My Brother's Keeper

by TheMissingDays

Its the start of something new. Can Charles and Thomas escape their fate or will they be stuck growing up the old fashioned way.

The Costume Box
2025

Chapter 1

My Brother's Keeper Part 1 - Chapter 1

Triumph

I looked out across the small darkened conference room. The light of the projector was making me squint a little. I tried not too. The boss was at the head of the table. He showed no emotion, then again I didn't expect him too. On the inside though he was probably just as nervous as I was. I looked over to my left making eye contact with the potential client. He was flanked by two others. They seemed interested in what I was saying. I was only explaining how the program worked, that was all I had to do. I was also the best person for the job, I knew how it worked inside and out. I had designed most of it. This newest version was also a complete overhaul, it was the most user friendly it had ever been. I then looked to my right where Thomas sat. He gave me a nod. Good. I needed that nod. Thankfully I was coming to an end.

“That is all the changes we have implemented since the last version,” I said before taking my seat.

“Thank you Charles,” the boss said. “Now Thomas here will tell you about how this program can streamline your whole operation.”

Thomas stood up from his chair as he walked up to the front. He had a confident swagger. He was the salesman after all. I

was just the designer. I could tell you how the program worked, Thomas would make you wonder how you ever got by without it. Which he did. We had spent weeks prepping for the pitch. Me showing him all the intricacies of the program and him figuring out all the ways it could be used to make the customer want it. I sat back watching him work. He was charismatic, knew just the right things to say to make you feel like you were best friends and that he was on your team. Not a single question lobbed his way seem to catch him off guard, he seemed to have the perfect answer to it all. After an hour Thomas was sitting back by my side as the customers quietly discussed among themselves. The man then turned to us a smile on his face. We had him!

“I think this is just what we need,” he said.

“Well lets sign some papers,” My boss said as he went to their side, pen in hand. Handshakes and small talk exchanged and the customers left happy. My boss closed the door before turning to us.

“The dynamic duo strikes again,” he said putting a hand on each of our shoulders. “Congratulations.”

“Thomas got them on the hook,” I said breathing for the first time since the pitch had started.

“Look I can sell a bottle of water to a fish but this program really sells itself,” he said giving me a punch to the shoulder.

“You should both be proud,” My boss said. “I think this is the single biggest sale in company history. Which means we're

rolling out the red carpet. Charles I want you personally to be support for them at least for the first three months before we send them over to customer support."

"I understand sir," I said. The boss was buzzing as he then took out some cash.

"As for right now though, why don't you two take an extended lunch and have some drinks on me," he said stuffing it into our pockets. "Don't get too crazy now you still got some work to do." We both nodded. We walked back to our cubicles, to grab our bags.

"Damn feels good to land that one," Thomas said running a hand through his slicked back blonde hair and loosening his tie a little. "Biggest sale of all time, not bad at all. My commission is going to be nice."

"Yeah," I said. "Makes all those late nights worth it, too bad I don't get commission." I sighed pulling a little at my black beard that my wife had trimmed up neatly for me just last night in preparation for the pitch.

"I think this is perfect leverage," Thomas said. "You should ask for that raise."

"I don't know," I said. I wasn't exactly good in those types of situations. You had to sell yourself and that wasn't exactly my skill set, not like Thomas. That's why we worked so well as a team. I make it, Thomas sells its. We complimented each other each of our strengths, covered for the others weakness. It also might be why we were good friends as well.

“Dude for real. You've worked here for five years and in all that time you've never asked for a raise. You ain't some fresh faced scrub anymore, this company needs you more than you need them.”

Thomas may not have been wrong. I was thirty-two now. Although I still had trouble not thinking of myself as some small cog in the machine.

“I guess maybe you're right,” I said.

“That's the spirit,” Thomas said with a smile. “I'll even give you some pointers over lunch, tell you exactly what to say.” I nodded as we made our way to the front door. That's when I stopped in the hallway.

“Hey so, since this is kind of a celebration I think we should invite Davis along as well.”

“Really,” Thomas asked scrunching up his face.

“Well yeah,” I said. “He helped me out a lot with the code, so you know I should thank him.”

“I don't know,” Thomas said tilting his head from side to side.

“What don't want to hang out with the nerds?” I said sarcastically.

“Oh c'mon,” Thomas said with a chortle. “If that were true I wouldn't hang out with you either. That guy just is kind of weird don't you think.”

I made a sort of frown. I didn't necessarily disagree, but still

he had helped. Davis was on the coding team and he and I were cut from some cloth, that being we were both geeks. While Thomas had spent his time in college dating girls and partying I had been cooped up in basements playing D&D and Davis probably wasn't much different.

“He's not weird,” I said dismissing Thomas rather shallow appraisal. At first glance I would never peg Davis for the geeky type. He didn't exactly exude that kind of energy. Just looking at him I would think he was closer to Thomas in personality. He was fit for one showing that he hit the gym on a regular basis. He had a neat patch of hair on top of his head with shaved sides and a black mustache. He definitely gave off alpha male vibes. The only reason I knew he was geek was when I had spotted a Go Ranger figure on his desk one day. I had made mention of it and then we proceeded to have a twenty minute long conversation about which of the classic series were the best.

“Dude you know what I saw him looking at a week ago?” Thomas then asked. I cocked my head waiting for something harmless to come out of my friends mouth. “He was looking at baby stuff, like cribs and stuff.”

“So,” I chuckled. “I was looking at baby stuff yesterday and you were standing right behind me.”

“That's different,” Thomas said. “I know you and Kelly are trying for a baby.”

“Well maybe he is too,” I said.

“With who?” Thomas retorted.

“I don't know, his wife, girlfriend?” I said.

“He doesn't have one,” Thomas said.

“How would you know that, you just admitted that you rarely talk to him.” I said becoming a little annoyed at Thomas's persistence.

“I'm hooked into the office gossip,” Thomas said. “Tonya from accounting and Leslie from the front desk have tried to ask him out and got shot down.”

“That only proves my point that he is already in a relationship.” I said.

“Don't you think he would have said that then?” Thomas said. “He just told them no thanks.”

“So he's a private person,” I said as we came to Davis's office door. Thomas furrowed his brow.

“Do what you want,” Thomas said shrugging. “If he helped then I guess he can come.” I smiled as I knocked on the door before entering. Coming into the room I saw Davis was the only one in the room. He was typing on his computer and when he looked up and saw me he smiled as if he was happy to see me.

“Hey Charles, to what do I owe this pleasure?” he asked sitting back in his chair.

“Just wanted to let you know we landed the big sale,” I said

feeling proud to be able to tell him, and why shouldn't I be? Months of work and late nights had paid off.

“Hey, happy to hear it,” Davis said.

“Yeah so me and Thomas are headed out to a celebratory lunch right now and I figured since you helped me out you should come along too.”

“With you and Thomas, well sure,” Davis said and I swore I saw a twinkle in the man's eye. Davis signed out of his computer and we walked into the hallway to find Thomas leaned up against the wall.

“Hey,” he said with a nod. We made our way out to the parking lot.

“Man this is great news for you two,” Davis said. “I can't tell you how proud I am of you guys.” Thomas grimaced a little.

“Yeah, its really great,” I said with an awkward chuckle feeling as if I was a kid again hanging out with friends from two different groups, sort of hoping that the one friend wouldn't embarrass me in front of the other. I could kind of see why Thomas looked slightly unnerved. Davis's comment sounded more like something a boss or at least a mentor would say. Not co-workers. Not to mention I was technically more senior than Davis, not that I really cared about such things.

“I'll drive,” Thomas said taking out his keys. If there was one thing Thomas took a lot of pride in it was his car. It was a muscle car that he had put some work in. We got in with

Davis in the back as I sat up front. The engine roared as we departed. No one really talked, but with how loud the engine was we would have to practically shout anyways. We pulled up to a bar that served a pretty mean burger. In the booth me and Thomas both got a beer, we were celebrating and one beer wasn't going to get us too buzzed to work. Davis ordered a ice tea saying he hadn't been given the go ahead by the boss, which was understandable enough.

“So whats next?” Davis asked. “I mean is it back to the drawing board for the next version?”

“Boss wants me babysitting the new customers,” I said. “At least for a little bit.”

“The first thing is Charles getting a raise,” Thomas said.

“I don't know, maybe nows not the right time,” I said. Even with Thomas saying he would help me I was still uncomfortable with idea.

“Maybe you're right,” Davis said.

“What are you talking about?” Thomas said with some ire directed more at Davis than me. “We just made the biggest sale in company history, and Charles is the one that was the lead designer on the project. This company would be nothing without him.”

“Chill Tom,” I said. “I may be the lead, but its a team effort.”

“I didn't mean to say that Charles isn't important,” Davis said. “Just if he doesn't feel comfortable asking for a raise then

maybe he should just wait. Maybe the boss will give it to him without him asking."

"Yeah, that'd be nice," I said.

"You gotta take action," Thomas said. "Show a little initiative, you can't just wait around forever. " We all kind of fell silent.

"You two known each other for a long time?" Davis then asked his finger waggling a little between the two of us.

"We met five years ago when we started working here," I said.

"Oh really," Davis smiled. "I would have expected you guys to be like childhood friends."

"Why?" Thomas asked.

"I don't know," Davis said with a shrug. "Just seems like you guys are really close."

"Weird," Thomas said under his breath. It didn't seem like Davis had heard.

"Do you think you guys would have been friends as kids?" Davis then asked.

"Probably not," I laughed. "I think we were very different people back then. The reason we even know each other is because Thomas saved my ass on the first day." Davis seemed to raise an eyebrow that suggested he was interested in hearing more. "I accidentally erased a whole database," I said. "I was pretty sure I was going to get fired. Thomas

stepped in though when the boss came to ask me about it. Totally convinced the boss it wasn't even my fault."

"Oh Thomas that was a very noble thing to do," Davis said.

"Well we were both the new guy, so I just thought we should stick together." Thomas said bristling a little at the praise from Davis.

"You stuck your neck out for me dude," I said. Thomas gave me sort of look before we both noticed Davis smiling at us. I would be lying if I said it didn't unnerve me. It just had a weird energy to it. It sort of reminded me of how my Dad would smile at me right before he would say something like 'I'm proud of you son' once again Davis was giving off a weird vibe and I was kind of starting to see what Thomas did. This conversation was getting kind of heavy for a celebratory lunch between co-workers, yet Thomas was already ahead of me and seem to know the perfect way to take control of situation.

"So Davis, tell me, got a girlfriend at home?" Thomas asked. I watched the strange expression fade from Davis's face.

"Nah," he said seemingly unbothered. "Dating hasn't really worked out for me. Which is fine, I've been a loner for most of my life." I prayed that Thomas didn't confront him about the baby stuff. All Thomas did was glance at me, as if to say I told you so. The food then came out and I was grateful to have an excuse to stuff something in my mouth. Afterwards the conversation turned to more normal things as Thomas and Davis seemed to get into a friendly argument about the

defensive line of the local football team. I didn't have much to offer on the subject since I wasn't a sports fan.

We got to the end of the meal as Thomas asked for the check. Which I thought was weird since we had been given an extra long lunch break, my guess was Thomas was more than eager to dump Davis, I didn't exactly disagree. After paying we walked back to the car.

“This was a lot of fun,” Davis said. “Thanks for paying.”

“Don't mention it,” Thomas said.

“Well hey I think it would be fun to get lunch all together again, next time I'll pay.” Davis then said.

“Eh I'm usually taking customer's out for lunch so I'm not in the office a lot,” Thomas said, obviously trying to subtly tell Davis this was a one time thing.

“Oh yeah, makes sense. Maybe breakfast then?” Davis asked not taking the hint. “What do you guys like? Chocolate chip waffles with nice big glass of milk?”

“Only if they're homemade,” Thomas said laughing. I shook my head a little. What adults meet up for breakfast on a workday? Honestly I was starting to suspect that Davis was starting to get the wrong idea about this lunch. That this somehow meant we were now going to be the best of friends. Getting into the car I got on my seat belt. I looked in the rear-view mirror to see Davis sitting back in the seat not making a move to put on his own seat belt. Thomas started the car as the engine roared, I suddenly felt a strange tingle go along

my back. I looked over and noticed Thomas was staring straight ahead, his hands gripping the steering wheel, but the car was not moving.

“Are you okay?” I asked my mouth feeling heavy as my words slurred. For a moment I thought I was starting to feel drunk. But that was impossible I had only had one beer.

“Yeah,” Thomas said his words sounding just as slurred. I then saw his head bow down. It was Davis who reached up front turning off the engine and taking the key out of the ignition.

“Its alright boys,” he said as he gently guided Thomas back to recline in his seat. “Just sit back and let it happen.”

I felt Davis move me back as well. My neck seemed to lose all tension as the back of my head hit the backrest. I couldn't move my arms, nor my legs. Something was very wrong, but I didn't have time to think about it as my eyes closed and then I lost consciousness.

***

There are bad ways to wake up. The worst is probably in excruciating pain. Another way is perhaps a lot less worse under most circumstances. Right when you open your eyes and find yourself staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling. At first you panic a little and then your brain starts up and suddenly you remember where you are. Yet as I stared up at the ceiling that didn't happen. I shifted and was overwhelmed by a flurry of sensations that did not seem to make sense. My body didn't

feel normal. I looked over to the side and was met with the sight of oak bars. I sat up. I was in a crib. I shook my head. As I looked down seeing the body in front of me I could tell it was off. The dimensions were completely different. My legs weren't as long. I was dressed strangely as well. I was clothed in a pair of fleecy red footie pajamas. I got myself to my feet putting my hands on the top of the bars of the crib. As I moved I felt a strange bulk between my legs. I put my hand on my crotch, my fingers looking closer to chubby little sausages. I squeezed the front feeling something poofy. My eyes widened. Was I wearing a diaper, but why? I went to investigate further but could not find a zipper. My hands went to the back of my neck where I could feel a small tab covering a zipper. I groaned a little noting that it sounded very high pitched. I definitely wasn't going to be able to get out of this by myself. I looked around the room some more. It was dark so it was kind of hard to make things out although there was a little light coming from a nightlight plugged into the wall.

The walls were painted with clouds. In on corner was the shape of a rocking chair. I saw near the front was a large dresser with a mirror on top although I couldn't get a look in it as the back of the crib was taller than me. As I stood the idea formed in my head that I was in an over sized crib that could fit an adult. I looked over to the other side and saw another crib in the room. I could see the form of a baby moving around. I watched silently as I saw the other figure sit up looking around. Until they finally stood up. In the low light I could see them. A head full of moppish blonde hair,

two big rosy cheeks and a set of saucer like eyes, then again that could just be because of the shocked look on their face.

“Hey kid,” I said cringing a little as I heard my voice come out high and squeaky for the first time.

“Can you talk, do you know where we are?” The toddle looked at me as his lip curled up a little.

“Who are you calling kid?” the boy said as his hands went up over his mouth. “Wh-what the hell,” he shouted. My eyes went wide as my mouth went dry. Something about the way the kid had said it. Not in the sound of his voice, but in his inflection.

“Th-Thomas, is that you?” I croaked. The other kid looked at me before he lunged forward grabbing a hold of the top railing as I was.

“Charles?”

I nodded as a sick feeling overtook my stomach. The delusion that I was in some over sized nursery or whatever, that my eyes had been playing tricks on me were dashed. I guess somewhere in the back of my mind I had known it to be true. If the kid across from me was truly Thomas then there was no reason to think I was not in a similar situation. I watched as Thomas inspected himself in the same way as I had. He was also wearing a fleece sleeper except his were blue and the bulge at his crotch confirmed he was also diapered.

“Are we babies?” he asked with a shaky voice.

“Seems that way,” I said.

“B-b-but how?” he hissed.

“I don't know,” I said furrowing my brow. We heard some shuffling outside of the door as we both turned around. The door opened and the lights came on. I squinted against the bright light before my vision came back and I saw Davis standing in the doorway. He was wearing a gray t-shirt and some sweatpants looking like the adult I had always known him to be.

“Thought I heard some talking in here,” he said very non-chalantly as he walked into the room and standing in-between the two cribs.

“Davis, thank god,” I said. “Its us Thomas and Charles. We somehow turned into babies. Do you know where we are? What's going on?” Davis gave me a small smile.

“Woah woah, there Charlie, take a deep breath, one thing at a time,” he said putting his hands up and moving them up and down in a shushing manner.

“Okay,” I said taking that deep breath. I was just glad he believed us. “Okay first things first can you get us out of these cribs?”

“Charles you idiot,” Thomas said. I looked over to Thomas who was glaring at Davis. “He had something to do with this.”

“How very perceptive of you Tommy,” Davis said with a smile as he gave Thomas a pat on top of his blonde mop.

“W-What,” I stammered feeling the strength in my legs go out as fell down to my knees.

“I know you guys probably have a lot of questions so I guess I'll just explain.” Davis said. “First off you probably want to know how, the simple answer is I have magic powers.” I shook my head. I was a logical person, never once in my life had I believed in things like magic or anything of the sort. “Yep its true,” Davis said nodding his head. “I started working my magic when we were in Tommy's car after lunch. I turned you guys into sweet little boys right around 24 months old, so nearly two.”

I tried to say something but I couldn't form a single word. What was I supposed to say? That this was impossible, I was looking at the evidence all around me. Thomas was gripping the railing of his crib and I could see his knuckles going a little white.

“Turn us back now,” he growled through clenched teeth. Davis simply smirked.

“Even if I wanted too I couldn't. You see magic is not infinite. I can't just use it all willy nilly. Its kind of like water in a lake. If I use a lot of it eventually it will run out, and believe me to do what I did, I pretty much did just that. It would take years for me to gather enough to reverse this. I mean I had to do a lot. But don't worry you are completely safe here. I've got everything I need to take care of you just you wait, you'll both love it here.”

He was planning to keep us here, with him? I finally found

my voice as I looked up at Davis.

“People are going to be looking for us,” I said feeling rather confident in my assertion. I mean this was tantamount to kidnapping, people at work would wonder where we were when we suddenly didn't show up. Thomas had a girlfriend as well and I had a wife...oh god my wife, Kelly, she was probably already contacting the police. Davis merely chuckled.

“Nope,” he said shaking his head. “I made it so that no one even remembers you. That was what really used up a lot of magic. I re-organized everything. As far as the world knows Charlie and Tommy are just two little babies who live with their Daddy.”

“Why?” Thomas said, the anger having left his face and being replaced with a despondent look of horror.

“You see I knew from a young age that my greatest dream was to be a father,” Davis said with a wistful look.

“Then get a girl knocked up,” Thomas yelled the anger coming back to his expression. “Like every other person who wants kids you freak.”

“Aww well you see dating is kind of a crapshoot these days,” Davis looking slightly annoyed. “I guess I kind of came to the conclusion that I wasn't really interested in pursuing a relationship.”

“You could have adopted or something, there are like a million other options before this,” Thomas roared back his

temper obviously boiling over. It was honestly rare for me to see him like this, although given the situation I didn't blame him.

“There are problems with that as well.” Davis said. “You just never know what you'll get with adoption or giving birth. I preferred to make a more informed choice.”

“You just said you have magic,” Thomas countered. “You could have just conjured up whatever weird kids you wanted.”

“Not true,” Davis said clicking his tongue. “There are limits to magic you know. I had to get creative. Honestly I have been saving up my magic for a long time and I was starting to think I would never find my perfect children, but then you two came along. At first I didn't think much. But as time went on I started to notice you guys. I started to see how naturally close you were with one another, the more I watched the more I came to admire so many things about you. Then it just hit me one day that you two would make great brothers for one another and you were the ones for me. I do have to say that I had no idea how you would turn out, but good gosh you two are adorable. I had no idea how cute you two would be as babies. I totally made the right choice.”

A chill went down my spine. Just thinking back to lunch that day, knowing that Davis was sizing us up like a predator ready to pounce. We had been nothing but unsuspecting field mice unaware of the snake nearby.

“What the hell,” Thomas yelled finding his anger again. “You actually expect us just to go along with this? Just because you

changed us like this doesn't mean we are going to act like babies. We're still adults."

"Maybe not at first," Davis said. "But your brains have changed. Pretty soon you'll start to take on behaviors appropriate for your age as you acclimate. Speaking of which." Davis gave Thomas a small smile as he walked up to the crib. Without a word his hand went and squeezed the front of Thomas's diaper which caused Thomas to back away to the opposite side of the crib.

"What the hell perv," Thomas yelped.

"You're very fussy Tommy, I was just making sure you didn't need your diaper changed."

Thomas was in shock by the invasion of his personal space.

"My name is not Tommy," he muttered.

"I know your name silly," Davis chuckled. "But Tommy fits you so much better now, your parents probably called you Tommy when you were this small before. Now lets check on Charlie."

Davis came over to me feeling the front of my diaper, I was completely frozen not able to offer the tiniest bit of resistance. I was then lifted up into his arms as he gave a few pats to my butt.

"Looks like you are completely dry as well," Davis said. It felt weird being held against Davis. I still wasn't used to the new dimensions of my body and it felt like I was being held

by a giant.

In Davis's arms I finally got a look at myself in the mirror. My face was changed just as Thomas's had been. Chubby little cheeks and a pug like nose. My beard was gone and my hair was soft and feathery with my bangs swept to the side. The perfect visage of a toddler. Davis set me back in the crib.

“Alright boys, its late so I think its time to close those eyes and go back to sleep.” Davis said.

“FUCK YOU,” Thomas screeched. He then began repeating it over and over. Davis stood for a couple of seconds accepting Thomas's tirade.

“Now, now no need for that,” Davis said being drowned out by Thomas's continued expletives. “I got just the thing,” Davis then said looking around before slapping his forehead. “Oh I must have forgotten them in the kitchen. I'll be right back.” He then left the room. Thomas stopped yelling. I sat with my head down the heavy breathing from Thomas being the only sound in the room.

“This is all my fault,” I said quietly. “If I hadn't insisted on inviting him this would never have happened.”

“Don't talk like that,” Thomas said. I looked up to see him standing at the side of his crib nearest to me with a serious look on his face. “You heard him. He's been planning this for a long time. He didn't magic this room together. He set all of this up in advance, this was an inevitability.”

“Yeah, yeah you're right,” I said.

“Listen Charles,” Thomas said sounding about as serious as he could with his new chipmunk voice.

“We are going to get out of this. I don't know how but we are getting out.” I looked at Thomas my expression probably looking a little unconvinced.

“How can we?” I asked. “You heard him. We're going to start acting like babies.”

“No we aren't.” Thomas said. “You promise me right now. You won't forget that you are an adult.” I looked at Thomas, something about his determination got to me. He was right. I could not allow myself to forget that. I thought about my wife, her face so vivid in my mind. I had to get back to her. I stood up looking at Thomas.

“I won't forget, I wont,” I said a slight shock going down my spine as I said it as if the declaration was being cemented into me.

“There's that fight,” Thomas said smiling. Davis then came back into the room.

“Alright boys got a little something nice for you.” Davis said approaching Thomas first.

“Let us out right now, you asshole,” Thomas bellowed before Davis plopped a pacifier into his open mouth. I watched waiting for Thomas to spit it right back in his face. Shockingly he didn't. I watched as Thomas began to suck on it. His face screwed up before his eyes went wide. Thomas fell onto his butt. The pacifier still in his mouth bobbing up

and down.

“I had a little magic left over so I put a little enchantment on these pacifiers. It won't last forever but it will be enough to teach you two how to self soothe.”

Davis then came over to me, another pacifier coming for my own mouth. I sealed my lips shut turning my head away.

“Oh is Charlie getting a little fussy too,” Davis cooed. He tickled my tummy. I tried to resist but I actually squealed, the tickling had felt so intense that I couldn't help it. Davis seized the opportunity to slip the pacifier into my mouth. I tried to spit it out, but found my mouth betraying me as it began to suck. I felt an intense wave of calm overtake me. I looked over to see Thomas was on his back still suckling away, his eyes were closed and his arms splayed out at his sides.

“There we go, nice calm babies,” Davis said as he laid me down on my back, I couldn't resist. Davis then went and turned off the light. “Get some sleep boys. Daddy has lots more fun in store for tomorrow.”

I closed my eyes as I drifted towards sleep. The last though that floated across my mind was a question. Just how were we supposed to fight this?

Chapter 2

My Brother's Keeper Part 2 - Chapter 2

Part 2

Escape.

I was thinking a lot about Harry Houdini this morning. Not really sure why, maybe it was Davis's fault. He had invoked the name in an offhanded comment when he was undressing me that morning. An act which I could not stop him from doing. He had gotten the pajamas off of me while I was still in the crib.

“Looks like these Houdini's suits really worked,” he had said. “Nobody got mischievous and tried to mess with their diaper.” I guessed that was the nickname for that style of pajama and it had certainly made it impossible for either of us to try and strip. He looked at me for a moment before tossing the pajamas into a nearby hamper. He then moved over to Thomas who seemed more in mood for a fight as he struggled against Davis. Thomas's attempts proved to be nothing as Davis had him down to a diaper quickly.

“Guess no one needs a diaper change yet hmmm,” Davis mused, although he did look a little disappointed. I had no intention of using the diaper and neither did Thomas. I knew I would eventually have to find a way to relieve myself, but that was for later. At the moment I didn't feel the need to go,

which was strange. I was one of those people whose body seemed to keep to a schedule and right after waking up in the morning was one of the appointed times. I guess I should be grateful that my body didn't feel the need to uphold routine in the face of a crisis.

Davis had us both strapped into highchairs in his kitchen soon after, bibs around our necks although only Thomas had gotten his pacifier plopped back in his mouth for being too fussy. This time though I could tell the effect from last night wasn't as strong. He still couldn't bring himself to spit it out, but he was able to maintain a glare on his face.

I fiddled with the buckle on the highchair. I was held in place by a V-shaped strap going over my shoulders and clicking into a buckle that rested on the front of my diaper where the wetness indicator still read yellow and dry. I couldn't get it undone. I didn't possess the strength nor the dexterity. If only I were more like Houdini.

I had been a fan of magic when I was a little kid. The thought that someone could make something appear out of nothing had astonished me. I wanted to learn how to do it. So much so that my Dad had gotten me a magic video that would teach me the beginner tricks.. My disappointment was immense when I had learned that it was nothing but smoke and mirrors. My Mom having seen me make the first discovery that the world was not as magical as it seemed had then decided to get me a book about Harry Houdini. I'm not really sure why she thought that it would help but something about it had appealed to me. Especially the parts about how Houdini had

made a habit of exposing spiritualist and mediums who used the tricks of the trade to take advantage of people. That had been a formative moment in my life. It had taught me to always look for the logic in the world. To learn how things worked. There was a certain kind of magic to that. My thoughts were brought back to the present when Davis placed a plate on my tray.

The plate had cookies around its rim and I could see through the pockets of the waffles that were cut up on it that Cooking Monster was underneath. I looked over to see Thomas had a similar plate except his was Oscar the Grouch themed, Davis had already made the comment that it suited Thomas that morning. He then placed a hand on the handle of Thomas's pacifier.

“Now Tommy I'm going to take out your pacifier, do you promise to be a big boy and not throw any more hissy fits.” I could see Thomas wince a little, but he let the glare drop from his face and nodded his head slowly. Davis then removed the pacifier as a string of spit came out with it.

“Hope you boys are hungry. Daddy got up nice and early to make these waffles homemade,” Davis said smiling proudly. “Just like Tommy wanted.” He said mussing up Thomas's mop of blonde hair. He then stood looking at us expectantly. I looked at the cut up pieces of waffle drenched in syrup.

“You didn't give us a fork,” I said with a mumble.

“You're too little for that,” Davis said. “You can just use your hands. Don't worry about making a mess. Daddy will clean

you right up after." Part of me wanted to flip the plate right off the tray. But that would probably make the psycho calling himself Daddy happy. He would probably think I was starting to act like the baby he wanted me to be. I would'nt give him the satisfaction. I instead pushed the plate away from me.

"No thanks, I'm not hungry." I said. Thomas followed suit. Davis let out a little sigh.

"C'mon you two, you gotta eat. Do I need to feed you myself?" he asked taking a fork and stabbing a piece of waffle from my plate as he then moved it towards my mouth. I turned my head letting it hit my cheek. Davis furrowed his brow a little before trying to give it to Tommy.

"C'mon Tommy open wide for the airplane Weeearoo," he said making airplane sounds.

"I don't want it," Thomas said covering his mouth smartly so that Davis could not stuff it in his mouth. Davis dropped the fork before putting his hands on his hips.

"You two, what am I going to do with you?" he said rhetorically. He then took the plates away setting them on the counter near the sink. He then went to the refrigerator. "If you don't want the yummy waffles then I guess you'll just have to get by on formula for the morning."

Davis returned with two bottles, they were set on our trays yet neither of us made a move to grab them. Mine had construction vehicles all over it with yellow handles at its side. Thomas's was space themed with green handles.

“C'mon boys you need something in those tummy's,” Davis said. He then went and picked up the bottle in front of me moving it towards my mouth. I pushed my head back into the back rest of the highchair. I felt the nipple touch my lips. I was clenching them together with all my strength. Similar to the pacifier though my mouth moved on its own as the nipple entered my mouth. I began sucking. As the formula hit my tongue I could tell I didn't like it. It had a milky taste to it, yet also had a strange sour taste to it as well, with a metallic aftertaste. Still I couldn't stop myself from drinking, no matter how hard I tries to resist.

“There you go Charlie,” Davis said. “You can hold it by yourself just like a big boy.” he said pulling my hands up to the handles which I grasped as I continued drinking. “These bottles are just like the pacifiers, a little magic to get you guys used to drinking from them.” Davis then had Thomas's bottle at the ready.

“No, no, no,” Thomas protested still covering his mouth. Davis moved one of his hands away giving him a small enough opening to plop the bottle to Thomas's lips. Just as I had Thomas soon was holding his bottle and guzzling down the formula within.

“Good boys, drink up all your baba for Daddy, then we can get you dressed and then its time for a trip to the grocery store.

As soon as I emptied the bottle I was able to pull it out of my mouth. Honestly I felt a little sick. I then found myself being

hoisted up into Davis's arms. He began to pat my back and I let out a burp.

“Give Daddy two more burps,” Davis said as he continued to pat my back. I didn't resist in fact I kind of was hoping I would puke it up. If not to only get the stuff out of me, but I thought it would be kind of satisfying to cover Davis in it. Unfortunately I only mustered up two more large belches which seemed to satisfy Davis. Thomas was still working on his own bottle so I was carried back to the nursery. Davis put me in a pair of yellow shorts with snaps along the inseam and a red shirt which read “Thing One” on it before I was placed back in my crib to wait. Davis retrieved Thomas and brought him back to the room. He put up a fight as Davis tried to dress him.

“Tommy if you dont let me dress you, then you're going out in just the diaper, is that what you want?” Davis asked holding the matching yellow shorts in his hand. Thomas puckered his lips a moment considering the option. He then let his shoulders slump a little as he shook his head. He allowed Davis to get him dressed. He was put in a matching outfit except his shirt read 'Thing Two' on it. Afterwards we were both taken out to the car and strapped into car seats. I pushed against the straps. The harness was even more secure than the highchair. Not even Houdini himself would have been able to slip out of it. The drive to the store was short, which was a small mercy as Davis insisted on playing childrens music with a chorus of kids singing in a cacophony of auto tuned tones. In the store Thomas was placed into the

child seat of the cart so Davis could keep a close eye on him, while I found myself in the basket of the cart.

I marveled at my surroundings. I had been to this store countless times. It looked completely different now from my new perspective. Shelves that I remembered grabbing high packages of bread from for little old ladies were now completely out of reach.

“Here, Tommy can you hold onto this for Daddy?” Davis said placing a loaf of bread into Thomas's lap. He looked at it with some interest before he lifted it up and threw it out of the cart. “Tommy!” Davis exclaimed as he picked the bread up.

“My name is not Tommy,” Thomas said through gritted teeth. “And you're not my Dad.”

“I am now,” Davis said shaking his head before placing the bread into the cart at my feet. “Can I trust you Charlie?” I looked at the bread for a moment. Part of me wanted to raise my foot up and crush it underneath the lime green foam clog on my foot. I merely nodded my head though which earned me a “Good boy” and a pat on the head. Thomas looked back at me with a little scowl. I didn't react though. Thomas probably thought I was brainwashed already, yet I was thinking differently – this was our best opportunity for escape. It had occurred to me that Davis had brought us out into public very much knowing we were still adults in mind. With that thought he was probably going to be watching us like a hawk, which meant if I was going to find an opportunity to get away he would need to trust me a little.

Screaming for help would do no good. We wouldn't be believed anyways. Thomas didn't seem to have the same idea. Every time Davis would put something in the cart he would make some comment about how it was disgusting or a terrible choice. I could tell Davis's patience was wearing a little thin by the time we reached the cereal aisle.

“Okay Tommy since you seem to have so many opinions here's a choice,” Davis said holding up two cereal boxes. “Do you want Cheerios or Lucky Charms?” Thomas looked between the two options for a moment.

“Cheerios,” he said obviously going for the more mature option, though I had seen Thomas eating all kinds of sugary cereals at his desk on occasion.

“Then use your manners and say please,” Davis said with a smirk. I could see Thomas bite his lower lip a little.

“Please,” he said although I know it killed him to do so. I breathed a sigh of relief. If Thomas could give Davis just a little bit of compliance it might just give us a better shot. Yet Davis wasn't done yet.

“Please what? Who are you talking too?” Davis said with a sickly sweet smile. I could see Thomas gripping the handle of the cart.

“I'm not calling you that,” he mumbled. Davis gave a frown.

“I guess we won't get this then,” he said going to replace the box back on the shelf. I jabbed a finger into Thomas's back, he looked back at me with a grimace.

“Play along,” I hissed quietly. “Just for a little bit.”

Thomas looked away keeping his head down. I could see his hands grip harder on the handle.

“Please Daddy,” he grumbled.

“What was that?” Davis asked in a mawkish tone. “Couldn't quite hear you.”

“I said please Daddy,” Thomas said with a groan.

“Wonderful,” Davis beamed as he handed Tommy the box of cereal. “See when you're a good boy, you get things you want.” Davis then gave Thomas a kiss to the top of the head, which set Thomas off. I couldn't really blame him.

“What the hell creep,” he screeched pulling his head away. “You think I give a shit about cereal!” he said before chucking the box down the aisle. Davis gave another sigh as he retrieved the box before placing it into the basket. He then bent down at the front of the cart going into the diaper bag he had brought along. Thomas was still going off lobbing more expletives in Davis's direction. He was silenced as Davis plopped a pacifier into his mouth.

“I really can't understand why you are being so obstinate,” Davis said as he watched Thomas suckle on the pacifier his face scrunched up in a quiet fury. I had a few ideas but decided not to voice them as it would probably get a pacifier in my own mouth. Thomas however didn't need my help as muffled rebukes came from his mouth.

“So cranky,” Davis said dismissively. That's when a rather loud gurgle came from Thomas's stomach causing him to wince a little as he clutched his stomach. I didn't doubt he wasn't feeling the greatest. My own stomach was feeling rather full and upset at the moment. “Oh is that it,” Davis said raising an eyebrow. “Do you need to go?”

Thomas shook his head. Davis smiled.

“C'mon Tommy, its not good to hold it in,” he said as he began to tickle Thomas's sides. “You can do it, just go ahead. You'll feel a lot better,” Davis said as he continued to tickle his victims sides. Thomas was letting out squeals interspersed with muffled swears cut off by the pacifier. Davis did not let up until Thomas was hunched over. With a pained moan I heard the telltale noise. I knew exactly what was happening and it filled me with a sense of pity for Thomas.

“Looks like its time for a change,” Davis said in a sing song voice. I could tell he was pleased as punch. Thomas looked at him, I couldn't see his face but I didn't need too. I already had an idea of what he looked like. “Nothing to be worried about, its a natural thing for babies to do.” Davis said as he began to push the cart. “Daddy will have you cleaned up in no time.”

We arrived outside of the bathrooms. I was pulled out of the cart and set on my feet. I looked at Thomas who was staring a hole into the ground. I wanted to say something to him, but what could I say. There were no words that would make him feel any better at the moment. Davis then put the diaper bag around his shoulder before gathering Thomas into his arms.

The way his backside seemed to smush up against him in Davis's arms caused him to let out another moan. I could tell Thomas was disgusted by it. Davis then grabbed my hand and walked into the restroom. Thankfully it was empty. Davis went to the wall where a changing station was. He unfolded the table and set out a changing mat from within the bag. He then laid Thomas down and secured him to the table with a strap across his chest. Davis then turned to me.

“What about you Charlie?” he asked. Before I could give a response Davis was already behind me pulling at the waistband of my shorts. “Looks like you are still clean. Think you can be a good boy and wait patiently while I change your brother?” I walked a few paces and stood by the white tiled wall that separated the entryway to the rest of the bathroom.

“Yes Daddy,” I chirped. Davis looked at me for a moment before smiling.

“Great job bud,” Davis said before turning his attention to Thomas. I watched as Davis turned his back to me. My efforts to make it appear that I was nothing if not the more obedient child was paying off in spades. Davis didn't so much as look back at me as all his attention was now on Thomas. I waited until I heard the tapes of the diaper tearing away. Just to make sure that Davis was going to be fully focused on Thomas. I took one tentative step just to get my courage. Then I slipped out the side and off around the corner before I took off running as fast as my little legs would carry me.

I didn't really know what I was going to do. As I ran towards

the exit of the store a plan began to form in my head. My house was about a mile away from this store. It would be a long walk for me, but I could get there. I had to find my wife. Even if Davis really had erased me from her memory I knew I could convince her. She was the love of my life. The person I had the deepest connection with. There was no way any sort of magic could erase that completely. I had made it right up to the sliding doors that lead out of the store when I felt two hands grab me from behind and lift me up into the air.

“Where are you going little man?” a woman asked as she spun me around so I could see her as she placed me on her hip. I sputtered unable to form words. “Now where is your Mommy, do you see her?” the middle aged clerk asked.

“I don't have a Mommy,” I managed to squeak.

“Lets find your adult then, I know you didn't come here by yourself. Do you see them anywhere?” the woman asked as she carried me away from the door to the main drag of the store where all the aisles emptied.

“L-Let me go, pleeease,” I pleaded as I tried to twist out of the woman's grasp, which was not helping my stomach one bit.

“We'll find them soon sweetie,” the woman said as she bounced me up and down. “They're probably worried about you.”

“There he is,” Davis said coming out of the aisle with the cart and Thomas. He walked up to the woman who handed me

over to Davis. I let out a small moan. I had been caught and delivered right back to my captor.

“I found your lost thing heading for the door,” the woman chuckled noting the matching shirts me and Thomas wore.

“So sorry about that,” Davis said. “I was changing his brother and took my eyes off of him for a second.”

“I had two little ones too,” the woman laughed with a wave. “Happens to everybody.”

They then continued to exchange pleasantries as my stomach turned over. I tried to hold back but my bladder and stomach had other ideas as they both released. I whimpered a little. Davis could no doubt tell what was happening. He gave two soft pats to my backside. Getting back to the cart he set me back in the basket causing the mess in the back of my diaper to spread.

“If you had just waited at the bathroom, I could have changed you right away,” Davis said. “Now you gotta wait.”

“I don't care,” I said furrowing my brow at him. I sat in the cart sulking in my own mess as Davis went to the checkout lane. Thomas looked back at me for a moment. I expected him to give me some sort of smile or smirk or something, at least some sort of expression of camaraderie. Instead he just turned around continuing to suck on his pacifier.

Getting to the car Davis got Thomas secured in his carseat before going to the trunk with me and the cart. He laid me out flat on the folded down back seat.

“What are you doing?” I whined not understanding what was happening.

“Changing that stinky diaper,” Davis said as he pulled out a new diaper from the bag. “Me and Tommy don't want to have to smell you all the way home.”

“No not here,” I yelped as Davis was already unsnapping the buttons on my shorts.

“Don't worry Daddy will be fast,” he said slipping the pacifier in my mouth. I whined a little as the fabric of the shorts was pushed up over my stomach. I couldn't stop him, I knew that. Struggling would make the process only take longer. I had no choice but to sit there and take it. I tried my hardest not to think about it as the diaper was untaped. As Davis pulled the front away I felt more pee begin to flow. Davis chuckled as he put the front of the diaper down quickly. “All done,” he asked as he proceeded with the change. My legs were lifted up as he used the front of the diaper to wipe my backside. The dirty diaper was then removed. Davis proceeded to wipe me down. I closed my eyes trying my best to not think about what was happening. The wipes were so cold that I couldn't really think about anything else. It got worse as he laid by butt on a fresh diaper before wiping down my front side. The whole process felt mortifying. I couldn't even breath a sigh of relief as I was taped into a fresh diaper. This must have been how it felt for Thomas, no wonder he had been in no mood after my escape attempt to even offer the smallest bit of consolation.

I was put back into my carseat, I stared straight ahead for a bit feeling just a little dazed. Davis finished loading the car before getting into the drivers seat. He turned around to face us.

“Boys,” he said with some sternness. “I am very disappointed with how you both acted in the store. We are going to be having a discussion about this when we get home.”

Neither of us responded. Not like we could. The car trundled along as the radio played softly. At one point I reached up and took the pacifier out of my mouth. It didn't even register with me what I had done at first. I looked at the pacifier curiously for a moment. I smiled. The enchantment must have worn off. I tapped Thomas excitedly showing him the pacifier in my hand. He looked at the pacifier in my hand for a moment as his eyes went wide. However he then looked at me before his brow furrowed and he turned his head facing away from me. I looked a little bewildered at his reaction was he...mad at me? What in the world for? I tapped him again, he shirked me off not even looking back. I sat back in my seat. What was his deal? I huffed a little air through my nose as I sat back. My eyes turned to watching the passing scenery. It wasn't until a few minutes later that I realized I was sucking my thumb. I pulled it out of my mouth with some shock. When had I started doing that? As I looked at my spit covered thumb I felt a strong urge to return it to my mouth. I shook my head. Trying to push away the urge, but I couldn't. A moment later I had my pacifier back in my mouth. Between sucking a pacifier and sucking my thumb, I would take the

pacifier – at least that way I wouldn't mess up my teeth.

Back at the house me and Thomas were deposited into a playpen located int the corner of the living room while Davis left to unload the groceries. It was somewhat spacious with chunky looking red and blue pieces stuck together. The foam mat underneath our feet looking like puzzle pieces stuck together with some letters and numbers on each individual square. There were plenty of baby toys suitable for two year olds as well as some stuffed animals littering the ground. Neither of us showed any interest in the toys. Thomas went over to a corner and sat down facing away from me. I stood putting my hands on my hips marching over to Thomas.

“Are you mad at me?” I said pulling the pacifier out of my mouth. Thomas glared at me before turning his head back around. I was getting fed up with the cold shoulder treatment. “If you're mad then say something,” I said grabbing him by the shoulders pulling him back so that he fell backwards. Thomas scowled as he flipped onto his stomach before getting to his feet. He took the pacifier out of his mouth and threw it at me.

“Yeah I am mad at you,” he said.

“FOR WHAT?” I shouted, throwing my hands up dramatically.

“YOU LEFT ME,” Thomas shouted back. My mouth dropped up a little as I looked at the pained expression on his face. “You were just going to leave me here with him,” Thomas said lowering his voice. “You were ready to abandon me the

first chance you got.”

“Like you wouldn't have done the same,” I tutted.

“No I wouldn't,” Thomas said as he furrowed his brow and looked to the side. It looked like he was trying not to cry. “You've obviously never heard of no man left behind.” I was about to give my rebuttal yet was interrupted as Davis came back in the room. In his hand was a black stick like object that looked like a paint stick. He set it on the coffee table before approaching the playpen.

“So first off all I want to say I love you two very much,” Davis said. Thomas let out a chortle. “But your behavior today was unacceptable. Tommy you were being very difficult in the store and throwing things around is never okay.” Davis then looked at me. “Charlie, running away is also not okay. You could have gotten yourself hurt or worse. There are consequences for these actions,” Davis said, as he picked up the stick.

“So what you're going to beat us?” Thomas asked yet he didn't seem scared or nervous.

“Not at all,” Davis said holding up the stick. “My Aunt would use this on me when I was little. It stings a little but it won't leave you feeling sore after like a spanking. Just enough to make sure you learn your lesson.”

I'm not sure why, but my ears perked up hearing the small smidgen of Davis's past, call it my inquisitive nature.

“You were raised by your Aunt?” I asked. Davis gave a small

smile.

“We're not talking about me right now,” Davis replied. “Right now its about you two.” Davis came over and lifted Thomas out of the playpen “Tommy you're going first. For being disrespectful and destructive you're getting three swats.” Davis pulled down Thomas's shorts as he held him from behind around the waist. I watched as he deliver three quick swats to Thomas's thigh. I saw Thomas wince with every hit yet he made no sound. Once that was over he pulled Thomas's shorts back up and put him back in the playpen I was next. “Now Charlie running away is very serious so you'll be getting five swats.” I didn't say anything as my punishment was carried out. It stung that was for sure, but I did my best to stay strong, yet on the last swat I let out a stifled yip. After I was redressed Davis got both of us on his hip.

“I'm glad we're done with that, Daddy loves you both very much,” Davis said giving us each a kiss to the cheek. I turned my head away hiding my displeasure. Afterwards we found ourselves back in our highchairs being treated to the waffles from that morning. Both Thomas and I ate with our hands silently. Apparently since we were mad at each other that took precedence over fighting against Davis's baby treatment. Once the waffles were finished we found ourselves sat on the couch with Davis in the middle he had more bottles of formula prepared for us. I brought my bottle up and began drinking without any encouragement. I was thirsty anyways and I found myself actually wanting to drink it. I could tell

that I could stop if I really wanted to, the enchantment must have been even weaker than the pacifiers. Davis still had to bring Thomas's up to his mouth but he didn't resist as much. I was a little surprised that the taste wasn't nearly as bad as it had been that morning. There was no difference though. I had watched Davis make them, it was formula with nothing added. After the bottles we were taken back up to our room and put down for a nap.

“Now close those eyes boys you both had a very big morning,” Davis said putting pacifiers into our mouths. As I laid there suckling on my pacifier. I thought a lot about what Thomas had said in the playpen. I was starting to understand why he had been mad. The thought of having to go through all of this alone was unimaginable. Hell I was ready to give up last night. Who knows how I would have fared if Thomas hadn't been there. We were best friends, a dynamic duo and I hadn't even thought about him when I had ran. I plucked the pacifier from my mouth as I sat up.

“Hey Thomas you still awake?” I asked.

“Yeah,” I heard a muffled reply.

“I'm sorry,” I said. “You're right, I shouldn't have left you like that. Sorry.”

“No, I'm sorry,” Thomas said having taken the pacifier out of his mouth. “You saw your chance and took it. I know you would have come back for me.” I shook my head.

“We're not getting out of this unless we work together,” I

said. “We aren't escaping through some haphazard plan. We're gonna have to wait for the perfect opportunity if we're going to have a shot. I hate to say it, but I don't think we are going to get that opportunity unless we build up a little trust.” Thomas groaned. I didn't really need to go into detail to get my point across as to exactly what that entailed.

“I'm not calling him Daddy again.” Thomas said.

“We might have to,” I said. “But we'll both know its not by choice.”

“Yeah,” Thomas agreed. “Nothing by choice.” Our conversation was then interrupted as Davis came back in the room with a baby monitor in hand.

“I hear talking in here,” Davis said in a sing song voice as he plugged the baby monitor into the wall and switched it on. “You boys will have plenty of time to play after nap time, but now is the time for rest, okay?” Thomas and I both laid back replacing the pacifiers back into our mouths.

“Yeth Daddy,” I lisped behind the pacifier. My opening salvo in the fake act of compliance and obedience. Davis smiled as he left the room leaving the door open a crack. I looked over at Thomas who gave me a wink. I was filled with a renewed sense of determination. We were getting out of this, we just had to.

Chapter 3

My Brother's Keeper: Part 3 - Chapter 3

Impulsive

Two years doesn't sound like a lot of time on paper, and the older you get the faster the years seem to fly by. But two years to a child might as well seem like a hundred. At least that's what it felt like to me as I stood in the main room of Little Frogs Learning Academy where me and Thomas attended morning preschool sessions. Two years, that was how long Thomas and I had been stuck in our second childhoods. Now I know what you're saying. Two years! In all that time you never once tried to escape? The answer to that would be yes. We both knew we needed the perfect opportunity and when you're at the age where adults think that leaving you alone for even a minute could result in catastrophic outcomes, perfect opportunities don't come along easily. Not too mention all the gadgets meant to keep small children from wandering were nothing if not effective. We weren't tall enough to open doors or get past baby gates and the preschool was like Fort Knox. It was a nice prison but it was still a prison to us.

I sat at the kidney table enjoying the nice sunbeam at my back as I colored in a picture of a frog with a crayon. Thomas approached the table setting a toy car on the table. He had been playing with the other kids for awhile.

“Need a break?” I asked.

“Yeah, kind of.” Thomas said with a sigh. “These kids really wear me out.” I chuckled a little. Thomas seemed to act like the perfect little boy at preschool, it was all part of his rebellion. At home with Davis he was different. He always found ways to make things difficult for Davis. Sometimes he went a little too far and got himself some swats but he was being more careful these days since Davis had stopped using the stick and had switched over to spankings. According to Davis we were big boys now, and we would get big boy punishments when we got out of line. As if a over the knee spanking and a timeout in the corner were somehow the epitome of maturity. I didn't follow along with Thomas but I supported him in doing what he had too. At home he was obstinate and stubborn, yet when Davis would pick us up from preschool he only got glowing reviews and comments about how sweet and loving little Tommy was. It must eat Davis up, I sincerely hoped it did. Although Davis never showed if it did. It was good to see that Thomas still had his resolve. Me on the other hand, I wasn't fairing as well.

Thomas possessed a stronger will than I had, of that I was certain. Too many times I had let my childish emotions get the better of me. Too many times I had seeked out Davis for attention and comfort. I just couldn't seem to stop myself. I wanted to be stronger like Thomas. I just couldn't. Thomas though once again had been there to build me back up. He had told me it was probably for the best. We did have to keep Davis under the assumption that we had morphed into the

little boys he had changed us into. I just worried what it was doing to my mental state. Thomas wasn't wholly immune to it either. I had seen him break down into tears before and be pacified by a hug and some gentle words. Those times were rare however. Most of the time he showed any affection towards Davis it was as if he was baiting him before he pulled away again.

“Hey boys hows it going,” Ms. Kendall, one of the preschool teachers asked as she came up behind us.

“Good,” we both responded with our sweet little voices. She smiled as I saw her pull the waistband of Thomas's cookie monster blue sweatpants causing him to jump a little.

“Ooops sorry to surprise you there Tommy, just doing a little check, we got a stinker somewhere in this room.” she said letting his waistband snap back into place.

“Its not me,” Thomas said as his face reddened.

“No, its not,” she smiled. She then looked at me. I shook my head at her, it definitely wasn't me either.

“Lets just see about that,” she said as she pulled back my own waistband. “Not you either,” she said a second later. “Great job on keeping those undies clean,” she praised. I could see Thomas give a small look of annoyance. If there was one area I was doing better than him it was potty training. Thomas was still in training pants night and day, while I had graduated to padded undies a week ago.

“He still has to wear pull-ups at night,” Thomas said a little

bitterly.

“Tommy you should be proud of Charlie,” Ms. Kendall said pulling him into a side hug. “You're going to be joining him very soon, I just know it.” Thomas nodded his head. Yeah he was jealous, which I kind of found funny. Then again potty training had become a competitive activity between us. One he thought I was smoking him in. I didn't necessary think it was true. The mickey mouse pull-ups actually looked less babyish than the puffy white underwear with different colored paw prints all over it with a smiling puppy face on the butt that I was currently wearing under my gray sweatpants with the firetruck patch. I really wasn't doing that much better than him if our potty training charts were anything to go by. Thomas was still having accidents during the day and night, yet he still sometimes woke up dry. Me on the other hand I was wet every night. Soon enough he was going to leave me behind and then he would be doing better than me in every conceivable way.

“You'll get there soon, Tommy,” I said placing a hand on his shoulder. He gave me a frown while I smiled back. I was going to enjoy my slight advantage while I still had it at least. We ribbed each other sometimes, it helped keep us sane.

“Oh Charlie that is so sweet of you,” Ms. Kendall cooed. “Though do any of you think we should take a potty break?” I shook my head. Thomas looked a little indecisive.

“Maybe,” he said squirming a little.

“Lets hurry then,” Ms. Kendall said lifting him up into her

arms and ferrying him to the bathroom at the back of the room. I went back to coloring my picture. A boy named Howie came and sat next to me.

“Charlie can I color with you?” he asked. I smiled and pushed some crayons over to him. I wasn't like Thomas, he was the king of preschool. Everyone wanted to be his friend. He was the perfect playmate since he still possessed adult sensibilities. He never argued about toys or what role he got in the games of pretend and made sure everyone who wanted to play was included. Me being his brother did give me some social standing among the other four year olds, but Howie was the only kid I could really consider my friend. We were similar in lots of way. We were both more on the mild side and enjoyed quieter activities rather than the boisterous activity's Thomas lead the other kids through. Although he was always careful not to get the others too riled up. He took it easy on the preschool staff, he certainly had a soft spot for them. He had told me once that his girlfriend was a preschool teacher and the job could be draining. Maybe that's why. They probably reminded him of her. I often thought of my own wife, Kelly. It helped me to keep up my resolve.

“I like your frog,” Howie the freckled face curly red haired boy said pulling me out of my thoughts. I looked over at his coloring seeing he had gotten though a lot of it which made me wonder how long I had been lost in thought for.

“Oh thanks, your shark is really good too,” I said. Howie was definitely more artistic than me. I had trouble staying in the lines sometimes. My physical attributes were that of the

average four year old after all, something that made the idea of escape that much more complicated. I looked out across the room to see Thomas had returned from the bathroom and was sat cuddling in Ms. Kendall's lap on the floor in the center of the room. It was probably close to pick-up time and I could only assume that is exactly what Thomas wanted Davis to see when he walked into the room. He wanted Davis see him being a snugly little boy who only ever kept the man the world thought of as his Daddy at arms length. I went back to my drawing. I only had to finish the grass and then I would be done.

“Charlie,” Ms. Kendalls voice then called out a few minutes later. I looked up to see her stood near the exit next to Davis. “Daddy's here to pick you up.”

I gathered up my picture and waved goodbye to Howie. I grabbed my backpack from my cubbie before scurrying up to Davis.

“What do you go there squirt?” Davis asked.

“I colored a picture,” I said holding up my coloring with both hands. Davis smiled as he knelt wrapping and arm around my hips and lifting me up to his hip.

“Wow, this is really good!” Davis said with some mawkish over the top praise. “You colored this all by yourself?”

“Yeah,” I said smiling at the praise. I knew I should be reviled in accepting the childish praise. The problem was I liked it. I had wanted to show this picture to Davis. I really was losing

myself.

“We'll have to put this one on the fridge,” Davis said delivering a kiss to my cheek. I let out a small squeal as my shoulders bunched up. Thomas came up a moment later. “Hey Tommy ready to go.”

“Uh huh,” Thomas said.

“Everything go okay today?” Davis then asked turning his attention to Ms. Kendall.

“Just great, as usual.” she smiled. “Little darlings as always.”

“Great,” Davis said. “And how did we do with the potty?

“Charlie did great, and I'm happy to report that Tommy didn't have any accidents,” Ms. Kendall reported.

“Great job sport,” Davis said ruffling up Thomas's hair. “You're going to be caught up to Charlie in no time.”

Thomas merely grunted. He wasn't about to come back with any sort of snide comment. He wanted out of the training pants more than anyone.

“Okay boys say goodbye,” Davis instructed.

“Bye Ms. Kendall.” I waved from Davis's arms. Thomas on the other hand held his arms out. Ms. Kendall smiled as she knelt down to receive a big hug from Thomas.

“Bye Ms. Kendall, I love you,” he said in the most syrupy voice he could muster.

“I love you too sweetheart,” Ms. Kendall said. I watched Davis's face for any reaction. Thomas was laying it on thick as he always did when Davis picked up. I could not see anything that seemed to suggest Davis was bothered. We were then off walking towards the parking lot. I was still being carried while Davis held Thomas's hand.

“You boys have fun today?” Davis asked.

“Yeah, we did a lot today,” I said

“What about you Tommy learn anything new?” Davis then asked.

“Not really,” Thomas said in a monotone.

“Make sure you work hard,” Davis then chuckled. “Want to make sure you two are ready to start kindergarten next year.”

Me and Thomas shared a glance. School certainly represented an opportunity for us. A full school day would give us ample opportunity to escape. I inwardly groaned though. There was a good chunk of the year left and then summer. It still seemed like a long time to wait. I was placed in my carseat first before Davis carried Thomas to the others side to get him strapped into his own seat. Davis then gave both of us a bag of crackers and sippy cups with juice.

“Eat your snack so you got energy for storytime,” Davis said as he closed the door to get into the drivers seat.

I ate my snack. The routine of the days having been firmly established. Most days the babysitter, an elderly woman by

the name of Joanne, would pick us up from school. Which I didn't mind as she also watched after Howie. Wednesdays however Davis worked from home and had a more flexible schedule. So he would pick the us up and then take us to the library for storytime and song hour. I was determined today to not let myself get caught up in the activity. Thomas never did. Sure he would stand up in a line with the rest of the kids doing the dances and singing the song. It was still an act, unlike myself. I couldn't help myself sometimes it seemed. The part that I truly liked though was afterwards when Daddy...I mean Davis would let us pick out some books to check out.

“Hey Charlie, I think you'll be able to check out that book you wanted this week,” Davis said reminding me.

“I really hope so,” I said. Davis was referring to a book all about animals that I had spotted on the checkout desk last week. Unfortunately it hadn't been ready to check out at the time.

“Even if its not though, don't be too upset, we'll find you another book on animals, okay?” Davis then said.

“Okay Daddy,” I said. I found myself cringing a little at how easily I would call Davis 'Daddy' honestly it had stop being an act for me a long time ago. Even in my head when I thought of Davis the word daddy seemed to be the default, I didn't even feel weird about it anymore. The thing was, as much as I knew I should hate Davis, part of me didn't. The most infuriating thing about Davis was despite the awful

thing he had done to us, he was still a pretty good parent. He was patient, doting, and attentive. He could be a little firm with punishments but that might be the only thing I would take issue with, that and the whole kidnapping thing of course. Sometimes I found myself wondering if I would be able to hold out. Just how long did I have left? I could only trust that Thomas would be there to pull me back.

We arrived at the library and soon enough I found myself sat next to Thomas in the kids section of the library as we listened to one of the librarians read us a giant oversized storybook surrounded by other small children. Davis was in the back with some of the other parents. I hated myself for wishing a little bit that he would come and sit with us in his lap in the crowd like he had used too. The story was about a little puppy that gets lost during his first walk to the park. At first he enjoys his new freedom, but then it starts to get dark and he wishes that his family would find him. I started to empathize with the dog. In many ways I was lost. Lost in a world that no longer even knew me, at least if Davis had been telling the truth about everyone forgetting about Charles the adult. It probably was true. I wouldn't accept it though. If I did get away. I would find my wife and convince her of the truth. I was fairly certain I'd be able to do it. We knew each other like our own selves. I knew things about her that she had never told another soul.

The story came to an end with the puppy finding his family. It was then time for wiggle time as the librarian called it wielding an acoustic guitar. She started with a rendition of “If

you're happy and you know it” Shit! This one always got to me, this and the hokey pokey. I tried to just go through the motions. That's what Thomas did, just so he didn't get singled out and accused of being shy. That was the proposed modus operandi. Fly under the radar, don't bring un-needed attention to yourself. That's how you got people to drop their guard. It was easier to work on a plan when those in charge didn't suspect their was a plan in the first place.

It got to the part of the song where you spun around if you were happy. I did so having abandoned going through the motions and was now fully on board with wiggle time. Spinning around I noticed something. I stopped not going for another spin as I turned my head to look a the crowd in back of me. I scanned all the peoples faces, mostly laughing parents. I didn't see Davis anywhere. I looked around further, I didn't see him anywhere. I tapped Thomas on the shoulder.

“Daddy, I mean Davis is gone,” I said in a hushed whisper. Thomas cocked an eyebrow as he looked around to confirm it.

“Hang on,” Thomas said ducking out of the line. He moved to the sides looking down the aisles of books before he came back. “I can't see down every row, but he isn't in the kids section,” Thomas said. I peered over to the front desk near the glass doors that lead outside. He wasn't there either.

“What the hell?” I whispered. “He just left us?”

“Yeah,” Thomas said. We looked at one another.

“Lets run,” I said. To my utter surprise Thomas shook his

head.

“No,” he said. “That's a bad idea.”

“This is what we've been waiting for,” I said my voice rising a little as I quickly lowered it back down. “This is our opportunity.”

“No, it's not. He could be just around the corner there are too many things that could go wrong. I don't want to burn our one opportunity.” Thomas said. I rolled my eyes. I could understand Thomas's hesitation. If we got caught all the trust we had built up over the years would be gone. It would probably take even longer to get it back. Even understanding all that something in me couldn't let this moment pass. I felt like I was walking on a tightrope and sooner and later I was going to fall.

“The longer we stay talking the less chance we have,” I said. “Do you really want to spend another day here, or do you want to go with me now and finally get away.”

“I thought you like being Daddy's little boy,” Thomas smirked. I groaned.

“Razz me all you want when we get out of here. Buts its now or never,” I said. “I won't leave without you though.”

I saw Thomas's smirk fade. He then nodded. We waited for the librarian to get to the part in the particular song where all the kids got to run around and jump around. It was a good thing we came here weekly and knew all the cues and dances. It allowed us to manipulate the perfect opportunity to slip out

of the kids section unnoticed. We moved quickly getting to the side of the checkout desk where the librarian on the either side wouldn't be able to see us over the top. We slinked to the door. Thankfully from this side it was push to open as neither of us would have been able to reach the handles. The air hit my face as we walked out the doors. It felt different, maybe because it was the fresh air of freedom. We were doing it, we were escaping. Getting outside was a sensory overload. I didn't have the foggiest idea of what to do. So I took off running down the sidewalk. The only important thing was to get far away. I looked back and saw Thomas behind me, a huge smile plastered on his face. We came to a stop nearby an empty lot. I was breathing heavy.

“I think we can stopping running now,” I said catching my breath.

“Shit,” Thomas said walking to my side. “Can't believe that worked, but I'm glad I listened to you.” I stood up.

“What do we do now?” I asked. Thomas laughed.

“Who knows, but I'm proud of you dude.”

“Proud of me?” I questioned.

“Sure,” Thomas said placing an arm around me. “You actually showed a little initiative. Saw what you wanted and took it.”

I smiled a little. It felt good to hear that from Thomas. I was feeling pretty great at the moment. Suddenly I felt an arm go around my waist, a moment later I was in the air looking

down at the sidewalk as my legs dangled. I looked over to see Thomas next to me with a surprised look on his face. I craned my head to see that Davis had both of us under his arms. He had stern look on his face.

“You boys are in very big trouble.”

Chapter 4

My Brother's Keeper: Part 4 - Chapter 4

Part 4

Adjustments

Thomas and I were sat on the couch. Davis was in the middle of a very long lecture. I wasn't even listening. I was scared though. Not only was I feeling like a little boy who was in trouble, I was also feeling the weight of my failure and what that meant. I had spent two long years building a level of trust with Davis, lulling him into the delusion that I was his good little son. Even if there were times I hadn't necessarily been acting it had all contributed to the grand goal – that was all gone now. We were back at square one.

“I can't believe you two, I was gone for thirty seconds!” Davis exclaimed. I shuddered a little. I was so stupid. Of course he had stepped outside to take a call. Our little victory had been false, Davis had been following us the whole time. He had seen us right when we stepped outside. Davis's phone then vibrated again. He took it out of his pocket. He rolled his eyes looking at the screen. “I'll be right back you two keep those butts planted, got it?” Thomas and I nodded. There was nowhere for us to run we all knew that. Davis walked out of the room to take the call.

“Whats up with you?” Thomas whispered after a few

seconds. “Why are you shaking?” I looked at Thomas not even aware that I was.

“I messed up,” I said. “This is really bad.”

“Oh please,” Thomas said rolling his eyes. “So what, we got caught. Don't beat yourself up about it. He is probably going to spank us which will suck, but so what?”

“You don't get it,” I hissed. “He knows now that we are still trying to escape. That means he is now going to be keeping an even closer eye on us. That means we don't get any more chances. All that time spent acting like little kids is gone, he knows it was bullshit.” Thomas licked his lips a little as he thought on what I was saying. “I should have listened to you,” I said. “I just screwed us over in the biggest way possible.”

“Don't go saying stuff like that,” Thomas whispered putting a hand on my shoulder. “You can't be thinking like that. Charles, you're good with logistics and shit. I need you to come up with the perfect plan if we are going to get out of this. Don't worry about anything else. When he comes back in, just follow my lead.”

I wanted to ask Thomas what he was planning, but I didn't get the chance as Davis came back in. He stood in front of us with his arms crossed.

“Okay, here is what is going to happen,” Davis said. “You are both getting spankings and timeouts, so who is going first?”

“W-wait,” I stammered. I had to say something, try to salvage

the situation. There had to be something I could say, some excuse that would make it seem like we hadn't been trying to run away. “I-I-I'm sorry Daddy,” I sniffled. Shit, what I was saying was out of real remorse I felt. Not for screwing up but because I genuinely felt bad that I had upset Davis. The feelings were too strong to resist. They were no help here.

“Charlie shouldn't be in trouble,” Thomas said jumping to his feet. “Its not his fault. I told him to do it. He didn't want too, though.” Davis looked at me the side of his mouth curling up a little as if he didn't know whether to believe Thomas or not.

“Well Charlie is that true? Did Tommy talk you into it?” Davis asked. I sat with my mouth open a little. I sputtered a little before looking at Thomas who was giving me a deathly serious look. He was telling me to take the out. He was giving me plausible deniability.

“Y-yes,” I said meekly. I didn't feel good about lying and placing the blame on Thomas, this had been my idea. However Thomas was showing that he knew the importance of me saving face at the moment.

“I see,” Davis said. He walked up to the couch and picked me up. He carried me to the corner and set me on my feet. “You'll do your timeout first then, nose in the corner.”

“But I just told you it wasn't his fault,” Thomas bellowed. “He shouldn't be in trouble.”

“Charlie made a bad choice by going along with you. He will be punished for that, even if it wasn't his idea.” Davis said. I

stood in the corner with my nose in the corner. I don't know why Thomas continued to protest. He had done enough already. I didn't need to get off scot free. I just had to chalk it up to Thomas always wanting the best outcome. He was never happy unless he walked away with the best deal.

I was getting off far easier than him. We had learned that when we were both about to get spankings it was always best to go second. That was how Davis did it. The boy who was going second would do their time out in relative comfort while the one who went first would have to do their timeout with a sore bottom. After the other one got their spanking punishment was over and Davis would be their to cuddle and soothe the crying, well just me that is. Thomas never cried. Me? I couldn't seem to help it. My small body was more sensitive to everything including pain. Just one of the many ways that Thomas was better than me. I hated myself for succumbing so easily. But a sore bottom and the feeling of shame seemed to be the perfect mix to send me right into the arms of Daddy seeking out comfort.

“You know Tommy I've been really patient with you,” Davis said as I heard the sound of Thomas's sweatpants and pull-up being moved down his legs. “I think its time we address this stubbornness of yours.” Thomas said nothing. He never did. He was like a prisoner in front of the firing squad, a lit cigarette in his mouth.

As I heard the first smack ring out I felt a shock go from my spine up to the base of my skull. I felt my chest tighten. The second smack I could feel something. This had never

happened before. With each swat I could feel something like vibrations reverberating against my back. My eyes went wide. With each successive swat I felt something so foreign to me. Its as if I could sense something changing. I couldn't really describe it accurately. I could only say on some level I could feel the world around me. With each swat its as if threads were being pulled and twisted around. On the fifth swat I heard Thomas let out a yelp. That wasn't right, Thomas didn't do that. By the eight swat he was crying. Davis kept on going. Thomas was blubbering for him to stop, telling him how sorry he was, calling Davis Daddy. The spanking lasted no longer than normal and Thomas was then carried over to the corner. I looked at Thomas as I was lead away. He was sobbing and red faced with some snot running out of his nose. No,no,no,no this wasn't how Thomas acted, never, not in a million years. I found myself across Davis's lap my own pants and underwear being pulled down.

“Daddy,” Thomas wailed.

“Tommy turn around and nose in the corner now,” Davis said firmly.

“I'm sorry,” Thomas blubbered as I watched him turn around. I sat in complete shock. As my own spanking commenced I didn't feel any of the sensations that I had just moments previously. In fact I wasn't even registering the pain of getting my bottom swatted by Davis's hand. Despite being focused on something far more alarming I still found my self sniffling lightly by the time my punishment concluded. My pants were pulled up before I was sat up into Davis's lap.

“Okay Tommy time out is over. You can come and get a hug now.” Davis said gently. Thomas turned around wiping the tears from his eyes as he came over to the couch. Davis had an arm around each of us holding us close to his chest. Both of us sniffling and holding onto him. The only thought in my mind was, what the hell had just happened?

“Okay boys,” Davis said. “I'm going to go get a late lunch ready and then its naptime,” he said giving us both a kiss to the top of the head before getting off the couch. I wiped my eyes a little. I looked over at Thomas who sat for a moment. He then slid off the couch. He looked like he was lost. I watched as he walked around the room a little as if it were a foreign place to him. He then walked over to the toybox in the corner of the room. He just stood for a moment. I was wondering what he was doing. He then picked up one of the toy trucks. My eyes widened as I watched him plop down onto the ground with the truck. He began to crawl around a little pushing the car along. He then stopped going back to the toybox and pulling out a playset that went along with the cars and some more cars to boot. I got up off the couch.

“Thomas,” I said with a shaky voice. He didn't react still playing with the cars. “Thomas,” I said louder. The boy looked up at me with a clueless look.

“What?” he said.

“What are you doing?” I asked shaking my head in disbelief.

“Ummm playin with cars,” Thomas replied. I went to my knees putting my hands on top of the car in his hands.

“You don't play with cars though,” I said. Thomas looked at me with a nervous look.

“I guess they looked kind of fun,” he said. Thomas then moved the car away from my grasp.

“Stop it,” I said. Thomas turned away from me.

“You play with them all the time, why can't I?” he asked scowling at me. I stood looking at him. His memory seemed to be okay, but he was still acting weird.

“What happened back there with Davis?” I asked. Thomas's scowl softened as he turned away.

“I got a spanking, same as you,” he mumbled. I shook my head again. That wasn't true. Something else had gone on.

“Thomas,” I said.

“Why do you call me that?” Thomas then said turning back around to face me.

“Its your name,” I said.

“Yeah I know, but no one else calls me that.” he said.

“You want me to call you Tommy?” I asked raising an eyebrow.

“Well yeah,” Thomas said with a shrug. “That's what Daddy calls me, and Ms. Kendall and all my friends.”

My eyes went wide. I had hoped that Thomas was playing a joke or something, but he wasn't. No way he would ever joke

like this. I knew now Davis had once again used magic, I had felt it. I stood up and marched towards the kitchen. I didn't know what I was doing. I was fuming. I was mad at Davis, but mostly at myself. Thomas had jumped in front of a bullet for me and had paid a price for it that neither of us had considered. This was bad.

Thomas kept me level headed. He was strong enough for both of us. He could resist the change more than I. He said that was his job. He would keep me sane and I would keep the charade up. I had really done it now. I had given into an impulsiveness that befit my childlike appearance. Worst of all I had dragged Thomas down with me. I came into the kitchen to find Davis setting some sandwiches on the table.

“Hey, Charlie, lunch is ready go get your brother,” he said.

“CHANGE HIM BACK,” I shouted. Davis looked at me for a moment before giving me a sympathetic smile.

“You've noticed huh?” he said.

“Y-y-you brainwashed him. I know you did,” I said. I was shaking. I had never confronted Davis like this. I had no idea how he would react. Not too mention I may just be selling myself out, which is what Thomas had tried to cover up. Davis lifted me up under the armpits and sat me on the counter island to my back so that we were at face level.

“You think I brainwashed him, why?” Davis asked.

“Because he's acting like a...a –“ I stammered.

“A little boy?” Davis said finishing my sentence.

“Y-Yeah,” I said losing my voice.

“Well that's what he is,” Davis chuckled. “Whats the problem with that?”

“That's not how he acted before,” I countered. All ideas of facades was not important anymore. I wasn't going to let myself be gaslit.

“I did use magic,” Davis then said. I went to retort only falling silent when I realized Davis had just admitted to my accusation – he wasn't supposed to say that. “But I didn't brainwash him,” Davis continued. “I just nudged him in a better direction.”

“What do you mean?” I asked furrowing my brow. Davis laughed again.

“You are my inquisitive boy aren't you,” he said mussing up my hair a little. “I'll tell you, I've known that Tommy was having some struggles with his emotions. So I decided that I would help him along and just make it easier for him to let his emotions out. Its a natural process that you two have been going through. Tommy just needed some help over the hump, that's all.”

“I don't get it,” I said. “Why didn't you just do that from the start?”

“I didn't think I needed to,” Davis said. “You would have both gotten there on your own. You know that better than anyone.”

My mind was racing. I certainly understood what he was talking about. But there had to be something else going on. Why had Thomas been able to resist so much? I wanted answers, if not for anything else than to satiate my own curiosity.

“But why,” I said my voice cracking. It was a loded question. If Davis had known from the start that Thomas wasn't acclimating then why did he decide now to do something? Why couldn't I resist like Thomas? Why was I constantly shooting myself in the foot? Why, why, why? Davis didn't seem to get all the meanings of the question.

“Oh buddy,” Davis said wrapping me up into a hug as he lifted me into his arms and began to rub my back. “I don't know all the answers. But what I do know is that you were doing better than Tommy. I guess that's a difference between you two. Tommy can be really stubborn. But you are more sensitive. It means you are more in touch with your feelings. Its a good thing. It allowed you to be happy and carefree like any other little boy. Don't you think Tommy deserves to be happy too?" Davis then set me onto my feet. “There feel better?”

I nodded my head, I was lying, I didn't feel better about any of this. Davis then knelt down placing hands on either side of my head so that I was staring directly at him.

“I would never use my magic to brainwash either one of you. If I did that then you wouldn't be you. I just want you boys to be happy.” Davis's comment had no doubt been meant to

comfort me and with how he was talking I knew he was telling the truth, it was a bitter pill to swallow. If I was truly still me than that meant all the childish emotions I was having were mine. I hadn't been foolish because Davis had somehow warped me to be. It was because as I was, I was foolish. A foolish little boy who couldn't take care of himself.

“Now go get Tommy, its lunch time.” Davis said. Sitting at the table I ate my pb&j sandwich.

“Aren't you going to eat?” I heard Davis ask looking at Thomas who had a sour look on his face. I felt a smile begin to curve on my lips. Thomas never ate right away, not before telling Davis he was a crappy cook. I was beginning to hope that for all of Davis's effort maybe he hadn't been able to completely change Thomas.

“I don't like the crust,” Thomas declared. My face fell.

“Eat your sandwich,” Davis said. “We don't waste food in this house,” Thomas let out a huff picking up the sandwich. He ate all of it except for the crust. He looked like he downright enjoyed it as he did. There were even crumbs and a little jelly at the corners of his mouth.

“Tommy I still see those crusts,” Davis noted.

“I don't like them,” Thomas mewled.

“Okay, then I guess we won't go outside and play on the swing set after nap time,” Davis shrugged.

“That and the crust are what make you grow big and strong.

Charlie ate his so I guess you'll be okay with him being your big brother."

"What, no way!" Thomas exclaimed as he looked at me with big wide eyes. He smashed his crust together into a ball before shoving them into his mouth. He took a drink of his juice to wash it down.

"Atta boy," Davis smiled standing up. "Alright guys potty then nap. Whose going to make it to the bathroom first?"

"Me," Thomas said hopping out of his chair giving me a challenging look before he scurried up the stairs. I didn't really have it in me to race him at the moment. I was drained and I felt even more sluggish then usual.

Getting into the bathroom Thomas was already sat on the training potty. I pulled down my pants and undies and took a seat on my own training potty. Davis hadn't gotten around to getting a potty seat for the toilet yet. He also said it was probably safer in case we had to go in the middle of the night to not be climbing up onto the toilet. It didn't matter to me though. Its not like I would ever wake up to go anyways. Davis collected our pants folding them up neatly on the counter.

"I'm done," Thomas said standing up proudly as he went pulled his pull-up to his waist.

"Me too," I said somewhat glumly as I got my padded undies back on.

"Good job," Davis said. "That's two stickers for the charts,"

Davis said giving us each a smiley face sticker. We went and stuck them on the charts with out names on them that were hung on the wall. We then walked to our room for a nap. I climbed onto my bed crawling up to the head of the bed.

“Charlie you look like such a big boy in your puppy undies,” Davis cooed. “Give me a waggle of your tail.” I waggled my butt as I looked back at Davis with a smile on my face as I giggled. A moment later I felt my face go red as I turned away frowning. Why had I done that? I quickly got under my covers. I had totally forgotten how mad I was at Davis. Truly I had the attention span of a toddler.

“They aren't that great,” Thomas mumbled from his own bed.

“Now now Tommy,” Davis said as he took a seat on Thomas's bed wrapping him up in a hug and petting his head. “There is no need to be jealous. You're getting there. Couple more days like today and you'll be in the big boy undies too.”

“I know,” Thomas said glumly. I watched as Davis leaned down to hug Thomas who wrapped his arms around Davis's neck before falling back onto his bed. Davis then gave him a kiss to his forehead and Thomas smiled as he closed his eyes. I felt sick.

“Ready to close those eyes?” Davis asked me as he pushed some of my hair to the side. Davis then hugged me I felt him letting go and only hugged him tighter.

“Please,” I said. “Just hug me a little longer.” Davis didn't say anything he just kept hugging me and rubbed my back a little.

“Its going to be alright,” he whispered. I just kept hugging him tighter. I needed this. I needed to feel whatever comforting feeling this caused my brain to create. I didn't care it was Davis that I was hugging. There wasn't anyone here that would judge me except for myself. And I didn't really care what I thought, I already hated myself. Davis tucked me in. I closed my eyes. Did I mention I was completely drained physically and emotionally?

Upon waking up I had the tiniest sliver of hope that Thomas would be back to normal. I looked over to see his bed abandoned. I got out of my bed hearing voices coming from he bathroom. The door was open. I saw a wet pull-up on the ground. Davis was knelt down next to Thomas as he pulled on a new pull-up. Thomas had a pouty face.

“It was just a little one,” Davis said ruffling up Thomas's hair.

“I wanted to go the whole day,” Thomas whined.

“Its okay bud, all in due time,” Davis said hugging Thomas. “You've been doing a real good job, so on Saturday you can wear the undies and try them out.”

Thomas's face lit up.

“Really, really, really. I love you Daddy!” Thomas exclaimed before giving Davis a kiss right on the lips. I turned my head away. Thomas was truly lost. Not even if he was putting on the biggest act in the world would he have ever done that.

“Wowza,” Davis chuckled as he got Thomas's sweatpants from the counter and held them out for Thomas to step in.

“Someone's excited.” Davis then spotted me standing in the doorway. “Hey Charlie boy, have a good nap?”

I nodded as Davis used his finger to signal me closer. Davis then pulled the front waistband on my undies forward as he peered inside. “Dry as the desert,” he said.

“I get to wear undies on Saturday,” Thomas blurted out no doubt in an effort to glaze over my accomplishment.

“Yeah I heard,” I said paying more attention to stepping into my sweatpants that were being held out for me.

“We're gonna match,” Thomas said.

“Thats great,” I said. Thomas frowned a little but didn't say anything more.

Davis then brought us out to the swing set in the backyard. He didn't let us play out here by ourselves yet, not really sure why. The yard was surrounded by a white picket fence that we wouldn't be able to climb. Thomas was currently on the swings demanding that Davis give him under-dog after under-dog. I sat at the top of play structure spinning the yellow plastic wheel attached at the side next to the plastic spyglass.

“I want another one Daddy,” Thomas squealed as he soared.

“No more Tommy, I've given you like five already. You gotta swing by yourself,” Davis said taking a step back as he wiped some sweat from his brow. “Hey Charlie you want to swing, I might have the energy for one more under dog with your name on it?” Davis asked looking up at me.

“No thanks,” I said. “I'm steering the ship,” I said as I spun the steering wheel. He nodded. A moment later the neighbor next door was standing by the fence calling him over for a chat. Davis left us to go and talk to the elderly man. Thomas came to a stop on the swing and climbed up the play set to where I was.

“You wanna play pirates?” he asked. I shook my head instead going and sitting at the top of the slide preparing to go down.

“Do you not like me or something?” Thomas asked looking a me with a confused look.

“Why would you think that?” I asked. Thomas pursed his lips for a moment.

“Cause you won't play with me, and you've been looking at me weird all day,” he finally said. Thomas was probably right about the weird looks, although I hadn't been doing it intentionally. It was true that I had been pushing him away though. It had nothing to do with him. Or well...you know. I had no ill will towards the four year old boy Tommy that stood in front of me. I knew we were probably more similar now than we had ever been. Both of us powerless to resist are childish needs and emotions. I would be a hypocrite if I tried to justify my coldness down to no longer seeing Thomas in front of me. It was me, I couldn't face him without feeling a large knot of guilt in my chest. Somewhere deep down I somehow knew that if I could talk to Thomas not Tommy he would tell me not to blame myself. That wasn't a possibility though.

“I'm not mad at you or nuthin, its just something happened and you changed and –“ I said.

“I know,” Thomas said crouching next to me.

“You know?” I said as my mouth hung open.

“Yeah,” Thomas said in a whisper as if he didn't want to admit it.

“So you know that we were adults and that Davis isn't our Daddy?”

“I guess,” Thomas said. I smiled, I couldn't believe it. Davis's magic hadn't worked.

“This is great,” I said. “I thought he had messed you up or something. Erased your memories or something. We can still escape.”

“I don't want too,” Thomas said. “That was really scary what we did today. I don't even know why I went with you. I don't want to leave Daddy.” I did a double take from the whiplash of my thoughts. What was he saying?

“Why not? You know he's not our real Dad, we used to be adults,” I sputtered. Thomas merely shrugged.

“I just don't want to leave,” Thomas said. “All my stuff is here, and I wouldn't be able to go to preschool and play with my friends or see Ms. Kendall. I don't want to leave Daddy either. I could never hug him or play with him again. I don't want to leave him that would be really sad.”

I stared at Thomas for a moment. It finally dawned on me exactly what Davis had meant when he had explained to me what he had done. I knew exactly what Thomas was talking about. Davis hadn't brainwashed him. Thomas knew what I knew but he was now feeling the same feelings I often did, but they were probably magnitudes stronger than mine. The childish emotions were overpowering his mind, his adult desires couldn't compete. I was seeing what I would eventually become, this is what Davis had envisioned when he had said we would naturally acclimate. It wasn't that we would forget the past. We just wouldn't care any longer. We would want Davis to be our Daddy, we wouldn't want to run away. We would someday just accept that we were happier here. We wouldn't want to return to our adult selves.

“Thomas I'm so sorry,” I said placing my hand on the side of his head. “If I could I would reverse this. Make you able to not have those feelings.” I said becoming a little choked up. Thomas blinked. I stopped talking noticing his eyes looked different.

“Charles.”

“Charles?” I repeated looking up at Thomas with a look of intrigue as I pulled my hand away. Thomas's face twisted up a little before he shook his head. “Thomas are you okay?” I asked.

“I'm fine, and quit calling me Thomas.”

I cocked my head. I looked down at my hand. It felt tingly. I put my hand back on the side of Thomas's head.

“What's your name?” I asked. Thomas pursed his lips for a moment.

“Its Thomas,” he said. “How are you doing this?”

“Doing what?” I asked.

“When you touch my head its like I think clearer,” Thomas said. “Like I don't feel like a little kid.”

“I think I have magic,” I said not really believing it myself. It was true though. This feeling was familiar, I had felt it when Thomas was getting spanked.

“Don't stop,” Thomas said. I nodded. I didn't care if I had to walk around for the rest of my life with my hand on Thomas's head.

“I'm sorry,” I said. “Its my fault this happened to you,” I said.

“Don't be stupid,” Thomas said. “This isn't your fault. I've been pushing Davis for years at this point.” Thomas then paused before he looked at me somewhat embarrassed. “Its really not that bad. Honestly its the least stressed out I've felt in awhile. Is this what you've been feeling like?”

“Yeah kind of,” I said. “But you're way worse.”

“You really don't have to remind me,” Thomas said smirking. “But you know its kind of okay,” Thomas said.

“Dude, you kissed him,” I said. “Like on the lips.”

Thomas rolled his eyes. “Like I said you don't need to remind me. I did'nt mean I'm okay with this just that I'm not

completely disgusted with how I'm acting in the moment."

"Yeah I suppose," I said. I really shouldn't have been bringing up the multitude of embarrassing things Thomas had done that afternoon.

"Charles are you okay?" Thomas then asked.

"Yeah sure," I said. "Now that I got you back."

"No, you look pale," he said.

"I do?" I asked. I noticed I was starting to feel a little woozy.

"Its the magic," Thomas said. "You're using too much maybe."

"I won't stop," I said. "I can't." Thomas then gave me a gentle smile.

"You're going to have to." he said putting his hand on mine getting ready to pull it away. "Its okay. Like I said. Its not that bad. I'll survive. Just promise me one thing," he said.

What?" I asked.

"Tommy really wants to play pirates with you," Thomas laughed. "Think you could humor the kid for a bit?"

"Yeah, sure," I said nodding. There were some tears in my eyes as I finally let my hand fall. I sat for a moment staring at Thomas.

"You're crying," Thomas said standing up. "I'll go get Daddy.

"No," I said getting to my feet wiping away my tears. "C'mon I thought we were playing pirates."

“Oh yeah,” Thomas smiled. Then that's what we did. We played pirates all afternoon. It was the most fun I'd have ever had with Thomas and possibly in my life. For once I didn't feel self conscious or hating myself for giving in to my childlike mindset. We were just two brothers playing without a single care in the world. I knew it was an afternoon I would treasure for the rest of my life.

Later that night after a bath and getting put in our pajamas I tried my magic again on Thomas.

“Charles you shouldn't be doing this,” Thomas said as I restored his old sense of self. “You should save it, you know.”

“Yeah I know,” I said. “I was just checking in, and making sure I could still do it.”

“I'm fine,” Thomas said. He didn't look like he was fan of me worrying about him. “Also thanks for playing pirates, that was fun.”

“Yeah, I had a good time too.” I smiled. Just then I heard Davis's footsteps approaching and I quickly pulled my hand away.

“So since nobody was able to check out new books at the library today we'll have to get something from the shelf,” Davis said going to the small collection of books on a shelf in the room. He gathered us together on my bed. He had an arm around both of us as he read from the book. I found the moment peaceful. I hadn't really thought about what the future was going to be, but instinctively I knew the plan had

drastically changed. It was going to take time though. I might as well get comfortable with my life for the moment.

Thomas fell asleep during the second story. Apparently I had done a good job tiring him out that afternoon. Although I was very sleepy myself. I watched as Davis carried him over to his own bed. His eyes closed and head rested on Davis's shoulder. He was going to be okay for the time being. I had magic now. We weren't just going to escape, no, I was going to find a way to untangle this whole mess. I was going to save the both of us. I needed to. Not just for myself but for Thomas as well. I was his only hope.

Chapter 5

My Brother's Keeper: Part Five - Chapter 5

Set up

It was a dreary afternoon as I walked along the sidewalk with Howie. We were on our way to Ms. Joanne's house after school. At seven years old we were trusted enough to walk the short distance from the school to the babysitter's house after school. I was wearing my rubber green frog raincoat and boots while Howie was decked out in a solid yellow set. We were jumping into big puddles that we found along the way.

“Hurry up,” Tommy called from ahead. He was wearing a blue raincoat and not joining me and Howie in jumping in the puddles. We jogged to catch up to him. “You guys and your puddles,” Thomas scoffed.

“Its fun,” Howie said a little defensively.

“You have boots on, jump in one,” I said.

“I don't want to get my pants dirty,” Thomas said lifting up his leg to show the white pants of the karate gi he wore underneath. We had gotten done with our after school clubs. Thomas did karate while Howie and I had elected the computer club. I had chosen it because it had advertised that it taught coding. I figured I might pick up something since coding had been one of my weaker areas as an adult. The educational content seemed to be neblous at best as it taught

very rudimentary skills through a game. Its not like it mattered. I had pretty much forgotten everything I once knew about coding. It was still fun though.

“Whats the big deal?” Howie asked.

“My Daddy will get mad if he has to wash this thing every night,” Thomas scoffed. “Unlike you guys I have to wear this for my club.”

“He's gonna wash it anyways,” I smirked.

“Can we just hurry up,” Thomas said crossing his arms. “I gotta go to the bathroom.”

“Yeah, okay,” I conceded. We walked the rest of the way to Ms. Joannes house. We walked up to the small house and walked into the front door. We were greeted by Ms. Joanne a elderly lady who had been watching us since we were little kids.

“I see two boys who decided to get soaking wet on the way back,” she said smirking as she put a hand on her hip looking at me and Howie.

“S-sorry,” I stammered a little. Thomas kicked off his boots as he darted off towards the bathroom leaving me and Howie.

“You two take off your socks and pants and I'll throw them in the dryer. Howie and I complied as we took off our wet clothes and handed them to the older woman. “There's a snack in the living room she called out as she walked off to put our stuff in the dryer. Howie and I made our way to the

living room finding some cookies set out on a plate. We took a seat on the floor in front of tv to eat. Thomas came in a little later smirking as he saw us in just our shirts and underwear.

“Yet another reason why I didn't jump in puddles,” he said with a haughty tone.

“Not a big deal,” I shrugged, not having a shred embarrassment as I sat in my pokemon undies with pikachu on the butt.

“Yeah,” Howie said leaning back as if he was showing off his shark undies. “You're the only one in pants, so like you're the weird one,” he said chuckling. Thomas shook his head as he sat down digging into his own portion of the snack as we watched cartoons on the tv.

Honestly life was pretty good. The rigors of second grade were nothing compared to the life of a working adult. That isn't to say I still didn't have any desire to get back to my old life, if anything I was eager to do it, but some things took time. Its not as if I hadn't been doing anything in that regard either, in fact I had been working hard, and I had certainly had some triumphs.

I could feel it with every year that my magic increased. There had been some breakthroughs in that area as well. I had gotten frustrated with trying to figure out how this magic worked. Its not something I could talk to Davis about. I was pretty sure he had no idea I even possessed magic. Davis had turned me and Thomas into his biological children. I

sometimes wondered why no one seemed to question this. Our appearance hadn't changed. We didn't look like him and even as brothers we didn't look alike. I just chalked it up to being a side affect of the magic, that being that no one questioned it. I guess I was lucky that Davis had made us his bio kids. He probably hadn't thought that by doing that it also meant we inherited his ability to use magic. I had magic, which I needed to change us back, but I also needed to learn how to use it. It was a good thing I had found that book.

I had stumbled upon it one day while sneaking around Davis's office. The one room in the house that he didn't let us in. He had forgotten to lock the door one day a couple of years back and I had seized the opportunity to snoop. It was a normal office for the most part. The weirdest thing about the fact that he had a dedicated office was that I never saw him use it. If he worked from home he was usually set up in the kitchen or living room. I had looked around being extra careful feeling that if I made too much noise I would have set off some alarm or something.

There had been a desk some framed photo on the wall that looked to be some abstract art that would have been hung up in a waiting room at some drab office. There was also three bookshelves taking up one of the walls. I had gone and looked at the books. Being barely six years old at the time my reading comprehension hadn't been great. What little I did manage to decipher showed the bookshelf to be populated with technical manuals which I recognized, some self help books, and some crime thrillers. One book had stood out to

me. It had been different than all the rest. It was leather bound and looked worn. I took it off the shelf and opened it up. At first the symbols had looked even more alien than the letters of the alphabet. I had wondered if it was written in a different language. Then suddenly the symbols began to rearrange themselves. It still didn't look like anything I could read but to my astonishment I could actually understand what they had meant. I knew my magic was allowing me to read this book. I quickly hightailed it out of the room and hid the book in my room. That book had become my obsession.

At first I thought I had stumbled upon a spell book that would teach me how to cast spells. Upon further reading under my covers at night with a flashlight I discovered there was no such thing. The book itself was somewhat instructional but pertained mostly to exercises to increase one's own awareness of their magic. To someone like me who thrived on understanding systems and how they connected and worked this was frustrating. There didn't seem to be any sort of logic to this magic. Most of it seemed to come down to willpower and desire. To find that this was all based on feeling had sent me for a loop. It was just so typical for how things seemed to be going for me these days. The more I thought on it though the more I came around to the idea. I just had to keep my desire intact until it was time to make a move.

As I finished up my snack Howie grabbed the beyblade arena Ms. Joanne had. The three of us proceeded to spend the rest of the afternoon battling it out with the tops. The doorbell rang as Ms. Joanne let Davis in.

“Tommy, Charlie, Dad is here,” she said. Thomas ran over to him leaping into his arms as Davis lifted him up giving him a big hug.

“How was karate sport? Learn how to break the boards yet?” Davis asked.

“Not yet,” Thomas said with a frown. Davis then looked at me standing in just my t-shirt and underwear as he cocked his head a little.

“Stomping in those puddles again Charlie?” he chuckled.

“Only a couple,” I said sounding all innocent.

“Yeah right,” Thomas said. “You jumped in every single one.”

“Now, now Tommy.” Davis said patting his bottom a couple of times. “Nobody likes a tattletale.”

“Here's your pants sweetheart,” Ms. Joanne said handing me my jeans. I got them on quickly and soon enough we were back home. Dinner that night was some pizza that Davis had picked up on the way home. I ate like three pieces while Thomas scarfed down four. He was always hungry on the days he had karate after school.

“Tommy you really need to eat your crust,” Davis tutted noting the pile on his plate.

“There the worst part though, plus they're really chewy.” Thomas said.

“You've always had a problem with the crust,” Davis

chuckled.

“I know one way to solve my problem,” Thomas then said with a glint in his eye.

“Oh yeah, whats that?” Davis asked.

“Well if we had a dog, then I could just feed them to him,” Thomas said with smile. Davis sat back in

his chair.

“Here we go with the dog again,” he sighed.

“Oh c'mon Dad. Me and Charlie would take care of it and everything, right?” Thomas asked looking at me for support.

“A dog would be cool,” I said as I shrugged my shoulders. I kind of wanted one too if I was being honest.

“It would be a big responsibility,” Davis said.

“I would take it for a walk every day, and I would feed it too,” Thomas said. “And Charlie would pick up the poop in the yard.”

“Hey,” I yelped. “Why am I on poop duty?”

“I figured you're good at all that cleaning and organizing stuff,” Thomas reasoned. It was true. The only reason are room wasn't a total sty is because I actually picked up after the both of us.

“Still doesn't mean I want to clean up dog poop,” I said.

“You boys are getting older,” Davis said sitting back in his

chair. “Maybe I could think about it.”

“So we're getting a dog?” Thomas said sitting up in his chair on his knees.

“I said I would think about it,” Davis said. “Right now though its time for homework.” I went and grabbed my backpack off the hook near the door along with Thomas. “You guys have math homework tonight?” Davis asked.

“We always have math homework,” Thomas grumbled. I nodded. I didn't remember anything about what kind of homework I got when I had been in second grade the first time around, but it was true that without fail we always had math homework.

Getting up to our room Thomas set his bag on his bed with the race car themed bedspread, emptying out the contents. I had space themed ones. The pastel blue walls had been painted over with a dark green long ago but the clouds on the ceiling remained as the only reminder of when this room had been our nursery. The walls were also now adorned with posters befitting the taste of two seven year olds. In the corner though was the best thing ever.

Davis, last year had bought us a teepee which the two of us could fit in together. He never climbed in it though. It was too small, which was perfect. It was our secret little hideout. I brought my backpack with me as I crawled into the teepee taking a seat at the back laying back comfortably on the myriad of soft pillows and stuffies that were inside. The childish emotions seeped out of me, leaving me clear headed.

Thomas crawled in taking a seat across from me. I watched as he breathed out a sigh of relief.

“Ahh man does it feel good to get in here after a long day.” he said. I smirked.

“Lets get this homework done quick,” I said pulling out the worksheet from my folder.

I hadn't just been sitting around for the last two years no sir. If I was going to get us back to normal I would have to practice my magic and this teepee was my crowning achievement. I had managed to enchant it. Whenever we were inside we could be the adults we truly were. Any thoughts of little kids were gone, we were Charles and Thomas – at least mentally speaking.

Thomas and I went about filling out the math worksheets. With our adult minds fully entact within the tent it was more tedious than anything. Although we were both careful to make sure we purposefully marked a few wrong – didn't want anyone getting suspicious.

“Gah I hate having to show work,” Thomas grimaced as he shook his hand out a little. “I can do twenty plus fifty in my head, but no, got to draw it out with number groups.”

I finished my work as I went and got it packed away in my backpack. Thomas was close to being done as well, going over his worksheet to make sure it looked convincing enough. I pulled a book out of my backpack and began flipping through it. After homework me and Thomas would just hang

out in the tent for a bit. Shooting the shit as adults was a welcome reprieve.

“What are you reading?” Thomas asked.

“The book I checked out during library today,” I said holding it up.

“True Tales of Alien Encounters,” Thomas said reading off the title with a scrunched up face. “Why do you read shit like that?”

“I don't know, I think its interesting,” I said shrugging my shoulders.

“Aliens aren't even real,” Thomas scoffed.

“Really,” I said raising an eyebrow. “You can't possibly sit here and tell me you don't even consider it a possibility.”

“I don't.” Thomas said rolling his eyes. “I mean at least not like in that book. Maybe there are micro-organisms out there, but intelligent life, that's science fiction.”

“You would have said the same thing about magic,” I countered. I wasn't bothered about Thomas's position, although I had never known him to have such a strong opinion before.

“I have evidence of magic,” Thomas replied. “There is no evidence of aliens.”

“Oh I never knew you were such an empiricist,” I said with a snicker.

“Tell you what, tomorrow I'll make you a nice tin-foil hat in art class,” Thomas said. We both laughed, I reached over giving Thomas a light hit to his arm.

“Easy,” Thomas said wincing.

“Oh sorry,” I said. “I didn't mean to hit you so hard.”

“You didn't, its this,” Thomas said rolling up the sleeve of his gi to reveal a couple of bruises. “Tommy had to spar with Joseph in class today.”

“That kid still picking on you?” I said wearily shaking my head.

“When I'm an adult again I swear I'm going to get my revenge,” Thomas said.

“What? Going to beat up a kid?” I asked with a unconvinced look.

“No,” Thomas chortled.

“Maybe Tommy should use a little magic?” I said with a devious smirk.

“I would if I could,” Thomas said. The thing was Thomas had magic, same as me. Its just when he was Tommy he couldn't seem to use it. Of course I had never told him straight up about it. With Tommy I had to be careful. If he realized he might tell Davis and that would be bad. I tried my best to try and lead Tommy on. I think the problem was that not telling him he had magic made it impossible to use. You had to have intentional thoughts I guess. I had worried when I had first

enchanted the tent that Tommy was going to spill the beans. Yet it seemed once Thomas left the teepee he didn't have any memory of what we talked about. It was a nice feature but frustrating still because it just proved I still didn't know how all this worked. We heard the door to our room open. The sound of footsteps approached our teepee.

“What time is is?” Thomas whispered. I uncovered the digital clock that we kept in the teepee showing the time being eight o'clock. Thomas rolled his eyes. Just then two hands came in through the opening grabbing Thomas by his torso and pulling him out. The sounds of shrieks and giggles filled the air. I crawled towards the opening poking my head out to see Thomas laid flat on his back laughing as Davis tickled him. I crawled out and got to my feet as I watched.

“Daddy no more,” Thomas squeaked as Davis got to his feet with a smile.

“Alright, but its time to get ready for bed,” Davis said. Thomas and I made our way to the bathroom to brush our teeth. We took some time to see who could spit the most into the sink before returning to our room where Davis had our pajamas set out on our respective beds. I went to my pile seeing the Spiderman themed Goodnite on top of my pile. I grimaced a little as I took off my clothes. I knew for a fact that I had not been a bed wetter when I had been an actual kid. It was downright maddening as to why I now was.

“Any request for bedtime stories?” Davis asked sitting on the ground as he scrolled on his phone. My ears perked up.

“I got one,” I said as I rushed over to the teepee in just my pull-up. I retrieved the book I had gotten at the library bringing it over to Davis. “Lets read this,” I said presenting the book to him.

“Lets see it,” Davis said grabbing me so that I was sat in his lap. “True Life Alien Encounters eh,” Davis said smirking.

“We are not reading that,” Thomas said as he came over to stand above me and Davis in his tightie whiteys. Of which I think he only wore to rub my nose in the fact that I still wet the bed. I tried to not let it get to me when Thomas acted like a total child. However he was not above teasing me about this and it did in fact bother me.

“Why not,” I said feeling just a tad bit indignant.

“Because that stuff is stupid,” Thomas said. I smirked. I could see that Thomas's distaste for aliens was not a completely adult opinion. It was kind of funny to me seeing it manifest in his child self.

“It is not,” I said. “You're just scared it will give you nightmares.” I said not able to hold myself back.

Like I said, I did kind of find this funny.

“I'm not scared,” Thomas said furrowing his brow. “Aliens aren't real so I wouldn't have nightmares. Only babies believe that kind of stuff.” I pursed my lips I could almost tell what he was going to say next. “Which you must be since you're wearing a diaper.” Thomas sneered.

My face went a little red. Suddenly I felt very small in Davis's lap as I squirmed a little causing my pull-up to crinkle a little almost like it was adding extra oomph to Thomas's insult.

“Hey,” Davis said giving Thomas a light swat to his butt before he pointed a finger at Thomas.

“Tommy I know I've told you numerous times not to tease your brother. Now say you're sorry.”

“Sorry,” Thomas huffed as he stepped away.

“Charlie is not a baby,” Davis said as he wrapped his arms around me a little tighter. “And you know by this weekend he is going to be your big brother.”

I saw Thomas scowl. I guess I shouldn't have been totally surprised by Thomas going extra hard on teasing me. He did get a little insecure every year around this time. Come Saturday I would be older than him for the next three weeks until his birthday.

It was a technicality if anything, I wasn't actually older than him, but that didn't stop some joking around from Davis or other adults. I might even join in a little too. Thomas had given his blessing in the teepee at one point. He thought it was good to teach Tommy some humility or whatever. Sometimes it seemed like Thomas was raising Tommy himself. Thomas seemed to have made a distinction between himself and Tommy. I didn't share that opinion. I was Charlie and he was me.

“Speaking of birthdays,” Davis said. “I haven't heard anything about that from you. Are we doing a party? Should we get invitations sent out to your friends.” I really didn't want a big party, my mind would be on other things that day anyways. Birthdays were a significant time of the year for me.

Every year I could feel my proverbial tank for gathered magic grow. Magic gathered slowly. The book had some exercises, mostly meditation practices to gather it more quickly. It was still a slow process. I just wondered if I would have enough to do what I needed to. Part of me wanted to wait. I estimated by the time I turned ten I would probably have more than enough. The only problem was I simply couldn't wait that long. Every year that passed I was becoming more like Thomas and my desire to end this charade was faltering. In the past I would focus on my wife bringing the image of her smiling face up in my thoughts. Now I could barely remember what she looked like. Her face was blurry in my memories. If I was being brutally honest with myself I probably wouldn't make it halfway to my ninth birthday, I would lose my desire and become content to stay a kid. This was the year I had to act.

“I don't really want a party,” I said shaking my head.

“Really,” Davis said. “We gotta do something, you don't turn eight everyday you know.” I thought a little on it for a moment.

“Well maybe we could go to Kart Krazy,” I said. It was a local go kart and mini-golf spot. I had been to more than one

birthday party there and it was fun enough.

“That sounds cool,” Davis said. “But you're sure you don't want to invite any friends, not even Howie?” I shook my head again. Birthdays always made me feel at odds with myself. It seemed to be the one day when I really could feel my emotions at odds with one another. I didn't want to risk being flippant towards Howie.

“You and Tommy are good enough,” I said.

“You should invite people,” Thomas said getting on his pajama shirt that had a generic looking game controller on it with the words 'I Game in My Sleep' across the top. “You'll get more presents that way.”

“Tommy has a point,” Davis chuckled. “A greedy one, but he isn't wrong. You know you haven't even told me what you want.” I winced a little. What I really wanted Davis would never give me, not that I would ask for that. Another idea then came to me.

“Actually I want a bike,” I said.

“A bike, whats the matter with the one you got?” Davis asked. What wasn't wrong with it? The bike in the garage I had gotten when I was five. It was super kiddie too.

“I want to ride my bike to school but kids would make fun of me if I rode mine,” I said. “I want a real bike, not one for little kids.”

“I see,” Davis said. “We'll have to see I guess. But its getting

late so get your jammies on." Davis said releasing me from his arms. I got up putting on my Pokemon pajamas before getting into bed.

"Okay lets start reading this tonight," Davis said holding up a chapter book that was clearly meant for younger kids starting to venture away from picture books.

"But what about the alien book?" I whined a little. I was a second too late to catch myself from complaining.

"Charlie, we are going to read something that everyone can agree on okey dokey." Davis said. I laid back in my bed with a sigh. I caught Thomas looking just a little relieved out of the corner of my eye. I began to wonder if the alien thing did actually scare him?

The week plodded on until it was Friday. My birthday was tomorrow and I was caught between my adult self feeling anxious and wondering if the expansion of my magic would be enough and my child self who was excited by the prospect of presents and being the center of attention. Thomas was away that night. He had been invited over to a sleepover and surprisingly Davis had agreed. I guess he thought we were old enough now to handle a night away from home. Although he had given Thomas a little pep talk before dropping him off no doubt picking up on some nerves emanating from him. It dawned on me that this was the first night we would not be sleeping in the same room. It was kind of nice I guessed to get dressed for bed that night and not have to feel self conscious about my night-time protection in front of Thomas.

I got into my bed grabbing my alien book and picked up where I left off. I could have read in the teepee, but the book was meant more for kids and I was getting more enjoyment out of it this way. There was a knock on my door later as Davis poked his head in.

“Charlie, bedtime,” he said.

“Aww c'mon Dad can't I stay up a bit longer?” I begged.

“No shot kiddo,” Davis said walking into the room. “Its already late, and you need your energy for tomorrow.”Davis took my book and closed it before setting it off to the side as she took a seat on the bed. He tucked me in before brushing my bangs off to the side. “I can't believe you are about to be eight, where in the world does the time go? It feels like it was just yesterday I was changing your diaper.”

“Daddy, seriously,” I mewled as my face went a little red. Davis merely chuckled in response.

“You sure you're going to be okay tonight?” Davis then asked.

“Why wouldn't I?” I scoffed.

“You know, this is the first time you and your brother have slept away from each other,” Davis said. I didn't really think it was a big deal. I wasn't nervous about it or anything. I just hoped Thomas was having a good time.

“I hope Tommy is having fun,” I said.

“He is,” Davis said. “I actually just talked to him on the phone to say goodnight. He's been having a blast.”

I smiled. “Good,” I said.

“Now close those eyes and get some sleep. Big day tomorrow.” Davis said before he gave me a kiss and shut off the lights. I closed my eyes as my thoughts wandered. If everything worked out this was going to be the last weeks of me being a kid, I had already decided that Thomas's birthday was the big day. I figured it would be a good birthday present. I still had problems to solve though.

That night I had a nightmare. I was an adult again. I was standing in a nursery, my wife was there as well. She was folding some baby clothes.

“Isn't this one cute?” she asked holding up a onesie.

“Yeah, too cute,” I chuckled.

“Great, I knew you would like it,” Kelly laughed. “It looks great on you.”

“Wha –“ I stammered in confusion before I realized I was now as small as a baby and I was wearing the onesie.

“Okay Charlie time for your nap,” Kelly said as she lifted me up and placed me in the crib.

“Wait Kelly, I'm not a baby,” I yelped. “Its me Charles, your husband.”

The door opened as Thomas came walking in.

“Getting the baby down for his nap?” Thomas asked.

“Yeah but he's a little fussy,” Kelly said putting a hand on her

hip.

“Don't worry little buddy,” Thomas said patting me on the head. “Your Mommy is just going out to find a guy for herself and maybe a Daddy for you. I won't let any jerks hit on her.”

“Thomas wait – “ I said before I found a pacifier being pushed into my mouth. I couldn't spit it out either.

“He was saying the funniest thing though,” Kelly laughed. “Telling me he was my husband. Have you ever heard such ridiculous thing. I can't be married to a baby!” They both laughed as they went to the door. Why were they leaving me? My hand was outstretched through the slats of the crib. The door shut as I screamed out.

“DON”T LEAVE,” I screamed as I jolted up in my bed. The soft sound of rain pattered against the window. Tears were rolling down my face as I was somewhere between trying to catch my breath and crying. The lights flicked on as Davis came rushing in.

“Charlie are you okay, I heard screaming.” I looked over at him not able to form words. He gave me a sympathetic smile as he came over to my bed and picked me up into his arms. “Did you have a bad dream?” he asked as he rubbed my back. I just nodded putting my face into his shoulder in a moment of weakness. “Just take some deep breaths,” Davis instructed as he carried me out of the room. He set me on the counter in the bathroom before filling up a paper cup with some water and giving it to me to drink. I gulped it down.

“Thanks,” I said wiping the last stray tear from my eye.

“That's what I'm here for,” Davis said. “So what was it bad dream, or the storm?”

“Dream,” I said. Davis didn't reply instead pulling my waistband back to see the puffy wet pull-up underneath.

“Might as well change that since you're up.” he suggested.

“I guess,” I said. Before I could even move to get off the counter I was already back in Davis's arms. He set me on the edge of my bed before he went to the dresser and grabbed a fresh pull-up and the package of wipes.

“Lay back,” he instructed.

“I got it,” I said, yet Davis just chuckled as he pushed me back gently on the bed.

“You've had quite the fright and its the middle of the night. So just let Daddy take care of you,” he said. I didn't protest as I felt my pants be removed and the wet pull-up be torn off, before Davis went int with a cold wipe. Here I was on the eve of turning eight year's old and I was getting wiped down like a baby, and considering the dream I had just had it wasn't making me feel better.

“There all nice and dry and ready to go back to sleep,” Davis said as he got the dry pull-up around my waist. I sat up with a sigh and a gloomy expression. Davis picked me up again. “I have an idea,” he said sounding enthused. “Since Tommy is at a sleepover lets have one of our own.” I looked at Davis

quizzically before I found myself being carried down the hall. I was plopped into Davis bed in just my shirt and pull-up as he laid down next to me. He pulled me close laying my head on his chest as he stroked my hair. My midnight outburst had seemed to flip Davis's coddling instincts into overdrive.

“Daddy, I'm okay,” I said. “I can sleep in my own bed.” Truly I wasn't. My heart was still beating fast.

“Nonsense,” Davis said. “You can sleep in Daddy's big comfy bed tonight, this way you won't have to worry about anymore bad dreams. Speaking of which what was your dream about?”

“N-nothing,” I mumbled.

“Certainly didn't sound like nothing.” Davis said. I let out another sigh.

“I was alone, everybody left me,” I said before stopping. If I kept talking about it I felt like I would burst into tears again.

“That would be scary,” Davis said in a reassuring way. Yet I didn't feel it. He was talking to me like a little kid and I could only hear it as condescending at the moment. “You don't have to worry about that though. You'll always have Tommy and I.”

I didn't respond. I wasn't scared of being alone. My mind was already analyzing the dream trying to find the meaning behind it, trying to see why my brain had decided to concoct that little number for me to experience. It probably had something to do with doubt for what I was planning. The two people in my dream had been the ones I was doing this all for. Thomas and my wife. Maybe deep down I felt like I was

failing them. Was that guilt? Possibly. Maybe I felt guilty because they were depending on me whether they knew it or not, I wasn't doing enough. I had let myself fall into my childlike mindset without a hint of resistance one too many times. Even now I was doing it. Did I really deserve to be an adult again? Maybe I was better off like this? Would it really be such a bad life? Maybe I wanted this more than I was admitting to myself.

“You're right,” I said chasing my thoughts away. “I'm not alone, it was stupid to be scared.”

“Hang on now, I didn't say that,” Davis said. “Being alone can be scary. Nobody wants to be lonely.”

“Well I don't want to be scared of that,” I said. Davis now had a hand on my back cuddling me closer as he kept stroking my hair.

“You know growing up I was pretty lonely,” Davis said sounding as if he were reminiscing.

“Really?” I said. I was somewhat curious. I knew very little of Davis's past. He never really talked about it. I just assumed there wasn't much to talk about.

“Sure, you know I always felt like I could never be truthful with people. I could never be my true self. I always had secrets that I couldn't tell other people.”

“Like magical powers?”

“Yes, like magical powers,” Davis said chuckling. I didn't

really understand that sentiment. I had magic powers and I had no problem making friends.

“But your Aunt knew right?” I then asked. Davis looked down at me for a moment with a surprised look.

“How did you know I lived with my Aunt?” he asked.

“You told me,” I said. Davis then gave a sort of shrug.

“Guess I did. Sure she knew but she wasn't exactly a good person to talk too. She was old. Kind of strict too.”

“What about your parents though?” I asked.

“Didn't know them,” Davis said quietly. “They died when I was very little.” I was silent for a moment before Davis started back up. “But that's all in the past. None of us have to worry about being lonely. We're family buddy, we'll always have each other. Now its late close your eyes and try to get some sleep.” Davis released me as I rolled over onto my stomach. “Night buddy love you,” Davis said kissing me on the forehead.

“Love you too,” I said. The thing was I kind of meant it. I don't really know when it happened. I knew I should hate Davis with every fiber of my being. Yet I couldn't. Maybe I was suffering from stockholm syndrome or something. Whatever I had to tell myself to feel better about it I guess. After everything Davis had just told me, I couldn't fault him in his desire to have a family. I could see why it would appeal to him. I could still fault him for how he had achieved it though. That was the messed up part. Possibly the worst part

is I was starting to understand why he had done it. If you had the power to get what you wanted in just the way you wanted it, wouldn't you use it? As far as Davis knew, Me and Thomas were perfectly happy as his little boys. He had no idea what I was planning. Each day that passed thought I doubted myself more. I began to worry that things were going to work out perfectly for Davis, which meant Charlie was here to stay.

Upon waking up the next morning I was greeted in the kitchen by Davis who had made my favorite breakfast. Homemade chocolate chip waffles and bacon. After getting dressed Davis took me out to the garage where I found a brand new red bicycle with a bow on it. I let out cheer rushing up to my new bike sitting on it as I tried out the handbrakes.

“Guess you like it,” Davis said.

“I love it!” I exclaimed. Davis then let me ride it over to Thomas's friends house to pick him up. Thomas had apparently had a good time and was already trying to organize another sleepover with his friend this time at our house on his birthday. Davis didn't seem to enthused by the idea but left it at a we'll see. I was hoping that his response was a soft no instead of actually entertaining the idea. It would only complicate what I was going to have to do come Thomas's birthday. The less people around the better. As things stood Thomas was going to be my biggest obstacle. I needed his help, the only question was how was I going to get him to do something he didn't want to?

After lunch we got into the car and arrived at Kart Krazy. I was none too pleased when Davis affixed a large button to my shirt that denoted that it was my birthday, which meant there was no shortage of staff and strangers alike congratulating me. I did not like the attention. Still I couldn't really complain as the rest of the day was spent riding go karts and then going for a round of mini-golf culminating in some pizza and birthday cake. Afterwards me and Thomas found ourselves free to wander around the arcade with two cups full of tokens while Davis sat at the table reading through some newspaper. He had shooed us off telling us that we had tuckered him out. After some games I spotted a shooting game that sported two large mounted machine guns inside of an enclosed cab.

“Lets play that one,” I shouted excitedly over the loud noises of the arcade.

“Looks cool,” Thomas said. We entered into the darkened cab. The game had some sort of warning that said this was supposed to be a scary game meant for a mature audience.

“Maybe we shouldn't play this,” Thomas said.

“How scary could it be?” I asked with a smirk. “We got these giant guns.”

“Well okay, I guess your right,” Thomas said furrowing his brow. The game started. It was pretty hokey as far as I was concerned. We were soldiers that had been deployed to a secret laboratory where something had gone wrong. Nothing had happened yet as we moved down the corridor. All of a sudden a vent popped out of the ceiling and a second later a

green alien with giant black eyes and razor sharp teeth was right up in our faces. We both screamed. Mine was out of surprise and I immediately lit the alien up with my gun. Thomas's though was far different as he made a quick exit out of the cab. I looked over a little confused. I got up abandoning the game and came out to find Thomas standing in a corner with his back to the rest of the arcade.

“Hey Tommy,” I said putting a hand on his shoulder as I went to pull him back.

“Leave me alone,” Thomas said shirking off my hand. I looked at him confused, what was his deal? Sure it had been surprising but he was overreacting.

“C'mon it wasn't that scary.” I laughed a little.

“I didn't say it was scary,” Thomas yelled back before his voice fell a little. “It was stupid, really stupid.” I stood for a moment. I could hear it in his voice. He was actually close to crying. I shook my cup of coins a little feeling just a tad bit awkward for a moment. Even in the state he was now, childish displays like this were indeed still rare for Thomas. He did after all try to put forth a tough guy attitude.

“Hey wanna go play the motorcycle game,” I asked pointing off to the distance. Thomas turned around after a moment. His eyes were a little watery as he wiped them.

“Uh sure, that one looks cool,” he quickly walked off. It finally dawned on me that Thomas's aversion to aliens wasn't out of distaste or even a minor fear. He was terrified of them.

I smirked as I watched him walk off. I felt a little bad for Thomas as the thought played across my head. But these were truly desperate times. I knew I was going to use that.

Chapter 6

My Brother's Keeper Part 6 - Chapter 6

Gardening

I was laid out on my stomach on the living room floor as the tv was blaring some cartoons. I was shirtless as I had some lego that I had received for my birthday in front of me. I was very much enjoying my time. Saturday mornings just hit different when you are a kid. I snapped the last block onto my spaceship. I sat up with a smile admiring my work. It had taken me nearly a week and half to finish it. I flew it through the air a little bit making the accompanying noises of thrusters.

“CHARLIE,” I heard Davis shout as I turned around to see him standing in the living room. “TURN THAT TV DOWN,” he shouted, though he didn't look angry. I quickly grabbed the remote and muted the tv. “You're going to go deaf you know,” Davis said adopting a quieter voice.

“Sorry,” I said, before I held up my spaceship. “Look Dad I'm done,” Davis smiled a little as he walked over taking the ship out of my hand.

“Pretty cool kiddo,” Davis said as he turned it around in his hand before handing it back to me.

“What are you going to do with it now?”

“I'm going to take it up to my room to join the armada, there's going to be a huge war soon,” I said having decided how the rest of my morning was going to be spent.

“The war will have to wait,” Davis said. “Go put it in your room, put on a shirt and then meet me back in the kitchen. I need to have a talk with you boys.”

“I didn't do it,” I said quickly.

“Do what?” Davis said as he raised an eyebrow.

“I dunno,” I said. I really hadn't done anything so whatever it was it had to be Tommy's fault.

“No one's in trouble, its not that kind of talk,” Davis laughed. “Now hurry up.” I went up to my room setting my ship among the others before pulling out a bright white shirt with a blue pocket and some stripy sleeves, before I made my way downstairs where Tommy was already sat in a chair facing Davis at the table where there was something covered by a sheet. I took a seat wondering what this could be about.

“Now that everybody is here,” Davis said before pulling away the sheet. “Ta-da,” he said. It was a poster board with me and Thomas's name at the top and then below our names was a list.

“What is it?” Thomas asked.

“Its a chore board,” Davis said.

“Chores,” Thomas said with a whine.

“That's right,” Davis said looking proud of his arts and crafts project. “You boys are at an age where you can start helping me out around here. Each week you'll have a list of chores to get done by Sunday. We'll switch the list up every week.”

“I shouldn't have to do chores,” Thomas said crossing his arms.

“And why is that?” Davis asked.

“You just said that we were old enough right? But Charlie is eight and I'm still seven. So only he should have to do chores, since he didn't have to do them when he was seven.” Thomas said finishing his argument by taking a big breath.

“Tommy, your birthday is next week. So you can get an early start,” Davis said. “Plus I haven't even told you the best part.” Thomas and I sat forward a little in our chairs.

“If you get all your chores done, you'll get your allowance.”

“How much?” I inquired.

“Ten bucks,” Davis nodded. “If you do all your chores.” I felt myself get excited at the prospect of ten dollars, before reminding myself that I used to make a lot more than that. “And just to get you guys going, you only have to do one job today,” Davis said. “Charlie I want you to go water the vegetable garden. Tommy you go gather up all the dirty laundry and bring it down to the laundry room.

“I want to do the watering,” Thomas protested.

“Next week it will be on your list,” Davis said. “But this

week you're on laundry detail.”

I got up from my seat ready to tackle my task feeling there was some justice to the assignment. Most of the dirty clothes on the floor of our room belonged to Thomas anyways. Getting out in the backyard I looked at the vegetable patch at the far side of the yard and the hose wrapped up in its holder on the back of the house. I could uncoil it but then I would have to wrap it back up which seemed like a lot of work. I then saw the watering can. I grabbed the can and took it over to the hose. I cranked on the hose and went to fill up the can. The stream of water came out faster than I was expecting and I lost control of it getting myself wet. It wasn't a big deal since it was warm outside anyways. There were three planters boxes full of all sorts of produce which in a month or two would be ready to harvest. I could only hope I wasn't still around to enjoy the fruits of my labor. It took me three trips from the vegetable patch back to the hose to get everything watered. I was also drenched by the end of it. Davis walked out with a smirk on his face seeing me standing with water dripping from hair.

“You were supposed to water the plants not yourself,” he laughed.

“I did water the plants,” I said. Davis walked out to the vegetable patch to survey my work.

“Looks like you did a good job squirt,” Davis smiled as he came walking back over to me. “Now why

don't you go and change into some dry clothes. Tommy still

hasn't brought down the dirty ones so hurry up so you can just add them to the hamper."

"Aye, aye, sir," I said with a salute as I ran into the house and up to my room. Coming in I saw Thomas laying on his bed reading a comic book.

"Laundry duty tough?" I smirked.

"Taking a break," Thomas said not even looking at me. I looked around seeing that Thomas had at least managed to get the clothes into the hamper. I got my clothes off finding that even my underwear was wet. I went to the dresser and grabbed a new pair with a yellow waistband and Yoshi from Super Mario Bros on the butt. I then noticed on my arm was a little red spot. It looked like some sort of bug bite. I looked over at Thomas. An idea then popped into my head. I was gardening that morning and now was the time to plant some seeds.

"Oh no," I said with panic in my voice.

"What," Thomas said lowering the comic book enough to look at me.

"Look at this," I said showing him the red spot on my bicep.

"Uh yeah okay," Thomas said cocking his head. "What about it?"

"This is bad," I said as I began to pace up and down the room. "Really bad."

"What?" Thomas asked finally putting down his book.

“I've been marked,” I said looking at Thomas.

“Marked?” Thomas asked raising an eyebrow.

“I read about it,” I said grabbing my alien book. I opened it up to a page that I had bookmarked. “It says right here,” I said showing Thomas the book. “The shifters are an alien race that can take on the appearance of humans. They observed us and then when they find a target they give them a mark for abduction or experimentation.”

“That ain't real,” Thomas said putting his comic book back up.

“Yeah it is,” I said pushing his book down. “You've heard the noises at nigh haven't you?”

“N-no,” Thomas stuttered. I had to hold back my smile, I could tell I had him.

“I hear them at night,” I said lowering my voice. “In fact last night I heard footsteps in the kitchen.”

“It was probably just Dad,” Thomas said.

“Nah,” I shook my head. “He was in his room, I heard him walk up the stairs before the footsteps in the kitchen.” Thomas put down his comic book as he went towards the door.

“Seriously shut up, I don't want to hear this. You're just trying to scare me.” I slammed the door shut before he could leave.

“Tommy you gotta help me. I don't want to get experimented on.”

“Charlie stop,” Thomas said backing away from me into a corner.

“They are already here, this is serious,” I said. I then put a finger to my mouth. “Shhhh, do you hear that?” I asked.

“H-Hear what?” Thomas quivered.

“That sound, its in the walls,” I said. Honestly there wasn't a sound but the power of suggestion was not to be discounted.

“STOP IT!” Thomas screeched before he started crying. I took a step back taken off guard by Thomas's reaction. I had only meant to put the idea in his head, but this reaction was great, at least for my objective. I had pushed his fear to such a level that he was responding with panic.

“What is going on in here?” Davis exclaimed as the door swung open. Thomas wasted no time barreling into Davis and hiding his face in his stomach as he continued to cry.

“C-C-Charlie wont stop,” Thomas wailed. “He keeps saying there are aliens out to get us and that they're in the walls.”

“Tommy, buddy you know that's not true,” Davis said calmly as he hugged Thomas.

“I told him I don't like it, but he won't stop,” Thomas blubbered. Davis gave me a stern look as he shook his head before he knelt down.

“Tommy take a deep breath and then go get a drink of water. I'll deal with Charlie okay?”

Thomas continued to cry but nodded his head all the same as he walked out of the room. Davis shut the door before turning to look at me.

“What in the world are you doing?” Davis then asked me.

“It was just a joke,” I said shrugging.

“No its not,” Davis said. “You know how Tommy is about that stuff. Picking on him until he starts crying is not a joke its bullying.”

“It was funny,” I said dismissively. Davis cocked an eyebrow before grabbing me by the arm and leading me over to a bed. A second later I was across his lap and he was pulling the back of my underwear down.

“Since you think bullying is so funny, lets see how funny it is when I bully this butt.” Davis said. I proceeded to get a spanking. I was proud of myself for not crying during it. I just laid there and took it like a champ. After my bottom had been thoroughly reddened I was sat up on my bed. “You're grounded until lunchtime,” Davis said. “And I'll be taking this too,” he said grabbing my alien book.

“No books, or toys or anything, also you can kiss your allowance this week goodbye. You will sit here and think about what you did.” Davis said before leaving the room. I got off the bed and went and got some pants and a shirt on. Honestly I wasn't the least bit bothered by this punishment. It was so totally worth it.

Lunchtime rolled around and I was freed from my grounding.

Sitting at the table Thomas didn't so much as look at me. It was fine that he was mad at me, I did deserve it after all. I had plenty of time to smooth things over. Davis sensing the tension made a move to lighten the mood.

“So Tommy your birthday is right around the corner, any ideas of what you want?” Davis asked. Thomas shrugged.

“He wants a dog,” I suggested. Thomas's face brightened up.

“Yeah, a dog,” Thomas said. Davis shook his head.

“A dog isn't really a birthday present,” Davis said. “If we got a dog we would make that decision as a family since it would belong to everyone.” Thomas frowned as he stared at the macaroni salad on his plate.

“I don't really mind if Tommy gets a dog for his birthday,” I then said. “He wants it more than me anyways,” I said shoveling some food into my mouth.

“Yeah so it would be more of gift for me anyways,” Thomas said.

“A dog is a big responsibility,” Davis said waving his hand. “I know you would take good care of it, but there are still things that you can't do yet, and who do you think that would fall on?”

“You,” Thomas said gloomily as his shoulders slumped.

“I got my hands full with you two already,” Davis then said as he reached over to muss up Thomas's hair. “But don't get all sad now, we'll figure something out later on.”

The day proceeded on from their. I left Thomas alone. I still had a space battle to play out up in my room anyways. Despite my great success that morning, I still didn't have a great plan on how to make those seeds bloom. That night though I was going to be given my chance.

Bedtime had rolled around and as I laid with my eyes closed I heard Thomas call out.

“Hey Charlie,” he said sounding like a church mouse.

“Yeah what?” I said.

“That stuff about aliens, you were just joking right? You were just making fun of me?” I opened my eyes. I was being put on the spot and I needed to proceed carefully.

“I wasn't trying to make fun of you,” I said.

“For real though,” Thomas said sitting up. “You don't really think there are aliens in the walls, right?”

“I'm not sure,” I said. “But if there were it wouldn't be a big deal.”

“What do you mean?”

“Well the shifters ain't that scary,” I said. “They have a certain weakness that makes them not that big of a threat.”

“Really, what?” Thomas asked sitting up. I licked my lips buying time. I needed to come up with something.

“You see, if you know they're a shapeshifter then you can control them with your mind,” I said.

“That's why they don't want you to find out what they really are. Its why they disguise themselves.”

“R-really, but how,” Thomas said.

“You just think really hard about it, that's all,” I said. Thomas laid back down in his bed.

“That easy huh?” Thomas said staring up at the ceiling.

“Yep, that easy,” I said.

***

It was Saturday night, the eve of Thomas's birthday. We were sat in the tent. Thomas was reading a newspaper during his adult time. Me? I was sitting cross legged thinking on things. I re-adjusted my sitting position hearing the crinkle of my pull-up. We had just taken baths and were in our pajamas. I didn't like coming into the tent being dressed for bed, but I needed some time to steel myself for the battle tomorrow. There was still a lot of uncertainty, and I didn't know if things were going to work out.

“You okay?” Thomas asked lowering his newspaper into his lap.

“Huh, yeah,” I said.

“You look like you got something on your mind,” Thomas said. I was silent for a moment before I looked up at Thomas.

“I'm doing it tomorrow,” I said. Thomas looked at me blinking a few times as if he hadn't understood what I said.

“You sure?” he said.

“Yeah, I'm ready.” I said.

“Whats the plan?” Thomas asked. I told him it, all of it. After I was done Thomas looked down. “I don't know, you're putting a lot of faith in me. I don't know if I can.”

“You will or you won't, there not a whole lot I can do anymore. This either works or it doesn't.”

“I'm not rushing you. Take all the time you need to come up with a plan,” Thomas said.

“I don't have time,” I replied. “If I don't do it now, I won't want too.” I couldn't lie anymore. Even now I was doubting if this was the best thing to do. I was having to fight more and more against the idea that I was better off this way. I was scared of losing my Daddy, scared of being an adult.

“So if this works looks like its our last night as brothers,” Thomas said taking on an optimistic tone. Neither of us wanting to talk about what happens if we failed.

“We're still going to be brothers,” I smirked. Thomas smiled back.

“Yeah, I guess there is no reversing that.” he laughed. We had been through so much together and somewhere along the way our bond had changed. It was a nice silver lining if anything.

***

It was the day of Thomas's birthday. I finished putting the

finishing touches on my present. It was perfectly wrapped. It had to look like an adult had done it. I was just happy that I had been at Howie's house for a playdate and had spotted this. He had given it to me no problem, since he didn't need it anymore. I just hoped this worked. That this was enough to spur Thomas into action. I walked down into the kitchen and put my present with the other two Davis had already set out on the counter. I then walked to the living room where Thomas was sat on the floor in front of the tv. I took a seat next to him.

“Happy birthday,” I said. Thomas looked at me and smiled with a nod.

“Bet you're bummed,” Thomas then said.

“Why would I be?” I asked.

“Because you're not the older brother anymore,” Thomas said smugly.

“You know that's only a joke, right?” I asked lilting my head. Thomas looked away planting his eyes back on the tv.

“Nobody can make that joke anymore,” he said.

“Until next year,” I snickered. Thomas shook his head not even looking at me.

“So want to tell me what I'm getting?” Thomas asked.

“How would I know,” I shrugged.

“Well maybe I got something Daddy couldn't keep a secret.”

Thomas said his voice rising with intrigue.

“Its not a dog if that's what you mean,” I laughed. Thomas frowned.

“You would tell me though, right? I mean if he got me a dog.”

“Probably,” I said. Thomas was setting me up perfectly and he did'nt even know it. “But you heard him, we're a handful for him already. I mean he would have to get rid of one of us first.” Thomas didn't look away from the screen, I continued on though, this was too good of a line. “You'd rather have me as a brother than a dog, wouldn't you?”

“Nah, I'd take the dog,” Thomas snickered.

“Oh,” I said looking into my lap as I hung my head looking as disappointed as I could.

“I-it was just a joke,” Thomas said noting my reaction. “Seriously Charlie you're more fun to play with than a dog.”

“Ok,” I said quietly.

“Are you seriously bothered or something?” Thomas asked.

“No, its just, its nothing, I'm just thinking about something,” I said.

“What?” Thomas asked. I fought back my smile. I had him!

“Nothing really just...a couple of nights ago I overheard Daddy talking about a dog and it got me kind of worried.”

“So he did get me a dog?” Thomas asked as his eyes widened.

“No, at least I don't think so,” I said. Thomas sat back down.

“Guess we'll know soon. Daddy said I could open gifts before lunch.” Almost as if on cue Davis came strutting into the living room saying it was time. As we got up to follow him to the kitchen I could only agree with Davis. It was certainly time.

Chapter 7

My Brother's Keeper: Part 7 - Chapter 7

This was an interesting difference from the other two stories of yours I've read. More along the lines of what I traditionally expect from an AR story and Davis being your typical AR controlling and humiliating villain. I appreciated though that you gave Davis SOME depth to him. The heart of the story that kept me coming back was of course the relationship between Thomas and Charles as they developed that brotherly bond as the story went along. I was especially glad that even after the magic spell was reversed (and then some) that Thomas and Charles kept their deep brotherly bond. I needed to read that for the ending to feel satisfying and was quite happy to find it there.

Though I will say there were opportunities where I thought things might have taken a turn for the worse... such as Ms. Kendall turning out to be Thomas' wife (once it was mentioned that his wife was a preschool employee, I was looking out for who she could be everywhere) and that's the true reason he was getting all emotional around her, was his adult longing to be with her mixing with his childish desire for motherly connection and love. And that it wasn't the "ruse" that Charlie thought it was, but Thomas teetering just as much as he was on the edge of giving in to the situation. And Thomas keeps the fact that Ms. Kendall is his former wife from Charles because he's ashamed to admit that his

"ruse" he's concocted and convinced Charles of, isn't working as well as he'd hoped and is in denial about it.

But this chapter takes all of that out of my head cannon.

I was also then expecting for Kelly to appear in Charles' life in some capacity as a toddler, causing him to at first falter but then pluck up his reserves to continue to find a way to get back to her as he sees the lonely life she's been condemned to without him in it or something like that.

But beyond some head cannon and some missed potential, the story was good.