One of the Family

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

One of the Family Part 1 - Chapter 1

It was a beautifully perfect late august day at the park. Tyler Kenner sat at the wooden table eating his meager lunch consisting of a peanut butter sandwich and a fun size bag of chips, the same meal which he had been eating for nearly every meal for the past week since it was all his budget would allow for. He looked out across the park towards a nearby playground which was populated with families of children enjoying the day of nice weather. Tyler wasn't really paying attention to much of anything as he was lost in thought thinking about where his next destination was going to be.

Tyler referred to himself as a virtual nomad. He traveled around the country looking for interesting things to write articles about and then he would try to sell those articles to other websites. While he was somewhat successful at it, having gotten his writing published more than a few times, the world of freelance writing did not pay well and he was still considered an amateur. As the twenty eight year old Tyler sat and ate his sandwich he found himself in a bit of dry patch. He hadn't sold anything for a couple of months and his money was running out. He needed a hit and fast, even forty bucks would do.

As his mind wandered, he looked over to the playground. He spied an older boy around ten or so standing by what appeared to be his younger siblings a boy and girl over by the playground. The kid had brown wavy hair and was wearing a

soccer jersey tucked into a pair of black athletic shorts. As Tyler watched the scene he saw the boy dutifully lead his younger siblings over onto the woodchips of the playground. Tyler began to concoct a backstory for the kid, something he often did when people watching. The kid seemed responsible. He probably got straight A's and all his teachers probably thought he had so much potential to do great things. Tyler found himself beginning to reminisce about himself at that age, he had been much the same way. His teachers and other adults were always going on about how smart he was and how he was sure to do great things. Tyler chuckled a little as he thought about his current life, if only they could see him now with all his success. The only person that wouldn't be surprised would be his Dad who had always been telling him to get his head out of the clouds and that if he wanted any success in his life he needed to buckle down and work hard. But that didn't suit Tyler no sir, he had wanted to be an artist, a free spirit. Tyler could only feel that he had squandered his own potential or perhaps he had been rebelling against something...perhaps success or rather his Dad's idea of success. Tyler shook himself away from the thoughts of his Dad and once again began trying to brainstorm something that would be a sure-fire hit that he could easily sell when a young woman came and sat next to him.

“Mind if I sit here?” she asked.

“No, go ahead,” Tyler said shaking himself out of his thoughts.

“Thanks all the other tables are are taken up by families and

I saw you here alone so I thought you wouldn't mind." The woman said with a disarming smile.

"I don't mind company," Tyler confirmed. He looked at this mystery woman as she opened a Tupperware container containing a salad and began to eat. She had red frizzy hair that was tied up into a bun and freckles all across her face and arms. She was wearing a white tank top and a knee length multicolored dress. Tyler was getting new age hippie vibes from her as he eyed the bangles that clanged together every time she moved her arms. He assumed that if he asked about chakras or star signs she would be able to tell him anything he wanted to know. They engaged in a bit of small talk about the nice weather and how well this park was up kept.

"Oh that's cute," Fiona said pointing out the kids that Tyler had noticed earlier. The little girl was climbing across the monkey bars as the oldest boy had her on his shoulders so that she could reach. The middle brother was on top of the monkey bars seemingly cheering her one from the top. The kids parents were close by as the Mom seemed to be telling the younger brother not to be on top of the monkey bars while their father was at a nearby table setting up lunch.

"They seem like a nice family don't they?" Fiona mused.

"Uh yeah, charming," Tyler said with a shrug.

"So you here all alone or you with family?" she asked.

"Just me," Tyler said. "I'm traveling right now, so I just

stopped off for lunch."

"Traveling, where ya headed?" the girl asked.

"No where in particular, I travel all over," Tyler explained. "My home is wherever I happen to park my car. I know its pretty strange."

"That's not strange at all, I do the same thing actually," the girl said with a grin. "I'm Fiona by the way," she said sticking out her hand.

"Tyler, Tyler Kenner."

"So Mr. Tyler Kenner what does a fellow wanderer do on his travels?" Fiona asked with a curious glance.

"Well I go all around looking for interesting places, events or people and then I write about it and try to sell it to websites," Tyler said.

"Does that pay well?" Fiona asked taking a glance at Tyler's meager lunch.

"It does not," Tyler said a little embarrassed. "I'm in a little bit of dry spell at the moment."

"That's just the ebb and flow of life I suppose," Fiona said. Tyler nodded with a grin. Even though they had only met a few minutes ago and had engaged in a bit of small talk Tyler found himself at ease around Fiona. She was cute for sure but she was also incredibly charming and easy to talk to. Having to admit to a near stranger about his financial situation would have made Tyler very self-conscious but with Fiona it felt like

their was no judgment coming from her at all, like she was an old trusted friend.

“What do your parents think about your profession?” Fiona asked as she took a big bite of a cucumber slice.

“I don't really know,” Tyler said with some hesitation. His parents wasn't something he liked to talk about, but he didn't really see the harm in it with this girl. “My Mom died when I was three and my Dad died when I was twenty three, right before I got out of college and started on this lifestyle.” Tyler said.

“Oh my gosh, I'm sorry to hear that,” Fiona said with a sympathetic look.

“Its fine,” Tyler said with a small smile and a wave of his hand. “I don't really remember a whole lot about my Mom to even know how she would have felt, but My dad on the other hand would not have approved. He was a military man so he was pretty straight laced and serious. It was all yes sir or no sir with him,” Tyler said. An awkward pause fell over the two as neither one really knew what to say to continue the conversation.

“What about you?” Tyler asked trying to lighten the mood. “How do you make your fortune on the road?”

“Well I don't know if I really should say,” Fiona said sheepishly.

“Hey now, I told you mine, you cant chicken out,” Tyler said with a grin.

“Okay, but only if you promise not to laugh,” Fiona said.

“Promise,” Tyler replied making an X across his heart.

“I'm a witch,” Fiona said watching Tyler intently to see his reaction.

“A witch?” Tyler said not sure if he had heard her correctly.

“Yep,” Fiona said awkwardly as she drummed her fingertips on the table.

“So like what, you go around making potions and casting curses?” Tyler said with some sarcasm.

“No not like that,” Fiona said. “I don't tell people fortunes or run around performing rituals. What I do is help people get attuned to the universe.”

Tyler raised an eyebrow he couldn't believe how spot on his assessment had been Fiona was definitely the new age hippie type of person he had thought she was when she sat down. Next she was going to start talking about aura's and special energies he guessed.

“So like how does that work,” Tyler asked, thinking there was no harm in humoring her.

“Well I just find myself put in contact with people that the universe wants to help and I help those people and the universe connect.” Fiona explained.

“Then what? I mean what does that mean? What does the universe exactly do?” Tyler asked

Fiona shrugged. “Its different for everybody I guess. The goal is happiness though.”

“So what does the universe get out of that, how does it decide who to help and who to not?” Tyler asked finding himself genuinely curious as he had never heard of this particular brand of new age wackiness before, it might just make for a fun article.

“I don't know, I'm just the middle man,” Fiona said with a smirk having relaxed a bit upon seeing that Tyler wasn't being dismissive of what she was saying.

“And that pays well?” Tyler asked.

“The universe shows its gratitude in many ways,” Fiona said in a serious tone.

“Did the universe tell you to come sit by me?” Tyler asked in a somewhat flirty tone.

“Maybe,” Fiona replied in a playful tone as she flashed him a mischievous smile. Tyler was now convinced Fiona would be perfect for his next article. She had all the right qualities. She was fun, quirky and had just the right amount of sass.

“You know maybe I'm starting to believe you,” Tyler said. “I think the universe did bring us together. I was trying to figure out what I should write for my next article and I think you would be perfect. Do you think I could interview you?”

“I don't know how well that would work,” Fiona said with some hesitation. “Its kind of hard to explain what I do with

just words.”

“Let me worry about that,” Tyler said. “I'll make sure people get what it is you do.” Fiona frowned for a second as she hemmed and hawed thinking of whether to agree or not.

“Maybe if I show you,” Fiona said. “I could cast a spell on you.”

“You want to cast a spell on me?” Tyler asked skeptically.

“If you're okay with it.” Fiona said bringing her bag onto the table and beginning to rummage through it.”

“Fine by me,” Tyler said with a shrug. He knew nothing was going to happen. Its not like he actually bought into all this universal magic mumbo jumbo. Fiona pulled out a white rose and plucked three petals off it.

“Okay give me your hand,” she instructed. Tyler placed an open hand into hers. His heart skipped a beat as it had been a while since he had some contact with another human much less a girl as cute as Fiona. He pushed those thoughts out of his head. What was he some love starved teenager? He was working right now anyways, he needed to be focused on the experience if he was going to be able to write about it later.

“I'm creating a conduit right now,” Fiona explained as she placed the three petals onto Tyler's hand in the shape of a triangle. “Now I just need you to relax, close your eyes and try to push all thoughts out of your head.” Tyler closed his eyes and felt Fiona close his hand around the petals.

“Don't worry you'll know what to do when the time comes,” Fiona said. “Oh and Tyler it was really nice to meet you, I hope you find what you are looking for.”

Tyler became suspicious at her last comment. Had this all been a ruse just to run away on him? He opened his eyes and saw that Fiona was no longer there. He looked around and saw no trace of her anywhere which was strange only a second had passed there was no way she would have been able to disappear out of sight that fast even her bag and salad bowl were gone. That's when Tyler noticed something was really different. The world seemed to be cast in some sort of pale blue light different from the sunny day it had been before. As he looked around he could see he was still in the park but to his shock all the people were frozen in place. He got up from the table in a state of panic as his head swirled. What the hell was going on here? As he looked around he felt compelled to walk over to the playground. As he wandered he could see everyone was where they had presumably been just a second ago. Kids were suspended in air on the swing set, a mother was frozen in place chasing after her toddler who had a look of pure glee plastered on his face. Even the birds flying in the sky were frozen.

Tyler couldn't comprehend what was going on. There was no way this was real. As he tried to reason he could only come to one conclusion, he had been drugged. But how? He hadn't eaten or drank anything the whole time Fiona had been sat at the table. Could it have been the flower petals? Was this like that zombie powder stuff he had heard about, that came from

a white flower, right? As Tyler's head swam with these questions he noticed something near the stairs of the playground. There on the ground was something that looked like a small spring of water bubbling up from the ground no higher than an inch or two. It was the only thing except for himself that was moving and making small burbling sounds. Every part of his being was telling him to touch it. As his hand got close the liquid shot up suddenly except it wasn't like water it was more of gel as it quickly encapsulated his body. Tyler went to scream and felt the gooey liquid fill his mouth and move down his throat and in a few second it felt like it had filled every corner of his insides from his head to his toes. Tyler couldn't breathe and was in a state of panic, thinking he was going to die. He closed his eyes and went to try and scream again before it all seemed to stop.

He was still standing and he could breathe again but he kept his eyes closed. He could feel the sun on his face again and hear the normal sounds of the park around him.

As he opened his eyes he was met with the sight of a little girl's face mere inches from his. Tyler yelped out of surprise and stumbled backwards falling flat on his butt.

“You okay Ty?” The little girl asked with a concerned look. Tyler looked around his eyes darting all over. He was still at the park in the spot close to where he had touched the weird watery goo. Everything seemed completely normal except for the fact that everything seemed way bigger to him now. Tyler looked down and noticed his feet in front of him, except they weren't his. They were way smaller and his shoes had

changed. Gone were his normal sneakers and now he was wearing two shoes that were colored green and blue with velcro tabs and the top of a trex head on the top of the shoes staring back at him. As his eyes moved up he could see that his body had also gotten way smaller. He stared down as he brought his hands in front of his face. What had once been big adult hands were now small and delicate looking if not a little pudgy. Tyler didn't believe they were his at first but found that he could move them as if they were as he opened and closed them. Tyler let out a yelp of surprise but instead of his normal adult voice all that came out was a high pitched squeak. Tyler covered his mouth with his hands as his eyes went wide. There was no way that had been him, how was this possible?

“C'mon, up up now Ty,” the girl said having moved behind him. She lifted him up to his feet somewhat clumsily. Tyler steadied himself and then noticed the clothes he was wearing. Just as with the shoes they were not what he had been wearing when he came to the park. Instead of his t-shirt and jeans he was now dressed in a pair of shortalls which where white with thin blue lines. He touched the denim fabric with his new hands feeling the material. He was hit with the sinking realization he wasn't hallucinating. Fiona had not been lying about having powers, it was real, she had changed him.

Chapter 2

One of the Family: Part 2 - Chapter 2

Tyler stood before the stairs leading up to the playground, the little girl he had met only moments ago standing in front of him.

“Ty don't you want to play?” she asked. Tyler took a step back wobbling a little on his new tiny legs. “Are ya scared?” the little girl asked. Tyler nodded his head. He was scared but not for the reasons this girl thought. “Don't be scared, your big sister is here,” she said looking rather proud. Tyler felt somewhat reassured by the comment for a second before realizing what she had said made no sense to him. What did she mean? He was an only child. As he looked at her standing in front of him she could be no older than six years old. She had chestnut brown hair that came down past her ears and then bobbed out at the ends. She wore a blue dress and a pair of tan shorts. The thing that struck Tyler though was even though he knew he had never talked to this girl before in his life he somehow still knew her name was Mallory, and deep down inside of himself he felt a certain sense of familiarity towards her as if she really were his older sister.

That couldn't be though, Tyler was twenty eight. He knew for certain that this little girl was not his older sister.

“You can hold my hand,” Mallory said outstretching her hand towards him. “We can go up and see Connor and Jace. Didn't you want to go by them?” Upon hearing the other two names

Tyler was overcome with a sense of desire to go to them. Those were his older brothers and he thought they were so cool and big, wherever they went he wanted to be right there with them. He took Mallory's hand feeling confident to take a step onto the stairs as long as she held his hand. They made their way up coming to a bridge that wobbled as you walked across it. Tyler spied two older boys standing in the middle of the bridge. The older one was the responsible looking kid he had noticed before wearing the soccer jersey. The other one Tyler presumed to be the younger brother looked to be around eight. He had short black hair that seemed to curl out a little at the ends. He had a serious demeanor to him as he saw the other kids approaching. Tyler bounded onto the bridge towards them barreling into the older of the two boys knowing him to be his eldest brother Connor, and wrapping his arms around the boys waist.

“Hey Ty you made it up,” Connor said with some enthusiasm.

“Great, the little kids are here,” the younger boy, Jace said with with a groan.

“I am not little,” Mallory said with some offense.

“Fine then, whats 405 minus 34?” Jace asked. Mallory scrunched up her face as if she were trying to figure it out before giving up.

“I don't know, I can't do big numbers yet,” she said a little disappointed.

“Yeah cause you're a baby,” Jace said mockingly. Connor

gave a look to his younger brother.

“Really?” Connor said looking at Jace. “What's five times six then?” Now it was Jace's turn to scrunch up his face into a sour expression.

“You know I don't know multiplication,” Jace grumbled.

“People aren't babies just because they don't know everything,” Connor stated. “If that was true that would make you a baby too.”

“Thirty-six,” Tyler piped up looking up at Connor. Jace and Mallory snickered thinking it was funny that their three year old little brother had tried to answer.

“Th-Thats right,” Connor said with a shocked expression, silencing the snickering of the other two. “How did you know that?”

Tyler blinked and then realized he was holding onto Connor as he released him and stumbled back. Tyler couldn't understand why he had come up here. Why had he run over to this kid? He realized in the moment he had actually thought they were brothers. That wasn't right though, he didn't have any brothers and he wasn't some little kid. He started looking around perplexed by the wave of emotion that had just overtaken him.

“It's time to come down now guys, lunchtime,” a man said approaching the bridge.

“Coming Dad,” Mallory said. “Race you,” she said as she

tapped Jace in the chest running past him.

“Yeah right,” Jace said not wanting to be shown up by his younger sister as they ran higher up the play structure towards the tall tube slide at the top. As Tyler saw the other two take off he found himself running after them, the clarity of his thinking now gone as he could only think about following the other two desperately wanting to be included in their game. He saw them enter into the tube slide hearing their excited yells from within. As Tyler approached he balked at the entrance being overcome with a sense of fear as he peered into the dark tube.

“You want to go down?” Connor asked standing behind Tyler. The twenty eight year old turned three year old looked up at the older boy with a look of confusion. He knew he shouldn't want to and he also knew that the last thing he should feel was scared but there seemed to be some inner conflict inside of himself between two different sides that he couldn't resolve.

“I'll go with you,” Connor offered sitting down at the entrance to the slide and pulling Tyler over to him sitting Tyler down in front of himself and wrapping his arms around the little boy. “One, two, three,” Connor said before launching the both of them down into the darkened slide. As they slid down Tyler was filled with an exhilarating sense of excitement mixed with a little fear. But with Connor holding him close Tyler felt like he would be okay as he let out a cheer filled giggle. They reached the bottom and the sudden sunlight blinded Tyler for a second but as his vision came

back he saw a woman with long curly brown hair with blond highlights bent down on one knee wearing a pair of sunglasses and a big smile.

She had her phone out and was taking a picture of the two boys emerging from the slide. Tyler was once again overcome with the sudden desire to run to this woman whom he knew to be his Mom. Tyler broke free from Connor's hold as he ran as fast as his legs could carry him leaping into the arms of the woman who scooped him up.

“Mommy I went down the big slide,” Tyler said still giggling freely.

“I saw, was it fun?” his Mom asked.

“Lots,” Tyler gushed. His Mom smiled once again at the little boy's enthusiasm. Connor came and stood next to her. She placed a hand gently on the back of his head pulling him closer to her.

“Did you thank your big brother for taking you down with him?” she asked as the three began to walk towards a table where the rest of the family had gathered.

“Thank you,” Tyler said dutifully looking down at Conner whose head was still nestled at his Mom's side.

“No problem,” Conner said with a grin looking back at Tyler. “I'll take you down again.” Tyler's eyes went wide at the prospect of another go at the slide.

“Can we go now?” Tyler asked looking at his Mom.

“Maybe after lunch,” his Mom replied. Tyler rested his head on his Mom's shoulder a little disappointed that she wouldn't let them go down the slide again right at that moment, he couldn't feel to upset however as a new sensation was overtaking him. Being held in his Mom's arms was filling him with a sense of warmth and contentment that he hadn't really ever felt before. Even to Tyler's adult mind it was filled with an odd sense of nostalgia that he couldn't quite place.

Tyler was sat down at the picnic table by his Mom, which was enough to snap him out of whatever daze he had been in. Tyler kicked himself for letting these new emotions and desires get the best of him once again. He began again to look around the park. He needed to get away from these people who seemed to think he was their kid which Tyler knew wasn't true. He needed to find Fiona and get her to reverse whatever she had done to land him in this predicament. As Tyler scanned the park he saw the table he had been sat at with Fiona only a few minutes ago, but now felt like hours. It was his best shot at picking up her trail. He busted away from the table in a sprint catching the rest of the family by surprise. He made it to the other table climbing up onto the bench. He saw the sandwich and the bag of chips he had been eating still there. He grabbed the sandwich holding it up to his face like some long lost artifact, certain proof that this wasn't some dream, proof that he had been here as an adult.

“No Ty, yucky,” his new Mom said snatching the sandwich out of his hand and grabbing him up in her arms. Tyler had been so preoccupied with the sandwich he hadn't even

noticed her catching up to him. Tyler squirmed as he tried to get out of her grasp.

“No, mine, that's my sandwich,” Tyler mewled.

“You have your own sandwich at the table, that other one is someone else's trash” his Mom said bringing him back to the other table and setting him down on the bench. He saw another pb&j sandwich cut up into little strips in front of him along with some apple slices and a sippy cup filled with juice. Tyler was reviled by the sight of such an infantile spread that he knew was meant for him.

“Whats up with him?” a man who was sitting next to Tyler asked. Tyler turned to see the same man who had been at the playground staring down at him. Tyler's head was telling him this was his Dad. However Tyler knew that wasn't true he remembered his Dad, a straight cut no nonsense military man, not his guy who seemed different in every way. He had swept back black hair and a scruffy beard with bits of gray speckled in it. He was wearing shades and a white t-shirt.

“I don't know, he's probably just cranky,” his mom mused.

“You cranky Ty?” The man said with a smile as he ruffled Tyler's hair. Tyler pulled back from the man's touch.

“He just needs some food,” his Mom said.

“Maybe,” his Dad said with some doubt. That's when Tyler felt his new Dad's finger reach up into his pant leg. Tyler shot back from this sudden invasion of his space nearly falling backwards off the bench.

“Thought so,” his Dad said having seemingly confirmed his suspicion. “Let's go Ty guy,” his Dad said picking him up and beginning to walk towards the parking lot. “You need a change buddy.” Tyler was in shock by the sudden turn of events not even realizing what the man had meant. That's when he realized what was off. He could feel under his clothes a certain sense of bulk between his legs that felt cold and damp against his skin. Tyler began to panic as the dots connected in his head. He was wearing a diaper and it was undeniably wet.

Tyler began to panic as he tried to break free of his Dad's hold realizing what was about to happen. His Dad held firm as they made it to the family's blue minivan. Dad opened the trunk and with one hand laid out a plastic mat decorated with pictures of tiny teddy bears and placed Tyler on top of it before grabbing a diaper bag nearby.

Tyler was in full on hysterics at this point as his Dad held the thrashing toddler down who was trying everything to get away.

“What's gotten into you?” the befuddled father asked never having seen his son act like this. Tyler was having none of it as he kept up his furious tirade.

“Tyler James West, you stop that this instant!” his dad said forcefully, raising his voice. Tyler immediately froze looking at his new Dad's angry expression. This surge of emotion was something Tyler hadn't felt for years. The tone and volume had been the same as when Tyler's real Dad had yelled at

him. When Tyler had been little this always managed to fill him with a sense of anxiety and dread at the impending yelling and the subsequent punishment to follow. Tyler feared his new Dad was about to put him over his knee and spank him until he was nothing but a bruised and whimpering mess. However upon seeing the look of pure fear on his child's face the man did no such thing. His expression instantly softened as he swept some hair out of the toddlers face.

“Daddy is sorry he yelled,” the man said in a soft and reassuring tone. “But you need to calm down, okay.” Tyler made no reaction as he was frozen into submission, the only thing he could do was focus on the ceiling of the car.

He felt his new Dad begin to undo snaps in the crotch of his shortalls before pulling them up to his chest. He then heard the sound of tapes being pulled apart as the bulky cold material was lifted from his skin. A rush of cool air went over his groin. Tyler then felt a cold sensation hit him as the man began wiping him down. Tyler felt his legs be lifted into the air as the cold wipe was then applied to his butt. Then he heard the crinkle of another diaper being unfolded and he was set back down onto the fresh dry padding. His Dad then applied some lotion around the area and then a small sprinkling of baby powder, the smell invading Tyler's senses. He then felt the front of the diaper be pulled up between his legs as it was subsequently taped into place.

“There isn't that all better?” Dad asked as he redid the snaps of the shortalls before lifting Tyler off the mat and back into his arms. Even Tyler had to admit it felt worlds better than

the wet one had.

Arriving back to the table, Tyler was once again set back down in front of the food. He was beyond mortified with what had just transpired. How had he not noticed the diaper before, and when had he wet it without even realizing it? The other thing Tyler had noticed was when his new Dad had said his name. The first and middle name were right, but the last was all wrong. It was Kenner not West.

Tyler hesitantly picked up one of the apple slices and took a bite. There was nothing else for him to do. These people were not going to let him escape, he was stuck with them for the time being. Adding to that he found he was starving since he hadn't even eaten much of his former lunch and given all the stress of everything that had happened he found himself utterly exhausted. He needed to regroup and regain his energy and think of a way to sneak off without anyone noticing. He picked up one of the sandwich slices and took a bite. His mouth exploded with the sweet taste of the peanut butter mixed with the jelly unlike he had ever tasted before. Before long he had completely devoured the rest of the sandwich seemingly oblivious to the mess he was making on his face. He then grabbed the sippy cup needing something to wash it down. The apple juice also tasted sweeter than before as he guzzled it down. Tyler sat content munching on the few remaining apple slices as the rest of the family finished their own meals. He felt so much better now that he had food in his stomach, which allowed him to think much more clearly.

“Someone was hungry,” his Mom said picking him up from

his seat and wiping his face with a napkin.

“I don't think I've ever seen him eat a full meal before,” his Dad remarked as he began to clear the table and pack up. Tyler rested his head onto his new Mom's shoulder still tired from the trauma of that afternoon.

“Can we go back and play?” Jace asked standing by the table. Dad puckered his lips as he looked at his watch.

“I don't know, what do you think hun?” he asked looking to his wife.

“I think someones tired,” she said stroking Tyler's hair. “Maybe we should hit the road and get to the hotel.”

“Great,” Jace said rolling his eyes. “We have to leave cause the baby's tired.”

Tyler couldn't bring himself to react to the comment clearly directed at him as he was far too drowsy in his Mom's comforting arms.

“Now, now Jace,” his Dad tutted. “We only stopped to eat. Besides if we leave now we can make it to the hotel with time to swim in the pool.” The disappointment of the other kids evaporated with the promise of a pool.

“You go get the kids situated, I'll finish packing up,” Dad said.

The rest of the family began to make their way to the car, as the reality of the situation began to set in for Tyler. Hotel? That meant these people were on vacation, which meant they weren't even from around here. What was worse is that they

were leaving the park, but they couldn't. This place was Tyler's best bet of finding Fiona, they couldn't leave, not yet. Tyler knew that if they left any chance he had of reversing whatever happened to him diminished greatly. His adult fear of being stuck like this forever mixed with his three year old emotions. He began to squirm but now with his drowsy state of exhaustion his efforts proved even more fruitless than before. Tears sprung to his eyes and he began to sob helplessly as he watched the picnic table where his sandwich and bag of chips, the last remnants of his former life were, get smaller in view.

“There, there, its okay baby,” his Mom cooed rubbing his back. Her words did nothing to calm him though. It wasn't okay, none of this was okay.

Chapter 3

One of the Family: Part 3 - Chapter 3

Part 3

The entire family was in the car as Dad started the engine. Tyler had found himself strapped into a car seat. He pushed against the harness as he continued to wail.

“No, don't leave,” he screeched, as the car pulled out of the parking lot. Tyler spotted his car still sitting in the parking lot, undoubtedly filled with everything he owned this caused his stomach to twist up into knots as if he were watching his life be taken away from him. He could do nothing as he watched the park disappear from view. The family eventually made their way to the freeway doing their best to ignore Tyler's increasingly desperate wail. After it became apparent that he wasn't settling down anytime soon Jace leaned forward from the backseat to try and quell his brother's supposed tantrum.

“Ty, I know the park was fun but a pool is funner,” Jace said trying to reason with the newly turned three year old. Mallory leaned across seated in her own princess themed booster seat to offer her assistance.

“Don't you want to swim in the pool Tyler?” she asked. Tyler however was unconvinced. He didn't want to hear about a stupid pool, nobody understood what he was going through. He flailed his arms out wildly striking Jace in the face with a thwack causing the boy to recoil back into his seat.

“Yowww,” Jace howled as he covered his face. This caused their Mom to turn around.

“Jace are you okay?” she asked with concern. Jace was covering his face so that only one eye was visible. She saw a singular tear roll down his cheek before he nodded, trying his best to put on a tough facade. “Take the next exit,” Mom said.

“Really?” Dad said somewhat annoyed at the prospect of having to stop so soon after just getting started.

“We gotta do something,” she said.

“Fine guess I'll gas up,” he said resignedly. The Minivan pulled into a gas station a few minutes later. Tyler had not let up one bit. His Mom got out of the car and slid open the door where Tyler was seated before unbuckling the straps of his carseat and scooping him up into her arms. Tyler didn't care one bit if he was about to get punished. He didn't care one bit that he had hit Jace in the face either. He was in a state of pure panic. A full on meltdown caused by his own fear, frustration and helplessness. As they stood outside the car his Mom held him in her arms bouncing him up and down slightly while rubbing his back.

“Shhh, its okay, shhh,” she kept repeating. Tyler found her soothing voice and comforting gestures to be winning out. She was the only thing he had right now as his world had been turned upside down in the span of an hour. He nuzzled into her shoulder and clasped his arms around her neck, still sobbing uncontrollably having petered out only a little from the full on hysterics of earlier. The truth was though he was

running on empty.

His Mom made her way to the back of the van and opened the trunk finding the diaper bag tucked in the back, she pulled something out and closed the trunk.

“Can you look at me sweetie?” she asked. Tyler raised his head for a moment before finding something being slipped into his mouth. He realized it was a pacifier. At first he wanted to spit it out, but instinct took over as he began to suckle it rhythmically. He found it to have a soothing effect on his demeanor. After another few minutes, the pacifier combined with his new Mom”s calming embrace had reduced him from sobbing to letting out weak little whimpers behind the pacifier.

Satisfied he had finally calmed down enough his Mom placed him back into the car-seat snapping the harness together over him. She then went to the backseat to check and make sure that Jace truly was okay. Aside from a light red mark that would fade within a few minutes the boy was no worse for wear. Dad had finished gassing up the car and got back into the car looking back at his toddler son now sucking on a pacifier with a few stray tears still rolling down his face.

“I thought we were weaning him off the paci?” Dad said giving a questioning look towards his wife in the passenger seat.

“You want to listen to a crying toddler for the next three hours, be my guest,” she said. He shrugged seeing her point as he started up the car, ready to make their way back to the

freeway.

“How about a movie?” Mom said as she pulled out a cd case and took a disc out placing it into the console at the front of the car. Tyler watched as the screens built into the headrest of the car turned on and an animated kids film began to play. The movie did not appeal to Tyler in the slightest. He hated that he was wearing a diaper strapped in a car seat and sucking on a pacifier. Yet he found he couldn't spit it out not wanting to deny himself its soothing effects on him. As he watched the screen he found his eyes becoming increasingly heavy and before long he closed them letting the pacifier slip from out of his mouth. His Mom looked in the rear-view mirror to see him sleeping peacefully, his cheeks still stained with tear marks.

Tyler came too a couple of hours later. He still had his eyes closed not wanting to leave the peacefulness of sleep just yet. He could feel that he was being carried as he nuzzled further into the shoulder of who was ever carrying him. The sense of nostalgia overcame him once again. Tyler didn't know where it was coming from as he couldn't remember a single time he had ever been held like this.

The ding of the elevator doors finally roused him enough to open his eyes. He looked around to see he was being carried by his new Mom down the hallway of a hotel. He saw his new Dad behind him pushing a cart piled with duffle bags and suitcases. They came to a stop in front of a door as his Dad got a keycard out of his pocket and opened the door. Upon entering the room Tyler was set down on the bed. He

was still groggy as he rubbed his eyes. He looked around at the room. It was pretty normal as far as hotel rooms went. Their was a tv in front of him with a dvd player and a chair off to the side with one large bed that Tyler was currently sat upon.

“There's only one bed,” Connor said looking around the room. “Where is everyone supposed to sleep?”

“I call the bed,” Jace said hopping up onto the bed next to Tyler.

“If Jace gets a bed then so do I,” Mallory said.

“Relax,” Dad said opening a door to adjoining room. “We have two rooms everyone gets a bed.” The three kids scurried into the other room to inspect. Not wanting to be left out Tyler slid off the bed and went to the other room. It was identical to the room he had just come from. “Kids will be here in this bed,” Dad said announcing the room assignments.

“I have to sleep with the boys?” Mallory asked, wrinkling her nose.

“Its just for one night sweetie,” Mom said.

“I don't know if the bed if big enough for all four of us,” Connor said skeptical.

“Tyler will be sleeping with me and your father in our bed,” Mom said placing a hand on top of Tyler's head.

“But I want to sleep with Mommy,” Mallory said wrapping her arms around her Mom's waist.

“You really want to sleep in a bed with Tyler?” Jace asked. “Even though he pee's the bed” Tyler felt a surge of anger rise up in him with the boy's mocking.

“I do not pee in bed,” Tyler shouted.

“You pee everywhere,” Jace said with a smirk. “That's why you wear diapers.”

“Dude knock it off,” Connor said as he lightly shoved Jace onto the bed, although he was also smirking a little. “He's just a little kid still.”

Tyler clenched his fist ready to charge at Jace in anger when he suddenly came to a stop as his fist un-clenched and his shoulder's slumped. He was once again made aware that he was in fact still wearing a diaper and much to his humiliation it was once again wet. He didn't have time to contemplate how he had wet himself again or when it had happened as their was a more pressing matter to attend to. He could feel his stomach hurt the telltale sign that he needed to get to a bathroom. Tyler rushed out of the room over to the bathroom in what was going to be his room for the night. He grabbed at the handle with some difficulty before finally getting the door open. He rushed over to the toilet. It was bad enough he had wet in his diaper, he wasn't about to drop a load in one. As he stood in front of the toilet he went to try and undo the buckles on his shortalls. He found that his little fingers struggled with the task of getting them undone as he began to panic that he wouldn't make it.

“What are you doing Ty?” Mom said walking into the

bathroom. Tyler turned to look at her. He didn't care about his dignity at this point, it was apparent he needed help.

“Potty,” he said with some urgency. He had wanted to ask her to undo the straps of his clothes so he could use the bathroom, but found his mouth simply couldn't verbalize the words his head had wanted to say. Mom rushed over and quickly undid the straps letting the shortalls fall to the ground around his feet. Tyler ripped the tapes of the diaper letting it fall with a wet splat onto the ground, before climbing onto the toilet. He found it hard to sit as he had to support himself over the bowl with his hands. He looked up to see his Mom watching with great interest as he sat there. It seemed he wasn't going to be afforded his privacy. He did his business quickly relieved that he had made it. He went to grab some toilet paper but slipped down into the bowl as the toilet paper unfurled onto the ground.

“Don't worry about that,” his Mom chuckled as she lifted him off the toilet. “I'll clean you up,” she said as she left the bathroom for a moment before returning with a wet wipe and the changing mat in her hand. She laid it down on the ground and patted it directing Tyler to lay down. Tyler grimaced as he took his place, knowing it was probably better not to start a fight in his current state. She got him cleaned up quick before helping him to his feet. As Tyler looked at her she was smiling.

“Ty Ty you just went in the big boy potty,” she said. Tyler looked a little confused not sure of how to react. “I'm so proud of you,” she said wrapping him up into a big hug. Any

reservations Tyler had immediately went out the door as he was filled with a warm fuzzy feeling at hearing her words. A sense of pride welled up in him ready to burst at the seams.

As she released him he ran out of the bathroom into the other room where the rest of the family was still gathered.

“I went potty,” he shouted proudly with a goofy smile on his face. His happiness was short-lived however as he stared back at the amused and befuddled expressions of his new family.

“Um, good job,” Jace said with a raised eyebrow, breaking the silence. Tyler took a step back realizing what he had just done, his face then went red as he remembered he was buck naked below the waist. He ran out of the room. He hid behind the bed crouching down as tears sprang to his eyes. Why had he done that? Why had felt so proud of something like going to the bathroom? What he hell was happening to him?

“Hey, Ty guy whats the matter?” his Mom said in a gentle voice as she knelt down next to him rubbing his back.

“I'm dumb,” he said not lifting his head up from his knees. Once again not being able to verbalize exactly what he wanted to say.

“No you aren't,” Mom said reassuringly.

“Yes I am, everybody thinks so,” he said with a sniffle. His mom sat cross legged on the ground before pulling him into her lap.

“Nobody thinks you're dumb. They were just a little surprised

was all. Which is why you probably shouldn't run around with no pants silly," Mom said as she played with his hair. Tyler leaned back into her feeling a little better about the whole thing. He couldn't deny how safe he felt in her arms. How it seemed like all his problems weren't that bad.

"Let's get ready to go swimming, whaddya say?" his Mom asked. Tyler looked up at her with a smile. Swimming sounded great. Mom picked him up and placed him on the bed. Tyler sat swinging his legs happily as she went through a bag getting his swim stuff out. Tyler was excited. He was really good at swimming and it had been a long time since he had done it. In high school he had actually been on the swim team. He had tried to get his Dad to come to a meet but he never did. They had been good enough to even make it to states one year surely then his Dad would have given him some attention. Yet much to Tyler's disappointment not even that had swayed his father to show up. The team had ended up taking second in the competition. Tyler remembered being excited to show his trophy to his Dad. However his father had only regarded it with a passing glance before remarking that second place still meant they lost. He should have been used to it by that point but the comment had cut Tyler so deeply that he quit the team the next day finding his motivation having all but evaporated.

"Okay lets get you ready," Mom said bringing Tyler back to the present. He looked down to see that she was pulling a blue swim diaper with smiling fish on it up his legs.

"Nooo," Tyler mewled as he threw himself back on the bed.

“Sorry bud, them's the rules,” his Mom said disregarding her son's resentment as she finished pulling it up around his waist. Tyler resigned himself to his new attire. He had already wet a diaper twice today, what could he expect?

“Okay let's get your trunks on,” Mom said holding a pair of blue swim trunks with little cute t-rexes on them out in front of Tyler. Tyler got off the bed and placed his hands on her shoulders to steady himself as he stepped into the trunks. He wished he could wear something different, but accepted the swim suit reasoning that at least it would cover up the diaper. She then had him slip on a pair of Paw Patrol flip flops onto his feet.

“Lets go see if everyone else is ready?” Mom said taking Tyler's hand and leading him to the other room. Upon walking in they found Connor sitting on the bed in a pair of blue and white swim trunks.

“You guys ready?” Mom asked looking around.

“Except for Mallory,” Jace said wearing a camo shirt with a matching set of swim trunks. He pointed over to the bathroom door. Mom walked over and knocked on the door.

“Mal you need help?” Mom asked.

“I'm ready,” Mallory said opening the door and stepping out wearing a pink princess themed one piece that had ruffles along the edges.

“You not swimming, babe,” Dad said appearing around the corner in a t-shirt and his own swim attire.

“I was just going to lounge,” Mom said.

“Suit yourself,” Dad said with a shrug. “We ready to get this show on the road? This little fish looks ready to get wet,” Dad said picking up Tyler into his arms and giving him a kiss on the cheek. Tyler giggled being tickled by the man's beard before being set back on the ground.

“Let's go,” Mallory yelled leading the charge as the family followed to the pool.

Chapter 4

One of the Family: Part 4 - Chapter 4

Part 4

The West family arrived at the indoor pool to find that they had it all to themselves. The pool was a decent size with a shallow and deep end. Off to the side was a hot tub and on the opposite side was a small square kiddie pool. They set their stuff down near a chair before Connor and Jace rushed off jumping into the pool with Mallory close behind. Dad jumped in being mobbed by the kids as soon as he surfaced. Tyler went to take a step to join them before he found himself held back by his Mom.

“Not so fast mister,” she said leading him back to the chair. “You need your floaties first.”

Tyler watched as his new Mom pulled a set of plastic deflated floaties out of the swim bag next to her chair. They were yellow and had pictures of smiling octopuses and turtles on them. She went to slide the first one up his arm as he pulled back. He didn't want to wear the floaties, his adult mind and toddler mind were mixing ins a strange stew at the moment. He knew he was a great swimmer and for some reason it was important that his family see that.

“You need to put these on if you want to go into the pool,” his Mom calmly stated.

“No,” Tyler said scrunching up his face, his frustration

growing that he couldn't help but give a little hop before crouching down pulling his knee's to his chest. “I'm really good swimmer, I almost won the race,” Tyler said.

“What race are you talking about?” His Mom asked. Tyler wanted to tell her everything about the swim team and how he was so close to winning at states, yet the disconnect between what his head wanted to say and what he could say still persisted.

“He was going to be proud, but he wasn't,” Tyler said, his thoughts a complete and jumbled mess. His new Mom knelt down to his level and rubbed his back to coax him out of his ball. She wasn't quite sure what he was talking about, she chalked it up to the strange things kids sometimes said that didn't really mean anything.

“Why don't you put your floaties on and then you can show everyone what a good swimmer you are?” Mom suggested trying to redirect him back in the right direction.

“No,” Tyler said with a screech. “No foaties”

Mom stood up throwing her arms up with a shake of her head. She was going to have to change up her approach it seemed.

“Fine, you don't have to wear them,” she said. Tyler lifted his head up.

“Really?” he asked. She nodded. Tyler hopped up with a smile thinking he had gotten through to her. But before he could run off to jump in the water he found himself being

lifted up under his arm pits. His Mom carried him over to the kiddie pool and set him down in the water that came up to about half of his shin. He found the water itself kind of gross, it was warm and smelled strongly of chlorine. Tyler looked up at his new Mom confused.

“If you don't want to wear your floaties like a big boy then you can swim in the baby pool,” she said laying it on extra thick. Tyler's brow furrowed. He wasn't going to let himself be manipulated so easily. He stomped across the pool which was only a few feet, before sitting down on the edge his arms crossed and a pouting face. If this is how it was going to be then he just wouldn't swim.

His Mom went back to her chair and layed down taking a magazine out of the bag to read thinking he would eventually cool down. Tyler sat looking at the others playing in the big pool. He had regained his clarity and found this to be a good time to try and gather his thoughts. Putting aside the fact that he now found himself in a three year old's body, there were still things that made no sense. Why was he here with these people? Why did it seem so normal for them, as if it had always been like this? Tyler knew he hadn't been like this that morning.

He had woken up and drove his car over the state line and had stopped for lunch at the park to rest. But to this family they seemed to not realize that he hadn't been with them all day. They all seemed to truly believe he was a part of their family and it had been that way forever. What also struck Tyler as strange was that they had clothes and things for him already,

things they wouldn't have had that morning since he had still been an adult. A sudden thought popped into Tyler's head. What if he hadn't been changed, but switched bodies with someone else? What if all that stuff had actually belonged to their actual three year old son. The chilling thought of a three year old now inhabiting his former body now played in Tyler's imagination. Tyler dismissed the thought. That didn't actually line up. He remembered seeing the family arrive at the park. Even though it had just been a passing glance he was certain it had just been the three kids and the parents, their hadn't been another kid with them. Whats more they called him by his name, even his middle name was the same the only thing having changed was the last. He also had to take into account that he did indeed feel some familial attachment to them. Remembering back to the park he had known their names and their supposed relation to him on an almost instinctual level despite having never met these people before. It only made sense that it was the same for them.

Tyler noticed on the back wall behind them was a wall of reflective glass, he got up to look at himself, since he had not seen himself since the change. Looking in the mirror he was shocked but somewhat relieved to see the image staring back at him. His short black hair had grown out into a mop that curled slightly at the ends. His face was rounder and clear blemishes. His eyes were big and green. His body was significantly changed. Gone was his broad muscular physique, instead replaced with a thin and slender figure with a bit of baby fat around his belly. He recognized himself from old baby pictures he had seen. It was still him, he hadn't

switched bodies after all. He did notice there were some subtle changes though that did give him more of resemblance to his new family but they seemed so minuscule that he couldn't tell if they were really changes or if he had always looked like this.

As he turned away from the reflection finding it to be just a little too bizarre to keep looking at it he caught himself staring longingly at the rest of the group playing in the pool. Mallory was ontop of Connor's shoulders while Jace was on Dad's and they were engaged in a chicken fight. Tyler found himself overcome with a desire to join them. Tyler shook himself out of this thought. He had far more important things to do at the moment, there was something he needed to find out. He walked over to where his new Mom was reading her magazine.

“Mommy,” he said quietly before frowning a little not having meant to call her that.

“What is it dear?” she asked putting down her magazine.

“Have I been here forever?” he asked.

“No, we've only been here for about twenty minutes,” she said. Tyler shook his head growing frustrated not being able to say what he wanted. He was going to find it hard to get across what he was truly asking.

“I mean, do I have a birthday?” he asked, electing to try asking something more direct and less open ended.

“Of course you do, don't you remember?” his Mom asked

with a little grin. “It was only two weeks ago, on July 23rd. We went to the store and you picked out Opie, your wolf stuffie and then we went to the fun zone and you played in the ball pit and we had a big chocolate cake and then you opened your presents. You got that paw patrol movie and that set of toy cars and those flip flops you wore when we came to the pool.”

“Oh,” was Tyler's only response. The date was right but he didn't remember any of the other stuff she seemingly did. He had spent the day driving only stopping at a gas station and treating himself to a cupcake. It seemed to Tyler that they had memories of him but he didn't. Why was he the only one that didn't? Just what kind of spell had Fiona cast?

As Tyler contemplated this new revelation Connor got out of the pool and walked over to where he was.

“You gonna swim Ty?” Connor asked.

“He can't get into the pool until he puts on his floaties,” Mom informed him.

“Whats the problem with that?” Connor asked putting a hand on top of Tyler's head.

“I don't want them,” Tyler said pushing Connor's hand away defensively. “I'm a good swimmer.”

“Yeah, I know that bud,” Connor said. “But the floaties are just there to help make you an even better swimmer.”

Tyler looked back unmoved by his brother's reasoning.

“C'mon, please can you put them on for me, I really want to swim with you,” Connor said putting his hands together in a pleading way. Tyler sat for a moment thinking as his tongue stuck out of the corner of his mouth. He didn't want to wear them yet somehow he was filled with an odd sense of excitement upon hearing that Connor wanted to swim with him.

“Fine,” Tyler said quietly.

“Awesome,” Connor said grabbing one of the floaties and sliding Tyler's arm into it as Mom did the other. They then both blew them up until they were full. As Tyler stood with the fully inflated floaties now on his arms he found he hated how they propped up his arms up at his sides.

“Let's go Tyler,” Connor said extending his hand out. Tyler gladly took it and walked over to the edge of the pool. They jumped in together. As Tyler bounced up from under the water he let out an excited squeal. The water was perfect. It wasn't too cold and just the right amount of refreshing. Tyler was then grabbed and pulled close to his Dad.

“Ty guy's in the water,” he said as Tyler giggled. “What are you going to do first?” his Dad asked.

“I'm going to swim the best,” Tyler replied being released from his Dad. He looked over to the side of the pool deciding to swim towards it. He was finally going to be able to show everybody what a great swimmer he was, although he had kind of forgotten why that had seemed so important in the first place. As Tyler began to swim he found that it wasn't

working as he had anticipated. He was more or less thrashing in the water and not making much progress in the direction he wanted to go. He came to a halt letting the floaties on his arm keep him afloat. This wasn't how this was supposed to go. In his head he knew exactly what he wanted, he knew how he wanted to move his arms and legs but it seemed like his body was unable to do so. Tyler's lower lip began to quiver a little as a slight whimper escaped from his lips. His new Dad seeing the distress on his face once again picked him up and held him.

“Whats the matter Ty? Don't you like the water?” he said.

“I'm a bad swimmer,” Tyler said with a quiver.

“You were doing fine,” his Dad replied.

“No, I'm s'posed to be good, but I was bad,” Tyler said looking at his Dad as his eye's began to get watery. “Now you mad at me.”

“I'm not mad at you,” his Dad said with a reassuring look.

“Really?” Tyler said now nearly on the verge of tears.

“Really,” his Dad replied. “Here I'll help you. His Dad then set him back into the water before taking Tyler's hands into his own and gently pulled him along through the water. “Kick your feet Ty,” his Dad instructed. Tyler began to kick with all his strength. His Dad then let go of his hands and swam a few inches away. “Now use your arms too,” His Dad said.

With the floaties on Tyler wasn't able to start doing any front

crawls but he was able to propel himself forward in a doggy paddle. He made it to his Dad who scooped him up once again.

“You swam so good,” Dad said with a smile.

“I swim by myself,” Tyler said with a giggle. His Dad set him back into the water and spun him around where he could see Jace near the side of the pool.

“Now swim to Jace, okay,” his Dad said giving him a little push forward. Tyler paddled all the way to his brother who received him with a grin.

“I swam Jace, I swam,” Tyler said with unbridled joy.

“That was pretty good,” Jace admitted before pointing Tyler towards Connor. “Can you swim to Connor?” he asked.

“Connor,” Tyler called out as Connor waved him over. The only thing Tyler could think about was how cool Connor was going to think he was as he paddled forward. As he got to his oldest brother the boy picked him up.

“Super duper dude, give me a high five,” Connor said holding his hand up. Tyler slapped his hand with a smile plastered on his face. “Ok back to Dad,” Connor said giving him a push towards their Dad who was waiting with open arms. Tyler collided into his Dad's chest as he wrapped his arms around the man's neck needing a quick break for a moment.

“Daddy, did you see?” Tyler asked breathlessly. “I'm a good swimmer,”

“You're the best,” his Dad said. “I'm so proud of you.” Tyler paused for a moment hearing those words as he regarded his new Dad's warm smile. Tyler knew that he wasn't just saying it. His Dad was genuinely proud of him. Tyler's lips curled up into a smile as tears sprang to his eyes so overcome with some weird mix of emotion that he couldn't help himself as he buried his face into his Dad's chest.

“Are you sad?” his Dad asked somewhat confused by the boy's reaction.

“Nuh uh,” Tyler said. “I'm happy.”

Dad brought a hand to Tyler's back and gave him a few gentle pats.

“There there,” his dad said continuing to pat his back. “You're okay, You're okay.” After a few moments Tyler lifted his head up.

“Daddy I want to swim more,” he said.

“You can swim all you want, but first I think you gotta fly,” with little warning Tyler felt himself get launched high into the air above the water. He let out another squeal of joy as he came to the peak before splashing back down into the water. As he surfaced he wiped some water from his eyes.

“More,” Tyler said as he paddled back towards his Dad who subsequently launched him back into the air. Tyler knew he was giving into his toddler mindset, but he didn't really care. This was the most fun he had ever had in a pool and he didn't want it to end.

The other kids had now gathered and were demanding their own turns as their Dad took them on one by one. Connor, Jace and Mallory started doing tricks like can opener's and cannonballs on their own turns. Even though Tyler couldn't do that he was more than happy to flail in the air when launched up. After about fifteen minutes their Dad was spent and could do no more getting out of the pool to take a seat next to his wife. The kids began to get out and jump back into the pool continuously with cannonballs to see who could make the biggest splash and even threw in some dives which Tyler couldn't seem to do despite wanting to, instead opting to just jump into the pool with all the grace and finesse of a brick which he found fun nonetheless. He was delighted though when Conor and Jace had taken his hands and swung him by the arms a few times before tossing him into the water.

After a while the kids were doing handstands under the water while Tyler paddled around in-between them, still brimming with pride at his newfound skill when Mom announced it was time to get out.

“Can't we swim more,” Mallory whined.

“You guys have been swimming for two hours now, its time to get ready to get dinner,” their Mom replied.

“C'mon guys lets go,” Connor said with a sigh as he began to swim towards the stairs leading out of the pool. Tyler did'nt want to leave but if Connor was getting out he would too. He found his new Mom ready and waiting with a towel. She dried off his hair before letting the air out of the floaties and

removing them which Tyler was happy for. She then proceeded to wrap him up in the towel making sure that he wouldn't be dripping on the way back to the room.

“Hey Dad I saw a place in the lobby where they let you rent movies,” Connor said. “Do you think we could stop by on the way back.”

“I don't see why not,” Dad said with shrug. “What do you think, babe?” he asked looking to his wife.

“Sounds fine, why don't you guys go ahead and I'll take Tyler back to the room to get ready.”

Tyler watched as the rest of the family left the pool a little miffed he was once again being left out. His new Mom finished drying him off and then tied the towel around his neck like a cape.

“There's my little superhero,” she said ruffling his hair before taking his hand as they walked out of the pool area. Tyler was somewhat pleased with his cape. As they came into a hallway he let go of Mom's hand and ran ahead trying to get the cape to flap behind him. Much to his disappointment it seemed he wasn't able to run fast enough. Mom caught up with him at the elevators.

“Don't you fly away from me now,” she said with a chuckle as she put an arm around him pulling him close to her thigh. The elevator door opened and they entered in and saw their was another older woman in the elevator with them. She looked down at Tyler and smiled.

“He is just the cutest little thing isn't he,” she cooed. “How old is he?”

“Just turned three,” Mom replied. Tyler was coming out of his toddler mind set and he didn't really appreciate being talked over.

“Are you really?” the lady said now talking directly to him. “My my you are such a big boy, aren't you, can you tell me your name.” Tyler found the way the lady was talking to him to be condescending whats more though was he was suddenly feeling intimidated by this lady who seemed so big to him now. He turned himself towards his Mom hiding his face in her leg.

“It's okay baby, you can tell her your name,” she said. Tyler turned a little revealing only half of his face.

“Tyler,” he said in a whisper.

“Well that is such a handsome name for a handsome boy,” the lady said. Just then the elevator came to a stop as the doors opened.

“This is my floor,” the lady said stepping off. “It was nice meeting you two, bye bye Tyler,” she said waving as Tyler watched the doors close. They eventually made their way to the room. Tyler went and sat on the bed as his Mom went to gather up his clothes that had been left in the bathroom. He was still a little disappointed by how he had behaved in the elevator. He used to interview people all over the country yet had gotten scared by some old lady asking him a question.

Tyler's new Mom reappeared with his clothes and a new diaper. She had Tyler stand in front of her and removed his swimsuit and swim diaper leaving him naked. Tyler went a little red in the face. He wasn't sure why the family had already seen him naked, what more dignity did he really have left. She lifted him up onto the bed and unfolded a diaper.

“No diaper,” Tyler said as he rolled over onto his stomach.

“No fussing now,” Mom said as she rolled him back onto his back.

“I used the potty, “member?” Tyler asked with a pleading face.

“I know bubba,” Mom said. “You were such a big boy, but we are going to a restaurant and you still don't always know when you have to go. You don't want to have wet pants do you?” Tyler twisted his face up as he began to whimper.

“Here why don't you take this,” Mom said holding an object in front of him.

“Opie,” Tyler said as his eyes went wide seeing the wolf stuffie in front of him. He grabbed at the wolf and hugged him close.

“You forgot about him after the park, I think he feels a little lonely,” Mom said. Tyler was struck by the realization that he had completely forgotten about his furry friend.

“I'm sorry Opie,” Tyler said as he snuggled the animal closer. With Tyler now completely distracted his Mom had no

problem diapering him up. There was a clattering of noise in the next room announcing the arrival of the rest of the family. “I have to show everybody Opie,” Tyler said sitting up.

“Lets get your clothes on first then you can,” Mom said grabbing his t-shirt from earlier. Just then Dad entered into the room. Tyler bounded off the bed and ran up to the man, Opie held high above his head.

“Daddy, Opie's here,” Tyler announced.

“I see that,” his new Dad said taking the stuffie out of his son's hands.

“I forgotted him,” Tyler said his expression turning into one of confusion. He didn't understand how he could have done that. He loved Opie so much after all.

Tyler's Mom saw an opportunity as she ambushed him from behind with his shirt as she got it on him. Tyler turned to look at his Mom.

“Mommy why did I forget?” Tyler asked with some concern.

“I don't know honey. You were pretty upset at the park and sometimes when we are upset we forget things,” she said.

“What matters is he's here now,” Dad said setting Opie on the bed so he was looking at Tyler. His Dad then went into the bathroom to change out of his swimsuit. Meanwhile Tyler's Mom helped him put on his shortalls from earlier. She looked at her son standing in front of Opie still sat on the bed, Tyler seemed deep in thought about something. Dad returned from

out of the bathroom.

“I'm going to go freshen up a bit,” Mom said as she disappeared into the bathroom. Dad walked further into the room seeing Tyler who now had Opie in his arms. Dad scooped the boy up into his arms and jumped onto the bed. He layed flat on his back having Tyler sit on his stomach facing him. He noticed that Tyler still had a strange pained expression on his face. Tyler was clearly in some sort of conflict. What his Dad didn't know was that it was between two very different set of emotions.

“What's the matter Ty, aren't you happy to see Opie?” Tyler gave a weak smile and nodded as he gripped the stuffy tighter before a solemn look returned to his face.

“Do you really forget people when you get mad at them?” Tyler asked. His Dad raised an eyebrow at the strange question that seemed so unlike his son to say.

“No buddy you don't forget people just because you're mad.” his Dad said.

“But I forgot Mommy,” Tyler said.

“What do you mean you forgot Mommy?”

“I was mad at her, and I forgot,” Tyler said as his face turned into a frown. He collapsed forward burying his face into his Dad's chest. “She left me and I forgot,” Tyler said as he began to softly whimper. His Dad put a hand on Tyler's head and began to stroke his hair while he rubbed his back with the other.

“You didn't forget her,” his Dad said in a soothing tone. “She didn't leave you, she's just in the bathroom she'll be back in a minute. Tyler continued to weep softly as he nuzzled further into his Dad. Just then his Mom re-appeared in the room.

“Okay lets go,” she said.

Tyler shot up from his Dad and scurried across the bed.

“Mommy,” he said as he jumped into her arms. His new Mom had to take a step back to steady herself as she had not expected to be met with a careening toddler.

“I was only gone a minute,” she said. Tyler didn't say anything in response though. He finally understood why being in her arms gave him such a familiar feeling. He had experienced this before. This must have been what it was like when his real Mom had held him in her arms so many years ago.

Chapter 5

One of the Family: Part 5 - Chapter 5

Part 5

Tyler found himself strapped into a booster seat surrounded by the West family in a large corner booth at a restaurant they came to for dinner. He looked around the walls covered with faux memorabilia. A server approached the table. He was wearing a red striped shirt. Pins adorned the straps of his apron where he kept straws and the small hand held tablet he used to take orders. Tyler guessed this was the type of place that referred to their employee's as “rockstars” in an otherwise shallow attempt at conveying some sense of originality.

The server distributed menus to the table. Mom and Dad along with Connor got the adult menu, while Jace, Mallory and Tyler were given paper activity sheets that included the kids menu. The server was taking drink orders when Tyler noticed his new Mom pull out the sippy cup from earlier.

“Do you think you could fill this up with some lemonade?” she asked.

“For sure,” the server said taking the cup before walking away to get the rest of the drinks. Tyler let out a little huff. He was more than capable of drinking out of a cup, he just needed to show them. He looked around the table. He was sat in-between his new Dad and Mallory. He made a grab for the glass of water placed in front of Mallory.

“Colin, the glass,” Mom said alerting her husband to what was going on. Tyler had been too fast for his new parental figures to intervene as he tipped the glass up. A splash of water hit his face as it cascaded down his chin before soaking into his shirt.

“Woah, there cowboy,” his new Dad said as he pushed the back of the glass back down to stop the entirety of the glass from spilling out before taking it out of Tyler's hands and setting it back onto the table.

“Oh now his shirt is all wet,” his Mom said with a sigh.

“It's fine, just a little spot is all,” his Dad said taking a napkin and dabbing the wet spot on Tyler's shirt. Tyler looked down at the wet spot a little taken aback by the fact he had spilled. Was he really so uncoordinated or had it just been a product of him being far to eager to prove himself?

“The man will be back with some tasty lemonade for you really soon, just wait till then champ” his Dad said ruffling Tyler's hair noticing the dour expression on the toddler's face.

“Sorry,” Tyler mumbled as he fidgeted with the strap of his shortalls.

“It's okay,” his Dad said giving him a quick reassuring pat on the back. It was a new reaction for Tyler as if he had ever done that in front of his real Dad he would have been called useless or a nuisance. The server returned with the drinks, the sippy cup was placed in front of Tyler. He however didn't grab this cup as he could only sit back still reeling from his

earlier defeat.

“We ready to order?” the server asked.

“I think we still need some time,” Mom said with a cursory glance around the table.

“No problem,” the server said. “I'll be back in a few minutes,” he said once again taking his leave. Tyler became aware of the hunger pangs of his stomach as he could smell the food all around him. He decided to take advantage of his situation to get some grub in him. After all it was a good opportunity now that someone else was footing the bill and it had been a long time since he had had a warm meal. He looked down at the menu in front of him before he was struck by a sudden realization. He couldn't read a single word on it.

He shook his head as if he was having a momentary glitch in his vision. He knew he could read. Yet as he continued to stare at the menu nothing seemed to make sense. The letters looked like weird shapes, as if they were some strange alien language. He tried to focus in on one at a time and as he did he found that some of them slowly morphed into recognizable letters such A, B, and some D's and a couple of E's but most of them stayed the same. Having exhausted himself he put his head down being overcome by a feeling of helplessness.

“What'sa matter Ty Ty? Mallory asked tapping him on the shoulder. He turned his head to look at her.

“I can't read,” Tyler said morosely.

“Well duh,” Jace said overhearing the conversation. “You're still a baby after all.” This comment caused Tyler to once again hide his face. He really didn't need the constant reminders of his new diminutive status.

“Jace,” Dad said shooting the boy a displeased look before leaning towards Tyler. “Its okay Ty we can pick something out together, okay.”

Tyler lifted his head, still wearing a gloomy look.

“Okay lets see, it looks like they have a cheeseburger, a grilled cheese, a mini pizza, and some mini corndogs with mac and cheese,” Dad said pointing out each menu item as he read it, of which Tyler still couldn't make heads or tails of. “Any of that sound good?”

Tyler found that nothing really appealed to him as his appetite had seemingly dissipated. At the same time though he was also wishing for a steak option, something to help him feel like the adult he knew he was.

“I don't care,” Tyler said sitting back with a frown. “You pick.” Dad only nodded with a shrug while also looking to his wife who could only look on with a concerned look of her own. The server returned and took everyone's orders during which Dad ordered the corn dog meal for Tyler. As the family waited for their food Tyler"s eyes wandered around before settling in too watch what the others at the table were doing. Connor and Jace were engrossed in a game of tic tac toe against one another as Mallory happily colored a picture on the menu. Mom noticed Tyler's gaze and pushed the cup of

crayons toward him.

“Why don't you color a picture for me,” she suggested. “You might feel better.” Tyler picked up a green crayon with some hesitancy. He looked at it in his hand for a moment before looking down again at the menu. He decided it would be good to do something to try and get his mind off of his problems for a minute. He wasn't about to color a picture like a little kid though. As he looked down at the menu his face scrunched up a little still being bothered by the fact he couldn't read any of the words. He flipped the menu over to the blank side as he halfhearted started to scribble a little. He found that it was hard to hold the crayon properly in his small hand before switching over to gripping it in his fist, which felt better. An idea then sprang to his mind. Even if he couldn't read he could probably still write since he had been able to recognize some of the letters with some effort, he had been a writer by trade after all. Surely even with his head being a little out of wack he hadn't completely lost the one skill he had used on the daily. He decided to start off with something simple, something he knew he could write. He settled on trying his own name, something he had written thousands of times over his life.

He put the crayon to the paper and made a line and then another writing out a T albeit looking a tad bit sloppy. That had been simple enough. He then went to the next letter but found it a little more difficult. He knew he wanted a y but was finding it hard to remember what that looked like. With some concentration he wrote it out being a little deflated when he

saw that it was backwards, but he was still feeling pretty good about his progress to stop now. Next was the L yet try as he might he simply couldn't remember how to make one. He knew it was simple, so why couldn't he bring the image to his mind? He sat back a moment only to watch the paper slip away as Mallory now had it in her hands showing it to the whole table.

“Look,” she said excitedly. “Ty wrote his name.” Tyler's eyes went wide as he watched his childish scrawl be displayed for all to see.

“Noooo,” he mewled as he grabbed the paper out of her hands before covering it with as much as his body he could still being strapped into a booster seat. “Don't show it,” he said putting his head down and looking like some dog guarding it's bone.

“Hey now, let me see,” Dad said leaning over as he coaxed the paper out from under Tyler. “What's the problem, it looks great,” Dad said.

“It's not right,” Tyler said meekly not wanting to face his new Dad.

“What are you talking about? That's your name it says Ty,” Dad said with a grin.

“He probably wanted to write out the whole thing,” Connor reasoned.

“Is that it, did you want to write Tyler?” Dad asked. Tyler could only nod.

“Okay,” Dad said placing the paper back in front of Tyler. “Go ahead.”

“But I forgotted how to do L,” Tyler admitted, his voice shaking a little.

“L's are easy,” Connor chimed in once again. “It's just a straight line.”

Upon hearing that Tyler could suddenly see what he had been trying so hard to remember. Of course, it was so simple how could he have forgotten? He wrote the lowercase L onto the paper. Tyler then put the crayon onto the paper to do the next letter however it was even worse than the previous letter. He had no idea if it was a simple letter or not. Tyler pushed the crayon down into the paper causing the tip to smush a little.

“Let me help you, then you'll know for next time,” his Dad said as he wrapped his hand around Tyler's. “First you do an e,” he said as together they wrote the letter. “Then finally an r,”

Dad released his hand as Tyler regarded the work. The name looked so similar to him as if he should have known it from the start.

“Now you should do the middle and last,” Mallory said. Tyler liked the idea, for some reason he really found himself wanting to do it. As he began to start on the middle part of his name he came to a stop once again. This was really hard.

“Daddy, do it,” Tyler said pushing the paper towards his dad. Dad took the crayon and wrote out the rest of the name

before putting it back in front of Tyler.

“Okay just copy what you see here,” Dad said pointing to the full name. Tyler began to work drawing out the shapes of the letters as best he could.. Tyler came to a pause as he came to the start of the last name. He looked at the W in the word West above where he was writing. He wanted to write it out, but something in him told him that it was wrong. Tyler wrote out a letter and then came to a halt once again, finding that he had wrote the letter K instead of a W.

“That's not right silly you wrote K, let me do it for you,” Mallory said with a giggle as she went to use her own crayon to write the correct letter.

“Mal stop,” Dad said putting his hand up. “He needs to do it himself so he can learn.” Tyler was perplexed. He had done it right, he knew he had. Why were they saying it was wrong?

“I did it right,” Tyler said confused.

“No, you needed a W not a K, see just like I did,” his Dad said pointing to the one he had wrote. “Its okay, mistakes are how we learn, try again.” Tyler felt reassured by his Dad as he started over below his first attempt. He needed to concentrate as he slowly wrote out his name. This time he did it just as Dad had done setting the crayon down as he finished.

“Great job Tyler, you just wrote your full name,” his Dad said putting an arm around the boy. “Looks like we've got a little writer on our hands,” Dad said with a grin towards his wife. Tyler was staring at what he had just written looking at each

word. “Tyler James West” it seemed right to him but there seemed to be something off about it that he couldn't quite place his finger on.

“Ty hold it up I want a picture,” Mom said having her phone ready to snap a picture. Tyler held up the paper in front of him as his Mom snapped a pic. She took a look at it before frowning.

“You're not even smiling,” she noted. “Say cheese,” she said pointing the phone at him again. Tyler could only manage a small smile as he heard the click of the camera app. Mom looked at the photo again realizing he still wasn't giving her the big smile she wanted.

“What's the matter, baby?” she asked “Aren't you happy?”

“It's not good,” Tyler mumbled as he stared at the name on the paper.

“Its perfect the way it is,”his Dad said rubbing Tyler's back thinking his son was referring to the sloppy handwriting of a three year old being what was bothering Tyler.

“C'mon give mama a smile,” Mom said once again raising her phone up. Tyler took the paper in his hand again and gave her the biggest smile he could muster as she snapped the picture looking at it with the look of a mother melting at the sight of her adorable child. Even though Tyler smiled he was anything but happy. His parents seemed so pleased with him, so why did he feel sad?

The server reappeared with the food setting the plates in front

of their intended recipient. Tyler looked at his plate. It had five mini corn dogs on it along with a small bowl of mac and cheese and another small bowl of steamed broccoli. The smell of the food blasted Tyler's senses making it easy for him to push the thoughts about his name out. He grabbed the fork to dig into the mac and cheese whose golden color seemed to be calling to him. He found that like the crayon trying to hold the fork normally proved difficult and since the fork was an adult size he found it downright unwieldy. He elected to clench it with a fist like the crayon before, he plunged it into the bowl of noodles. He brought up a heap of noodles to his mouth. As he brought the food into to his mouth he found that he could not fit the entirety of the fork into his mouth only able to bite down on half of the contents of his fork leaving the rest of the food to mush into his lips as some stray noodles fell and stuck to his face.

“Small bites there kiddo,” Dad said as a reminder. Tyler grimaced at the fork. A thought crossed his mind that he had always eaten like this, so why now did it seem to not be working as it once had. As he dug back in he made sure to take a smaller portion this time of only a few noodles. He opened his mouth wide sticking just the front part of the fork into his mouth. This seemed to work better for him. He was loving the warmth of the food and the cheesy gooey goodness that was dancing across his taste buds. He ended up completely cleaning out the bowl of noodles before moving to the golden brown corndogs.

He picked one up with his hands finding it was just the

perfect size for him. His Dad had squeezed some ketchup onto his plate. He dipped the corn dog in and then took a bite. The sweet cold ketchup mixed with the warmth of the corn dog was so good that he basically inhaled the rest of the corn dogs. He sat back with a sense of contentment as he let his dangling legs swing gently under the table. He was feeling pretty full now and was starting to regain just a bit of clarity that had seemed lost in the muddle of feelings he had earlier.

“Tyler sweetie don't forget your veggies,” Mom said with a knowing look. Tyler looked at the small bow of four large broccoli florets with some derision. He hated broccoli even as an adult he avoided it.

“Eat your tree's kiddo,” Dad said. Tyler picked up a piece of broccoli. Food clearly tasted different now than it had, maybe with his new sense of taste broccoli wouldn't be so bad. He took a bite and immediately wrinkled his nose as he swallowed the veggie. He found it was ten times worse now. The taste was overly bitter and the texture was near unbearable in his mouth. Tyler stuck his tongue out in disgust.

“Tyler,” his Mom said shooting him a warning look.

“I don't want it,” Tyler said, feeling the full brunt of the injustice of being a kid. It wasn't as if he was being some little kid trying to skirt out of meal time to go off and play. He simply didn't like broccoli and he shouldn't have to eat it. Why couldn't it have been anything else, like mushrooms. He loved mushrooms baked, stuffed, fried, raw it didn't matter. Tyler knew though it was probably a stretch to think a

restaurant like this would offer something like that, especially on the kids menu.

“You need to take four more bites,” his Dad said sternly. Tyler picked up another piece knowing full well his supposed parents weren't going to let him out of this, even if he did throw a tantrum about it, which he was not going to lower himself to. Tyler took another large bite eager to satisfy the arbitrary requirement that had been placed on him. He was an adult after all, there would be no tears or complaining from him, he was just going to grin and bear it. As he took his last bite he looked down to see there was only half a piece left. Figuring he had come this far he might as well go all the way. He took the last bite as he nearly had to choke it down. He let out a sigh feeling as if he had just endured some sort of torture. The server appeared once again to clear the finished plates out of the way.

“I see this little guy cleaned his plate,” the server said as he took Tyler's plate. “Rule is if kids under five clear their plates they get a free scoop of ice cream. Whaddya say parents?”

Tyler's ears perked up. Ice cream seemed to be just what he needed to get the disgusting taste out of his mouth and the lemonade wasn't cutting it.

“Free is free,” Dad said.

“I don't know its getting kind of late,” his Mom said checking the time.

“Please Mommy,” Tyler said laying it on extra thick with a

pair of puppy dog eyes, despite finding the whole exchange embarrassing as he was more or less aware of his current situation.

“Yeah come on please Mommy,” Dad said as he used his fingers to to force a smile on Tyler's face. His Mom just stared back a little un-amused. “C'mon Renee,” Dad said straightening up. “Let the boy have his ice cream.”

“Oh okay,” she said with a sigh.

“If Tyler gets ice cream can we?” Jace asked.

“Ice cream all around,” Mom said with a wave of her hand. The kids let out a small cheer.

“Only his is free though, right,” Dad asked the server gesturing towards Tyler.

“That is correct, sir,” the server said. Dad gave Mom a raised eyebrow from across the table.

“Let the kids have their ice cream,” Mom said in a sarcastic tone. Dad could only let out a small guffaw.

The server returned a moment later with the kid's chosen flavors. Tyler had chosen chocolate. He took his first bite and felt his mouth explode with flavor as the sweet smooth treat melted in his mouth. If there was going to be a silver lining when he looked back on this ordeal after he got himself turned back, it was going to be that he got to experience ice cream as a kid again. After having finished his scoop Dad wiped his face down. Tyler feeling a little foolish that he

hadn't even noticed he had gotten it all over his mouth. A little had even dripped down his chin making a small stain on his white shirt. A badge of shame for Tyler that showed the world he was just a messy little three year old.

The family was gathered at the front as Dad paid the check. Connor and Jace were playing rock paper scissors with each other to pass the time and Mallory was talking to her Mother. Tyler was standing a bit behind with Opie in his arms. He suddenly realized that no one was really paying attention to him. Tyler looked down at Opie who seemed to speak to him in a very real manner. The stuffed animal told him now would be a good time to run. No one was watching him. They could make their escape and find Fiona and bring an end to this whole ordeal. Tyler knew he had to act. He saw some patrons heading towards the door. He slipped in with them as he walked out the door no one being any wiser that he had made his exit.

Night had fallen as Tyler walked out into the parking lot. He hadn't really taken much notice before but as he walked by himself he couldn't help but feel a little overwhelmed by how big the world seemed to him. As an adult who traveled all around it had always seemed like the world was his oyster to do with what he wanted. He could go anywhere and do anything, that is if he had enough money for gas. But now the world seemed foreboding and mysterious. Tyler was beginning to feel a little anxious. He made his way into a grass field. As he was walking across it he could see a busy street ahead of him. The cars seemed to be speeding by so

fast as he could feel the gusts of wind hit him. He paused for a moment as he clutched Opie into his chest. Just then he became aware of the enormous amount of pressure in his bladder, no doubt the lemonade he had drank during dinner. How could he have not noticed it before? He was nearly ready to burst. As he looked around a little panicked he could see there was nowhere to go. He had ventured a good deal out from the restaurant at least to his three year old perspective. It was dark and he was all alone and suddenly he felt extremely small and scared. Suddenly Tyler's bladder released as he felt the warmth spread in his diaper as he could only react in horror. Tyler's legs got wobbly as he let out a whimper. He crouched down hugging Opie tightly.

“This is bad,” Tyler whispered to Opie. The wolf responded telling him he shouldn't have come out here alone. There was no way for him to get anywhere like this. Tyler knew he was in trouble. The family didn't know he was out here. They weren't going to find him and why should they? Its not like he was really one of them. They had probably already forgotten about him and gone on with their lives happy to be rid of the burden he surely was. Tyler was alone again, just like he always was.

“Tyler” the familiar voice of Connor said as Tyler glanced back to see the boy jogging towards him. Connor knelt down immediately as he got to his little brother's side noticing that Tyler was quivering.

“What are you doing out here, everyone's looking for you?” he asked.

“I-I was trying,” Tyler said unable to mask the shaking in his voice.

“It doesn't matter, lets just go back okay.” Connor said standing up as Tyler unwound from his ball. He looked up at Connor who gave him a smile. Connor seemed so big right now like he wasn't scared of anything. Tyler took his hand feeling a sense of relief wash over him. Connor would take care of him, Connor could keep him safe. As they came to the ramp leading into the restaurant Tyler spotted his Dad with Mallory and Jace looking around.

“Dad I found Tyler,” Connor called out. Tyler saw a wave of relief wash over his Dads face.

“Renee, we got him,” Dad yelled out. Mom appeared from around a corner looking frazzled as she bolted towards Tyler. She plucked him up into her arms immediately

“Oh my god, thank the heavens,” she said as she gave him a flurry of kisses. After calming down a bit she looked him in the eyes. “Don't you ever do that again, do you understand me. I can't imagine what we would have done if something ever happened to you. Why did you walk off like that?” she said. Tyler's mouth hung open a smidge as he tried to process what was even happening. The look of concern on his Mom's face made him feel a mixture of sadness and guilt.

“I-I-I'm sorry,” he said as his face crumpled and tears began to stream down his reddening face as he began to cry. His Mom put hand on the back of his head lowering it onto her shoulder.

“It's okay baby, Mommy knows, you're safe that's all that matters,” she said in a gentle mothering tone. As Tyler's cry's echoed out in the night he knew running away was no longer an option, it would be impossible for him to navigate the world as he was now, and at this point he didn't care, he felt he never wanted to leave the safety of his Mom's arms again.

Chapter 6

One of the Family: Part 6 - Chapter 6

Part 6

Tyler once again found himself strapped into his car seat. He was clutching Opie against his chest as he was lost deep in thought watching the lights of the cars go past. The car was quiet except for the soft playing of the radio. Apparently Tyler had caused a panic among the family with his escape attempt, something he did feel bad about. He tried to re-adjust himself in his car seat as the strap that was against his crotch was pushing his wet swollen diaper against his body. Yet nothing he did seemed to help. The straps held him tight. He was just going to have to wait until they got back to the hotel. The fact that he had wet his diaper was very concerning to Tyler. He had reasoned that at the park he had transformed and had the wet diaper from the start and the only reason he hadn't noticed was because of everything else going on. The second time he had done so in his sleep. But this time he had been fully awake and had been powerless to stop it.He could no longer hide behind an excuse, he simply did not have control over his bladder. As Tyler thought about everything that had happened that day he was starting to understand a little more about just where he stood. The wetting and his trouble swimming along with the events at the restaurant with him not being able to read and write and the difficulty eating his food all pointed to one conclusion. While his mind was still mostly intact with some momentary lapses, his physical

capabilities were that of an average three year old.

The minivan entered into the hotel parking lot. Tyler could hear Connor and Jace whispering about something in the backseat. The car pulled into a spot and Dad shut off the engine as everyone began to pile out. All except for Tyler who was feeling somewhat demoralized by the fact that he needed to wait for someone to unstrap him as he couldn't get them undone by himself. Dad opened the sliding door to get Tyler but was interrupted by Jace pulling on his arm.

“Dad we need our blankets from the back,” Jace said.

“There are blankets on the beds already,” Dad replied

“Daaad,” Jace mewled a little. “Its for the movie.”

“Fine,” Dad said with a deep sigh already knowing why the blankets were so important.

“Want me to get Ty?” Mom asked.

“Nah, I'll bring him up with me and the blankets, you go on ahead with the others,” Dad said.

“You sure?” Mom asked. “You might have your hands full.”

“I got it, Tyler can be my little helper.” Dad said as he gave Tyler a quick tickle under his chin which elicited a giggle from the boy. “Plus I think me and him need to have a little T-A-L-K,” Tyler was a little miffed that the trick of spelling things out now seemed to work on him as he hadn't understood what his Dad had said. Although he had a pretty good guess. He was in for a lecture. As Tyler watched the rest

of the family enter the hotel lobby a swirling sense of fear began to bubble up in his stomach. In his experience with his real Dad, lectures meant a lot of screaming and every degrading term in the book being hurled at him. He knew his new Dad was nothing like that but he couldn't help his response that had been conditioned in him all through his life. His new Dad unstrapped him and carried him to the back of the car before setting him down on his feet.

“Tyler we need to have a little chat you and I,” his Dad said kneeling down to get face level with the toddler boy. “You made Mommy and I feel really scared at the restaurant, do you know why?”

Tyler held Opie up to his face as he started to feel ashamed.

“Cause I ran away,” Tyler said in an incredibly small voice.

“That's right,” his new Dad said. “We didn't know where you were, you could have gotten lost or really hurt. You don't want that do you?” Tyler shook his head.

“From now on when you want to go somewhere you need to ask me or Mommy first, do you understand me?

Tyler nodded.

“Then I need you tell me,” Dad said pushing Opie down so Tyler could see his face. “If you want to go somewhere who are you going to ask first?”

“Daddy or Mommy,” Tyler said, feeling a twinge of embarrassment at having referred to the two of them by those

names.

“That's my guy,” Dad said with a smile as he pulled Tyler into a hug. Tyler couldn't help but wrap his arms around his Dad's neck. “I love you so much, you're my favorite Ty guy in the whole wide world and I never want to lose you again.” Dad said.

Tyler was once again overtaken by that warm fuzzy feeling that radiated in him. Even though he was thinking with his adult mind it still felt nice to hear someone say they loved him and actually mean it.

Dad stood up and opened the trunk, he rummaged through the car producing four rolled up fleece blankets.

“Think you can carry your own blanket?” Dad asked as he took Opie from Tyler's hand replacing it with one of the fleece blankets before placing Opie on top of the bundle.

“I want to carry more,” Tyler said in an effort to be more helpful.

“That's all right, you just carry what you have,” his new Dad said gathering up the remaining bundles.

“Daddy will carry the rest.”

Tyler followed his Dad through into the hotel lobby careful to stay close. The world still felt so incredibly big to him but knowing that there was someone close by looking out for him made it not feel so scary. As they entered into their room Dad went into the other room to deliver the kids their blankets.

“Did you carry your blankie all by yourself?” Tyler's new Mom asked giving him a little smile.

“Um yeah,” Tyler said feeling a little bit bashful at being asked such a question. She took it out of his arms and unfurled it letting it rest on the bed. Tyler could see it was Paw Patrol themed.

“You and Opie are going to be so snugly tonight, huh,” his Mom remarked as she set the wolf stuffie in the center of the blanket. Connor now appeared in the room dressed in a white t-shirt and a pair of flannel pajama pants.

“Hey Ty you wanna come watch the movie? We got Star Wars” Connor asked with an excited look. Tyler smiled at the invitation. He was actually a huge Star Wars fan and thought it would be great to watch something he actually enjoyed as an adult.

“I don't think he can tonight dear,” Tyler's Mom said gently stroking Tyler's head. “It's already past his bedtime.” Tyler looked at the digital clock on the desk next to the T.V. He could still make it out the numbers and with a bit of effort he surmised that it was currently nine o'clock.

“Oh ok,” he said as he bowed his head in disappointment. He really didn't want to go to sleep, but he also didn't want to cause anymore trouble for these people than he already had. Tyler then suddenly felt himself be lifted up by his Dad from behind. His Dad began to tickle him which elicited surprised laughter from Tyler as he squirmed all around. When his Dad had finished Tyler found himself being held upside down.

“Bedtime schmedtime,” Dad said as he heaved Tyler up so that he was now being held upright. “Whats the harm in letting him stay up a little later than usual? I think the little man deserves some movie time. He was such a good swimmer, he wrote his name all by himself at the restaurant and he was my good little helper,” Dad said rattling off Tyler's supposed list of achievements. Mom gave a little sigh before smiling.

“I suppose, Its the last night of vacation” she said relenting as Dad passed Tyler to her. “But first jammies, okay.”

Tyler nodded his head, happy to comply if it meant he would get to watch the movie. Mom carried him over to a spot on the floor where his changing mat was. Tyler could see there was already a fresh diaper waiting for him along with changing supplies and some pajamas already laid out. His Mom undressed him leaving him in just the wet diaper before she laid him down on the mat. She un-taped the diaper, and Tyler found he was no longer surprised by the feeling of cool air hitting his groin as the old diaper was removed. He didn't even shudder when he felt the shock of the cold wipe hit his skin. Had he really grown so accustomed to such an infantile experience in the matter of a day? His Mom finished with the lotion and the powder and brought the diaper up in-between his legs as she finally taped it into place. Tyler couldn't help but feel relief now that he was in a nice dry diaper. His Mom then grabbed a bottle of baby oil. She placed a few drops on his chest before she began to rub it in all over his chest and tummy. She continued with his neck and his cheeks. When

she was done she had gone over nearly every inch of him. Tyler was like putty on the ground feeling like he had just gotten the worlds greatest massage. His Mom then picked up the pajamas and threaded his feet into the garment before putting his arms in. She then stood him up facing him away from her as he felt her zip him up in the back. Tyler looked down to see he was wearing a red pair of footie pajamas that had little foxes all over them. He wrapped his arms around himself feeling the incredibly soft fabric against his now baby smooth skin. He was a little concerned with the fact that they zipped up in the back knowing he would not be able to get them undone without assistance. He guessed he wasn't going to be making any nighttime trips to the bathroom by himself, that was before he realized they just expected him to use his diaper.

“All nice and cozy,” his Mom said as she picked him up and carried him to the other room.

As they entered Jace and Mallory were jumping up and down on the bed. Jace was outfitted in a pair of minecraft pajamas while Mallory was sporting a unicorn themed nightgown.

“Stop jumping,” Connor said with some alarm. “You guys are going to ruin it.”

As Tyler looked about he could see now why the kids had wanted the blankets. They had used the hotel blankets to construct a blanket fort on the bed. It was attached at the headboard as it sloped down with an opening at the foot of the bed.

“Connor's right you two,” Dad chided as he stood near the dvd player with the disc in his hand. “I'm not starting this movie until everyone's settled. All three kids crawled into their fort poking their heads out of opening as they layed on their stomachs.

“All right we're ready,” Mallory announced.

“Where do you want to go Ty?” Mom asked. Tyler pointed to a spot in-between Connor and Jace, feeling to shy to actually say it. For some reason though he felt like he really wanted to be in-between the two boys.

“I don't want him next to me,” Jace said moving defensively closer to Connor.

“Jace don't be mean,” their Mom chided.

“I'm not,” Jace protested. “I just don't want him next to me.”

“Jace, if your little brother wants to be next to you then let him,” Dad said. “You know its only because he really looks up to you.”

“Why should I,” Jace said glowering. “He's the one that hit me in the face today.”

Tyler instantly felt a mix of embarrassment and shame well up inside of him remembering the incident from the car. Other than a few snide comments Jace had been nice to him especially at the pool, he had thought that Jace had moved past it but as he saw the hurt look on the boy's face it was clear it was still bothering him.

“Quit acting like a baby,” Connor remarked. “Just get over it.”

“No, no, he's right,” Mom said much to the surprise of Jace. Mom placed Tyler on the ground so that he was now facing his brother before sitting on the bed placing a hand on top of Jace's head.

“Tyler do you remember in the car when you hit Jace?

“It was an accidwent,” Tyler said sheepishly slipping over the pronunciation of such a big word.

“That may be, but Jace was only trying to help you and you hurt him and made him feel really bad,” Mom explained. Tyler averted his gaze. He really hadn't meant to, everything had been happening so fast. He had no idea that Jace had been that close to him until after he had smacked him. Mom placed a hand under Tyler's chin bringing his head back up. “Don't you think you owe him an apology?”

“Sorry, Jace,” Tyler said “I didn't mean to.” Jace's stony expression broke as he sat up on his knees.

“Yeah, I know,” he said as he pulled Tyler forward up onto the bed so that he was now between him and Connor. “Just don't do it again,” Jace said laying back down onto his stomach. Tyler couldn't help but feel relieved at the boy's forgiveness. He was happy that it seemed Jace didn't hate him.

“Now that's what I like to see, some brotherly love,” Dad remarked.

“Stooop,” Jace whined as he put his face into the blanket

balled up in front of him.

“Opie,” Tyler suddenly yelped realizing that his stuffie was still in the other room. His Mom went and grabbed it for him. Upon returning she tucked it in closely to Tyler who was a little embarrassed having called out for it. It was a tad bit concerning to him how attached he was to a stuffed animal, yet at this point Opie was the only person that truly understood what was happening to him, even if Tyler knew that it was all in his head.

“You and Opie enjoy the movie,” Mom said before kissing Tyler on the forehead. “And one for you,” she said turning to Connor and giving him a peck on his cheek.

“Mom, stop,” Connor said with a grin.

“And you too,” Mom said coming to Jace.

“Nooo,” Jace said as he covered his face with his blanket before it was pulled away and he received his own kiss. Mallory on the other hand gratefully accepted her's.

“Don't forget the lights,” Jace said as Dad popped the movie into the player.

“Yeah, yeah,” Dad said as he and Mom retreated into their own room to let the kids enjoy the show, flipping off the lights as he went.

The movie began with the opening scroll, Tyler could immediately tell it was one of the original trilogy although which one he was unsure as his ability to read was still

lacking. Tyler was kind of impressed that the kids went for one of the older one's instead of a more recent entry. Tyler was then struck by a memory from his own childhood as the opening scene began playing of the rebel soldiers trying to fend off the invading stormtroopers. He remembered his first sleepover with his friend Colin. They had built a blanket fort similar to the one he was in now and had stayed up all night marathoning the original trilogy. It was one of his happiest memories from childhood. He started to wonder what Colin was up to these days. As Tyler kept thinking about his old life he suddenly remembered his car still being back at the park. At some point someone would inspect it. His name was still registered to it. He wondered if the cops would open up a missing person's report. Who would they even call? He didn't really have any family as he had never met his Mom's relatives and his Dad had become estranged from his own. Tyler didn't even have friends as he had drifted away from them after graduation. The sad realization hit Tyler that absolutely no one was going to be looking for him, or would even know that he had gone missing.

Unbeknownst to Tyler tears began rolling down his cheeks. Connor looked over and noticed it.

“Hey Ty it's okay, are you scared of Darth Vader?” Conner asked as the figure of the imposing Sith lord appeared on the screen.

“Don't worry about him,” Jace said as he put a protective arm over Tyler. “I'm a Jedi so I can take him.”

“Sure you can,” Connor said sarcastically. Tyler shook his head as he wiped his tears.

“Not scared,” he said.

Tyler was touched by the protective nature of the boys on either side of him. He remembered back to the restaurant when he had felt the same feeling he had been feeling now, when he felt he was all alone and no one was going to find him, but someone had. They had found him. Not only that, they had been worried about him. Even if it was under false pretenses Tyler took solace in knowing that for the moment there were people that cared about him. Tyler focused back in on the movie. Even though he knew the movie backwards and forwards he marveled at how fresh it seemed to him now, he was eager to see the ending sequence trench run as it was one his favorite parts. Yet by the halfway point of the movie he had dozed off, his head resting against Connors shoulder.

Tyler awoke opening his eyes about halfway to a darkened room. He could feel his Mom gently stroking his hair. He could tell he was in a bed in-between his new Mom and Dad. He decided to close his eyes as he heard them talking in low almost whisper like voices.

“You think he's been acting kind of weird?” his Dad asked.

“Yeah, ever since the park,” his Mom said. “I mean that was no normal tantrum he threw when we were leaving, it was almost like he was completely panicked about something,” his Mom said. “I was a little scared to be honest.”

“Hrmm, I kind of noticed something was up before that,” His Dad said. “When I went to change him he was kind of flipping out, and uhh well I kind of barked at him. He then just froze up,”

“It probably scared him was all,” Mom reasoned. “You don't ever really yell at the kids.”

“I know, but its like he was terrified of me or something like I was going to hurt him.”

“He knows you wouldn't” Mom said in that same reassuring tone she used on Tyler.

“I suppose,” Dad said. Tyler could hear a sense of regret in the man's voice.

“But its not just the tantrums he's been trying to do things he's never done before,” Mom said.

“When we got to the hotel he ran into the bathroom all by himself and used the toilet.”

“Really,” Dad said with some surprise. “Maybe he's trying to tell us he's ready for potty training?”

Tyler's face went red with the implication.

“You know he fought me really hard on the floaties too, he's never done that,” Mom said.

“Yeah he seemed a little off in the pool too. He was swimming how he usually did but I noticed he seemed frustrated.” Dad said.

“I can't believe you got him swimming though,” Mom said. “I'm so happy I got a video of him paddling around with that goofy little smile on his face.”

“I didn't even do much, he took to it right away. It was like he already knew how to do it he just needed to be reminded. But you know what was really weird. I told him I was proud of him and he started crying,” Dad said. “You know with the swimming and then with him trying to write his name I'm getting the sense that he's trying to prove something to us.” They were quiet for a moment as they both pondered their own thoughts.

“Maybe we should look into a therapist?” Mom said. “He could have self-esteem issues.”

“Can a three year old have self-esteem issues?” Dad said with some skepticism.

“I don't know, I'm just spitballing here,” she replied.

“I don't think its all that serious. Maybe its just because we've been on vacation. You know this is the first vacation we've taken since he was born. Everything has probably just been so new that he feels overwhelmed.” Dad reasoned.

“You're probably right,” Mom said. “It'll be good for him once we're home and he's in a more familiar setting.”

Tyler felt his Mom withdraw her hand as he could feel both of them shift in the bed. About ten minutes later it seemed both of his new parents were asleep. Tyler felt a little strange to be in a bed between these two people who were still

strangers to him. But given everything that had happened to him today, it was probably the least awkward thing when compared to the rest.

Tyler curled up into a ball as he clutched Opie close. He couldn't help but feel bad upon hearing their conversation. These people had no way of knowing what was going on. They had only been trying to care for him in what they thought was the best way given who they thought he was. Tyler should have been grateful. It was clear now that he did need help with some things, yet it seemed all he had done was cause them to worry. That wasn't fair. Not to them or their very real kids sleeping in the other room whom hadn't been given all the attention that they should have since their parents had spent so much on him. Tyler was the impostor here.

“We need to be better,” Opie said telepathically.

“I know,” Tyler responded. He needed a plan. It was clear to him that he wasn't going to be able make it out in the world on his own, but he couldn't keep on like this. As Tyler thought on these questions he didn't realize that his thumb had made its way into his mouth as he eventually fell asleep.

Morning came as Tyler's eyes fluttered open with the gaze of a sunbeam coming through the window. He sat up in the bed to find it empty.

“Good morning sleepy bear,” his Mom said as she walked into view as Tyler rubbed the sleep from his eyes. “You ready to get up?”

Tyler gave a small nod.

“Then lets get you dressed,” she said moving him over to the changing mat on the floor. She made quick work of his wet diaper and had him dressed and freshly diapered in no time. His Mom then scooped him up into her arms.

“Lets go get breakfast downstairs, I think they have waffles,” Mom said.

“Yaay, waffles,” Tyler said putting his hands in the air with a smile.” His Mom gave him a kiss on the cheek as they left the room. Tyler wrapped his arms around her neck and rested his head on her shoulder. He had made his decision. He needed time to get his bearings and figure out a plan to find Fiona, in the meantime he wasn't going to cause his temporary family to worry about him anymore. If that meant acting like the bright cheery three year old they all took him for then so be it, no matter how embarrassing or uncomfortable it was sure to make him feel.

Chapter 7

One of the Family: Part 7 - Chapter 7

Part 7

Tyler awoke staring up at an unfamiliar ceiling. He remembered that he was in the West families house in his supposed room. They had gotten back late last night. He had felt himself be carried into the house but was so tired he had not been able to rouse himself enough to open his eyes. When he had felt himself laid into a soft bed he fell back asleep almost instantaneously.

He pushed back the bed sheets which had teddy bears flying in biplanes all over it. The room was a good size but definitely befitting a toddler. The walls were white with thick blue stripes all around. There was a Paw Patrol poster and a Mickey Mouse poster on the wall. He saw multicolored letters high up spelling out his name on the wall as well. There was a white closet door to his right and a rack of brightly colored bins with toys near the wall. In the corner was also a changing table stacked with diapers and other changing supplies. There were short railings attached to his bed which he realized was a red racecar bed. He was relieved to see it was not a crib. He slipped out to stand on the carpeted floor.

He was wearing the powder blue footie pajamas his new Mom had changed him into the night before at a rest stop. As he walked around the room he was instantly hit by the

cramping in his stomach. He crouched down clutching his stomach he had been trying to hold it in refusing to use the diaper, but now it was far too pressing to ignore. Tyler was helpless to stop nature from taking its course. He felt the back of his diaper expand as a putrid smell filled into his nostrils. He frowned as he stood, the feeling was disgusting. Some tears sprang into his eyes as he felt completely mortified by the experience. He turned to see Opie on the bed looking back at him. Opie was telling him he had to do something. Tyler looked down to see that his pajamas thankfully had the zipper in the front. He struggled a little to work his fingers to unclasp the button at the top before he could finally pull the zipper down. As he was pulling his legs out his foot got stuck in the hole causing him to clumsily stumble backwards before landing on his butt. He felt the mess in the back of the wet and soiled diaper spread all around. He could tell he had just made things ten time's worse. Tyler got back to his feet feeling the diaper sticking to his backside. He grasped at the tapes and tore them off as the diaper sickly slid off his body. As he stood naked his door opened as he now saw his new Mom standing in the door way.

“Tyler time to wak...Oh no what are you doing?” she said immediately seeing the situation in front of her. She picked him up holding him out in front of her. “To the tub with you,” she announced as she carried him down the hall into the bathroom before setting him into the tub. She turned on the faucet and un-attached the shower head. She made him stand as she sprayed down his backside. “Honestly making such a mess first thing in the morning,” she said with a sigh.

Tyler could only stand with his hands covering his face, completely humiliated at the situation he had gotten himself in. After she had finished spraying him down she wrapped him up in a towel and took him back to his room where she placed him on his back on the changing table.

“You need to let Mommy or Daddy take off your diaper,” she said as she cleaned up the dirty diaper off the ground before depositing it into a trashcan. “At least none of it got on the carpet” she said returning to stand over him at the changing table.

“I'm sorry,” Tyler said completely deflated.

“It's okay baby, you were just trying to be a big boy, huh?” Mom said as he got him taped up into a fresh diaper. She lifted him onto the ground as she went into his closet returning with some clothes.

“Arms up,” she instructed. Tyler put his arms up into the air. He wanted to protest and insist that he he could dress himself but he wasn't about to argue with his new Mom after what he had just put her through. She had him dressed in a black t-shirt that had a picture of a pastel brontosaurus on it with black shorts that had a white stripe going down the side. Tyler felt a little silly in the outfit but knew there were probably even worse outfits lying in wait in the closet. Mom picked him up and put him on her hip.

“You ready to get some breakfast in that tummy?” she asked. Tyler nodded slowly. His Mom gave him a kiss on his cheek seeing he was still bothered by what had just happened. As

they walked down the hallway Tyler took a look around since he had not even seen the inside of the house yet. His room was in the middle of the hallway. There was the bathroom he had just been in right next door and further down were another two rooms at the end of the hall. Closest to the stairs were two sliding doors that he could only assume was a master bedroom where the parents slept. Tyler's Mom walked down the stairs and then into a kitchen. There was a large island in the middle with a sink and other appliances strewn about. The table was near a dividing wall that allowed one to see into the living room from the kitchen. Tyler was placed in a chair that was also outfitted with another booster seat.

“What kind of cereal do you want?” his new Mom asked as she strapped him in. Tyler could only shrug. His Mom went to a cupboard and pulled out two boxes as she turned towards him.

“You can have Cheerio's or the fruity Pebbles,” she said. As Tyler looked at the boxes, for some reason he found himself drawn to the Fruity Pebbles. Just thinking about the bright, vibrant cereal in a bowl appealed to him.

“Pebbles,” he said. His Mom poured a bowl and set it in front of him with a spoon. Tyler noticed the bowl had pictures of construction vehicles around the rim. The spoon wasn't much better. It was a yellow plastic with a small excavator on the front to give the illusion that the spoon was the scoop for the machine.

“You want some juice?” his Mom asked holding up the sippy

cup in her hand. Tyler shook his head. He was already feeling incredibly infantile with his bowl and silverware and the sippy cup would only make it worse. Tyler picked up his spoon with some derision and began to eat. He found the cereal to taste great, almost like a decadent dessert. Whats more he found the tiny spoon to be the perfect fit for his smaller features and before long he was happily shoveling the cereal into his mouth with out a care in the world.

Jace came wandering into the kitchen still dressed in his pajamas and a cowlick on the side of his head.

“You want some breakfast?” Mom asked as Jace took a seat at the table. Jace only nodded. His Mom prepared a bowl for him setting it down at the table.

“Can I have some orange juice?” Jace asked.

“What do you say?” Mom asked.

“Pleeease,” Jace said in an overly sweet tone. Mom went to the fridge and poured a glass setting it in front of Jace complete with a swirly straw. As Jace sipped the juice Tyler found himself mesmerized by the liquid twisting up the straw. He so wished that he could also have one but knew he wouldn't be allowed. Jace noticed Tyler staring, a mischievious smile spread across his face. Jace sucked some juice into the straw and then lifted it out of the cup before blowing it back out into his cup like a fountain. Tyler laughed a little finding the display to be amusing. Jace smiled again being encouraged by the reaction of his little brother. Jace took another sip and repeated his performance this time

making a funny face. Tyler found this even funnier as he began to giggle. As Jace was about to go for an encore he was stopped.

“Jace, stop that you are going to make a mess,” Mom chided. Jace let the straw fall back into the cup with a gloomy look. The sudden interruption made Tyler become aware that he had been laughing. What Jace had been doing had been incredibly childish, how could he have thought it was funny?

“Where is everyone?” Jace asked causing Tyler to realize that it seemed to be just the three of them in the house.

“It's Saturday so your father had to drop Connor off at soccer practice and then take Mallory to gymnastics,” Mom said. “And you need to hurry up and eat and then get dressed so we can go to the store.”

“I don't want to go to the store,” Jace whined. “I wanted to watch cartoons.”

“You can do that when we get back,” Mom replied.

“Why are we going to the store anyways?” Jace asked still bummed that his plans had been squashed.

“We need to get some stuff for Tyler,” Mom said.

“Like what?” Jace asked.

“Can't tell,” Mom said giving Tyler a smile. “It's a surprise.” Tyler was more than a little apprehensive at the idea. What could she possibly have up her sleeve. Surely it could only mean more embarrassment for him. “Now hurry up and eat

and then get dressed," Mom instructed as she unsnapped Tyler from his booster seat and picked him up into her arms. "I'm going to get Ty ready," she said.

Tyler was carried back up to the upstairs bathroom where he was sat on the counter. Tyler turned around to look in the mirror. He hadn't seen his reflection since the pool and still found it unnerving to see his three year old self staring back at him.

"Okay, lets get those teeth brushed," Mom said, as Tyler could see her holding a toothbrush with some pink toothpaste already on it in her hand.

"I can do it," Tyler said, grabbing the toothbrush from her hand.

"Okay, go ahead," Mom said taking a step back. Tyler looked down at the toothbrush to see it was once again plastered with the characters from Paw Patrol. Tyler frowned a little. He hadn't even been aware of the show three days ago yet now it seemed like it was popping up everywhere. Tyler stuck the toothbrush into his mouth. He didn't have time to dwell on such thoughts. He needed to concentrate if he was going to show his new Mom he was more capable than she thought. As he moved the toothbrush around his mouth, he found his uncoordinated efforts lackluster as he was more or less fumbling around his teeth rather than actually brushing.

"That's a very good job," Mom said with a smirk. "But now Mommy is going to make sure we get your teeth all clean." Mom removed the toothbrush from Tyler's mouth as the boy

couldn't help but feel just a bit humiliated that he couldn't even manage such a simple task. “Open wide like a crocodile,” Mom said. Tyler obediently opened his mouth as his Mom started to brush his teeth properly. Tyler wanted to make a fuss but remembered that he was trying to not make trouble for these people. If this is how it was going to be then he would just have to put up with it for now. He held onto the hope that he would get his old body back no matter how long it took.

“Spit and rinse,” his new Mom said turning on the faucet. Tyler was grateful that she at least trusted him enough to do this part.

She carried him back down stairs setting him on a bench near the front door and put his dino themed shoes on his feet. As she went to do up the velcro straps Tyler pulled his feet up onto the bench.

“I'll do it,” he said as he pulled the straps tight and and stuck them into place. At least he was able to do this much. Jace appeared coming down the stairs dressed in an orange tank top and a pair of blue shorts, his shoes already on his feet.

“Did you brush your teeth?” Mom asked.

“Yees,” Jace said with a groan.

“Really?” Mom said giving him a skeptical look.

“Yes really, do you want to smell?” Jace said with some annoyance. Mom only chuckled as she lifted Tyler up into her arms and walked out the front door to the minivan in the

driveway. She buckled Tyler into his car seat while Jace crawled into the back seat. Mom got into the driver's seat and started the car.

“Wait,” Tyler yelped.

“What is it honey?” His Mom asked turning to look at him. Tyler had realized that Opie was still sitting on his bed.

“I-I,” Tyler said as his feelings became mixed up. He wanted Opie more than anything, but he knew that would only solidify the fact that he was starting to act more like a three year old.

“Nothing,” Tyler said quickly dismissing his desire. He was an adult he didn't need a stuffed animal. He would be just fine without it.

The three arrived at the store and Tyler found himself being made to hold his new Mom's hand as they crossed the parking lot. He was actually having a hard time keeping up with his little legs. Upon entering the store he was lifted up and placed in the child seat of the cart. He let out a small sigh but guessed it wouldn't be so bad as he was actually feeling a tad bit tired from the little distance they had walked. Mom made her way into the store and stopped off first in the children's clothing section.

“Clothes shopping,” Jace said with a groan.

“I need a couple of new outfits for Tyler, since he's growing so fast,” she said ruffling Tyler's hair. “You could also use some new pants I think, you know we are going to have to go

back to school shopping soon, we could get some of it done now,"

"I don't want to try on clothes," Jace said wrinkling his nose.

"Suit yourself," Mom said with a shrug. "It'll just take that much longer with all three of you, and you know how long Mallory takes."

"Fine, but I'm only trying on a couple of things," Jace said with a roll of his eyes. As they went down the aisles Tyler could see his Mom picking clothes out that were meant for him. He was a little offended that she wasn't even asking his opinion.

Soon enough she had gotten what she wanted and had moved on to another section for older kids. Jace picked out a some t-shirts and his Mom had gotten some jeans for him to try on. They made their way to the changing room and she sent Jace into one of the stalls to put on the first pair of pants.

"Come out and show me," his Mom reminded.

"I will," Jace said still annoyed that he was being made to go clothes shopping. Mom took a seat at the bench waiting for Jace to re-appear.

"You excited for your surprise?" Mom asked.

"Maybe," Tyler said growing more anxious by the minute. He couldn't help but feel somewhat suspicious at all the secrecy. He was really wishing that he had brought Opie with him.

"You'll love it, I just know it," His Mom said with a smile.

This did not seem to help Tyler as he began to worry about what would happen if he didn't like it. Would she be disappointed with him, or even worse mad? Jace came out of the dressing room. She made him lift up his shirt so she could see that they fit around his waist, which Jace did with a fair bit of protest.

“I can tell if my own pants fit,” Jace said.

“I'm just making sure,” Mom said. “Now if you stop with the attitude I might just let you pick out a toy at the end.”

“Really?” Jace said as his face lit up.

“Sure,” Mom said. “A small one.” Jace ran back into the changing stall with a renewed sense of vigor.

Mom was stood by the cart looking over the clothes she had picked out for Tyler

“Look at these aren't they cute?” she asked Tyler holding up a pajama set that had little teddy bears on it. Tyler wrinkled his nose. He thought it was completely babyish even for a three year old. “You don't like them?” she asked noticing Tyler's less than pleased expression. Tyler shook his head as he hid his face. He was feeling guilty and ungrateful, but he couldn't help it seeing the pajamas that seemed to fill him with a deep sense of humiliation.

“We don't have to get these. Why don't you pick out one you like,” she suggested lifting Tyler out of the cart and setting him on his feet.

“Really,” Tyler asked still feeling like she was just going to be mad at him for not liking what she had chosen for him.

“Of course,” she said patting him on the head. Just then Jace came out of the changing stall wearing the last pair of pants he had to try on.

“Are these good?” Jace asked. His Mom checked them out before giving her approval.

“Okay, change out of those and come find us when you are done. Me an Tyler will be in the pajama section.” With that she took Tyler's hand and walked with him back to the pajama section. She placed the pair with the teddy bear's back on the rack.

“Anything look good Ty?” she asked. Tyler stood in the middle of aisle looking up and down. If he was going to be given the chance to pick something out, he was going to try and find something mature looking. As he went up and down the aisle he realized that was going to be harder than he thought. All the choices in front of him were suitably juvenile. He passed an orange pair that had a jack o lantern face on them as the store was starting to put out their fall selection. A Halloween themed pair wouldn't be so bad, but as he looked at the smiling jack o lantern face he felt it was still a little too cutesy for what he was going for. Then he spotted what he thought would be his best option. It was a black pair that would make it look like the wearer was a skeleton from the neck down.

“This one,” Tyler said pointing to the skeleton pj's. His Mom

picked them up and held them up against his body.

“You want to be a little skeleton?” she asked grinning.

“Um yeah,” Tyler said looking bashful at the comment.

“What do you say?” His Mom asked expectantly.

“Please Mommy,” Tyler said not being able to catch himself at calling her Mommy.

“Well when you ask like that, how could I say no,” His Mom replied. Jace came sauntering down the aisle. “What do you think of the pajamas your brother picked out all by himself?” Mom asked. Jace regarded them for a moment before nodding

“Those are pretty awesome,” Jace said. Tyler couldn't help but smile, being pleased that even Jace thought they were cool.

“Put them in the cart,” Mom said handing the pajamas to Tyler. They walked back to the cart that was still by the changing rooms. Tyler heaved them over the side of the cart, feeling so proud of his selection. His Mom then lifted him up putting him back into the child's seat.

“Okay now close your eyes and don't open them till I say so,” His Mom instructed. Tyler covered his eyes as he felt the cart begin to move. As they were moving Tyler realized he had once again slipped from his adult thinking. It seemed to have happened so fast that he hadn't been aware of the exact moment it happened. A twinge of fear began to hit him. What if he let it happen and he wasn't able to come back? Was it

really possible he would forget himself? He knew if that happened there was going to be no coming back, he would be stuck like this forever. The cart came to a stop and Tyler heard some plastic crinkling as something was pulled off a shelf.

“Okay open your eyes,” his Mom said with excited anticipation. He let his hands fall to see the face of a toddler wearing a pull-up smiling back at him. As he looked from the package of training pants to his Mom's smiling face he watched as her expression became concerned.

“Ty honey, are you crying?” she asked. Tyler blinked noticing the watery tears in his eyes. He had been so caught up in his fears of losing himself completely that he hadn't even noticed the tears.

“What's the matter?” his Mom asked stroking his cheek. Tyler pulled away from her touch and wiped his eyes quickly.

“Nothing,” Tyler said. Seeing him randomly start to tear up would only cause her to worry more, which is something he wanted to avoid. “Are these for me?” he asked changing the subject as he grabbed the package of pull-ups from his Mom. His Mom could do nothing but stare at him with a strange look.

“Um yeah,” she said before shaking her head still a little confused at his sudden change in demeanor.

“I think its time for you to be a big boy, do you like them?”

“I love them,” Tyler said forcing a big smile as he bounced up

and down in his seat putting on a little act for his new Mom. Even though Tyler found his little show mortifying he was actually excited by the prospect of potty training. He was going to breeze through this and be back in regular underwear within a couple of days restoring a tiny shred of dignity he had lost in the transformation. Seeing Tyler seem so happy made his Mom feel more at ease as she grabbed a pack of diapers of the shelf and put them in the cart.

“Why are you getting diapers?” Jace asked, just a little too loud for Tyler's liking. “Isn't he potty training now?”

“He'll still need them at night and for long car rides,” his Mom said. “At least in the beginning,” she said with a reassuring look towards her toddler son. Tyler frowned a little realizing he wasn't yet completely free of the diapers. She began to push the cart again leaving the diaper aisle and they found themselves in the baby accessories aisle. Tyler watched as they moved past high chairs and playpens thankful he hadn't been regressed so far as to still need these things. Mom grabbed two boxes containing training toilets and also a seat ring to place on toilets while traveling. Tyler felt his stomach twist up a little imagining how humiliating it was going to be to use these things.

“I think that's everything,” his Mom said going over a mental checklist in her head making sure she had grabbed all the necessary supplies.

“Time for toys,” Jace said jumping up and down.

“One toy,” his Mom said reminding him this wasn't a

shopping spree. This did not seem to deter Jace as he rushed ahead apparently knowing exactly where to go.

They found themselves in the toy aisle as Jace wandered up and down wanting to see all his options before making a choice.

“You can get something too,” his Mom said lifting Tyler out of the cart and setting him on his feet. Tyler looked around a little hesitant. He didn't really want a toy. Even though he could still read the time on digital clocks with some effort, price tags and the concept of money still seemed a little fuzzy in his head. That being said he knew his new Mom had just spent some money on stuff for him. He could only feel that she had just given a generous gesture and he didn't want to push it any further.

“No thanks,” he said as he shuffled his feet a little. Mom was once again caught by surprise by this reaction. What kid would actually refuse the chance for a new toy?

“Jace is getting one, you should too,” she said. “Its a big day after all,” she said giving him a little nudge down the aisle thinking he just needed a little extra assurance that it was okay. The truth was that Tyler found this to be a dangerous situation. It seemed whenever he let his guard down and started to act like a little kid even if he was just putting up a front at first it always ended with his toddler side taking over. He gave a timid look back at his Mom who gave him a reassuring nod. Tyler wandered a little farther away. He decided just to take a look to satiate her. What harm was their

in taking a look? It had been awhile since he had found himself in the toy aisle after all. Mom made her way over to Jace who had seemed to narrow down his choice between either a batman figure or a spider man figure as he held both in his hands. Jace stole a glance down towards Tyler before looking back to the action figures.

“Is something wrong with Ty?” Jace asked.

“What do you mean?” Mom asked curious to where this question was coming from.

“When we were getting the pull-ups he had tears in his eyes but he seemed happy,” Jace said.

“Did that worry you?” Mom asked as she pulled Jace into her with a one armed hug from the back.

“No, not really,” Jace said. “But he did the same thing on vacation when we were watching the movie. He had tears in his eyes and we thought he was scared but he told us he wasn't.”

Mom was a tiny bit surprised to hear this wasn't a new occurrence. She looked down the aisle at Tyler who was standing with his arms crossed and his head slightly cocked to the side, looking more like an adult looking for a gift for a child they knew little about rather than a little boy.

“I don't think its anything to worry about,” Mom said. “Tyler's just at that age where he sometimes feels these really big emotions and he doesn't quite know how to deal with them yet. But he's learning and the best thing we can do is

help him along and watch out for him, you think you can help me and your Dad with that?”

“Yeah of course,” Jace said looking up at his Mom.

“That's my big man,” Mom said giving Jace a boop on his nose. Jace smiled.

“Have you made a choice?” Mom asked.

“Batman,” Jace said holding up the action figure.

Meanwhile Tyler had become transfixed by the large array of toys. The bright colors and exciting imagery had lulled him into a hypnotic daze of sorts making him unable to look away. As his eyes scanned the shelves he stopped upon seeing a box containing different animal figures sitting a few shelves up. There was a moose some ducks a bear and some deer but the one that drew his eye the most was the wolf figurine that immediately reminded him of Opie. He simply couldn't resist it anymore. He climbed onto the first shelf and reached up standing on his tippy toes. The tips of his fingers just barely reached as he inched the box ever closer. What he didn't realize was that the box had caught another box on its edge and as he finally managed to bring the desired box over the edge it started a chain reaction causing two other boxes to come falling down on top of him. The cascade of objects caused Tyler to fall backwards straight onto his butt as the boxes fell on top of him one after another. As he sat on the ground the fallen debris all around him he felt just a little dazed.

His Mom was already at his side having seen what was going to happen seconds before it did.

“Oh baby, you okay?” she asked kneeling down next to him. Tyler looked up at her with a pitiful expression that immediately caused her heart to drop. He stared back with big watery eyes. His mouth was formed into a sad frown as his bottom lip stuck out with a quiver.

“It's okay honey, nothings broken we can put the boxes back on the shelf like nothing ever happened,” his Mom said in a gentle voice. Tyler looked away not being able to face her anymore. She probably thought he was the stupidest little baby on earth. How could he have been so clumsy? He was really regretting not bring Opie with him now as it seemed the world was closing in on him.

“Let's see,” his Mom said picking up the boxes that had fallen. “Is this the one you wanted?" She asked showing him the box with the animals in it. Tyler looked up as he could only nod slowly. “Well this looks like lots of fun and I see there's a wolf, did that remind you of Opie?” she asked. Tyler once again could only nod. His Mom got to her feet and put the other boxes back.

“Sorry, I'm stupid,” Tyler said pulling his knee's close to his chest. His Mom once again knelt down in front of him.

“Hey now,” she said with just a little assertiveness. “I don't ever want to hear you say that again. That's a naughty word we do not use, especially about ourselves. Now on your feet.” Tyler felt compelled to obey to the authority of her tone. She

lead him back to the cart putting the box of animals into the cart. She turned back towards Tyler.

“See nothing to worry about,” she said. Tyler took a deep breath feeling himself want to cry, there was only one thing he wanted right now. He looked up at her with a timid pleading putting his arms up in the air. She gave him a small smile as she scooped him up in his arms where he buried his face into her shoulder. Being in his parents arms like this made him feel safe like nothing could get him, his little safe haven when things seemed too hard and overwhelming.

“You drive,” Mom said to Jace as he eagerly pushed the cart along. Soon they were all loaded up back in the car. Tyler hadn't wanted to separate from his Mom as she strapped him into the car seat. She had taken the wolf figure out of the box and gave it to him to hold. Tyler had clutched it to his chest with a shuddering breath. On the way home she drove thru and got some lunch passing a small bag of fries back to the boys. Tyler was feeling peckish but the smell of hot fresh fries was even too much for him to resist. Upon returning home Tyler sat at the table more or less picking at the chicken nuggets in front of him as he could feel his eyes drooping and getting heavy. He was simply not able to finish his meal. His Mom wiped his face and then picked him up.

“I think its nap time,” she said as she carried him into his room. Tyler didn't like the idea of being put down for a nap, but his drowsy state didn't leave him any energy to protest. His Mom set him on the bed and pulled off his shorts revealing the diaper still around his waist.

“No diaper,” Tyler mewled. His Mom stuck a finger in the leg gathering seeing that he was still dry.

“I know you're excited to wear your new pull-ups but I don't think you should put one on for nap time,” Mom said. Tyler looked away understanding that she meant he would only wet it in his sleep.

“Tell ya what, when you wake up from your nap you can put one on, and all your new stuff will also be set up, okay,” she said as she gently pushed him back into the bed. She snuggled Opie close to him the wolf's soft fur pushing him closer to the edge of sleep as she pulled the covers over the two.

“Now close those eyes,” she said in deeply soothing voice that seemed to release any tension Tyler still had. “I love you,” she said giving him a kiss on his forehead. She got up from the bed and began to leave before Tyler shot a hand out grabbing the bottom of her shirt. She turned to look at him as he looked back with his big round eyes.

“Please stay,” he said in an impossibly small voice. She only smiled back sitting back down on the bed.

“Of course baby,” she said as she gently began to stroke his hair. Tyler nuzzled into her as he closed his eyes listening to her soft hum of a lullaby. A few minutes later he was out. Mom got up slowly from the bed and walked to the door taking a one look back at the toddler in the bed napping peacefully, before gently closing the door.

Chapter 8

One of the Family: Part 8 - Chapter 8

Part 8

Tyler was sitting on the floor of the living room in front of the Tv. He had Opie sat next to him and he was drinking out of his sippy cup. On the tv was an episode of Paw Patrol playing, it was his third episode of the morning. When his new Mom had turned it on for him after breakfast he turned away from the tv not having any interest in watching the infantile program. Tyler however had let his curiosity get the better of him as the program played on. He had taken a glance only to see what the show was all about since it seemed to pop up everywhere in his life now. After about five minutes he had been completely engrossed into the show, which he now sat happily watching.

A hand appeared from behind and snatched the remote from the ground in front of Tyler, he looked up to see Jace standing behind him.

“Enough baby shows,” Jace said as he switched the channel.

“Noo,” Tyler squeaked as he got to his feet to grab the remote back. Jace held the remote out of Tyler's reach as he tried to hopelessly jump to get it back. Jace gave Tyler a small shove back, which only made Tyler grow more frustrated as he charged back at his brother. “Turn it back,” Tyler shouted as he began to swing his tiny fist into Jace, which didn't even seem to phase him.

“What is going on here,” Mom said as she came around into the living room.

“Jace changed the show,” Tyler said pointing at Jace.

“I wanted to watch something different,” Jace said. Mom let out a sigh.

“Tyler was watching the tv first Jace, did you even ask if you could change the station?” she asked.

“No,” Tyler interjected not even giving Jace a chance to respond. Jace pursed his lips seeing that he was about to lose this argument. He looked at Tyler for a moment and then smirked.

“Tyler's wet,” Jace announced. Tyler's mouth dropped as he looked down at his pull-up which had Chase the police dog smiling back at him. He remembered yesterday when he had first put one on his Mom had shown him the wetness indicator on the front and had told him that when he was wet it would fade so he had to make sure that it was always there. As he looked at it now though it was completely gone.

“Oh dear, it seems you are,” Mom said as she moved closer to confirm. Tyler covered his face with his hands in complete humiliation. Tyler's Mom had elected to have him go without pants for the day to necessitate easier checks and less things to take off if a quick run to the bathroom was necessary. Tyler hated this as it made it possible for anyone in the family to see whether he was still dry or not with a quick glance.

“C'mon lets go get you on the potty and then a new pull-up,”

Mom said as she lead Tyler to the downstairs bathroom. She tore off the sides of the wet pull up and had him sit on the training toilet while she left to go grab a dry pull up.

Tyler sat with his chin resting in his hands. He looked up at the sticker chart that was on a stand on the counter. It had a calendar on it. His Mom had shown it to him yesterday and explained that if he went a whole morning or afternoon without wetting his pullup he would get one sticker and if he was able to do both he would get two stickers. Tyler had been confident that by the end of the first two days he would already have a bunch of stickers, after he was still mostly an adult. Potty training would be no challenge for him. Unfortunately he had assumed wrong. He still did not have a single sticker. Yesterday he had wet the first one after only two hours. Mallory had been the first to notice and had decided to take it upon herself to be the one to change him. Tyler had fought back valiantly but had not been able to prevent her from tearing the pull up off completely before Dad being alerted by the all the noise was able to swoop in and save him. Afterwards she had been told that she was not allowed to change him, but she had still been allowed to supervise while he sat on his potty. The only success that Tyler had so far was that in the morning when his Mom had woken him up he had pooped in the toilet instead of his nighttime diaper. Although it had still been a mortifying experience to have to do his business under the watchful eye of another person.

Mom came back in the bathroom with a fresh pull-up in hand.

“How's it going?” she asked. Tyler looked up at her with a frown. “You don't need to go?”

“No,” Tyler grumbled.

“Okay, then stand up and lets get dressed,” she said. Tyler stood as his Mom held out the pull-up for him to step into before she pulled it up making some fine adjustments to make sure it was nice and snug. “All right, all ready to try again,” Mom said cheerily.

“What's the point,” Tyler said with his head hanging down. “I'll just mess up again.”

“Hey now,” his Mom said kneeling in front of him. “You can't give up so easily. You've only just started.” Tyler looked up at her with another frown. “You'll be in big boy undies in no time,” she said.

“Really?” Tyler asked feeling just a sliver of hope begin to form with his Mom's reassurance.

“For sure, now no more sad faces,” she said before she started poking his stomach which caused Tyler to giggle. They went back to the living room where Tyler now saw Jace had fully taken over the tv and was sitting on the couch.

“I want to watch Paw Patrol,” Tyler mewled tugging on his Mom's shirt.

“I think you've watched enough tv,” she said. Tyler let out a groan seeing that he wasn't going to get his way. It was only then that he realized what he was doing. He clenched his

teeth, angry that he had actually wanted to return to watching a little kids tv show.

“Why don't you play with something else,” his Mom suggested pointing to a corner of the living the room that was set up as a play area for him. There was a foam mat on the ground that made it look like one was looking down at a town with roads and buildings perfect for driving toy cars along. There was a train table with a myriad of wooden tracks and trains, a small activity table and a plastic easel that had paper attached to it.

“Why don't you draw a picture for Mommy?” his new Mom said. Tyler had heard this request before. She was always trying to get him to make something for her. He wondered if she had memories implanted of him doing this before, yet as he looked around the house he could see no evidence that he had ever done such a thing. There were drawings and simple crafts from the others kids around and yet nothing from him. He was curious as to how they remembered him acting. As Tyler eyed the easel in his play corner he became a tad bit anxious at the thought of actually giving something to her. It felt weird to him, she wasn't his Mom, this wasn't his family, even if he was at times acting like it was, whether intentionally or not.

Tyler walked across the living room and took a seat at the train table and began putting the wooden tracks together. He had been taking out pieces from a large plastic bin nearby thinking it would help keep his mind focused on something. But as he started putting together more and more pieces he

found that he was having trouble figuring out how to incorporate the bridges and turns as the pieces didn't seem to fit together. After some time Tyler sat back to look at what he had put together and found it was rather simple and flat. Tyler furrowed his brow. Why did this seem so hard? It was simple wooden tracks after all.

“Playin trains Ty?” Connor asked. Tyler looked up to see his oldest brother kneeling down across the table from himself.

“Kind of,” Tyler said as let the bridge piece fall from his hand onto the table with a thud.

“This is a pretty cool track,” Connor said taking one of the trains and rolling it down a section of track.

“It's not right,” Tyler said. “I want the bridge.”

“If you want to connect that piece you need the slope pieces,” Connor said as he dug through the plastic bin before pulling out a sloping piece. He set it down and connected it along with the bridge piece to Tyler's track.

“I have a bridge,” Tyler exclaimed as he pushed a train across the bridge.

“We can do more,” Connor said digging out more pieces and connecting them together. Before long the table was filled with a twisty track that went up and down and even had a tunnel on one part. Tyler happily pushed a long chain of trains along the tracks sending it up and down, across bridges and through tunnels.

“Connor, Mikey's here to pick you up,” Mom said from the kitchen. Connor got up from the floor.

“Play with me,” Tyler said getting up and catching up to Connor.

“Sorry bud, I'm meeting some friends,” he said.

“I can come,” Tyler said as he gave a pleading look to Connor.

“I think you're a little young for laser tag,” Connor said as he ruffled Tyler's hair. “Maybe some other time.”

Tyler followed Connor into the front hallway and watched through the screen door as Connor walked to a car parked in the driveway and got in before it drove away. Tyler walked back to the train table taking a seat on the ground with a sad thud as he rested his cheek on his hand and pushed the train around with little interest. What Connor had said had only come off as condescending, of course that had not been Connor's intention. Tyler knew that he was plenty old enough for laser tag, in fact he was probably too old for laser tag at twenty eight, but no one else knew that. What could he really expect? He was living the life of a three year old.

As he continued to push the train around he started to add more and more train cars to his line. He then took the animal figures he had gotten from the store yesterday and had them act as conductors and before long he had a whole little story unfolding with rival animals fighting for control of the train tracks. As much as he tried to steer himself away from such behaviors he couldn't overcome the overwhelming feeling

that this was right, this was how it was supposed to be. It seemed so easy for him to slip into his new mindset that at times he just wished he could forget he had ever been an adult.

“Okay, lunchtime,” Mom said appearing in the middle of the living room. Tyler looked up bewildered

that so much time had passed without him noticing.

“Just let me finish this show,” Jace said not taking his eyes off the tv. Mom walked over to the tv and shut it off.

“Hey,” Jace said.

“You have watched more than enough television for today,” Mom said.

“But its summer,” Jace protested.

“Exactly,” Mom said. “Its a beautiful day out, you shouldn't spend it being a couch potato.”

Jace got to his feet with a groan as he walked towards the kitchen. Tyler followed into the kitchen to find Mallory already seated at the table eating. Mom lifted up Tyler and placed him in the booster seat. His meal was already on the table. He looked down to find that like with breakfast his food was on a special plate that was once again construction themed and divided into three compartments. His silverware was also the same, themed after different construction equipment. He picked up his fork which had a tiny bulldozer on it near the front. He looked at Jace and Mallory eating

with their normal plates and forks and sighed wishing he could have the same as them. Tyler looked down and saw he had a simple cheese sandwich and some fruit salad. It was a rather plain meal but Tyler knew that with his new palette it was just the type of meal he would end up preferring anyways. He pushed around a grape with the bulldozer fork.

“Do you not like grapes,” Mallory asked watching as Tyler more or less looked like he was playing with his food rather than eating.

“I'll take them if you don't want them,” Jace said as he stabbed his fork into the grape and took it off Tyler's plate. Tyler's first reaction was to protest, but he caught himself and reasoned with himself that he didn't actually care that much. His sudden urge to react to things with such emotion was becoming somewhat of a worry for him. Usually he was far more laid back.

“Jace, don't take food off of you brother's plate,” Mom said as she sat down at the table with her own bowl of fruit. “And Tyler you need to eat your food and not play with it, so you can grow up big and strong,” she said with a grin.

“Okay,” Tyler said with a weak smile as he took a bite of some melon. It was just a tad bit insulting that everyone thought he had been playing with his food, but for some reason Tyler found he just didn't have it in him at the moment to refute the insinuation. He ate his food quietly. It tasted good and Tyler found himself thankful that unlike when he had been an adult, he no longer had to worry about where his

next meal was going to come from. Jace and Mallory finished quickly departing the table off to do whatever it was they wanted. Tyler sat resting his chin on his hands.

“What's going on with you Ty?” Mom asked. Tyler shook his head. He was just feeling a tad out of sorts at the moment, but felt like it wasn't something he could explain. “I think I know, already,” Mom said as she picked him up into her arms. “I think first we are going to try the potty, and then its nap time, hmmm.” she said as she carried him upstairs to the bathroom before setting him down. She pulled down his pull-up, which was thankfully still dry and then had him sit on his training toilet.

As Tyler sat he didn't feel like he needed to use the bathroom but only a few moments later the unmistakable sound echoed from inside of the toilet. Tyler's eyes went wide. How could he not have noticed? He looked up to his Mom who was smiling ear to ear as he finished.

“Ty you did it, you went pee pee in the potty,” she exclaimed. Tyler couldn't help but smile. He had done it. He had managed not to wet himself for once. It felt somewhat liberating as if he were one step closer to his old self.

“I did it!” Tyler said jumping to his feet with a smile plastered on his face.

“Okay hang on,” his Mom said as she pulled the pull-up back up around his waist.

“Do I get a sticker?” Tyler asked pointing at his chart on the

counter.

“Only if you stay dry till dinnertime, okay,” Mom said.

“I can do it,” Tyler said with a sense of resolve.

“I'm sure you will,” Mom said leading him to a step stool by the sink. He washed his hands as his Mom counted to twenty to make sure he did it thoroughly. She scooped him back up.

“Since you used the potty I think you can wear your pull-up for naptime,” she said.

Tyler furrowed his brow.

“I'm not tired,” he said still feeling self conscious at being put down for a nap.

“Doesn't matter,” Mom said as she carried him into his room and placed him on his bed. She tucked him in along with Opie nuzzled close to him. “You need to at least try, I don't want any cranky little boys this afternoon,” she said.

“I'm not a little kid,” Tyler said with a pout.

“No you aren't but everybody takes naps, even me sometimes,” Mom said as she began to stroke his hair. “You need to just close your eyes and try. Can you do that for me?” she asked. Tyler sighed as he closed his eyes. Out of everything he had experienced as a little kid this was maybe the thing he hated the most. The fact that nobody ever really listened to him. Then again maybe that wasn't part of being a little kid, that only really applied to his specific situation. He was the one that couldn't say what he really meant. His Mom

once again began to hum a little lullaby softly. Tyler found he couldn't resist the gentle stroking of his hair mixed with the soft lull of his Mom's humming and without even realizing it he had fallen asleep.

Tyler awoke with a yawn as he sat up and stretched out his arms. He got out of the bed and checked the wetness indicator on his pull-up. He grinned seeing that the picture was still visible. He walked out of the room and found that the house seemed quiet. He could hear some noises coming from Jace's room down the hall. As he turned the opposite direction he could see one of the door's to his parents room open. He walked into the room never having seen inside before. It was a normal room with nothing out of the ordinary. There was a large bed and a full length mirror in the corner and an exercise bike and a tv hung on the wall. He saw his new Mom's purse sat atop a dresser. Tyler decided now was a good time to do a little snooping. He grabbed the purse and brought it to the floor. As an adult this would definitely be a little creepy but he knew that it was perfectly normal for a little kid to go through their Mom's purse. He opened it up and found a wallet, he pulled it out and found a license in front. As he looked at it he tried to make sense of the letters but just as in the restaurant everything looked more like strange symbols rather than writing. He then spotted some numbers which he recognized as a date of birth. He looked at them for sometime trying his best to figure out how old his new Mom was.

After many minutes of deliberation as he tried to work

through his somewhat fuzzy grasp of simple arithmetic he finally deduced that she was thirty-three years old. Tyler felt a knot in his stomach form thinking about the fact that this woman who had been taking care of him like a three year old wasn't that much older than him. He put the wallet back in the purse and left the room. He didn't want to think about it anymore as it only made him feel that much more awkward. Thats when he was caught by Mallory out in the hall.

“What were you doing in there?” she asked in an accusing tone.

“Nothing,” Tyler said feeling like he was on some sort of trial.

“Oh yeah,” Mallory said probing further.

“Really,” Tyler said sheepishly feeling that any moment she was going to tattle on him.

“Let's check your pull-up,” Mallory said instantly changing subjects.

“Hey stop,” Tyler said as she knelt down to inspect. He hated the fact that Mallory seemed to delight in taking any chance to baby him.

“Still dry,” she said with some disappointment.

“Of course it is,” Tyler said with some resentment.

“Why don't you come play with me Ty,” she said.

“No thanks,” Tyler said taking a step back.

“Come on, it will be fun,” Mallory said as she grabbed him

by his wrist and lead him into her room not willing to take no as an answer.

Mallory's room had rainbow colors on the back wall along with purple walls on the sides. Her bed had unicorn bed sheets complete with a pink lace canopy hung above. In the center of the room was a tiny table with chairs. She had a tea set placed out with a bear and a baby doll already sat at the table.

“It's time for tea,” Mallory announced as she gave a smile to Tyler. He took a step back as he gave a nervous look to the scene in front of him. On one hand he didn't really want to. But as he looked at Mallory's smiling face he couldn't help but think that it wouldn't be so bad since he knew it would make her happy. Anything thing to ignore the fact that if he refused and tried to run the six year old was more than capable of overpowering him.

“Okay,” Tyler said still a little hesitant.

“If you are coming to tea you need to be properly dressed first,” Mallory said as she opened a trunk in the room. Tyler could see the trunk was filled with dress up play clothes. Mallory dug around for a few minutes before pulling out a sparkly red skirt.

“Here you can wear this,” Mallory said putting the skirt over Tyler's head and pulling it down to his waist. She then got out a floppy white hat and placed it on his head. Tyler felt completely silly. He just had to remind himself that he was an adult and all he was doing was humoring a little girl by

playing along. The added bonus was that the skirt covered his pull-up which would hopefully keep Mallory from making any more unwanted comments about the status of his pull-up. Mallory pulled out a white dress for herself and a purple hat. She sat down and extended a hand across the table where Tyler took his seat. Mallory poured some water from her mini tea kettle into two teacups. Tyler picked his up to take a sip just a little relieved to finally drink out of an actual cup.

“Now don't forget, pinky out,” Mallory said as she demonstrated taking a sip from her own cup with her pinky extended. Tyler followed suit only dribbling a bit of water onto his chin.

“That's how proper ladies drink tea Ms. Tylina,” Mallory said with a giggle. Tyler furrowed his brow at his new name. Mallory then produced a package of saltine crackers and took one out before spreading some jelly on it. “Would you like a cracker?” she asked. Tyler shrugged. “What do you say?” Mallory asked.

“Yes please,” Tyler said. Mallory smiled as she placed the cracker on the plate in front of him. “How about you Mr. Teddy,” she said now addressing the bear as she prepared a cracker for the stuffed party guest. Tyler wondered why the bear got to still be a Mr..

Tyler picked up the cracker and was about to take a bite.

“Pinky out,” Mallory reminded him as he rolled his eyes before sticking his pinky out. Mallory sat back with a satisfied look as she took another sip of tea. “The crackers are

good today aren't they?" Mallory asked.

"Very tasty," Tyler said speaking with a refined tone which caused Mallory to laugh.

"Oh I know we should do your makeup," Mallory said standing up.

"M-makeup," Tyler stammered as he watched her go to a small vanity table and pull out a tube of lipstick out of the drawer.

"All ladies need their makeup," Mallory said as she began to walk towards him looking like a slasher monster closing in on their prey.

"No," Tyler said as he covered his mouth. He had put up with the clothes and the tea party but this was now going too far for him.

"You'll look so pretty," Mallory said as she pulled his hand away and pinned it against Tyler's side. She was much too strong for him.

"Stoop," Tyler said as he turned his face away.

"Hold still," Mallory demanded as she brought the lipstick closer. Tyler began to panic. He couldn't pull away from her but there was no way he was going to stop resisting yet he knew sooner or later she was going to win.

"What are you doing?" Jace asked. Mallory stopped as Tyler saw Jace standing in the doorway with a displeased look on his face.

“Get out,” Mallory said. “We're having a tea party and you're not invited.

“You like wearing that stuff?” Jace asked walking into the room ignoring Mallory's protest. Tyler shook his head. “C'mon.” Jace said pulling Tyler away from Mallory. “Take that stuff off. You're coming with me.” Tyler quickly discarded the hat and skirt.

“He can't go we are having tea,” Mallory said taking a step toward Tyler.

“He's not your dress up doll,” Jace said stepping in front of her. “Besides he's a boy not a girl, he doesn't like playing tea party.”

“Yes, he does,” Mallory said trying to get around Jace. The boy gave her a light shove.

“Don't push me, I'm telling,” Mallory said stomping her foot.

“Go ahead, but I'll just tell Mom you are playing with her makeup again,” Jace said pointing to the tube of lipstick still in his sister's hand.

“Fine,” Mallory said with a huff as she took a seat. Jace took Tyler by the arm leading him out of the room. As Tyler looked back at Mallory pouting he felt a little bad, yet was still relieved he had been rescued from getting a makeover. Jace lead Tyler to his room and walked in before returning a moment later with a pair of shorts.

“Put these on,” Jace said tossing the shorts to Tyler.

“Why?” Tyler asked not waiting for answer before putting the shorts on.

“We're going someplace fun, and you cant go in just a pull-up” Jace said.

“Where?” Tyler asked curious as to what Jace meant.

“The creek,” Jace replied. “But I suppose you should go potty first,” Jace said with a smirk. Tyler put his hands on his hips. He didn't appreciate being told to go to the bathroom by a kid. “Well hurry up and go,” Jace said pointing. Tyler went into the bathroom still annoyed yet happy that Jace wasn't going to follow him in since it seemed Jace took very little interest in Tyler's potty training. Tyler sat on the toilet waiting to see if anything happened.

“Are you done yet?” Jace said poking his head in.

“Leave me alone,” Tyler said as he pulled his shorts up and came out of the bathroom.

“I'm just trying to be helpful,” Jace said. “Not like I want to watch you take a piss,” Jace said scrunching up his face.

“Where is the creek?” Tyler asked changing the subject.

“What are you talking about?” Jace said. “You know where it is, we've been there before.”

“I have?” Tyler asked of course knowing full well he had never been.

“Yeah we were there just two weeks ago. Don't you

remember?” Jace asked. Tyler shook his head.

“Of course you do,” Jace said. “We caught tadpoles, Connor even took a video on his phone.”

Tyler's ears perked up. He found himself wanting to see this video for himself. There were of course pictures with him in them around the house. But even seeing the evidence in front of him Tyler had no memories of them being taken. Something about seeing a video of himself though filled him with some curiosity. He wanted to see how he acted in the videos. Was it really him?

“Lets go we need to go through the woods first,” Jace said leading the way downstairs. They got their shoes on and walked to the backdoor. As they were about to leave Tyler remembered the promise he had made with his new Dad back at the hotel.

“Wait, I have to tell Mommy where we going,” he said walking off to find her before feeling a hand grab him by the collar and yank him back.

“You can't tell her,” Jace said with an alarmed look on his face.

“Why not?” Tyler asked growing suspicious.

“Because well umm,” Jace hemmed and hawed for a moment. “She just doesn't need to know, okay.” Tyler pursed his lips, he knew something was wrong, but he couldn't quite place his finger on it as his thoughts were muddled once again.

“I'm s'possed to tell her where I go,” Tyler said. “I promised.”

“That's only if you're alone. I'm going with you and since I'm a big kid its okay,” Jace reasoned. Tyler sat for a moment thinking as his tongue hung out the side of his mouth. What Jace was saying made perfect sense in a way. If Tyler was with him then he wouldn't get lost, Jace was older anyways so he would watch him.

“Okay,” Tyler said agreeing. “But I hafta bring Opie.”

“Leave him,” Jace said. “If you bring him to the creek he'll just get dirty.”

Tyler didn't understand why that mattered. Opie was a wolf he didn't care if he got dirty.

“Okay,” Tyler relented. Jace was older and bigger. If he said not to bring Opie Tyler was going to listen. Jace was smarter anyways.

“Let's go,” Jace said opening the door.

“To the creek,” Tyler said excited for the new adventure that awaited.

Chapter 9

One of the Family: Part 9 - Chapter 9

Part 9

The boys were walking down the forest trail. Jace came to a stop and looked behind to see Tyler still toddling along behind.

“Hurry up,” Jace said. Tyler caught up and came to a stop to catch his breath. “You're slow,” Jace observed. Tyler gave him a glare as he puffed up his cheeks. He was trying his best to keep up but Jace was just too fast for his little legs.

“I need to rest,” Tyler said as he crouched down.

“Its not much farther,” Jace said with a sigh. Tyler got to his feet once again and continued to follow his brother further into the woods.

Tyler was starting to regret coming. His feet hurt and he couldn't help but feel like he had been talked into a bad idea by Jace. Not to mention as he looked around he could tell they were going pretty deep into the woods as the thicket of tree's became thicker by the minute. He looked up and noticed that the sky had become somewhat overcast and he hoped that it wouldn't start to rain.

As Tyler thought more about the situation he was in he could only deduce that there was no way the parents were okay with their kids coming this far unsupervised. Tyler found himself becoming quite nervous at the prospect of getting in

trouble. Not only would it be deeply humiliating to be punished like a child especially by people who were not his parents he also was scared by not knowing exactly what that entailed. Would they ground him, yell at him or even worse spank him? Tyler shook his head at the thought. That wasn't really these people's style, or was it? When he had ran away at the restaurant he had been giving a talking too. But this was somewhat different. He had knowingly broken a rule when he had not told his Mom where they were going. Then again was that something he could be blamed for? He hadn't been thinking all that clear when Jace had so easily convinced him to come along.

“We should go back,” Tyler said coming to a halt.

“What are you talking about?” Jace asked turning to look at Tyler.

“We did'nt tell Mommy, we'll be in trouble,” Tyler said. He pursed his lips after his comment hearing him call her Mommy again without even realizing it.

“No we won't” Jace said. “Nobody even knows we're down here.” Tyler cocked his head. That comment was worrying in more ways than one. “Besides we're here,” Jace said turning the corner.

Tyler ran after him not wanting to be left behind. Tyler walked out into a forest clearing and down a little hill was the creek. Jace was already down by edge taking off his shoes and socks. Tyler stood by the edge and watched Jace walk into the creek.

“Are you coming Ty?” Jace asked looking at him. Tyler fidgeted with the bottom of his shirt. He wanted to go back as he was still worried about what would happen if they were discovered but as he looked at the water he couldn't help but imagine how good it would feel on his feet. Tyler sat down and took off his own shoes and socks, he was here so he might as well enjoy it.

He took a step into the cool water of the creek. The water was soothing and the bottom was muddy and soft. Jace found a large rock and picked it up before tossing it back into the water creating a large splash that sprayed both boys. Tyler laughed as he found his own smaller rock and tossed it creating another splash. Jace kicked his feet kicking up some water at Tyler.

“Hey,” Tyler said with a grin as he tried to do the same. As his foot came up he felt himself lose his footing and fell backwards into the water. Tyler looked up at Jace with a morose expression.

“Just stand up,” Jace said with a laugh. Tyler got to his feet feeling the pull-up under his shorts having swelled up considerably. Tyler could feel some tears start to come to his eyes.

“No crying,” Jace said. “Did you really think we weren't going to get wet. Don't you remember last time?”

“Last time?” Tyler asked.

“You got soaked last time too. You were running around in

just a diaper by the end," Jace said.

"I'm not taking off my clothes," Tyler said with some indignation.

"I didn't say you had to." Jace laughed.

"I don't want to be wet," Tyler grumbled.

"Watch this," Jace said as he leapt into the air coming back down causing a huge splash soaking his own shorts. "See now I'm wet too."

Tyler giggled.

"Again, again," he cheered. Jace jumped up again creating another huge splash. Tyler then jumped himself splashing in the creek with a laugh. The boys continued their reverie jumping up and down in the water and running along the waterway kicking up as much water as they could. By the time they were done Jace's shorts were soaked and the lower half of his shirt as well. Tyler on the other hand was completely drenched from head to foot, tiny droplets of water dripped from the ends of his hair and he even had specks of mud and other dirt speckled all over himself.

They were now sticking their hands deep down into the mud and bringing it up out of the water letting it ooze out of their hands back into the water creating blops of sound as the mud hit the water, something about this seemed to fascinate Tyler.

"Having fun," a familiar voice said. Tyler looked up to see Connor standing on the bank with his arms crossed.

“Connor, Connor, look,” Tyler said as he scurried over to his oldest brother with a clod of mud in his hand. “Its goopy,” Tyler said with a smile.

“I see that,” Connor said with an amused look. “But its time to go, okay.”

Tyler frowned.

“But I don't wanna leave,” Tyler said with a pleading look. “You can play with us.”

“We don't need to listen to you,” Jace said smugly. “Besides we're having fun.”

“Mom's the one who told me to come get you guys,” Connor said with a shrug. “Mallory told on you.”

“That little,” Jace said as his face twisted up in a scowl. He stood for a moment stewing in the water. “I'm not going back.”

“Suit yourself,” Connor said. “Mom will just have to come down here herself I guess. But I'm taking Ty back with me.” Connor picked up Tyler's shoes before examining the sopping wet boy for a moment.

“I guess I'll have to carry you back,” Connor said realizing there was no way Tyler was going to be able to make the journey back in his condition. Connor crouched down and motioned for Tyler to get on his back. Tyler came out of the water and got on Conner's back wrapping his arms around his older brothers neck. He figured he should probably cut his

losses. “Geez your wet,” Connor said as he stood up.

“Sorry,” Tyler said feeling guilty.

“Its alright buddy,” Connor said with a chuckle.

“Is she mad?” Tyler asked finally realizing that his earlier suspicions were correct.

“Nah, not really,” Connor said. Tyler's years of interviewing people had given him the ability to read people a little better than most. He could tell Connor was downplaying the situation in an attempt to make him feel better or perhaps to trick him into coming along quietly.

Jace stood in the water for a moment watching the two of them walk off before he grabbed his own shoes and started to follow after them.

“Did you have fun in the creek?” Connor asked as they walked along the forest trail.

“Yeah,” Tyler said forgetting his earlier worries for a moment for the chance to tell Connor about all the fun things he and Jace had done. “We jumped up and down and made big splashes,” Tyler said with a sense of pride.

“Yeah I can tell,” Connor replied. Tyler remembered then that there was something important he was supposed to ask Connor but he couldn't seem to remember what it was. Tyler grew frustrated as he started to think about how his attention span was definitely shrinking. After a lengthy walk back they made their way up the hill from the woods leading to the

house a few stray raindrops began to fall.

“Looks like we got back just in time,” Connor said as he let Tyler down from his back. “Getting stuck in a rainstorm would have been a bad way to end your first time at the creek,” Connor said. Tyler shot a look at Connor not sure if he had heard him right. Tyler was sure Jace had said it had only been a few weeks since the last time they had all been down there together. Before he could question Connor he saw his Mom marching across the yard.

“It looks like you two had some fun,” she said, however she was not pleased. She grabbed both Tyler and Jace by their arms and marched them over to the patio before releasing them and standing in front of them with her hands on her hips and a stern expression.

“What in the world were the two of you thinking going down to the creek by yourselves?” she asked, although the question seemed more rhetorical than anything. Neither boy said anything. “And don't think I don't know this was your idea Jace,” she said. Tyler felt guilty seeing that most of Mom's ire was directed towards Jace. “Just what kind of example is that to set for your little brother? Not to mention hitting your sister,” Mom said laying a rapid fire of accusations at the boy's feet.

“I didn't hit her,” Jace retorted back.

“I don't want to hear it,” Mom said putting a hand up in the air. “You will go and change out of those wet clothes and then stay in your room until your father gets home.”

Jace went to say something but Mom was having none of it.

“Now mister,” she said pointing to the house. Jace scowled as he stomped off into the house. Tyler felt his stomach twist up as he began to shiver a little from the cold realizing that she had now turned her attention on him.

“And what do you have to say for yourself?” she asked a little less stern than she had been with Jace.

“Um well,” Tyler said as he looked down at the ground. He was struck by how ridiculous this situation was. He was an adult, dammit, why should he have to explain himself to someone only a few years older than himself anyways. But what really bothered him was how small this made him feel. As if he were actually a child feeling ashamed and guilty for his actions.

“Look at how filthy you are,” his Mom said softening just a bit. “It was bath night anyways, guess you'll just have to get it earlier,” she said with a sigh as she took Tyler's shirt off and then removed his shorts and his pull-up leaving him naked outside. She then picked him up and carried him upstairs to the bathroom. She started filling the tub before having Tyler get in. This was the first time Tyler was getting a proper bath, and even though he had been in various states of undress before in front of her something about being in the tub made him feel more vulnerable and awkward than ever before. She went to work immediately lathering up his hair with shampoo. Tyler could smell the fruity smell as she grabbed a cup and quickly began rinsing the shampoo out of his hair.

She then grabbed another bottle of of soap and began to lather up his body. Tyler giggled a little as she got under his arms, but his Mom seemed to be all business at the moment. She took a washcloth and began to scrub all over getting all the mud and dirt off of him.

“Okay, I think that's all of it,” she said as she let the tub start to drain after rinsing him clean of soap. Mom grabbed a towel off of the rack and wrapped Tyler up and lifted him out of the tub before setting him on the counter. She took a hairdryer out of the drawer and dryed off his hair. Tyler turned to look at himself in the mirror. His hair looked so soft and fluffy at the moment. His Mom then set him onto the ground.

“Why don't you try to use the potty while I go get you some clothes,” she said. Tyler nodded and obediently went and sat on his potty keeping his towel wrapped around his upper half for warmth. Tyler watched his Mom leave the room. He was still intent on getting his first sticker even if that meant fully committing to the potty training process. As he sat he felt his bladder release into the toilet. He smirked a little. It seemed he was starting to get the hang of it.

“I went potty,” he declared happily as his Mom walked back into the bathroom with some clothes in her hands.

“Good job honey,” his Mom said. Tyler stood up as his Mom held out a fresh pull-up in front of him.

“I'm going to get a sticker,” Tyler declared as he stepped into the pull-up.

“I don't think that's going to happen,” Mom said pulling the pull-up to his waist. Tyler looked at her confused. What did she mean by that? He had gone the whole afternoon without a single accident. Surely she had enough faith in him to make it to dinnertime.

“Your pull-up was completely wet when you came back from the creek,” Mom said as she got to her feet.

“But that was only cause I fell,” Tyler said. “It was water.”

“Sorry bud, there is no way to tell if it was just water or not,” his Mom said. Tyler let his mouth drop a little in disbelief, was she serious?

“I did'nt pee,” Tyler protested. It shouldn't have mattered if he had fallen in the water, to be disqualified for such a reason was only a technicality that she was lording over him.

“We can't count it unless we are absolutely sure,” his Mom said. “That's not how this works. Arms up,” she instructed. Tyler put his arms up not knowing how to react. On one hand he was angry and feeling like he was being punished in some way but if he was being truthful he knew there was no way for him to be sure that he hadn't used his pull-up down at the creek. He had been so caught up in the fun that nothing else had seemed to matter. He looked at the sleeves of his shirt to see it was a pajama shirt with images of cowboys riding bucking horses on it.

“Pajama's,” Tyler said quietly as he feared that she was going to make him go to bed early as some sort of punishment.

“No use in having you dirty up another outfit,” his Mom said. “You can just wear your jammies for the rest of the day.”

Tyler let her dress him in the pajamas with no fuss. If anything he felt like he had gotten off pretty easy. Jace still had to face Dad when he got home. Besides the pajamas were nice and cozy so there were to be no complaints from Tyler. That's when Tyler remembered he had something important to ask Connor. He needed to see this video that Connor had taken at the creek.

“I need to find Connor,” Tyler said as he went to leave the bathroom.

“Hang on,” Mom said scooping him up into her arms. “I'm not done yet with you.” She carried him out of the bathroom and walked down the stairs where she placed him on the bottom stair.

“You are on time out now,” Mom said. Tyler's eyes went wide. Hadn't the sticker been enough? Not to mention he still felt like he hadn't done anything wrong. Jace was the one that had talked him into going to the creek in the first place. How was he supposed to know it wasn't okay?

“I didn't do anything,” Tyler said still in shock.

“Oh you didn't?” Mom asked. “I know it was Jace's idea but you made the choice to go with him, and neither you nor him asked me permission to go. Your Dad already told you that you are not allowed to go off on your own without asking for permission first. Don't you remember?”

Of course Tyler remembered the conversation from the hotel parking lot, but this wasn't like that, he hadn't been trying to run away.

“I'm not sitting in time out,” Tyler said standing up. He was an adult not a child. He had put up with more than enough of this treatment. He wasn't going to be told what to do by someone who wasn't even that much older than himself.

“You will sit,” his new Mom said with some force. Tyler found his rebellious attitude instantly evaporate as he became intimidated with this show of authority as he sat back down quickly. “You will not get off this step for the next ten minutes and if you do that will only add time, if we have to do this all night then so be it, Do you understand me?” His Mom asked with a stern expression.

“Yes,” Tyler said meekly.

“Good, I'll come get you when your time is up,” His Mom said as she walked down the hall into the kitchen. Tyler put his face into his hands. All of this was crazy, here he was wearing some pajamas meant for a kid sat on a step in time out, in a house with people he had only met a couple of days ago. There was no way this was actually happening. He wondered if maybe he was actually in a coma and he would wake up any minute now in a hospital. But he knew that wasn't the case, he really was here, this was his new reality. He began to sniffle a little. He felt so hopeless. No one would ever believe him, no matter how hard he tried he was going to be stuck like this.

The time seemed to stretch on forever as Tyler had curled up into a ball on the stairs. He felt an arm rest across his shoulders. He looked up to see his Mom sitting next to him with a sympathetic smile.

“Your time is up,” she said. Tyler crawled onto her lap and snuggled into her.

“Oh honey, its alright,” she said as she rubbed his back. “Mommy's not mad. I know its no fun to be in trouble, but I need you to understand that I want you to be safe. That's why you have to listen when we tell you something.”

“I know,” Tyler said. He didn't care about being put on time out anymore. He only wanted to feel like someone cared about him, to chase away his feeling of hopelessness and to know that even if he was stuck like this he wasn't going to end up alone. His Mom sat on the step rocking him back and forth gently as Tyler's sniffles dissipated.

“I'm sorry Mommy. I'm always being bad,” Tyler said. Mom sat Tyler up on her lap and brought her face close to his so that their foreheads were touching.

“You are not bad, you are the most perfectly precious boy whom I love very much.” she said before kissing his nose. Tyler tilted his head back not able to help the small smile that curled up on his lips. His Mom then got up from the steps setting him on his feet.

“Now you go play while I get dinner started,” she said giving him a playful swat on his butt. Tyler felt a lot better as he

stood in the hallway thinking about what to do next. He needed to go and find Opie first, then he thought it would be fun to continue his train game from earlier that day. Perhaps even Connor would play with him as well. A spark went off in his mind when he remembered Connor. He needed to find Connor, he needed to watch the video.

Connor's room was in the basement, which was near the stairs where he stood. Tyler opened the door and made his way down the darkened steps. He had never been in the basement before. He came to the bottom of the steps and took a look around. There was an area to his left that looked like it was for storage given all the bins and boxes piled up. Further back was a hallway leading to a door. It was much darker down here than on the stairs and Tyler found himself getting a little nervous at being in the unfamiliar part of the house. Tyler gathered up his courage and walked down the hallway and knocked on the door. For a second he became scared that a monster was going to pop out from behind the door and eat him but was relieved to see Connor open up the door.

“Ty what are you doing down here?” Connor said with some surprise.

“Should I not be?” Tyler asked a little worried that he had broken another rule.

“No, its just you usually say your too scared to come into the basement,” Connor replied.

“Oh,” Tyler said taking a look around, it seemed his feelings about the basement were not a new development.

“So what's up?” Connor asked.

“I want to watch the video,” Tyler said remembering what he had came down here for in the first place.

“What video?” Connor asked.

“Of the creek,” Tyler said.

“I didn't take a video of you at the creek,” Connor said a little confused with Tyler's request.

“But Jace said you did,” Tyler said becoming worried that this had all been a wild goose chase.

“Oh you mean from a couple weeks ago?” Connor asked.

“Yeah, that one,” Tyler said as his face lit up.

“Why do you want to see that?” Connor asked. Tyler didn't get why Connor was being so cagey, he began to feel like he was in some sort of high stakes negotiation and with one wrong word Connor would withhold the video he was desperate to see. Tyler fidgeted for a moment trying to come up with a good answer. Maybe it was due to nerves from having walked through the basement by himself or perhaps it was because he felt anxious being so close to getting some valuable info but his thoughts were all a mess.

“I want to see me,” Tyler blurted out. Tyler clenched his teeth, what kind of dumb reason was that? Connor furrowed his brow and pursed his lips.

“You're not in the video, though. You weren't with us at the

creek that day.” Connor said. Now it was Tyler's turn to look confused. He was sure that Jace had told him he had been there. Even though Tyler of course had no memory of the event, Jace certainly did, which meant Connor should have too.

“Please, I want to see,” Tyler pleaded now knowing he had to see this video no matter what.

“Okay,” Connor said finally relenting as he let Tyler into his room. Connor's room definitely screamed basement bedroom. There were two small rectangular windows high on the wall near the ceiling. Wood paneling on the walls and some posters for sports teams were hung up. There was a bean bag chair in the corner and a desk next to a bed. Connor grabbed his phone from his desk and brought up the video in question and held it front of Tyler to watch.

“Like I said you weren't there maybe you were taking a nap or something,” Connor said. Tyler watched the video intently. He saw Jace running through the creek, then Mallory came into view sitting by the edge of the creek next to Dad who had his feet in the water. The camera then panned and Tyler saw his toddler self standing in the middle of the creek in just a diaper holding a plastic cup in his hand. Tyler knew this video wasn't real, it couldn't be. He had still been an adult and perhaps hundreds of miles away at the time. Yet there he was supposedly standing in the same creek that according to Connor he had just been too for the first time in his life.

“I'm right there,” Tyler said almost as if he didn't believe it

himself.

“What?” Connor asked as he flipped the phone around to see for himself. Tyler saw Connors face go from surprised to perplexed in the span of a few seconds. “But that's not right, you weren't there, I know you weren't” Connor said as he sat at his desk chair. Tyler scurried over to him to get a view of the video still playing. He watched as Connor began talking to him in the video. Tyler held up the cup full of water for the camera to show the tadpoles that were swimming around.

“You got a lot of tadpoles, Ty,” the video version of Connor said.

“I'm gunna have a hundred frogs,” video Tyler exclaimed. Tyler looked up at Connor whose face was now twisted up. There was no way he had just forgotten that Tyler had been there. They were having a full on conversation in the video.

“I'm right there,” Tyler said again as Connor slowly looked over to him. “But you're right I wasn't supposed to be. This video is wrong.”

“This doesn't make any sense,” Connor said rewinding the video and watching it again. “I know you weren't there, I remember that day perfectly.”

Tyler's eyes went wide. There was no way this was a coincidence something strange was going on here.

“What about other stuff? Do you remember me any other time before the vacation?” Tyler asked, his heart was now beating hard. Connor was silent for a moment as he pondered

the question. A concerned look came over Connor's face.

“I think something's wrong with my head,” Connor said more so to himself as he brought a hand to the side of his head with a wince.

“No, there is nothing wrong with your head. Your the only one who remembers the truth,” Tyler said. Tyler couldn't believe what he was hearing. Connor was like him, his memories were right. He finally had some validation that he wasn't crazy.

“But why can't I remember? Your my brother you've been here this whole time, but I can't remember you?” Connor said his voice shaking a little.

“I'm not your brother,” Tyler said. “I'm not even really a kid.” Tyler said. He didn't really think about how Connor would react to such a revelation. He was just too happy to finally be able to tell someone the truth.

“What are you even saying, Ty?” Connor asked.

“I know it sounds crazy, but on that day when you stopped at the park on vacation a girl cast a spell on me that changed me into a little kid, and then everyone here suddenly thought I was part of your family.”

“Why are you talking like that?” Connor said his face being a mix of concern and confusion as if he hadn't even processed what Tyler had just told him. It was then that Tyler realized he was talking different. It was if he was able to finally say what he had been trying so hard to do so before. He was

talking like his adult self. “If this is some sort of game, I don't like it Ty” Connor said. Tyler could see that Connor looked uncomfortable. But he couldn't let up, he had to make Connor see the truth.

“It's not a game,” Tyler yelped. “You can't remember a single thing about me from before the time at the park. You know its true. I'm not supposed to be here.”

“I'm kind of tired,” Connor said getting up from his chair abruptly and leading Tyler out of the room. “Why don't you go play somewhere else, I need to lay down,” Connor said before shutting his door. Tyler stood looking at the door. That was not the reaction he had been expecting. He knew in that moment he had messed up. He wasn't sure what was going through Connor's head but he did know one thing for sure. Connor had been scared and it was all his fault.

Chapter 10

One of the Family: Part 10 - Chapter 10

Tyler was sat on the stairs looking at the door leading to the basement. He was waiting to see if Connor would emerge. Tyler knew he had messed up. He had been so eager to finally tell someone the truth that he hadn't taken into account who he was talking too. He had spent so much time thinking of Connor as someone so much bigger and older than him that he had forgotten that Connor was still a kid.

Even if by some miracle Connor had fully believed him what could Tyler really expect him to do about it? Tyler didn't know what Connor was thinking but as he sat on the stairs he was praying that Connor didn't believe him. Tyler would tell him it was all a game he had been playing, It would be better that way anyways. This was Tyler's problem and he didn't need to dump it on the shoulders of a ten year old.

Tyler heard footsteps coming down the stairs behind him.

“Ty you're back,” Mallory said. Tyler rolled his eyes. He was feeling somewhat annoyed with her for ratting him and Jace out. He shook his head dispelling the thought. He really shouldn't be angry at her. She was still a kid after all.

“Well since you're here we can finish our tea party,” she said.

“No thank you,” Tyler said gruffly.

“Don't be grumpy now,” Mallory said wrapping her arms around him as she began to pull him up the stairs. “It'll be fun.”

“Nooo, leave me alone,” Tyler whined as he grabbed onto the railing of the stairs.

“I'm your big sister you need to listen to me,” Mallory said as she tried to pry him off the railing.

“I do not,” Tyler protested as he increased his grip holding on for dear life. It was incredibly frustrating at just how much stronger she was than him.

Just then the front door opened up and Dad walked through wearing his shirt and tie and his work-bag slung across his shoulder.

“What's going on here?” Dad asked with some amusement.

“Tyler's being mean,” Mallory said releasing her hold. “And he won't listen to me.”

“Mallory what did I tell you about bossing around your brother,” Dad said.

“I just want to play with him, I'm being nice,” Mallory said with a cross of her arms.

“I want to be alone,” Tyler said.

“Mallory you can't force him to play with you, if he wants to be alone, leave him alone,” Dad said.

“Hmph, fine,” Mallory said with a huff as she went back

upstairs to her own room.

“Big sister's eh,” Dad said as he knelt down in front of Tyler and gave him a pat on the head. Tyler gave the man a nod of acknowledgment. “But you do look kind of sad sitting here all alone, is something bothering you?” Dad asked. Tyler looked back with a forlorn look before shaking his head. His problems were his own to deal with. It wasn't as if he would even be able to explain what was bothering him anyways.

“Okay, then” Dad said with an understanding look. Tyler gave him a small smile happy that he wasn't going to push the issue any further.

“Oh your home,” Mom said appearing from the kitchen.

“Yep, the work day is finally over,” Dad said with a stretch.

“Sorry to say but its time to clock in on the Dad shift,” Mom said as she gave him a hug and a kiss on the cheek.

“Which one?” Dad said with a groan knowing what Mom had meant.

“Well we had two boys who thought it would be a good idea to run off to play in the creek today,” Mom said giving a glance towards Tyler.

“All on their own, huh?” Dad said with a raised eyebrow towards the boy sat on the step. Tyler shrank down a little under his Dad's gaze an all too familiar unpleasant feeling of fear and anxiety washing over him.

“Me and Tyler have already had a talk and he served out his

punishment. The ringleader however is still up in his room waiting for you," Mom explained.

"Guess I'll go see what he has to say for himself," Dad said with sigh as he walked up the steps.

Tyler felt a twinge of guilt hit him. He knew that Jace was in far more trouble than he would have been only because Tyler had went with him. Tyler knew that Jace's parents were upset with him for being irresponsible and dragging a three year old along with him. But Tyler could only feel like the situation was reversed. He was the adult here, he had been the irresponsible one. Tyler clenched his teeth in frustration, he should have listened to his gut and not let himself fall into thinking like a little kid. He should have been the one to talk Jace out of it, but because he hadn't now Jace was going to be blamed. Tyler had once again caused a bigger problem. Tyler got up too chase after his Dad. He wanted to tell him it was his fault and not to blame Jace.

"Tyler where are you going?" Mom asked. Tyler spun around to face her.

"I have to tell Daddy Jace wasn't bad," Tyler said. "I wanted to go, I was bad."

Tyler grimaced a little at his words. Whatever ability he had gained when talking with Connor was now gone. He was unable to speak using the words he wanted in his head.

"Oh honey," Mom said as she walked up the steps and picked him up into her arms. "This isn't your fault. Jace isn't in

trouble because of you.”

“Yes he is,” Tyler said. “ If I didn't go you wouldn't be mad at him.”

“You and Jace both made your own decisions.” Mom said with a nod. “And now just like you had too he has to face his own consequences, do you understand that word, consequences?”

“Yes,” Tyler said puckering his lips. He still understood what words meant even if he couldn't say them very well.

“Now, want to come help Mommy set the table for dinner?” she asked. Tyler shook his head.

“I want to be alone,” he said with a small whimper seeing that it would do no good to plead his case.

“Suit yourself,” Mom said as she set him back down on the stairs. She went back to the kitchen leaving Tyler alone on the step.

Tyler sat looking between the two doors of his brother's rooms. Both of them were going through their own troubles and Tyler couldn't help but feel it was all his fault. After some time he heard the door to Jace's room open and the sound of two sets of footsteps approaching. He turned to see Jace and his Dad standing on the step above Tyler.

“Now what do you need to say?” Dad asked. Jace looked at Tyler with some concern.

“I'm sorry I got you in trouble by...” Jace began.

“No,” Tyler interrupted. “I was bad, not you.” Jace did a small double take at Tyler's words. He hadn't expected to be interrupted. “I shouldn't have gone, its my fault,” Tyler continued.

“Ty, I know you feel bad, but Jace does need to apologize for taking you with him.” Dad said. “Even if you think he was being nice, it was still not a very responsible thing to do and he knows better than that. What if you guys had gotten hurt?”

“No sorries,” Tyler said with a stamp of his foot. “I don't want it.”

Jace looked to his Dad befuddled as to what he was supposed to do. Dad was just as confused with Tyler's insistence as he scratched his head for a moment before shrugging his shoulders.

“If he doesn't want it, he doesn't want it, so I guess your off the hook” Dad said. “But you still need to apologize to your mother, so go on.”

Jace nodded and walked down the steps giving Tyler a gentle good natured punch to his arm as he walked past. A sense of camaraderie having formed between the two.

“You're a strange one, all right,” Dad said scooping up Tyler into his arms and giving him a kiss on the cheek, which caused Tyler to giggle at being tickled by the man's facial hair. “Dinner will be ready soon, but first I think someone needs to sit on their potty, right?”

Tyler gave no response as he let his Dad carry him into the

bathroom before pulling down his pants and pull-up. As Tyler sat his Dad picked up the sticker chart.

“No sticker's yet, huh champ.” Dad said.

“I didn't have any ax-dents in the afternoon but Mommy said no sticker,” Tyler grumbled remembering the injustice of earlier.

“Well that doesn't sound fair,” Dad said. “Did she say why?”

“I was wet from the creek,” Tyler said. “But it was water, cuz I fell.”

“Hmmm,” Dad said with a nod. “Going to have to agree with your Mom on this one buddy,” Dad said with a sympathetic tone. Tyler rested his chin on his hands with a pout. Of course Dad was going to agree with her. Tyler finished up and stood up pulling the training pants up himself. Dad knelt down and fixed the waistband.

“We may not be able to put one on the chart but you can have this,” Dad said placing a sticker onto Tyler's shirt. “Our little secret,” Dad said with a wink.

Mom called up the stairs that dinner was ready. Dad helped Tyler wash his hands and then picked Tyler up and put him on his hip. He stopped by Mallory's room to tell her to come down for dinner before walking down the stairs. Dad placed Tyler into the booster seat and strapped him in before taking his own seat. Tyler sat grinning ear to ear as he looked at the smiley face sticker on his shirt. Even if his parents wouldn't count it on the chart he would. As far as he was concerned he

earned the sticker fair and square.

Connor walked into the kitchen taking a seat at the table. Tyler and Connor's eyes met for a moment before Connor averted his gaze. Tyler bit his lower lip as he looked down. Connor was obviously still bothered. Tyler knew he just needed to give Connor some time and he would eventually get a chance to talk to him alone, which is when he would tell him it had all been a game, and then everything would be alright again. In the meantime the best thing to do now would be to lay low and not start acting like a little kid, since that would probably only serve to weird Connor out. Tyler wasn't sure if Connor believed him or not, but if he did what would he think if Tyler was acting like a three year old but knew he wasn't?

Tyler knew all too well he wasn't acting, there were two sides to him in a constant struggle for control, but if there was one time he had to fight back this was it.

“How was laser tag with Mikey?” Dad asked Connor.

“It was fun,” Connor said. “I won two of the rounds,” Connor said with some enthusiasm. If he was still bothered by what Tyler had said he certainly wasn't going to let anyone know something was up.

Mom placed a platter of chicken breast onto the table over a bed of roasted vegetables.

“Looks good,” Dad said as he stabbed his fork into one of the breast and brought it over to Mallory's plate and started

cutting it up for her. Mom did the same for Tyler. Mallory upon seeing that she was getting the same treatment as her younger brother grabbed her own silverware.

“I can do it myself,” she said with some haughtiness. Dad drew back his own silverware with a chuckle and let her cut up her own food. Tyler wanted to do the same but noticed his toddler silverware did not include a knife and he knew his Mom would not allow him to wield the one in her hand. Tyler looked up to see Connor slowly cutting into his own food as he stared down. Jace on the other hand had the entire piece of meat on his fork and was already biting into it.

“Jace please use your silverware properly,” Mom chided. Jace made an annoyed lood as he let the chicken fall back onto his plate as he picked up his knife and began sawing into it.

“How about some veggies honey,” Mom said to Tyler. She had a spoon and scooped a serving placing it into one of the compartments of his plate. Tyler looked down to see a mixture of carrots and potatoes and some onions and then he noticed the mushroom.

“Mushrooms,” Tyler exclaimed seeing a food that he loved on his plate.

“Do you not want that?” Mom asked as she went to take it off his plate. Tyler was quicker though with his fork as he stabbed into it and pulled it away.

“I love mushrooms,” Tyler said.

“You do,” his Mom said with some surprise. “Well good for

you," she said happy to see her child excited by the prospect of eating a vegetable.

"Their my favorite," Tyler said as he waved it a little on his fork. Something he enjoyed as an adult would surely be just the thing to help him focus on keeping his toddler self in check. Mom had finished and sat down to get her own plate of food.

Tyler could smell the fragrant aroma of rosemary coming from the veggies. He took a huge bite of the delectable morsel expecting to taste the hints of the seasoning as it melted in his mouth. As he chewed he scrunched up his nose. It didn't taste how he expected. It was incredibly bitter on his tongue and the texture was a little chewy and kind of slimy. Tyler swallowed the piece in his mouth as he eyed the remainder on his fork. It looked right and it smelled right there was not an issue in how it was prepared. He took another smaller bite thinking he had just gotten a bit too much seasoning on his first bite, but it was still the same. He put his fork down dejected as he stared at the mushroom still on his fork.

"Do you not like it?" Dad asked noticing the look on Tyler's face.

"No," Tyler said shaking his head.

"That's okay," Mom said. "Its good that you tried it. Just eat the carrots, I know that you like those."

"No," Tyler said again a little more forcefully. "I like

mushrooms I know I do.”

Tyler could feel his heart starting to beat faster. The constant changes in his life were swirling in his head. Food tasted different now. He liked watching tv shows made for little kids. He carried around a stuffed wolf and liked playing with toys, he was starting to call people he didn't even really know Mommy and Daddy without even thinking about it and not to mention he was having trouble keeping his pants dry. Everything about him was changing and it was happening so fast he did'nt even seem to realize it was happening, this wasn't him it was someone else. An overwhelming sense of fear came over Tyler as he realized he was losing himself, forgetting who he truly was.

“I don't want to be here,” Tyler said as tears sprang to his eyes. “I don't want to be like this.”

He frantically tried to unbuckle the strap to the booster seat, yet with his fingers he just couldn't seem to muster the dexterity to do so, which only served to cause him to panic even more.

“I want to get out,” Tyler wailed. His Mom seeing that her son was clearly in distress reached over and unbuckled him from the seat. Tyler sprang out and took off down the hallway wailing. He didn't know where to go but he needed to go somewhere. He ran up the stairs to his room. He shut the door behind him and dove under his covers as he clutched Opie to his chest and sobbed.

Back at the dinner table the family was in a shocked silence

at the whirlwind of activity. Mom gave a concerning look over to Dad.

“I guess I'll go see what that was all about,” Mom said still a little taken aback.

“You stay and eat,” Dad said standing up. “I'll go” he said before leaving to make his way to Tyler's room.

“Why did he get so mad about a mushroom?” Jace asked with some confusion with just a subtle hint of amusement.

“Little kids are like this sometimes,” Mom said. “Tyler's at an age where he is trying to figure himself out and sometimes they get these ideas in their heads that they believe to be true and when it comes out that it wasn't the truth it can be quite upsetting to them. You all did similar things when you were his age,” Mom said with an air of nostalgia. Jace and Mallory began to ask for examples from their own lives which Mom seemed happy to regale them with however Connor was silent. There was something about how Tyler had reacted that didn't seem right. That wasn't just some toddler having a meltdown. Whatever had set Tyler off had downright terrified him into hysterics. Connor had been thinking about what Tyler had said to him earlier all afternoon. He had finally just chalked it up to a game Tyler was playing. After all it wouldn't have been the first time Tyler had said something strange and out of left field. But as much as Connor wanted to believe that he couldn't ignore the issue of his memories being messed up. After what Connor had just seen, perhaps there was something to it.

Meanwhile Dad had entered into Tyler's room and took a seat on the race car bed.

“Tyler can you tell me what's wrong?” Dad said softly placing a hand on the lump underneath the covers. Tyler only curled up tighter underneath the covers. “C'mon Ty guy, you gotta tell me whats going on with you,” Dad said as he pulled Tyler, blanket and all into his lap. He situated the blankets so that he could see Tyler's tear stricken face staring back at him from within the covers.

“I like mushrooms,” Tyler said as he wept softly. “I don't play with toys and I hate cartoons, and I know how to use the potty,”

Dad looked a little confused not quite sure at how to react to these sudden declarations.

“You know its alright to like things and not others, That's normal.” Dad said.

“It is not,” Tyler wailed. “I'm not me, I want to be me.”

Dad stared at Tyler for a moment perhaps realizing that there was something bigger at play than simply not liking a certain food and he was at a loss at what to say. Dad hugged Tyler close and began to rock him gently as he let Tyler cry himself out.

After a couple of minutes Tyler had settled down a little and was now only weeping a little as his Dad continued to rock the bundle in his arms.

“So you want to be you?” Dad said having pondered what Tyler had said. “Well I got good news, you already are you.”

Tyler furrowed his brow. This man could not begin to understand what he had meant. Tyler was not going to let himself be swayed once again to feeling like everything was okay, like they had been able to do in the past.

“I don't want to change anymore,” Tyler said more as a vent than a response.

“You're gonna change, bud.” Dad said. “You know when I was your age, I was a very different person than I am now and I liked a lot of the same things you do, but as I grew up things changed, but some things stayed the same, for instance I still like cartoons and hate brussel sprouts,” Dad said with a smirk. Tyler frowned. He knew this man was trying his hardest but his comments were not exactly reassuring. Of course he knew he was gonna change but what his supposed Dad couldn't understand was that it wasn't the good kind. He was changing from a twenty eight year old into a three year old.

“You don't have to worry about changing though. Its a good thing we have to change so we can become the people we are meant to be,” Dad said.

Tyler found himself almost wanting to start crying again at the thought that the only way he was going to get back to normal was going to be through having to grow up again. He had already done that once and it hadn't exactly been the easiest life. To have everything taken from him like this was a

depressing thought. His struggles, his triumphs, what had it all been for?

“Do you understand what I'm saying?” Dad asked. Tyler casted his eyes downward. “I guess it might be a little over your head,” Dad said with a chuckle. Tyler wanted to protest. He understood it perfectly it was his new Dad who didn't understand.

“Just trust me when I say you'll be okay, I'll be here to make sure of that,” Dad said. “So you feel like going back to dinner. Tyler crawled back onto the bed pulling the blanket with him hiding himself once again. “Okay, I understand you still need some time, you just come down when your feeling better.” Dad said giving him a pat on his back. Dad got up and left the room. He found Connor standing in the hallway.

“Is Tyler okay?” Connor asked with a look of deep concern.

“I think he'll be fine, he just needs some time,” Dad said.

“Do you think I could talk to him?” Connor asked.

“I don't know if it will help,” Dad said making a worried face. “But if you think you can get him to come back to dinner, you're welcome to try. Just don't be disappointed if it doesn't work,” Dad said placing a hand on Connor's shoulder before walking back down the stairs to the kitchen. Connor took a deep breath and opened the door, shutting it silently behind himself. He took a seat on the bed next to the lump under the blankets.

“Hey Tyler can I talk to you?” Connor asked. Tyler groaned a

little from under the blankets. He wondered if everyone was eventually going to make their way into his room one by one. He wanted to be alone, why couldn't they give him at least that?

“You know that stuff you were saying to me earlier it kind of scared me,” Connor said. Tyler felt his guilt well back up inside of him.

“I'm sorry,” Tyler said from under the covers. “It was just a stupid game.”

Connor chuckled a little.

“Even if I don't want to admit it, I believe you,” Connor said obviously not believing Tyler's lie. Tyler poked his head out from under the covers. Connor believed him?

“If what your saying is true about you not being who I thought you were I'll admit it freaks me out a little to be honest. But seeing you downstairs just now, I can tell its probably way worse for you,” Connor said. Tyler sat up keeping the blanket around his body.

“Its really scary,” Tyler said with a quiver. “I'm becoming someone different than I was.”

“I bet,” Connor said. “I'd be scared to if I suddenly changed and had a bunch of people I didn't know acting like they knew me.”

“That part's not so bad,” Tyler said. “Everyone's been really nice to me. And even if I know I'm not really part of this

family I still kind of get the feeling that I am, like I knew who everybody was like I had always been like this, if that makes sense."

"I think I get what your saying," Connor said. "Even if my memories are saying that you weren't here before that day at the park, I still feel the same way about you that I do for Jace and Mallory. I still feel like you're my little brother."

Tyler puffed his cheeks out a little at being referred to as little brother, but he wasn't about to hold that against Connor. For the first time somebody actually understood exactly how he felt and in some way understood the struggle he had been going through, as if Connor could read his mind.

"So how old are you really?" Connor asked. Tyler pursed his lips. Given how he had acted around Connor in the past he felt a little awkward actually admitting his true age. What would Connor think about a twenty eight year old crying and wetting his pants? "You don't have to say if you don't want," Connor said picking up on Tyler's apprehension. "Its just that sometimes you seem to act like a little kid, so I was just curious."

"I can't help it," Tyler said. "Most of the time I can think like my normal self but sometimes my head gets all fuzzy and messed up. Also it seems that my body is only capable of doing things like a three year old."

"I guess that explains it," Connor said. "Why don't you start at the beginning and tell me how you got like this."

Tyler nodded and then told Connor the whole story, about the park and Fiona and the spell and how he had opened his eyes shrunken down on the playground.

“I just want my normal body back, and everything to go back to normal,” Tyler said finishing his story. Connor was silent for a moment. Tyler feared that he was going to laugh in his face and reveal that this had all been a ruse and he didn't actually believe him.

“I'm gonna help you,” Connor said finally breaking the silence.

“What, why?” Tyler asked surprised by the seemingly sudden decision.

“Because I have to,” Connor said.

“You really don't,” Tyler said. “This is my problem not yours.”

“Even if we both know its not exactly true, for the time being you are my little brother, so its my duty as your older brother to help you.”

“Thats,” Tyler began to say before finding himself at a loss for words.

“You still think of me as your brother, right?” Connor asked. Tyler nodded. “See then there's no problem with it, we'll find this Fiona woman and get you back to your old self in no time.”

Tyler smiled as he felt a small sense of hope restore in himself. There was no way he would be able to do this alone.

With Connor's help the two of them might just be able to pull this off.

“I'm not sure how to find this lady but I'm sure together we'll figure something out, but is their anything else I can do in the meantime?” Connor asked.

“Umm, maybe don't treat me like a little kid,” Tyler said. Connor thought on this request for a moment.

“I think I can do that,” Connor said with a smirk. “I don't think I'll be able to convince the others though.”

“That's fine,” Tyler said. “As long as I have one person who believes me, it will help me keep my head straight.”

“And I also promise not too make fun of you for those times when you do act little. Since I know you can't help it."

Tyler smiled upon hearing Connor's promise.

"So if that's settled, think you can go back downstairs? I think everyone's a little worried about you” Connor said. Tyler got out from under the blankets and stood in front of Connor. He was feeling much better now. Just the fact that Connor believe him was enough to make him feel like his whole world wasn't crashing around him.

“Umm, thanks Connor for helping me, it means a lot,” Tyler said.

“Don't mention it bro,” Connor said with a smile.

Chapter 11

One of the Family: Part 11 - Chapter 11

Tyler was awoken with a hand gently shaking him.

“C'mon Ty its time to wakey wakey,” he heard his Dad say. He opened his eyes a little to see his Dad's smiling face. Tyler's eyes were still heavy with sleep as he closed them again and pulled his covers up over his head with a groan like a hungover adult after a night of too much drinking. “Somebody's still sleepy,” Dad said in an exaggerated low tone. Tyler felt the covers pulled back as his Dad's hands began to tickle him all over. Tyler squirmed as he squealed under the assault.

“I'm up, I'm up,” Tyler said finding any feeling of drowsiness evaporated.

“Oh look whose awake,” Dad said in a sing song voice. Tyler sat up wiping the sleep from his eyes. He then became aware of the uncomfortable feeling of the night time diaper he was still forced to wear. It was cold and clammy around him and the unmistakable scent of a mess mixed with baby powder made Tyler feel a little sick.

“Lets get ready,” Dad said scooping him out of the bed and placing him on the changing table. His Dad removed his pants and then started on the diaper. Tyler had gotten used to his new parents changing him and no longer felt awkward

about being in various states of undress in front of them even if it was still a humiliating experience. His Dad got him cleaned up and then set him on the ground naked from the waist down.

“Alright to the potty,” Dad said as Tyler took the lead. Out in the hall he saw Connor walking towards the stairs. Tyler darted into the bathroom thankful that the boy had not seen him. It was fine for his new parents to see him like this since they didn't know any better. But the prospect of Connor now seeing him like this would be all too embarrassing since he was the only other person who knew the truth. It had been three days since Tyler had revealed the truth to Connor, but he hadn't had much of an opportunity to talk to him. For the last three days Connor had been out of the house most of the day at a soccer camp to get ready for the upcoming season. It seemed a little excessive to Tyler but Connor seemed to take his athletic endeavors with a degree of seriousness. The only problem is that when Connor did get back he was pretty tired and Tyler didn't want to bother him when it was so obvious he was exhausted.

Tyler sat on the his training potty waiting for something to happen as his Dad leaned against the bathroom counter scrolling through his phone. Tyler noted that the man seemed dressed for work as he wore a white button down shirt and a black tie. He wondered what this guy did for work. Both he and his wife were still relatively young and had a nice house with three kids, well four if Tyler counted himself. Mom didn't seem to work which meant that Dad must have some

sort of high paying job.

“What do you do for a job?” Tyler asked. His new Dad looked up from his phone with a weird smile on his face, no doubt a little amused by the question that seemed to come out of thin air.

“You don't know?” Dad asked. Tyler shook his head. “I sell houses,” Dad said as matter a factly.

“Oh,” Tyler said finding the answer to be more ordinary than he had anticipated. He was half expecting something like lawyer or stock broker or some sort of executive. “Are they big houses?” Tyler asked. This question caused his Dad to laugh a little in response.

“Bigger than I can afford,” Dad said. Tyler smiled a little before resting his chin in his hands. He began to wonder if he had gotten a different career in his old life, one that would have afforded him a life similar to this mans would his real father had respected him? As he pondered this more he realized he had never known what his real father had wanted for him, it had seemed that no matter what it was never good enough for him. In his eyes Tyler was a screw up and there was nothing he could do to convince him otherwise.

“So is today the day?” Dad asked holding up the sticker chart that still didn't have a single sticker on it. Tyler looked down with some gloomy resignation. It seemed no matter how hard he tried he would inevitably slip up at some point and wet his pants, not to mention the fact that he had woken up in a soiled diaper, he wasn't exactly feeling his most confident

self. “Have a little confidence buddy,” Dad said.

“Its never good,” Tyler said muffled as his hand was covering his mouth.

“Hey Ty look at me,” he said kneeling down to get to Tyler's level. “All's I ask of you is try your best,okay? If you do that then there's no reason to be upset. You're my little champ after all.”

Tyler grinned a little not seeming to mind the infantile pet name his Dad had assigned to him. Dad had seemingly figured out the best way to defuse Tyler's defeatist attitude was a little bit of encouragement and assurance that it wasn't the end of the world if he messed up. Though he did wonder when Tyler had seemingly become so critical of himself.

“Alright, I think you're empty,” Dad said bringing an end to potty time. He grabbed the pull-up off from the counter and held it out for Tyler to step into. Dad then helped him wash his hands before carrying him down to the kitchen before strapping him into his booster seat and pouring him a bowl of cereal. Mom was sat at the table a laptop in front of her. She was wearing a robe and sipping some coffee as Connor sat across from her eating his own bowl of cereal with his nose buried in a magazine.

“Thanks for getting him up,” Mom said as Dad leaned down to kiss her.

“You owe me for the mess this morning,” Dad said with a chuckle. Tyler felt his face go red, especially since Connor

was sitting right there in earshot.

“Uh huh,” Mom said with a sarcastic tone. Dad left on his way to work. Mom closed her laptop.

“Connor can you watch your brother for a moment while I get dressed and get Jace and Mallory up?” she asked. Connor looked up from his magazine giving a glance towards Tyler.

“Sure,” he said with a shrug before returning to his reading. Mom left the room leaving the two of them alone. Neither one of them said a word to one another, a weird awkwardness settling between them. Tyler began to eat his cereal trying his hardest to not let any of it dribble out out onto to his face. A task that was easier said than done being equipped with his three year old coordination. Connor got up and put his bowl in the sink.

“You done?” Connor asked looking at Tyler.

“Um yeah,” Tyler said pushing his half eaten bowl of cereal away. Connor picked up the bowl putting it in the sink. He returned with a napkin in hand and went to wipe the milk that remained on Tyler's face.

“I can do it,” Tyler said moving his head back.

“Oh sorry,” Connor said realizing what he had been doing. Tyler took the napkin and wiped his own face. He then went to unbuckle the strap securing him in his booster seat but found he still couldn't seem to get it undone. Connor watched him struggle for a few moments.

“I got you,” Connor said as he reached down and unbuckled the strap.

“Thanks,” Tyler said not even able to look Connor in the face as he slumped down out of the chair. The two of them stood next to one another not sure how to proceed.

“So I was thinking we should start our search for Fiona today, since I'm done with soccer camp” Connor said breaking the silence.

“Oh yeah, that sounds good,” Tyler said with some enthusiasm.

“So what do you know about her? Where should we start looking?” Connor asked.

“Not much,” Tyler admitted. “I don't even know her last name, I pretty much already told you everything.”

“Hmm this might be harder than I thought,” Connor said.

“But you'll still help me, right?” Tyler said with some concern that Connor was going to give up right then and there.

They were interrupted by the clamoring footsteps of Jace and Mallory approaching the kitchen.

“Of course,” Connor said. “We'll talk later though, okay.” Connor said. Tyler could only nod. Jace walked in not giving any notice to his siblings as he took a seat at the table putting his head down obviously still groggy.

“You okay there bro?” Connor asked with an amused look.

“Its still summer,” Jace said not even lifting his head. “Why do we have to be up so early?”

“Mom's probably just trying to get you used to it for when school starts,” Connor offered as an explanation. “It's not even that early, I've been up since six,” Connor added.

“You're a freak,” Jace said giving his brother a tired look. Mallory on the other hand walked into the kitchen full of sunshine.

“Good morning,” she said cheerfully before grabbing Tyler's head and pulling it towards her in a hug. Which had caught Tyler completely off guard. She released him rather abruptly causing him to stumble back a little. “Looks like someone's still dry, good for you,” Mallory said eyeing the wetness indicator on Tyler's pull-up. Tyler felt his face go a little red as he covered his pull-up with his hands and turned away from her.

“Mallory lay off, and don't say stuff like that to him,” Connor said.

“I was only telling him good job,” Mallory said.

“You're treating him like a baby,” Connor said.

“I'm his big sister, I can help take care of him,” Mallory said with some pride.

“Babies can't take care of babies,” Jace said not wanting to pass up an opportunity to antagonize his sister caring little if Tyler was caught in the crossfire of insults.

“Jace,” Connor said with a groan.

Tyler retreated to the living room not wanting to hear any more of the ensuing argument especially if it centered around his new status as the baby of the family. He climbed onto the couch and wrapped himself up in the blanket that had been resting across the back of the couch leaving only his head poking out of the top. This way no one could do a cursory glance at the status of his pull-up. Connor came in a few moments later taking a seat on the couch near Tyler.

“Hey don't listen to them,” Connor said sensing that the comments had probably hit Tyler pretty hard.

“It's fine,” Tyler said smiling weakly. “I don't mind,” he said. Connor could tell it was a lie but decided not to press the issue further.

“Want to watch some cartoons?” Connor said trying to change the subject. Tyler shook his head.

“What, you hate cartoons or something?” Connor asked.

“Its not that,” Tyler said. “They just make me feel little.”

“Well how about some sports then, you like sports right?” Connor asked as he flipped the tv on to some morning sports talk show.

“Yeah, sure,” Tyler said turning his attention to the tv, happy with the mature suggestion and the fact that Connor seemed to be trying to help him keep his head straight. As Tyler watched the the highlight reel he found himself becoming

rather bored. The truth was he was never much into sports.

“Oh man how could he miss that,” Connor exclaimed in reaction to a highlight of a basketball player missing a crucial yet easy shot. Connor seemed to be enjoying the show as he continued make loud reactions to the action on the screen. Tyler tried his best to focus but it didn't seem to help as he felt his attention slipping further away. Tyler looked over to his play area and spotted some car toys that seemed to be far more interesting to him at the moment. He shed the blanket and walked over to the cars and sat down and started to push them around making car noises as he drove them around the city themed carpet. Connor watched him for a moment. He considered saying something, but decided against it. Tyler seemed to be enjoying himself and was unbothered by the fact that Connor was there to see. Connor had been fully aware of the awkwardness between the two of them, he wanted Tyler to be able to be comfortable around him, regardless of how he was acting.

Mom came into the living room.

“Tyler,” she called out. The toddler looked up from his cars. “Its time to stop playing and come and get dressed.” she said motioning him over to her. Tyler looked back down to his cars and then to Connor with an embarrassed look.

“Okay,” he said making a hasty exit as he ran out of the living room, leaving Connor to wonder if he had made the right call. Tyler was a little upset with himself that he had let himself slip so easily. He stood at the top of the stairs rubbing the side

of his head trying to get his mind straight before he felt himself be lifted up from behind into his Mom's arms.

“You feel okay?” she asked noticing what he had been doing.

“Yeah,” Tyler said quick to dissipate her worry.

“Let's try to go potty,” she said carrying him into the bathroom. Tyler finished up his business quickly, happy that he hadn't had an accident and still in the running for a sticker, but still bothered by the fact that the only time he seemed to make it to the bathroom on time was when one of his parents insisted on taking him. Tyler followed his Mom to his room, he noticed she had what appeared to be a diaper bag with her. He watched her take out an extra pair of shorts for him and place it into the bag.

“Okay lets get you changed,” she said. Tyler looked at her confused.

“But I'm not wet,” Tyler said confused.

“I know hun but I want you to wear a diaper while we are at the store today, we're going to be there awhile and I don't want you having an accident because we couldn't get to a bathroom quick enough.” Mom explained as she pulled his pajama top off of him.

“But I was going to get a sticker,” Tyler said with a groan.

“If you feel like you need to go just tell me and we'll bring your travel seat just in case,” she said as she tore the sides of his pull up off and placed it on his dresser. “And we'll save

this for later.” she said.

Tyler didn't like the idea one bit but didn't make a fuss as his Mom lifted him up onto the changing table. As she lifted his legs up and slid the diaper under him he could only feel completely bummed out for a myriad of reasons. For one being put back into a diaper during the day felt like a complete step backwards as if he were being sent back to the beginning of an obstacle course he had already made it halfway through. He was also annoyed that they were going out of the house today. He and Connor were supposed to start their search for Fiona today, a prospect that excited him to no end as it would be his first real step of progress to getting back to his real life. Mom had him powdered up and taped into a diaper in no time. She lifted him off the table and set him on the ground before going and and pulling some clothes out of the dresser. She dressed him in a pair of gray shorts and a bright orange shirt that had a smiling bannana on it resting on a pool chair underneath a smiling sun wearing shades and a rainbow that also had a smiling face, the words “sunny day” written across the bottom. Tyler grimaced a little at the shirt, he found it to be overly loud as far as his wardrobe went. She finished by putting a pair of Spiderman socks on his feet.

“Want to bring Opie?” Mom asked picking up the stuffed wolf from the bed. Tyler wanted to refuse, thinking what Connor would think, but then remembered the last time he had been to a store and how much he had regretted not bringing his furry companion. He nodded his head as his

Mom handed him the wolf. Tyler followed his Mom down the stairs as they made a stop at the shoe bench.

“Time for shoes,” Mom said.

“I can do it myself,” Tyler insisted as he grabbed his dino shoes and sat on the ground putting them on his feet even doing the velcro snaps by himself.

“Look at you getting your shoes on,” Mom praised. “You're growing up so fast,” she added with a hint of sadness. Tyler didn't say anything not in the mood to be praised for such childish things.

“Okay get ready you two, its time to go,” Mom announced entering into the kitchen.

“Where are we going?” Jace asked standing at the island counter.

“Back to school shopping,” Mom said.

“I already got clothes,” Jace said.

“We still need to get you supplies,” Mom countered. Jace's shoulder's slumped as he realized he wasn't getting out of a shopping trip. “Aren't you excited to start the third grade?” Mom asked. Jace made a little grunt as he trudged out of the kitchen muttering under his breath.

“I'm excited to start first grade,” Mallory said getting up and shooting a sunny smile at her Mom.

“That's wonderful,” Mom said hugging Mallory before

releasing her watching her skip out of the room.

“Please take after your sister when you start school,” Mom said looking at Tyler. The boy only looked down as he fidgeted with Opie's ear. The idea of having to start school gave him a pang of anxiety and he hoped he wasn't going to be sticking around long enough for such a situation to come to pass. Connor came out into the kitchen, his shoes already on.

“And there is my soon to be fifth grader, how do you feel about being top dog at the school?” Mom asked.

“Its not going to that much different,” Connor said with some indifference. “Middle school is when things really change.” he added with some apprehension.

“Worried?” Mom asked.

“A little,” Connor admitted.

“Well you have a whole year still ahead of you,” Mom said mussing up his hair. “Seeing as you two are ready how about you take Tyler to the car and get him into his car seat?” Mom asked.

“Uhh I don't know about that,” Connor said shooting an apprehensive look at Tyler who responded with an alarmed expression.

“You'll do fine,” Mom said. “It'll really help me out while I go and hurry along your brother and sister, well I guess just your brother,” Mom said.

“I guess,” Connor said still unsure.

“Great,” Mom said as she turned to look at Tyler. “Hear that your big brother's going to get you buckled in.”

“Yaaay,” Tyler said through a fake smile. Mom left the kitchen to go upstairs leaving the two boys alone in the kitchen.

“Lets just get this over with,” Tyler said turning around to walk to the door leading to the garage.

Connor opened up the door to the car letting Tyler climb into the car. Connor gave him a small boost helping him into the seat.

“You want to do the straps yourself?” Connor asked.

“I can't,” Tyler grumbled holding up his hands. “I can't get the buckles to work.”

“Okay, no problem,” Connor said nervously. He pulled the chest harness first snapping it into place before pulling the other belt down between Tyler's crotch and buckling it into place, his hand brushing up against the front of Tyler's diaper as he did it. “A diaper,” Connor said surprised. Tyler's eyes went wide as his face flushed red.

“Mommy made me, I didn't want to,” he yelped his face turning even redder as he realized he had once again referred to her as Mommy.

“Sorry, sorry,” Connor said flustered. “I shouldn't have said anything,” Connor turned away clenching his teeth. “Sorry,”

“he said again quietly. Tyler saw that it seemed to bother Connor just as much as it did him.

“It's okay,” Tyler said. “I still have to wear them at night, so it shouldn't be a big deal if I'm wearing one now and its not like this is the first time you've seen me in one.” Tyler said trying his best to put Connor's worries of causing him offense to rest. Connor was having just as hard adjusting to the new situation as Tyler was. As weird as it was to think about Connor was the kid and Tyler was the adult in this situation. He should try his best to be supportive at least and not make it any harder on Connor.

“I'm sorry again,” Connor said getting into the car himself and going to the backseat to buckle himself in. The two of them once again found themselves sitting in an awkward silence. The rest of the family arrived a few excruciating minutes later piling into the car. Mom turned around and pulled on Tyler's strap checking over Connor's work.

“Looks good, everything go okay?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Connor said sheepishly from the back. The drive to the store was uneventful as Tyler watched the scenery pass by from his window. At the store he found himself once again strapped into the childs seat of the cart as the family walked up and down aisles of clothing. The store was far more crowded than last time as the back to school sales were now in full effect. Tyler found himself getting antsy as he was forced to sit still while everyone else was hustling and bustling about grabbing clothing items of the racks. The only

person who was just as bored as him was Jace as he trudged alongside the cart.

“Can I walk?” Tyler asked Mom. She looked at him with a grin.

“Want to stretch your legs?” Mom asked as she unstrapped him and lifted him out of the cart setting him on his feet. “Make sure you stay by the cart though, no running off on your own, okay.”

Mallory grabbed his hand.

“I'll make sure Ty doesn't get lost,” Mallory said taking charge. Tyler was about to pull his hand away.

“Thank you Mallory,” Mom said agreeing with the arrangement. Tyler pursed his lips. If he known this was how it was going to be he would have just stayed in the cart. Still he figured it could be worse, Mom could have been one of those parents who put their kids on a leash, that would have been the most mortifying situation for Tyler. Mallory dragged him along swinging his arm to an fro pleased to have been given charge over him. Thankfully for Tyler she seemed to have forgotten all about him as they found themselves in the girls section and her attention had turned to picking out new clothes for herself. Tyler stayed close to the cart just to show his Mom he was capable of walking around without constant supervision.

After about an hour of going up and down the clothing aisles Mom decided that Connor and Mallory had accrued enough

clothing that a trip to the changing rooms was in order. Tyler was thankful since that meant he would be able to sit down for a moment. His legs were tired from the constant walking not to mention he wasn't used to walking so much with the added bulk of the diaper. They came to a stop in front of the entrance to the changing rooms.

“Okay you two, hop to it,” Mom said. “And I want to see how they fit,” she reminded as Connor and Mallory disappeared into the changing rooms. Tyler then felt the back of his waistband be pulled back. He yelped out of surprised jumping forward feeling the waistband snap back against him. He spun around to see his Mom looking a little surprised by his reaction.

“Sorry to startle you sweetie, I was just doing a quick check,” she said with a giggle. Tyler walked away with a huff and crawled onto the bench where Jace was already seated. Mom stood by the cart scrolling through her phone while Jace busied himself with a rubiks cube he had brought along, which left Tyler alone with nothing to do to pass the time.

Time seemed to be at a standstill. This would have been boring as an adult but Tyler found with his three year old attention span this was mind numbing torture. Connor came out wearing one of the collared shirts he had gotten since he was going to be joining the orchestra that year and needed something to wear for concerts. His Mom checked it over making sure the collar wasn't too tight and the sleeves were a good length before giving her approval and sending him back. Mallory was slower as she insisted on putting on the

full outfits she had cobbled together as the burgeoning fashionista she saw herself as before making an apperance. Tyler now knew why Mom had warned Jace about how long it took for her to try on clothes. Mom took a seat on the bench and plopped her phone into Tyler's lap.

“You looked bored babe, why don't you watch some videos on my phone,” she said tapping the screen as an episode of Sesame Street began to play. Tyler was aware of the show for sure but he had never watched it when he was younger. His Dad had not been fond of any children's programming so Tyler had little exposure to anything during his own childhood. It wasn't until the age of ten when he had been given an old tv by his grandma for his room that he had even watched a cartoon. Tyler picked up the phone with some hesitancy. He wanted to refuse at first but upon weighing his options he began to watch. He could either be an entertained three year old or a bored three year old. The choice was a no brainer. As he watched the video he found himself instantly enchanted by the bright and colorful puppets on the screen. He especially liked when it seemed like they were talking directly to him, it excited him as if they were his old friends and by the end of the program it certainly did feel that way. If he had been quizzed he would have been able to name them all without a pause.

As the episode came to an end Tyler looked up from the screen looking around. He had been so taken by the show that he had forgotten they were at a store. He spotted Mom standing near the entrance to the dressing room looking over

one of Mallory's outfits. He got off the bench to go and ask her to start another video for him when he realized the pressure in his bladder. He was about to blow. He ran over to her and tugged on the bottom of her shirt to get her attention. She looked down at him.

“Mommy I need the potty,” he said with pleading and urgent eyes.

“Oh no,” Mom said as she looked to the dressing rooms and then back to Tyler. She couldn't leave Connor and Mallory behind just to rush Tyler to the bathroom. Just then Connor came out of the dressing room wearing his regular clothes as he deposited the last few items he had chosen into the cart. Yet Mallory was nowhere to be seen.

“Connor I need you to run Tyler to the bathroom,” she said.

“I don't know about that,” Connor said as he looked down at Tyler who was now trying to hold it in by scrunching his legs together.

“It'll be fine, take this bag it has the travel seat in it,” she said as she shoved the bag into his arms.

“Hurry so he doesn't wet his pants,” she said.

“Mom I really...” Connor began to say.

“Please,” Tyler mewled cutting off Connor as he looked up at him with a look of pure desperation. Tyler didn't care at this point who was taking him to the bathroom, he just didn't want to wet his diaper, it was already bulky enough.

“Alright, lets go,” Connor said with some urgency as he took Tyler's hand and they began to walk briskly off to the bathrooms.

The bathroom was thankfully empty. Connor went into the first stall and placed the travel seat onto the toilet. Tyler pushed past him as soon as he was done.

“You need help?” Connor asked.

“I can do it myself,” Tyler replied before he shut the door. He pulled off his shorts and ripped off the the tapes of the diaper letting it drop to the ground. He maneuvered himself onto the toilet. The travel seat making it easy for him to sit on top of an adult sized toilet without fear of falling in. As soon as Tyler was situated he let loose feeling the deep sense of relief wash over him. He had done it, he had made it to the bathroom on his own. As he finished his business he hopped off the toilet and flushed the toilet. He picked up the diaper off the ground and began to try and put it back on. He could manage pulling up his training pants on his own just fine but the diaper was a completely different story. He stumbled around as he tried to hold the diaper in place to tape it back up but with his lack of coordination and balance it was going to be an impossibility on his own. He let the diaper fall back onto the ground, feeling defeated.

“You okay in there?” Connor asked from the other side of the door.

“I'm fine,” Tyler replied quickly. As much as he wanted to hide his frustrations his voice had betrayed him as anyone

would be able to hear the sniffles beginning to form.

“Are you sure? You don't sound fine,” Connor said opening the door and peeking in.

“Don't look,” Tyler squeaked as he pulled his shirt down to cover himself. Connor came into the stall closing the door behind him putting together the pieces of what the problem was.

“Tyler remember what I told you?” he asked.

Tyler looked up at him with a pitiful look.

“I'm here to help you,” Connor said as he knelt down and placed a hand on Tyler's shoulder.

“Whatever it is, I'm here to help you no judgment,” Connor reiterated.

“I can't get it on,” Tyler said looking down at the diaper.

“I'll do it for you,” Connor said grabbing the diaper off the ground.

“But I don't want you see me naked,” Tyler said. Connor decided not to remind Tyler that he had already seen him naked once before.

“It's not a big deal,” Connor said. “We're both guys after all.”

“It's still embarrassing,” Tyler replied with some gruffness.

“Well think about it this way, this isn't your real body, right? So really I'm not actually seeing you naked.” It was a weak

excuse but Tyler could see some logic to it.

“Okay, fine,” Tyler said finally relenting.

“It'll probably be easier to get this on if you lie down,” Connor suggested. Tyler went to lie on the ground before Connor stopped him. “Don't lie on the floor,” Connor said.

“Where am I supposed to then?” Tyler asked confused.

“Uhh well,” Connor said as he opened the door and pointed at the baby changing station on the wall.

“Really?” Tyler said scrunching up his face.

“It beats lying on a dirty bathroom floor,” Connor reasoned. Tyler let out a groan as he followed Connor out of the stall. After unfolding the table from the wall Connor lifted Tyler onto the changing station.

“Just make it quick,” Tyler said.

“I will,” Connor said with some confidence. Tyler could see though that as Connor began he was certainly out of his element, looking unsure as to what his first step was.

“I need to wipe you off first, right?” Connor asked with some hesitancy.

“No,” Tyler yelped quickly. “I only went pee,”

“Okay, then I guess lift up your butt,” Connor instructed. Tyler lifted himself up making it easy for Connor to slide the diaper under him before covering his face with his hands. Even if Connor had reassured him it was no big deal, Tyler

couldn't bear to show his face. He felt Connor pull the diaper up between his legs before taping up the front smoothing the tapes out with his hands to make sure they were secure.

“See, easy peasy,” Connor said as he lifted Tyler off of the table setting him on the ground.

Tyler went and retrieved his shorts. He sat on the ground as he pulled them up his legs, standing up to readjust them around his waist. He then went back over to Conner who held him up to the sink so he could wash his hands.

A janitor came into the bathroom and saw the two boys at the sink.

“Helping your little brother out?” the man said with a smile regarding the sweet scene before him.

“Um yeah,” Connor replied as he set Tyler back on the ground.

“I think you forgot something,” the man said. Connor turned around to see the man was talking about the travel seat still attached to the toilet.

“Thanks,” Connor said as he retrieved the item, stuffing it back into the diaper bag before he set about washing his own hands.

The two boys returned back to their Mom who was still stationed by the changing rooms, Mallory was still not to be seen.

“Everything go okay?” she asked.

“Yep, Ty's still dry,” Connor said as he gave him a gentle slap on the back.

“You made it, good job,” Mom said with some enthusiasm as she ruffled Tyler's hair. “And lets see how your big brother did,” she said as she pulled Tyler's shorts down in front to inspect the tape job on the diaper. Tyler's eyes went wide as he realized he was exposed in the middle of the store.

“Looks good,” Mom said pulling his shorts back up. Tyler looked around hoping no passerby's had noticed. “Oh Connor, I need you to try on these pants,” Mom said holding up a pair of dress slacks. “To go along with your concert shirt.”

“Okay,” Connor said with a sigh as he disappeared back into the dressing room.

Jace had abandoned his rubik's cube and had his head up against the wall as he stared up at the ceiling.

“Jace why don't you go pick out some notebooks for yourself, your going to need three of them, I think their just over there,” Mom said pointing across the way.

“Okay,” Jace said jumping up from the bench happy to be doing something other than waiting around.

“Take Tyler with you,” Mom said.

“Ugh, why,” Jace said with a groan.

“Buddy system,” Mom said with a smirk. Jace rolled his eyes as he went to leave.

“And hold his hand,” Mom said.

Jace once again groaned as he roughly grabbed Tyler's hand and dragged him off to the area Mom had pointed out. As soon as they turned the corner Jace let Tyler's hand drop as he began to peruse through the myriad of notebook options. Tyler walked along the aisle as he looked at all the school supplies in front of him, He came to a display that caught his eyes. He saw a book that had the Sesame Street characters he had recently become acquainted with on the cover smiling at him. He picked up the book looking at the cover.

“What's that?” Jace asked coming up behind him. Tyler tuned around.

“Big Bird,” he said showing Jace the front cover.

“Oh its an activity book,” Jace said taking it out of Tyler's hands and opening it up to show him a page with letters on it that were meant to be traced over. “You want it?” The more Tyler looked at it the more his desire for it grew.

“I really really want it,” Tyler said.

“This isn't the right one,” Jace said putting the one in his hand back on the display and grabbing another one with an identical cover, the only difference being that this one had “2-3” on top of it instead of “5”

“Ask Mom, she'll probably say yes,” Jace said handing the book to Tyler. They walked back Tyler clutching the book close to his chest. As they returned it finally looked like Connor and Mallory were finished trying on clothes.

“I got my notebooks,” Jace announced as he flashed three notebooks all Minecraft themed as he dropped them in the cart. “Tyler found something too.”

“Oh he did, did he,” Mom said with a raised eyebrow. Tyler stood back apprehensive to approach.

“Well go ahead show her,” Jace said as he motioned Tyler to step forward. Tyler walked up to his Mom and handed her the book. She looked at the cover before flipping through the pages.

“Can I get it?” Tyler asked shyly.

“He likes Sesame Street, huh,” Mallory said. “Maybe I'll give you my Elmo doll.” Mallory offered as a kind gesture.

Mallory's comment seemed to make something click in Tyler's head Why had he wanted this book so much in the first place? What was worse even now that he realized what he was asking for he found that he still wanted it. Tyler instantly grew self-conscious with his request.

“Sure, looks good,” Mom said with a shrug as she handed the book back to Tyler as he looked down at it with a mixture of anxiety and shame. He couldn't want this, it was for little kids. It shouldn't appeal to him in any way.

“I don't want it,” Tyler said.

“I thought you did?” Mom asked confused at Tyler's sudden change in opinion.

“He did,” Jace piped up. “He said he really really wanted it

when he picked it up."

"I did not," Tyler said as if he had just been accused of a crime. Tyler took a step back as he looked at the rest of the family staring at him. "I don't want it," Tyler said as he turned around and ran back towards the aisle.

"Tyler come back," he heard his Mom say. But he wasn't going to stop. He wasn't going to get this book, He was going to put it back. That way nobody could accuse him of liking any such thing.

"I'll go get him," Connor said before taking off after Tyler. He found in him in the notebook aisle. He was crouched down in front of the display he had grabbed the book from originally. "Hey Tyler," Connor said as he knelt down next to the boy.

"I don't want it," Tyler said not lifting his head.

"Really," Connor said taking the book back down off the display. "You can really look at this book and tell me it doesn't make you happy?"

Tyler lifted his head up to look at the book. Even with all the drama surrounding the object he had to admit even now he still wanted it.

"C'mon its me, you can tell me the truth," Connor said.

"I do want it," Tyler admitted.

"If it makes you happy then you should get it." Connor said.

"She's probably mad at me, she won't let me have it now,"

Tyler said with some sadness.

“Nah, she's your Mom she'll let you have it, believe me It's educational after all. Mom's love that kind of stuff,” Connor said with a smirk.

“But she not my Mom, not really,” Tyler said.

“Hey remember what I said. For right now I'm your brother, which means for right now she is your Mom and I know she loves you just like she does me, Jace and Mallory, so don't worry so much about that.”

Tyler stood up wordlessly as he let Connor hand him the book. It seemed Connor was serious when he had said he considered Tyler his brother even if he knew the circumstances around it weren't as straightforward as could be. They walked back together to where there Mom was still waiting. Tyler approached his faced filled with worry at the reaction he was going to get.

“I'm sorry,” he said. “I got upset."

Mom gave him a sympathetic smile as she picked him up putting her on his hip.

“That's okay as long as you apologized for running off. Now tell me do you want this book?” Tyler nodded. She took the book from his hand and placed it in the cart.

“Its been a long morning hasn't it.” she said pushing some hair out of his eyes. “Why don't you rest a little, I'm sure you'll feel better,” she said as she readjusted him in her arms

so that he could lay his head onto her shoulder. Tyler realized he was feeling somewhat drowsy as he nuzzled into her shoulder. Connor took over steering the cart as they made their way to other aisles filled with other supplies on the kids list. Tyler let his eyes close as he listened to his Mom tell the others what to pick out. She began to gently rub his back as he relaxed even further not even noticing when his thumb made its way into his mouth. The last thing he heard her say was something about going over to the shoe department. By the time they made their way over there Tyler was fast asleep bringing an end to his shopping trip.

Chapter 12

One of the Family: Part 12 - Chapter 12

Tyler opened his eyes staring up at a ceiling. He sat up finding himself on the couch in the living room. He stretched out his arms before removing the blanket covering him to find he was still wearing a diaper. He looked down and poked the front of it as he peered at the yellow line on it, he was still dry. He looked into the kitchen and could see his Mom's laptop open at the table with a stack of paper's next to it but didn't see her anywhere. In fact the whole house seemed rather quiet. He got off of the couch and wandered into the kitchen .Just then he felt the pressure in his bladder. He listened to hear if he could hear anyone but no such luck, had they left him? With no one around he was going to have to do this himself. He ran into the downstairs bathroom and shut the door behind him. He took of his diaper and sat on his potty. As he went he realized this was the first time he had been able to use the bathroom in private since his transformation, it was a breath of fresh air to be sure. His peace was disturbed by a knock at the door.

“Akapa,” he said slipping over the pronunciation of the word occupied. The door opened as Mallory walked in.

“Using your potty Ty Ty,” she said. The way she said it made Tyler feel all the more babyish. He kicked himself a little for forgetting to lock the door.

“Get out,” Tyler said trying his best to sound firm and authoritative. Mallory was unfazed as she got closer, now standing over him.

“I need to help you,” Mallory said placing her hands on her hips.

“I'm already done,” Tyler responded.

“Good job,” she said giving him a pat on the head before picking the diaper off the ground. “And it looks like your diaper is dry so now I can put it back on you.”

Tyler's eyes went wide upon hearing her intention.

“Just lay down right here,” Mallory said pointing to the ground.

Tyler shook his head, there was no way he was going to comply with her request.

“C'mon, be a good boy” she said grabbing onto his shirt sleeve to pull him off of seat. Tyler gripped the sides of his potty. “I'm really good at changing baby's diapers since I change my doll all the time.” she said as she continued to try and pull him forward.

“No, not you,” Tyler mewled hoping to remind her that she was not under any circumstances supposed to change him.

“Tyler listen to me” Mallory said giving one final hard tug peeling the boy off the potty onto his knees..

Just then the door swung open as Mom stood in the doorway.

Tyler could almost hear the hallelujah chorus begin to ring out.

“Mallory Jane what on earth do you think you are doing?” Mom asked. Mallory spun around.

“Nothing,” she said innocently as she quickly hid the diaper behind her back.

“It certainly doesn't look like nothing,” Mom said walking forward putting a hand on Mallory's shoulder and peering behind her back. Mom plucked the diaper from her hand and held it up.

“Me and your Father have told you before that you are not allowed to change Tyler,” Mom said having deduced what had caused all the commotion.

“You let Connor do it at the store,” Mallory said as she crossed her arms and furrowed her brow in a pout.

“That was an emergency, and most importantly he had permission,” Mom stated. “Besides he is the oldest, I wouldn't let Jace do it either, even if he asked.”

Tyler was relieved to hear this bit of info. The thought of Jace diapering him made his ears go hot just from the mere thought of it.

“Now what do you have to say to your little brother?” Mom asked Mallory.

“Sorry,” Mallory said turning towards him with a frown. Now that Mom had put out that fire she turned her attention

towards Tyler as she examined the diaper in her hand.

“Tyler is this the diaper you were wearing?” she asked.

“Yes,” Tyler said with some worry that she was going to be mad that he had taken it off himself.

“And did you come in here all by yourself?” she asked.

“Uh huh,” Tyler nodded still feeling suspicious that he was in trouble. However any concerns of his instantly disappeared as she took a step towards him with a grin kneeling down on his level.

“Such a big boy,” she said nuzzling his face with her own, which elicited a giggle from Tyler relieved to see his worries had been unfounded. “Are you done?” she asked taking a quick glance into the potty.

Tyler nodded as he stood up.

“Then lets head upstairs and get you dressed.” she said picking him up and carrying him upstairs Mallory following behind. She set him down on the ground in the upstairs bathroom. Tyler was a tad bit confused as to what they were doing in here, he had just gone to the bathroom.

“Mallory can you go grab the pull-up on the dresser in Ty's room?” Mom asked.

“Yep,” Mallory said speeding out of the bathroom happy to be given a task pertaining to Tyler's care. She returned so quick that if there were world records for such things she would certainly have won it. She handed the pull-up from the

morning to Mom who held it out in front of Tyler to step in, once that was finished she stood up.

“Ty, you went the whole morning without any accidents, you know what that means?” she asked with a sly smile appearing on her face. Tyler's eyes went wide as he couldn't believe what he was hearing, was she serious? Had the moment he had been waiting for finally come.

“You get a sticker,” Mom said excitedly as she pulled a sticker sheet out of the top drawer of the bathroom counter and set it down on top of the toilet seat for Tyler to take.

“I'll put it on for you,” Mallory said swiping up the sheet of stickers into her hand.

“Mal,” Mom said with a raised eyebrow. “Those are Tyler's stickers, you got to do it when you were potty training, now its his turn.”

“Okay,” Mallory said glumly as she handed over the sticker sheet. Tyler looked at all the stickers before him.

“Pick whichever one you want,” Mom instructed. Tyler took a moment to decide before settling on a smiling blue shark.

“This one,” he said pointing it out. Mom peeled it off for him placing it onto his finger and then showing him the right box to place it on the chart which he placed with much pride. Tyler regarded the sticker there on the chart. His tongue poking a little out of the side of his mouth as his lips were formed into a goofy smile. “I did it,” Tyler said wrapping his arms around himself as he jumped around in a circle.

“Hold up the chart so I can take a picture,” Mom said taking out her phone. Tyler stood smiling from ear to ear as he held the chart in front of him as his Mom snapped a picture. She then swept him up into a hug. “I'm so proud of you,” she said as she gave him a kiss on the cheek. Tyler let a satisfied sound escape from his lips. He was relishing in the positive attention that was being showered upon him. He wasn't used to this and he loved it. His Mom set him down as he basked in the afterglow of success.

“I have to tell Daddy,” Tyler said with enthusiasm.

“He's showing a house right now, but you can tell him when he gets home,” Mom said.

“But I want to tell him now,” Tyler said as frowned a little. He didn't want to wait.

“I know sweetie, but it'll a be a good surprise for him when he comes home, he'll be so happy,” Mom said as she pushed some of his hair to the side. “In the meantime why don't you go tell your brother's, there in Jace's room. I'm sure they'll be happy for you.”

Tyler's face brightened up at this suggestion as he raced out of the bathroom over to Jace's room. There was no way they wouldn't be impressed with the news. He burst through the door to find Connor and Jace sat on the floor, controllers in their hands as they stared up at tv they were playing Minecraft on.

“I got a sticker,” Tyler announced beaming with pride as he

stood next to them.

“Wooow, good job,” Jace said sarcastically, not even looking away from the screen.

“Hey that's great Ty,” Connor said with a grin. Tyler was a little disappointed with their muted response to his accomplishment but he didn't have much time to dwell on it as his eyes locked onto the screen. He watched the action on the tv as the hands of the brother's characters moved around. Tyler took great interest in seeing them as they broke and placed blocks. He looked down at the boys controllers watching them hit the buttons. Hearing the satisfying clicks of the analog sticks as they clicked against the plastic of the controller. The only thing Tyler could think was that this looked like fun and he wanted in.

“Can I play?” Tyler asked.

“No,” Jace said curtly. “This isn't a game for babies.”

“I'm not a baby,” Tyler spat out as his lower lip stuck out. How could Jace call him that, he had just told him about the sticker and everything.

“Jace don't be mean,” Connor said. “Here Ty you can try,” Connor held out his controller which Tyler took excitedly. It was big in his hands and he had trouble getting his fingers to maneuver the sticks but after a moment he had moved the character on screen near a large building. He pressed a button and watched as the character on the screen broke some of the blocks on the wall.

“Stop,” Jace shouted as he angrily snatched the controller out of Tyler's hands and pushed it into Connor chest. “You're breaking our stuff.”

Tyler was taken aback by the sudden outburst feeling ashamed that he had messed up. How was he supposed to know what to do this was the first time he had played this game. He hadn't meant to break anything.

“I'm sorry,” Tyler said his voice quivering. “I pwomise I won't do it again, please let me play.”

“No,” Jace said definitively as if he were an emperor issuing an edict.

“Tyler its okay, its not a big deal, you can play with us,” Connor said with a sympathetic look as he quickly tried to restore the peace.

“He's gonna ruin our build,” Jace protested with an incredulous look towards his older brother.

“Relax,” Connor said trying to quell Jace's outrage. “Go get the other controller, you know the one we used to give Mallory,” Connor said with a knowing look.

“Oh yeah,” Jace said his face morphing into one of understanding as he got up and pulled a controller out of the desk drawer in the corner of the room. He came back and handed it to Tyler.

“Yes,” Tyler said as he took a seat on the ground next to Jace and began to play happy to be included with the boys in their

activity. Tyler found it a lot of fun to move the sticks around and press all the buttons on his very own controller to his hearts content as he watched the character on screen break blocks and then set them all around. As Tyler played he spotted what looked like a wolf off in the distance.

“A wolf,” Tyler exclaimed. He moved the stick to get a closer look but his character went in the opposite direction. Tyler tried again this time pressing some buttons but no matter what he did it seemed he couldn't get it to work right. He knew enough to know that pushing the sticks in the direction he wanted to go was supposed to work, so why wasn't he going in the direction he wanted? It was at that moment that some understanding of what was happening formed in his mind. He looked down at the controller and noticed it wasn't lit up like the ones his brother's had. Tyler pressed a few more buttons watching the character on screen to see if it had any effect and to his dismay it seemed his suspicions were correct. He had been happily hitting the buttons and watching the screen for awhile completely unaware that he had never been playing in the first place. They had tricked him.

Tyler looked over at the other two boys who were unaware that he had discovered the ruse. He expected this kind of thing from Jace, but this had been Connor's idea. Connor wasn't supposed to do stuff like this. He had promised to not treat him like a little kid, even if he was acting like one. He was supposed to be helping him. Tyler felt his stomach twist up with the realization that he had been betrayed by the one person he was supposed to be able to trust.

Tyler put the controller down on the ground and stood up without a word.

“What's up Ty?” Connor asked.

“I don't wanna play no more,” he said quietly before walking out of the room, Connor noticing the clearly hurt look on his face. Tyler walked out into the hallway a dejected feeling overtaking him as he began to walk to his room.

“Ty wait up,” Connor said catching up with him as he went to put a hand on his shoulder to stop him.

“Leave me alone,” Tyler said with a growl. Connor retracted his hand a little shocked to hear the venomous tone coming from the small boy.

“Don't you want to play more, it looked like you were having fun,” Connor said a little nervous.

“No,” Tyler said keeping his back to Connor. “You don't want me to play either, tat's why you gave me dat controller, right? Cuz I'm just a stupid baby?”

Connor pursed his lips realizing that Tyler had discovered their trick.

“Ty isn't wasn't like that,” Connor began to say.

“Shuddup,” Tyler shouted silencing Connor. He was in no mood to hear any sort of excuse out of Connor's mouth. “Just leave me alone,” Tyler said as he walked to his room and shut the door behind him. Connor stood motionless in the hallway he wanted to run into Tyler's room, tell him he had only been

trying to let him be happy and relaxed. Connor walked back to Jace's room slowly. He had messed up again and there was no way Tyler was going to talk to him at that moment.

Tyler crawled under the covers of his bed hugging Opie close to him. He could hear the wolf talk to him telling him that Connor had only been trying to be nice, he shouldn't be mad at him, hadn't he been having fun?

“He's a trador,” Tyler said aloud. Apparently this was enough to silence the wolf as Tyler didn't hear another word from him. Tyler sat up in his bed. He looked at his pillow encased with a powder blue pillowcase that had a bear with aviator goggles smiling up at him. Tyler clenched his teeth as he began to punch his pillow with his fist. Why did this have to happen to him? Why did he agree to let Fiona cast her spell? Why did he have to stop at that park? He could have eaten while driving. Why did he have to have a job that made him travel? Why couldn't he have had an office job? Why did his Mom have to die? Why did his Dad have to have been a jerk? Why couldn't he have been more successful? Why did it seem like no matter what he did nothing ever worked out for him?

Tyler stopped punching the pillow he let himself flop to his side as he breathed heavily. He wondered how long had he sat there hitting the buttons on that controller completely unaware that he wasn't really playing just like a dumb little toddler? His grasp on his adult thoughts was slipping even more, just how much longer was he going to be able to fight this? Tyler felt completely hopeless and there was only one

person he could turn too in times like this. One person who could make him feel like things were going to be okay no matter what happened.

Tyler made his way downstairs with Opie in his arms. He stood in the entrance way to the kitchen where his Mom was sat at the kitchen table at her laptop. She had some stacks of papers next to her and was typing away on the keyboard pausing every few moments to look at a paper before resuming her typing. Tyler was content to stand and watch, just seeing her seemed to fill him with some sort of calming effect that blunted his frustrations.

Mom looked up from her computer noticing him standing in the entryway.

“Hey cutie,” she said with an inviting smile as she motioned him over. Tyler couldn't resist the invitation as he plodded over to her. She put an arm over his shoulder as she pulled him close. “What's up is something wrong?” she asked rubbing the top half of his arm.

“No, I'm fine,” Tyler said.

“Well that sad look on your face says otherwise,” Mom said as she lifted him into her lap. Tyler averted his gaze, had he really been so easy to read? “You want to talk about it?” Mom asked.

“No,” Tyler said in an impossibly small voice. “I just want to sit here.”

“Okay honey, you can sit here until you feel better,” Mom

said. Tyler leaned back so that his head was resting against her chest as he looked at the computer screen. He could see number's being typed into a spreadsheet. After a minute or two he found himself becoming curious as to what she was doing.

“Mommy do you have a job?” Tyler asked.

“Of course I do, don't tell me you didn't know,” Mom said. “I'm an accountant, which means I help people with their money, I just don't go into an office like lots of other Mommy and Daddies do. Makes it easier to watch over you kids,” she explained.

“Oh,” was all Tyler could offer in response. Tyler situated himself as he snuggled closer to her. He could hear the steady beating of her heart which seemed to placate his deep anger at his treatment upstairs. Mom paused her typing as she brought up a hand to cradle Tyler's head as she looked over what she had just typed.

“You sure you're okay baby?” Mom asked again. The nagging feels inside of him seemed to mix around and felt like he needed to say something to try and flush them out.

“I feel...bad,” Tyler said using the only word he could really think of to describe his current state.

Mom placed a hand on his forehead to feel his temperature taking his comment to mean physically instead of mentally.

“You don't feel warm,” she said with some relief as she began to think a little about what the problem could be. “You know

you were pretty tuckered out from the shopping trip and missed lunch, why don't you have a little snack just to tide you over till dinner, how does that sound?”

Tyler's problem had nothing to do with an empty stomach yet he had to admit to feeling a little hungry at the moment. He nodded consenting to the suggestion.

“Lets get you in your seat then,” Mom said standing up with him in her arms.

“Nooo,” Tyler whined. “No seat, please,” he said with some distress. He was feeling too small and vulnerable at the moment. The booster seat would only magnify those feelings, something which Tyler wanted to avoid. Mom frowned a little but saw there was certainly something else going on.

“Hmmmm, well its just a snack so how about this. I'll set up a spot on the ground and then you and Opie can have a picnic on the floor.” Mom said as she gave a pat to the wolf still clutched in her toddler son's arms.

Tyler nodded his head, his face still filled with concern as she set him on the ground. She placed a green place-mat on the ground and after a few minutes of rummaging around the pantry set a plate filled with cheese and crackers in front of Tyler as well as a yogurt cup already opened with a spoon stuck in it.

“Bon appetit,” Mom said as she sat back down at the table and continued to work. Tyler was a little peckish at first but as he ate he came to find he was more hungry than he had

realized. He practically inhaled the rest of the crackers and then moved on to the yogurt shoveling it int his mouth with reckless abandon. Mom closed her computer and turned in her seat to look down at Tyler as he put the finishing touches on his yogurt cup. She smiled at him as she grabbed a napkin from off the table.

“You made quite a mess of that you little creature,” she said affectionately as she began to clean his face. Tyler blushed a little not realizing how much of the yogurt he had gotten smeared on his face. “Okay, feeling better?” Mom asked as she finished.

“Yeah a little,” Tyler said feeling his mood had lifted slightly. Mom cleared away the place mat as Tyler wandered into the living room. He saw his shorts on the ground. He picked them up and sat on the ground and began to put them on so that he wasn't walking around in just a pull-up. He did make a quick check of the wetness indicator first which was thankfully still intact before pulling the shorts on completely. As Tyler sat looking around the room he found himself at a loss for what to do next. His toys in the play area didn't seem to appeal to him at the moment like they had that morning and he knew that if he asked for the tv his Mom would probably switch on some preschooler's show for him to watch.

Mom came into the living room to find Tyler staring off into space with a melancholy look.

“Still feeling a little down?” she asked. Tyler nodded slowly with a frown. “I know what will cheer you up, how about you

go ask your brother's to go play outside with you, doesn't that sound fun?" She knew that Tyler always cheered up when his brother's agreed to play with him.

"No," Tyler yelped in alarm at the mention of his brothers. Mom's eyes narrowed a little as she became suspicious at Tyler's reaction.

"Why not, were they mean to you? Is that why you seem so sad?" She questioned.

"No, they not mean," Tyler replied quickly. Even if he was still mad at Connor its not like he was vindictive enough to try and get him into trouble. "I...just dont wanna play," Tyler said.

"Hmmm," Mom said not fully buying his story. "Well you just ate, and you don't want to play, so how am I going to turn that sad little face all happy?" she asked rhetorically of course. "I know," she said with a smile forming on her lips. "How about you and I make some cookies."

Tyler thought on the suggestion for a moment. It didn't sound bad. In fact the more the thought about it the more happier with the idea he became. Baking wasn't an infantile activity and he was going to get to do it with her which seemed to seal the deal for him.

"Okay," Tyler said with a grin as he stood up. He followed Mom into the kitchen. She brought a chair over from the table by the sink and let him stand on it so he could wash his hands. Afterwards she moved the chair to the island counter

as she began to set out the equipment and ingredients they would need. Finally she pulled out two aprons one for her self and one for Tyler that was more his size if a tad bit big on him. The words “Little Chef” were printed on it. Mom tied the strings around him.

“Ready?” she asked.

“Ready,” Tyler said with a smile and a thumbs up. Mom measured out each of the ingredients they would need before passing Tyler the cup to let him dump it into the bowl. Tyler's Mom told him to look at her after he had dumped in the flour. She then used her finger to draw whisker's on his face with the flour.

“There now you're Tyler the tiger,” she said.

“I want to see,” Tyler said. Mom went to take out her phone but discovered it wasn't in her pocket.

“Since you're my little helper go and get Mommy's phone from her purse while I add the eggs,” she instructed. Tyler was enthused by the idea not even thinking that his Mom had found the perfect diversion to get him out of the kitchen while she cracked eggs, something Tyler would no doubt want to try for himself and would inevitably end up adding eggshells to the ingredients. Tyler jumped off the chair and took off towards the front door where his Mom's purse hung low on a hook. Tyler stood on his tiptoes seeing the phone in the front pocket of the purse. It took him a few tries but he managed to get the phone out and into his hands.

"There you are," Tyler heard Connor say from behind him as he turned around to see his brother standing at the foot of the stairs. “Listen I really need to talk to you,” Connor said paying no mind to the flour whiskers on Tyler's cheeks. “I just wanted to say...” Connor began.

“I'm busy, I can't talk,” Tyler said cutting Connor off as he walked back towards the kitchen his nose stuck up a little in the air. Tyler knew it was petty but it did make him feel better.

Connor watched him walk away. he took a seat on the bottom step and put his face into his hands, how in the world was he going to make this right?

Tyler climbed back onto the chair handing the phone to his Mom.

“Hurry, hurry, I want to see,” Tyler said jumping a little on the chair.

“Don't jump,” his Mom said unlocking her phone. “ We don't want you to fall.”

She held the phone out with the selfie camera active. Tyler could see his face with his whiskers now. He let out a small squeal at the sight. His Mom leaned in so now that both of them could be seen on the screen.

“Make a tiger face,” she said. Tyler let out a roar as he put his hands up like claws which seemed ferocious to him but to anyone else would have sounded more like kitten's meow as Mom smiled while snapping a picture of the both of them.

“So fierce,” Mom said putting her phone away as she picked up a package of chocolate chips.

“Okay now for our last ingredient,” she said handing the bag to Tyler.

“How much?” Tyler asked eyeing the bag.

“All of it,” Mom said.

“Really?” Tyler asked his eyes going wide.

“Dump it,” Mom said with a playfully serious tone. Tyler did as he was told letting the entire contents of the bag fall into the bowl. Mom then took an electric mixer and stirred the mixture together as Tyler watched the satisfying whirl of the ingredients swirl together. Mom took the mixer out after everything had combined nicely into a sticky gooey dough. She took a little amount into her fingers.

“Say aaah,” she said before plopping the tiny glob into Tyler's open mouth. Tyler let his head rock side to side as he tasted the sweet dough dance across his taste buds.

“More,” he said opening his mouth for another taste.

“Sorry bud you can only have a little or you might get sick,” Mom said as she took out a baking sheet. Tyler puckered his lips into a pout. “But now you get to use your hands,” she said as she took some of the dough and formed it into a ball. “Now you try,” she said watching Tyler as he did just as she had done. “Good,” she said as he placed his dough onto the baking sheet. “Don't make them to big.”

Tyler took another chunk of dough to make another ball. He found this to be really fun. He liked how squishy the dough felt in his hand as he rolled it around. He started to think about trying to make one into a worm wondering if his Mom would allow such a thing. He abandoned this thought though upon hearing her speak again.

“Hey bud, me and Tyler are making cookies. Want to help?” Mom said. Tyler looked up to see that she was talking to Connor who was standing in the entryway to the kitchen. He had a muddled somewhat despondent look on his face.

“I'll pass, Tyler probably wouldn't want me to intrude anyways,” Connor said his voice matching his gloomy demeanor. Mom looked from Tyler to Connor sensing there was something going on between the two of them.

“You hear that Ty,” Mom said placing her hands on Tyler's hips. “Connor thinks you don't want him to help. What do you think of that?”

Tyler looked up from his task and gave Connor a steely eyed look, before shrugging.

“He can help if he wants,” Tyler said. Even if Tyler was still holding some resentment towards Connor, who was he to deny him the fun of making cookies. If Connor wanted to then Tyler would let him.

“Seems like Ty has no objections,” Mom said.

“Okay, sure,” Connor said with a weak nod.

“Atta boy,” Mom said with a grin. Connor washed his hands before taking a spot next to his Mom as he began to work with them to prepare the dough. They got the dough onto the baking sheet in no time flat and into the oven they went.

“How long till they ready?” Tyler asked, his face pressed up against the oven door.

“About ten minutes,” Mom answered.

“Mmm,” Tyler moaned as he fell back onto his butt. “That's so long.”

“It'll be over before you know it,” Mom said. “In the meantime maybe someone should try to use the potty.”

Tyler stood up with a start, with all the fun of making cookies he had forgotten all about making sure not to have an accident. He pulled down the front of his shorts with no shame seeing that the wetness indicator was still standing strong.

“Still dry,” he said with relief as he pulled his shorts back up.

“Maybe Connor could take you to try the potty, since he did such a good job this morning at the store,” Mom said making a sly suggestion hoping that forcing the boys together would help to ease whatever tension was between them.

“No,” Tyler said as he hugged his Mom's leg. “I want Mommy,” he said with some defense. Mom placed a hand on top of his head.

“Oh okay,” she said with a sigh as they walked off to the

bathroom. By the time they returned the cookies were done baking and Connor had taken them out and set them on top of the stove to cool. Tyler stood on his tiptoes to peer over the edge at the enticing treats, the smell of fresh baked cookies overtaking his senses.

“Can we eat them?” he said with unbridled anticipation. Mom touched one checking to see if they were ready.

“I think so,” she said. “But only one or you'll spoil your dinner.”

Tyler ran over to the table and crawled into one of the chairs letting his legs swing excitedly as he sat.

“You want one?” Mom asked turning to Connor who made no indication to his answer only standing with the mopey look he had adopted. “Have a cookie,” Mom said giving him a small side hug. “You'll feel better,” she said leading him over to the table as he took a seat next to Tyler. She placed down a napkin in front of each boy before returning with a cookie for each. Tyler took his and eagerly took a bite closing his eyes as he let the pleasant pleasure of a warm fresh baked cookie overwhelm him. Mom's phone rang and she answered. From her reply it seemed to be some sort of business call as she took a step out onto the patio closing the door behind her leaving the two boys alone with their baked goods.

Tyler nibbled at his cookie letting his head sway back and forth as he hummed a happy little tune, not noticing or perhaps not caring about the crumbs that were spilling into his lap. Tyler looked across the table to see Connor staring

with a blank less expression not having taken a single bite of his own cookie.

Tyler felt a twinge of sympathy as he could see that Connor seemed to still be feeling bad from the controller incident.

“You gunna eat the cookie?” Tyler asked. Connor looked up at Tyler for a moment.

“I'm not hungry,” Connor said pushing the cookie away. Tyler put his own cooking down pursing his lips. He had been angry with Connor for sure, and he still felt he had every right to be, but perhaps he had gone too far. Its not as if Connor had been trying to be mean.

“I'm sorry, I think I let myself get too upset,” Tyler said seeing that Connor had only been trying to make a good hearted gesture towards him and didn't really deserve all the guilt he was feeling now.

“You don't have to apologize,” Connor said with some surprise. “I should be the one whose sorry. I shouldn't have done that, it was stupid, I promised you I wouldn't do stuff like that.”

Now it was Tyler's turn to feel guilty. He could see that he and Connor were alike. They both let their mistakes fester inside of themselves letting it eat away at them until their was nothing left except a miserable emptiness. Tyler felt horrible that he had done nothing but hold Connor's mistake over him, something his real Dad had often done to him. How could he have done such a thing to another person? He promised

himself he would never become a person like that.

“You were acting so little and I just wanted you to feel like you could be comfortable around me like that.” Connor said offering up his thought process. “But I shouldn't have assumed that you would just be okay with that. You told me how much it bothers you” Connor was silent for a moment. “I know you may not think of us as brothers, But I do and I guess I wasn't a very good one today,” Connor said his head hanging low in misery.

Tyler exhaled through his nostrils before getting out of his seat. He walked over to Connor squirreling his head underneath Connor's arm before wrapping his own arms around Connor's torso in a hug.

“You're a good big brother,” Tyler said. Connor looked down at Tyler in quiet shock before letting his arm settle onto Tyler's back. Tyler's words and hug lifting the guilty weight off of his shoulders with those few simple words.

“Thanks Ty,” Connor said. “That means a lot.

Chapter 13

One of the Family: Part 13 - Chapter 13

Tyler let out an exasperated moan as he leaned back into Connor's chest. The two of them were in Connor's room at his desk in front of the computer. Tyler was sat in Connor's lap.

“We're getting nowhere,” Tyler said morosely.

“We only just started,” Connor said as he rested his chin on top of Tyler's head. Tyler looked over at the clock on the desk. They had been at this for nearly two hours now and so far hadn't found anything promising. Tyler had wanted to start earlier, in fact he had wanted to start after they had gotten done baking cookies yesterday but it seemed one thing after another had popped up and gotten in the way.

Dad had shown up with dinner in tow. After dinner, family movie night had been declared. After that Tyler had been ready to start but had been thwarted by it apparently being bath night. Then much to Tyler's dismay he was informed that it was close to his bedtime, which seemed completely unfair. Why did he have a bedtime? Its not like he had anywhere to be, plus it was still summer for a few more days. Tyler had managed to tell Connor he would sneak down to his room later. Connor had waited for him for a bit, but Tyler never showed. The one two combo of being read a story and then some lullaby's from Mom had proven to be too much for Tyler to resist and he had been out like a light by 8:30.

That morning hadn't been much better. Since it was Saturday Connor had been at soccer practice in the morning. Tyler had been taken along with Jace who was being dropped off at a friends house and then Mom had swung by the library where Tyler had found himself among other toddlers and little kids for story and song time. As much as Tyler had tried to resist he had inevitably gotten swept up in the festivities and had been a willing participant while standing in a line with some other kids doing the teapot dance with a smile on his face as Mom took a recording on her phone, a video he hoped none of his siblings would ever see.

After a quick run to the grocery store he had finally returned home for lunch and then a nap. Finally after all that Tyler and Conner had finally found time to begin their search. Tyler had been excited but as time wore on he found himself becoming more and more deflated, adding to his sour mood had also been the fact that despite his triumphs in the the potty training department yesterday he had already had two accidents that day kicking him out of contention for stickers.

“Its going to take awhile to find her since we only have a name,” Connor mused. “She probably doesn't go around advertising that she's a witch.”

Tyler knew Connor was right. They were going to have to switch up how they were searching, but what could they do with just a name?

“Socials!” Tyler yelped as an idea came to him. “She might have sometin like that,”

“Mmmm” Connor grimaced. “Mom and Dad say I'm not allowed on social media, plus don't you have to be thirteen to have one of those?”

Tyler chortled a little as he looked up at Connor, he really was such a goody two shoes sometimes.

“People lie about dere age online,” Tyler said as if he were an older brother teaching his younger brother the ways of the world, at least that's what it would have sounded like without the slight lisp that Tyler's speech had adopted recently. Tyler took Connor through the process of setting up an email address. After about thirty minutes Connor had been signed up for all the big social media sites.

“I better not get in trouble for this,” Connor said uncomfortable with the idea of defying his parents rules. They began their search again with some renewed vigor but it wasn't long before Tyler could feel a sense of hopeless frustration begin to set in as they were seeming to fare no better. Tyler slinked off of Connor's lap and layed on the floor his arms and legs splayed out.

“This is hop-less,” Tyler said. He thought about the kind of person Fiona had struck him as. A new age type of free spirit. She probably wasn't one for social media in the first place. In fact it seemed to be dawning on Tyler that as far as online presence goes, she was probably a total ghost.

“We've been at this awhile,” Connor said turning in his chair. “Maybe we should take a break?”

Tyler sat up and sighed with a nod.

“What did you have in mind?” Tyler asked. Connor got up from his chair and picked up a soccer ball.

“We could go and play some soccer,” Conner said. “Kicking around a ball always help me clear my head.”

“Whatever,” Tyler said with a wave as he got up from the ground and followed Connor out to the backyard. There was already a net set up in the yard. Dad was sitting in a chair on the patio a book in his hand.

“What are you boys up to?” Dad asked looking up from his book.

“We're just going to play some soccer,” Connor answered.

“Sound fun,” Dad said before going back to reading his book.

The boys started to kick the ball around. Connor seemed to have some skill as he made it look effortless as he dribbled the ball without even having to look at his feet. Tyler could see the time at soccer camp had paid off. Tyler was having much more trouble as his three year old strength made it hard for him to even give the ball a good kick, he found himself tripping over the ball more often than not. When he did manage to move the ball Connor wasted no time in stripping it away from him. Connor wasn't holding back it seemed. After the umpteenth time of having the ball stolen from him Tyler fell to his knees with a frustrated groan. He was breathing heavily and was sweaty. This was the exact opposite of clearing his head, this was a workout. Tyler

looked over to the patio and saw Dad watching the two of them his brow somewhat furrowed. No doubt realizing just how one sided this match up was.

Connor kicked the ball into the goal and then turned around to see Tyler sitting in the middle of the grass. Connor walked over to Tyler.

“This isn't really working,” Connor said as he looked down at Tyler.

“My legs are too short,” Tyler grumbled letting his stubby legs fold out in front of him.

“Why don't you be goalie?” Connor suggested. “That way you don't have to run and you can use your hands.”

Tyler though on this suggestion for a moment. In truth he actually didn't really want to keep playing but as he looked at Connor's expectant look he couldn't really say no. He could see Connor was trying his best to include him while also not patronizing him by treating him like a little kid. Tyler got up off the ground and made his way to the goal.

“Okay here I come,” Connor said as he started to make his approach. Tyler watched trying to predict where Connor was going to kick the ball. Connor came up along the side before kicking the ball hard sending it rocketing towards the goal where it smacked Tyler in the face. The force of the ball knocked Tyler's head back causing him to fall backwards landing flat on his back. Tyler could feel his face stinging intensely as if he was being poked by thousands of hot

needles. He sat up for a moment still in shock before the floodgates were let loose and he began to bawl his eyes out.

Dad was up from the table already on his way to the crying boy having seen the whole incident. He lifted Tyler up into his arms.

“There, there, buddy you're okay,” Dad said consoling the crying toddler. Tyler nuzzled his face into his Dad's shoulder as he continued to cry. It had been a hard kick but Tyler didn't think it should hurt as much as it did.

“You're supposed to block with your hands not use your face,” Connor said making a weak attempt at a joke.

“Connor,” Dad said with some anger. “What on earth were you thinking?”

Connor furrowed his brow a little.

“He agreed to be goalie, I thought he knew what to do. How was I supposed to know he wasn't going to block?” Connor asked.

“You are not playing on the field in a match right now,” Dad said. “You should know better than to be kicking balls like that at him. He's a little kid, you have to be more gentle with him.”

Connor bit his lower lip. Of course his Dad was going to be angry at him, he didn't know the truth. But Tyler did. As Connor watched Tyler continue to cry he started to feel some anger. Why wasn't Tyler sticking up for him? He's the one

who told him not to treat him like a kid. Was he just going to continue to cry like a little kid and let Connor take all the blame? Connor let out a grunt as he walked away taking a seat in the chair at the patio with his arms crossed.

Jace wandered into the backyard having been dropped off by his friend's Mom and upon hearing the commotion came to inspect.

“Whats up with him?” Jace asked hearing Tyler's muffled whimpers.

“Connor kicked him in the face with a ball,” Dad said while rubbing Tyler's back.

“Oh,” Jace said with the tiniest of snickers. He thought it might have just been a little funny to see that. He looked over to Connor who was sat in the chair with a stony expression. “Are you guys going to keep playing?” Jace asked giving a small kick to the soccer ball.

“You up to keep going?” Dad asked to Tyler leaning him backwards so he could see his face. “Jace wants to play with you.”

Tyler looked at Jace with an apprehensive look his tears having dried up.

“You play?” Tyler asked looking at his Dad.

“Sure kiddo,” Dad said, seeing a good opportunity to spend some time with his kids. Tyler nodded still a little anxious to get back into the game, but he wanted to keep going.

Especially if Jace was going to, he could be lots of fun and since Dad was there he would make sure that Jace wasn't mean to him.

“Connor play too,” Tyler said pointing towards his oldest brother still sulking in the chair.

“You two start,” Dad said. “I'll go and get sourpuss out here,” Dad said walking over to Connor.

Tyler and Jace began. To Tyler's surprise Jace was actually going easy on him. He was letting Tyler get the ball and was even doing prat falls when he tried to take it from him, much to Tyler's delight. As Tyler neared the goal Jace took the ball from him and kicked it in the goal. Tyler frowned a little at having been denied his golden opportunity.

“Go and get it,” Jace said as he punted the ball down the yard. Tyler was amazed by how far Jace could kick. He ran off to get the ball. As he ran he looked over at the patio to see Dad knelt down next to Connor. Tyler couldn't hear what they were saying. He saw Dad place a hand on Connor's shoulder. He saw Connor frown before nodding his head and getting out of the chair. Whatever Dad had said had been enough to get Connor back on the field. Tyler got to the ball and turned around to see that Connor was in the goal. Tyler began to kick the ball down the yard heading for the goal. He saw Jace approaching. Tyler kicked the ball in front of him but had only sent it rolling slowly towards Jace. Just as Tyler thought he was about to get it Jace flopped onto the ground.

“Nooooo,” he said dramatically holding his hand out towards

the ball. Tyler knew this was his opportunity and ran as fast as his legs could carry him to the ball. All's that stood between him and the goal was Connor who looked ready to stop it. Tyler gritted his teeth and kicked as hard as he could. Despite putting everything in it his toddler strength was only enough to send the ball rolling slowly towards the goal. Just then Dad came running forward picking up Connor.

“Dad attack,” he said as he moved Connor out of the goal. The ball rolled slowly in as a smile formed on Tyler's mouth.

“I scored,” Tyler squealed putting his arms up in the air.

“Its a gooooal,” Dad said as he picked up Tyler putting him on his shoulder's and parading him around a bit. Tyler could see Jace sitting up clapping on the ground where he had flopped moments earlier, but as he looked at Connor he saw him standing with his face twisted in a scowl.

“That's not fair, you can't do that,” Connor said looking annoyed. Dad turned to face him.

“Just helping out my teammate is all,” Dad said lifting Tyler off his shoulders and setting him on the ground.

“Whatever,” Connor said as he began to walk towards the house. “This is stupid.”

“Hey Connor,” Dad called after him to no avail as they watched him go into the house. Jace came up and stood next to his Dad and Tyler.

“What crawled up his butt?” Jace asked.

“Jace, language,” Dad chided giving the boy a stern look.

“Is Connor mad?” Tyler asked.

“I guess he is,” Dad mused.

“I go talk to him,” Tyler said as he began to take a step forward sensing that Connor's anger had something to do with him.

“Hold up there kiddo,” Dad said scooping Tyler up stopping him from going towards the house.

“But Connor's mad, I'll make him feel better,” Tyler said confused as to why his Dad would stop him.

“I don't think that's the best idea right now,” Dad said. “You and Connor are very alike, you know how you get upset and want to be alone sometimes?”

Tyler nodded.

“I think that's what Connor wants right now too, so we need to give him his space, okay?” Dad explained.

“Okay,” Tyler said somewhat sad. What his Dad was saying made sense but the idea that Connor was mad at him had taken root in his mind, however it seemed fuzzy to Tyler why that was exactly. What had he done to make Connor so mad in the first place? Tyler spent another hour playing with Jace and his Dad before he could take no more letting himself flop onto the grass.

“You tired?” Dad asked. Tyler nodded.

“Mouth dry,” Tyler said sticking out his tongue.

“Why don't you go inside and ask Mommy for some water?” Dad suggested.

“Dad let me kick some goals,” Jace said still having a boundless sense of energy.

“Alright, alright,” Dad said with a sigh as he got in the goal. Tyler got up and walked into the house. He walked around the kitchen seeing no sign of Mom anywhere. As he walked past the living room he spotted Connor sitting cross-legged on the couch watching tv. Tyler approached he had to make things right with him.

“Um are you mad at me?” Tyler asked meekly as he fidgeted with the bottom of his shirt.

“What would give you that idea?” Connor said in the form of question but with his surliness it wasn't meant as one. Tyler was thinking a bit more clearly now and was able to put together some reasoning for Connor's mood.

“Is it because you got in trouble cuz of me?” Tyler asked.

“What do you want from me?” Connor snapped at him. “I was only doing what you asked me too, I wasn't going to treat you like little kid, and then you take one ball to the face and start crying like a baby, then I get in trouble. You could have said something you know,”

“I...I could'nt help it,” Tyler stammered.

“Yeah, you can't help it, and everyone just treats you like a

three year old and you seem perfectly fine with that, yet when I do it you get all uptight and angry at me," Connor said.

"That's not true," Tyler said. "I don't like being treated like that by the others either."

"Really?' Connor said with a raised eyebrow. " You didn't raise any objections when Jace was out there falling all over the ground or when Dad let you score that goal not to mention you looked pretty happy this morning doing the teapot dance at the library in the video Mom showed me."

Tyler's face flushed red. He went to say something but found the words get stuck in his throat. He was mortified knowing the one person he didn't want seeing the video had seen it and was now throwing it in his face. Tyler stood desperately trying to find the words he needed.

"I mean...you..can't" Tyler dribbled out.

"Forget this," Connor said rolling his eyes and getting up from the couch walking out of the room. He heard Connor walk towards the basement before opening the door and closing it roughly behind him.

Tyler fell onto his butt feeling completely dejected. He could now see that he had put Connor in an impossible situation. There was no way Connor could keep up his promise around other people as it would only cause problems. Tyler was in a three year olds body and people were going to treat him as such and they would expect Connor to do the same lest he be labelled irresponsible or he would be reprimanded for being

too rough. Not to mention that as much as Tyler tried to resist he did act like a three year old sometimes too and its not like Connor could read his mind and tell when those times were happening. Tyler had done it again he had caused problems for the others, and whats worse he may have just turned the one person who was trying to help against him.

“Hey Ty guy what are you doing sitting here all alone?” Mom asked coming into the living room to see him sitting in the middle of the floor. He looked at her with a saddened look. He wanted to get up and run crying into her arms but he resisted.

“Thirsty,” he said feeling his mouth had gone completely dry.

“Wait there,” Mom said going back into the kitchen and returning a few moments later with a sippy cup full of ice cold water and handed it to him. Tyler took a huge sip letting the cold water hit his mouth leaving him refreshed. Mom took a seat on the couch as she scrolled through her phone. Tyler got off the ground and climbed onto the couch next to her. She gave him a small smile as she put her arm around him pulling him close as he continued to sip from his cup. Even with his Mom reassuring presence Tyler was still overcome with a deeply saddened feeling that mixed with his guilt over Connor. He couldn't bear this feeling anymore and knew there was only one choice for him, he needed to retreat into his toddler head-space where these feelings could not follow him.

“Mommy can I watch tv?” he asked in a small voice almost

as if he were ashamed of what he was

doing.

“Sure, sweetie,” Mom said picking up the remote and switching on the television. “What would you like?”

Tyler was silent for a moment, he was having second thoughts. He knew he shouldn't but the empty feeling was beginning to spread throughout him. He was pitiful for wanting to run away like this, he was a weak screw up just like his real dad had always told him.

“Paw Patrol,” Tyler said. Mom clicked on the show and it began to play. Tyler watched intently waiting for himself to become inevitably sucked in. Yet it didn't happen. He sat through two whole episodes fully aware of how simplistic and childish the show was. As a third episode began Tyler got off the couch and made his way over to his play area he began to play with some of his toys halfheartedly. He was frustrated that the one time he wanted to slip it wasn't happening. He could only surmise that he needed to overload himself, completely immerse himself in the mindset he wanted. Time passed slowly and Tyler could feel he was no closer than he had been at the start. Nothing seemed to grab him in the way it had so easily in the past. He spent the rest of the afternoon trying anything he could. He even let himself have an accident on purpose as a last resort but even that had proven fruitless.

Dinnertime rolled around and Tyler pecked at his food. Connor was still ignoring him. At one moment their eyes met

but each boy looked away neither of them able to reconcile their feelings toward one another. As the night came to an end Tyler was taken up to his room by Dad and put into a diaper and some pajamas. He was read a story before Dad tucked him in and gave him a kiss on the forehead before shutting off the lights and closing the door behind him. Tyler found his usual bedtime routine that had always lulled him into sleep had been completely ineffective as he tossed and turned. However there was one new thing. He had opened his eyes and began to stare at the ceiling unable to sleep. The darkness seemed to pulse and move into weird shapes all around him and he was beginning to think that there were mysterious figures moving about in it. He pulled the blankets over his head and hugged Opie tight. Just great he thought. Now he was was afraid of the dark.

Tyler had been somewhat half asleep when he heard his door creak open and then close. He heard footsteps walk across the floor. His heart began to beat faster. Surely it was one of those things in the darkness. They had been lying in wait watching for the perfect opportunity to attack and that time was now. He felt something sit on the edge of his bed. Tyler closed his eyes as tight as he could and curled up into a ball. If he was going to be eaten he didn't want the terrifying sight of a monster to be the last thing he ever saw. His mind was racing. Spindly arms, razor sharp teeth, multiple red eyes that shone in the darkness and tentacles that would wrap around him among a few frightening images that sprang into his head.

“Ty you awake?” he heard Connor whisper. Tyler shot

straight up throwing the covers off of himself to see Connor sitting on his bed.

“Woah,” Connor said seeing the horrified worried look on Tyler's face.

“Its you,” Tyler said as he put a hand to his chest his expression morphing into one of relief. It seemed Connor's presence was enough to keep whatever terrible things had been surrounding him at bay.

“I didn't mean to scare you,” Connor said.

“You didn't,” Tyler said quickly. A silence fell between the two of them.

“I came up here because I couldn't wait till morning,” Connor began slowly. “I've been thinking about everything all day and I said some really terrible things to you. I just want to say, I'm sorry, like really sorry.”

Tyler shook his head.

“No, I sorry.” Tyler said.

“Ty really, you don't have to be,” Connor said. “I was being a jerk and then I went and said that stuff about you being little and everything.”

“You wasn't wrong,” Tyler said. “I was.”

Connor cocked his head a little as Tyler took a deep breath doing his best to concentrate on speaking, wanting to get the words just right.

“It was not fair for me to ask not to treat me like a little kid when I act like that. It just feels like every time it happens I fur-get a little more. It was scary. If I don't rememba then I can't set things right. But I was being selfish and making it hard on you.”

“You don't have to worry about that,” Connor said. “Even if you forget I'll remember and I won't give up until I find Fiona, just like I promised.”

“Tanks” Tyler said. He was happy to know that his faith in Connor had not been misplaced. “It not so bad ya know, being treated like a little brother. I never had any siblings before. Its fun sometimes,” Tyler said. “I get that people are going to treat me like a little kid and you have to go along with it. So I won't get upset about it anymore."

“Just promise you'll let me know if it gets to be too much for you. I don't think its wise for you to not try to resist somewhat and I'll help when I can, I mean I don't know what the rules to all this is anyways. You should keep your options open”

Tyler nodded as if he had received some sagely advice. He shouldn't abandon his adult self. The future was uncertain and he was going to need his adult wits about him if he was going to see this through.

The door opened casting a light onto both boys.

“Connor what are you doing?” Mom asked stepping into the room. “Its late and now you've woken Tyler up.

“Sorry,” Connor said shooting up from the bed. “I was just umm well you know,” Connor stuttered trying to come up with some excuse while his Mom stood with her hands on her hips.

“I was crying,” Tyler squeaked. “ Connor came to make me feel better.”

Connor shot a surprised look at Tyler.

“Yeah,” Connor said going along with Tyler's lie. “I was walking past and I heard him so I just came to make sure he was okay.”

Mom let her hands drop as her expression softened.

“Well that's a good big brother,” Mom said as she patted Connor on the cheek with a proud smile before taking a seat on Tyler's bed. “Now why were you crying?” Mom asked.

“I was scared,” Tyler said pulling his knees to his chest.

“Scared?” Mom asked.

“Of the dark,” Tyler whispered.

“Oh honey there's nothing to be scared of in the dark,” Mom cooed.

“But there were...things they were going to get me,” Tyler said. He knew full well that there had been nothing there but in the moment it had certainly felt like that. He could only guess that when the lights went off again and he was alone that same feeling would return.

“That must have been scary,” Mom said as she put her arm around Tyler and used her other hand to stroke his hair. “But you know Mommy is close by and I won't let those monsters get you.”

“They will,” Tyler yelped as he hid his face into his Mom's chest. “I'm not fast enough to get away.”

Connor's eyes went wide as he realized that Tyler wasn't lying he had slipped almost instantly. He had gotten pretty good at discerning when Tyler was acting little and when he was actually being little.

“I have an idea,” Connor said as he left the room. Mom continued to try and reassure Tyler he was safe. He had never shown any fear of the dark before. The only reason she could think for this new change was that as he was getting older his imagination was beginning to act up in both good and bad ways. Connor returned with something in his hand and set the device onto the dresser in the room before plugging it into the wall. He flicked on a switch and Tyler marveled as a night sky filled with stars illuminated the ceiling of his room.

“Jace doesn't use it anymore,” Connor said.

“What a wonderful idea Connor,” Mom said. “What do you think? No more monsters now, huh.”

Tyler nodded as he looked around. The dull light that was being cast from the display was keeping the shadows at bay.

“Okay, then,” Mom said as she pushed him back onto the bed gently and tucking him back in. “It's well past your bedtime,

and you need all the sleep you can get. Tomorrow is the last day of summer and then school starts and I'll be going back to the office again." she said before giving Tyler a kiss and leaving the room. Tyler looked up at the stars mesmerized by the deep sense of peace that they seemed to fill him with. That was until a thought crossed his mind. Had his Mom just said she was going back to the office? But then what was going to happen to him?

Chapter 14

One of the Family: Part 14 - Chapter 14

It was Monday morning, the first day of the new school year. It had been a whirlwind of a morning with everyone rushing around and of course all the kids had been made to stand for a photo to commemorate their first day. Afterwards Mom had asked Connor to get Tyler buckled in the car. Recently she seemed to be pushing Connor to take on more responsibility. Tyler didn't mind it so much as the awkwardness between the two had vanished as they had finally seemed to ease into a new understanding between the two of them. Connor buckled the last strap of the car seat and then pulled on the belts to make sure they weren't too tight nor too loose.

“Whats with that look,” Connor asked noticing Tyler's gloomy look.

“I hafta go to a sitter,” Tyler mumbled as he tossed Opie onto the car floor. Connor gave Tyler a sympathetic look as he picked the stuffie off the ground and set it back in Tyler's lap.

“C'mon its not going to be that bad,” Connor said.

“Says you,” Tyler said giving him an unconvinced look.

“Be happy you don't have to go to school,” Connor said

“What you dont like school?” Tyler asked.

“Its fine I guess, but it gets boring sometimes anyways its not

going to be so bad for you its just Ms. Mary's house things could be worse, at least its not daycare," Connor said trying to get Tyler to see some good in the situation. It seemed to work a little as Tyler thought on it. Having to go to school again gave him an icky feeling. Having to sit at a desk and raise his hand, having to ask permission to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water, and not to mention having to actually do schoolwork it all seemed so authoritarian to Tyler now. When he had graduated college it had felt like a weight off his chest, never having to worry about exams, grades, or having to write another paper on post modern literary theory. Tyler was certainly glad he was able to avoid returning to the world of education. It seemed so weird to him now that he had ever accepted it. He had tasted freedom and he was eager to get it back. The last thing that Connor had mentioned though certainly sent a shiver down his spine, daycare. He thought about being made to sit in a circle and sing songs or play with toys that would have a faint smell of disinfectant. Having every moment of his day set to a schedule and his every move being monitored by some strangers. The thing that really put him off the idea though was the thought of being in room surrounded by kids his own supposed age. Tyler didn't have a lot of experience in that department so far, the only kids he had to deal with were his own siblings. Connor and Jace were older so it wasn't too bad, and while Mallory could be a little overbearing she could at least be reasoned with sometimes. The idea of having to get on with a real three year old seemed exhausting to Tyler not too mention dangerous. He knew he would no

doubt get pulled into some childish activity and would be powerless to resist slipping.

Mom, Jace and Mallory finally got into the car and Mom began the drive to school. It was about a ten minute drive before Mom pulled into the drop off line. They made their way up to the front before Connor slid open the door as Mom wished them a good day at school kissing each one of them as they passed. Connor got out last and gave one last look at Tyler.

“Good luck,” he said quiet enough that Mom didn't hear. Tyler nodded in way to signal the same affirmation towards Connor. Tyler watched as Connor took Mallory's hand having been given the task of getting her to her classroom on the first day.

“Ready to go to Ms. Mary's?” Mom asked as she began to drive away. “She is so excited to see you again.”

Tyler didn't respond. The truth was he was feeling nervous. From what Connor had told him Ms. Mary had looked after both Jace and Mallory and even Tyler when he had been an infant before Mom had switched to a work from home schedule. Tyler had also been able to find out this wasn't going to be an everyday thing, Mom only needed to go into the office twice a week and she would be back to pick him up in the afternoon just in time to get the others from school. Even if it was just a short time Tyler still felt some anxiety of having to go. He had gotten plenty used to his treatment at home. He did find that he had a certain sense of normality

and security instilled with him towards his new parents. But he didn't know this Ms. Mary and he didn't seem to have that connection he had had with the other family members when he had transformed. She was a total stranger to him and that is why Tyler felt so uneasy about having to be treated like a three year old by her. He was completely vulnerable in this state after all. Tyler was broken out of his worried thoughts when Mom pulled up to a house.

It was an older two story house that had a cobbled stone path leading up to the front door. The path way was lined with flowers on either side. As Tyler examined his new surroundings it seemed perfectly idyllic to him. Mom got him out of his car seat putting him on her hip as she slung a Mickey Mouse backpack across her shoulder.

“Don't forget Opie,” Mom said putting the wolf into Tyler's arms before closing the door and beginning to walk up the stone path towards the front door. Tyler looked down at Opie, the wolf told him that they were going to get through this just fine. Tyler hugged him close, at least one of them was confident. They had only taken a step on the front stoop before the door opened to reveal an older woman with an infant in her arms standing in the house. She looked to be in her late fity's with black curly hair that was starting to show signs of graying. She had a pair of rainbow colored glasses on her face that had a chain attached to them.

“Renee good mornin,” she said with a cheerful exuberance as she opened the door letting Mom enter into the house.

“Mary, its so good to see you again,” Mom said as she set Tyler onto the ground before the two women embraced in a friendly hug. “This must be your new granddaughter,” Mom said looking at the baby in Mary's arms.

“Yes, this is Mika,” Mary said offering the baby over to to Mom who took her into her her arms.

“I saw the pictures on Eve's facebook but I think she might just be even more adorable in real life,” Mom said as her face melted into an adoring look.

“Speaking of adorable,” Mary said looking down at Tyler as she knelt down smiling at him. “Is this really Tyler? You've gotten so big,” she said. Tyler felt just a bit intimidated by this strange woman as he hugged his Mom's leg hiding half of his face.

“Don't be shy sweetie,” Mom said putting her hand on his head. “This is Ms. Mary she used to look after you when you were a little baby like Mika here.”

“Oh its fine if he's shy,” Mary said with an understanding look. “He was so little before there's no way he could possibly remember me.”

Tyler knew full well that was true, but she was wrong in her reasoning. He had never been here before in his life.

“And who is this,” Ms. Mary said as she patted Opie on his head. Tyler let his grip loosen a little. “Is this your friend, whats his name?” the older woman asked showing genuine interest.

“Opie, he's a wolf,” Tyler offered still a little wary, but he couldn't pass up an opportunity to talk about his furry friend. Ms. Mary gave him a warm smile.

“Do you like wolves, are they your favorite?” she asked.

“Uh huh,” Tyler said with a nod as he let go of his Mom's leg completely.

“Its very nice to meet you Opie,” Ms. Mary said as she shook the wolf's paw. “He seems like a very nice wolf.”

Ms. Mary stood back up to continue talking to Mom who was returning the baby to Ms. Mary. Tyler heard Opie tell him that she seemed like a nice lady, after all only nice people liked Opie.

“I have a bag here for him,” Mom said as she removed the backpack and handed it over. “There's a change of clothes and some pull-ups in there for him as well as a few things to keep him busy,” Mom said.

“Thanks dear,” Ms. Mary said. “After reading your e-mail I went and dug out Gabe's old training potty so we are all set in that department.”

Tyler was a little embarrassed to have his potty training be so openly discussed like this. Mom knelt down putting her arms loosely around Tyler.

“Now you be good and mind your manners for Ms. Mary, I'll be here this afternoon to pick you up,” she said before hugging him. Ms. Mary took Tyler's hand and lead him to the

door as they watched his Mom leave. She turned back and gave him a wave which he returned. She wasn't even out of the driveway before Tyler started missing her. Her car disappeared down the street as Ms. Mary looked down at Tyler.

“So munchkin what should we do first?” she asked. Tyler looked around a little unsure. His head was beginning to swirl with thoughts. On one hand he was missing his Mom and feeling incredibly shy. On the other hand he was becoming increasingly frustrated. The only reason he was here was because everyone thought he was little boy unable to take care of himself. He had gotten used to the babying at home but this new experience was reminding him that his freedom had been taken from him. He could no longer go where he wanted and do as he pleased.

“How about some television? You look like a Sesame Street fan,” Ms. Mary said taking notice of Tyler's outfit of a pair of red shorts and a t-shirt with Elmo's big face on it. Tyler's ears perked up hearing the name of his new favorite show.

“Sesa stweet,” he squealed. Ms. Mary walked down a hallway as Tyler followed close behind turning the corner into the living room. It appeared to be a cozy room. Tyler saw a large brown couch up against the wall, a coffee table was set in front. There was an old wooden piano along the wall and a stone fireplace. A large tv hung on the wall with an entertainment center underneath that seemed to contain many movie cases within it. There were some odd toys strewn about the room as well as a baby rocker and a pack and play.

Tyler looked at the pack and play and felt some nervousness at the thought of being put into such a thing.

“Do I need ta sit in there?” he asked pointing at the offending object.

“I think you're a little big for that, its for Mika.” Ms. Mary said as she placed the baby into the playpen. Tyler was relieved to hear that his age had for once disqualified him from such an infantile experience. Tyler took a seat on the couch as Ms. Mary turned the show on for him as she took a seat in the recliner picking up a magazine from the coffee table. Tyler couldn't resist as his attention was locked onto the tv. Before long he had abandoned the couch and was standing close the tv dancing along to the songs and answering the questions posed to him by his puppet friends.

“Do you know what the letter of the day is?” Big Bird asked as a capital T appeared on the screen.

“T” Tyler shouted raising his arms in the air. “That's the first letter in my name,” Tyler said turning to Ms. Mary.

“That's right,” she said looking up from her magazine. “Do you know your ABC's yet?”

Of course Tyler knew that, he had learned that a long time ago.

“A,B,C” he began reciting with some enthusiasm. “D,E,F...” he stopped as he thought for a moment. His brow furrowed a little. Something was off. He couldn't think of the next letter. Other letters came to mind but he knew they weren't the ones

that came next. He knew that his ability to read and spell were gone but naming the letters themselves should have still been within his ability.

“You need some help?” Ms. Mary asked. Tyler shook his head he didn't really have any interest in reciting the rest of the letters.

“I used to know,” Tyler said quietly to himself as he climbed back on the couch. He was mystified as to when this had happened. The troubling thought came to him that he was forgetting more and more each day. Ms. Mary looked at Tyler clearly seeing that something was bothering him as he sat on the couch with a confused look on his face.

“Maybe you should try this,” Ms. Mary said going into Tyler's backpack and pulling out the activity book that he had gotten at the store a few days ago.

“My book,” Tyler said. With everything that had been going on between him and Connor he had forgotten about it. Ms. Mary set it down on the coffee table with a box of crayons.

“You can work on your letters,” Ms. Mary said opening up to the first page. It had the letter A at the top. Then there were some lines where he was supposed to trace over the letters along with some other activities to go along with it. Tyler took out a crayon and got to work. It was fun for him to trace over the letters filling him with a sense of accomplishment that he was writing. He then moved on to coloring in a large A at the bottom of the page. Ms. Mary switched off the tv and turned on some music on the radio. Which Tyler didn't seem

to mind as the program had switched over to some other show that he had little interest in. Tyler sat for a long while making his way through several pages of the book. He was happy that his Mom had let him get the book at the store. He took breaks here and there to play with some of the toy cars on the ground as he alternated between the two activities.

He was putting the finishing touches on the page with a G on it. Pleased with his work he held it up to show Ms. Mary how well he had traced the letters and colored in the pictures.

“Look,” he said smiling. Ms. Mary had just finished giving Mika a bottle and was burping her on her shoulder.

“Oh sweetie you did such a good job,” Ms. Mary praised much to Tyler's delight. “Do you know what letter that is?” she asked.

“G”, Tyler responded.

“Thats the letter you forgot earlier,” Ms. Mary said. “See you did know it,”

Tyler put the book back down at on the coffee table. Of course he had known it, he was an adult after all. Tyler blinked fully coming to his senses. He looked at the book gritting his teeth a little as he looked over what he had just been working on so happily just a moment ago. He had slipped again.

He looked at the written instructions at the top of the page even in his adult mode the letters when all put together seemed to meld into some unreadable sequence of symbols,

but that wasn't exactly new for him. Tyler tried to think for a moment to pinpoint the exact moment he had slipped. He figured it had been in the car after they had dropped off the kids when he had started to feel nervous about coming to Ms. Mary's house. How long had it been since he got here, just how long had he slipped for? Tyler scanned the room and saw a clock up on the mantle of the fireplace.

He looked at the clockface concentrating as hard as he could but his mind couldn't make heads or tails of it. He took a deep breath. He knew that it had been a long shot and did'nt let it bother him too much as he looked around for a digital clock of some sort since he knew he could still read those without issue. He looked over towards the entertainment center and saw the time was displayed on the cable box. Even though he knew it was the time something was not connecting. He couldn't make sense of the numbers as they related to time. Tyler was shocked with the revelation that he could no longer read time even though he had been able to do it yesterday.

“What time is it?” Tyler asked with some urgency. Ms. Mary looked down at her wristwatch.

“Oh my its nearly eleven,” she said with some surprise as she got up from her chair and placed Mika back in the pack and play. “Come here dear,” Ms. Mary said motioning over to Tyler. He approached wondering what had seemed to launch the older woman into action. Ms. Mary pulled the waistband of Tyler pants to get a look at his pull-up. Tyler jolted back a little surprised by the sudden invasion.

“Still dry it seems,” Ms. Mary said not noticing Tyler's adverse reaction. “We better get you to the potty though.”

Tyler was alarmed. He was very much in his adult mind at the moment. Being brought to the bathroom by his new family was one thing, but he he could only feel that another person doing that to him while he was like this would somehow be deeply humiliating.

“I don't gotta,” Tyler said quickly sitting back down at the coffee table and picking up a crayon to continue with his book. In his head he was screaming at himself to slip, for the love of god please slip. Much to his dismay though it seemed it was not something he could force like this.

“You can go back to playing after,” Ms. Mary said lifting him up by his arms and carrying him out of the living room. Tyler squirmed trying to get away, he couldn't deal with this right now, not like this. Ms. Mary easily turned him around and put him on her hip to get a better grasp on him.

“Now now,” she said. “We don't want any accidents or you won't get a sticker when you get home.”

Tyler gave one last wriggle before letting himself go limp. Ms. Mary believed her reminder of the sticker had made him more cooperative. In truth Tyler had resigned himself to his fate upon realizing there was no way he would be able to get away from her. He was going to have to bear yet another humiliating episode.

They entered into a bathroom before Tyler was set down in

front of a green and blue training potty. Tyler stood looking a the toilet, the feeling of humiliation and embarrassment he had felt when he had first been made to do this in front of his new parents returning to him. Ms. Mary, upon seeing that Tyler was not taking any initiative pulled down his shorts and pull-up with one smooth motion. Tyler squeaked a little as he waddle the short distance to the potty sitting down quickly pulling his shirt down as much as he could to cover himself. Tyler was resolved not to use the bathroom, not in front of her. In a sense he was trying his hardest to assert some control over his life. The revelations of the morning were sinking in and hitting him hard and his current predicament wasn't exactly ideal for him to try and deal with them. Yet, try as hard as he could there was no denying the echoing sound coming from the toilet as his bladder released. He couldn't even control this. Tyler felt completely demoralized as he stood up having finished his business. He made no motion to pull up his pants. What dignity did he have to preserve anymore? Ms. Mary knelt down and did it for him.

“Good job,” she praised. “Your mommy is gonna be so proud if we tell her that you stayed dry all day when she comes to pick you up.”

Tyler made no response not having even heard what she had said. Tyler felt like the walls were closing in on him. Nothing seemed to matter anymore. He had agreed with Connor that it would be a good idea to resist the overtaking of his toddler side, but no mattered how hard he seemed to try he couldn't fight it. It was beginning to seep in even when he was

thinking like an adult. It would only be a matter of time before he completely lost himself. Ms. Mary could see that a sad pitiful look had formed on Tyler's face. She had known that Tyler seemed to have strange mood swings from time to time, since his Mom had mentioned it in the email she had sent.

“Oh dearie what seems to be the matter,” Ms. Mary said bringing a hand to his face as she rubbed his cheek with her thumb. Tyler blinked as he looked at her giving him a sympathetic look.

“I'm...sad,” he said. Yes that was the right word, the only word he needed to explain what he felt. His life had been taken from him and there was nothing he could do. There was no going back, this was his new reality now and pretty soon he would forget that it had ever been anything different. He was grieving, the person he had been would be all but forgotten. Ms. Mary's lips were pursed as she looked at him. Tyler knew what she was going to say. She was going to tell him not to be sad, what reason did he have to be sad? Or she would try to redirect him towards something else knowing he would forget he had felt like this. Because to everyone around him he was a silly little boy having silly little feelings, they weren't serious, No one had any way of knowing the complicated web from which these these feelings were coming from. But to Tyler's surprise she did none of that.

“Its okay to be sad,” she said as she wrapped him up in a hug. “We have to feel like that sometimes so we can be happy. If you need to feel sad right now then go right on ahead.”

Tyler let himself fall deeper into her warm embrace. If anything he felt validated. She was giving him the time to feel what he needed. She wasn't dismissing it, only offering him the support he needed at the moment. Tyler couldn't allow himself to give in to his sadness, that would only cause him to slip he had to be stronger than that.

“Feeling a little better?” Ms. Mary asked as she released him. Tyler nodded with a hint of grateful smile curving up one side of his mouth. He did in fact feel just a little bit better.

“Okay, then lets get those hands washed so we can go outside and wait for the bus, it will be here soon,” Ms. Mary said getting to her feet and leading Tyler over to a step stool near the sink.

“Bus?” Tyler asked as he washed his hands.

“Yep, Gabe is on the bus,” Ms. Mary said. “He's four so he goes to preschool in the morning. Do you remember Gabe?”

Tyler shook his head. He did remember that Ms. Mary had said the name earlier that morning but of course he had no recollection of who that was.

“You were both little babies back then so you probably don't remember but you two used to play together all the time. He is really excited that another kid around his age is going to be here so I'm sure you two will be fast friends again,” Ms. Mary said. Tyler felt a small twinge of anxiety bubble up in him. This was something he had been afraid of. He was now going to be faced with someone his own age. If what Ms. Mary said

was true this kid was going to want to play with him and drag him into all sorts of childish activities. Tyler knew it was going to be hard to resist, the possibility of slipping would be all too easy. Every slip was starting to become more worrisome. It seemed to be speeding along the degradation of his adult mind. If he slipped again what would he discover that he had lost when he came back, that is if he ever came back again?

Chapter 15

One of the Family: Part 15 - Chapter 15

Tyler was sat upon the green plastic push cart as he moved it back forth slightly with his feet on the cobbled path leading up to Ms. Mary's front door.. His hands were resting upon the black steering wheel as he twisted it from left to right more out of something to do with his hands rather than actually trying to steer. Which wouldn't have mattered anyway since the steering wheel had no bearing on the wheels in the first place.

Tyler refused at first to even sit upon the toy when Ms. Mary had first set it on the path for him to play with while they waited for the bus. He could see that if he did start to scoot around on the plastic hunk that he would no doubt be propelling himself up and down the path imagining he was driving a car having slipped again. But he could also tell that the fear he was starting to feel at the prospect of slipping was going to cause him slip anyways, in a sense there was no winning. That's when an idea crossed his mind. Maybe their was a third way. But first he had to confirm if it would even work. And that was how he now found himself sat upon the hard plastic oblong shaped vehicle.

As Tyler rocked back an forth slightly he could see that his original hypothesis was holding, he hadn't slipped yet. It had dawned on Tyler that the only thing that stopped him from

slipping completely was to give into his toddler side just a little. To float between the two sides of himself. As he went through everything that had happened to him thus far he could almost begin to see the pattern. The times that seemed to force him to slip deep were when he had felt strong emotions. He thought back to the restaurant, He had been able to keep himself aware of what was going on but the growing frustrations of his adult side had built up in him all through the night. He had completely slipped upon finding himself outside alone and scared.

He then thought back to his tea party with Mallory it was the same there. He had been mostly aware of what was happening then, it was only when he had panicked when she had been trying to put lipstick on him and he had been losing the struggle that he had slipped again. He knew that sometimes it seemed to happen naturally but the strongest and deepest slips almost seemed like defensive measures. It was only when he came out of the deep slips that he discovered he had lost some ability. Tyler thought more on this. He had two sides in him right now a toddler and an adult, and he had assumed they were fighting for control but maybe that wasn't right. Perhaps it was just the fact they were incompatible with one another. A toddler could not possibly deal with the emotions of an adult while an adult did not possess the same thought process as a toddler. It seemed to Tyler that he needed to find some harmony between the two, a way they could co-exist. He had to find a way to let his toddler side be taken care of to maintain his grip on his adult side.

As Tyler thought more on this a yellow bus pulled up in front of the house. Ms. Mary stood up with Mika in her arms as she walked forward to greet the passenger that would be deposited. The doors swung open as Tyler saw a little boy wearing a Thomas the tank Engine back pack hop down the stairs one by one before leaping onto the sidewalk.

“Hi Grandma,” the boy said as he flashed a big smile revealing two big dimples on either cheek.

“Gabe nice to see you so happy this morning,” Ms. Mary said as she knelt down to hug the boy with one arm. As she stood Gabe looked up to see Tyler near the front of walkway his smile disappeared being replaced by a curious almost analytical expression as he looked at the new kid in his midst.

Gabe had short black hair that was shaved short at the sides leaving a tight square bunch at the top. He had a flat little nose and big brown eyes He was about an inch taller when compared to Tyler but still had a small bunch of baby fat poking protruding out much like Tyler. Gabe walked forward and stood in front of Tyler looking down at him.

“Gabe this is Tyler do you remember him?” Ms. Mary asked standing next to the boys. Gabe cocked his head to the side a little. As Tyler stared back it almost seemed like Gabe could almost see through him, almost as if Gabe being a real little boy, the genuine article, could spot the fake. Gabe knelt down his face mere inches from Tyler's own.

“Do you wanna play?” Gabe asked as a smile lit up on his face. Tyler blinked in astonishment for a moment being taken

off guard at the near instant change in demeanor.

“Hang on there,” Ms. Mary said interjecting. “Before any talk about playing happens we need to fill those tummy's with some lunch.”

“After lunch we play?” Gabe asked looking at his grandmother.

“We'll see,” she said leading the boys inside.

In the kitchen Tyler was sitting in a booster seat along with Gabe to his right. He was trying his hardest to contextualize his treatment into adult terms as best he could in an effort to avoid another slip. He had to reason to himself that given his height a booster seat was needed, for its utility of course. The silverware placed in front of him was plain which Tyler found was helpful. Ms. Mary brought a casserole dish to the table and took off the top. A puff of steam rose as Tyler could see some casserole of rice and green beans and carrots all mixed together with some cheese. Ms. Mary spooned a helping onto each boys plate. Tyler picked up his fork ready to dig in. He took a heaping forkful into his mouth. The dish was piping hot as he could not close his mouth as he let out puffs of hot air.

“Oh darling careful,” Ms. Mary said pushing his sippy cup of milk towards him as he took it into his hands and sucked in a mouthful of cold milk. Tyler set the cup down taking in another couple of breaths to cool his mouth. He was alarmed at first to think he was starting to slip due to the surprise of the hot food in his mouth. He took a few moments to gather

his thoughts just to confirm he was still thinking straight.

“Remember to blow on your food,” Ms. Mary said with a chuckle, as she took a seat nearby in front of the highchair that Mika was sat in, a few jars of baby food set out on the tray. “Although I am glad to see you aren't a picky little thing unlike some,” Ms. Mary said with a disapproving glance towards Gabe. Tyler looked over to see Gabe was meticulously flicking the chunks of carrot to the side of his plate.

“I hate carrots,” Gabe grumbled as he continued picking out the offending veggie. Tyler smiled feeling more mature than his older counterpart.

“You need to eat everything on your plate,” Ms. Mary chided. “Look at Tyler he's being a proper gentleman.”

Tyler continued to eat being careful not to get any on his face. It had become far to common of an occurrence for him to get his face all messy while eating. If he wanted to maintain a level of clarity the last thing he needed was for Ms. Mary to have to wipe his face for him just like a real toddler. Lunchtime came to an end and Tyler was proud of himself as he watched Gabe get the gobs of gooey rice wiped from his face and Ms. Mary had praised Tyler for not getting any food on his own. This was all Tyler needed to do to stop himself from slipping. He simply needed to act like the adult he knew he was. As Tyler and Gabe were released from their booster seats Gabe grabbed onto Tyler's wrist.

“We can play now,” the boy declared with a triumphant smile.

“Not so fast,” Ms. Mary chimed in as she picked Mika up into her arms. “Its time for naps.”

Gabe's happy expression fell.

“But you said after lunch,” Gabe said with a whine.

“Gabe,” Ms. Mary said with some assertiveness. “After lunch is naptime. I will not be tolerating any crankiness.”

“I wanted to show him my castle,” Gabe said with some sadness.

“There will be plenty of time for that after,” Ms. Mary said as she headed towards the stairs with Tyler's bag slung across her back. The boys obediently followed Ms. Mary upstarts into a nursery where she set Mika down into a crib. Tyler looked around and could see a tiny cot on the other side of the room. There was also a rocking chair and a diaper changing table. The most curious thing however was the cozy little spot covered with blankets and pillows on the ground.

“Tyler you can lay down right here, okay,” Ms. Mary said pointing to the spot on the floor. Tyler took a seat among the fluffy and warm accommodations. He could tell it was going to be snugly.

If there was one thing Tyler liked about being a little kid it was definitely naptime. The ability just to kick off in the middle of the day for a quick snooze was great. It wasn't like he couldn't have done this in his old life but every minute he wasn't working meant he might be missing out on money and for the cash strapped freelancer that just wasn't an option. Not

to mention Tyler always was tired around this time of the day. He chalked it up to the fact that the world simply wasn't made for someone with a small body such as his. Everything took double the energy to accomplish. Gabe had abandoned his shorts getting down to just a pair of tighty whities as he crawled into the cot. Tyler felt just a tad bit jealous at seeing the older boy in a pair of underwear. Tyler even began to suspect that he had done so on purpose perhaps to assert some idea that Gabe was the older kid. Even though he had never asked there was no doubt in Tyler's mind that Gabe had noticed he was wearing a pull-up under his shorts or perhaps he had gotten a glimpse of them poking out from his waistband.

“Tyler honey, lets get you up on the changing table so we can get your diaper on for naptime,” Ms. Mary said as she pulled a diaper out from his bag. Tyler looked at her with a scandalized look.

“I don't wear diapers for nap,” Tyler said.

This was bad. If he had to wear a diaper there is no doubt Gabe would make fun of him. Which would only make Tyler feel embarrassed and if that happened he would surely find himself slipping, right? He had been doing so well since the morning he couldn't let it end like this.

“Well hun your Mom said you did and she also packed one for you, so I think its what she wants,” Ms. Mary reasoned.

“But I don't, honest,” Tyler said as his bottom lip stuck out in a quiver. He could feel himself start to slip. It wasn't as if he

was completely lying either. It was true that his Mom still diapered him for naps but the last few days she had let him nap with just a pull-up. He never woke up dry but he never fully flooded the thing either.

“You know what I think” Ms. Mary said as she knelt down to his level. “I think you're Mommy was just being extra cautious since you were coming here today, so I'll tell you what. Since you've been such a big boy today and you haven't had one accident I'll let you go with just the pull-up, that is if you try the potty right now.”

Tyler shot up from his makeshift bed and ran down the stairs to the bathroom. He was already sitting on the the potty by the time Ms. Mary finally caught up. He used the bathroom to its fullest extent. Ms. Mary got him cleaned up and lead him back up to the nursery sans his shorts leaving him in just a pull-up. Tyler was nervous as to Gabe's reaction to seeing him like this, but much to his relief it seemed that Gabe had no interest whatsoever as he already had his own covers pulled up and his eyes closed. Tyler crawled under the blanket and hugged Opie whom he had grabbed from the couch on his way up close to himself.

“If you need anything I'll be in that rocking chair over there,” Ms. Mary said as she tucked him in. She then went and sat in the chair switching on some soft lullaby from a boombox. Tyler closed his eyes and was asleep in minutes.

“C'mon c'mon.” Tyler was startled awake as Gabe shook him roughly.

“Gabriel I told you not to wake him,” Ms. Mary said with some annoyance. Tyler sat up rubbing his eyes.

“It's okay, I'm up,” Tyler said still a little groggy. Ms. Mary forced a smile as she knelt down to him.

“Lets see how that pull-up is doing,” she said pulling his covers back. Tyler braced himself against the sudden cold air. He immediately became worried about Gabe seeing him without pants. Tyler expected some comment but Gabe made no inclination that he even cared.

“Looks dry to me,” Ms. Mary said with a grin. Tyler looked down a little surprised to still see that the image of the dog bone was still there. He was shocked, this was only the second time that he had woken up dry. “Your Mommy is going to be so happy when we tell her you made it all the way through nap time,” Ms. Mary said. Tyler felt the edges of his mouth begin to curl up into a smile. He made it through the morning, that meant he would get a sticker. Tyler shook his head, he couldn't let himself get excited over something like this. Even big happy emotions could cause him to slip.

“Let's play,” Gabe squealed as he grabbed Tyler by the wrist and practically dragged him out the door and down the stairs.

They came to the basement door. Gabe opened the door. Tyler could see a stairway leading down into a inky darkness. Gabe went down the stairs into the darkness as Tyler hesitated. Even in his adult mode he found the his newfound fear of the dark was overpowering.

“Hurry,” Gabe said emerging from the darkness and grabbing Tyler by the hand and leading him down the stairs. As he was lead further into the darkness Tyler became anxious as it only got darker the further they got away from the light coming from the open door at the top of the stairs. Gabe stopped and pointed into the darkness.

“Isn't it cool?” he asked. Tyler squinted but could see nothing but darkness as his eyes had not yet adjusted. He was actually more concerned that a monster was going to jump out at any moment and attack the two of them.

“Maybe you should turn on the lights,” Ms. Mary said. Tyler squeaked with a jump as he turned around to see Ms. Mary and Mika behind them. The woman flicked a switch on the wall causing the fluorescent lights in the ceiling to come on dispelling the darkness. Tyler could see he was standing in a playroom of sorts. There was a brown couch up against the wall and some plastic bins that were filled with toys lined up against another wall. In the middle of the room was something else altogether. There were three nylon fabric tubes of different colors connected by two small tents. The sides of the tents were mesh and Tyler could see into them that they were filled with colorful plastic balls. This network of tents and tubes lead into a large cardboard refrigerator box that was painted on the side to resemble a stone castle with a wooden drawbridge door on the front that was closed at the moment.

“Let's go,” Gabe cheered as he dived into the first tube crawling through into the the first tent. He looked at Tyler

through the mesh siding seeing that he had'nt moved. “Are'nt you coming?” Gabe asked looking at Tyler curiously. If Tyler was being honest he did want to, it looked like fun, but he knew that was his toddler side talking. He couldn't allow himself to give in.

“Tyler might still be a little sleepy since he just woke up, give him a little time,” Ms. Mary chided from the couch. Gabe crawled out through the tube and went to one of the plastic bins. He dug around for a few minutes before walking over to Tyler with a pile of things in his arms. He dropped it on the ground and then grabbed a white cloth smock and put it on over himself. There was marker scribbles all over it that loosely resembled some sort of design.

“We can be knights,” Gabe said as he handed Tyler the remaining smock. Tyler was at first going to refuse but it was then that he realized he was still just wearing a t-shirt and pull-up since in Gabe's eagerness to lead him to the playroom he had not been given the chance to collect his shorts. Tyler took the smock and put it on giving himself some coverage. Gabe then placed a plastic knights helmet on Tyler's head before handing him a shield and a foam sword before donning his own armor.

“Now what?” Tyler asked feeling just a bit silly in his new accessories.

“We fight,” Gabe said swinging his sword and bopping Tyler on the head causing his helmet to slip down over his face.

“Gabe,” Ms. Mary tutted from the couch. Tyler however

didn't find any problem with it.

“Hey,” he said pushing his helmet back up with the slightest giggle before he swung his own sword which Gabe blocked with his shield. This didn't seem bad to Tyler. Maybe if gave in just enough to satisfy his toddler side he wouldn't need to worry about slipping, maybe this is what treading the water between his two selves felt like. Besides it seemed like Gabe wanted a swordfight and Tyler was all too pleased to give him just that.

Before long the boys were running around swinging their swords at one another. Tyler was holding back a little not wanting to hurt his older but in reality much younger playmate. Gabe on the other hand seemed to have no such hangups as he swung around with a somewhat clumsy yet reckless abandon. Tyler held his shield up to block an incoming strike leaving himself completely open. Gabe was far too fast however as he lunged forward stabbing Tyler in the eye with the tip of the foam sword. Tyler yelped dropping his sword and shield to the ground as he covered his eye and crouched down. Tears were starting to form in his eyes. Why did it seem to hurt so much? Gabe wasn't that strong it shouldn't hurt this much. All sorts of feelings started to swirl around. He felt so small and helpless right now. He missed his Mom, why couldn't he have just stayed with her? Then none of this would have happened.

“Oh Tyler dear,” Ms. Mary cooed as she knelt down to him. “Its okay, let Ms. Mary see,” she said pulling his hands away gently. Tyler looked up at her with a sad look as he tried his

best to hold back his tears. He couldn't cry not now, if he did that surely would cause a deep slip.

“I think you're going to be okay,” Ms. Mary said with a compassionate look as she gave him a tender hug. “Better?” she asked. Tyler nodded. The hug seemed to be enough to comfort his toddler emotions, allowing him to regain his composure.

“Gabe I think you owe Tyler an apology,” Ms. Mary said looking back towards Gabe who had a guilty look painted on his face.

“No,” Tyler said getting to his feet. “It was an ax...ack”

“Accident,” Gabe said finishing Tyler's words. Tyler nodded confirming that's what he meant to say but had not been able to pronounce the word himself.

“You are being very strong right now,” Ms. Mary said mussing up Tyler's hair a little. “But I think the sword-fights are done for now.”

“C'mon I want to show you something,” Gabe said accepting the decision of their adult overseer as he lead Tyler over to the entrance to the tunnel. Gabe crawled in first. Tyler hesitated once again, He was still having those feelings from when he had been stabbed the biggest one being him missing his Mom. He knew it was dangerous for him to dwell on them. Tyler got on his hands and knees and crawled into the tunnel. Maybe this was the right option, something to take his mind off his emotions. Tyler followed Gabe into the

cardboard castle. As he looked up at the top he was in awe at how big it all felt.

“This is where I keep my trucks,” Gabe said showing Tyler a collection of big monster truck toys. “You can use this one,” Gabe said handing him a red one while he took a green one. Gabe then pushed the drawbridge down before zooming out with his monster truck. Tyler smiled as he followed after Gabe. The boys crawled all over the room racing their monster trucks over everything as they made engine sounds with their mouths.

The doorbell sounded from upstairs breaking Tyler's attention away from pushing his truck all over the dirt mound the boys had made out of pillows an activity that had kept the boys occupied for quiete some time.

“That must be your Mom,” Ms. Mary said getting to her feet. Tyler however was already bounding up the stairs before she had even made it halfway there. Tyler managed to open the front door with some difficulty swinging it open to see his Mom standing on the front stoop.

“Mommy,” he yelled in excitement.

“Hey kiddo,” Mom said as she opened the screen door and took a step into the house before scooping him up into her arms with a hug. Tyler was beyond happy to see her, in fact his might have been the happiest he had ever been to see someone before in his life.

“Looks like you had some fun today,” Mom said examining

his current get up as he was still wearing the smock and plastic helmet. “What are you supposed to be?”

“A knight,” Tyler said with some pride.

“Well you certainly look big and strong in your armor but may I ask where your pants are sir knight?” Mom said with a chuckle.

“Ummm,” Tyler looked around a little. He didn't exactly remember where he had left them or the fact that he hadn't been wearing them at all.

“ Here they are,” Ms. Mary said appearing in the hallway with Mika and Gabe in tow. “He left them in the bathroom when he went potty before nap time.”

“He did huh,” Mom said taking the shorts from Ms. Mary and taking a seat on the steps with Tyler in her lap as she got his shorts back on him. “And how did the potty go today?”

“Dry all day,” Ms. Mary said with a grin.

“Good job sweetie,” Mom said in a sing song voice as she tickled Tyler's tummy.

“He was very well behaved today, a perfect angel in fact,” Ms. Mary continued as she went on to give a full report of the events of the day.

“I'm happy to hear everything went well,” Mom said as she set Tyler onto the ground and then addressed him. “Go and give this stuff back to Gabe and say goodbye, so we can go and pick up your brothers and sister and see how their first

days went.”

Tyler listened obediently to his Mom as he took off the smock and helmet and handed it to Gabe.

“I don't want you to leave,” Gabe said casting up a pair of puppy dog eyes. Tyler could tell that Gabe had been happy to have had someone to play with around his age instead of just his baby sister and Grandma. Tyler actually felt kind of bad for him. He didn't really like to think of Gabe being lonely while he was here.

“Tyler will be back on Friday,” Ms. Mary said. “Thats only three days from now.”

“We play then?” Gabe asked.

“Mhmm,” Tyler chirped causing a smile to appear on Gabe's face. Tyler returned to his Mom's side as they departed. He was put into his car seat before his Mom handed him Opie which Ms. Mary had also returned. Tyler looked down at the wolf. They came to a consensus with one another that they liked it at Ms. Mary's house. It had been a successful day for Tyler as he felt that he had made huge strides. He had found a way to keep his two sides in check. Something that was a huge step forward for him.

Pulling up to the school Tyler looked out the window at all the kids walking out. He scanned the crowd of children to see if he could spot his own siblings. He spotted Jace first who was standing at the sidewalk alone before Connor joined him holding Mallory's hand. Mom pulled up and Connor opened

the door as everyone got in the car.

The car ride home was filled with non-stop talk about the first day of school, or rather Mallory's first day which she gave a breathless play by play of. After Mallory had finished Mom moved on to Connor wanting to hear what her eldest thought of the fifth grade. He seemed eager for the year as he talked about some of the things the teacher had highlighted they were going to be doing but was more than a little miffed that he had gotten homework on the first day.

“Thats what happens when you get to the top, their just going to expect more,” Mom said. “How about you Jace, haven't heard much from you, Are ya liking the third grade?”

“Nothing really,” Jace mumbled from the back seat.

“Thats all you have to say, C'mon it couldn't have been that bad.” Mom said prodding him for something more.

“I like that we get our own desk and don't have to sit at tables anymore,” Jace said offering up the littlest scrap of information about his own day.

“Well that's good, anything else?” Mom asked.

“No,” Jace said curtly. “I'm just kind of tired is all.”

“Probably because you didn't go to sleep until late last night, so lets make sure we all get to bed on time tonight,” Mom said.

“Yeah okay,” Jace mumbled as the car pulled into the driveway. Tyler was unbuckled by Connor as slipped down

and jumped down to the ground out of the car. Tyler took a glance at Jace walking into the house. He could tell something was definitely up with him. Jace had been uncharacteristically quiet on the car ride home. Tyler did'nt really like seeing him like this. Jace was his older boisterous brother who took on every challenge set in front of him. This kid was so unlike Jace in every way. Tyler ran up to him grabbing onto his arm. Tyler had his adult mind but to Jace he was a kid, maybe that would be enough for Jace to drop his guard and open up to him in the way that kids only really do with one another.

“You okay?” Tyler asked. Jace pulled his arm up out of surprise. Tyler caught sight of a bruise on his arm and his mind immediately went to bullying. Yet Tyler couldn't see that being the reason. If anything he would accept Jace being the bully before thinking that he was the bullied, not that Jace would ever do that. Even if Jace teased him or pushed him around a little Tyler knew that Jace was a kind-hearted person at the end of the day.

“What do want?” Jace said looking down at Tyler with a questioning look, his reaction being more out of surprise than any annoyance.

“You look sad,” Tyler said. “Why?”

“I'm not sad, just tired,” Jace said repeating the same thing he had said in the car.

“I want to make you feel betta,” Tyler said with a little hop. Jace gave him a weak grin.

“There's nothing you can do,” Jace said. “I'm fine, school is just hard sometimes, you'll understand when you're older.” Jace left Tyler standing in the garage as he went into the house. Tyler thought about the bruise he had seen. But it wasn't like that was any sort of evidence. Jace always had a scraped knee or mysterious bruise on him. He was a a rough and tumble kind of kid, the risk taker of the family. Perhaps he was telling the truth, he was just tired after the first day of school.

Tyler crossed his arms a little. Jace's last comment had been a blow to his newfound confidence. Even if he was able to maintain his adult thoughts what good would it be if no one would ever take him seriously? Nobody would look at him as someone to lean on or be honest with. In this body he had nothing to offer in that department.

“What were you guys talking about?” Connor asked coming up behind Tyler.

“Nothing,” Tyler said, “Nothing at all.”

Chapter 16

One of the Family: Part 16 - Chapter 16

Connor was sat at the kitchen table with his homework spread out before him. It was Sunday afternoon and he had put it off all weekend. He twiddled his pencil in his hand as he looked at the math problem in front of him. He looked over at the digital clock display on the oven as his mind wandered. He remembered back to after the first day of school when they had returned home. After putting his stuff in his room he had wandered upstairs to find Tyler staring up at the clock display with a muddled look on his face.

“Something interesting?” Connor had asked wondering what could have had Tyler so focused. Tyler had looked up at him with his brows furrowed in a sour look.

“I can't tell time no more,” Tyler had grumbled. “It happened this morning.”

“You know the numbers right?” Connor had asked. Tyler had nodded naming the two fours and the three in sequence. “So just put it all together,” Connor had said as if he couldn't understand what had Tyler so stumped.

Four...” Tyler had started before falling silent.

“Forty-three,” Connor said finishing the thought.

“Furty-three,” Tyler had repeated as if he had been speaking a

different language. Tyler had puffed up his cheeks before he let a frustrated sigh and walked off to the living room. Connor had followed him as he watched him head over to the train table and begin to play with the tracks. It had seemed a strange reaction at the time but as Tyler explained later on he found that giving in to his toddler side just a little helped him to stop himself from having a deep slip which is when he found he would lose some new ability of his adult side. Connor had observed this new behavior throughout the week as he watched Tyler taking on more toddler-like behaviors when he got frustrated as if he were soothing himself, but it was different than when he acted little as he never let himself get so caught up in it. Yet as much as Tyler seemed to be getting along Connor could see that was starting to act more little more frequently and it wasn't as if Tyler didn't have complete slips either as was evidenced by the complete breakdown he had experienced during the night of a particular heavy thunderstorm. It was clear to Connor that as much as Tyler was trying to keep his toddler side at bay, he was losing the fight. Connor knew he needed to find Fiona fast, a search that had stalled out. Even when they found some time to continue on it would only be thirty minutes or so before Tyler would start to become increasingly bored and antsy. Connor found it best just to let Tyler play with some toys on his bedroom floor while he soldiered on at his computer alone.

“You'll never finish if you don't focus buddy,” Mom said snapping him back to the present. Connor looked over at her sitting across from him at the table with her laptop open.

“You stuck, want some help?” she asked.

“No, I'm fine,” Connor said as he focused back in on the math problem in front of him. He was almost done but as he was about to start back in on the final few problems he found his attention once more pulled away by the voices of his Dad and Tyler out in the hall.

“I don't wanna,” he heard Tyler mewl.

“Its going to be fun, you always like playing in the yard with your brothers,” Dad said trying to reason with the fussy boy.

“I don't care,” Tyler replied with a stomp of his foot.

“Be that as it may we already signed up so we're going,” Dad said putting his proverbial foot down as if to challenge Tyler's stomp directly.

“Noooo,” Tyler whined as some shuffling was heard. A moment later Dad walked into the kitchen Tyler slung across his shoulder like a sack of potatoes as his arms and legs dangled limply.

“Say goodbye to Mommy,” Dad said turning his back so that Tyler's head was now facing her. Mom couldn't help but give him an adoring look as she saw his cute pouty face which was made all the more irresistible with the plain orange baseball cap on his head that was turned around backwards so that a tuft of his moppish black hair poked out from the hole.

“Its going to be okay pumpkin,” she cooed as she stood up before planting a kiss on his forehead. “There are going to be

other kids your age there and you get to go with Daddy, doesn't that sound fun," she said holding his cheeks in her hands.

"Please, I don't wanna go," Tyler said with a pair of puppy dog eyes.

"You won't want to leave once you get there," Mom said with chuckle before releasing him. Dad then walked towards the door as Tyler's continued whine grew fainter before being completely silenced by the shutting of the door.

"What was that all about?" Connor asked having watched the whole scene play out with some concern.

"Oh your Dad saw a flyer for a Parent-Toddler sports group that they hold at the school gymnasium on Sundays. He thought it would be a good thing for your brother and him to do together, so he signed up."

"Sports group," Connor said with a questioning look.

"I think they just throw a bunch of balls and sports equipment out there for the little kids to play with, I doubt their going to be running drills or anything like that," Mom said clearly showing she didn't think it was anything serious.

"Is it really okay to force him to go if he doesn't want to?" Connor asked showing some worry.

"You're a kid aren't you? Sometimes you are going to be forced to do things you don't want to do." Mom said shooting a knowing glance at her son. "Besides Tyler will have fun,

he's just being little pessimistic right now, you know how he is sometimes," she said with a little laugh. "Its funny to think about a little boy being a pessimist, but we love him all same," Mom said more of a comment to herself.

"I suppose," Connor said knowing full well that Tyler was not simply being pessimistic. Connor knew that Tyler had very real concerns about being put into such a situation and he felt bad that he wasn't able to do more to shield him from such problems but there wasn't much Connor could have done for him. It was simply part of being a kid. Sometimes you had to do what your parents said. Connor got back to work the last part of his homework taking far longer than he thought but after another hour of work he finished up his last problem relieved to finally be done. He got up and began to pack up his homework.

"You done?" Mom asked.

"Yep, I'm free," Connor said with some cheer.

"Great, I was hoping to get your input on something," she said motioning him over to her. As Connor walked over his Mom grabbed him pulling him onto her lap.

"Mom what are you doing?" Connor said with a laugh. "I'm a little big to sit in your lap."

"Nonsense, you're never too big to sit in Mommy's lap" she said as she wrapped her arms around his stomach. "Because you'll always be my baby," she said in an overly sweet tone.

"Is this what you wanted me to look at?" Connor asked

looking at the computer screen in front of him which had a list of names and info under them.

“Yeah, as you know me an your father are going to have to be away overnight for a convention and then later on for my cousin's wedding so I was looking at sitters for you guys,” she said.

“You wanted me to pick out a babysitter,” Connor said with some derision.

“I know you think you're too old but its going to be overnight and I can't leave a bunch of kids unsupervised,” Mom said. Connor almost laughed at the comment. Even if she did leave them alone there would still technically be an adult in the house. It was then that Connor realized he had never gotten a straight answer from Tyler of how old he really was, Connor could only surmise that Tyler had been an adult since he was so cagey about admitting his real age.

“There aren't any pictures,” Connor commented seeing a blank box next to each profile with the tiny icon of a ripped piece of paper in each square.

“I can't get the images to load,” Mom said with some frustration. “I guess you'll just have to judge from their qualifications than their looks, which is more important anyways. Connor scrolled through the names stopping at one that read “Sophie Taylor” she was thirty eight and mentioned the importance of setting routines. Connor rolled his eyes he was smart enough to know that was code for no fun allowed. He scrolled through a few more before he came upon a name

that made his heart stop. The letters seemed to jump out at him as he read the name “Fiona Hinshaw” spelled out across the top of the info box.

“This one,” Connor said nearly leaping forward.

“What's so exciting about her?” Mom asked surprised by Connor's reaction. Connor went to say something but realized he hadn't even read a single thing about her.

“I guess I just have a feeling is all,” Connor mumbled.

“A feeling eh,” Mom said with a smirk leaning forward as Connor got up from her lap. “Lets see,” Mom said as she looked at the profile and she began to list off some of the info. “Takes newborns to 12 years, accepts multiple kids, oh likes to do active and outdoor based activities and her rates are pretty reasonable. She doesn't sound bad I think I might just send her a message and check her availability.” Mom said clicking away before she began typing out a message. Connor stood in the kitchen full of nervous anticipation.

“So what did she say?” Connor asked as he heard a ding come from the computer.

“I just sent the message,” Mom said. “It'll probably take a little time for a response.”

“Oh,” Connor said feeling silly at his impatience.

Connor awkwardly shuffled out of the kitchen into the backyard where he began to kick around a soccer ball. He needed to calm down. He started to talk himself down a little.

It wasn't as if they had never found anyone named Fiona before. He had no reason to think this was anything else than another dead end. He hadn't even seen a picture before, not too mention the only real thing he knew about the Fiona he was looking for was that she was witch, what in the world would she be doing on a website to hire babysitters and nannies. As Connor thought more on it he started to see that he was over reacting a tad. The chances of this actually working out were minuscule. Connor heard the car pull in and the garage door open signaling that Dad and Tyler were home. He decided to go in side partly because he had been in the yard awhile and was getting hot and also because he was curious to see how Tyler had gotten on. Connor got himself a glass of water from the sink and turned around just in time to see Tyler walk into the house. Tyler had a look on his face that could best be described as shell shocked.

“Did you have fun goober,” Mom asked.

“Yeah,” Tyler said his wearied expression going unchanged as Mom gave a befuddled look watching him as he walked past his footsteps heard going up the stairs a moment later as Dad walked through the door.

“Didn't look like he had much fun,” Mom said looking at Dad.

“What are you joking?” Dad asked with a slight guffaw. “We had a blast.”

“Did he have fun or just you?” Mom asked with some suspicion.

“What you don't believe me?” Dad asked with a hint of offense. “Fine, check this out,” Dad said pulling out his phone. Connor walked over and watched the video on the phone over his Mom's shoulder. He could see Tyler in a gymnasium running across a gym floor with a mini foam football in his arms as two other kids chased after him. Tyler got to the end of the gym where Dad was standing and filming.

“Touchdown Tyler!” Dad exclaimed before Tyler turned and threw the ball at him with a giggle as he hopped over to Dad before wrapping his legs in a hug.

“Oh how cute,” Mom exclaimed.

“Check this one out,” Dad said bringing up another video. In this one Tyler was pushing a tennis ball along the floor with a plastic tennis racket in his hand that he was wielding like a hockey stick as he shufflled the ball into a mini soccer goal.

“Daddy I score,” he said turning to the camera flashing his signature goofy smile with his tongue sticking out a little at the side.

Awww,” Mom cooed at the phone. “It looks like he did have fun.”

“Told ya,” Dad said in a told you so kind of way.

“He just looked so gloomy when he walked in,” Mom mentioned apologetically for having doubted Dad.

“Oh yeah,” Dad said with some agreement. “He was a little

chatterbox on the way home and then he just suddenly got all quiet."

"Probably just tuckered out," Mom replied.

"So what have you all been up to?" Dad asked taking a moment to stand up straight and stretch out his back.

"I have good news," Mom announced. "I think I found a sitter for when we go out of town next week."

"Really," Dad said.

"Yep, Connor picked her out." Mom said with as she flashed a cheeky smile in Connor's direction.

"Oh he did huh," Dad said with a smirk and a raised eyebrow.

"She just got back to me and she's available so I told her to come over on Friday for a meet and greet." Mom said.

"As long as she not crazy she can have the job, although after a night with our monsters she might just turn." Dad said with a laugh.

"Our children our angels," Mom said with some fake offense. "Now show me that video of my littlest angel with the tennis racket again," Mom requested.

"Wait, I didn't even show you the best one yet," Dad said starting another video.

Connor left the kitchen. He didn't need to see anymore, he already knew what had happened. Tyler had slipped and it looked like it had been a pretty big one to boot. Connor found

Tyler in his room sat cross-legged on his floor with his back to the door.

“How ya holding up Ty?” Connor asked taking a seat across from him.

“I slipped,” Tyler said pulling his hat off his head and plopping it down onto the ground with a defeated slump before looking at Connor with a pitiful look some of his hair plastered to the side of his head with sweat. “Big time” Tyler said.

“Yeah, I kinda saw some of the videos Dad took,” Connor said with a wince. Tyler let out a groan as he flopped down onto his back.

“C'mon Ty it will be okay,” Connor said reassuringly placing a hand on Tyler's leg and giving it a little shake.

“Noooo it too much,” Tyler whined, showing Connor that he hadn't completely regained his clarity yet as he was somewhere in-between his toddler self and adult self. Connor consider telling Tyler about the sitter but hesitated. Connor wasn't feeling the most confident about their chances. He knew that Tyler was starting to feel desperate. If Connor told him about the sitter Tyler might just latch onto the tiniest sliver of hope it presented and build it up during the week. What would happen then if Friday came and the woman who walked in the door wasn't his Fiona? It might just crush him completely and send him spiraling into a depression.

“Ok, so you slipped, big deal,” Connor said. Tyler sat up

looking a Connor with a grim look.

“It is,” Tyler said with some consternation. “I have to stop it.”

“I think we have to accept its going to happen no matter what,” Connor said steeling himself in case Tyler directed some of his frustration his way. Tyler's face scrunched up. Its not like he disagreed with Connor's assessment. He had come to the same conclusion himself, but it didn't make Tyler feel any better about it.

“I know you're worried about not being able to come back after a slip but its pointless to worry about that. What matters is that you're still here now. I'm still with you too, we will figure this out, I promise you that.” Connor said giving Tyler a reassuring smile.

“Yeah, I know,” Tyler said as his features softened a little. “Thanks,” he whispered.

The door then opened as Mom walked into the room.

“What are you two doing in here?” Mom asked as she scooped Tyler up into her arms.

“Tyler was just telling me about everything he did at the sports group,” Connor said.

“You were?” Mom asked as she nuzzled her nose against Tyler's.

“It was so much fun,” Tyler said putting his hands up in the air in a cheer. Connor was impressed by how quickly Tyler could turn it on when he needed to.

“Well I want to hear too,” Mom said. “Lets get you on the potty and then you can tell me all about it in the bath you stinky little sports star.”

Mom turned to leave as Tyler looked back at Connor with an exhausted look. Connor could only shrug his shoulders while shooting back a sympathetic look.

Later that night after Tyler had been put to bed he found himself lying awake. He was having a rare moment of completed clarity as he stared up at the stars being projected onto his ceiling. The stars always had a soothing effect on him but tonight they weren't cutting it as he found himself feeling down. He was wondering what he was even doing anymore. Maybe it was time for him to admit defeat. Thinking back on his old life he began to think what was he even trying to get back to? He hadn't been very successful as an adult. Maybe that was what this was all about. The universe had deemed him a failure and had sent him back to what he truly was, a little boy who couldn't take care of himself. As the harrowing thought fell on him he had to push it out. Whose to say he wouldn't have eventually found his way. Maybe he had been one story away from his big break.

Surely he had been on his way to establishing himself. Who was the universe to decide what he was? Besides he couldn't just assimilate into the West family. It wasn't right. They weren't his parents and the kids weren't his siblings. Even if he wasn't ever going to make something of himself it wasn't fair to them to be suddenly burdened with his presence. Tyler simply couldn't let himself be hoisted off on people like that.

His life was his to decide, not Fiona's or the universe's

Friday morning had arrived as Connor had held back from telling Tyler anything about their babysitter. Over the week he had had to bite his tongue many a time when observing how down Tyler seemed. He had wanted to tell him but felt that whatever temporary happiness Connor could give him would just make a likely failure all the more heartbreaking. As Connor did his morning duty of strapping Tyler into his carseat for the morning car ride to school he felt that maybe now was the time to say something.

“So you know how we are going to have a babysitter this weekend?” Connor started off still not sure if now was the right time.

“Yeah,” Tyler mumbled not showing much interest in the topic.

“I think you should know that I pushed Mom to choose this one.” Connor said.

“Oh,” Tyler said still despondent as he stared at the ground.

“Her name's Fiona,” Connor said deciding to lay everything out on the table. Tyler looked up slowly to meet Connor's eyes. “Now before you get excited just know that I didn't see a picture or anything so I have no way of confirming if its her or not,” Connor quickly added to answer the question that Tyler surely would ask. “I just thought you should know though.” Connor watched Tyler as his expression hardened into deep thought as he looked back down at the ground.

“You're not mad I didn't tell you sooner?” Connor asked with a wince. Tyler shook his head.

“I get it,” Tyler said as he nodded. “Thanks for telling me.”

During the car ride Tyler was trying to keep his expectations in check, he could certainly see Connor's point of view. It was needless to get his hopes up on this slim hope. But by the time afternoon had rolled around he found himself filled with a nervous anticipation. Not even playing with Gabe at Ms. Mary's was enough to distract himself as the day seemed to be going tortuously slow.

Finally Tyler found himself back home at the appointed time as Mom had the kids lined up in front of the steps making Tyler feel like a member of the Von Trapp Family all to meet the new babysitter. The doorbell rang as Mom opened the door and Tyler's heart started beating so hard he was sure it was going to pop. The sunlight hit him in the eye as the mysterious figure walked through the door obfuscated by the blinding light. Tyler closed his eyes as they adjusted before he opened them again as his vision came back into focus.

The first thing he saw was the bright red hair that fell down to the shoulders of this woman, before her face came in to view, the familiar freckles dancing across her cheeks and nose before the clang of the bangles on her wrist rung out into his ears. Tyler's mouth fell agape as he stared in shock to see Fiona standing in front of him. Tyler blinked again and again not ready to believe it was actually her standing in front of him. She was here, it was really her.

As Mom finished with the pleasantries she began to go down the line introducing the kids.

“This is my oldest Connor he's ten and this tough guy is Jace he's eight, and this ray of sunshine is Mallory she's six,” Mom said placing a hand on each head as she said their names with Fiona smiling pleasantly as she looked at each of them. “And this little bundle of joy is Tyler he just turned three.”

“Well aren't you all the most charming group I've ever seen,” Fiona said with her gentle and disarming way of speaking. “You boys look like the sporty type,” she said looking to Connor and Jace as the boys seemed eager to let Fiona know her assumptions were true as they listed off their favorite sports and what they were most talented at.

“What about you Mallory?” Fiona asked turning her attention towards the girl. “You like to get out their and mix it up with your brothers?

“I'm in gymnastics,” Mallory informed her with an air of superiority. “But I also like tea party's do you like tea?” she asked.

“I do,” Fiona said with a grin.

“Would you like to have a tea party with me?” Mallory said with a hopeful look.

“We simply must,” Fiona said as Mallory beamed back up at her. Fiona then came to Tyler who was still staring up at her with a deer in the headlights look.

“Hey buddy,” she said as she knelt down in front of him.

“I'm Tyler,” he spat out haphazardly. In truth their was so much he wanted to say to her in that moment that it had all gotten jumbled up his mouth. He locked eyes with her searching for any hint that she recognized him.

“That's great,” Fiona said finding his sudden declaration funny. “So what do you like?” she asked looking at him with cooing smile. Tyler couldn't tell if she was just being coy or if she really didn't recognize him. She had to though, how could she not? It was then that Tyler remembered that right after he had changed she had seemingly disappeared almost instantly.

“He likes Sesame street,” Mallory chimed in taking on the role to answer for him.

“Me too,” Fiona said with a gasp of fake surprise. “Tell me whose your favorite?”

“Elmo is his favorite,” Mallory said putting her arms around Tyler. “He always dances with him.”

“Well I certainly look forward to seeing that,” Fiona said with a small laugh. Despite Tyler being completely tongue tied at the moment he still had gumption to shoot an annoyed look up at Mallory.

“Now that introductions are done, why don't you follow me this way so we can talk more,” Mom said as she lead Fiona out into the kitchen. Mallory followed along while Jace slunk back off to his video game leaving Connor and Tyler alone.

Tyler was frozen in his spot staring off into space.

“So,” Connor said not able to discern whether Tyler was happy, angry or sad. “Ty, you there?

Tyler looked over to Connor his eyes were beginning to get wet.

“It was a long shot,” Connor said coming to the conclusion that they had failed again. “We'll keep trying.”

“You found her,” Tyler said as if he didn't believe it himself before he ran over to Connor wrapping his arms around him as he nuzzled his face into Connor's stomach. “You really found her,”

Connor let out a little laugh as the realization set in.

“Thank you,” Tyler said looking up at Connor with a grateful smile. “You've saved me.”

“Don't mention it,” Connor said placing a hand on top of Tyler's head. “That's what brothers are for.”

Chapter 17

One of the Family: Part 17 - Chapter 17

The West kids including Tyler were all sat upon the sofa in the living room with their Dad in front of them.

“I'm expecting a good report when I get back,” he said as he continued on with his speech. “I don't want to hear about anyone trying to get one past the babysitter. That means no telling her that you're allowed to do things you know you aren't supposed to,” Dad said casting a glance over to his two oldest sons before settling in on Jace. “Like going down to the creek by yourself,” he then turned his attention on Mallory “Or taking and using things that don't belong to us.” Dad then looked at Tyler. “Or telling her that we get two bowls of ice cream for dessert,” he said with a chuckle as he mussed up the boy's hair. Tyler felt a little offended at the accusation, he had never done such a thing. “You all know what our expectations for behavior are,” Dad said with a final declaration.

“You can trust me, Daddy,” Mallory said standing on the couch. “I'll make sure the boys are good.” Dad picked her off of the couch.

“Thank you princess, I know I can trust you to help Fiona keep these boys in line,” he said before giving her a kiss on the cheek.

“Ok I think we're ready,” Mom said walking into the room looking at her watch. “Fiona should be here any moment.” almost as if she had willed it into existence the door bell rang as Mom went off into the front hall re-appearing a few moments later with Fiona in tow.

“I left you all the notes and numbers on the counter, don't hesitate to call or text with any questions,” Mom said.

“The kids will be on their best behavior,” Dad chimed in. “You shouldn't have any surprises.”

“I think we'll have a great time,” Fiona said as she looked over at the kids.

“We should get going,” Dad said picking up his bag. The parents began to hug and say their farewells to each child.

“You be good now,” Mom said as she came to Tyler. “We'll see you again tomorrow,” she said before wrapping him up in a hug. Her promise of seeing him again tomorrow hit Tyler in a strange way. If everything went to plan come tomorrow, he wouldn't be here anymore and most likely any memory she had of him would be gone as well. If anything Tyler should have felt happy by this. All he wanted was to set things back to how they should be, but at this moment he just felt sad. Mom always had a strange effect on him. Every time she left him at Ms. Mary's house he always missed her and was happy when she came to pick him up. When Tyler began missing her it always felt like a wound re-opening each and every time.

As Mom and Dad pulled out of the driveway with the kids waving farewell Tyler felt a few stray tears come to his eyes. The car had disappeared as Fiona turned to face the kids. She zeroed in on Tyler immediately.

“Oh honey it will be okay,” she said in a gentle voice as she picked him up. Tyler was frazzled by the sudden attention and the fact that he was now being held in her arms. “You can't be missing Mommy and Daddy yet, they just left.” Fiona said

“I'm not,” Tyler said wiping the stray tears from his eyes as he realized that's what had gotten her attention in the first place.

“I can tell how brave you are going to be,” Fiona said as she gently started bouncing him up and down. Tyler was conflicted, on one hand she actually was making him feel better. But he shouldn't be comforted by her. She was the one that had gotten him into this situation in the first place. “Maybe we should do something fun, that'll help don't you think?” Fiona asked.

“We could have a tea party,” Mallory suggested. “Tyler loves that.”

“He does not,” Jace interjected. “Mallory always tries to force him to play that with her.”

Tyler gave a grateful smile to Jace, thankful that he had seen fit to stand up for him.

“Hmmm,” Fiona hummed as she looked around trying to

think of something now that Mallory's suggestion was off the table. “Anybody else got any suggestions?” Fiona asked.

“I got one,” Jace said with a innocent smirk.

Twenty minutes later the group was down at the creek in the woods behind the house at Jace's suggestion. Tyler was sat in the grass as he watched Connor and Jace throw rocks into the water as Mallory and Fiona sloshed up and down through the water hand in hand. Tyler watched Fiona closely. It seemed she really didn't have any idea who he really was. They had only really talked for a few minutes so it wasn't that unbelievable to Tyler. He had thought that they had had a connection though, he had been flirting with her pretty heavily at the time, but perhaps that was one sided on his part. However Tyler still felt that if he were the one to go around turning people into toddlers he might at least remember them. A thought then crossed his mind. Just how many people had she done this too? What if she got some kind of sick joy from seeing her victims suffer? If that was true she might have no intention of turning him back. The scene of her laughing at him with a sadistic smile on her face as she refused to turn him back played out in his mind. Tyler had half a mind to go up to her right now and demand to be changed back but he was going to stick to the plan that he and Connor had laid out. He was going to wait until bedtime when they could get Fiona alone.

“Hey bud, don't you want to get in the water?” Fiona asked as Tyler looked up to see her kneeling in front of him.

“I dun wanna get wet,” Tyler said.

“I brought a change of clothes for you,” Fiona said nodding towards the diaper bag that was sitting nearby. Tyler couldn't help but feel a little embarrassed that she had packed a diaper bag for him, especially if she knew the truth about him.

“I'm fine,” Tyler said. Fiona gave him a curious look before she shrugged and left to go back to the creek where Mallory was calling for her attention. Connor now approached having seen the two of them talking.

“Hey, you going to come in?” he said taking a seat next to Tyler.

“I might slip,” Tyler said. That was the one thing he didn't want to do. Given his luck it might be the one time he wouldn't come back and then his one chance would flitter away just like that.

“Do you really need to worry about that?” Connor asked. “I mean you are getting changed back tonight, so this might be your last hoorah at being a kid.”

“We dun know that,” Tyler grumbled. “What if she don do it?” Connor sat for a moment thinking on Tyler's reservations.

“If that happens,” Connor began slowly. “You would still have a place here, with us,” he said as he and Tyler looked at one another. “I would'nt mind,” Connor said as he looked away with some shyness. “Having you as a brother.”

Tyler looked at Connor for a moment. He was about to say

that he didn't want that, but thought better of that, knowing Connor was only trying to make him feel better. Tyler also had been somewhat touched by the comment. Tyler had it so ingrained in his head that he was a burden to this family, especially on Connor and to hear that he didn't actually think that was comforting in a way. However it didn't actually change Tyler's resolve to get his true body back.

“Thanks,” Tyler said.

After some time Fiona declared it was time to go back as it was getting late and they were going to have to figure out what to do for dinner. Fiona carried Tyler back which made him feel a little awkward but he preferred it to having to walk the whole way since it was always hard for him to keep up. Upon walking into the kitchen Fiona set him on the ground.

“Okay if you are wet you need to go change clothes,” Fiona said to the rest of the group. Tyler looked around to see that Jace and Mallory were both dripping with water. Connor was okay except for the bottom of his shorts and Fiona had actually took some time down at the creek to lay out in the sun so she was already dry.

“Looks like its just you two,” Fiona said glancing at Mallory and Jace.

“We forgot Tyler,” Mallory said with some alarm. Tyler looked at her confused. He was completely dry since he hadn't gone in the water. Before Tyler could say anything however Mallory grabbed at his shorts and pulled them down revealing his pull-up.

“He's wet,” Mallory said looking at the puffed up pull-up. Tyler looked down to see that the fade when wet designs were nowhere to be seen.

“Mallory, what are you doing?” Connor said with some anger.

“I'm helping,” Mallory said not seeing what the big deal was. Tyler felt tears come to his eyes as he looked around the room before looking up at Fiona. Having been exposed like this in such a state in front of her proved to be far too humiliating for him as he began to cry.

“Oh sweetie its okay, no need to cry,” she said trying to calm him.

“He's probably sad because now he does'nt get a sticker,” Mallory said.

“Is that what this is all about,” Fiona asked as she began to stroke Tyler's hair. “Y'know buddy its more my fault since I didn't check on you sooner, so maybe we will just let this one slide.”

“That's not how it works,” Mallory said shaking her head, acting as the authority on Tyler's potty training regimen. “Mommy says he has to tell us when he needs to go too.”

Fiona gave a perplexed look at Mallory not finding her rigid adherence to the rules helpful at the moment.

“Lets get you cleaned up,” Fiona said with a sigh.

“Noooo,” Tyler screamed finding the idea of Fiona seeing him in his most vulnerable state an absolute no go.

“I'll take him,” Connor volunteered. Fiona looked at Connor for a moment.

“Maybe that's best,” she said with a nod.

“I'll go too,” Mallory said with some enthusiasm.

“No, stay here,” Connor said as he began to lead Tyler away.

“I can help,” Mallory said with some insistence.

“You aren't allowed too, remember?” Jace said. In some ways he was doing what Dad had told them and not let anyone try and skirt the rules, but in truth Jace was more than happy to thwart Mallory whenever the opportunity arose.

“Is that true Mallory?” Fiona asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes,” Mallory said with a pout in her mind not wanting to give Fiona any reason to dislike her.

“Then lets have Connor take care of it, you two need to get yourselves changed anyways.” Fiona instructed.

Connor got Tyler up to the upstairs bathroom before shutting the door behind them. Tyler was still crying unable to control himself.

“Tyler its alright, just breathe,” Connor said softly. Tyler didn't seem to register what Connor was saying as he crumpled onto the ground tears still streaming down his reddened face. Connor looked down at him with some concern before he left the bathroom and returned a moment later with a new pull-up.

“You got this, right?” Connor said placing the pull-up next to Tyler who was still inconsolable. Connor let out a groan seeing that Tyler wasn't going to come around fearing that he had already slipped.

“Come here,” Connor said gently as he got Tyler on his feet before he tore off the wet pull-up and cleaned the crying boy up before putting a fresh pull-up on him. “See its done, its over so you can stop crying,” Connor said trying to get Tyler to calm down to no avail as his temporary little brother continued to sob. Connor finally grabbed Tyler by the shoulders.

“Ty, get it together,” he shouted as he gave Tyler a shake. Tyler stopped crying as he looked back at Connor with a surprised look having been snapped out of whatever swirl of emotion had gripped him.

“Its gonna be okay,” Connor said softly as he hugged Tyler. “I got you.”

Tyler put his face into Connor's shoulder. He hated the fact that he had almost let himself slip like this. Connor had saved him once again. Tyler couldn't help but feel a security in Connor's arms at that moment. He was filled with a sense that Connor was so much bigger than him and that he would keep him safe as if he really was his older brother.

“Feeling better?” Connor asked as he stood up.

“You save me again,” Tyler said wiping the few stray tears from his eyes.

“That's what I'm here for,” Connor said.

Returning downstairs they found a strange scene of Jace helping Fiona make a dinner of mac and cheese.

“Hey guys,” Fiona said “Dinner will be ready soon.”

“Hopefully it won't be burned,” Connor said with a smirk. Jace shot him a withering glare.

“Your brother is a wonderful assistant,” Fiona said putting an arm around him which made him grin.

At dinner it became clear to Tyler that Jace had taken a liking to her and was set to to impress as his usual table manners were far more refined than usual.

After dinner they had broken out Monopoly, there had been some worry that this game was beyond Tyler's skill level. Connor had worked out a compromise and had just put Tyler on a team with himself. A particular vicious property war had broken out between the brothers that had bankrupted Mallory and Fiona before finally Jace had to admit defeat when Connor and Tyler had sucked all his money dry with a fully upgraded set of property's that Jace wasn't able to avoid on a particular bad set of rolls.

“Well that was fun,” Fiona said sitting back in her chair taking a look at her phone. “But I think its a little wolf pup's bedtime,” she said having adopted the pet name for Tyler after having observed his infatuation with the animal. She picked him up out of Connor's lap. “You guys get this cleaned up and then when I get back we can do a M-O-V-I-E,” Fiona

said. Tyler was a little miffed at being reminded that he was unable to decipher things that were spelled out, not to mention that he was aware that he was being barred from an activity because of bedtime. He didn't have much time to dwell on this however realizing that it was the moment he had been waiting for all day. He looked at Connor as he was being carried out of the kitchen who gave him a thumbs up.

Fiona walked into Tyler's room switching on the light switch. She set him on the bed and took off his shirt before removing his shorts. She then picked him up and put him on the changing table. It had become such a routine for Tyler that he hadn't even realized the fact that she was going to change him. As Fiona went to tear the side of the pull-up Tyler went into a panic.

“Stoop,” Tyler yelped as he twisted his body away. It would be humiliating for her to change him like this, to treat him like a baby moments before he was to reveal himself to her. She might come to the conclusion that he had become more of a baby than a man which is something Tyler had been worried about as well. What if she thought it would just be better to keep him like this because of that?

“Calm down there little buddy,” Fiona said as she pushed him back down onto his back, which didn't require much strength at all.

“I'm not a baby,” Tyler mewled as he tried to move.

“I know sweetie, you're a big boy,” she cooed. “But even big boy's need help getting ready for bed, here why don't you hug

your friend," Fiona said as she pushed Opie into Tyler's chest. There was no protest Tyler could make to avoid this. He hid his face behind Opie as he felt Fiona remove his pull-up. His legs were then lifted in the air before he was set back down onto the crinkly diaper. Tyler's face went an even deeper shade of red as he felt her put the lotion and powder on him. It was incredibly mortifying to be diapered by the girl that only a month or so prior he had been flirting with at a park. Maybe it was because she was the only person that he had come into contact with before and after his transformation that made Tyler feel for the first time how completely reduced he had become. Just where in the hell was Connor?

Fiona finished with the diaper and moved Tyler back over to his bed. He had gone very quite and didn't put up any resistance as Fiona dressed him in a pair of monster trucked themed footie pajamas. She pulled the zipper up and then snapped the the top button into place.

"You look super cool in those jammies" Fiona said taking a step back to admire him. "Why don't you pick out a book and I'll read it for you."

"I don't want a story," Tyler said.

"Some of these look really good," Fiona said as browsed through the bookshelf.

"I hate all those books," Tyler said with some annoyance.

Just then Connor came into the room.

"I'm here," Connor said a little out of breath. Tyler wondered

what had taken him so long but was happy that he was here all the same. For some reason with Connor being there he felt himself become more confident.

“Oh Connor good,” Fiona said. “I think I could use your help. I'm trying to find a good story for Tyler here, are there any particular ones he likes?”

“I wouldn't know Mom and Dad are the ones who read to him at night,” Connor answered. Tyler shot him a glare mad at him for telling her that he got read to every night just like a little kid.

“I don't want a book,” Tyler repeated.

“Hmmm,” Fiona said looking at him, thinking that he was just being cranky. “If you don't like these books then maybe I'll tell you a story.”

“No,” Tyler said as an idea came to his mind. “I'll tell you a story.”

“That's a good idea,” Connor said shutting the door behind him. “You should listen to his story.”

“Sounds fun,” Fiona said with a smirk as she sat on the bed across from Tyler. “Okay little bard, I'm all ears.”

Tyler wore a deeply serious look. His moment had finally arrived.

“Once upon a time there was a man named Tyler Kenner,” he began as he watched Fiona's reaction, yet she gave no reaction to his words as her pleasant smile remained. “He was

sitting in a park when a witch came and sat next to him and she asked to cast a spell on him," at this he saw Fiona's expression change from a smile into a surprised look. Tyler knew he didn't need to go any farther it was perfectly clear to Fiona that Tyler knew things about her that he shouldn't.

"So you do remember?" Tyler asked dropping the pretense of his story.

"Tyler," Fiona said quietly as her brows furrowed searching for any familiarity she had with the name. "I don't know if I remember a Tyler."

"I was going ta write a story about you," Tyler said a little more forcefully a little saddened to hear that the attraction he had felt between them had all been in his head.

"The writer," Fiona said as her eyes went wide. "That was you."

"Yes," Tyler yelped jumping to his feet, he was overjoyed to be validated by her, someone still remembered the old him. His happiness however was short lived as it quickly turned to anger. "I've waited a long time for this," Tyler said as all the frustrations seemed to boil over. "Just where do you get off doing this to people? Did you think it would be funny to turn me into a little kid? Or is this just what you do for kicks?"

Fiona had her head down as she listened to Tyler's anger erupt at her.

"I wanna know, tell me, why?" Tyler spat.

“Tyler,” Fiona said as he lifted her head. “I'm truly sorry, you have to believe me when I say that I didn't turn you into a little kid, in truth I didn't know what was going to happen.”

“Wh-what?” Tyler said. What exactly did she mean by that?

“When I perform the spell I don't know how its going to effect the person, that's between them and the universe. Like I told you I'm just a middleman, a facilitator if you will. I do it under the understanding that the person will be happier than they were before.”

“I am not happy,” Tyler said crossing his arms. “You messed up, so you need to fix this. Change me back.”

Fiona was silent for a moment as she bit her lower lip.

“I don't know if that's possible,” Fiona said almost as if she were a doctor delivering a terminal diagnosis to a patient. Tyler felt the strength go out of his legs as he fell onto the bed. His mouth was hung agape as he looked at Fiona processing what she had just said. The little light of hope at the end of the dark tunnel had just gone out for him. His worst fear had suddenly become a reality.

Chapter 18

One of the Family: Part 18 - Chapter 18

oookay, i've been binge reading this series all day after reading the first couple parts and i LOVE it!!

I'm obsessed with how you portray the two parts of Tylers brain, and how he's constantly trying to find a way to get a balance. Also it means we get plenty content of both 3yr and older Ty and i love it alot!

The last couple parts in particular i really like. I was worried for a sec that Fiona wasnt going to remember, and it woulda been really underwhelming. But i'm glad she did! and i love the chemistry between the two. Much like Ty, it's definitely sad knowing that they might've went on adventures together, cause I would love to see that :)) but also this being mentioned gives me hope for his life if he does turn back.

Fiona bringing up how this could be a way of Tyler getting to make up for lost time or something he missed out on is AAAahaha i'm really happy about that. It makes this much more exciting rather than "oh you desire to be younger secretely so accept it" and raises the idea that he might get the benefits of both. Getting to experience a glimpse of a good childhood, and also getting to continue his life as an explorer with a new friend! that feels much more satisfying cause it keeps his core character and who we've followed, and developing him as a character. OHH but also him accepting

his new life and stuff would also be cute so idkkk i'm mixed on the options now!

Anyway yeah, this is probably incoherient i'm writing this the moment i finished it. So I haven't compiled my thoughts at all lmao. But yea, basically... really well done! lmao.

Chapter 19

One of the Family: Part 19 - Chapter 19

Tyler dipped his spoon a little and watched the milk drain out into his bowl of cereal before he dropped the spoon altogether in his bowl. He sat back in his seat. It had been a few days since Fiona had babysat. It was a normal morning as the kids sat around the table eating breakfast before school. Tyler had never expected to still be here, he had thought once he found Fiona that would have brought an end to this ordeal yet now it seemed he was stuck for a little longer. He wasn't angry about it or even really sad, mostly he just felt a little down about the whole thing. Dad came bustling into the kitchen in his white shirt and tie and work bag slung over his shoulder.

“Lets get this show on the road,” he said with a clap addressing the kids.

“You're taking us to school?” Connor asked getting up from his seat and grabbing his backpack.

“Yep and I'm also picking you guys up, so we can go to the store after,” Dad said in a quiet voice as he pointed back towards Mom who was stood at the sink as a smile came to her lips, yet she acted like she hadn't heard anything. The rest of the kids seemed to nod in agreement all of them seemingly having some sort of understanding, all except for Tyler who felt thoroughly out of the loop.

“We going to the store?” Tyler asked looking around the table.

“Sorry kiddo,” Dad said as he ruffled Tyler's hair. “You can't come this time.”

Tyler looked back confused. If all the other kids were going then why was he being excluded? As far as he was concerned he was perfectly well behaved when they went shopping. He never threw tantrums or tried to run off and cause mischief like other toddlers.

“I want to go,” Tyler said with a downtrodden look hating the fact that he was being excluded.

“I know bud, but you have somewhere else to be today,” Dad said giving him a sympathetic pat on the head.

“Somewhere else?” Tyler repeated. Since it was Thursday he didn't go to his sitter's house. The revelation he was going anywhere today was news to him.

“You and me are going,” Mom said as she came over and got him out of his booster seat holding him in her arms as she wiped some milk from his chin. “We're going to the doctor's office for your three year old check up today.”

Tyler scrunched up his face at this news. He wasn't exactly enthused by the news that he was going to be poked and prodded at. Not too mention it was going to be at a pediatricians office which in Tyler's mind were hotbeds of germs from errant children coughing and sneezing and putting their hands all over stuff, he was probably going to catch something.

“You're going to be my big brave boy today, right? Dad asked.

“Yes,” Tyler said glancing sideways to hide his displeasure.

“That's my guy,” Dad said before giving Tyler a kiss on the cheek and then turning his attentions towards the others to get them moving. Mom sat Tyler on the couch and turned on some little kids show for him as the rest of the kids filed out the door. Connor doubled back to Tyler quickly.

“Don't be nervous,” Connor said.

“I'm not,” Tyler said with a cock of his head. “Its just a check up.” Connor just gave him a smile before rushing out the door.

As Tyler sat on the couch watching tv he remembered what Fiona had told him before she left. She had simply reminded him to be open to the experience to see if there was some answer in it.

“I'll be eager to hear if you find anything,” she had said. As he looked around the room he wondered what he was possibly going to find in watching preschooler programs and playing with toys. What great knowledge was he supposed to gleam from living as a three year old that was supposed to give him some sense of understanding about his life as an adult? After a little while Mom came into the living room.

“Ty lets get you on the potty,” Mom said as Tyler slid off the couch and followed her to the bathroom. Sitting on his potty he looked at his sticker chart which was looking much more filled out these days. He was still having accidents regularly and he never woke up dry but their was some definite

progress being made. Tyler finished his business and then stood up pulling his own pull-up up. Mom knelt down to make some adjustments to his waistband.

“I think you'll be in big boy undies in no time,” Mom remarked as she stood back up.

“I wish it was now,” Tyler said gloomily.

“Sorry buddy, you're just not ready yet,” Mom said as she picked up the sticker chart looking it over still seeing far too many blank spots to spots filled with stickers for her to feel confident that Tyler was in any way ready for normal underwear.

Tyler let out a small little moan at hearing that pull-ups were still on the menu for him for the time being.

“Though you know you've been doing a lot better,” Mom said seeing Tyler being so downtrodden and trying to give him a little boost of confidence. “Maybe I should have your Dad get you some special toddler undies at the store. We could let you wear them around the house a little bit here and there, just to give you some practice.”

“I want dem,” Tyler said with some enthusiasm. He knew she was talking about the underwear with the padding in them that were more like cloth pull-ups than underwear but anything that got him closer to actual underwear was a win in his book. Tyler's Mom helped him wash his hands and then brushed his teeth for him.

“All right I have a little work to do so why don't you play in

the living room for a bit," Mom said as she lifted him off the counter.

"Uh Mommy" Tyler called out thinking she had forgotten something. "What about gettin

dwessed?" Tyler asked. After his Mom had changed him out of his nighttime diaper she had sent him to breakfast in just a white t-shirt and pull-up. "You're fine in just that," Mom said placing a hand behind his head as she lead him out of the bathroom. "Will get you fully dressed after nap-time when we go to the appointment."

Tyler spent the rest of his day finding things to occupy himself with. He wasn't exactly against Fiona's suggestion of letting himself be open to this experience as he was as interested as anyone in finding some answer to what all this meant, but it seemed he was having trouble doing so. Part of his problem is that he was so hyper focused on trying to pick up on whatever signs he was supposed to see that it was hard for him to slip into his toddler mode. Most of the time he came away feeling like he was more or less pretending to be a toddler which was wholly different than his experience of slipping into the little mindset.

The day dwindled on and after a quick nap after lunch. Tyler was finally dressed in some blue sweatpants and a pull over sweater with tractors on it complete with his bear beanie and was strapped into his car seat with Opie at his side and on his way to the doctors office. As Tyler looked out the window he started to think about the check up and what it would entail

and that's when a truly worrying thought struck him. What if they somehow could tell he wasn't really a toddler? The revelation that he was apparently naturally resistant to magic caused him to start reasoning that maybe there were other ways that the spell hadn't been as effective on him as it appeared to be. What if during the exam something triggered that would show differences between him and his temporary family. That would show he didn't belong to them? At the beginning of this whole ordeal it would have been a welcome bit of hope for Tyler but now it was the last thing he wanted. If the doctors somehow figured he wasn't really the child of Colin and Renee West they would take him away right? That meant he would eventually be placed in foster care, and then what if he got adopted out? There wasn't a single good outcome in that situation.

Not only would he be cut off from Fiona but that also meant losing Connor, the only other person in the world that knew the truth. As Tyler thought more about getting taken away, the idea began to scare him. The thought of his Mom's face as they took him from the room, never being able to see his Dad, Jace, or Mallory again. He could see that his parents loved him and doted on him. He enjoyed having an older brother like Connor who looked out for him and he liked it when Jace played with him and took him on adventures even if they got in trouble afterwards and he could also see that Mallory adored him in a way that could be overbearing at times yet had good intentions all the same. He was used to this family and knew what to expect. He had also heard enough horror stories from the foster care system to know he would be truly

rolling the dice.

The car pulled into the hospital's parking lot. As Mom came and opened the door and began to unstrap Tyler he shrunk back in the car seat.

“I don't wanna go,” Tyler whimpered. Mom picked him up and held him close.

“There's nothing to be worried about,” she said as she began walking towards the doors. “And if you're well behaved in their we'll get some ice cream after so just be my brave little man like I know you are.”

Tyler let out another little whimper. At this point he had thoroughly convinced himself that there was going to be no chance of ice cream when all was said and done. In fact if Mom knew what was going to happen she would be running away from the hospital right now. Or perhaps when she found out that Tyler wasn't hers she was going to be happy to leave him, after all what parent would want to waste time on a fake child? Mom made her way with Tyler to the pediatrics office and walked up to the front desk.

“Hi there we're here for an appointment with Dr. Rindell,” she said to the receptionist behind the desk.

The woman at the desk smiled looking at Tyler. “And what is our patients name?” Mom gave Tyler a look.

“Can you tell the nice lady your name?” she asked. Tyler shook his head and buried his face into his Mom's shoulder wrapping his arms tight around her neck. Both woman just

chuckled.

“Tyler West, is the name,” Mom said. The receptionist clacked away at the keyboard for a moment.

“The doctor will see you shortly,” she said. It was only a short wait before a nurse appeared calling

Tyler's name and showed them to an exam room. Mom walked in and took a seat with Tyler on her lap next to a desk while the nurse took a seat at the computer and began to type in some basic info. Tyler looked around the room and saw there was an exam table and some medical instruments on the wall along with a sun and rainbow painted on the wall.

“Okay lets start off with height and weight, lets get these shoes off,” she said as she took off Tyler's shoes. The nurse then rolled her chair across the room to where the scale was set on the floor.

“Can you hop up here for me buddy?” the nurse asked Tyler, pointing to the scale.

Mom set Tyler on the ground. He stood looking at the nurse across the room before he turned to look at his Mom.

“It's okay honey,” his Mom reassured. Tyler walked over and got on the scale. The nurse took his height and then pressed a button for the weight.

“So Tyler how old are you?” the nurse asked as she waited for the weight to display. Tyler shrunk down a little as he turned his face away. “It's okay if you don't feel like talking,”

the nurse said. “Why don't you just show me on your fingers.” Tyler put up three fingers in the air taking a moment to remember how old he was supposed to be.

“Wow, three years old that's so big,” the nurse said with a gasp. Tyler felt a little stupid. She would surely laugh at him when she found out how old he really was, the only question is when that would be. “Okay you can go back to Mommy now,” the nurse said. Tyler stepped off the scale and ran back into his Mom's arms as he cuddled into her.

“What's gotten into you today?” she asked with a little laugh. “He's usually not this clingy,” Mom remarked to the nurse who had returned to the computer.

“Perfectly normal for kids his age to be nervous,” the nurse said showing little concern. “We're going to take his blood pressure next it might be easier just to take his shirt off.”

Mom removed Tyler's sweater and shirt and leaving him shirtless. The nurse then went through several basic test such as blood pressure and listening to his heartbeat as well as taking a look in his ears eyes and nose explaining each one to him before she did it. Tyler was just waiting for the moment when she would notice something off about him yet that moment never came.

“Okay, its looks like his immunizations are all up to date,” the nurse said. “But we are going to do some blood work, does he have a problem with n-e-e-d-l-e-s?”

“He hasn't in the past,” Mom said.

“Noo,” Tyler whimpered having fully understood what was coming next. Nothing had come up in the physical exam but surely they would see something in his blood work, something that would prove he wasn't a real member of the West family. Both women seemed a little surprised that Tyler had seemingly figured out what was coming next.

“If you could just hold his arm still I can do this real fast,” the nurse said as she began to pull out her tools.

“Tyler just close your eyes and this won't hurt a bit,” Mom said as she held him tight so that he couldn't move his body or his arm. Tyler knew there was no way out of his Mom's hold. What was going to happen was going to happen. He closed his eyes tight as he felt the nurse put a tight strap around his arm. He wasn't scared of the needle in the slightest only what would surely be revealed. Within a moment the nurse had what she needed as she removed the needle and bandaged up the spot on his arm.

“You did so well,” the nurse cooed as she gave him a big smile.

“You were very brave,” Mom praised. Tyler said nothing as he watched the nurse put the vial of blood into her plastic container before getting up.

“The doctor will be in soon,” she said as she left the room with her things. Tyler cuddled into his Mom as she wrapped him in an embrace. He knew that with his blood in hand they were going see truth. These were probably his final moments with his Mom. The final moments where she would love him

as one of her own. Tyler whimpered a little at the thought.

“Tyler we're nearly done, and there wont be anymore needles, so you don't need to be scared.”Mom said gently as she rubbed his back.

“They gonna know,” Tyler said.

“Know what?” Mom asked a little confused by his comment. Tyler looked up at his Mom. Perhaps now was the time to tell her and get out in front of it. He owed her at least that.

“I...we...” Tyler stammered not able to form the words he wanted. “I'm not yours.”

Mom gave Tyler a confused look as she tried to figure out what he was even trying to say.

Just then the door opened and the doctor walked in and took a seat in front of Tyler and his Mom. He was a middle aged man whose youthful features were starting to show the first signs of aging apparent by the wrinkles that showed when he smiled.

“Hey there you two,” he said with some good cheer. “How are we today?”

“We're doing great,” Mom replied.

“And how's Tyler?” the doctor said looking to the boy, Tyler remained silent wondering if the doctor had already figured things out.

“Go on sweetie,” Mom prodded. “Tell the doctor how you

are.”

“I'm fine,” Tyler whispered.

“Sorry, he not usually like this,” Mom said apologetically.

“The nurse already told me he's a little nervous, which is perfectly normal,” the doctor said with a wave. “He's up to date on immunizations and we have the results of the blood work,” the doctor said as he looked over his clipboard. “So I just need to check a few things and then we'll proceed from there.”

Tyler noted the words the doctor had chosen. “proceed from there” he had said which only confirmed to Tyler he had no intention of letting them leave. The doctor proceeded to listen to his heart and ask questions.

“How is he sleeping at night?” the doctor asked as he looked into Tyler's ears.

“He sleeps through the night and naps for one or two hours a day,” Mom replied.

“Good, good,” the doctor nodded. “Could I have you stand for me, Tyler?”

Mom picked Tyler off her lap and set him down on the ground.

“Okay Tyler I just need you to walk to the door and back can you do that for me?” the doctor asked. Tyler stood still looking at the doctor. He wondered what the game was here. The doctor had seen the blood work, they had to know

already, so why was he acting like this was just a normal exam, why hadn't he just come out with it already. Tyler turned and walked towards the door and back as he did so he came to the fearful conclusion that the doctor was buying time. They had probably already called the police to take him away or perhaps the doctor also knew he was really twenty eight and not three and was doing a preliminary exam on him. If they knew that, he would no doubt be taken to some lab to become a test subject for the rest of his days, the medical oddity of the century.

The doctor then put a blank piece of paper on his board and gave Tyler a pencil.

“Can you draw a circle here for me buddy?” the doctor asked. Tyler did as he requested wondering why he was even going along with all of this.

“All right just one more thing I gotta check,” The doctor said before he pulled Tyler's waistband forward and took a quick glance inside of his pull-up before letting the waistband snap back, leaving Tyler relieved that it had been over so quick.

“And how is the potty training going?” the doctor asked.

“He has has some accidents during the day and is still in a diaper at night. Honestly I am a little worried that we may have started too soon,” Mom answered.

“As long as you're seeing progress there is nothing to worry about.” the doctor said as he wrote down a few more notes “Okay you can put his shirt back on,” the doctor instructed.

Mom put Tyler's shirt and sweater back on. “You like tractors?” the doctor asked taking note of Tyler's sweater.

“Yeah,” Tyler said quietly.

“Very cool, I just have one last question for you Tyler,” the doctor said. “Is there anything you want to tell me about? Maybe something that makes you feel not so good or something that you don't think is normal?”

Tyler shook his head. The doctor was surely leading him on but he wasn't willingly going to say it.

The door then opened as Tyler spun around fully expecting to see some police officers there to take him away, however it was only a nurse.

“Perfect timing,” the doctor said. “Nurse Simmons could you take my friend Tyler here down to the prize bucket well I finish up with Mom here. I think he has earned a little something for being a great little patient today.”

“I'd be happy too,” the nurse said as she extended her hand out to Tyler. He took her hand as she lead him out to the room, taking one last look at his Mom who sat smiling at him from her chair. Tyler knew what was happening. They were separating them. He thought it was for the best, he couldn't bear to see her horrified look when they told her the truth about him.

Tyler was lead down the hallway into another smaller room that seemed to be used for storage. The nurse pulled out a small basket from a cabinet that was filled with small toys

such as model airplanes, sticky hands and army men with parachutes among other things.

“Really?” Tyler asked wondering why they were even keeping up this charade. He wanted them just to end it already.

“Of course hun, take whatever you want.” the nurse said.

Tyler took a mini slinky. He figured that if he was placed in foster care he could keep it as a memento to remember his old family by. The nurse then lead him back to the reception area where he was surprised to find his Mom waiting. He stood by her as he looked up at her. She must want to say something to him. Maybe she wanted to ask him how he could have thought it was okay to trick his way into her family, how could he have thought they could ever love him?

“Hey goober what'cha got there?” she asked as she scooped him up into her arms.

“A sinky,” Tyler said surprised at her reaction.

“Very cool,” Mom remarked. “Ready to go?”

“We weaving,” Tyler asked still skeptical of her reaction.

“Of course we're done here,” Mom said as she carried him out of the doctor's office. As they made their way back to the car Tyler was shocked. Had they really found nothing? Had he once again created some wild scenario in his head?

True to her word Mom had stopped off at a fast food restaurant and gotten a small bowl of ice cream and she and

Tyler were now sat on a bench outside ready to enjoy. She had expected Tyler to be excited yet as she looked at him he looked somewhat dazed still. Even on the ride over he had been silent. His Mom took a spoonful of ice cream and fed it to him, which he took with no enthusiasm for a supposed favor tie treat of his. She then took a spoonful for herself before giving him another spoonful. After the fourth round Tyler turned his head away apparently not wanting anymore, all of the anxiety that had run through his body had left his stomach still tied up in knots. His Mom didn't need to see anymore, she knew there was something up with him.

“Hey Ty, want to tell me what's wrong?” she asked setting the bowl down and putting her arm around him. Tyler simply shook his head.

“Oh so we're going to play the guessing game, huh,” Mom said. “Let's see, were you scared of going to the doctor's office?” Tyler shook his head again. Mom was a little surprised. She thought for sure that had to be it. What else could have gotten him into such a mood? It was then that she remembered the odd thing he had said to her in the exam room.

“Tyler did you need to tell me something at the hospital?” Mom asked. Tyler glanced up at her quickly before looking away again.

“Yes,” he said in a whisper. Mom pulled Tyler into her lap wrapping her arms around him.

“Then why don't you tell me now,” she said.

“I can't,” Tyler replied. “You'll get rid of me then.”

“I will certainly not,” Mom said with some faux outrage. “I would never get rid of any of my kids.”

“But I'm not, and you should” Tyler said. “I'm sposed to be someplace else.”

Mom cocked her head a little. It was a strange thing for her to hear coming from Tyler even though he did have a penchant for saying some pretty off the wall things sometimes. But as she held him she could feel him shaking. It was clear to her that whatever he was trying to say he believed fully and maybe her best bet was just to play along to try and get to the bottom of whatever crazy idea had popped into his head.

“So you come from somewhere far away?” Mom asked.

“Mhmm,” Tyler said as he nodded his head. “I have to go back, I don't belong.”

Mom turned Tyler around so they were facing one another.

“That would make me very sad,” she said. “Tyler I don't care where you came from or how you got here, even if you're an alien from outerspace. What matters right now is that you are here now with me. You make my life so much happier. Me and your Dad love you so much. You're our son even if you don't believe it.”

As Tyler looked at her face he could feel something stir inside of him. Part of his brain was telling him that this was the effect of the magic she had been only made to love him as

her own. But Tyler could also feel that her feelings for him were genuine. He was well aware that she was merely playing along with him, trying to make him feel better on his own level. Yet even if she didn't know the truth, maybe it was like she said. It didn't matter how the feelings got there only that they were there now. People adopted children all the time and came to love them as their own, why couldn't this be the same.

“Its okay 'den?” Tyler asked. “If I stay?”

“Of course you can stay.” Mom said with a small laugh. Tyler rested his head on her shoulder as he wrapped his arms around her neck. As Mom held him she could feel the shaking throughout his body subside. Whatever strange ideas had gotten him so distressed had apparently been resolved. As they sat on the bench Mom began to think a lot on the weird conversation that had just passed between them. Tyler could be so strange sometimes. Mom didn't seem to mind though, each of her kids had their quirks that set them apart from one another and yet they were still so similar in other ways. Tyler's peculiarity was just part of his personality even if it did cause some problems from time to time and make it hard for his parents to try and figure out what got him feeling so upset and sad sometimes. Yet even if it was strange it still seemed perfectly normal for Mom.

In fact during the last couple of months she had an odd feeling develop in her towards him. Sometimes she would get an odd sense of familiarity from him as if she he were someone she had known long ago but hadn't seen for awhile

and now it was as if they were picking up where they had left off. It was a ridiculous idea, he was only three years old after all. As she looked down at him she entertained the idea that he really had come from someplace else, and wondered how she would feel if it was actually true and not just the strange imagination of a toddler at work. It was a quick decision for her, what she had said was true, it wouldn't have changed anything he was her kid and she loved him.

Tyler was feeling better as he let a warm fuzzy feeling spread through his body. he could see there were only two possible scenario's in front of him. Either Fiona would return with a way to reverse the spell or he would have to just simply grow up again. After everything that had gone through his head at the doctors office he realized if that was to be his fate then there was no place he rather do it than here with the West family, it wouldn't be so bad he concluded.

“Mommy,” Tyler said.

“What is it darling?” Mom asked.

Tyler hesitated for a moment. Maybe this was just his toddler side talking but he didn't care.

“I love you,” he whispered into her ear. He felt his Mom squeeze him a little tighter.

I love you too buddy,” Mom said. “I love you too.

Chapter 20

One of the Family: Part 20 - Chapter 20

Tyler was laying on the couch in the living room after having returned from the doctor's office. He was resting his head in his Mom's lap as she scrolled on her phone with Opie perched atop his head as an episode of Spongebob played on the tv. He was not really paying much attention to the show however as he was caught up in his own thoughts. He had basically told his Mom the truth. Given that he had done it with the vocabulary of a toddler it probably wasn't very clear. However their had been enough of the truth contained within to get his point across He glanced up at her for a quick second before he averted his gaze. Even though he had been assured that even if she did believe him it wouldn't have mattered he worried that his parents might begin to think there was something wrong with him mentally. He remembered back to the conversation he had overheard that night in the hotel room when they had thought he had been asleep between them. They had voiced similar concerns. They had dismissed it as nothing to worry about. But now what if what he said gave them pause to think a little more on it?

Tyler heard the garage door open and a moment later the kids came bounding in through the door. Tyler sat up curious to see why they had gone to the store in the first place. Jace and Mallory came over to the couch.

“Mommy you have to go,” Mallory said.

“What do you mean?” Mom said in a playful tone fully aware of what they had been doing.

“Yeah, yeah, you can't look,” Jace said as he and Mallory both grabbed one of their Mom's arms pulling her off the couch and leading her out of the room with added shouts of not spoiling the surprise. Connor did not join in opting instead to take a seat on the couch next to Tyler.

“Everything go okay?” Connor asked.

“Yeah,” Tyler said with some apprehension. “Or well somden did happen.”

Connor looked at Tyler expectantly wondering if Tyler was about to tell him about a slip and that he had lost some new ability he had previously had.

“I kinda told Mommy the truth,” Tyler said as he wrung his hands a little.

“So she knows?” Connor asked with a shocked expression.

“No not really, I don't tink she bewieved me,” Tyler said as he watched Connor's face relax a little.

“But I still tink I said too much. They going to tink I cayzy.”

Connor rested his head back into the couch.

“I wouldn't worry about it too much,” Connor said with a smirk. “They already think its normal for you to say some weird stuff.”

“I don't say weed stuff,” Tyler said with some offense. Which was met with a laugh by Connor. Just then Dad came through the door carrying several large shopping bags in his arms.

“Your Mom out of the room?” he asked.

“Jace and Mallory did their job,” Connor reported.

“Good, meet me up in the bedroom,” Dad said walking into the kitchen. “You too Ty.”

“Why did you go to the store?” Tyler asked still not having the foggiest idea of what was going on.

“C'mon you'll see,” Connor said as he got off the couch. Tyler followed him upstairs to their parents room.

Upon walking in Tyler could see his Dad had laid out a bunch of boxes on the bed.

“Hey just the guy I wanted to see,” Dad said addressing Tyler as he held his hands behind his back. “gotcha something.”

“For me?” Tyler asked wondering what it could be. His Dad then revealed a small plastic package that he was hiding behind his back. As Tyler took it into his hands he realized it was a package of underwear that his Mom had promised him.

“Can I wear them now?” Tyler asked as his eyes went wide.

“Sure,” Dad said as he took the package and tore it open and removed a pair. He knelt down and removed Tyler's pants before tearing the sides of Tyler's pull-up and then holding the underwear out for Tyler to step into before pulling them

up. “Take a look,” Dad said pointing to a full length mirror in the room. Tyler took a look at himself in the mirror. The underwear was yellow with blue piping and waistband. They had Cookie Monster on the front with pictures of cookies printed all over. They were padded but still thinner than a pull-up. Tyler smiled as he looked at himself.

“I like 'em” Tyler said turning to his Dad.

“They look great on you,” Dad said. “But listen there are a couple of rules. First you can only wear them around the house, and if you have an accident you'll have to wear pull-ups for the rest of the day, okay?”

“I'll stay dry, promise” Tyler nodded before turning back to the mirror to admire himself some more. Jace and Mallory then walked into the room.

“I got new undies,” Tyler said upon seeing his two other siblings enter the room.

“They're so cute,” Mallory cooed.

“I'm a big boy now,” Tyler said turning to Jace. Tyler watched as Jace's face curled up into a smirk.

“Yeah you are a big kid,” Jace said giving Tyler a pat on the head. Tyler was enthused that even Jace had to admit that he was grown up now. What he didn't know was that Dad had already told the kids to be supportive as the training underwear was supposed to give Tyler some confidence and give him something to work towards. As his excitement tempered down Tyler finally turned his attention towards the

rest of the items on the bed.

“What all this?” Tyler asked peering out over the items.

“Their gifts,” Mallory said as she jumped up onto the bed and grabbed a white box.

“Gifts?” Tyler said still confused.

“Its Mom's birthday on Saturday so we went to the store to get her presents,” Connor explained. Each kid went and grabbed their respective gifts that they had picked out for their Mom. Mallory had gotten her a new pajama set. Jace had gotten her a gift basket filled with different coffee's, a mug and a variety of cookies and biscuits. While Connor had gotten her a foot spa. Tyler felt a little awkward seeing that everybody had something to give. He didn't want to be the only one who didn't have something.

“I want to give her something too,” Tyler whined feeling it was pretty unfair that he hadn't been taken along for such an important thing, even if he had a doctor's appointment couldn't they have waited?

“We got you something to give her,” Jace said as he set a shoe box in front of Tyler on the bed. Tyler opened up the top to reveal a pair of slippers. Tyler looked at them with a less than impressed look.

“She really wanted a new pair of slippers,” Dad said taking a seat on the bed next to the slippers trying to let Tyler know it was a perfectly good gift despite the boy's dour expression.

“I wanted to pick it out,” Tyler grumbled a little as his shoulder's slumped.

“Sorry buddy,” Dad said putting a hand on Tyler's shoulder. “I wouldn't have time tomorrow to take you guys to the store and you were busy today.”

Tyler knew he was being picky and that his Mom wouldn't really care whether or not he had been the one to pick out the gift, and its not like he really had any money to buy her something himself. Yet he was still an adult and the whole thing seemed dis-ingenious to him.

“It won't be from me,” Tyler said with a sigh.

“You should make her something,” Mallory suggested.

“Now that is a great idea Mal,” Dad said as Mallory grinned at being praised for her clever suggestion.

“If you make her something then it will really be from you.”

“Make what?” Tyler asked not really seeing what he could possibly make that would make her happy.

“You could draw her a picture,” Connor said. “She's always asking you to do that.”

“That's true,” Dad said as he looked at Tyler. “Your Mom just said yesterday how she doesn't have anything of yours hung up on the fridge. I bet she would be really happy to get something like that from you.”

Tyler thought on the suggestion for a moment. It was true that

she was always asking him to make her something with the little art supplies he had in his play corner. However Tyler wasn't much of an artist as an adult or rather he was a writer not a drawer but its not like he was going to be writing anything worthy of being a gift right now.

“We can use the stuff in my room,” Mallory said launching herself off the bed and grabbing Tyler by the arm and taking him to her room.

She sat Tyler at the the little table in her room and then began to pull out paper, crayons and markers. Tyler sat with a blank piece of paper in front of him. With no idea in his mind the blank page was an intimidating foe for any artist. Mallory sat across from him already drawing out some picture.

“What'cha gonna make?” she asked looking up at him.

“I don't know,” Tyler said puckering up his lips. Mallory thought for a moment holding the end of the marker against her cheek.

“You should draw Mommy,” Mallory said. Tyler looked at her as he considered the idea. In his head it seemed like a great suggestion. It was somewhat common to give someone a portrait of themselves as a gift after all. Tyler got to work doing his best to draw out the image of his Mom. He was trying his best to make it look good. He started over about a dozen times not being happy with the results.

“How's it going in here?” Dad asked as he entered the room and looked down at the table at Tyler's current drawing. Tyler

set down his marker looking at his current attempt. It was certainly his best yet, but his regressed motor skills could only carry him so far and while it looked maybe a little better than what the average three year old could do it definitely still looked like something a toddler without any idea of perspective or artistic sense would conjure.

“Bad,” Tyler said as he stood up and walked away in a huff. There was no way he would ever be able to make anything good enough for a gift. What was worse is that he had actually been somewhat enthused by the idea. He had been thinking a lot about what would happen when Fiona came back with a way to reverse the spell. Tyler knew that his parents and family had done a lot for him and he had begun to think of something he could do to pay them back. Money was out of the question as he didn't have any even as an adult but he still felt he should do something. This gift was his opportunity to in someway express his gratitude, especially towards his temporary Mom. But there was no way he was ever going to be able to create something that would actually show her how much he appreciated her kindness towards him.

Dad took a seat on the small chair which was somewhat comical as it made him look like a giant.

“Ty did you really draw this all by yourself?” Dad said holding up the picture.

“Yeah,” Tyler said looking at the ground, sure that his Dad was going to make fun of it.

“I didn't even have to help him,” Mallory added. Dad looked

at Tyler for a moment before setting the paper back down.

“Tyler come here,” Dad said as he motioned him over. Tyler walked over before his Dad pulled him onto his lap.

“This is really good,” Dad said. “So we should make it official,” Dad said as he took a marker and wrote “To Mommy” up in one corner. “And now we'll write from Tyler down here,” Dad said as he went to the bottom of the page.

“Wait,” Tyler yelped. His Dad stopped and looked at him. “Love,” Tyler said bashfully as he pointed at the paper. His Dad smiled.

“You're right,” his Dad said as he wrote out the word. “Now sign your name,” Dad said handing the marker to Tyler. Tyler did as he was told and wrote out his own name. He had gotten a lot better at writing his letters since he had been working in his activity book though he still did have troubles with his y's and accidentally wrote it backwards.

“She will love this,” Dad remarked. Tyler scrunched up his face. No matter what assurances his Dad offered he just wouldn't allow himself to think it was anything but worthless, not good enough for what he wanted to say.

“It's dumb” Tyler said as he put his hands down on either side of the paper, holding it down so his Dad couldn't take it away to give to his Mom. “Its not special.”

Dad let out a deep hum from his throat as if he was in deep thought.

“Its not dumb,” Dad said. “But I think I have an idea of how we can make it more special. Mallory can you get out your finger painting kit.”

Mallory nodded as she got up from the table and disappeared into her closet reappearing a moment later with a plastic case with jars of paint in them. She set it on the table as Dad took out a jar of red paint and blue paint. He took a paper plate and poured a puddle of each color out.

“Alright bud,” Dad said as he took Tyler's hands and put each hand in a puddle before lifting them up and then placings them on either side of the page where Tyler's hands had been planted moments earlier. Dad then lifted up Tyler's hands and revealed the red and blue hand prints now on the drawing. “Now she'll have something to remember how big you were when you made this for her,” Dad said. “And once this dries I'll put it in a nice frame so it will look really special.”

“I like it,” Tyler said in a whisper. It seemed perfect. There on the piece of paper was this version of himself memorialized. The version of himself that she loved.

“Daddy I want to paint too,” Mallory said.

“Well I don't think we have time, but after dinner I'll get you two set up in the kitchen and you can paint in there where we don't have to worry too much about a mess,” Dad said as he eyed the carpeted floor of the room.

“We get to paint,” Mallory exclaimed clapping her hands together.

“How does that sound?” Dad asked Tyler.

“I want ta,” Tyler said with a grin. It had actually been fun to dip his hands into the paint and Tyler found himself wanting to do more.

“Good, but first dinner,” Dad said as he stood up with Tyler in his arms and took him to the bathroom to wash his hands before they went down to dinner. Upon entering the kitchen Tyler was excited to show his Mom his new undies.

“Look at you,” she had exclaimed reaching for her phone to snap a few pictures.

“I'm a big kid,” Tyler said happily as he even posed for a few pics.

True to his word after dinner Dad had Mallory and Tyler set up at the table with the finger paints; wrapping a garbage back around each of their necks as makeshifts smocks. Tyler was enjoying himself as he put more and more layers on his paper, the colors melding together into a deep brownish purple. By the time he was done he had just as much paint all over himself as was on his paper.

“Look Mommy,” Tyler said as he took his painting over to his Mom who was washing dishes after dinner.

“Oh its beautiful,” she cooed as she looked at the paper. “I'm going to put it on the fridge.”

“No you cant have it,” Tyler said with some alarm as he stepped back. Hearing that she wanted to put it on the fridge

caused some anxiety to bubble up inside of him. As he looked at his painting he began to see how terrible it was. In fact he started to feel some shame at how he had actually thought it was something worth showing to her in the first place. Not too mention he had just made her something better and didn't want this painting to be the first thing he gave her.

“Tyler I think its pretty, can't I please have it?” she asked. Tyler stood seeing the situation he had gotten himself in. He looked at the trash can thinking he could just throw it away. Yet he knew she would just take it out. If he tore it up though then she wouldn't be able to hang it up, but she would probably be sad. He saw Dad walk into the kitchen and an idea sprang into his mind, however he knew this would also probably hurt his Mom's feelings, but there was no other option.

“Its for Daddy,” Tyler said as he walked over to his Dad and handed him the picture. He then motioned for his Dad to lean down. “Don't put it on the fidge,” he whispered into his Dad's ear.

“You're sure you don't want to give it to her?” Dad asked.

“I want the gift to be special,” Tyler said with a nod.

“I get it,” Dad said with a chuckle. Tyler turned to see his Mom leaned up against the counter with a sad look on her face.

“So-sorry,” Tyler said with a frown.

“Its okay if you want to give it to your Dad,” Mom said with

a sigh. Tyler hung his head low. Even if she said it was okay, he still felt terrible about the whole thing. He felt as though he had hurt her deeply. He would just have to hope that when he gave her his gift she would forgive him.

It was at that moment that Tyler noticed the damp feeling spreading on the front of his crotch as a small trickle of liquid ran down his legs and began to form a small puddle underneath him. His mouth dropped as he realized he had just had an accident. His eyes went wide as he looked from his Mom to his Dad who looked on a little surprised at what had just happened.

“I..I...I” Tyler stammered as he looked down at the front of his new undies that had grown dark from his mishap.

“Oh Ty,” Dad said as he lifted him up under the armpits and began to carry him out of the kitchen. “Looks like its bath time.”

Tyler sat in the tub as his Dad scrubbed the paint off of him he couldn't help but sniffle a little doing his best to hold back his tears. How could he have done that?

“It's not a big deal, you know,” his Dad said as he poured some water over the boy's hair. Tyler pulled his knees to his chest as he hid his face.

“But I fail,” Tyler said “and I promised.”

“That's okay,” Dad said as he ran his hand through Tyler's hair pulling his head up in the process.

“Mistakes are how we learn, and we only got you the undies because Mommy and I thought you were doing so well.”

“Really?” Tyler asked still unconvinced.

“Yes, really,” Dad said. “Besides its almost bedtime and you weren't going to wear them to sleep in anyways. So tomorrow you can try again.”

“I guess,” Tyler said as his Dad drained the tub and wrapped him up in a towel. If anything at least he had had an accident at a convenient time for his parents. “Now no more moping,” Dad said as he carried Tyler off to his room to get him ready for bed.

The time had finally come as the family was gathered in the living room on Saturday morning to give Mom her gifts. Tyler was sitting cross- legged with his wrapped present in his lap in the big recliner that was positioned a little ways from the couch as the rest of the kids were crowded around Mom who sat in the middle of the couch. Tyler had been excited to give his gift but had opted to go last. As he watched her open up the nice gifts the other kids had gotten her from the store he began to get worried. She seemed to love their gifts so much each of them had seemed to pick something out for her that was perfect for her and exactly what she wanted, and all he had was some stupid drawing he had made, how could it ever compare? They were after all her real kids and they knew her so well. She then opened up the slippers that he had been meant to give her.

“All right, new slippers just what I needed,” she said as she

pulled them out of the box. Tyler was now regretting not giving them to her himself, even if it hadn't truly been from him at least she would have liked it. “Thanks everybody,” Mom said as she set down the slipper box. “Everything was wonderful.”

“There's one more from Ty ty,” Mallory announced. Mom looked across at Tyler still in the chair.

“Tyler you got me something?” Mom asked with a smile. Tyler curled up into a ball.

“Ty whats with you?” Dad asked as he knelt down by the chair.

“I don't wanna,” Tyler whispered as he curled up tighter.

“Why not? You worked really hard on it, and she'll love it,” Dad reasoned.

“Its not good,” Tyler said as he turned his back to his Dad.

“That simply won't do,” Dad said with a chuckle as he lifted Tyler off of the chair setting him down on the floor. “Now go on,” Dad said as he gave a him a gentle shove forward. Tyler could see there was no way out of this. He was going to be forced to give her the stupid little thing he had made and he was going to have to see the disappointment in her face. He walked forward and held the gift out to her with shaky hands.

“Now lets see what this is,” Mom said as she unwrapped the gift. Tyler looked away not able to watch. There was silence. Tyler turned to look at her slowly. She was covering her

mouth with her hand as she looked up at him. “You made this for me?” she asked.

“I know its...” Tyler began before he felt himself pulled into her arms.

“I love it,” Mom said.

“Really?” Tyler asked as his Mom loosened her hug on him.

“Of course," she cooed. “This is the most perfect gift you could have gotten me. Now I'll always be able to remember just how you were, even when you are all grown up.”

Tyler smiled a little as he looked down at the framed drawing. He could see that it truly made her happy to have his gift. All his doubts and worries had once again proven to be false. He hoped that when Fiona reversed the spell that the drawing would not disappear. Even if she didn't remember him he wished that when she looked at it she would still feel happy and in some way still be able to feel the gratitude he wanted to show her. Perhaps that would be enough for him.

Chapter 21

One of the Family: Part 21 - Chapter 21

Tyler was in a foul mood as he sat in his car seat with his arms crossed. He fidgeted against the straps that were bothering him as they pressed down on his diaper that he was wearing under his Halloween costume. He had actually been looking forward to the day when Connor had told him about it. The family was headed to the Halloween fair. An event the town held every weekend before Halloween day. There were going to be booths and games set up all over town and the kids would get to do some trick or treating early. Tyler had seen it as a good opportunity to try and as Fiona had put it, open himself up to new experiences. In his former life Tyler had never actually been trick or treating before. His Dad had not been a fan and had never taken Tyler out and as he had gotten older his Dad had put him in charge of handing out the candy, leaving no time for Tyler to go out himself. If anything this had been the perfect opportunity for Tyler to get a taste of something he had missed out on.

He had been further drawn into the festivities when his Dad had taken all the kids out costume shopping the previous week. Tyler had walked up and down the aisles looking at the costumes in his size. Some of them were far too cutesy which his Mom would probably like if he chose something like that. A lot of the other costumes would see him dressing up as a character from one of the little kids show he seemed to like

these days. He briefly flirted with the idea of dressing up as the Cookie Monster or Chase the police dog but dismissed the idea out of hand. This was going to be his sole opportunity to experience Halloween as a kid, so he had to find the perfect costume. That's when he came upon a wolf costume. He grabbed it off the rack immediately, he knew this was the one for him.

His Mom had let him try it on once they had gotten back home. It consisted of a one piece bodysuit that zipped up in the back complete with gray shaggy fur and a tail. There was also a hood that flipped up with ears on top. Tyler had been completely taken with the costume as he spent the rest of the day running around the house pretending he and Opie were a part of a wolf pack. He loved shaking his butt to make the tail swish through the air and jumping up on the furniture as if it were some overlook in the woods he could spot his prey from. He would then let out a loud howl before jumping off and running off after his imaginary query.

At bedtime his Mom had finally coaxed him out of the costume as she pulled out the skeleton pajamas she had let him pick out at the store a month earlier. When she had finally gotten him dressed in them she turned off the lights and to Tyler's surprise the bones glowed in the dark. His Mom had taken a video of him running around the room which she let him watch afterwards. Tyler had been absolutely delighted by the illusion that he had been nothing but a bunch of bones. On the whole Tyler had enjoyed the entire seasonal run up to Halloween, that was until this

morning when his Mom had taken him up to his room to get ready for the fair.

She had laid Tyler's costume out on his bed as Tyler sat next to it wearing a pair of white training undies with a red waistband and Elmo's face prominently displayed on the back. That's when it had happened. She had laid him back and pulled the undies off. Tyler had expected this as he was still not allowed to wear the undies outside of the house since his accidents were still far too frequent. Yet instead of pulling out a pull-up she had gotten a diaper. As she moved to get it on him Tyler had scurried backwards sitting up with some alarm.

“Diaper?” he had asked with some confusion.

“Yep,” Mom had said as she grabbed him by the ankles before pulling him back towards her. “This is what you gotta wear today.”

“I don't want diapers,” Tyler had mewled as he rolled to his side. “I wear pull-ups 'memba.”

“I know honey, but your costume will be hard to remove quickly and we'll be walking a lot too so we might not be able to make it to a bathroom quick enough.” His Mom had explained.

“No diaper,” Tyler had protested once again rolling further away before sitting up into a ball with his back towards his Mom. This was his one Halloween and he wanted it to be perfect, there was no way he was going to let her put a diaper

on him, as if he were some little baby, the fact that he was still in diapers at night not crossing his mind for an instant.

“Either you wear the diaper or me and you will just stay home,” Mom had said issuing her ultimatum. Tyler had looked back at her with an alarmed look. He really couldn't decide what made him more like a little kid. Having to wear the diaper or throwing a fit about it in the first place. Eventually he relented letting her put it on him, but he still wasn't happy about it.

As the car began to enter into the town center Tyler looked out his window as he began to spy all the festivities that had been set up. Fall decorations abounded. There were stacks of pumpkins all along the sidewalks. The store windows had paintings of fall foliage or skeletons and black cats. A large banner hung over main street that read. “Halloween Fest.” Tyler was actually beginning to get excited again seeing all the tents and booths set up in the park. Dad found a parking spot and everyone got out of the car. Dad opened the trunk and pulled something out before unfolding it. Tyler furrowed his brow upon seeing that it was a stroller no doubt meant for him.

“C'mon little wolf,” Dad said patting the seat of the stroller motioning for Tyler to get in.

“Don't wanna,” Tyler said crossing his arms. Tyler had never ridden in a stroller before and he didn't understand why all of sudden now he had to. It was then that he realized this was the first family outing of this nature he had been on. Dad gave

him a questioning look. He was always riding in the cart at the store as well, maybe this was normal?

“Buddy we are going to be doing a lot of walking today, and their will be a lot of people around too. I don't want you getting lost.”

“I won't get lost, I can walk,” Tyler said as he furrowed his brows puckering his lips into a pout.

“Tyler,” Dad said with some firmness.

“We just got here, he's probably not tired yet,” Connor interjected. “If he holds my hand it will be okay right?” Connor said as he grabbed Tyler's hand.

“That should be fine, but don't let go of him for even a second,” Mom said with a a raised eyebrow. “You know how your brother likes to wander.”

Connor looked down at Tyler and gave him a sympathetic smile. Tyler just grumbled under his breath. Why did everyone treat him like he was so helpless all the time? The family began to walk around as they decided what to do first.

“I want to play some games,” Jace said.

“I want a caramel apple,” Mallory shouted.

“We should go through the haunted house,” Connor suggested. As the kids continued to shout out suggestions Dad sat looking at the brochure he had gotten upon first walking in.

“Enough,” he finally said silencing the shouts of the eager kids. “There will be time enough for all that. I think our first stop should be the trick or treating area, and then we should get a spot for the parade,” he said. The rest of the group seemed happy with the itinerary.

As they walked towards their first stop Connor and Tyler were a little behind as Tyler's legs could only go so fast. Tyler spotted a booth with some flashing skulls off in the distance. He moved a little to make his way towards it finding it interesting before he felt himself pulled back a little. He looked back a little surprised having forgotten that Connor was holding his hand.

“Hey now,” Connor said with a smirk. “Don't get me in trouble already.”

“S-sorry,” Tyler mumbled feeling a little embarrassed that he had already tried to wander off not even five minutes in. How careless could he really be? He really was a little kid who needed somebody watching after him.

“Its all right, you're just excited” Connor said with an understanding tone. “It must be kind of cool to get to re-live all this stuff. Dressing up, trick or treating. Did you like Halloween when you were a kid?”

“I didn't really get to do this kind of stuff when I was a kid,” Tyler said. “My Dad didn't like it so I never got to go out.” Tyler admitted with some melancholy. Connor came to a stop.

“You mean you've never trick or treated before?” Connor

asked with a shocked and appalled look.

“No,” Tyler replied with a shake of his head.

“Oh man, well lets hurry,” Connor said with some urgency as he quickened his pace to catch up with the rest of the family all but pulling Tyler along. They made it to a parking lot area that was lined with cars that had their trunks open with people standing beside them as a swarm of children went from one car to the next. As they walked up to the entrance a woman looked them over. Apparently to get in you had to be wearing some sort of costume, parents of course not required. Tyler and Mallory were the only two wearing their full costumes, she was going as a witch and had the witches hat a black dress and black and white striped leggings. Jace would be going as a Jason Voorhies esque knock off complete with a large plastic machete and hockey mask that had a pump that he could squeeze to make it look like he had blood splatters all over the mask. This was a choice Mom had been none too pleased that Dad had let him get it. She had told him that he could wear the full costume Halloween night but not too the festival, so he was only wearing the tattered blue jumpsuit. Connor had elected to go as a viking but was only wearing the horned helmet. The lady found them satisfactory as she handed them each a plastic jack o lanter bucket to use, making special mention of how cute Tyler was. As Tyler stepped into the parking lot he looked around with a confused look.

“What is this?” he asked.

“Its trunk or treat,” Connor said. “We go from car to car and get candy.”

Tyler pursed his lips, this wasn't what he had been imagining. First of all it was light out and second they were in a parking lot.

“This is lame,” Tyler grumbled.

“Don't worry we'll do the real thing on Halloween,” Connor reassured him. “But free candy is free candy.”

“Okay gang, me and your Mom will wait here,” Dad said as he and Mom took a seat on a bench.

“You three keep an eye on Ty,” Mom said. Tyler gave her a sour look. “And you keep an eye on Opie,” Mom said with a chuckle as she stuffed the wolf into Tyler's bucket. Tyler turned away hiding his scowl. As the kids made their way to the first trunk Tyler removed Opie and began to carry him. He and Opie were a pack after all.

“Tyler you have to say it,” Jace announced.

“Say what?” Tyler asked.

“Trick or treat,” Jace replied.

“How come?” Tyler asked a little confused at Jace's insistence.

“Because the adults will think its really cute if the baby says it, we'll get more candy that way,”

“I'm not gunna say it, I'm not a baby,” Tyler grumbled.

“Don't be nervous,” Mallory said putting her arm around Tyler. “Here I'll show you how,” she said before leading Tyler off. Connor held Jace back a little.

“Jace, lay off of him,” Connor said.

“What are you talking about?” Jace asked with a clueless look on his face.

“You know the baby comments bother him,” Connor said.

“He is a baby. I mean he's wearing a diaper and everything,” Jace snickered glancing ahead at Tyler, the bulge and outline of his diaper noticeable under his costume.

“Jace, for real,” Connor said with a serious look. “You know as far as little brother's go he's pretty good. Think about it he doesn't take your stuff, he doesn't tattle on you, heck he tries to take the blame half the time. The least we could do as his older brothers is try and make this day special for him.”

“Whats the big deal about today, its not like he wasn't here last time.” Jace said. Connor pursed his lips remembering that Jace probably had memories of Tyler being with them the last time they had attended the Halloween Festival.

“Yeah, but he was really little back then, so he definitely doesn't remember it,” Connor offered as an excuse. “So this is the like the first time for him, and we should make it a good one.” Jace looked askance for a moment before finally shrugging.

“Okay, fine,” Jace said. Connor was relieved to see that his

comment didn't come off as in congruent with Jace's memories of how Tyler had supposedly been last year. The two boys caught up to Tyler and Mallory who had already moved onto the second car.

“Okay, just like I did,” Mallory prodded. Tyler held out his bucket.

“Trick or treat,” Tyler said halfheartedly.

“Aren't you just adorable,” the older lady said. “Take a little extra,” she said dropping and extra candy bar into Tyler's bucket. The boy gave a look of surprise as he turned to look at Jace who gave him a smirk and nod. Sometimes Jace really did know how to game the system. After another twenty minutes the kids came to the end and returned to their parents.

“You got so much Ty,” Mom said as he handed her his bucket.

“I gots the most,” Tyler said in a sing song voice as he rocked his head from side to side, his mood having turned around.

“Okay we better hurry if we want to get a good spot for the parade,” Dad said. Tyler again took Connor's hand surprisingly not having to be told to as the family began to walk. Connor looked down at his smiling little brother and became a little worried that Tyler had slipped, knowing that it would cause him some distress later on.

“Ty, you doing okay?” Connor asked in a low voice.

“Hmmm, yeah,” Tyler replied a little confused by Connor's concern.

“I just thought you might have slipped,” Connor said with some relief.

“I'm just having fun,” Tyler said with some defensiveness. “Its not like I'm going overboard or nothing. I'll be fine”

“Sure,” Connor replied. “You know you best.”

The parade site was all the way across town and Tyler felt his feet start to become sore as his pace was slowing to a crawl. Mom turned back at one point to see Connor and Tyler lagging a good deal behind the rest of them.

“You need a rest honey?” Mom asked as she came up to the two boys having doubled backed to them.

“A little,” Tyler said as he panted a little. Mom picked him up and carried him as they caught up to the group before she deposited him in the stroller.

“Mommy noooo,” Tyler whined as she strapped him in.

“Now, now, you just get comfy and we'll be there in no time. And take a drink,” she said handing him a sippy cup full of water. “You look hot.” she said as she pulled down his hood.

“I coulda made it,” Tyler grumbled under his breath. Mom began to push the stroller. He begrudgingly began to drink from his cup. As much as he didn't want to admit it, all the walking had given him a pretty good work out and his mouth was very dry. They arrived on the street and got a spot at the front for the parade. Tyler sat in his stroller with a sucker in his mouth that his Mom had given him. As the parade started

Tyler started to enjoy it. Some of the floats were pretty inventive and some of the costumed people had pretty elaborate get ups. Some of them even threw candy out into the crowd that would send a swarm of kids scurrying to grab it up. Tyler pushed against his straps as he whined for his Mom to let him free. She had denied him telling him he wasn't allowed and she didn't want him running into the street before giving him another piece of candy from his bucket to placate him. Tyler sat back in a pout. He could feel himself starting to get upset. If anything he was being reminded of his old life. This was the sort of event Tyler would have loved to find when blowing into some unknown town, a perfect opportunity for a story of some sort and a good excuse to enjoy the local flavor. Tyler was beginning to once again feel that his freedom had been taken from him. His real Dad had never taken him to anything like those sorts of things, not that the town he grew up in even did stuff like that. A loud sound then rang out bringing Tyler back to the present. The sound of loud engines revving came down the street as some people dressed up like skeletons riding dirt bikes came into view. They were doing wheelies and donuts in front of the crowd creating a lot of smoke. Just then a memory flashed before Tyler.

He had been on the road as usual and came upon a dirt bike race being held in some podunk little town in the Midwest. He had stopped to take in the sights. He had even started chatting up some of the racers and interviewing them while taking pictures for his story. One of the racers had been kind enough to let him take a spin on the bike. It had been an

exhilarating ride for Tyler feeling the speed and wind in his hair. It had been a very good day as he had ended it getting drunk in a bar with some of the locals. He had even sold the story a week later.

Back in the present Tyler's Mom came to his side.

“Its not too loud is it?” His Mom asked as she waved her hand trying to clear some of the smoke. Tyler didn't respond at first as he sat mesmerized by the sight of the bikes and the sound of the engines whirring. The bikes then moved on as Tyler turned to his Mom.

“Mommy I want a bike like that,” he said. His Mom frowned before giving him a sarcastic smile.

“Not in a million years, those things are dangerous,” she said before giving him a pat on the head and returning to watching the parade. Tyler grimaced at the blunt response. It was a very on brand response for a parent. He had thought a lot about if there was no way to return to normal. He had adopted the attitude that he should try to be optimistic and look at it as an opportunity to do all the things he hadn't gotten a chance to try in his old life. His Mom's response had been a reminder that if that did happen he would still be under parental authority, and would not get those opportunities if his parents said no. He wondered how good of a deal it would be?

“You liked the dirtbikes?” his Dad said leaning in next to him.

“Yeah they was so cool,” Tyler said in a melancholic timbre.

“You know I had a dirtbike when I was a kid,” his Dad mused. “Remind me in a couple of years alright,” Dad said with a mischievous grin and a wink. Tyler giggled a little. Even if one parent said no, that didn't mean the other one would.

The parade winded down as the family made their way back to the main area. Tyler had hoped he would be released from the stroller, but no such luck. As they stood around amid all the other booths Dad was once again looking at the brochure.

“Connor wanted to do the haunted house,” Dad said. “Looks like its just over there,” Dad said folding up the brochure and placing it in his back pocket as he lead the way. Tyler looked upon the imposing structure. It was something one would find at a fairground. It was a black box of a building with faded paintings of skeletons and bats on the outside. Loud noises emanated from it as flashing strobe lights could be seen from the doorway.

“All right, whose going in?” Dad asked turning towards the kids.

“I'm definitely going,” Connor said with some enthusiasm.

“Me, too,” Jace said. Mallory gave an uncomfortable look.

“It looks...scary,” she said as she grabbed onto her Mom's hand and shrunk back.

“Its supposed to be,” Jace retorted with some smugness. “That's why its cool. "

“I wanna go,” Tyler piped up from his stroller. It looked like good fun to him, plus he didn't want to be left out, especially if Jace and Connor were going.

“I don't know Ty,” Mom said with some apprehension. “This might just be for the big kids.”

“I am a big kid,” Tyler said with some offense. “I wanna do it. Pwease,” Tyler said casting a pair of puppy dog eyes at her. Mom seemed unmoved by his pleading.

“Whats the harm,” Dad interjected as he unstrapped Tyler from the stroller letting him up onto his feet. “Its just a little haunted house. Not like he's asking to go into a burning building or anything.”

Mom gave Dad a slightly exasperated look.

“If he wants to give it go we should let him,” Dad reasoned further with a grin as he took out his wallet and gave Connor a ten dollar bill.

“Fine,” Mom said relenting. “But you're the one staying up tonight if this gives him nightmares.”

“Nah,” Dad said. “That doesn't sound like my Ty guy, right?” Dad asked glancing down towards Tyler.

“I'm not scared,” Tyler said with some confidence.

“You two keep an eye on him in there,” Dad said giving a serious look towards his two older boys.

“We will,” Jace sighed as he began to walk off. The boys

approached the front desk where a bored twenty something sat under an umbrella.

“Three of you?” he asked looking at the group.

“Yep,” Connor answered.

“You sure your little brother will be okay?” the man asked looking squarely at Tyler.

“I guess,” Connor said giving Tyler a cursory glance.

“Whatever,six bucks” the man said with a shrug. Tyler gave a little scowl. He was getting pretty annoyed with the fact that everybody seemed so concerned with him getting scared. Wasn't that the point? He understood how people saw him, yet the fact remained he was an adult still, so he wished that people would give him some credit.

Connor got his change and they were then allowed to enter. Jace took point as they walked through a darkened hallway. All of a sudden there was a bright flash of light illuminating a vampire mannequin with blood dripping from its mouth as an ear piercing wailed played. Tyler jolted back a little. His heart was sent racing.

“You good,” Connor asked looking down at him.

“Y-yeah,” Tyler nodded. It had certainly startled him but it was more due to the abrupt loud noise than anything else. As they ventured deeper they came across more flashing lights and loud noises along with mannequins made to look like monsters. Tyler was becoming more bothered as each new

one got to him more and more. He clasped onto Connor's shirt.

“I-I want to go back,” Tyler whimpered.

“We're almost at the end... I think,” Connor said as he looked around a little unsure himself. “Plus we kind of lost Jace, so we gotta find him. So hang in there. Why don't you just close your eyes and I'll lead you through,” Connor suggested. Tyler did as he was told covering his eyes as Connor lead him along from behind with his hands on Tyler's shoulders. As they kept on walking more noises and flashing lights erupted. The noise was starting to become overwhelming.

They had found themselves in the middle of a large room. Screams and wails seemed to bounce off the walls.

“I wanna leave,” Tyler said in a panic.

“I can't find the exit,” Connor shouted over the barrage of sound. Tyler opened his eyes and was met with flashing lights and monsters every which way he turned. There seemed to be no way out.

“I want Mommy,” Tyler screeched as he broke away from Connor.

“Ty wait up,” Connor shouted.

Tyler was in no condition to wait, he was in a state of panic. As he stepped into a hallway another ear piercing wail erupted as a zombie like monster shot out from the wall gesticulating as if it were being shocked. Tyler felt the breath

go out of his chest as he felt the strength leave his legs and he crumpled onto the ground bawling his eyes out, just like the helpless toddler he felt like at the moment.

“I've got you,” Connor said coming from behind pulling him up to his feet and clasping his hand tight as he pulled Tyler along. The exit had only been a few steps from the zombie as Connor got Tyler back outside into the sunlight.

“Oh there you are,” Jace said turning around having been waiting at the exit. “Whats with him?” Jace asked looking down at Tyler still crying.

“He got a little too scared,” Connor said with some ire as he walked past Jace feeling that it was perfectly obvious what had happened. Connor got Tyler back to the rest of the family. Letting go of Tyler's hand and sending him off towards Mom.

“Oh baby come here,” Mom said as she scooped Tyler up into her arms bouncing him up and down a little as she rubbed his back. “It was too scary, wasn't it?” she asked. Tyler gave a little moan as he buried his face into her shoulder. His crying had subsided a fair bit now that he was safe in his Mom's arms. Yet he still felt completely ashamed. Not only had he gotten scared by a third rate fairground haunted house but in his eyes he had failed his Dad once again after telling him that he wasn't scared. This seemed to be a pattern for Tyler. He was always promising his Dad he was going to do things and then he would inevitably screw them up. It was just the same as it had been with his real Dad. Tyler didn't know how

he was going to face him now. Tyler lifted his head and looked over to his Dad who was talking with Connor and Jace who were telling him what it was like inside, giving him every detail of each of the mannequins as he listened on with a smile on his face, he didn't even seem to notice Tyler. The boy could only surmise that he was disappointed in him.

“What did I tell you,” Mom said accusingly towards Dad. “It was too scary for him.”

Dad seemed unbothered as he sat back on the bench with a smirk as he held his hands up.

“It was a haunted house, that's the point,” Dad said getting up from the bench and walking up to Mom as he took Tyler out of her arms. “You're okay aren't ya?”

Tyler wiped some tears from his eyes before mustering up a weak smile. He wanted to put on a brave face for his Dad, just so he wouldn't be mad at him. Dad then set him back in the stroller and strapped him in. Tyler became aware that his diaper was wet. It must have happened in the haunted house. He didn't say anything being far too embarrassed to mention it at this point.

The family made their way to the midway where many carnival games were set up. Tyler played a couple not having much luck since his dexterity wasn't great. But he did manage to win a prize at the duckling booth. It was a random game of chance in which you would pick up a floating rubber duck in a pool and then look at the color on the bottom. He had picked a winner and was rewarded with a plastic ring with a

spider on it. It was a small prize but it did make Tyler happy as he was the only kid among his siblings to actually win something. Eventually the family made their way to a picnic table near a playground and a wide open field that lead into some woods. Dad took Connor with him to go and procure some food while the rest waited at the table. As Mom went to get Tyler out of his stroller she felt the front of his diaper and could tell it was wet.

“Lets get you changed out of that costume Ty,” she said setting him on the ground.

“I wanna keep it,” Tyler said hugging himself as if that would stop his costume being removed.

“I know you do darling, but we are going to eat and then you can go play on the playground and I don't want your costume to get dirty or ripped before Halloween,” Mom said as she removed his shoes. Tyler let his arms slump to his sides. He didn't really want to take off his costume but he could certainly see her point. It would be a shame if something happened to the costume before the actual Halloween. It would certainly put a damper on the real event if he couldn't actually wear his costume.

“Lets go,” Tyler said with a sigh as he stood up accepting that he was going to have to take off his costume.

“Go where?” Mom asked as she cocked her head a little.

“To change,” Tyler replied with some confusion.

“We can just do it here,” Mom said seemingly unfazed by his

reaction as she pulled down his hood and then unzipped the costume at the back before pulling it down to Tyler's ankles. Tyler froze realizing he was standing in the middle of the park in just a wet diaper. His Mom was busy pulling some clothes out of the diaper bag leaving Tyler with his eyes darting around the park to see who was looking at him. Tyler could see that people definitely noticed. He could see the smiles from onlookers who no doubt that it was a cute scene but to Tyler it was mortifying. Finally she got him onto the changing mat and removed the costume completely before removing his diaper. Tyler's face went a deep red now that he was completely naked out in public. Mom thankfully made quick work of her task and had him taped up into a new diaper. She then had him stand as she got a pair of brown corduroy pants on him and and an orange woolen sweater with a jack o lanter face on it. She completed his outfit with his bear beanie on his head.

“All done,” Mom said in a sing song voice as she began to pack everything up. Tyler puffed his cheeks out a little. She had obviously planned on changing him into a new outfit so why did he have to wear another diaper, she could have at least let him wear a pull-up.

Dad and Connor returned soon after. As Tyler climbed up onto the bench he saw a large doughy thing sitting in front of him. It had dark swirls on it similar to a cinnamon roll but much larger.

“What is it?” Tyler asked as he eyed the mysterious confection.

“Its an elephant ear,” Connor said sitting next to Tyler with his own ear in front of him. “Try it, its good.”

Tyler picked up the large portion, it was a little sticky. He gave it a sniff, he could smell the sugar. He then finally took a bite. His mouth exploded with sweetness as he started taking bite after bite.

“Slow down Ty,” Mom chided as she took the ear out of his hands setting it back down into the tray.

“It so good,” Tyler gushed with a full mouth.

“Chew whats in your mouth first, before taking another bite,” Mom instructed placing a hand on his back. As Tyler sat chewing swinging his legs happily he looked around the table. A sudden realization struck him as the noise seemed to grow far away and things seemed to move slower. The thing he had realized in that exact moment was that he was perfectly content, one could even say happy. As time seemed to speed back up to normal and the volume of the world around him returned to normal Tyler furrowed his brow a little. He felt like he had just been shown something. The answer he was supposed to find was within his grasp yet he couldn't put his finger on it, it was still there within the periphery.

“Mommy I want to go play,” Tyler said coming up with an excuse to get up from the table. He needed some time alone to think about what had just happened. He didn't want to wait till later as it felt like he would lose his grip on whatever feeling had just passed through him.

“Okay, one moment,” Mom said taking a wet wipe and cleaning the stickiness off of Tyler's hands.

“I'm going too,” Jace announced having scarfed down his own food in record time.

“Keep an eye on your brother and don't stray too far,” Dad said.

“Yeah, yeah,” Jace said as he began to walk off towards the playground with Tyler at his side. Tyler was a little annoyed at having been put under Jace's supervision even if it wasn't like he was actually watching him since the playground was right there, well within their parent's view. Tyler was just going to have to find a spot he could hide away to think. The plan would probably work out well given that Jace was his companion since he knew that his brother wasn't going to insist on keeping him close, if anything Jace was going to act more like he didn't even know him. As they came upon the playground Tyler felt Jace grab him by the shoulder.

“Ty lets go somewhere else,” Jace said. Tyler turned to look back at him and noticed that Jace had a wary look on his face. This was not a normal look for Jace.

“How come?” Tyler asked as he surveyed the playground. He couldn't see anything strange. It looked like a normal playground with a bunch of other kids and adults around.

“Just c'mon,” Jace said as he lead Tyler out into the field. They had walked a good distance out along the forest edge. “I think there's a river back there,” Jace said peering into the

woods. “Want to go check it out, might be kind of cool.” Tyler looked back seeing the table where the rest of the family was. They had really wandered far away.

“We should go back,” Tyler said with some apprehension. “We gonna get in tubble”

“Its fine,” Jace said with a sigh. “And if we do get in trouble just blame it on me.”

Tyler cocked his head. Now he knew something was really up if Jace was giving out these sorts of offer's. Tyler looked back again at the table which looked so small in the distance. He knew if they disappeared into the woods his parents would definitely get worried. Tyler then realized that even in his head he was referring to them as his parents. He no longer even batted an eye calling them Mommy or Daddy out loud.

“Are you coming or not?” Jace asked. Tyler shook his head and sat on the ground. “Suit yourself,” Jace said walking off into the woods alone. Tyler was just fine with the arrangement. He had wanted to be alone after all and this way at least he wouldn't get in trouble.

As Tyler began to think about things he laid back lifting Opie above him. Something had awakened within him. What had brought on that feeling? It couldn't be that he actually liked being a little kid.

“What do you think?” Tyler asked out loud. “Am I sposed to stay?”

Tyler peered into the deep green eyes of the wolf yet he said

nothing. It seemed his companion wasn't going to say anything. It was as Fiona said, only Tyler could figure out the answer. Just then he watched as Opie was plucked from his hands. Tyler shot up and saw that another boy had appeared and was holding the wolf in his hands as he regarded it with some interest.

“What is this a dog?” the boy said. He had a shaved head and some freckles with a bullish demeanor. Tyler surmised that the boy was Jace's age.

“Itsa wolf,” Tyler said. “It mine.”

“Can he swim?” the boy asked still looking at the wolf.

“I guess,” Tyler said finding the question odd.

“Lets test it out,” the boy said with a smile. “There's a rive not too far away. Lets go throw it in.”

Tyler looked on a little befuddled by the suggestion. Just what was this kid going on about?

“Don't wanna, give em back,” Tyler said stepping forward to grab Opie back. The boy held him out of reach.

“Jump for it,” the kid said with a laugh. Tyler pursed his lips as he leapt up yet the kid kept holding Opie out of reach as he snickered. Tyler stopped and gave the kid a frustrated look. Is this what kids did for fun these days?

“Please, give Opie back,” Tyler whined.

“Nah, I think I'll keep it. You can just get another one.”

Tyler began panicked at the thought of losing Opie. He charged forward into the boy who shoved him back hard enough for Tyler to fall back onto his butt. As Tyler was about to get back up someone whizzed past him careening into the other boy who stumbled back a little. Tyler looked and saw Jace with a wild look on his face now standing between him and the other boy.

“Don't push my brother,” Jace growled. The boy had an amused look on his face.

“So this is little Jacey wacey's brother.” he said with a laugh.

“Just give him back his toy,” Jace said as he went to grab the wolf. The other boy held it back.

“I'm gonna keep it,” he said holding Jace back with his free hand.

“What do you even want it for?” Jace asked as he tried to grab Opie back.

“I'm gonna give it to my dog, he'll like it,” the other boy said.

“Opie,” Tyler yelped the image of the wolf having his stuffing pulled out by some dog playing in his mind.

“Stop being stupid and give it back,” Jace said.

“Back off,” the other boy said as he shoved Jace back onto the ground next to Tyler. However this did not deter Jace as he charged right back in. The other boy then got him in a headlock as Jace struggled to get free. Tyler didn't know what to do. He wasn't strong enough to back up Jace and if he tried

to run and get his parents the other kid would surely take off before they got there. The situation seemed hopeless to Tyler as he began to realize he was going to lose Opie. Just then the other boy was yanked hard as he let go of Jace. Tyler now saw Connor had him by the collar. Connor reached over and grabbed Opie from the other boys hand tossing it to Jace.

“Beat it,” Connor growled letting go of the boy. For a moment the other boy looked at Connor as if sizing him up before letting some air out between his teeth and walking off. “Everybody ok?” Connor asked looking at his brothers.

“We're fine,” Jace said as he went and gave Opie back to Tyler.

“Is that the kid that always picking on you?” Connor asked.

“He doesn't pick on me,” Jace said with some ire.

“Jace c'mon you need to tell somebody about whats going on, its been weeks now,” Connor said with a concerned plea.

“I don't need help,” Jace said with some gruffness as he began to walk off back in the direction of the table. Connor watched for a moment as he shook his head. He then turned his attention to Tyler who was still on the ground clutching Opie in his arms.

“You all right?” Connor asked kneeling down next to Tyler.

“I couldn't do anything,” Tyler whimpered a little as he hugged Opie tighter. He felt so powerless. If it hadn't been for Jace and Connor then Opie would have been taken.

“Lets just go back,” Connor said as he got Tyler to his feet. They caught up to Jace as the three boys walked back silently.

“Where did you all get off to?” Mom asked as the three of them returned before she noticed Jace's hand that was now sporting a noticeable scrape. “What happened to your hand?”

“Nothing,” Jace said somewhat annoyed as he took a seat on the bench. Mom looked at him for a moment a pained expression on her face.

“Oh Jace we should at least go to the first aid tent and get that cleaned out,” she said taking a seat next to him and grabbing his hand to take a closer look.

“I don't want to, I'm fine,” Jace said defensively as he pulled his hand back. Mom simply put her arm around Jace and pulled him close in a side hug before whispering something in his ear. Tyler watched a sort of half smile half frown appear on Jace's face before he looked up at his Mom and nodded. Tyler knew what had just happened. He had experienced it enough himself. It was clear that Jace had been bothered by what had just happened and he had been putting up a defensive wall. But a quick hug from Mom with some reassuring words had been all it took to send that wall crumbling.

“C'mon on tough guy,” Mom said with a smile as they got up and walked off with her arms still around him.

“So what really happened?” Dad asked as he pulled a stray leaf out of Tyler's hair. Both of the boys were silent.

Tyler nuzzled in close to his Dad. He was feeling all mixed up by what had just transpired. His adult side was telling him someone needed to say something, especially if this had something to do with how Jace had been acting after the first day of school. But the kid side of him was telling him to keep quiet, he didn't want to get in the middle of Jace's business.

“What sort of mischief did your brother get you into this time?” Dad said pulling Tyler into his lap.

“Nuthin,” Tyler said shaking his head. “It wasn't him,”

“You mean someone else did that to him?” Dad asked.

“I can't tell you,” Tyler said. Dad gave a questioning look to Connor who merely looked away. Dad gave a deep groan as he rubbed Tyler's arm as if he were trying to coax the answer out of him.

“I think you've said enough,” Dad finally said with a grin the situation being clear to him.

“Don't tell Jace,” Tyler said looking up at his Dad with a worried expression. The last thing Tyler wanted was to be thought of as a tattle tale.

“Don't worry, I'll handle it from here,” Dad said with a chuckle. “But I'm happy you said something. That's what we do in this family, we look out for one another.”

Tyler cuddled in closer to his Dad. Something about what his Dad had said gave him some comfort. Then something clicked in his head. Perhaps it was the thing he was looking

for all along. Being here with this family had given him a sense of security, that no matter what happened there were people who had his back who loved him and in return he cared for them as well. That was the thing that had been missing from his old life. As Tyler thought more on this the pieces seemed to all fall into place. Maybe the thing he had been missing from his old life was a family, his own family. Maybe that's what the universe had been trying to show him. He had spent his entire life trying to validate himself, to prove himself worthy to one person who could not provide that to him. Maybe Fiona was supposed to have changed him like this so he could be shown what he was missing. Tyler couldn't help but feel he had found his answer.

It all seemed to make sense. This had all been a lesson. Tyler had been an unhappy lonely person, but he didn't know that because that's what he had been for his whole life so it just seemed normal. The reason he had been changed into a little kid was because he had needed to be shown what he had been deprived of. Shown what parents were supposed to do for their kids. If the universe had just plopped him into a new life with a wife and kids Tyler wouldn't have known what to do. How was he supposed to take care of a kid when his own blueprint had been so messed up?

The rest of the day went on without much incident. Tyler got his face painted and the family ended the day with some caramel apples before heading back home. As Tyler laid in bed that night he was eager for next weekend. That's when Fiona would return. He was sure she would have found a way

to reverse the spell, he had gotten what he needed. All the pieces were falling into place. He thought of what he was going to do when he returned to his old body. He was nervous to start dating again yet excited at the same time. He knew there was someone out there for him, someone he could love and that would love him back. Someone he could start on the next chapter of his life with. Someone he could be happy with. Tyler smirked a little as the image of Fiona came to his mind. He remembered that she had commented that she had found him handsome as an adult. Maybe there was something there? When he was an adult again perhaps he would take her up on that offer of hitting the road together. Tyler closed his eyes as his thoughts ran through his mind. This had to be the feeling that Fiona had talked about, right? He seemed so sure. Yet as he got closer to sleep some doubt seemed to seep in. Was this really the feeling he was supposed to have? Was this his answer? Tyler pushed down his doubts. This had to be it. This had to be what he was looking for.

Chapter 22

One of the Family: Part 22 - Chapter 22

It was Halloween night as Tyler lead the way down the sidewalk to the next house. The neighborhood was decked out to the nines in Halloween paraphernalia, and the plethora of glowing jack o lanterns seemed to give the night an orange glow. Mobs of costumed children stalked through the streets. Shouts of laughter and wails of ghostly screams filled the night air.

“Hey, slow up Ty,” Dad said as he caught up to the boy. Tyler turned to look to see that his siblings were a little farther behind.

“But I want more candy,” Tyler said holding up his pillowcase which already had a heft of tasty treats inside.

“We have plenty of time to go through the whole neighborhood you'll get more than enough, you're going too far ahead, remember what you promised?” Dad asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Yes,” Tyler said kicking a little at the ground as he looked down. His Dad was referring to the conditions of him not having to ride in a stroller for the night. He had to promise not to run off and stay with the group.

“Good boy,” Dad praised as he gave him a pat on his head scratching one of his faux wolf ears as if he were really an

animal. Connor, Jace, and Mallory had caught up as the kids then made their way up the front walk to the next door. Mallory rang the doorbell and a few moments later a man in a chefs outfit opened the door. The kids all raised their bags and shouted trick or treat in unison as candy was dropped into each of their pillowcase's.

“Alright, M&M's,” Jace said peering into his bag. He and Mallory then turned and bounded down the stairs to meet back up with their Dad.

“You having a good time?” Connor asked looking down at Tyler.

“Yeah this a lot of fun,” Tyler said grinning from ear to ear as he hopped down the steps. “I hope I get to remember it, when I turn back that is.”

“Yeah,” Connor said a little wistfully. “When you turn back.”

Fiona was due to babysit the upcoming weekend and Mom had made mention to Tyler that Fiona had asked her to pass along a message to him. That message being she had found that candy she had told him about and would bring some along for him to try. Tyler knew exactly what she meant. She had found a way to reverse the spell. This had been cause for great celebration for Tyler but when he had told Connor he had gotten a strange reaction. Connor had only smiled and told him it was good news but Tyler could tell he was forcing it. Seeing Connor's reaction now Tyler could only surmise that Connor wasn't exactly as happy as he was. Tyler could sympathize, he felt a little sad too thinking about leaving the

West family, after all it felt like they were a real family at times. But Tyler also knew that this was how it had to be. He had his own path to walk now. He was going to go off and find his own family and create the place he was supposed to be, just as the universe intended.

The night wore on as they made their way house to house. It was near the end of the night when they had run into a man dressed as a scarecrow with two little girls both dressed up as Dorothy from The Wizard of Oz. The scarecrow was none other than Mr. Mathis, Jace's teacher. He had called out to Jace for a quick hello. Dad and the man then exchanged pleasantries as they sent their kids up to the house staying back to talk as adults do. After getting their candy Tyler turned around to see a scene that gave him pause. Mr. Mathis had his arms crossed with a deeply concerned look on his face as he listened to Dad talk. Tyler didn't need to hear what was being said to know that it was not a light conversation. As the kids walked back up to their respective Dads the two men took a moment to finish their conversation.

“Once again I'm sorry to bring this up now,” Dad said with an apologetic look.

“Not at all,” Mr. Mathis said. “With stuff like this I want it brought to my attention as soon as possible no matter what I'm doing. I think the solution we've discussed we'll be satisfactory for everyone.”

“Thanks again,” Dad said as the two men shook hands. The two groups went their separate ways as it was getting late and

time to head home.

“What were you talking to my teacher about?” Jace asked obviously feeling somewhat nervous.

“Nothing much,” Dad said.

It was soon after the kids were sitting on the living room floor their hauls in front of them. They were trading away the things they didn't like when Dad entered into the living room.

“Jace I need to talk to you,” Dad said.

“I didn't do it,” Jace said almost like an automatic response to those words.

“You're not in trouble,” Dad said with an amused look as he beckoned Jace to follow. The two of them left the room and could be heard going up the stairs to Jace's room. They were gone for a long time, until Jace finally re-appeared in the living room with a stormy expression on his face. He went to the candy pile and gathered up his portion into the pillowcase.

“Who told,” Jace said standing up and casting an accusatory look towards Connor and Tyler.

“Nobody said anything,” Connor replied with a stone face. Tyler remained silent knowing full well that Connor was lying. Tyler had been the one to let it slip about what had happened at the Halloween festival the week before, although in his defense it wasn't as if he had meant to. However his expression must have been a guilty one as Jace stared daggers at him.

“Tattle tale,” Jace hissed before leaving the room. Tyler couldn't help but feel completely terrible. This was the reason no one ever confided in him. Just like a real toddler he was a total blabbermouth. Dad came into the room taking a seat on the couch and flipping on the television before noticing the deeply saddened look Tyler had on his face.

“Whats with the gloomy little wolf” Dad asked. Tyler didn't respond.

“Jace called him a tattle tale,” Connor said putting a hand on Tyler's shoulder. Tyler shrugged it off.

“He did, huh,” Dad said walking over to Tyler before sitting down on the ground and pulling the morose boy into his lap. “Jace is just a little upset right now, so don't pay any mind to what he says.”

“But I am a tattletale,” Tyler mumbled.

“There is a difference between tattling and helping,” Dad said. “Jace doesn't know it yet but things are going to get better for him, you'll see. But for right now I think its someone's bedtime.”

Tyler hugged his Dad good night after being informed that his Mom was waiting for him up in his room. As Tyler walked down the hall to his room he passed by Jace's room. The door was closed but he could see the light was on from under the doorway. Tyler wanted to go in, to say something. But he didn't know what he could possibly say. Tyler walked into his room to see his Mom already having some pajamas

set out for him.

“Hey sweetie, ready for bed?” she asked.

“I guess,” Tyler said a little despondent. His Mom got him up on his bed and had him changed into a diaper and then put his Spiderman themed pajamas on him. It was the little kids version of course from the show that had made its way into Tyler's rotation of shows he watched in the morning after the kids had gone to school.

“Okay why don't you go pick out a story for us to read,” Mom instructed motioning towards the bookshelf.

“I'm sleepy,” Tyler said looking a little wearily at his bookshelf as he sat on his bed. Mom let out a sigh as she sat on the bed next to him.

“Something has got you feeling really sad, huh?” Mom said as he pulled him onto her lap cradling him in her arms. “Why don't you tell Mommy all about it.”

Tyler knew that she would just do the same thing his Dad had done. She would just reassure him that he had done the right thing. The adult Tyler knew that was true. This was for the best, Jace had been caught in a situation that wasn't going to go away on its own. But as Tyler knew now the few months he had spent as a kid had left him not always seeing the adult side of things. He could understand the way kids felt about stuff, just like when he had been a kid himself. If Fiona wasn't returning at the end of the week Tyler would have been worried about it. He was starting to think more like a kid than

an adult, more often than not.

Being cradled in his Mom's arms was proving to be too much for him. He felt so safe with her. He was feeling he could tell her anything and she would make him feel better, right?

“Jace is super mad at me,” Tyler said in a near whisper.

“Jace gets mad sometimes, everybody does, but you know just as well as I do that he'll cool off and by tomorrow I'm sure he'll feel much better.” Mom said in a gentle tone. In many ways Tyler wanted to accept what she said as the truth but there was a lot of doubt in his mind. There was no way Jace would ever forgive him. He was going to hate him forever.

“He hates me,” Tyler said with a whimper.

“He does not, he loves you very much,” Mom cooed.

“But I tattled,” Tyler said. Why couldn't his Mom understand that? He was a stupid little blabbermouth.

“Listen Tyler, you didn't tattle. Me and your Dad kind of already knew something was up. But you know how Jace is. He wants everybody to think of him as this big strong guy. But he is in a situation that he can't solve on his own. He's not really mad at you. He's mad at himself. Does that make sense?”

“Yeah,” Tyler said perking up a little. Why couldn't he have seen that before? Yet now hearing his Mom say it things seemed to be so clear. Tyler felt bad for Jace. In Tyler's

estimation he was being far too hard on himself.

“Jace is having to learn a hard lesson right now, that even he sometimes needs help,” Mom continued on. “He just needs to see that this is going to be good for him.”

“Can I go talk to him?” Tyler asked as he sat up in his Mom's lap.

“I think we need to give him some space,” Mom said.

“Please, I need ta,” Tyler said giving her a serious expression. Mom regarded Tyler with some curiosity before she set him on the ground,

“Ok,” she said. “But don't be upset if he doesn't want to talk.”

Tyler gave her a nod before rushing out of his room and down the hall. He approached Jace's door and knocked.

“Come in,” he heard Jace say from the other side of the door. Tyler opened the door and stepped in.

“Oh its you, I though it was Mom or Dad,” Jace said as he set the book he was reading in his lap.

“I um...” Tyler began to say.

“Get out,” Jace said as he narrowed his eyes before picking his book back up. Tyler clenched his fist. Every part of him wanted to back out of the room. But he had to say something.

“I'm sorry I tattled,” Tyler said.

“I don't care,” Jace said not even putting his book down.

“I wanted to help,” Tyler said. Jace put down his book once again with a scowl.

“I already told you there was nothing a baby like you could do,” Jace said not mincing his words. “You made things worse.”

Tyler knew what Jace was feeling. It had been something he had felt a lot in his own life and something he had felt a whole lot over the last couple of months. Jace no doubt felt like the world was closing in on him, that his problems were insurmountable, frustrated that he couldn't do something about it. He felt powerless.

“Thank you,” Tyler said.

“For what?” Jace asked looking at Tyler with an odd expression.

“At the park,” Tyler said walking up to Jace's bed. “You saved Opie and me,”

“Connor is the one you should be thanking,” Jace said with a frown.

“Nuh uh,” Tyler said shaking his head. “You were like a hero, a superhero,” Tyler said with a grin as he grabbed onto Jace's arm and lifted it up above his head. “You flew like Superman,” Tyler said with some glee recalling how it had really seemed like Jace had swooped in out of nowhere. In that moment Tyler had forgotten that he was actually much older than Jace. To him Jace really was his cool big brother who could do anything.

Jace gave a small chortle from his nose as he pulled his arm back.

“Batman is cooler,” Jace said as he gave Tyler's forehead a soft little flick. He then got off the bed and put his arm around Tyler as he lead him to the door. “Get out, its past your bedtime Ty,” Jace said as he gave him a little push into the hall. As Jace closed the door Tyler noticed the smallest little grin formed in the corner of Jace's mouth. Tyler stood in the hallway for a moment. There was nothing Tyler could do to help him any further he was after all a little kid who needed his big brothers to save him from tyrannical eight year olds, but hopefully that had been enough.

The next day after school Tyler could see that something had changed with Jace as he got in the car.

“So how was your day?” Mom asked. Jace gave her a shy look.

“Umm it was good,” he said after a moment's hesitation.

“You're not just saying that?” Mom asked with a raised eyebrow.

“No, it really worked out,” Jace said with a smile as he made his way to the back seat. “Hey Mom do ya think I could do basketball after school?” Jace asked.

“You've never wanted to do after school sports before, what changed?” Mom asked.

“I was put into a different group rotation at school,” Jace said.

“My new group was doing basketball today and some of the other kids said I should join the after school club. It seems like fun,” Jace said shirking back a little as if he were a little shy to talk about his day. Mom simply smiled.

“It should be fine,” she said. “But talk to your Dad about it when he gets home.”

Tyler smiled a little listening to the conversation. He didn't understand all the talk about group rotations but he knew something had changed for Jace. It wasn't as if Jace was a lonely kid, he certainly had friends. But this attitude was different. Usually he came to the car in a sulk and seemed tired all the time. Tyler was sure that whatever his Dad and Jace's teacher had done had been the reason for the turn around, but he felt just a tiny bit responsible for putting things into motion and was happy nonetheless that he had been able to play a small part in the events.

The next day Dad had arrived home with a basketball hoop seemingly all gung ho about Jace's newfound interest.

“Did you really need to buy a whole basketball hoop,” Mom had remarked. “You know he might not even want to do it anymore by next week.”

“Ahh who cares,” Dad had replied. “I thought it was weird we didn't have one already. Besides even if he's not the next Micheal Jordan it will still be fun for everyone just to shoot the ball around.”

Dad then set up the hoop after dinner and he played with the

kids in the driveway. Tyler had been having great fun bouncing the ball along even if he wasn't able to get the ball in the basket. He had only gotten to play a little bit before his Mom had declared that it was his bedtime. It seemed completely unfair to him further pushed by the fact that as he lay in bed he could still hear Dad and his brothers outside. A thought then struck Tyler. This was how it was supposed to be. In a few short days he would no longer be here. It would go back to just being three kids and he would be somewhere far away, off on his own grand adventure. The thought gave Tyler a strange comfort. He just hoped that the good things would still persist.

Tyler was once again at Ms. Mary's house. He and Gabe were sat out on the front walk with a plethora of matchbox cars between the two of them.

“This one is the best,” Gabe said holding up a bright orange hot rod.

“Yeah. Its really cool,” Tyler said regarding the car.

“Here,” Gabe said passing it to him. “You can borrow it, just bring it back on Monday.”

“I can't,” Tyler said softly as he handed it back to Gabe.

“Why not?” Gabe asked giving Tyler a weird look. Tyler pursed his lips a little as he spun one of the wheels on the car.

“I hafta go somewhere, so I won't be back,” Tyler said.

“Oh like on a trip?” Gabe said with a smile.

“Umm yeah kinda, except I'll be gone for a very long time, so we wont see each other.” Tyler said trying to explain it as best he could to his companion.

“Oh,” Gabe said appearing to frown a little. “Then you can keep it,” Gabe said after a moment.

“Huh,” Tyler said looking back surprised. “But it your favorite.”

“Thats okay, I have lots” Gabe said spreading his arms out over the collection in front of them. “You can have it so you have something to play with.”

“I can't,” Tyler said extending the car back to his friend.

“Nope, its yours. Since your going far away I want you to remember me. Mommy says that if we do nice things for others then they remember you.” Gabe said with a self satisfied look as if he had just said something sophisticated, and as Tyler saw it he had just said something that could qualify as such, even if he was just repeating something an adult had told him. “But you gotta promise not to forget me, cause we best friends,” Gabe said with a toothy grin. Tyler's eye's went wide. As far as Tyler was concerned he guessed it was true. Gabe was his best friend.

“So you promise, right?” Gabe asked.

“Yeah,” Tyler said holding the car close. “Promise.”

Tyler stood in the kitchen a little later that afternoon. Dad was

busy rolling some luggage out to the car as Mom busied herself writing out a note for Fiona at the counter. Connor was stood next to her a nervous look on his face. Fiona would be along shortly, but Mom and Dad were in a rush, so it had been decided that Connor would be placed in charge until Fiona arrived. It would only be about twenty minutes tops, so their parents saw it as a good opportunity for Connor to get his first taste of watching over the house alone. Not too mention if something did go horribly wrong, the neighbor lady Mrs. Moody would be right next door.

“I've written down all the numbers here, don't leave the house, and don't go crazy,” Mom said.

“We'll be fine, its not like we'll be alone that long,” Connor said with some confidence although Tyler could sense some nervousness within him.

“I know,” Mom said. “Pretty soon we'll be leaving you in charge all the time.”

“Renee, we gotta go,” Dad called out from the living room.

“Coming,” Mom said picking up her purse from the counter.

The kids gathered in the living room to see their parents off.

“Connor is in charge until Fiona arrives, so you all listen to him,” Dad said to the rest of the kids. Mallory smiled as Jace wore a sour expression on his face. Mom and Dad then said their farewells to the kids. Mom came to Tyler last as she picked him up and gave him a kiss.

“We'll be back on Sunday all right. You'll be a good boy until then?” Mom asked.

“I know he'll be,” Dad said as he mussed up Tyler's hair. Tyler felt a wave of sadness overcome him as he looked at the smiling faces of his temporary parents in front of him. He was happy that this was all coming to an end, yet it also meant leaving this family behind. It was a bittersweet emotion. There was so much he wanted to say to them, but they would never realize the truth of what he was saying.

“Thanks for everything,” Tyler said as he hugged both of them at the same time.

“You're welcome,” Dad said with a small laugh. Tyler released them feeling a little embarrassed not realizing what he had said or how strange it would have sounded coming from him.

“I mean I love you,” Tyler said quickly as he looked at his Mom. She just smiled back.

“Love you too honey,” she said as she set him down.

“Dont burn down the house,” Dad said as they both exited out the door with a wave before shutting the door behind them. And just like that they were gone. Tyler stood for a moment looking at the closed door. Tyler had expected to feel more sad upon realizing that that was the last time he would ever see them, but he wasn't. Maybe it just hadn't fully hit him yet or maybe now that he had gotten what he needed his feelings were returning to normal. Maybe that was part of the process.

Now that he was going to return to a life where they were not his parents his attachment to them was waning.

Jace returned to his room to continue playing video games while Mallory went to her room to continue with her art project, leaving Connor and Tyler alone in the living room.

“So how are you doing?” Connor asked. “Must be pretty excited. Judging from Fiona's message it seems she found a way to turn you back.”

“Honestly, it doesn't even feel real,” Tyler said crawling up onto the couch. “But yeah I'm excited.”

“What are you going to do first, when you get back to your old life?” Connor asked.

“Well it wont really be my old life,” Tyler said. “I guess this whole thing was supposed to show me something or other.”

“What did it show you?” Connor asked taking a seat next to Tyler.

“Its kinda hard to say,” Tyler said as his mouth turned up and down a little. “I think I was supposed to see what a family was like. Something like that I guess.”

“Thats it?” Connor asked sounding a little let down.

“Umm well,” Tyler said sounding a little unsure himself. He was finding it hard to explain in a satisfactory way. “Its just a feeling,” Tyler said softly.

“You know Ty maybe...” Connor began to say but was cut off

by a thud and then the unmistakable sound of glass shattering before they heard Mallory let out an ear piercing shriek. The two boys looked at each other with wide eyes before they both leapt off the couch and ran up the stairs.

Jace was already in the doorway when they arrived.

“She's bleeding,” Jace said as Connor ran into the room. Tyler was going to go right in after Connor but found himself held back by Jace.

“Ty, there's glass,” Jace said having enough wherwithal to stop his baby brother from running into the room. As Tyler looked on he could see it was true. Mallory was on the ground in front of a shelf all around her were some chunks of porcelain glass. She was crying as she held her shin, blood was smeared onto her hands.

“What happened?” Connor said in a frazzled tone.

“I-I wanted to p-paint my piggy bank but it was up high so I had to climb to r-reach it,” Mallory said through her tears. “But it fell on me.”

“Let me see,” Connor said as he knelt down. Mallory removed her hands to reveal a nice gash that had been inflicted by one of the pieces of the shattered piggy bank on the ground. “That looks bad, don't move I'll get the first aid kit,” Connor said before rushing off to his parents bathroom. As Tyler watched he could see that while it looked bad this wasn't anything to panic about. Her cut wasn't that serious and she would only need some gauze to dress the wound.

Tyler broke away from Jace as he followed after Connor. Tyler found him in their parents bathroom hunched over a first aid kit on the ground muttering under his breath.

“Connor,” Tyler said a little uneasy. Connor looked up at him with a panicked look on his face.

“This is bad,” Connor said. “That cut is really bad, its going to get infected. Why didn't she ask for help? I would have gotten that stupid thing for her.” Connor said as if he were thinking out loud. He pulled at his hair a little as he let out a frustrated grunt. “She's going to have to go to the hospital!” Connor yelped.

“It's not that bad,” Tyler said rolling his eyes a little at Connor's dramatic display. Tyler walked over and crouched down next to him. “Clean it with this,” Tyler said taking a bottle of hydrogen peroxide out of the kit and setting it on the ground in front of Connor. “Then use this to cover it and stick it on with this,” Tyler said placing a gauze pad and some medical tape in the pile. “Easy peasy,” Tyler said clapping his hands.

“You're sure?” Connor asked looking over the items Tyler had set out.

“You can do it, cause you're the big brother,” Tyler said as he smiled at Connor.

“Okay,” Connor said taking a deep breath. He walked out of the bathroom and returned a moment later carrying Mallory with Jace following closely behind. Connor set his sister on

the counter and then grabbed his supplies. He poured some of the peroxide on the wound as Mallory whimpered a little. It fizzed up a little as Connor gave a look back towards Tyler who only nodded confirming that it was normal. Then Connor rinsed the area with some water from the sink. With all the blood washed away the wound did not appear as bad as it had appeared. Connor then used the gauze and tape and dressed the wound.

“There I guess that'll do, does it hurt?” Connor asked Mallory. She nodded as a couple of stray tears fell down her cheek. “Well at least its not bleeding anymore,” Connor said with some relief. Just then the doorbell rang.

“It's Fiona,” Jace shouted as he excitedly ran out of the bathroom. It only took a minute for Fiona to come running into the bathroom.

“Oh my gosh,” she said letting her bag slump onto the ground as she ran to Mallory. “Jace already filled me in. Mallory are you ok?”

“I think so,” Mallory said. “Connor knew what to do.”

Fiona looked over Connor's work, pulling back the gauze pad a little to see the injury before putting it back in place.

“It must have been scary,” Fiona said wrapping Mallory up in hug before taking her off the counter and setting her on the ground.

“It was,” Mallory said. “But I only cried a little.”

“That's not true,” Jace said. “You screamed so loud the whole neighborhood probably heard you.”

“Did not,” Mallory retorted.

“Now, now,” Fiona tutted. “Its a pretty good cut. So some tears are nothing to be ashamed of. But you know what makes me feel better after I get hurt?” Fiona asked as she put a hand on top of Mallory's head. “A nice big glass of chocolate milk, whaddya say?”

“I'll go get the syrup,” Mallory beamed before rushing out of the room.

“We can all have some,” Fiona said. “While we discuss our plans for the weekend.”

“Guess I'll go get the milk out so she doesn't drop that too,” Jace said as he sauntered out of the room.

Fiona began to tidy up the first aid kit before setting it back into the open drawer.

“Good thing you knew what to do Connor,” Fiona remarked.

“Yeah except I didn't,” Connor said with some shame. “I'm just lucky there was an adult here.”

Fiona looked up to see Connor looking down at Tyler who seemed to not even notice the comment.

“Oh so Tyler helped huh?” Fiona asked.

“Uh huh, I did,” Tyler said excitedly as he bounced up and down. “I gots the stuff out of the box for Connor.”

Fiona and Connor exchanged a weird look with one another seeing Tyler behave like a real toddler fishing for some praise.

“Ty you okay?” Connor asked as he placed a hand on Tyler's shoulder. Tyler seemed to go blank for a moment before he shook his head as if coming out of a daze.

“Um yeah I'm fine,” he said, his demeanor changing instantly. Connor let out a sigh of relief upon seeing him come back to normal. The last thing they needed was for Tyler to slip completely right before he was about to be changed back.

“I guess I'll go pick up the glass,” Connor said making his way to the door.

“Why don't you let me do that,” Fiona said with some concern.

“They're pretty big pieces,” Connor assured her. “I can at least do that.”

“Hey Connor, don't beat yourself up,” Fiona said grabbing him by the shoulders. “It's your first time being in charge, its always a disaster for everybody. The first time I babysat I didn't notice the kid down a whole bowl of blueberry's and then he projectile vomited blue puke onto a really nice rug.”

“If you say so,” Connor mumbled as he left the bathroom.

“Oh dear, guess we'll have to cheer him up,” Fiona mused as she looked down at Tyler standing next to her.

“He's pretty hard on himself,” Tyler said frowning a little.

“I'll say,” Fiona said with a sigh. “Anyways did you get my message?”

“Oh yeah, so you really found a reversal spell?” Tyler asked.

“I did, took forever Grandma's library was no joke but I found it alright,” Fiona said with some pride.

“You really think it will work?” Tyler asked feeling like he didn't want to be too optimistic.

“I mean it has too right. I'm actually surprised, it seems pretty simple.” Fiona said. Tyler was silent for a moment digesting the fact that the thing he had been after all this time was finally right in front of him.

“What happens though, afterwards? I mean will they remember me, will I remember them?” Tyler asked a little wary that there still may be some complications.

“As far as I can tell it will reverse the effects of the spell. Things will be back to how they were before. Your family will have no memory of you whatsoever, it will be like you were never here. Although when it comes to you and Connor I can't say for sure. Although I'm confident in saying you will probably remember everything since your memories were never tampered with, and if that's true then I guess the same will go for Connor as well.”

Tyler nodded. If anything he was hoping that he would remember. Even if some moments are things he would rather forget, there was also the feeling that everything would be for naught if he lost his memories as well.

“So I guess you want to do it now?” Fiona asked.

“Actually I think we should wait,” Tyler said without a moments hesitation. “ I'll go to bed like normal and then you can come back when the kids go to bed.”

“That might be best,” Fiona said with a nod. “After all it might be kind of hard to explain why there is suddenly some random dude in the house.”

“You really think that'll happen?” Tyler asked with some concern.

“I don't know,” Fiona said with a shrug. “Its not like you were in a different location after the first time.”

Tyler cocked his head a little.

“You really have no idea what you are doing, do you?” Tyler said.

“Hey this is uncharted territory for me as well,” Fiona said. They both laughed a little.

The rest of the day had been rather uneventful. It had just been a normal day. The only thing that had been strange to Tyler was how distant Connor was being. Tyler knew that Connor was going through a lot, just as he was. The anticipation of the event weighing on both of them. Although Tyler seemed to sense that Connor wanted to say something, maybe he just didn't know how to broach the subject?

It was now becoming late as the kids sat at the table eating ice cream for dessert. Fiona had just gotten back from a

promised tea party with Mallory and was still wearing her red billowy hat that Mallory had lent her.

“Hey Fiona after this could we watch a movie?” Jace asked.

“I don't see why not,” Fiona said as she checked her watch. “Although it is getting kind of late for some of us,” she said casting a look at Tyler.

Tyler nodded, he thought it might be a good time to gather his thoughts alone while he waited for Fiona. Maybe think about what his next steps would be once he was restored to his original age.

“Do you think Tyler could watch too?” Connor asked not even looking up from his ice cream as if his question was somehow offensive. Fiona gave Tyler a muddled look.

“If he wants too,” she said. “What do you think squirt think you can stay up for a movie?”

Tyler looked at Connor for a moment however Connor never lifted his head. He was trying to gauge what Connor was feeling since it was obvious that he was trying to delay their separation. Was he upset? Nervous? Sad?

“I wanna watch,” Tyler said with a smile.

“Then its settled,” Fiona nodded.

In short order everyone assembled into the living room. Tyler walked in having gone back to his room to retrieve Opie. He was starting to become anxious about what would be happening later. Plus this would be the last time that having a

favorite stuffy would be able to settle his nerves, why not indulge?

Tyler saw that Connor was sat in the recliner alone while Jace was lying on the ground in front of the tv.

“Hey bud saved you a spot,” Fiona said patting a seat on the couch next to her with Mallory on the other side. Tyler looked from the couch to Connor in the chair. He found it strange that Connor had been the one to suggest that Tyler stay up to watch the movie yet seemed to still want to remain distant. He thought for sure he would want Tyler to sit next to him yet had picked the one spot that he could sit in alone. Tyler got on the couch as Fiona put her arm around him and started the movie. He kept glancing over to Connor who seemed concentrated on the screen. Tyler wanted to go over and talk to him to get whatever was causing this strange behavior out in the open, but he knew he couldn't at least not in front of the others. It was all too obvious to him that Connor didn't want him to leave, that much had been made clear by his past comments. Tyler knew he was going to have to do something to get Connor to understand his point of view. Tyler did'nt want to leave Connor like that, especially if like him Connor was going to retain his memories of everything that had happened.

As the movie played on Tyler could feel himself starting to get tired as it was past his usual bedtime. He fought against it as best he could, but Fiona had pulled him in close in a cuddle. Her warmth was making it hard for him to resist. Tyler closed his eyes for a moment, he was just going to rest

them for a moment. However he had drifted off to sleep quickly.

The next thing Tyler felt was himself being shook awake.

“Hey Ty we gotta get you into bed,” Fiona said. Tyler opened his eyes to see Fiona's smiling face looking down at him. He rose up into a sitting position as he rubbed his eyes a little embarrassed that he had actually fallen asleep. It probably wasn't even that late yet he had not even been able to keep his eyes open. The other kids were already on their feet stretching out as the credits of the movie played on the screen.

“Okay its eleven so I think I've let you all stay up plenty late,” Fiona said getting up from the couch.

“Why don't you all go get ready for bed. Mallory I want to check on your injury and get a new band aid on it, and then afterwards I'll come and tuck you in Jace.” Fiona said.

“I don't need to be tucked in,” Jace said a little flummoxed. Fiona just smiled.

“If you insist but I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't at least come and say goodnight.”

“Well if its your job I guess,” Jace said looking just a slight bit bashful as he went to leave the room.

“Wait,” Connor yelped as he went and stood behind Tyler. Mallory and Jace turned to look back at Connor. “You guys should say goodnight to Ty,” Connor said. “And give him a hug.”

“Why?” Jace asked looking confused.

“Because it will make him feel better,” Connor said although he did not sound convincing in the least. Mallory smiled as she went up to Tyler and hugged him.

“Nighty night Ty,” she said not needing much of a reason to snuggle her little brother.

“Night,” Tyler said as he hugged her back tightly.

“Okay, Jace now you,” Connor said as Tyler and Mallory separated.

“I don't see why I have to,” Jace said still looking rather skeptical.

“Just do it,” Connor said pushing Tyler a little forward. Jace finally walked up to Tyler with a sigh and gave him a halfhearted hug.

“Good night Tyler,” Jace said with some sarcasm. Tyler wrapped his arms around Jace.

“Night Jace,” Tyler said. He felt Jace put a hand onto his head and give him a couple of pats before Tyler released him. Tyler looked up at him and saw he had a small smirk on his face.

“There I did it,” Jace said as he turned around and walked out of the room with Mallory following behind. As Tyler watched them leave it hit him just how much he was going to miss them. It seemed strange to him to have this feeling as it had not been there when his parents had left but now he could feel himself missing his Mom and Dad upon thinking about them.

Tyler could only chalk it up to the fact that the appointed time was getting closer, it was starting to become real. He was going to change back and he would never see these people again.

“Tyler I'll meet you in your room,” Fiona said before she left the room to give Tyler and Connor some time alone.

“So I guess this is it,” Connor said, a muddled expression on his face.

“Yeah, I mean this is what we've been working for,” Tyler said. Connor looked down for a moment. Tyler was starting to feel as if Connor was regretting helping him. “Connor just say it,” Tyler said. Connor looked up at him with a surprised look before his face softened.

“Do you really have to go?” Connor asked. “Are you really so miserable here?”

“Its not like that,” Tyler said. “I mean sure there have been some tough moments but I've come to love you guys like family.”

“So you could stay,” Connor said a hopeful look in his face.

“No, I can't,” Tyler said as he watched Connor's face fall. “It just wouldn't be right. This isn't my family.”

“I won't accept that, its not good enough,” Connor said as he got on his knees and put a hand on each of Tyler's shoulders. “I've already accepted you as my brother, everyone here loves you and you just said you loved us too.”

“I know,” Tyler said. “But its just sometimes I feel like an impostor. I have to do whats right not just me, but for everyone.”

“You don't have too. We can tell everyone the truth. I'll call Mom and Dad right now and tell them everything on the phone, I'll make sure to convince them of the truth and then you'll see they'll still love you just the same, I know they will.”

“Connor, I just don't think that's how things are supposed to be.”

“C'mon Ty don't leave,” Connor said as he got choked up. He pulled Tyler into a hug as he began to cry. Tyler wrapped his arms around Connors head as he stroked his hair. He was only doing what he had learned from his own parents. He needed to show Connor that everything was going to be okay. After a few minutes Connor lifted his head as he wiped away some of his tears.

“Sorry, I shouldn't be trying to tell you what to do,” Connor said. “Its your choice.”

“Its alright,” Tyler said with a smile. “This must suck for you. I mean you worked so hard to help me. I get my original body back but you don't really get anything.”

“I don't care about that,” Connor said as he got to his feet.

“Connor just understand its what I have to do,” Tyler said.

“Yeah I get it.” Connor replied.

“You wanna come watch?” Tyler asked giving Connor a

sheepish look.

“No,” Connor said shaking his head. “I want to remember you like this.”

Tyler nodded, he could understand the sentiment. Connor then began to walk out of the living room.

“Hey Connor,” Tyler said calling after him. Connor looked back. “Thanks for everything. If things could be different, I would love having an older brother like you.”

Connor nodded with a smile before walking off to his room. Tyler heard him shut the door to the basement leaving him alone, all his goodbye's were finished.

Tyler walked upstairs to his room. As he passed by Jace's room he could hear Fiona humming softly. He smirked a little. It reminded him of how his Mom would often hum lullaby's to him. Tyler walked into his room and sat on his bed to wait for Fiona. Tyler looked over to his dresser where his Mom had placed a framed photo from Halloween. Tyler got off the bed and went over and picked up the frame. It was him with his siblings in front of the house before going trick or treating. Tyler looked at himself smiling back while wearing his wolf costume.

“That was fun,” Tyler said softly to himself as he put the picture back on the dresser. Tyler stood for a long while just thinking about everything that had happened, from the time in the park to his time at Ms. Mary's house with Gabe, to all the time he had spent with his siblings and his parents. He closed

his eyes with a sigh as he shook his head. This was how it was going to be. He got onto his bed and picked Opie up into his arms. The wolf spoke to him asking if he was sure.

“Yeah, I'm positive,” Tyler replied back. His door opened as Fiona walked in shutting the door gently behind her.

“So we ready?” she asked taking a seat across from Tyler on the bed.

“My minds made up,” Tyler said. “But before we start could you help me write a letter?”

“Sure, to who?” Fiona said grabbing a notepad and pen from her bag.

“To Connor,” Tyler said. “I just want him to know why. Its kind of hard to say in person and I'm feeling pretty clear right now. Plus I was always a better writer rather than a speaker.”

“Okay, ready when you are,” Fiona said clicking her pen. Tyler dictated what he wanted written taking extra time to make sure the words were just as he wanted them. Fiona finished out Tyler's message and read back what Tyler had told her to write.

“So this is the conclusion you've come to?” she asked giving Tyler a serious look.

“I'm certain,” Tyler said with a nod.

“Okay, I'll make sure this gets to Connor in the morning,” Fiona said folding the note up.

Tyler and Fiona then proceeded to talk for awhile about Tyler's decision and how he had come to his conclusions.

“So yeah, thats how I feel about it,” Tyler said finishing up his last explanation.

“I'm happy to hear it,” Fiona said. “I felt so bad when you told me who you really were and how unhappy you felt.”

“I'm sorry about that,” Tyler said placing a hand on Fiona's hand.

“Don't be, you really had every right to be. But I guess it all worked out. We're all a little wiser in the end.”

Tyler smiled a little at the thought. Just then a thought crossed his mind.

“I forgot something on the note,” Tyler yelped jumping up. “We gotsa add it quick.” He said jumping up and down on the bed.

“Okay hold your horses,” Fiona said pulling the note back out. “Whats so important? She asked. Tyler once again told her what to write.

“That's what was so important?” Fiona said with a smirk.

“Don't make fun,” Tyler said collapsing to his knees with a pouty face. “Its important to me.”

“Alright alright,” Fiona said folding the note back up. “Now I think I fully understand your decision and I'm an convinced of your certainty. So you know what comes next,” Fiona said.

“Yeah,” Tyler said as he extended his hand out with a smile. “I know.”

Connor awoke in his bed. The sun was shining in through his small window. He sat up and looked at his clock it read 9:30. He got up out of bed noting how cold it felt in the house. He had spent last night crying off an on in his room alone. He had sat up waiting for the moment when he would forget that Tyler ever existed. The moment when he turned back. That time never came though even now in the morning light he could still remember his little brother. Connor could only reason that he wouldn't forget thanks to his natural resistance to magic. As Connor made his way through the basement upstairs he could only think about how hard it was going to be having to remember Tyler while the rest of his family would have forgotten. As Connor came out from the basement he looked upstairs at the closed door at the end of the hallway that had been Tyler's room. Part of him wanted to go up and look in. He decided against it. Just the thought of expecting to see his little brother asleep in his race car bed only to be met with the sight of a bare room full of storage would be too much to bear. Connor made his way into the kitchen to see Fiona sitting at the table with a mug of tea in front of her as she had a magazine open.

“Hey sleep well?” Fiona asked.

“Not really,” Connor grumbled not appreciating her bubbliness so early in the morning.

“I figured,” she said. “but I have something here that might cheer you up,” she said as she slid a folded up piece of paper towards him. Connor picked it up and unfolded it and began to read. By the time he had reached the end his mouth was hanging open as he looked up at her.

“He wanted you to hear it from him,” she said.

“So its true?” Connor gasped.

“Not a doubt in my mind,” Fiona said. “I'm surprised you didn't notice,” Fiona said as she motioned toward the booster seat still attached to the chair at the table. Connor looked at it surprised that he had'nt seen it when he walked in.

“He's outside with Jace right now,” Fiona said. “Why don't you tell them to come in. I still need to get him dressed and then we can all have breakfast.”

Connor ran to the door and bursted outside. For a moment he couldn't believe what he was seeing. Jace and Tyler were out in the yard. Tyler was the same as he had ever been. The two of them were running around in the yard playing with nerf guns. Tyler was pants less wearing only his nighttime diaper and a race car themed pajama top squealing with delight as he shot at Jace.

“Tyler,” Connor shouted out. Tyler stopped and looked over to Connor as a smile spread across his face. Connor bolted towards him. Tyler dropped his gun as he ran to meet him wrapping his arms around Connor's waist as they collided.

“Connor, you awake,” Tyler said excitedly.

“Ty I don't know what to say,” Connor said. “You're really sure?”

Tyler looked up at Connor.

“Didja read the note?” he asked looking up at Connor with a confused look.

“Yeah I did,” Connor said. “I just dont want you to do anything because of me.”

“I meant every word of it,” Tyler said as he grinned. Just then a nerf bullet hit Tyler in the back of the head.

“Gotcha,” Jace laughed.

“Not fair,” Tyler said as he turned around holding the back of his head where he had been struck. “I was huggin Connor.”

“There is no T in nerf war,” Jace said as if he were actually explaining some official rule.

“Connor be on my team,” Tyler said as he picked up his gun and held it up towards Connor.

“Maybe later,” Connor said. “Fiona said she needs to get you dressed and then we're having breakfast.”

“She promised pancakes,” Jace said excitedly as he dropped his own gun and ran off towards the house.

Fiona was waiting inside as the boys entered. Mallory was at the table with a coloring book in front of her.

“Okay you, lets go get dressed,” Fiona said as she scooped

Tyler up into her arms. “Can I trust you three to get out the ingredients for pancakes,” Fiona said addressing the other kids.

“Yep we can do it,” Jace said with some bravado.

“Great we can all make them when I get back,” Fiona said.

“I wanna flip 'em,” Tyler said.

“I think I'll do that part,” Fiona said with a chuckle. “But you can help mix the batter.”

“I'm really good at mixin,” Tyler said. “I did that when I made cookies with Mommy.”

“Great,” Fiona said as she booped Tyler on the nose. “Looks like I've got an expert to help.”

Fiona carried Tyler upstairs to the bathroom and set him down in front of his training potty before removing his diaper and having him sit down.

She then left and returned with his clothes. Tyler had finished his task and was standing up with his sticker chart in his hands.

“Look at all my stickas,” he said showing the chart to Fiona.

“Wow, thats so many,” Fiona said as she held out a pair of training undies for Tyler to step into.

“We'll have to make sure that we get two stickers on there today. I bet your Mommy will be really happy to see that when she gets back, plus we can also tell her that you woke

up dry this morning.”

“She gonna be super happy,” Tyler said as Fiona pulled up his Elmo themed undies to his waist. “I wish I could tell her now.”

“Tell you what, after breakfast we can call her and tell her on the phone,” Fiona said as she got Tyler into some pants and pulled a shirt over his head.

“Yes, yes,yes,” Tyler said as he hopped up and down. Fiona then picked him back up putting him on her hip.

“Hey Fiona, after breakfast can I watch Sesame street?” Tyler asked.

“Of course,” Fiona said. “ I never did get to see you dance with Elmo.”

“I'm da best danca,” Tyler said with a smile. As Fiona carried Tyler down the hallway she looked at him as he rocked his head back and forth humming some tune. She couldn't help but notice his sudden change in demeanor. It had happened almost instantly last night as she had taken his hand and put him up on the changing table to get him ready for bed. The last time she had done that she could tell he had been embarrassed yet now he didn't seem to have any qualms with her treating him like a three year old or acting like a three year old for that matter. Yet it wasn't like he was someone different she could still see the same person she had met in the park all that time ago. This wasn't a slip into some other mindset and it wasn't an act, he was being genuine. To her it

seemed like he was no longer fighting with himself almost as if he had found some sort of peace.

“Hey Ty,” Fiona asked. “You still think you made the right choice?”

Tyler looked at her for a moment before grinning.

“I know I did,” he said.

Chapter 23

One of the Family: Part 23 - Chapter 23

Tyler West was sat upon the the gymnasium floor of Puckett Elementary. He was sat cross legged with the rest of his kindergarten class as they listened to the principal Mr. Falsom address the entirety of the student body at the end of quarter school assembly. Tyler found himself incredibly bored. He couldn't bring himself to really focus in as the principal droned on about all the goings on at the school during the first quarter. He talked about how much the student body had earned at the fun run and the amount of food they donated during the food drive or how well the first choir concert had gone. His ears did perk up a little when the principal mentioned the kindergarten class's fairy tale play however. Though he did feel a little embarrassed remembering it since he had been made to play baby bear in Goldilocks and the Three Bears. A role that had been all but foisted upon him since it made so much sense, him being the youngest person in his class at just having turned five years old over the summer. Tyler looked to Gabe his best friend sitting beside him. Gabe had gotten to play Puss in Boots and even got to carry a sword with his costume. Tyler had been so jealous. But he had played his role dutifully and Ms. Gobert, his teacher had even praised him afterwards, which had made him feel rather good even if Jace had teased him a little afterwards.

Even so Kindergarten had been going well for Tyler. It was true that he had just barely made the cut off, in fact there had been some talk of him staying in preschool for another year. Yet his preschool teacher had recommended he go to the kindergarten assessment just to see how well he did. Tyler had passed with flying colors and the school had seen no problem with admitting him for the next school year. Tyler had been a little nervous upon arriving at his first day, but by the end of the day all his doubts had been laid to rest. The teacher had shown the rest of the class his name tag making special mention that it was the neatest in the class and as time went on Tyler was finding the actual schoolwork to come to him rather easily. It had happened more than once for the teacher to be explaining something and then Tyler would be hit with a wave of sudden understanding of the concept, almost as if he already knew it. Though that only happened sometimes, there were other times he struggled just as much with new concepts along with the rest of the class, especially with adding and subtracting. Although after parent teacher conferences Tyler's Mom had told him his teacher was very pleased with his progress.

As Tyler continued to listen to the principal he looked back at the rest of the student body. He spied his big sister Mallory with the rest of the third graders a little further back. She was whipsering something to her friend before they both started giggling before they were silenced by a shush by a nearby teacher. Tyler then looked further back to the bleachers where the fifth graders were. He spotted his older brother Jace who looked just as bored as he was. Tyler turned back and looked

the clock. He was still learning how to tell time with the non digital clocks. If he was right, the school day was nearly over so surely the principal would finish soon so they could all go home for the weekend. Tyler had something to look forward too this weekend, it had all started during his birthday a few months back.

He remembered opening presents and blowing out the candles on his cake, when Dad had announced there was one last surprise in store for him. Tyler was then lead out to the garage with Mallory covering his eyes with her hands.

“Oh god, you didn't,” he had heard his Mom exclaim a moment before Mallory removed her hands and Dad shouted surprise. Tyler had let out an excited cheer at seeing his Dad standing next to a dirtbike just his size in the garage.

“Its a real dirtbike,” Tyler had exclaimed as he clamored forward taking a seat on it not caring one bit that the bike looked incredibly run down. “Can I ride it now?”

“Well it doesn't start up yet,” Dad had said with a wince.

“But me and Dad are going to fix it up for you,” Connor explained. Apparently part of Dad's master plan to sell it to Mom was to use the bike as a father son project for him and Connor to do together and a chance to impart some practical skills on Connor. Tyler didn't really care about all that, in the moment he was happy just to sit on the bike and imagine himself zipping across dirt mounds and flying through the air.

“Here we got this too,” Connor said setting a bag down on the

ground. Tyler had gotten off the bike and peered in the bag before pulling out the contents.

“A suit,” he said holding up the shirt and then some pants, boots and finally a helmet. Connor had then taken him inside to help him put it all on. Tyler reappeared a few minutes later wearing the full suit. Even Mom hadn't been able to resist snapping some photos of him in his gear.

Dad and Connor hadn't anticipated it taking long to get the bike up and running, the man Dad had bought it from had said it only needed a little work, yet the bike had proved to be more of an undertaking once they had started. It had been more than a few months since then. Dad and Connor had certainly had to learn a lot along the way and one rebuilt engine and new fuel system, along with some mechanical manuals and more than a few youtube videos later the bike had finally roared to life just the previous night. Tyler had been so excited to take it for a spin. Connor had rushed him into the house to get his gear on. Just as he was about to mount the bike Mom had appeared declaring it would have to wait for tomorrow as it was then 8:30 which meant bedtime for Tyler.

At first Tyler wanted to protest. It was no secret she was none too keen on the bike, she had been secretly hoping that the long months of repairs would have seen Tyler lose interest yet he had persevered, spending time in the garage with his brother and Dad handing them tools and standing around in a circle troubleshooting whatever new problem had arisen, not that he was much help in that department. As Tyler stood

hearing the roar of the engine in back of him he felt himself getting angry, this was just another attempt to keep him off the bike.

Connor had then leaned down and whispered something in Tyler's ear. It had been a plan.

Tyler took of his helmet slowly and held it limply at his side as he put the saddest expression he could muster on his face.

“Okay, Mommy,” he had said in the most pitiful tone as he took slow sad steps towards the door.

“Thats not fair,” Mom said with a smirk as she looked at him. “I suppose it wouldn't hurt if you took a little ride,” she said with a look that showed she knew that she had just been manipulated. Tyler quickly put his helmet back on as he followed his Dad who wheeled the bike out front. Tyler got on the bike as his Dad gave him some quick instructions. Tyler grasped the handles with anticipation. He gave it a little gas and felt himself zip forward. He braked immediately coming to a stop. He took a deep breath and gave it some more gas and now found himself propelling forward in the front lawn. It was exhilarating to say the least, as he rode forward a flash of a memory came to him. He had done something like this before. But he had been older. It was no secret to Tyler that he had once been older than he was now. He had never forgotten, and it wasn't strange for him to feel these moments of familiarity with something, yet it never really bothered him that much. The only thing Tyler could take away from it all was that it seemed each year he was

beginning to remember more and more almost as if the older he got the more unlocked for him. As Tyler was preoccupied with the memory flooding into his brain he failed to notice a dip in the lawn. A moment later Tyler was tumbling across the ground. Dad was by his side in seconds as Tyler lay on the ground looking up at the sky.

“Ty you okay,” Dad said kneeling down next to him. Tyler sat up a little dazed.

“I think so,” Tyler said as he took of his helmet and plopped it on the ground next to him.

“You gotta pay attention to the path in front of you,” Dad said with a smirk. Tyler got to his feet as he walked with his Dad back to the bike.

“I think that's enough for tonight,” Dad said as he switched off the engine.

“I want to keep going,” Tyler said as he put his hands on the seat. “I promise I wont fall again.”

His Dad merely chuckled as he lifted Tyler up into his arms and began to carry him back to the garage.

“Sorry squirt, but your Mom was right, it is bedtime.”

As they came back into the garage Connor came up to Tyler.

“Hey that was really good, you looked pretty cool,” Connor said as he held his hand up to Tyler.

Tyler gave him a high five yet had a slightly disappointed

look on his face.

“Come here you,” Mom said as she took him from his Dad's arms. “You're sure nothing hurts?” His Mom asked as she stroked his cheek. “That fall looked pretty bad.”

“I'm okay,” Tyler reassured her.

“Ty's tough,” his Dad said as he mussed up his son's hair.

“I'm sorry,” Tyler said as looked at his Dad. “I shouldn't have fell.”

Tyler was feeling guilty. His Dad and Connor had worked so hard on the bike and Tyler hadn't even been able to make it across the yard without falling. There was no way his Dad wasn't disappointed in him. What was the point of all that work if Tyler wasn't going to be able to ride well he would probably end up breaking the thing.

Tyler looked at his Dad's face staring back him with a furrowed brow confirming Tyler's suspicions of how his Dad felt. Tyler turned his face away no longer able to withstand the judgmental look.

“Hey,” Dad said as he stroked the boy's hair. Tyler faced him once again this time seeing that his Dad's features had softened. “You don't need to be sorry. That's the first of many falls you will no doubt have, its just how it is.”

“Your Dad's right,” Mom added. “No reason to be so gloomy. Now its a school night and it is really getting past your bedtime mister,” she said as she carried him inside. Tyler

rested his chin on his Mom's shoulder as she carried him up to his room. His parents reassuring words had little effect on him. The voice in his head was seeing to that.

The same voice that sometimes told him the answers to questions in school or sometimes reminded him not to be nervous at new experiences because he had done it before also told him other things. Like to stop throwing a tantrum when he got upset or to listen to his parents even if it was something he didn't want to do. Right now that voice was telling him he had to be better. He had to make sure his parents were happy with him, that he didn't cause them problems. He had to prove he wasn't a burden.

Coming back to the present in the school gymnasium he looked at the clock, it seemed like it had barely moved from where it was. His Dad had promised him that tomorrow they would take the bike out to a dirt track and he would really get a chance to drive around.

“And now for our last bit of business,” the principal said. Tyler focused back in upon hearing that the assembly was finally at its end. “We will give out our award for star student.”

A murmur spread throughout the gymnasium. Tyler and the rest of the kindergartners looked around a bit confused as to why the rest of the kids seemed to become excited.

“As most of you know every quarter one student is chosen as the star student,” the principal began. “Each teacher nominates one student from their class and then through a

vote among the faculty a winner is chosen. There are many ways to be nominated, such as taking their studies seriously, demonstrating respect and always striving to better themselves. Not only should our star student take pride in being named but as an added reward the class which the star student belongs to also gets and ice cream sundae party," the principal said as the students began to cheer.

"I hope its someone from our class," Gabe said as he looked at Tyler who only nodded in agreement. An ice cream party would be awesome.

"Don't get too excited," a boy named Greg said who was sat on the other side of Tyler. "My big sister told me about this, they usually choose one of the older kids."

"That's not fair," Gabe said as he let his hands fall into his lap.

"Maybe when we're bigger," Tyler said giving his friend a pat on the back. Tyler had no reason to doubt Greg's words. In did make sense to him in a way. They were just kindergartners the older kids knew a lot more than them and they were stronger too. Tyler knew this from experience having older siblings himself. Whenever he couldn't figure out a problem on his homework Mallory would always swoop in and show him how to do it, and when he played basketball against Jace in the driveway Tyler was never able to beat him even if he tried really hard. Tyler then smiled a little. It would be kind of cool if one of them got chosen he would be able to tell everyone that they were his family. Tyler then wondered if Connor had ever been a star student when he had been in

elementary school. Surely he had been, since Connor was the coolest person he knew. Tyler made a mental note to ask Connor when they met up to walk home from school.

“Now without further ado,” the principal said as another staff member gave him an envelope. “Our star student is...” the man paused as the students began to pound the ground creating a drumroll. “Tyler West from Mrs. Gobert's Kindergarten class,” the principal announced as everyone began to clap. Tyler sat frozen as he heard his name. Surely he had been hearing things, there was no way the principal had just said his name.

“Ty you won,” Gabe said as he grabbed Tyler by the shoulders and shook him. Tyler looked back at the excited face of his friend with a shocked expression. Now there was no doubt in his mind that it had been his name. Mrs. Gobert Tyler's teacher was now standing in front of him and then knelt down.

“Tyler, you have to go up and get your award,” she said with a grin as she extended her hand out to him. Tyler took her hand as he got to his feet. Everything seemed to be moving so fast as he walked over to where the principal was standing waiting for him. Tyler shook the principal's hand before he was given a certificate to hold.

“Lets hear it for our star student,” the principal said as the student body clapped again. Tyler was feeling overwhelmed as he stood in front of the whole school. He scanned the crowd and spotted Mallory who was saying something to the

girl next to her as she pointed at him. Tyler then looked over to where Jace was sat. Jace had a smirk on his face as he shot Tyler a thumbs up. Tyler was then sent back to his class where he was met with some pats on the back and congratulations. The assembly was then brought to a close and school was finally released.

Tyler was now walking with Jace and Mallory as they made their way to the middle school which was down the street to meet up with Connor who would shepard them back home. Tyler was still holding the certificate in his hands. It had large stars on it along with some fireworks in the corners. His name was spelled out in large letters underneath where it said “STAR STUDENT” a note was attached with a paperclip from his teacher explaining why he had been nominated. Although Tyler couldn't really read it as it was written in cursive.

“Ty I'm so happy for you,” Mallory said as they held hands while crossing the street as per Mom's instructions for him when he crossed any road. “You must be the most popular kid in your class now.”

“What does that mean?” Tyler asked. “Pop...muler?”

“Popular,” Jace corrected. “It means everybody thinks you're really cool.”

Tyler was then reminded of where he had heard the word before. One day he had wanted Connor to take him on a bike ride but Connor could'nt because he was busy already with plans to go and meet up with friends. Tyler had complained

to his Mom that Connor was always hanging out with his friends. His Mom had merely patted him on the head before remarking that Connor was a popular kid and not too be to upset with him as lots of people wanted to spend time with him.

“I wanna be popular,” Tyler remarked finding the idea appealing if it made him similar to Connor.

“You totally are,” Mallory said. “All my friends thought you were so cute standing up front at the assembly.”

Tyler frowned a little. He didn't want to be thought of as cute by a bunch of girls. He was also a little confused, hadn't Jace just said being popular meant that people thought you were cool?

“Yeah, Ty you'll definitely get all the girls now,” Jace said as he made a kissy face at Tyler.

“Shuddup,” Tyler replied with a smirk.

The group arrived at the front of the middle school. Connor was talking to his friend. He waved goodbye before walking to meet with his siblings.

“Finally, the weekend is here,” Connor said. “You guys ready to head home?

“Ty is the star student,” Mallory said never having been one to stop herself from announcing good news.

“Really?” Connor said surprised as he looked at Tyler.

“Yeah, they gave me this,” Tyler said as he handed his certificate over to Connor.

“Ty, this is really cool, congrats,” Connor said as he looked at the award before handing it back to Connor.

“Were you ever the star student?” Tyler asked already assuming the answer would be yes.

“No, I never was,” Connor replied with a shrug. “You're the first one in the family.”

Tyler was a little surprised to hear this.

“Really?” Tyler asked as he looked at his siblings. “Not even Jace?”

“Nah,” Mallory said with a laugh. “Jace gets into trouble too much to be a star student.”

“I don't care about being star student,” Jace retorted. “So whats your excuse?”

“I don't need to be star student,” Mallory said as she wrapped Tyler's head in an embrace and pulled him close. “Seeing my cute little brother get it is enough for me.”

Tyler pulled away flattening his hair out a little with his hands. The kids began to walk back home as Tyler held his certificate admiring it a little as they walked.

“You'll have to show Mom and Dad, they'll be really proud,” Connor remarked. Tyler stopped cold in his tracks. Something about what Connor had said gave him a pause. As

he looked at the certificate a series of troubling thoughts began to form in his mind. Was this thing really all that special? Connor and Jace had both gotten a couple of awards playing sports and Mallory had even won one once for gymnastics. Mom and Dad had seemed really proud of them for that. However Connor and Jace's awards had been in the form of a trophy and Mallory had gotten a medal, not a flimsy piece of paper. As Tyler though more on this he came to the stark realization that he had not even known he was trying to get an award. His Dad had once told him that awards were how we recognized people for pushing themselves to do their best in pursuit of a goal. Tyler had not pushed himself any harder or tried to do better at anything, he had simply been announced the winner, for what, he still wasn't sure. Tyler took his backpack off of his back and opened it and stuffed the certificate inside.

“Hey careful, you're crumpling it,” Connor said taking notice of what Tyler was doing.

“Mom's gonna want to put it on the fridge you know,” Mallory suggested which only made Tyler more certain. The fridge was no place for a proper award, that's where Mom hung up small things like reminders and novelty magnets. Tyler was now sure he didn't want his parents to see this. It wasn't good enough.

“I don't want them to see it,” Tyler said as he zipped his backpack up and slung it back around his shoulder.

“Why not?” Mallory asked a confused look on her face.

“It's just...well..umm,” Tyler stammered before he wiped some tears that were starting to well up in his eyes. His anxiety and doubts whirling inside of him like a storm causing him to wish he had never won the stupid thing in the first place. Tyler stood gripping the straps of his back pack as he looked at the ground trying his best to fight back the tears. It was Connor who walked over slowly and put a hand on Tyler's shoulder.

“Its okay Ty,” Connor said softly as he gave Tyler's shoulder a reassuring squeeze.

“Just don't tell 'em,” Tyler said looking back at Connor with his big puppy dog eyes.

“If that's what you want then we won't tell, right?” Connor said turning around to the other two making sure they knew he had just commited all of them to keeping a secret.

“I wasn't going to say anything anyways,” Jace said putting his hands up. Connor then stared at Mallory waiting for her to commit to the arrangement.

“I don't see what the big deal is,” Mallory said putting a hand on her hip.

“Mallory,” Connor said with some annoyance.

“Fine, I won't tell,” Mallory said crossing her arms.

The kids then continued on home. Connor had put an arm around his little brother and Tyler had spent the rest of the walk resting his head against Connor's side. Upon arriving

home Tyler saw his Mom's car in the driveway. He ran into the house to find his Mom in the kitchen still in her office clothes having just arrived home.

“Mommy,” Tyler yelped as he ran up to her being lifted up into her arms.

“There's my big kindergartner,” Mom said as she spun him around a little. Tyler rested his head on her shoulder. He had felt better walking with Connor but nothing beat a hug from his Mom when he was feeling out of sorts. Somehow it always made him feel better.

“How was school guys?” Mom asked as the rest of the kids spilled into the kitchen hanging their backpacks up on the hooks on the wall.

“Same as always,” Jace said. “Boring.”

Connor and Mallory responded with simple one word answers.

“Well they can't all be exciting,” Mom said with a sigh. “But remember the weekend doesn't start until homework is done. I don't want anyone rushing Sunday night to finish what they had all weekend to do.”

“I don't have any homework,” Tyler giggled.

“Then it looks like you get to go play,” Mom said as she set Tyler onto the ground.

“Lucky,” Jace grumbled as she pulled a social studies book out of his backpack before taking a spot at the table.

“I'm gonna work in my room,” Connor said before retreating to the basement.

“I have to practice for the concert,” Mallory said with some pride before she went up to her room, moments later music could be heard blaring out from her room.

“I'm gonna change and then I'll get you a snack while you work,” Mom said as she ran a hand through Jace's hair before leaving the kitchen herself. Tyler stood breathing a sigh of relief. His siblings had kept their word and hadn't said anything about the assembly. Tyler then turned to look at Jace who was busy working away.

“Whatcha doin?” Tyler asked as he came up to the table peering at Jace's textbook and workbook. He could'nt help himself when it came to his brothers everything they seemed to do seemed interesting to Tyler.

“Homework, duh,” Jace said sarcastically.

“Can I help?” Tyler asked.

“Not unless you know the names of all the continents.” Jace said in a way that expressed his annoyance with Tyler's questions.

“Oh thats easy,” Tyler said before he rattled off the names of the landmasses. Jace stopped a moment as he read his book before he gave Tyler a strange look.

“How did you know that?” Jace asked quizzically. Tyler hadn't even realized he had been answering the question.

“I don't know, I just did,” Tyler said. It was the truth sometimes things like that just popped into his head.

“All right Einstein. Here's another one. What ocean separates the United States from Great Britain?” Jace asked looking expectantly at the boy who had just answered his last question as if he were some geography whiz. Tyler thought for a moment. He knew Great Britain was a place but if you asked him where it was on a map he wouldn't have the foggiest idea.

“Um the big one,” Tyler said. Jace laughed a little.

“Guess you just got lucky on that last one,” Jace said. “Now stop bothering me. Go play or something and just be happy you don't get homework on the weekends,” Jace said as he went back to working on his schoolwork. Tyler walked out of the kitchen. He went up to his room Feeling a little proud of himself for knowing something that Jace didn't yet as he thought about it more, it wasn't as if he had understood what he said. It had just come out of his mouth, almost as if some one else had been talking. It didn't really bother him that much. Sometimes he really did just seem to know things, and sometimes he understood what he said and other times he didn't.

Tyler took out some toys and spent the rest of his afternoon playing on the floor of his room with his action figures. Soon enough dinner had rolled around. The family was sat around the table eating pizza that Dad had brought home. Tyler wasn't really paying attention to the conversation as he was

preoccupied with the giant slice he was currently tearing into.

“Anything fun happen at school today?” Dad asked.

“We had an assembly today,” Mallory blurted out. “Tyler won an award.”

Tyler felt himself freeze up as the piece of pizza fell from his mouth. Connor groaned as he put his face in his hands.

“Whoops,” Mallory said with an awkward smile realizing she had slipped up.

“Mallory,” Tyler hissed as he clenched his fist.

“You are the biggest blabbermouth,” Jace said side-eyeing his sister.

“I don't see what the big deal is, he's the star student I think its a good thing.” Mallory said defending herself.

“Wait a minute,” Mom said with a shocked look as she put up her hands to silence the bickering. “Tyler won an award in front of the whole school and nobody told me?”

“Its in his backpack,” Mallory said dropping any allusions to keeping the secret. Tyler was sure now she hadn't mentioned it by accident.

“I want to see it,” Mom said as she got up from her seat and walked over to the bags hanging on the hooks and opening Tyler's which was always easy to spot since it was bright red and had a large graphic of a firetruck on it. Tyler watched on in horror as his Mom pulled out the certificate which was

only a little crumpled. She looked at the certificate smoothing out the edges a little.

“Why wouldn't you show this to me?” Mom asked a slightly confused smile on her face as she turned the certificate around so that everyone could see.

Even though she hadn't meant it as such Tyler could only hear an accusation aimed at him. Tyler got up from his chair. He could feel everyone's eyes on him, they wanted an answer. Tyler could only feel like his parents were mad at him.

“Its nothing special,” Tyler said as his voice quivered.

It is special,” his Mom replied. “You are the star student.”

Tyler felt the words catch in his throat as he felt like he was on trial. He felt the tears once again begin to well up in his eyes. He shook his head.

“I didn't want you to see,” Tyler finally managed to yelp before running out of the room as he headed for the safety of his room. He could no longer bear to stand anymore in front of his parents with the stupid award being shoved into his face.

“Whats gotten into him?” Mom asked as she watched the scene play out in befuddlement. Dad got up from his chair and took the certificate from his wife's hand as he examined it. He then noticed the note from the teacher attached as he un-clipped it and read it through.

“He did'nt want us to tell you,” Connor piped up.

“He was happy about it at first,” Jace added with a shrug. “But then he all of sudden got all moody about it and we had to promise not to say anything,” Jace said as he gave a look at Mallory who now looked guilty.

“I suppose we are going to have to go talk to him,” Mom said giving Dad a concerned look.

“I'll do it,” Dad said with a nod as he walked out of the kitchen with the award in hand, leaving the note behind for Mom to read.

Up in his room Tyler had his face buried in his pillow laying face down in his bed like a dead man. He heard his door open and then felt the weight of his Dad sit on the edge of his bed.

“Ty,” Dad said as he shook Tyler's leg. “Why don't you sit up?”

“Don't wanna,” Tyler said his voice being muffled by the pillow.

“Come on now,” Dad said as he lifted Tyler up so that he was now sat up next to him. “You're not a little baby anymore, you can talk to me like an adult.” Something about what his Dad said gave Tyler a twinge as he felt a little jolt go through his neck. “So why didn't you want me and your Mom to see this?” Dad asked holding the certificate in his hand. Tyler was silent as he looked away. “You know I think its pretty great,” Dad said.

“But its not,” Tyler said “Its just a stupid piece of paper. They only gave it to me so I would feel good about myself.”

Tyler seemed to think this was a perfectly reasonable explanation. After all that's what his teacher was always saying. That they should be nice to others so they would feel good about themselves.

“You really think that's it, did you happen to read the note that was attached from your teacher?”

“No,” Tyler admitted. “I can't read the writing.”

“Well I did,” Dad said. “Your teacher seems to think you are an exceptional individual.”

“Exceptional?” Tyler repeated back.

“Yeah it means not normal,” Dad said. Tyler shot him a strange look.

“They think I'm weird?” Tyler asked but as the words left his mouth he found that it did make sense. Sometimes he did feel weird, different in a way. He didn't really understand why the school would give him an award for such a thing. He wanted nothing more to be just as good as his siblings.

“Not like that,” Dad said with a chuckle. “It just means you are doing really well. According to your teacher you are a smart, empathetic boy who is always ready to lend a helping hand to anyone who needs it. I gotta say I agree.”

Tyler furrowed his brow. Just because he sometimes knew things that he shouldn't didn't mean he was smart, that was that voice in his head. Tyler didn't know what the second word meant but he didn't really feel like just because he was

nice that he deserved some reward, he was supposed to be nice.

“I have to be better,” Tyler said out loud but it was more to himself than anyone.

You're fine just the way you are,” Dad said putting his arm around the boy.

“No,” Tyler said as he got up from the bed with a frustrated growl. “I don't want to be fine, I...I have to be better...I just gotta.”

Dad was silent for a moment as he looked a Tyler.

“You know bud, I've noticed something about you for awhile now, ever since you were a little kid its seems you have been out to prove something. I want you to tell me why you can't just be proud of yourself for once?”

Tyler felt a jolt go through his body once again, his Dad's word stirring something from deep within him. Something he had pushed down for so long but could no longer hold back.

“I just want you to be proud of me Dad,” he said the words seeming so foreign to him. It struck him in a weird way as he looked at his Dad on the bed in front of him, and for a moment he didn't recognize him. He had never called him Dad before it was always Daddy. For a moment it felt as if Tyler had been talking to a completely different person, someone he had known long ago.

“Um...no...I mean,” Tyler stuttered as he took a step back

shaking off the strange feeling that had overcome him a minute ago. “I just want you to be happy I'm here, I just want to be good enough so I can be part of the family.”

His Dad stared back at him pushing his cheek out with his tongue for a moment before he gave a great big sigh.

“Ty you don't have to prove anything to anyone. I don't want you to ever worry that you aren't good enough to be in this family ever again,” Dad said sounding more like he was scolding Tyler for doing something bad. “Whether you feel like it or not, you are a part of this family, in fact I would say you don't even realize just how much you are. You are being so hard on yourself for nothing, that's just like your brothers, I'm afraid you all get it from your mother, she's the same way,” Dad said with a laugh. Dad then took Tyler's hands and pulled him forward before wrapping him up in a hug.

“I want you to know that whatever you do in life as long as you are happy and healthy I will always be proud of you. I just love you too much not to be.”

Tyler clutched his Dads shirt with his hands. Something was happening and he knew there was something he had to accept some final thing he had to realize.

“I love you too Daddy,” he said as he felt his Dad hug him just a little tighter. Tyler nuzzled a little into his Dad as a feeling of calm came over him. In some ways he imagined that he had been at the bottom of a deep pool holding on to something heavy and now he had been able to let go of it. Perhaps it was resentment? Or regret, whatever it was didn't

matter anymore. Tyler was leaving it behind floating to the top and leaving it at the bottom.

A moment later Tyler was in his Dad's lap as they both looked at the award certificate Dad held in his hands.

“My whole class gets to have an ice cream party too,” Tyler said as he recounted the events of the assembly to his Dad.

“Wow, I bet they were all happy with you,” Dad said.

“Gabe said he was going to make a sundae that reached the ceiling,” Tyler said with a giggle.

“That sounds like something he would do, he would probably eat every last bite too. I once saw that boy down five hot dogs in one sitting. I wonder where it all goes?” Dad wondered aloud.

“His Mom says he has a bottomless pit for a stomach,” Tyler offered as an explanation.

“That must be it,” Dad said with a nod. “Okay, I think we should go back downstairs,” Dad said lifting Tyler off his lap. Tyler nodded. As they walked back to to the kitchen he felt a little silly with how he had reacted. What in the world had he been thinking. That voice in his head reasoned that sometimes kids had weird thoughts, but it was okay, his family wouldn't make fun of him. Tyler walked into the kitchen to see his Mom was just finishing clearing the table. He walked up to her with some apprehension.

“Um I won this,” he said handing her the certificate. His

Mom took it in her hands taking a moment to admire it.

“I'm so proud of you,” she said as she wrapped him up in a hug. “Now go stand over there so I can get a picture of you and your award.” Mom said as she pulled out her phone.

“Fine,” Tyler said with a smirk as he took his position. He knew there was no talking Mom down when she wanted her picture.

Tyler stood holding his certificate with a big smile on his face as his Mom took her photos.

“Its really something Ty,” Mom said as she looked at her photos. “The star student.”

“My whole class gets an ice cream party,” Tyler said with some pride that his whole class was also going to be rewarded because of him.

“When is that happening?” Mom asked. Tyler thought for a moment. He had never actually heard when it was supposed to happen. Ultimately he just gave a shrug.

“I don't see why you have to wait,” Dad said grabbing his keys. “We have cause to celebrate tonight, I say we all go get some ice cream right now.”

“Really!” Tyler exclaimed. Dad called the other kids and soon enough the entire family was sat at a table at the local ice cream parlor enjoying some frozen treats. Tyler had a cone with two scoop on it that he was licking trying to keep the quickly melting ice cream from covering his hands.

“Ty you got it all over your face,” Mom said as she wiped the ring of ice cream that had formed around his mouth with a napkin. Tyler was unfazed as he went back to licking his cone. Just then a memory flashed before him. He was sitting in a car, he was older. A cupcake sat in front of him on the dashboard. “To another year,” he had said in a voice so unlike his own now. Tyler came back to the present. The memory had been so vivid, and he came away feeling the loneliness he had felt then. He looked around at his family that was at the table with him. He smirked a little. The memory had caused him to for a moment take stock of his current life. He could remember how he had always felt a little lonely back then, but now he didn't need to worry anymore. There were people all around him. His friends at school, his siblings, and his Mom and Dad. Tyler didn't really think a lot on his past but he knew he had made a choice and at the time it had seemed like a gamble. But now he knew it had paid off and that's all that really mattered.

Chapter 24

One of the Family: Final Part - Chapter 24

Connor walked down the hotel hallway pulling out his phone to check the time. It read nine am. He couldn't let Tyler sleep in anymore plus he still needed to track down his Dad to get the car keys. Connor got to the room and pulled out his wallet taking out the room key before he used it to open the door. He walked into the darkened room. The bed where Mallory and their little cousin Kaycee who was staying with them for the summer while her parents were out of the country, was empty. Connor looked to the other bed in the room that he had slept in to find that Jace was still asleep like a rock. Connor then looked over to the cot positioned between the foot of the two beds where his ten year old little brother was also still asleep. He made his way over to the cot and gave Tyler a shake.

“Ty wake up,” Connor said. Tyler gave a little moan as he pulled his covers tighter up to his neck and rolled onto his side. Connor smirked a little. He walked to the other side and knelt down before using his fingers to plug Tyler's nose. It only took a few moments for Tyler to snort and sit upright. Connor could only chuckle.

“Whats the big idea?” Tyler asked as he scowled at his oldest brother.

“Time to get up, we gotta go,” Connor said. Tyler looked over

at the clock on the bedside table.

“The race doesn't even start till three,” Tyler said. He was of course referring to the whole reason the family had even taken this little trip. Tyler was entered into a dirt bike race taking place later in the day. Dad had gotten talking to one of the other dads at the weekend league for kids at the local racetrack who had mentioned this race. Even though it was a few hours away Dad had seen it as a good opportunity for a small family trip. The summer had been so busy with a house guest and getting everything Connor would need for his upcoming freshman year at college a family vacation had been put on hold.

“I'm not talking about the race,” Connor said. Just then Jace sat up in the bed with an annoyed look on his face.

“What is with all the noise?” he asked not even fully opening his eyes.

“Me and Tyler are going somewhere,” Connor said. “Want to come?”

Jace looked over at the clock and then back to Connor.

“Its too early just be quiet and let me sleep,” Jace said before laying back down and pulling the covers up over his head. Connor just shook his head with a grin. That was the answer he had been expecting, he had no intention of inviting Jace, this was just for him and Tyler.

“We're going somewhere?” Tyler asked now fully awake.

“Yep, just you and me,” Connor said.

“Where?” Tyler asked curiously.

“That's a surprise,” Connor said with a mischievous look. “So hurry up and get ready.”

Tyler got out of bed and grabbed some clothes from his bag before shuffling into the bathroom. He brushed his teeth as he wondered what Connor was planning. Tyler certainly had no idea as this was the first mention Connor had made about any such plans. Still Tyler felt a little excited upon hearing that it would just be him and Connor. Tyler took off his pajamas before donning a pair of blue superman briefs with a red waistband and the S emblem on the front. It was his lucky pair of underwear that he always wore on days when he would be racing. Tyler knew it was kind of silly but there was just a little part of him that believed they made him fly just a little higher over the dirt mounds when he was on his bike. He finished getting ready pulling on a pair of cargo shorts and a Sonic the Hedgehog tank top. Tyler ran his hand through his hair a little grimacing at it. His Mom had taken him to get it cut a few weeks ago. Tyler had insisted on a mohawk which Mom had flat out denied instead instructing the hairdresser to give him a short cut with a fade in the back. Tyler didn't think it was the worst haircut or anything, it just wasn't a mohawk. Tyler came out of the bathroom and got his shoes on.

“Lets go,” Connor said seeing that Tyler was now ready as he opened the door and they walked out into the hallway.

“C'mon just tell me,” Tyler whined a little as the two of them walked down the hall towards the elevators.

“I told you Ty its a surprise,” Connor repeated for maybe the fifth time during their short walk.

“But I wanna know,” Tyler said.

“Man, you kids these days have no patience,” Connor said with a sigh.

“I'm actually older than you,” Tyler mumbled a little. Connor looked down at Tyler as his brother looked straight ahead with an expression that showed that he didn't really think much of the comment. However it did strike Connor a little weird. He knew that Tyler was well aware that he had once been older, but as far as Connor could tell he didn't really think about all that much or rather if he did, he certainly didn't tell Connor about it. Tyler acted like a typical ten year old. He watched cartoons and played video games, found fart jokes to be funny and thought girls were weird, if not a little interesting at times. What made Connor really take a moment was that today of all days Tyler had chosen to make such a comment. Did he know?

As they turned the corner they ran into Mallory who holding their little cousin Kaycee in her arms.

“Oh geez,” Mallory exclaimed as she came to a stop. “I almost ran into you guys.”

“Connor, Ty Ty,” Kaycee said as she smiled at the two boys.

“Hey Kaycee,” Connor said with a smile as he patted the girl on the head.

“We goin swimmin, you should come too,” the little girl said with an gleeful smile.

“Sorry, I can't go,” Connor said with an exaggerated frown.

“Ty Ty come,” Kaycee asked looking at Tyler who gave her a smile.

“I can't either, I'm going somewhere,” Tyler said.

“You're going somewhere,” Mallory said as she gave Tyler a raised eyebrow.

“Yeah me and Connor, but he wont tell me where,” Tyler said giving Connor a small shove with his elbow.

“Oh,” Kaycee said as her head drooped a little with disappointment.

“Hey don't be sad,” Tyler said as he walked up to his little cousin. “I promise I'll swim with you tonight, okay.” Kaycee looked up as she grinned a little.

“Promises?” she asked sticking out her pinky finger.

“Promises,” Tyler said as he wrapped his pinky around hers.

“Maybe Jace will come with us?” Kaycee then asked looking at Mallory.

“He's still asleep in the room,” Connor said. “But I wouldn't get your hopes up.”

“Jace is kind of a grump in the morning,” Mallory said as she started off down the hallway. As Connor and Tyler headed towards the elevator they could hear the two girls chanting “Jace is a grump” repeatedly.

The two brothers stepped out of the elevator as Connor took the lead making his way to the dining room area where they found their parents sat at a table enjoying a cup of coffee. Connor walked up to the table with Tyler in tow as he held out his hand.

“Here to get the keys,” Connor said. Dad placed the key fob into his hand.

“Keep it at the speed limit,” Dad said. “Last thing I need is to come and post bail for you two.”

“Hardy har har,” Connor said sarcastically. “Don't worry its not like I'm taking the minivan street racing.”

Mom pulled Tyler into a hug.

“You mind your brother now, he's in charge,” she said as a reminder.

“Do you know where he's taking me?” Tyler asked.

“Of course,” Mom said with a smile. “Not sure whats so special about it, but Connor seems to think you'll really like it.”

“Come on, just tell me already,” Tyler said looking at his parents. Mom just pulled her finger across her lips like she was zipping them shut.

“A surprise is only fun if its a surprise,” Mom said.

“Okay, fine,” Tyler said with a grin. Even though he was unbearably curious as to what Connor had in store, he did have to admit the anticipation was kind of fun.

“Make sure you are back here by one so we can get out to the racetrack with enough time for setup,” Dad said to Connor.

Connor gave his dad a salute before they walked out of the hotel to the car ready to start on their journey. Tyler got into the back of car. Connor turned around and gave him a mystified look.

“What are you doing?” Connor asked.

“Sitting,” Tyler replied with some confusion.

“Don't you want to join me up front?” Connor asked as if it were funny for Tyler to sit where he was.

“Uh Mom and Dad say I'm not old enough to sit up front,” Tyler replied. Connor simply smiled.

“I won't tell if you don't,” Connor said. Tyler climbed up into the front seat with all the excitement of a kid who knew they were getting away with something. As the two drove Connor only half regretted his decisions to let Tyler sit up front as Tyler had chosen to entertain himself by constantly switching the radio stations.

“Geez, Ty just pick something already,” Connor groaned.

“S-sorry,” Tyler stammered a little as he sat back in his seat.

“Its fine,” Connor said feeling he had come off sounding more annoyed than he actually was.

“Are we there yet?” Tyler asked.

“Its a little further away still, but does any of this look familiar to you?” Connor asked as he motioned to the sights outside. Tyler took a moment to look out his window.

“No. Not really,” Tyler said shaking his head. “Should it?”

“You just don't remember,” Connor said. Tyler looked at him as he furrowed his brow returning his gaze back outside. Nothing really stood out to him, just what was he supposed to remember?

“Here entertain yourself,” Connor said tossing his phone into Tyler's lap. “I'll tell you when we get there.”

“Sweet,” Tyler said picking up the phone and opening up a game. Tyler was completely absorbed into the phone as Connor continued driving. Tyler did have his own phone but it had parental controls on it that limited his game time to only one hour a day, two on the weekends of course, so the chance for some unlimited screen time was a welcome opportunity in his world.

The car drove on and after another hour Connor finally pulled into a parking lot. Tyler looked up from the phone screen sensing the car coming to a stop.

“We're here,” Connor said turning off the engine and getting out of the car. Tyler looked out the window. Nothing really

stuck out to him, it looked like a park. There was a playground and some picnic tables around, not too mention it was completely devoid of people. Tyler got out of the car and followed along with Connor as his older brother walked towards the park. Connor came to a stop at the edge of the grass.

“So you recognize this place right?” Connor asked. Tyler stood for a moment looking out at the scene in front of him not really understanding what was so special. Then in a flash it came rushing back to him, the very act of seeing something familiar had stirred up the memory in his head making it all the more clear. This was the park where he had met Fiona, the park where he had been changed.

“No way,” Tyler said a breathlessly as he looked around. Not much had changed about it other than the tables and playground equipment looking slightly more run down than they had been eight years ago. “This is the place,” Tyler said looking at Connor. “But how did you know?”

“I got curious one day and I retraced the path we had taken on that vacation and I eventually found out where this park was. When Dad told me about where we would be going on this trip I realized it wasn't that far away. When I realized what day today was I figured it was too good to pass up.”

“The day?” Tyler repeated back.

“Today is the anniversary of the day we met,” Connor said. “C'mon lets go have a seat. Tyler followed Connor towards the playground. He had so many thoughts going around his

head. They walked past one of the tables and Tyler realized it was the table he had been sat at when he had first met Fiona. He ran his hand across the top as he walked past. Connor and Tyler climbed up the playground equipment taking a seat on the bridge letting their legs dangle over the edge as they overlooked the park.

“You know I've kind of wanted to ask you something,” Connor said. “I've just been wondering if you remember when you were older?

“Yeah, I do,” Tyler said as he rested his chin onto his arms that were supported by the metal bars on the bridge. “Its kind of fuzzy most of the time though. I haven't thought about this park for so long, but I can tell you that is the table I sat at eating a pb&j sandwich and a bag of chips as an adult, I also remember some people I used to know, friends, my grandma...Dad.”

Connor looked at Tyler seeing a sort of melancholic look on his face. Connor got a little worried that maybe bringing Tyler to this place was having a negative effect on him, perhaps it was reminding him of things he'd rather forget.

“You mean your real Dad?” Connor asked.

“The person I used to call Dad,” Tyler said as if he was correcting Connor. “My real Dad is back at the hotel.” Connor smirked a little.

“That must be kind of weird, do be able to remember being an adult,” Connor said.

“Not really,” Tyler said surprising Connor. “I mean I remember being able to drive and I remember I used to write articles, I used to read the news and go to bars, but I don't really understand that stuff anymore. Its kind of like when I remember being a little kid, the shows I used to watch and the things I thought were fun aren't the same. Its just because I'm different now than I was back then.”

Connor nodded, Tyler's explanation seemed to have some logic to it.

“That's pretty philosophical Ty,” Connor chuckled.

“Whats that mean, philosophical?” Tyler asked causing Connor to laugh again. Tyler gave him a unappreciative look.

“Sorry,” Connor said. He really couldn't help himself. The juxtaposition of Tyler talking about the intricacies of life as if he were an adult only to turn around and confirm he truly was a kid was too much for Connor.

“It just means it was a deep thought,” Connor said. Tyler didn't respond as he merely shrugged, not seeing what was so deep about it.

“Why are you asking about this stuff anyways?” Tyler asked as he gave Connor a serious look.

“I don't know, guess I'm just feeling nostalgic.” Connor said. “When we first met we used to talk about this kind of stuff all the time. Then the day after you decided to stay you just kind of stopped bringing it up all together you just seemed to start acting like a normal little kid after that. To tell you the truth I

was a little sad.”

“You were sad?” Tyler asked in a way that seemed to indicate that Connor's reaction had been strange considering everything they had gone through.

“Don't get me wrong I was happy too. It seemed like a weight had come off of you and you were definitely less stressed out. But at the same time that was the thing that had brought us so close together in the first place, so it was kind of sad to lose that connection.” Connor explained.

“I didn't forget,” Tyler said. “It was more like everyday that passed it just didn't seem to be as important to me. There were long stretches of time where it didn't seem to occur to me. Like I didn't care anymore about once being older, I just wasn't that person anymore.”

“I don't know if I buy that, the old you is definitely still here,” Connor said. “There are times where I see bits and pieces of your old self coming out.”

“Like what?” Tyler asked cocking his head a little.

“Its small stuff, a comment here or times when you act a little out of character for your age,” Connor said waving his hand. “But there are other times too. Like remember when I forgot to pick you up from swim practice when you were eight, and then I found you trying to walk home in that downpour?” Connor asked. “Man when you got into the car you really laid into me.”

“So what I was mad,” Tyler said.

“Yeah but the way you were talking was more like Mom or Dad lecturing me on the finer points of responsibility rather than my furious kid brother,” Connor said with a laugh.

“Really,” Tyler said with a laugh. “Guess I didn't realize. Maybe I haven't really changed that much.”

“What do you remember about that night,” Connor asked. “You know when you decided not to change back?”

Tyler sat back as he thought. He definitely remembered the conversation he and Connor had had before walking up to his room to meet Fiona. He also remembered that it had been a quick change of heart for him. The particulars of everything were a little fuzzy but he knew that at some point every doubt and uncertainty had fallen away and he saw what his choice was truly going to be.

“I remember I wrote out a note with Fiona,” Tyler said. “It was for you.”

“What did it say?” Connor asked almost as if he were angling towards something.

“I don't know, it said a lot of stuff, I don't remember it word for word,” Tyler answered with a shake of his head.

“Good thing I got it right here,” Connor said producing a folded up piece of paper.

“You kept it,” Tyler said with a laugh as Connor handed him the letter.

“Of course, “ Connor said. “Its sentimental to me.”

Tyler unfolded the note looking at the words written out. It was strange that these had been words he once said.

ÿýHey Connor so this might seem kind of strange to you given how we left off last night. Before you accuse me of playing a trick on you just know what I told you was how I felt at the time. I was completely committed to going through with it, but I've done some thinking. It may seem kind of a fast conclusion but please don't think you have made me feel guilty of making a choice. I think that in reality I just wasn't ready to be honest with myself. I was so focused on getting my original self back that I failed to understand how things truly were. I was making excuses just to try and shift the facts into a narrative that supported what I thought I was supposed to want. I was thinking too close minded. That if I made one choice I would have to give up everything else. I see now that is not what is happening. I don't really know why all this happened. Whether I was supposed to be apart of this family all along and I had just been born out of place or if I was just seeing what I was missing from my life, it simply doesn't matter. I say with all honesty that I love being here with all of you. You are my family. It doesn't really matter how I got here all that matters is I'm here now. You were right, I don't have to leave. In fact its the worse option. Why should I go and try and make for myself what I already have? Its not like I have to give it up either. There is one choice that gives me everything. I'm not starting over this is merely the next chapter in my life, I'm ready to keep moving forward to see what new adventures await me. You have told me on more than one occasion that I would always have a place here. I'm

taking you up on that offer so I hope you weren't kidding. We're brothers now.

P.S

I really want a dirtbike don't let Daddy forget.

Tyler folded the letter back up. It was strange to think that at one point in time he had talked like that. If he were to write that letter now it wouldn't sound the same.

“Thought you might get a kick out of it,” Connor said as Tyler handed him back the note.

“It was interesting,” Tyler said with a nod.

“Here is something else kind of cool,” Connor said handing another piece of paper to Tyler. The boy unfolded it and looked at it. At the top was Connor's name with some info such as age and date of birth. Further down was a pie chart with different ethnicities listed with percentages next to them. Tyler wasn't really sure what to make of it or why Connor was showing him this.

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“What is this?” Tyler asked.

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“Its a DNA test,” Connor said. “I sent away for it in the mail. Remember when I made you spit into that vial and then wouldn't tell you why?”

ÿý

“Oh yeah,” Tyler said remembering the incident vividly. He had been really curious about it.

“Here's yours,” Connor said handing Tyler yet another piece of paper. This one was similar to Connor's except of course it was Tyler's info at the top. As Tyler looked over the numbers he realized something.

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“The numbers are the same,” Tyler said not really seeing what the big deal was.

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“Yep they are,” Connor said with a grin. “Looks like that spell worked a little better than we thought. We really are brothers through and through.”

“Cool, I guess,” Tyler said as he handed the paper back to Connor.

“I thought you would be more excited than that,” Connor said with a frown at seeing his surprise not get the reaction he was hoping for.

“Its cool, really,” Tyler said flashing Connor a weak smile. “Its just I didn't think we weren't.”

“Wait, a minute I didn't meant it like that,” Connor said becoming a little flummoxed. “We're brothers no matter what.”

“Mhmm,” Tyler hummed as a smirk spread across his face as

he looked out at the park. Connor was a little worried that he put an idea in Tyler's head that the results on the paper meant a whole lot more to Connor than they actually did. In truth it wouldn't have mattered what they said. Nothing would come between the bond he and Tyler had forged.

“Tyler I'm really sorry, this stuff doesn't really matter,” Connor said stuffing the papers back into his pocket. Tyler looked at Connor with a little surprise.

“Are you mad?” Tyler asked.

“No!” Connor exclaimed. “I thought you were.”

“I'm not,” Tyler replied. “Look I appreciate it and everything but I guess long ago I just got to a point where it didn't really matter how related we were in a traditional sense. I've accepted where I am, and who I am.”

“Good,” Connor said with some relief. “I'm really happy to hear that.”

The two were silent for a moment before Tyler spoke again.

“Hey do ya think when we get back I can go swimming?” Tyler asked. Connor couldn't help but laugh. It had been one of those little moments where Tyler demonstrated some deeper understanding of the world around him that most kids would have no perspective of before a moment later going right back to being a normal kid.

“Yeah if we hurry,” Connor said getting back up.

“I can play more games on the way back right?” Tyler asked

as they walked back to the car.

“Of course dude,” Connor said.

“Yes,” Tyler said as he pumped his fist before taking off in a sprint towards the car.

As Connor started the car he looked at Tyler already absorbed into the game on the phone. Tyler looked back at him for a moment.

“Thanks for bringing me here,” Tyler said with a smile. “It was really cool.”

Connor smiled as he backed out the car.

The day had passed and soon enough Tyler found himself sat on his bike in the starting line up, the sound of engines revving filling the air. Connor was in front of him doing some last minute checks before he stood up getting close to Tyler's face.

“Okay remember to take it easy on the first two turns. After the third turn leading up to the jump is when you can really open it up.” Connor instructed.

“Got it,” Tyler said with a nod.

“Oh and Ty one last thing,” Connor said giving Tyler a light slap on top of his helmet. “Remember to fly high,”

The countdown came and the race started Tyler heeded the advice and as he came on the straightaway he punched the acceleration launching himself into the air off the jump. Tyler

loved the feeling of flying through the air. Time always seemed to slow down for him in these moments. As he soared through the air he could always feel it. The undeniable truth of it all. He was where he needed to be, everything had its place before him and there was no reason to worry. All the hardships of his past, all the steps he had taken in his life had lead him to a place where he could see the path forward. He had finally arrived and he couldn't wait to see what new adventures lie in store for him

THE END