

Those Kinds of Friends

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"When can we meet for dinner?"

There were four of us on the text thread. Coordinating our calendars required a herculean effort of texting back and forth, negotiating childcare duties with our husbands, and keeping our fingers crossed that no one would suddenly throw up while we were walking out the door. Finally, we found a date that worked for everyone and arranged to meet at a local taco restaurant.

Before our drinks even arrived, my friend Elizabeth got right to the point.

"Look," she said. "my mom has a group of friends that meet for dinner once a month. They've been doing it for years, watched each others' kids grow up, and gone on vacations together. I was wondering if y'all would want to be those kinds of friends. If you do, I think we should commit to monthly dinners together."

We looked at each other awkwardly. Though we all attended the same church, our friendship was surface-level at best. But excitement sizzled up, too. We felt chosen, entrusted with the vision Elizabeth had cast. If we were honest, it sounded exactly like what we all craved, too: let's raise our kids together, grow old together. She knew, even if we didn't yet, that real friendship wouldn't spontaneously blossom just because it sounded like a nice idea. We would have to take the first steps and commit to the logistical hurdle of setting aside two hours each month, in seasons that we could not yet foresee.

We all agreed. And a few days later, Elizabeth texted again: "I think I've waited the appropriate three days to text y'all after a great 'first date' to see when we can do it again! Get your planners out..."

Despite our erratic schedules, we tried, nobly, to organize a dinner together each month. We settled into an every-other-month kind of pace, but the first day of the new month reminded us all to try again. We took turns picking the restaurant, trying local joints and discovering new favorites.

Our group text thread became a lifeline. We helped welcome new babies into the world by painting nurseries together and calming each other's fears about childbirth. We started a Sunday School class together. And once we realized that we wanted our husbands to become

friends too, we started planning couples' cookouts and game nights, pitching in for a baby-sitter to watch our growing brood of kids.

Christmas was approaching. In contrast to our monthly dinners "out," we began planning an elaborate girls' night "in." It felt long overdue: the last time I had watched a movie with someone other than my husband was with my college roommate ... almost a decade ago. In our texts back and forth, we exchanged ideas for our evening together, growing more and more excited as we counted down the days.

When the much-anticipated night finally arrived, we snuck out of our houses as soon as we put our kids to bed. We showed up with movies and snacks in hand, scarfed down some Christmas cookies, and spiked our hot cocoa with liberal amounts of Bailey's. Then, we settled onto the sofa, pulling blankets over us to watch *Love Actually*.

The camera panned across the London-Heathrow airport, zooming in on various couples who hugged and kissed as they reunited at last. Hugh Grant's familiar voice set the scene by reminding us that "Love actually is all around ..."

And that was all we remembered. An hour later, we slowly stirred, opening our eyes and stretching. We had slept through the entire movie and completely missed our night together! Unable to muster up enough energy to try again, we stumbled sleepily into our cars to head home.

Could there be a more appropriate symbol of friendship during this season of life? In the trenches of early childhood, as we struggle to navigate who we are and how to reclaim our identity, passions, and social lives, what we often need, more than anything else, is a long nap.

In the future, we will be able to make it through movie night without falling asleep. We will be able to leave our houses without worrying we will wake up our children. We might even be able to carve out a standing dinner date instead of scrambling to clear our schedules every few months.

For now, though, we live within the tension. We commit to our friendship without quite knowing how we will find the time for it. We trust that each small investment of time and energy will matter in the long run. Every text message, coffee date, and failed movie night -- crammed into the margins of our busy lives -- nurtures our souls and sustains us until the next time.

Because we're those kinds of friends