

**Title:** Subtlety and Promises

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**Prompt:** [quote challenge, June 2005] 32. *Have heart, my dear, we're bound to be afraid even if it's just for a few days... making up for all this mess.* – *Snow Patrol* 2500 words, due at end of June.

**Notes:** quote not used, per se. Inspired by it and events. (Make-up, way late, as you can tell. Written during the time, however.) *Rating: G, oh-so-family-friendly.*

He says he's allergic to all the love he receives when he comes here. That's why he doesn't feel good. And you smile and tell him not to worry, you hate him. You give him a hug and the joke is laughed away as it always is. But you've crossed a line and there's no going back.

You tell him you're leaving, and all jokes aside, he comes alert. "When?" he asks, standing straighter and watching you with dark, penetrating eyes.

"Soon," you say. "A few days." You're self-conscious under the surface probing, and you just want to hide. "Will you miss me?" You begin to realize that you still feel the warmth of his neck on your nose where you had hugged him and you blush, tempted to rub the feeling in and away.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" he counters, and you can only stare at the knot of his tie, the lapels of his jacket. (Wasn't he trying for Whatsherface?) "We could've done... something. Are you having a going away party?"

You gaze incredulously at him, wondering why he's so worried about it. "I'm just visiting my grandparents. Not like Whatsername."

"Well, aren't there flights out of... wherever?"

You smile, and slide in a joke. "Yes,... I'll be catching one when I come back. In a couple of months." He laughs with you and you almost feel at ease. The laughter you can deal with. It's when he goes silent like he does at that moment, poised and watching for the slightest motion, that shakes your core. Your smile wilts slowly, meager pieces of itself.

He asks when you're leaving, dates and times. When are you free, between now and then, as it's only 2 days until you go. 24 hour restaurants and what foods you like. You fiddle with the bag on your shoulder, wishing you were in jeans and a tee instead of this dressy skirt and heels as you tell him everything he wants to know. You say you'll try to swing it for you both being together, a goodbye dinner.

The day comes and you're too busy to have the dinner. He calls and says he understands, but you can hear the disappointment in his tones. You promise to bring him something back, but you know two months feels like two years and two years ends in September. You think of him on the flight and you wish that, for once, you weren't so afraid of missing someone.

Two months now (two years of the heart, two years in September) and you'd nearly forgotten him. Nearly, except for the days you went shopping, or the days you heard a joke. You'd nearly forgotten him, but you remember everything on the flight home. The invitation, the promise, the long goodbye, you've changed who you are because two months is a lifetime. You're smaller, even, whole. And in mid-flight, you curl up into a ball and wonder how he'll see you, now that who you are isn't who you were. How can you be so

The flight ends, and you prepare for the worst. You avoid everyone for two days, needing the space to "get settled" (needing the space to compose yourself and remember where home is). You saw the sights, but nothing caught your eye. Two months, and he was always on your mind.

You finally see him, 2 months/2 years wiser, but no less vulnerable than the day you left. You're still having trouble sleeping, as though he tortured you all on the trip. You look haggard, less than thrilled.

But there he is. A dream, a nightmare, a memory. Reality. You give a tentative smile, and you know that you are still just a child, despite the adult decisions you're making. He doesn't seem half so conflicted as he steps forward, hugs you. Breaks down the barriers of air you were depending on. Breaking through walls like it was toothpicks and thread.

"How are you? How was it?" he asks, and you know. It's a legitimate question. No jokes, just the sound of a welcome home.

"Good. Good. Both good." You're nervous and you're not making sense to yourself. "I'm glad to be home."

"Me too," he says, as you filter through your bag for his present. You freeze as he says it, as it hits you what it was. You tell yourself it's not what you think, and pull out a little package. "For you." You think you sound a little off and you hope he doesn't know how much you've thought of him.