

It was October when Wendell died. Blink had curled up with his head on Wendell's chest when the old man passed in his sleep. His daughter, Shannon, had found him the next morning. Once the family had started discussing what would happen to the cat, Blink decided it was time to leave.

Cats can come and go as they please, as everyone knows. Calicos were masters of floating to the highest shelves. White cats could walk through walls and locked doors as if it were smoke. Grey cats could pass through memories, choosing who remembers them and who forgets. Brown cats were experts at evading dogs or coyotes. Yet, black cats could pass through time as the need arose. Blink decided there was a need.

Blink knew he wasn't a kitten anymore. His muzzle was grey and he wasn't as agile as he used to be. Luckily, jumping through time didn't involve much physicality. Finding the weak points between times was easiest at night, so Blink waited until sundown the next day. The family had left out some dry food out for him but hadn't checked the windows as carefully as they could have. Wendell kept the window over the kitchen sink open a little, for the 'plants to breathe', and he had never fixed the loose corner of the screen. It was just big enough for one--admittedly overweight--black cat.

Blink hopped down to the porch railing, then landed on top of the trashcan and jumped onto the soft lawn. There was an untrimmed bush in the furthest corner of the yard with small yellow flowers that seemed to glow a little brighter in the moonlight. Blink almost tripped over the discarded tire swing with the rope coiled to one side. Wendell kept meaning to bring the knotted mess to the dump, but then his shoulder started acting up again. It was a chore for someone younger, but pride made Wendell refuse too often. Blink ducked through the greenery and swerved through the bushes.

The bush went deep, beyond the line of rocks that marked the end of the property. Blink went deeper and the leaves felt warmer as the night sky transitioned to a bright sun. Walking out into the yard, Blink climbed up the wall of stacked stones and prowled the perimeter. The bush was a little more controlled at this point and the tire swing was still hanging from the tall branch of the oak tree. Blink slipped through the gap in the fence that Wendell wouldn't fix for another couple of years.

"Everything packed?" Wendell asked, setting a duffle bag in the back seat of the old minivan. Blink hated that car, but it was the only vehicle big enough to carry Shannon's college supplies.

"Yes." Shannon laughed, setting a box of potted plants in the front seat. "If not more packed than when you last asked."

"Toothbrush?" Wendell asked, pushing his glasses up his nose.

"Crap...be right back."

Wendell chuckled and sat in the open trunk of the minivan. Blink stepped out between Wendell's legs and rubbed against his ankles.

"Hello there..." Wendell grinned and scratched the black cat's soft forehead. Blink arched his back and purred. Wendell smirked and sighed. After a long moment of quiet, Shannon came back out of the house. "All set?"

"Yup, all set now!" Shannon said, skipping down the stairs. "Ready to go?"

"We're gonna meet your mother for dinner and then head up to school from there."

Wendell rubbed the cat's neck again before standing. Blink circled the car, avoiding Wendell's gaze and making a quick escape. Shannon would be home over the holidays and live at Wendell's home for another two years after graduating before she would find a job. When

Wendell had brought Blink home, an anxious Shannon had cuddled with the cat all night.

Shannon was kind, but Wendell had been Blink's caretaker. Blink wasn't here for Shannon.

This was not where Blink needed to be.

There was another weak point under the front porch. Blink had to crawl low on his belly to slip through the open space under the first step. Down here, there were spider webs and a few frogs, but it was nothing that Blink had to fear. Passing into the shadows under the porch, Blink felt a chill around him as the summer afternoon changed to a brisk fall morning.

Blink emerged into a busy city through a broken crate behind a dumpster. The sounds of construction were deafening and the rumbling traffic made Blink's bones tremble. It was an overcast morning and the bitter scent of coffee made the cat's nose wrinkle. Blink hated cities, but this building was where Wendell had first lived on his own. Almost.

Rounding the corner, Blink saw two young couples milling around a moving van. Wendell was carrying a large box up a short stoop, the door propped open with a large brick. He had a mustache and beard that made him look like a bear in Blink's opinion. The man, a friend of Wendell's from college, unloaded a box and passed it off to a young woman as she leaped down the stoop. Rebecca, Wendell's future wife, took a smaller box and rushed up the stairs, smiling at Wendell as they crossed paths.

Pausing on the steps, Wendell made eye contact with Blink again. He rubbed Blink's chin with his fingers and Blink arched his back as Wendell moved his bony fingers along the cat's spine. Rolling onto his back, Blink let Wendell rub his dark belly for a little while. Smirking, Wendell straightened and went to grab another box. Blink shook his head and rose up.

Wendell and Rebecca would have their arguments to be sure, but for now they were hopelessly in love. Rebecca was working towards her dream of becoming a dancer, which would

be put on hold after a badly broken ankle. Wendell would begin his new job at the insurance office soon and would make his way up to a senior sales associate before the end of his first year. Wendell was able to provide for him and Rebecca. If Blink's memory was correct, Wendell would propose to Rebecca a few days after the promotion.

This was not where Blink needed to be.

Going across the street, Blink prowled under a fruit stand and slipped under the white and red tablecloth. He shook off the chill and walked out the other side of the checkered tablecloth, avoiding the rapid footsteps of high school students in graduation robes. The sea of long, dark robes would make it impossible to find Wendell here, but Blink followed his senses. People cooed and clicked for him as he passed by, but Blink had his heart set on one person.

Standing in a line of students and getting his picture taken, Wendell beamed with his arms around two friends. His face was slim and angular, with dark eyes, dark hair and a bright smile. This young Wendell was full of promise and possibility, even if he didn't realize it. He fidgeted with his robe sleeves while his parents chatted with an aunt. Blink rubbed up against Wendell's legs and purred.

Wendell squatted and pet Blink under his chin. Behind the smile, Blink could still see some trepidation, a bundle of nerves and more than enough fear of the unknown. Wendell would be leaving for college at the end of the summer, with the tuition paid for with extra shifts at the movie theatre down the street. Still, this Wendell hid his fears well behind an encouraging smile. Blink slipped away, disappearing into the sea of black robes.

This was not where Blink needed to be.

Someone had discarded a graduation robe in the heat, hanging it over a railing so it swung above the ground. Blink jumped through the weak point, the cloth warm and thick against

his face. The transition was quick and Blink landed in a living room. The carpet was ugly, a dull beige rug that Blink had trouble stepping in. The wallpaper had a faded floral pattern that Blink thought even a white cat might get stuck in. An older woman opened the door and Blink escaped the home before the stranger saw a stray black cat in their living room.

The suburb was bustling with children on bikes and cars coming home from work. A dog was barking down the street and a crow cawed on the peak of the nearest roof. Blink walked on the sidewalk, undeterred by the children on bikes or the threat of a dog. Looking up at a street sign, Blink realized he was on Oak Street. Wendell rarely spoke of his childhood home. Blink would be lying if he said he wasn't curious. Walking down the road, the black cat read the numbers painted on the mailboxes. 10...12...14 Oak Street.

A young boy sat on the stoop, holding a baseball glove with a cap pulled low over his eyes. Young Wendell rolled his baseball against the stoop, the sphere teetering on the edge of falling off. He watched the driveway intently, focusing forward. Blink approached but heard a voice from the side of the house. Curious, Blink investigated from a kitchen window propped up with a short piece of wood.

“—to tell him? Joey is his brother for God's sake!”

Joey. Blink hadn't gotten to meet Joey, but Wendell had mentioned him once or twice in his sleep. Joey hadn't lived as long as Wendell and remained a dark rain cloud in the old man's sleepless nights. Blink had never explored Wendell's relationship with his brother, though he was aware of the strain between them.

“Well, I appreciate that, Sheriff.” The woman in the kitchen sighed, exhausted. “Is there any way we could—no. No, I understand. Thank you.”

Blink slipped around to the front of the house and crawled through the orderly bed of flowers. The young boy had finally pushed the baseball off the top step and watched it come to a slow stop in the middle of the yard. Wendell put his elbows on his knees and looked down both ends of the street. Blink realized he knew Joey wasn't coming home that night.

Hopping up onto the stoop, Blink meowed. Wendell jumped a little and looked over his shoulder. Blink curled around his side and looked at the young boy. It wasn't hard to see the old man's face behind the sad eyes. Wendell pushed on the cat and made a dismissive motion.

Blink rubbed against Wendell's back and purred. He bumped his head on Wendell's elbow, jostling the boy a little until he had to change position and scooted further down the step. Blink was relentless, following the boy and rubbing up against his legs. Wendell looked down at Blink with some irritation, but the cat rolled onto his back, exposing his stomach to him.

With a slight smile, Wendell reached down and massaged the cat's chest. Scratching under the chin, Wendell smoothed out a bit of hair sticking out and ran his hand along the length of Blink's body. Blink purred and playfully batted at the hand, earning a quiet laugh from Wendell. Blink rolled over and rubbed his side against Wendell's bare shins, arching his back and wrapping his tail around Wendell's ankles.

"Wendell?" His mother called from inside. "Could you come here a minute, sweetie?"

"Coming!" Wendell said, scratching Blink again before going into the house.

It was a cool summer evening as the sun started to slip behind the tree line. Blink stretched out on the last step, soaking up the remaining heat absorbed by the concrete. Wendell would get the bad news and come to sit on the stoop to watch the world go by. When he was older, Wendell would always sit on the porch with Blink and watch traffic until his temper dulled. Blink decided to wait for Wendell on the step, eager for attention and another chance to

distract Wendell from his anger. It was healthier than stewing and something he would need to learn for life.

This was where Blink needed to be.