to be worth something. My uncle has been gone too long. He is plotting something, I’m sure. He has no tolerance for emotional abuse. Physical either, but emotional scars last longer Uncle Wyatt says. He is a divorce attorney by the way. This is what he does in his sleep. He makes sure women are dealt a fair deal. You’ll see,” Velvet says.

“Ok ladies, this is what is going down now. I notified your current lawyer and told him to messenger me over all of your files; that I was taking over your case. When he argued I let him know who I was, he shut up pretty quickly. He can’t win over me, I promise you that. He is a weak person as humans go, forget about being a

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lawyer, my guess is, his own wife rules the show there, possibly even his mother too.

That aside, I contacted your ex’s lawyer as well. He was none too pleased to hear from me. I said we don’t want to push off the court date tomorrow so he should send me all he has tonight. His lawyer is a sharp guy, but he only takes on rich men to work with. He likes to bulldoze over unsuspecting women. The whole divorce thing, is a game to him. How much can he get his already non-deserving clients. How much humiliation can he make the woman suffer in public. I refuse to go up against him in court. If I ever have to face him, it is only in a judge’s chamber. Since I’m coming in late to this one, he will still think he gets to parade all your dirty laundry. But he won’t, because I’ll put a quick stop to all of what he has. My staff is on your side and any chance I get to take your ex’s lawyer’s ego down a few notches is all fun for me. He will see tomorrow what a real lawyer does for a client,” he takes a big breath and continues softer.

“Ok, that being said. Velvet’s idea isn’t horrible. Kirk will stay in the same school, same friends, nothing in his life will change. Your ex can put up the house for sale but not many realtors around here will take him on, because this case is public, not private, and if they look him up, and they will, no one will want to work with him. He will have to sell by owner and try and find a lawyer to do the paperwork. For the right money he can find someone. But he won’t be making much profit, I assure you.

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The judge you are going before is a long-time advocate of women’s rights. Your ex’s lawyer thinks he can charm everyone. It will be a circus, but we won’t be the clowns, they will be. Oh, and Lotus? This one’s on me. As I said before, any chance I get to knock this man down, is a bonus day for me.

One thing to consider is Kirk’s opinion of his father. Will he miss him? Will he want to live here and never see his father again, something to consider. I can go down and talk to him man to man if you’d like. If you trust me to do so,” he says softly.

Lotus looks at him and back at Velvet. “It sure is a lot to take in all of a sudden. I was still getting used to the idea of having a friend close by. I don’t even know your birthday, your favorite ice cream,” she looks at Velvet.

“July twentieth, and mint chocolate chip,” Velvet says softly but with a big smile.

“Oh no you aren’t,” Lotus goes to grab her purse and digs out her driver’s license. She hands it to Velvet. Velvet looks down and sees July twenty-first listed as the birthday, same year.

“Well then. I guess it’s settled,” Velvet says showing the license to her uncle.

“I’ll go talk to the boys, get their take on what will be the new normal in their lives,” he says and stands to walk down the hall to the bathroom first before heading to the boys.

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“Velvet, I met you hours ago and you’ve turned my life upside down. But in a good way. I promise, you’ll hardly notice me. I can’t believe this is going to work. No more, never again will I be forced to see him? In court or otherwise?” she asks.

“Seems that way. Oh Lotus, I hope you don’t mind screaming babies,” Velvet says completely forgetting she was pregnant for a moment.

She sits down and explains her situation to Lotus, how she became pregnant and on the day she was going to tell her ex, he served her with papers that explicitly said she can have the house and nothing more, that he paid the place off. She owns it free and clear and he was done with her.

~ ~ ~

“How did court go?” Velvet asks Lotus

“I’m so glad you called. I have no one else to talk to. Your uncle is a force, let me tell you. I hope I’m never on the other side of his team. I was a nervous wreck walking into the court room. You never really know what to expect until you’re there. My ex was there with his attorney and with Edna, she was smirking the whole time. I think she got what she wanted, only him. Your uncle was right about that.

She has him so twisted up, that he willingly gave away his own child to please her. Bitch. Kirk told me before bed last night that she serves him oysters all the time and sushi, he hates that stuff and walks into the

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kitchen to make himself pasta. Sometimes she has none in the house and she laughs when he looks for some. Last time he went, he told me he brought his own food in his backpack so that when he walked away from the table after eating only the vegetables, he would tell her thank you for a great meal and leave to his room. He hated lying but he is a survivor.

Back to today. The judge allowed your uncle to present his case first, when the other lawyer heard about, and saw all the written statements from my ex about how worthless I am and how he would do whatever he wanted, how his lawyer is a puppet same as all the rest of the people he has to deal with, he nearly fell off his chair. There wasn’t much to argue after that. I can’t thank you enough. Your uncle also had proof that their affair was going on over six months before my accident,” Lotus says. “I don’t know how he found that so fast and I don’t want to know but the surprised look in Edna’s face was worth it. Not sure she knew he was married then, maybe she thought we were separated or something.”

“Lotus, what about living? Where are you going to live in the end?” she asks cautiously. No one made a final decision last night.

“If the offer still stands, I’d love to move down the block. I hear there is a lot of empty space waiting to be filled,” Lotus says swallowing some pride.

“I’m serving pasta with chicken tonight, Haskell’s favorite. Want to bring a salad?” she asks

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“Velvet,” and then the tears came, she can’t hold back anymore. Velvet stays on the phone with Lotus until she is able to calm herself down enough to turn on the car and head home. Her ex gave her twenty-four hours to pack up and leave.

Velvet decides to leave her office and meet Lotus at her home. She is going to need help. When she gets there she sees her uncle, his son, and two of his daughters, all with their pick-up trucks ready to go. She smiles at her cousins, she knew they’d all come if need be. He has used them before. Sometimes a woman needs support and Uncle Wyatt is perfect at that.

As Lotus pulls into her own driveway she can’t believe her eyes. She gets out of the car and walks into Wyatt’s arms. Then to Velvet, which is when she breaks down again. “It’s like the divorce is happening all over again only worse. I’m not a fit mother, look what I’m doing to my son,” she says through tears.

“Come on, you knew this was going to end this way, Kirk doesn’t mind. Haskell certainly doesn’t mind, and neither do I. My uncle brought his moving crew, come on, let’s go in and do this all in one shot. When the boys get home, they can help each other sort through stuff,” Velvet hugs Lotus one more time before Lotus opens her front door.

Lotus steps in and gasps loudly. She looks around her living room and runs to the kitchen, she screams and Velvet’s uncle pushes her aside and runs in. “Don’t move a thing I’m calling the police. It could have

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only been one person to do this. Velvet you go upstairs, hopefully their clothes are still whole, pack up the trucks and leave. I’ll stay here and wait for the police with Stan.”

Velvet looks around the room, sheer chaos. He came in and slashed all the furniture, she can see dishes on the floor, she holds on to Lotus as they go upstairs. “You go first, I can’t look,” Lotus says at the top of the stairs.

First Velvet checks Kirk’s room. “Looks ok. Nothing broken but not much here in the closet.”

“He must have taken all that he and Edna bought for Kirk probably,” Lotus says in defeat.

“Probably all his toys too, I hope he didn’t show up at school. Well, no one called from there so probably not. He may or may not know where the school is anyway,” Lotus says more to herself than out loud.

“The boys are the same size, no one will know at school if they are wearing the same things. Jeans and t-shirts are all the same,” Velvet says trying to reassure Lotus. This is so messed up, she thinks to herself. What is the purpose of doing this? To make sure she had nothing to take? Why punish the boy like this?

“Velvet. I don’t want anything. We’ll start from scratch ok. Leave everything here. Burn it all, let them deal with the contents when they have to sell. They didn’t say I had to clean out the house, only take what I wanted in the next twenty-four hours. He must have come over immediately after the trial, after we spoke earlier. He

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knew I was going to see a client, it was a very important one I couldn’t push off, somehow, he knew I wasn’t going home right away. Like him, I was going to work. Can you check on one thing in my room for me please?” Lotus looks to her new friend, new roommate.

“Sure, anything for you,” Velvet says.

“In my closet under my shoes, there should be a flat box, it’s as blue as the carpet so no one sees. My grandmother’s necklace is there and her wedding ring. Please, get that and let’s go. If that isn’t there I’m suing his ass for what those pieces are worth, and it’s worth a lot more than sentimental value I assure you that; I had the necklace appraised and almost fainted,” Lotus says.

Velvet walks into the master bedroom. There are two broken mirrors. One has a note written in lipstick that says, ‘*probably doesn’t look any different to you this way.*’ She is happy Lotus chose not to go into her own room. She finds the closet and happily sees the box, she pulls off the top to make sure the items are there. They are. She turns to see the mirror in the master bathroom is also broken, she is afraid to see what is written on that one. Velvet feels herself trying to exhale now. She stands up straighter and walks out of the room, she closes the door behind her.

“Is there anything else of value?” she asks.

“No. Clothes can be replaced. I haven’t bought anything since the divorce so I’m willing to start anew. I’ll go look at the thrift places. Start with a few essentials. Maybe my mom will pitch in to buy things for Kirk. I’ve

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never asked her before, but maybe she will be willing to do that, if I explain the truth to her. He is still her grandson, you know. Sometimes she does talk to him. He likes her well enough,” Lotus says.

“Call her right away, from the car. Come, we will drive over to my place.” When the women get downstairs, the police are already there. Velvet looks at her uncle who sees they are empty-handed. She walks over to him and whispers what is written on the mirror upstairs that she actually read and what else she saw. She kisses his cheek and that of her cousins. “You guys can still come for dinner. I’m making chicken and pasta because Haskell thinks that is a staple in his diet, I believe Kirk does too,” she looks to Lotus who can only shake her head yes.

~ ~ ~

Walt is taking his usual morning walk with his dog, around the park. The morning’s mist is still on the ground, the sun isn’t quite up yet. Brisk walking has become Walt’s routine over the past few years. He likes starting his day with some movement but he hates to exercise in the traditional sense of the word. No sit ups for this guy, no weights either.

His dog begins to bark at something on the ground. Walt walks over to see what the dog sees. In front of him is a deflated balloon so he picks it up to bring it over to the trashcan when he sees a letter attached. He tears the letter off, throws out the balloon, and pockets the letter. He will look at this with his morning coffee.

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Walt is big on routine, he walks over to his favorite café and sits at one of the outdoor tables so he can keep his dog next to him. The dog lays at his feet as he takes the first sip of his coffee. He takes out the letter and begins to read. Walt has never been more shaken in his life. This can’t be true. How did he find this today? How can this be? But it has to be her, no one else looks as beautiful. No one else has that dimple so high up on their left cheek.

And the boy? His boy. Now he knows why she told him so many years ago that a long-distance relationship isn’t going to work. But why didn’t she tell him the truth? Why has she been doing this alone all this time? And she is willing to do this alone again it seems. “Oh Velvet,” he whispers. The only person he can think to call is his mother, “Hello Mom,” he says.

“Oh dear, what’s wrong?” she asks knowing full well he never says more than ‘Hi, it’s me’ when he calls.

“I need to see you. Can I come? Today? Really, today,” he says with a sigh. For the first time in his adult life Walt is thrilled that he has enough money to do as he pleases. His companies run themselves mostly, he has some great managers and financial people who keep things moving. He helped a friend by investing in his idea eight years ago and then the whole world opened up for both of them. The business has since been sold and both he and his friend made enough to almost retire on already. But that sounds boring, so they keep starting new things together and investing wisely.

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“I’ll cancel everything I have. When will you be here?” she asks cautiously.

“I’ll go home and pack, drop off the dog to my neighbor, he likes him better than me anyway, and be on the road within the hour. I suppose I’ll be there by noon or shortly thereafter. See you soon,” he hangs up with his head heavy.

Walt left Velvet ten years ago. He is a couple years older than her and she was still in school. He was finished and had a great job offer here so he had to take it. No one gets such a good job right after graduation, he had that kind of offer that would have been foolish to pass up.

Walt tried as hard as he could, he called her almost every day, tried to come visit on long weekends but she kept pushing him off. Kept pushing him away. He did not understand why, when they were together, they were kindred spirits. Of one mind, the most blessed he had ever felt, the most whole. Losing her was a crush. He stopped calling like she asked, but he wrote to her constantly. Telling her his feelings towards her and about his work.

Never a letter back, then finally he received his own letter back with ‘return to sender’ written on the top. He was crushed all over again. How could they have gone from so deeply infatuated to leave me alone so quickly? He has missed ten years of his son’s life. Ten years! He has a son. He wants a million more with her. The very thought of her has him missing her all over again. His son

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thinks he is dead, that is a cruel blow as well. Although, she said away, not dead, that part is his son’s interpretation by his own admission in the letter.

He would have come home, would have made things work. Brought her to him and had her finish her degree near him. They are only a few hours away from each other. Today, the anniversary of when he moved over here, today he finds this letter. Amazed that the balloon flew this far.

As he nears his mother’s house, he wants to run to the local police or maybe the post office and find her and hold her. He wants to grab her up and never let her go. He pulls into his mom’s complex and heads to her building. He bought her this condominium when his money became more than he needed for himself.

After that, he paid for his brother’s wedding as well as his sister’s. He made sure they had everything they wanted, in the place they wanted for their dream wedding. If he wasn’t going to get married himself, the least he could do was to make sure the ones he loved most, were happy. His youngest brother is still finishing college, but when the time comes, he will get his dream wedding too. Walt already put away money in a special account in his baby brother’s name.

With his shoulders hung low, he knocks on his mother’s door. She opens the door, then opens her arms to her eldest son who looks as if he wants to climb into her lap and cry. He hugs his mom tightly, when he lets go he sighs.

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Walt walks into the kitchen and gets something to drink. His mom is on the first floor and has a modest little porch with some grass, enough to sit in a chair and appreciate the day, with enough space for her to do some gardening.

He walks back into the living room where he left his mom standing, hands her the letter, and falls onto the couch with his head face down.

She takes the letter to her favorite wingback chair and sits down to read. She quickly covers her mouth so she doesn’t scream, she knows that boy, she’d recognize him anywhere, he is the exact copy of his father at that age. She looks down at the other picture, Velvet? Oh no. She reads the letter, now that she knows what is going on, what has him so crushed.

Oh, that poor boy. Poor Velvet. She loved that girl years ago, she would have helped her, she could have lived with me, she thinks to herself. Finished her degree than gone to live with Walt. Oh, my dear, you are still loved. Don’t you know that? He would have come back for you. With her heart hurting for her son, her grandson and for the woman she knew years ago. Roxy walks over to her son, she sits next to him on the couch and rubs his back as she had done when he was a small child and in need of her love.

She lets him lay there, she sits next to him for nearly twenty minutes when Roxy finally says, “Walt, please sit up. Let’s figure this out. A very delicate situation. We can’t go running over there and say hi.

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Although part of me wants to hold that little boy tightly, now and forever. But a second one? I wish she would have told me, or you, one of us. And more importantly, how did it get to you so far away?”

Walt sits up and looks at his mother. “I thought about that too, I’m guessing it was stuck on someone’s truck for a while and must have loosened when near me. Mom, I’m hurting all over again. What do I do? Walk up to her door and say, hey, I had this letter fall into my lap, know anything about it? Mom, I want to hold him, I want to hold her more importantly. I’m a wreck. We have to do something. Can we figure out where she lives and then you can accidentally run into her at a nearby grocery store, everyone has to eat some time.”

“How do you know she is even in this area?”

Roxy asks.

“Look at his shirt, has the school emblem on the front pocket. My old school Mom. They are here. I want to go to school and watch him, but they might arrest me for stalking. Ugh! I want her back, no one has every compared to her. No one! I’m alone because no one ever came close to making me feel like she did. I love my sister and brothers and I love you Mom, but Velvet? That was so different. I made every effort, I called daily. I wrote letters. I never wanted us to stop, two years, two long years of trying to stay in touch. Why did she cut me off?” Walt begins to cry, his heart broken all over again, the pain feeling fresh.

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Roxy sits and holds her son. This is hard, going to be harder if they can’t find or get through to Velvet. She thinks a while. “I’ve got an idea son. I know what to do,” she says.

Walt sits up from her lap and looks at her face, “I’m listening.”

“The school used to have a career night in the spring. I used to go every year to speak with kids who might be interested in science and show them all the wonderful things they could do with science knowledge. Remember? I had a great booth. It’s February, time for them to be planning again, if they still do the fair. I’ll ask again. Even though my kids are long gone. Maybe they still want me. I’ll work on as a volunteer and try to get to see him, hopefully she’d come to the event with him. Then on the night of the event, you can watch from afar and approach slowly. In public, where she might feel safer,” Roxy looks at her son.

Walt thinks about the whole thing. “That will take too long. I’ll burst by then.”

“You’ve waited this long,” she says.

“Ok, call tomorrow. In the meantime, let’s go make dinner together. I’m thinking your famous meatballs will do the trick,” Walt smiles at his mother and she hugs him again.

~ ~ ~

Lotus and Kirk have been living with Velvet and Haskell for a little over three weeks now. Lotus’s mom

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came immediately when she heard what happened. She took both the boys shopping but Haskell only went to keep his friend company, he refused to let her buy him anything saying he had enough. He didn’t turn down her desire to buy them ice cream cones though. The knock at the door has everyone jump at the kitchen table. “I’ll get that,” Velvet says.

She walks to the door to see her uncle. “You didn’t call first, everything ok?” she asks.

“I need to talk to you guys. Kind of important. Can I come in?” he asks.

“Oh sure, go in the den, I’ll get Lotus,” Velvet grabs her friend out of the kitchen and tells the boys to please finish eating and then go do homework.

“Ok, what is going on now?” Lotus asks.

“It has taken this long to do the investigation on the house, pictures were taken first, fingerprints, tire prints on the roadway and believe it or not your neighbor across the street came voluntarily to the police when he saw you move out, to say he saw your ex enter the door and come out holding a lot of clothes. He took a couple of pictures but has been laid up with a pulled out back and hadn’t been able to get them to the police until a few days ago, he lives alone. A good man to befriend. For both of you, he is protector of the block, he refers to himself. He told the police to give you two his phone number, seems he is the neighborhood watchdog, not just this block. Nice to know you have one. Unless he becomes a pest. However, he appears to be sincere in his

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duties. Even if self-imposed. He walks the block twice a day, predawn and after dark.

My partner, who handles these types of things, informed me an hour ago that your ex is being charged with robbery, vandalism and fraud because he tried to make a claim to his homeowner’s insurance that the house was robbed. This no longer concerns you really, but in case Edna comes after you, I wanted you to know. She can’t do anything legally. But she is his wife, and she just lost her money because he can’t make any in jail, and his accounts were frozen due to a separate investigation which you don’t need to know about. They consider him a flight risk. You definitely got out in time on this one. His lawyer noticed that there is only one joint account, the rest are ruled by him, meaning your ex, alone. She may or may not know of any of the other ones. He brought this upon himself Lotus, nothing you can do,” he says with a heavy heart.

“Thank you for telling us. Why don’t you come have ice cream with the boys? They’d appreciate seeing you again. Velvet, if you don’t mind, I’m going upstairs to lay down a few minutes,” Lotus says.

Velvet nods and watches her friend go up to her room. She looks to her uncle, “Go, I’ll watch the boys.” Uncle Wyatt proceeds to go find the boys and see what help he can be to them during homework time.

“Kirk, when are you going to tell your mom how you feel?” Haskell asks.

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“I can’t, you see what is going on with my parents. I don’t even know if we have insurance anymore because we used my dad’s insurance card at the doctors before. I know these things because we’ve had to talk about them since the divorce. How can I go get things checked if we barely have money to pay for the little parts we need? I heard all they said when we were supposed to not be listening. I love her Haskell, my mom is the best in the world, your mom is next, but how do I tell her I think there is something wrong with me? I can’t. It doesn’t hurt much, only some of the time,” he says.

“How about we tell Uncle Wyatt, he’ll know what to do,” Haskell says looking at his friend curled up on the couch again. He has to do something, even if it is going to hurt their friendship. He has to do something.

“Haskell, I can’t, please,” Kirk says holding on to his stomach.

“Hi Uncle Wyatt, you all done with the moms?” Haskell asks, he uses his eyes to show him Kirk, then he looks down and touches his belly, trying hard to be subtle so Kirk doesn’t see him.

Wyatt sees what is going on. “Yeah, I am. Kirk, I was honest with you before and I’m going to be honest again, your dad is the one who ruined the old house. But he left a lot of fingerprints and other evidence which makes him a criminal even to his own belongings. He doesn’t live there anymore and therefore it’s not his at the same time. I hope you understand that. He is in jail now. I wanted to tell you man to man so you’d understand

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what is going on, I’m sorry son,” Wyatt kneels down next to Kirk, he puts his hand on his forehead, the boy is burning up with fever.

“You want a cold washcloth to help you feel better? My own mom used to give me those. Maybe some fever medicine too,” Wyatt says.

“Ok Uncle Wyatt,” Kirk whispers.

“Stay here Haskell I’ll get it,” Uncle Wyatt walks out of the room and sees Velvet coming down the stairs by herself.

“Is she ok?” he asks.

“Yeah, she needs a moment to process. What’s wrong? Why do you have a wet cloth in your hand?” Velvet asks.

“Kirk is not feeling well. I think this has been going on a while. I’ve been over here before when he has been laying on the couch during homework time and Haskell is doing the work out loud. After he feels better, he gets up and copies Haskell’s answers which were half done by him anyway.

The boy is sick Velvet. He needs a doctor, she doesn’t have insurance anymore, does she?” he asks.

“Insurance? I never even thought to ask. Ok. I’ll talk to her. She will have to get from her current employer I suppose. But she may have to wait, they don’t let you do things automatically. What should we do?” Velvet asks.

“Give him till morning, but no later. If he doesn’t look better, you pull Haskell aside and ask him to tell you

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the truth,” he says. “Let me bring this to him now as I promised.”

~ ~ ~

Ike loves coming to his new buildings as they are being constructed. This one is going to be one of his favorites. He is sure they will fill up the leases in no time at all. People have already been contacting the office to ask when the bottom will be move-in ready, then they ask if they can see floorplans to decide where they want to be. He takes the elevator up to the middle floor to see the view they will have and decide whether or not they can advertise a good view from this height.

The building is still a skeleton, but the view won’t change much after the walls are in. As he steps off the elevator, something catches his eye. A balloon? That is kind of funny, he looks down and sees there is something attached. A letter. He smiles realizing this must be a school thing, he remembers doing them himself. Ike opens the letter to see what could be inside.

Dear Grandpa,

This is Kirk. I remember you when I was small. I know you are in heaven now and the teacher asked us to write to someone we know up there, so I picked you. I don’t know if you can see what is going on down here, but things are not great anymore.

They used to be, but then my parents got a divorce. You know what that is right? I thought so. Anyway, my dad lives

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across town in a fancier part where all the homes are too big for the amount of people who live in them.

Mom had a car accident around that time too and I'm happy she is still here with me and not you. She is amazing at being a mom. She is good at her work too. The accident gave her a lot of scars on her face, my father says she is ugly now, but I think she is beautiful. She is. Look down, you'll see her eyes are still as bright, her smile still as loving as it always was.

Dad has this new wife, her name is Edna, she hates me. I heard them talking about sending me away from everyone. She serves me weird food so I don't eat at her house. I don't want to go there ever again. My dad thinks I'm stupid, says a boy should not want to be a teacher but something more important like him. I like my teachers, I want to be like them. Is that ok? I also like to cook and Mom taught me how to sew on my own buttons already.

Anyway, Grandpa I have to tell you something I haven't told Mom yet even. My best friend Haskell knows. He is watching me. He said one day he is going to tell Mom, even if I say not to, if things get worse he means.

I'm sick. Something is wrong with me. Sometimes when I pee, it hurts, sometimes there is blood there and sometimes my gut hurts so much I curl up on the couch and wait for the pain to be over.

Haskell helps me through those times. I told you, he is my best friend. We are better than brothers, the two of us. He only has a mom like me.

I don't want to come visit you Grandpa, I need to stay here with Mom, I know I'm only ten but she needs me. I really don't feel well and I'm scared.

Please send help.

Kirk

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Ike looks at the date of this letter. Almost a month ago. He sees the name of the school on the letterhead is a local one, so this must not have traveled too far. Maybe since it got stuck in the building the wind didn’t carry it any further. But now that he knows a child is in trouble, he has to help.

As he heads back down his first call is to his brother, the pediatrician. He needs to know what he is dealing with here and who the child should go to first. Ike has enough money, he will pay for all of the medical bills. This boy needs help immediately. The boys are young, they may not know when things go on for too long. This can be very dangerous. His mind is going to all kinds of possibilities.

“Hold on Kirk. I’m going to help you,” Ike says as he gets into his car and heads over to the school. He knows exactly where the place is, he went there himself.

His phone rings, his brother says, “What the hell are you doing? You can’t go barging into a school demanding to see the child who sent out the letter. Are you crazy?”

“What else can I do, I told you the symptoms. This boy could be seriously sick if they are still going on,” Ike says.

“Ok, yes. I’ll give you that. But Ike, you can’t swoop in like a superhero. Life doesn’t work that way. The legal system won’t let you. Ok, let me think. Hold on,” his brother gets quiet. “He was pretty graphic in what

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he said. If this came across my desk I’d say we’d have to take immediate action. Testing for a few things, and yes, even cancer,” he says solemnly.

“I can bring this to your office, you can say you found the letter yourself,” Ike says.

“I’m still thinking. Hold on. He has only been around for a couple of years you said? Maybe one of my partners has seen him, can’t be too many ten-year-old boys named Kirk in the area can there? Don’t go to school, go to your office. I’ll come by as soon as I have a plan. I mean it,” his brother hangs up.

Ike passes the school and drives slowly as the kids are all outside now. He doesn’t see anyone near the fence, so he has to move on. Ike walks into his office still shaken. He has to help this boy, he has to before things get too far; he is hoping they haven’t yet.

The wait for his brother is torture. When his brother finally walks in, he doesn’t look happy. “Ok, let me see the letter. My lawyer says in my hands I can do something, not much, but something. But we will have to handle this carefully. Remember the mother doesn’t even know this was written,” he says. “Only my brother would read the letter, most would throw it out,” he mumbles to himself.

“Ok, here,” Ike says.

His brother reads Kirk’s letter again for himself. “Sounds like he could have a bladder infection, this can spread to the kidneys. We need to find this kid and verify what is going on. Maybe he has been eating a lot of red

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foods, but the pain and fever shouldn’t be there then. Come on, let’s go see if school is still in session. My lawyer told me what I can do.”

The two brothers take Ike’s car and head over to the school. The students have gone for the day but there is one secretary there who speaks to them. The doctor speaks with authority and asks to see the chart from a ten-year-old boy named Kirk, he shows her all his credentials and she lets him see his medical chart. Nothing remarkable there but what he was really looking for was the address. He sees there is a new one. Thankful, more than ever, that he has an amazing memory, he closes the folder and says, “Thank you Ms. I’ll be on my way now.”

“He wasn’t in school today, thought you might want to know that. We’ve had doctors come in before checking up on patients. Once I spotted a fake doctor, and had to call the police. We know how to check medical ID’s here. I would never have given you the information otherwise, just so you know,” she says with a serious face.

“As you shouldn’t. I appreciate that. That is why I showed you my identifications right away before you asked. I know this is highly irregular, but I believe you feel this child needed me to see this, or you would have questioned me further. I assure you we are only looking out for his best interest. Please take a copy of my ID, keep it on file with this file in case you feel you need to use it. I can tell you are a very caring individual. Went

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here myself many years ago, we didn’t have such nice secretaries as you. Keep up the good work,” he says.

“Thank you. Have a good afternoon, and good luck,” she says and they walk out the door back to Ike’s car.

“What now?” Ike asks.

“We drive by the house but don’t go in unless we see an adult there. Then we will have to introduce ourselves and talk to them in private and show them the letter. We have to Ike, my lawyer said so,” he looks to his brother, “Ike?”

“I’m so scared for this boy. All the way down to my gut, I have no explanation for this. I’ll cover all the expenses. Whatever the ‘it’ is. You hear me?” Ike says with urgency in his voice.

“Yeah. Loud and clear. Let me plug in the address.” The doctor plugs in the address to the car’s GPS system and Ike begins to drive again. They drive by the house and don’t see a car. They drive away to a café they saw nearby.

“I’m assuming another hour or so and we can drive by again,” the doctor says.

“Ok,” Ike says quietly. They wait and have a drink and a piece of pie. “I’m done waiting,” Ike says.

“Yeah, I’m with you on that,” the doctor looks at his watch, surprisingly they have waited an hour and a half.

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This time they see not one but two cars in the driveway. “Ok,” Ike parks and they walk up to the door together.

The doctor does all the talking and gets them into the door. He looks to his right and sees a young man curled up on the couch with a wet towel on his forehead.

Looking at the two women before him he says, “This is about the strangest thing I’ve ever done, but can we talk in a private room please. I promise neither one of us is out to get you, rob you or take anything from you. We are here to help you with something you don’t even know you need help with yet.”

“I don’t know why I believe you, but I do. Lotus let’s speak with them in the den here. Boys we’ll be right back,” Velvet says, she saw one of them looking over at Kirk and he has concern on his face, a lot of concern.

“Just so you know, I have a gun in this drawer and can pull it out and shoot before you even touch the doorknob,” Velvet says as insurance.

“No need for that. My name is Ike. This is my brother, he is a doctor, a pediatrician actually. Apparently, your son Kirk had an assignment about a month ago to write to someone in heaven and let it go attached to a balloon. I found the note today and I, well we. My brother here is a doctor. I said that already. We feel you need to read this. Who is Kirk’s mother?” Ike asks.

Lotus holds up her hand and he hands her the envelope. She sits down next to Velvet and they both read together. She puts her hand on her mouth and runs to

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her son. “She has had a whole lot of crap recently. This isn’t helping. How is this helping?” Velvet asks.

“Because I’m going to take care of him at no expense to the mother. My brother Ike here is the financial backing of this. This child needs help and I’m hoping we can give him this help sooner than later,” he stands to go out to the child. The doctor walks over to Kirk and squats down in front of him. “I’m a doctor for children. Many of my patients call me Dr. Drew, you can too. I am going to ask you to lay on your back for a moment while I touch your tummy. Can you do that for me Kirk?” he asks.

Kirk complies but when the doctor touches where his bladder and kidneys are, Kirk jumps. Lotus is watching and crying and shaking her head. She can’t take much more. Her son didn’t tell her because he didn’t think she needed more to worry about. Didn’t think they had means to pay for his care. Velvet is behind her and she calls Haskell over and says to both boys who are now sitting up on the couch. “Boys, this is not the kind of secret you keep from an adult. You understand? Mr. Ike here found your letter and was so concerned he came to find you along with his brother Dr. Drew. Kirk, I’m afraid you’re going to have to go to the hospital. But we will be there with you. Hopefully with a couple of tests we will find out what is going on and you’ll be back to normal as quickly as Dr. Drew can fix you.”

Haskell begins to cry, “I wanted him to tell you. I begged him, didn’t I Kirk?”

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“Yeah, he did. You’ve had enough pain Mom, I didn’t want to cause you more and I know we don’t have Dad’s insurance card anymore. I’m sorry. I’m in a lot of pain though today. Today the pain doesn’t want to go away. Can we go get this fixed now?” he says almost in a whisper.

“We can drive, or we can call an ambulance, your call,” Dr. Drew looks at Lotus, who looks to Velvet, her newest best friend and greatest sounding board she has ever had.

“How about I drive Haskell and Ike here and you take my friend and her son in your car. This way you can talk privately about what is going on with him,” Velvet offers.

“We can do that, Ike give me your keys. Come here Kirk, I’ll carry you out,” Dr. Drew says.

They all walk out to the cars together. In the car Haskell says, “Mom, he is worried about dying. Thought you’d want to know. I promise I’ll never keep such a secret from you. Like you never did from me. You told me about the baby right away. I can’t wait to show you how much help I will be when the baby comes. I will Mom. I will, I help Geni all the time, I’ve learned a lot from her and her mom,” Haskell says quietly.

“Oh, I know you will Haskell. I know. Oh, poor Kirk, why didn’t you tell me then? Or Uncle Wyatt?” she asks.

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“I tried, I wanted to, I gave Uncle Wyatt clues and wanted him to ask Kirk questions but he never did. I guess I’m not good with clues,” he bows his head.

“I’m sure the person you are talking about heard you, but without Kirk talking, it would have been hard for him to tell what is going on. You did a great thing sticking up for your brother,” Ike says.

“They aren’t brothers, best friends. Lotus and Kirk moved in with us recently after she had a nasty legal battle with her ex, who is now in jail. This has been one hell of a roller coaster she has been on lately and I’m sure she wants to jump off by now. I know I would,” Velvet says.

“Lotus, is one of the rarest flowers, but a real beauty. I think her parents named her correctly,” Ike says.

“Really?” Velvet asks.

“Blonde curls, bright eyes, quirky smile. Yeah, I’d say a rare beauty. I hope I’m not imposing too much if I ask how old she is,” Ike says.

Velvet smiles, a man who thinks she is beautiful during a moment of turmoil could be the exact thing Lotus needs right now. “We are both thirty-two, we found out our birthdays are one day apart.”

“You had your sons young then. How nice for you,” Ike says.

“I was still in school when Haskell was born. Finished school, now I work as a consultant for a few different companies. You?” Velvet asks.

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“Started as an architect but now I own a few different companies,” he smiles as she pulls in the parking lot right behind the doctor. They park near each other.

“Hold on here. I’ll get him a gurney,” Drew says as he runs into the emergency room doors.

Velvet steps out of the car and stands next to her friend. “I know this sucks; but on the other hand, two handsome men came riding in on their white horse to save the day. I think maybe his grandfather really did have a hand in this.”

Lotus looks up at her friend. “Yeah, I was thinking the same thing. Weird huh? I shouldn’t even be looking at men, who would want this?”

“Um, Ike over there said you were named correctly, rare beauty like the lotus flower itself,” Velvet says.

“Velvet that’s a mean joke,” Lotus says.

“Nope, ask Haskell, you know he’ll tell you the whole truth, he still doesn’t always have a filter,” she smiles.

“Ok everyone, Ike help Kirk up on this gurney. I have a room for us all waiting,” Dr. Drew says.

~ ~ ~

A long night was had by everyone. Uncle Wyatt came by to take Haskell home, but he wouldn’t go. He has been sleeping on the couch on his great uncle’s lap in the waiting room. Ike has been staying in with Lotus alternately with Velvet.

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The doctor comes out to the waiting room to address everyone. “Lotus said I should come tell you that things aren’t as bleak as maybe Kirk himself thought. Looks like a bladder infection and for now the infection is contained, hasn’t spread to his kidneys at first look, but we will continue to watch. He will stay here for a couple of days until we see improvement from the treatment. We are going to use intravenous treatment to get to the infection faster. You can go home. Come back tomorrow. He will still be here,” the doctor says.

Velvet stands to shake his hand. Then she turns to Ike and hugs him. “Thank you for reading the letter, many of those letters were probably thrown away with the balloons they were attached to. You’re a special man Ike.”

“Haskell, Kirk has to stay here, come honey, Uncle Wyatt and I are going to take you home,” Haskell stirs and looks around for his friend “I’ll tell you in the car.”

~ ~ ~

In the morning Haskell comes to the kitchen and sits with his mom, “It feels weird without them here for breakfast and they only moved in a short while ago.”

“I know but you have school and I have work. Lotus already texted me saying that Kirk is looking better already, his body likes the medicine he is getting, so his healing won’t take as long, which is good.” The part she didn’t say to Haskell is that Ike spent the night there, talking to Lotus the whole night. That the two of them

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both admitted that by morning they feel they have been on at least three dates already. Something Lotus also admitted to Velvet that she never dreamed would happen again.

After school Velvet takes Haskell to see his friend. “Hey we have homework to do, you ready?”

Kirk sits up in bed and the two of them get started right away working on all they have to do. Haskell teaches him the new math problems. Velvet and Lotus sit on the other side of the room to talk.

“I can’t believe you’re in a private room,” Velvet says.

“Ike wouldn’t let them give me anything less. Even if he doesn’t call me after Kirk is home. The time he gave me, calmed me down. Gave me renewed hope that maybe one day I’ll find a good guy. He is a total stranger, well, not so much anymore, and he is doing this because he wants to. The truth is, I have to wait ninety days before my insurance kicks in at work. I’ll never be able to pay him back, this is a fortune I’m sure,” Lotus says.

“One he is happy to share with you. This is not a loan Lotus, he is paying for Kirk’s care. He told me so on the way over yesterday. I didn’t sleep much last night because I am debating with myself if I should ask Haskell what he wrote his letter about,” Velvet says.

“Kirk says the letters were supposed to be private that no one was supposed to know. That is why he wrote exactly what was on his mind,” Lotus looks at their two

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boys. “We did damn good over there Velvet, we did damn good,” she says with pride.

Velvet watches the two boys, “Yeah, we did.” Watching the two boys and her own budding friendship with Lotus has given her a lot to think about. She has had a rough time with men, the second man never really wanted to be married but did so, in the end, because his family’s money wouldn’t come to him if he was single. He married at a time he knew his father to not be well. Stayed long enough to get his money plus a couple extra months to show it wasn’t calculated. Which is why he could buy her the house and still have plenty left for himself. It was never a marriage, she shouldn’t be sad, but she is. She didn’t see through him, and now she has his baby. The only reason he bought the house for her is he could afford to with his inheritance and didn’t want her to get any of what he felt was coming to him, she realizes. Velvet sighs.

There was only one real man in her life and she threw him away. Told him to go on with his life and not worry about her. He tried for a long time, a very long time to get her back but she didn’t want to leave this area, stubborn fool she was, and to be with him she would have to. She loves living here, for her, this is the best place to raise a family. Low in crime, beautiful almost the whole year around. Who wouldn’t want that for their child? Why was she so selfish? Young and stupid, that’s what it was. Emphasis on the stupid. Life would have been so different if she didn’t push so hard.

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“Hey Mom, look!” Haskell says holding up a paper.

“What’s that?” Velvet asks.

“The job fair is coming up next week already, they’re doing it earlier this year. Kirk wants to talk to the teachers about their jobs and I want to see the science lady and the magicians, they always have entertainment. Can we go please?” he begs.

“I will have to ask Dr. Drew if Kirk has any restrictions before I can make any promises, is that fair?” Lotus asks.

“Yeah, that’s cool,” Haskell turns back to talking to his friend. He takes out a deck of cards and they begin to play.

~ ~ ~

Walt has stayed with Roxy since he found the letter. He has been frozen, unable to go back to his own place. “If she only knew how close I really was, maybe she wouldn’t have thought much of moving or coming to see me at least,” he says one morning.

“Walt, stop. The past is the past, we can’t change what has already happened. We can only move forward. I’ve seen the boy, hard not to find him when he looks so much like you, lately he seems pre-occupied. Not smiling, only a face of concern. I hope nothing serious is going on,” Roxy responds.

“I haven’t had a good night’s sleep since I got here Mom. This is not normal. I’ve waited patiently for

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what feels like weeks now and I’m falling apart each day. I have accomplished nothing while being here,” Walt tells her.

“I know, but the fair is tonight, they don’t do this in the Spring anymore, I had called on the last day to get in; thankfully, because I used to go all the time, they let me in. You’ll see her. Things will become clear. She could have simply been too scared to tell you and now that so much time has passed, she assumes you forgot about her. We can’t come up with a million reasons, we have to wait and see what she says. Ok?” Roxy is hoping against all hope that things go well tonight. She never wanted to mention to him things could backfire and she may hate to see him. Maybe she regrets being with him. But her son is in such distress, she has to do all she can from her side. If nothing else, he deserves to know his own son. That much is clear to her.

“Come on, help me gather the stuff for my booth, we are allowed to set up as early as 3:30 this afternoon. We’ll get there early, at least waiting there may be easier for you,” Roxy looks at her son, he looks worse today than the day he came to her.

The first day walking around the school getting ready for the fair, she spotted her grandson, she had to control herself, and not run over to hold him. He is a handsome boy, strong and looks to have a lot of friends. She watched him a while in the hall and then she had to move on realizing that this was not a good idea to watch too closely. She didn’t want to scare him.

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But today, today is the day she is hoping he will come see her. She had asked for a booth spot that not too many people would want, in the back, but it has a good view of the door to the gym so Walt can see the moment they walk in and follow them with his eyes. If they don’t come to her booth, he will approach her before she leaves. One way or another, he will speak to her tonight.

Walt puts on a nice button-down shirt, cleaned and pressed, dress pants and his favorite fun tie with science symbols as the pattern, so he can look as if he belongs at his mother’s booth. His knowledge of science helped him create some of the businesses he has worked on, so he can talk to students as well.

Once in the school building, Walt’s nerves begin to rumble inside of him. He is so jumpy, every door that opens around them he turns to look to see who is coming in. In the gym he scouts out the layout so he knows the fastest way to get to her from any point.

When he sees the booth his mother picked, he smiles, he can watch the door all night. He leans over and kisses her cheek, “Thank you,” he smiles, and so does she.

The fair starts at 5:30. Walt and Roxy sit and eat some sandwiches around 5:00 so that they won’t get too hungry during the fair. The fair is open until 8:00 at night to give working parents time to come as well.

The organizers of the fair walk around checking to see if anyone needs anything. Walt wants to tell them yes, a woman. “Walt? Is that you? It’s me Sandra, oh my.

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We were in a million classes together over the years here and again in high school. Can you believe I’m working here now as an administrator? Sandra, the one who found any reason to leave class in eighth grade?” she looks to him for recognition.

“Well, I guess now you can’t leave, can you? Nice to see you. Wow. I had no idea I’d run into anyone I went to class with. After college I left here, my job took me a few hours away. Been there ever since. This is my mother Roxy,” he says as way of introduction.

“I saw your last name but didn’t make the connection until I saw Walt, sorry. Without your son, I don’t think I would have graduated high school. He is the one in the group that said we all have to graduate if we ever want to eat more than burgers and fries in our life. Remember that? Now look at us. All grown up. I have a husband and four children. How about yourself?” she asks.

“Me? No wife, no children, that I know of,” he says as a joke.

“Walt, always the kidder. I always thought you’d be the first one married. Roxy, your son has so much love to give. I hope you haven’t broken too many hearts over the years. Well, I have to go check on everyone else. Nice to see you both. Have a good night and thanks for coming,” Sandra walks away smiling.

“You don’t remember her at all do you Walt?” Roxy asks after she is out of earshot.

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“Not even a little bit,” he laughs and so does Roxy. Laughter is a good way to ease some of their tension.

“Just goes to show you how you can affect the people around you without knowing you have. You’re a good man Walt, you started off as a good kid, like your father. He was an amazing man,” Roxy says remembering her husband.

“Yeah, Dad was pretty great,” Walt looks to his mom, “Don’t get teary eyed now, we have a long night ahead of us.”

Other booth operators keep walking around and greeting each other. For Walt, this helps to pass the time away. Now the doors have officially opened and his eyes are glued to the door of the gym.

“I’m so glad you’re better Kirk, I wanted to go to this so badly. Better to go with a friend,” Haskell says to him.

“Yeah, I’m sorry I was such a jerk about not telling my mom. We talked about my reasons I didn’t tell her. She isn’t mad at me, so that is good at least,” Kirk says. “Mom and Ike have become good friends now too so maybe something good will come from this, huh?”

“I agree, Ike seems like a nice guy. He talks to your mom every day and he comes over a lot. My mom likes him too. Weird that they met because of our balloons. I’m sure glad we did that assignment,” Haskell laughs and so does Kirk.

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“Oh, my goodness, she is real and she is as beautiful as ever,” Walt whispers to his mother as he sees them come in.

“Yes, I agree. Hold on Walt, they will make their way around here. I’m positive they will,” Roxy tells him and then attends to the students at her booth.

Walt follows them with his eyes around to a couple of the other booths. When she is right in front of him heading his way, he sits down behind his mother so she won’t run in the opposite direction.

“We’ve got this,” Roxy whispers to him as the women, two children and one man approach her booth.

“Welcome to the science booth, what questions can I answer for you?” Roxy asks with enthusiasm.

Velvet recognizes her right away. Her heart skips a beat. How can she affect her like this after all these years? She reaches her hand to hold on to Lotus’s hands. “Roxy?” she asks almost choking on the word.

“Yes Velvet. It’s me,” Roxy says softly.

Lotus looks at Velvet, then the woman in front of her then she gasps as a man comes from behind the booth. Velvet looks quickly at Lotus. No doubt about who the father of Haskell is anymore. Lotus squeezes Velvet’s hand to support her friend.

Velvet looks to where Lotus is looking. He is here. Walt, the one that got away, the one she pushed away. The only one she ever wanted. Lotus knows the whole story. The two of them have shared their deepest

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secrets over the past month or so. As if they’ve known each other their whole adult lives and then some.

“Mom? Are you ok? Is it the baby? Do we have to find a doctor? Come on Ike do something,” Haskell looks from one adult to the next.

Velvet looks down at her son, his worry is all she needs to pull her out of this. He deserves to know. She looks to Ike for a moment and he nods, seems he understands pretty quickly what is going on here and he is encouraging her.

Velvet looks at Walt again, he has tears in his eyes; she looks to Roxy, same thing, now she looks at her son and says. “When I’ve told you your father is gone, I never meant to say he was dead or anything like that, he was gone away from my life. I let him go, at the time, I thought it was the right thing to do,” she pauses, and says again, “at the time. But now. I feel as if I’ve made a colossal mistake. Haskell, this man over here, his name is Walt. He is your father and this woman, Roxy, she is your grandmother,” her tears begin to fall without her wanting them to.

Haskell turns to see a man that looks familiar, but he doesn’t know why. He takes a step back and bumps into Ike. Ike puts a hand on his shoulder and squeezes for support. Walt looks at his son, at Velvet and the first thing he can think to ask to break the ice is. “Who is your friend Haskell?”

“This is Kirk, he is my best friend and his mom Lotus, they live with us now. This is Ike, the man who

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came to save Kirk and his mom. From a letter he wrote,” Haskell doesn’t know what else to say.

“A letter you say? Like this one?” he takes out Haskell’s letter and puts it on the table in front of them. Velvet looks to Lotus who nods. She picks up the letter and reads what her son had to say. Her son is scared for her. Afraid she would do harm to herself or the baby, she holds her breath so she doesn’t let out all her sounds of anguish at the same time, as Lotus had done when she read Kirk’s. Velvet hands the letter to Lotus and bends down to hug her son.

“I was walking my dog one day and the pooch found something, he began barking, so I picked it up and read your letter and now I am here. What do you think about that Haskell?” Walt asks.

Haskell begins to cry, he looks to Kirk and the two boys hug each other. Answers, they got answers. So many kids in their class didn’t, they got letters sent to school saying their balloons were found and they found the letters to be sweet, or nice. They got letters back of encouragement to go on and find their dreams. But both Haskell and Kirk had real answers to their real problems. It is a lot to swallow for a ten-year-old boy.

Ike speaks next. “How about we all head down the street to the pizza shop and talk this out?” he suggests.

Haskell looks at his mom, “Ok?” he whispers.

“Yeah, more than ok,” she responds.

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A few weeks after the fair, everyone is still talking to each other. Roxy comes by only once a week to see the boys, she helps them with homework and babysits until their mothers come home from the one shared late night they have.

Ike has become an integral part of Lotus’s life and she has never felt more beautiful. She has told him everything about her past and he still is around. He told her about his arrest when he was a young teen and she has accepted him as well. They agree that pasts should stay in the past but they also felt each other should know about them. Their relationship is nothing that she has ever experienced before. Completely open. All the time.

Today Ike is taking Kirk and Haskell out to see his new building project. He wants to show them what architecture is all about and how science and math come together to make a building. The boys wait impatiently at the door after school.

“What would have happened if we never sent those letters?” Kirk asks.

“I don’t know, and it would have been different letters if we wrote them in school. Geni said the teacher read everyone’s letter, even though she said they were supposed to be private. I would have never said the same things, how about you?” Haskell asks.

“No, never. I wonder if this is what fate is all about,” Kirk mentions.

“Maybe your grandfather pushed the letter in Ike’s hands. We will never know, but our lives have

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certainly changed since then. My mom is going to the doctor today to check on the baby inside of her. She might even be going with Walt, I’m not sure. I thought I heard her say something on the phone about the visit last night,” Haskell says. “I’m still worried. What if the baby’s father decides he wants the child? They can do that you know. Come get a child they think is theirs. I saw it once on a show,” Haskell says with a bit of fear in his voice. He knows his mother had wanted to give up the baby early on, but he is not so sure now.

“Look Ike’s here, we can ask him. Ok?” Kirk says.

“Nah, I’ll keep this one inside,” Haskell says as they walk outside to meet Ike at his car.

“You boys lock up the house?” he asks.

“Yes sir,” they say.

“Homework done?” Ike asks.

“Most of it. I have to study for math more. But the test isn’t until Friday,” Kirk says.

“Ok, we’ll study when I take you back home,” Ike pulls out of the driveway and heads to his construction site. When they get there, he hands the boys hard hats and takes them to the spot he found the letter.

“Wow, my letter flew inside the building? That’s amazing. You can see clear to the river from here. I’d love to work here and see that every day. Better than looking out of our school building hey Haskell?” Kirk asks.

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Haskell simply nods. He is really worried about his mother today. She and Walt have talked every day since meeting. She seems happy when on the phone but sad when she is not. He has heard her cry a few times at night in her room. Sometimes Lotus has gone in the room and he hears them talking until late in the night. Haskell hasn’t slept well since meeting his real father.

He is a nice man. Roxy treats the boys well, and is a lot of fun, but there is something missing. He got all he wanted, he found his father, has a new grandmother but his mother is still not happy. He should be with her at the doctor now, not here at this construction site. He should be supporting his mother, Ike will probably end up being Kirk’s new dad, and he is happy for his friend, but he doesn’t belong here. He wants to go home. The tap on his shoulder has him jump, he looks up to see Ike.

“Want me to take you home?” he asks.

“Yes please,” Haskell says.

“Ok,” Ike walks over to Kirk who is marveling over all things construction right now. “We need to take Haskell home. I think he is worried about something.”

Kirk looks up at Ike then over to his friend, “He is worried about his mom and the baby. But don’t tell him I said that to you,” he whispers.

“I’ll keep your secret. Come. The building will be here tomorrow, and the next day. We can always come back,” Ike says.

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“Thanks Ike,” Kirk walks to his friend and puts a hand on his shoulder, “We’re going home now.” Haskell slowly follows them.

When they get home, Haskell runs up to see if his mom is home. She isn’t. He looks for a note of some sort, nothing. He chooses to send her a message on the phone Walt bought him, saying if he was going to be home alone, even with Kirk, he needed a way to reach his mom quickly.

*‘Mom, you ok? Should I come to the doctor with you? Ike will bring me. I’ll pay for a cab.’*

Velvet sees her phone has a message, she reads it and puts her hand on her heart. Her poor son is so worried about her again. She shows her phone to Lotus, who came with her to the doctor. Walt had offered but she declined his offer. In fact, she finds herself pushing him away again and she doesn’t even know why. She and Lotus talked about this almost all of last night, neither one slept more than two hours before heading off to work.

Lotus takes her friend’s phone and types a message back to Haskell. *‘I’m ok. Lotus came with me this time. I’ll tell you all about the baby when I get home. Did you have fun with Ike?’*

*‘Yeah but I was worried about you the whole time. Please be careful Mom.’*

*‘I promise I will.’*

Lotus shows Velvet the conversation she had with Haskell. Velvet nods. Her words are lost in her head and

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in her throat. She feels there is something wrong with the baby too. Haskell must have felt something as well.

“Oh Lotus, what am I to do? What if there *is* something wrong? How do I tell him?” she asks.

“Which him? Walt, your ex or Haskell?” Lotus asks.

Velvet looks in her eyes, oh my. She is right, “I don’t know if I can answer that.”

“Velvet Meyers?” a nurse calls.

Velvet stands and Lotus squeezes her hand one last time before Velvet goes with the nurse.

~ ~ ~

“Mom, Velvet is pulling away again. What have I done? I’ve let her call the shots. I speak to her only when she calls, but by the end of the call, I can tell she is on the verge of tears. I’ve seen Haskell less than you have. I’m going to lose her again and I don’t know why. She seemed happy to see me again when we first saw them. But now, I’m not so sure,” Walt looks at his mom across the dinner table.

“She had a doctor’s appointment today but I never heard from her. I know this one is not my baby but she is already hiding things. Am I so awful to be around? Have I made some serious mistake again? I told her I could move back here without any difficulty. I’ve confessed everything, I couldn’t hold back,” he watches as Roxy takes in all that he is saying.

“Haskell seems worried about her too. He was very quiet last night. We did homework, discussed school

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a bit but nothing else. He is withdrawn as well,” Roxy says.

“You haven’t answered any of my questions. What did I do Mom?” Walt asks again.

“I’m not sure I have an answer for you. You’ll have to have a heart to heart with her, but that would mean tying her down to a private meeting,” Roxy tells him. “Since she did tell you about the doctor’s appointment, I think you are safe in calling her tonight to ask about how that went.”

“Can I show up? Can I please just show up?” Walt asks.

“Not uninvited. Especially if you think there is a problem between you two,” Roxy says.

Walt’s phone rings with a text ‘*Walt, Mom has been home all afternoon crying. Lotus won’t talk to me. Mom won’t talk to me. I am scared. What do I do?*’

Walt shows the text to his mom, “I’m going over now. My son needs me.”

“Ok. Be careful how you handle this. Be compassionate, loving, and most of all, listen,” Roxy says.

“Got it,” he sends a message back to Haskell. ‘*I’m on my way over. We’ll talk when I get there, ok?*’  
*thank you. ☺*’

With Haskell’s response, Walt knows he is right in heading over. The boy is scared. He calls Ike on the way over, “Do you have any idea as to what is going on?”

“Lotus called me when they got home. She said Velvet is upset from the moment she left the doctor’s

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office but won’t say why. She tried all afternoon to get her to talk, she has no more information than she did before. I’ll let her know you’re coming. Mind telling me your full history with Velvet so I can understand your connection better?” Ike says.

Walt explains his history with Velvet to Ike, it is not long but there is a lot to say. “Well, that makes sense. I think I would have left for that kind of job as well. Hard to say why she pushed you away though. What about her parents, what do you know about them?” he asks.

Walt is happy he is at a stop light right now. “Oh, holy hell. Ike you hit the nail on the head. Her father used to tell her she was never good enough, at anything. Literally, never cooked well enough, never looked good enough, grades were not high enough. Men were not great to her. Her father even had her brothers believing that about her too, and by the time she graduated high school, they were downright mean to her. Why I never thought of them, I don’t know. I always pushed them out of my mind because they made me too angry. Thanks man. I’ve got this now. I’ll be there in five.”

Ike walks back into the house, he spoke with Walt out on the patio. He walks over to Lotus and Kirk and says, “Let’s go for ice cream. Walt is coming over, I think the three of them need a minute or two alone.” Kirk looks over at his friend who has been moping around since they got back from the construction site and now back at Ike.

“Ok,” he says softly.

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Lotus and Kirk grab their jackets and leave before Walt gets there. Moments later Walt knocks on the door. Haskell looks up and realizes he is the only one in the room now, he walks to the door and sees Walt. Haskell’s reaction comes from within, he leaps into Walt’s arms and Walt takes him in immediately. This is the connection Walt has been waiting for.

They stand in the doorway for a few moments before Walt finally breaks them apart and looks at Haskell in the face, he asks one question. “Do you know your mom’s parents at all? Her father specifically? Your uncles?”

“I only met them once. It was right before she married the other man. I didn’t like them. I like Roxy, she likes to teach me things. They only sat here and told me things,” Haskell says.

“What kind of things?” Walt asks.

“Her father told me to work hard, kept asking me to get him a drink. If I didn’t fill it enough I had to do it again. Mom didn’t like the visit. They didn’t come to the wedding because her father said he didn’t want to give her away, that he should get paid for keeping her around all these years. I remember that exactly. I don’t think Mom knows I heard that,” Haskell looks at Walt. “Am I in trouble for telling you?”

“No, I’m not upset at you my dear boy. I want to tell you something. I like your mom. I’ve liked her for many, many years from deep down in my heart. But sometimes she pushes me away. I think I know why now.

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Do you trust me enough to go talk to her by myself or do you want to come to?” Walt wants to make sure Haskell trusts him, that’s very important between a father and son. Walt’s father always made sure they had trust between them.

“Can I go because I want to? Not because I don’t trust you,” Haskell asks.

“Yeah, come on Buddy. Let’s go heal your mom. Together.” Walt puts out his hand and Haskell surprises him as he jumps into his arms wanting to be picked up. Walt carries his son up to Velvet’s room. The fact that his son is already ten years old doesn’t bother him, he is happy to hold him for as long as Haskell allows him to. They stand at her door a moment and listen to her cry.

Haskell is the one who nods his head and Walt walks in, “Velvet. We need to talk,” he says softly, “now.”

Velvet turns around and sees her son holding on to his father for dear life. Not a simple hold but a real one, one that shows love and trust in the person he is holding. “I have nothing to say,” Velvet says.

“Good, then listen to your son, he has a lot to tell you and you need to listen to him with both ears,” Walt says, he sets Haskell down and pushes him towards his mom.

Haskell looks back at Walt then turns to his mother, “Mom, you are sad all the time. You became happy when Lotus and Kirk moved in, it was fun. But now you’ve been sad again and Walt, my father, made you happy for a week or so but now you’re sad again.

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What did the doctor say Mom? You always tell me but today you didn’t. What happened? Why can’t we be happy again? What do you need me to do to make sure you’re happy again?” he asks and begins to cry as he sees his mother crying as well.

Walt has stayed back by the front of the room near the door. He is watching and waiting for her to look up at him. He needs even a small clue that she wants him there.

Velvet watches her son, she hears his words and her pain only grows. How did he become so smart? Certainly not from her. Must be Walt. She looks up at him for a moment; that is all he needs. Walt steps forward and sits down next to Haskell on the floor, who is in front of his mother.

“You’ve done a great job raising this young man so far. A great job. He is smart, observant, he has great ambitions and he makes it clear that he worships you. As do I. As I always have. I want you to listen to me, listen for the first time, really listen Velvet. Eyes, ears and heart open to listen. You’ve proved all of them wrong. Your whole damn rotten family. As far as I’m concerned, they can all rot in hell. You have a good job, you make enough money to support your family. I’ll bet you’re even better off financially than your brothers, who never knew how to save a dime. Nor could they hold a job longer than a few months, if I remember correctly.

You were given a gift of a house because your ex-husband was afraid to be saddled with you until you ever

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got married again. I’m sure he did the math and thought paying off the house was better than paying you monthly forever. Something that happens a lot, unfortunately. Men like clean breaks, Lotus’s guy did the same thing, kind of. Your ex doesn’t know about the baby, but we will have to notify him. We will do this through a lawyer, just to notify him and make sure he knows you need or want nothing from him. He will sign the papers to get rid of his responsibility. But he has to know, it’s only fair.

One more thing, you can’t push me away this time Velvet. Haskell and I have talked a long time. I’ve already put my house up for sale. I’ve sent for all of my belongings and I signed a lease on an apartment near my mom. I’ll stay there until we are together. Now, your turn. What happen at the doctor today?” he asks putting his hand out hoping she will hold him and not hit him away.

Velvet looks at the two men in her life that she loves the most. One hand goes out to Haskell and one to Walt. She feels their strength running through her and looks at them in the eye as best as she can. One deep breath, then another, “For one, I’m wrong, I’m not four months pregnant, I’m five.”

“Ah, spotting again huh? You used to do that a lot, I remember you’d be annoyed by this each month. So that first month of spotting you were actually pregnant. Something I can explain to you another day, ok Haskell?” Walt says.

“Ok, sounds gross to me,” the adults smile at each other. Velvet cannot believe that he remembers that

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about her, from so many years ago. Why did she push him away? Is he right? Did she hear her father in her ear about not being worthy?

Walt nods to Velvet so she will continue, “Haskell you won’t be able to help me with the baby unless you grow two more arms. There are two of them in there. I shouldn’t be surprised, their daddy is a twin, and many others in his family. His family is weird like that, so many twins one would think it unnatural to have a single child in that family. Walt, I’m not equipped for this. I can’t do all of this alone. I can’t, I’m not smart enough, I’m not strong enough and I have no help,” her tears came once again but she is not sure how, she is so cried out.

“Momma, you aren’t dumb! Stop that! You are the smartest mom in all of my school. You make me great food, you took in Kirk and Lotus because they needed us. You have a big heart. Stop saying that, don’t believe them. You’re my mom and I love you,” Haskell is screaming through his tears. Velvet grabs her son and holds on tightly.

Walt looks at them and sheds a few tears himself, “Velvet. Your father is an ass, your brothers aren’t too far behind. Haskell tells me he only met them once. Before you were going to have a second wedding. If there was a way of stung someone for emotional abuse, I’d love to do that. But I can’t, what I *can* do is promise you the same thing I promised years ago, the same words I still mean. I am here, body, heart, mind and soul. And the best thing I

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can offer you is financial as well as emotional backing. In my short life Velvet, I have made enough money, that I don’t need to really work so hard any more, but I do. I like what I do. I will support you in all things. All you have to do is say yes. Please, this time, say yes.”

Velvet catches her breath, she looks at her son. “I’m sorry I worry you. Sometimes adults aren’t as strong as they appear to be. I had you when I was very young, I was by myself because I pushed Walt away. I didn’t want to be the reason he didn’t get his dream job because mine wasn’t going to happen. But I was given you, we’ve done pretty well so far, haven’t we?”

“Yes Mom, more than ok. I’ve seen kids at school that say they have so much money, but you know what? They are never really happy. I’m really happy, my house is happy. That makes us rich in love doesn’t it? Mom, I like Walt too. I like my father. I want him to stay. Please, he can make us even happier, like Ike has for Lotus,” Haskell looks at his mom.

“You’ve had to grow up so fast. I want you to only have fun now, like all kids your age. No more taking care of me or the house. I’ll get a real babysitter for when the time comes, maybe Roxy will come by more afternoons, so you’ll never be alone again,” she says.

“I’m not alone. Kirk and I always stay safe, you taught me what to do Mom, you’re smart. You’ve told me how to take care of myself. Me and Kirk have been doing good. Or well, I forget which word to use,” Haskell says.

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Velvet hugs her son one more time. “You’re so grown up, only a grown young man would come in my room now and be strong enough to yell at me. I’m so proud of you. Can you forgive me for falling apart?” she asks.

“I heard Lotus and Ike say that sometimes a mommy who has a baby in them can easily cry. I don’t mind you crying as long as you stop being sad,” he tells her.

Walt puts his hand on Velvet’s shoulder, “I’m not leaving,” he says again. “Ever,” he emphasizes.

Velvet sits up and looks at Walt. “Why?”

“Because I fell in love with you all over again as soon as I saw your picture in the letter. I knew then, I had to find you, and find my son. I had to make this all right this time, make us work. I went running to my mom first thing. Think of that? A man in his thirties running to his mother for help with an old flame? I must be a sorry excuse of a man. But this sorry excuse wants to spend the rest of his life loving you, and his son. As proposals go, this one sucks but I can no longer deny what I feel. What I’ve always felt.”

“I have a pretty full house already Walt,” she says.

“We can buy a larger one if you want. Get away from this, sell this house, put the money away for the twin’s college fund. You won’t need the money from this house. I’ve got you covered. We can wait until after the babies are born. Wait for you to recover from that,

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physically,” Walt looks at Velvet and swallows hard. This was not his intention for today.

“Well Haskell, what do you think? Should we marry Walt? Should we let him love us forever? Even when we are sick, even when we are sad. Even when we have so much homework we get frustrated?” Velvet asks her son.

“If he makes you happy every day. I want to say yes,” he says.

“I will make her happy every day. I can promise you that Buddy. I’ll try and make you happy as well. But for now, I think we need to call Kirk and Lotus and Ike and let them know twins are coming. I think my mom will be screaming on the phone. Want to call her Haskell? You can tell her the good news,” Walt says.

“Can I Mom?” Haskell asks excitedly.

Velvet finds herself smiling for the first time in a long time, “You never did like my family, did you?” she asks Walt.

“I am your family, I like me just fine,” Walt smiles and watches as Velvet smiles, from inside her, he can tell.

“Go ahead Haskell, call Roxy,” she says, her smile is only getting bigger.

Haskell takes Walt’s phone to make the call, “Hello Roxy this is Haskell guess what!!!?? Mom is having twins and we’re going to marry Walt!” he screams into the phone.

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Roxy is rendered speechless. She catches her breath and says, “Haskell I’m going to hang up with you before I scream. Then I’m running over there with lots of cake and a million hugs.”

Haskell looks at Walt, “Can I call Kirk too?”  
~ ~ ~

Lotus wakes up at 3:00 in the morning, she tip toes into Velvet’s room and wakes her up.

“What’s wrong Lotus?” Velvet says half asleep.

“I heard something outside, you have to come see this,” she says.

“Lotus, I’m almost nine months pregnant with twins, I can go into labor any day now and you want me to look at something that will surprise me?” Velvet’s voice still filled with sleep.

“Pleeceeease?” she begs.

Velvet looks up at Lotus. That is the face of excitement not nerves. “Ok. Help me up,” Velvet and Lotus walk slowly back to Lotus’s room to look out in the back yard. Velvet smiles at Lotus. “Oh my, he really does love you.”

What they see is Ike carefully stringing banners from one end of the yard to the other, each banner says ‘I love you’ in a different language. “Should we let him finish, or do you want to run out there now and say yes, you know there is a question coming after all this effort.”

“I don’t know Velvet, I kind of want to stand here and watch him. All this effort. He has been non-stop putting out things for me since we met. We went to the

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doctor yesterday for one last check with Kirk. They did another ultrasound to make sure he is completely healed. This has taken a long time, I know, but Dr. Drew says sometimes this can happen when things were let go for so long. Kirk has been really good about following all of Dr. Drew’s directions with food and drinking. He even apologizes when he knows he didn’t drink enough that day. You’ve seen him,” Lotus says.

“Yeah, he won’t ever wait to tell you things about his body again, that is for sure. Oh, Lotus look!” Velvet whispers to not wake the boys. She grabs her friend’s shoulder and the two of them stand there watching Ike as he carefully assembles the largest lotus plant they have ever seen. It is covering half of the yard already. Large silky looking pieces of material being carefully placed and tied to each other. He has put up a frame of twigs and now the petals are being formed.

“Oh Velvet, how did we get so lucky after so much of the other kind of luck?”

“We found each other,” Velvet says putting her arm around Lotus and leaning her head onto her friend’s. They stand there watching together how Ike puts the whole back yard into a garden of love. He is so quiet, the boys haven’t woken up yet. He is tying things together instead of hammering them.

The best part has finally been put out. A giant engagement ring balloon is now floating up from the middle of the giant Lotus flower, clearly attached to a

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small ring box. Lotus’s phone rings. “Hello?” she whispers pretending to be asleep.

“Meet me out back,” Ike says.

“Ok,” she hangs up. Hugs Velvet, grabs her robe and goes downstairs. Velvet thinks she should leave them alone but she also wants to watch. No, she decides to give them privacy. She walks out of Lotus’s room and as she passes Kirk’s room she hears him say. “Look he is going to do it.”

“Boys?” she says.

“Kirk woke me up, he knew this was coming. Come look Mom,” Haskell says. She sits with the boys and watches as Lotus walks outside and runs straight into Ike’s arms.

~ ~ ~

“Roxy? I’m so scared. I can’t do this,” Velvet says.

“Does that mean you’re already at the hospital or need a ride?” Roxy asks.

“A,” pause “ride,” Velvet says in between contractions.

“I’m two minutes away, I was shopping for clothes. Get downstairs, grab your bag. I’ll call Lotus,” Roxy hangs up and takes a couple of breaths before she calls everyone to let them know.

~ ~ ~

Walt and Velvet had talked about this a long time. They decided it was best for Walt to do this in

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person. He had found Velvet’s ex-husband and made an appointment to see him as any business person would.

“I’m here to see Mr. Mercury. Walt, is my name,” Walt tells the secretary.

“Right this way.” Walt follows her into an office with a man who is sitting there as if he has no cares in the world at all and yet the smug look on his face of a man who is sitting there thinking his only job is to accumulate more money.

Walt waits to be addressed. Finally, the man says, “What do you need?”

Not a cordial, how can I help you or what brings you here today but a cold, emotionless, what do you need, all that money he inherited surely didn’t change his disposition. Walt decides this man is owed no courtesies. “I’m here for one purpose and one purpose only. I’m about to marry your ex-wife, but I wanted you to know that the day you delivered her the divorce papers, she was going to tell you that she is pregnant. I’m here to tell you, you are the father, but that Velvet needs nothing from you. And if you get any ideas about suing for custody you will lose,” With that Walt stands to leave the room.

“Can’t be mine. I’ve been fixed,” he says coldly.

“As the dog you are, but I assure you we will do a DNA test to have it on record as to who the father is, in case of any medical needs,” Walt quickly leaves the office. He gets into his car and begins to go back to work, but he calls his lawyer first. He wants to make sure the biological father will never be able to touch the twins.

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Walt wants to beat him at anything he might do. They will need no money from him, ever. Walt will make sure they never need for anything. Especially love, they will never need more than he will be showering them. “Walt, I’ll cover all that needs to be covered for Velvet, that’s a promise. What is the dog’s name?”

Walt gives him the name and where he works. “Got everything, not a very liked individual in the business world. I’ve had his name come across my desk a couple of times over the past couple of years. None of it has been good. I’ll protect those babies, I’ll have this done before the day is over. Go home, give Velvet a kiss for me.”

Walt exhales now, he feels a bit calmer knowing the twins will be protected from their biological father. His phone rings as he pulls out of the parking lot, “Hello,” he says somewhat out of breath.

“Walt? Where are you man? We’ve been trying to find you. Velvet is at the hospital. The babies are coming,” Ike says.

“I was with her ex. I’m on my way,” Walt says, still not feeling fully back to himself. He hopes the drive changes his mind.

As he walks into the hospital room and sees Velvet, his Velvet, in pain from labor, his whole world changes. He runs to her side and holds on to her. “Ok. I’m headed home to be there for the boys, call me with good news. See you soon,” Lotus says as she kisses her

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friend’s forehead. As she passes Walt she squeezes his arm and nods.

“Velvet, I’m sorry I’m late. I was busy with work. Forgive me?” Walt asks.

“You came. You’re here for me,” she whispers.

“Every day for the rest of our lives,” he says.

The twins come relatively quickly. One red-headed girl and one blonde boy. Similar to their father, he is blonde and his twin brother is a red-head. Velvet was told that twins don’t always have twins. After they were born, she took one look at them and felt she won the lottery.

“Velvet. You are the most wonderful woman I know. Sure, others have given birth to twins before but you rocked delivery more than anyone, I’d bet my fortune on that. I love you Velvet, more each day. They are beautiful. Haskell will love them. Kirk will too, and Uncle Ike and Aunt Lotus. My mom, Lotus’s mom is getting on a plane now to come meet everyone. So much love will be around them.

Those letters pulled us all together. I’m sure the boys had no idea what would happen if someone found them. But it wasn’t someone it was me. It was Ike. Velvet, all the stars are aligned,” he leans down and for the first time since coming back, he kisses Velvet right on the lips.

“Oh Walt, you still leave me breathless,” she puts her hands on his cheeks. “I’ve been waiting for that kiss for so long. It was better than I remember and so much

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better than I imagined it would be. I love you too,” she says, surprising herself. She has yet to say those words.

~ ~ ~

Lotus’s mom arrives on a day that has more going on than she ever expected. She has news of her own to tell her daughter. The first being an outright apology for how she has treated Lotus since the accident. She comes in to see great celebration. Kirk introduces her to Haskell and Ike even though Kirk is still unsure as to why she is here. She talks to Kirk but never his mother. He greets her with caution as he shows her around. “You are very sweet Kirk, but you don’t have to babysit me. I’m going to find Lotus now. You go celebrate with everyone,” Kirk smiles a tender smile and joins everyone in the other room.

Lotus’s mom finds her in the kitchen. “I see this is a time of celebration here, and I didn’t come here to be rude or selfish but we need to talk a moment. Can we please go outside?”

Lotus looks at her mom, for the first time in years her mom is looking her right in the eye. Looking at her face, “Sure Mom.”

They walk outside and her mom sees the giant Lotus flower that has yet to be taken down, or the banners of love. “Oh my, this is more beautiful than you said. The picture didn’t do justice to the actual pieces. I haven’t said this in a long time, and I am long, long overdue. I am

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proud of you Lotus. Lotus, you’ve done so much with your life. I see you as my inspiration.

Ike called me before he asked you to marry him and told me everything that recently happened. Kirk’s letter. How you met, what has happened since. You never told me the real reason you moved in here, Ike did. He told me a lot, I’m embarrassed to say, it took him to make me open my eyes. An old fool knows better than me.

I have no excuses, but this. Your father married me for the simple reason that he loved the way I looked, and he used to always tell me he would have beautiful children with me. He was right you know. We had beautiful children. But he was talking about the surface of them and I was talking about who they will be.

Before he died, four years ago, he told me that if I wanted to see and be seen with something as lowly as you, then I deserve you. I didn’t know what he meant. He then said to me that ugly begets ugly. To which I finally understood what he meant when he told me years before that moment, that I will be needing plastic surgery before I’m fifty at the rate I’m changing. He kept saying need and that I should start looking for a good doctor to keep up my appearance. I’m grateful he died before he pushed that idea further. I’m grateful he died before I killed him for the thoughts.

I realize that Kirk wrote to him and that he has fond memories of his grandfather; that is a good thing, let’s let him keep those couple of memories. But the memory of his words had my head so twisted. Thankfully,

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Ike turned my head around. If you’ll accept me back in your life. I would love the honor of walking you down the aisle again,” Lotus’s mom’s tears are falling freely, she doesn’t even know if what she said made any sense.

Lotus looks at her mom and cries with her. “Oh Mom. I have scars and you have wrinkles. But my men, Ike and Kirk, they are full of love and see none of them. We are quite the pair, aren’t we? Do you have enough money? Did he leave you with anything, I never asked you?” she asks through tears.

“No, he left the majority of his wealth to his sons. But not to worry, I’m still working, and I already asked for a transfer to the branch in your area before I left to come here. I was approved and have to show up at the office in two days. Show me everyone today, we have so much to catch up on,” she says.

Lotus holds on to her mom and they walk into the house to the sounds of screams. “Lotus, Mom had a boy *and* a girl!” Haskell screams. “Oh, sorry. Hi Maám.”

The two women laugh.

~ ~ ~

When Velvet comes home with the kids everyone’s world becomes fuller. All the adults have decided to take turns in watching the kids, all of them. Roxy and Lotus’s mom help with homework and dinners. Ike and Walt are doing their part, whenever they can.

“Hey, I can’t believe you are nursing these guys. How are they eating today?” Lotus asks Velvet.

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“Pretty good. Walt insists I try and nurse for the first month, after that, he says I can pump and give them bottles or just give bottles with formula, he is leaving the decision up to me and how I feel I can handle this but he asked for one solid month of mother’s milk, it didn’t seem like a hard request. He is such a worrier. I’m a little worried too,” Velvet says.

“About what?” Lotus asks.

“Our boys took a chance and wrote a letter.

From that, we gained so much. You even have your mom back and I have Roxy on my side. But we also need to let go of some baggage. I think we need to write our own letters to those who may have been holding us back. No more holding on to negative feelings. Let’s let the bad energy go,” Velvet says.

“I’m in,” Lotus says. She goes to get some paper to write on. The two of them work together to write out all their negative feelings.

*To those who have done us wrong,*

*The scars on my face are from an accident not an on purpose. Therefore, if you look carefully, I'm still the same beautifully, strong, woman I always was. Clearly it is you who have a problem with my looks, not me.*

*I may not have been as smart as you wanted or as athletic as you wanted but I have made a good name for myself and I have a good job and great children. I have no enemies, how about you?*

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I found a partner that loves me for me fully and accepts me for my faults. Who do you go to sleep with at night besides your own ego? Does it comfort you to be so alone?

I am surrounded by love from morning till night. No one here is picking a fight. The life I have doesn't need your kind. Keep your negativity out of my mind.

We release you from our lives, we're free

Sincerely,

V & L

Lotus gets up and seals it in an envelope.

“Balloon?” she asks.

“No, that is only for someone to receive. We want to burry this. Let’s use the bar-b-que grill and burn the words, let the negativity go up in smoke. Set aflame all our darkness,” Velvet says.

“I’ll take one baby, you take the other. Let’s do this now,” Lotus says.

Velvet and Lotus walk downstairs and set the babies down in their bassinets to sleep and head outside. Velvet turns on the gas for the grill and starts the flames. Lotus drops the letter in and they watch as their sorrow is transferred into nothing but smoke and set to sail in the wind.

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