First Night

By C. Jade Wyton

Toni and his family are spending the night in their new house in Silver Hollow. They're all having trouble sleeping, and so sit together to have a little chat.

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It was the first night in their new home, and Toni couldn't sleep.

The house had seemed so big and empty, compared to the cramped little farmhouse they had come from.

There was *room* for… well. More rooms.

Instead of three bedrooms between six people, it was now seven bedrooms for four. Which, Toni thought was *far* too many bedrooms. But Garrett had ideas for how to use the spare rooms; he always had so many good ideas.

Toni rolled over, his gaze scanning the dark, empty room.

He wasn't used to having his own bed, let alone his own room. Even though it had been well over a year since their divorce, Toni and Garrett had never bothered to stop sharing their bed— It was just too expensive to buy new beds. And the house was too cramped to fit them, anyway. And they had been married for almost twenty years, by that point; it was such a habit….

Toni turned the thoughts over in his mind, and realised that they sounded a lot like the kind of weird excuses people might come up with if they were still in love and trying to justify staying together. And, for a moment, he almost *wished* that were the case; that he could go back to the simplicity of what their relationship had been, before he realised he was…. All of *this*.

A loud sigh escaped Toni as he shook his head.

No.

Despite the troubles that came with his new identity, he was glad he'd finally figured out why he'd always felt so *wrong* with himself. And why his affections for Garrett had never felt the same as his (now-ex) friends had always described their own husbands.

It was strange to realise that what he had thought was attraction had just been trust. Garrett had made him feel so safe and cared for that he had been captivated by the man, and willingly shared his life with him; the feelings of security and comfort so strong they filled the gaps that should have been filled by allurement and romance.

Despite the confusion of his feelings, though, Toni could never say that what he felt wasn't love. Because it *was* love— A different kind of love, to what he'd first thought he felt, but still love. Strong and beautiful….

But not the kind of love that could be used to justify sharing a bed when there were extra rooms.

Another sigh escaped Toni, and he rolled over again.

It was for the best. Definitely; they both needed to be able to move on and start new relationships, and there was *no* way to do that if they didn't establish
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healthy boundaries and new habits….

But, still, it was strange to sleep alone after two decades of stealing the blankets and kicking away Garrett's cold feet. That, and the new house seemed so cold and big and strange—

A scratching sounded at the window and Toni almost leapt out of his own feathers. The sound that escaped him as he sat upright sounded half like a frightened bird squawk, and half like a teenage girl shrieking at a horror movie.

His hands were clamped over his beak as Garrett rushed in, half-dressed and ruffled from head to toe.

'What?!' he exclaimed, lifting the old baseball bat he held and glancing around. 'Are you alright?! What happened?!'

'I…' Toni blushed as he glanced to his window and the old tree outside moved with another gust of wind and scratched it again.

Garrett followed Toni's gaze to the scratching sound, and he slowly lowered his bat. 'It's uh. It's a bit like that tonight, isn't it?'

Toni nodded, smoothing down his feathers to hide his embarrassment as Garrett let out a breath.

'I can't sleep, either,' Garrett said, offering Toni his hand. 'Want to watch a movie?'

'Yeah,' Toni let himself be helped up, and followed Garrett out of the room. 'Something easy?'

'Something easy, Garrett confirmed as they reached the stairs.

Stairs.

Stairs were also new and weird; the old house didn't have stairs. And, as Toni made his way down them, he was glad Garrett held his hand tight to help him balance.

'It's weird to not hear you snoring,' Toni blurted, as he let Garrett lead him. 'It feels… lonely.'

Garrett gave a sympathetic chuckle and helped Toni down the last step. 'I know. But you'll find someone to keep you company, soon. We both will.'

Toni wasn't sure he believed it. After everything he had been through, and how his so-called *friends* had reacted to his coming out (both times), he wasn't sure that he would ever find someone he could trust as much as Garrett….

He flopped onto the couch with a heavy sigh and, after Garrett had turned on the television and flipped the channel to some old-looking movie, flopped over again to lean against Garrett's side.

Garrett responded by adjusting how he sat; leaning over against the arm of the couch so he was practically lying down, Toni resting their head on his chest.

It was relaxing. And much more comfortable than their lonely bed upstairs.

Toni gave a long sigh, finally feeling himself relax, and let his eyes start to close….

'You *know,*' the voice of their daughter, Tegan, floated from the staircase. 'Usually, when a couple gets divorced, they *stop* watching romances and cuddling on the couch.'

Garrett gave a chuckle, reaching over to beckon his daughter towards him.

She made her way over, plonking down on the floor in front her parents instead of on the couch beside them.

‘Did I wake you?’ Toni asked, blushing as his daughter sat down. ‘I’m so sorry.’

‘Eh, I was mostly awake before that,’ Tegan shrugged. ‘It’s quiet here. It’s weird not to hear the ducks squabbling.’

‘We can get more ducks,’ Toni promised. ‘Once we’re settled in.’

‘Cool…. Did you see the photos Maranda sent to the family chat?’ Tegan asked, pulling her phone from her pocket to show her parents a very sweet-looking picture of the ducks they’d left behind in the move snuggled together in their nesting box. Then, she pulled back her phone and gave a sigh. ‘I know I always complained about sharing a room with her, but now that I actually have my own room, it feels really strange.’

‘I know what you mean,’ another voice —the voice of Toni’s teenage son, Ralph— huffed from the top of the stairs. ‘Ryan was *literally* the most annoying thing to have to share a room with. But it just feels really *open* without his stuff there to trip on.’

Garrett chuckled as Ralph’s talons *clacked* their way down the stairs and he joined his parents on the couch; flopping over Toni’s legs and giving an exaggerated sigh.

‘How you doing, champ?’ Garrett asked.

‘Eh, fine,’ Ralph shrugged, and Toni felt him start to pick at their leg feathers. ‘Bored, mostly. But y’know. I’d be bored back home, too. So nothing new.’

‘*Don’t pluck me, love,*’ Toni spoke softly as he pushed his son’s hand away. ‘I’m sorry. Is there anything we can do to help?’

‘Can we get a dog?’ Ralph asked. ‘Ryan said that Grandpa’s letting him pick out a puppy to train! That’s *so* unfair! I want a dog, too!’

‘Ryan’s doing it for work,’ Tegan pointed out. ‘It’s not for fun. It’s, like, his *job!*’

‘So? It’s still unfair,’ Ryan huffed; though he quietened down as Toni pet his shoulder.

‘We’ll talk about a dog once we’re more settled,’ Toni said. ‘But no promises. They’re a big commitment.’

‘Like moving to a new house?’ Tegan pointed out; her tone so matter-of-fact it made Toni wince.

An awkward silence hung in the air, as the boys all tried to think of a way to respond to Tegan.

It was Ralph who finally spoke, ‘So. You remember when Old Red had to be put down, and Grandpa told us he died and was buried in the backyard?’

Oh, gods, Toni didn’t want to know where this train of thought had come from; but he nodded anyway and gave a quiet, ‘Yes, I remember?’

‘Well, Millie said that, when her dog died last year, her dad told her little brother that he went to live on a farm upstate.’

‘I’ll send *you* to a farm upstate,’ Tegan mumbled.

‘Hey, now,’ Garrett pet his daughter’s head. ‘None of that talk.’

‘*Broody,*’ Ralph muttered under his breath.

‘Shush!’ Toni scolded. ‘Be nice to each other.’

‘Yeah, whatever,’ Tegan made a big show of rolling her eyes. Then, she sniffed loudly and flopped backwards; letting Garrett mess up her pom and ruffle her

cheeks. ‘Hey, Mum?’

‘Yes, Teeg?’

‘I can still *call* you that, right?’ she asked. ‘Like. You never said to call you “Dad” or anything? Is it okay to call you Mum? Or is that weird?’

‘I don’t mind either way,’ Toni reassured. ‘I’ve been “Mum” for twenty years, it’s…. I’m fond of it.’

‘Oh, thank gods!’ Ralph blurted. ‘I was really worried about how I was gonna tell the difference between Dad and Dad.’

Tegan rose from her sit, just so she could smack her brother, and then flopped back down.

‘Tegan!’ Toni scolded.

‘What!’ Tegan answered. ‘He was being stupid!’

Toni just sighed; too tired to do more than shake his head.

Luckily, Garrett took charge.

‘Nah, kiddo,’ he said. ‘That’s not on.’

Tegan gave an over-exaggerated groan, rolling her eyes, before she shrugged again and started fidgeting with her toes. ‘You know the neighbour has a kid, yeah?’

‘Yeah, I saw her,’ Garrett acknowledged. ‘She looks about Ralphie’s age! Come tomorrow, you might have a new friend, hey bud?’

‘What?’ Ralph cocked his head in confusion.

‘Dad wants you to meet the neighbour’s kid, you reject,’ Tegan scoffed.

‘*Tegan,*’ Toni sighed.

Tegan just rolled her eyes, and pushed herself up again. ‘Whatever. I’m going back to bed. I’ll see you in the morning, if we don’t all die in our sleep.’

‘Can that happen?’ Ralph asked, his eyes going wide.

‘*No,*’ Toni and Garrett answered in unison.

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