

## Blue Since the Day We Parted

Posted originally on the [Archive of Our Own](http://archiveofourown.org/works/18252767) at <http://archiveofourown.org/works/18252767>.

Rating:	<a href="#">Teen And Up Audiences</a>
Archive Warning:	<a href="#">No Archive Warnings Apply</a>
Category:	<a href="#">F/F</a> , <a href="#">F/M</a> , <a href="#">M/M</a> , <a href="#">Multi</a>
Fandom:	<a href="#">The Bridge (Podcast)</a>
Relationship:	<a href="#">Etta Perrault/Kate Burnham/Roger Kaplan/Bertie Renard</a> , <a href="#">Bertie Renard/John</a> , <a href="#">Roger Kaplan/John (implied)</a> , <a href="#">Sky Rymand/Sophie Sheridan</a>
Character:	<a href="#">Etta Perrault</a> , <a href="#">Kate Burnham</a> , <a href="#">Roger Kaplan</a> , <a href="#">Bertie Renard</a> , <a href="#">John (The Bridge Podcast)</a>
Additional Tags:	<a href="#">Mamma Mia AU</a> , <a href="#">Post-Canon</a> , <a href="#">Twenty Years Later</a> , <a href="#">Trans Female Character</a>
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2019-03-27 Chapters: 18/18 Words: 18826

## Blue Since the Day We Parted

by [CharacteristicallyMinor](#)

### Summary

The only thing on Etta Perrault's mind is the tenth anniversary celebration of the re-opened Transcontinental Hotel.

She didn't plan on her daughter inviting all three of her exes and former coworkers to the anniversary party, in order to discover her true parentage.

(Mamma Mia au)

# Chapter 1

“Sophie, you checked the contact list for the anniversary, right? Made sure I wasn’t missing anyone important?” Sophie’s mom was already in pre-event bustle mode, even though the tenth anniversary party was months away.

Sophie absentmindedly swiveled her chair as she watched her mom dig through a pile of papers on her desk. She stopped upon seeing her mom’s annoyed expression. “I did. Don’t worry, Mom. We’re good.”

“You checked in with the travel agency and the bureau, right? Made sure we’ll have enough support in case, y’know, someone wants this to be a repeat of last time.” Last time, in this case, was referring to the first tenth anniversary party of the hotel, and the reason that the hotel had been closed for almost thirty years before her mom had re-opened it.

“I did. The bureau’s sending a few agents, and the travel agency will be making sure we have plenty of security.”

“Ok, good. You’ve talked with the watchtowers? Made sure they’ll know what’s going on and direct people accordingly.”

“Yup. They’re even sending a supervisor from one of the watchtowers to coordinate communicate with the other watchtowers from here, since we’re going to be causing a ton of traffic.”

“Perfect. What about the event staff? Are we just going with the usual?”

“I actually wanted to check in with you about that. I know we usually do an ice sculpture for the centerpieces, but I found a company that does these big floral installations, and I thought it might not be a bad idea to do something like that instead. We’ve been trying to get people to understand that this isn’t the same event as last time, so I think that having the ballroom look different from last time would be a good, y’know, visual reminder.”

Sophie’s mom sighed. “I’m not thrilled about using someone new for such a big event, but it might be worth it. Anything to convince people that this isn’t going to be a repeat of last time.”

“At least it’s bringing in more business than it’s causing us to lose,” Sophie said, trying to be optimistic.

“From fucking thrill seekers and disaster tourists,” her mom said. “No, you’re right. If it’s going to happen regardless, we might as well be making money off of it. And—thank you. You’ve been doing a lot of the planning work, and that’s made things easier for me. You’ve been doing a great job.”

“Well, I learned from the best,” Sophie said, feeling a little guilty. She’d genuinely wanted to help out her mother, but she’d also had ulterior motives in volunteering to organize the event personnel.

All three of her mom’s former coworkers would be coming to the hotel for the anniversary: Kate Burnham with the bureau, Roger Kaplan as Watchtower liaison, and Bertie Renard as co-owner of the company that was going to be providing the floral installations.

In just a few months, Sophie would be meeting her other parent.... Whoever they were.

## Chapter 2

Sophie stood outside the hotel, watching as cars pulled up. It was late evening, and there were plenty of customers arriving to check in for the night. She ignored the big tour bus, the flashy convertible, the vans filled with families. She had a specific car in mind.

Finally, she was it. As soon as it pulled up in front of the hotel, the door opened, and her girlfriend came running out.

“Sophie!”

“Skye!” She yelled in return, running to wrap her arms around the other girl.

It had been over a month since she’d last seen her girlfriend. They’d spent longer apart before, but that had been before they were dating. Besides, she had something important to tell her girlfriend.

Sophie had first met Skye the year that Sophie and her mom had moved out to the Bridge to re-open the Transcontinental Hotel. Living on the Bridge had been fun, but there weren’t too many kids her age around who actually lived there and weren’t just spending a few days on vacation.

Then she met Skye. Skye’s parents were divorced, and she spent her summers on the Bridge with her dad. Skye’s dad had been friends with Sophie’s mom years ago, and he’d been the one to suggest that their kids spend some time together.

They’d grown even closer when Skye decided to go to Sophie’s college. They’d started dating halfway through Skye’s second semester there; a bit over a year ago, now. The only one who’d been surprised was Sophie’s aunt; everyone else had known it was inevitable.

“It’s so good to see you!” Skye said.

“You too. I’ve missed you,” Sophie said. “How’s your mom doing?”

“She’s good. Vaguely resentful that my dad and my girlfriend live near each other, so she gets less time to see me in the summers. The usual,” Skye said. She rolled her eyes. “She’s just going to have to deal, though, because being away from you for that many weeks was awful.”

Skye’s dad came up, carrying their bags. “Hey, Sophie. How’s your summer going?”

“Hey, Frank. My summer’s been good. Busy, though. We’ve had a lot to do to prepare for the tenth anniversary.”

“How’s your mom holding up? Gotta be kind of hard, dealing with the anniversary of her mom disappearing and all that.” Sophie liked Frank, but she was glad Skye hadn’t inherited her dad’s complete lack of tact.

“She’s good. Running around doing a million things at once, but good.”

“Can you girls bring the bags inside while I park the car?”

“Sure, Dad,” Skye said as they grabbed the bags.

When they got into the lobby, Sophie popped behind the front desk to check Frank in and grabbed a keycard for him. She didn’t have to do the same for Skye; Skye was going to be staying with her.

Sophie handed the keycard and Frank's bags off to him when he came in, then headed up with Skye to drop off her bags in Sophie's room.

As they walked, Sophie said, "Okay, so I may have done something slightly crazy."

"I'm concerned, but go on," Skye said.

"I'll tell you when we're in the room. I just wanted to give you a minute to prepare yourself."

"That is the least reassuring way you could have chosen to start this conversation," Skye said. "Did you get a tattoo?"

"No!" Sophie said. "Well, not yet. That's still on the agenda at some point in the next few years. No, this is bigger."

Sophie opened the door to her room. As soon as they were inside, Skye shut the door behind her and said, "Okay, we're in, tell me."

"So, you know how your dad likes to talk about the time that he, like, led a mutiny in his hunting club and ended up saving the whole Bridge?"

"I pretty much tune it out at this point, but yeah, I'm definitely familiar with the story."

"Well, months ago, he was in the middle of telling it. And I was kind of just nodding along, but then he mentioned something about the month it happened. And you know when it happened?" Sophie didn't wait for a response. "It happened eight months before I was born. Which means that I was conceived on the Bridge."

"Huh, I guess that is interesting," Skye said, clearly not understanding why Sophie was so worked up about it.

"Which means that I was conceived during a month when the only people my mom saw were three coworkers, whose names I was able to find in the watchtower records."

"Holy shit," Skye said. "Do you know who your father is?"

"Not yet. I thought I could narrow it down a bit, so I looked them up on social media. I wasn't able to find one guy, but I found the other two. At first I thought I could probably eliminate the woman as being less likely, but one of her old profile pictures is with a trans flag at Pride so she's definitely still in the running. And the other guy, the one who actually uses social media, has been married since I was a baby. So he's probably less likely, but his husband wasn't on the list of coworkers, so he was either in a long-term long-distance relationship, even though the Bridge definitely didn't pay well enough back then for that to be a good option for anyone, or else he only met his husband after he stopped working there."

"Plus, he totally could have cheated on his future husband with your mom," Skye said.

"That too. As for the other guy, he still works for the Bridge, so he's still alive, but that's all I know."

"So how are you going to narrow it down? I'd ask if any of them look like you, but, well," Skye waved her hand to indicate Sophie's appearance. She looked just like her mom.

"Yeah, that's not going to work. I figured, well, if I saw Mom's reaction to seeing them again, I'd know. Because seeing old coworkers is totally different than seeing an old partner or hookup, and

her expression and behavior will reflect that.”

“Oh my god,” Skye said, clearly starting to understand where this was going.

“I invited them all to the tenth anniversary party.”

“Oh my god,” Skye repeated. “Your mom’s going to freak out. She’s going to kill you.”

“No, she won’t. Because she won’t know that I know that one of them is my other parent.”

“I think she’ll suspect something, when they all show up.”

“That’s where my genius comes in. See, I didn’t invite them as guests. They’re all going to be working, in their actual jobs, as part of the event. One of them is a bureau agent, another’s coordinating with the watchtowers, and another’s doing the decorations.”

“And your mom hasn’t noticed them on the list?”

“I made the finalized list over break. She trusts me, and she trusts her staff. She doesn’t need to know the individual names of the staff from the other organizations we work with until right before the event, if then. She hasn’t noticed them yet, so worst comes to worst, she’ll notice their names on the list tonight, and I’ll still figure it out based on who she’s making a million excuses to avoid.”

“You’re setting your mom up to have, like, a breakdown or something. You know that, right? She’s overwhelmed enough by the tenth anniversary celebration, if I know your mom at all, and this is going to push her over the edge.”

“Or maybe it’ll provide a distraction from all the traumatic memories and event planning. Who knows, mom might even get back together with the love of her life or something.”

“Hopefully that’s not the married guy.”

“Ehhh, only a thirty-three percent chance of that. And his husband’s coming, too, so that should stop him from trying to cheat on his husband if he is the type to do that.”

“You invited the—of course you invited the husband.”

“Well, yeah. They kind of come as a set, since they work together.”

“Tomorrow is going to be such a clusterfuck.”

“No, it won’t. It’ll be fine. I’m going to meet my other parent, we’re going to have a great tenth anniversary celebration, and maybe mom will even be reunited with a long-lost love. If it’s not the married guy.”

## Chapter 3

“Are you sure that this is a good idea?” Bertie asked, looking over at John.

“I’m sure that we’re at least a month too late to change our minds,” John replied.

“That’s not reassuring.”

“It’ll probably be fine,” John said. “Worst comes to worst, we spend an awkward weekend working for one of your exes while we create an amazing display. We’re going to great publicity out of this, at least.”

“I know that,” Bertie said. “We’re great at our jobs. It’s the whole ‘seeing Etta’ thing that I’m worried about. I mean, we haven’t talked to her in decades, she didn’t even come to our wedding, and now she’s inviting us to work for her?”

“It might be strictly professional. She might not be worried about this at all,” John reasoned. “Or maybe the whole ‘tenth anniversary’ thing is bringing back old memories, and that made her want to, y’know, reconcile other old connections. That’s what you were thinking before, right?”

“Well, yeah. And that still does make sense. I just... I still haven’t figured out if I want to reconcile. It’s been over twenty years.”

“You said yes to the job, didn’t you? Isn’t that an answer, in its own right?”

“Why do you have to be so reasonable?”

“I have my moments,” John said.

---

Kate looked around the airport for her ride. As one of the more senior agents, she hadn’t been part of the crew who’d come to set up the command station and do early recon. She was just going to be there for the day of the event.

It had worked out, though; it had been suggested that she could get a ride from the airport to the hotel from the man who was going to be managing communications between the hotel and watchtowers for the event, and she’d been quick to agree.

She wondered what Roger looked like, almost twenty-two years later. He’d be in his mid-fifties by now, she decided after some quick mental math.

She glanced around for a gray-haired, more wrinkled version of Roger.

“Kate! Kate Burnham!” She turned toward the voice and saw Roger. He looked the same as he had the day they’d last seen each other. Exactly the same.

She walked over to him, examining him as she did so. His hair was dark, but maybe he dyed it. She dyed hers, so she could hardly fault him if he did. But his face... his face was what really threw her off. There were no new wrinkles, no other marks of age. If he’d been a stranger, she would have been confident that he was in his early thirties.

For a second, she wondered if Roger had a son that she didn’t know about. But no, this was clearly Roger, not just a son who’d inherited all of his looks from him.

Or, rather, this was either Roger, or something wearing his face. She had weapons, but they were all packed. This was a crowded public place—there were plenty of bystanders around who could be hurt.

“Hi, Kate,” Roger said. He looked nervous.

“Hey, Roger,” Kate said, tone dry. “Care to explain why you haven’t aged a day since I last saw you?”

“Good genes?” Roger tried.

Kate stared at him. “Either you’re not aging, or you’re not Roger. Now, which one is it? Think carefully.”

“Alright, fine,” Roger said, resigned. “Call your boss; they’ll confirm that I’m me.”

Kate dialed the number, carefully keeping an eye on Roger as she did so.

“Hello?”

“Hi, it’s Agent Burnham. Code 232423. I’m here with something claiming to be Roger Kaplan. He hasn’t aged in twenty years, says you know about it?”

“Roger Kaplan... let me pull up the file,” they said, pausing as they found the information. “Okay, you’re probably dealing with the real deal. Says here he’s been immortal for decades. One-time deal, no humans or creatures harmed in the process, doesn’t require renewals. There are some weird conditions on his immortality, but they only affect him. Basically, he’s totally harmless.”

“Great. Thanks for looking that up for me.”

“Keep me updated if anything seems suspicious at the event. I know the preliminary reports from the other agents are that they haven’t found anything, but this is basically a chance for at least two different terrorist groups to do some historical reenactment. Even if you think it might be nothing, let me know.”

“Will do.”

They ended the call. Roger raised an eyebrow at Kate. The sight was so familiar, the same even after over twenty years. She’d spent less than two years seeing it on a daily basis, but it suddenly made her miss those years. Especially the last month.

Kate steeled herself. This was no time to be distracted with old memories.

“The verdict?”

“The director himself has vouched that you’re totally harmless.”

“Vaguely insulting, but if it means that I don’t get shot, I’ll take it.”

“Thought you might. Although, what with your abilities, I’m kind of surprised that you’re worrying about that.”

“I can still bleed and get hurt; I just can’t die from it,” Roger said.

“So you weren’t faking being hurt when you were stabbed,” Kate checked.

“The stabbing was real. I couldn’t have died from it, but it hurt just as much as it would have hurt anyone else,” Roger said.

“It would have been nice to know you couldn’t die, back when we were planning to fight for our lives.”

“I know. I should have—I wanted to tell you, I just didn’t know how. I was trying to figure that out. And then, well, it was a moot point.”

“That’s lucky,” Kate said sharply “Everything worked out really well for you, I guess.”

“Look, I get that you’re upset,” Roger started.

“Upset? Of course I’m fucking upset,” Kate said. “I would have died for you. Any one of us would have. And you couldn’t even—you would have just let that happen and walked away without a scratch on you.”

“I messed up! I understand that. But stop being so high and mighty. I wasn’t the only one keeping secrets, you know. Or are you forgetting that you were secretly working for the Bureau of Oceanic Anti-Terrorism even then?”

“That’s different,” Kate started.

“How? If Polaris had actually attacked, we would have needed the information you were gathering. Not to mention your cousin—”

“Leave Bollard out of this,” Kate snapped.

“Fine,” Roger said.

“The car’s this way,” Kate said shortly. They walked together in silence.

A couple minutes into the drive, Roger said, “I am sorry.”

Kate sighed. “I know. It’s—well, I’m still not happy about it, but it was twenty years ago. It’s not like it matters anymore.” It was a lie, but Roger didn’t need to know that.

“About that,” Roger said. “This can’t be a coincidence, right? You and I both working at Etta’s event?”

“It doesn’t seem like one,” Kate agreed. “I haven’t seen her since we all worked together; have you?”

“Nope. Bertie, either for that matter. I’m half expecting him to show up today, even though I doubt he’s working on the bridge again.”

“I think he and his husband were going to start some sort of landscaping business? Or a flower shop or something?” Kate guessed. “I haven’t seen him since his wedding. Which, I might add, neither you nor Etta came to.”

“I couldn’t,” Roger said shortly.

“Busy with important Watchtower business? I was working to make the bureau a publicly recognized agency, and I still found time to get a weekend off to see an old friend get married,” Kate said sharply.



“I really couldn’t,” Roger said. “I can’t leave the Bridge. One of the conditions of my immortality.”

“Oh,” Kate said. “That must be frustrating.”

“I’m used to it,” Roger said, tone making it clear this wasn’t up for discussion.

“So,” Kate redirected, “How do you think seeing Etta is going to go?”

“Who knows. We never did have the easiest relationship.”

“I think you two did alright, the last month or so,” Kate said. “And she invited us. That’s gotta count for something, right?”

## Chapter 4

“Etta! How’ve you been?” Frank asked, joining Etta in her office. Etta’s desk was even more of a mess than usual, covered in haphazard piles of papers.

“Well, one of the vegetable delivery trucks is late, two of the chefs have been bickering like children all morning, and I somehow agreed to new decorations for the ballroom in a fit of insanity. So, you know, not great,” Etta replied, looking frazzled.

“Sounds like your average pre-event jitters. Or is this worse because, y’know, your mom disappeared during the last tenth anniversary celebration for this place and that’s bringing up old memories?”

“I was trying not to think about that, Frank, but thanks for making sure that my childhood trauma is at the forefront of my mind today,” Etta said, glaring at him. It was a friendly glare, Frank was pretty sure.

“Sorry, I kind of figured it already was? Or else it wasn’t bothering you. Sophie said you were fine, just busy.”

“Sophie has enough on her plate without needing to worry about me, too. She’s been taking a lot of responsibility for this event,” Etta said. “I still can’t believe how much she’s grown up.”

“I still can’t believe the girls are already adults,” Frank said. “Makes you feel old, doesn’t it?”

“Positively ancient,” Etta agreed.

“And hey, we’re probably going to be in-laws in a few years. Or at least, co-in-laws? Something like that,” Frank said.

“I don’t think it works like that. I’ll be Skye’s mother-in-law, and Sophie will be your daughter-in-law, but I don’t think there’s a term for our relationship to each other. Thank god.”

“Hey, being my co-in-law isn’t that bad. It could be worse. You’re also going to be Skye’s mother’s co-in-law.”

“Oh god, that is worse.” Etta had assumed Frank was exaggerating when he mentioned just how annoying his ex was. He had not been. She was a good mother to Skye, but not exactly the type of person Etta would willingly spend any time with.

“Just imagine family parties. You, me, my ex, your aunt... it’s going to be something, alright.”

“Hey, Aunt Yvette’s not that bad. She’s going to be here this weekend, and I want you two to play nice.”

“Hey, I’m perfectly nice to her. It’s not my fault she’s convinced that I’m Sophie’s deadbeat father.”

“I think the fact that Sophie and Skye are dating has made her finally let go of that idea. Or, well, if not, then my aunt’s going to be too busy being yelled at by the girls to have much time to judge you.”

“Oh, that might actually be fun to see,” Frank said. “You know, you could have cleared this all up

years ago by just telling your aunt who got you pregnant.”

“And you could keep your nose out of my business, Frank. We’ve been over this.”

“Relax. I’m not saying you should tell me. I’m happy not knowing which of your coworkers got you pregnant. If I knew, I’d probably mess up and let it slip to someone,” Frank said agreeably. “But it wouldn’t be the end of the world if your aunt knew, right?”

“It’s none of her business, either,” Etta said. “Anyways, unless you want to mediate between the fighting chefs, scram. I have work to do.”

“Just have them talk to each other. Good communication is important in a healthy relationship,” Frank said. Etta gave him a look. “What? It was in one of those audiobooks I listened to, back when I was trying to make it work with Skye’s mom.”

“Thanks for the relationship advice, Dr. Phil. I’ll be sure to keep it in mind.”

---

Etta’s other guest arrived at the hotel early in the afternoon.

“Aunt Yvette!” Etta called, crossing the lobby to go greet her aunt.

“Hey, Etta,” Yvette said, reaching out to hug her. “So, how’s the tenth anniversary coming along?”

“It’s going well. Really, you didn’t have to worry about me. I’ve been doing this for ten years.”

“It’s my prerogative, as your aunt, to keep an eye out for you. You’re so busy with all the work that goes into running a hotel; I’m just here to make sure that there’s someone looking out for anyone who tries to turn this into a repeat of the last tenth anniversary.”

“Trust me, Aunt Yvette, everything’s going to be fine. There are no cults running around this time; I never would have raised Sophie out here on the Bridge if I didn’t believe it was actually safe. Besides, there are plenty of bureau agents and travel agents here to make sure nothing goes wrong. Look, there are some over there,” Etta said, pointing towards the side of the room, where a bureau agent was talking with a few travel agents.

Etta started to walk with her aunt toward them, saying, “Why don’t you talk to them, let them explain what-“ before trailing off as she saw the face of the bureau agent.

How the fuck had she not realized that she’d accidentally invited Kate fucking Burnham, one of her exes, to the big anniversary event.

“Actually, Aunt Yvette, why don’t you do that later,” Etta redirected, pivoting and guiding her aunt out of the lobby. “They look busy, and I want to check out the ballroom. Sophie arranged for a new set of decorations, some sort of big flower arrangement thing. She forwarded me the mock-ups and some old event photos of theirs, and it should look pretty amazing.”

“Uh, sure, let’s go do that, then,” Yvette agreed, looking slightly confused. “I’m sure if Sophie found them, they’re going to look amazing.”

Etta hoped her aunt hadn’t noticed anything was off. The last thing she needed was her aunt deciding this was a mystery that needed investigating. She was already going to have her hands full this weekend with the massive potential crisis that was Kate and Sophie in the same building.

“And here we are,” Etta said, opening the ballroom door.

The ballroom looked incredible. Etta tried to remember how much she'd agreed to pay for it, but whatever it was, it was worth it. The room looked alive and vibrant. The florists or movers or whoever had set it up so that, instead of detracting attention from the view out the glass wall, it instead balanced it, enhancing the whole room's appeal.

The room looked nothing like the kind of place you'd go to summon a malicious sea monster, which was exactly what Etta had hoped for. She made a mental note to congratulate Sophie on her hiring choice.

"Oh, it's gorgeous!" Aunt Yvette gushed. "I love those flowers on the bottom of that display."

A woman wearing a t-shirt for the florist company overheard her. She came over and said, "Those are hydrangeas. They're something of a trademark of ours. Our founders, Bertie and John, it's like their flower."

"That's—that's wonderful," Etta managed. "The whole display looks great. Aunt Yvette, I need to go check on something in my office. Are you fine if I leave you here?"

"Sure, Etta. I'll start checking things out. If there's anything fishy going on around here, I'll find it. Pun intended, of course."

"Great," Etta said weakly. She hurried off.

Etta was going to look at the event staff list, and she was going to figure out what had happened. She was going to figure out if Bertie and his husband were actually here or if it was just their company, and she was going to avoid ever speaking to the BOAT team. This was going to be fine.

As she walked towards her office, one of her employees told her, "the Watchtower liaison's here. I had him wait in your office to talk to you."

"Thanks," Etta said. Fine. She would deal with the liaison first and then have the breakdown she so richly deserved.

Etta opened the door to her office and found Roger Kaplan, looking exactly the same as he'd looked when she'd last seen him over twenty years ago.

Etta very calmly closed the door to her office. She crossed the hallway to the elevator and waited for it to come. Only when the elevator doors had closed behind her did she allow herself to quietly scream.

---

Frank was in the middle of a nice nap when his phone rang.

"H'lo?"

"I'm going to kill you," Etta said. She sounded really pissed off.

"Oh man, did I park in the wrong space? I did my best to figure out where I was supposed to park, but I wasn't sure where the lot boundaries are. You really need more signage."

"That is... so far from the point I can't even consider caring about it right now. You, Frank Hayward, have brought all three of my old coworkers here for the anniversary. I don't know how you did it, and I don't know why you did it, except to torture me, but you did it, and I'm going to kill you for it."

“Okay, calm down. I haven’t even talked to Roger or Kate in years, why would I have them come here? And I never even mentioned this to John and Bertie. You clearly don’t want to have anything to do with your old coworkers, or else you would have talked to them in the past two decades,” Frank said. “Do you actually think I’ve paid enough attention to your organizational system that I could have snuck three new guests in without you noticing that something was wrong?”

“Well, then, who did it? Who cares enough to find all my old coworkers and hire them without me noticing?”

“Hire them? Wow, you really-“ Frank wasn’t able to finish what he was saying before Etta interrupted him.

“Oh my god.”

“What?”

“I figured it out.”

“Figured what out?” Frank asked before realizing Etta had hung up on him.

Sometimes, Frank really didn’t understand Etta.

## Chapter 5

“Bertie! Bertie Renard!”

Bertie glanced around the loading bay. He was a little worried when he realized that one of the agents was calling his name, until he recognized her.

They’d both gotten older, but Kate wore the years well. She looked even more authoritative now, with the weight of experience behind her.

“Kate?” Bertie said, jogging over to her. “Wow, it’s been years.”

“Looks like Etta decided to turn this into a full Watchtower 10 reunion,” Kate said. “Roger’s here, too.”

“Wow,” Bertie said. “I didn’t realize—well, I figured Etta would be here, but I haven’t even seen her yet.”

“I haven’t either. I guess she’s really busy,” Kate said. “Uh, I should warn you about Roger. It turns out he’s immortal, so he hasn’t aged at all since we last saw him.”

“What?”

“Yeah, it was a surprise for me, too. I called headquarters to confirm, and it’s really him.”

“I... don’t know how to feel about that,” Bertie admitted.

“I’m going with slightly pissed off, since that would have definitely been good to know when we were all planning to fight for our lives. But, like, it’s been twenty years, so I guess it’s not worth being mad over.”

“Wait, does that mean that the stabbing...?”

“He says that was real,” Kate said.

“It looked real,” Bertie agreed. He still saw it in his nightmares, once in a while. “Anyways, is this your first time seeing either of them in years, too, then?”

“Yeah. The last one of our coworkers I saw was you, at your wedding,” Kate said. “How’s that going? Still married?”

“Of course I’m still married,” Bertie shot back, offended. Just because things hadn’t worked out with Kate and the others didn’t mean that he was somehow unloveable. “John and I are doing great.”

“Sorry, I could have phrased that better. I just wanted to check. Everyone always assumes I’m still married, and that gets awkward.”

“You were married?”

“For almost twelve years. It didn’t work out.”

“Sorry to hear that,” Bertie said, not entirely sincerely. Some part of him that he didn’t want to examine was glad that Kate was single. He reminded himself firmly that he was married to John,

and that Kate's marital status shouldn't matter to him.

"That's life," Kate said with a shrug. "I'm glad you and John are going strong. So, what are you doing here?"

"John and I have this company installing floral installations, and Etta hired us for the event," Bertie started, happy to get a chance to talk about their company.

---

John knocked on the door of Etta's office. He really should have let Bertie do this, since it was his ex, but he'd wanted to test the waters first. John didn't really understand why Etta had invited them here, after all this time, but he didn't want Bertie to be disappointed.

"Uh, come in?" a man's voice answered.

John cautiously opened the door.

A man was sitting in her office, looking extremely worried.

"Do you know where Etta Perrault is?" John asked him.

"I can't say I do, but I doubt she'll be coming back here any time soon. She, uh, kind of left in a hurry."

"Did something happen?" John asked.

"I kind of surprised her. We—well, we used to work together. She invited me here, but I think it might have been a mistake to come. For both of us."

John squinted at the man before saying, "Not from Watchtower 10, right? You look familiar, but I'm pretty sure the guy I'm thinking of is way older than you."

"That might be me. Who are you?" The man asked, looking suspicious. "I can't say I remember you."

"I'm John Renard. Bertie Renard's husband? He used to work with Etta, too, but I'm pretty sure his only male coworker was about his age."

"Right, Bertie's husband. You two stayed around for a couple of weeks, after Kate and Etta left. I kind of remember you now," he said. "I'm Roger Kaplan. I was at Watchtower 10 with Bertie and Etta. Due to an incident on the Bridge when I was younger, I don't age anymore."

"Bertie never mentioned that about you."

"He didn't know. None of them did. I try to keep it a secret, except when there's no other choice. I'll have to tell Etta, too. And Bertie, I assume—he's around somewhere, right?"

"He is."

"Out of curiosity, have either of you actually talked to Etta lately? Or just her staff?"

"Just her staff. But we have signed forms from Etta, she knows we're going to be here."

"Does your company have Bertie's name in it?"

"No, actually. It's my family name. We gave our company my name, then I took his name when

we got married.”

“So Etta might not know it’s your company?”

“I guess. I can’t imagine how she’d manage to hire us without intentionally seeking us out. I mean, we’ve gotten some good publicity, but we don’t usually work on the Bridge, or do this type of event.”

“You’re right, that does seem intentional. Someone must have planned to have all of us here,” Roger said. He still looked worried. “It’s probably nothing. She probably just left so fast because she got nervous about seeing all of us again.”

“I can’t imagine why. She spent twenty years not caring how her old coworkers felt; I don’t know why she’d start now.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” Roger asked.

“It’s nothing. I’ll leave you to it,” John said, leaving the room.

Once he was closer to the lobby, he took a deep breath. He reminded himself that Bertie had chosen to come here because he wanted to see his exes again, and he wasn’t being supportive by picking fights with them.

He headed into the lobby, looking around for a member of the staff. He spotted a hotel employee heading across the room.

“Excuse me, do you know where I can find Etta Perrault?” He asked her.

“She’s busy right now, but I might be able to help you?”

“I’m with the florists; I wanted to get her approval on the ballroom decorations,” he said.

“I could give you a preliminary approval if you want?” the girl offered. “She’ll still have the final say, but I should be able to spot any major issues with a basic inspection.”

“That would be great. Are you one of the assistant managers, then?” John asked. She looked young to have the position—he would have estimated her to be college-aged.

The girl smiled at that. “Not exactly, but I’ve been working with her to plan this event.”

“I’m John, by the way.”

“I’m Sophie.”

They headed into the ballroom.

“Wow, that looks wonderful,” Sophie said.

John was relieved. He still wanted Etta’s approval, but having one of her staff on board would make that easier.

“With the really tall structures, what supports do you have in place to make sure they won’t fall?” she asked.

“That’s more a question for my husband than me—we co-own the business, and he’s the engineer,” John said. He spotted Bertie across the room and waved him down.



“It’s nice that you two work together. Did you meet working here?”

“No. The opposite, actually. We co-founded the business right after our wedding.”

“Wow, that’s awesome. How long have you two been married?” Sophie asked.

“Almost twenty-one years.”

“Almost as long as I’ve been alive, then,” Sophie said. “I’m twenty-one.”

“Now that makes me feel old,” John joked.

“Hey, what’s up?” Bertie asked, coming up to stand next to John. When he noticed Sophie, his eyes went wide. “Are you Etta’s daughter, by any chance? You look just like her.”

John turned to look more closely at her and tried to remember what Etta looked like. Bertie had put all the photos of his exes away years ago, once it had become clear that none of them were interested in keeping in touch. From what he could remember, though, the girl did look a lot like Etta.

“Yup! Everyone says I look just like her. I’m two inches taller, though. Not that you’d notice,” she said, gesturing towards Bertie’s height.

“Your mom always did say I was a giraffe.” Bertie said with a laugh.

“Anyways, I had some questions about the structural stability of the taller displays, and John said you’d know about that.”

“Come on, I’ll show you how I stabilized the taller ones.”

As Bertie and Sophie walked away, John’s mind wandered. It was kind of a funny coincidence, Bertie’s friend having a kid right around the time they got married. He wondered whether that was why she hadn’t come to the wedding. Bertie wouldn’t have been upset if he’d known she couldn’t come because she was taking care of a newborn, and not just because she didn’t care enough to want to be there for him.

It occurred to him that Etta must have gotten pregnant really soon after leaving the Watchtower, if Sophie was already twenty-one. He and Bertie had gotten married a year after finding each other again—they’d opted for a fairly small ceremony, since the thought of spending their wedding day with people they hadn’t seen in years or barely remembered didn’t appeal, and so they’d been able to plan it without too much advance notice. And if Sophie was already twenty-one, and their anniversary wasn’t for a few months...

John glanced over at Sophie again. She looked too much like her mother for there to be any hints to her other parent’s identity. Taller than Etta, but that was most of the population.

John needed to talk to Bertie as soon as he was done with Sophie.

## Chapter 6

“Excuse me, Agent Burnham, but there’s an urgent matter I need to coordinate with you on,” Roger said as Kate was finishing her conversation with another BOAT agent.

“This had better be important,” Kate said as the agent walked off.

“It really is. Is there anywhere we can go where we’re less likely to be overheard?” Roger asked, looking pointedly at the agents bustling around.

Kate rolled her eyes. “We can talk in the hall.”

They went out in the hall, closing the door behind them. Roger looked around nervously for any eavesdroppers.

“Alright, what’s up?”

“Have you actually talked to Etta at any point leading up to the event?”

“No. My supervisor did mention that I’d specifically been requested for the assignment, though, so me being here isn’t a coincidence. Why?”

“I’m not actually sure Etta knew we were all going to be here. When I saw Etta, she looked surprised to see me and immediately ran off. Bertie’s husband confirmed that neither him nor Bertie had talked to Etta, either.”

“She might have just been startled that you haven’t aged. I wouldn’t blame her.” Kate said. “But if you’re right, then someone else planned for us all to be here. Could just be someone trying to plan a nice surprise for Etta, but it could also be something more sinister.”

“That’s what I was thinking, too. This would be a good way for one of the old cults to get revenge. It might be nothing, though.”

“Might be. It’s worth looking into. I’ll find Etta and see what she knows.”

“Thanks. I’d appreciate it if you keep me in the loop, if possible? If I’m going to be fighting for me life, I’d like a bit of warning.”

Kate looked at him.

“That was poor phrasing on my part, I suppose,” Roger said.

“Just a bit,” Kate agreed. “I’ll let you know whether it’s something, though.”

“Thanks,” Roger said.

Kate went off to go find Etta, leaving Roger standing alone in the hallway.

---

“Bertie! Bertie, we need to talk now. It’s important.” John had meant to talk to Bertie as soon as Sophie left, but then one of their employees had needed John’s input on how to arrange the last few displays, and by the time he’d been free of that, Bertie had been in the middle of checking the supports on an arrangement. John had waited as long as he could, but they needed to talk.

“Did something go wrong? Is one of the displays unstable?” Bertie asked, looking worried.

“No. The displays are fine. Just, uh, why don’t we go off in the corner. I think I figured something out, and you need to know about it.”

Bertie still looked worried, but he followed John to a quiet corner of the room. John didn’t want anyone overhearing their conversation.

“So, uh, you know Etta’s daughter,” John said. “When I was talking to her, I mentioned our anniversary was coming up, and she mentioned that she was also twenty-one years old.”

“Okay?” Bertie said. “That’s a weird coincidence.”

“No, it’s not. I don’t think it’s a... look, our wedding was right around a year after we were reunited, right? Like, almost exactly a year.”

“Yeah?”

“And it’s about three months until our anniversary. Which, if my math’s correct and I really can’t find the flaw in it, means that Sophie was born less than nine months after we were reunited. And, uh, not to put too fine a point on it, but you were one of the people sleeping with Etta nine months before Sophie was born.”

Bertie stared at John, frozen for a moment.

“Oh my god,” Bertie said.

“Congratulations, I guess?” John offered.

“Oh my god,” Bertie repeated. “I might have a daughter.”

“Yup,” John said.

“Do you think Etta told the others?” Bertie asked. “Maybe she knows it’s not me, and she told whichever one of them it was who got her pregnant?”

“Is that something she might know? Was there a moment when she was having sex with one of the others and the condom broke? Did not all of you have the type of sex with her that could result in pregnancy?”

“I don’t think so? Etta was on birth control, so we weren’t using condoms. We were to start with, but we ran out of them pretty quick, and that’s the last thing anyone wanted to ask the Bridge supply office for. And, uh, position wise and whatever, all three of us are candidates. So unless she had Sophie DNA tested and checked it against one of the others and found a match, I don’t think even Etta knows.”

“Roger mentioned that he and Kate hadn’t talked to Etta lately, so I doubt she did that. I don’t know either of the others as well as you did, but I’d imagine they aren’t the type to abandon their kid if they knew the kid existed.”

“You’re right, they’re not. That’s reassuring. I’m not the only one completely blindsided by this. We’re not the only ones,” Bertie corrected himself, “you’re in this as much as I am. You might have a step daughter, after all.”

“Huh, yeah. That’s weird. Not bad, though. I haven’t considered being a parent in over two

decades, but the idea of an adult step daughter is kind of nice actually.”

“I think I agree with you,” Bertie said. “Plus, the sentimental part of me likes that something good came out of my time at Watchtower 10. Like, a living reminder that it wasn’t all bad times.”

“Not to overstep, but I think a lot of it wasn’t bad,” John said. He wondered whether he should add something.

He’d been thinking a lot, since they’d gotten the invitation, about Bertie’s relationship with his old coworkers. John coming back had been one of the reasons they’d broken up in the first place. While he didn’t regret coming back in the slightest, he’d hated seeing Bertie’s devastation at losing touch with them. He would have been happy to share Bertie with them; he’d never been the jealous type, and Bertie knew that.

John didn’t say anything, though. Not yet. Bertie hadn’t even seen two of his old lovers yet.

“Why don’t we go find one of the others?” John suggested. “Either Etta for an explanation, or Roger and Kate to see what they know. Our display’s already set up, pending Etta’s approval.”

“I’m kind of scared of what we’re going to find out. I just don’t understand why Etta didn’t tell me. I don’t understand why she stopped talking to us, then called us here over twenty years later.”

“I know,” John said. “I don’t understand either. But I think in this case, wondering is worse than knowing.”

“You’re right,” Bertie said. “Can we wait here a little while longer, though?”

“Of course,” John said. “We can wait as long as you need.”

John reached out and took Bertie’s hand.

“No matter what happens, we’re in this together,” John said.

## Chapter 7

Sophie couldn't help but grinning. She'd already met one parent candidate, and he'd been really friendly. She definitely wouldn't mind having him as a dad, although she really hoped he hadn't been cheating on his husband.

One parent down, two to go. She went to the conference room where the BOAT agents had set up shop next.

The agents all looked up as she entered.

"Excuse me, is one of you Agent Burnham? I have a couple of questions for her about security."

"She's not here," one of the agents said. "I'm sure one of us could talk you through it, though."

"No, that's fine. I'll come back later, then," Sophie said. She really did have a few security questions planned out, but they were just an excuse to talk to Kate.

She couldn't help but be a little disappointed. Still, there was still another parent candidate to talk to. She could always come back for Kate after she met Roger.

Besides, Roger was the one she was the most curious about. He wasn't on the internet anywhere, and she didn't even know what he looked like.

"Hey, is the Watchtower liaison here yet?" she asked Ava, who was currently working the front desk.

"Yeah. Logan found him wandering around, looking for your mom. He got him set up in the extra office next to the security room."

"Great!" Sophie said, and headed off to find him.

She took a deep breath before opening the door.

Inside the room, there was exactly one person, a man who looked to be in his early thirties.

"Are you Roger Kaplan?" she asked.

"Uh, yes," he said, looking startled. "Are you—"

She interrupted him before he could finish. "Uh, sorry, I just remembered I have something I need to take care of, I'll be back soon."

She ran off, leaving Roger staring after her in confusion.

---

"Oh my god, Kate Burnham? Is that you?" a man called out, jogging over to her. "Etta mentioned you were here, but wow, it's still a surprise."

"Frank?" Kate asked. "What are you doing here?"

"Me? I drop by all the time. It's you I'm curious about. You haven't been here... well, ever."

"Etta invited me here. I really can't believe she invited you, too."

“Etta definitely didn’t invite you here. She’s, like, really annoyed that all of you showed up for some reason.”

“We all thought we were invited by Etta. If we weren’t, that means someone else wanted us all here.”

“Wasn’t me,” Frank said. “I’ve already told Etta, I haven’t even talked to you or Roger in years.”

“Why are you all buddy-buddy with Etta, all of the sudden?”

“All of the sudden? We’ve been friends for, like, over a decade. Although it was mostly the girls, at first. My daughter and Etta’s daughter,” Frank explained.

“Etta has a daughter? You actually found someone willing to have kids with you?” Kate asked, not sure which to focus on first.

“I mean, we’re divorced, but yes. And yeah, Etta has a daughter. Didn’t you... oh man, I don’t think I was supposed to tell you that.”

Kate couldn’t help but feel hurt by that. “Don’t worry. I won’t be disturbing Etta’s new family with my presence. I’m just here to do my job.”

“O-kay?” Frank said, looking confused.

“Nice talking to you,” Kate lied.

She hurried off without waiting for a reply. If Etta hadn’t hired them, then she needed to figure out who had.

If she kept her eyes out for any children that looked like Etta, that was no one’s business but hers.

## Chapter 8

Yvette had many talents that had suited her well during her career as a paranormal debunker. She was a natural skeptic, and she didn't spook easily. She was a good judge of character. And, perhaps most importantly, she had an excellent memory. Particularly for faces.

And today in particular, she'd noticed a few faces that she hadn't seen in over two decades.

She'd spotted all three of her niece's old watchtower coworkers running around the hotel, although one of them looked suspiciously like he hadn't aged at all. Etta herself had been nowhere to be found ever since spotting them, which seemed to point to it being a surprise.

Sophie had taken a particular interest in event planning lately. It wasn't hard to put the pieces together.

She found her great-niece hurrying down the hallway near the security office.

"Sophie! There you are," she said, wrapping her niece up in a hug. It also gave her an excuse to stop her niece from running off.

"Hey Aunt Yvette!" Sophie said, sounding distracted. "I'm so sorry I didn't get a chance to say hi to you earlier. I've just been so busy with the anniversary. In fact—"

"Come on, sit and talk with me for a minute before you go running off again. Your mother did the same thing, you know. Said hi then ran off to go do something. I know you girls are very busy, but I've been forced to wander through this very nice hotel all on my lonesome."

"I'm really sorry about that, Aunt Yvette."

"You know, while I was walking around, I was thinking about something. Have you ever seen the movie 'The Parent Trap'?" Sophie's eyes widened. "Your mom used to love that movie when she was a little girl. She'd watch it over and over."

"Uh, I think I remember watching it once when I was young, but it's a pretty old movie."

"I know. I was just thinking, what with all your mom's old coworkers running around, you might have taken some inspiration from the movie."

Sophie stared at her, too surprised to say anything. Yvette loved when she had that effect on people.

"I may be old, but I'm still a detective at heart," Yvette said.

"I can see that, Aunt Yvette," Sophie managed.

"I'm guessing you're trying to figure out which one is your parent?" Sophie nodded. "Well, I can't say I know, either, but I'm sure you'll know by the end of the weekend, since they're all here now."

"I'm not so sure of that," Sophie admitted. "I still haven't found one of them, and another of them isn't even here. I think his son was invited instead."

"Roger? No, that's him, all right," Yvette said. "I don't know why he hasn't gotten older, but Kate knows him."

“Really?”

“I may have done a little bit of eavesdropping. Just enough to make sure it was really him.”

“Thanks, Aunt Yvette,” Sophie said.

“Now, I know that you aren’t going to like this suggestion,” Yvette started. “But I really think that it might be a good idea to go talk to your mother.”

“She’s had twenty-one years to tell me, and she never has,” Sophie said bitterly. “Why should now be any different?”

“You know, I never agreed with your mother’s decision not to tell you about who got her pregnant. I think you deserve to know your history,” Yvette said, voice going soft. “When Frank and Skye came into your lives, I hoped... well, he’s been more than a father to you than anyone else has, even though your love for Skye’s not exactly sisterly.” Sophie laughed at that. “And if it wasn’t him, then it was someone you never met, someone who never got to meet you. That’s why I kept hoping it was him, even after your mom said that it wasn’t. And, well, it annoyed Frank, and I do enjoy annoying him. But now, you have a chance to know where you came from. And I think that, since you’ve forced her into it, Etta might be more willing to tell you.”

“I don’t know if I want to give her the chance,” Sophie admitted. “She’s going to be so upset, and I’m so happy right now. I don’t want her to ruin it.”

“You don’t have to follow my advice,” Yvette said. “But I think you should give her a chance.”

Sophie sighed. “All right. I’ll be the bigger person, and all that.”

Yvette hugged her niece again. “I’m proud of you.”

Sophie hugged her back, then went off to find her mom.



## Chapter 9

Sophie's mom was predictable. She wouldn't have liked being told that she was, but Sophie had grown up with her, and she knew her mother's habits well.

So she knew that when her mom disappeared, the first place to look for her was down in the basement.

Sophie didn't quite understand why her mom chose to hide in the lowest level of the hotel basement when she was upset. She'd done the same in their house back when they lived on the mainland. There was probably some significance to it, but her mom had never bothered explaining.

There were a lot of things that her mom had never explained.

"Mom?" Sophie called. "Are you here?"

She heard a soft voice speaking in the distance. Following it, she found her mom talking on the phone to someone.

"I understand that, but you two still have to work together. We need both of you for the dinner tonight."

Sophie's mom glanced up at her, then turned back to the phone call. Sophie waited while her mom negotiated a truce in the kitchen, at least for the evening.

"What's up?" her mom asked.

"You know what's up," Sophie said. "There's a reason you've been hiding in the basement."

"Well, yes, it's the anniversary of my mom leaving, and it's bringing up some bad memories."

"But it's not just that, is it?" Sophie asked.

Her mom sighed. "Why did you invite my old coworkers?"

"I want to know where I come from. I've been asking you for years, and you've never told me. So, I figured, well, if they're all here, I'd finally find out. One way or another. I'd rather hear it from you, though, so here I am. Giving you one more chance to tell me yourself," Sophie said. She tried to keep herself calm, keep her tone reasonable. One of them had to be the adult here, and it wasn't going to be her mom.

"Why does it matter? Why are you so obsessed with finding out who got me pregnant? Aren't I enough for you?" Sophie's mom asked, sounding frustrated almost to the point of tears. "I was raised by a single mother, and until she disappeared, I was perfectly fine. I never needed another parent."

"It's not about being enough for me. It's about deciding I don't deserve to know my own history. I don't like being lied to."

"I've never lied to you about this. It's just never mattered."

"It's never mattered? Do you know what it's like, to be the only kid at school who doesn't know the names of more than one of her grandparents? To know that I probably have cousins, grandparents, aunts and uncles out there somewhere that I've never met? Two generations of single

mothers leaves a lot of gaps on the family tree.”

“I’m not a bad parent. I’ve done everything possible to raise you, to give you everything.”

“I’ve never said that you’re a bad parent. You’re taking this personally and not listening to me. It’s not an insult to you mom. It’s just... I hate being kept in the dark. I don’t like the idea that I have another parent out there somewhere, and I still don’t even know their name.”

“Sometimes, it’s better not to know.”

“That’s bullshit. Even if it turns out that whoever got you pregnant was an awful person, then I’ll know and be able to move on with my life. I won’t have to wonder all the damn time. Right now, I’m left with this huge mystery hanging over me, and so I can’t move on.”

“I’m sorry. I just—I can’t deal with this right now.”

“Fine. Fuck you. I’ll figure this out on my own.”

Sophie stormed out.

## Chapter 10

Etta watched Sophie go. She'd been so sure, all those years ago, that she'd made the right choice, keeping Sophie's parentage a secret. Even now, she knew she'd done the right thing. She just wished it hadn't hurt Sophie so much.

When Etta's mother had abandoned her, she'd been sent to live with her aunt.

Before Etta came to live with her, Yvette had lived in a one-bedroom apartment in the middle of the city. She'd spent her days solving mysteries, and her evenings out at bars with her friends. In other words, she'd been an average aromantic, childless thirty-year old.

When Etta came, Yvette had broken the lease on the apartment she lived in, since it wasn't big enough. She'd given up solving mysteries full time, since she needed to be there for a traumatized child. And she'd left the city she loved, since her sister's letter had instructed her to hide.

Yvette had never complained about the sacrifices. She'd done her best to accept her new life. To adjust to living in a new town, surrounded by families who gossiped about her being single at her age. To accept that solving mysteries was something that had to be done in moderation now that she had a child who needed her to be present. She'd shifted her life around Etta, and she'd never told Etta that she resented her for it.

Etta had watched her aunt be pulled between her duty to Etta and her dreams for her own life. She'd resented her aunt when she'd left on long research trips, and she'd resented her aunt when her aunt had stayed with her, tired and worn out.

Her aunt had never chosen to have a child. She'd had one thrust upon her, and she'd done her best to take care of Etta. She'd never been the perfect guardian, but she'd always tried, and Etta loved her for it.

Still. Etta imagined another life. A life where her mom was who she'd seemed to be, when Etta was a child. A life where her mom had never left, had stayed to raise her to adulthood. A life where her aunt was able to travel around, doing what she loved all the time.

When Etta had found out she was pregnant—well, no, that wasn't when she'd had to make the decision. First, she'd had to decide whether to keep the baby. Once Etta had decided to keep the baby, she'd tried to imagine a life for her child.

Etta had briefly allowed herself to imagine raising the baby with the others. Imagined calling them all up, convincing them to get back together. Imagined them all buying a house somewhere and living together without the constant fear for their lives that had characterized their most recent time together. Imagined buying a bed that was actually big enough for all of them, instead of pushing two beds together. Imagined actually saying that she loved them, rather than just thinking about it. Imagined them saying it back.

Then she'd pushed the thought aside. That was never going to happen. Bertie had left to get married. Kate had gone off on some secret agent mission, risking her life to track down the remainders of two cults. And Roger would probably never leave the Bridge, not willingly. Even if she had told them—she imagined having to get a DNA test, then split custody with one of them. She imagined Bertie's domestic bliss being interrupted, Roger trying to raise a baby on the most dangerous structure on Earth, having to tell a school-aged child the news that Kate had died on a mission somewhere. Etta just couldn't do it. She couldn't do it to them, or to her unborn baby. It

would be better not to tell them.

So she imagined a different future for her and her unborn child. Living with her aunt for a while, then finding a job. Something stable, out on the mainland. Somewhere near where her aunt lived, maybe.

It would be a good life for her child. Etta had grown up with a single mom, and cult affiliations aside, Etta's childhood had been nothing less than magical. She'd never wished for another parent, not when her mom was there. And even when her mom had disappeared, she'd never really wanted another parent. She'd imagined having to go live with someone who had dated her mother for a month or two and then moved on, rather than living with someone who had spent her whole childhood with her mother. There was no contest.

No, Etta had done the right thing. Etta had raised Sophie as well as possible. She just didn't know what to do, now that Sophie was an adult, and all her other parents were here.

No, that wasn't true. Etta did know what she had to do. She just wasn't sure she was ready to actually do it.

## Chapter 11

Sophie was curled up on her bed, entirely covered by her comforter, when she heard a knock on the door.

“It’s just me,” Skye said. “Can I come in?”

Sophie slowly got up to let her girlfriend into the room. She ushered her in, closing and locking the door behind her.

When Skye saw Sophie’s tear-stained face, she offered her a hug.

Sophie let herself melt into Skye’s embrace, trying not to get snot on her shoulder.

Skye rubbed Sophie’s back.

“I just—I just want to know who my family is. I just want a chance at having—at having a whole big family. I know that I should be grateful for mom and Aunt Yvette, and that that’s a lot more family than some people have, but all I want is another name on the birth certificate. I want to know my grandparents’ names, and whether they’re still alive. I want to know where I came from.”

“There’s nothing wrong with wanting that,” Skye said comfortingly. “Family’s—it’s not necessary, but it’s nice to have. You deserve a chance to meet the rest of your family, if they’re out there.”

“I mean, god, I only know the name of one of my grandparents. And she’s, like, evil and dead, but it’s still nice knowing who she is. I’d rather know that my grandma is evil and dead than have her be this big mystery.”

“That makes sense,” Skye said.

Sophie moved out of Skye’s embrace to get a tissue. After cleaning her face a bit, she said, “I’m sick of feeling like a bad daughter because I want to know who my other parent is. My mom’s taking it like some sort of rejection of her, and I don’t know how to get her to understand that this isn’t about her. Plenty of people have two parents without either parent feeling like they weren’t good enough to be a single parent, or some bullshit like that.”

“I know it’s not the same, but when my parents first got divorced, they were kind of like that. Any time I mentioned missing the other parent, they’d be offended, like I was saying they weren’t good enough. But my parents had to figure it out, for my sake. Not that they’re great at it now, but they’ve gotten better. Your mom’s never had to figure out how to deal with sharing you with someone she broke up with, so it’s probably even worse for her. But, like, that’s her own hang-up that she has to deal with. It’s not fair that she’s taking it out on you.”

“It’s not,” Sophie said. “I hate having to be the reasonable adult here.”

“Do you know what you want to do?”

“That’s a good question. I want to find out who my other parent is. I know it’ll hurt Mom, but not knowing hurts me,” Sophie started. “More specifically than that, I’m not sure about. I don’t really want to go up to them and ask them, not until I have a better idea who it is. Which means more investigating, I think.”

“My dad might be willing to help out,” Skye suggested. “He used to know all your mom’s old

coworkers, at least a little. If he gets them talking about old times, maybe that'll help."

"That's a good idea. My aunt might be willing to help out too, now that I've given Mom a chance to come clean on her own. If she goes up to each of them and casually mentions my mom has a twenty-one-year old child, she might be able to tell who takes interest in that. That's what I tried with one of the guys, but I really couldn't tell whether he was reacting normally or not."

"That sounds like a solid plan. Between the four of us, I'm sure we'll have it figured out soon," Skye said.

"Thank you so much for supporting me through this," Sophie said. "It's a lot easier to deal with, knowing you're on my side."

"I'm always on your side," Skye said.

Sophie leaned in to kiss her girlfriend. Parent-finding could wait a little bit longer.

## Chapter 12

Kate glanced around the hall to make sure it was empty before opening the door to Etta's office. She didn't need the hotel staff asking questions about what she was doing in there, not until she knew whether something was going on.

Etta's office was empty. It was cluttered, filled with stacks of paper. Kate started going through them, careful to keep them the way that she'd found them. It never hurt to avoid leaving signs that she'd been there.

It took her a while, but she finally found a proposal document suggesting hiring Bertie's company. The author on it was listed as Sophie Perrault.

Well. That changed things. On the upside, that meant that this was likely a well-meaning surprise from Etta's wife, and not a cultist plot.

On the downside, this meant that Etta had a wife.

Which was fine. She really should have expected that. She'd already known that Etta had at least one kid; it made sense that she was married, too. Just because Kate was divorced, that didn't mean that she should expect everyone else to be single.

The next step in this investigation would be confirming that this Sophie Perrault was the one who'd hired her. Which meant meeting Etta's wife.

Sometimes, Kate hated her job.

---

Sometimes, Roger hated his job.

No, that wasn't fair. This wasn't even his job. He'd been sent on special assignment, away from his usual job. If he'd been doing his regular job, none of this would have happened.

Roger still wasn't clear on what was actually happening. The last time he'd heard from Kate, she'd confirmed that Etta didn't know they were here, but she didn't have any more information. Which meant that Roger was just killing time, sitting in an office and waiting for either the party to start or for someone to try to kill him.

Or for yet another person to see him and run away, he supposed. There'd been Etta, to start with, and then a girl who could only be Etta's daughter.

Roger hadn't really expected Etta to have any kids. He really should have, though. Even though his life had stayed mostly the same over the past twenty years, that didn't mean that the others' lives had. They'd grown older, gotten married, and had children. All while he'd stayed exactly the same.

He really needed to tell Etta about his immortality, whenever she showed up. He was pretty sure he'd freaked her out by not giving her advance warning that he hadn't aged. That was probably why she'd sent her daughter in; her daughter must have been checking that it actually was him.

The door opened again. Roger glanced up, hoping it was Etta.

"Roger?" Bertie asked, looking in. "Wow, you really haven't changed. John and Kate told me, but still... wow."

“Bertie,” Roger said, looking back at him. Bertie was middle-aged now. Roger could see the wrinkles starting to form in his face, the grey spreading through his hair. But it was still Bertie. Still the man Roger had... well, it didn't matter, now.

Bertie's husband, John, followed Bertie into the room.

“So, uh, we figured something out, and we wanted to talk to you about it since it involves you,” John said. He looked at Bertie to continue.

Bertie opened his mouth, looking extremely nervous.

Roger was suddenly reminded of the way Bertie had looked when he and Etta had first proposed the idea that the four of them start a relationship together. For a fleeting moment, he wondered if Bertie and John were going to propose something similar.

There wasn't any doubt in his mind as to whether he'd accept.

“Etta has a daughter, and, well, based on the timeline of—look, she's either yours, mine, or Kate's, and I had no idea she even existed before today.”

“Oh,” Roger said. Of course that was what the conversation was about. He was stupid to have thought—well. It didn't matter now. “I think I met her, earlier.”

“So you didn't know she existed, either?” John asked.

“No. Not until today,” Roger said. “Does Kate know?”

“We haven't told her yet. We're going to do that next,” Bertie said. “Do you know where we can find her?”

“I'm not sure. She's been looking into who invited us here, since Etta didn't.”

“Etta didn't?” Bertie asked, looking crestfallen. “I thought—I thought this was her way of finally reaching out to us, after all this time.”

John glared at Roger, as though he was somehow responsible for this, and reached out to squeeze Bertie's shoulder. Roger watched Bertie lean into the touch.

“She didn't,” Roger confirmed. “We're not sure if someone well-intentioned brought us all together for a reunion, or if there's something more sinister happening.”

“You're worried that one of the cults is making a reappearance,” Bertie realized.

“I can't fucking believe this. No, actually, I should have expected it. Of course this isn't actually a chance for a reunion. God knows most of you didn't bother to stay in touch or even come to our wedding. No, of course this is some sort of murder plot. That's the only fucking thing that ever happens out here, heartbreak and murder,” John said. By the end of his diatribe, he was almost yelling.

“Babe, it's okay,” Bertie said. “Really, it's fine. I shouldn't have gotten my hopes up.”

Roger tried to guess what Bertie had been hoping for. Did he just want to be friends again? It had to be that, surely.

“They're the ones who shouldn't have suddenly decided to stop caring about you the second I came back,” John said.



“That’s not what happened,” Roger interjected.

“It sure felt like it,” Bertie said softly. “After our reunion, after the fighting was done, it was like everyone decided to act like the past month had never happened. Everyone just pretended like we’d only ever been coworkers, and split up, and never contacted each other again. I tried to—I didn’t know what to say to you guys, in a letter or phone call. I thought, if we all saw each other at our wedding, then maybe... I don’t know. But Kate was the only one who came, and we didn’t know what to say to each other, after a year apart and missing you and Etta.”

“I couldn’t come. I can’t leave the Bridge. It’s part of my curse, the price for being forever young and undying,” Roger said. He wanted to look away from Bertie, to avoid the intimacy of the moment, but at the same time he couldn’t help but hold Bertie’s gaze. “Everyone else was leaving. Watchtower 10 was just a stopgap on the way to everyone’s real lives, with marriages and families and purpose. You all were going to move on and grow old, and I was going to stay here and stay the same. I couldn’t hold you all back.”

“I didn’t know,” Bertie said.

“I didn’t want you to,” Roger replied. “It’s my burden.”

“That doesn’t mean you have to bear it alone,” Bertie said.

Roger shrugged. “It’s ancient history now.”

Bertie looked nervous, but he stepped forward, toward Roger. “It doesn’t have to be.”

It took Roger a moment to be able to do anything but stare at Bertie in disbelief. Once his brain caught up, he moved toward Bertie.

He’d kissed other people in the past twenty years, of course. One-night stands and semi-regular friends with benefits in the form of other Bridge supervisors, and even a few short relationships with people once the Bridge was no longer a ghost town.

In that moment, however, Roger was sure that none of them could compare to kissing Bertie.

Once he and Bertie finally broke apart, he glanced toward John to see his reaction. He was smiling as though all of his hopes had come true. He also, Roger noted with interest, was blushing slightly.

“I definitely want to do more of that, but we need to find Kate,” Bertie said, smiling widely.

“We do,” Roger agreed, vaguely aware that he was smiling back.

“If you two want a little more time, I think it can wait a few minutes,” John said.

Roger and Bertie took that as their cue to kiss each other again.

When they broke apart, pausing for air, John said, “I can, uh, leave if you two want.” Roger glanced over at John. He was flushed, and Roger suspected that the last thing he wanted to do was leave the room. Roger couldn’t help but enjoy that he was one of the ones who’d put that flush there.

“You don’t have to,” Roger offered.

At some point this weekend, Roger was going to have to talk with John about whether they were going to act on their attraction to each other. That could wait, though.

Roger went back to kissing Bertie.

## Chapter 13

Etta headed upstairs. She knew she had to face the music; to talk to her daughter and then, in all likelihood, introduce Sophie to her exes.

Etta didn't feel ready. She wished that there was some way to convince everyone to let it all go. To convince Sophie that she didn't need to meet her other parents, and to get her exes to leave without her or Sophie having to talk to them at all.

Etta knew that wasn't going to happen, though.

As she was heading towards Sophie's room, she saw her aunt up ahead. The last thing she wanted to deal with right now was a conversation with her all-too-perceptive aunt. She tried to duck out of sight before her aunt could spot her, but Yvette noticed her before she could turn and take a different route to Sophie's room.

"Etta!" Yvette called.

Etta briefly considered just running away. Then she reminded herself that she was being a mature adult.

"Hey, Aunt Yvette. What's up?"

"Has Sophie talked to you yet?" Yvette asked bluntly. She saw Etta's expression fall at that and winced. "I take it the talk didn't go so well, then."

"Did you help her plan this?" Etta asked sharply.

"No. I was just as surprised as you when I saw all your old co-workers here. All I did was suggest that she go talk to you instead of trying to guess who her other parent is on her own."

"I can't say that that went as well as you hoped," Etta replied, accusation gone from her tone.

"Excuse me for intruding, but—why won't you just tell her? I don't know why you didn't want to tell her before, but surely whatever the issue was has been resolved now that she's an adult," Yvette said.

"I just—I don't know how they're going to react to finding out about Sophie. I don't want her to have to deal with having parents who don't want her."

"Is that why you never told them about her? You didn't want them to reject her?"

"No, that's not it. I know that any one of them would have done their part to help raise her. But, well, I don't want her to be raised by someone who never wanted children."

"Someone like me," Yvette prompted.

"You gave up so much to raise me, and I know you never wanted that. All you wanted was to travel around searching for the truth, and I stopped you from doing that," Etta said. "I don't want Sophie to grow up, knowing that she was the reason one of her parents had to put their life on hold for her."

"Etta," Yvette said. "I want you to listen carefully. I never, for a second, have regretted raising you. It was hard, sometimes, but it's been so rewarding, seeing you grow up into such a wonderful

woman.”

Etta hugged her aunt.

When she let go of her, Etta said, “I know that. I do. I just... I have a hard time believing it, sometimes. And I really didn’t believe it when I was younger.”

“I know you’re just trying to protect Sophie,” Yvette said. “But she’s not you. She’s grown up into a strong young woman who has never had to doubt whether she was wanted. And even if she is rejected by your exes—which I don’t think she will be--- we’ll be there for her. And Skye and Frank, too. She has plenty of people who love and support her.”

“You’re right,” Etta said. “I needed to hear that.”

“Now, before you go tell Sophie, I have one more question—you’ve established that there are exes, plural. Now, which two is it? Or is it all three?”

“Aunt Yvette!” Etta protested. “Stop investigating me. You’ll find that out after Sophie does.”

Her aunt laughed. “It was worth a try. Now, go talk to your daughter.”

---

Etta knocked on Sophie’s door.

After a minute, Sophie answered it. Her face fell a little when she saw Etta. That hurt, but Etta knew she deserved it.

“Can I talk to you? I handled things poorly earlier, and I want to make that right,” Etta asked.

Sophie looked cautiously hopeful.

“Alright. You can come in.”

Etta walked in, and noticed Skye sitting on Sophie’s bed.

“Do you want me to stay?” Skye offered.

After a moment’s consideration, Sophie shook her head. “No. I think I can handle this on my own.”

Skye squeezed Sophie’s hand before leaving the room.

Once Skye shut the door behind her, Etta said, “You’re an adult, and I haven’t been treating you like one. I’ve been trying to protect you, but I’ve only been hurting you.”

“Thank you,” Sophie said. “I know that seeing all your old coworkers here without any warning must have been a shock. I shouldn’t have taken such drastic measures, but I just didn’t know what else to do.”

“I understand that,” Etta said. “While I can’t say that I’m thrilled with your methods, I think that I needed something like this to force me into telling you. Otherwise, I would have kept trying to protect you.”

“Protect me?” Sophie asked.

“I—you know I was raised for the second half of my childhood by Aunt Yvette. She had to give up a lot of her own dreams and goals to raise me, and I was old enough to understand that. I resented

her, for spending time away on research trips, and for not perfectly adjusting to full-time parenting,” Etta explained. “I didn’t want you to have that. I didn’t want you to ever feel unwanted or like you were forcing a parent to give up on their dreams for you.”

“I had you, though,” Sophie said. “I don’t think I could have ever felt unwanted with you as my mom.”

At that, Etta couldn’t help but start crying. Sophie leaned in to hug her.

When Etta was a little calmer, she said, “Thank you. I’ve tried so hard to do a good job raising you, but I know I ended up projecting some of my own emotional baggage onto you. I’m going to try to be better at not doing that. Which means telling you about how I got pregnant.”

“Thank you,” Sophie said. “I’m really glad I get to hear it from you.”

“How much have I told you about the end of my time working at Watchtower 10?”

“I have the broad strokes. There was basically this gang war between two cults, and your mom was high up in one of them, so her rivals kidnapped Aunt Yvette. And then the two cults both wanted to get you but ended up fighting each other instead. Then Aunt Yvette escaped and you went back to the mainland with her for a bit, and that’s when you found out you were pregnant with me. And, uh, Frank saved the day by fighting some of his hunting buddies?”

“That’s pretty much correct,” Etta said. “But a couple of months before I was reunited with Aunt Yvette, my watchtower was attacked. We all survived it, but one of my coworkers was seriously injured—or, well, maybe it wasn’t actually that serious in retrospect, but it seemed serious at the time. And the people who did it escaped, and we knew that both cults were coming for us. That was a hard time, for all of us. And, well, we turned to each other for comfort. All four of us.”

Sophie’s eyes widened. “Does that mean—”

“I don’t know which one of them actually got me pregnant,” Etta said. “I didn’t want to worry about sharing custody, so I never got a DNA test. I figured it would be obvious when you grew older, but you look so much like me that I’ve never been able to tell.”

“That’s not what I was expecting,” Sophie said. “I guess that makes all three of them my parents, in a way.”

“I’m sure they’d be willing to take a DNA test,” Etta suggested.

“I think I want to talk to all of them, first. I can figure out if I want to get the test later,” Sophie said. “I’ve always wanted to know about my other parent, but it’s always been about finding out my history, not the genetics.”

“That sounds like a good plan,” Etta said. “I suppose I should go with and introduce you.”

“I’d really like that,” Sophie said.

“God, they’re going to hate me,” Etta said.

“They might not. I mean, they all showed up here, just because you invited them. They might just be happy to see you again.”

“I doubt that,” Etta said. “I think that the whole ‘secret daughter’ thing might put a damper on any reunions.”

“Well, there’s only one way to find out,” Sophie said optimistically.

## Chapter 14

After checking in with her team, Kate headed off to go find Etta or her wife.

On her way, she spotted Roger leaving his temporary office, followed by Bertie and John. Roger's hair looked distinctly mussed, and the trio all looked much happier than they had earlier.

Kate was hit with a sudden wave of nostalgia and jealousy. She remembered making Bertie smile like that; remembered being the one with her hands in Roger's hair.

But things were different, now. John was with them instead of Etta. Etta was married and had kids. And Kate was... well, Kate was doing her job.

"Hey, Kate," Bertie said. "We need to tell you something."

"Congratulations," Kate said. "Roger, you might want to fix your hair."

Roger looked startled, then hurriedly tried to comb his fingers through his hair. Bertie did his best to help, while John smiled at them indulgently.

Kate started to walk away from their reunion. She was happy for them, really, but it was still painful to watch.

"Wait, Kate," Roger called. "That wasn't what we wanted to tell you."

Kate sighed and walked back over to them.

"What is it?" Kate asked. "I'm still working on the investigation."

"We won't keep you from it, but there's something you need to hear f—" Roger trailed off, distracted by something over Kate's shoulder. Kate spun around, half expecting to be under attack.

At the end of the hallway were two figures. For a second, Kate wondered if Etta was as unchanged as Roger, before realizing that she was looking at the wrong person. Etta had aged just as Kate herself had; there was gray in her hair and laugh lines on her face. She looked more sure of herself than the girl Kate remembered, and Kate couldn't help but sorely wish that she had been there to get older with her.

The girl with Etta was undoubtedly her daughter. Kate estimated that she was only a few years younger than Etta had been when they'd first met, but she seemed carefree in a way that Etta had rarely been.

"Actually, I think I'll let them explain," Roger said.

When Etta and her daughter reached them, Etta smiled nervously and said, "It's good to see you all again. I know it's been a long time, but I'd like you to meet my daughter."

Etta's daughter smiled and said, "Hi, I'm Sophie."

"Wait, you're Sophie Perrault? Are you the one who invited us all here?" Kate asked.

Sophie blushed. "That was me, yeah."

Kate glanced at Etta's left hand. She wasn't wearing any rings. "I guess I can close my

investigation, then. When we figured out that Etta hadn't invited us, we were concerned that it could be a sign of a resurgence in cult activity," Kate explained.

"I'm really sorry about that," Sophie said. "I just wanted to meet all of you."

"There's something else you all should know," Etta said. "Sophie's... well, she was born eight months after I left the watchtower. I don't know which one of you got me pregnant, precisely, but it was one of you."

Kate stared at Etta.

"Why didn't you tell us earlier?" Bertie asked. "John figured out that Sophie must be one of ours earlier, and I've been trying to understand that ever since."

In the back of her mind, Kate noted that that was why the others looked less shocked than she felt. She didn't bother processing that, too focused on taking in the fact that they had a daughter.

"When I found out I was pregnant, I was kind of a mess," Etta said. "We'd all just broken up, I'd just found out my mom was evil, and I'd just been reunited with my aunt. And I was just... I was feeling very unwanted at the time, and I kept remembering how it felt, knowing that my aunt had put her life on hold for me as a child. I didn't want that for Sophie. And later on, I still didn't want that for Sophie, or for any of you."

"I missed you," Bertie said. "When all the dust settled, Kate ran off to do whatever she was doing for BOAT, and you left with your aunt. We never even broke up; we just all left. I didn't know how to fix that. I tried to get us all in one place, for my wedding, but that didn't work out, and after that I just gave up."

"I wanted to go," Etta said. "But I knew it was going to hurt, going there and being reminded that I wasn't a part of your life any more. And Sophie was only a few months old, and I didn't want to leave her, and I was too afraid to bring her."

"I would have loved to meet her," Bertie said.

"I've missed you," Etta said. Bertie opened his arms, offering a hug. Etta immediately accepted, wrapping her arms around him in return. They leaned into each other, squeezing each other tightly.

Once they let go of each other, Bertie said softly, "Don't disappear again. Please."

"I won't," Etta promised.

"Not to ruin the moment, but can I ask why you look like you're in your thirties?" Sophie asked Roger.

"It's a long story, but basically, I won a bet. I'm immortal, but I can't leave the Bridge," Roger said. "I know it's a lot to take in."

"Everything about today has been a lot to take in," Sophie said lightly. "I think I can handle one more complicated surprise, although I do want to hear the full story at some point."

Kate looked back towards Etta, only to realize that Etta was watching her.

"What are you thinking?" Etta asked her, as Sophie started saying something to John.

"I don't know," Kate said. "I'm thinking of what-if's and could-have-been's, I guess."



“I know the feeling,” Etta said. “I thought I was doing the right thing, raising Sophie by myself. But seeing you all again is making me question that.”

“If it makes you feel better, it still might not have worked out. My ex-wife, she left me because I spent too much time on my job. The same might have happened with us.”

“Right now, I can’t imagine anything that would make me want to leave again,” Etta said.

“What do you want, then?” Kate asked.

“Right now? I want you,” Etta said.

Kate leaned in to kiss her. It was their first kiss in over twenty years, but kissing Etta still felt like coming home.

When they broke apart, Kate saw that Sophie was beaming.

“It’s nice to meet you, Sophie,” Kate said. “Now, I’m new to this whole parenting thing, but I know we all want to know everything about you.”

## Chapter 15

The ballroom was beautiful at night. The first time she'd seen it in its full glory, Sophie had been reminded of every princess story she'd loved as a little girl. Even now, over ten years later, she still loved watching the parties thrown there; dancers dressed in their finest clothes, music filling the room, and the ocean, dark and mysterious through the windows.

The tenth anniversary celebration was a particularly large event, even for them. Sophie couldn't help but be pleased that, despite some of the news outlets' best attempts, there wasn't even a hint of anything sinister. On the contrary, Bertie and John's floral arrangements made the ballroom look even more vibrant and lively than ever.

Sophie joined her mother at her vantage point at the side of the room.

"I think we can call this a success," Sophie said.

"It's too early to say that. You'll jinx us," her mom protested, before relenting, "but it does seem to be going very well."

"Are you all right?" Sophie asked. "You left us a while ago; we've all been wondering where you went."

Sophie had spent most of the evening getting to know her new parents and watching them all become more comfortable being around each other again. Technically, half of them still had jobs to do for the night, but they'd managed to circumvent that. Kate had put her second command in charge, under strict orders to report anything unusual to her immediately. Sophie and her mom had done the same; for the most part, the celebration could run without them now that it was underway. Roger hadn't been so lucky, but they'd simply all set up camp in his temporary communications room and quieted down whenever he had to make an announcement.

Sophie hadn't been concerned when her mom first left the room, but after fifteen or twenty minutes had gone by, she'd left to go after her. The others had shot concerned glances her way; she wasn't the only one who had noticed her mom's absence.

"I'm fine," her mom said. "I just needed a break. I've been distracted, for most of today, by the reunions, but it's still hard to forget about the anniversary."

Sophie herself had almost forgotten, in all her excitement over her new parents, that this celebration was a reenactment of the time that her mom had lost her own mother.

"I still miss her, sometimes," her mom admitted. "Even though she left me. Even though she wasn't a good person."

Sophie wrapped an arm around her mother's shoulder.

After a couple of minutes, Aunt Yvette joined them.

"What are you two girls up to?" she asked. "We've all been missing you, back at our own party."

"We're remembering the first tenth anniversary," Sophie said.

"I should have known. She would have been so proud of you two," her aunt added, smiling sadly. "Maybe the person she became wouldn't have been, but the girl I grew up with would have loved

you two.”

“I wish she was still around,” Sophie’s mom said. “Not the woman we met once, when I was an adult, but the woman I thought she was. The mom I grew up with.”

“I do, too,” Aunt Yvette said.

They’d go back to their own party soon. For now, though, they all took a little time to grieve the woman Sophie’s grandmother could have been.

## Chapter 16

“Alone at last,” Kate joked. She and Bertie were the only ones in the communications room at the moment. Roger and Etta had stepped outside to talk privately, John had gone to the bathroom, and everyone else had already gone to sleep.

“I hope Etta and Roger’s conversation is going okay,” Bertie mused. “I’d hate for them to go back to old habits.”

“I think it’ll be fine,” Kate said. “Most of their arguments were about whether Etta was doing her job, and that’s not exactly an issue any more.”

Bertie smiled at that. “Not exactly, no. Although those two are the ones who had big secrets, between the secret daughter and the immortality.”

“How are you feeling about that?” Kate asked.

“Sad, mostly,” Bertie said. “I feel bad about us all leaving Roger, now that we know that he can’t leave the Bridge. And as for Sophie... I keep wishing that I’d known about her, but then I keep remembering those first couple of years after I got John back and thinking ‘well, maybe it was for the best.’”

“Really? I always thought that, out of all of us, you were doing the best. You had a husband, a job, everything.”

Bertie laughed. “John and I were in pretty rough shape, for a while there. He was terrified of forgetting everything again. I kept waking up scared that he would be gone and having nightmares about losing him again. I had nightmares about losing you all, too, except that you guys weren’t there when I woke up,” he explained. “We’d talked vaguely about having kids, back before I lost him, but we decided pretty fast that we were in no shape to raise a child.”

“I didn’t realize,” Kate said. “I’m sorry.”

“I’m sorry, too. I should have—I had planned to talk about resuming our relationship, at the wedding. With John’s blessing, of course. But when Etta and Roger didn’t come, I was so discouraged,” Bertie said. “I should have still talked to you. I shouldn’t have just let you leave.”

“I don’t know,” Kate said. “I’m not sure it would have worked out. I think that it would have been hard, being together and being so aware that we were missing the others.”

“Still,” Bertie said. “I don’t want you to think I like you any less than I like the others. I’ve missed you. I don’t know if—I’m still not entirely positive if all four of us are getting back together, but no matter what I’d like it if you and I gave a relationship with each other a chance.”

Kate didn’t bother responding, instead turning to kiss Bertie. Bertie eagerly leaned into the kiss, wrapping his arms around her.

After they broke apart, Kate said, “even if Etta and Roger decide that they can’t stand the sight of each other, I’m not letting go of you.”

“Good,” Bertie said with a smile.

---

“Let’s go out on the balcony, where we won’t be overheard,” Etta suggested.

“Sure,” Roger agreed, following her down the hallway and outside.

“Do you still do that thing where you brood on the balcony in the rain?” Etta asked.

“Would you believe me if I said that I didn’t?” Roger asked.

Etta considered that for a moment. “Only if you said you’d found somewhere even more gloomy and atmospheric to brood.”

“Unfortunately, nothing better has come along,” Roger said. “The balcony is still my brooding spot of choice.”

“You know, I still go to the basement when I’m upset,” Etta confessed. “It’s been over twenty years since I lived in Watchtower 10, but somehow that habit’s stuck.”

“I guess some things never change,” Roger said with a smile.

“You certainly haven’t,” Etta said. “I can’t believe I’m older than you.”

“I’m an old man on the inside,” Roger said. “Same as before.”

“I never minded, before,” Etta said.

“I think you’ve forgotten a few dozen arguments we had that are evidence to the contrary,” Roger said.

“That was before we were together,” Etta said. “Ancient history.”

“Is it going to stay ancient history?” Roger asked.

“I don’t want to rehash old times,” Etta said. For a second, Roger’s face fell before she continued, “I’d rather create something new. We’re both different now. I’m the older one, at least on the outside. You’re no longer my boss. We’ve had our own separate lives, and cleared the air concerning a couple of major secrets. I think it’s time we start learning who we are to each other again.”

“You always did have a way with words,” Roger said. “I’d like that. I’d like to start something new with you.”

After that, they didn’t bother with words, their mouths too busy becoming re-acquainted with each other.

---

“Tonight was nice,” Skye said sleepily. She and Sophie were curled up together in bed, having just turned out the lights.

“It was,” Sophie said. “I’m so excited to have all this new family.”

“They seem really friendly,” Skye said. “I can’t believe I’ve already met John, though.”

“It’s so weird to think that you met one of my dads before I did,” Sophie agreed. “Although I should have probably realized that your dad might still be friends with some of my mom’s exes.”

“I’m almost more surprised that at least some of dad’s stories are true,” Skye said. “I always

thought he was exaggerating his role in fighting back against the cults, but John totally backed his story up. He told me that he and Bertie wouldn't even be together if not for my dad."

"Your mom's going to be pissed," Sophie pointed out.

Skye sighed. "Ugh, you're right. She already hates that dad gets to see me more since he spends so much time near your mom; four more parents that all get along with my dad aren't going to help the situation."

"I can't believe I have five parents," Sophie said. Skye could hear the smile in her voice. "And that mom's finally dating again. Her last serious relationship was, what, back when we were still in high school? And now she's dating a bunch of other people and they're all also my parents."

"I have to say, your plan worked out really well," Skye said. "I'm lucky to have such a clever girlfriend."

"Aww," Sophie said. "I'm lucky to have such a supportive girlfriend."

Skye leaned over to kiss Sophie. They'd been dating for almost a year and a half, but she couldn't imagine ever getting tired of kissing her.

Even though Skye was in a hotel, sharing a bed with Sophie felt like coming home.

## Chapter 17

Kate had an early flight, so her and Roger were the first two to leave the hotel.

For the first couple of minutes of the drive, they were quiet. It had been hard, saying goodbye to everyone. They'd just been reunited with the rest of their lovers and had just met Sophie; it felt wrong to leave after just one night.

Duty called, though, and Kate was needed back at headquarters. They'd see each other again, Kate knew. They'd already made plans for the next time they could all get together, and in the meantime, there would be phone calls and video chats.

They'd waited over twenty years to get back together; somehow, waiting a bit more time to see each other felt excruciating.

Kate reached out and put her hand over Roger's. He smiled at the contact.

"I'm going to miss you," Roger said.

"I'm going to miss you, too. I wish we had more time together."

"Long distance is going to be hard, but I think it's going to be worth it."

"As long as we're still in each other's lives, I think this will go a lot better than the last time we said goodbye. And we can still visit each other."

"Where do you actually live? I know that BOAT headquarters is located near the mainland."

"My apartment is on the Bridge; I'd rather have a faster commute and have to do a bit of driving to get to the city instead of the other way around."

"That works out nicely, then," Roger said. "At least it's only Bertie and John that I have no hope of visiting."

"They'll just have to come out here more often, then," Kate declared. "They're their own bosses, anyways; getting time off shouldn't be that complicated. Especially with us and Etta giving them plenty of incentive to do so."

"I think we can be pretty convincing," Roger agreed, before growing more serious. "I didn't get a chance to ask you earlier—are you still upset that I never told you about the whole immortality thing?"

Kate paused to think about it for a moment. "Not really. I get it, you know. Bertie said something last night—he mentioned how the first years after his wedding were hard, because he and John still hadn't recovered from being out on the Bridge. Our lives back then—they were really hard, and scary, and we were put in a lot of situations where there wasn't a clear correct choice and choosing wrong could mean dying. And when you're making decisions in that space, it's pretty hard to think clearly." She continued, "Besides, it's not like you were the only one with a secret. None of you knew I was working for BOAT, and Etta didn't tell us about Sophie. There's no point in blaming each other for the choices we made twenty years ago."

"Thank you," Roger said. "I still can't believe that the past twenty-four hours are real. This feels too good to be my life."

“You deserve this,” Kate said. “We all do.”

---

“Man, I can’t believe that you’re actually in a relationship with four people,” Frank said. “Like, sure, I know all of the old Watchtower 10 crew were close, but I didn’t even know they were all dating each other way back when. And now you, too!”

“You’re just jealous because you’ve been single way too long,” John said with a laugh.

“Yeah, maybe. But I wouldn’t want to be dating four people. Dating one is hard enough. Sometimes I think Etta’s aunt has the right idea. No awkward dates, no worrying about romance, just living life as a lone wolf.”

“I’m pretty sure she’s aromantic, not just too scared to try actually commit to someone again,” John pointed out.

“Hey, I’m not scared. I’m just taking my time, alright. Anyways, I was interrogating you, not the other way around.”

“There’s nothing to interrogate me about. I’m secure in my relationship, and happy to have more people added to it,” John said. “Roger, Etta, and Kate were there for Bertie when I couldn’t be, and I couldn’t be happier that they’re back in his life.”

“That sounds way too altruistic. C’mon, man, I’m happy for Etta that she’s not single any more, but not if it comes at a cost to you.”

“There is no cost, really. Trust me on this.”

“But, like, what’s in it for you?” Frank asked, still not understanding.

“Well, for one thing, the increased happiness and emotional well-being of my partner. Also, Roger’s really hot.”

“He’s, like, immortal though. Isn’t that weird?”

“I’m a middle-aged man dating a hot thirty-something who has the emotional maturity of another middle-aged man. What part of that could possibly be weird?”

“Okay, okay, I get it. You’re having a great time. I’m glad you’re happy,” Frank said sincerely. That was one of the things he liked about Frank; he wasn’t the most tactful guy, but that meant that when he was being nice, John could trust that he was genuinely happy for him.

“You aren’t doing so bad yourself. All ribbing aside, you’ve done a great job raising your daughter.”

“Skye’s amazing, isn’t she? She’s the best daughter I could imagine. And she’s dating your daughter!”

“We’re practically family,” John said.

“Finally! Someone else who’s as excited as I am about someday being co-in-laws. Etta just doesn’t get it.”

“I can’t imagine why,” John said, smiling at Frank.

---



“Are you sure you have to go?” Etta half-asked, half-whined at Bertie.

“I don’t think our clients would be very happy if we didn’t show up to decorate for their wedding, unfortunately,” Bertie said. “Trust me, we wouldn’t be leaving if we didn’t have to. I’m going to miss you.”

“I can’t believe all of you have to leave, so soon after us being reunited,” Etta said.

“You can always come and visit us, you know,” Bertie pointed out. “We’d be happy to have you.”

“You know, I almost never leave the hotel, except to go to Sophie’s college. I think that’s going to be changing, from now on,” Etta said. “And until then, I suppose we do have phone calls and skype calls and texts.”

“I’m going to call you tonight, and I expect to hear one of your stories,” Bertie said. “I’m sure you’ve managed to find plenty of new material over the past twenty years.”

Etta’s eyes lit up at that. “Oh my god, you’re right! I have so much to tell you all.”

“And I look forward to hearing it,” Bertie said. He leaned in for one more goodbye kiss.

Etta watched him go, already daydreaming about the next time she would be able to see him.

# Epilogue

## Chapter Summary

One year later

“Sophie, could you help me with something in one of the conference rooms?”

“Sure, mom.”

Sophie had just graduated college a few days ago, and it was overwhelming, to say the least. She still didn’t have a job lined up, although she’d had a few promising interviews that she was waiting to hear back from.

For now, though, it was nice to have a little time back at home. Even if being home meant working at a hotel.

Sophie opened the conference room door, her mom following behind her.

“Surprise!” several voices called out.

Sophie gasped. Her whole family was there. All of her parents, Skye, Aunt Yvette, and Frank.

“You didn’t think we’d miss your graduation without making up for it, did you?” Kate asked.

“I—oh my gosh. You were on a mission!” Sophie said.

“It finished yesterday,” Kate said. “I may have lied about when it was supposed to end.”

Sophie hugged her mom. Kate hugged her back, squeezing her tightly.

When Sophie let go of Kate, she turned to Roger. “C’mere.”

Roger hugged her, saying, “I’m not actually one of the surprises. You definitely knew I was going to be here.”

“I haven’t seen you in months! And you weren’t supposed to be here for another, like, two hours.”

“I missed you too.”

After that, Sophie turned to her other dads.

“I saw you guys this weekend, what are you doing here?”

“We couldn’t miss the real graduation party,” John said.

“Plus, we were always planning to spend some time here this summer,” Bertie said. “It made sense to do it in time for your graduation and birthday.”

“Are you going to be here for a couple of weeks, then?” Sophie asked, thrilled. She leaned in to hug Bertie and John.

“We all are,” Kate said. “Well, Roger’s going to be driving back and forth a bit, but that definitely still counts, Roger.” Sophie could tell from the way that she emphasized his name that this was an ongoing debate.

Sophie had seen all of her parents over the past year, but she’d never spent so much time with all of them at once. They were busy people, not to mention that Roger couldn’t leave the Bridge, while Bertie and John had a multiple day road trip if they wanted to drive to the Bridge at all.

“You too, Aunt Yvette?” Sophie asked, going over to hug her great-aunt.

“I’m retired, I can do what I want,” Aunt Yvette said. “Don’t worry, I won’t cramp you kid’s style.”

Sophie wasn’t entirely sure if “you kids” was meant to refer to herself and Skye, or if it extended to all of their respective parental figures. Knowing Aunt Yvette, she absolutely meant to call several forty and fifty-year olds kids and had done it intentionally to annoy them.

It was good to be home.

Finally, Sophie turned towards her girlfriend and Frank.

“We’re just here for the weekend, but I’ll be back for your birthday,” Skye said.

Sophie was trying to find a job near their college, but she knew that they might have to be long distance for a year. To put it frankly, that sucked. She knew that her parents were managing long distance, and her mom at least seemed much happier than she’d been when she was single, but relationships were still so much easier when everyone got to see each other regularly.

“How’s the job going? Are you the queen of the interns?” Sophie asked.

“There’s like two other interns, so it’s not a big kingdom,” Skye said. “But I think they’re impressed that I’ve actually spent some time living on the Bridge.”

“Those summers have really paid off,” Frank bragged. “Living with me was practically career training.”

“Sure, dad,” Skye said with a fond eyeroll.

After she was done greeting Skye and Frank, Aunt Yvette came over and asked, “So, Sophie, how’s life after graduation?”

Sophie glanced around the room. Her parents were clustered together with Frank, talking about something.

Sophie had had a good childhood. Despite her occasional complaints about wanting a bigger family, her mom had done an excellent job on her own. But Sophie was glad that her mom didn’t have to do it on her own any longer. They had a bigger family now, like Sophie had always wanted.

She looked at her girlfriend, who she was excited to start a life with after Skye graduated.

“Good. Really, really good.”

Please [step by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work.