



To Taking Chances

Kira's boss takes a chance on her by sending her overseas to work at their other office. Little does anyone know that once a chance is taken, many more opportunities will arise. Kira not only finds life-long friends, but she finds family. Family she didn't know she had.



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Kira is not happy with the way things have been going with her current boyfriend. There are days she enjoys his company and other days when he annoys her down to her core. Time to break up. This is not working. She so badly wants what everyone around her has. At the age of twenty-nine, she feels she will never find that person. Especially if she stays in this small town of hers, she knows everyone here is at this point.

“Kira!” her boss calls to her.

Kira looks over at her boss, a man who prides himself on believing he is the best boss anyone can have. He also happens to be good at what he does and has made a successful company blossom into a successful corporation. She stands to walk over to his office. “Yes sir? How can I help you?” she asks, trying not to sound too annoyed.

“Inside,” he says briskly and shuts the door behind her. Well, this can’t be good, she thinks to herself. “Ok façade over, how are *you* doing?” he asks her calmly.

Kira looks at him unsure of what he is talking about. “Doing well, thank you for asking.”

“Really? You don’t seem to be so happy these days, I’m very good at watching people, it is what got me to where I am today. You, my dear,

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whether you admit it or not, are not a happy person right now. I only have one question, is anything going on in the office that I should know about, something that would be turning your smile upside down?

Someone say something inappropriate, because I won’t tolerate that,” he asks with genuine concern.

“No sir. Personal,” she says.

“Ah, well. We don’t like that either. Dump him, whomever he is, if they put that kind of look on your face, they aren’t worthy of you. Dump him. Sorry, said that already. I’ll even give you a good reason. I called you in, one to check on you, but two, to offer you the position you asked about overseas. I think you’re right. I think you’d do a great job and on top of that, I think it is time you jump ship and get out of this small town. I did the same thing years ago, and it was the best thing I ever did. You need to spread your wings. Try new things. I’ve done that already, I’m ok settling down here. My kids are growing nicely and they aren’t encumbered with the craziness of an inner city or a big city for that matter. This is a good spot for me and my family.

But you’re young Kira. I would like to see you grow. If you don’t have a passport, please leave this office and go straight to the post office to fill out the forms. It will take a couple of weeks so order one

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expedited, I’ll pay the difference. I’d like you to leave in two weeks. Any questions?” he asks.

“No questions, a lot of appreciation for having that kind of trust in me. I won’t let you down. I do have a passport but I’ll go check if it is current. As I said before, I already speak the language, well to be honest I understand more than I can speak but it will give me a good start. My father is from there. He will be thrilled. I suppose I can call some distant cousin to give me a room until I find a place. I’ll get on finding a ticket later tonight. The two weeks will give me a chance to finish my current project for you,” she smiles.

“I already have your ticket booked,” he hands her the printout of the itinerary. “I’ll be briefing you about what you need to do there over the course of the next two weeks. You will have to put in a lot of extra time here until then, so that when you get there, everyone will think you know the business and they don’t have to teach you anything. They claim things are different there and I always tell them but I sign the checks and you’ll do this my way. You’re going to have to be strong and make sure that stands true,” he says in his business tone, secretly excited he is getting her away from her current boyfriend. He met him once and doesn’t like him at

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all, her father will be happy too. Kira needs a special kind of person, and he knows just the right guy.

“If I can stand up to Marly right here in our office, I’m pretty sure I can stand up to anyone over there, don’t you?” she jokes. Marly is one of their toughest clients they have and she puts him in his place all the time when he makes demands that are unrealistic or even inappropriate.

Her boss laughs, “I suppose that is true. Starting tomorrow, please come in an hour early and expect to stay late so I can brief you about how the day went over there.”

“That is a reasonable request. Thank you, sir, really, I won’t let you down,” she says as she stands to leave the room.

“If I thought you would, I’d never offer you the position. Charlie may not like my decision. When I tell him he will be getting more to do here, I hope he will calm knowing that,” he laughs.

Kira walks out feeling very good. What a difference in her mood. She sends a text to her boyfriend saying she has something important to talk about and can he call her later, his response is ‘*aw really? I have poker tonight with the guys, can it wait till after that? Say around 11pm?*’

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She tells him yes because she doesn’t think it is nice to do this in a text. Next, she calls her father. “Wow Kira, I’ll call my sister and let her know you will be around.”

“Oh Daddy, don’t do that. I don’t want to be set up with half the village before I even have a chance to eat my first dinner. I was asked to get a hotel room near the office, when I have free time, and I will, then I will make all my visits and look for an apartment. How does that sound? Or you could come with me and show me around like you did when I was little.”

“Honest, it sounds honest,” he laughs.

“You’re right, once she finds out you’re still single she will be on the prowl for the perfect man for you. Are you going to stay with your current boyfriend? Or break things off before going?” he asks.

“I was contemplating breaking things off this morning when my boss called me into his office. Everything in its right time, huh? He hates to travel, or at least he says he does, so I’m hoping for a clean break. I’ll call you tomorrow and let you know,” she tells him

“Drop on by for dinner tomorrow, Maxine and I are going to try our hands at homemade pizza. Oh, and in answer to your offer, I’ll come visit while

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you’re there, though, not right away,” he laughs thinking about it.

“You two are funny. I’m glad you found a second love Daddy, Maxine is great. Love you,” she laughs.

“Back at ya,” he smiles.
~ ~ ~

Rupert has been working in this building for a few months now, if it isn’t one problem, it is another. He knows the real problem, the building is old and the plumbing needs an upgrade or he will be coming back here every week for an eternity putting bandages on each new part that is broken. He likes the residents; they are nice to him but he has to be able to do other jobs and not be on call to this one building. Lately, he has been here every day.

Today, he is meeting with the owner of the building, he has a proposal for him. He wrote out what it would take for him to repair the whole building at once verses what it will cost for him to keep coming out each week to make minor repairs and he is pretty sure the owner will be happy to jump on this, considering the shape of the plumbing, the age, and the manpower Rupert has already put in for the past two years. He used this history to make an estimate on what future costs will be. His overhaul

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now will prevent emergency repairs later that could cost more than plumbing repair if apartments are ruined from excess water leaks.

He looks down at the numbers again, by doing this building all at once, he will actually be saving the owner close to fifteen thousand dollars, he hopes that is a big enough incentive to do the whole building at once, the venture is not cheap. Rupert has to approach each business deal as only numbers, he has to push away his connection to the client so that he can do the best he can from a business point of view only.

“Rupert! Come on in. I am sorry you were waiting, I came in only moments ago through my back entrance, I turned on my computer’s camera and here you are. I thought we were meeting later but I actually have more time now. Please come with me,” he walks down the hall to a conference room and makes two cups of coffee, he offers one to Rupert.

“Would you believe I don’t drink coffee? I thought you knew that,” Rupert asks.

“Well, then I suppose I’ll drink both, why don’t we sit down here and I’ll look at what you brought me. You said you were making a proposal for me that you hope I won’t turn down,” he smiles.

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He and Rupert went to college together, he knows how smart Rupert is and always tells him to get out of the plumbing business and join him. They are good friends, he wants to see him succeed to his fullest potential. Now that he is reading this proposal, he sees that Rupert is doing what he always said his friend could do. This proposal is perfectly written, fully comprehensible and it is going to save him a lot of money. Who wouldn’t want to do this?

“It’s a lot of upfront money. How long will this take you Rup?” he asks.

“A month to two months working full time, depending on how easily I can get access to each apartment. At most I’m hoping for four months. I’m assuming people will behave about the inconvenience because who wouldn’t want working plumbing all the time?” he asks. “You probably should have done this before you renovated the walls and such though, that’s part of the expense.”

“Why didn’t you go to medical school or engineering like your mom wanted? You can take apart anything and put it back together better than it was before. I’m not saying you aren’t good at what you do; but plumbing always seemed so low on the totem pole of jobs to me. Sorry, that came out wrong,” he apologizes quickly.

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Rupert holds up his hand, “If you were anyone else, I’d be insulted, but I know where this is coming from. Thank you for the vote of confidence but I’ll let you in on a secret, a doctor needs a plumber a lot more often than a plumber needs a doctor. We keep ourselves in good physical condition so we can carry the loads we need to, twist and reach to the spots we need to. At least you don’t spend all your time behind a desk as a plumber either, you get out there and are physical every day. Doctors can’t say that now, can they? You still box down at Green’s Gym?” Rupert asks.

“Only about once a month, but it is still the best workout there is. My wife appreciates that I didn’t let myself go as so many of our male friends have done after marriage. I said, no offense but I keep myself like this for me not you,” he smiles.

“I hope she laughed,” Rupert says.

“Yeah, she knew what I meant. I like this proposal by the way. How about I do this. I’ll send out an email to all the residents right now telling them the start date and that not to complain about plumbing until then, unless it is a burst pipe or some kind of real emergency. In addition to this, I will ask them all to give me two days a week that they think they can be home for you. Will that work?” he asks.

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“Does that mean you’re going to let me do this?” he asks.

“It means, *we* are going to do this, only an idiot wouldn’t want to save that kind of money. This isn’t about the initial savings Rupert, but a yearly one. I never realized how much I’ve been paying you each year. This year alone will be a nice savings, even after paying for this. Next year, when I don’t need you, it will be a lot more savings. The year after that is practically free. Rupert, I may give you a hard time sometimes but I wouldn’t put my building in anyone else’s hands. I’m buying a fourth building and I was going to ask you to come to the walk through so you can give me your opinion about the real state the structure and its plumbing are in. I won’t only take their word for truth. I’ve been dealt that garbage before, remember the building on 44th street? That was a disaster. This building is fifty years old and they say the plumbing works like new. I don’t know what that means, will you do that for me? I’ll pay you your hourly rate as if you are on a job. No freebies, I don’t ask for favors, I never want to owe anyone anything. It gets too complicated,” he says.

“Truman, I appreciate that, really I do. So many people think that plumbing is beneath them. The most arrogant and successful person needs one,

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once in a while. I ignore them usually. I go in to all clients the same way, assess the problem, give a recommendation and tell them an approximate cost. Never a solid cost because I never know what I’m getting into.

One man decided I wasn’t worth that much so I started packing up to leave. He yelled at me that this is not how I should treat a client. I was so fuming and had such a bad week that week with things going wrong that I looked him in the eye and said, ‘But that is how you treat your patients. How many of them do you tell the truth to? Which ones do you tell how much a treatment will cost before moving forward? How many of them do you assess and know you can’t do anything and yet you charge them anyway for your time? How many times have you been wrong and you don’t get yelled at because you simply say, you need to see an expert now, that you’ve done all you can? Well I’m your expert and I’m telling you the truth. You don’t seem to like it and since I work for myself, I don’t have to like every client either. Please get yourself a second quote.’ After that, I decided that I needed to really keep my cool. I could have lost a lot from that one, who knows.” Rupert admits.

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“No, you didn’t lose anything that day Rup, you gained. You gained respect for standing up for yourself. You gained respect because you called him out on his own behaviors. You gained a great reputation too because I happen to know the jerk you’re talking about, he called and told me about what happened with the plumber I recommended and I responded by saying, good for him. Meaning you. I told him that I sent him the best, and if he can’t recognize that other people know things he doesn’t, than he needs to learn to do his own plumbing. Did he call you back?” Truman asks.

“No, but I did get a call from a hotel shortly after that. That you too?” Rupert asks not wanting favors either.

“Nope, your own reputation my friend, your own. Which hotel? Anyone I know?” he asks.

“The Greenpoint? It’s a dump, but they seem like nice people. I told them I can’t commit to such a large project because I’m on my own. I recommended a friend who does large jobs. That place is nuts, not for me, too many bosses. Maybe I’m cutting off my own nose. I don’t want to get into large jobs like that. Your building is fine, I’m already known there and besides it is only seventy-five apartments. Not a two hundred and fifty room hotel

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with three hundred and twenty-five bathrooms plus four industrial sized kitchens. I want to be able to breathe once in a while, you know?” Rupert asks. “Not be too locked into one person. A place like that, would take me all year, and I don’t think I can charge a full year’s salary. Aw listen to me, I’m rambling, sorry.”

“I get that. My wife likes me to be able to breathe as well, it’s important to her. We take off one weekend each month, leave on a Thursday night and come back late Sunday or sometimes Monday morning. Best idea she ever had, keeps us in honey moon mode. When it’s your time, I hope you follow that advice. Always good to keep things fresh.

Ok, I’m not getting into your love life. Don’t give me that look. I don’t know any women looking. I’m only saying, as your good friend, I’d like to see you partner up is all, and with someone as great as my girl. That’s all. No ulterior motive, I swear.

Back to business, I see you put the cost in three payments. I like this format Rup, you worded this well. This contract is easy for a layman to understand and yet not make him feel you’re dumbing the contract down for him. Good work. But about the new building I have. I really do want you to look at it. Your choice of days is tomorrow,

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Friday or next Tuesday. What do you think?”

Truman asks.

Rupert looks at his phone’s calendar, “I think tomorrow is your best bet. I have a few bigger jobs in the next couple days that will push me off if I can’t get them done quickly. I can’t afford that. Especially if you’re taking on the whole apartment building. I need to finish current jobs first,” he says.

“While you were looking at your phone my wife sent me a text, she wants you to come for dinner next week. My birthday. She insists we celebrate this year. Thirty-five and all that. But she wants it in the house. You up for something like that?” Truman asks, knowing Rupert hates big parties, someone is always trying to set him up with someone else they’ve invited. The last one was a nightmare, he couldn’t shake her until he told her he would get a restraining order. Crazy.

“For you? Yeah, I can do that. I’ll bring you a bottle of the good stuff. Your wife serves wimpy alcohol. Even her wine. If we’re going to celebrate, then let’s do this right. Is she calling Willi too? I hear he is back in town,” Rupert replies.

“I’ll let her know. I’m sure she will want to hear about his latest escapades. Let me sign this and write you that first check. Then I’ll see you

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tomorrow, here is the address. 8:00am? Good for you?” Truman walks and talks.

Standing in front of his office door waiting for the signed contract and check, Rupert looks at his calendar again. He can do 8:00am. “Yes, that works for me,” he calls to his friend.

“Why don’t you ever follow me into my office Rup?” he asks.

“I feel as if that is a private place, we had our meeting, no need for me to invade. I’m weird, I know. Either way, I’ll see you in the morning,” Rupert walks out thankful that his friend sees the value in doing what he offered. Sometimes it is harder making a business deal with a friend but Truman and Rupert have been able to keep their friendship through many business deals.

He will sit down tonight and start ordering all the supplies he anticipates and a few of those he thinks might come in handy. Today has started off great, a whole building to do, another one to give an opinion on. Yep, Rupert thinks to himself, today is going to be a good day.

~ ~ ~

“Oh my, Daddy, thank you for calling. I’m on my way home, and I was thinking of you. How

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hard it must have been to leave all of this to come to a small town where you knew no one,” she says all in one breath.

“That is where you are wrong, we all thought of the move as a magnificent adventure. Three brothers and an aunt who could outrun us all. We were headed for great times. That is all we thought about. No one expected for my oldest brother to get sick and not live much past finding our new home. But my aunt even took that as a good sign, she would tell us all that our sadness came first and now we can live our lives happiest. She made sure we were always happy, always well cared for. My sister stayed behind to help my parents, so you see, everyone was happy. From one small village to a small town, not much different. Tell me, how is work?” he asks.

“Work is great, the biggest worry for my boss was that the employees would talk to me and tell me how things are run over here, thinking that I knew nothing and would give in to them and their lazy ways. Boy were they shocked to find out I knew everything about them and the business and probably more than they wanted me to know too. I even came in knowing everyone’s name, my boss made sure I saw pictures and learned everyone’s name.

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But after those first couple of days, we seemed to be getting used to each other. One man keeps telling me that office romances work, then he winks at me. Almost every day so far. Ugh. I give him credit for trying, but I’m also his boss, two people up from him in fact. I suppose that doesn’t bother him as much as it would in the main office near you. Some men won’t even talk to a boss that are two people higher on the tier. How is Maxine?” she asks.

“She said she is thinking it is time she met the family. How about we come out to you in about a month?” he asks slowly.

“That will work. I have a lunch meeting with your sister tomorrow. I figured if I meet during the day, she can’t keep me too long. I’ll have to get back to work. Is that mean?” she asks.

“It will give her something to brag about when she sets you up,” he laughs and so does Kira.

“Daddy, you’re terrible. Her husband isn’t doing well she said. Do you know anything about that?” Kira asks

“Yeah, he is sick and tired of being old. He has been complaining about being old since we were all in our thirties. Now in his sixties, he probably feels ancient and will outlive us all because he is an

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ornery son of a bitch. My sister likes to take care of people, she gives in to his nonsense and he feeds on that. Been that way since they got married. But if he is really sick, I’ll bet he is a bigger pain in the ass than before. Sorry, I’ve never liked how he treated her. He is the reason she didn’t come when your Momma died, he feigned some other stupid illness at the time. God forbid he takes care of himself or asks his boys to do something. She didn’t come in when your brother got married for some other drummed up reason. If he is sick Kira, I hope its long and painful. Really,” her dad says quite flustered.

“Daddy, I never knew. You always spoke so fondly of your sister, she has always called us and talked to us even for no reason at all. Simply to get to know us,” she smiles.

“Because she knew he’d never let her see you in person, not here anyway. She knew. I think he thought that once we had her here, we wouldn’t let her go back, I made sure to invite them both to everything but he still said no. He always thought he was more important than me and my brother. More important than her aunt too. My parents saw their child happy but I think they knew the truth about him and gave their blessing anyway. They shouldn’t have.

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Aw damn it all, I’ve ruined our whole conversation. I’m sorry Kira but you being there brought it all back as if it was yesterday. I miss your mom too, as much as Maxine misses her husband. We talk about our spouses often, as if they are old friends just not living around here.

When was the last time you saw my sister anyway?” he asks trying hard to change the subject. Maxine is sitting next to him holding his hand now. He looks to her and she smiles a reassuring smile. He smiles back.

“The call is not ruined Daddy, any call with you is a good one. It’s my fault, being here, talking about your sister. I brought up bad memories. I’m not sure you ever told me the real reason she doesn’t come visit until today. I love her anyway Daddy, she is part of you. I saw her about five years ago, remember? After getting my graduate degree you sent me on a trip to anywhere and I chose here. I think it was a different season when I came last time, things look so different.

Oh, I found an apartment. Actually, a basement apartment with an older woman. She lives upstairs and part of the cost of the room is that I give her my phone number in case of emergencies because I have a car. Her son used to live with her

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but now that he is gone and flown away on business for a while, she would like a little insurance that she will be ok in an emergency. The basement apartment reminds me of Denis’s first apartment. So funny that two people have such bad taste. But hey, it’s a bed, and I don’t have to deal with being in an apartment building and listening to noisy neighbors. There is one building across the street too that has been abandoned for a while. She has neighbors on each side of her but they seem to keep to themselves.

She told me she heard the new owners across the street want to rejuvenate the place, make it livable again and bring back more life to the area. I guess I’ll be living in a construction zone again. Can’t get away from them,” she laughs.

Maxine grabs the phone, “Hi Kira, that is the funniest story ever. I’ll tell you why. I ran into your ex yesterday, he asked how you were doing all alone and I told him ‘she isn’t alone, she has a whole gang of men and woman standing around waiting to be her friend.’ Sorry, but I didn’t really like him anyway,” she laughs.

“Maxine, you are pretty funny. He sent me a couple of phone messages and emails and I told him there was no reason to feel obligated to keep in

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touch with someone who broke up with you. That was before he saw you yesterday,” Kira says.

“Guess he realizes what he threw out,” her father says. “But really, how is work honey?” he asks again.

“My boss is smart, he sat with me every day before I left and we went over the numbers of this branch, he wanted me to walk in with ideas and be ready to go. To shake things up. I had one person quit on me already. I was told by a few people that he kept bragging he would be the one to take over this branch when Mr. Hensley retired, that he was the perfect match and he knows everything perfectly, especially how they run here. He even went so far to say he knows this place better than my boss.

Goes back to what Nana used to tell me, ‘only fools are perfect’, no love lost when he walked out. He stood there a moment expecting me to say don’t go. But I stood and opened my door to let him out. He went in a huff.

I called my boss, he was glad, he hates firing people and he said this guy deserved to be fired long ago. An inflated sense of self doesn’t help in most places.

When I told my co-workers I have family here they seemed to soften to me, feeling as if I

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wasn’t such an outsider any more. I do have that one guy who keeps hinting about a romance with me besides the winker, the boss said he was going to straighten that out quickly. He said flat out that I’m too good for that guy and I shouldn’t even think about him for a minute.

It’s nice here Daddy, really. I’m doing fine. I hope you do make it out here in a month, there is a festival being advertised all over the place and you’d be here for that. Maxine and I can go shopping for trinkets and you can visit your sister and get ice cream,” Kira laughs.

“Oooo Kira, that is the best offer yet. We are booking tickets as soon as we get off the phone. Festivals! Love them! Love you too honey,” she kisses Kira’s father on the cheek.

“Ok you two, a daughter doesn’t need to hear kissing sounds on the phone. Love you both. See you soon!” she calls into the phone and finishes getting dressed for her day.

The knock on the front door startles her. No one knows she is here. She opens her door and there is a very large man standing in front of her. He backs up seeing that she is scared to look at him. “Sorry Ms. My name is Rupert. I’m a plumber and was asked to check out the plumbing in the building

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across the street. Only, there seems to be a problem, an elderly woman is standing on the porch and not letting us in. She is screaming the name Kira and saying get up here I’m having an emergency. I think she is confused. Can you come help?” he asks.

“Oh dear, Mrs. Roth must be having a bad day. I’m coming, can you please step back?” Rupert does as he is asked.

Kira grabs her keys, Mrs. Roth’s keys as well and her own phone. She runs past the man at her door and stares across the street. Yep, that’s her alright. She slows down as she walks across the street. “Mrs. Roth, you seem upset. What is going on so early in the morning?” Kira asks. This is the second episode, in the short couple of weeks she has been here, that she has seen this behavior from her landlord.

“These men are trying to get into my house. It’s my house. I don’t have to let them in,” she says visibly upset.

“I know this looks like your house from afar,” Kira says. “Did you go for a walk this morning Mrs. Roth?” she asks.

“Of course I did. I woke at 6:30 this morning, changed my clothes, washed my face, brushed my teeth and hair and went out Momma. I

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made it to school on time,” she stands proud to tell Kira this.

“Well then, good for you. How about I take you across the street to your friend and we can get you something good to eat for being so good about all of this. Don’t worry about these men, they will be leaving soon. I trust them. You can too,” Kira says trying to withhold her fear for this dear sweet woman she only met a couple of weeks ago.

Mrs. Roth takes Kira’s hand and walks back to her place easily. Truman and Rupert watch all that happens in front of them. “Sam,” they say in unison. Remembering their friend who had a stroke during college, that is the same kind of episode he would have back then. Truman shakes his head. “Let’s go in. We can check on them later. I don’t think they’re going anywhere,” he says.

“She handled the older woman very well. I will admit that. You first,” Rupert puts out his hand so Truman can open the door.

Kira gets Mrs. Roth comfortable on her couch and asks her to lie down a while. She complies and falls asleep easily. Then Kira looks through the house to find Mrs. Roth’s phone, she must have dropped it again. In the refrigerator, same place as last time.

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She scans the contacts for her son. “Hello, this is Kira, the woman renting the room downstairs from your mom,” she says.

“Why are you using my mom’s phone. Aw crap, don’t answer that,” he says nervously.

“She is alive, no worries there. But sir. Um, I’m afraid this is the second episode of this kind that has happened in the couple of weeks that I have been here,” Kira explains the first and then explains what happened moments ago.

“Aw crap again,” he pauses. “Mom was fine when I left, I promise you. I didn’t abandon her,” he says quickly. “I have to work you know,” he pleads.

“I’m not assuming you did. The first week she spent hours and hours talking about her two sons and their lives. I feel as if I’ve known you for your whole lives. I even knew to call you before your brother. I was new here and we took walks around town when I first got here, she loved to show me around and, in the process, she told me everything about your lives. I hope it was as pleasant as she made it sound,” Kira says.

“Actually, Mom always made life simple for us. Whatever the trouble, she figured out a way to make it simple. For example, my divorce, she didn’t tell you about that because it was a mess. Didn’t tell

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you that our father shot another man because he caught the man cheating on his wife for the third time. Dad was going to go to jail but the man’s wife wouldn’t press charges. He didn’t kill him, only shot him. Right in the knee, right in front of the woman he was cheating with while calling out to her that the man is married. Word is she didn’t move a muscle. Owner of the shop did, he had a rifle aimed at my dad and said to wait for the police. He did, he waited. Because in waiting he could watch all the other people and he kept talking. Talking about the first woman he cheated with, the second one, and now the one in front of him is the third. Told everyone in the store where the man worked too. Kept waiting and talking. My friend used to work there as a bagboy. When the police showed up, not one person would say what happened. Yeah, she doesn’t talk about that part either. Dad died last year. Where is she now?” he asks heartbroken.

“I had her lay down on the couch. The trauma put her right to sleep. I’m not sure she can live alone but I don’t know what options you have,” Kira says.

“None right now. I can’t leave here. I’m on assignment for another three months. Then I am supposed to go back there, I have so much to do

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right now I barely have time to deal with my work, let alone Mom. I promised her I would come back and told her to hang on for me. Damn it. I don’t know what to do.

My brother is in the military, he can’t come either and she is the last remaining of her generation in my family. Damn it again. I’m sorry, this is not your problem. I don’t know what else to say,” he says softly.

Kira looks around the room. The place is well kept, “I can move upstairs until you get back. But I do go to work every day. Can you hire an adult babysitter during the hours I’m at work?” she asks.

“They have them?” he asks.

“They do where I come from, maybe they do here. I can work from home today while you figure things out. I can’t do that often. I’m the new boss,” she says.

“I’ll take the day. Are you sure?” he asks.

“Better than looking at yellow walls with purple flowers in the basement,” she tries to joke hoping it wasn’t his choice.

He laughs, a loud laugh. “My cousin was becoming a decorator and asked to use our basement as his launching room. He said everyone loves those colors together,” he laughs again.

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“In moderation, yes. Not on every wall. I’ll lock the doors and go downstairs to get my stuff. Where should I sleep?” she asks.

“Take the den on the first floor so you’ll hear her leave in the morning or any time. She won’t go in the den, Dad died in there. But the room is not creepy, I promise, she just won’t go in. She lets me go and other people too. She only stops herself. There is a bathroom in there too, behind the Picasso-like painting is the hidden door. You’ll have to shower upstairs though. Are you sure?” he asks again

“I can’t leave her like this. That would be cruel and I’m not that kind of person. She was calling me by name for an emergency so at least she knows partly where she is and who I am for now, this is good. This situation is only a couple of months. You’ll be back and figure things out by then,” she says.

“In the meantime, I’ll figure out tomorrow. Thank you again Ms. Kira,” he says.

“Not to worry, we’ve all had moms,” she laughs and hangs up.

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Rupert and Truman have been working on the new building design together. The basic foundation is still good but the whole skeleton of the building needs to be redone. Once the seller saw that Truman brought a plumber with him, he knew he wasn’t getting the price he originally asked for.

Truman felt the man needed the money so he opted to meet him in the middle of the two prices. He saw the look of gratitude on the owner’s face and knew he had done the right thing. Now he needs to bring the place down to practically nothing and rebuild something but the question is what to rebuild? The area is residential so he probably has to stay with that but not an expensive one so he doesn’t want to make anything too fancy. Rupert suggested making condominiums so that people can own their own apartments and all Truman has to do is keep up the outside of the building and the grounds. He will make back the money he overspent in the buy by selling each unit. Brand new units will bring in a very good price.

Rupert showed Truman how much more he will profit from having sold them individually and having a steady building upkeep charge as well, to that, Truman finally agrees. “Rupert you’re wasting your time under those sinks. You have a great

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business head, a good financial understanding of things. Are you sure you don’t want to help me out more?”

“I’m sure. I understand buildings as far as how they work. I understand their worth. Like a doctor understands how a body works, I understand how plumbing works, but he probably couldn’t build one from scratch and make it work the same as it did before, I can. I like what I do Truman, I really do. Maybe I didn’t explain it exactly right but you get the idea. I know what I know and I know it well. As a side thing, I understand the value of a good place to live and I think that this neighborhood has a lot of potential. There are a lot of people who can’t afford a whole house around here but they’d like to own a place, even a smaller one, would be a dream. You’ll see. You will sell out before they are finished being built,” he says, although his last couple of statements are lost to the window he is facing.

“I haven’t seen her either Rup. The woman or the older woman, either of them. We’ve come out to this building three times since then and I haven’t seen them at all. Lights are on and off so I assume they are there, could be timers. Who knows. Before you ask, no. I didn’t check into who they were. I’ve been too busy with my own life, but we should. The

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older woman, Mrs. Roth was it? I think she owns the place. That’s the impression I got.” Truman looks to his friend. Rupert wants to help, he can tell. Rupert always wants to help. “Let’s go back to my office, we’ll look up public information on the house. Write down the address will you please?”

Rupert turns around. “I have to get back to the other building. I’ve barely made my way past the top floor, I promised you it would be done in a month, nor more than two. Not going to happen if you keep bringing me over here.”

“Rup, I’m the boss of that job too, remember? If it takes you two or two and a half months then so be it. It could even take you four. My office. Let’s go,” he says to his friend. They walk back out of the front door and to Truman’s car.

The drive is silent. Truman looks at Rupert at a stop sign. He is more than concerned. He is worried. They watched this before, with their friend. Each day was sad. It was hard on the family to lose someone who is standing right in front of you but can’t love you back.

He continues to drive and the two of them walk right into Truman’s office and close the door. “Wow, Truman, I wouldn’t have thought you were a mahogany wood guy. I was expecting a more modern

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look. This is nice,” Rupert says as he watches Truman already tapping away on his computer.

“My wife has great taste,” he says.

“In decorating.” Rupert jokes. Truman looks to his friend and smiles.

“Here’s the house and the public records on that address. Ha, I was right, the older woman owns the house. Mrs. Roth. Now what?”

~ ~ ~

The first month of living upstairs with Mrs. Roth has been a rollercoaster for her emotions. Kira gets the blow by blow of the day from the sitter and then writes a condensed version to Mrs. Roth’s son. Who then calls her and tries to make sense of what she said.

“Kira, you’ve been so wonderful in all of this. I know you don’t know me, if there is anything I can do for you. Let me know. You stepped into a family in need without so much as a second glance. Your parents must be proud of you,” he says one afternoon.

“My father shows that gratitude all the time. My mom passed away. He is coming out to visit actually in two days. Staying by his sister,” she tells him.

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“Oh no Kira, I’m taking you from family? I can’t do that. I simply....”

She cuts him off, “We’re not close family. My father is expected to stay with his sister. I’m not. He is on vacation. I am here because my work transferred me to their office here. Mine is long term, I didn’t want to sign a lease on an apartment until I found a neighborhood I wanted to be in.

I met your mom at the store and stopped her from putting up the notice about the apartment downstairs, telling her once people know she is alone they will come take advantage of her. I convinced her to find a better and safer means of advertising and gave her my phone number.

Two days later, she said she checked me out and then decided to make me the offer instead. So here I am. She had a pretty bad day today. Wouldn’t get dressed, they told me. I told them not to push her because who cares if she walks around in pajamas all day. Then the babysitter said she was only wearing her underwear to which I said ‘when you get to be that age, I hope you’re in better control of your mind. For now, leave her be.’ I hope you don’t mind if I said that. It’s not very dignified to walk around like that.

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Does she have a doctor? Do you want me to take her to one? It’s not getting better and by the time you come in two more months she may be afraid of you. I’m sorry Ken but that’s what I’m seeing. Maybe she needs some kind of medication. Sorry, I’ve rambled on too much,” Kira is so involved now she can’t turn away.

Ken takes a deep breath. “I’ll make the call and tell them who is bringing her. Can you send me your picture so I can tell them what you look like? You’ll have to show your ID anyway. Oh Mom,” Ken sits back in his chair. He can’t wait two more months, Kira is right. He will reevaluate his project and see how much he can get done here and how much he can do remotely. This is not something you leave to a perfect stranger to take care of. Although as strangers go, she seems to be on top of her game in life. His phone chimes, “Nice picture. Hold on,” he sends one back to her of himself. Seems only fair.

“Oh, so you’re the one with the grey streaks. She never said which one. You need some sleep Ken. Worrying from over there isn’t going to help you. I’m going to make us dinner, you should do the same and try and get some sleep. I’ll speak to you tomorrow,” Kira hangs up. Mrs. Roth wasn’t kidding when she said her son looks like he had a bad dye

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job. But his natural black hair has patches of grey that aren’t necessarily as distinguished as most men are when going grey.

“Kira?” Mrs. Roth asks.

“Yes Maám,” Kira responds.

“I’m not having a good day, am I?” she asks with a tear rolling down her cheek.

“Not every day will be good, but we will make the most of them. Dinner?” Kira asks.

“What is wrong with me?” she asks

“I don’t know. Your son Ken said he is going to make you a doctor appointment. I’m going to take you. Will that be ok?” she asks.

“Ken is a good boy. Is he still looking like a crazy man?” she asks referring to his hair.

Kira shows her his picture. Mrs. Roth smiles, she touches the phone, “Spitting image of his father you know. Same blue eyes, same crooked smile. I’m hungry Kira,” she looks up at Kira.

“Ok. Let’s go cook together. You tell me what to do while you sit down and rest and I’ll do all the heavy lifting,” she tells her.

And so it goes for the rest of the week. Each night Kira comes home and sees her landlady in some form of undress, and she leaves her alone.

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Monday comes and it is time to get her to the doctor. Thankfully Ken made an early appointment.

“Mrs. Roth, you have to get a shirt on today. We have to go to the doctor ok?” she asks.

“I don’t want to wear pants,” she says.

Kira quickly runs to her own closet and pulls out a dress that will hit below Mrs. Roth’s scared up knees that she knows she doesn’t want to show off, the dress looks like an elongated golf shirt. “Borrow my shirt,” she tells her.

“Oh, how lovely dear. Yes, this will be fine. Do I need shoes?” she asks.

Kira runs to Mrs. Roth’s room and finds some sandals she can slip on. She grabs her hairbrush and comes down the stairs. “I’ll brush your hair and then we’ll go.”

Finally, in the car, Kira listens as her phone gives her directions to get to the doctor. She has all of Mrs. Roth’s papers that the doctor asked her to bring. She walks her into the office and sees that Mrs. Roth isn’t comfortable. “You ok?” she whispers.

“I don’t want a shot,” she says in a small voice.

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Oh no, not now. Not a regression now. “I’ll tell the doctor no shots, please sit with me,” Kira encourages.

Mrs. Roth’s turn comes quickly and Kira has never been so excited for efficiency in an office as she is now. “Hello, I’m Dr. Yu. I read the email from the patient’s son. Thank you for taking care of her, I know how hard this can be. He forwarded me all of your emails since you’ve been there so I am now all caught up. Mrs. Roth, how are you feeling today?” he asks.

“I don’t want a shot,” she says bringing her legs up to her chest and sitting back against the wall.

“I don’t want to give one either. Can I check your eyes, ears and blood pressure?” he asks with patience.

The full exam goes on for an hour. Dr. Yu is very thorough. During this time Mrs. Roth has had moments of clarity and moments of regression. “It may be hard to do, we may have to result to giving her a light sedative to accomplish this, I think we need a scan of her brain to rule out a couple of things. Any idea if she has ever been claustrophobic?” he asks.

“No one mentioned it to me,” Kira says.

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Dr. Yu makes a call on his computer tablet, “Hello doctor, how is the visit going?” Kira hears Ken’s voice. The doctor turns the screen so he can see everyone.

“Hello Mom. You look lovely in red,” he says.

“Thank you. My sister gave it to me which is why there is too much room in the boobies, hers were always bigger than mine,” she giggles.

Kira self consciously puts her hands across her chest. Ken sees this and figures out where the dress came from, he smiles at Kira and says thank you with his mouth but no sound. The doctor takes over and tells Ken what he has observed in the past hour and what he wants to do. “Do you want to be here for that scan?”

“Set it up. I’ll see what I can do. Kira?” he looks to her pleading.

“I’ll be there don’t worry,” she says to him and the doctor.

“Good, because if she gets agitated she needs a familiar face. I know Kira you haven’t been around long but you were the last one she learned and sometimes that sticks very well especially since you’ve been so nice to her, it’s a comfort to her. We can slow the progression of this but we are not likely

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to get rid of the cause. If you have other siblings Ken, you might want to tell them to come visit while she can still have some memories of them.” Ken can only nod, he is thinking of trying to get in touch with his brother, it is not as easy as it used to be, but now he has to try harder.

“Dr. Yu, you’ve been very honest with me and I appreciate it. I’m going to make a couple more inquiries to find my brother and I’ll call you personally. Kira, please take Mom home now. Stop and pick up some popcorn for her, that’s her favorite snack ever,” he tries to smile.

“Ok. Mrs. Roth, you ready to go for some popcorn?” Kira asks

“Oooo, that’s sounds like fun. Bye sir, it has been nice to meet you,” she says to the doctor and stands to shake his hand. She looks one more time at the screen in front of her and stops suddenly, “Ken dear, please shave, you know I don’t like beards. They make you look too dark. No, I don’t like it at all. Not at all,” she says sternly, as a mother would.

Ken can only nod, he is fighting back tears that his mother recognized him and told him the one thing he knew his old Mom would say. Kira takes Mrs. Roth’s hand and leads her out of the room.

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Dr. Yu looks to Ken. “What’s wrong?” he asks.

“My brother was injured in action recently. I don’t know if I can get him there to see her. He is going to be crushed. They were really close when he was younger. I don’t know how to say this to him.” Ken admits.

“It’s best to say the truth, take a chance that he will understand more than you think he will. He may already have an idea if he has called her in the past few months. Go on Ken. Call. You’ll see. You took a chance on Kira being in the house, take another one on your brother,” he smiles to Ken who looks like he could really use a hug.

“Mom took her in, I always trusted my mom’s instincts. Seems that part of her is still there. I’ll call you back when I get through to my brother. I’ll let you know who is going to be at the scan. Thank you Dr. Yu, for your understanding,” Ken signs off.

~ ~ ~

Rupert waits outside Truman’s building across the street from the old lady and young woman he met a while ago. No sign of them yesterday afternoon either. He has to stop this. He feels like a

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stalker. But something about that woman has him caught. She has his full attention and he doesn’t know why.

Rupert sees the car pulling in the driveway, she is driving slowly. That is confusing. He begins to walk over to see if they need help. He calls over first, “Hello.”

Kira gets out of the car and hears someone calling. She turns to look behind her, ah, the man who found Mrs. Roth. She waves him over and walks around to open the door for her passenger. “Mrs. Roth, honey. We are home. Please hold my hand and let’s go inside,” Kira’s voice is trembling.

What is wrong, Rupert thinks to himself. He can hear the fear in her voice. “Can I help you Ms.?” He asks Kira.

“Mrs. Roth has been staring out of the car since we got back in after the doctor’s visit. I’m not sure what to do,” she says honestly.

“Mrs. Roth? She isn’t your parent?” he asks.

“No, I’m staying here for a while, moved in recently and that’s when things went bad for her. Seems to be escalating faster than the family expected or wanted. I’m in touch with her son. We had a doctor’s appointment today, afterwards I took her for popcorn and since we’ve been in the car, she

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has looked like this,” she points to her and Rupert comes closer to look into the passenger’s seat.

He bends down to open her seatbelt and slides one hand under her legs and the other behind her back, he lifts her out of the car. Kira closes the car door and he follows her into the house. Rupert takes Mrs. Roth to the couch and sits her down gently, this is when he finally speaks. “What scared you Mrs. Roth? Whatever it is, is gone. I assure you, you are safe at home. Please, open your eyes and look around,” he is holding her hands in his as he speaks.

Kira’s hand is on her heart, she is so touched by this stranger’s actions, she is also scared to death she did something wrong. Mrs. Roth blinks her eyes and shakes her head. She sees Kira in front of her and looks down at her hand to see who is holding it. “You’re the one who wanted my house,” she says, still sounding confused.

“Oh that. That was a misunderstanding. I came to your door instead of the one across the street. My friend owns the building across the street and I was coming to help him. Thank you for remembering me,” he says softly.

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Mrs. Roth nods her head in recognition of his story, she turns to Kira. “I’m hungry dear, did we make dinner yet?” she asks.

“It is only lunch time Mrs. Roth. What would you like?” she asks nervously.

“I’d like to order pizza, we’ve been cooking a lot lately. Our new friend here can stay too. Let’s get a lot of junk; pizza, fries and even those garlic bread pieces I like so much. My treat. Don’t you have to work today my dear?” she asks Kira.

Kira shakes her head, yes, she has to work. A lot. But today she told everyone she had a family emergency and she will be on her computer in the afternoon. “Um, sure. We can order though. What kind of pizza do you eat?”

Mrs. Roth looks at Rupert, “What kind do you like?” she asks. Rupert looks at this woman, clearly not in the right place mentally, he recognizes this. “Vegetable sounds good. You?” he asks Kira.

“I eat anything. I’m afraid I haven’t been here long enough to know where to order from,” she admits.

“I’ll make the call then,” Rupert takes out his phone and places an order. “It will be here in about fifteen or twenty minutes. The store is nearby. Now, how about we take off your sweater Mrs. Roth. I

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don’t think it is cold in here anymore. You’re wearing a beautiful red dress.”

He helps her take off her sweater and he places it softly on the chair near him. He stands and walks to Kira, and whispers, “When I was holding her hand, her pulse was going quite fast. Do you have someone to call?” he looks at her face.

Kira nods and steps out of the room to call Dr Yu and then Ken. “Kira, I’m actually at the airport. I couldn’t stay anymore and let you do this all by yourself. You’re not even family and you’ve done more than anyone else she has for her in her whole life. Did you call Dr. Yu or do you want me to? I’m not boarding for another half an hour,” he sighs.

“I called. He is actually making a house call. Seems he lives only a few minutes from here and was on his way home. He is stopping here first. I guess he didn’t have a full day of patients today. Or maybe he has a break, he didn’t say. We’ll see you soon then,” Kira walks back into the living-room and sees Rupert and Mrs. Roth playing cards at her table.

The doorbell rings and Rupert opens the door and pays the delivery man. He walks back in as if he has done this many times before, in this house. “Have you been here before?” Kira asks quietly.

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Rupert looks back at her, “No, the layout of the house is familiar to me is all. I work in houses all the time. I’m a plumber,” he says and turns back quickly towards the woman waiting with his cards. No reason to continue talking to the young woman, he can tell she already made up her mind about him.

“My name is Kira, by the way,” she says as she sits down next to him at the table.

“Mrs. Roth, do you want to bathe tonight? Maybe put on a new cotton dress?” she asks and then whispers to Rupert her son is on his way. He nods.

“I can’t bathe with a man in the house. I’m no hussy!” she says in earnest.

“Oh, Mrs. Roth, I would never suggest that, not in a million years. I meant after our friend leaves,” she looks to him for help.

“Rupert. My name is Rupert. Mrs. Roth it has been a pleasure eating with you. I’ve never seen anyone cut their pizza and eat with a knife and fork,” he teases

“My mother said all food should be touched by utensils that is why we have them. Now, young man, you will come back tomorrow, right? I mean we will need to weed the garden again, it is a mess. But the shingles on the front windows need fixing

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too, oh I don’t know where you’re going to start. My Harold will tell you in the morning. I’m going to go up to my room now,” she turns to Kira. “Are you still here? I thought you were staying in the basement apartment.”

“I was staying up here in the guest room Mrs. Roth, I thought we would both be safer that way. You know, in case I needed you. I’m alone here remember,” she tries to give her some information without making her feel she forgot again.

“Oh right. A grown woman afraid of the dark isn’t good in the basement. Will you do the dishes dear? I’m going to go upstairs now,” Mrs. Roth stands with some difficulty.

There is a knock on the door, Kira almost forgot the doctor was supposed to show up. She jumps to answer the door. “Hi, sorry I’m late. I actually got a flat tire, but thankfully someone came quickly. How is she now?” he asks.

Kira relays what has happened since she left him this morning, and the most recent conversation with Rupert. “Rupert is here? Oh good, I have a question for him,” he says as he walks into the living room.

“Good evening Mrs. Roth aren’t you looking lovely this afternoon?” he asks.

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“I always look lovely. I’m not a fool you know,” she says in a biting tone. Uncharacteristic for sure.

“Well, I meant particularly lovely. Can I ask you a couple of questions?” he asks.

“Sure, but my friend here was going to take me upstairs now. You can follow,” she puts out her elbow for Rupert to help her walk to, and then up the stairs. He holds on to her the whole way up and brings her to her room. Kira is right behind the men and walks into the room quickly to make sure nothing is out that will embarrass Mrs. Roth.

She sees the room is in order and sighs. Doctor Yu does too. “Order is good. Sometimes it is good to check the house situation. No offense,” he says to Kira.

“None taken,” she says softly. Mrs. Roth is still holding on to Rupert.

“You can set me down over here son,” she points to her vanity chair. As she sits down she takes out her brush and begins her nightly routine of brushing her hair. Doctor Yu steps in.

“A hundred strokes?” he asks. She nods and he begins to brush her hair and talk to her. Questions to find out if she knows who is in the room. Who he is, where her children are, how long

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she has been in the house. What today is. He goes back and forth from questions of the past and the present. She misses every other one. Now he nods, having received a better picture of where her head is.

“I’ll schedule the scan, although I’m fairly certain I know what is going on. I don’t think she had a stroke of any kind,” he says softly.

“Yes, your strokes were very kind. Now, if you don’t mind I need to get changed for bed,” the two men quickly walk out and down the stairs. Kira stays and helps Mrs. Roth pick out bed clothing, then she asks. “Are you sure you don’t want to shower or bathe?”

The woman wears perfume but her son is coming and he is going to know she hasn’t bathed. Kira can’t get her near any water at all for the longest time, she is worried.

“I want to wear the blue one please. That was a big dinner and I’m afraid so much food has made me tired. Thank you, Kira for taking such good care of me. You’re so much better than those babysitters that come during the day. But I know you have to work during the day. I know. You’ll be home for breakfast tomorrow?” she asks.

“Yes Maám, I will,” and so will your son, she thinks to herself. I hope he isn’t angry with me, she

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thinks to herself. She helps her into bed and then Kira walks to the door. She comes back quickly and leans down to give Mrs. Roth a kiss on the cheek. “Good night sweet woman,” she says softly, she checks her watch, it is only 4:30 in the afternoon. Maybe she will stay asleep. Maybe she will lay here with nowhere else to go and fall asleep later. Mrs. Roth smiles and rolls to her side to get comfortable.

Kira runs down the stairs and sees the two men have cleaned up the food from the table and have already done the dishes. Now they are sitting in the kitchen talking. “Is this some sort of reunion?” she asks.

“I’m sorry. I’ve known Rupert for years. Everyone around here does. This man performs magic with plumbing. He knows buildings as well as or even better than some doctors know the human body. We were talking about what my house needs.

How do you know each other, besides that initial meeting across the street?” Dr. Yu asks.

Rupert looks to the good doctor, “Actually, this is only the second time we’ve met. I hadn’t seen them around recently and Truman and I have been out here a few times, I came by today to check and see how things were going. Having had an elderly aunt go through something like this for a long time, I

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recognized what was going on. I’m sorry if I intruded on Kira,” Rupert begins to stand.

“Intrude? I believe I’ve stepped into someone else’s reality – I’m supposed to be working every day. I was sent here by the owner of the company to be in charge here and already I’ve taken two days off for family emergencies and it’s not my family. Now I have people sitting with me in a house that is also not mine, who think they are my friends, and have done wonderful things already. Intrude you say? How can *you* intrude when I don’t even know where to begin to walk? I’m so confused right now I’m not even making sense. Since you know the place so well, please see yourselves out, I have to get some actual work done.” After her rant, Kira walks over to the guest room/den where she is staying, she grabs her laptop and walks back out to the living room chair to curl up and answer e-mails and respond to all the questions that were asked her today. Working helps her calm down and get back to her own reality.

Intrude? How can one intrude when Kira doesn’t even know the boundaries anymore? She isn’t family, isn’t even friends, she is a tenant. Isn’t she? She sighs and begins to tap away at her computer again.

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In the kitchen Dr. Yu and Rupert have a business conversation for a few minutes before the doctor finally says, “You’re going to stay, aren’t you?” he asks Rupert.

“How can I not? Look at the state she is in, and the son is coming soon and he will surely be in an equal state of disbelief. I don’t think Mrs. Roth has bathed in a long time and I think Kira is thinking she failed at a responsibility that isn’t even hers,” he looks at the doctor and at the door towards the living room. That woman has touched him deeply and he doesn’t know why. He doesn’t have time for this.

Dr. Yu touches Rupert’s hand on the table. “You’re not that old Rupert, take a chance,” is all he says and stands to walk out on his own. Rupert calls Truman to get his take on all of this.

“Whoa, this is bad Rupert. Are you thinking this is like your Aunt Rudy’s condition? Or our friend with the stroke?” he asks.

“How’d you remember that?” Rupert asks.

“We’ve known each other longer than you want to admit my old friend. I remember your Aunt Rudy, she made everyone fresh taffy for our birthdays,” he tries to bring a happy moment in to the conversation.

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Rupert sighs, “Yeah, she did. So, what do I do now? I have to be at your other building tomorrow all day and the next day. I’m finishing the last three apartments and then you are done and we can look at the place across the street again. This job is already over the time I promised,” Rupert is trying to stay formal.

“Be a friend Rup. You know how. Be her friend, sounds like she needs one. She isn’t angry. She is confused and anyone in her position would be. Go. The son will be home soon and maybe you can help her move back down to the basement,” Truman takes a deep breath. “Call me any time. I’m here.”

“Thanks. Tell your wife thank you in advance too because I will probably be calling you late tonight,” he laughs and so does Truman. His wife loves Rupert and wants him to find the right woman for him. Someone to love and appreciate all of him.

Rupert walks out into the living room and sees Kira tapping at her computer but she is also crying. He brings her a box of tissues and walks away to sit on the other chair. “Want to talk?” he asks.

“No,” she says through tears.

“Want to punch something?” he asks

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“No,” but this time she smiles a bit.
“When will her son be here?” he asks slowly again.

“I think he said by 7:00 tonight. I don’t know where he is coming from so I don’t know how long it is supposed to be. I’m also worried that she won’t sleep through the night, it was kind of early when she went to bed,” she looks up at Rupert. “Why are you here Rupert? Really?”

“I told you. I was worried about the woman upstairs. She reminds me of my Aunt Rudy, I went through watching this deterioration before. It can be hard. Then when I came over and saw her in the car, my heart sank. I saw that too. Often. She would get so focused on trying to remember something that she would be lost, off in her own head somewhere.

Sometimes she came out ok, other times she began to cry. When she remembered her husband, she cried the most. He had been gone for a long time. Sudden heart attack when he was only fifty. I know you aren’t family Kira and that must actually make this worse for you, because your pain is only yours, you can’t share it with anyone. I wanted to stay to let you know you have a friend in the area,” he watches as she absorbs all of what he said.

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“You mean this will get worse?” she takes a couple of deep breaths with her eyes closed. When she opens them, he is still sitting there watching her. His eyes are so deep you can get lost in them. His look of concern for her has her insides moving, but that can’t be true, no one looks at her like that.

She blinks her eyes a couple of times. Her phone rings. “Hello Ken. How are you?” she asks.

“I’m tired. I’m very tired,” he takes a breath. “I came to pick up my brother to take him to Mom, but they won’t release him until the doctor sees him tomorrow. We sat and cried over this together. His wife is here and she joined us momentarily. You don’t know my mom Kira, she is our rock. Rocks don’t melt,” he chokes on his words again.

“No Ken. Rocks don’t melt, but they can erode. She doesn’t look like she has had a rough life. Rupert came over to help out, he bought her pizza and all the trimmings. He brought her upstairs and Dr. Yu talked to her while brushing her hair. Who does that?” she asks.

“Welcome to our neighborhood Kira. Can I speak to Rupert?” he asks.

“It’s Ken. He wants to speak to you,” she hands him the phone.

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“Hello Ken. I never made the connection. I’m sorry. I should have,” Rupert says.

“She wasn’t around for many years Rup, only Dad was there. You know that, I know that, but Kira doesn’t have to know. Ok?” he asks.

“Yeah man, of course. Where are you?” Rupert asks and Ken gives him the detailed version of the story. “So, you’ll have to drive then, not fly,” he says.

“Looks that way. We sat and cried together. I haven’t been gone that long, how can this come up so quickly? Why didn’t I see signs before I left and done something for her? Ugh. How is Kira doing this for a stranger, she must be some kind of heaven sent angel,” he says.

“You could say that,” Rupert says softly, looking over at this woman and wondering how he is so smitten without knowing her very long. Heaven sent sounds right.

“If you think it is necessary, stay in my old room Rup. Mom won’t know,” he tries to joke.

“I have work tomorrow and so does Kira. I think she is trying to get her to bathe but that’s not working well,” Rupert looks into Kira’s eyes for approval of the assessment. She nods.

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“Ah, Momma nearly drowned as a child. She takes sponge bathes a lot in a dry tub. There should be a pitcher for water in the bathroom. Fill two of them and put them in the tub, she will do the rest. I hope. She has a favorite wash cloth too. I hope that is there. I never thought to tell Kira, I assumed Mom was still doing that on her own. Damn it. Aw Rup, just damn it all,” he sighs.

“Go, be with your brother. I’ve got this. Keep in touch, either Kira or me,” he hangs up and hands the phone to Kira and tells her about the bath situation.

“Oh, I’m glad you asked. I was too embarrassed to do that. I mean how do you say, hey your mom stinks and I can’t get her in or even near the water, and say it nicely?” She sits back down in her chair, “If you know Ken so well, why didn’t she know you?” she asks.

“She did, she never called me by my name. It was always son, dearie, or hey aren’t you Ken’s friend? Holding on to me going upstairs, I’m pretty sure she knew who was holding her. At least for part of the way,” he says. “Go to work in the morning. I’ll hang here and wait for Ken and the babysitter.”

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“But she asked me if I will be here for breakfast, I said yes. I can’t change my mind,” she says almost annoyed.

“What time did she get up today Kira?” he asks in a low tone to try and keep her calm.

Kira thinks a moment. “Oh yeah, 5:30. Yeah, I’m not exactly leaving for work yet. I suppose the timing is good. Ken will be back and my father is coming in to see his sister in two days. I’ll go stay with them while he is here and Ken can get things situated here. Then maybe I can move back to the basement. Such as it is,” she says more talking to herself than to Rupert.

“Kira, I’m assuming there is a reason you’re not staying with your aunt to start with. How did you find this place?” Rupert asks.

Kira explains the whole story to him, from the job offer, her break-up, all the way until the moment she landed and found this available room. “I’m sorry, you didn’t ask for my whole life story. Rupert, how does everyone around here know you if you’re only a plumber?” she pauses then hits her own forehead. “Oh crap, that isn’t what I meant. Why are you still talking to me, I’m such an idiot?”

Kira gets up, sets her laptop down on the coffee table and walks to the window to look outside.

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Out at something or someone who isn’t so damn good looking and whose eyes aren’t melting her insides. He is really pulling her in and she doesn’t know why. There isn’t one thing bad about him. Not one.

Rupert watches as she walks to the window. Something is bothering her, he can tell. He is not insulted by what she said, he understands where it came from. Fear. There must be some kind of fear there, maybe she has her own Aunt Rudy, or maybe she has never seen this and is frightened by the idea of losing full control of one’s mind. No one has an easy time with this, especially the patient. People forget that the patient, in their lucid moments, knows what is going on.

“I’ve been working in this area since before college. I’m thirty-five now Kira, people know me because I’m good at what I do. I pride myself on my work. My parents wanted me to become a doctor but my Aunt Rudy? She had my back and told me to do what I wanted to do. I know mechanical plumbing as well or even better than some doctors know the human body. That is the phrase I use that helps people understand my knowledge.

The reason so many people know me is because I tend to make friends with my clients. I

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recently did a complete overhaul for one of my friend’s buildings. The same one who owns the building across the street. Each unit in the building is a new friend to me. You may think that is a bit conceited but I really do make friends easily. I’m a good listener too. Kira, can you talk to me please. I can go on and on but I’d prefer to hear from you,” he jokes

Kira turns and all she sees are two very big, dark eyes staring at her with great concern. Her first thought is that she wants to call her dad. He’d know what to do. But then she realizes that he isn’t here and only she is and this pair of gorgeous eyes with a body to match. “I was brought here to shed light into this part of the business. My boss and I have been working together since I finished college. He approved my transfer for two reasons, one; I’ve been here before because of family and two is because he said he wants me to spread my wings, that I’m too young to be stuck in our small town. So, now I’m here. I go to work and I come home and take care of Mrs. Roth and I take care of her any time she calls me. I suppose in some ways it is more than I bargained for. I’m sorry for complaining. I really shouldn’t be. Wow, you’re right, you’re a good listener.

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I hope Ken is going to be able to deal with his brother and that situation on top of all of this.”

~ ~ ~

Ken looks down at his brother sleeping in his hospital bed. With him staying tonight, his sister in law went back to her hotel for the night. Her first night out of the hospital. “Oh, brother dear, we are in deep trouble here,” Ken tells his brother all that has happened in the past couple of days with their mother.

His brother silently reaches a hand up and touches Ken’s hand which is on the railing of his bed. Ken looks down. “Damn, you heard me,” he says.

His brother blinks a couple of times and pulls himself out of his drug stupor. “Ken. Who is with her,” he whispers.

Ken starts from the beginning and tells his brother the whole Kira story, “and then I spoke to Rupert who is staying tonight.”

“I can’t walk yet Ken. I can sit up, but the physical therapist is the one who moves my legs. They say I have to learn how in the next few months or I won’t be able to. Very aggressive physical therapy. Can I do that near Mom’s house? If not, I’ll

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have to stay here and deal with the military treatment,” Teddy adds.

“I’ll have to check when we get there. But we do have that new sports medicine place near me. Maybe that will have what you need. If we have to, I’ll drive you right back here after you’ve had a moment to see Mom,” Ken says.

“Katy, where is Katy?” he asks nervously.

“She went to the hotel for the night, she has been here the whole time,” Ken says looking at his brother questioningly.

“Ken. She only came yesterday, she told me she and the baby are going to her parents. She told me if I get back to normal to call her. You must have come in right after that and she played the martyr. Since my last deployment she has been threatening divorce. She even said she should have gotten out before this so no one thinks ill of her for leaving an invalid.

Then you come and tell me about Mom. Life is exciting for me. But at least with me, we aren’t fighting like you and your wife did,” he grins.

“Teddy, you make more money as a discharged officer than she makes in her little receptionist job. You can get custody of your son if

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you want to. She never liked being pregnant as I recall. Why would she want the child?

As far as the other part goes? We’ve done everything together. Raising a child would be nothing for me. I’ll support you through all of this. You supported me when my life went to hell. Brothers stick together. The doctor is coming in the morning to give me instructions on how to travel with you. I suppose you have some limitations which is why we are driving not flying.

Life looks complicated now but we’ve done this our whole lives. We can do it a few more years,” Ken says to his brother.

“Ken. Rupert must really like Kira,” Teddy says.

“Well that’s a change in subject, what makes you say that?” he asks.

“The last few women in his life he couldn’t get away from fast enough. All those clients who try to flirt with him, get him angry. The ones who try to befriend him, annoy him. She is a woman in need of a friend and he is freely giving himself to her. Do you know what she looks like?” he asks.

Ken searches his phone for the picture she sent, “Here, I had to have her send me a picture so I

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could tell the doctor’s office who was coming with Mom.”

“Wow, she sure is pretty. Yeah, Rupert is lost. Oh, I’m so excited. This will definitely make the trip home worthwhile,” he smiles. “Listen Ken, about my wife and kid. The boy’s skin is three shades darker than mine. Of course, I am sickly white most of the time right now, but still. I’m not sure I want to fight this. Might be easier to let her go and forget about the past four years,” he looks at his brother.

“Teddy, our father was much darker than you realize. Maybe he actually did give you something. Maybe her guilt is what is prompting this. A simple DNA test would let you know. Don’t let her take your son. She wants a clean break, that means you get to have what is yours and she doesn’t get to make those decisions. You do, the courts do. No unilateral decisions. You hear me?”

You’ll have me, the house, Rupert and whomever else we need to drag in so that the child is raised with love. The courts will love the story and the support. Right now, we both need to sleep. Big day tomorrow.” Ken looks at his brother and pats his hand. Teddy easily slips into sleep again.

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“Kira!!” Mrs. Roth screams.

Kira jumps from her bed and runs out of her room. She sees Mrs. Roth standing in the living room with only her underpants on and nothing else. She runs to her and holds her by the shoulders. “Mrs. Roth. I’m here, what’s wrong?” she asks shaking her a bit to get her to focus.

“I’m a mess, look at me. I’m a mess. I can’t be a mess. Oh no, I can’t be one of those people. I can’t Oh Kira I want to die,” Mrs. Roth stands shaking.

Kira looks down and sees that Mrs. Roth had a bathroom accident. “You’re not one of those people. You were sleeping so soundly you must have forgotten to get out of bed. It happens to many people in sound sleep. I’ll help you back upstairs and get your pitchers ready for you in the bathroom,” she says to try and calm her.

“Ok, you’re sure this is normal? I’m not going to be that person. I won’t let that happen,” she holds on to Kira and walks back upstairs. When they get upstairs Kira sees that Rupert is already there in the bedroom, he has already changed the sheets. Kira looks at him and smiles, a tear falls down from

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one of her eyes. She continues to walk Mrs. Roth into the bathroom.

Kira finds the pitchers that Ken had mentioned and fills them both with warm water. Mrs. Roth steps into the dry tub and accepts the pitchers easily. She points to her soaps and shampoo. When she has all she needs, she sits down in the tub and begins to wash herself. Kira is startled when she hears Mrs. Roth crying behind the curtain of the tub. “Mrs. Roth?” she calls to her softly.

“They’re going to put me away. I’m going to lose my house. They will forget about me. How did I let this get so bad?” she asks.

“Mrs. Roth, has this happened before?” she asks.

“Yes,” she whispers.

“I’m going to call the doctor. Can I leave you here for a few minutes?” Kira asks.

“Yes,” she whispers.

Kira leaves the bathroom and sees Rupert standing there. She looks around the room and sees that the mattress has been hauled into the hallway. The sheets and pillows have been placed in the same manner that Mrs. Roth had them. Her pajamas are outside in the hallway with the sheets as well. Kira is frozen in place, she doesn’t know what to do now.

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Rupert walks over to her and holds his hands out. Kira walks into his arms and he holds her. “I heard her screaming, she kept saying ‘not now, not again. I don’t want this.’ This isn’t the first time Kira. We need to get her to the doctor. I think something else is going on; even on her good days she hasn’t been able to tell you what has happened. Do you want to call the doctor or do you want me to?” he releases her and looks into her eyes.

Kira looks into Rupert’s eyes and in all of this chaos the only thing she can think of is kissing this man. Being in his arms feels not only comforting but perfect. “I’ll call,” she chokes out.

“Ok. I’ll finish up here. She didn’t notice me in here before. I think that is why she takes off her pajamas. They are soiled a lot. She throws them out, this is why you haven’t found them before. When she knows, she disposes of them. Go call, I’ll keep an ear out for her. I’m trying not to talk to her so she isn’t more embarrassed in front of me. Go,” he leans forward and kisses her cheek.

Kira looks into his eyes and nods. In the hallway she calls Dr. Yu to explain what is going on. She looks at her watch. Mrs. Roth slept from 4:30 until 2:00 in the morning. She has slept ten hours so far. Probably more than enough. Kira realizes she is

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going to have to stay up now. Somehow, she will get to work tomorrow. She has to. She walks back into the room and heads to the bathroom with clean underwear as well as a clean night shirt. “Mrs. Roth. How are you doing? I brought you some fresh clothes.”

“I’m done now honey. Help me stand up,” she says.

Kira pulls back the curtain and sees that the pitchers are empty and that Mrs. Roth is now clean. “How about I take you to get your hair done tomorrow? We’ll ask them to put it up in a nice braid,” she smiles.

Mrs. Roth smiles, “I’d love that. Is Ken’s friend still here?” she asks.

“His name is Rupert, yes he is. Why do you ask?” Kira asks.

“Oh, I was going to talk to you about him. I didn’t want him to hear,” she says.

“He won’t listen to us in here,” Kira says.

“Kira, while I can, I’m going to tell you one thing. Rupert, as you call him, is the best man on earth next to my boys. If he gives you the time of day, please honey, see where it goes. My Ken? He has a girl pinning for him already, he has to wake up and see her. Her name is Cheri. My other son,

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Teddy, his wife is a bitch and I hope they break up. No one knows this but I don’t think the baby is his. Now before I lose my mind completely give this old lady a hug and tell me we’re good,” Mrs. Roth says with tears in her eyes.

“Oh Mrs. Roth, he is quite good looking. But I’m a simple woman, I don’t make friends as easily as he does. I’m only twenty-nine, I’m probably too young for him too. Listen, Mrs. Roth, don’t let this morning bother you. Really. I think there is something else wrong that makes this happen. It is not your memory. Is it ok if I take you back to the doctor to have him check this? Maybe he can do something about that part of these recent changes?” Kira looks at this woman, a perfect stranger not too long ago, and now she loves her like family.

“Oh Kira, you think so? Yes, please call him. Please. What time is it?” she asks.

“It is only 2:00 in the morning. But you went to sleep very, very early. Even early for you. You want to go downstairs and make some fun breakfast foods? I want you to teach me how to make those biscuits you promised me. I didn’t have a mom to teach me these things. Will you do that for a stranger?” Kira asks, feeling as if she is talking to the real Mrs. Roth right now. She has to push her

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thoughts of Rupert in the back of her mind. Her cheek is still hot from where he kissed her earlier.

“I’d love to. Oh darlin’, I only had two sons. Let’s go. I’m up for it and as long as I am me, pull it all out of me. I’ll give you my recipes. You’ve made this old woman very happy,” she grabs Kira in for another hug.

The two women take their tears and each other down the stairs. Rupert meets them in the kitchen. He has already put up a pot of hot chocolate as they walk in. “Morning Mrs. Roth, you want mint in your hot chocolate or only marshmallows this morning?” he asks quietly.

Mrs. Roth grabs Kira’s hand with one hand and puts her other hand on her heart. She nods to Kira and Kira instantly understands what she is saying. She wants her to get together with Rupert. This time with Mrs. Roth, while she is completely lucid, has been very special so far. Kira wants to make the most of her lucidity.

“We’re going to learn how to make biscuits this morning Rupert. Care to join us?” she asks Rupert.

“I’d love to help. How about you ladies make the biscuits and I’ll make some fresh berry sauce with the fruit I saw in the refrigerator last night,” he

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smiles at Kira. This is going to be a long night but he can tell Kira is trying to get the most out of Mrs. Roth’s lucid moment. He also gets out a pad of paper so Kira can write this down. Mrs. Roth’s biscuits are one of her family’s favorites.

~ ~ ~

Teddy’s doctor walks in and sees his patient sitting up in a chair. “Well this looks promising. Who put you in that chair?” he asks.

“That would be me. We worked together this morning. In and out of the chair three times. That was this morning’s goal. Hi, I’m Ken, his brother. I’m the one who needs to get him in a car and drive for six hours,” he reaches out his hand to shake with the doctor.

“Can we make the goal four times? I’d like to see how much you do on your own, or with minimal help from your brother. I know what you were told before by a physical therapist and they aren’t doctors. They are good at what they do, but I’ve been doing this much longer than the therapists we have here. You will be able to walk. Maybe not dance to a fast beat, but walking, yes. If you are already comfortable doing this, I see your prognosis as being very good.

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Be honest with me, how much pain are you really in?” he asks.

“On a scale of one to five, I’d say a two or three. So not so bad. I don’t want to take a lot of pain meds. What else can we do?” Teddy asks.

“The more you use your body, the more comfortable you will get. But that six hour drive may take eight or more since you may have to stop often to stand. I’ll give you some exercises to do on a daily basis until you find the right therapist. I’ll give you guidelines and appropriate questions to ask them. If they have anything to say against my recommendations? Don’t use them. I mean that. What kind of place do you live in?” he asks Ken.

“We live in a two-story home but there is a guest bedroom on the first floor with its own bathroom, no shower though,” he says.

“That’s fine, once or twice a week up the stairs for a shower will be fine. As long as you buy a shower chair in case he is tired by the time he gets up there. I’m good with that sort of set up. Let me do a full check up – I’m feeling this is a going to be discharge day. Tell me why the rush?” he asks.

Ken begins to tell the good doctor about their mother. The three men talk for a long time. The doctor spends a lot of time on giving them

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instructions about the drive as well as the follow up with the therapists. “I’d also suggest you go to a message therapist. I’ll write down what I want them to do. It will make you feel less stressed too. Too many men don’t go for a message because they think it is for wimps but let me tell you, it can really make you feel relaxed and sometimes that is more important. I’m giving you the discharge you want, however, I would like you to see this particular doctor for a follow up. Now that I know where you’re going, I remembered him. He happens to be my cousin so he will know exactly how I think and what I want for you.” He continues to write down on his pad of paper. Using a few pages, he finally hands Ken all of his instructions. Then he signs the official discharge papers and wishes them well.

“Well Teddy, I have one question. Do you remember much of our conversation last night?” Ken asks.

“Yeah, I was more awake than you think. My phone had a voice message on it that I listened to when you were out of the room. My wife left after you showed up, as I said she did. She is back with her mom and she has the baby with her. She said papers will be sent to your home because she is assuming you’re taking me there. We’ll ask Rupert

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for his friend Truman’s lawyer. I think I need that DNA test. I’m keeping the voice message, it isn’t exactly a nice one. I gave you the censored version. Take me home Ken,” he smirks.

“My pleasure. Let me call Kira and see how things are going today. Maybe you’ll want to hear that too,” Ken waits until they are in the car and on their way before he calls Kira.

“Morning sunshine, how is your day so far?” he asks in his best friendly way.

“Hold on,” Kira whispers. She walks out of the room and back downstairs. After she gets downstairs she points to Rupert and then to her phone. He follows her out to the living room and she turns on her speaker on the phone. “Hi, I just put your mom back into her room to lay down. We’ve all been up since 2:00 this morning. Rupert is here with me, you’re on speaker,” she says.

Rupert reaches over and holds her hand. It has been a long, trying morning already but every time he touches her, he feels grounded and he sees the motion seems to relax Kira as well.

“I have Teddy in the car, we’re on our way,” Ken goes on to describe their night as well as their morning. Teddy feels the need to be honest with

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everyone and he plays his wife’s voice mail for all to hear.

Kira sits in her seat and cries. She can’t help herself. This man was injured and has a long recovery but the names she called him were so inappropriate she wants to jump through the phone and hug him. Seeing she can’t speak, Rupert tells them about their time with Mrs. Roth. How many batches of biscuits they made, how much they laughed together even. He tells them there is a large pot of chili on the stove that needs to slow cook all day and will be ready by the time they get here. It is now 8:00 in the morning and Mrs. Roth was getting tired, so Kira put her back to bed.

“I have to go to work in a few minutes.

Rupert said he will stay home today. What do you need us to do for you? Besides me moving back to the basement. That is, if you even want me to stay,” Kira says as she realizes her life may change again.

“Kira, I’m sorry to displace you. You can take a room upstairs if you’d like. That basement is scary on a good day. Until we redo the walls, no one should stay there. Kira, you’re family already. If Momma is telling you recipes than she trusts you, she never told my wife a thing about her cooking,” Teddy says.

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“She told me this morning that she never liked her, in fact I believe she called her a bitch and wished you two would separate. That was at 2:30 this morning when she was fully lucid,” Kira covers her mouth. She can’t believe she said that. Sleeplessness has hindered her filter.

“I understand your dad is coming soon Kira, how is that going to work?” Ken asks.

“I thought maybe I’d leave you guys alone and stay with him at my aunt’s place. I’ll move all my stuff out, and after he leaves, I’ll see what happens,” Kira can’t stop her tears from coming. Even though her voice sounds strong, her tears reveal what is in her heart. She is thankful only Rupert can see this.

He squeezes her hand again and then he scoots over to sit next to her and puts his arm around her shoulder. This feels complete, it is the only way he can describe what he is feeling. Heaven sent, that is what he is keeping in his heart. But when can they actually talk about this without it being intertwined within the Roth family? He wants to take her out, maybe when she is staying with her father, out of this situation, they can explore there being an us.

“We will keep you posted as we go along. Rupert, thanks again for being such a good friend.

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Mom always did like you. We’ll be in touch,” Ken says.

“No worries, drive carefully,” he says and hangs up for Kira who seems to be stuck in her seat right now.

“Kira, you have to go change for work. You’re still in your pajamas. Go on, quickly. I’ll pack you up some lunch. Don’t think about what will happen after your father leaves. Can we think only about how we had a good six hours of her being completely lucid? It was a lot of fun. I think we all had a good time. I know I did,” he looks into her eyes.

Kira looks into Rupert’s eyes. How she wished this was going to be true. “Thank you, Rupert. That means a lot to me that you enjoyed this morning. I do need to go to work today. We have a big project that needs to be tended to. Will you be with Mrs. Roth today?” she asks him, never letting her eyes leave his intense stare.

“I’ll be fine with her, but not as fine without you,” he bows his head for a moment. “I’m sorry, I didn’t want to say that today but Kira now that I did, I want you to know that since the moment I saw you, there was something pulling me in towards you. This morning we worked so seamlessly together in the

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kitchen, it felt natural. Say something please,” he pleads

“Rupert, I felt you looking at me but I never assumed you were really looking at me. This is a lot to take in. Can I go to work please? I need to, part of me will be here with you,” she stands quickly so that she doesn’t do anything she will regret. Kira gets to her room and dresses for work. She needs to get her head on her project so she plays her slideshow presentation on her laptop to get her head in the right place. Now that she is dressed, she turns to the mirror and looks at herself. Her face is flush, she shakes her head and grabs all she needs for work.

As she gets to the door, Rupert grabs her hand and turns her around to face him. “I have to see where this is going,” he whispers and leans down to kiss her right on the lips. Then he says to her, “This has nothing to do with the Roth family, and all to do with us.”

Kira smiles at him, “Really?” she asks.

“Please Kira, take a chance on me. On us,” then he kisses her one more time, softly on her lips.

“If I don’t leave now, we could stand here all day. I’ll let you know how the presentation goes,” she leans over and kisses his cheek and hugs him.

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Rupert watches as she walks out to her car and leaves. He immediately calls Truman to discuss this.

~ ~ ~

Teddy has been home for a whole week already. He watches his mother in various states of lucidity. The doctor had given her something to fix her bladder and colon functions. Since then, she has been fine as far as that part is concerned.

She was in a good mood when he came home and knew him right away. That was comforting, but today is not one of her better days and the adult sitter that is in the house is not handling her well. Teddy can’t run to her rescue so he calls Rupert, he knows he is across the street now. Rupert comes running over and sees that the sitter has Mrs. Roth sitting against her will. “What the hell are you doing?” he asks angrily.

“She is walking around the house fourteen times already, she needs to sit still so I belted her down, it’s a normal thing we do,” she says defending herself.

“Like hell you do!” he yells. Takes a picture of Mrs. Roth, then opens the belt. She immediately puts her hands around his neck and he lifts her from

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this chair and brings her to Teddy. “Stay here and take care of Teddy, he wants you to read to him,” he says, handing her a car magazine.

Then he walks back out into the other room. “Where are you going? Sit down!” he demands. He calls the company she works for because he is now also on the emergency list for the family and demands that they come pick up this woman immediately.

“Sir, I assure you this is not standard practice. We will be there within minutes,” the man says.

“If you leave this house, I’ll be calling the police. You’re lucky I didn’t call them first,” he stands in front of her with his arms crossed.

“You don’t have to be so mean. I’m a trained professional. I know how to deal with delinquent elderly,” she says with confidence.

Rupert decides to remain quiet. The man on the phone was true to his word and came quickly. He takes the woman by force out to his car. Rupert closes the door and goes to check on Teddy and his mother.

He walks into the room and sees that she is sitting in a chair asleep. “She came in and sat down. We talked a minute or two and then she fell asleep.

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I’m no babysitter. I can’t even take care of myself. How are we going to do this?” Teddy asks.

“First of all, we make sure you’re in the living room before Kira leaves for work each day. Second, we do your physical therapy even more to make sure you’re getting the maximum benefit. Let me help you out of bed. Sit up,” Rupert tells him

Teddy can sit by himself but he can’t move around yet without assistance. “I suppose it is time we see if we can get that visiting therapist the doctor mentioned. Call Ken for me, will you? I’m too embarrassed,” Teddy says.

Rupert walks Teddy into the other room and sets him down on the couch. Then he goes to get Mrs. Roth and brings her into the room with them. She wasn’t really sleeping, she was tuning out, she does that a lot when she feels stressed. Same as his aunt had done.

Kira surprises everyone by showing up for lunch with company. Her father and Maxine, plus her aunt. Upon entering the house, she knows something is wrong because she sees Rupert there in his work clothes. She tries to turn everyone’s head around by introducing everyone to her family.

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Her father approaches Mrs. Roth, she stands and hugs him. They stand there holding on tightly as two old friends would. “Daddy?” she asks.

He doesn’t move. He stays holding Mrs. Roth, clinging to her as she is to him. Kira’s aunt speaks up, “Kira, this is not only Mrs. Roth. This is our cousin, a woman we thought we lost years ago when she was taken away. She had good reason to mind you,” she looks to Teddy, “You’re her son, aren’t you?”

“Yes, what do you mean she had good reason to?” he asks. All he knows is that at the age of ten, his mother left the house. Ken was thirteen. She didn’t come back until he was graduating from college. What is this woman talking about? His mom never talked about her family. He had no idea he had cousins.

“Do you want to call Ken?” Rupert asks. Teddy nods.

When everyone is calm and sitting together in the kitchen. Kira’s father speaks. “A long time ago, your mother witnessed a very horrible and violent murder. She was the star witness and they had to protect her. Your mom called me. I’m the oldest cousin, it was after midnight the night after the trial. She told me they are taking her away because they

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believe her life was in danger. The other family was vowing to get back at her for putting their father and husband in jail for life.

She didn’t want to change your lives. She spoke with her husband, your father, and they believed her leaving was better for her and you guys and that he was going to tell you guys that she had to leave to take care of something important.

I don’t know what else he told you. I have the file of the case if you want to see proof. When Kira has been telling me about Mrs. Roth I was too stunned to believe she actually had come back to you guys. No one has heard, all these years.

We knew you were around, but your father and I didn’t really get along. He thought I was a deserter by leaving this country. He used to tell me that if I ever talked to you boys he would have me arrested,” Kira’s father takes a deep breath and slides over some pictures for the boys to look through.

Family pictures of when their mother was younger, pictures with Kira’s dad and aunt standing with Mrs. Roth at birthday parties and even at her wedding. Ken jumps up to go find his parent’s wedding photos. They thumb through it to find the group shots, and sure enough, Kira’s father and sister are sitting right there next to their parents.

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“Kira, you see this? You *are* family,” Teddy begins to cry, and she moves over to him to hold him in her arms.

Mrs. Roth is watching all of this. She is holding one of the group shots. She looks up at Kira’s father and sister. “Can we play marbles today?” she asks in her soft child-like voice.

Kira’s father begins to cry, “Yes darlin’, yes we can,” he takes out a bag of marbles from his pocket. He must have known this was a possibility.

“They used to play for hours. Your mom would beat my brother at every match. I’ll bet if you look in one of her old boxes, you’d find her marbles. She treasured those,” she says.

“But what brought her back?” Teddy asks.

Kira’s aunt continues, “I looked it up last night. At the time she came back, it is recorded that the family formally forgave her. It is a newspaper announcement saying that on his deathbed, the man admitted to doing what he did that caused him to be put in jail, admitted all of his wrongdoings to his wife. She must have seen the article and decided to come back home. I have that article too if you want to read anything about them,” Kira’s dad continues to play with Mrs. Roth.

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“This is awfully convenient, now that our father isn’t alive,” Ken says.

“She wrote to him Ken. She wrote to me in America too because she figured no one would find out. I have those letters. The last one came right before she rejoined your family. Did you father have any private files you never went through?” he asks from the floor.

Ken stands and walks into the back den, his father had a briefcase he was never allowed to look into, and until today, he never felt the need to. But he also never got rid of the briefcase. He dumps the contents on the counter and in it he sees a stack of letters that are secured together. The oldest letter has a date on it that corresponds with her leaving. “Can you all please walk into the other room?” he says to the group in front of him.

Ken sits with his brother and reads each letter out loud. She loved them. She left so they would be safe. She came back when she felt safe. Kira’s father’s story is true. “Teddy, I suppose this is why our father took her back so easily. They were still in love, all those years of separation. I hope we can find that kind of love.”

“Yeah, that sounds wonderful. But how do we find that? You married an insane woman and

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look who I married? A woman who thinks that while I was gone it was ok to entertain herself with someone else. I’ve been doing the math more. We’ll do a DNA test because it will tick her off. I feel strongly that he isn’t mine though. I received my honorable discharge papers yesterday from the personal military delivery guy, actually a gal.

I no longer have that. I’ll have to find something else to do. Maybe I can help Truman. I’ll talk to him. What should we do about Mom?”

“Kira! Rupert!” Ken calls them back into the kitchen.

“Yes,” they say in unison as they walk in together. “Welcome to the family Kira. This may take us some time to get used to but it does explain why our father would go out of town sometimes and never tell us where he was going. We’re now assuming he went to be with his wife. While we get over the past, we’ll have to deal with the here and now though. Suggestions?” Ken asks.

“I have one,” a voice from behind says.

They look to see Kira’s aunt. “While your father was running off to visit his wife, his one true love, mine was running off to a second one. Since your father has been here, a woman showed up at my door claiming to be his daughter and wanting to

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see him. He became infuriated and started screaming at her about how she was not supposed to be here.

Your father looked at my husband and punched him in the face knocking him over. Kira, I’ve been staying with Maxine and your father at the hotel since then. Instead of hiring a plethora of sitters and healthcare professionals. I’m offering to move in here. I’ll live in the basement. I am a registered nurse. Retired one that is. She is my cousin, a long lost and very loved cousin. I’ll be happy to take care of her as long as we can keep her home but at some time we might not be able to.

I can help you too Teddy, recovery and rehabilitation was my specialty. I’ll be happy to do this, if you’ll have me. I’ve always been a caretaker. My children are siding with my husband saying he has a right to have part of his life unknown to his wife. I’m not sure how they think this is right but they do. I feel sorry for their wives. Wait until they hear what my sons have said. The women don’t know yet. I’m planning on telling the truth though. They deserve that and deserve to figure out where their husbands go when they are out of town on business. Let the do this early on, unlike me. But that aside, my brother has been telling me for years that I need

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to leave. Might as well leave to help out real family. That is if you believe us, and if you’ll allow me.”

Everyone in the room begins to cry. “We took a chance on Kira, a perfect stranger. How can we not take a chance on real family?” Teddy says.

~ ~ ~

Six months later the family is sitting around the dinner table when Mrs. Roth speaks up, “I always loved you Ken. Always. But the man I saw who killed someone had a beard like that. I’ve asked you before, I’m asking again. Can you please shave?” tonight is a good night for her.

The knock at the door stuns everyone and Teddy pushes himself up from his chair and uses his walker to get to the door. A man is standing there with a very young boy. “Teddy?” the man asks.

“Yes. Who are you?” by this time everyone is standing behind him.

“I represent your ex-wife. The child she had is not yours. We received that proof from you a few months ago. However, the real father doesn’t want him and the mother has decided she doesn’t either. I’m here to ask you if you’re interested in taking care of this child. Otherwise the child will be put into an

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adoption agency. Your ex-wife said you might want him. You’re under no obligation obviously,” he says.

Ken puts a hand on his brother’s shoulder.

“Your call, we support you,” he says.

Mrs. Roth pushes forward to look at the baby. “Oh Teddy, look at him,” she says softly. Teddy had never met this child, he had come back injured and has been in the military rehabilitation hospital for the past few months, the child is still under a year, Teddy never met him.

Kira’s aunt pulls Mrs. Roth back. “The baby isn’t his honey,” she tells her.

“Take a chance on the baby, he has nothing,” his mother tells Teddy.

Truman happens to show up behind everyone. He is with his wife, “Everything doing well here?” he asks cautiously.

The lawyer turns around and sees two people standing behind him. Everyone is staring at Truman, he knows something they don’t, Rupert can always tell his friend’s looks. Truman slides his hands around the baby and takes him from the lawyer, he hands the baby to his wife. She holds him tightly. Teddy looks at Truman and then takes a step back to allow him in.

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Back in the house, everyone is standing around looking at each other. Truman takes a deep breath. “My brother called me. Yeah that brother,” he says to Rupert.

Rupert finishes the story because Truman needs to sit down. “Truman has a brother that finds it fun to make children. He convinces military wives that their husbands will never know the difference. I’m assuming this time, Truman is pressing charges against his brother, and he is taking the child as his own.”

Truman bows his head in shame. His wife is rocking the baby. He can’t even look at the child. He doesn’t know what to do. He sits down with his head in his hands

The lawyer speaks, “I have the papers for custody, who wants to sign them?” he says.

Truman slowly raises his hand. The papers are signed and the lawyer quickly leaves the home. Kira speaks first. “He is a beautiful child Truman. You two will make great parents.”

Truman begins to cry again. His wife speaks now, “We can’t have children Kira. This is a gift but it is hard to feel like a gift considering where it came from. How do we tell the child of his origins?”

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“You won’t have to. Chances are he will have some family traits and look like Truman. No one will question who the child’s father is. As an adult, if you want to tell him, you can. If your brother ever gets in the child’s life he might say something and then you’ll have to explain how his father chose to give him up over taking responsibility. My guess is, the truth will be best. You now have the paperwork to prove his brother’s decision too. He had to sign over his parental rights in order to put him up for adoption.

I think it is time that this family begin to celebrate their blessings instead of mulling over their failings. Since I moved here I see that everyone in this room is family. We found out accidentally that we’re actually family and life has been good since.

You guys all took a chance on me and I can’t thank you enough. I say, take a chance on this child Truman, he will bring you joy,” Kira says.
~ ~ ~

One month after the arrival of the child, Kira’s boss comes in town to verify how well she is doing. He can see from afar things are going well but he likes to make visits in person as well. Kira greets him happily.

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“You look wonderful dear. I see happiness from the inside. Who is the new man you haven’t been telling me about?” he teases.

“His name is Rupert, a plumber and a great friend to the family I have found here. Which is actually my family, long lost but mine all the same,” she says.

“Rupert?! Well, I’ll be damned. I was planning on making sure you two met when I got here. He is an amazing guy. I wanted you to meet. I can’t believe you already have. How close are you? If you don’t mind me asking,” he says.

“Very close,” she smiles.

“Oh honey, I’m so happy. I can’t even tell you how much. I took a chance in sending you here and I’m so glad I did. You’ve exceeded what I was hoping you’d do in the office and now you have Rupert in your life. You’ve made this old man so happy,” he says.

“Rupert is coming over soon. We have lunch together every day, he plans his jobs around having lunch and dinner with me,” she says. The two people smile and begin to talk about work.

~ ~ ~

“Truman, it has been nine months since I first met Kira and my life changed forever. I want to

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make sure I’m doing the right thing. How do I know I am?” he asks thumbing the ring he bought for Kira.

Truman smiles at his phone. Life sure has changed a lot since Kira showed up. Seeing Ken and Teddy getting through their own trauma with their mother, now living with an old cousin. He and his wife have a new baby and have decided to look into the adoption agencies around here to see if any of his brother’s other children are still there.

“Taking a chance on love is a wonderful thing Rup. You two certainly have the right stuff. I’d say go for it. At thirty-five you deserve to be happy, you have a long life ahead of you,” he smiles again and while still talking to Rupert he sends a message to his wife.

When he hangs up with Rupert he calls his wife. “I’m so excited Truman. So excited. To add to my excitement the adoption agency called me to tell me that she has only received one child with the same father listed. A girl that is three years old. Let’s go meet her Truman. Everyone else is taking chances, we can too,” she says with tears.

“I want it all with you, family, love, and forever. If we have to adopt all of them. I’m happy with that. Call her back. I’m coming to get you now,” he says. He knows that their financial position makes

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them easy to approve for adoptions, plus he is their biological uncle. This makes custody easy, it’s the adoption they have to officially file for.

Rupert arrives back at the Roth house as he has done each night since that fateful day when Kira called him frantic. He knocks tonight, Ken answers the door and smiles. Rupert is not in work clothes, he is in a tuxedo and is holding onto three purple tulips. It must mean something between the two of them Ken assumes. He opens the door wider and lets Rupert in.

“Who’s at the....” Kira stops in the middle of the room looking at Rupert.

“Say yes!” Mrs. Roth screams before Rupert can say a thing. Rupert walks over and gives Mrs. Roth a kiss on the cheek. He hands the tulips to Kira who already had a tear falling down her cheek. “If it wasn’t for all these people we wouldn’t have met. I didn’t know how to include them all except to do this here. Kira will you marry me?” he asks simply.

She looks to Mrs. Roth who is nodding at her. Ken and Teddy are smiling wide as can be as well. “Yes Rupert. Yes,” she whispers.

For the first time, Rupert grabs her in for a big passionate kiss. When he comes up for air, he

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pushes her hair behind her ears and says, “I’ll make you happy forever. I promise,” he says.

Another knock on the door has everyone even more startled. Cheri is standing there in what looks to be a very formal dress. She walks in, she sees Rupert and laughs. “I suppose you beat me to it.” She turns to Ken and says, “Enough friendship garbage. You and I belong together and if these past few months haven’t shown you that, you’re a bigger idiot than I thought. I will erase your memories of a bad marriage. Together we will always take care of Teddy and anyone else in your crazy family that needs us. I’m not proposing marriage right now but I am proposing that you and I are together. You’ll see I’m here for the long haul,” she steps forward and grabs his face to pull him in for a kiss he will not soon forget.

“About time Cheri, I was beginning to think you were going to wimp out,” Teddy jokes.

Ken looks to his brother who is smiling. Kira is smiling and so is Rupert. He has no words in his head now, instead, he grabs her back and returns the kiss. Even deeper. Mrs. Roth screams in joy and everyone laughs with her. They are happiest that she is recognizing what is happening before her.

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Rupert and Kira’s wedding have brought everyone back together. Her aunt’s children have cut off their mother, so Kira did not invite them. Or anyone else from that part of their family. Turns out one of the wives knew already and has been blackmailing her husband to make it public which would make him lose not only his job but his career. They deserve each other. The others walked away with the help of their mother-in-law. Ken and Teddy found a couple of lost cousins from their father’s side who also confirmed the story about their mother. They decided to stay in touch from now on.

Mrs. Roth is having more days that aren’t good but everyone is still taking care of her at home. They feel she deserves to be around family having had so many years she had to be alone.

To toast the new couple, Kira’s boss stands up with a very simple toast, “Here is to taking chances,” he holds his wine glass up.

“Here, here!!” the crowd agrees.

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