

Synopsis

Once upon a time, they had been normal. They had been a normal family of three, with two raising one in a loving manner. They loved that one, and he loved them two. The three had been happy.

Then, they became five. The same two, now raising three. The three loved each other, and they loved the two. But the two, as much as they loved the three, didn't know if they themselves were meant to be two, or ones on their own.

Eventually, the two did become individual ones. And the five became *four*.

But one couldn't keep on raising them like two. They weren't a normal family anymore, and he couldn't maintain it that way. So, he asked for the help of another one.

That *one* was *me*.

I still don't fully know *why* two became ones so suddenly, but I knew that I couldn't let the other two, the *newer* two know the truth so quickly. They were so young at the time, I don't know if they can even remember there ever being two. All they have is one. And... me.

I don't think I'll ever be able to tell them about two, though. They only know one, and he'll never speak about two again. But I do remember how two felt. How being *three* felt, from the very beginning. It felt good.

But I don't think we'll ever be able to feel that way again. Now it feels like three instead of four... but not in that sense. It's just me and the younger two... one raising two this time.

I still have to. One does his best, I know that he's doing all he can... but I can't help but wonder what having two again would be like. What being *five* again would be like.

But now isn't the time to really dwell on that. It's time to continue my own story to them... where two never split away from each other, where one doing his best actually matters... where not being normal turns out okay. Where *everything* turns out okay.

Even if our real life doesn't have such a happy ending in sight.

“Come on, we haven’t had one for the whole *week*, Q!”

“Please? You said you didn’t have a lot of homework, and we’re done with ours!”

“And it’s only 8:30! Pretty please, you said we were over halfway!”

“Yeah! Miss Temple said she liked the story too!”

Quinn shook his head slowly, looking onwards at the two pairs of eyes. They stared like owls at him as he hefted a sigh, the slightest hint of a smile irking on his lips.

“Alright, alright, I suppose we could do another chapter before papa comes home.” He said, giving a soft chuckle. He walked through the doorway, flicking off the lightswitch, leaving only the nightstand lamp to warmly glow in the small room. As he pulled up a small chair between the two beds, he could see the blankets shifting against the mattresses. He stifled a yawn as he sat down, glancing between the two. “Where did we leave off again?”

“You said Felix had just found Peter, right?” One of them leaned close, hanging off the edge of the bed, dark orange eyes glittering with excitement. “He first saw him while dreaming, but then he saw him while awake?”

“Don’t lean out so far, Oliver.” Quinn chided lightly, leaning back in his seat. “And yeah, I can remember now.”

“You left it there!” The bright voice came from the other bed. “But then papa came home, and we couldn’t continue!”

“I know, I know.” A glint of mischief came to his eyes. “But do you want to know what happened after seeing him?”

“Aw, I hope he didn’t get mad-”

“Shh! I want to hear!”

He smiled slightly. “Felix was stunned. He thought he was still dreaming for a moment, not able to speak. After all, here was the person that had apparently managed to save his mother through a dream, in the flesh! But guess what?”

Quinn didn’t even wait to begin speaking again. “Peter didn’t realize he had seen him in a dream. After all, he had done it so many times before that he no longer paid attention to all their faces. So, he didn’t know why a complete stranger was looking at him so oddly. *Until...*”

“What happened?” Oliver asked, question brimming with excitement.

“Felix couldn’t stay still. He *needed* answers. He couldn’t take it simply as a coincidence, and he didn’t want to. And so, he approached him, right then and there on the street.”

“What then? Did Peter find out? Did he run away?” Their voice caught on the last question. “Aw, please don’t have him run away!”

“Calm down, Willow.” He chuckled. “Felix was shocked, but even he knew not to make a scene out in the open. With both burning curiosity and anxiety, he asked if he could speak to him somewhere in private. And after a moment of hesitation... Peter agreed.”

Quinn could see his siblings’ own curiosity, lit ablaze in their eyes. “Felix wasn’t exactly sure where to go, as they had been out on the street, so they decided to just go into a nearby library. Peter still didn’t put the connections together, but his thoughts were starting to grow too. Finally, they found a quiet corner, and when he asked Felix what was going on... he got a response he wasn’t expecting.”

“What did he say?”

“For a moment... he couldn’t *say* anything. Felix suddenly broke down in his arms, right then and there. He had been so desperate, so emotional when his mother had contracted the

illness... and so he simply broke down, in front of the person that had miraculously been able to bring her back. He couldn't stop repeating how thankful he was, how much it meant to him..." His eyes went unfocused as he went on. "Peter was a complete stranger, and yet, after what happened... he was nothing short of a blessing to Felix.

"All the while, Peter was standing still. The moment Felix had just collapsed against him, sobbing his gratitude... he had realized. He realized he was from his dream, that he had chosen to make that choice and take on his prayers. He had saved another family through his powers, like he had countless times in the past few years.

"But this wasn't like any of the other times he'd managed to do it. Through all the years of having to weigh one scenario against another, one possible death against another... Peter had strayed away from the very reason he'd decided to take on this job. He had done this to bring joy to those suffering, to put just a bit more good into the world... but day after day of moral dilemmas, constantly grating at his mind... it had made him numb. Indifferent. Apathetic to those he had once been nothing short of *empathetic* for.

"But when he heard, saw, *felt* Felix's gratitude... it felt like a spark, from the ashes of his passions all those years ago, had been reignited. And Peter remembered that the people he was helping, the ones that he visited in their dreams... They were human. They had relationships, feelings, desires... they were *why* he was still doing all of this. And to finally see the real individual impact that he made... It was a blessing to him too."

Quinn took in a deep breath, opening his mouth to continue. But suddenly the words on his tongue dried up, freezing as his ears picked up on something. A distinct sound of a door

opening, far away from them yet unmistakable in the silence. Swallowing, he glanced at the bedroom doorway for a moment before whispering to the two, still curled up in bed.

“Papa’s home, we’ll have to leave it there, alright?” He murmured, standing up from the chair. “We’ll continue it later, I promise.”

“Tomorrow night?” Willow stared at him with pleading eyes.

He bit his lip, stifling a sigh. “...Maybe not. But we’re getting closer, I promise.”

“But that was so sweet!” Oliver blurted out. “Aw, do we really have to go sleep now? I’m not even that tired.”

“Nonsense.” He chuckled, pushing the chair back into place, hand trailing towards the lamp. “Today was a school day, and even if it’ll be the weekend tomorrow, you still need a good sleep schedule. And so do I.”

“I can’t wait to tell Miss Temple about this part, though.” She whispered, pulling up her blankets. “She’ll be so happy!”

“I bet she will.” Quinn glanced at each of them for a moment, a soft smile on his face. “Night, you two.”

“Good night, Q!”

“Good night!”

He pressed down against the small switch, and the golden glow disappeared. As he closed the door behind himself, he could feel his own grin dissipate as well.

The walk through the cold, shadowed corridor was tense as he neared the kitchen, feeling the gentle, warm environment from earlier fade back with each step. Chin slightly up, posture

straight, hands clasped behind his back, expression turning unreadable... all changes barely noticeable to himself, after so long.

Quinn turned the corner, into a familiar sight. "Greetings, father."

A person glanced up for a split second from their suitcase, sweat shining on the top of their smooth head. A wool jacket was slung over their elbow, faded and worn. Folders lay open in their hands, papers and booklets hastily scattered around. "Good to see you, Quinn." He muttered, promptly turning back to the leather case. "Are your siblings-?"

"Tucked into bed already. Leftover dinner is in the fridge if you are interested, I made chicken stir-fry-"

"No need." A familiar look of slight discomfort appeared on his face, standing up with the suitcase in hand. "Thank you Quinn, but I've already had dinner earlier before leaving, I've got a dozen packets to review right now..."

"That's fine." He said, keeping his expression as monotone as ever. "But there is a school play that Willow and Oliver were interested in, after school next week on-"

"They can go if they wish, leave the flyer on the counter." He waved a hand dismissively, already rushing past and down the hallway. "I'll take a look tomorrow, thank you."

Quinn stood still as he heard his footsteps rapidly fade away, hearing a door firmly close shut. He was still staring at the jacket on the coathanger next to the front door, masked expression not changing.

Thank me? He watched the shadows falling across the wool, waving back and forth.
There's no one to thank for any of this.

He swallowed back the rising bitterness in his throat, hands unclasping as he walked back towards his own room, turning on the light as he glanced around the walls. His gaze almost immediately fell upon the neon paper lying on his desk, one that had been given to him so eagerly from two pairs of hopeful hands when he'd gotten home from high school.

Quinn picked it up, exhaling a deep breath as he looked at the small pictures. Should he leave it on the counter or not? He doubted one would generate a different response than the other, if all the other times had been any indication...

He'll still have to not come. Or he won't notice it. Or stuff it into his bag and forget. Or just never remember me telling him in the first place.

But despite the faithless thoughts in his head, he still found himself back into the hallway again, staring at the colored flyer grasped between his fingers. He finally reached the kitchen, glancing at the table in the darkness, hand moving to place the neon paper on the wooden top.

He stood back from it, glancing around at the room, taking in the eerie silence. The only cracks of light flitted through the curtained windows, shining bright on the barrenness of the so-called home they lived in. It wasn't even that large, by any means... but in the cold loneliness of the shadows, he knew it couldn't be further from ever feeling full.

I still have to try. He shook back the dark thoughts in his head. *Even if I'll still be the one driving them there anyways.*

Besides, there was still a glimmer of hope inside of him. Asking couldn't hurt. The *effort*, at least, shouldn't have hurt.

But as Quinn sat there on his bed, staring with unfocused eyes at the notepad he held in his hands, the hollow feeling in his chest told him otherwise. He sighed as he reread his own handwriting, looking at the story on the pages.

“Thank you, thank you, thank you- god, what is your name, I have to at least know that-”

“My... my name is Peter, I... I’m just very glad that I... could have helped. She means... a lot to you, doesn’t she?” He was nervous, to say the least, finding it hard to meet Felix’s bright gaze, filled with such hope and excitement.

“Yeah, she- god, she really does.” He whispered, eyes shining. “I was so worried that she... she wouldn’t make it, but now... she has. I don’t- I don’t know how you’ve done it... but... thank you. Thank you so much, from the bottom of my heart.”

Quinn suddenly snapped the small book shut, swallowing as he slowly set it back down. That was enough reading.

If only our mother never left in real life. His mind drifted back to the small room with two beds, and the unlit lamp on the nightstand between the soft sets of snoring. *If only you two knew how much happier that story ends.* And to the man behind his locked bedroom door, no doubt slaving over a mess of binders and pages, lit only by his laptop screen. *And if only you could be the father- no, the person you once were.*