

Somewhere Over the Rainbow

by Keppiehed

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Chapter 1 of 1

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Prompt: Arrival

A/N: This was written for Brigit's Flame, week #3. I would like to say thank you to my gracious beta, Pipisafloat.

"Mom? Mom! Oh, geez..."

The sound of the front door opening startled Lucille from her reverie. She stared down into the cup of coffee that was clutched in her viselike grip. It had long since grown cold. She flexed her stiff fingers and coaxed them to loosen their hold. Even the simple task of letting go seemed too much sometimes.

"Mom? Where are you?" Chip made his way through the living room and into the kitchen. "Oh, for Pete's—" He gave an exaggerated sigh when he saw her. "I thought we agreed that you would be ready to go when I got here, Mom. What's up?"

Lucille rolled her ankles in a circle, stretching and testing them. She heard a series of pops, but they seemed okay. She stood with effort and turned to look at her son. "No. You agreed to that. I will be ready as soon as I can get my things together. That may take awhile, honey," she told him gently, and carried her cup to the sink. She didn't wince at the pain in her feet; it had been there for so long, it wasn't worth thinking about.

"How long, Mom? You were supposed to be packed weeks ago." He couldn't keep the whine out of his voice, even at this age.

Lucille shuffled by him and tugged her housecoat up around her neck. "I will go as quickly as I can, Chip. These old bones only move so fast."

Chip didn't bother to respond; he only flipped a device out of his pants pocket, one of those sleek, shiny gadgets that everyone had now. It made him feel so important, but she couldn't see what the rush was. Lucille left him in the kitchen while she went to get dressed, but his voice drifted to her ears. "Jesus Christ, Jill, it's like she's got Alzheimer's or something. How many times have we been through this? I said be ready at eight o'clock, and here she is staring off into space like some..."

Lucille pressed her lips together. The irony was that she felt deaf at the most inconvenient times, yet now the sound carried perfectly to her ears, and she could hear every cruel word. Ah, the indignities of old age. It seemed every day brought a new complaint with it.

Lucille got dressed and sat on the edge of the bed. She let her gaze wander around the room. The dust motes danced in a shaft of sunlight that slanted in. There was stillness here, and she intended to savor it, her last moments here in her home.

Her rheumy eyes rested on the quilt. She had made that with her sewing circle the year Jillian was born. Her gnarled fingers stroked the seams, feeling the tiny stitches.

The ladies had had their hands full back then, a wedding or birth to mark every month, it felt like. Lucille remembered choosing the pinks for her first girl, how everyone laughed and joked while the needles flew through the fabric; the way the squares had lined up so neatly. Not so with life, it seemed. Now most of those ladies were either in their graves or in a home. Lucille let her arm drop and looked away.

There was the perfume bottle on her dresser that Archie had brought back for her from Paris. He had to take a business trip, and it was his first time away since they had been married. Lucille had laughed at such frivolity, but then when her fingers lifted the delicate stopper and she caught the scent... she had worn nothing else to bed that night but the perfume from another land. Lucille smiled fondly at the memory. They had been so young, so in love.

There was a teacup that her oldest son, Gary, sent back from his travels around the world. He was always the adventurous one. Had been. Her beautiful boy, all dark hair and always laughing, showing off his dimple... Lucille's eyes blurred, and she sucked in a breath to try and head off what she knew was coming. Gary had been killed in his last tour of duty. It had already been years ago, but she couldn't think about him without tearing up. Today was not the time for maudlin thoughts.

A knock startled her out of her reminiscing. "Mom? You decent?"

Lucille quietly wiped her eyes. "Yes, Chip. Come in."

Chip opened the door. "I talked to Jillian. I know you wanted her to come instead, but the kids have the flu, so it's me. And I have a meeting, so we have to get moving, okay? Where's the box? They said you could take one. They provide everything else that you need."

Lucille looked up at Chip. It didn't matter how old they got, she felt like she was wading through time, having the same conversation over and over. "I don't prefer your sister to come, Chip. Here are my things."

Chip glanced at the box that was sitting on the floor. "This only has junk and knick-knacks, Mom. I thought I explained that you could bring one or two mementos, but you need to bring necessities. That's all the room you have." His tone was condescendingly patient, like he was dealing with a child. It grated on Lucille's nerves.

Chip started tossing things onto the bed. "Where's your toothbrush? And underwear? That's what I mean. Come on, I'm just going to put some stuff in and we are leaving. Jillian can bring the rest by later in the week."

Lucille saw the things that she had carefully selected to bring with her piled in a heap like garbage. "I have to bring my things. You said I could bring some, Chip." She didn't want to sound like she was pleading, though it was true.

Chip ran a hand through his hair. "Fine! Grab two, that's all there's room for. Let's go!" He stood up and walked out.

Lucille didn't know how to choose from a lifetime of memories. How could she condense it into two things? At her age, she felt life slipping through her fingers into a fog. She had never valued her possessions, only her family, but now they helped her to remember. She felt the panic rising as she looked at the pile. Her hand shook as she reached out.

A music box from her mother and a black and white army-issue photograph of Archie dressed in his uniform from the war. The picture never failed to tug at her heart. He was staring straight at the camera, hands behind his back, so sure and calm. He had no idea what he was going to face. That was all she could think to grab when Chip's arm was on her elbow and she was whisked away from it all. Before she could register it, she was strapped into the car like the child she had become and her house was merely an image in the rearview mirror.

The car ride was a silent one. Chip was not the talkative type, and Lucille didn't have the strength to say anything today. As they arrived at the Welcome Nursing Home, an unseasonable blast of cold air stole the breath from Lucille's lungs when she opened the car door. She stood there, empty inside and trying to regain her bearings. She felt dizzy for a moment as she gazed at the gray stucco that would be her new residence. Never home, she thought rebelliously.

An attendant rushed over, ready to help her. Lucille allowed the nurse to guide her into a wheelchair. When she turned her head to say goodbye to Chip, he was already on his phone. He waved at her.

Lucille turned back around and let herself be wheeled into her new, sterile future. As she rolled through the sliding glass doors, she realized she was still clutching the music box and picture. The lid of the box fell open slightly, and a few rusty notes tinkled out.

The nurse giggled. "That's one of my favorite songs! I haven't heard it since I was a little girl. Let me see, how does it go? Hmmm... hmmm... and wake up where the clouds are far behind me..."

Lucille gazed at Archie's face and wiped a tear off the glass.