You Can Trust Me

by dorkyassassins

Summary

As Skye's fifth foster family dropped her back off at the orphanage, Skye wondered if she would ever find a forever home. Then she met Melinda May and Phil Coulson and everything seemed to change.

This is a revision from my already completed fic on ff.net (it REALLY needed to be revised lol)

Notes

After about 3 years, I finally decided to revise this mess lol and Get With The Times and post it to AO3! It's a Skye kid!fic and has a bunch of family feels. Also, please note that when I wrote this, Daisy was still going by 'Skye' so I'm just going to keep it like that. A big portion of that reasoning is explained in later chapters but I just wanted to give you a heads up.

In this fic, Skye is 6.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Skye flew out of the car as soon as it came to a stop. She didn't care that they were taking her back to St. Agnes', she didn't care that this "family" only lasted a couple of weeks, and she didn't care that they were taking her back because her foster brother told them she wouldn't stop hitting him (which was a lie). She just needed to get out of the car.

Foster Family number four, the Harvey's, had died in a car and ever since then, she couldn’t handle being in one. As soon as she thought about the Harvey’s, it was like she was back at that night and she was trapped in an awful memory.

It had happened a week before her 6th birthday and they had just signed the adoption papers a couple days before. It was the happiest she ever remembered being, until a drunk driver swerved into them late one night. It was all her fault and they wouldn't be dead if it wasn't for her. She had been at her first sleepover ever, and she was nervous because sometimes she still wet the bed and she had nightmares a lot, so she refused to fall asleep. She had asked Avery's mom if she could call Mrs. Harvey because she wanted to go back home.

She had been sitting on the floor by the staircase, trying not to cry, when Mr. and Mrs. Harvey had walked in the door. She’d felt even guiltier because they both came and she hadn't been able to stop a tear from escaping. Mrs. Harvey had spotted her and rushed towards her while Mr. Harvey stopped to talk to Avery's mom.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I didn't mean to make you come back. Please don't be mad at me!" She had been full-on crying and she remembered Mrs. Harvey just pulling her into a tight hug. She had stiffened for a minute, out of reflex, and then relaxed into the hug as he felt Mrs. Harvey gently stroking her hair.

"Skye, never feel bad for calling us when you need us. We're your parents now. We want to be here for you and we aren't mad. How about we head home?" Mrs. Harvey had whispered into her ear.

She remembers feeling her tears dry on her face as she tried to remind herself that Mr. and Mrs. Harvey were her parents now, and how good it had felt to realize that. She was still getting used to the fact that if she called, they would come when she needed them. It was a foreign feeling but she thought that she was starting to really like it.

She had looked up at Mrs. Harvey and smiled tentatively up at her before nodding. Mrs. Harvey lifted her into her arms and Skye wrapped legs around her waist and her arms around her neck. She wasn't used to being hugged or having someone there to help her stop crying and it was all new to her, but she had hoped that she would get used to it. Mrs. Harvey didn't even yell at her, she just thanked Avery's mom, made sure Mr. Harvey grabbed Skye's overnight bag, and carried her to the car. At that point, Skye had started to feel much better.

Mrs. Harvey had buckled her into her car seat and kissed her cheek before getting into the passenger seat. The kissing and displays of affection were also things Skye was trying to get used to. She had had a lot of "forever homes" up until that point but no one had wanted to adopt her. Out of all the families she'd been with, she had been the happiest that the Harvey's wanted to keep her. They never yelled at her or hit her, Mr. Harvey never tried to scare her or touch her, and they seemed to actually want to be her parents. She remembered being a little afraid because she was finally starting to feel happy and whenever that happened, something came along and ruined it.

They had started heading back home and Skye stared out the window and towards the night sky. She
had always loved looking at the moon and stars ever since she could remember. They never failed to be right where they were supposed to be.

"How about when we get back home, we read you your favorite story, huh? Don't tell anyone, but Goodnight Moon is also becoming one of my favorites," Mr. Harvey had grinned at her and Skye had giggled and caught his eyes in the mirror. He had been smiling back at her when the car swerved right into them.

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey had died on impact and Skye had been left alone in a mangled car for an hour before someone saw and called the police. Miraculously, she walked away with only minor scrapes and bruises but she couldn't stop seeing how Mrs. Harvey's head had been twisted in a weird way, or how Mr. Harvey's arm bone stuck out through his skin.

She had stopped talking for a little while after that.

It was because she wouldn't talk that Foster Family number five hadn't worked out so well.

The Ramsey's had started off being nice but Skye was wary and still mourning the Harvey’s. They had smiled at her when they took her home from the orphanage and their real son, Aaron, had said that he wanted to be friends with her. She hadn't trusted him at all because when foster families had real kids, she knew that they would end up hating her. They didn't want to share her parents with a girl like her. They always ended up being mean, taking her toys away or taunting her.

She had tried to smile for them the first few days, families liked happy kids, but she wasn't happy and she didn’t fake it very well. She'd had a mom and a dad for a week and they were already gone and it had been all her fault.

Words had stuck in her throat and they hadn't been able to escape.

Her silence hadn't been an issue for the first few days. Obviously, the Ramsey’s thought it was a temporary thing, but when she didn't respond when they asked her questions, she could see the anger starting to appear in their eyes. Especially in Mr. Ramsey's eyes. He started picking on her and pushing her around and if she did something wrong, he would yell very loudly and throw things across the room. She guessed that it was probably easier to be mean to someone when they wouldn't say anything back. She had finally decided that it would probably be safer to start talking again when Mr. Ramsey started yelling at her for something that Aaron had done. She had thought that maybe if he knew that she hadn't do a bad thing this time, he would stop being so mean to her, but when she finally opened her mouth and said that it hadn't been her who had knocked his computer to the ground, it was Aaron, Mr. Ramsey had stopped and then started yelling louder about how she was blaming their innocent kid for something that she had done.

A couple weeks later when Aaron accused her of hitting him, Skye could tell the Ramsey's wouldn't believe her even if she told them the truth. They were looking for an excuse to get rid of her, and honestly, she was looking for an excuse to get out of there, so she hadn't denied it.

That was how she had ended up here, almost seven years old and without a family.

She was currently kneeling on the grassy lawn in front of St. Agnes', trying to force air into her lungs and hold her tears back. She heard the Ramsey's walk by her and towards the front office of the building. They had already called the nuns in advance and told them they were bringing Skye back, so all they needed to do was sign some things and she would be free of them. When she finally felt like she was getting enough air into her body, she started to stand back up again, only to be pushed back onto the ground.
"Mary Sue what the hell are you doing back here?"

"Yeah, another family didn't want you?"

"At least you didn't kill this one. They managed to get rid of you before that happened."

Three older boys were laughing at her and daring her to try and get back up. Jonathan and his stupid friends had always been especially mean to her and she didn't know why. It could've been because she was smaller than most girls her age or because she didn't have that many friends to back her up, but Skye tried to never back down from a fight, even when she was scared and outnumbered. So, she slowly got up from the ground and tried to look intimidating.

Jonathan laughed at her, "Look guys, she's trying to scare us. What're you gonna do Mary Sue? Beat us up?" His friends started laughing harder and Skye tried her hardest to hold back her tears. These stupid boys couldn't see her cry, it would only make everything worse.

"That's not my name! And I just might!" Skye yelled at them and curled her tiny palms into fists. They only laughed harder.

Melinda May and Phil Coulson stepped out of their car and into the sun. After a lot of thought and consideration, they had decided they wanted to foster another child. Melinda was pretty excited but also fairly nervous about having another child running around their home. She loved children and ever since they had found out that they'd probably never be able to conceive a child of their own, they had become foster parents.

"Okay Phil remember, we're just here to talk to Sister Margaret about maybe finding another child to foster." May glanced towards her husband and found that he was giving her a lopsided grin.

"I know, I know, I already told you that I don't expect to bring home a child today…but wouldn't it be amazing if we could?"

May just sighed and shoved him good-naturedly.

She was about to say something back when she was distracted by little voices coming from a little ways away. She turned around and saw a group of three boys, maybe around eleven years old, standing around a small girl. The boys were laughing at the little girl, who's hands were gripped into tight fists. Her hair was dark, long, and tangled, and her bangs were getting in her eyes. Her shorts had dirt on them and her shirt was about two sizes too big. May could see that the little girl was trying not to cry, even as she raised her fists and shouted, "That's not my name! And I just might!" at the three bigger boys. The boys laughed harder at the small girl and looked at each other. Suddenly, one of the boys stopped laughing, leaned in towards the girl, and pushed her to the ground. May saw the girl's ankle twist as she fell and her face ended up in the dirt. Both May and Phil started rushing towards the commotion and all she could feel was anger towards the boys and immense sympathy for the little girl. As they approached, she heard the boys taunting her, "You're so scary Mary Sue," and "No wonder no one wants you Mary," before the boys saw them approaching and ran away.

Phil reached the little girl first and reached out to help her, "Hey, Mary is it? Are you ok?" As his hand gently landed on her arm to grab her attention, the girl screamed and tried to scramble back and away from him. She whimpered in pain as she put weight on her ankle but continued to crawl backwards. She was crying softly now and May saw the little girl look up in fear towards Phil, so she gently pushed him out of the way.
"Hey sweetie, my name's Melinda but everyone just calls me May. We saw what those boys did and
we wanted to make sure you weren't hurt. Are you okay?" She made sure to keep her voice calm
and soothing so she didn’t spook the child. The little girl hadn't even glanced at her yet, her brown
eyes were locked onto Phil. She looked so scared and when she remained silent, May tried again.

"Mary Sue? Is that your name?" May moved slightly, blocking Phil from the girl's sight. The girl
stared at her hands and mumbled something. May tilted her head towards the child on the ground so
she could try to catch what she had said but it was no use.

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear that."

The little girl finally looked up and May's heart clenched when she saw that the girl was still crying.
"My name's Skye…" she said again.

May smiled at her, happy that she was talking and looked a little less afraid than before.

Skye was staring up at this lady and couldn't tell if she could trust her or not. Her ankle still hurt and
she’s pretty sure her shin might be bleeding but she’s unable to take her eyes off of the two adults in
front of her. She didn't know if they were mean or not and it was always a bad idea to look away
from mean people because that’s when they were most likely to hurt you, when you didn’t know it
was coming.

‘May’ was a pretty name and as Skye warily pulled her eyes away from the man to look at May, she
noted how kind her eyes looked. She felt like she could maybe trust her, she had chased Jonathan
and his dumb friends away, so Skye told May her name and May smiled at her. That made her feel a
little better.

"Is it alright if we look at your ankle? We saw that you twisted it when you fell," May asked gently.

Skye’s eyebrows raised incredulously when she realized that May was asking her for permission. No
one ever did that and it made Skye feel kind of powerful. She could say no to her right now and May
wouldn’t be able to touch her. She wanted to say no, just to feel the power of saying such a word, but
May's voice sounded sincere and her kind eyes beckoned her to trust her, so she nodded at her.

When the man reached down towards her leg, not May, Skye shuffled back even farther in surprise
and fear. Her eyes darted towards May and back towards the man. She narrowed her eyes at him and
tried to look intimidating as she studied him. He didn't look mean. His face was open and he had
those wrinkles around his eyes that old people got because they smiled a lot. But Mr. Ramsey didn't
look like he was mean at first either and he definitely was one of the meanest people she had ever
met.

"No! Only you!" Skye whimpered and pointed at May. Her ankle was hurting and she was tired and
she'd had nightmares all night last night and couldn't sleep, so she didn’t have to energy to try and
figure out if she could trust May’s friend.

May glanced at the man and then back at her. "Skye, this is Phil. He's my husband and he's also a
doctor, so he's very good at seeing if people are hurt. He won't hurt you, I promise."

Skye wanted to trust her but she couldn't. She didn't know him and he could always end up hurting
her worse and all she really wanted to do was go inside, find an empty bed, and lay down. She
started crying harder and angrily rubbed at her eyes when she realized that she was acting like a baby
right now.

Phil said something to May that Skye couldn't hear and then backed up a step, which made Skye feel
a little better and her tears started to marginally slow down.

May sat down in the grass next to her and said, "Skye, I'm going to lift up your leg to look at your ankle. Tell me if anything hurts and where. If it hurts, I'll stop okay?" It felt good to know what May was going to do before she did it and even though she knew May would probably end up touching her tender ankle, she couldn't help the hiss of pain that escaped her mouth when cool fingers skimmed over it.

May gently set her leg back on the ground and said, "Nothing seems to be broken. You twisted your ankle pretty badly but that's nothing some ice and rest can't fix. You have a scrape on your shin that's bleeding, but after it's clean and you have a bandaid on it, it should be as good as new." May smiled down at her and Skye felt better and a little silly for making such a big deal over something as small as a twisted ankle.

After May's reassurance that she was going to be fine, her tears stopped and felt embarrassed that these strangers had seen her cry so much. She was going to be seven in few months and she told herself that needed to stop acting like such a baby all the time. She mumbled a thanks and expected them to leave but they didn't.

She looked back up at May and saw that she was holding out her arms. Skye's nose scrunched up in confusion as she glanced from May to Phil, trying to figure out what May wanted. Did she want a hug or something? Skye continued to stare at her before May got the hint and said, "How about we go inside and clean you up? You can walk if you feel up to it but I thought it might be easier if I carried you until we put some ice on that ankle."

Skye thought it over quickly and carefully. Her ankle was sore and she was having trouble keeping her eyes open. She needed a nap and she just wanted the pain in her leg to go away, so she lifted her arms and May scooped her up and put her on her hip. Skye remained stiff in her arms and looked back at Phil, who was walking behind them. She wondered if she had hurt his feelings by refusing to get near him. He caught her eye and gave her a tentative smile and Skye quickly looked away, feeling guilty that she might have hurt his feelings even though he seemed fairly kind.

May placed her on the counter in one of the bathrooms and Skye vaguely wondered how she knew her way around the orphanage so well before she saw May glancing around helplessly in search of something.

"They have band aids in the cabinet over there." Skye said softly and pointed to the cabinet on the wall. She was looking at her feet, glaring softly at the dirt smudged onto her legs and how mad she was at Jonathan and his friends for doing this to her, so she missed the smile that May gave her, but she heard Phil start to pull things out of the cabinet.

May wet some gauze and started cleaning Skye's leg up. It hurt a little but Skye didn't say anything and made sure she didn't wince. She'd complained a lot already and they were being so nice to her and she didn't want them to stop. May placed a bandaid over her cut and saw Phil hand her an ice pack. Phil let May put it on her ankle, but said, "Okay sweetheart, keep this ice pack on for 15 minutes. If your ankle is still sore, wait about an hour and ice it again. Do you know how long that is?" His voice was nice and soft but Skye couldn't tell if he was insulting her or if he really wanted to know if she could tell time. She couldn't, she always mixed up the two hands on the clock and forgot what the numbers stood for, but he didn't need to know that.

"I'm six, not a baby." She scoffed and straightened up indignantly. She immediately froze and yelled at herself when she realized that that wasn't a very nice thing to say to someone who had been so kind to her. What if they got mad? What if they yelled at her? Skye could feel dread start to pool in her tummy and she started to come up with ways to fix this but Phil and May's laughter stopped her.
Phil smiled at her and shrugged, "Okay I was just checking, I didn't mean to make you think I thought you were a baby. We could always set a timer just in case you forget?" The dread was still sitting heavily in her tummy but she pushed it aside when she realized that May and Phil didn’t seem angry at her. She was grateful Phil thought of using a timer because she really didn't know how to tell time and she thought Phil might've known that she was lying.

May picked her back up, much to Skye’s surprise, and they brought her into the lounge and placed her onto the couch. Phil brought in a timer that she'd seen the nuns use in the kitchen and placed it on the coffee table in front of her, "Okay Skye, keep the ice on your ankle until this starts ringing."

May gingerly resituated the ice on her ankle and gave her a smile. Skye knew they were about to leave but she really didn't want them to. They had been really nice to her and had made her bad day a little better and she was grateful for them. Sadly, she realized that there was nothing she could do to make them stay, so even though she didn't really know them and they could be crazy people, she leaned up and gave May a really quick hug. It was still a little too scary to hug Phil, so she just glanced his way and said, "Thank you," and hoped they knew she really meant it.

They both smiled at her and stood up to walk away. Rather than watch them walk away from her, Skye let her heavy eyes fall shut and she quickly fell asleep.

May thoughtfully looked at the little girl lying on the couch and couldn’t help but feel a sharp tug in her chest. Her breathing had already deepened and May could tell that she had already fallen asleep. Phil came up beside her and wrapped an arm around her waist, "Poor thing." May nodded and leaned into his touch.

"Come on, we're late for our meeting," May sighed and they both walked towards Sister Margaret's office.

The nun was talking on and on to them about the children who would fit best in their home and the logistics of taking in a new child for what felt like forever. She kept on talking and talking and May had started to tune her out. She didn’t feel too awful since Phil was listening intently and could fill her in on the important stuff later.

Her mind kept flitting back to how the little girl, Skye, was doing, and the sharp tug she had felt in her chest when she had watched the girl sleep.

The poor little girl had been so frightened of them but Phil especially, and her blood ran cold when she realized that something bad must have happened with a previous foster father. No child deserved to feel that way. She could feel herself getting angrier the more she thought about it. Skye had been alarmingly light when she had carried her into the house, she could feel that she was underweight, and May knew that most six year olds were much bigger than Skye was at the moment. She remembered how unsure Skye had been when they had offered their help and how ill-fitting and dirty her clothes had been.

She knew what was happening here and she didn’t even try to fight the immediate connection she felt to Skye. She knew that she could help the little girl and she wanted her and Phil to be the ones to help her find trust and happiness again.

Her thoughts were interrupted when she felt eyes watching her.

She looked up and saw Sister Margaret and Phil talking intently, Phil glanced her way and she
managed to suppress a smirk at the look he gave her. Her eyes searched around the room and stopped when she saw a pair of dark brown eyes staring at her through the crack in the door. She would recognize those eyes anywhere and her lips tugged up into a small smile when she saw Skye’s eyes widen at being caught.
Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Skye jerked awake and looked around, confused for a long moment about why she was lying on a couch. Her ankle was really cold and she realized that it had been the timer going off that had woken her up. She gingerly took the ice off of her ankle, set it off to the side, and prodded her frozen ankle with her fingers. It was still a little achey but it felt much better than before. She experimentally stretched it out a little and only felt a dull pain rather than the intense pain she had felt earlier. She smiled with relief, grateful that May and Phil had fixed her up.

Thinking of the kind lady and man who had instantly rushed to her aid made her feel a little sad and wistful. They were probably gone by now and she probably wouldn't see them again, and that thought made her chest ache a little bit. She sighed and swung her feet off the couch and onto the floor. The Ramsey's had probably already left and that thought cheered her up a bit as she carefully stood up and put some weight on her ankle.

Skye started to slowly walk towards the room she used to share with some of the other girls, the reality that she was back at St. Agnes' finally sinking in. Since she was usually the smallest, the older girls always ended up taking her stuff. She always tried to stand up for herself but there was only so much she could do when she lacked the ability to put up a hard fight and when none of the nuns listened to her and were convinced she was a "problem child." She didn't know why no one believed her, she always tried her best to tell the truth and it wasn’t her fault that the other kids like to pick on her.

She hated this dumb place. She hated the uncomfy bed she had to sleep on and the clothes that never seemed to fit her. She hated that she would inevitably have a nightmare and wet the bed and all the other kids would tease her for it while the nuns scolded her and made her clean her sheets up. She hated that no one would listen to what she said and that no one believed her when she was telling the truth. She wanted friends and she desperately wanted a family.

The Harvey's could've been her family. They had been her parents for a little while and they had started to feel like an actual family before they had died. No, they were killed, Skye reminded herself, she had killed them.

Having a family and then having it ripped away from you felt worse than never having a family at all, Skye thought to herself. This was the second time in her short life that she had been abandoned by people why had called themselves her parents and it felt like her chance at having a real family had already passed her by.

Skye was drawn out of her thoughts when she heard voices coming out of Sister Margaret's office. That was where people went when they wanted to take kids away from here. They went into Sister Holly's office when they were bringing kids back. Skye didn't want to go back to her own room and face all the girls waiting to tease her in there, so she quietly limped up to the door. She looked down the hallway to make sure that no one would see her spying on the people inside, that was considered bad behavior and she would definitely be punished for that, but she was relieved to find that no one was around. She figured that everyone was in bible study or in a service, depending on what day and time it was today.

Making sure to be super quiet as she approached the door, Skye put her hand on the wall and leaned towards the small opening. Her eyes widened in surprise when she saw May and Phil sitting across
from Sister Margaret. She felt a flutter in her tummy when she realized that meant that they wanted to
take a kid away from here. A small part of her hoped that maybe they would take her but she
immediately squashed that hope down. May and Phil had seen her cry and complain earlier, and she
had made Phil feel bad and had acted like a total baby in front of them, no one wanted to foster a kid
like her. They probably wanted nice little girl or boy who laughed and smiled all the time and who
wouldn't wet the bed, and even though she tried really hard, that wasn't Skye.

Even though May and Phil didn't want her, Skye couldn't help but stare at them. They were going to
take somebody and if they don't want her, she really hoped that they would take Lucy. She lived in
Skye's room with her and was one of the only girls who didn't make fun of her. She didn't stick up
for her either but at least she left her alone. Skye thought that Lucy deserved to have a nice family.

She was still staring intently at May and Phil when the older lady's eyes landed on her. Her eyes
widened and she sucked in a breath when she realized that she had been spotted. May smiled at her
and before she could stop herself, she involuntarily smiled back.

Skye couldn't help it, she liked May. Maybe it was her kind face or the way she had treated Skye life
a regular human and not a stupid orphan or maybe it was how she kept giving her nice smiles or
helped her out when she didn't have to. Skye didn't know what it was, but she felt herself starting to
trust May. It was okay to trust girls, she reminded herself. None of the foster moms Skye had been
with had ever pushed her down or tried to scare her. They had yelled sometimes and maybe ignored
her but they weren't as bad as the boys. The boys did bad, mean things and Skye had quickly learned
that she couldn't trust boys but she could learn to trust girls.

May was still smiling at her and so Skye gingerly lifted a hand and waved at her. May's smile grew a
little wider as she snuck a look at Sister Margaret and waved back. Skye stifled a giggle when Sister
Margaret cleared her throat and May jerked her head back towards the nun.

Sister Margaret gave May a disapproving look that Skye knew very well and said, "I can show you
some of the drawings some of our little ones did yesterday. They aren't here right now, they're in
bible study, but this could help you get a feel for which one might work best in your home." Phil
nodded eagerly and they both stood up. The group was walking towards the door when Skye
realized that they were going to pass right by her and see her and she started to panic. She quickly
hobbled down the hallway and hid behind a corner, proud of herself for finding such a good hiding
spot under pressure. Making sure she was completely out of sight, she watched as the group exited
the office and started walking towards the craft room.

Skye quietly followed them around, staying far enough away that they couldn't see her, and
unfortunately that also meant she couldn't hear what they were saying. She thought she heard her
name a few times but she was probably just imagining it. They stopped in the crafts room and May
and Phil started looking at everyone's drawings. Phil pointed at one and May smiled down at it and
Skye felt a hot flash of jealousy pound through her. She didn't have any drawings in there, her
drawings were folded neatly in her pillowcase so that no one could tear them up, but she wished that
she had one in there so that May and Phil could look at it.

Once they were done looking at the drawings, they made their way back to the office. Skye hustled
into the kitchen and hid behind some curtains as they passed by. She limped back towards the office
after them but was disappointed to find that the door was firmly shut. Sighing, she trudged back to
her old room. At least she could get settled before the other kids arrived.

May knew Skye had been following them. She glanced back every now and then and saw a flash of
dark hair or brown eyes flitting behind a wall or staring at her. She had looked for one of her
drawings in the craft room but was sad to find that she couldn't find any. She had asked the nun
about Skye, telling her that they had met her on the way into the orphanage, and discovered that
Sister Margaret wasn't a fan of Skye's. The nun had only said that Skye had just left a foster family
and had returned today and then she had redirected their attention back to the drawings that the other
children had made.

When they were returning to the office, May saw Skye run behind some curtains in the kitchen
and noticed how Skye was limping and favoring one leg over the other. She felt a rush of anger that
this little girl was obviously being neglected or bullied or something and she was surprised at the surge
of protectiveness she felt. Skye didn't deserve to be treated like this. When they walked back into the
office, May made sure to shut the door firmly behind her.

"Sister Margaret, there is one child in particular that I'd like to know about. She said her name was
Skye. I asked about her earlier?"

The nun let out a breath, "Her name is actually Mary Sue but she has taken it upon herself to change
it. She just got back from staying with a nice foster family. She was hitting their son and acting
disobediently and violently so they had no choice but to bring her back. I don't know if she's the right
fit for you. We have some other well-behaved children that also need to be foste-"

May cut her off, "Actually, I think she'd be a great fit for us," she glanced at Phil and he nodded at
her. Good, she didn't want to make any decisions without him, "And we would like to foster her."

Sister Margaret stared at her and shook her head in disbelief. "Are you sure? Here's her file," she
handed over a large manila folder, "and as you can see, she's fairly problematic." May could feel her
anger growing and she didn't even glance at the file, prepared to give this woman a lengthy piece of
her mind. Before she could open her mouth, Phil laid a gentle hand on her arm and spoke up, "Yes,
we've made up our minds. We want Skye to be a part of our family. If you would be so kind as to
give us the paperwork, we would greatly appreciate it." He narrowed his eyes at the nun and she
sputtered a bit but started filling out the paperwork.

Phil smiled at her and whispered, "I thought we weren't making any decisions today?"

"We can't leave her here Phil."

"I know. I knew as soon as she hugged you that we had found the newest member of our family."

Skye was sitting on her bed when she heard Sister Margaret open the door, most likely to give her a
lecture on being naughty at her last foster home, but when she looked up, Sister Margaret was
leading May and Phil into the room. She stood up quickly and felt her heart start to beat faster but she
told it to calm down and not get her hopes up. They were probably just coming in to say goodbye to
her.

Phil grinned at her and May waved.

"Skye, this nice couple would like to be your new foster parents," Sister Margaret motioned towards
May and Phil and Skye blinked rapidly. She sneakily reached out and pinched her own arm because
this had to be a dream or something. After pinching her arm one more time, she decided that she still
wouldn't get her hopes up in case this was some kind of joke, so she didn't say anything.

Sister Margaret looked towards the couple and shrugged, which prompted May to glare at the nun,
step forward, and kneel before Skye, "Hey Skye, if it's alright with you, we'd like to take you home with us?" She said it like a question and Skye felt the same rush of power that had rushed through her the last time that May had given her a choice. If she didn't want to go home with them, she didn't have to, and this was the first time she was given that option. Skye found it hard to swallow, she was so nervous.

"Is this for real? Or are you joking?" Skye whispered to May. She glanced up at the nun, and then focused back onto May's face.

May's lips twitched into a smile as Phil walked forward and kneeled beside May. Skye resisted the urge to lean away from him. He'd been nice to her so far and she didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"This is for real Skye. We would really, really like it if you lived with us." Phil smiled at her and waited for her to say something. Skye knew she should say yes. She knew she should be jumping around with happiness because these nice people wanted her and were willing to get her out of this place, but she needed to make sure of some things first. She had to be careful, she had learned the hard way what happened when she wasn't.

"Do you have any other kids?" She asked May.

"We have two living with us, a boy and a girl. They older than you are, teenagers, but they're really excited about having a new sibling. They've been begging us for years to get them a little brother or sister." May answered her and reached for Skye's hand. Skye flinched a little but let her take it.

They had other kids and Skye’s heart sunk a little after hearing that. Other kids didn't like Skye. They didn't like it when foster kids came in and tried to steal their parents away from them, and Skye knew that they would probably be mean to her.

As if May could tell what she was thinking, she said, "You know what? They were foster kids just like you are. But then they became a part of our family, just like you can too. I promise you, they're very nice."

Learning that May and Phil’s kids had been orphans too had her perking up. They could still turn out to be mean but for some reason, Skye trusted May when she said that they were nice. She was willing to take a chance, because even though this could go terribly wrong and this new family could turn out as mean as the last one, Skye really wanted a family.

So she straightened up and tried to sound confident when she said, "Okay."

May and Phil beamed and she could tell that they wanted to hug her but she was incredibly happy when they didn't. Skye smiled up at them though so they knew that she appreciated them.

Sister Margaret interrupted their moment by abruptly saying, "Okay, well this paperwork should be complete by tomorrow. You can come pick Skye up around noon if that's okay?" The grown-ups started talking again and Skye felt sadness and a little bit of dread wash through her. They weren't taking her right now and had to come back to get her. What if they forgot? What if they got home and decided they didn't want a new kid after all? What if they got into a car accident on the way here and died?

Her heartbeat was going really fast and she tugged sharply on May's hand. May sat on the bed beside Skye but not close enough to make her feel crowded, "What's wrong sweetie?" May seemed like she was worried about her and that made Skye feel even worse for making her upset.

"You can't take me today?" Skye whispered. She could feel her eyes starting to sting but refused to
cry. They had already seen her cry today and nobody wanted a crybaby in their family.

May stroked her cheek and Skye was surprised to find that it felt good. "I'm sorry, I wish we could take you with us right now but Sister Margaret won't let us until everything is filled out."

Skye's throat felt tight so she didn't say anything, just dejectedly looked down at her feet.

May ran her fingers through Skye's hair and Skye involuntarily leaned into her touch. "I'm so sorry Skye. We don't want to leave you here for tonight but we promise we'll come back for you, and Phil and I? We never break our promises." Skye nodded at her but still felt nervous and sad.

"How about this? I'll give you my phone number and you can call us if anything happens. Even if nothing bad is happening and you just want to talk, you can call us." Hearing that made Skye feel a tiny bit better because if they forgot about her, she could call them and remind them.

"Okay," she finally said. May smiled at her, dug around in her bag for a moment before finding a pen and some paper, wrote out her phone number, and handed it to Skye. "You know how to use a phone, right?" when Skye nodded, May kept talking, "Okay, please don't be afraid to call me, okay Skye? I mean it, call me if you need me and I'll be there." That sounded so similar to what Mrs. Harvey had said the night she had died that it made Skye's throat tighten and her eyes sting again.

She managed to finally nod at May after taking in some slow breaths. She felt like she should hug her but it was still a little scary, so instead, she wrapped her pinky around May's so she knew how grateful she was. May glanced down at the contact and smiled.

Phil came back over and kneeled by Skye so that he was looking into her eyes, "I'm so happy that you'll be joining our family Skye." She studied him for a long moment and knew that he meant it, so she gave him a small grin, even as she subtly leaned away from him.

May and Phil both stood up and announced that they had to go and pick their daughter up from dance class and Skye's heart sunk because they were leaving.

After coming to a decision, Skye jumped up with them, determined to be with them until they drove away. She hovered near May and bit her lip to stop herself from smiling wildly when the woman reached down and hooked her pinky with Skye's.

The group walked towards the front door and Skye zoned out a little because the grown-ups were talking about adult things and all Skye could really focus on was May's pinky and how it was tightly locked around hers and how right it felt. When they made it to the front door, they paused and May and Phil both leaned down to say goodbye.

"Goodbye Skye, we'll be here tomorrow at noon to pick you up." Phil paused before saying, "and I am so excited that you'll be living with us."

May nodded in agreement and said, "We're excited for you to join our family Skye. We'll be back tomorrow and don't forget about what I said." With that, May gingerly eased her pinky away from Skye's and they walked towards their car. Once they got settled into their seats, they looked back towards her, smiled again, and waved. She raised a hand and waved until she couldn't see their car anymore.

One word kept ringing in her head, even long after May and Phil's car disappeared from her sight: family.

They were excited to have her be a part of their family. Skye didn't mind that Sister Margaret tugged her back into the orphanage and told her to go clean up her things. She didn't care that the other kids
would be back soon and would probably tease her. She didn’t even think about Jonathan and her hurt ankle. All she could think about was that she was about to have a family again, and she couldn’t stop grinning.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you think please !! x
Chapter 3

Phil was smiling at his family, who were all sitting around the dinner table. Tomorrow, they would have one more person sitting around the table with them and that thought had his heart racing with happiness and excitement.

"I know this is pretty sudden and we didn't expect to find a child so quickly but I know that you guys will really like her and make her feel welcome here," Mel was explaining the situation to their kids.

"Mom, you know we'll love her. I've wanted a little sister since before you brought Trip home. No offense Trip, you're an awesome big brother." Natasha looked sheepishly over to Trip but he didn't seem to mind.

"None taken, Tash. I'm excited too." He was smiling broadly.

Phil knew that his kids would welcome Skye and try to make her feel comfortable and like she is a part of this family but he also wanted them to know what they were getting themselves into.

"Look guys, I know you're both very excited to meet Skye but please keep in mind that she's a foster kid. This will be her sixth foster family and she's only six years old. From what we saw, she's been neglected and probably abused. She's skittish and she was pretty scared of me when she saw me, so I'm not sure if she's that way towards all adults, or just men. So Trip, she might not feel comfortable around you at first and please know that it's not personal. She needs us you guys," His family was staring at him and he hoped that they understood that having Skye around was going to be challenging but worth it.

"Dad, we know what it's like. We can help her. Nat and I, we know what she's going through," Phil looked up and smiled at his son.

"I know buddy. You guys are great kids. Skye is lucky to have you guys as siblings."

Skye's happiness did not last as the day progressed. All the other children came back from attending bible study and it had gone as badly as it usually went. Normally, they would tease her, maybe push her around, and then leave her alone, but they were merciless today. Skye didn't know why everyone was being more mean than usual but it was making her feel bad. The girls in her room had taken the new shoes that the Ramsey's had given her when she'd first started living at their house, so she was stuck wearing her old, holey sneakers. When it was free time, she couldn't even play outside because of her hurt ankle so she was stuck sitting under a tree, watching all the other kids run around and have fun.

No one was happy that she was back and she couldn't really blame them. Skye wasn't even happy that she was back. What got her through the endless teasing and mean comments was knowing that...
Phil and May would be back tomorrow to take her away.

She really, really hoped that they would be back tomorrow.

The paper with May's phone number was folded neatly in the front pocket of her shorts and she kept checking to make sure that it was still there. Whenever the teasing got too much or she started doubting herself, she would rub the paper between her fingers to make herself feel better. She resisted the urge to call them and make sure they remembered to come and get her. She didn't want to annoy them so much that they decided to leave her here.

The day was winding down and Skye was getting ready for bed. She was slowly brushing her teeth and changing into her pajamas, dragging her feet and wasting as much time as possible. She didn't like going to bed and tried to stay awake as long as she could because her nightmares scared her so badly. Sometimes she'd see monsters looming over her and red eyes staring at her from the darkness. Other times she was back in the Harvey's car, knowing that they were going to crash but unable to warn them. A lot of the time she was back in an old foster home and her foster parents were yelling at her or pushing her around. She could never tell which nightmare was worse but sometimes they scared her so bad that she wet the bed and that was worse than all of her nightmares combined. She couldn't even control her own body, which was scary and infuriating and just supported the fact that no one would want a kid like her.

As she laid down in her bed, she hoped that tonight would be a good night. Maybe knowing that May and Phil would be here soon to rescue her would be enough to ward off the nightmares. With that hopeful thought in mind, she closed her eyes and slowly fell asleep.

She was back at the Ramsey's house, playing with a doll on the floor of the living room. Mr. Ramsey was still at work, Mrs. Ramsey was making dinner in the kitchen and Aaron was upstairs in his room, so it was quiet and peaceful. She was actually having fun, so she smiled. Then she heard a car door slam and she knew that Mr. Ramsey was back. She froze and her smile quickly slipped off her face. Would it be safer to stay here and pretend she wasn't scared, or run away and hide and hope he didn't see her? She didn't have time to make a decision before the door slammed open and it banged against the wall before he shoved it closed. It made a loud noise that make Skye's ears ring and her heart speed up.

She looked towards the doorway and saw Mr. Ramsey staring at her, so she forced herself to smile at him before looking away. Maybe if he thought she was happy to see him, he would leave her alone. Unfortunately, that didn't work this time.

"What're you smiling about, huh? Are you laughing at me?" He started stomping towards her and ripped the doll out of her hands. The doll's plastic hand snagged on Skye's finger and it stung a little but she didn't say anything.

Her eyes widened and she vigorously shook her head.

"What? We're not a good enough family for you to talk to? You think you're too good for us? We took you in! I put food on your plate and a roof over your head and this is how you thank me?!” His voice was getting louder and louder and Skye wanted to put her hands over her ears because his voice was hurting her head, but she knew that would only make things worse, so she looked down and stared at her shoes. She felt like she was frozen in place.

"You look at me when I'm talking to you! Why does no one respect me around here? Stand up and look me in the eye when I'm talking to you!" He was screaming at her and Skye whimpered. She forced herself to stand up but couldn't control how much her body was shaking.
"You ungrateful, stupid little girl! You don't appreciate anything we do for you! I don't know why we even took you in! My wife wanted a little girl to talk to and have fun with, so I went to get her one and we ended up with you!" He was yelling right in her face and she could feel his spit hit her cheeks but she couldn't move. All she could do was take his insults and hope it would stop soon.

"What? You got nothing to say?" Skye stayed silent and tried to stop her legs from quivering.

Mr. Ramsey let out an incoherent yell and threw her doll at the wall. It hit a picture hanging there, making the glass shatter and the picture frame fall.

"Look what you made me do!" Mr. Ramsey let out a scream of rage and then started destroying the rest of the living room. He slammed his fist into the wall and threw pictures onto the ground. He grabbed a lamp and hurled it on the floor and Skye watched as it shattered to pieces. A piece of the lamp flew right towards her and cut her on the thigh but she didn't say anything, just started to silently cry.

After he had destroyed the room, he stomped right up to her. He was looming over her and yelling in her face and she just wanted everything to stop. "You ruin everything! You ruined our lives and you killed your last foster parents! I don't even know why we took you in! Yeah, the nuns told us how you were the one to kill the last family who took care of you! It's all your fault! Everything is your fault!" Skye was sobbing now and didn't even notice when his hand struck out and pushed her. His hand connected with her ribs and she lost her breath. She fell backwards and she knew that her head would connect with the edge of the coffee table that was sitting in front of the couch but before that happened, she jerked awake.

Skye's eyes flew open and she quickly doubled over and tried to catch her breath. She couldn't breathe. She was getting hysterical and couldn't calm down and she barely remembered to take a deep breath and count to five. That's what Mrs. Harvey had taught her to do when this happened. After a few more tries, it helped to calm her down and she greedily gulped down air. Nervously, she looked around the room and was relieved to find that all the other girls were still sleeping. She shifted to lay back down again when she felt her pajama pants sticking to her legs.

"Please no. No, this can't be happening." She threw back her sheets and sure enough, there was a ring of wetness in the middle of her bed. Her nerves were already frazzled due to her nightmare and she couldn't stop the tears from rushing down her face. She needed to clean this up before anyone saw. She was too old to be doing this and the nuns would yell at her and May and Phil would realize that they wouldn't want a kid like her.

Quietly, she stood up and ripped the sheets off of her bed. She had plastic sheets underneath her normal ones so at least her mattress wasn't wet. She dragged them to the laundry room, hid them under some other dirty sheets, and hoped that they weren't noticed when the laundry was done. She grabbed some clean sheets, tiptoed back into her room, and remade her bed. She then grabbed a new nightgown and crept towards the bathroom. She was still crying silently, and she told herself to stop but she she couldn't no matter how hard she tried. She counted to five like Mrs. Harvey taught her but it wasn't working and she was only starting to cry harder.

When she got to the bathroom, she took off her ruined pajamas and cleaned herself up. She put on a clean nightgown and hid her soiled ones at the bottom of the dirty clothes hamper. Once that was all taken care of, she stepped towards a mirror and stared at herself.

Her face was red and puffy from crying and her tears didn't show any signs of stopping. Her dream was right. Everything was her fault. Mr. and Mrs. Harvey would still be alive if it wasn't for her, it was her fault that Mr. Ramsey had always been mad at her, and it was her fault that all her other foster families didn't want her. No one wanted a kid like her, and the awful thought that May and
Phil wouldn't want a kid like her crossed her mind.

She started to panic, her breathing getting more hectic and her tears burning tracks down her cheeks. May and Phil probably didn't know that she had nightmares and wet the bed and accidently got people killed; if they did, they definitely wouldn't want her.

She silently ran back into her room and grabbed the piece of paper with May's phone number on it. Without thinking, she ran into the kitchen where the nuns left the phone, grabbed it, and ran back into the bathroom. She locked the door behind her, shakily unfolded the paper, and dialed the number.

When it started to ring, she froze.

What was she doing? She knew it was nighttime and May was probably sleeping. She'd be annoyed if Skye woke her up. And what was Skye even going to say to her? She was about to hang up when she heard a groggy voice answer the phone.

"Hello?" There was a long pause and Skye held her breath, “Hello? Is anyone there?” May's voice was thick with sleep and Skye could tell that she had woken her up and that made her feel terrible. She started crying harder.

"Skye? Is that you?" May sounded worried. Skye didn't want May to be upset and she desperately wanted to say something to reassure her but she couldn't make her voice work.

"Skye? Are you okay? What's wrong sweetie?" May's kind words made Skye cry a little harder. She knew she needed to be quiet or someone would wake up and find her and she knew that she needed to answer May, but her throat felt tight and the only thing coming from her mouth were sobs.

She didn't notice at first that May had started humming softly. She didn't recognize the song but it was nice and gave her something to focus on. Her tears finally stopped and she sniffled a little bit and when May heard, she stopped humming.

"Skye? Are you okay sweetie? Do you want us to come see you?" Skye knew that May was trying to be comforting but some of her panic resurfaced and she shook her head even though May couldn’t see her. They couldn't drive here, she thought, it was nighttime and they could get in a car accident and then Skye would lose another family.

She finally got her voice to work and managed to answer, "No! You can't come here at night! I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I shouldn't have called." She could feel her eyes welling up again and tried to force her tears away.

"Skye, listen to me okay? Don't ever feel bad about calling when you need me. Phil and I want to take care of you. We want to be here for you when you need us. I want you to know that any time you need me, I'll be there for you, even if it's..." She paused, "2:17 in the morning. We are here for you, okay?" May sounded earnest and Skye imagined her kind face smiling at her.

The kind words calmed her down even though she had a hard time believing them and Skye nodded but then realized that May couldn't see her so she whispered, "Okay."

"Okay," Skye could hear the relief in May's voice. "Now that you're feeling a little better, can you tell me what happened?"

Skye knew she should tell May about the nightmare and about how she wet the bed so that May would know that Skye was a problem before Skye went to live with her. Then if May decided she didn't want her, at least it would be before she grew attached to them, but she just couldn't do it.
Instead she blurted out, "I killed my other foster parents." It felt weird saying the words out loud. She had always thought them and Mr. Ramsey had said it a few times but she never had, and they left a bitter taste in her mouth.

May didn't say anything, so Skye continued on, "I killed them. They had to come and pick me up from a sleepover and when we left, a car hit us and they died. I saw it. It was my fault and I killed them." Skye's eyes were leaking tears and she was clenching the phone in her tiny hands. She paused for only half a second before continuing, "They're dead now but they said they wanted me to be a part of their family and you said the same thing. So, I just wanted you to know that I probably shouldn't be. A part of your family, I mean. ‘Cause I could kill you too, by accident, and I don't want to." Skye said the last part in a rush. She really wanted to live with May and Phil but they deserved to know that she was a killer. If that meant that they wouldn't want her anymore then at least they would still be alive and she wouldn't grow attached.

May didn't say anything for a couple of seconds and Skye started to worry that May had hung up on her but then she heard May's voice, "Oh sweetie you didn't kill them, the car that hit you did. It was not your fault, okay baby?"

"It was though! If it wasn't for me, they would still be alive." Skye was still crying. her voice cracked on the last part of the sentence, and she was clinging to the phone like a lifeline.

"Skye, it was not your fault. You didn't kill anyone, okay? It was an accident, and accidents happen all the time, unfortunately, but you had nothing to do with them dying." May's voice was soft and it sounded sad. Skye didn't say anything, she didn’t know what to say, so May continued, "We still want you. We still want you to be a part of our family and nothing is going to change that. Do you still want to be a part of our family?"

Skye was quiet for a few seconds as she thought really hard. She really wanted a family, she wanted to live with May and Phil and she wanted to meet their other kids, and maybe they would like her and be nice to her and maybe they could be a family. She wanted them and it was probably selfish for her to make them take care of a kid as bad as her but she wanted it anyways.

She was still sitting on the floor of the bathroom, clenching the phone between her fist, but her tears had stopped and she felt a little better after talking to May. After taking a deep breath, she pushed down her guilt and wiped away her tears. "Yes, I want to be a part of your family," She whispered.

"Good, because we want you Skye. Now, are you sure you don't want us to come and see you? We can drive over, it won't take long and we don't mind, I promise," Skye could hear May smiling and her kindness made Skye's eyes tear up again but she refused to cry any more.

"No, I'm okay, I promise," She paused and took a deep breath before mumbling, "Thank you."

"Okay, but only if you're sure."

"I am. I'm okay."

"Alright sweetie. It's pretty late, how about you try to go back to sleep? Phil and I will be there early to pick you up. I know Sister Margaret said noon but we'll probably come by earlier because we're so excited to see you."

Skye smiled at that, "Okay May, goodnight."

"Goodnight Skye," May's voice was soft and gentle and Skye paused a long moment before finally hanging up.
Quietly, she put the phone back where she got it and made her way back to her room. She slid under her covers after noting that all the girls were still sleeping and laid there thinking about what May had said. She still wanted Skye, even though she knew she killed her other foster family and was a problem. She had promised that she wanted Skye to be a part of her family, no matter what. Skye didn't know if she believed her, she barely knew May, but she really, really wanted to.

She shut her eyes and fell asleep thinking of the song May had been humming earlier.

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Natasha was sitting on the staircase facing the door and she couldn’t keep her foot from jiggling excitedly. Her parents had gone to pick up their new sister awhile ago and they should be back any minute, and she would be lying if she said she wasn’t nervous. Trip was in his room working on a paper for school but Nat wasn’t able to focus on her homework. She was getting a sister and she had always desperately wanted a younger sibling.

She had been ten when her mom and dad had fostered her.

She hardly remembers being taken to the U.S. from Russia but she clearly remembers when the men in black uniforms had stormed the house she was being kept in. She had barely spoken any English and had been terrified. They had taken her from the bad men who had kept her for as long as she could remember and then dropped her into her first foster home.

She had only been there for a week before her "older brother" tried to sneak into her room one night. She put him in the hospital and they put her back into the system. After that, May and Phil had taken her in and she will never be able to express to them how grateful she is. They were calm when she hurled insults at them in Russian. They taught her English and helped her find ways to channel her anger and deal with her emotions. May took her to her first dance class and Phil helped her with her schoolwork. She loved them and she knew that they were her real family.

She had been twelve when they told her she was going to get a new sibling. She thought that it would be a younger sibling but then they brought home Trip. He was fourteen and had a smile on his face from the second he walked through the door. Natasha had been convinced that he wasn't a real foster kid since none of the other kids she knew were that happy. His parents had died in a car crash a couple months before and had an aunt who had taken care of him for a little while but had refused to continue. May and Phil were his first foster parents and Natasha made sure he knew how lucky he was to be put with them rather than some other family.

She hadn’t trusted Trip at first. It had taken her months to even have a civil conversation with May and Phil but Trip's eternal happiness and jokes cracked her tough exterior. Over the past two years, they had become closer as siblings and as friends.

May and Phil had adopted both of them last year and they had officially become a family. They stuck together and helped each other out and it was great having parents who loved her and an older brother who was always there for her but she still wanted a younger sibling.

So, when her mom and dad had told her that they were going to bring a little girl home, she was thrilled. Her dad told her about Skye's situation and how jumpy she was but Nat wasn't able to focus on her homework. She was getting a sister and she had always desperately wanted a younger sibling.

The telltale sound of a car door shutting had her head snapping towards the front door. She heard the
key going into the lock, she saw the doorknob twist, and she felt nervousness creep up on her. What if Skye didn't like her? What if she was a bad big sister? What if they ended up hating each other?

Natasha was wrenched from her thoughts as she heard her mom's voice, "... and there's a park down the street we can go to if you want?" Natasha saw her dad enter first and he stepped aside to let her mom walk through the door. Behind her was a tiny girl with long brown hair and big brown eyes. Her bangs were getting in her eyes and her hair was falling out of its ponytail and Nat watched as she shook her head quickly to try to get her hair out of her way. She had on shorts and a red shirt that was too big for her and her right pinky was wrapped around Natasha's mom's left one.

The little girl was curiously looking around the house but when she spotted Natasha she seemingly froze in place. Nat saw her whole body clench up and she took a step back but still managed to keep a tight grip of May. Natasha gently smiled, making sure to stay still so she wouldn't startle little Skye, and held her breath in anticipation. Skye studied her and finally lifted a tiny hand and waved hesitantly, refusing to make eye contact. Her dad opened his mouth, probably to introduce them, but then Trip came running down the stairs and Natasha winced when she heard how loud he was being. Her brother stopped right by her and smiled brightly at Skye.

Nat saw fear flash in the little girl's eyes as she stepped back behind May, hiding her whole body behind her mom's legs.

"Hey girl, I'm Trip, you're new brother," Trip exclaimed happily, completely unaware of how he had frightened their new sister.

Natasha sighed exasperatedly.

Chapter End Notes

Thanks for reading and give me your thoughts! xx
Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

When Skye first woke up, she didn’t remember her nightmare or her call to May. Then, when she rubbed away the last of her sleepiness, it all came flooding back.

Her cheeks heated up and embarrassment jolted her awake. She couldn’t believe what had happened and before she could convince herself to just go back to sleep and try to forget anything had happened, she reminded herself of what May had said about her wanting Skye to be a part of their family no matter what. That fact alone kept her from crawling back under the covers.

After rubbing the sleep away from her eyes, she hopped out of bed and went to the bathroom. A lot of the other kids weren’t awake yet, she always woke up pretty early, and she enjoyed having the bathroom to herself. Waking up early had become a habit after living with Foster Family Number Three. Her old foster mom had always gotten mad when Skye didn’t wake up when she told her to and would yell awful ugly things that made Skye want to cry. To avoid that, she had forced herself to start waking up before everyone else and the habit had just stuck.

She brushed her teeth and did her best to untangle her hair and once she was done with that, she stood on her tiptoes so that she could look at herself in the mirror. She studied her reflection, poked the purple smudges under her eyes, and told herself that May and Phil were coming to get her today. The thought was enough to bring a small smile to her face.

After quietly heading back to her room, she got dressed in some shorts and a red shirt. It was a little big but it didn’t have any holes in it and it looked clean and she wanted to look nice when she met her new family members. She tried to pull her hair into a ponytail but she had trouble reaching all of it so it came out a little messy but she was satisfied that her hair was out of her face.

Slowly, so that she didn’t make any noise, she pulled her bag out from under her bed. She hadn’t unpacked yesterday, knowing she would be leaving soon anyway, but she threw her pajamas and toothbrush into the bag. She took her drawings out of her pillowcase and gingerly placed them between her clothes in her bag so that they wouldn’t get wrinkled. Then, she pulled on her old, holey sneakers and looked around to see if she had missed anything but that was it. She looked out the window and saw that it was still pretty dark out and the sun was still rising and she guessed that there was still a long time until May and Phil would come to get her. She wasn’t exactly sure what time it was, but if she went into the kitchen, they had a digital clock there that Skye was able to read.

She left the room, sticking her tongue out at some of the meaner girls who were still sleeping along the way, and walked quietly into the kitchen. One of the nuns was in there, probably starting to get breakfast ready for all of the kids, and Skye was happy to find that it was Sister Louise. She was Skye’s favorite so she didn’t feel the need to sneak around, so she skipped to the clock and saw that it was only 6:48am. On the phone, May had said that they would be here earlier than noon but Skye wasn’t sure how early that meant. She sighed deeply and felt her mood worsen when she realized that it would be a long time before May and Phil would come and get her.

She reached her hand into a bowl of fruit, hoping to grab an apple, but Sister Louise’s hand shot out of nowhere and stopped her, "Sorry pumpkin, no eating until breakfast."

Skye wrinkled her nose and pouted a bit. Sister Louise usually wasn’t this strict and had always snuck Skye snacks before so she didn’t understand why she wasn’t letting her eat an apple now. The
nun stared at Skye and tilted her head to the right and after a moment of confusion, Skye looked over and saw Sister Margaret walking past the kitchen and towards her office. Skye caught on and said, "Yes ma'am."

Sister Louise smiled and grabbed the apple Skye had been planning to take. She lowered it so that her hand was hidden behind the counter and sneakily handed it to Skye so that Sister Margaret didn’t see. The little girl grabbed it and put it under her shirt.

"Why don't you go color until breakfast is ready?" Sister Louise smiled at her and gently nudged her towards the craft room. Skye smiled in response and swiftly walked out of the kitchen. Once she was safely in the craft room, she took out the apple and bit into it.

Skye munched on her apple and drew pictures, wasting time while waiting for May and Phil to pick her up.

After a bit, she heard the nuns calling to all the children, telling them that breakfast was served, but Skye didn't feel like eating anything else or putting up with the other kids. She knew May and Phil could be here at any moment and she felt nervous and excited at the same time. It was making her stomach hurt a little and so she tried her best to distract herself. She got tired of drawing after a while and grabbed a book instead. She couldn't read the words on the pages very well but she traced the pictures with her fingers instead and that still was pretty fun and managed to keep her mind occupied.

Skye had moved from the books and onto playing with the limited amount of dolls available when she heard the front door open. It could have been one of the nuns but she heard Sister Margaret greet the people at the door and she knew it was May and Phil.

Butterflies erupted in her tummy and her heart started beating really fast. They were here to take her away, just like she wanted, but she was still so nervous that her palms were starting to get clammy.

What if they weren't as nice as they seemed? What if their other kids hated her and picked on her? What if they got tired of her and sent her back?

She was staring at her hands and pondering these things when she heard Phil's voice greet her from the doorway. She jerked her head up and stared at him only to see that he was smiling kindly at her and May was right beside him, a matching smile on her face. She hastily stood up and brushed her bangs away from her eyes, trying to make herself look as presentable as possible. She knew that she should say something but she was scared and didn't really want to talk so she just raised her hand and waved at them.

Sister Margaret was standing behind them and caught their attention, "I just need you to sign the last of this paperwork and she's all yours." Sister Margaret said that a little too happily for Skye's liking but she didn't say anything about it. Phil glanced at May and then left her to follow the nun back to her office.

She was standing alone in a room with May and she was feeling embarrassed again. What if May had changed her mind and was actually mad at Skye for calling her so late last night? She stared down at her shoes, unable to look at the woman across from her, and started rocking gently back and forth. She saw May's shoes getting closer to her but she didn't look up and felt a little relieved when May stopped a short distance away from her.

"Hey Skye. Are you feeling better today?" May sounded like she was concerned about her, and that made the little girl feel even more embarrassed. A small part of her had hoped that May would have just forgotten about the whole thing. She could feel her cheeks heating up and she nodded without taking her eyes off of her shoes.
Skye saw May start to move closer and she involuntarily took a step back.

May stopped and took a deep breath, "Skye, sweetie, would you please look at me? I just want to make sure you're really okay. I'm not mad at you, I swear." She didn't sound mad and she hadn't lied to Skye so far, so she lifted her head and met May's eyes. The older woman smiled at her and she could see that May wasn't mad at her. She had her hands held out in front of her in a placating manner and a gentle smile on her face.

"There are those beautiful brown eyes. Are you really okay?" May took a step closer and Skye didn't step away from her this time, she stayed where she was.

"I'm okay, I promise." May didn't look like she was convinced though, so Skye decided to smile at her to reassure her. A look of shock flitted across May's face but then she grinned back at her and didn't question her further.

"Are you ready to go?"

Skye nodded.

"Do you have your bags packed?"

The little girl nodded again.

"Well aren't you prepared? How about we go grab them and find Phil?" May was looking at her expectantly so Skye nodded for a third time and motioned for the older woman to follow her before leading May out of the craft room and into her room. She ran to her bed and grabbed her bag, happy to find that it was right where she had left it and that no one had touched it or messed with it. She looked around one last time to make sure she had all of her things before walking back to May's side and looking up at her.

"You want me to carry that for you?"

Her duffel bag was fairly small but so was Skye, so it looked pretty big compared to her. She knew that May was just asking because of that but she wasn't sure she wanted May to touch all of her things just yet. This was all she had and she was used to keeping her belongings close to her otherwise they got stolen or ruined, so she protectively pulled the bag closer to her body even as she thought about how she didn't want to tell May no and risk her getting mad.

As if May sensed this, she calmly said, "Skye, you don't have to give it to me. If you want to carry it, that's perfectly fine. I just thought I'd offer."

Skye let out a deep breath, "I want to carry it. Please?"

May just smiled in return and stepped towards the door, "Let's go find my husband. I bet that mean old nun is holding him hostage."

She didn't know what 'hostage' meant but the way May said it sounded funny so Skye grinned and walked towards Sister Margaret's office. They found Phil in there and the grown-ups started talking so she anxiously stood by the door and zoned out and imagined what her new siblings would be like.

She hoped they were kind and would talk to her and maybe even play with her sometimes. She really hoped that they weren’t mean and that they wouldn’t get angry at her for having to share their mom and dad with her.

Her thoughts were interrupted when she heard her name being called and she realized it was time to
Skye didn't bother saying goodbye to anyone, she didn't really have anyone to say goodbye to if she was being honest to herself, she just walked with the group out the front door and didn't look back. When she spotted the car, she froze. For some reason, it had never really registered that Skye would have to go in a car to get to May and Phil's house. The thought hadn't even crossed her mind, she had been too worried about everything else, but now that she saw the harmless-looking car that they were heading towards, her heart started beating fast and her breathing got shallower.

Sister Margaret was saying goodbye and walking away and then May and Phil were talking about something but she couldn't hear them over the loud noise of blood rushing through her ears. She wouldn't lose control of herself and make a scene, she couldn't, because she didn't want May and Phil to see her like that. They would think that she was broken and would leave her at St. Agnes'.

Phil was opening the car door and looking expectantly at Skye but she couldn't move her feet forward. She couldn't breathe right and her eyes started welling up with tears when she realized that she couldn't get in the car even though she knew she needed to. Her vision got blurry and her heart was beating so fast she thought that it was going to explode. Somehow through her tears, she saw Phil reaching for her and she flinched so hard that she stumbled back a step. She was breathing harder, like she did after she ran around the playground for too long, and she was starting to feel dizzy, which she didn’t think was a good thing to be feeling.

"Skye? Skye, listen to my voice sweetie. Everything’s alright, okay? Can you focus on me please?"

Skye heard May's voice calling to her and she turned to where she thought the sound was coming from. She felt herself start to cry and she hated herself for it but at least she could see better than before. May was staring at her intensely and she was kneeling down so that Skye didn't have to look up at her, which she appreciated a lot.

"Good girl. Okay, now try to match your breathing to mine, alright? Take a deep breath in... and let it out," Skye tried to match May's breathing and it helped a little but her heart was still beating super fast and it was uncomfortably banging against her ribcage.

Skye looked past May to the car for a moment and her breathing hitched before she whimpered, "My heart is going to explode, May." She didn't know if the older lady understood what she was saying through her tears.

Suddenly, May grabbed her hand. Skye wasn't expecting it so she couldn't stop it but instead of hurting her, May held it gently and raised it up to her own chest. Skye could feel May's heart beating, it was strong and steady, so Skye pushed her hand closer to May's chest and let the older woman's heartbeat calm her down. Her tears slowly stopped, her breathing eventually returned to normal, and her chest didn't feel like it was going to explode anymore, but she was still scared.

She looked back towards the car and swallowed thickly.

This time, it was Phil's voice that drew her eyes away from it, "Skye, I'm a safe driver and would never endanger yours or anyone else's life while I'm driving. If you want, I could drive extra slow?"

Skye's hand was still on May's chest and her fist involuntarily clenched around May's shirt but she didn't answer.

He tried again, "How about we have May sit in the back with you?"

Skye perked up a little at that. She couldn't help but feel safe around May and she could help her
breathe if she started panicking again.

"Really?" She asked Phil, not sure if he was telling the truth but hoping that he was.

He smiled at her and nodded enthusiastically, "Of course. If it will make you feel better then of course we'll do it."

He sounded so sincere and his words were so nice that Skye felt bad for flinching away from him earlier. Phil was nice and he hadn't done anything mean to her so far and Skye wanted to trust him like she was starting to trust May but she couldn't. Not yet. So she did the best she could and gave him a watery smile instead.

She pulled her hand away from May and cautiously approached the car. The door was still open from earlier, so Skye gingerly got in and sat in the booster seat that was waiting for her. May leaned forward and buckled her in as she tried to keep her breathing from speeding up again. As May walked around the car to get in on the other side, Phil stood by her and kept the door open so that she wouldn't be in the car alone, which she was very grateful for. May got into the car and buckled up next to her and Phil shut the door, took his place in the front seat, and once he was settled, he glanced back at May. She nodded at him, he started up the car, and they were off.

Skye was okay when they were on the deserted roads leading away from the orphanage. She wasn't happy or felt safe but she was okay. It was when Phil got onto the highway that Skye started to panic a little bit. There were too many cars speeding by them and it was loud. As a semi barreled past them, Skye whimpered and cowered back against the seat.

May noticed and got her attention, "Hey Skye, have you ever played Ms. Mary Mack?"

Skye looked over at May and tilted her head and thought about it but he had never heard of that game before, "No, what's that?"

May smiled at her, "It's this game that you play with one other person. I can teach it to you, if you want?"

Skye studied her, winced when another car sped past them, and then nodded.

It turns out that the game was kind of like patty cake and Skye figured out that it was basically intense high-fiving with a little extra flare. There was a certain type of partner-hand-clapping-thing that you had to do along with a little nursery rhyme that you had to sing. Skye had gotten the hang of it after a few tries and was playing happily with May.

She was so involved with the game that she hadn't noticed the car had stopped until Phil declared that they were home. She instantly felt nervous again as she bit her lip and thought about how her new brother and sister were in there.

May unbuckled her and Skye hastily jumped out of the car, glad to finally be out of the confined space, and studied the house in front of her. It was two stories, painted blue, and the porch wrapped around the whole front of it. There was a porch swing and flowers lining the walkway that led to the front door. The house was beautiful, and one of the biggest ones Skye had ever been able to live in, and she discreetly pinched her arm just to make sure that this was real life and that she wasn't dreaming.

May leaned down so that they were eye-to-eye, "Are you nervous?"

Skye shook her head even though she was.
The older woman looked like she knew Skye was lying but decided not to say anything. Instead, May held out her pinky and Skye stared at it for a long second before taking it with her own. May straightened and started walking towards the front door with Skye following behind her and Phil leading them.

"We have a pretty nice backyard that you can play in. Our neighbors have kids around your age that you can play with too. Oh, and there's a park down the street we can go to if you want?" May was talking to her and Skye was only half listening as Phil opened the front door and she cautiously stepped inside.

They stopped right inside the doorway and Skye looked around, holding in a gasp when she saw how beautiful their house was. It was neat but still looked homey with an open floor plan, so that she could see the kitchen, living room, and dining room all at once. Skye took in the comfy looking furniture and the stacks of books lining the bookshelf in the living room. Her eyes were sweeping past the staircase when she saw someone sitting on it. She immediately froze and instinctively took a step back.

It was a girl and she was older than Skye was, with bright red hair and green eyes, and she was staring intensely at Skye. She didn't get up from where she was sitting, she just smiled kindly at her. Her eyes were gentle and her smile was really pretty, and Skye finally decided that the girl didn't look mean or like she was going to hurt her, so she lifted the hand that wasn't holding onto May's and waved shyly. She saw Phil open his mouth to say something from the corner of her eye but he was interrupted by the sound of running feet.

An older boy came rushing through the hallway and down the stairs, stopping when he reached where the redheaded girl was sitting, and Skye's eyes widened. He was loud and big and kind of scary, so Skye rushed behind May's legs and hid.

She continued to hide even as she heard the older boy say, "Hey girl, I'm Trip, you're new brother."

Skye's left pinky was still wrapped around May's right one and now her right hand was clenching the bottom of May's shirt. Trip's voice was smooth and deep and it sounded nice and friendly but he was pretty tall and loud and Skye was scared, so she pushed her face into the back of May's shirt. She heard a new voice, it was raspier but still nice, and she guessed that it belonged to the girl sitting on the staircase, "Trip! You scared her!"

She felt May's pinky comfortingly tighten around hers and heard Trip speak again, "I'm sorry Skye, I didn't mean to scare you. I was just really excited to meet you."

He sounded sincere so Skye slowly peered around May's legs.

The redhead had stood up and compared to Trip, she was pretty short. Trip was smiling brightly at Skye and his eyes were warm so she took a small step away from May but made sure she was still behind her before cautiously waving at him too.

May released her pinky and beckoned the two other kids closer. They descended the rest of the staircase and stopped when they were in front of Skye, both of them smiling eagerly at her.

"Skye, you already met Trip, and this is Natasha. They're both very excited that you are joining our family," May waved a hand towards the two older kids before comfortably resting her hand on Skye’s shoulder.

"We sure are. Welcome to the family Skye!" Trip was leaning down and holding out his hand
towards her. She guessed that he wanted a high-five but wasn't sure, so she looked up at Phil and he gave her an encouraging nod. After telling herself to not be scared, Skye gingerly pushed her hand into Trip's before quickly pulling it back towards her chest.

Skye’s lack of enthusiasm didn’t seem to faze Trip and he continued smiling at her. Skye noticed that the girl, Natasha, was still looking at her intently and she didn't know if she was grateful that Natasha was being quiet or scared. Trip didn't seem mad that she was here but she wasn't sure what Natasha thought and that caused her anxiety to increase a little.

Phil clapped his hands together and Skye couldn't stop from jumping at the sudden sound. He shot her an apologetic look before saying, "Well! Now that introductions are out of the way, I'm going to go make us all some lunch. Skye, May will show you where your room is okay sweetheart? Trip, how about you come help me?"

Trip nodded and slowly walked to the kitchen with Phil but he kept looking back at Skye and smiling. Skye wondered if he always smiled that much and if his cheeks ever got sore from it.

May started walking up the stairs and Skye followed. "Your room is upstairs Skye, right next to Natasha’s. We decorated it for you but if you don't like it we can change it."

They walked past the first room on the left and it had a word on it that Skye couldn't read. It also had a beautiful hand-painted scene on it of a forest covered in snow. The trees had no leaves on them and it was obviously winter because the sky was gray and snow was falling. It was so lovely that Skye paused in front of it to admire it for a few long moments.

She had never met a family that allowed people to paint on the doors but she had also never met a family quite like this one.

She kept walking and looked over to the first room on the right. The door was slightly ajar and she spotted a desk with a computer on it. The bed had dark green sheets and she was guessing that this was Trip's room.

That meant that the door with the beautiful painting on it belonged to Natasha. She snuck a glance at the redhead, who was following her and May, and thought that maybe she could ask Natasha to teach her how to draw like that.

"Our room is right down there at the end of the hallway, the bathroom is over there, and your room is right here," May said as they paused by the second door on the left.

It was closed and Skye took a deep breath before shakily placing her hand on the doorknob. She never got her hopes up when entering a new room. Most of the time, she had to share a room with some other kid so she was already pretty lucky that she got her own room in this house. She twisted the handle, opened the door, and her mouth hung open in surprise at what she saw.

The room had light blue walls, a fluffy carpet, and a pretty bed. The blankets were light blue with white polka dots and there was sky blue material hanging from the ceiling that draped over the top of her bed frame and made it look like it belonged to a princess. The bedside table was painted white with little flower designs on the edges and so was her dresser. There was a dollhouse sitting in the corner and a desk facing the wall by the door. On the desk, there was a pretty lamp that had a pink lamp shade, so it casted a cool pink light that made that half of the room appear to be purple. She saw a white door at the far end of her room near the dollhouse and assumed that was where her closet was.

She absolutely loved it.
She loved everything about this room.

After studying the room for a few long moments, she couldn't resist running around and touching everything.

She ran her hands down her comforter and noted how soft it was before dropping to her knees and putting her hands on the carpet. It was so soft and plush that the tips of her fingers disappeared in it. She stood back up, ran to the dollhouse and kneeled in front of it, noting that it was the kind that you could open up and see the inside. There were some dolls already living in the house and she ran a hand over one of their heads before jumping up and running over to her desk and holding her hands up to the lamp so that she could see the shadow that it casted.

She was beaming and had forgotten that May was in the room with her so when she looked back towards the doorway and saw not only May standing there, but Natasha too, she took a step back and sheepishly played with her fingers.

They were smiling at her so smiled back and said, "I love it. Thank you."

She felt like she should hug May because a thank you didn't really cover the magnitude of what she was feeling but Natasha was staring at her and Skye didn't know if she would want some new little girl hugging her mom. Instead, Skye held out her pinky and May instantly grabbed onto it.

"I can help you unpack before lunch is ready?" May offered. It was then that Skye realized that her bag was still in the car. May seemed to realize this too because she said, "You girls hang on, I'll be right back," and then rushed out the door.

There was an awkward moment when Natasha and Skye were left alone where no one moved or said anything but Skye broke it by wandering over to her bedside table and running her fingers over the flowers painted on it. They were tiny and only on the edges of the furniture, same with the dresser, but Skye thought that that was perfect.

She heard Natasha clear her throat but continued to run her fingers over the pretty design.

"Do you like the flowers?" Natasha sounded nervous and Skye looked up at her.

"They're really pretty. I love them," She spoke quietly and continued running her fingers over the design.

Natasha cleared her throat again and looked away, "Ah, that's good. I, uh, I painted them for you."

Skye's fingers froze.

Natasha had painted the flowers for her and Skye’s throat stopped working properly when an unidentifiable feeling swept through her. Natasha had been thinking of her when she did that, and she didn't have to, she did it because she wanted to.

Skye didn't know what to say. It was probably one of the nicest things anyone had ever done for her and Skye felt hopeful that maybe Natasha really did want her for a sister.

Before Skye could say anything, Natasha started speaking again. "I was a foster kid too you know? I was scared when I first came to live with mom and dad. I didn't know who they were and I didn't know they were as nice as they are. I know that you are probably scared too because you don't know us that well but I wanted you to know that I'm happy you're here and you don't have to be scared of us. We all want you to be here and we want you to be a part of our family…" She paused for a second before continuing quickly, "and maybe one day, you could think of me as your big sister."
Skye's eyes started welling up with tears because Natasha was right and she was scared. Living with new families was always scary and nerve-wracking and Skye usually got stuck with mean people but Natasha was being nice. She understood what she was going through and was trying to make her feel welcome here and no other foster sibling had ever done that before.

Natasha was still looking at the floor, so Skye slowly approached her and when she was standing directly in front of Natasha, the older girl finally looked up. Skye studied her and found that she looked a little embarrassed but fully sincere, so she took a deep breath and held out her pinky, hoping that Natasha would catch on that she was still a little too afraid to hug her and that this was the best she could do right now. Fortunately, Natasha understood, because she smiled brightly and gripped Skye's tiny pinky with her own.

Skye smiled back at her and whispered, "Thank you Natasha."

Their pinkies were still interlocked when May walked in with Skye's bag a couple of seconds later.

Chapter End Notes

pls gimme ur thoughts they make my day !!! xx
The rest of Skye’s first day in her new home had been fairly uneventful.

After May brought her bag into her new room, Skye quickly put away all of her things. May helped her hang up her few shirts and didn't say anything about how they were either too big or had holes in them.

Natasha stayed quiet and watched them silently, only speaking up to suggest that they go shopping soon, "Hey mom, I've been wanting to get some new jeans. Is it okay if we go shopping soon? Maybe we can grab Skye some new outfits too?" Natasha glanced at Skye and then stared purposefully at May. The older lady had nodded and said how that was a great idea but Skye was too busy trying to carefully fold her jeans to think anything of it.

They all ate lunch together at the big dining room table. Phil made her a peanut butter and jelly sandwich and gave her a bowl full of goldfish crackers. Skye liked looking at the crackers but she felt badly for eating them because they were smiling at her, so she just munched on her sandwich and listened to everyone talk.

She didn't say much but no one really expected her to or forced her to and she was grateful for that. They were talking about their day and Natasha and Trip were telling May and Phil about what was going on at their school, and even though Skye had no idea what or who they were talking about, she still felt included in the conversation. It was nice and Skye got the feeling that this was something that happened regularly in their home.

After lunch, they showed her around the rest of the house. Skye stuck close to May and Natasha as they wandered through the large house and pretty backyard but Phil and Trip didn't seem to mind. She really liked the house. It was pretty big, bigger than any house she had ever stayed in, but still felt comfortable. They had a room upstairs that had video games, books, and toys, called the playroom, and Phil told her that they had pulled out their old toys and dolls and put them in the room for Skye to play with. An unfamiliar feeling swept through her at the thought of them going through all that trouble just for her.

She was currently sitting in the playroom coloring while Natasha was laying on the floor next to her reading a book and Trip was playing video games and sitting on the beanbag chair in front of the t.v.. It was quiet and Skye made sure to keep herself distanced from the other two kids but they didn't seem to mind too much. It was nice being around them and it was good that they weren't being mean to her but Skye didn’t know them well enough to completely relax. She was sneaking a look at the two of them when Natasha glanced up at her, smiled, and returned her attention back to her book before Skye could even react.

It was dark outside when May stuck her head into the room and smiled when she saw everyone, "Hey guys, I have to run to the store and grab a couple of things for spaghetti tomorrow night. Phil’s
downstairs if you need him." She smiled at them again and left the room.

As soon as May disappeared, Skye’s anxiousness skyrocketed.

She didn't want to be left alone without May and she thought about running after the older woman but then Natasha sat up and asked her if she could color with her and that distracted her. Trip joined them too and they were all coloring together for about twenty minutes until Phil walked into the room and told Skye that she should start to get ready for bed.

"How about you go brush your teeth and get cleaned up. I can get a bath ready for you while you go grab your pajamas." He motioned for her to go grab her things and then walked out of the room, probably to go get her bath ready.

Skye froze up, her jaw snapped shut and she curled her hands into fists so tight that she could feel the sharp pain of her short nails digging into her palms, and Natasha seemed to notice. She gave her a questioning look but Skye didn't say anything. Her heart starting beating really fast again and she shot up and quickly walked to her room before Natasha or Trip could notice and say something. Once she got to her room, she grabbed her toothbrush and nightgown but didn't move towards the bathroom.

She was trying to control her breathing and her heart rate but it wasn’t working very well.

She didn't take baths. She took really quick showers but never, ever took baths.

Not anymore.

She refused to take a baths ever since Foster Family Number Three, the Bedford's. They were really nice to her and Mrs. Bedford always played dolls with her and never, ever yelled. Mr. Bedford worked a lot but when he was home he was always kind and never shouted. But he would help Skye take baths and she didn't start to feel uncomfortable until his hands started lingering longer and longer.

One night Skye had told him that she didn't want to take a bath and she wanted to take a shower instead and he had yelled at her and told her that she had to take a bath. She didn't know why but she had yelled at him and told him that she really didn't want to, but he had shouted back at her and raised his hand as if he was going to hit her until she did as he said. The Bedford's gave her back because they had to move away and couldn't afford to take her with them.

She tried to never take baths after that. But now Phil was telling her to take a bath.

She knew something had to be wrong with this family; it was too good to be true. She couldn't say no, that would make him angry and then she didn't know if he would hit or yell and May wasn’t there to help her. She felt tears leak down her cheeks as she realized that she had to go and take a bath.

Slowly, she shuffled to the bathroom with her toothbrush in one hand and her pajamas in the other.

"Okay Skye, your bath is ready! I put bubbles in-" Phil trailed off slowly.

Skye was sniffling and staring determinedly at the tiles on the bathroom floor, refusing to look up at Phil or the bath.

"Skye, are you alright? What's wrong?" He sounded worried and took a step towards her but Skye whimpered in fear and backed into the doorway. Her back hit the side of doorway and she protectively pulled her pajamas up towards her chest.
Phil saw her reaction and stopped short, "Natasha! Could you come here please?" He didn't shout but his voice was loud enough so that Natasha could hear him from a few rooms over and it prompted Skye to cry harder. She heard Natasha walking towards them from the hallway and felt the redhead slide by her and go stand by her dad. Skye slid down to the floor, pulled her knees to her chest, and curled into herself.

"Skye, if you don't want me in here while you take your bath, that's okay. Natasha can stay with you and make sure you're alright." Phil said softly but it sounded like he was really far away.

Her heart was beating uncomfortably fast again and she was crying really loudly now, sobbing, and she couldn't catch her breath. She started rocking back and forth in an effort to comfort herself.

"I don't want to take a bath. Please, I'll be good. I promise I'll be good. Don't make me, please!" Her voice came out louder than she intended and she immediately worried about them thinking that she was yelling at them so she hastily added, "I didn't mean it! I'll be good!"

Natasha took a careful step towards her and was slow enough that Skye let her sit down cross-legged on the tile in front of her.

"Skye it's okay, you don't have to take a bath. Look, dad's draining it right now," Skye looked up and saw that Phil was doing what she said. The water was slowly disappearing and swirling down the drain but Skye didn’t feel relieved and she couldn't stop crying.


"Mom isn't back yet but she should be here soon. You don't have to do anything until she gets here," Natasha kept her voice soft and scooted a little closer.

Skye nodded and kept rocking back and forth. Her breathing and heart beat were still really fast and she couldn’t stop crying but she was starting to feel less panicky. Natasha slowly reached forward and offered Skye her pinky. Skye sniffled and stared at it for a minute before unsteadily reaching for it and grasping it with her own. They sat like that for a little while before she heard the door open downstairs.

"Hey May, could you come up here please?" Phil said it loud enough for May to hear and Skye flinched. He shot her an apologetic look and Natasha tightened her pinky around Skye's.

She was still having trouble breathing but she slowly started to feel better now that May was back. Phil wasn't going to make her take a bath and Natasha's presence was comforting. As soon as she heard May's voice, she sagged in relief, "Skye? What's wrong? Phil, what happened here?"

May kneeled down and sat next to Natasha on the floor, her hands fluttering around, unsure what to do.

"I… I'm actually not sure. Skye saw the bath and started crying. She was asking for you," He spoke softly and quietly and Skye barely heard him. She hesitantly lifted the hand that wasn't attached to Natasha’s and put her little palm over May's heart again so that she could feel it beat steadily. It helped to calm her down and she was able to catch her breath and finally stop crying.

"Skye, do you want to tell us what happened?" May asked her quietly.

Skye looked up and saw that Natasha and May were giving her concerned looks and Phil was shooting her worried glances from a little farther away. They didn’t look like they were angry at her, just worried and a little confused, and Skye told herself that they at least deserved an explanation for what had just happened.
"I'm sorry! I don't like baths. He wouldn't stop even though I told him I didn't want to take them. I told him! But he still made me and I don't like them. I don't want to take a bath, please!" She knew she wasn't making much sense but she didn't know how else to say it. Her eyes started welling up again and her fist clenched around May's shirt tightly.

"It's alright sweetie, you don't have to take a bath. Is it okay if you take a shower instead?" May reached forward, paused to see if Skye would object, and when she didn’t, wiped the tears off of Skye's cheek. Instead of flinching away from the touch, Skye leaned into it.

The little girl sniffled, "Showers are okay."

Natasha untangled their pinkies and Skye slowly unclenched her fist from May's shir before shakily standing up.

"Are you alright now, Skye?" Phil asked her and he sounded concerned.

Skye wiped away the rest of her tears and nodded, "I'm sorry."

"No sweetheart, it's alright. I didn't mean to upset you." He smiled kindly at her before walking out of the bathroom, making sure to keep a respectful distance between them.

"Okay, I'll turn the shower on for you. You can shut the curtains but is it okay if we stay in here and make sure that you're alright?"

Skye thought about it for a second. May and Natasha had been nice and had calmed her down and hadn't yelled at her or forced her to take a bath. She was pretty sure they wouldn't hurt her and didn’t mind if they stayed with her.

"Yeah, that's okay."

Natasha watched the little girl step into the shower and close the curtains quickly behind her. She took a deep breath and looked at her mom, who was also staring at the closed curtains with an unreadable expression on her face. Natasha lifted herself so that she could sit on the bathroom counter and her mom sat on the closed toilet lid. They both heard Skye start humming to herself and it was almost as if she hadn't had a complete meltdown earlier.

She leaned in close to her mom and whispered quietly so that there was no way Skye could hear her over the running water, "Mom, what was she talking about? Did someone make her to take baths?"

Her mom's eyes were still locked on the curtains but she answered just as quietly, "I think it might've been worse than just forcing her to take baths. Judging from her reaction, something else happened. I'm only telling you this because you saw what happened. Certain things seem to trigger these types of responses and your father and I both want you to be careful and know what to do if that happens. Skye has been through a lot, Tasha. We're not sure what exactly happened to her but we know that she was abused. You're a sweet girl and I know you would never intentionally do something to upset Skye but you have to be extra careful around her, at least until she gets used to us."

Natasha’s heart hurt a little from hearing this, but she straightened up and nodded, "Of course mom. She's my little sister and I'll do anything to keep her safe."

And she would. When she was younger, she had been kept with other girls and she never been able to keep them safe from the bad men who had taken them all. She could protect Skye though and she
wouldn't let anyone or anything scare her.

They sat there in silence, waiting for Skye to finish her shower. Natasha couldn't wrap her head around anyone hurting her little sister and felt herself growing angrier and angrier. How could anyone hurt her? She took a deep breath and did the exercises her parents had taught her that helped her move past her anger and started feeling a little calmer.

She focused back on Skye, who was still humming softly in the shower, and Nat grinned a little. "Hey Skye? What are some things that you like?"

There was a pause before the little girl answered, "What do you mean?"

"Well I like dancing and hanging out with my friends. What do you like?"

There was another pause, this one a little longer than the one before, before she heard "I like the moon and the stars."

"Really?" Natasha had expected her to say her favorite t.v. show or her favorite color, so she was a little surprised.

"Yeah well, it... they are pretty and they're always there...and I mean..." Skye was babbling and trying to justify her answer and Natasha felt bad because she knew Skye thought that she thought her answer was stupid.

"No I didn't mean that in a bad way! I just never thought of the moon and the stars as being something that someone liked. It's a great answer Skye. The stars are beautiful, just like you."

Skye didn't say anything but she did poke her head out from behind the curtain and told them that she was ready to get out. Her mom reached in and shut the water off before holding up a big, fluffy towel. Skye carefully pushed aside the shower curtain and stepped out of the tub so that May could wrap the towel around Skye's little body and start rubbing away the excess water. Natasha grabbed Skye's pajamas from where they were left by the doorway and handed them to her mom, who then gave them to Skye to put on.

Natasha was zoning out a little as Skye got dressed when an idea came to her. She perked up and bolted out of the bathroom, not bothering to explain herself to her mom who had given her a confused look, before running into her room and digging through the back of her closet.

When she had been twelve, she'd had to do a science fair experiment and ended up doing a research board on the planets. She had used glow-in-the-dark stars to decorate the board and she knew she had tons of extra ones lying around somewhere. Her search in her closet came up empty though, so she groaned in frustration and ran into Trip's room.

Not bothering to knock, she barged in, causing Trip to jump a little in surprise. Her brother tossed his phone onto his bed and raised an eyebrow, "What're you doing?"

"You know when I did that science fair experiment the year you moved in with us? I had like a gazillion extra glow-in-the-dark stars and I can't find them. Do you remember where I put them?"

"What're you gonna do with a bunch of stars, girl?" He asked her but got up anyways and dug around in the back of his closet. He pulled out a Ziploc bag filled with the stars and handed them to her. "Remember? You gave them to me because I wanted to put some on my walls but never got around to it. What do you need them for?"

"Skye told me she liked the stars and the moon and I thought that we could put these on her wall to
make her feel like this is her home too. Wanna help?"

Trip gave her a grin "Hell yeah I do."

When they walked into Skye's room, the little girl was sitting on her bed and their mom was sitting behind her, gently brushing a comb through her damp hair. Skye stayed still when she saw them walk into her room but their mom smiled at them.

"Skye, I know you said you liked the stars so I went and found these. They glow in the dark and can stick to the walls. I thought you might want to put them up?" Natasha asked casually and noted how the little girl's eyes lit up with interest.

Her mom finished brushing through Skye's hair and Skye leaned forward, towards Natasha and Trip, "Really? I can put them on my walls?" She twisted around and looked at May, who shrugged and said, "I don't see why not. They'll look pretty cool when the lights are off."

Natasha grinned, walked to the bed, and tipped the ziploc bag upside down so the stars spilled onto the bed. She picked one up, took the plastic off the back of it so that it was sticky, and handed it to Skye. "Okay Skye, put this wherever you want."

The little girl looked at it, then up into Natasha's eyes, and then back at the star. She finally reached up to take it before glancing around her room inquisitively. She didn't say anything for a minute and stayed seated but then she looked up at Natasha again and asked, "Can I… can I put them on the ceiling?"

Natasha glanced at Trip and saw that he was smiling at Skye, "Girl, that is a great idea. Nat, why didn't we think of that?"

Trip took the star that Nat was offering him and peeled off the back, "If I stand on the bed, I can easily reach the ceiling. Where do you want them Skye?"

The little girl tilted her head back and considered the ceiling for a moment before pointing to a spot. Trip put the star there and they continued on like that, with Natasha handing Trip stars and him placing them wherever Skye told him to and May silently watching. They had filled up most of the ceiling above Skye's bed when the little girl said that it needed one more.

Nat handed Skye another star and then said, "How about you do the last one, little sis?"

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Skye was momentarily stunned that Natasha had referred to her as her little sister and gaped at her for a few long moments before grabbing the offered star and standing up on her new bed. She wobbled a little bit but looked up and saw where she wanted to place the star; right above her head. She stared at the spot, wondered how she was going to get it up there, and was about to jump when Trip's voice stopped her, "Is it okay if I lift you up Skye?"

She tilted her head and considered the offer. Trip had asked her if it was okay and was giving her a choice. He was also smiling at her, had been all day, and hadn't been mean to her once, so she nodded at him.

He grabbed her gently around the waist and hoisted her up carefully, holding her so that she was in reach of the ceiling and was dangling in midair. She looked down and saw how high up she was and got a little scared but before she could panic, Trip calmly reassured her, "I got you girl, go ahead."
She reached above her head and stuck the star onto the ceiling, right where she had wanted it to go, and Trip gingerly lowered her back onto the bed. Skye immediately sat down, wanting to feel lower to the ground, before looking back up at the ceiling and smiling. It was decorated with neon green stars and Skye thought it was beautiful.

May surveyed their work, "It looks really good guys. But it's this little girl's bed time so everybody say goodnight."

It was at that moment that Phil wandered into the room. "Wow guys, that looks awesome. Why wasn't I invited to help?" He pretended to look wounded but when he saw Skye's guilt-ridden face, he quickly smiled and said, "Kidding."

Natasha and Trip both said goodnight and waved at her but before they could leave the room, Skye hopped off the bed and ran over to them, "Wait!"

They both turned back around and Skye took an involuntary step back, "Uh, thank you. I, uh, I really like the stars." She forced herself to not stare at the ground and instead looked into both of her new siblings faces so that they knew she was telling the truth.

"No problem Skye. I'm glad you like them," Natasha said earnestly while Trip leaned forward and ruffled her hair. She made herself not jerk away and smiled back at them instead. They left the room and Skye walked back to her bed, hopped onto it, pulled back the covers, and snuggled into them. She settled back into the pillows and marveled at how soft and comfy everything felt. After sighing contentedly, she looked up to see Phil and May standing on one side of her bed, grinning at her.

"You comfy?" Phil asked her

She nodded and felt her eyelids start to droop. It had been a long day and she felt worn out but content.

Phil's lips tugged upwards at the sight of the little girl's eyes falling shut against her will, "Perfect. Goodnight Skye."

May leaned in and brushed Skye's hair out of her eyes, "Goodnight sweetie. I'm glad you're here with us."

Skye smiled at that and snuggled further into the blankets, cocooning herself in the warm sheets. On their way out of her room, May and Phil plugged in a night light and then shut the door, leaving it open just a crack so that some light from the hallway peeked through.

They didn't hear Skye whisper, "Me too."

Skye felt her eyes shut and gave into the feeling. The last thing she saw before she fell asleep was the soft, yellowish-green glow coming off the stars on her ceiling.
Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

When Skye woke up, she saw that it was still kind of dark outside but the sun was starting to peak above the trees. She felt rested and when she rolled over and pulled the sheets further up her body and cuddled closer to her pillows, she noted that everything was dry. Since she was so relaxed, she tried to close her eyes and go back to sleep but after a little while, she gave up.

Huffing a little, she rolled onto her back and stared at the stars on her ceiling. After admiring their soft green glow for a long moment, she wondered what she was supposed to do when she woke up. Some of her past families didn't like her to leave her room until everyone was awake but May and Phil had never said what they wanted her to do.

Skye listened carefully to see if maybe she could hear somebody walking around but she couldn't so she thought really hard about what her next move should be.

At that moment, her full bladder made itself known, so she got out of bed, poked her head out of her door, and looked around the hallway. Everyone's door was shut and the house was dimly lit and after looking around for a bit longer, she quietly ran to the bathroom and shut the door softly.

She finished up and was creeping back towards her room when she heard singing coming from downstairs. The sound was faint but she could tell that whoever it was had a terrible voice. She walked towards the staircase and put her hands on the banister to try and see into the kitchen so she could figure out who it was but the angle was all wrong, so she slowly moved down the steps until she could see properly.

Phil was rummaging around the kitchen and singing a song that Skye didn't recognize. He was still in his pajamas and had an apron decorated with bright flowers on. Phil looked silly and Skye couldn't help but smile at his antics.

He was making pancakes and they smelled really good.

Drawn to the smell of food, Skye tiptoed down the rest of the stairs and made her way into the kitchen. She hid behind the counter and Phil was still singing and flipping pancakes, totally unaware that she was there, so she peered around the corner to get a better look. Phil must've got to a really good part in his song because he grabbed the spatula and used it like a microphone before doing this energetic spin thingy.

Mid-spin, he spotted Skye and immediately stopped, clearly flustered, and said, "Oh! Oh, good morning Skye! You're up early." He smiled at her and his cheeks were pink and Skye thought he looked a little embarrassed.

"I didn't know if you wanted me to stay in my room until everyone else was up... I can go back." Skye started to turn away but Phil's voice stopped her.

"What? No sweetheart, you don't have to stay in your room. Are you hungry? I'm making pancakes and it's best to grab them before everyone else wakes up. Trip and Natasha have to leave for school in about an hour so they should be up very soon." Skye hesitated for only a second before nodding and moving back into the kitchen. She didn't really know what to do so she just awkwardly stood there.
Phil seemed to sense that she was a little lost, "Hey Skye? I want to cut up these strawberries but these pancakes are almost done. If I pull up a chair for you to stand on, can you help me?"

Skye nodded, grateful to have something to do, and Phil smiled again. He pulled over a chair from the dining room and placed it in front of the griddle, which was covered in pancakes. Skye clambered up onto the chair and Phil handed her the spatula.

By the time the pancakes were done and ready to be taken off the griddle, Phil had finished cutting up the strawberries and was standing next to Skye, making sure she didn't accidently burn herself.

"Okay I'll hold the plate, you scoop up the pancakes and put them on it. Deal?" Phil picked up a plate and held it near Skye. She nodded and very carefully scooped up a pancake before slowly sliding it onto the plate. She grinned, proud that she hadn’t dropped it, and Phil smiled at her and encouraged her to pick up the rest of the pancakes. When they were done, Phil started pouring more batter onto the griddle.

"How about we make this batch with chocolate chips?" He grabbed a bag of chocolate chips from a cabinet and looked at her excitedly.

"You can put those in pancakes?" Skye wondered.

"Oh Skye. You are in for a treat. Chocolate chip pancakes will change your life. Here, put some on the pancakes I just poured out." Phil handed her the bag of chocolate chips and Skye gingerly placed a small amount on the pancakes. Phil helped out and put some on the rest before the batter started to cook.

"Phil! Yours has a smiley face on it!" She pointed out.

"You can have this one Skye. It'll be very happy to be eaten by you."

Phil smiled at her and helped her flip the pancakes over.

They were on their last batch when May wandered in, quickly followed by Natasha and Trip. Natasha still looked tired but Trip looked like he was sleep-walking and Skye smiled at how goofy he looked. Natasha and Trip were dressed for school and they all mumbled good mornings before May walked over to Phil and kissed him on the cheek.

"We're almost done here, you guys can sit down at the table." Phil shooed May out of the kitchen before she could grab some strawberries. "I'll finish these pancakes Skye. How about you bring the bowl of strawberries to the table?"

"Okay." Skye jumped off the chair and grabbed the bowl Phil handed to her. It was made of glass, so Skye made sure to walk extra carefully to the table. She set it down and climbed up into a chair as Phil came in with a huge plate of pancakes and a pitcher of orange juice. When he set them down, everybody dug in.

Skye couldn't reach anything so she just waited patiently. Trip noticed, put together a plate of pancakes and strawberries for her, and pushed the maple syrup her way. She poured some over her plate and thanked him.

Her first bite of the pancakes was magical, she didn't know that pancakes could taste that good. She happily ate while everyone else talked about their plans for the day. Natasha was saying that she had to do a group project for history and she was lucky enough to have her best friends in her group. Trip was asking Phil if he could go to the movies with his friends tonight. May was reminding
Natasha about her dance recital coming up and asked if she was practicing. All the while, Skye was content to just sit there and listen.

Trip glanced at his phone and shot up out of his chair, "Nat, we gotta go. Hunter should be here any minute!" They both scooted away from the table and grabbed their bags from the floor.

"You tell Hunter to drive safely okay? I have no idea how that boy got his license but I'm a nervous wreck whenever he's driving you guys anywhere," Skye couldn't tell if May was joking or being serious.

"Mom, Hunter's not that bad," Trip admonished as he shrugged his backpack on.

"Yeah mom, he's only half as bad as you think he is," Natasha grinned and then looked at Skye, "Do you wanna go to the playground when we get back? It's right down the street and we can walk there."

Skye loved playgrounds but she didn't know if she wanted to go anywhere without May. She could get lost or left behind and she was very unsure but she didn't want to say no to Natasha so she nodded.

Natasha smiled at her, said goodbye, and then they were both out the door.

"And then there were three." Phil said as he started gathering everyone's plates. May got up to help but Phil told her that he had it covered.

May looked over at Skye, "I forgot to ask how you slept last night sweetie. Were you okay?"

Skye nodded at her, "I slept good. My bed is real comfy."

"I'm glad you like it. Phil looks like he has everything covered here so I'm going to go take a quick shower. Do you want to watch some t.v.?"

When Skye nodded at her again, May lead her into the living room and waited for her to get comfortable on the couch before turning on the t.v. so that it was playing Spongebob. She made sure that Skye was comfy before heading upstairs to shower.

Skye was happily watching Spongebob's silly antics when the show cut to a commercial. The commercials were boring, so she stood up and started looking around the room. There were pictures all over the place, on the walls and sitting on shelves and tables, and Skye eagerly looked at as many as she could. In one, Natasha was younger and doing ballet. Her face was focused and she looked beautiful and Skye wished she looked like Natasha.

There were pictures of Trip holding a fishing pole, Natasha staring intensely at the camera, May and Phil on their wedding day, and some with all of them together. Skye was looking at a picture that was standing on the table at the end of the couch. It was of May and Phil with two younger people in between them, not Natasha and Trip, but they looked like brother and sister and even though they weren't smiling, just staring intensely at the camera, they looked like they were happy. The boy had light blonde hair, it actually almost looked white, and his arm was thrown around the girl’s shoulder. The girl was beautiful; she had long, dark hair and wore a black dress and Skye admired her red jacket because it made her look like a rock star. This picture was more formal than the other ones but Skye could tell that everyone in it felt comfortable around each other and happy.

She wondered who these two strangers were.

Skye reached forward to trace the girl's face in the picture but she accidentally stroked the glass too
hard and knocked it over, causing it to crash to the floor. The picture frame shattered, glass flying everywhere, and Skye's eyes widened in surprise as she let out a yelp.

She started to panic as the realization that she had broken May and Phil’s picture struck her. Anxiously, she looked towards the kitchen, where Phil was still washing up, and then back to the mess she had made.

May and Phil were going to be upset at her and send her back and she really didn’t want to go back to the orphanage so soon. She really liked it here and desperately wanted to stay. Her breathing hitched and she dropped to the ground and reached out to pick up the mess so that they didn’t notice and couldn’t send her away.

She picked up the wooden frame first and looked around desperately before haphazardly shoving it underneath the couch. She then got to work on the shattered glass.

She was grabbing a particularly large piece when it sliced her finger. The cut wasn't big but it stung and instantly started bleeding. She hissed in pain, stuck her finger in her mouth, and kept picking up pieces of glass.

"Skye, I thought I heard something break. Are you okay?" Phil walked into the living room and took in the situation. Skye stood up ramrod straight and yanked her injured finger out of her mouth before hiding it behind her back. The glass that she had already managed to pick up slipped from her grasp and fell back to the floor.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean to break it! I was just looking and it fell down and I was trying to pick it back up! I'm sorry, I'm sorry I'm sorry." She was crying now, taking in big gulps of air, and Phil was staring at her with wide eyes.

He took a step towards her and she made a move to step back but Phil stopped her, "No Skye, please don't move! I don't want you to step on any glass and cut your feet." Skye looked at the small shards of glass around her bare feet and stopped her retreat so that Phil could approach her.

He didn't look mad, just worried, but Skye wasn't sure if he was pretending or not.

"I'm going to pick you up okay? There's glass all around your feet and it's not safe. Is that alright?"

She looked at the glass surrounding around her again and it seemed much more dangerous than before. There was glass everywhere, small shards sticking up by her toes and sprinkled all around, and she was getting scared. Her finger was hurting, tears were streaming down her cheeks, and she didn't know what Phil was going to do.

He was reaching towards her so she nodded at him and lifted her arms so that he could lean forward and pick her up. Skye stiffened in his arms, doubting her decision to let Phil have that amount of control over her, but before she could squirm out of his grasp, he was setting her down on the couch, leaving the room, and coming back with a broom in hand.

Skye was still silently crying as she watched Phil sweep up the glass. He hadn't yelled but he might later, and that thought kept her on edge.

He was probably going to send her back to the orphanage. She'd only been there a day and she had already broken their things and cried twice, why would they want to keep her around?

She forced herself to stop crying but her finger was still hurting so she put it back in her mouth.

Phil quickly finished cleaning up and put everything away before he walked up to Skye, "Are you
okay?"

Skye nodded even though her finger still hurt and she could taste blood.

Phil zoned in on her finger and looked concerned, "What happened to your finger Skye?"

She shrugged and didn't say anything, not wanting to bother him when she could find a bandaid to put on it later.

"Can I see your finger please?" Phil asked.

Skye hesitated and he noticed. He held his hands up in a gentle, placating manner and soothingly said, "I'm not mad at you Skye, I just want to see if you're hurt."

Phil sounded sincere and he looked worried for her so she made the decision to trust him and she hoped she didn't regret it. Slowly, she took her finger out of her mouth and showed it to him.

Skye heard him suck in a breath and she studied her finger. The cut wasn't too big but it was still bleeding and she watched as a small droplet of blood slowly trickled down onto her palm.

"Skye! Why didn't you tell me you were hurt? Come here sweetheart, let's get this cleaned up." He ushered her off the couch and towards the kitchen.

"Can I put you on the counter?"

Skye nodded and Phil lifted her up and set her by the sink. He turned on the water and instructed her to hold her finger under it. She did as she was told and watched as he grabbed some band-aids, gauze, and a tube from the cabinet over the refrigerator. He gently reached for her hand and pulled it out from under the stream of water.

After shutting the water off, he used to gauze to wipe the water and blood away from her finger before putting pressure over the cut and looking to her, "The pressure should stop the bleeding.” He gave her a reassuring smile, “You'll be okay sweetheart, it’s nothing a bandaid can't fix."

Skye stared hard at her gauze-covered finger, which was resting on her lap, and mumbled, "Are you going to take me back to St. Agnes’?"

She continued to stare at her finger, not wanting to see his face when he said yes.

"Skye, please look at me." She finally looked up and he was staring at her earnestly, "We're never taking you back there, okay? When we told you that we wanted you to be a part of our family and we meant it. In this family, we never turn our backs on each other. So you could break every single picture in this whole house and we still wouldn't take you back. You're going to stay here for as long as you want. Understand?"

Skye didn't understand. Well, she understood the words that he had said but she didn't understand the meaning behind them. They wanted her… forever? Even though she wanted to, she couldn’t bring herself to believe him.

"I can see that you're doubting me but we'll prove it to you. We all want you to be a part of this family Skye so whether you believe me or not, we're not going to give up on you."

He smiled kindly at her and then took the gauze off of her finger and inspected the cut. He seemed satisfied with what he was looking at and grabbed the tube from the counter. After taking the top off of the tube, he squeezed it so that clear gel came out of it before gently rubbing it over her cut. He
then grabbed something else from the counter and held it behind his back.

"Okay Skye, this is a very serious question… do you want a Spongebob bandaid or a Rapunzel bandaid?" He whipped the band aids out from behind his back and held them in front of Skye so that she could see them. She pointed at the princess one and he unwrapped it and carefully put it on her finger, "There, good as new!"

Skye was feeling much better and she let out a relieved breath as she noted that Phil hadn't yelled at her or hit her. Instead, he had been nice and fixed her finger for her. She felt a little embarrassed for crying earlier but Phil hadn't said anything about that either.

She studied him as he hummed quietly and threw away their trash and came to the realization that Phil was good.

"Thanks Phil," she said quietly but he still heard her.

"Anytime pumpkin, that's what I'm here for. Next time though, please tell me when you're hurt."

She nodded dutifully at him.

"I'm going to get you off the counter now, is that okay?"

She nodded again and lifted her arms, less stiff this time as Phil gently set her down on the kitchen floor. He gave her a grin and then May walked into the kitchen, hair still a little damp from her shower.

"What'd I miss?"

Phil glanced at Skye before saying, "Skye had a little accident and cut her finger. Everything's alright though."

As he finished speaking, his phone rang. Skye jumped at the sudden noise and he gave them an apologetic look before answering it and moving into the living room to talk.

May walked towards her and knelted down in front of her, "Are you okay, sweetie?"

Skye held up her bandaged finger as a response and May made a sympathetic noise, "Oh no, does it hurt?"

Skye shook her head and said, "It did but then Phil fixed me and I'm all better."

May grinned at that and was about to say something else when Phil walked into the room, "I'm so sorry guys but they need me down at the hospital."

May's eyebrows rose, "I thought they gave you the week of?"

"They did but there was a bad accident on the highway and it's all hands on deck. I shouldn't be there for too long but they wouldn't have called if it wasn't important."

May nodded at him and told him that it was fine. He ran upstairs, got dressed in an impressive amount of time, and then ran out the door after kissing May on the cheek and saying goodbye to Skye.

May turned to her and shrugged, "I guess it's just you and me kiddo."
It was a while later and May and Skye were lazily sitting on the front porch. The older woman was swinging on the porch swing and reading a book while she was lying on the ground coloring.

"Hey May? When am I going to go to school?" Skye glanced up at May and noted how she stopped swinging so that she could get a good look at her.

"We actually wanted to talk to you about that. Since we live in another district, you're going to have to start a new school." May said it kindly, almost timidly, but Skye still felt sad and a little upset.

She liked school. It wasn't fun all of the time but it was where she could go and live normally, like other kids. She had friends at her old school and she liked her first grade teacher and she really didn’t want to start over at another school and be the new kid.

When Skye said nothing, May continued, "I'm sorry sweetie but your old school is too far away. We thought we'd give you today to adjust, go into the school and make sure you're registered as a student tomorrow, and then you'd start on Thursday. How does that sound?"

Skye didn’t really want to change schools but she knew she really didn't have that much of a choice. If she wanted to keep living here, and she did, it was just something that had to be done. So, dejectedly, she said, "Okay," and went back to coloring, effectively ending the conversation.

About a half hour later, a car stopped on the side of their street, right in front of the house. It had loud music blasting from it and Skye anxiously scooted closer to May. The backdoor and passenger door flew open and Natasha and Trip emerged from the vehicle, laughing happily and turning back to the car to say something to the driver.

The driver had brown hair and brown eyes and was smiling widely. He turned down the music, leaned out of his window and shouted, "Hey May! How are you doing?" His voice was deep and he said his words funny.

"I'm great Hunter. Tell your parents I said hi, will you?" May was smiling fondly at the guy so Skye forced herself to relax a little.

He put his fingers to his forehead in a mock salute and said, "Will do," before driving away.

Trip and Natasha rushed up the walkway and stopped on the porch to give their mom a kiss on the cheek and say hello to her.

"So Skye, are you ready to go to the playground? I've been looking forward to it all day." Natasha sat down on the ground next to Skye and smiled at her. Trip did the same and they both flung their backpacks to the side.

Skye still wasn’t sure about going to the playground without May. She looked up to the older woman and May smiled encouragingly at her, so she looked back towards Natasha and nodded.

"Great! My friends are coming over later to work on our history project so we should go now so you can play for a bit before we have to leave." She paused, "Oh yeah, mom, I forgot to ask. Is it okay if my friends come over later?"

May rolled her eyes but said that it was fine.

"Trip, you wanna come too?"
"Anything to put off doing this math homework. I don't care what anyone says, trigonometry is hard."

Trip and Natasha started walking down the porch stairs and Skye took one last look at May. The older woman gave her a thumbs up, "Go have fun sweetie. If you need me, have Natasha or Trip call me. I can get there really fast if you need me to," Skye nodded and followed her new older siblings.

"Skye, you are going to love this playground. It has everything." Trip was talking excitedly and Skye was trying to look like she was interested but in reality, she felt like she was going to throw up.

They were quickly making their way down the street and Skye kept looking back towards May until she couldn't see her anymore.

Chapter End Notes

i feel like revising a chapter that I've already written shouldn't take this long but it does!!
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

sibling bonding time & meeting some new people

Skye's tummy felt like it was full of butterflies and she was nervous about being so far away from May. She kept reminding herself that Natasha and Trip were good, that they hadn't been mean to her and they had told her that they wanted her to be here with them, but it wasn’t helping much.

Trip was still talking about the playground and the different play structures that it had but Natasha seemed to sense that Skye was feeling nervous because she offered the little girl her pinky. Skye gratefully took it, happy to have something to ground her in the moment, and tried to focus on what Trip was saying.

Skye could see the playground getting closer and she had to admit that it was pretty awesome. It looked like a really big wooden castle and had slides and monkey bars coming out of it. There was a big swing set next to it and a bridge, made of tires, that was connected to the big castle. It had a wooden seesaw, a whirl-a-round, and a funky, geometric dome that could be climbed all over. It was the coolest playground Skye had ever seen and her nerves started to slowly disappear as excitement took over. There were a few other kids climbing around the play structures but Skye was focused on the swings, which were her favorite.

Finally, they made it to the playground but Skye was reluctant let go of Natasha's hand. She didn't want to walk away from them and have them accidentally leave her here.

"Here we are Skye. You wanna go play?" Trip still sounded really excited even though he was big and probably wouldn't be able to climb around the castle. Skye studied the wooden castle and decided that he definitely wouldn’t be able to comfortably fit on it but Trip’s smile was still big and bright.

Skye stared at the ground, rubbed her shoe in some sand, and anxiously mumbled, "If I go play, you guys won't leave me right?"

"Yes, of course we'll still be here Skye," Natasha answered her and tightened her hold on her pinky to reassure her. That made Skye feel a little better and they hadn't lied to her yet, so she nodded.

Natasha nudged her brother, "Actually, Trip, you wanna go on the seesaws? I haven't been on one in forever."

"I haven't been on one in a while. Let's do this," Trip smiled at Skye and ran over to the seesaws.

"What're you gonna do Skye?"

"I think… I wanna go on the swings?" She phrased it as a question and grinned a little when Natasha nodded enthusiastically.

"That sounds fun! And look, you can see us from the swing set. If you need us, we'll be over here okay?"
Skye nodded again and felt Natasha untangle their pinkies. She watched the older girl make her way towards the seesaw where Trip was waiting for her and then made her own way to the swing set. No one else was using them so she chose the swing on the end, hopped up on the seat, and started swinging slowly. She didn't try to swing too high because she was afraid she would fall off but it was still really fun.

She had been enjoying herself on the swings for a couple of minutes before she heard two kids bickering to her right. Looking over, she saw a boy and a girl her age digging in the sand and tugging a yellow plastic shovel between them.

"Fitz! You got to use it yesterday, it's my turn remember?"

"No! You used it yesterday, it's my turn today!"

Both of them said their words funny, kind of like Hunter, and Skye slowed down and came to a stop on her swing. She studied the two kids and saw that even though they were fighting, they were smiling at each other and looked like they were having fun. Maybe they wouldn't mind if Skye played with them?

She carefully got off the swing and made her way over to them. They were still bickering as she approached and she was able to stand right next to them before they even noticed her.

When they did spot her, they stopped and openly stared at her. Skye didn't really know what to say but she was saved when the girl opened her mouth and spoke instead, "Hi! Do you want to play with us?"

Skye blinked and marveled at how easy that was.

She smiled and nodded before kneeling down in the sand next to them. She watched as the boy stole the plastic shovel from the girl's hand while she was distracted and grin triumphantly. The girl just rolled her eyes and smiled at Skye before pointing at the boy, "That's Fitz. He's usually nicer than this."

Fitz gave her a stern look but pointed at the girl and said, "That's Simmons. Well, her name is actually Jemma but I call her Simmons."

Jemma and Fitz both stared expectantly at her and she wondered why until she remembered that she hadn't told them her name.

"Oh! My name's Skye."

"That's a neat name! Fitz, isn't that a neat name?"

"Yeah, it's pretty neat."

"We were trying to build this sandcastle to look like the playground. Wanna help?"

Skye nodded again and the three of them started digging. Fitz was surprisingly good at it and Jemma mostly provided little shells and leaves that they could use to decorate the sandcastle. Skye helped as best she could but she wasn't the best at building the castle but no one seemed to mind. Regardless of her sandcastle skills, she was having fun with these two, they were really nice and she thought that maybe they could be friends.

After clearing her throat, she softly said, "So… do you guys go to school here?" She kept her eyes focused on her hands, which were currently trying to sculpt the sand into looking like the seesaws,
and scrunched up her nose in frustration when she realized she wasn't doing a very good job.

She heard Fitz answer her, "Yeah! We're in Ms. Hill's first grade class. We've never seen you before, do you go to school here?"

Skye still wasn't happy about having to change schools but maybe if she was put in the same class as these two, it wouldn't be so bad. "I'm new here but I'm supposed to start school on Thursday."

"Cool! Maybe you'll be in our class!" Jemma was smiling brightly at her.

They went back to digging and Skye couldn't help but grin at her good fortune. She had just made two friends and it hadn't even been that hard.

They were almost done with their sandcastle when Skye heard someone calling Simmons’ name.

"Oh! We have to go Fitz! We'll see you later Skye!"

"Yeah Skye, we'll see you later!"

They both waved at her as they ran towards the woman who was calling them. Skye waved back at them before abandoning their sandcastle and going back to the swings. She was thinking about her new friends when she heard someone say, "Hey, get off. I want to use that swing."

Looking up, she saw that there was a boy standing in front of her. He looked like he was a little older than she was and he didn't look very nice. Skye slowed her swing down to a stop.

She wasn't going to let some bully scare her. Jonathan was bigger than this kid and she never backed down from a fight with him.

"No, I'm swinging on this one. There's an empty swing down there." She tried to start swinging again but the kid's hand shot out and grabbed the swing's chain so that it wouldn't budge.

"Too bad. I want this one, so give it to me." The boy puffed out his chest and tried to look bigger.

Skye could feel herself growing angrier and she narrowed her eyes at the boy. No one else was using the swings and there were a bunch of open ones. Why was he trying to steal hers?

She hopped off the swing but stood in front of it so the boy couldn't get on, "If you don't want to use another one, you can use this one when I'm done! But I'm not done yet, so wait your turn!"

She saw the boy's face get angrier. He held up his hands like he was about to push her but before he could, she heard a voice speak up from behind her, "Is everything okay here Skye?"

Looking back, she saw Natasha and Trip standing behind her and she instantly felt better. When she looked back to the boy, she saw that there was an older boy standing behind him and she wondered where he had come from so quickly. They both looked kind of similar and Skye guessed that they were brothers. The older boy looked way scarier than the younger one and he was staring menacingly at Skye.

The older boy put his hand on the younger boy's shoulder and squeezed. She saw the younger one wince but he didn’t protest or try to flinch away. When the older boy spoke, his voice sounded like a growl, "Yeah, there's a problem here. This kid won't let my little brother use the swing."

Natasha took a step forward so that she was standing right next to Skye and growled back, "Oh really? Because from what I saw, your little brother was messing with my little sister for no reason. If
he wants to swing, he can use that one over there." She crossed her arms over her chest and didn't back down when the older kid stepped towards her.

Natasha might not have been scared but Skye sure was. The older boy was big and he looked really mean. He had the same look in his eyes that Mr. Ramsey always had when he was about to do something scary.

Skye took an involuntary step back and accidentally bumped into Trip. He smiled reassuringly at her and gently placed his hand on her shoulder, which actually made Skye feel a little better.

The older boy wasn't backing down, "If my brother wants to play on this swing, then your little brat should let him."

When he said that, Natasha took a step closer and uncrossed her arms. Skye couldn't see her face but from the way she was standing, Skye could tell Natasha was getting angry. The redhead's hands had curled into fists and when she spoke, her voice was quiet and controlled, which Skye thought was scarier than if she would have shouted.

"Listen here, I won't let you or your little brother bully my sister. If you have a problem, you're going to have to take it up with me and my brother here, understand?"

As the older boy's eyes flickered up and glanced at Trip, his gaze momentarily landed on Skye and he sneered at her. Skye cowered further into Trip's legs as her breathing hitched.

She was scared that the boy would actually fight Natasha and it would be all her fault. She really didn't want Natasha or Trip to get hurt because of her.

She whimpered and tentatively reached out towards Natasha, not quite sure what she was going to do, and Trip surprised her by quickly lifting her up and setting her on his hip. He was gentle and even though his action shocked her, it helped to reassure her. From up here, the boy didn't look as tall and imposing as he did before.

The older boy sized Trip and Natasha up and seemed to relent but didn't want to look like he was giving up, "The swings are stupid anyways. Come on Grant, let's go." He squeezed the little boy's shoulder again and Skye could see that it hurt. The little boy, Grant, didn't say anything, just winced again and let himself get led away by his older brother.

Skye watched them walk right out of the playground and down the street. When she looked back, Natasha was taking deep breaths and had turned around so that she was looking at her.

She took in Skye, who was still clinging to Trip's neck, and seemed to note that she was fine, "Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

Skye shook her head and stared intensely at Trip's shirt, refusing to make eye contact. She wasn't hurt but she felt really guilty for almost making Natasha and Trip get into a fight because of her.

"I'm sorry! I didn't mean for anything bad to happen. I-" Skye was mumbling, stumbling through an apology, but Natasha cut her off, "This wasn't your fault маленькая звезда. That kid was picking on you and you stood up for yourself."

"Yeah… but you almost got in a fight." Skye was still mumbling but Natasha didn't look mad at her, instead, she was smiling reassuringly.

"Listen Skye, we're family now, and family takes care of family. I wanted to protect you and stand up for you, Trip did too, and anyways, that guy wasn't going to actually fight. He was all talk.
Nothing we couldn’t handle."

Skye felt Trip nod and started to feel a little better.

According to Natasha, they were a family and apparently, families looked out for one another.

She felt her eyes start to well up with tears, not because she was scared, but because she was happy and kind of overwhelmed. They had said before that they wanted Skye to be a part of their family but Skye hadn’t really believed it until now. Her other foster siblings had never really stood up for her before, they were more likely to be the ones picking on her. She’d never had a real brother and sister but now that she knew that this was what it was like to have some, she never wanted to go without them again. She felt protected and safe and cared for and she couldn’t remember the last time she had felt that way.

Trip was still holding her close to him, he was swaying gently from side to side which was very soothing, and Natasha was still smiling at her. Impulsively, Skye smiled back.

She didn’t really know what to say, she wanted them to know how much she appreciated them but didn’t know how, but they didn’t seem to mind.

Trip jostled her a little bit so that she looked at him, "How about you come play with us? We were gonna go on the monkey bars."

Skye nodded, Trip set her down, and they made their way to the monkey bars. She quickly forgot her encounter with the mean boys as she played with her new brother and sister.

When Natasha said that they should head back home, it was starting to get dark and Skye was tired from running around. Trip had been chasing her through the wooden castle and she was grinning because he kept hitting his head because he was too tall. He bonked his head on a plank of wood when Natasha shouted at them that it was time to go, and Skye giggled but felt a little relieved. She was getting tired and her feet were starting to hurt because her shoes were way past worn down.

They started walking back home and Natasha and Trip were laughing and talking about something that was going on at school while Skye was shuffling behind them, moving at a slower pace. She jumped a little when Natasha’s phone rang loudly and jogged a few steps so that she was closer to her siblings.

Natasha answered it without even checking to see who was calling, "Hello?"

She listened to what the person on the other end had to say before telling them that they would be home soon and hanging up.

"That was mom. My friends came over earlier than I expected, let's go guys."

They started walking faster and since Skye was struggling to keep up before, she lagged further behind. Natasha noticed and slowed down so that Skye could catch up, "You feeling tired маленькая звезда?"

When Skye nodded, Natasha bent down in front of her, "Hop on."

When Skye didn't move, Natasha glanced back at her and smiled, "Come on, I'll give you a piggyback ride."
Skye scrunched up her nose in confusion, "What's a piggyback ride?"

Trip turned to look at her, "Girl, what have you been doing with your life? Piggyback rides are probably the only good thing that comes out of being small. Hop on Natasha's back and she'll carry you home."

When Skye still looked unsure, Natasha encouraged her to wrap her arms around the older girl's neck and her legs around her waist. Skye did as she was told and when Natasha stood up, she let out a yelp of surprise. Natasha laughed and asked if she was okay, Skye nodded and felt Natasha's hands reach out and grab her thighs so that she could hold her up. They started walking back towards the house and Skye slowly started to relax.

"Natasha?" The older girl hummed in response, so Skye continued, "What does that word mean?"

"It means 'little star'. I don't have to call you that if you don't like it." She sounded unsure of herself but Skye quickly protested, "No! I mean no, I like it. You can call me that."

Skye smiled but Natasha couldn't see so she awkwardly patted her on the shoulder. It was nice to have a nickname that meant something good for a change.

Trip and Natasha started talking about school again and Skye felt her eyes start to grow heavy. Natasha's even steps were lulling her to sleep and Skye couldn't stop her head from falling to rest on Natasha's shoulder as her eyes involuntarily shut.

She was in the weird space between sleeping and consciousness when she felt Natasha walk up the front porch steps and open the door to their home. She groggily lifted her head and when they stepped into the living room, she saw a group of boys sitting on the couch talking animatedly to May. Her eyebrows drew together, confused as to who these people were, and she pressed herself closer to Natasha.

When the group saw Natasha and Trip, they shot up and started walking towards them, loudly saying hello and smiling. They looked friendly enough but they were all pretty big and tall and that made Skye nervous. She froze up before wiggling around so that Natasha would set her on the ground. Natasha obliged and Skye instantly tucked herself behind her legs.

She heard Natasha say hello to all the boys and Skye realized that these were probably her friends. If they were Natasha's friends then they couldn't be that bad but Skye didn't trust them enough to talk to them or even move out from behind her new sister.

She heard a deep voice say, "Nat, I remember you saying that you had a new little sister. Is that the little princess that's hiding behind you?"

Skye perked up at that and she stood up a little taller. She had always wanted to be a princess.

Peering around Natasha's legs, she and looked up, up, up towards the three boys. They were all smiling at her but she still couldn't bring herself to say anything.

The same guy spoke again, "Nat, why didn't you tell us you had a princess for a sister?" He got down on one knee in front of her and bowed. He looked very silly, hunched over like that, and Skye felt her lips twitch up into a tiny smile.

"Your Majesty, my name's Clint. It's an honor to meet you." He straightened up and gave her a mock salute too and Skye felt herself start to relax.
Skye looked up at Natasha, who was rolling her eyes fondly, before giving Clint a tiny wave.

Clint winked at her, then stood up and introduced the two other boys. He pointed at the blonde one, "This is Steve," and then he pointed at the dark haired one, "and this is Bucky."

The blonde, Steve, spoke as May made her way over to the group, "It's a pleasure to meet you Skye." He smiled at her and the Bucky nodded and waved at her.

They all seemed nice, so she shyly waved back at them before running over to May.

Natasha pushed Clint and started leading the boys to the couch, "Mom, we're gonna work on our project in the living room. Is it okay if they stay for dinner?"

May nodded while reaching out to brush Skye’s bangs away from her eyes, "These three are always welcome to stay for dinner."

The boys all thanked May and then let themselves be led away by Natasha.

May kneeled down in front of her, "Did you have fun at the playground?"

Skye nodded happily because she really did have a lot of fun with Trip and Natasha even though she had been nervous before.

"You're pretty dirty sweetie, how about you take a shower and then you can help me get dinner ready?"

Skye nodded again. She liked helping Phil cook breakfast and she was eager to help again. May ushered her up the stairs and grabbed a pair of pajamas from Skye's room before leading her into the bathroom. She turned the water on and Skye stepped into the tub and shut the curtains, happy that May had remembered that she was afraid of taking baths.

She was washing her hair when she heard May call her name.

"Yeah?" She squeezed her eyes shut as she tried to rinse away the shampoo without getting any in them.

She heard May reply, "I was thinking that after we go to your school tomorrow to sign you up, how about we steal Natasha away from her school and go shopping together, just the three of us? We can have some girl time."

Skye paused before she answered. She didn't want May to buy her things that she didn't need. She had clothes; they weren't the best and they fit weirdly but they worked well enough.

"Um, you don't have to take me shopping May, that's okay."

"Skye, we want to buy you clothes. It'll make us happy to buy you new things, okay? You don't have to feel bad because this is something we want to do, alright?" May's voice was kind and she sounded like she really meant it so Skye relented and agreed, not wanting to make her angry by arguing.

"Okay good. Are you ready to get out?"

When Skye said yes, she saw May's hand reach through the curtain and shut the water off for her. After pulling the curtain out of the way, she stepped into the towel May was holding out for her. May helped her dry off, get dressed, and brushed her hair before they finally made their way to the
Skye watched as May pulled a chair up to the stovetop and told her that she could help stir the noodles. Dutifully, she climbed onto the chair and carefully stirred. The spaghetti sauce was already ready and Skye curiously watched as May put the garlic bread into the oven.

Skye could hear Natasha laughing in the living room and hoped she was having fun.

The garlic bread was nearly done and May left the kitchen to go add more chairs to the dining room table. When she was done, she came back towards Skye and took the pot full of noodles over to the sink to drain the water out. Skye climbed off the chair and heard May tell everyone that dinner was ready.

Phil still hadn't come back from the hospital so May made a plate for him and put it in the fridge.

She helped May bring the food to the table and saw everyone else starting to sit down. The seats filled up and she ended up between May and Bucky. May helped her fill her plate with food and then everyone dug in.

She was trying and failing to get the spaghetti into her mouth rather than on the napkin on her lap when she looked over and saw something strange.

Leaning in closer to Bucky, she saw that his left arm wasn’t real, it looked like it was plastic. She glanced up, saw that he was staring at her, and recoiled. He didn't look mad that she had been ogling his fake arm, instead, he just gave her a small grin.

"Why does your arm look like that?" Her eyes widened and she yelled at herself for saying that. What if she had hurt his feelings? Skye didn't like it when other people commented on how small she was and she bet Bucky didn't like it when people talked about his arm.

She was about to apologize when Bucky answered, "When I was about your age, I was in a car accident. Everyone else was okay but I lost my arm and they gave me this fake one instead."

He didn't sound upset, just matter-of-fact, and Skye felt sympathy and sadness flash through her. If his car accident was anything like the one she had been in, she knew how awful that must have been for him.

He didn't look sad but he could be faking it so Skye wanted to reassure him, "I'm sorry. I was in a car accident too."

Her throat started to close as she thought about it and she wasn't able to say any more.

May ran a comforting hand down her back and she saw Bucky give her a sympathetic look before he said, "Car accidents are really scary and I'm sorry you had to go through that."

Now Bucky was trying to make her feel better, which was kind of working because her throat stopped feeling so tight. It was nice to know that someone else understood what she had been through. It probably wasn't his fault that he got in the car accident though but it was Skye's fault that she had been in hers.

"Does it hurt?"

"It feels achy sometimes but other than that, I barely notice that it's there. Do you want to touch it?"

Skye didn't know why but she kind of did, so she nodded and he brought his arm closer to her. It
was flesh colored and looked pretty normal. She touched where his forearm would be and was a little shocked to find that it was cool rather than warm.

"Check this out," There was a soft whirring sound and then his hand started moving.

"Woah! That's pretty cool." Skye admired his hand some more before looking up at him and saying, "I like it."

Bucky chuckled and smiled at her, "I'm glad you like it Skye."

With that, they all went back to eating their dinner. When they were all done, the group went back into the living room to work on their project and May told Skye that it was bedtime.

Skye made her way upstairs, with May following after her, and into her room. She jumped onto her comfy bed and May pulled the covers up and over her body.

"Did you have a good day today?" May asked

Skye didn't even have to think about it before answering, "Yes."

May smiled at her and leaned forward to brush Skye's hair out of her eyes, "Good. Goodnight sweetie. Sweet dreams."

"G'night May." Skye snuggled deeper into her pillows and heard May plug in her nightlight, linger by the door for a few moments, and then quietly leave.
Skye could smell smoke, and the sound of twisting metal and breaking glass was still resonating in her ears. She remembered the car swerving into them and their car rolling over twice before landing upright in a ditch. Her head hurt really badly from where it had banged against the side of her car seat and her arm was bleeding. She thinks that it had been cut by some flying glass while the car had been rolling but she wasn't sure.

Her whole body was hurting and she moaned in pain.

She squeezed her eyes shut and cradled her head in her hands until her ears stopped ringing and she stopped feeling dizzy. She gingerly opened her eyes, lowered her hands, and her eye caught on the car that had hit them, sitting upside down in the middle of the road. It was mangled and the front bumper was lying a couple of feet away from it on the ground. Glass was scattered everywhere and she saw smoke coming from the front of it. Through the smoke, she saw the driver’s head lolling limply to the side. She couldn't tell if he was alive or not but now that the initially shock of the crash had subsided, she was getting really scared.

She started crying, which only made her head hurt even more.

She looked to the front seat to see if Mr. and Mrs. Harvey were okay and saw Mrs. Harvey first. She was fairly easy to spot, with her head twisted around, facing Skye at an unnatural angle. Blood was trickling down her face, turning her blonde hair red, her eyes were closed, and Skye couldn't see her chest moving.

"Mrs. Harvey? Are you okay?" She didn't answer, didn’t even move, and Skye whimpered.

She was getting hysterical now, her breathing erratic and tears flowing quickly down her cheeks.

It took a moment for her to work up the courage to look towards Mr. Harvey and when she did, she saw that his head was resting against the steering wheel. His arm was flung over the center console and Skye screamed when she saw a bone sticking out of it.

Her throat was tight but she managed to whisper, "Mr. Harvey? Mr. Harvey are you awake?"

They weren't answering her and she reached towards them but was yanked back by her seatbelt. She struggled to get out of her car seat but couldn't undo the buckles or straps. It felt like it was getting harder and harder to breathe, so she thrashed from left to right but that didn't seem to help at all.

She yelled in frustration and screamed, "Please! Get up! Mom! Dad! You have to wake up! Please!"

They didn't respond and Skye continued to scream for what felt like forever until she heard sirens getting closer and closer.

When Skye woke up, her cheeks were wet and she realized that she was crying. She continued to cry for a little while, making sure to be quiet so that no one would hear her, before forcing herself to
stop. As her tears dried, she rubbed her face against her soft blankets and felt extreme relief when she shifted and felt that her sheets were still dry. She couldn't fall back asleep, not after that, so she got out of bed and turned on her pink lamp. Sitting down by her dollhouse, she played with the dolls in an attempt to keep her mind off of her nightmare, until she heard Phil walk past her door and downstairs to get breakfast ready.

Quickly, she followed him downstairs so that she could help him make breakfast again, hoping that it would take her mind off of her nightmare. Today, Skye helped make toast and parfaits, and when they were done and everyone else had wandered downstairs, they all sat around the table and talked as they ate.

"So Nat, are you okay with us picking you up from school a little early? We've got some shopping to do," May grinned conspiratorially at Skye as she asked Natasha.

Natasha gave her mom an incredulous look, "Seriously mom? Would I ever say no to getting out of school early?"

"Alright, point taken."

Trip pointed out that Hunter would be there soon to pick them up, so he and Natasha both hopped up and ran out the door after saying goodbye.

"Alright Skye, I'm going to take a shower. How about you go get dressed and when I get out, we'll head over to your new school?" May reached over and handed Skye a napkin, motioning that she had something on her face, as she asked.

Skye wiped her face before replying, "Yeah, okay." She tried to seem like she was excited but she didn't think she fooled anyone since Phil was shooting her worried glances and May looked skeptical.

After carefully putting her plate in the sink and running upstairs to her room, she tugged on one of her two dresses and hastily ran a brush through her hair. She heard May turn on the shower and sighed, realizing she’d have to wait a little while with nothing to distract her from thinking about her nightmare or how she was going to have to go to a new school. In an attempt to stay busy, she sat down at her desk and pulled out some crayons and paper from the drawer.

She was absentmindedly coloring and her mind couldn’t help but swirl with unwelcome thoughts. She had liked her old school and teacher, she’d even managed to make a few friends so that she had people to play with on the playground and eat with at lunch, and she didn't want to go to a new school where she didn't know anyone. It was scary and the more she thought about it, the more butterflies she felt collecting in her tummy.

When May walked into her room, freshly showered and in a blouse and nice looking pair of slacks, Skye was a nervous wreck. Gratefully, she took May's offered pinky, said goodbye to Phil, and walked outside into the bright sunshine. She stopped short when she saw the car sitting in the driveway, and her heart started beating erratically. She didn't know if she could get into it after her nightmare, and as her fear starts to grow, she desperately wishes that she didn't feel like this. She wished she could just get into a car without having trouble breathing.

Before she could completely lose control of herself, May kneeled down beside her, "I know you're really afraid to go into the car. It might help if you tell me what you're scared of?"

Skye didn't think that would help at all but May was smiling kindly at her so she gulped down some air and shakily answered, "I'm scared that… that a car is going to hit us and you'll die and I'll be all
alone."

A traitorous tear escaped and before Skye could wipe it away, May leaned forward and caressed her cheek. Skye leaned into her touch and let May's sympathetic face soothe her a little bit.

May continued to stroke her cheek and kept her voice gentle, "That's a scary thought Skye and I can see why you would be worried. Unfortunately, a car accident could happen to anyone and I can't guarantee that it won't, but I can guarantee this: I will do everything in my power to keep everyone safe, especially you."

Skye tilted her head as she listened and May continued, "I know you're scared baby but I also know that you're really brave." When Skye started to shake her head in protest, May argued, "No, you are Skye. You want to know how I know this? You took a chance living with us. You didn't know us but you decided to come and live with us anyways. You've been through so much and yet here you are. I'm so proud of how brave you are."

Skye was full on crying now, big fat tears dripping down her cheeks, because no one had ever said such nice things about her before. No one had called her brave or had told her that they were proud of her but May was proud of her.

May was nice; she helped her when she was crying and couldn't breathe. She didn't yell at her or call her stupid or push her down. She talked to her like she was a real person and gave her choices and actually listened to what she had to say. Skye liked May and even though she told herself not to, she found herself trusting her. Even with that sudden realization, she still surprised even herself when she stepped forward and flung her arms around May's neck.

May obviously hadn't been expecting that because she almost fell over with the force of Skye throwing herself at her, but she regained her footing and gently but firmly hugged her back. Skye was still crying and she pressed her face into May's chest. The older woman started rubbing her back and making soothing noises, which helped to calm Skye down until she slowly pulled away from May and ran a hand down her face, wiping her tears away.

"Thanks May," she mumbled. She was a little embarrassed of what she had done but when she looked up at May, the older woman was smiling kindly at her.

"Anytime sweetie, it's what I'm here for."

Skye nodded but still felt a little embarrassed.

"Do you think you can get in the car?" Skye contemplated the question. May didn't sound annoyed or agitated, just curious and concerned, so she carefully studied the car.

It was a black sedan and looked fairly harmless, just sitting there in the middle of the driveway, and Skye reminded herself that May thought she was brave. If May thought that, then Skye could be brave.

So, she mustered up all of her courage and nodded. May reached out and gently brushed Skye’s bangs away from her eyes before giving her a fond look and proudly saying, "That's my girl."

*Her* girl. May considered Skye *her girl* and Skye had never felt this deep sense of belonging before.

As nice as it was, she forced herself to ignore the feeling. She was getting worried that she was getting too attached too quickly and that scared her.

May opened the back door and Skye took a deep breath before slowly climbing in. She let May
buckle her into her booster seat and watched her get into the driver's seat, gripping her seat belt tightly and taking measured breaths. Skye felt nervous even though she was trying really hard to be brave.

May started the car and before she drove away, she looked back at Skye, "What's your favorite song ever?"

Skye wasn't expecting that and she thought about it for a second before uncertainly saying, "I like the Rapunzel songs."

May nodded, turned back around, did something to her phone, and then the familiar disney music started playing. The older woman turned the volume up a little, turned back around to make sure that she was alright, and when she gave May a sharp nod, she then slowly pulled out of the driveway.

Skye found herself singing along to the song, the music keeping her attention away from the fact that she was riding in a car. She smiled when the next one that came on was her absolute favorite song ever, and she started singing a little louder and more enthusiastically.

When they got to the school, Skye actually felt a little disappointed because they were in the middle of a song. May shut the car off, got out, opened up Skye's door and unbuckled her. When Skye's feet hit the ground, she let out a relieved breath.

May put a gentle hand on her shoulder and said, "Skye, I'm really proud of you for going into the car even though you were afraid."

That made Skye smile really big and stand up a little straighter, happy that she had made May proud of her.

She looked up and took in her new school. It looked pretty nice, with a big grassy area in the front of it and stairs leading up to the front door. It looked kind of big though and Skye was afraid she would get lost in there.

"Ready?"

Even though she wasn't, Skye nodded, took May's offered pinky, and they both walked into the school.

The halls were empty and Skye looked at all of the art on the walls as they took a right and walked into the office. There was a lady sitting behind a desk smiling at them, who May walked up to started talking to. May didn't let go of Skye's pinky and she was grateful for that.

Finally, May signed some papers and said goodbye to the lady before swinging skye’s pinky and grinning at her, "Let's go rescue Natasha."

Natasha had been staring at the clock all day, willing it to move faster. She was stuck in math class, waiting for her mom to come and get her, when she finally got called out for early dismissal. She tossed a smirk in Steve's direction before practically sprinting out of the room. She made sure to send a group text to Steve, Bucky, and Clint, reminding them to come over to her house later so that they could finish up their project as she made her way to the front office.

When she walked into the office, she saw her mom standing by the receptionist’s desk with little Skye standing right beside her, pinkies linked together, waiting for her. Natasha smiled.
The receptionist was watching her and her mom winked at her and said, "Ready to go to your dentist appointment Nat?"

She rolled her eyes and saw Skye give her mom a confused look.

"May, I thought we were going t-" Before Skye could finish, Natasha interrupted her, "Let's go guys, we're gonna be late."

She led them out of the building and Skye tugged on her mom's hand, "May, I thought we were going to the mall, not the dentist. I hate the dentist." Her little face scrunched up adorably and Nat couldn't help but smile.

"We are sweetie, but if they knew that, they wouldn't have let Nat leave."

"Oh."

By then, they had made it to the car and instead of sitting in the passenger seat like usual, she sat in the back with Skye. She helped buckle Skye in while her mom turned the car on. As soon as it was on, Disney music started playing, which surprised her.

She raised her eyebrows and looked at her mom and when their eyes met in the rearview mirror, her mom just shook her head, so Nat didn't question it. Skye started singing along and that made Natasha grin. Her little voice was so cute and she stumbled over most of the words because she didn't know all the lyrics.

Skye continued to sing softly as Nat and her mom talked about their days, and when they made it to the mall, they all got out and walked towards the entrance.

"So, Nat needs jeans. Why don't we go to Macy's first and then go from there?" May raised an eyebrow at Nat and Skye and they both nodded in unison. When they walked through the doors, Nat noted that it was busier than usual, especially considering it was the middle of afternoon on a weekday. She started walking towards the store but stopped when she realized that Skye wasn't following them.

"What's wrong, маленькая звезда?" She looked down at the little girl and saw her mom kneel beside her.

Skye looked unsure of herself. She was staring at all of the people milling around them and Natasha had to admit that it was pretty busy and she could see how all of these people could scare Skye.

"There are a lot of people here. What if you lose me?" The way she said it made Nat feel like Skye had been lost in a store before. That thought made her angry but she forced herself to smile gently at Skye and say, "We would never lose you, Skye."

The little girl still looked uncertain as her mom straightened up and lifted Skye up with her. Skye looked startled and her mom said, "Here, this way there's no way we can lose you."

Skye remained stiff for a minute before relaxing a little bit and wrapping an arm around her mom's neck.

Once that was settled, they found Natasha some jeans to try on before heading to the kids section of Macy's. Natasha loved looking at little kid clothes, everything was so freaking cute, and she was excited to shop with her new sister.

"Okay Skye, when you see something you like, point it out and we'll grab it." May instructed her
and the little girl nodded.

After a couple of minutes, it became obvious that Skye wasn't going to say anything.

"Skye, don't you see anything you like?" Natasha questioned, motioning at all of the very cute clothing around them, sure that Skye had to at least like something here.

When Skye didn't say anything, just looked away guiltily, May jostled her a little bit so that the little girl would look at her. "Skye, remember what I told you yesterday? I want to buy you these clothes. Don't feel bad, I promise I want to do this."

Skye reluctantly nodded and Natasha pulled a shirt from the shelf, it was pink and had little blue hearts all over it, and held it up enticingly, "How about this Skye? It's super cute."

The little girl studied it before nodding, "I like that."

After that, it was fairly easy to pick out clothes that Skye liked. The little girl seemed to like everything. After Nat tried on her jeans and got the correct sizes, she came back to find their cart basically full. She spied some dresses, a lot of shirts, some shorts, skirts, jeans, leggings, socks and underwear.

They were now looking at shoes and when Skye saw Natasha coming, she smiled brightly and held up a pair of sneakers. "Natasha! Look at these! May said I could get them!" The pair she was holding up was white and blue and had a star on the outside side of each shoe.

Nat smiled at the little girl, happy to see that Skye looked like she was enjoying herself, "Those are perfect for you Skye."

Skye was smiling so much and it made Nat's heart kind of feel like it was going to explode with happiness. It was good to see her get excited and have fun and act like a little kid. Her mom put the shoes in their cart and Natasha lifted Skye up and placed her in it. She made herself comfortable on top of her clothes, they walked over to the registers, and May paid for all of their things.

Natasha grabbed the bags and May lifted Skye out of the cart. The little girl wrapped her legs around her mom's waist and her arms around her neck before hugging herself tightly to the older woman and Natasha's eyebrows raised in surprise at the display of affection. Skye whispered something into May's ear and she smiled.

"Let's go girls. We can stop and get ice cream on the way home." Skye let out a happy sound and rested her head on May's shoulder, clearly tired. Natasha readjusted her grip on the bags and followed her mom to the car.

When they got there, Natasha saw that Skye had fallen asleep, so she gently grabbed her from her mom's arms and placed her into her booster seat. She quietly strapped her in, chuckling a bit as the little girl's head lolled to the side, and then got into the passenger seat.

The drive back was fairly quiet; both women didn't want to wake up Skye.

"We can have ice cream after dinner instead," May said, glancing back to make sure that Skye was still sleeping soundly, and Natasha nodded.

Natasha kept her voice soft when she said, "Skye seems to be doing better. I saw the hug."

Her mom smiled softly, "Yeah, it surprised me too. Actually, she had a rough patch when we went to get into the car to go pick you up. Remember last night when she told Bucky that she had been in
a car accident?" When Nat nodded, she continued, "Well, I called the orphanage and asked about it and they said that she was in the car with some older foster parents when a car hit them and they died instantly. Apparently, she was trapped in the car for an hour before they got her out. Poor baby, she's terrified of cars. That's why the Disney music was on earlier, I was trying to distract her."

Nat felt a rush of sympathy run through her and she glanced at the sleeping girl sitting in the backseat. She couldn't believe little Skye had been through so much in her short life and was still able to smile. Learning about this just strengthened her resolve to ensure that Skye was safe and happy with her family.

When they returned home, her mom shut the car off and went to go wake Skye up while Nat walked to the back and started grabbing their bags.

She heard her mom and Skye talking, "Wake up sleepyhead."

Skye's voice was tiny and groggy when she answered, "Did we get ice cream?"

"No baby, you fell asleep, remember? We can have some after dinner, I promise."

"Oh, okay."

They all walked into the house and saw her dad sitting at the dining room table looking over some papers. When she asked where Trip was, her dad told her that he was at the movies and her mom sat down next to him and they started talking, so Nat went and dropped their bags off in Skye's room. She texted the group chat and told the boys that she was home and they could come over whenever they wanted.

When she went back downstairs, she saw Skye sitting on the floor in the living room playing with her dolls. Nat had noticed that Skye really liked dolls so she ran up to the playroom and dug around for a couple of minutes in a forgotten bin in the corner of the room. She grabbed the doll she was looking for, fist pumped in triumph, made her way back downstairs, and sat down next to Skye.

The little girl looked up from her dolls and grinned at her, "Do you want to play with me Natasha?"

"I would love to play with you Skye but first, I wanted to give you this," She handed Skye the doll and saw the little girl's eyes light up. The doll had long brown hair and brown eyes, it was plastic and it had a permanent smile but rather than looking creepy, it looked cute. It had a purple dress on and white shoes and Skye gingerly grabbed the doll and studied it for a long moment.

"This doll looks like me, Natasha."

"I know. Do you like her? Her name's Alice. She used to be mine but I want you to have her."
Natasha was a little ashamed to admit that Alice had been hers but it was the first toy that May and Phil had bought her. When they had given it to her, she had angrily yelled at them in Russian, saying how she was ten years old and she was too old for toys. She had thrown the doll on the floor in her room and left it there until it was time for her to go to bed.

Back then, she had still locked her door when she was going to sleep. She didn't want a repeat of what happened in her first foster family, so after she locked her door, she laid down on her bed to try and fall asleep. She hadn't been able to go to sleep so she opened her eyes and saw the doll. She had gotten out of bed, walked over to it, picked it up and brought it back to bed with her. For some reason, cuddling with the doll helped Natasha sleep better, and she had slept with that doll every night for two years before she decided that she didn't need it anymore.

She hoped that Alice might help Skye feel more comfortable here just like it helped her.
"I really, really like her. Thank you." Skye smiled brightly at her and hugged the doll close before handing her a blonde doll so that they could play together.

They were still playing on the floor when Nat heard the doorbell ring and she hopped up, knowing that was probably her friends, "Sorry kiddo, I've gotta finish this project. We can play some more later."

Skye shrugged and continued playing with Alice.

She let the boys in and they all said hello to Skye before they got the work in the living room. They were almost done with this stupid project, thankfully, and tonight they just had to hammer out the last of the details and practice their presentation. Taking turns, they all presented their own parts of the project in front of each other for practice, all the while making fun of each other and laughing while giving each other tips and corrections.

When it was her turn, Nat stood up and presented her part and when she finished, Clint was the first one to speak up.

"Maybe when you present, try not to glare at the whole class. You'll probably scare them and part of the grade is peer evaluation." He was smirking at her so she knew that he was joking.

She grinned, plopped down beside him, and elbowed him in the ribs, "At least I sound like I know what I'm talking about. You were all over the place when you were presenting."

Clint huffed indignantly and rolled his eyes, "Whatever, while you were presenting, you looked like you wanted to beat us all up!"

Poking him in the side, she made a triumphant sound when he squealed and then smirked, "Maybe I do want to beat you up, ever think of that?" They were jokingly raising their voices and Nat saw that Clint was smiling as Steve and Bucky gave each other an amused look.

"Like you even could."

Clint sounded mighty sure of himself and Nat raised an eyebrow. He very subtly shifted slightly away from her but she caught the movement and laughed loudly.

He grumbled and she and Steve started making fun of him loudly.

Natasha was about to suggest they get back to work when Bucky shushed them, "Hey guys! Shh, look." He tapped her on the shoulder and pointed to the side.

When she turned around, her heart clenched painfully. Skye was still sitting on the floor but now her knees were pulled up to her chest and she was rocking back and forth. Her hands were covering her ears and her cheeks were wet, and Nat realized that their loud voices must have scared her.

Nat started to get up but Clint beat her too it, and before she could stop him, he approached Skye, but when he got too close, the little girl whimpered and scrambled backwards. She brought her hands up to block her face and said, 'No! I'll be good, I'll be good!'

Clint jerked back like he had been burned before he gave Natasha a questioning look and she motioned for him to move away. He obliged and Nat slowly moved closer to Skye. She sat down on the floor and scooted forward before tentatively saying, "Skye? We were just pretending to be mad at each other, we weren't actually going to hurt each other. I'm sorry we scared you."

Skye kept rocking and crying and wouldn't look at her, which made Nat felt like she was going to
start crying. She felt awful and extremely angry at herself for scaring Skye and she berated herself for already failing as a big sister.

"Skye, please, I would never hurt you, you're my little sister."

Skye wouldn't stop crying and Natasha felt like the worst person in the world. She didn't know what to do but she needed Skye to calm down so she called in her mom. May came running in, saw Skye on the floor, and gently motioned for Nat to move to the side, so Nat got up and went to stand by her friends. They were taking in the whole scene with wide eyes and part of her wanted to tell them that they should go away and give Skye some privacy but the other part of her couldn’t look away, just like them.

Natasha saw her mom lean towards Skye and whisper to her before she gently lifted one of the little girl's hands and placed it on her chest. She continued to whisper to her and after a couple of minutes, Skye slowly stopped crying. Her mom wiped Skye's tears away and the little girl wrapped her arms around her neck, clearly trying to catch her breath and compose herself a little bit. May whispered something else and Skye nodded and tightly wrapped herself around her mom as she stood up.

Before they could leave, Natasha picked Alice up from the floor where Skye had left her and carefully approached them.

Skye's head was buried in her mom's neck but she must've heard Nat approaching them because she turned her head and looked at her. The little girl's cheeks were still a little damp and her eyes were red and Natasha felt the overwhelming urge to kick herself for being so careless.

She offered Alice to Skye, who reached out to take it before tucking the doll into her chest. Her mom walked past her, leaned forward to kiss her forehead, and then took Skye upstairs.

Unable to keep her emotions under control, Natasha sat down on the couch and felt her eyes start to well up with tears. She cleared her throat, bit down on the inside of her cheek, and told herself not to cry. It was difficult though, she had basically just given her little sister a panic attack and she absolutely hated herself for it.

She dropped her head into her hands, "I can't believe I did that too Skye."

Steve sat down beside her and started to rub comforting circles on her back, "You didn't mean to scare her Nat. You couldn't have known that would happen."

Even though she knew Steve was right, guilt still gnawed away at her. She had scared her little sister, and what’s worse, she had sworn that she would protect her and keep her from getting scared. It had barely been two days and she had already broken that promise.

She rubbed her eyes and looked up, "Guys? Is it okay if we finish this later?"

They all nodded and Bucky gave her a sympathetic pat on the shoulder before saying, "Of course Nat. We'll text you later."

They all gave her quick hugs before walking out the door.

She needed to go apologize to Skye and she needed to know if she was alright.

Sprinting up the stairs, she skidded to a stop as she caught her mom leaving Skye's room. She left the door open a crack and before turning and spotting her, putting a finger over her lips to tell her to stay quiet, and motioned for them to talk in Nat’s room.
As soon as Nat shut her door, she anxiously spoke, "Is Skye okay? I didn't mean to scare her mom! We were just messing around, I didn't even think we were being that loud. I'm so sorry, I'm a terrible big sister. Can I go see her?"

"She's sleeping right now, but you can talk to her in the morning.” Her mom tugged her onto the bed to sit beside her and tapped underneath her chin so that Natasha would look at her, “And you are not a terrible big sister Nat, you had no way of knowing that Skye would react that way."

She looked down at her shoes. "You sound like Steve," she mumbled.

"I knew I liked that kid for a reason."

Natasha huffed and shook her head. She didn’t deserve her mom’s comfort right now.

Her mom sighed, "Nat seriously, there was no way any of us knew this would happen. We're still learning what triggers Skye and unfortunately, there's no other way to do it than by trial and error. She's fine now, actually, she felt bad that she worried you and your friends."

That made Natasha feel one hundred times worse. The last thing she wanted was for Skye to feel bad about anything.

Her mom gave her a sympathetic look and leaned in to kiss her forehead. "She'll be fine baby," and with that, she left the room.

Nat couldn't do anything but think about Skye for the rest of the night. She couldn't focus on her homework so she gave up and got ready for bed. As she laid down, she willed herself to go to sleep so that she could wake up tomorrow and apologize to Skye.
When Skye woke up, the first thing she thought of was that she had to go to school today. The second thing she thought of was how guilty she felt.

She had completely lost control of herself in front of Natasha and all of her friends. They had been laughing and having fun and Skye had probably ruined it. Now, Natasha probably hated her and didn't want to be her sister anymore, and the thought of losing the sister she had only barely just been given made her heart ache and eyes feel itchy with unshed tears. She couldn't help how she had reacted; they had been getting louder and louder and then they had said something about fighting and then Skye couldn't get Mr. Ramsey out of her head.

She hadn't meant to ruin Natasha's fun, she had just gotten really scared and couldn't stop thinking about how Mr. Ramsey would yell at her and push her down and throw things at her. When May had come in and helped her remember that she was safe, she hadn't been able to look at Natasha. She didn't want to see her new sister’s disappointment or anger at her, so she had only glanced at the older girl for a second, just long enough to grab Alice and tuck her close, but it was enough time to see that Natasha had looked upset and like she was going to cry.

Skye had embarrassed her in front of her friends and made her sad and she had to apologize. Maybe if she said she was sorry, Natasha would forgive her and keep wanting to be her sister. Skye really wanted to keep her sister, she had only had one for a few short days but she knew that losing Natasha would hurt.

Quickly, she scrambled out of bed, grabbed Alice, and tiptoed out of her room. She didn't hear Phil downstairs, so she assumed that she was up earlier than normal. Slowly, she made her way to Natasha's door but she couldn't make herself walk in, so she stared at the scenery painted on the door for awhile. The snow and barren trees might've looked a little sad and lonely but for some reason it comforted Skye.

Finally, after a short pep talk, she gathered up her courage and twisted the doorknob.

She had never been in Natasha's room before and she didn't really know what she expected it to look like, but she didn't think it would look like this. Her room was very, very neat. Her walls were a dark color, she couldn't tell what because there were no lights on, and all of her furniture was white. There were posters all over her walls, most of them had superheroes on them while some had ballerinas, and there was a desk against the wall with a big mirror hanging just over it. There were pictures stuck into the sides of the mirror and Skye could see Steve, Bucky and Clint in a lot of them. She wanted to move closer to get a better look at them but she thought that she should ask Natasha first.

Her eyes were drawn to the bed, which had a white frame and white sheets, and she could see Natasha's red hair but nothing else. She slowly approached the bed and when she was standing right by it, she carefully climbed up and sat down next to Natasha. She stared at the sleeping girl for a little while before deciding that if she wanted to apologize, Natasha needed to be awake, but she didn't know if Natasha would get mad if she woke her up, so maybe she should just wait until she woke up
on her own.

That sounded like a better idea, so she sat there for a couple of minutes before Natasha shifted and made a noise. Skye couldn’t tell if she was starting to wake up or not, so she leaned in a little and whispered, "Nattie? Are you waking up?"

The older girl groaned and reached up to rub her eyes before slowly opening them and blinking blearily at Skye. When she saw her, she bolted up and quickly leaned over to turn on her lamp.

"Skye! Are you okay? What’re you doing in here?" She looked worried and that made Skye feel worse because Natasha was worried about her even though she had ruined her night.

"I'm sorry, I can go," She started crawling off of the bed but Natasha stopped her.

"No, wait. Please don't go, I want to talk to you." Skye looked over and Natasha was sitting up now and cautiously reaching towards her. When Skye sat back, she threw the blankets off of her and scooted over so she was right in front of Skye. Bracing herself, Skye thought that maybe Natasha wanted to yell at her or tell her she didn't want to be sisters anymore.

She prepared herself for the worst and whatever it was, she would not cry.

"I wanted to apologize Skye. I feel so terrible for what I did, I didn't think about how you would react, but I should've known that that would scare you. I didn't mean to make you scared Skye, please, you have to believe me." Natasha was wringing her hands in her lap and pleading with her, looking contrite and upset, and Skye couldn't believe what she was hearing.

Natasha was apologizing to her. She wasn't mad at her, she felt bad about what happened, and thought it was her fault that Skye had been scared.

Skye had to reassure her, "No, it was my fault Nattie. I'm sorry I did that in front of all of your friends. It was stupid." She looked down at her hands and shrugged, "I'm stupid."

Even though she told herself she wouldn't cry, she couldn't stop the tears from escaping. She had been told she was stupid her whole life and she had tried not to listen to them but it was hard not to. She had acted like she was stupid last night so maybe they had been right about her all along.

Natasha sucked in a breath, "Skye, look at me."

Reluctantly, she looked up and caught Natasha’s eye, and the redhead earnestly said, "You are not stupid, okay? I never want to hear you say that again. You are smart and beautiful and kind and whole bunch of other awesome things but you are not stupid." She paused to take a breath and to gently intertwine her pinky with Skye's, "You’re a great little sister and I want you to know that I'm sorry for scaring you."

Skye had a lot of thoughts swirling around her mind but she focused on the main one, "So, you still want to be my big sister?"

Natasha chuckled lightly, "Skye I'll always be your big sister, not matter what. Even if we fight or are far away from each other, even if you want me to stop being your big sister, I still will be and nothing will change that. We're sisters forever."

Skye was surprised at how happy and relieved she felt when she heard Natasha say that she still wanted to be her sister and wasn't mad at her. Her tears slowly stopped and she felt the overwhelming urge to give Natasha a hug. Usually, that would scare her. She didn't want to get close in case they sent her back but Phil had said that they were keeping her forever and Natasha said that
she would always be her sister and May had helped her so many times… she couldn't help but hope that they wouldn't send her back.

Maybe they would actually keep her and she would have the family she always wanted.

She remembered what May had said yesterday, about Skye being brave, and so she thought that maybe taking a chance was braver than trying not to get attached. This family could turn out like the Ramsey's or the Bedford's, or they could turn out like the Harvey's. The scary part was that Skye had no way of knowing which way they would go.

She decided that she could be brave like May thought she was, so she slowly crawled into Natasha's lap and started playing with the older girl's hands. Natasha pulled her a little closer and rested her head on top of Skye's. They sat like that for a little while before they heard Phil walk past the door and head downstairs.

"So, are you excited to start school?" Natasha had started rocking them back and forth and it made Skye feel like she could fall back asleep.

She wasn't happy about going to a new school. Actually, she was really nervous and scared and she could feel a bunch of butterflies flying around in her tummy. What if she made no friends? What if everyone was mean? What if her teacher didn't like her?

When she didn't answer, Natasha took her hands out of Skye's and wrapped them around her so that she was cuddled close to her chest. It felt nice and warm and she leaned into it. "Skye, sisters tell each other everything. You can tell me if you're scared and I'll keep it a secret. I won't even tell mom."

Tilting her head, she considered the new information. She didn't know that sisters told each other everything and if that was true, then she could tell Natasha that she was nervous, "I don't want to start a new school. What if people are mean?"

Natasha kept rocking them and it felt good to say that she was scared out loud and not have someone make fun of her, "When I first started living with mom and dad, I had to start a new school too. It was scary at first and I didn't know anyone but then I met Clint and it got less scary and more fun. You'll make friends here and school will be okay, I promise."

Skye started to feel a little better and she thought about Fitz and Jemma. She had already sort of made some new friends, who she hoped were in her new class.

Natasha gently patted her thigh, "Let's go pick out your outfit. You gotta look good on your first day." Skye nodded and scrambled out of Natasha's lap and into her room, eager to have Natasha’s help.

Together, they picked out a nice shirt and jeans. She pulled the tags off and marveled at how well they fit compared to her old clothes before Natasha tied her shoes for her and offered to do her hair.

Skye was sitting at her desk with Natasha braiding her hair when May came in.

She looked surprised when she saw both girls were already awake, "I was going to wake Skye up and get her ready for school but it looks like you beat me to it."

Skye smiled at her and felt Natasha tie off her hair.

Standing up, Skye admired her reflection in the mirror hanging on her closet door. She looked … normal, which was something that Skye had never really looked like before. She looked normal and healthy and happy and she couldn’t stop her lips from twitching up into a tiny grin.
May gave her a smile, "Oh Skye, you look adorable. Nat, why don’t you go get ready while we grab breakfast."

Natasha smiled at Skye and kissed her mom on the cheek before disappearing out the door. May led Skye downstairs and helped her climb into her chair in the dining room before placing a bowl full of cereal in front of her. Skye dug in and happily ate her cereal and after a few long moments, she felt Phil sit down next to her.

Phil had been keeping his distance from Skye, knowing that she had trouble feeling comfortable around men and wanting her to be able to settle into their home with as much ease as possible. He wanted Skye to trust him and for her to know that he would take care of her and protect her and keep her safe. He didn't know what exactly happened to make her so fearful of men, but he could guess.

Now that she was slowly warming up to everyone, Phil thought it was a good time to try and get closer to the little girl.

He remembered when Natasha first came to live with them. She had been an angry little girl, always shouting, glaring, and throwing things. They had had to teach her English and help her find ways to deal with her anger but she had never been afraid of them, just angry and misunderstood.

Trip had been a dream. They knew that kid was tough but he had surprised them all when they found out that he wasn't afraid to talk about what he was feeling. He had healthy ways to deal with his emotions and his past and although he still had his rough days, he was never afraid of them.

He remembered when they took in the twins. At the age of ten, their parents had died when their apartment building had collapsed. They were mistrustful and stuck together, both refusing to even acknowledge Melinda or him for weeks, but they had never been afraid. They finally warmed up to them and they had become a family.

Now, the twins were off at college, Trip was a straight-A student, and Natasha was a kindhearted dancer.

However, Skye was afraid of him. She didn't let him approach her and flinched away from him whenever he got too close. She was starting to warm up to Mel and Natasha and he could tell that she wasn't distancing herself to hurt his feelings, but he couldn't help but feel a little excluded.

He shook that feeling off just as quickly as it came. He would gain Skye's trust if it was that last thing he did and he would show her that he wanted her to be a part of his family and that he wanted to protect her and keep her safe and happy. He knew that it would take time and effort and would be hard but he was willing to do that. He would prove to her that even though he was a male and an adult, he could be trusted.

He just hoped that Skye would come around.

"Ready to go to school kiddo?" Phil was smiling at her.

She smiled back at him and nodded even though she was still nervous, even after her talk with Natasha. She wished she could just stay here and never go to school again.
He gave her a sympathetic look, took her empty bowl of cereal away from her, and leaned down a little so that they were eye to eye, "It's okay to be a little nervous sweetheart."

When she just nodded again, he said, "Well, let's get a move on. We don’t want to be late on your first day now do we?"

He handed her the blue backpack and lunchbox that May bought her yesterday and she followed him out to the car.

She reminded herself to be brave and slowly got into the car. When she was all situated, May buckled her in and they listened to Disney songs on the way to school. She looked out the window as she sang along to the music, trying to stamp down her nerves by thinking about playing dolls with Natasha or the stars stuck onto her ceiling.

They pulled into the school and as Phil parked, Skye realized that they were going to go in with her, which made her feel a little better. As she peered out the window, she didn't see any other kids running around and wondered why.

May unbuckled her and she hopped out of the car, "Why is no one here yet?"

"We’re here a little early so that you can meet your teacher and see your classroom before anyone else gets here," Phil smiled kindly at her but her tummy still had butterflies.

They tried to start walking towards the school but Skye couldn't make her feet move. She didn't want to go to school, she wanted to go back home and play with Alice.

"What's wrong baby?" Skye looked up into May's kind face and found that she looked concerned.

Skye shifted her weight from foot to foot and sucked in a shaky breath before answering, "What if no one likes me here? Or I get lost? Or my teacher doesn't like me? What if the kids are mean and they push me down like Jonathan did… Can we go back home?"

May and Phil glanced at each other while Skye bit the inside of her cheek.

Kneeling down so that they were eye to eye, May said, "I'm sorry baby, but you have to go to school. We got here early so that you could look around the school so that you won't get lost and I'm sure that you’ll make a bunch of friends here.” The older woman fondly brushed Skye’s bangs away from her eyes, “And we know for a fact that your teacher is very nice.”

Skye kept fidgeting but May’s words made her start to feel a little better, "How do you know that?"

Phil kneeled down next to them, "Because she's a friend of ours. We've known her for a long time and she is very, very nice.”

All of the things that they were saying made sense and had calmed her down a little, but she was still nervous. She didn't like meeting new people or being in a new place on her own.

"Skye, you're going to be safe in there. No one will hurt you, I promise. You'll be fine sweetheart,” Phil was looking at her earnestly and she couldn't help but feel comforted, so she nodded and attempted to give him a confident smile.

Both May and Phil stood up and offered her each a hand, which she took gratefully, and they made their way into the school.

They made sure that she knew the way to her classroom and as they approached it, she saw a lady
with dark hair standing by the doorway. She smiled as they got closer and Skye shifted so that she was behind May and Phil and partially out of the woman’s sight.

"Maria! It's so nice to see you again, it's been awhile." Phil was smiling at her and shaking the lady's hands and then the lady shook May's hand.

"Too long Phil, we should get together for dinner sometime soon. Pepper tells me all about your guys' adventures in the hospital," she was smiling knowingly and Skye relaxed a little at the familiarity between the three adults.

May laughed and then tugged on Skye's hand a little, "This is our new baby, Skye."

Even though Skye was still nervous, she didn't want to be rude, so she shyly waved at the lady.

The lady smiled brightly at her and reached down to shake her hand. Skye blinked at her for a long moment before awkwardly shaking her hand, something she had never done before.

"It’s amazing to finally meet you Skye. I’m your teacher, Ms. Hill, and I’m very excited to have you in my class. We're going to have so much fun together.” She was smiling brightly and looked genuinely happy to be meeting Skye, who let out a relieved breath at finding out that her teacher truly did seem nice.

"Let's head into the classroom and talk some things over. I'll show you your desk, Skye."

Ms. Hill led them into the classroom, guided Skye over to an empty desk, and told Skye that that was where she could place all of her supplies. She pulled out her new pencils, notebooks, and crayon box and placed them gently into her desk. She was excited to use all of her new supplies and she made sure everything was in it's place before joining Ms. Hill, May, and Phil at Ms. Hill’s desk.

Looking around, Skye decided that she liked her new classroom. One wall was all windows and they had cubbies to put their lunchboxes and coats in. There were maps and posters on the walls and hanging over the chalkboard was the alphabet. Overall, it was bright and happy-looking in here and Skye could see herself enjoying her time here.

She looked back to Ms. Hill, who was shuffling some papers on her desk, looking for something in particular. The image reminded her of sitting in front of Sister Margaret’s desk, about to be scolded, which made her squirm in her seat. May must’ve sensed her discomfort because she wrapped her pinky around Skye’s, which made her feel better.

Ms. Hill finally found what she was looking for and smiled triumphantly. "So, it looks like you're a very good student Skye," Skye grinned a little bit at that, "But your old teacher says that you're a little behind in reading and math."

Skye wasn't good at reading or at math, she knew that. She had never wanted to ask for help at the orphanage because the other kids would find out and laugh at her and at some point, she had gotten so far behind that it was pointless to ask her teacher for help since they had already moved so far beyond what Skye understood.

She felt her cheeks start to heat up but Ms. Hill was quick to reassure her, "There's nothing wrong with that, Skye. I'll work with you one-on-one and we can get you caught up, no big deal." She smiled at Skye and then looked to May and Phil, "I'll send home some extra worksheets that you guys can help Skye with. With both of our help, she'll be caught up in no time."

May and Phil nodded enthusiastically and Skye realized that she liked Ms. Hill. Her new teacher didn't make her feel stupid and she wanted to help her, so she nodded at her and grinned a little. She
wanted to be a better reader and she wanted to do well in math, and she was willing to work a little harder to accomplish that.

"Excellent! Well, my students should start showing up within the next few minutes so you might want to start saying goodbye." She smiled at them all, shook May and Phil's hand again, and went to stand outside her door, probably to give them a little privacy.

Skye knew that May and Phil would have to leave her but she didn't want them to go. She liked Ms. Hill but she didn't want to be left alone with a bunch of people she didn't know. What if May and Phil forgot to come back for her?

Her eyes starting to well up against her will so she stared hard at the ground and forced the tears to go away. She decided that if they had to leave her, it would probably be best to just get it over with as fast and emotionless as possible.

Standing up, she made her way back to her desk and mumbled, "Bye guys."

She was staring intensely at her desk, proud of herself for not crying, when she felt May and Phil approach her, "Skye, you don't have to do that. We know you aren't happy to be going to a new school and that it's scary to be in a new class with a bunch of people you don't know." May was talking gently and Skye refused to look up at her, instead choosing to keep staring at the desk.

Phil tried, "I'm sure you'll make a lot of new friends here, Skye. We'll miss you at home."

Phil's words sparked a new wave of tears to fill her eyes but she refused to let them fall. She kept staring at the stupid desk that kept getting blurrier and blurrier.

"Okay, well we're going to head out. We'll be outside to pick you up as soon as school is over. We'll miss you Skye, have a wonderful day baby." May's voice was soft and gentle and a tiny part of Skye wished that she would have just left her alone because it was so much harder to try to leave them when May and Phil were being so nice and compassionate.

When Skye finally looked up, she saw May and Phil's retreating forms and felt guilty for ignoring them, "Wait!"

They turned around and Skye ran up to them, flinging her arms around May's middle and burying her face into her stomach, "I'm sorry! I'm scared. Don't leave me here, please."

She felt May start to rub her back and heard her make soothing sounds, "Oh sweetie, it's okay to be scared."

Skye rubbed her face back and forth against May's soft shirt, "It is?"

This time Phil answered her, "Of course it is, everyone gets scared, but we both know that you'll be fine here. You might actually have a lot of fun and if you need us, you can always ask Ms. Hill and she can get into contact with us for you. We're always here for you Skye."

Phil's words made her feel much better, so she slowly pulled away from May. She remembered that May had said that she was brave, so she took a deep breath and tried her best to be brave. "Okay. You guys will come back and get me right?"

Phil and May exchanged glances again.

"Of course we'll come back and get you Skye. We would never leave you behind." Phil's voice was kind and Skye studied him. He had been comforting her all morning and she remembered what she
had been thinking about with Natasha this morning, about giving this family a chance, so she cautiously stepped up to him and wrapped her arms around him in a quick hug.

It was a very brief hug, Skye stepped out of it pretty much immediately, but she could tell that Phil was happy because his smile was bigger than it usually was.

"Okay sweetie, we need to go now. We'll be out front to pick you up at the end of the day. Have a great day baby." May looked like she wanted to stay but she took Phil's hand and started leading him out of the room.

"Have fun today Skye! We'll miss you." Phil smiled at her one last time and then she was alone.

Taking a deep, calming breath, she sat back down at her desk and told herself that she could do this. She would be okay here and she would try to make friends.

Soon enough, other kids started trickling into the room and a boy came and sat in the desk next to her, "Hi!"

He had dark blonde hair, green eyes, and he was smiling widely at her. She decided that he looked nice, so she gathered up all her courage and said, "Hi."

"You're new here! I'm Lincoln and I sit right here, so we're neighbors." He was still smiling and Skye thought that she was lucky to be sitting next to someone who seemed so kind.

"I'm Skye."

He was about to say something else when she heard someone else call her name. Looking towards the door, she saw the boy and girl from the playground waving excitedly at her.

"Skye! You're in our class! Oh yay, this is going to be so much fun!" Jemma walked up to her and Fitz followed, "Yeah, you should sit with us during reading time. We sit right by Ms. Hill so we can see all of the pictures in the books."

Skye looked at the three people standing around her and smiled tentatively at them. Maybe school wasn't going to be as bad as she thought.
Chapter 10

Skye had actually enjoyed school.

She sat with Fitz and Simmons during reading time and at lunch, where they had traded snacks and told her who was nice and who she should avoid. Lincoln had helped her find everything in the classroom and had worked with her on her reading when they had to fill out a worksheet. Ms. Hill had worked one-on-one with her to help her with her math and she didn't even make Skye feel stupid as she very slowly worked through all the problems. She and her new friends had played tag during recess and no one had been mean to her at all. All of her classmates had been really nice and Skye was happily surprised to find that she liked it here.

It was the end of the day and Ms. Hill had given them a worksheet to do that focused on the letter S. Skye liked practicing writing her S's because it was easier to write than the R's but more challenging than the Q's. Plus, her name started with S, so it was a personal favorite of hers. Lincoln had finished his worksheet already but Skye was making sure to write neatly, so she was still working on hers. He was talking to her and she was trying to ignore him so that she could focus and not mess up.

"Oh! You forgot to put your last name at the top of the sheet!"

Skye looked up at him and internally sighed because she knew she was going to have to have this conversation with her new friends eventually and she hated how different it made her feel.

She didn't have a last name, or actually, she didn’t have one that she chose to acknowledge. The nuns at the orphanage had given her a really bad one so she never ever used it.

Furrowing her eyebrows, she thought about it what to do for a long moment before deciding to just tell him the truth and hope he didn't think she was too weird.

"I don't have a last name." Quickly, she went back to filling out her worksheet and hoped that Lincoln would just stop talking about it and change the subject.

"What are you talking about? Everyone has a last name." He waved his hands around energetically so that Skye got the point that everyone in the classroom had a last name.

Her cheeks heated up and she kept her eyes averted, "Well I don't."

After a few moments of silence, she glanced up real fast and saw that Lincoln looked really confused, "Your last name is the same and your mom and dad's!"

She felt herself starting to grow angry. Why couldn't he just leave her alone? She didn't answer him and focused on her worksheet really hard instead.

"Skye?" Lincoln sounded curious but she was still mad at him. She could feel him staring at her even though she wasn't answering him, which made her even more annoyed.

She dropped her pencil, turned to him, and angrily said, "I don't have parents so I don't have a last name!"

Now Lincoln looked even more confused, "But… I thought everyone had parents?"

Her anger slowly started to fade away. How could she expect Lincoln to understand? He had parents. His mommy and daddy probably loved him and never yelled at him or hit him so how
would he know that there were some people who didn't have mommy's and daddy's?

"My parent's didn't want me so they left me at an orphanage. A lot of other kids live there with me and they don't have parents either. Some of them know their last names but I don't know mine 'cause they left me there when I was a little baby."

Lincoln looked sad, "You don't have a mom and dad?"

Skye sighed, "No."

Lincoln looked away for a couple of seconds before looking back at Skye, "But you moved here and started a new school. Why?"

After thinking hard about how to explain this, she finally said, "Well, sometimes other families will look after me and the other kids so that we don't have to live in the orphanage. They're called foster parents and a new family took me away so now I'm living with them, but since they live in a different town, I had to go to a different school."

Lincoln was nodding along sympathetically, "Oh. I'm sorry you don't have a mom and dad, Skye. But I'm happy that you're here and that we're friends now."

Skye didn't really know what to say to that but luckily, she didn't have to say anything because Ms. Hill told them get their things together and line up by the door. Lincoln took the bus home so he was in a different line and she was saved from having to think of something to say to him.

First, they made sure all the other kids got on the right busses and then Ms. Hill led the rest of them to the front of the school where their parents were waiting for them. As they walked along in a line, Skye started to worry that maybe May and Phil had lied to her and wouldn't come and get her. When they walked out the front doors, Fitz and Jemma said goodbye to her and then ran over to Jemma's mom. Skye fidgeted from foot to foot and tried to spot May and Phil. When she couldn't find them, she stood on her tiptoes and craned her neck to try to see better, but they were nowhere to be seen.

They probably forgot about her.

Skye stopped looking and stared at the ground, feeling foolish for actually believing that May and Phil wouldn't forget about her. She didn't know why she thought that this family would be different from the other ones.

She was drawn out of her thoughts by the sound of her name being called. She jerked her head up and saw May and Phil standing by a tree, smiling and waving at her.

A giant weight lifted off of her shoulders and she ran over to them, "You remembered me!"

Phil took her backpack and lunchbox from her, "Of course we remembered you. We were having trouble finding you in the crowd though. Maybe we should all agree to meet here by this tree from now on?"

Skye was smiling, completely overjoyed because they hadn't forgotten about her, "Okay, Phil." She grabbed May's pinky and they started walking towards the car, "How was your first day, baby? Did you make any friends?"

Skye nodded and started telling them about Ms. Hill and what she did at recess and about how she traded her goldfish for an apple at lunch. She told May about Lincoln, Fitz, and Simmons as the older woman buckled her into her booster seat. May got into the passenger seat and Disney music
was already playing in the background.

"Fitz and Simmons are our neighbors Skye. The Fitz's live to the right of us and the Simmons' live to the left of us. They can come over and play whenever you want sweetie."

"Really?" Her new friends lived really close to her and they could play all the time and Skye sneakily pinched herself on the arm because this was way too good to be true.

"Of course baby. Nat and Trip's friends come over all the time and yours can too." May turned around and gave her a smile and Skye wiggled around in her booster seat because she was too happy to sit still.

"It sounds like you had a pretty good first day. How about we celebrate by stopping and getting some ice cream?" Phil glanced at her in the rearview mirror.

Skye loved ice cream. She didn't get to eat it as much as she wanted and there was no way she was ever going to turn some down, so she nodded enthusiastically and began singing along to the Lion King song that was currently playing.

Phil turned the car into a little ice cream shop before stopping and unbuckling Skye, who skipped enthusiastically after him. The shop was kind of cold and Skye was instantly drawn to the display case that held a bunch of different ice cream flavors. She wasn't tall enough to see the ice cream so she started jumping up and down, but it wasn't really helping much. She was mid-jump when she felt someone grab her around the waist and stopped her from hitting the ground.

She hastily looked back, slightly alarmed, and saw Phil's smiling face as he lifted her up and placed her on his hip. She remained stiff at first but then she reminded herself that she had decided to be brave this morning, so she relaxed and wrapped an arm around Phil's neck. Once she was settled, he leaned over so that Skye could peer into the containers and look at the different ice cream flavors.

"There's so many different flavors! I don't know what I want to get." Skye was looking at the names of the different ice cream but she was having a difficult time reading them.

"You can get whatever you want sweetheart." Phil was smiling at her and she saw May talking to an employee.

May called over, "Phil, you want a chocolate milkshake right?"

Phil nodded and conspiratorially muttered to Skye, "She knows me better than I know myself."

Skye grinned at that and went back to looking at the ice cream flavors. There was one that was light blue and had pink and yellow sprinkles in it. "Phil, what’s that one?" She pointed at it and Phil read the name to her, "Birthday cake. Is that the one you want?" Skye had never had birthday cake flavored ice cream before so she nodded.

He walked over to May, who was already eating her ice cream and holding Phi’s milkshake, and the employee, “Skye knows what she wants."

The employee looked at her expectantly and Skye froze a little bit. The worker looked bored and she didn't want to talk to him, so she looked away and turned her face so that it was pushed against Phil's shoulder. She felt his hand rub comforting circles against her back and he whispered to her, "Do you want a cup or a cone?"

"Cup please," She whispered back and pushed her face harder against his shoulder before realizing that Phil had uncomfortable shoulders even though they were good to hide in.
"Skye wants birthday cake ice cream in a cup. I guess we should get something for Nat and Trip too, huh?" He jostled Skye a little so she knew that he was talking to her and she nodded because Natasha and Trip deserved ice cream too. "Can we also get cookie dough and chocolate peanut butter cup in cups to-go please?"

The employee nodded and went to go complete the order. In a moment, he came back and handed Skye her cup of ice cream but he let go before she had a good grip on it and it fell to the floor. Skye saw it hit the ground and watched as ice cream exploded out of it and immediately felt her eyes start to well up with tears. May and Phil had been really nice to her and had gotten her ice cream and she had ruined it.

She unintentionally clenched Phil's shirt really hard in her fist and forced herself not to cry. They hadn't yelled at her yet but she braced herself for the screaming to start.

She fearfully looked up, "I'm sorry! I didn't mean for it to fall!"

May was shook her head and looked like she wanted to give Skye a hug but didn't, which Skye appreciated. Instead, she said, "Skye, it's fine. It was an accident, okay? We'll just get you a new one sweetie." She looked to the employee and he nodded and told another employee to clean up the mess while he went to get more ice cream.

Her eyes were still filled with unshed tears and she turned her head to make sure that Phil felt the same way that May did. He gently patted her back and said, "It's okay Skye, we know it was only an accident. We aren't mad."

Skye anxiously glanced back and forth between May and Phil and she slowly relaxed when she realized that they really weren't mad.

She was so used to adults just automatically being angry at her when anything went wrong that it was jarring to not get that reaction. She really wasn't used to people like May and Phil.

They didn't blame her when accidents happened or yell or hit or push or scare her. She wasn't used to dealing with adults like this and she didn't know if this would last but she hoped it did because she liked them and felt safe with them. She liked that they didn't yell at her or make her do things that were scary or that she didn't want to do. Sure, they had made her go to school but Skye knew that she had to go to school and May and Phil had made sure that she felt safe before leaving.

Skye liked May and Phil and Natasha and Trip and she wanted to stay with them for as long as she could.

The employee handed Skye her new ice cream and she made sure to grab it carefully so that she didn't drop it again. She gave Phil a shaky smile, who softly patted her knee, before digging in.

They got home and Phil carried Skye's backpack and lunchbox while she carefully brought Natasha and Trip's ice cream inside.

"Well, if it isn't the Fantastic Four. Aren't you done with that presentation yet?"

"Actually mom, we literally just finished."

Skye peered around May to find Natasha and her friends sitting on the floor in the living room with bowls full of snacks sitting around them. She quickly scurried over to Natasha and said, "Nattie, we got you ice cream!"

Natasha grinned and raised an eyebrow, "Did you now?"
Skye smiled and shook the carryout bag so that she could see it, "Yeah, and Trip too."

"Trip! There's ice cream down here with your name on it!" Natasha shouted and Skye was proud of herself for not flinching away from the loud noise.

They waited a couple of seconds and then they heard feet running down the upstairs hallway. She saw Trip fly down the stairs and skid to a stop by May and Phil, "Did someone say ice cream?"

Phil nodded and pointed to Skye, "It's with the little delivery girl."

Skye handed Trip the bag and he walked into the kitchen with it before coming back and handing Natasha her ice cream and a spoon. She thanked him and Trip happily ruffled Skye's hair before returning upstairs.

"We've got some work to catch up on so we'll be in the dining room. You guys are going to stay for dinner, right?" May watched as the group all looked at each other and Clint nodded at her.

"Great. Skye, you can play for a little while but they you need to get started on your homework alright? Phil and I can help you with it." May smiled at her and then disappeared into the dining room with Phil.

Skye grabbed Alice from where she was lying on the couch watching t.v., just where Skye had left her this morning, and sat down by Natasha. She made herself comfortable, looked around, and shrunk back a bit when she saw that Clint, Steve, and Bucky were all staring at her. Her cheeks flushed when she realized that the last time they had been here, Skye had totally lost control in front of them.

Hesitantly, she lifted a hand and waved shyly at them.

"No ice cream for us, Skye?" She couldn't tell if Clint was kidding or not but she felt really guilty for not having any for him.

Looking down at her cup of ice cream, she realized that she still had some left, so she held the cup up to him, "I didn't know you were gonna come over. You can have the rest of mine Clint."

He laughed, "I was just joking Skye. You don't have to give me your ice cream but it was really nice of you to offer."

Skye pulled her cup back to her and nodded.

"Nat told us it was your first day at a new school today. How'd it go?" Bucky asked.

She looked up and saw that Bucky staring at her with genuine interest, so she answered him, "It was okay. I made some friends today and traded my goldfish for an apple at lunch."

They all smiled at her and then Steve said, "Tell us all about it Skye."

He also looked like he really wanted to listen to what she had to say. She looked up to Natasha and the older girl gave her an encouraging smile so she told them. She told them about Lincoln, Fitz, and Simmons and about what she did at recess and about how she really liked Ms. Hill. They smiled as they listened to her and Skye was encouraged by their open expressions.

When she was done talking, Natasha said, "It sounds like you had a good day, маленькая звезда" Skye nodded and it got quiet for a minute or two.
Clint looked around, "I don't know about you guys but I've been dying to get my hands on some crayons to color. Skye, do you maybe want to color with us until you have to start your homework?"

Nodding enthusiastically, she exclaimed, "I'll go get my crayons and some paper!"

She hopped up, ran to her room, and grabbed her box full of crayons and colored pencils and a bunch of construction paper. She ran back downstairs and was about to sit down next to Natasha when she decided that she wanted to sit by Bucky instead. He was sitting a little farther away from everyone else and she didn't want him to feel lonely.

She sat down cross-legged and put the supplies in the center of the circle.

Clint grabbed a green piece of paper and some crayons, "Thank you Skye. I'm gonna draw you a picture. Do you like dogs? I love dogs. I'm going to draw you a dog."

She smiled at him, grabbed a piece of paper of her own, and dragged some colored pencils over to her. Steve and Natasha also grabbed some supplies while she grabbed a handful of crayons and a pink sheet of paper and handed them to Bucky. He smiled at her and thanked her before he started to draw on his paper.

She gave him a smile in return and then glanced down to her piece of paper, trying to figure out what to draw. After a few long moments of deliberation, she decided that she was going to draw Bucky a picture so that if he ever thought about his car accident and felt sad, he would have something to look at and he could feel happy again.
Chapter 11

The next day during lunch, Skye was sitting next to Fitz and Simmons, slightly upset because Lincoln wasn't in school today. Whenever Skye glanced at the empty desk beside her, she felt sad. She had traded her goldfish for Fitz's apple again and they were happily eating when she mustered up the courage to ask them what had been on her mind all day, "Do you guys maybe want to go to the playground by our house after school today?"

She had asked May if it was okay that morning and May had excitedly agreed, probably happy that Skye was making friends. She had been trying to work up the courage to ask them all day and she had finally managed to when they were secluded to the corner of their lunch table in the cafeteria.

Simmons looked over to Fitz and they both smiled, "Yeah! We love that playground. It's way better than the one here."

Skye had to agree with that, even though the playground at school was pretty cool too.

Fitz nodded, "Yeah, we love it. Oh! My dad got me a new ball! We could play footie with it!"

"Oh Fitz! That's a great idea."

Fitz and Simmons were smiling at each other and Skye was happy but a little confused, "What's footie?"

Simmons sighed, "Where we come from, it means soccer."

She wondered why they didn’t just say that and tilted her head in confusion, "Where are you guys from?"

Fitz pointed to Simmons, "She's from England," and Simmons pointed at Fitz, "He's from Scotland."

Skye didn't know where either of those places were, "Does everyone talk like you guys do where you come from?"

"Yeah. I moved here two years ago and Fitz moved here a year after that. We've been best friends ever since!" Jemma playfully elbowed Fitz in the ribs and he retaliated by pinching her lightly on the arm.

Watching how familiar they were with each other made Skye hope that they would become Skye's best friends too. "May said that she could take us an hour after we get out of school. Is that okay?"

Simmons nodded, "Yeah. I can ask my mommy but she'll probably say yes, and –"

Fitz cut her off and Jemma rolled her eyes, "Why do you call your mom May?"

Skye sighed. She hated explaining this to non-foster kids, it made her feel like she was alien, "May isn't my mom."

Jemma and Fitz looked at each other before Simmons spoke up, "Where's your mom?"

Skye reminded herself that she shouldn't be angry at them. They both probably had mommies and daddies that loved them and they didn't know what it was like to have been abandoned. She looked up at her two new friends and they both just looked curious, not like they thought she was weird because she didn't have a mom, so she decided to answer them.
"I don't know where my mom and dad are, they left me at an orphanage when I was a baby. May and Phil are looking after me now."

Jemma looked like she did when she was trying to figure out a math problem on one of the worksheets Ms. Hill gives them, "So...they're your new mommy and daddy?"

Skye’s nose scrunched up in protest and she realized that Jemma had no idea what she was talking about. She may know a lot about math but she didn't know anything about foster families. That was Skye's area of expertise, "What? No."

Fitz's eyebrows pulled together together in confusion, "Do they tuck you in at bedtime?"

"Yeah," She answered in bewilderment, not quite sure where the new line of questioning was coming from.

"Do they pack your lunch for you?"

"Yeah."

Jemma took over the questioning, "Do they give you hugs and make you feel safe?"

Skye nodded.

"Do they make you feel better after you had a bad dream?"

Skye remembered when she had called May while she was still at the orphanage the night she had dreamed about her car accident. May had calmed her down and made her feel better after her nightmare, so she nodded again.

Jemma and Fitz looked at each other again and Skye wished they would stop doing that because it felt like they could read each other's minds.

"That's what my mom and dad do," Jemma said.

"Yeah, mine too."

"It sounds like May and Phil are your mommy and daddy."

Skye looked at them like they were nuts, "They aren't my mom and dad, they're just looking after me for a little while."

This time Fitz spoke up first, "They do mommy and daddy things. Why can't they be your mom and dad?"

Skye was starting to feel angry again, "You guys don't get it. I'm going to throw away my trash."

She got up and slowly walked to the garbage bins, grumbling to herself about her new friends and their complete misunderstanding of the situation.

Jemma and Fitz didn't know anything. Skye knew she had a real mommy and daddy somewhere, she just couldn't remember them. All she knew was that they didn't want her anymore so they left her with a bunch of stupid nuns. She wondered if they had ever loved her or even thought about her now.

Mr. and Mrs. Harvey had said that they loved her and they never left her alone or made her feel like she was unwanted. Her real parents hadn't done that. The Harvey's had put bandaids on her cuts and
tucked her in at night and read her her favorite stories. When she had been sad, they had watched Rapunzel with her. They had done all the things her real parents were supposed to do and now that she thought about it, they had felt more like parents than the idea of her real parents ever had.

She thought about May and Phil and admitted to herself that they did do mommy and daddy things. They had done all the things the Harvey's had done while her real mommy and daddy didn't do anything. All they did was leave her.

Maybe it was okay to have more than one mom and dad.

Before she could ponder that any longer, she forced herself to stop thinking about it because it was scaring her a little.

She threw away her trash and made her way back to Fitz and Simmons. They were thankfully arguing over which letter in the alphabet was better and had forgotten about their earlier conversation, so Skye happily sat down and joined the heated debate.

She focused on not thinking about mommies and daddies for the rest of the day. She didn't think about them when Ms. Hill read them Goldilocks and the Three Bears, or when she ran up to May and Phil at the end of the day and they both smiled really widely at her, or when Phil carried in her backpack for her again, or when May was cradling Skye's pinky in her own as they made their way to Jemma's house. She didn't.

May knocked on Jemma's door and they quickly heard footsteps running towards them before an unfamiliar voice said, "Jemma! Let me open it, we don't know who that is!"

May looked down and gave her a tiny grin.

"Sorry mom."

Skye giggled at how contrite Jemma sounded, even through the door.

Jemma's mom opened the door and started talking to May while Jemma and Fitz squeezed by them and ran up to her.

"Look Skye, I have my new ball!" Fitz held a soccer ball right up to Skye's face so that it almost touched her nose.

"Fitz! You're pushing it against her face, cut it out!" Jemma yanked the ball out of his hands and smiled when he complained. She started playing keep away with him and he jumped up to try to get it. Simmons giggled and tossed it to Skye and they kept it up until Skye took pity on him and gave it back.

Jemma's mom finished talking to May and beckoned Jemma forward, "Melinda is in charge of you and Fitz, okay darling? Make sure you listen to her and please be good." She leaned forward, kissed her daughter on the cheek, and then hugged Fitz.

"Okay mom, we'll be good."

"I know you will darling. Have fun!" Jemma smiled at her mom and May led them all off the porch and down the street.

Skye's heart ached a little when she heard Jemma's mom shout after them, "I love you!" and Jemma turned around and casually shouted it back to her.
May asked them about school and they all talked excitedly over each other until they got to the playground. Once they got there, May told them that she would be sitting on the benches if they needed her and to go have fun. They ran to the empty space between the swings and the sandbox and started kicking the ball around, playing keep away again.

They were trying to keep the ball away from Jemma, so Fitz kicked the ball over towards Skye but he kicked it harder than he expected to and it went flying towards the back of the playground.

Jemma was breathing heavily and it was a little difficult to understand her when she said, "Fitz! Now look what you've done!"

Skye grinned at them as they started bickering, "It's okay guys, I'll go get it." She ran back to where she saw the ball go and was searching for it when she heard, "Is this yours?"

The voice startled her and she looked up to see a tall guy standing near her, holding Fitz's ball out to her. She didn't know who he was and she wasn't supposed to talk to strangers, so she didn't say anything. The guy looked like he was maybe around Phil's age and he was smiling at her but Skye still shrank away from the stranger.

The guy tossed her the ball, said "Here you go," and stared at her for a long moment before walking away.

Skye gripped the ball tightly and ran back towards her friends. As she got closer, she saw that they were talking to a boy. He was a little older than her and kind of looked familiar.

Jemma spotted her and waved her over, "Skye! You've found it! This boy asked if he could play with us and we said yes so now we can have teams!"

The boy turned towards her and she now knew why he looked familiar and her scrunched her nose up angrily when she realized it was the same kid who had picked on her the other day.

Walking up to him, she planted her feet and crossed her arms. "You were mean to me," She accused.

He actually looked guilty and Skye's anger faltered a bit. He shuffled his feet and stared at the ground before mumbling, "Yeah... I'm sorry I was mean to you. My brother told me that I had to go and steal your swing. I didn't want to, I swear." He looked into her eyes and Skye could tell he was telling the truth. She recalled how his brother had grabbed his shoulder painfully and could relate to having mean older siblings.

"Your brother didn't look very nice. He was mean to my sister." She uncrossed her arms but was still a little unsure.

"Yeah, he is mean. And scary. I promise, I wouldn't have been mean to you if my brother hadn't made me."

Skye studied him, took in his sincere expression and thought about what he had said, before coming to a conclusion, "Okay. I forgive you but only if you promise to never be mean to me again."

The boy nodded eagerly, "I promise. I'm Grant but everyone calls me Ward."

Finally, Skye loosened up and grinned, "I'm Skye. This is Fitz and that is Simmons. C'mon, let's play. You can be on my team."

Ward grinned back at her and they got back to playing. By the time May said that it was time to go, they were all laughing and having fun but it was clear that they were starting to get tired. They all
groaned but listened to her.

Skye turned to Ward, "We gotta go. Maybe we can play the next time we're both here?"

He nodded, picked up the ball, and tossed it to her, "Okay. Thanks for letting me play with you guys even though I was mean to you."

"Everyone should get a second chance," Ward grinned at her and she smiled back.

"Bye Ward. It was fun playing with you. Next time you should be on my team and we'd totally win," Fitz said and Jemma promptly elbowed him.

"No, Ward can be on my team next time!"

"No! He should be on mine Jemma!"

"Fine! Then Skye can be on mine and we will kick your guys' butts!"

"Oh really?"

"Yeah!"

"Well maybe I want Skye to be on my team!"

Skye rolled her eyes, waved at Ward, and led her two bickering friends towards May.

"Did you guys have fun?" May interlocked her pinky with Skye's and the group started walking back towards their homes.

"Yeah!" All three kids answered and May smiled in response.

Natasha had been trying to fall asleep for the past hour. It was past midnight and she was usually asleep by now but for some reason, she just wasn't able to fall asleep. She didn't know why, maybe it was because she was nervous about her upcoming presentation or her dance recital, but she wished that whatever was keeping her up would go away because she knew that she was going to be tired tomorrow. The one small saving grace was that it was the weekend and she would be able to sleep in.

She had had a boring day at school. Clint had stayed home with the lame excuse of being 'sick' but she knew that he just hadn't finished his math homework and didn't want to get a zero. Steve had actually been sick and Bucky had to go to a specialist to have his arm checked over, so he had only been at school for half a day.

Grumbling a bit, she came to the conclusion that she needed to make some more friends because eating lunch alone was not fun.

When she had gotten home, she had planned on hanging out with Skye and Trip, but Skye had been at the playground with her mom and Trip left to go to Hunter's house. She had watched movies with her dad and they had joked over popcorn until Skye and her mom came back. Then they all watched some t.v. and ate dinner before Skye had to go to bed and her parents started talking about some patients at the hospital.

They both had to go back to work next week but her mom had cut back her hours at the hospital so that she would be home when Skye was home from school. Her mom was a physical therapist and her dad was a pediatric doctor and they both really liked their jobs. Natasha could tell that her mom
was a little sad about having to cut back her hours but she had said that she wanted to be there for her, Trip and Skye.

Nat groaned and twisted around in her bed, feeling completely awake. Why was it so hot in here? She kicked her blankets off of her legs and stared at the ceiling, cursing sleep for being extra evasive tonight.

She had desperately started to count stupid little sheep in her head when she heard something. Sitting up quickly, she stayed still so that she could listen.

Was that crying? She turned on her lamp, uncertainly stood up, and waited a couple of seconds before she heard the crying again to go investigate. She was right next door to Skye so she figured that it must be her.

She crept out of her room and gently pushed open Skye's door before whispering, "Skye? Are you alright?"

She stopped just inside the doorway. It was pretty dark in the room but the nightlight provided enough light so that Nat could see little Skye in the process of stripping her sheets.

When Skye heard her voice, she immediately froze up, and when she finally looked up at her, Nat could see that her face was wet and that she was breathing quickly. Worry shot through her and she briefly wondered if she should go and wake up her parents.

Skye started backing away until she hit the bedside table, "I'm sorry! I had a bad dream!" She was still crying, sobbing actually, and it made Natasha's heart clench painfully.

It only took a moment for Natasha to squint in the semi-darkness and see a dark patch on the middle of Skye's sheets for her to understand the situation.

Making sure to come across as harmless as possible, she walked towards Skye, "It's okay маленькая звезда."

She stopped in front of the sobbing girl and floundered for a second, unsure of what to do. Natasha was actually surprised that her mom and dad hadn't heard the crying and come running in by now.

Before she could figure out a way to handle the situation, Skye used her arm to wipe her nose and shakily said, "No it's not! I had a bad dream and wet the bed and May and Phil don't know that I do that sometimes and they'll send me back cause I'm a problem."

Natasha blinked, surprised at the outburst and not quite sure what her little sister was saying. "What? No Skye, it was an accident! Mom and dad are never going to send you back." She really wished that Skye would believe them when they told her that she was here to stay, but she understood why she was hesitant.

Skye gave her a disbelieving look, "Yes they will Nattie! You can't tell them! Please, don't tell them!"

Skye was looking at her so desperately that Nat would've promised her anything but she had to make sure the girl knew that her parents wouldn't send her back to the orphanage over a stupid accident. "Skye, it was only an accident! They aren't going to send you away."

Shamefully, the little girl looked at the ground and started crying harder. Natasha knelt down next to her, "Oh Skye."
Natasha started rubbing her back in what she hoped was a comforting manner and was completely unprepared when Skye suddenly launched herself into her arms. She had to take a step back to regain her balance but once she did, she wrapped her arms around the crying girl, realizing that she must really be upset to be hugging.

Natasha started swaying and Skye's cries quieted down a little, so she leaned back a little to get Skye's attention, "Let's clean this up okay?"

Skye nodded and stared at her toes while Natasha finished stripping off the bed. There was still a wet spot on the mattress because Skye didn't have a protective sheet and she made a mental note to tell her mom that she should probably buy one.

She opened one of the drawers in Skye's dresser and pulled out a new nightgown and underwear before leading Skye out of her room and into the bathroom. She instructed the little girl to get undressed as she turned the shower on and checked the temperature.

"Okay Skye, you rinse yourself off and I'm going to throw these in the washing machine," She motioned towards the soiled clothes and sheets. The little girl was still silently crying but she nodded and stepped into the shower.

Natasha didn't feel comfortable leaving Skye alone for long, so she quietly jogged to the laundry room and loaded up the washing machine before running back upstairs. Skye was still in the shower when she got there so she sat on the toilet lid and made sure she made a little bit of noise so that the little girl knew that she was there.

"Skye, mom and dad won't care that you wet the bed. It was an accident."

There was such a long pause before Skye answered her that Nat thought she was ignoring her, "They all mind."

Natasha's heart broke a little bit at that and she felt an overwhelming amount of anger towards all of Skye's past foster families for making her feel this way.

Reeling in her anger, she managed to calmly say, "You know my mom and dad are different. They're good Skye. A lot of foster parents aren't but they are, I promise."

Skye didn't answer her, she just poked her head out from behind the curtain and Natasha took that as the signal that she was done. She reached in to turn off the water and pulled a towel out of the closet before wrapping Skye up in it. She helped her dry off before handing the little girl her new clothes and helping her get dressed.

By the time Skye was dry and dressed, she had finally stopped crying but was still staring determinedly at the ground. Natasha knelt in front of her again and brushed her damp hair out of her eyes, "It's okay Skye. Everyone's wet the bed before, it was just an accident."

Skye looked at her with watery eyes and hugged her again.

She was just full of hugs tonight and even though the circumstances weren't ideal, Natasha was glad that Skye was opening up to her. She hugged her back for a minute and then stood up and lifted Skye up with her. The little girl wrapped her legs around her and leaned her head against Nat's chest as she walked them back towards her room, making sure to stop in Skye's room to grab Alice first. The mattress was wet and there was no way Skye was sleeping on it tonight.

Skye lifted her head when Natasha stopped by her own bed, "Nattie, this is your room, not mine."
She sounded adorably confused and Nat couldn't help but smile, "I know маленькая звезда, but your mattress is still wet and you can't sleep on it."

Skye's cheeks started to turn red and Nat could tell that she was embarrassed so she tried to make her feel better, "Besides, I couldn't sleep anyways and need someone to cuddle with. Are you up for it?"

Her sister seemed to really consider it, and for a moment Nat thought she was about to be rejected, before she finally nodded.

Natasha gently set Skye onto her bed and watched her climb up and slide under the covers before handing her Alice and climbing onto the other side of the bed after her. Skye shuffled around awkwardly for a few seconds before Nat reached out and wrapped an arm around her waist. The little girl stiffened for a second before relaxing and curling into her. It kind of felt like when Nat used to sleep with Alice when she was younger, which was nice and comforting.

She heard Skye's breathing slow down and deepen before she shut her eyes and finally drifted off to sleep.

Mel wasn't surprised when she woke up in the middle of the night.

She had been doing it every night since Skye came home with them. It was probably just nerves about caring for a new child, especially one that was younger than any of the other children they had cared for. She would get up, check on Skye, and then fall back asleep like nothing happened. She had accidentally woken Phil up the first time she had done it but now he slept through it.

Quietly, she rolled out of bed and walked down the hallway, surprised to find Skye's door shut, especially because she specifically remembered leaving it halfway open because Skye didn't like to sleep with the door shut. Maybe she had gotten up to go to the bathroom and had shut it by accident. Either way, Melinda felt herself speeding up.

When she opened up Skye's door and didn't see the girl in question, her lungs seized up in panic. She flipped the lights on and felt her throat start to close as she looked at the empty bed. She took in the unmade bed and frantically looked around the room.

After a thorough search in the closet and under the bed, she was horrified to find that Skye truly was nowhere to be seen. She got up and ran to the bathroom, hoping to find her in there, but let out a groan of frustration and panic when she saw that it was also empty.

Before she allowed herself to fully panic and wake Phil up, she took a deep breath and thought to check and see if Skye was with Trip or Natasha.

She peered into Trip's room but saw that he was the only one in his room. Feeling her panic increase, she sent up a quick little prayer to anyone who was listening and opened Nat's door. A giant weight was lifted off of her shoulders when she saw Skye's little body curled into Nat's.

Her heart was beating so fast that she seriously thought she was going to give herself a heart attack but slowly, it started to calm down and go back to its normal pace.

She walked up to Skye, wanting to make sure that she was safe and injury free, and when she checked over the little girl, she seemed fine. She had Alice gripped tight in one hand and her other one was tucked under her sleeping face. She was curled into Natasha, with the older girl's arm was wrapped around her waist.
Knowing that Skye was safe was a giant relief but she was now fully awake after that utterly terrifying experience. As she turned to leave, her foot accidentally bumped against the bedside table. She cringed and looked back to the two girls. Skye shifted a little but stayed asleep but Natasha blearily blinked and squinted at her.

"Mom?" Her voice was soft but gravely with sleep.

She whispered, "Sorry sweetie, I was looking for Skye. Why's she in here?"

Natasha looked a little uncertain but answered anyways, "She wet the bed. She was really afraid to tell you guys so I helped her out."

That actually made a lot more sense and felt a little ashamed about her slight overreaction.

"Okay. Thanks for helping her out baby. We'll talk about it tomorrow morning but for now, go back to sleep. I love you."

Natasha smiled sleepily at her and closed her eyes as Melinda made her way out of the room and quietly shut the door.

It made sense that Skye was afraid to tell them she wet her bed. She was a frightened, abused little girl.

Her reaction made sense, but May still felt a little guilty and sad about it. She had hoped that they were making progress with Skye. Her recent displays of affection and trust were proof of that and she had foolishly hoped that maybe Skye would stop being so afraid of them by now. She knew that that was a silly hope, that it would take time before Skye fully trusted them, but she still wanted it nonetheless.

She knew that it was going to take time and dedication to get through to Skye that they weren't going to hurt her, but both she and Phil were ready to commit to that, and she had to remind herself that they were making slight progress already.

Keeping that in mind, she pushed aside her feelings of guilt. They would talk to Skye tomorrow and make sure she knew that they weren't mad at her and that she could come to them if anything ever happened again. She knew that it would take awhile for Skye to fully trust them but she was willing to work for it.
Chapter 12

When Skye woke up, she was disoriented and not quite sure where she was. The walls were much darker than her own and the blinds weren't open like hers usually were.

After a long, puzzling moment, last night came flooding back to her. Remembering her awful monster-filled dream made her cringe, but when she remembered her little accident, she wanted to curl into a tiny ball and never talk to anyone again.

As the heat in her cheeks started to slowly fade away, she started to worry about May and Phil finding out. When she had wet the bed at the Ramsey's, they had yelled at her. She knew that May and Phil were nicer than the Ramsey's but she didn't know what they would do and not knowing was what was killing her.

Natasha hadn't yelled at her or called her stupid or a nything, instead, she had comforted her and helped her clean up. Natasha was awesome and one of her favorite people right now.

Rolling over onto her side, Skye saw that Natasha was still sleeping. She had one arm thrown haphazardly over her head and the other one was still wrapped loosely around Skye. Her legs were tangled up in her sheets and her mouth was open a little, and Skye smiled a bit at how peaceful she looked.

Skye didn't want to wake her up so she stayed still and waited for her to wake up on her own, but a lack of light filtering through the blinds told her that the sun wasn't even awake yet. She'd only been here for a few days but she had already learned that her new sister liked her sleep and wouldn't be getting up anytime soon, so she cuddled a little closer to Nattie and slowly fell back asleep.

The next time she woke up, it was because she heard a voice whispering in her ear. She made a noise and rolled over, trying to escape the sound.

A breathy laugh tickled her ear and she groaned when Natasha said, "Come on маленькая звезда. Dad's making breakfast and I'm starving."

She rolled back over and opened up one eye, wincing a little at the soft light filtering into the room. She opened her other eye and blinked in surprise because she never slept this late. She felt good though, like she was really energized and could run around all day, which was weird because she didn't normally feel like this.

Glancing at Natasha, she saw that the older girl was leaning on her elbow and smiling down at her, completely nonplussed and showing no evidence that she was upset about last night.

"Hi," She raspily said as she stretched out her arms and legs.

"Good morning маленькая звезда," Nattie said as she gently tapped her on the nose, "Let's go. I smell bacon and we need to get to it before Trip does." Natasha smiled again and hopped out of bed. Skye was still slowly waking up but was fully awake when she heard Natasha mention bacon. She loved bacon.

"I'll race you Skye. I bet you I can beat you to the table."

Skye looked up at the challenge, she never turned down a dare, and at Natasha’s confident look, Skye felt herself start to smile.
"I'm gonna beat you Nattie!" She bolted out of the room, getting a head start, and as she was running down the stairs, she could hear Natasha running behind her shouting, "Hey! You cheated!"

Skye couldn't stop herself, she felt well-rested and happy and she was winning, so she started laughing.

May was helping Phil make breakfast, a little surprised that Skye wasn’t awake yet, but she knew that the smell of bacon would get her kids down here pretty quickly.

"We just need to make sure that Skye knows that we aren't mad at her and that she can come to us for anything," She said as she cut up some fruit. She had filled Phil in on the whole situation and they were talking about how they should approach Skye about it.

They were standing next to each other and she felt Phil wrap an arm around her waist and press a kiss to the side of her head, "I know honey, I want Skye to feel comfortable around us. She'll learn to trust us."

He sounded sure of himself and Melinda let his confidence loosen the tight knot of worry that had taken up residence in her chest, "I hope so, she's already made so much progress."

"I know, she let me pick her up the other day.” Phil sounded so happy that she couldn’t help but grin.

May’s own heart had soared when Skye hadn’t flinched away from Phil in the ice cream shop. She knew that Phil was struggling to make sure that Skye felt safe around him and she knew that he had been ecstatic when she had allowed him to get close to her.

She was about to answer him when she heard little feet running around upstairs, "Here comes the cavalry. Brace yourself."

She started pulling out plates and glasses while Phil finished with the bacon, both of them well versed with how to move around each other without getting in the way.

She was in the middle of pouring orange juice into a cup for Skye when she heard a very unfamiliar sound.

It was laughter, too high pitched to be Natasha’s or Trip’s, and she jerked around to look at Phil when she realized that it had to be Skye.

She was laughing, sounding carefree and happy.

They had never heard her laugh before.

Phil’s eyes were wide and he appeared to be just as surprised as she was.

Skye skidded into the dining room and grabbed the nearest chair to help steady herself, "I beat you Nattie! I won." She smiled proudly and looked up at the older girl, gloating a little bit over her victory.

Natasha was smiling at her, "Yeah yeah, you won even though you cheated."
"You didn't say *when* we were starting, I thought you meant right away," Skye said innocently.

She saw Natasha playfully scoff, "Of course you did маленькая звезда. Let's eat, I'm starving."

She led Skye into the kitchen and they both gave each other confused looks when they saw May and Phil, who were both staring at her with wide eyes. May was in the middle of pouring orange juice into a cup and Phil was neglecting the bacon. Skye’s nose scrunched up in confusion and she took an uncertain step back.

Both adults snapped out of it when Natasha said, "Is that bacon ready dad? We need to grab some before Trip wakes up."

Phil finished frying the bacon and set it on a plate before handing it to Nat while May handed her a bowl of fruit, "Why don't you go eat sweetie, we need to talk to Skye real fast."

Natasha nodded, gave Skye a smile, and then walked away humming to herself and picking through the bacon.

Her shoulders tensed up when she heard that they wanted to *talk* to her. In Skye's experience, when adults said they wanted to *talk* to you, it usually meant they wanted to *yell* at you. She braced herself and looked down to the floor, already telling herself that she wouldn’t cry no matter how upset May and Phil were with her.

They must have seen how uncomfortable she was because May said, "We aren't mad at you Skye, we just want to talk to you about what happened last night."

Her cheeks heated up when she realized that they already knew she had wet the bed last night. It made sense, since her mattress didn't have any sheets on it and there was probably still a wet spot on it, but Skye still wished that they had never found out about it. Natasha was right last night, May and Phil were *good*, but Skye didn't know what they would do about this.

"What happened Skye?"

Skye started fidgeting but mumbled, "I had a bad dream."

"Do you have bad dreams a lot?" Phil's voice was really kind and reassuring but Skye was still very tense.

Skye wished her dreams would go away but they never, ever do. She started thinking about all of her bad dreams, about the monsters and the car accident and the Ramsey's, and she felt her eyes starting to well up with tears. They were really scary dreams and Skye wished they would stop.

She sniffled and nodded.

May's feet moved towards her and she forced herself not to move away because they were being really nice to her, "Oh sweetie, I wish you would've told us what happened. We could've helped you."

She felt May's hand start to stroke her hair, which felt really nice, but she continued to look at the ground as she muttered, "I didn't want you to be mad at me and take me back."

"Skye, I told you that we were *never* going to take you back, remember? That's never going to change, especially because of a little accident," Phil said reassuringly.

She still had trouble believing that.
May's hand came up to cup her cheek and gently guided her to look up, "We just want you to know that if that ever happens again, you can come and tell us. Even when you have a nightmare, you can come and tell us. We won't mind and we won't get mad, okay?"

They weren't going to yell at her, they had really just wanted to talk, and Skye couldn't believe it. May and Phil were so good.

They were good and nice and they didn't yell or make her feel stupid. They talked to her like she was a grown up and they didn't scare her or do bad things. They took her to get new clothes and got her ice cream and made her feel better when she was scared. They let her play with her friends and took her to the playground.

They were just good, and Skye didn't know how she had been so lucky to be able to live with them, but she hoped she never had to leave.

The thought of ever leaving May and Phil made the tears in her eyes spill over. She didn't want to live with anyone else ever again.

May and Phil didn't know what she was really crying over, they thought she was upset because she wet the bed, but she didn't correct them. She just let May pull her into a hug and listened as she said soothing words and Phil rubbed her back comfortingly as she buried her face into May's neck and tried to get the tears to stop.

When they finally did, May and Phil both gave her a comforting smile and stepped back. Skye wiped her nose and felt a little embarrassed about how much she had cried this week.

"Are you okay sweetheart?" Phil looked concerned for her and Skye felt a little less embarrassed. They didn't seem to mind that she cried a lot.

She nodded and wiped the tears off of her face.

May smiled, "Okay, now that that's all taken care of, let's go eat." They all walked into the dining room and saw Trip and Natasha both eating and bickering over something.

Skye sat next to Natasha and the older girl slid some bacon onto her plate and whispered to her, "I saved you some bacon. When Trip came down, he ate, like, all of it."

She smiled gratefully at her older sister and started eating.

Phil was making his coffee when he said, "So, does anyone have any plans for today?"

Natasha spoke up, "Nah, I was going to hang with the guys but Steve's still sick and he ended up getting Bucky sick when he visited him. Clint might come over later though, just depends on if his parents aren't too mad at him for skipping school yesterday."

Trip said, "I have an English assignment coming up that I was going to get started on. It's actually not that bad. We have to choose a movie from our childhood and write about how it influenced our beliefs and if it had any impact on our development. I was just going to watch movies all day until I found one that was easy enough to write about."

"You get to watch movies all day for homework?" Skye wished that that was her homework. Ms. Hill gave her a lot of worksheets to do and they were pretty hard.

Trip turned to her and gave her an easy grin, "Not usually, but this time yeah. You wanna watch them with me?"
Did she ever. Skye loved watching movies and she hoped that maybe she could get Trip to watch Rapunzel with her, "Yes!"

Natasha shoved her last piece of bacon into her mouth and hopped up from the table, "I'll go grab some from the playroom."

May and Phil got up and grabbed everyone's dishes before moving into the kitchen to clean up. Skye followed Trip into the living room and sat down on the floor in front of the t.v. He grabbed all of the pillows from the couch and spread them onto the floor before he handed one to Skye so that she could lean on it.

"You can help me pick which movie to write about Skye."

Skye felt very important when he said that. Trip wanted her to pick to movie that he was going to write about for his homework.

"Okay. I'll pick a really good one, I promise."

He grinned at her before saying, "I know you will." He paused for a second before rubbing a hand over the back of his neck and continuing, "Hey Skye? I know we haven't really hung out all that much since you got here but I want you to know that I really like having you for a little sister."

Skye didn't really know what to say to that, all she knew was that it made her really happy to hear Trip say that, so she smiled brightly at him.

He smiled back at her as Natasha came running back into the room with a stack of DVD's in her hand. "Okay guys, I only grabbed the best. We've got Lilo and Stitch, Lady and the Tramp, The Lion King, Mulan, and the old-time classic, Cinderella."

Trip groaned, "Nat, I hate Cinderella. You know that."

She smirked at him and took Cinderella out of its case before popping it into the DVD player, "I know. That's why we're watching it first."

Trip groaned but before he could say anything else, Skye piped up, "I think Cinderella is pretty. I wish I had a fairy godmother like she did."

Natasha grinned triumphantly, "See? Skye likes it too. It's two against one, so shhhh, it's about to start."

Trip didn't say anything, he just rolled his eyes and threw a pillow at Nat, which she easily caught it before sitting down on the other side of Skye.

They finished Cinderella and immediately put Mulan in after it. Skye thought Cinderella was good, but she didn't know if it was the one Trip should do his project on. May and Phil wandered in and watched Mulan with them. Trip got up and pretended to do the fight sequences that the characters were doing and Skye giggled at him. Natasha and May sang the Reflection song to her and that made Skye giggle even harder since they were purposefully being as dramatic as possible.

After Mulan, they took a quick break and had sandwiches for lunch. Skye went upstairs and grabbed Alice before running back to the living room and sitting in her spot between Natasha and Trip.

Next they watched Lady and the Tramp. Skye had never seen this movie before and she loved watching all the dogs, especially when they ate the human food. She liked it but thought that Mulan was better.
Then they watched The Lion King after May and Phil brought everyone popcorn and Trip said that his friends, Bobbi, Hunter, and Mack, might be coming over soon. When Natasha heard that, she also asked if Clint could come over, to which May and Phil said yes.

They were at the part where Scar was singing his song about being prepared when there was a knock at the door. Trip paused the movie, which made Skye pout a little because she really liked this song, and got up to answer it.

When Trip opened up the door, there were three smiling people standing on the other side of it. Skye didn't know them and when they started talking loudly and laughing, Skye scrambled back until she bumped into Natasha. The older girl pulled her into her lap and wrapped her arms around Skye's middle, and that alone made her feel exponentially safer.

Trip's friends followed him into the living room and said hello to May, Phil and Natasha. One of them was the guy who always drove Nattie and Trip to school. She thinks his name is Hunter, but she isn't completely sure. The other one is a really tall guy with big arm muscles and brown eyes. He was smiling but he was still intimidating. The other one was a really tall girl with blonde hair and pretty eyes.

"Is this your new little sister?" The pretty girl was talking to Trip but still smiling at Skye and she relaxed a bit at how kind she was.

Natasha answered before Trip could, "Bobbi, this is Skye. Skye, that's Bobbi, Mack and Hunter. They're all really nice so you don't have to be afraid of them."

Skye nodded and shyly waved at the three new people. They were all standing by Trip and staring down at her and it was still a little scary even though Natasha said that she didn't have to be afraid of them.

One of them, Hunter, leaned down so that he was eye level with Skye, "It's great to finally meet you Skye. Trip's told us a lot about you."

He talked a little like Jemma did except his words sounded funnier and it made Skye smile a little.

"You sound funny," She pointed out, relieved that Hunter was also smiling at her and sounded kind.

That made everyone laugh and Bobbi smiled conspiratorially at her, "He does sound funny, doesn't he?"

Bobbi elbowed Hunter and Skye looked at him to make sure she hadn't hurt his feelings but he didn't look upset and he was still smiling at her.

Everyone made themselves comfortable on the floor while May and Phil brought out more popcorn.

"We're trying to find a movie that I can use for Mrs. Jerry's class," Trip said.

Hunter groaned, "I haven't even started thinking about that project yet."

Mack laughed and smirked, "I'm not in that class. No paper for me."

Hunter playfully punched his arm, "You're lucky mate. Mrs. Jerry loves giving us projects to do."

Bobbi smiled, "I already finished mine. I wrote about Tangled." She turned to Hunter, "You can read it over so you know what an A paper looks like." Hunter scoffed at that and elbowed Bobbi.
Skye perked up when she heard Bobbi say that she wrote her paper about Rapunzel. Natasha must have noticed because she leaned down and whispered, “Do you like Rapunzel?”

She nodded excitedly, perking up in her sister’s arm.

Bobbi looked over to her, “She’s my favorite princess. I like her little chameleon friend, he’s so cute and funny.”

Skye felt her excitement growing, happy to have someone to talk to her favorite movie about who enjoyed it as much as she did. She was practically vibrating with how excited she was, she was definitely grinning like a lunatic at Bobbi, but it was okay because Bobbi was smiling back at her.

Even though she was still a little apprehensive about being around new people, she couldn't stop herself from saying, "Rapunzel is my favorite person ever! She was really brave when she stood up to her fake mom even though she was really scary."

"She was very brave." Bobbi nodded solemnly and Skye immediately decided that she really liked Bobbi since she liked her favorite princess too and was being nice and talking to her.

Skye turned around when she heard May speak, "Skye, we don't have the Rapunzel DVD but we can get it if you want."

Even though she really really wanted to have the Rapunzel movie, she didn’t want May and Phil to have to keep buying her stuff all the time, she glumly said, "You don't have to May."

May gave her a pointed look, "Remember what I said when we went clothes shopping? We like getting you things, okay?"

"Okay." She sat back down next to Natasha but kept on smiling.

Trip started the Lion King back up and at some point, Clint wandered in and sat down on the other side of Natasha. He quietly said hi to Skye before he focused on the movie. Hunter and Clint pretended to be Timon and Pumbaa and repeated everything they said in silly voices. Bobbi and Natasha laughed at them and Skye couldn’t help but join in.

As they finished the Lion King and put in Lilo and Stitch, Mack spoke up, "This one is way better than The Lion King."

Clint sucked in an exaggerated breath and pretended to sound offended, "Are you telling me that you actually think Lilo and Stitch is better than The Lion King? Are you nuts?"

Mack shot an amused glance at Hunter before saying, "No, I just have better taste than you."

Clint huffed but was smiling and Skye was glad to see that they were just joking around with each other and not actually fighting. Everyone quieted down and they watched the last movie.

Skye had never seen it before but she liked it right away. Throughout the movie, she found herself inching closer and closer to the screen. There was something about Lilo that made her feel connected to the character. She had lost her mommy and daddy and other kids were mean to her too, and she really liked the part where Stitch said that Lilo and Nani were his new family.

When the movie was over, May and Phil started gathering up all the empty bowls of popcorn and everyone stretched.

"So Skye, which one should I write about?" Trip was staring at her and everyone else in the room
turned to her too.

She shrunk back a little as everyone focused on her but she knew which one she had decided on, "Lilo and Stitch, because they didn't have a real family but they made their own one."

May and Phil smiled at her and Trip nodded, "Good choice kiddo."

Skye was happy that Trip liked her answer, she wasn’t sure what she would’ve done if he hadn’t.

As May and Phil disappeared into the kitchen to start dinner, Skye glanced around at everyone else in the living room. They were all still looking at her so she crawled back into Natasha's lap.

"I'm kind of sick of watching t.v., which is something I never thought I would say. Let's go out back and play soccer or something," Trip glanced around at everyone, who nodded in agreement and got up.

"Let's go Skye, you can be on my team," Natasha tugged her up and Skye smiled gratefully at her.

"Hey! I wanted her to be on my team." Trip walked over to them.

"We can all be on the same team dummy. How about me, you, Skye, and Bobbi versus Mack, Clint and Hunter?"

Bobbi said, "Sounds good to me.” She poked Hunter in the chest before saying, "You're going down."

He grinned and poked her back, "Oh it's on!"
Melinda finished cleaning up the dishes from dinner, watching through the window above the sink as all the kids finished up their soccer game in the backyard before it got too dark outside. More specifically, she was watching Skye, and she was happy to see that the little girl wasn't scared of the bigger kids and appeared to be having fun.

The older kids were dotting on little Skye. They would purposely fumble a kick or let the ball go into their makeshift goal just so that Skye felt special and included. May loved all of them for that, they were a great bunch of kids.

Moving out of the kitchen, she sat down on the couch next to her husband, glad to have a moment of silence and peace. The t.v. was finally free and Phil was watching some action movie as she put her feet on his lap and leaned against the arm of the couch.

"Aren't you sick of watching movies?" She sure as hell was, she had no idea how her kids had been able to sit on the floor all day and watch movie after movie.

Phil glanced at her before looking back to the t.v. screen and grabbing onto one of her feet. He started massaging her foot and May let out an involuntary groan of satisfaction, to which he smirked, "I'm sick of watching children's movies. There's only so many musical numbers I can take."

He put the volume down and turned to her, "Did you see Skye earlier? She got so excited about Rapunzel that she forgot to be afraid of the other kids. We should go buy that movie if it means so much to her."

May chuckled and agreed, "At least she's letting us buy her stuff now. It wasn't easy convincing her to let me buy her some new clothes."

"Mel, she's doing so much better. Remember when she first got here? I didn't think I'd ever hear her laugh but look at the strides she’s already made. She's like a whole new kid." Phil was smiling and it felt contagious.

She prodded him on the thigh with her foot, "I know, but keep in mind that certain things still frighten her. We have a long way to go."

Phil gave her a look, "I know honey, it's just great to see her act like a kid. That little girl deserves to be happy."

She completely agrees that Skye deserves happiness and safety and a normal childhood. Unfortunately, she already had a pretty abnormal childhood so far but she and Phil were determined to give her as normal of one as they could provide.

She was about to say something when she heard Trip calling them. They looked at each other and stood up, anxiousness creeping up on her at the urgent tone in Trip’s voice, and turned to find Trip walking in with Skye in his arms. She was gingerly holding her wrist to her chest, not crying but
clearly in pain, but Mel took the lack of tears to be a good sign.

Trip gently placed Skye on the couch and gave her a guilty look, one that May knew too well, "What happened?"

Phil leaned down to check out Skye's wrist but she stayed focused on Trip, "We were playing and I must not have seen Skye because I kicked the ball and she ended up tripping over my foot and falling. She landed on her wrist pretty hard." He anxiously looked over to Skye, "I'm so sorry Skye."

The little girl looked up at him, blinked away the tears in her eyes, and gave him an understanding look, "It's okay, it was my fault."

May leaned forward and pushed Skye’s bangs out of her eyes, "It wasn't anyone's fault baby, it was an accident okay? Next time, we'll just be more careful, right?" She gave a pointed look to Trip, who guiltily nodded. Skye nodded too and winced a little as Phil gingerly prodded her wrist.

Phil finished checking over the wrist and gave Skye a playful look, “The good news is that we won’t have to cut it off.” Skye cracked a grin, which seemed to be Phil’s goal because he looked entirely too pleased with himself, "Nothing seems broken sweetheart, just bruised. I'll go get some ice to put on it and we’ll check it again tomorrow to see if we should wrap it up."

As he disappeared into the kitchen, May looked at the group of kids standing in her living room, "You guys can go back outside and finish your game. Skye will be fine."

Trip still looked guilty and everyone else looked worried and she practically had to push them outside but they finally went back to their game. Phil came back into the living room, placed a pillow in Skye's lap, and instructed her to lay her wrist on it before gently laying the ice over her wrist.

"We'll just leave that on there for about twenty minutes, okay?" Skye nodded at him and Mel took a seat on the other side of the little girl.

She grabbed the remote and threw an apologetic look at Phil before saying, "Let's see if Spongebob is on!"

Skye nodded enthusiastically and settled into the couch and May could hear Phil's quiet groan but he stayed and watched it with them, making comments on how he thought a Krabby Patty would taste and how he wished he could live in a pineapple like Spongebob did. He made Skye laugh and when he did, he would catch May's eye and smile brightly. It was very obvious that they both loved hearing the little girl laugh.

Once the twenty minutes were up, Phil took the ice off of Skye's wrist and Mel caught the little girl’s attention, "I think it's shower time sweetie. You were playing pretty hard out there." Skye had dirt all over her legs, hands, and face, and she was still a little sweaty from running around.

Skye nodded and hopped off the couch before following May upstairs, grabbing pajamas on the way, and into the bathroom.

They ran into a little problem as soon as Skye tried to start undressing herself and winced in pain as she attempted to unbutton her pants.

"I know you like to undress yourself but I don't think you'll be able to with that wrist of yours. I might have to give you a hand when you wash your hair too. Is it okay if I help?"

Skye considered that for a long minute. Her face was thoughtful and May was actually a little concerned that she would say no, but then the little girl nodded and lifted her hands above her head
so that Mel could take her dirty shirt off.

As May was carefully maneuvering the shirt off, she spotted two circular scars on Skye's tummy, right by her belly button. She paused for a second as she stared at them but then finished taking the shirt off, not wanting Skye to think that anything was wrong. She had never seen them before but that was probably because Skye had never allowed her to get this close to her while she was undressing.

"Skye? Where did those come from?" She motioned towards the scars and Skye looked away from her.

She thought that Skye wasn't going to answer her, that she had struck a nerve and that the little girl would draw back into herself like she did when she had first arrived, but then Skye sucked in a deep breath and muttered, "He said I was bad."

"What do you mean baby?"

Skye was still looking away from her, "He said I was bad, so he poked me in the tummy twice with his cigarette. It was really hot."

May felt anger flood through her. Skye was saying that someone burned her with a cigarette because they thought that she was bad. An adult had actually done this to a child. Her child.

She tried not to let her anger show on her face. She didn't want Skye to think that she was mad at her.

Skye was still refusing to look at her and May was overwhelmed with what she was feeling. Someone had harmed Skye and Skye actually thought that it was her fault. She could not believe that an adult had done that to her and then forced a child to believe that her abuse was her own fault.

Half of her wanted to find everyone who had ever made Skye feel this way and make them pay while the other half of her wanted to cry. This little girl had been through too much.

She sat down cross-legged on the floor, "Oh Skye. You weren't bad okay? The person who did this to you was bad. No one should ever purposely hurt someone else. This was not your fault okay?"

Finally, Skye looked at her and May's heart broke a little. She had tears swimming in her eyes and she looked so broken, "He said it was my fault because I was bad."

May had to push back her anger and remind herself that Skye didn't need any more anger in her life. "It was not your fault. There is no way that what he did to you can be justified. You didn't do anything wrong sweetie, he did."

By the time she was done talking, Skye was crying. May wanted to hug her but she didn't know if Skye would like that right now and she really didn't want to ruin the progress they had made by imposing on Skye's personal space. Instead, Skye surprised her by crawling into her lap and wrapping one arm around her neck in a hug. She kept her hurt wrist cradled to her chest but buried her face into May's neck. Surprise kept her immobile for a moment but then May wrapped both arms around the little girl and rocked them back and forth.

Her heart broke for Skye. This little girl didn't deserve any of the terrible things that had happened to her, nobody did. She got dealt a terrible hand in life and May wished more than anything that she could erase all of her pain but she knew she couldn't, so she just hoped she was helping to repair some of the damage made by her past.
Skye finally started to quiet down and May rubbed a hand soothingly down her back. The little girl moved away so that she wasn't plastered to May anymore but stayed in her arms, "May, you're the best foster mom I've ever had." She paused and looked away before seeming to gather up enough courage to say, "Can I stay with you for awhile?"

Didn't Skye get it by now? If May had anything to say about it, and she did, Skye would be staying with them forever. She and Phil never gave up on children that needed them. "Skye, you're going to stay with us forever, remember?"

Skye looked back to her and May saw hope sparkling in her big brown eyes. Maybe Skye didn't fully believe them yet but that just meant that she and Phil had to keep working towards gaining her trust, which they were both happy to continue to do.

"Okay little one, let's get you into the shower." She helped Skye stand up before she finished undressing her and guided her into the shower.

She let Skye close the curtains and only helped when the little girl absolutely needed it because respecting Skye's privacy and bodily autonomy was very important to her and had a huge impact on the bond of trust that was growing between them. When Skye was done, she dried her off, helped her put on her pajamas, and brushed her hair.

It was still about an hour or so before Skye's bedtime so they went back downstairs and found Phil and the rest of the children lounging around in the living room. Instead of watching t.v., they appeared to be playing charades which made her grin because it had been ages since she had seen anyone play that game.

Clint was in the middle of some crazy, monkey-like dance as the others shouted words at him and she could tell that he was getting a little frustrated that no one was guessing correctly.

She felt a tug on her hand and glanced down to see Skye's worried brown eyes blinking up at her, "May, is Clint okay? Why are they yelling at him?" She sounded a little scared and was still cradling her wrist to her chest, which reminded Mel that she should probably put some more ice on it.

She led the little girl into the kitchen and lifted her onto the counter before grabbing some ice and putting it into a Ziploc bag. She placed it on Skye's wrist and answered her, "Clint is fine sweetie. They're just playing charades."

Skye's nose scrunched up adorably, "What's shrariades?"

May couldn't help but chuckle a little, "It's charades baby, and it's a game where you get a word and have to act it out so that people can guess what your word is. The only rule is that you can't talk. It can be pretty difficult sometimes."

Skye glanced back towards the living room, where Clint was still doing his terrible monkey dance, before looking back to her, "Why is everyone shouting at him though?"

"Well, they're probably really excited about the game. They aren't shouting to be mean, they're shouting because they're excited."

"Oh."

"Do you want to go watch?"

Skye nodded and May lifted her off the counter but kept her in her arms and balanced her on her hip. Skye made sure the ice stayed on her wrist as they walked into the living room.
They heard Phil say that they gave up and Clint groaned loudly, "You guys! I was 'the missing link'. Come on now!"

Natasha laughed at him, "The only thing you're missing is some brain cells. How were we supposed to know that? You were just jumping around!"

Clint was about to say something back but he spotted Skye and smiled at her, "Our little princess has returned! How's your wrist Skye?"

Everyone looked towards the little girl, who grinned a little and shrugged, "It's okay."

"You are one tough cookie Skye. You're like a warrior princess," Mack said.

Bobbi agreed with him, "Yeah Skye. You're like Rapunzel when she helped Flynn fight off the bad guys when they were chasing them through the tunnel."

May had no idea what she was talking about but when she looked at Skye, the little girl was smiling brightly. Apparently being compared to Rapunzel was a great thing because Skye was practically glowing.

She really needed to watch that movie.

"Do you guys want to play?" Trip asked.

"Skye's got to keep this ice on her wrist for about fifteen more minutes. We can watch and guess though." She looked at Skye and the little girl nodded at her.

"Great, it's dad's turn next and I have a feeling this is going to be really funny."

Phil gave her an exasperated look but stood up and took a piece of paper out of the hat they were using as she took his seat and settled Skye onto her lap. Natasha was sitting next to her and pulled Skye's skinny legs onto her lap and started to tap out a rhythm onto Skye's knees.

Phil read his piece of paper and groaned, which caused everyone to give each other knowing grins, already anticipating the hilarity that was about to ensue.

Thirty minutes later and they were still playing charades. Natasha was doing some weird hand motion that no one understood and everyone was shouting random words, hoping that one of them was the right answer. Skye had remained silent the whole time they had been watching but she was giving the game her whole attention and seemed to be enjoying herself. May would occasionally guess a word but if she was being honest, no one here was particularly good at this game.

Skye had started to lean against May's chest and she could tell that the little girl was getting sleepy.

She looked over and saw Bobbi whisper something to Hunter, who passed the message along to Mack, Trip, Clint, and Phil. Natasha finally gave up and sat back down next to Clint, who leaned over and whispered something into her ear, and May started to get suspicious.

Bobbi stood up and made a big deal about picking a word out of the hat before running into the kitchen, grabbing a frying pan, and running back into the living room. She was about to interject and say that props weren't allowed in the game but when she glanced around, everyone seemed to be in on what was going on.
Bobbi made sure that Skye was looking at her before she quickly put her hair into a braid and started swinging the pan and pretending that she was hitting something with it. Skye immediately straightened up in her lap, sleepiness seemingly gone. Bobbi opened her mouth and motioned to her throat, in what Mel assumed was supposed to mimic singing, and she finally caught onto what was going on.

It was entertaining to watch Bobbi motion towards her throat and then to her hair, but she wasn’t as interesting as the look of absolute delight on Skye’s face.

Bobbi went back to pretending that she was hitting something with the pan and Skye finally seemed confident enough to tentatively say, "Rapunzel?"

Bobbi enthusiastically pointed at her, "Yes!"

Everyone congratulated the little girl, who was smiling brightly, and May wanted to hug everyone in this room for being so kind to Skye.

It was Clint's turn again and so he stood up and picked a piece of paper out of the hat. Skye started to limply lean back against May and she knew that it was bedtime. Before Clint could start, she said, "Okay everyone, say goodnight to Skye. It's bedtime."

Everyone groaned and Skye looked up at her with sleepy eyes, "But I'm not tired May."

May could tell that she was lying, "I know you aren't sweetie but it's still bedtime."

For someone who clearly wanted to keep playing, Skye didn't put up much of a fight as everyone said goodnight to her and May carried her upstairs and into her room. Phil pulled back her blankets and May gently placed the little girl onto her freshly made bed. She snuggled into her pillows and Phil tightly tucked the sheets around her.

They said goodnight and plugged in her nightlight but before they could leave, Skye's voice stopped them, "Wait!"

They turned around, giving each other a surprised but delighted look at Skye requesting them to stay with her, and each sat on one side of Skye's bed.

"Could you… could you guys tell me a story?" Skye was looking down at her polka dotted sheets as she asked them and Melinda could tell that it took a lot of courage for Skye to speak up.

Phil said, "Of course we can. Prepare yourself Skye, ’cause I'm an amazing storyteller." May rolled her eyes but she saw Skye grin and settle deeper into her pillows.

Phil took a deep breath and started, "Once upon a time, in a land far far away, there lived a beautiful princess."

Skye interrupted him, "Where did she live?"

Phil looked a little lost so Melinda decided to help him out, "She lived in a magical place called… Chicago." May hoped that Skye had never heard of the city before.

Phil shot her an exasperated look but continued, "Yes, she lived in Chicago. She had beautiful brown hair and brown eyes and she had the kindest soul anyone had ever met. Everyone loved the princess. The only problem was that there were evil people who were trying to take over her kingdom. One day, she decided to sneak out of her palace against her parents wishes to go and save her kingdom, so she saddled up her unicorn —"
Skye interrupted him again, "She has a unicorn! What was its name?"

May decided to leave this one up to Phil and she chuckled as he stuttered for a couple of seconds before saying, "Jameson. Its name was Jameson. She saddled up Jameson and they went off to save her people. On her way, she encountered many people who she recruited to help with her mission. After a long, long journey, they finally." May put a gentle hand on Phil's shoulder to stop him from continuing.

He stopped talking and focused on Skye, whose eyes were closed and was breathing deeply, fast asleep. Phil let out a breath and whispered, "Thank god. I had no idea where I was going with that story."

May whispered back, "I noticed."

They both stood up slowly so that they wouldn't wake Skye and she grabbed Alice from the floor and placed her next to Skye.

May looked at the small child sleeping in front of her and felt a surge of protectiveness wash through her as she thought back to Skye's scars.

This was her daughter and she wasn't going to let anything bad happen to her ever again.
Skye noticed that it was lighter outside than it normally was when she woke up. Rolling over, she stared up at the stars on her ceiling and snuggled deeper into her pillows, not wanting to get up.

After lounging around for another few minutes, she finally groaned, grabbed Alice, and got out of bed. She made her way downstairs and saw May and Phil sitting at the table eating cereal. Sleepily, she rubbed her eyes and walked up to May but it was Phil who noticed her first and put down his newspaper, "Good morning sunshine! You want some cereal?"

Skye nodded and leaned against May, sighing in content when she wrapped an arm around her and started stroking her hair.

"How about some Fruit Loops?" Phil was already standing when he asked and Skye nodded again and watched him walk into the kitchen.

"Did you sleep okay?" May was still stroking her hair and it made Skye feel even sleepier, so she forced herself to move away and take a seat at the head of the table.

"No bad dreams." She responded, the relief clearly evident in her voice. She hadn't dreamt of monsters or car accidents, instead, she'd dreamt of stars and dolls.

May smiled at her as Phil walked in with a bowl full of cereal, placing it in front of her, "Here you go sweetheart." She smiled and thanked him before grabbing her spoon and digging in.

May looked over to her, "We have to go grocery shopping today and we may have to grab a few other things from the mall."

She didn't like shopping that much because there was always a bunch of people around and she was afraid that she would get lost but she nodded anyways.

"We'll head out in about an hour or two, no rush." Phil said as he picked up his newspaper and flipped through it. He pulled out a page and placed it in front of Skye, and she was delighted to see that it had a bunch of boxes with drawings. There was one where there was an unhappy looking cat trying to eat lasagna, and even though Skye couldn't read all of the words, she liked looking at the pictures and tracing them with her finger while she ate.

Natasha wandered downstairs when Skye had finished eating and she was getting up to put her bowl in the sink. As she entered the dining room again, she saw Natasha sitting in the seat besides Phil with her forehead against the table. She groaned and dramatically said, "Why do mornings even exist?"

May smirked, "Sorry baby, no one likes them."

Skye had to agree with her there.
"We're going grocery shopping today. Wanna join?" Phil asked.

Natasha lifted her head, Skye had to suppress a giggle at the faint pink mark on her forehead, and looked over to him, "When?"

"Probably about an hour."

Natasha groaned again and let her head fall back to the table, "No thanks. I think I'll just stay here and procrastinate doing homework."

May chuckled and ran a hand over Nattie’s hair, expertly avoiding the tangles, "Don't procrastinate too long."

Natasha just groaned again.

Skye climbed back into her chair and to wait for May and Phil to finish eating. It kind of looked like Natasha had already fallen back asleep and she was reaching over to poke her when Phil suddenly looked over to her, "Oh Skye! I'm so sorry, I forgot to ask about your wrist! How is it sweetie? Does it feel better than yesterday?"

Phil sounded guilty and when she looked over to May, she looked guilty too, but she didn't know why. She unthinkingly rotated her wrist and noted that it was still a little sore but it wasn't as bad as yesterday. Skye was just happy to see that it hadn't bruised, she hated bruises and was sick of seeing them on her skin, so she cheerfully said, "It's better than yesterday."

"That's great, would you mind if I looked at it?" Skye shook her head and held out her arm so that Phil could inspect it. His fingers were cool when they softly grabbed her arm but they felt nice and it didn’t even hurt when he prodded her wrist.

"It looks fine. No break, sprain, or bruising. You're all set Skye, just make sure to take it easy for today."

Skye nodded at him and May got her attention, "How about you go get ready baby? We'll leave in a little bit."

"Okay." She ran back upstairs and opened her closet, it still shocked her to see all of the new clothes in it. For a long moment, she just stared at all of the bright clothes hanging neatly in front of her, then she snapped out of it and got to work picking out an outfit for the day.

There were too many options and it was too hard to choose, so she reached out and randomly grabbed a dark pink dress. It was cute but a little plain so she ran over to her dresser and rifled through it before she pulled out some white tights with yellow polka dots.

Skye got dressed and ran a brush through her hair, thinking back to the braids that Natasha had done for her on the first day of school, and considered asking her to do them again.

Once she was all dressed, she grabbed Alice and gave her a long look. The doll had been wearing the same purple dress and white shoes since Natasha had given her to Skye and she thought that she deserved some new clothes too. She went into the playroom and dug around in a bin, trying to find clothes for Alice. After digging around for a bit, she triumphantly pulled out some shorts and a shirt and put them onto her doll, happy that they both had new clothes on.

She ran back downstairs and saw Natasha lounging on the couch so she wandered over and climbed up next to her, "Nattie? What does proclastinite mean?"
Natasha glanced over to her, "You mean procrastinate?" When Skye nodded, she said, "It means that you put off doing something. Like, I don't want to do my homework, so I'm probably going to put it off until later tonight."

Skye thought about that and realized that she procrastinated all the time, "May and Phil help me with my homework but they make me do it after school, so I can't pro...procrastinate."

"We've all been there kiddo. Wait a few years and they'll let you do it whenever you want as long as it gets done."

A few years. Skye hoped she was here long enough to see if Natasha was right.

They watched the show for a few more minutes before May and Phil came downstairs, "Ready to go?" Skye nodded and they turned to Natasha, "We woke Trip up and told him we were leaving. He's in charge, call us if you need anything. We'll only be gone for a little while okay?"

Natasha glanced at them and raised an eyebrow, "Yeah, yeah I know the drill."

Skye said goodbye to Natasha and they walked out the door. This time, before Skye climbed into the car, she said, "Phil, can we listen to Lilo and Stitch this time?"

Phil looked unsure, "Uhhh…" He glanced at May and she nodded at him, "Of course we can sweetheart."

She grinned, climbed into her seat, and sat back so that Phil could strap her in. She tried to sing along to the songs but stopped and listened after a little while because she didn't know any of the words.

When they got to the mall, Skye hung back again. There were a lot of people walking around and she didn't want to get lost. She knew that May and Phil wouldn't purposefully lose her but it could still happen by accident. She tugged on Phil's hand, "Phil, I don't want you to lose me, okay?"

He gave her a perplexed look before he smiled reassuringly down at her, "Okay Skye, we would never lose you though sweetie."

She knew he meant it but it could still happen. May had even said that accidents happen all the time.

He was still looking down at her, with May quietly watching them, so she raised her arms and made grabby hands towards Phil, hoping he would get the hint. He did, she didn't know why she doubted him in the first place, and he stooped down, lifted her up, and balanced her on his hip. From up here, it didn't look like there was as many people and Skye instantly felt safer.

May ran a gentle hand down her arm, "How about you guys go to the play area while I go grab the things we need? It should only take me about a half hour, tops."

Phil looked at her, "How about it Skye? Do you want to go play or do you want to follow May around in a bunch of stores?" He made a sad face at the last part so Skye knew that he wanted to go to the play area instead.

She wanted to go play too but she didn't want to leave May all alone. She bit her lip, contemplating what to do, but luckily she didn't have to say anything because May did for her, "Go have fun sweetie, I'll come find you guys when I'm ready to go."

Skye nodded and Phil carried her further into the mall while May turned and went in the opposite direction. She spotted the play area up ahead in the middle of the mall, it had a bunch of play structures shaped like different animals, and even though it wasn’t as cool as the playground in their
They entered the play area and Skye could see a bunch of parents watching their kids while sitting on the benches that were placed around the playpen. Phil set her down to go play but she hovered near him. She didn't want to get lost.

"You can go play sweetheart, I'll go sit over there." Phil motioned towards a bench and Skye nodded but didn’t move, just fidgeted from foot to foot.

"I promise Skye, I won't lose you. Go and have fun kiddo." He waited there until Skye slowly moved away and started climbing on a small monkey bar. She was still peering at him from the corner of her eye and saw him sit down on a bench and wave to her so she waved back.

She continued playing in the playpen for a little while, climbing over everything and hanging upside down from the monkey bars. The whole time, she made sure that she could see Phil, which made her feel much better and safer.

She was currently playing on a structure that looked like a lion, climbing up it, jumping off it onto the rubber mat, and then starting all over again. She glanced back to Phil to see if he was watching and he immediately waved and smiled at her. After waving back at him, she started climbing back up the lion again but paused when an unpleasant, nagging feeling crept up on her. It kind of felt like someone was staring at her but when she looked around, she realized she was being silly because Phil had been watching the whole time she had been playing. Not quite able to shake off the odd feeling, she finished climbing up the lion and looked around, trying to find the source of her unease. When she couldn’t find anything out of the ordinary, she shrugged, chalked it up to being away from May, and jumped.

After a while, she got sick of jumping off the lion and wandered back over to Phil, "Did you see me climb up that lion? I jumped off of it even though it was really high up!" She was pretty proud of herself since she didn't really like heights but it had been fun to jump off the play structure. She had felt like a skydiver when she did it.

Phil chuckled and pushed her bangs out of her eyes, "I sure did sweetheart, it was very impressive."

She was about to say something else when the lady sitting beside him turned to her. Skye shrunk back into Phil even though the lady was smiling at her. There was a little girl playing with a pretty doll sitting by the lady's feet and she looked up at Skye for a second before going back to her doll, which made Skye wish that she had brought Alice. The lady had blue eyes and brown hair, so did the little girl sitting next to her, and she kept smiling at them and said to Phil, "Isn't your daughter just adorable!"

Phil gently grabbed her hand and tugged her so that she was standing on the other side of him, away from the lady. "Excuse me?"

The lady was still smiling but looked a little tense, "Oh! I'm sorry, I just assumed that her mother is
Asian?" When Phil didn't say anything, she kept on talking, and Skye sighed because this lady talked a lot, "I just mean that mixed children can sometimes look a little…intriguing but this little girl is adorable!"

She couldn't see Phil's face but she could see that he looked tense and his hold on her hand was just a little tighter than normal. The lady must have said something bad and Skye couldn't figure out what it was but she took a step back anyways.

"My daughter is none of your concern ma’am and, if I may, if you ever say anything about my kid’s race again, you better believe that you'll regret it."

The lady instantly stopped smiling, her mouth opened and looked like an 'o' and her eyes grew wide, and Skye would’ve laughed at how funny she looked but everyone around her was too tense for her to feel comfortable. Phil stood up and led Skye out of the play area before stopping short and breathing deeply.

Skye had never heard Phil talk like that before and he sounded really mad. The lady was talking about her; maybe he was mad at her? She took a step away from him and kept her eyes on the ground, not quite sure what was going on but wanting to play it safe either way.

Phil let out a long sigh, pulled out his phone, and said, "How about we see if we can find May?"

When Skye didn't say anything, she could tell that he had finally looked at her. She could feel his eyes on her and she shrunk back a little.

She heard his breath catch and he anxiously said, "What's wrong sweetheart?"

She refused to look up at him in case that made him mad.

"Oh. Skye I wasn't mad at you, I was mad at that woman. She said something mean and inappropriate. I didn't mean to scare you."

The tightness in her chest loosened a bit now that she knew that he wasn't mad at her, he was mad at that lady instead. Skye wondered what she could’ve said to make Phil mad, but she hadn't understood half of what the lady was saying so she couldn't figure it out.

She fidgeted a little and kept her eyes on the ground.

"I'm sorry Skye. How about we go get some ice cream and then find May?"

Ice cream sounded yummy and Skye never refused it so she nodded and finally looked up at Phil. His face was kind and he was smiling gently at her, no longer looking upset, and Skye finally believed him when he said he wasn't.

"Do you feel safe walking or do you want me to carry you?"

Skye thought about it. There was still a bunch of people walking around being loud and rowdy and now that Phil wasn't mad, he wasn't scary anymore, so she decided that it would be safer if she let Phil carry her.

She raised her arms and he picked her up but this time he didn't place her on his hip, he set her on his shoulders. She yelped and tightly wrapped her arms around his neck, which caused Phil to chuckle and raise his arms so that Skye could use them to hold onto instead of his neck.

"Is this okay Skye?"
She thought about it. Everyone seemed smaller from up here and even though she was higher up than she liked to be, she felt safe with Phil's hands wrapped around hers.

"Yeah."

"Good. Let's go get some ice cream!"

Skye smiled and Phil walked towards the food court. She looked around at all the people walking by, some people smiled at her but she didn't know them and she didn't want to smile back at them, so instead she looked at the clothes on display at each of the stores they passed and tried to see if she could spot May.

Phil walked up to an ice cream place in the food court and leaned forward a little so that Skye could see all the different flavors. His head kept getting in the way so she tapped him on the shoulder and he took her off of his shoulders and placed her on his hip so that she could see better.

Her eyes were instantly drawn to a really colorful ice cream so pointed to it and asked Phil what it was. "It's called Superman. Is that what you want?"

Skye nodded and was grateful when he ordered for her, got a chocolate milkshake for himself, and a vanilla one for May. While the employee was getting their ice cream, he set Skye on the counter, dug out his cell phone, pressed a couple of buttons and put it to his ear.

"Hello? Hey honey… No, we left the play area…. I'll tell you about it later…” He glanced down at Skye and smiled at her, "Where are you?... Oh, you're done?...How about we meet at the car?...Okay, we'll see you there. Love you.” He hung up.

He put his phone back into his pocket and turned to Skye, "May's all done so we'll just meet her back at the car." Skye nodded and he pulled out a couple of bills from his wallet before picking Skye back up, taking their order, and paying for everything. He grabbed two straws and a spoon and handed Skye her ice cream and May's milkshake before picking up his milkshake and holding them in the hand that wasn't holding Skye. "Can you hang onto that until we see May?" Skye nodded and they made their way out of the mall.

It was hard for Skye to resist her ice cream but she knew that if she tried to eat it, she'd drop May's milkshake and she didn't want to do that. When they reached the parking lot, they saw May waiting by the car, looking at her phone with a couple of bags sitting by her feet.

As they got closer, May noticed them and smiled. Phil unlocked the car and May opened the backdoor, "Did you have fun?"

Skye nodded and handed her the milkshake, "We got ice cream!"

"I see that, thank you for getting me something." May said warmly.

She blushed and shrugged, "Phil got it for you, not me."

"Yes but you helped, so thank you."

Skye knew that her cheeks were still pink but she smiled asPhil buckled her into her booster seat and handed her the spoon. She looked into her cup full of ice cream and appreciated all the bright colors looking back at her before she dug in.

They stopped at the grocery store and Skye followed them in as they grabbed a shopping cart. After she asked, they put her in the cart and started weaving through the aisles.
"Skye, if you see something that you like, tell us okay?"

Skye nodded at May and the older woman gave her a pointed look, "I mean it okay? If you see something that you know you like to eat, tell us."

It seemed like May could read her mind and Skye’s eyes were wide as she nodded again. As they walked through the store, Skye pointed to the apples, pretzels and apple juice, her three favorite things. Every time she pointed at something, May and Phil would smile real big and put it into the cart.

When everything was paid for, they unloaded their groceries into the cart before May took Skye out of the cart and placed her into her booster seat. As Phil put the cart back, Skye felt her eyes start to droop.

She was tired.

May talked to her as she buckled her in, "Did you have fun today?"

Skye nodded, "Yeah, I played on a lion and got to eat ice cream."

May laughed and finished buckling her in as Phil started the car. A Tangled song started playing but Skye was too sleepy to sing along. The last thing she remembered before falling asleep to the gentle lull of Rapunzel's voice was May and Phil talking quietly in the front seat.
Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

New characters in the house!!

May was sitting in the passenger seat, listening to Phil relay what had happened in the play area of the mall. She glanced back to make sure that Skye was still sleeping before saying, "That woman was lucky that I wasn't there with you guys. What made her think that that backhanded compliment was okay?"

Phil shrugged but she could see that he was still gripping the steering wheel pretty tightly. Before they could talk more on the subject, her phone started ringing, so she reached over and tapped Phil's fingers, watched as he loosened his grip on the steering wheel, and answered the phone.

"Mom!" She hadn't looked at the caller I.D. but she instantly knew who it was and straightened up in her seat.

"Wanda, it's so good to hear from you! We miss you so much sweetie."

She wholeheartedly missed the twins. They were her oldest children and the first kids that she and Phil had ever fostered. It had not been easy, they had had no idea what they were doing and Wanda and Pietro had not been a walk in the park. Somewhere along the way, the twins had started trusting them and it had gotten exponentially easier. Natasha came to live with them a year before the twins had left for college and they had managed to become pretty close. Since they came home every summer, Trip had also gotten to know them and he and Pietro had become fast friends.

Even though she was fairly certain that the twins and Skye would like each other, she was anxious for Skye to meet them. Wanda's quiet and comforting presence would surely help the little girl to trust her and Pietro's sense of humor and charm was impossible to resist and even though Skye had trouble trusting men, she thought that they would get along well.

"I miss you too. Pietro says hi, he can't really talk right now though. We're pretty busy over here."

The twins were both juniors in college and they had decided to study abroad together. Right now, they were in England studying at Oxford but their specific program had them moving to different universities every month. She was lucky if they called once every three weeks, and while she missed them a lot, she was also very proud of them.

"Tell him we love him and miss him."

"I will. How's everyone?"

"Same old same old. Natasha has a dance recital coming up and Trip's been training for the new football season. We all miss you guys."

"And how's little Skye?" May had told them about Skye on the phone last week and she had messaged them a couple of pictures of the little girl that had been in her file.

They were very interested in their new little sister.
"She's getting better. How about we video chat later and you guys can meet her?"

"Uh…one second, let me check real fast."

May kept the phone to her ear and could hear Wanda rustling around. She glanced at Phil, who was looking at her and whispered, "Tell them that I love them and miss them."

She heard the rustling stop and Wanda said, "We're going on a quick research trip for about two days. How about we set up a video chat for Wednesday at… 3:00pm your time?"

"That sounds great, I know Skye will be very excited to meet you both. Your dad says hello and that he loves you."

"Tell him I love him too. I have to go, I wish we could talk longer. I miss you mom."

May felt her eyes start to well up with tears. She missed her babies and hearing Wanda's voice made her miss them more.

"I miss you so much sweetie. Your father and I are so proud of you and your brother."

"Thanks mom. We'll both talk to you guys on Wednesday. Tell everyone we said hello!"

"Okay sweetie. I love you."

"Love you too. Bye mom."

May hung up and glanced at Phil, "They said that they missed you. We made plans to video chat on Wednesday at 3:00 so that Skye can meet them."

Her vision was still a little blurry and she felt Phil's hand grab hers and squeeze it, "I miss them too."

She squeezed his hand back, grateful for his understanding and reassurance, and they sat in silence for a minute before they heard whimpering coming from the back seat. Twisting around, she saw that Skye's little face was scrunched up and her left fist was opening and closing. In her experience, these were classic signs of nightmares.

Luckily, they were close to home and as soon as Phil turned into their driveway, she hopped out of the car and yanked Skye's car door open. She stroked her cheek and spoke softly so that she didn't scare her, "Skye wake up. You're having a nightmare baby. Everything's okay, wake up Skye."

The little girl's eyes flew open and she blinked rapidly for a long moment, looking like she was repressing her tears, before focusing on her. May brushed her bangs away from her sweaty forehead and gently asked, "Are you okay baby? You seemed upset."

It seemed like her acknowledging that there was a problem gave Skye permission to give into her tears because the little girl's face crumpled and she immediately started crying. May quickly unbuckled her from her seat and gathered her into her arms. Skye didn't say anything, she just wrapped her skinny arms around May's neck, buried her face into her shoulder, and cried. She picked up the girl and guided her out of the car, glanced at Phil, who was looking at them worriedly, gave him a hopeless look, and followed him into the house.

"Phil, can you bring the bags inside?" She didn’t look back to see if he was listening but she heard him call out to Natasha and Trip to ask if they would help him. She brought Skye into her room and sat down on her bed with the little girl still in her arms.
Skye had such a troubled childhood and it might help her to talk about. She knew that it probably wouldn't be easy for the little girl to say what had happened to her or to open up but it might make her feel better, and if Skye wouldn't talk to her, she would maybe have to start looking for a child's psychologist because this poor little girl needed some help and she felt a little out of her depth.

Skye had stopped sobbing but was still crying silently, her arms wrapped tight around May's neck and sniffling every once in awhile. She stroked Skye's long hair and spoke softly, "What were you dreaming about Skye?"

Skye buried her face deeper into the crook of May’s neck and thought back to her nightmare.

It had been when she had accidentally knocked over a glass at the Ramsey's. Mrs. Ramsey didn't say anything, she just went to pick up the broken glass, but Mr. Ramsey had started yelling at her. He had told her how she was stupid and how she never did anything right and that they should just take her back to the orphanage because if her real parents didn't want her, why should they? Skye had just stood there and listened to him, unable to run away, and had forced herself not to cry because when she did, Mr. Ramsey would always get angrier. This time, his words were so mean that she couldn't stop the tears from falling down her cheeks, and even though she ducked her head and hoped that Mr. Ramsey hadn't seen, but he did. He had gotten angrier and had thrown a book at her. She had stepped out of its way but he kept throwing things at her and then May had woken her up.

Mr. Ramsey was awful and said mean things and she really didn’t like him.

She shook her head, wiping her teary eyes on the collar of May’s shirt in the process. She didn't want to tell May about what had happened. What if May thought that she had deserved it? She had broken a glass and she was stupid and it was her fault that Mr. Ramsey was always mad at her.

May continued to comb her fingers through Skye's hair and it felt really nice, "Skye, it may help you feel better if you tell me what you were dreaming about."

Skye pulled her face away from May's shoulder but stayed in her arms, tears slowly coming to a stop, and May moved so that she was sitting cross-legged with settled Skye in her lap, "How could it help?"

May wiped her thumb over her cheeks and collected the last of Skye's tears, "Well, sometimes it helps to talk about the things that make you feel bad."

It didn’t really make sense to Skye, she didn't know how talking would help her feel better, so she stayed quiet.

"You know, when Natasha started living with us she would get nightmares. She wouldn't tell us what was scaring her for months and she kept having them. After awhile, I finally convinced her to talk to a therapist about what was making her feel bad. Do you know what a therapist is?"

Skye shook her head and May continued, "It's a person that you talk to and they'll help you deal with what's scaring you or making you feel bad. They help you so that you feel better."

When she said it like that, Skye thought that therapists sounded kind of cool but she still didn’t know how they went about making people feel better.

"If you want, I could find you a therapist to talk to if you don't want to talk to me. It might help with your nightmares, baby."
Skye was very uncertain; she didn't know any therapists so it would be a stranger, and she didn't like talking to strangers. Curling her fingers tightly into May's shirt, she looked up at May's kind face and decided that she would rather just talk to her.

"I was dreaming about...Mr. Ramsey. It was when I accidently broke a glass cup and he started yelling at me. He said I was stupid and that since my own parents didn't want me, that he and Mrs. Ramsey didn't want me either. I tried really hard not to cry May, crying always made him angrier, but I couldn't help it, he was being really mean." May was still stroking her hair and she was listening quietly, so Skye took in a shuddering breath, tried to gain some control over herself, and continued talking, "He saw and started throwing things at me and he didn't stop until he hit me in the shin with a book. It was my fault that he was mad at me."

Her fingers were still clenching May’s shirt tightly and she stared hard at them while she waited for May to say something. Luckily, she didn’t have to wait too long, "I'm sorry that you had to go through that Skye."

May's gentle words prompted her to start crying again and she didn’t even try to stop herself because she knew May wouldn't get angry at her because of it.

May rubbed her back soothingly and continued talking, "I want you to know that none of that was your fault though. No one ever deserves to get hurt Skye, and that includes getting hurt by mean words as well as being physically hurt. I want you to remember that when someone hurts you, it's never your fault, no matter what anyone says." Skye was still crying but she made sure to listen carefully to May's words, it sounded very important. "I know that some of the homes you have had to live in weren't very good and the people there weren't nice but you are safe here. You know that right?"

It dawned on her that she did know that she was safe and that this family wasn't like the other ones. She felt safe and wanted to stay here forever.

She nodded and May let out a deep breath, "Good. You are very safe here baby. Phil and I, and even Natasha and Trip, are going to do everything we can to make sure that you're safe and happy here because we all want you to be a part of our family."

Skye felt warmth flood through her whole body, not really knowing what exactly she was feeling but just knowing that it felt nice and comforting. She felt safe in May's arms and she never wanted to move. Was this what Jemma felt like when she was cuddling her mom?

Her mind instantly thought back to what Jemma and Fitz had said about May and Phil being her mommy and daddy. Natasha and Trip's real mommy's and daddy's weren't May and Phil but they both called them mom and dad anyways. Maybe... they could be Skye's mom and dad too?

Looking down, she unconsciously gripped May’s shirt a little tighter and mumbled, "May?"

"Yeah sweetie?"

She gathered up all of her courage, ignoring her nerves and how her palms were starting to feel a little sweaty, and asked, "Are you and Phil my mom and dad now?"

The hand that was combing through Skye's hair froze and she immediately responded by tensing up, worried that she had read the situation wrong and that May was uncomfortable because she actually didn't want to be her mom.

She felt herself start to panic and she berated herself for getting too attached to this family but before
she could start to pull away, May asked, "Do you want us to be your mom and dad?" Her voice still sounded soft and kind and Skye hoped that maybe she wasn't mad.

With surprising assurance, Skye knew she wanted May and Phil to be her parents just like she knew that her favorite color was blue and that the sun was warm.

She never had the chance to fully accept the Harvey's as her new parents before they had died but she wanted May and Phil to be her new mom and dad. Jemma and Fitz had said that they did mommy and daddy things and Skye knew that they would keep her safe. They didn't yell at her or make her feel scared and they made her feel better when she cried. Skye didn't know if that was how all parents acted but she knew that that was what she imagined good parents should be like.

She kept her eyes down, tried to keep the hope out of her voice, and said, "Yeah."

May surprised her by not even pausing before saying, "Good, because we would like to be your parents, if that's okay with you."

Skye twisted her head around to look up at May so fast that it kind of hurt, "Really?"

May's lips twitched up into a small smile, "Really."

Wanting to double check that she was hearing her right, she asked, "Are you sure?"

This time, May’s smile was really big and there was an undertone of amusement in her voice, "Yes Skye, I'm very sure and I know Phil is too."

"Oh." They wanted to be her mom and dad, which made Skye really happy, even though a super tiny part of her felt like she might be betraying her real mom and dad.

Subtly, she pinched her arm, convinced that this was the best dream ever. When she was convinced that she was definitely awake, she felt a little overwhelmed by the fact that May and Phil wanted to be her mommy and daddy.

Just then, Phil poked his head into the room, carefully studied them, and then fully stepped into the room. He had something in his hands and gave her a worried look, "You okay Skye?"

She nodded her head but was still looking at what Phil was holding, which looked like a photograph.

Phil walked over to the bed and sat down next to May before smiling kindly at her, "That's good, I was worried about you sweetheart."

His kind words made Skye feel warm again but she was feeling slightly overwhelmed by the fact that May and Phil wanted to be her mommy and daddy.

He offered her the picture, which she took and studied. It was the picture that was in the frame that she broke, the one with May, Phil and the brother and sister. "This was the one I broke."

Phil nodded, "Yes it was. Do you want to know who those two are?"

Skye nodded, incredibly curious about who they were.

May pointed at the girl, "That's Wanda," Then she pointed at the boy, "and that's Pietro. They were the first kids that we ever fostered. They're brother and sister, twins actually."

Skye liked their names even though they were a little odd. They seemed to fit with how they looked and she traced her finger over their faces on the picture.
"They lived with us for eight years and now they're in college. We never officially adopted them like we did Natasha and Trip but the twins are just as much our kids and they are. We told them about you and they're very excited to meet you," Phil said softly.

Skye scrunched up her nose, unsure about why she hadn't heard about them before, "Why didn't you tell me about them sooner?"

May started swaying from side to side and Skye swayed with her, "Well, we didn't want to overwhelm you sweetie. We know that it was really hard for you to meet Natasha and Trip and we wanted to give you time to get comfortable around us before we introduced you to them."

That actually made sense, Skye didn't know how she would've reacted if May and Phil had told her that they had four kids rather than two. "Am I going to meet them?"

Phil gently took the picture back and set it on her bedside table, "Well, they're very far away right now but they still really want to meet you, so we're going to video chat with them on Wednesday. You'll be able to talk to them then, is that okay?"

Skye nodded, feeling a little sad that she wouldn't be able to meet them face to face, which was weird because she didn't like meeting strangers. The fact that May and Phil had said that the twins were their kids, which meant that they were her brother and sister just like Natasha and Trip were, had eased her nerves. She had never realized how awesome it could be to have a brother and sister like Natasha and Trip and now that she knew what it was like, she was kind of excited to have more.

"Yeah, I want to meet them."

May and Phil both gave her warm smiles, which she returned.

May stopped rocking them and the mood in the room grew a little more somber, "Skye? I'm very happy that you opened up to me earlier but I think it might be best if you visited a therapist. I know you might not want to but it can really help."

Skye really didn’t want to talk to a stranger so she didn't say anything.

May loudly called Natasha's name before saying, "If you want, I can stay in the room with you when you talk to her. I'll make sure it's a girl. Actually, I can see if she would be willing to come over to our house and talk. Whatever makes you comfortable Skye."

It actually did make Skye feel a little better that the therapist would be a girl and could come talk to her in a place where she felt safe.

Natasha walked into the room, "You called?"

May nodded and gave Nattie a pointed look, "We were thinking that Skye might benefit from talking to a therapist."

"Oh! I went to a therapist for a while. I didn't want to at first but it actually helped a lot," Natasha said earnestly.

Skye slowly nodded. If they thought that she should see a therapist, she would try it for them. They hadn't lied to her yet so she trusted them when they said that it could help her.

"Okay. But can I talk to her here?"

May gently patted her thigh, "I'm sure we can find a very nice therapist who would be willing to talk
to you here sweetie."

Taking a deep breath, Skye resigned herself to the fact that she was going to see a therapist.
Skye woke up in the middle of the night, sweaty and feeling very unlike herself. Kicking her sheets off of her, she stood up and immediately regretted it as a wave of nausea hit her. She ran to the bathroom, which only made her uneasy stomach feel worse, and vomited into the toilet.

As she stopped heaving, she burst into tears at how awful she felt. Only the disgusting taste in her mouth got her to stand up, rinse her mouth out, and finally make her way out of the bathroom on unsteady legs.

She groaned pitifully; *nothing* was worse than being sick.

She was still crying, big heavy sobs that made it hard to breathe, and she thought that she should probably go see May and Phil. For a moment, she worried about waking them up in the middle of the night, but then she remembered what May had said a few days ago about going to them if she needed them. She was still sweating and crying and she felt really bad so she decided that she definitely needed them.

Making her way down the hallway, she slowly opened May and Phil's door, trying to be quiet so she didn’t wake up the whole house. The doorknob felt chilly and she winced, wondering how it was so cold, but then she realized that her body was just really hot. She made an effort to quiet down her sobs and tiptoed her way to one side of the bed, not sure who was lying where. As she rounded the bed, Skye stared down at Phil's sleeping face and noted how peaceful he looked.

Skye's stomach rolled and a sob escaped before she could stop it, causing Phil to jerk awake and his eyes to fall on her, "Skye?"

After he took a long look at her, he sat up, looking concerned, "Are you okay sweetheart? What's wrong?"

She put her hands on her tummy to try and make the uneasy feeling in it go away, "I don't feel good Phil."

Her voice must’ve woken May up because she quickly sat up in bed, read the situation quickly, and reached over to place her hand on Skye's forehead. Her palm felt really cold and Skye winced as May said, "Oh baby, you're burning up."

Phil got out of bed and disappeared out the door while May motioned for her to lie down next to her. As she ungracefully plopped down next to May, Phil walked back in with a glass of water in one hand and a bottle of medicine in the other. He poured some of the medicine into a tiny measuring cup and handed it to her, "Here Skye, this will help you feel better."

She took it from him and sniffed it, wrinkling her nose up at the terrible, sickly sweet smell. Resolutely, she shook her head, unwilling to drink the gross medicine.

"Come on sweetheart, it's supposed to taste like grape. It'll make you feel better," Phil cajoled her,
At that moment her stomach rolled again, and she decided that if the medicine would help make that stop, she would have to take it. She quickly drank the medicine and scrunched her nose up, gratefully taking the glass of water that Phil offered her and drinking half of it.

"That didn't taste like grape Phil."

"I'm sorry Skye but it will help you feel better, I promise." He said earnestly and Skye nodded at him, hoping that he was right.

May ran a comforting hand along her arm, "Oh baby, you're all sweaty. Phil, maybe she should take a cold shower. It could help with the fever."

Phil nodded and said, "I'll go start it up and grab her some new pajamas"

Skye didn't want to get up, she felt really tired all of a sudden and she was afraid that if she moved, it would make her feel worse. She burrowed deeper into May’s side as she said, "Come on sweetie, a shower will cool you down."

Skye shook her head, she just wanted to stay cuddled close to May and go to sleep.

"I know you don't want to but it will help baby. You can come in here and sleep when you're done, okay?"

Skye didn't say yes but she didn't say no when May picked her up and brought her into the bathroom, or when May helped her take off her sweaty pajamas and ushered her into the shower. She whined and tried to squirm away from the freezing water, causing May to turn the handle so that it was fractionally warmer but not by much.

"I know it's cold baby, I'm sorry," Her mom said soothingly.

Standing under the freezing water, she tried not to sway and forced her eyes to stay open until May said that she could get out. Her body felt achy and she stood limply as she let May dry her off and dress her. When May picked her back up, she was already closing her eyes and it was only a split second before she was being gently set on May and Phil’s bed. She heard Phil say that he got a trash bin in case Skye had to throw up, she felt them both lie back down, and then she was asleep.

When Skye woke up again, her eyes felt like they were burning behind her eyelids and her body still felt achy and hot. May was whispering to her, "I have to go to work baby but Phil will stay with you. I called your school to tell them that you were staying home and they said that a lot of other kids were sick but that it was just a 12-hour stomach bug. You should start to feel better later in the day okay? I'll see you in the afternoon."

Skye just nodded, rolled back over, and fell asleep again.

When she woke up for the third time, it was because she had to throw up. Phil was sitting beside her and when he saw her face, he immediately picked up the trash bin from beside the bed and held it in front of her. His other hand held her hair away from her face as she vomited into the bin.

Slowly, she sat back up and Phil put the trash bin back on the floor before rubbing a hand soothingly down her back. When she felt like she could talk again, she said, "Phil, I still feel bad."

Phil made a sympathetic sound and said, "I know sweetheart, it’s time for you to take some more medicine." He filled up the tiny measuring cup with medicine and handed it to her. She obediently
took it, pinching her nose and swallowing the thick medicine quickly even though it tasted really bad.

He took the empty medicine cup and water glass away from her, "Good girl. You've been sleeping a lot, which is really good. It’s about 11:00 now, do you think you want to go back to sleep?"

Skye shook her head. She felt tired but not like she could go back to sleep.

"Alright, how about we move this party downstairs so that you can watch t.v.?"

Skye wanted to watch t.v. but didn't think that she wanted to move. Phil slowly picked her up, making sure that her stomach felt okay the whole time, before bringing her downstairs and gently placing her on the couch.

He sat down on the other end of the couch, "Can you tell me what feels bad Skye?"

"My tummy feels bad and so does my head and I’m really hot and achy.” She snuggled into the couch and whimpered, “I feel bad Phil."

She really didn't like being sick.

Phil nodded and brushed her damp hair away from her eyes, "I know sweetheart. Do you think you could drink some ginger ale? It'll help settle your stomach."

Skye didn't know but she was willing to try so she nodded and watched Phil disappear into the kitchen before coming back with a glass full of ginger ale in his hand. She sipped it and it didn't make her feel like she was going to throw up so she assumed that that was good.

"Skye, I think I might have something that will help you feel better. Wanna see?"

Skye nodded eagerly, not used to having nice surprises. She saw him pull out a DVD and her eyes lit up as she recognized the front cover, "Tangled!"

Phil smiled, clearly delighted at her excitement, "Yeah, Melinda got it for you yesterday and I was thinking that we could watch it. What do you say?"

"Yes!" Skye cuddled into the couch and watched as Phil put the DVD in and sat back down, excited to watch her favorite movie with him.

When the movie started, Skye was wholeheartedly focusing on it, happy to see her favorite characters on screen. As it progressed, she felt her eyes start to grow heavier. She fought to keep them open but couldn't and unwillingly fell asleep.

This time when she opened her eyes, it was at the last couple of minutes of the movie. She shifted and noted that she didn't feel as nauseous as she had before and also felt a little cooler but she still felt pretty achy. She looked at Phil and saw that he was avidly watching the movie and she hoped that he liked it as much as she did.

The movie ended and Phil looked over to her, looking somewhat surprised that she was awake.

"Did you like it?" She asked, hoping that he had since it was her most favorite movie on the planet.
He grinned, "Actually…Yeah, I did."

Skye smiled, beyond delighted that he liked her favorite movie and that she could talk with him about it, "Who was your favorite?"

Phil considered it for a minute and it made Skye happy to see that he was taking this seriously, "I like the horse, Maximus."

"I like him too! He's a horse but he acts like a doggy!"

Phil chuckled and agreed, "Yeah, he's pretty silly, isn't he?"

Skye nodded and shifted on the couch so that she wasn't lying down anymore. She rested her back against the armrest on the couch and looked at Phil.

"How're you feeling sweetheart?"

Skye took stock of how she felt and found that she didn't feel like she was going to throw up anymore and that was the best feeling ever, "I don't feel so bad anymore, I'm just kind of tired."

"That's good sweetheart. Do you think you could try to eat some crackers? You haven't eaten all day." Phil stood up and handed her a new glass of ginger ale and she sipped it and nodded at him.

He turned to head into the kitchen and she stopped him before he could get very far, "Phil? Can you start the movie again?"

He started the movie over before heading into the kitchen and when he came back out, he was carrying a tray. He brought it over to her, "I got you some soup and crackers. You don't have to eat all of it but you should try to eat as much as you can, okay?"

She started slowly eating, wary of how the food would affect her recently settled stomach. She could only get through a couple of crackers and some sips of the soup before she shook her head and Phil took the tray away from her. He made sure that her ginger ale was still in reach before sitting back down on the couch.

She laid back down and Phil scooted over so that he could pull her feet into his lap. They continued watching the movie but Skye was only half-focusing because she had never had anyone take care of her like this when she had been sick, other than the Harvey's. The nuns had made sure that she had had everything she needed to feel better but they hadn't watched movies with her and made her feel better when she was throwing up. Phil was being really awesome and Skye realized that she felt completely safe with him.

The light weight of Phil’s arms resting on her legs and the sound of Rapunzel in the background lulled her back to sleep.

Melinda had managed to get out of work about an hour or two earlier than normal. She wanted to check on Skye, she had been worried about her all day, and hoped that she was feeling better. The school had told her that it was just a twelve hour stomach bug that was going around so Skye should be on the mend but it was impossible for her not to worry.

She sighed as she parked her car in the driveway and walked up her front porch.
She hoped that Phil had been okay with a sick Skye. Children reacted to sickness differently. When Natasha was sick, she just wanted to be left alone. She didn't like being touched and she did not like being fussed over. Trip was the complete opposite; he liked to be taken care of and he wanted to be coddled and basically turned into a whiny toddler. The twins were somewhat of a mixture between the two. If one got sick, in a couple of hours the other one was sick too. For a little while they would insist on being left alone and then for an hour or two, they would turn into cuddly kittens. They wanted to be hugged and fussed over and they would latch onto either May or Phil and cuddle with them until they reverted back to being distant.

The problem was that she didn't know how Skye was when she was sick. Even though her husband was an incredibly competent pediatric doctor, a small part of her had worried about the two of them all day.

She opened the door and immediately spotted Skye and Phil on the couch. She noted that the t.v. was playing and a catchy song was coming from it as she walked into the living room and set her bag on the floor. Silently, she grabbed her phone and took a picture of the two.

Phil was sitting in the middle of the couch, his head was tilted back and his mouth was hanging open, while Skye was lying down. Her face was smooshed into a pillow with her hands resting under her chin and her feet were on Phil's lap with a blanket thrown haphazardly over her.

Both of them were sleeping peacefully and the sight made her melt.

She didn't want to wake them up, so she took another picture and gently fixed the blanket so that it was covering Skye properly before quietly moving to the dining room to wait for the two sleeping beauties to wake up.
Chapter 17

When Skye woke up, her face felt warm but not stiflingly hot like before and she realized that was probably because she wrapped up tightly in a fuzzy blanket. Sitting up, she noted that she didn’t feel nauseous anymore and that Phil was gone from his spot beside her on the couch.

She didn’t feel so bad anymore, she was still felt a little off and unlike her normal self, but she was happy to feel less sick than before.

Quiet voices floated in from the dining room and Skye wandered in to find May and Phil sitting next to each other going over some papers. Trip was also sitting at the table with his computer in front of him, she could hear him pressing down on his keys, and he was the one who looked up and noticed her first, "Hey girl, how’re you feeling? You didn't look too hot this morning."

May and Phil looked over to her and she walked over to May, who wrapped one arm around her and placed her other hand on her forehead, "You feel much cooler baby. How do you feel?"

Skye leaned more heavily into May's side, easily accepting the comfort that she was offering. She didn't like being sick and even though Phil had cared for her all day and made her feel better and she thought he was amazing for it, she still felt the aftereffects of her sickness and just wanted a hug. With that in mind, she put her arms around May's neck, who made a surprised sound before lifting her up and placing her on her lap.

It felt good to just be cuddled so she burrowed closer to May and mumbled, "I don't feel bad anymore."

"That's great baby. Do you want to come with me to pick Natasha up from dance class?"

Skye nodded, happy to have a reason to get out of the house and to finally be able to see her sister dance.

"Okay sweetie, we'll have to leave soon though. How about you go put on some real clothes?"

Nodding, she reluctantly slid off of May’s lap, but before she went upstairs, she walked over to Phil and looked up at him. He gave her a kind smile and she wanted him to know that she was grateful that he had helped her when she was feeling bad, so she motioned for him to lean down a little and then she hugged him. He wrapped an arm around her back and rubbed it soothingly as she stretched up and whispered to him, "Thanks for taking care of me Phil."

Stepping out of the hug, she was met with Phil’s wide smile, "Always. That's what I'm here for Skye, I like taking care of you."

No one had ever told her that until she had come to live with May and Phil and it was an unfamiliar feeling to have a couple of strung-together words make her feel so warm and safe but if she thought about the fluttering in her heart too hard, she got confused about all the emotions those words evoked, so she she smiled back up at him and then made her way out of the dining room.

She quickly got dressed and went back downstairs to find May waiting for her at the bottom of the staircase. They said goodbye to Trip and Phil before getting into the car and listening to Aladdin songs on the way to get Natasha.

The dance studio wasn't too far away and they only got through a few songs before they pulled into the parking lot. May helped unbuckle her so she could jump out of the car and take in the dance
studio. The building was pretty big and kind of intimidating so she grabbed May's pinky and let the older woman lead her into the studio.

As soon as they stepped through the doors, Skye's eyes widened a little bit and she took in everything. It was very clean and bright and Skye could see a bunch of girls and boys wandering around. Some of them looked like ballerinas, some of them had on costumes, and some of them were just wearing normal workout clothes. Different types of music came from behind each door they passed as May led her further into the building. They quietly opened the last door and stepped into a little viewing room off to the side that looked into a big, cleared out room. It had a giant mirror along one wall and wooden beams along another one. It looked like the dance class was over because most of the girls in there were gathering their things and meeting their parents in the viewing room.

Skye's eyes roamed over the room and fixated on Natasha, who was off in the far corner of the room wearing a pale pink leotard and funny looking shoes. She was twirling around, looking beautiful and graceful, and Skye wondered how she was moving so fast.

She wished that she could dance like Natasha could.

Natasha finished twirling and spotted them, giving them a tiny wave before grabbing her bag and changing her shoes. May made her way over to Natasha and Skye followed after her, watching as Natasha pulled on some sweatpants, turned to them, and gave them an easy grin, "Hey guys, are you feeling better Skye?"

Skye nodded and then pulled her pinky out of May's so that she could go stand by her sister. She tugged on her arm and looked up at her, "Nattie, how were you doing that? It was so cool!"

Natasha smiled at her and ran a hand over her hair, "Thanks Skye, I've been practicing for a long time."

"How's practice for the recital going?" May asked as she took Natasha’s bag for her.

"You know, everyone's getting a little stressed out but it's going okay."

"Well, I'm sure it'll be great. Your recitals always are."

She tugged on Natasha's hand, "Nattie, what's a recital?"

Her sister grabbed Skye's pinky with her own and they started walking out of the building, "It's when all us dancers perform on stage for an audience."

"Oh. Can I come? When is it?" Recitals sounded fun and Skye wanted to see her sister dance again.

May laughed, "Of course you can go sweetie, we're all going. It's this Thursday."

Thinking really hard, Skye realized that it was Monday today and Thursday would be here soon. She remembered that on Wednesday she was going to be able to talk to Wanda and Pietro, she was still a little nervous about that, and decided that she had a very busy week ahead of her.

Natasha helped buckle her into her seat before sitting up front with May, who turned down the music a bit so that she could talk to Nattie, but she still sung along to the songs.

Their voices drifted back to her, "I forgot to ask you earlier, how was your presentation?"

"We totally killed it mom. You know how nervous I can get about talking in front of a lot of people but ours was definitely the best."
"I'm so proud of you sweetie, we should celebrate this weekend. Oh, did I tell you that we're going to video chat with the twins on Wednesday? We set it up so we'll call them at 3:00 so you should be out of school by then."

She heard Natasha squeal in delight, "Oh, I miss them so much! When are they coming back?"

"Well, they'll be over in Europe until the semester's over so they won't be back for about three months."

Natasha grumbled and May gave her a sympathetic look, "I know, I miss them too. But over Christmas break they'll be with us for a whole month."

Natasha seemed to perk up when she heard that. They kept talking and Skye's mind wandered to Wanda and Pietro.

Her sister sounded like she really missed them, and they couldn't be bad if Natasha liked them. She was excited and nervous to talk to them on Wednesday.

The next day, Skye felt like she had never even been sick. She insisted that she felt well enough to go to school and so May and Phil were driving her there as she happily sang songs from The Princess and the Frog. She stopped singing and spoke loud enough so that May and Phil could hear her, "Can we go to the playground later?"

May turned around in the passenger seat so that she was facing Skye, "How about we see how today goes first?"

"But I feel fine May!"

May gave her a pacifying look and reached back to pat her knee, "I know you do sweetie but let's make sure you still feel okay after school. If you do, then we can go to the park, okay?"

Skye agreed, mainly just because she knew that she would still feel okay after school, "Is it okay if Fitz and Simmons come and play too?"

Phil pulled into the school, stopped in the drop-off zone, and said, "Why don't you ask them and we'll ask their parents when we see them when we pick you up later?"

"Okay."

Phil hopped out and helped her free from her seat belt so that she could lean forward and hug May real quick. It was a little awkward because May was buckled into her seat but it still felt nice. She grabbed her backpack and lunchbox from the seat next to her, hopped out of the car, and Phil handed her a folded up piece of paper. She took it and scrunched up her nose in confusion, "What's this?"

Phil ran a hand over her head and fixed the headband that was holding her hair out of her face, "Give this to Ms. Hill. It just says how you were sick yesterday and a couple of other things. Don't forget to give it to her okay?"

She put the paper in her backpack and then put that on her back, "Okay Phil."

After giving him a smile and waving goodby, she ran into the school, excited to be back. She saw Ms. Hill standing outside her door and walked over to her.
Her teacher gave her a fond smile, "We missed you yesterday Skye. Are you feeling better?"

She rifled through her backpack, grabbed the paper that Phil gave her, and offered it to Ms. Hill, who took it, "I feel much better today."

"That's great. Why don't you go put your stuff down and sit on the reading rug? We're going to start the day off with a story." Ms. Hill smiled at her and skimmed over the paper she had handed her.

"Okay!" She ran into the room and obediently put her lunchbox in her cubby and her backpack by her desk before she saw Lincoln, Fitz, and Jemma already sitting on the reading rug and squealed happily.

She quickly walked over and sat by Lincoln, who gave her a high five and said, "Skye! You weren't here yesterday."

Scrunching up her nose, she dramatically said, "Yeah, I was sick."

"I was sick last week too. It wasn't fun," Lincoln gave her a sympathetic look.

Fitz very subtly leaned away from her, "Are you feeling better now?"

"Yeah, I'm okay."

Jemma pulled Fitz back upright, rolled her eyes at his dramatics, and spoke up, "Good. We missed you."

She had missed her friends too. They were a little weird sometimes but they were nice to her and they liked her. They missed her when she was gone and she missed them when they weren't around and that's how she knew that they were real friends.

"Do you guys want to go to the playground again after school?" She asked all three of them, even Lincoln, though she didn't know if Lincoln lived near them.

Jemma looked guilty as she fiddled with her fingers and mumbled, "I'm sorry Skye, my mom said she would take Fitz and I to the museum later today. Maybe we can go tomorrow."

Lincoln also looked pretty guilty, "I don't live near you guys and my babysitter looks after me until my mom gets home from work. She's not supposed to take me anywhere."

"Oh. Okay." Skye was sad that they couldn't play with her on the playground but she could still have fun without them there. Maybe Ward would be there.

"We're sorry Skye," Fitz gave her a sympathetic look and patted her awkwardly on the arm.

"It's okay."

Ms. Hill walked in and everyone quieted down for storytime.

The rest of the day was pretty fun. They learned about the letter T and about Africa. She worked with Ms. Hill, who helped her with her math and her reading. Fitz was disappointed at lunch because she had her own apple and didn't trade anything for his. They played freeze tag during recess and made a house out of popsicle sticks at the end of the day for art class.

At the end of the day, Ms. Hill led them outside and she immediately spotted May and ran over to her. Phil had told her earlier that he would be working today and he wouldn't be there to pick her up, which made her a little disappointed that he was going to be around less since he was going back to
work, but she shook those feelings off.

Instead of slowing down, she ran full force towards May and jumped, hoping she would catch her. Which of course she did, lifting Skye up and balancing her on her hip.

"How was your day sweetie?"

"It was good. I still don't feel sick May, can we go to the playground?"

"As long as you're still feeling better, I don't see why not. Are your friends coming?"

May started walking back towards the car and she opened the back door so that she could set Skye into her booster seat, "No, Jemma said her mommy was taking her and Fitz to a museum instead."

"Oh, well, we can still have fun at the playground on our own."

Skye smiled and let May buckle her into her booster seat.

When they got home, she ran upstairs and threw her backpack into her room and then ran back downstairs. She bounced up and down beside May, waiting for her to be ready to go.

May obviously saw her excitement, because she laughed and motioned for Skye to lead the way out the front door, "Okay, okay, let's go. When we get back though, you need to start your homework, okay?"

Skye nodded and tugged on May's hand, impatiently waiting for her to lock the door before they started to walk down the street towards the playground.

"So, you know how we talked about you seeing a therapist?"

Skye nodded uncertainly, still not sure if she would like to talk to a stranger.

"Well, I called Natasha's old therapist and she said that she would be happy to meet with you. She said that she wouldn't mind meeting with you at our house, so you could talk to her in your room if that will make you feel better."

Skye nodded again. She felt safe with May and Phil and she felt safe in their house, so if she had to talk to a therapist, she was happy that it would be where she was comfortable.

May squeezed her pinky, "Okay. She said she could come over tomorrow. Is that alright with you?"

Skye started to nod again but then she remembered something, "Wait! We're talking to Wanda and Pietro tomorrow!"

"It's okay baby, she'll be coming over at around 6:00 so you'll still have time to meet the twins."

Skye instantly relaxed, she really wanted to meet the twins and she would rather be able to talk to them than with some therapist.

Something had been bothering her about the twins, so she cautiously tugged on May’s head and asked, "May? How come you adopted Natasha and Trip but not Wanda and Pietro?"

May took a second before answering, "Well... before the twins came to live with us, they loved their parents very much. They were a very happy family and when their parents died, it devastated them. We talked to them about adopting them and they told us that making it official felt like they were trying to replace their mom and dad. That wasn't our intention but we respected their decision. Even
though they aren't our children on paper, they are our kids.

Thinking over this new information gave a small bit of clarity about the situation but also also some confusion. She didn't understand why the twins wouldn't want to be May and Phil's kids for real. Maybe it was because she didn't know what it was like to grow up with a mommy and daddy who loved her like Wanda's and Pietro's did. Maybe she could ask them later.

They reached the playground and May told Skye that she would be sitting on the benches. Skye nodded and ran off to climb all over the castle. She was pretending to run away from evil ninjas when she spotted Ward over by the monkey bars.

After zooming down the slide, she ran over to him, "Ward! I didn't know you were here. Want to go on the seesaw?"

Ward turned to her and she reeled back, her hand unconsciously reaching for the scars on her belly as she took in the tender-looking, extensive black bruises that decorated his left eye. He smiled at her and ducked his head, probably trying to stop Skye from seeing his eye but there was no way she could miss it.

"Ward! What happened? Are you okay?" She peered up at him and he took a step back.

"Well... I accidentally fell down the stairs. Don't worry, it looks worse than it really is."

Skye was nodding when she saw Ward reach down and brush an arm over his arm. Her eyes were drawn to the movement and they widened when she saw another bruise, this one looking like a handprint wrapping around his right wrist.

She recognized these bruises, having seen them before when some of the children were dropped back off at the orphanage after a failed foster family. He was lying to her; he hadn't fell down the stairs, someone had hurt him.

Crossing her arms, she widened her stance and lifted her chin, "You're lying."

Ward straightened up and anger flickered across his face, "What? No I'm not!"

"Yes you are! That bruise on your arm looks like a handprint! I've seen bruises like that before and you can't get them from falling down the stairs!"

Ward flinched back when she started raising her voice and he pulled her back into the castle before dragging her into a secluded corner.

"How did you know that?" He didn't sound mad anymore, just worried.

Skye looked away, noticing a lizard climbing around on some of the wooden planks surrounding them, and mumbled, "I lived with some mean people before and so have the rest of the kids at the orphanage. I know that someone did that to you, not the stairs."

Ward grabbed her shoulder, "Skye, you can't tell anyone! It's my fault that this happened."

Skye knew she was supposed to tell someone; when she had told May about her nightmare, she had told her that if someone purposefully hurt you that it was never your fault.

She needed to tell Ward that, "It wasn't your fault Ward. May told me that if someone hurts you on purpose, that it isn't your fault. If you tell somebody, they can make it stop."
He started to look panicky and his grip on her shoulder tightened, "No! Skye, you can't tell anyone! Please!"

She knew that the right thing to do would be to tell someone what was happening but he looked so upset at the thought of that that she started to doubt herself.

"This is the only time it's happened. It won't happen again, I promise! You can't tell anyone!"

"I don't know…"

"Skye! If you tell anyone, they'll take me away from my family! I can't leave my little brother, okay?"

Even though she knew that it was the wrong thing to do, she said, "Okay… But only if you promise that if it happens again, you'll tell somebody."

Ward released her shoulder and sighed, "Yes, yes I promise. Now you promise."

"I promise," she said, as guilt churned relentlessly in her tummy.

He let out a big breath and gave her a shaky smile, "Thank you Skye, let's go on the seesaw."

Skye let him lead her away and played with him but her heart wasn't in it. She remembered the first time they met, when he had tried to steal her swing, and how his older brother had painfully squeezed his shoulder. Maybe he was the one who had hurt Ward.

She thought that Ward was lying. He had said that this had never happened before but Skye knew that it had, he just hadn't had bruises that were easily spotted.

When Mr. Ramsey had left bruises on her, he used to make sure that no one else would see them. No one had ever seen them and she had hid them because he had told her that they were her fault and if anyone saw, they would blame her. May had told her that when he had hurt her, it wasn't her fault. It wasn't Ward's fault either and while she didn't want someone to take him away from his little brother, she knew that she should tell someone.

They kept playing until May told her it was time to leave. She looked over to Ward and couldn't stop the uneasy feeling that was working through her body when she saw his black eye again. It looked like it hurt a lot.

"I have to go."

Ward hopped off the monkey bars and landed in front of her, "Okay, I'll see you later Skye. Remember what you promised, okay?"

"Okay." Skye didn't feel okay, she felt uneasy as she walked away from him and towards May, who smiled at her and offered her her pinky. She gratefully took it and looked up at her, noting that May would never give her bruises because May was good.

They both silently walked back home, Skye feeling too bad about what she promised Ward to talk.

She could feel May staring at her but she ignored it until May finally spoke up, "What's wrong Skye?"

Staring hard at her feet, she gripped May's pinky tighter and muttered, "I can't tell you."

May stopped them, they were still a little ways from home and they were standing on the sidewalk.
"What do you mean you can't tell me?" She asked, the confusion and apprehension clear in her voice.

Skye swayed from left to right, dug a foot into the ground, and looked anywhere but towards May until the silence became too much for her and she mumbled, "It's a secret."

Crouching down, May brushed Skye's bangs out of her eyes, "Is it a bad secret?"

It was a bad secret. Skye knew that it shouldn't be a secret, that she should tell someone what was happening, but she had made a promise.

May looked worried, "Skye?"

Keeping her eyes averted, she thought back to Ward's bruises. Skye didn't know what to do. She knew that she should tell May about Ward but she had promised, and she wasn't supposed to break promises. But keeping this secret was making her feel sick.

She knew that if she didn't say anything, Ward would get hurt again. Mr. Ramsey didn't stop even though he said he would and she didn't think it would stop happening to Ward.

Rushing forward, she wrapped her arms around May's neck and hugged her tightly. May immediately wrapped her arms around her, which made Skye feel a little better.

"You're worrying me Skye," May whispered into her hair.

Those words weighed heavily on her, she hadn't meant to make May worried, so she shook her head, "I can't tell you, I promised."

May's arms gently tightened around her and Skye turned her head so that it was tucked under May's chin.

"It's a bad secret, isn't it?"

Skye didn't think it would break her promise to tell May that it was a bad secret, so she nodded her head.

May leaned back and Skye finally looked up at her, "Did someone hurt you Skye? If they did, you need to tell me. It's okay to break a promise if you're being hurt."

Those words hit her squarely in the chest, lifting some of the guilt as she mulled it over. It was okay to break a promise if someone was being hurt?

"No one hurt me May…"

The big breath that May let out tickled her cheek, "Okay good. Is…someone else being hurt?"

May said that it was okay to break a promise if someone was being hurt and May had never lied to her before. Maybe it would be okay to tell May the secret?

Skye nodded before quickly resting her head back on May's chest and hugging her tighter. May started stroking her hair and it felt nice, making her feel a little better about betraying Ward.

"Who's being hurt?"

She wasn't sure if she should say anymore. She had already mostly broken her promise that she had made with Ward and it hadn't even been a day.
"Skye, if someone is being hurt, you need to tell me so I can make it stop. I know you wished that someone would've stopped Mr. Ramsey from hurting you, didn't you?" May spoke softly but her words still packed a punch.

She flinched because it was true. She did wish someone would have made it stop. If Ward was being treated the same way that Mr. Ramsey had treated her, she knew she needed to help stop it.

But first, she needed to be completely sure, "You promise that you can help?"

"I promise that I will be able to help," May said, rubbing her back soothingly.

Skye nodded. She knew she needed to tell but she felt so bad that she started crying. May made soothing sounds and kept rubbing gentle circles on her back until she was able to get some control over herself.

"My friend, Ward… someone's hurting him. I think it's his big brother."

Skye turned her face into the juncture of May's neck and cried softly, hating herself for breaking her promise to Ward. Her tears quickened as she realized that Ward wouldn't want to be her friend anymore.

"Ward? You mean the Ward's that live down the street from us? Grant Ward?"

She nodded her head.

"You did the right thing okay? Now that I know, I can help him."

Skye shook her head and tried to push her face closer to May, "I wasn't supposed to tell."

May leaned away from her and brushed the tears off her cheeks, "It's usually a good thing to keep your promises but you did the right thing. You shouldn't keep secrets when someone is being hurt or is in trouble. It's okay to break those promises, okay?"

Even though the guilt was still eating away at her, she halfheartedly nodded, knowing that what she was being told was was important. May picked her up and Skye leaned her head against her chest and wrapped her legs around May's waist. As they started to walk home, she kept her face hidden in shame, feeling like a terrible friend even though May had told her that what she had done was okay.

She felt May walk up the porch steps, heard her open the door, and heard Phil shout hello to them but they didn't say anything back. May set her down in a dining room chair and whispered something to Phil, who disappeared as May leaned down so that she was face to face with Skye, "Listen to me Skye, I know you feel bad about telling me the secret but you did nothing wrong, do you understand me?"

It didn't feel like she had done nothing wrong, but she nodded and reluctantly said, “Yeah.”

Phil returned with Skye's backpack in hand and May ran a comforting hand down her head and said, "Phil's going to help you with your homework alright? I need to go make a phone call."

Skye nodded again and was surprised when May leaned forward and kissed her forehead. It was quick but warm and it settled a bit of the uneasy feeling in her chest.

Phil spread out all of her worksheets on the table and she tried to focus on them but all she could do was think about was the handprint-shaped bruise on Ward's wrist and worry about if he would hate her now.
Skye couldn't sleep.

She still felt really guilty about telling May Ward's secret, and even though May had told her that she had done the right thing, she wasn't so sure. Ward had said that if she told, he would be taken away from his little brother, and she didn't want to take him away from someone he loves.

When May had come back into the dining room earlier that day, she had told her that everything was taken care of but Skye didn't know what that meant. Even though she'd wanted to ask, she hadn't felt like talking. She hadn't been able to eat much of her dinner and had caught the worried looks everyone was giving her but all she could think about was that she felt like a bad friend. She'd taken a shower and quickly pretended to fall asleep so that May and Phil would stop making her feel worse with their concerned glances.

Now, Skye rolled onto her back and stared at the stars on her ceiling as she gripped Alice tighter to her chest. There was a tight knot in her stomach that felt like it was weighing her down. She felt guilty about Ward, nervous about talking to the therapist tomorrow, and anxious about meeting the twins, and there was no way she was going to be able to fall asleep with all of that on her mind.

Sighing deeply, she rolled out of bed. It had been a couple hours since she had been tucked into bed and Skye had heard everyone retreat to their rooms earlier so she wasn’t surprised to find the dark hallway empty when she poked her head out of her room. Skye tiptoed down the hall and stopped in front of Natasha's room.

After a quick inner debate, she opened the door and peered inside to find Natasha sitting on her bed, watching something on her laptop. She looked up when Skye opened her door and pressed a button on her keyboard before saying, "What's up Skye?"

She didn't really know why she came in here, it was just where she ended up, so she fidgeted from foot to foot and bit her lip. After a moment, Natasha shut her laptop and put it on her bedside table before patting the bed and motioning for Skye to come over. She walked over and climbed onto Natasha's bed before hesitantly crawling into her lap, seeking some sort of comfort from the tight feeling in her chest.

The older girl wrapped her arms around Skye's middle and it made her feel a little bit better.

Skye leaned into Natasha’s chest and she started swaying them before asking, "What're you thinking about?"

Even if sisters did tell each other everything, Skye didn't know if May had told Natasha about Ward and if she didn’t, Skye didn't want to break her promise for a second time, so she just shrugged, "I have to talk to a therapist tomorrow."

"Oh, I see." Skye couldn't see Natasha's face but she stopped rocking them and shifted Skye so that
they could see each other. The older girl brushed Skye's hair out of her face, "You wanna know a secret?"

Skye didn't know if she could handle another secret but she nodded anyways.

Nattie leaned in closer so that their faces were inches apart, "I didn't want to talk to my therapist. Actually, I didn't talk to her for three whole weeks."

"But May said that the therapist helped you!" Skye hoped that May hadn’t been wrong.

"She did help me but I didn't want to talk to her at first. I was nervous and didn't want to tell a stranger everything about me, I didn't know her and I didn't trust her, so for our first couple of sessions, I refused to talk. She would ask me questions sometimes but I wouldn't answer her. She didn't get mad at me though. This therapist is very nice, I promise."

She wanted to know more, the idea of therapy was still pretty foreign to her, so she asked, "What did you talk about?"

"I don't know if mom or dad told you but before I came to live with them, the people that I lived with... were... bad. They did really bad things and they weren't nice to me and I hated them." Natasha didn't look sad when she said this, she just said it like it was a fact.

Even though Nattie didn't look upset, Skye wanted to make sure that she wasn't just pretending. She thought that maybe she would feel better if she knew that Skye understood, so she slowly reached a hand up and cupped Natasha's cheek, "I lived with bad people too Nattie, it's okay."

Natasha smiled softly at her and placed her hand over Skye's. She gently lifted Skye's hand off of her cheek and pressed a soft kiss to her palm before intertwining their pinkies, "Thank you Skye. We're both lucky to be here with mom and dad."

Skye agreed, not even wanting to think about what could’ve happened if she had been placed with another family like the Ramsey’s, and continued listening to Natasha talk.

"I thought that the therapist would make me talk about all the bad things that had happened to me but she didn't make me do anything. She just let me talk about whatever I wanted to. At first, I didn't know if she was just pretending, so I talked about the stupidest things but she didn't make me stop, she just listened to me. She was nice and one time I had a really bad day and so I walked into her office and just started ranting. She listened to me and helped me figure out why I was feeling so angry and after that it was a little easier to talk to her about real things. She helped me cope with what happened when I was younger and gave me tips on how to deal with my emotions."

"So you liked talking to the therapist?"

Natasha seriously thought about it, which was something Skye wasn’t used to when people talked to her, and finally said, "Well, I didn't like it at first. It was weird and I didn't want to talk to a stranger but then I figured out that she was there to help me, not make me feel bad." Nattie stopped and breathed in deeply, "I'm not going to lie, when I first started living with mom and dad, I was really messed up. I was really mad and I had nightmares all the time. After talking to the therapist for a while, she helped to…unmess me up. Does that make sense?"

Skye kind of understood what she was saying. Natasha must’ve seen her slight confusion because she explained further, "Like, you know how when you dump your crayons out of their box and they're all in a pile?" Skye nodded, a little confused about where this was going. "My thoughts and emotions were like that giant pile of mixed up crayons. Each color was a thought or a feeling and
they were all jumbled up and mixed together. My therapist helped me pick up all the crayons and organize them back into the box. She helped me sort through everything, which made me feel better."

Skye nodded, finally understanding what Nattie was saying. Maybe the therapist could help with the giant knot that was taking up residence in her tummy.

"Is she nice?"

"She’s very nice, I think you'll like her a lot. You don't have to be nervous about talking to her. If you don't want to talk about something, she won't make you."

That made her feel much better and the knot in her tummy loosened a little.

Natasha had helped her feel better about the therapist, maybe she could help her feel better about meeting Wanda and Pietro, so she squeezed her sister’s pinky and mumbled, "Nattie, do you think Wanda and Pietro will like me?"

"Oh маленькая звезда. I think that they will love you,“ Natasha said with certainty, tugging her in for a tight hug.

Hearing that made the knot in her tummy loosen a little bit more.

"What're they like?"

Natasha gently pushed Skye out of her lap and peeled the blankets down on her bed, "Come here."

She patted one of her pillows and Skye crawled over and laid her head on it, watching as Natasha put her head on the same pillow and pulled the blankets up.

Skye snuggled into the sheets and stared at Nattie, waiting for an answer.

Her sister gave her a smile and tucked the blankets firmly around her, "They're awesome. When I first moved in, they were really nice to me but I wasn't very nice to them. I was scared here and didn't trust them," Nattie said this guiltily and Skye reached out and intertwined their pinkies again, "But after a couple of months, when I learned English and felt more comfortable here, they became my brother and sister. They protected me and made me laugh. They love me and I love them and I know that they'll love you."

Skye curled closer to her sister, letting Nattie’s words comfort her, "Tell me more."

"Well, Wanda loves helping people and animals and plants. Actually, she loves helping everything. She's the nicest person I've ever met and dad always says that she’s going to change the world. She told me that she wants to be a doctor and go to other countries to take care of people who need help. Pietro is the funniest and most protective big brother ever. One time, a boy at my school was making fun of the way I talked and he went with mom when she came to pick me up. I don't know how he knew who the boy was but he found him and told him that if he was ever mean to me again, he would regret it. I don't think that boy ever looked at me again. Of course, mom got mad at him for intimidating a younger kid but he didn't really care. Oh! And another time…"

Natasha kept talking and Skye found her mind wandering a little bit. Her eyes were starting to feel heavy and Nattie's voice was soothing.

She tried not to, but eventually she fell asleep listening to Natasha tell her about the twins.

The next morning, Skye woke up before Natasha did. She hadn't slept very well, her guilt had
invaded her dreams and had made her restless, and she felt more tired when she woke up than she had before she had fallen asleep.

Untangling herself from a sleeping Natasha, she quietly slipped out of her bed and made her way downstairs to find Phil standing in the middle of the kitchen eating cereal and reading a newspaper that was spread out on the countertop.

She didn't know what came over her but she found herself running towards him. He looked up when he heard her and was about to say something when she crashed into his legs, wrapped her arms around his waist, and pushed her face into his stomach. She could blame it on the lack of sleep or her guilt over Ward or her anxiety about everything else, but she just felt wrong. She didn't feel like she normally felt and she just wanted everything to go back to normal again.

What she really needed was a hug.

Skye didn't know how so much had changed over the past few days. She had never hugged anybody when she felt bad, she’d never allowed herself to act on that urge, never feeling safe when someone else was wrapped around her, but this family was different. They made her feel different, like it was okay to want to hug them, and she knew that she was safe wrapped up in their arms.

Phil let out a surprised sound but hugged her back, "Are you okay?"

She wasn't okay but she still tilted her head up and nodded, "Yeah."

She didn't think she convinced him though because he set down his bowl of cereal by his newspaper and leaned forward to pick her up. She wrapped her legs around his waist and he held her so that they were face to face before smiling kindly at her, "Now what did I do to deserve a hug like that?"

He hadn’t done anything, he was just Phil, and that was more than enough. "I don't know, I just wanted to."

Phil's smile widened, "Well feel free to hug me anytime you want. Your hugs are the best." He leaned in and whispered, "Don't tell Melinda I said that though."

Skye smiled back at him but when he moved to set her back down, she gripped onto him tighter, not ready to leave him yet. He didn't say anything, just put some bread into the toaster and when it was done, slathered it with jam and handed it to her. She wasn't very hungry but she ate it anyways and rested her head on Phil's shoulder while he swayed back and forth and finished reading his newspaper.

Skye still felt off but she felt a little better with Phil there.

May walked into the kitchen and she watched as the older woman took in her and Phil and saw her eyebrows rise. She didn’t comment on it though, just said good morning to both of them and kissed them both on the cheeks. Skye still wasn't used to the open displays of affection but it felt nice.

May grabbed herself a bowl of cereal and sat down in the dining room. Natasha and Trip eventually came downstairs and fixed themselves breakfast too, all while Skye stayed wrapped in Phil's arms, which he didn't seem to mind.

After a little bit she heard Phil say, "You need to go get dressed for school, sweetheart."

Skye reluctantly nodded and Phil set her down so that she could go upstairs to change before bringing down a couple of hair ties and walking up to Natasha, "Nattie, can you braid my hair?"
Natasha put her spoon down and took the hair ties from her, "Sure маленькая звезда."

Skye stood there while Natasha put two braids into her hair and tied them off. When she was done, she turned around and thanked her before sitting in the chair next to her. She waited until May said that it was time to leave before grabbing her backpack and following her out the door.

Skye didn't like today.

She didn't feel like herself at all.

During class, she had tried to avoid talking to her friends since she didn't feel like talking but she could tell that they didn't know why she was avoiding them and it made her feel worse because she had upset her friends. It made her angrier at herself for not being about to do anything right.

She could feel the tension and anxiousness in her growing and it made her feel awful. She didn't know what had happened with Ward. She didn't know if he was okay or if he had been hurt again. She didn't know if he had been taken away from his little brother and she didn't know if she had made everything worse rather than better. Despite what Natasha had said last night, she still felt nervous about meeting her therapist, she didn't like meeting strangers and was worried that her therapist would be mean to her. She was also anxious about meeting the twins because she really wanted them to like her.

Throughout the whole day, she had felt everything in her growing and the more she thought about all of that stuff, the more off she felt until she couldn't take it anymore.

They were working on another letter worksheet, this time it was the letter V, and Skye couldn't help but think about Ward. She was trying to focus on her worksheet but for some reason she couldn't fill it out properly and she felt something in her snap. Her eyes started tearing up and she forced herself not to cry in front of everyone. She looked around and saw Ms. Hill sitting at her desk so she walked up to her, making sure to look down so that no one could see her face.

She reached Ms. Hill's desk and heard her say, "Are you all done with your worksheet Skye?"

Skye shook her head, her vision starting to get blurry, and she didn't know why she was feeling this way but she hated it. Her voice shook when she said, "Ms. Hill, can you call May and Phil please?"

She was still looking at the floor, trying desperately not to cry, when her teacher asked, "Are you okay Skye?"

It was pretty obvious that she wasn't okay, she just wanted May and Phil and to stop feeling the way that she was feeling.

Ms. Hill stood up and placed a gentle hand on Skye's shoulder, "Come on, honey."

She let herself be led out into the hallway and was told to wait there while Ms. Hill asked the teacher next door to keep an eye on her class. Before she knew it, she heard Ms. Hill ask to speak to Phil and that was when she couldn't stop herself anymore and started crying in earnest. She didn't even know why she was crying; everything just felt so wrong today and all of her emotions had been accumulating and had finally burst out of her like a volcano.

Somehow through her tears, she was able to hear Ms. Hill say that May and Phil would be here soon, which made her cry even harder because she wanted them here now.
She started to have trouble catching her breath and felt Ms. Hill gently push her down so that she was sitting against the wall before instructing her to put her head between her knees. She did as she was told but it didn't seem to help at all.

"Skye, please try to calm down. I need you to breathe okay?" Ms. Hill sounded uncertain and kind of desperate.

She shook her head, not able to think or focus enough to control her breathing, and the fact that she wasn’t able to do anything made her feel even worse.

Ms. Hill started to rub her back soothingly, "Skye, tell me what I can do to help you."

Skye didn't know what would help, she didn’t even know what was wrong with her, but even though she was still sobbing and trying she catch her breath, she managed to say, "I… I want my mommy… and daddy. Are they here yet?"

"They'll be here any minute okay? But until then, can you try to breathe deeply for me?"

Skye tried to do as she was instructed but it wasn't helping and she felt her throat start to close up and she started panicking. Her vision started to get blurry and she was sucking in short gasps of air and for a split second, she wondered if this was what it felt like to die.

Finally, she heard quick footsteps getting closer and closer and suddenly May and Phil were there. She heard Ms. Hill tell them that she didn't know what happened but that she was having a panic attack. Skye didn't know if she'd ever had one of those before.

May and Phil knelt in front of her and she desperately looked up at them, hoping that they could help her get some control over her erratic breathing.

"Skye, listen to my voice okay? You're safe here and everything is alright. I need you to try to match your breathing to mine, okay? Take a deep breath in… and let it out."

She tried to match her breathing to May's but she was having trouble, "Mommy… I can't…breathe. I'm…scared."

"I know you are baby, keep trying to match my breathing okay?" Skye did as she was told and felt both May and Phil grab each of her hands and place them over their chests, right above their hearts. Their heartbeats were off but both of them were steady and strong and when she focused on the feel of their hearts beating against her palms, it helped her catch her breath.

When she was finally able to breathe again, the tightness in her throat went away and her vision went back to normal, and she looked up at May and started sobbing even harder.

May pulled her into a hug, "Oh my little baby, it's okay."

For the first time ever, Skye wasn't sure if she believed May and that made her cry even harder. Even if May said so, everything did not feel okay.

Everything felt broken.

She sagged against May, who hugged her tighter, and her hand was still on Phil’s chest so she tightened her hold on his shirt. Everything still felt wrong and off but with May and Phil there, it felt a little better.

Ms. Hill cleared her throat somewhat awkwardly, "You can take Skye home, I'll let the office know
what happened and make sure everything is taken care of."

"Thanks Maria."

"Of course. Feel better Skye." Ms. Hill's worried tone made her feel even worse since she had upset her teacher and Ms. Hill had been nothing but nice to her. She heard Ms. Hill walk back into the classroom as she turned her head and hid her face in May's neck.

Out of everything that was going on, Skye didn't know what made her focus on one thing in particular, but the fact that she had called May and Phil her mom and dad made her heart thump wildly in her chest.

She kept her face hidden and shamefully mumbled, "I'm sorry."

May started to gently run her fingers through her hair, "You have nothing to be sorry for. It's not your fault you had a panic attack, okay?"

It sure felt like it was her fault but that wasn't what she was talking about, "No, I'm sorry I called you my mom. I didn't mean to."

Skye didn’t know why she had called them her parents, it had just felt natural to say. May and Phil had told her that she could live with them forever and that they were a family but she didn't know if they would be okay with her calling them her mom and dad. It wasn't even about her doubting that they were her parents anymore, like it had been before, because she knew that they were her mommy and daddy. They made her feel safe and happy and protected with them, and she wanted them to be her mommy and daddy, she just wasn't sure if they wanted her to call them that.

May didn't even hesitant to say, "Don't ever be sorry for that okay? We want to be your mom and dad. We love you Skye."

Jerking back in disbelief in May’s arms, she looked up to see that the older woman’s face was open and kind and didn't look like she was lying. When she looked over to Phil, he nodded at her, clearly agreeing with May.

Even so, she didn't think she heard May right, "You...love me?"

"Yes, we love you very much."

Skye looked back to Phil and scrunched up her nose in confusion, "Are you sure?"

Phil’s lips twitched up into a small smile, "Yes Skye, we’re absolutely sure."

It was at that moment that Skye realized that the warm feeling that she got around her new family was love. She felt it whenever May helped her calm down or when she held her hand and when she waved at Skye every day when she picked her up from school. She felt it when Phil tucked her in at night and when she helped him make breakfast in the morning and when she hugged him. She felt it when Trip would make her a plate for dinner and when he told her that he was happy she was his sister. She felt it when Natasha interlocked their pinkies and when she smiled at her.

She loved them.

Her eyes started to well up with tears at this realization and she shakily said, "I love you too."

She launched herself back into May’s arms and hugged her tightly. She thought that this would scare her, realizing that she loved a new family and that they were hers, but it didn't, it only made her feel
After a long moment, she pulled away from May and threw her arms around Phil, who picked her up and hugged her tight. He started swaying and after a minute he said, "How about we go home, make some hot chocolate, and have a little talk, okay?"

Hot chocolate sounded good and she really just wanted to go home, so she nodded and rested her head on Phil's shoulder. He started to walk down the hallway and she cuddled closer to him. She still felt off and like everything was wrong but she had a family now, a mommy and daddy who said that they loved her, and she knew that she loved them.
When they got home, Skye followed May and Phil inside. She hadn't really felt like talking on the way home so she had just listened to Disney songs and shut her eyes, the exhaustion from the day hitting her pretty hard.

She let them lead her into the kitchen and Phil set her on the counter before he started making their hot chocolate. Dangling her feet over the cabinets, she watched him start to heat up some milk while May set three mugs onto the counter before wandering over to her and standing between her legs. May brushed her bangs out of her eyes and smiled at her, and Skye leaned into her chest. Everything felt better when she was snuggled close to May.

She didn't really know what had happened at school today, couldn't figure out why she had lost control over herself and had what Ms. Hill had called a 'panic attack'. Skye didn't really know what that meant but she knew that she didn't like it.

Something inside of her still was off kilter but she felt a little better after hugging May and Phil.

Thinking of them had her wondering if she start calling May and Phil her mom and dad all the time now. She didn't really know and even though she felt like they were her mom and dad, it still felt foreign for her to say it. She had never called anyone her mom and dad, except for Harvey's after their car accident, but they had been dead and for some reason, Skye didn't think that that counted.

Phil finished making the hot chocolate, put little marshmallows on top, and motioned for them to follow him. May picked her up, brought her into the dining room, and set her down on one of the chairs while Phil placed a mug of hot chocolate in front of her. They sat down across from her and for a split second, it felt like they were too far away.

She took a sip of her hot chocolate and stared at them, not quite sure what was going on.

May glanced at Phil before looking at her, "Skye, are you feeling a little better?"

She shrugged, feeling a little better but not much. She was still worried about Ward, nervous about the therapist, and anxious about meeting the twins but most of all, she didn't know what was going on inside of her. She just felt like a giant, jumbled mess.

"That's good sweetheart, could you maybe tell us what happened earlier at school?" Phil asked.

Skye didn't know what to say, she honestly had no idea what had happened at school today, she just mumbled, "I don't know."

May nodded, gave her an understanding look, and asked, "Okay, well, what were you feeling earlier?"

She wasn't really sure what she was feeling, it was like she was feeling everything and she wasn't sure what anything meant. Her eyes started to well up with tears, there were so many things going on
in her head right now, she didn't know how to explain it.

"I don't know! I don't know what I was feeling or what happened!" She yelled and her eyes immediately widened, realizing that she had just raised her voice and May and Phil. The tears in her eyes spilled over and she leaned back in her chair, "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to yell!"

May leaned forward and Skye huddled further into the back of her chair, which caused May to give her a pained look and lean back away, "It's okay Skye. What were you thinking about today?"

"I was thinking about…Ward, and the therapist, and about meeting Wanda and Pietro," she said quickly so that May wouldn't change her mind about not being mad.

Phil tilted his head and asked, "And all of those things…they were making you nervous?"

She nodded.

"Okay, so why do you think you're nervous about these things?" When Skye blinked uncertainly at him, he seemed to understand that she was overwhelmed, because he said, "Let's start with Ward. Why do you feel nervous about him?"

It was easier to think about this when Phil sectioned everything off like he did. "I don't know. What if he's mad at me for telling his secret? He'll hate me forever and won't want to be my friend anymore. What if he gets taken away from his family? He loves his little brother and doesn't want to leave him. What if I made everything worse instead of making it better?"

Skye was still crying and as she said everything that she had been thinking out loud, it made her cry even harder. She hid her face in her hands and sobbed.

Somehow, she was able to hear May say, "Oh baby, come here." When she looked up, May was holding her arms out to her and Skye didn’t hesitate to jump out of her seat and run over to her. May scooped her up, set her in her lap, and hugged her close.

"That's a lot to be thinking about. I called Social Services yesterday about Grant, okay sweetie? They called me back today and told me what happened. Grant's older brother had been hurting him and his little brother and his parents had been neglecting them, that means that his parents weren't taking care of him like they should be. They took him and his little brother away from them-"

Skye jerked her head up to look at May and cut her off, "They took them away from his family? He's going to hate me!"

May started to comfortingly run her fingers through her hair and continued talking, "No Skye, they placed Grant and his little brother into a foster home together. Actually, Phil and I know the family that they were placed with so we called them earlier and they have no intention of splitting up Grant and his little brother. Skye, you did the right thing by telling me what was happening. Grant and his younger brother get to stay together and they can't be hurt by the rest of their family anymore. You helped them."

Her tears slowed down as she listened to May and the heaviness in her chest eased a bit knowing that Grant and his little brother didn't get separated and that they were living together with a nice family that weren’t going to hurt them. "But…what if he's still mad at me? I broke a promise."

"I don't think he'll be mad at you, Skye. You helped him by breaking that promise. But, if you're still not sure, we could take you to see him," Phil said.

"Really?"
"If it'll make you feel better, then of course we will. We'll probably have to wait a week or two before we can go visit him so that they can all get settled in. Is that something you'd want to do?"

Skye thought about it. She still wanted to be Ward's friend but she didn't know if he still wanted to be hers. She needed to know what he was thinking. He could be mad at her, even though Phil and May said he probably wasn't, but she needed to know for sure. All of this uncertainty was driving her crazy, so she nodded at Phil.

"Okay sweetheart, we'll call them tomorrow and see when the best time would be for us to go and visit them."

May was still stroking her hair and she gently put a finger under Skye's chin so that she would look at her, "Does that make you feel a little better?"

The knot that had been in her tummy since yesterday was getting looser, "Uh huh."

May smiled at her, "Good, now why are you nervous about the therapist?"

Skye swallowed thickly. Natasha had made her feel better about seeing the therapist but there was still one main reason why she didn't want to talk to her, and she tried not to think about it because when she did it made her feel really bad.

Leaning forward, May kissed Skye's forehead, and when she blinked up at her, she realized that she was starting to get used to that. "You can tell usbaby. We want to help you."

They had made her feel better about Ward and she wondered if maybe they could make her feel better about this, so she looked away from May's kind face and stared intensely at the wall, "What if... what if she talks to me and can't help me 'cause I'm broken?"

Because that was what Skye had been afraid of her whole life. She was broken, a problem, and no family wanted her. They had all taken her back to the orphanage and even her real parents hadn't wanted her, they had just dumped her at the front door of St. Agnes'. The one family that had ever actually wanted her, the Harvey's, had ended up dead, and the only logical thing that she could come up with was that there had to be something wrong with her. She knew that there had to be something, and her biggest fear was that it would be confirmed: that the reason that everyone in her life didn't want her wasn't because of them, but because of her.

She heard May suck in a breath, "Skye, you aren't broken, why would you even think that?"

"Because! No one ever wanted me and when one family finally did, they died May. Four whole families found something wrong with me and sent me back. My real parents didn't even keep me long enough to figure out that I was broken, they probably knew when I was born!"

She'd never actually said that out loud before, she'd thought about it, but saying it was different. It made it feel a little more real.

Phil reached out, like he was going to hold her hand, but stopped and set it on the table instead before saying, "Skye, there is nothing wrong with you. You are not broken. If your past foster families couldn't see how amazing you are, then that's their fault, not yours. You've been through a lot of really horrible things, things that no one should ever have to go through, but that doesn't make you broken. Look at you sweetheart, you smile and laugh and have fun with your friends and we all love you. I don't see anything broken."

May squeezed her a little tighter, "You aren't broken Skye. You're strong, one of the strongest people I know."
Skye didn't really know how to react; May and Phil didn't think that she was broken, even though they had seen her cry a bunch of times and lose control over stupid stuff. They thought that she was strong, that there was nothing wrong with her, and she was having trouble believing them but she really wanted what they had said to be true. She wanted to not be broken.

"Now, why are you nervous about Wanda and Pietro?"

Skye just resigned herself to the fact that May and Phil had a knack for making her feel better about what was worrying her, "I'm scared that they won't like me."

Phil finally reached out and held her hand, "Skye, have we ever broken a promise to you before?"

Skye scrunched up her nose, not knowing what that had to do with Wanda and Pietro, and said, "No."

"Right, because we try to never break our promises, and I promise you that Wanda and Pietro will love you as much as we do."

Skye wanted to believe him, but how could he know that for sure?

"Were you nervous about meeting Natasha and Trip?" May asked.

“Definitely.”

"And you were nervous about nothing, weren't you? Natasha and Trip absolutely adore you and they love having you for a little sister. Wanda and Pietro will be the same way, they really want to meet you."

She had been worried for nothing when she first met Natasha and Trip. If there was anything that Skye was sure of, it was that this family was nothing like the other families that Skye had lived with. They were a good family and if May and Phil said that Wanda and Pietro would like her, she would try to believe them.

Skye let out a big breath, "Okay. I just… I really want them to like me."

Phil squeezed her hand gently and May hugged her close, "They will baby."

She sat there hugging May for a little while until the knot in her tummy was almost gone. She was still a little bit nervous about everything but it wasn't unbearable like it was before. She would talk to Ward and find out if he was mad at her or not, she would talk to the therapist and see how it went, and she would meet Wanda and Pietro tonight and hope that they would like her. She was still anxious but it wasn't consuming her. May and Phil had fixed her again, they seemed to always be doing that, and Skye found that she liked it.

She wondered if this was what all good mommies and daddies did. Did they help you when you were feeling bad? Did they hug you when you were crying and make you feel better? Skye wasn't sure, but she knew that May and Phil did those things and she thought that they were a good mom and dad.

Phil leaned forward and rubbed comforting circles on the back of her hand, "Do you feel better now Skye?"

"Yeah."

"That's good sweetheart. Can you look at me please?" Skye obliged and sat up in May's lap so that
she could look him in the eye, "If you ever feel worried like you did today, please come talk to May or I. Actually, if you ever feel nervous or bad or sad or anything, come talk to May or I. That's what we're here for. We don't ever want you to feel like that again okay? We want you to be happy."

Skye nodded at him.

"Okay good, is there anything else you want to talk about?"

Skye thought about it and shook her head. She wasn't really worried about anything else.

Phil smiled at her and squeezed her hand again before letting go, "Okay, if you think of anything, we're always here for you."

The familiar rush of warmth spread through her, and she now knew that that feeling was what love felt like. She loved May and Phil and that didn't scare her like she thought it would.

She tightened her hold on May's neck, leaned against her chest, and yawned loudly. Today had been exhausting and she hadn't slept well at all last night.

May tugged her closer, "Sleepy?"

Skye nodded.

"How about we go watch Tangled?"

"Yes!"

Skye ended up snuggled between May and Phil on the couch with her head resting on May's lap and her feet resting in Phil's. She tried to focus on the movie but her eyes kept growing heavier and heavier.

"May? Phil?"

She heard them both respond to her before she said, "I love you," and then she quickly fell asleep.

When Skye woke up, she was still lying on the couch except now, May and Phil weren't there with her and a blanket was thrown over her. Her face was pressed up against the back of the couch and she rubbed her eyes before rolling over, feeling much better now that she had been able to sleep for a little while.

May was sitting on the chair in the living room watching the news and she turned to Skye before noticing that she was awake and giving her a smile, "Hey sleepyhead, I was just about to wake you up. We're going to talk to Wanda and Pietro in a little bit. Are you hungry?"

Skye rubbed her eyes again and sat up before pushing the blanket off of her and nodding. She hadn't eaten anything at lunchtime and all she had today was the toast that Phil had made her.

"Let's go make a snack."

She followed May into the kitchen and allowed the older woman to place her on the counter, "What do you want to eat?"

"Um, an apple?"
May reached into the fruit bowl and handed her an apple. She grinned and bit into it while she watched May start loading the dishwasher with dirty dishes. "When are we gonna talk to Wanda and Pietro?"

"Well, it's 2:45 right now, so in about 15 minutes."

Skye nodded at her and went back to eating her apple. She was still nervous about meeting the twins but it wasn't all-consuming like it had been earlier. Glancing around, she noticed that someone was missing, "Where's Phil at?"

May glanced at her but kept putting the dishes into the dishwasher, "He went to pick up Nat and Trip from school a little while ago. He should be back any minute."

She nodded again and watched May move around the kitchen as she ate her apple.

She kept thinking about May and Phil being her mom and dad, wanting to be her mom and dad and for her to call them that, and she wanted to test it.

Setting her apple down on the counter, she straightened up and shakily said, "Mommy."

May had been putting clean dishes away but had instantly turned to her, which made Skye smile. She hadn't even hesitated, and it dawned on her that May had really meant it when she had said that she wanted Skye to think of them as her mom and dad.

When May saw her smile, she smiled back, and Skye stood up on the counter so that she was taller than May. She pointed at her, "You're my mommy and you love me?"

May walked over so that she was standing in front of her, "Yes, and you're my little baby." She reached forward and tickled Skye's tummy, who shrieked in surprise and started laughing. May laughed with her and Skye wriggled around and tried to halfheartedly squirm away until May stopped. As Skye caught her breath, May grabbed her from the counter and held her close, "I love you very, very, very much. I love you to the moon and back, more than all the stars in the sky."

Skye's eyes widened, no one had ever loved her that much, "Say it again."

May smiled and started swaying them gently, "I love you to the moon and back."

Skye cut her off and finished for her, "More than all the stars in the sky."

"Don't ever forget that okay?" May said, brushing a kiss against Skye's forehead.

Skye snuggled closer to her and sighed in content, "Okay mommy."

They stayed like that, with Skye tucked under May's chin and May swaying them back and forth in the kitchen, until the front door opened and Trip came running in with Natasha jogging behind him.

Trip spotted her and May and made his way into the kitchen, "Mom! It's almost 3:00 we need to get ready for the twins' call!"

Skye tried not to let it stress her out that she was going to be meeting her new brother and sister in a couple of minutes and instead she focused on hugging May tighter and inhaling the flowery scent of her shampoo.

She felt May's voice rumble through her when she responded, "My laptop's on my bed. Why don't you go grab it and set it up in the living room? We can all sit in there and talk to the twins."
Trip nodded before throwing his backpack on the ground and sprinting upstairs. Phil sighed, picked up Trip's backpack, and set it on the dining room table before she saw Trip run back downstairs and put the laptop on the coffee table in front of the couch. He motioned for them to come over and they all made their way to the living room to sit around him on the couch.

He pressed a couple of keys and sat back, "Okay, when they call, we'll be ready."

They sat there in silence for a couple of seconds, which made it harder for Skye to ignore the nervous feeling in her tummy, so she started playing with May's soft hair, causing the older woman to smile down at her.

She wasn't looking at the computer screen, so she didn't see the faces that were connected to the voices that suddenly invaded the room. "Hey guys!" and "You have no idea how happy we are to see you!" rang out from the speakers.

After taking a calming breath, she turned to the laptop to find two smiling faces on the screen. Wanda and Pietro looked almost exactly like they had in the picture that Skye had knocked over, except now they looked a little older. Wanda's hair was longer and had waves in it and instead of her black dress and red jacket, she was wearing a light blue hoodie. Pietro's hair was also a little longer and it somehow looked even lighter, which Skye did not think was possible, and he was smirking at them.

Skye felt herself start to shrink back into May but she stopped herself. She wanted to meet Wanda and Pietro, and May, Phil, and Natasha had all told her that they would love her, so she forced herself to straighten up.

"I miss you guys so much! Talking on the phone is great and all but it isn't the same as seeing you guys!" Natasha squealed excitedly as she subconsciously leaning closer to the screen.

Trip smiled brightly and leaned closer to the laptop too, "When are you guys coming back? Pietro, we still have a score to settle. You may think that you're better than me at football but you're wrong."

Pietro's smirk deepened, "I don't just think that I'm better than you, I know it."

"You're delusional," Trip scoffed, and Skye had a feeling that this was a common, good-natured, argument between the two of them.

"Then how do you explain why whenever we play against each other, I always win?"

"Because you're just lucky! Also, you cheat!"

Pietro seriously pointed a finger at the screen but Skye could clearly see the amusement in his eyes as he said, "I do not cheat! How do I cheat?"

Trip sputtered for a moment before saying, "I'm not exactly sure but I know that you do!"

"I don't cheat, you're just a sore loser."

Trip shrugged and rolled his eyes, "Whatever, I miss you guys."

Wanda rested her chin on her hand and said, "We miss you too. It's great over here but we wish you were with us."

"How're you guys doing? Do you get enough sleep? Are you being safe? Do you need money?" Phil asked, scooting forward on the couch to be closer to the twins. Everyone seemed to naturally
gravitate closer to Wanda and Pietro and even Skye found herself leaning forward in May’s lap.

Wanda shared a grin with Pietro and said, "We're fine Dad. We're being very safe and it's amazing over here. We probably don't sleep as much as we should, but what college student does?"

Pietro nodded along to what Wanda was saying and shrugged, "That's what coffee's for."

Skye was watching this exchange silently, fascinated with how Wanda and Pietro were interacting with everyone else. They were all talking like Wanda and Pietro weren't really far away right now and it felt so natural and comfortable that, even though Skye wasn’t an expert on families, she could tell how seamlessly the twins fit into the rest of their family.

Without warming, Wanda’s eyes suddenly focused on her and she reached out to smack Pietro on the shoulder as she exclaimed, "Oh! Hi Skye! It's so nice to see you!"

Skye blushed at the sudden attention and heard Pietro say, "We wish we could be meeting you in person but we're several countries away at the moment."

"But we can't wait to come back home and play with you! Actually, we sent you a present in the mail. It should be getting there tomorrow, we express shipped it."

Her eyes widened in surprise at the news that they had sent her a present and she wasn’t really sure what to say to them but the nervousness that she had been feeling for the last few days evaporated. Wanda and Pietro weren't mean, they wanted to see her in person and play with her, and she berated herself for being so unnecessarily concerned.

“We're very happy that you're in our family Skye,” Wanda said and Pietro nodded enthusiastically, obviously agreeing with his sister.

Skye took a moment to look around at everyone, her new family, before earnestly saying, "Me too."

She already had an amazing new mommy and daddy, plus Nattie and Trip. Now she gets to add a new brother and sister to her ever-growing family.
Skye leaned back against May's chest as she listened to everyone talk excitedly. She didn't know half of what they were saying but she loved listening to it. Wanda and Pietro had talked to her for a little bit, asking about her school, her friends, and her room, and her nerves had vanished as she had answered them enthusiastically.

She could confidently say that she liked Wanda and Pietro.

May was asking them about their school stuff. They were saying a lot of really big words but Skye noted how Wanda's eyes lit up and she got a little smile on her face when she talked about what she was learning. She saw how Pietro waved his hands around when he told them about their last research trip, and even though she was sad that they weren't here so that she could meet them in person, she was happy that they were happy.

It had been a while since they had started talking and she could tell that the conversation was starting to end and she was surprised at the sudden rush of sadness that swept through her at that because she wanted to know everything about Wanda and Pietro.

Natasha and Trip said their goodbyes, her sister actually teared up a little and that made Skye feel even sadder, before leaving the living room and going upstairs.

Wanda and Pietro both watched their retreating forms before Wanda asked, "How are they?"

Phil shrugged, "They're fine, they both just really miss you guys. We all do."

Pietro put an arm around his sister before saying, "We miss you too. I wish you guys could mail yourselves over to us. What do you say Skye, do you think you could fit into an envelope so that mom and dad could send you over here?"

Skye tried to imagine squeezing into an envelope and giggled at the image in her head, "I'm too big!"

Pietro snapped his fingers and sighed, "Aw shucks. I guess we'll have to wait to see you in person."

That made Skye wish that she could fit into an envelope. She hopped off of May's lap and moved closer to the computer screen, "I wish you guys were here so that I could see you for real."

Wanda made a sad sound, "Me too Skye."

Skye looked around the room before gathering enough courage to ask what had been on her mind, "Um… Do you… Are you…"

She chickened out before she could finish what she wanted to say.

After a moment of silence, Wanda tilted her head and urged her to go on, "What's on your mind Skye?"

Wanda's prompting gave her a little more courage but she still refused to look at the computer screen when she said, "Are you okay with May and Phil being my mom and dad too?"

This was super important to Skye. In some of the foster homes she had been in, the real children of
her foster parents hadn't liked it when Skye had been around. They hadn't wanted some foster kid to come in and steal their parents away from them. Skye knew that Wanda and Pietro had had parents before May and Phil but May had said that the twins were their kids even though it wasn't official and she didn't want them to think that she was trying to steal their mom and dad.

Her fingers were suddenly incredibly interesting and she stared intensely at them until she heard Pietro say, "What? Of course we are Skye."

Looking up, she saw Wanda nod enthusiastically, "We love it when our family gets bigger! Of course it's okay, why wouldn't it be?"

Skye breathed out a sigh of relief, she didn't know what she would have done if they had said that it wasn't okay, and shrugged at them, "Some kids didn't like me because they thought I was trying to steal their parents. I want you to like me."

"We think you're awesome Skye. We love that our mom and dad can be your mom and dad too," Pietro stated matter of factly.

Skye felt really warm when she heard that and she smiled at them, "Okay."

She backed up into Phil's legs and heard him say, "I love you guys but isn't it getting a little late over there? Go to sleep!"

Wanda looked at Pietro before laughing, "Oh dad, it's funny how you think that we don't have a ton of work to do. We'll be up for another few hours."

May pointed a finger at them, "You two need to start getting to sleep earlier, do you hear me? I will not have two zombies for children."

Skye thought of Wanda and Pietro shuffling around like zombies and giggled.

Wanda nodded seriously and said, "Yes ma'am," while Pietro raised two fingers to his forehead in a mock salute.

Skye saw that May was trying to be serious but then she saw her lips twitch into a smile, "I love you guys. Call us when you can, okay?"

Pietro nodded, "Okay mom. We love you too. Bye dad."

May blew a kiss at them while Phil smiled and said goodbye and Skye thought that it was over but then the twins turned to her and smiled real big. Wanda leaned in so that her pretty face took up the whole computer screen, "Bye Skye. We hope you like the present we got you. We'll talk to you later."

Pietro pushed his sister out of the way and Wanda glared at him, "I know you'll love our present because I picked it out."

Wanda scoffed and punched Pietro on the arm, "Don't listen to him Skye, we both picked it out."

Pietro rolled his eyes, "Yeah, she's right. But you're still going to love it. Bye Skye!"

He playfully winked at her and Wanda blew her a kiss sp she waved at them, said goodbye, and then their faces disappeared.

Skye looked back towards May and Phil and saw that May looked like she was trying to hold back
tears.

Confused about her sudden sadness, Skye rushed forward, climbed onto the couch, and sat on May's lap so that she was facing her and could put a hand on each side of May's face, "Don't be sad Mommy."

May breathed out a soft laugh, "I'm not sad Skye, I just miss my babies."

Skye took her hands off of May's cheeks and started stroking her hair like May did to her when she was upset. She tried to make her voice sound soothing like May's was when she was comforting her, "It's okay."

She heard Phil chuckle but kept her focus on May and was happy to find that she didn't look like she was going to cry anymore.

May leaned forward and pressed a kiss to her forehead, "Thank you baby. You have a little bit of time until your therapist gets here. Why don't you go upstairs and play?"

"I don't know…" Skye didn't want to leave May in case she was still sad and was just pretending to be better.

May laughed, "I appreciate your concern baby, but I'm fine. I promise." May leaned forward again and pressed her forehead to Skye's. Their faces were really close together and she could see straight into her eyes, "Thank you for taking care of me."

Skye smiled. It always seemed like May and Phil were making her feel better and she had finally gotten to help May feel better, "You're welcome Mommy."

Now satisfied that everyone was alright, Skye scooted off her mom's legs and ran up to her room. She grabbed Alice from her bed and looked around her room for a moment before deciding that she wanted to play with her dollhouse. She placed Alice in the kitchen of the dollhouse and pretended that she was making breakfast for her family.

She was in the middle of pretending her doll was making scrambled eggs when she heard her door open and looked over to see Natasha poke her head in, "Hi Nattie! Do you want to play with me?"

She held out the blonde doll that she had named Perrie for Natasha to take.

Her sister gave her an awkward smile, took Perrie, and sat down next to her by the dollhouse. She made Perrie wave to Alice before saying, "Skye, can I talk to you?"

"Of course Nattie," Skye said, glancing at her sister while still playing with her doll.

Natasha laughed a little and made Perrie do some ballerina twirls, "Okay, well…I'm pretty nervous about my recital tomorrow."

Skye looked over to her to see if she was joking but found that she wasn't. She didn't know why Natasha was nervous, she was the best dancer Skye had ever seen.

Setting Alice down to give Nattie her full attention, she scooted closer to her big sister and earnestly said, "Why? You're the best dancer ever!"

Natasha grinned at her and continued to make Perrie do some ballerina twirls, "Thanks, but I'm afraid I'm going to mess up."
Skye remembered what Phil told her when he was helping her with her homework, "It's okay if you mess up, as long as you keep trying."

"You sound like dad."

Skye smiled really big, "Thanks!" She remembered what May had told her when she started her new school, "It's okay to be scared Nattie."

Natasha set Perrie down and turned so that she was facing her, "Yeah?"

Skye nodded confidently, "Yeah."

Her sister let out a big breath, "Good, because I am… What if I fall down or forget something and look like a total idiot?"

There was no way that Natasha would ever look like an idiot, she was awesome at everything, so she scrunched up her nose and tilted her head, "You won't Nattie, you're the best at everything."

"Oh really? Everything?" Natasha chuckled and raised an eyebrow.

It was clear that her sister didn’t believe her and Skye couldn’t let that stand, and she scooted closer to Nattie and grabbed her pinky, "Yes. You're the best dancer and the best drawer and the best at braiding hair. You're the best person to talk to and the best big sister in the whole wide world!"

Her eyes widened in surprise when Natasha suddenly leaned forward and hugged her tightly but she managed to hug her back and heard Natasha whisper to her, "Thanks Skye, I needed that."

Leaning back, Skye smiled, happy to have been able to help her big sister.

They went back to playing with the dolls until she heard the doorbell ring, causing her to anxiously look up at Natasha. Knowing that her therapist was here caused her previous nervousness flood back into her, making her palms slightly sweaty and her heart to beat wildly against her ribcage.

Natasha stood up and offered Skye her pinky, "It's okay, you don't have to be nervous about talking to her. She's really nice."

It took a conscious effort to try and push the nervousness away so that she could try to be brave like May said she was. She stood up with Alice in her hand, interlocked her pinky with Natasha's, and took a deep breath before following her sister out of the room and down the stairs.

At the bottom of the staircase, she found May and Phil talking to a tall lady with dark hair. They all turned to look at them and Skye hid behind Natasha's legs, a little upset at herself for not being very brave.

"Natasha! It's so wonderful to see you, how have you been?" The lady asked in a soft, calm voice, pronouncing each syllable carefully and purposefully.

Natasha gave her pinky a reassuring squeeze before saying, "I've been great."

"That's very nice to hear. Is that Skye standing next to you?" The woman sounded curious and genuine, not annoyed that Skye was hiding or upset about her rude behavior.

After a quick pep talk, Skye managed to poke her head around Natasha's legs and look at the woman. Now that she was closer, she could see that the lady had three long scars on the right side of her face and one scar on the left side of her face that ran from the middle of her forehead to the
middle of her cheek. Skye wondered how she got them and if they hurt.

The lady had dark brown eyes, her pretty hair was pulled back and away from her face, and she was smiling at her. She looked nice.

Natasha squeezed her pinky again and tugged on her a little bit until she took a step out from behind her. Her sister gave her a reassuring look and motioned to her, "Yes, this is my little sister, Skye."

The lady leaned down a little so that she didn't look so tall and could look Skye in the eye, "It's very nice to meet you Skye. My name's Jiaying but you can just call me Jay."

Carefully, she studied her and found that she looked nice and even though Natasha had said that she didn't have to be nervous, she couldn't help it. Even then, she didn't want to be rude, so she shyly waved at Jay.

May stepped forward and finally said, "Jay's your therapist Skye. Do you want to talk to her in your room?"

Skye bit the inside of her cheek and nodded.

"This first session is mostly just an introductory session and it won't take too long, probably only about thirty minutes. Is that okay?" Jay asked.

May nodded, "That's perfectly fine." She turned to Skye, gave her a grin, and reached out to brush her bangs away from her eyes, "We'll be down here if you need us, okay baby?"

It was difficult to swallow around the lump in her throat, so instead of saying anything, she just nodded. She didn't know if she wanted to be alone with Jay even though she looked nice. Natasha made a move to untangle their pinkies but Skye gripped hers tighter, refusing to let go, "Um…Is it okay if Nattie comes too?"

Jay glanced at their interconnected pinkies before looking over to Natasha, who nodded, and saying, "That's fine by me. Lead the way Skye."

Both May and Phil were giving her encouraging smiles so she took a deep breath, told herself to be brave, and led Natasha and Jay to her room.

She chewed on her bottom lip as Jay casually looked around her room and she held her breath until the older woman said, "I really like your room. Is that a dollhouse? I used to have one like that when I was a kid."

Skye nodded and clutched Alice to her chest.

"Do you want to play?" Jay asked, tilting her head and motioning to Alice.

Skye didn't know if she was kidding or not, she didn’t really know what therapists were supposed to do, but she didn't think they were supposed to play with dolls.

Seeing the confused look on her face made Jay laugh, "I want to play, do you mind?"

Skye was still confused but she shook her head and watched as Jay sat down in front of her dollhouse and reached for Perrie.

That seemed to shake her from her silence, because she ran over and stopped her before she could grab the doll, "Wait! That's Nattie's doll! You can play with…" She reached for a brown-haired doll
wearing jeans and a red t-shirt, "You can play with Jamie." She handed Jay the doll and the woman gently took it from her and smiled, "Thank you Skye."

When her sister sat down next to Jay and went back to playing with her doll, Skye hesitantly sat down and went back to having Alice prepare scrambled eggs for her family.

For a minute or two, they all sat in silence and played with their respective dolls until she heard Jay speak up, "So Skye, do you know why I'm here to talk to you?"

Skye shook her head, she just knew that therapists were supposed to help you feel better.

Jay made Jamie walk over to Alice and wave to her, "Well, your mom and dad told me that you've been through quite a lot and I'm here to help you work through some things that might still be troubling you."

That sounded okay to Skye.

"I just want you to know that I'm here to help you. You can say whatever you want to me. You can yell or scream or do anything and I won't get mad or yell at you. You're safe around me, okay?"

Skye felt some of her nervousness start to melt away so she turned Alice around so that she was facing Jamie and offered the doll some of her scrambled eggs. "I can do anything? Even yell?" Skye wasn't sure if she fully believed her, yelling was supposed to be bad.

"If it'll make you feel better, then yes. Do you want to yell right now?" Jay asked.

Skye shook her head, she didn't like yelling but it felt nice to know that she had the option to do so. Natasha made Perrie join Jamie and Alice in the kitchen and they all sat down at the table and ate their breakfast.

They were quiet for a little while before Jay spoke up again, "So, the first time we meet is just so that we can get to know each other a little. Tell me a little about yourself."

Skye shrugged, not really knowing what to say.

Her silence didn't seem to bother Jay, "Well, I became a therapist because I like to help people, I have a dog named Pluto, and I'm really bad at riding bikes. I always fall off them."

"Is that how you got your scars?" Skye blurted.

Her eyes widened when her brain finally caught up with her mouth, "I'm sorry!"

Jay waved a hand, her calm smile never faltering, "No it's okay. I got these scars because someone hurt me."

Sympathy rushed through her, she knew what it was like to have scars because of someone else, and she didn't want Jay to feel sad so she set down Alice and pulled her shirt up a little to show Jay the two scars on her tummy, "It's okay, someone hurt me too."

She heard Natasha suck in a breath and quickly pulled her shirt back down before picking Alice back up again. Her sister leaned into her side for a moment and squeezed her pinky, which made her feel grateful that she was here with her.

"It's never okay when someone hurts you on purpose but thank you for trying to make me feel better Skye. You're very kind." Jay said, kind smile still in place.
Skye grinned a little at the praise and she didn't know if all therapists were like this, but she liked Jay.

"That's a beautiful doll you have there. What's her name?"

Skye pulled Alice close to her chest and ran her fingers through the doll's hair, "This is Alice. Nattie gave her to me and I love her. She lives here in the dollhouse with her family but she sleeps with me in my bed at night."

"She's very lucky to have you as her friend. Do you like playing with dolls?"

"Yeah."

"What else do you like?"

Natasha pointed to the ceiling, "Skye likes the stars and the moon, don't you маленькая звезда? That's why we put those stars on her ceiling."

Jay looked up and made an appreciative sound, "Those are really cool Skye. Why do you like the stars and moon so much?"

Skye thought it over for a second. She had always loved the night sky, it was part of the reason she had chosen Skye as her name. "I don't know, the moon is always there, no matter what. It's always in the sky at night time and it never leaves. And the stars are just pretty. Don't you think they're pretty?"

"I think they're beautiful."

Skye was relieved that Jay didn't think it was weird for her to like the stars and the moon. After that, it was a little easier to talk to Jay. They kept playing with the dolls and talked about random things, like her friends and school. It wasn't how she thought therapy was supposed to be but then she remembered that Jay had said that this session was just about getting used to each other.

It didn't take long to decide that she liked Jay and that maybe it would be okay to have her as a therapist.

After glancing at her watch, Jay made an apologetic sound, "I've got to head out guys."

Skye groaned, they were in the middle of doing their dolls' hair and were having fun and she didn't want Jay to go yet.

Jay grinned and stood up while Natasha and Skye followed after her, "It was lovely to meet you Skye. Do you think it would be alright if I came over again and we talked some more?"

Therapy wasn't so bad, Natasha had been there with her and Jay was fun to talk to, so she nodded at her.

"Great! I'll set an appointment up with your mom and dad. It was great seeing you again Natasha and I look forward to our next session Skye."

Natasha wrapped her arm around Skye's shoulders and said, "You too Jay. See you later."

Skye waved and the two girls watched Jay walk out of the room and down the hall before Natasha glanced down at her and said, "What'd you think? That wasn't so bad, was it?"

Skye handed her Perrie and sat back down, "No, it wasn't so bad."
Please note that Jiaying is NOT Skye's mom in this story !!!!! Sorry if it's confusing
When Skye woke up the next morning, she groaned, clutched Alice to her chest, and tried to go back to sleep. Then she remembered that Wanda and Pietro's present was supposed to come in today and her eyes snapped open. She threw her blankets off of her, put on some clothes, and ran downstairs, eager to see if her present was here yet. She could see Phil in the kitchen, like usual, and sprinted towards him. He looked up when he heard her, smiled, and held out his arms for her to run into, which she did, and he spun her around once before balancing her on his hip.

She wrapped one arm around his neck and grinned, "Is my present here yet?"

Phil laughed a little and went back to making pancakes with Skye in one arm, "Not yet sweetheart. It should be here when you get back from school."

Skye deflated a little. She really wanted to know what Wanda and Pietro had gotten her, and now she was wondering if she should get them a present too. Even if she knew what they liked, which she didn’t, she didn’t really have any money.

"Oh. Okay."

"Don't worry, it'll be here before you know it." Phil flipped the pancakes over and started swaying gently, a familiar soothing action that usually relaxed her in the morning but she was too excited today for it to have any real affect on her.

Skye didn't think she could wait any longer, she wanted her present now, but she couldn't make it get here faster so she would just have to wait.

Phil handed her a bag of chocolate chips, "Let's put some of these in these next batch, okay? Natasha's recital is today and we always make chocolate chip pancakes for good luck."

"Can I draw something special in Natasha's pancake?"

"Sure, just make sure you do it before the batter starts to heat up too much."

Skye watched as Phil scooped the pancakes off of the griddle before placing them on the plate that was sitting on the counter. He looked over to her and asked, "Ready?"

She nodded and he started pouring the batter into circles on the griddle. He finished and leaned forward so that Skye could place some chocolate chips into the bubbling pancakes. Phil put some in all of the pancakes except for the one Skye was working on as she focused on arranging the chips into a heart.

As she put the last of the chocolate chips on the pancake, she grinned and admired her work. The heart was a little lopsided but it still looked okay, and when she looked over to Phil, he was smiling at her, so she shrugged and said, "It's for extra good luck."
Phil squeezed her gently and said, "She'll love it."

As she helped him flip the pancakes, May wandered into the kitchen and kissed them both on the cheeks before grabbing a glass of orange juice. Skye stayed with Phil and watched as he unplugged the griddle and put a normal pancake and the one with a heart on it onto a plate. He set Skye down, handed her the plate, and said, "Why don't you go wake Nat up and give this to her?"

Making sure to have a good grip on the plate, she nodded determinedly, "Okay."

It took her longer to get to her sister’s room than normal because she was being extra careful but she finally made it and when she looked in the room, she saw that Natasha was already awake, dressed, and twirling around her room.

She pushed her way inside and hovered by the door, not wanting to interrupt, but Natasha spotted her and stopped twirling.

"What're you doing Nattie? You're usually still sleeping."

Natasha grinned sheepishly, "I couldn't sleep that well so I thought I'd get up and practice for today."

That made sense so Skye shrugged and offered her the plate of pancakes, "I made these for you. For good luck."

"You made this?" Nattie asked, examining the pancake with a soft look on her face.

She nodded, hoping her sister liked it.

"Thank you Skye. This is awesome." Natasha leaned forward and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, which made her smile and feel warm and happy.

"Let's go downstairs and eat. Could you grab my backpack for me?" Natasha took a quick bite from her pancake and motioned towards her desk, where Skye saw her black backpack hanging from her chair. She ran over to it and grabbed it, grunting at how deceptively heavy it was.

"Sorry Skye, I forgot that it's heavier than usual. I'm going straight to the dance studio after school so I have to carry more than I usually do. Here," She offered Skye the plate she gratefully traded the backpack for it.

"So I won't see you until tonight?"

"Not 'til after the recital's over," Natasha shrugged at her and Skye thought that she was still nervous about her recital because she was walking stiffer than usual.

She followed Natasha downstairs and saw that Trip, May, and Phil were already sitting at the table eating pancakes and that someone had already made a plate for her. They both sat down and dug into their breakfast.

"You excited for today?" May asked Nattie.

Her sister played with her fork and stared intensely at her pancakes when she answered, "Yeah, but I'm a little nervous."

"You'll be fine sweetie. You're an amazing, beautiful, and talented dancer."

Natasha grinned and shoved some of her pancake into her mouth "Thanks mom."
Seeing that Nattie obviously wanted some quiet time to herself, May turned to her, "I'm going to be taking Natasha to her dance studio after school so Phil will be picking you up today, okay?"

Skye nodded, still a little upset that she wouldn't be able to see Natasha until after her recital was over. She would have to wish her good luck this morning and what if she forgot by the time her recital started?

Trip glanced at his phone, jumped out of his seat, and chugged the rest of his orange juice, "We gotta go you guys. My club meeting starts in ten minutes."

"Let's go," May said, hopping up and motioning for Natasha to quickly finish her breakfast.

Skye looked around in confusion. Hunter usually drove Natasha and Trip to school but luckily, Phil must've seen her confusion, because he quickly explained, "Trip has to get to school earlier than usual so May's going to take them today. I'll drive you to school sweetheart."

The change in their normal routine threw her off a little but she nodded anyway and stood up so that she could say goodbye to everyone. She hugged Trip and he smiled and ruffled her hair as he went to grab his backpack. Then she put her arms around May's waist and squeezed her tight before saying goodbye before turning to Natasha and tugging on her arm so that she would lean down a little. She put her arms around the older girl's neck and hugged her, then she spoke softly so that no one else would hear, "Good luck Nattie, I love you."

Natasha jerked back in surprise, stared at her for a moment, and then smiled really big and leaning back down to whisper, "I love you too Skye," before squeezing her hand and following May and Trip out the door.

As she watched them go, she thought about how she truly did love Natasha. She didn't know how amazing it could be to actually have a sister until Natasha had showed her what it was like. Having a sister was like having a best friend that you lived with, and Skye loved that she could talk to Nattie about anything and she wouldn't make fun of her for it.

She was drawn out of her thoughts when Phil said, "It's just you and me kiddo. Why don't you go brush your teeth and we'll head out of here?"

Before she ran upstairs, she shoved the rest of her pancake into her mouth, getting stick syrup all over her face and hands. Phil's sigh made her giggle as she ran off to brush her teeth and grab some hair ties and clips to take back with her downstairs.

He was still sitting at the table so she walked over, stood in front of him, and held out the hair ties, "Will you braid my hair?"

After seriously thinking about it for a second, she shrugged, "You can do something else."

The face that Phil made was really funny, he almost looked afraid, and she laughed and shook the hair ties in front of his face until he took them from her.

"Uh, sure Skye," He said uncertainly so she turned around and felt Phil start to gently tug on her hair.

"Does it have to be braids or can I do something else?"

After a couple of minutes, she heard Phil groan, "You can do something else."

He let out a big breath of relief, "Thank god."
When Phil was done, she ran to look at her reflection in the mirror in the hallway. Phil trailed after her and she looked back to him to see that he looked anxious. She looked at herself in the mirror and smiled, a little shocked to find that her hair looked fine. He had put pigtails in her hair and had tied a white bow on each of them, and even though Phil was good at doing hair, she secretly thought that her sister was better.

"Are they okay?" He nervously asked.

Skye smiled at him, "Yeah, they're okay. Maybe Nattie could teach you how to braid though."

"I'll ask her later, now let's go sweetie."

He offered her his hand and she took it before following him out of the house and into the car.

Skye had really tried to focus in school but all she could think about was her present and Natasha's dance recital. She really wanted to know what Wanda and Pietro had gotten her and she was super excited to watch Nattie dance. Ms. Hill had had to remind her to focus on her math worksheet during work time, and even though she hadn't yelled at her, Skye had blushed and felt embarrassed.

But now it was the end of the day and they were being led outside so that they could go home with their parents. Ms. Hill held the door open for them and as Skye passed her, she paused, looked down at her shoes, and quietly said, "I'm sorry I was bad today."

"You weren't bad Skye, everyone has trouble focusing sometimes. It's okay."

Ms. Hill didn't seem mad at her, she was smiling, and Skye instantly felt better. She smiled up at her teacher and waved goodbye before walking out into the sunshine and looking around for Phil. She was standing by one of the trees and she started to make her way over to him.

She was almost to Phil, who was waving at her, but when she started to wave back, someone suddenly pushed into her and she fell to the ground. Looking up in surprise, she saw a kid a little bit older than her was standing by her looking guilty, "I'm sorry! I wasn't looking where I was going, I didn't mean to knock you down."

He looked like he meant what he was saying so Skye smiled at him and said, "It's okay."

The kid smiled back before running off, leaving her sprawled on the ground. Fortunately, nothing hurt, she just had some dirt on her elbows, and she soon heard Phil calling her name. Glancing over, she spotted him jogging towards her, so she stood up and brushed the dirt off of her.

Phil made it to her and crouched down, immediately looking her over for injuries, and said, "Are you alright? Who was that kid?"

"I'm okay Daddy, it was just an accident."

He stopped fussing over her and stared, and she glanced worriedly at him, wondering if someone had accidentally knocked into him too.

Phil kept staring at her until her brain caught up with her and she realized what she had said. It had just happened, it had been too easy to casually call him her dad, and she froze when she realized that she had said the words out loud. She had only thought it before and from the way he
was silently staring at her, she wondered if he maybe didn’t want to be called that. She thought that since May liked it when she called her mom that Phil would like it when she called him her dad, but now she wasn’t so sure.

Panic built up in her chest and Phil was still staring at her in silence so she fidgeted from foot to foot and looked at the ground, "Uh… I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that. You don't have to be my dad if you don't want to."

Tears started to pool in her eyes and she stared determinedly at the ground so she wouldn’t cry because she wanted Phil to be her dad.

Suddenly she was in Phil's arms and he was hugging her tightly and she was a little confused and concerned because maybe he had been knocked over and had hurt his head, "Um, are you okay?"

She leaned back and looked up and into Phil's face. He was smiling real big, Skye could see all of his teeth, and his eyes looked watery, and she was starting to get worried for real.

"I'm sorry Skye, I was just surprised that's all. I would love to be your dad. I would absolutely love it."

Relief flooded through her and she hugged Phil back, not knowing what she would have done if Phil had said he hadn't wanted to be her dad. She didn't even want to think about it.

He picked her up and made his way back to the car, "Let's go see if your present is waiting for you at home."

Skye squealed and had a hard time sitting still so that Phil could buckle her into her booster seat.

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Skye sprinted up the walkway, up the front porch, and bounced up and down by the door as she waited for Phil to unlock it. She glanced over and saw a small box sitting on the ground on the right side of the doorway and excitedly pointed at it, "Is that it? Is that my present?"

Phil stooped down and picked up the box, read the information on the front of it, and grinned, "This is for you Skye."

He handed it to her and Skye clutched it close to her chest, waited for Phil to unlock the door, and she bolted inside. She threw her backpack on the ground and ran to the table so that she could gently set the box on the table before sitting down and trying to open it.

The box wouldn't open.

She groaned in frustration and then Phil was there, some scissors in hand, and he gently moved her hands out of the way before cutting open the box. When he was done, he sat down next to her and excitedly reached into the box.

First, she pulled out a piece of paper, it was thick and had writing on it, and then she grabbed a smaller box. She knew that when you got a gift, you were supposed to read the card first, so she set the smaller box on the table and read the card aloud, "Dear Skye, We saw this in a little shop and cou...couldn't help but think of you. Natasha told us that you wo...woul...would like it. Pl...please think of us when you wear it. Love, Wanda and Pietro."

After rereading the card, she stared at the writing. There were two different kinds of handwriting and...
each line was written in a different one. When Wanda signed her name, Skye saw that she was the one who had the small, loopy handwriting and Pietro was the one with precise, blocky handwriting. She smiled at the card and traced the words with her finger.

Gingerly, she set the card onto the table before picking up the small box. It was a deep blue color and, after carefully taking the lid off, she gasped when she saw what was inside.

Sitting on white, fluffy paper was the most beautiful necklace that Skye had ever seen. It had a golden bronze colored chain and at the end of the chain was a light blue bead. Below that bead hung a crescent moon. It was intricately designed and had pretty swirls decorating the inside of it, and dangling from the top tip of the moon was a star.

Skye immediately fell in love with it.

She reached for it but then jerked her hand back, afraid that by touching it she might ruin it somehow. It was the most beautiful thing that she had ever been given and she didn't want to mess it up.

Phil leaned over and study it, "Oh Skye, that's so pretty. It'll look great on you."

Skye nodded and continued to admire the necklace even though she could feel him looking at her. He cleared his throat and asked, "Do you want me to put it on you?"

Skye really, really, wanted to wear it but she didn't want to ruin it. She glanced at Phil and worriedly nibbled on her bottom lip, "What if I break it?"

"If you break it, which I don't think you will, we can go and get it fixed," He said.

His reassurances made her feel better, so she handed Phil the box and he took the necklace out and motioned for her to turn around. She did as she was told and felt him place the necklace around her neck and attach the clasps together before gently pulling her hair out from under the chain. Turning back around, she looked down and saw the moon and star pendant hanging delicately from her neck.

She loved it, loved how beautiful it looked and the thought behind it. Looking up, she saw Phil smiling at her and she motioned to her neck, "How does it look Daddy?"

"It looks beautiful sweetheart."

That made her smile really big. She had to thank Wanda and Pietro for her present. She didn't know when they would call next but she had to make sure that she was there so that she could talk to them and thank them.

Putting her hand over her necklace, she rubbed the pendent between her fingers before gripping it gently. The metal was cool in her hands and it made her feel happy.

"Why don't we get your homework done so that you can play until Natasha's recital?"

Skye hated homework but she didn't even care, she was completely unable to stop smiling, so she went and got her backpack from the ground in the living room and sat back down next to Phil, her hand firmly grasped around her necklace the whole time.

When May finally got home after dropping Natasha off at her dance studio and stopping by the
grocery store to pick up a few things, she noted that they had about an hour before they had to be at the auditorium for the recital. She had had to drop Natasha off at the studio so that she could run through her dances with her group before the recital but the actual performance was going to be held at Renley’s Performing Arts Auditorium, which was where all the local plays and other artsy things were held at, so Natasha would ride over there with her dance instructors.

She was holding a couple of grocery bags so she handed Trip the keys so that he open the front door for her. As she walked in and set the bags down on the kitchen counter, she heard little feet running around upstairs and smiled as she heard Skye run down the stairs. She turned and grinned at the little girl sprinting towards her, happy at how carefree she looked with a grass stain on her jeans, hair flowing behind her, and a big smile on her face.

"Mommy! Look at what Wanda and Pietro got me! Look!"

Her heart still skipped a beat when she heard Skye call her 'mommy'. It was an amazing feeling to have Skye trust her enough to call her her mom and May loved that little girl just like she loved the rest of her kids. It had been the same way with all of her children but she never got used to the strong rush of emotions her children managed to elicit.

The little girl was still running at her and when she got close enough, she jumped so that May could catch her in midair and lift her up. Skye wrapped her legs around her waist and May held her so that they were face to face, "What's up buttercup?"

Skye was smiling brightly and it made her heart speed up a bit at seeing her so happy and unrestrained. She remembered when the slightest sound would cause Skye to start crying and it was kind of astounding how much progress she had made in the last few weeks.

She winced a bit when Skye grabbed onto the necklace hanging around her neck and accidentally tugged on her hair in the process. Skye excitedly shoved the piece of jewelry in front of her face and she had to lean back a bit to study it.

It was the perfect gift for Skye, the twins must have had Natasha or Trip help them with it, otherwise they wouldn't have known how much Skye seemed to like the stars and moon.

"Oh baby, that is just beautiful!"

Skye’s smile was still firmly in place but she blushed a little and moved the necklace back to her chest while keeping her hand grasped around it, "Thanks."

After pressing a quick kiss to Skye’s forehead, she set her on the counter, started putting away the groceries, and asked her, "Are you excited about Natasha's recital?"

She was setting eggs in the refrigerator but heard Skye say, "Yeah! I think Nattie was nervous though."

She knew that Natasha was nervous. Her daughter got extremely nervous doing anything in front of a crowd, whether it’s presenting a project or dancing, and she would always psyche herself out beforehand and then do an amazing job anyways. It always happened, and she constantly tried to help Natasha calm her nerves, but nothing really seemed to help.

"Nat's always a little nervous when she has to perform in front of a crowd but she'll be fine, baby."

She put the last of the groceries away and looked over at Skye, who was worrying her bottom lip between her teeth, and her heart melted at the little girl’s level of concern over Natasha’s nerves.
May walked over to Skye and stood between her legs, "Nat will be fine. She's always nervous before her recitals and she does an amazing job anyways."

Finally, Skye stopped nibbling on her bottom lip and nodded.

"How about you go get changed for the recital? We'll have to leave soon." She said as she brushed the bangs out of eyes.

Skye scrunched her nose up and looked down at her outfit, "Why do I have to change?"

"Because we're supposed to look nice at dance recitals. Come on, I'll help you choose an outfit."

Skye nodded so she set her down on the ground and followed her up to her room.

They both stared into the closet and Skye glanced at her before pointing out two dresses. May grabbed them and draped them onto the bed so they could decide between the two. One had spaghetti straps and was dark gray with multi-colored pastel polka dots all over it, and the other one had long sleeves and was light pink with a white peter pan color. May tilted her head, considered the dresses, and pursed her lips to keep from smiling when she saw Skye look at her and mimicked her by tilting her head too. held up the two dresses and watched Skye tilt her head to the side and consider them both.

After a minute or two, Skye seriously pointed to the pink dress and she handed it to her before putting the other dress back.

"Why don't you put this on and I have the perfect shoes for you to wear. I had to go to the mall on my lunch break and saw them and thought of you. I'll go grab them."

Skye nodded to her and May went back downstairs and got the bag of shoes from the back of her car where she had forgotten them. Her mall trip had been successful and she had bought Skye a couple pairs of new shoes since she realized that the little girl only had one pair of sneakers to wear.

When she walked back into the room, Skye's arms were stuck in her dress and she couldn't help but chuckle. Skye must’ve heard her because she let out a pitiful whine, tried to tug her arms through the dress with no success, and said, “Mommy, help.”

She rushed over and helped her pull her dress down. Skye's pigtails were messed up because of the whole ordeal but other than that she seemed fine and was smiling sheepishly.

"I actually got you a couple of new shoes." She saw Skye start to shake her head but kept didn’t give her a chance to protest, "Because I wanted to."

Skye stopped shaking her head and May smiled, pulled out a shoe box, and handed it to Skye, "I think that you'll like these the best."

Skye took the box from her and squealed when she pulled the small black combat boots out of the shoebox. May had seen them in the store and hadn’t been able to resist buying them, knowing that Skye would look adorable in them and that the little girl would appreciate how tough they would make her look.

She had to help Skye lace up the shoes, but once they were on, she stood up and admired her feet. She walked around a little bit and jumped up and down before running back over to her and wrapping her arms around her waist, "I love them!"

"I thought that you would,” May said, wrapping an arm around her and hugging her close.
Skye pressed her face into her belly and said, "Thank you Mommy."

"You're welcome baby. How about we fix your hair and then you can help me get ready?"

Skye nodded and stepped back so that May could redo her pigtails and tie neater bows into her hair. She couldn't stop the "aww" that escaped her mouth when she saw Skye standing in front of her in her pink dress, pigtails, and combat boots.

She looked absolutely adorable.

Skye tugged on her hand and started to lead her into the hallway, "Your turn!"

May already had nice slacks on, she just needed to change into a nicer shirt, so she went into her closet and chose an off-white blouse and a deep red one and brought them out for Skye to choose. She enjoyed watching Skye seriously consider each option, as if this decision was life or death, and liked that Skye seemed to be having fun. The little girl ended up choosing the off-white blouse and May nodded and went back into the closet to put the other shirt away and tug on the new blouse.

She walked back into the room to find Phil gushing over Skye, "Oh sweetheart you look adorable!"

Skye stood up on the bed and lifted a foot out, "Look at my new shoes Daddy! Don't they look really cool?"

Phil pretended to intensely inspect Skye's boots before saying, "They are very cool Skye. I think that I'll definitely have to take a picture of you, Nat, and Trip later tonight."

Skye grinned, visibly tickled that her dad liked her shoes, before jumping off of the bed and saying, "Okay. Are we going now? I want to see Nattie!"

Her enthusiasm was contagious and May walked towards her and offered the little girl her pinky, "Yes, we're going now. Let's get Trip and hit the road."

Skye grinned up at her and intertwined their pinkies before tugging her out of the room.
Chapter 22

Chapter Notes

Natasha's dances are inspired by this ballet performance (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CU5lMQRTwBE) and this contemporary performance (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CKMss1fHzcQ)

Skye jumped out of the car after Phil unbuckled her from her booster seat and looked around, scrunching her nose up when she realized that they weren’t at Nattie’s dance studio. The auditorium they were parked in front of was huge and families dressed in very nice clothes were walking from their cars to the front entrance. She was happy that her mom had helped her pick out a nicer outfit and she was especially happy about her new boots because they made her feel super tough.

She followed her family into the building and looked around. The front room was very big and open, with pictures hanging on the walls, and people dressed in uniforms handing out papers. Families were wandering around and chatting with each other and Skye scooted closer to May because there were a lot of people. One group of people started laughing really loudly and Skye clutched onto May's leg, not liking how loud they were being, and as she looked around, she noted that the room seemed to be getting busier and busier. She grabbed onto her necklace and rubbed the moon pendant and the smooth metal made her feel a little better.

Another group of people started talking loudly and she tightened her hold on May's leg. A warm hand started rubbing soothing circles on her back and glanced up to see May giving her a worried look, "Are you okay?"

Skye tried to be brave but just then a really tall man walked by a little too close and she unintentionally flinched away.

Someone gently took her hand and she looked over to see Trip motioning towards auditorium seats and giving her an understanding smile, "Let's go sit down. We want to get good seats so that we can see Nat perform."

It seemed like a good idea to get away from the crows, plus she really wanted to get good seats, so she stuck close to Trip as they went to find their seats. May and Phil each grabbed a pamphlet from the attendants and led them into a room with a giant stage and a whole bunch of seats. Trip tightened his hold on her hand and she heard him say, "Let's find a seat right in the middle. Natasha twirls around like a tornado on stage and I don't want to miss it."

Skye squeezed closer to him, looked up, and nodded enthusiastically, not wanting to miss anything either.

They found some open seats towards the front of the stage and in the middle, like Trip had wanted, and went to sit down. They had to scoot past a family sitting towards the end of the aisle and Skye sat down between May and Trip. She frowned immediately, glaring at the back of the head of the woman sitting in front of her who was blocking her view of the stage. She leaned to the left and to the right but still couldn’t see. She even tried straightening up so far that her back started to hurt but nothing seemed to help, so she turned to May and tugged on her sleeve, "I can't see."
May motioned for her to stand up and then held out her hands, so Skye raised her arms and let May pick her up and set her on her lap. From there, she had no trouble seeing the stage even though there was another, shorter, lady sitting in front of May. She saw Trip move over to her old seat and leaned back against May's chest.

Her mom wrapped her arms around her waist and the little girl started playing with her fingers.

After sitting there for a couple of minutes, alternating between playing with May's fingers and twiddling her moon pendant between her hands, she looked up to May and sighed, "When can we see Nattie?"

May pulled out the flyer she had been given and opened it up, "Why don't we find out?"

Leaning forward to get a better look, her eyebrows raised in surprise at all the names on it.

“Nat usually does contemporary and ballet, so let's find her.” May ran a finger down the page and paused, “Here she is.” May pointed to Natasha's name in two different places, which meant she’d be doing two dances. "She's going to be in the second and last dance.”

Skye nodded and took the flyer from May's hands, studied it, and focused on where she saw Natasha's name. She traced the letters for a minute or two and then handed the flyer back to May, bored again.

After another couple of minutes, she felt herself start to grow restless, wanting to see her sister dance so badly that having to wait was practically torture. Groaning, she turned and asked, "Mommy, when is it going to start?"

"In a couple of minutes baby."

Skye groaned again and heard Phil try to catch her attention, "I'm going to be taking pictures so that we can send them to Wanda and Pietro. Do you want me to take one of you, May, and Trip?"

Excited to have something to get her mind off, Skye nodded and saw him raise his camera to his face. She felt Trip lean in beside her and she scooted over so that he could be seen. She grabbed May's leg and smiled when Phil told them to say cheese.

He took the picture and then showed it to her and she couldn’t help but grin because she liked it so much. The three of them were all smiling and looked like a happy family, which is what she had always wanted.

She gingerly took the camera from Phil and asked, "Can I take a picture?"

Phil nodded and showed her which button she needed to push. She carefully held the camera, making sure that it was steady in her hands so that she didn't drop it, and turned to Trip. She pointed the camera at him and he immediately made a silly face, which she took a picture of and giggled when she looked at it. Trip was sticking his tongue out and crossing his eyes and she wondered how he got his face to look like that.

She turned to May and pointed the camera at her, "Mommy! Look at me!"

May looked over to her, saw the camera, made a kissy face, and Skye took the picture. She shifted to that she was facing Phil. He was already looking at her and when she pointed the camera at him, he made a goofy face. She took the picture, looked at it, and couldn't help but laugh at the snapshot. Phil's eyes were squeezed shut and his face was scrunched up and he looked really silly.
Her new distraction did the trick because soon the lights were dimming down and everyone quieted down. She looked around, felt Phil take the camera back from her, and figured that the recital must be starting.

A lady’s voice loudly came out of nowhere, and she tried to see where it was coming from but couldn't find a source, "Welcome to Spotlight Dance Studio's annual recital! Thank you so much for coming out and supporting our amazing dancers! We have a very special show for you tonight, so sit back and enjoy the performances put on by our very dedicated and talented dancers!"

May whispered in her ear and pointed to the pamphlet, "The tap dancers are up first."

Skye nodded even though she didn't know what tap dancers were.

She watched as the red curtain opened up to reveal about six girls in sparkly pink and silver dresses and nude colored shoes. They looked like they were ten years old and they were posing with their hands on their hips and smiling at the audience. The group of girls looked pretty and then the music started playing and she gasped.

The girls moved their legs really, really, quickly, and every time their foot moved, it made a loud tapping sound. She now understood why they were called ‘tap dancers’.

She watched as they danced around the stage, their taps going along with the beat of the music. They all moved around in sync with each other and Skye couldn't believe how fast their legs were moving.

They finished their dance and took a bow before exiting the stage, the curtains closing again, and May whispered to her again, "Nat's ballet group is up next."

Skye straightened up and tried to sit still even though she was really excited to watch Nattie dance.

The curtains opened back up and Skye watched as Nattie and two other girls gracefully entered the stage and posed. Her sister was in the middle and her costume was a light blue-green two piece with a really big skirt that kind of looked like a circle but Skye knew that ballerina's wore tutus, so it must be a tutu.

The music started playing and Skye watched as the girls started leaping and kicking and gracefully moving their hands around. They balanced on their tippy toes a lot and Skye wondered if it hurt. She kept her eyes on Nattie the whole time and saw how she kept a small, but concentrated smile on her face, and she could tell that she was really enjoying herself.

At some point in the song, she twirled off the stage and went back behind the curtains while one of the other girls danced by herself. Then Nattie twirled back on stage and went back to leaping in the air and swinging her body around in ways that Skye didn't even know was possible.

Skye was enthralled. The dance was over too soon and the three girls stood in a row and curtsied gracefully before exiting the stage. Everyone started clapping so Skye started clapping too. Trip whistled loudly and she made sure to clap really loudly so that Nattie knew that she was watching and thought that she was amazing.

Looking over to May, she saw that she was smiling, and she turned slightly in her lap so that she could excitedly ask, "That was so good! How did she do that?"

"Natasha’s very talented and works hard to be that amazing."

Skye nodded and turned back around to face the stage.
After that, they sat through jazz routines, hip hop numbers, another ballet dance, a couple of musical theater and contemporary performances and one acrobatic number before Natasha's next dance. She only knew all this because May would helpfully whisper to her what type of dance would be performing next. Skye thought that all of the dances were amazing but Nattie's ballet had been the best and she was excited to see her dance again.

Once again, May’s voice whispered in her ear, "This is the last performance and Nat's in it."

The curtains opened and the stage stayed empty until the music started playing and five girls ran out onto it. Natasha was the third girl to run on stage and her costume was beautiful, black and white with a ruffley skirt, and her hair was up in a bun, decorated with a pretty headpiece.

Skye had really, really liked Natasha’s ballet performance but she absolutely fell in love with this new dance. It felt more emotional than the last one and while Natasha was dancing, her facial expressions kept changing, and she didn’t know that dancing was kind of like acting until she watched her sister move around the stage.

The dance would start slow and then speed up and then repeat and she was completely entranced with how fast Nattie twirled around. It was pretty obvious that her sister was the leader in this dance because she would sometimes break away from the rest of the girls and do something differently before seamlessly falling back in line with the rest of the dancers.

Skye wished that she could do what Natasha did.

The song ended and the dancers curtsied before gracefully exiting the stage everyone clapped again before the lady's cheerfully loud voice called all the dancers back out. Everyone came back onto the stage, lined up, and bowed. Skye spotted Natasha and waved at her when her sister spotted them in the crowd. Natasha smiled and waved back before following everyone else off of the stage.

The applause slowly tapered off and May grabbed Skye from under her arms and lifted her while she stood up before placing Skye on her hip and saying, "We'll go meet Nat in the lobby."

Skye nodded and started waving her hands around excitedly, "She was so good! Wasn't she so good? It was amazing!"

May laughed and nodded along as they followed Trip to the lobby. Everyone stood around talking for a couple of minutes before Skye saw a bunch of dancers walk out of a door and towards their respective families. She craned her neck and searched for Natasha until she saw her bright red hair and wriggled around so that May would put her down. Once she was on the ground, she sprinted towards Natasha and she wasn't even afraid that she was running away from May and Phil.

She ran up to Natasha and threw her arms around her waist, "Nattie, you were so good! I wish I could dance like you! You were awesome!"

"Thank you маленькая звезда," Natasha said, chuckling a little and returning the hug.

Skye leaned back and looked up and into Natasha's face, "You didn't mess up! I told you that you wouldn't! Because you're the best at everything, remember?"

Natasha chuckled again, grabbed Skye's hand, and led her towards May and Phil, "Yeah, I remember. I think you're my little good luck charm Skye."

Her sister’s words made her smile, she’d never been anyone’s good luck charm before.
They reached the rest of their family and everyone took turns hugging Natasha and gushing about her performances, with Skye keeping a tight hold on her sister’s hand the whole time.

"I recorded both of your dances so that I can send them to the twins. They love watching you dance,” Phil said, motioning towards his camera and leaning forward to press a kiss to Natasha’s temple.

Natasha’s cheeks turned a bright shade of pink and she shrugged, "I hope they’ll like them."

Trip rolled his eyes and playfully pushed Natasha "Why wouldn't they like them? Girl, you twirled around like a top. I can't believe you didn't throw up."

"Ew, Trip,” Nattie pushed him back.

Their brother shrugged while May leaned forward to give Nattie another hug, "We're so proud of you!"

"Thanks, mom."

Phil clapped his hands together before pulling out his camera again and pointing it at her, Trip, and Natasha, "Okay you three, it's picture time!"

Nattie groaned but obliged so Skye stood between her brother and sister and they all smiled while Phil took a picture. He inspected it and nodded before saying, "Let's go out to eat to celebrate. Nat, you get to choose where we go."

Natasha thought about it for a second before saying, "How about Italian?"

Everyone nodded and Phil started herding them back towards the car. Natasha swung their hands as they walked and said, "I forgot to tell you earlier but cute shoes Skye."

"Thanks!" She said, skipping slightly so she could lift a foot up and admire a boot.

On the way to dinner, everyone kept complimenting Natasha on her dancing skills until she begged them to stop.

When they reached the restaurant, Natasha unbuckled Skye and she hopped out of the car, grabbed onto Phil's hand, and followed everyone inside. They sat at a table by the windows and she looked around, noting how nice the restaurant was and how pretty the music playing softly in the background was.

She made herself comfortable between May and Natasha and happily let May order a water for her since she didn't like talking to strangers.

Once their drinks were ordered, she turned to her sister, "Nattie, how do you dance like that? I wish I could dance like you."

"Maybe you can. Why don't you sign up for some dance classes?” Natasha asked.

Skye balked at that. She didn't know if she could dance in front of a bunch of people like Natasha had, she didn't even know if she could dance.

She vehemently shook her head but May said, "It couldn't hurt to try Skye. You might like it."

She shook her head again, not convinced.
"How about you come with me when I pick Nat up from dance class and you can watch for a little bit. That might change your mind, and if not, that's okay."

Skye thought about it. She wouldn't mind watching Nattie dance again and she knew that May wouldn't force her to dance if she didn't want to, so she nodded, happiness blooming in her chest at the smile Natasha gave her.

The waitress brought their drinks out and took their food orders, May ordering her spaghetti for her.

They were all talking about school and Trip was telling them about how Hunter had tried to skip class but had gotten caught when Skye reached to get a sip of water. As she tried to pick up her glass, it slipped from her grasp and spilled. The glass didn't break, but water started flowing off the side of the table and some splashed onto the people at the table next to them.

A man gasped and quickly scooted his chair back before saying, "What the hell? Who did that?"

She glanced over to the man and saw he looked really angry, so she shrunk back in her chair and put her hands over her face, "I'm sorry! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to."

Her hands were blocking her face so she couldn't see the guy's face but she heard him say, "Oh. Hey kid, it's alright."

His voice slowly drifted away and all she could think about was the time that she had broken that glass at the Ramsey's house and Mr. Ramsey had yelled and thrown things at her. She started breathing really quickly, heart pounding, and she heard the guy ask if she was alright. Phil said something back to him but she couldn't hear what it was over the sound of blood rushing in her ears.

Suddenly, May's voice was whispering in her ear, "Skye, it's okay. No one's mad at you and you're safe here. It was just an accident, okay?"

The reassuring words were comforting enough to get her to move her hands away from her face. She looked over and saw that May's face was really close to hers. She was still breathing pretty quickly but she told herself that she was safe with May and Phil and that helped to calm her down. Natasha intertwined their pinkies and May leaned into kiss her forehead and Skye took a deep breath before finally regaining control of her breathing.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to knock it over."

May comfortingly brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "I know sweetie, it's okay."

After carefully glancing around, she saw that the man at the next table had sat back down and Trip and Phil were dutifully cleaning up the water while shooting her concerned glances. Natasha was also looking at her worriedly and squeezing her pinky in comfort.

"Will you say it?" She asked May uncertainly, leaning slightly into her side.

Her mom looked confused for a moment before catching on, leaning a little closer so that their faces were almost touching, and whispering, "I love you to the moon and back-"

"More than all the stars in the sky," She finished, letting out a shaky breath.

May smiled at her and she tentatively smiled back. She still loved her even though she had spilled her drink all over the table and all over that man. No one was mad at her but Skye still felt a little embarrassed and slightly out of breath from her body’s quick, panicky reaction.
May caressed her cheek and said, "It was just an accident, you're okay. Let's get you another drink though."

They both sat back up and Skye saw that their waitress was already walking towards their table with another glass of water in her hand. She set it down on the table in front of her and said, "We get spills all the time, it's no problem."

Skye nodded gratefully at her but didn't reach for the glass, letting it sit far in front of her and at a safe distance.

Natasha kept their pinkies interlocked and May kept shooting her worried glances but the conversation picked back up again and the tension in her muscles slowly went away. As time went on, she stopped staring down at her hands and started participating in the conversation being held at the table.

The waitress brought out their food and Skye made sure to put her napkin in her lap so that she wouldn't get any food on her pretty dress. She mostly succeeded and laughed with everyone else when a big glob of Trip's chicken alfredo fell on his lap.

When she finished eating, she pushed her plate away from her, sat back, and watched her family eat their food while she gripped the moon pendant hanging from around her neck and wished that Wanda and Pietro were here so that they could play with her and she could thank them for the necklace.

Natasha's eyes were drawn to the motion and she looked over, "What's that?"

She released the pendant and moved her hand away so that Natasha could see it, "It's from Wanda and Pietro. They said that you helped them in their note."

Natasha admired it but shook her head a little, "I just told them what you liked, they picked this out on their own. It's so pretty on you!"

Knowing that Natasha had played a smaller role in her present than she thought just reinforced her desire to thank the twins for their gift. "I want to thank them. Can you help me write a card?"

"That's such a thoughtful idea! We can write it tonight and send it tomorrow."

The shared a smile and for the rest of dinner she tried to think of what she wanted to write in her card. She knew that she wanted to thank them but she also wanted them to know how happy she was that they were okay with her being in their family.

She thought about it as everyone finished eating, as they drove back home, and as they walked through the front door.

The moment they got home, she grabbed Natasha's hand and tugged her upstairs towards the playroom, hearing May shout after them, "Skye! You've only got about thirty minutes before you need to shower and go to bed okay?"

"Okay!"

She pulled Natasha into the playroom and her sister grabbed some construction paper while she grabbed some stickers, crayons, markers, and colored pencils after deciding that she wanted to draw them a picture too.

They sat down side by side at the desk and she grabbed a pink piece of paper and a dark blue crayon
while Natasha turned on the lamp and looked over to her, "Okay Skye, what do you want to write?"

Her sister helped her spell out the hard words and made sure her letters were facing the right way, and when she finished her letter, she pulled over a different sheet of construction paper. This one was just a plain white sheet but that was okay because she was going to draw all over it.

"Hey Skye, is it okay if I write a letter too and send it with yours?"

"Of course Nattie," She mumbled, focusing hard on her drawing.

Finally, she finished her picture and looked over to see that Natasha was still writing her letter. She sat patiently and waited for her to finish, grabbing her letter and reading it over again to make sure that it was perfect.

"Dear Wanda and Pietro,

Thank you for my necklace. I love it a lot and never want to take it off. I'm happy that you're okay with me being in your family. I wish that you were here with us so that we could go to the playground and play on the swings.

Love,

Skye."

She nodded happily when she finished reading it, proud of herself for having no misspelled words. She thought that it was a pretty good card.

Carefully setting her card down, she looked over to her picture and studied it. She had drawn a sun and some clouds and green grass. On the grass was her family. She had drawn May and Phil smiling, with her in between them holding their hands. It had been important that she had drawn in her moon necklace and new black boots. To the left of May was Natasha, wearing her costume from the last dance in her recital, which was pretty hard to draw but she thought she did a good job. Next to Natasha was Trip, who was waving and had a big smile on his face, like usual. To the left of him she drew Wanda and Pietro. She had drawn in Wanda's black dress and red jacket that she was wearing in the picture that now resided on her bedside table, while Pietro had on a dark grey shirt and blue shorts like what he had worn when they’d video chatted. It had been hard to find a color that matched his hair but she thought that she had done a pretty good job.

Everyone was smiling and they looked like a happy family.

Skye smiled back at the figures on her paper, seeing how the figures took up the whole page. She had a family now, and it was bigger and better than she had ever imagined it could be.
The next day, Skye thought about Natasha's dance recital during class. She thought about how May and Nattie had said that she could go to classes and learn how to dance like her sister did. She really wanted to but she didn't think she could do it and she really didn't want to look stupid and clumsy in front of everyone.

It was at the end of the day and Ms. Hill was letting them play for the last few minutes of class because they had been good all day. Skye was telling her friends about the recital as they sat in a semicircle around her. She was waving her hands around excitedly and saying, "And Nattie was spinning so fast! She was blurry, I swear!"

Fitz, Jemma, and Lincoln were listening and giving Skye their full attention, clearly impressed with her story and her sister.

"Is your sister a real ballerina?" Jemma asked.

Skye nodded and proudly said, "Yes, she is."

Jemma made an awed sound, "I wish I could be a ballerina! They're so pretty and graceful."

"You could take dance classes and become one. My mommy said that I could take them and I want to dance just like Nattie does. You should take some too!"

Jemma thought about it, "I'm going to ask my mommy."

Skye smiled at her friend, happy to hear that she was also interested in going to some dance classes, and heard Lincoln ask, "How long does it take to become a ballerina?"

"It must take a super long time. They can walk on their tiptoes. Can you walk on your tiptoes?" Fitz asked.

Skye shook her head and all of them stood up and tried to walk around on their toes. They kept stumbling and Jemma was hanging onto Fitz, who kept grumbling because she was making him fall over. They had to stop when Ms. Hill told the class that it was time to go home. Jemma, Fitz, and Skye all said goodbye to Lincoln before he got onto his bus and then they made their way to the front of the school.

As they looked around for their parents, Skye turned to them, "You guys should come over to my house and play this weekend. We have a really awesome playroom with a bunch of toys and my mom says that my friends can come over if I ask."

Her friends both nodded and Jemma said, "I'll ask my mommy!" before they both ran off to find their parents.

Skye stood by Ms. Hill and looked around for May, slightly worried because she was usually here by now and would be waiting by their tree but she wasn’t. She tugged on Ms. Hill's hand, "Do you know where my mom is?"

Her teacher looked around, "No, but she might just be running a little later than usual. If she's not here in a little while, I'll call her, okay?"

Skye nodded and kept an eye out for her mom. She watched as parents greeted their children and
spotted Jemma and Fitz getting into Jemma's mom's car. She hoped that they could come over and play with her this weekend since they had never been over to her house and she wanted to show them her room.

As she was scanning the area, she started to get the feeling that someone was staring at her. She looked left and right but couldn’t see anyone, all she saw were mommies and daddies hugging their kids and leading them to their cars. She glanced at Ms. Hill and saw that her teacher was quietly talking to another first grade teacher. After looking around one more time but not finding anything unusual, she tried to shake off the creepy feeling but couldn't.

Just then, she saw May pull up and hop out of her car, looking around wildly for a moment before spotting her and walking towards her. Skye started making her way to May and they met in the middle.

"I'm so sorry I'm late. There was an accident on one of the roads and traffic was terrible. I'm so sorry sweetie."

Skye reached out to take her pinky and they made their way to the car, "It's okay. Is it alright if Fitz and Jemma come over and play this weekend?"

She climbed into the backseat and May answered her as she buckled Skye in, "Sure, I'll call their parents later and see if it's alright with them."

Smiling, she watched as May got into the driver's seat, turned on some Disney songs, pulled out of the parking lot, and said, "So, I was thinking... how about we go to Toys R' Us before we pick up Nat from dance class?"

"What's that?" She asked, scrunching up her nose and looking at May’s face in the rearview mirror.

May’s eyes flickered up to look at her, the surprise clear on her face, "Toys R' Us?" She nodded and May continued, "It's a giant toy store sweetie. You've never been there?"

Skye shook her head but now that she did knew that it existed, she kind of wanted to go there. She liked toys.

"Well now we have to go. We have about an hour or two to kill before we have to pick up Nat. Let's go have some fun!"

Skye smiled but even though she wanted to go, she didn't know if she wanted to make May buy her a bunch of toys. Buying her clothes was different because she needed clothes but she didn't need toys. She had Alice and her crayons and Tangled; she didn't need anything else.

She sang along to the songs from The Jungle Book until May pulled into a parking lot, causing her to look out the window and suck in a breath at how huge the building looked. A little boy was walking with his dad out of the store. The dad was holding a really big bag in his hands and the little boy was talking animatedly.

Seeing the little boy sparked something in Skye, "When can I go see Ward?"

May parked the car, unbuckled her seatbelt, and turned around in her seat, "I can call his foster parents today and see when a good time for them will be. Does that sound okay?"

Skye nodded halfheartedly; she had been a little excited about seeing the toy store but now she just felt guilty. Ward could be in a really bad foster home or he could be super mad at her right now and she was about to go look at a bunch of toys with May. She berated herself for forgetting about Ward
so easily, telling herself that she wasn’t being a very good friend.

May must’ve seen how upset she was getting because she reached back and brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "Why don't I call them right now? Would that be better?"

Skye nodded again and May turned back around in her seat to pull out her phone. She pressed some buttons and put it against her ear, pausing for a few seconds before saying, "Hello?...It's Melinda, how've you been?...That's great. Is everyone adjusting?...That's wonderful to hear." May glanced back at her before saying, "So, my little one would like to come over and see Grant, is that okay?... Yeah, she was the one…. Great! When's a good time for you?...That sounds fine. Have a great day…Bye."

She hung up and looked back to Skye, "Both Grant and his brother are doing fine sweetie. We can go over and see them on Wednesday. How does that sound?"

Skye let out a breath, relieved to hear that Ward was okay but still needing to know if he was mad at her. She hoped that he wasn’t but if he was, it would be better to know, so she nodded at May, who shut off the car and helped Skye out of her seat.

As they were walking to the entrance of the store, Skye interlocked their pinkies and May said, "Now listen up sweetie, I know how you feel about us buying you things and I just want you to know that Phil and I want to buy you some toys, okay?"

It was a little hard to believe that that was true and Skye looked up at her and studied her face. She had to squint a little because the sun was really bright but she saw that May looked earnest, so she nodded, causing May to give her a warm smile, "Good. Let's go see what they've got."

Her jaw dropped when they entered the store; there were toys everywhere. She blindly followed her over to where all the carts were and lifted her arms so that May would know that she wanted to be put in the cart. This store was huge and even though she wanted to run around and see all the toys, she didn't want to get lost in here since it would take May forever to find her.

After she was placed in the front seat of the cart, they walked deeper into the store, "How about we look at the dolls first?"

Skye nodded and stared at all the toys that they passed, eyes widening at all of the things she hadn’t even known existed.

May turned them down an aisle and Skye thought she was in heaven. On one side, the shelves were filled with stuffed animals. Every single animal that Skye had ever heard of was on a shelf, and she gasped as she studied them.

Sitting on the middle of the shelf was Maximus, the horse from Tangled, and she reached her hands up and wiggled her fingers, "Can I get out?"

Once her feet were firmly on the ground, she ran over to the plush toy, gently took him off of the shelf, and held him in front of her face. The horse had a fluffy mane, a brown saddle, and was smiling at her. Skye hugged him to her chest and looked to the other side of the aisle, which was filled with baby dolls rather than stuffed animals.

There were barbies, dolls that talked and needed to be taken care of, mermaid dolls, and character dolls that she saw on TV. As she moved down the aisle, she spotted the princess dolls and jumped excitedly as she saw Belle, then Ariel and Eric, then Cinderella.

She searched for Rapunzel and finally saw her on the top shelf. She tried to reach for it but she was
too short, "Mommy! There's Rapunzel!"

May chuckled, grabbed it for her, and handed her the boxed doll, which she intensely stared at it before hugging close to her chest. The Rapunzel doll had long, blonde hair and was wearing a pink and purple dress. It came with a brush and some flower clips that you could pin into her hair.

She wandered over into the next aisle, making sure that her mom was following her, and kept looking at all the toys. The Prettiest Princess Castle Play-Doh set caught her eye and she paused to grab it and try to tuck it under her arm but she was carrying too many things.

She looked sadly at the play-doh set before gently placing it back on the shelf and hearing May speak up from behind her, "What're you doing Skye? Don't you want that?"

Turning around, she held up her stuffed horse and Rapunzel doll, "I'm just going to get these two, is that okay?"

May walked over, plucked the play-doh set off the shelf, and placed it into the cart, "You can get this too Skye."

She shook her head and tried to reach into the cart to grab the toy but May gently brushed her hands to the side, "Remember what I said? We want to get you toys that you like. It makes us happy to buy you things that you want. Now, what else would you like?"

Skye looked at her uncertainly but May just gently prodded her forward and they kept walking down the aisles. Even though Skye had heard what May said, she didn't want her to have to buy her things that she didn't need, so she tried not to pick anything else up. May must have caught on though, because every time Skye would stare at a toy with interest, May would grab it and put it into their cart, not bothering to even acknowledge Skye's protests.

They walked through most of the toy aisles and had made it to the books. May and Phil had a lot of books that they read to her before bedtime but Skye missed being read Goodnight Moon. No one had read it to her since the Harvey's died and it was still her favorite story.

She looked for the familiar green and blue cover and when she found it easily enough, she grabbed and stared at it. Would it be bad to have May and Phil read it to her, even though it was the book that that Harvey's had diligently read to her every night? It kind of felt like she was betraying them since it had been their thing and she didn't know if they would like another family reading it to her.

As she stared at the cover, May walked up next to her, "Do you want that book?"

Skye didn't look up at her, just continued to stare at the book and mumble, "Mr. and Mrs. Harvey read this to me all the time before they died. It's my favorite."

May put a comforting hand on her shoulder and said, "Why don't we get it and Phil and I can read it to you?"

"Do you think they'd mind if you read it to me? This was their book." Skye didn't know if she was explaining it right but May seemed to catch onto what she was saying because she crouched down and brushed Skye's hair out of her eyes, "I think that they would want you to be happy Skye. Does this book make you happy?"

Without thinking about it, she nodded and clutched the book tighter between her fingers.

"Then I don't think they would mind if I read it to you."
What May was saying made sense and she hoped that she was right. She gently handed May the book, who placed it into the cart and said, "Why don't you choose a couple more books and then we'll go get Natasha from dance class?"

Skye nodded and looked carefully at the books before choosing Stella Luna, Five Little Monkeys Jumping on the Bed, and How Do Dinosaurs Say Goodnight? and placing them in the cart.

She intertwined her pinky with May's and they both walked up to the registers to check out. The employee put all of their things into bags and May placed them in the cart. Skye tried to grab the stuffed Maximus out of the bag but she was too short and she scrunched her nose up in frustration. May looked over and saw what she was trying to do before grabbing the stuffed horse, pulling the tags off of it, and handing it to her.

The strong need to tell May how grateful she was surged through her so she wrapped her arms around May's waist and pressed her face into her tummy, "Thank you Mommy."

May returned the hug, leaned down to press a kiss to the top of her head, and said, "You're welcome Skye. Let's go get Nat."

Releasing her mom, she hugged her new horse close and nodded. She followed May back out to the car and climbed into the back seat while May put the bags away. Skye played with Maximus and sang along to Aladdin songs as they drove to Natasha's dance studio.

Once they arrived at the studio, she followed May inside and saw that it was pretty empty since most of the dancers were probably still practicing. May led her to the last room and they both walked in and went to the viewing room. Natasha and about six other girls were doing ballet exercises, with one of their hands placed on a wooden bar, they were going through different poses.

They all moved fluidly and Skye watched in fascination until their instructor said that class was over and everyone started gathering their things. As the parents went out to meet their kids, May and Skye went into the studio room and walked over to Natasha.

She was putting on sweatpants and a short sleeve shirt over her leotard and smiled at them, "Hey guys."

Skye ran the rest of the way over to her, "Hey Nattie. You looked really pretty doing your dancey moves."

Natasha chuckled and ruffled her hair before slinging her bag over her shoulder, "Thanks Skye. Have you thought anymore about signing up for some classes?"

Skye had been thinking about it, and she wanted to be able to do what Natasha did, "I don't think I can do what you were doing."

Her sister down to intertwine their pinkies, "You don't have to do what I was doing right away. That's for later on, when you've practiced for a little while. You'll start off learning easier things."

Skye considered that as they all climbed into the car and May drove off. Now that she knew that she wouldn't have to start off learning all the hard leaps and kicks that Natasha could do, the whole dance thing sounded much more appealing. She looked back to Natasha, "If I do it, will you be there?"

"I could ask your instructor but I don't think they'll mind if I help out. I help teach some of the younger students anyways."
Okay. I think I want to try it.

Natasha smiled real big at her and she heard May say, "That's great baby. We'll come in on Monday and sign you up."

Skye couldn't help but grin, her excitement growing, and she couldn't remember the last time she had been excited to try something new.

"You're going to love it Skye. Dancing is so much fun," Natasha said.

Skye hugged Maximus to her chest and grinned back at her sister, "I believe you Nattie."
Skye abruptly jerked awake the next morning, not remembering what her nightmare had been about, just that there had been big monsters and red eyes that watched her from behind dark objects. It took a moment to steady her breathing and she wiped the light layer of sweat off of her forehead before rolling over and trying to fall back asleep.

As she wriggled around to get comfortable, she suddenly froze, panic keeping her immobile as she realized that she had had an accident.

Her face crumpled and her heart shattered at the realization, especially since she had thought that she had stopped wetting the bed. It hadn't happened since the beginning of her stay with May and Phil and she had barely had any nightmares since the first week. She felt safe here and thought that all of that bad stuff was behind her now but apparently she was wrong.

It had been stupid to think that she could leave all the bad stuff in the past.

Throwing back her sheets, she slid out of her bed and started to pull off her sheets when she remembered what May had told her days ago. She had said that if she ever wet the bed again, that she should go tell her or Phil and they could help her. Even though the offer was enticing, she didn't want to tell them, her embarrassment was too strong and she didn't want them to know that she had done something that babies did.

She knew that she couldn't hide her whole bedspread and her wet pajamas in a place where they wouldn't find them, so she resigned herself to the fact that they would find out what happened eventually. As she walked out of her bedroom, she heard Phil's voice coming from downstairs, and she paused in her doorway, tears welling up in her eyes.

Why couldn't she do anything right? She wasn't a baby anymore, she shouldn't be wetting the bed, but she still was. The tears spilled over her cheeks and she silently cried as she made her way through the hall and down the stairs.

She felt uncomfortable in her damp footie pajamas but she slowly made her way into the kitchen, grasping nervously her moon pendant the whole time. Phil's back was facing her and he was singing while washing some dishes. She stood there, waiting for him to notice her as tears made their way down her cheeks. She knew that he wouldn't yell at her or make her feel bad, Phil wasn't like that, but she was still embarrassed and upset with herself anyways.

Phil was still humming to himself as he turned around with a dish towel in his hand and spotted her, "Oh! Skye! You scared me sweetheart. Why didn't you-" He didn't finish his question and Skye couldn't make herself look at him to see what his expression was like.

She saw his feet step closer and he asked, "Did you have an accident?"

Hearing Phil say that made her tears start to fall faster. Skye knew that he wasn't mad at her, but she was mad at herself, so she kept her eyes averted and sharply nodded. She couldn't believe that this was happening.

Phil's hand came into view and his voice was soft, "It's okay. Come on sweetheart."

She studied his hand for a couple of seconds before finally taking it and letting him lead her back to her room. It was already morning, so Phil grabbed her some clothes for the day and guided her into the bathroom. He put her clothes onto the counter and turned the shower on before saying, "I'm
going to go get your sheets. Leave your dirty clothes on the floor and I'll grab them and throw everything in the washing machine, okay?"

Skye stayed but he didn't seem to mind, and she watched as he walked back down the hallway and forced herself to stop crying. She told herself that only babies cried and she bet that Jemma didn't wet the bed or cry all the time.

She forcibly rubbed at her eyes before taking off her soggy clothes and stepping into the warm shower.

She was rinsing the soap off of her when she heard Phil walk back into the bathroom. "Skye, if you don't want me in here I can wait outside but I just want to make sure you're okay in there."

His kindness made her want to start crying again but she forced herself not to. Even still, her voice was thick what she said, "You can stay."

She heard Phil shuffle around before he said, "I can play some Tangled music if you want?"

Before she had a chance to respond, soft music started playing from behind the shower curtains. The music stayed fairly quiet because the rest of the house was still sleeping but she was grateful for it nonetheless. Humming along to the songs helped her to forget about what had happened as she finished her shower.

After watching May turn off the shower plenty of times, she did the same and wondered what she was supposed to do now. Before she could ask, Phil's hand poked through the shower curtain, offering her a towel. She kept the curtains closed, dried off, and handed the towel back to him so that he could replace it with her clothes. She pulled them on quickly and stepped out of the shower.

Phil greeted her with a smile and motioned for her to turn around and when she obliged, she felt him run a comb through her damp hair. When, he finished, he set the comb onto the counter before holding out his hand. After studying it for a long moment, she grabbed it and let him lead her to the playroom. The Toys R’ Us bags were in there because she had been too busy playing with Rapunzel and Maximus yesterday to have touched her other toys.

He went to the desk, turned on some Disney music, and shut the door so that it wouldn't wake anyone else. He sat down on the floor and said, "Will you show me your new toys? May said that you got some fun things yesterday."

Skye stared at him for a second before sitting down next to him and pulling her play-doh set out of the bag. He made an impressed sound and eagerly looked at her, "Why don't we open this bad boy up?"

When May woke up, she wasn't surprised to find the other side of the bed empty. Phil had always woken up ridiculously early and before, he would just stay in bed and read a book until she woke up, but now that he knew that Skye was also an early riser, he had dubbed the early morning as "Skye time." She didn't mind one bit, loving that Skye and Phil had a special time just for them.

May stretched and got out of bed, not bothering to get dressed since her family liked to be lazy on the weekends. She was making her way down the hallway when she heard giggling and soft music coming from the playroom. As she walked closer to the room, she could clearly hear a Tangled song coming from behind the closed door. She loved Skye more than life itself but she never thought she would end up knowing every word to every single Disney Song.

She opened the door and blinked at the scene in front of her.
Toys were all over the floor and music was playing from the computer on the desk, which was normal in this house. What was not a normal occurrence was Phil wearing a tiara, sipping imaginary tea out of a Beauty and the Beast teacup that came from a set that she had bought Skye yesterday, and pretending to eat what looked like cookies made out of play-doh. Skye was wearing the little Captain America costume that she hadn't been able to resist buying her from Toys R' Us and had a Rapunzel tiara balanced precariously on her head. Alice and her other doll friends were sitting in a semi circle with teacups in front of them and it appeared that she had walked in on a tea party.

Skye and Phil turned to look at her when they heard the door open. Skye grinned at her while Phil gave her a sheepish look. She raised her eyebrows.

The little girl stayed seated and held up a teacup that May assumed was supposed to be filled with tea.

May accepted the silent invitation and sat down next to Phil before taking the offered cup from Skye. He leaned in and pressed a kiss to her cheek as she got settled in.

She sipped her imaginary tea in comfortable silence before Phil said, "Skye, where's your Rapunzel doll?"

Her daughter's eyes widened before she hopped up and said, "Oh! She's in my room! I'm gonna go get her real fast!" She ran out of the room, holding her tiara on her head so that it didn't fall off.

She gave Phil a questioning look at the obvious ploy to get Skye out of the room for a little bit.

He set his teacup down and turned to her, "Skye wet the bed. She seemed pretty upset about it so I wanted to take her mind off of it."

May knew that accidents were bound to happen, especially with a kid who had a past like Skye's, even though she seemed to be making progress. Nightmares were tricky; they snuck up on you and no matter how hard you tried, it's impossible to control your subconscious.

She also knew that Skye was extremely self conscious and embarrassed about wetting the bed. It probably had more to do with a previous foster family's reactions to it and her inability to control her body and less to do with how she thought that she and Phil would react. At least, she hoped that was the case.

"Poor baby. We should tell Jiaying about this," She said, leaning her head on Phil's shoulder.

Phil nodded, "She helped Nat with her nightmares, she'll be able to help Skye too."

She had complete confidence in Jiaying's ability to help her children, she just hoped that Skye would be open to accepting help. She had been on her own for so long that it might be difficult for her, but Skye had a knack for surprising her. She had opened up to her and Phil and she had embraced them as her family, which May had thought would have taken months.

She was still leaning against Phil when Skye came barreling back into the room, doll in hand.

Skye clutched her Rapunzel doll in her fist as she ran back into the playroom, "Daddy! I got her! You can brush her hair if you want!"

He gently took the doll and tiny brush from her and said, "I would love to."

"Maybe you could learn how to braid with her hair, then you could do mine," She said helpfully as she sat back down.
He began brushing the doll’s hair and smirked, "You didn't like my pigtails?"

Her eyes widened as she realized that she might’ve hurt his feelings, "I liked them a lot! I just like braids too."

Phil laughed, "I was just kidding Skye. I will happily learn how to braid hair for you."

Sufficiently placated, she set her doll down and played until May reached over and poked her arm, "Can I have a doll to play with?"

Skye studied the dolls sitting in a semicircle around her before carefully picking up Perrie and offering her, "Here, you can play with Perrie. She likes Nattie but I think she'll like you too."

They played tea party for a little longer until Skye told them that they were out of tea. Her parents nodded seriously and suggested that they go downstairs and eat breakfast. She was getting hungry so she agreed and sat on the counter while they played music and made scrambled eggs and waffles.

Soon enough, Nattie made her way downstairs and into the kitchen, pausing to give Skye a sleepy smile, "I didn't know that Captain America was a princess, Skye."

After a quick glance at her Captain America costume, she reached up to adjust the tiara resting crookedly on her head as Nattie pulled herself onto the counter next to her.

She shrugged, "He can be a princess if he wants to."

"That's true," Her sister agreed, her lips tugging up and into a wider smile.

May’s cell phone rang and she moved out of the kitchen to answer it and Skye spared her a look before looking back to Natasha, "What're you doing today Nattie?"

Her sister shrugged and stole some scrambled eggs from the plate that May had abandoned, "Wasn't planning on anything. I kind of just wanted to hang out and be lazy."

Skye liked being lazy, lazy days had been very few and far between in her life, and she capitalized on them whenever she could. Maybe she could convince Natasha to watch Tangled with her.

May walked back into the kitchen and smiled at her, "Good news Skye. That was Jemma's mom and it sounds like Jemma and Leo can come over and play today. They'll be over after lunch."

Skye clapped her hands excitedly, "Yes! I want to show them my room. Nattie, will you play with us?"

Nat hopped off the counter, grabbed the plate full of scrambled eggs, and leaned forward to poke Skye in the tummy before saying, "Sure Skye, I wanna meet your friends."

Her mom and sister made their way into the dining room, carrying plates of food and silverware with them, and Skye fist pumped in triumph.

Phil poked her in the tummy to get her attention and then gestured to the plate full of waffles, "You think you could carry these to the table?"

"Captain America can do anything Daddy," She scoffed, giving him an incredulous look.

"Oh really?"

She nodded confidently, attempting to raise an eyebrow in disbelief (and failing) because she thought
that he would’ve known that fact about Captain America already.

He gave her a playful look. "Can he fly?"

Skye didn’t think that he could fly but she wasn’t about to tell him that, so she bluffed, "He could if
he wanted to!"

Phil quickly grabbed her and lifted her so that she was held out in front of him and horizontal to the
floor so it looked like she was flying like Superman. She squealed and stuck her arms out in front of
her like she saw superheroes do when they flew around and saved people's lives.

He walked her around the kitchen, moving her so that she would dip down and then soar back up.
She shrieked and laughed until he walked over to the counter where the plate of waffles was sitting
so that she could pick it up and hold it in front of her as Phil flew her into the dining room. He gently
set her down on one of the chairs and she put the plate onto the table before sitting down.

Everyone started grabbing food and Skye looked around, noticing a missing seat, "Is Trip awake
yet?"

May grabbed a waffle and looked over to her, "He won't wake up for a little while sweetie. That boy
likes his sleep."

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Hours later, she was sitting beside Natasha on the couch, only half-listening to the show because she
was so excited for Jemma and Fitz to come over.

When the doorbell finally rang, it took all of her willpower not to jump up and answer it herself. Phil
had told her that she wasn't supposed to answer the door on her own because it could be a stranger,
and she’s not supposed to talk to strangers, so she impatiently watched May make her way from the
dining room to the door as she followed behind her.

As soon as the door was open and May was talking to Jemma’s mom, Skye motioned excitedly for
Jemma and Fitz to come inside, grinning crazily as they scooted past the grownups and looked
around.

"Hi!" She shouted loudly, waving and wiggling around, unable to keep still.

Jemma kept looking around but took a moment to smile at her, "Hi Skye! Your house is big."

Fitz nodded along, "Yeah, it's pretty big. I like it."

Skye grinned, grabbed their hands, and lead them into the living room. They kept glancing at the
pictures on the walls so they didn't really see Natasha sitting on the corner of the couch, "Hey guys.
You're Skye's friends?"

Fitz jumped about a foot in the air and Jemma whipped her head around to look at her sister, who
smirked at them.

Fitz recovered first and but still had a hand pressed to his chest, "Yeah. I'm Fitz, that's Simmons."

Skye interrupted, "Her real name's Jemma though, and that's Leo."

Jemma nodded and Nattie waved at them. Skye pointed to her and said, "This is my big sister
Natasha, she's the ballerina!"
Skye saw recognition flash through their faces before the both of them moved closer to the couch. Skye followed them and stood so that she was leaning against her sister’s legs.

Fitz gave Natasha a disbelieving look, "Are you really a ballerina? Skye said you can spin really fast. Can you walk on your tippy toes? Does that hurt? We tried to do it and it hurt. Do all ballerinas have to wear tutus? Do guy ballerinas have to wear tutus? -"

Jemma interrupted, "How long does it take to become a ballerina? Do you have to go to ballet school? Do you want to be a ballerina forever? Can we see you dance?"

Natasha blinked at them and looked over to Skye. She just shrugged; her friends liked to ask questions.

"Uh, I do ballet, so I guess that you could call me a ballerina. I can walk on my tip toes and it hurts sometimes if you don’t do it right. Ballerinas don’t wear tutus all the time and it takes a little while to understand all of the ballet moves and poses before you’re any good at it."

Jemma and Fitz were nodding along with what Nattie was saying, totally transfixed on her, which made Skye smile. She was happy that her friends liked her sister.

Jemma pointed at her and asked, "Can we see you dance?"

"Yeah, can we see you dance?" Fitz parroted.

Nattie looked around uncertainly, "Um, I don't think-"

Skye interrupted her, "Pleeeeeease Nattie?" She made her eyes go wide and pouted a bit.

Natasha looked at her and let out a very long sigh, "Okay, but just a little bit."

All three of them smiled triumphantly and sat down next to each other on the couch. Natasha stood up, pushed the coffee table back a little bit, and performed some of her ballet dance from the recital. She did some fluid turns and kicks and jumped a little bit before stopping and rubbing her neck, "It's kind of hard to dance in here. It's better at the studio."

Jemma raised her hands and started waving them around, "No! That was awesome!"

Fitz nodded, "Yeah, totally awesome!"

"You're the best Nattie."

Seemingly satisfied with her sister’s dancing, her friends turned to her, "Can we see your room?"

"Yeah! It's upstairs." She pulled them off the couch and ran upstairs to her room, Fitz and Jemma on her heels.

She walked into her room and stood by the doorway while they explored. Fitz was looking at her pink lamp and Jemma was peering into her dollhouse. Skye fidgeted a little, hoping that they liked it.

Jemma sat down next to the dollhouse and Skye went to sit by her, "I like your dollhouse."

Skye picked up Alice while Fitz sat down on the other side of Jemma, "Thanks. My Mommy and Daddy got it for me before I came to live with them."

Fitz gave her a questioning look, "I thought you said that they weren't your mommy and daddy. You said they were just your foster parents."
"Yeah... they aren't the mommy and daddy who had me when I was a baby, but they're the ones who love me. That's what *real* parents do, right?"

Jemma nodded, "Yeah! I *told* you that they were your mom and dad."

Skye grinned and put Alice back into her little house, "You did. Let's go to the playroom! I have like five billion different colored crayons!"
Skye played with Jemma and Fitz, having fun with her new toys and managing to get Natasha and Trip to join them in the playroom, until it was time for them to leave. She was sad to see them go but her mood lifted when after dinner, her brother suggested that they have a family game night.

They were all currently on the living room floor, sitting around the coffee table with the Chutes and Ladders board game in front of them. Skye had never played it before, so Natasha had said that they could be on a team together until she got the hang of it. She was happily sitting by her sister's side and they both laughed as Phil moved his pawn and had to go down a chute, forcing him back into last place.

He groaned dramatically, "Why do I always have to go down the longest chute?"

"Because you keep getting the wrong numbers when you spin the dial Daddy," Skye supplied helpfully.

Trip and Natasha started laughing and Skye looked around, trying to figure out what was so funny, and ended up laughing along even though she was clueless.

Phil grinned at her, "Thanks Skye, I'll try to stop doing that."

She nodded seriously, "Good, then you might not lose."

Her siblings laughed again and she saw May's lips twitch up and into a small smile. She watched as her mom spun the dial and moved her pawn forward, landing on a ladder and climbing her way up the board, before throwing a satisfied smirk in Phil's direction.

"See? You should be getting the numbers that Mommy does," Skye said, emphasizing her point by motioning towards the dial and her mom's pawn sitting far up on the board.

Trip hid a smile behind his hand and Phil said, "Maybe your mom is just better at this game than I am."

Skye considered that. Some people were better at doing things than others were, like Nattie and her dancing, so she shrugged, "Maybe."

May ended up winning, with her and Nattie happily coming in second. For some reason, Phil was extremely excited to come in third place and Trip ended up being an incredibly good sport about losing.

Everyone stayed in the living room and hung out, enjoying the calm atmosphere and each other's presence. Trip opened up his laptop and started typing away while May and Phil turned on a movie. Skye ran upstairs and grabbed some of her new coloring books as well as some crayons and brought them down so that she and Nattie could color together.

After handing her sister a book, she started coloring in a scene of Spongebob and Patrick catching jellyfish. She had only been able to color in a single jellyfish when Natasha poke her arm and said, "Hey, look! This book comes with some temporary tattoos."

Leaning over, she looked at the page Nattie was pointing to. It was glossy and had a bunch of cartoon characters on it, all striking various poses. She scrunched up her nose, "What's that?"
Natasha gave her a startled look, "Temporary tattoos?" Skye nodded. "You stick them onto your skin and they stay on for a day or two. You wanna try some?"

Completely intrigued by the idea of temporary tattoos, she nodded and followed her sister into the kitchen to grab a damp washcloth and a pair of scissors.

They walked back into the living room and sat down. "Which one do you want?"

She seriously considered her options, studying the page intently, much to her sister’s amusement. It had Simba in the middle of a dance move, Rapunzel with her frying pan, Belle smiling at her, and Mulan holding a weapon. It seemed to have all of her favorite cartoon characters; Sebastian, Flynn Ryder, Anastasia, and even some villains like Ursula and Maleficent. It was overwhelming and had too many options for her to decide.

"Which one do you think?" She asked her sister.

Natasha considered it before shrugging, "You could do more than one."

"Who's your favorite Nattie?"

She initially pointed at Cinderella and then reconsidered after a moment, "I like Anastasia."

It wasn’t too surprising that Nattie liked that movie, she liked it too, and she think it had a lot to do with how much they could identify with the storyline, minus being a secret princess. "I want that one and you can have Rapunzel because she’s my favorite and then when we look at them, we’ll think of each other."

Natasha leaned in and kissed her forehead, "That’s a great idea."

She smiled, watched her sister cut around Anastasia on the piece of paper, and then peel off the glossy overlay. "Okay, where do you want it?"

After thinking about it for a moment, she pointed to her upper arm by her shoulder. Nattie gently put the temporary tattoo on her arm and then placed the damp washcloth over it, "I'll just have to hold it on here for thirty seconds and then it'll be done."

Trying not to fidget too much so that she wouldn’t mess the tattoo up was very difficult to do but she managed. Finally, her sister took the washcloth off of her arm and slowly peeled back the paper.

"Woah! It looks just like it did on the paper!" Skye gasped, twisting her arm to gape at the tattoo.

Natasha nodded and gently blew on her arm so that it would dry before handing Skye the scissors and the page with the tattoos on it. She made sure to cut it in a way that wouldn't mess up the Rapunzel tattoo, and tilted her head in question until her sister pointed to her arm, "Put it where I put yours please."

Skye nodded, peeled off the glossy cover, and put it on her before gently pressing the damp washcloth against her arm. She hummed a Tangled song while she waited, guessing when she thought thirty seconds were up, and hoped that she hadn't messed it up. She slowly peeled back the paper and breathed out a sigh of relief as she looked at the tattoo and noting that it looked just like it did when it was on the paper.

After Nattie thanked her, she looked back at the page and cut out the Mulan tattoo, then the Prince Charming one, and then the King Triton one. She walked over to the couch, jumped onto it, shuffled over to May, and climbed on her lap. "Mommy, can I put this on you?"
“Sure baby,” May said, combing her fingers through her hair in that familiar, soothing way that always caused Skye to relax.

Skye smiled and placed the Mulan tattoo on her arm, and then did the same to Phil and Trip. She put the King Triton tattoo onto Phil's forearm instead of his shoulder and the Prince Charming tattoo on Trip's ankle. When she was done, she smiled proudly at her handiwork and went back to coloring with Natasha.

They stayed in the living room and hung out until it was time to go to bed. Skye changed into her pajamas, grabbed a book from bedside table, got comfortable in her bed, and waited until May and Phil came to tuck her in. She handed them the book and stared at the familiar green and blue cover while May and Phil sit down on either side of her. She hoped that the Harvey's wouldn't be mad at her for wanting May and Phil to read Goodnight Moon to her.

Phil cleared his throat and opened the book, "In the great green room, there was a telephone, and a red balloon, and a picture of-

Skye listened as Phil read her favorite story and fell asleep to his gentle voice and the feeling of May leaning in to press a kiss to her forehead.

When Skye woke up on Monday morning, she grabbed her Alice and Rapunzel dolls and headed downstairs. She could tell that she had woken up a little later than she usually did because Phil was already done making breakfast and she was a little disappointed she missed the chance to help out. She joined him at the table and he pulled the comic section out of his newspaper and handed it to her. She dutifully looked it over and giggled at the silly images while she ate her scrambled eggs and toast.

She finished her breakfast before anyone else came down to join them, enjoying her alone time with Phil, and turned to him, "Can I bring Alice and Rapunzel to school with me? It's show-and-tell day."

"Sure, just be sure not to lose them."

Skye nodded seriously, "Okay, I never want to lose Alice or Rapunzel. I love them."

Phil stood up, grabbed her empty plate, pressed a kiss to the top of her head, and said, "I know you do sweetheart. It's getting pretty late, why don't you go wake up May and everyone else?"

Skye grinned and shot out of her seat, running upstairs and right into May and Phil's room. She quietly opened the door and peered inside to find that May was still sleeping, lying on her back with one arm thrown above her head.

Tiptoeing over to the side of the bed, she climbed onto the bed and straddled her stomach before leaning in close to her face and whispering, "Mommy, it's time to wake up."

Her nose scrunched up when she got no response, so she reached out and poked her on the cheek, "Mommy! It's wakeup time!"

This time, she got a response. Her eyes opened up, focused on her, and gave her a tired smile. "Hey Skye. What're you doing in here?" She asked, her voice rough with sleep.

Straightening up, she grinned, "Daddy said that it was getting late and to wake you up. Good morning!"
May looked over at her clock and made a surprised sound, "Good morning sunshine. It's not \textit{that} late."

She leaned in and kissed Skye on the forehead before reaching up and tickling her tummy. She squealed in surprise and started giggling. May kept tickling her until she was wiggling around, trying to escape the onslaught. Finally, she reached down and started tickling her back until her mom raised her hands, "Okay! Truce!"

Grinning, she scooted off of May's stomach so that she could lie down next to her. They both turned so that they were facing each other and May reached forward to brush some hair out of her face.

"I love you Mommy," She said, reaching forward and placing a hand on her cheek.

Resting her hand over Skye’s, May turned her head so that she could press a gentle kiss to her palm before saying, "I love you too."

"How \textit{much} do you love me?" She asked, grinning cheekily, clearly looking for something specific.

"I love you to the moon and back,-"  

Skye finished for her, "More than all the stars in the sky. Forever?"

May tugged her close and she easily burrowed into her, leaning in to place her head on her chest and listen to her heartbeat.  

"Forever and ever."

She wanted them to love her forever and ever and the reassurance made her heart soar as she turned her head to smile into May’s soft shirt. She sighed in content and felt familiar fingers start to comb through her hair.

They laid there for a minute or two in comfortable silence before May said, "We have to get up now sweetie. You have school and I have work."

Skye grumbled but listened to her, reluctantly crawling out of bed after May kissed her on the cheek and told her she had to get ready.

As she walked into her room, she immediately beelined to her closet to grab some clothes for the day. After rummaging around until she found some pink leggings, she was about to choose a shirt when an arm reached past her and grabbed a black and grey plaid shirt. She turned around and Nattie handed it to her, helped her button it up, and reached down to grab and pass her new boots to her. Her sister helped her lace them up and then carefully untangled her hair from her moon necklace and when she wordlessly handed Nattie some hair bands, her sister immediately pulled her hair back into two neat braids.

She grabbed her backpack and intertwined her pinky with Natasha's before both girls walked downstairs to see the lovely image of Trip haphazardly shoving scrambled eggs into his mouth. Natasha grabbed a piece of toast before shoving half of it into her mouth as Trip glanced at his phone and gave Nattie the look that meant they had to leave. She made sure to give her siblings a hug before they rushed out the door.

After taking a seat at the table, she picked Alice and Rapunzel up before gently placing them into her backpack. She leaned forward and whispered to her dolls, "Don't worry, I'll leave it open a little so you guys can breathe. I'll take you back out when I get to school." She zipped her backpack up three quarters of the way and watched as May walked into the room.
She kissed Phil and looked over to her, "Let's go kiddo, we're running later than usual."

Skye nodded and saw Phil hand May a travel mug full of coffee and a slice of toast. She followed them to the car and listened to Hercules songs on the way to school.

They were almost to school when Skye spoke up, "Mommy?"

May turned to music down and looked back at her, "Yeah sweetie?"

"I'm going to sign up for dance class after school today, right?"

"Yep, we'll go in a little earlier to get Natasha and sign you up."

"Okay. Do you think Natasha will be okay with me dancing too?"

May raised an eyebrow, "Why wouldn't she be?"

Skye twiddled her thumbs and mumbled, "Because dancing is her thing, not mine."

May turned around further and reached back to pat her comfortingly on the knee, "Natasha loves dancing and she's happy to share something she loves with someone she loves. I promise, she won't mind."

Skye took a deep breath and nodded, feeling better at her reassurances. She was still nervous to sign up for dance class but she was happy that Nattie would be there with her.

Phil turned into the parking lot and they hopped out of the car to help her out of her seat. She jumped out of the car, making sure she didn't jostle her backpack around too much so that she wouldn't disrupt her dolls, and turned to her parents.

"I love you Mommy," She said, throwing her arms around her waist and squeezing her tight.

Her mom squeezed her back just as tightly and said, "I love you too sweetie. Have a great day at school."

Skye nodded and stepped out of the embrace only to turn to Phil, raise her arms, and give him grabby hands. He grinned, lifted her up, and spun her around once, causing her to squeal and wrap her arms around his neck. He held her close and she said, "Bye Daddy, I love you."

"I love you too Skye."

She leaned back and he shifted his arms so that she was stable, "How much?"

She knew that May loved her to the moon and back, which was really far away. And she loved her more than all the stars in the whole sky, which was a lot. She also knew that Phil loved her too, but she couldn’t help but wonder how much.

He leaned forward and seriously said, "I love you higher than the sky and more than all the water in the ocean."

Her eyes widened. The sky was endless and she had seen maps before, so she knew that there was a whole lot of water in the ocean. He leaned a little closer and conspiratorially whispered, "And more than I love chocolate chip cookies."

Skye laughed happily, knowing how those were his favorite desserts.
After pressing a kiss to his cheek, she squirmed around until he set her down so that she could start walking towards the school. She got halfway before turning around and she saw that they were still standing there smiling at her, so she gave them a cheerful wave. They waved back and May blew her a kiss, which she caught before she ran into the school.

Ms. Hill had told them that they could have show-and-tell time before recess and right now, Lincoln was showing them his rock collection. He had huge collection and he let them all pass around a bunch of cool rocks so everyone could look at them.

Before him, Jemma had shown them her chemistry set that her mom had bought her and when she sat back down on the reading rug, she whispered to Skye that they could play with it later. Fitz hadn’t brought anything to show the class, but he didn’t seem to feel left out.

Skye was supposed to go after Lincoln and she was biting her lip nervously as she combed her fingers through Rapunzel's hair with one hand and gripped her moon pendant with the other. She really hoped her class liked her dolls and didn’t think they were dumb.

Lincoln put his rocks away and everyone clapped before he sat down by Skye. Ms. Hill stood up and said, "Okay Skye, what'd you bring in to show us?"

Her knees wobbled a bit as she stood up and she released her moon pendant from her vice-like grip as she made her way to the front of the reading rug. She swallowed thickly and held Alice and Rapunzel in front of her.

"This is Alice. My big sister, Natasha, gave her to me. My sister's a ballerina, so I think that Alice is a ballerina too. She helps me feel better when I'm sad and I love her because Nattie gave her to me."

She lowered Alice and held up Rapunzel, "This is her best friend, Rapunzel. My Mommy got her for me and she's my favorite princess."

A girl, Emma, raised her hand and Skye pointed at her, feeling kind of powerful as she did. "My favorite princess is Rapunzel too!"

Another girl, Gracie, raised her hand and Skye pointed at her too, "My favorite is Belle!"

That sparked a debate between everyone in the class. They all announced their favorite princesses and princes and Skye smiled as she listened, happily noting that everyone seemed to like her dolls. Ms. Hill quieted them down and thanked Skye for sharing her dolls before asking her to sit down. She took her spot next to Jemma and listened to Ms. Hill.

"Okay guys! It's recess time. I have a meeting in the office for about fifteen minutes so Mrs. Peliski will be watching you until I get back. I know you'll all be on your best behavior, so go have some fun. When we get back inside, we're going to go over our words of the week!"

She motioned towards the door and they all got up and filed out of the room. Skye stopped by Ms. Hill, "Is it okay if I bring Alice and Rapunzel outside with me? They like playing in the sand."

"Sure Skye. Just be careful with them. I don't want you to lose them, okay?"

Skye nodded and followed her class outside. She, Jemma, Fitz, and Lincoln went and played in the sand. They were building sand castles and Fitz was collecting leaves for them to use as flags.
Skye looked over to Lincoln, "I really liked your rock collection Lincoln. It's super cool."

"Thanks Skye, I liked your dolls."

"Thanks. And I really liked your chemistry set Jemma."

Before she could answer, Fitz said, "Yeah, Simmons is going to become a mad scientist!"

Jemma elbowed him in the stomach, "I am not Fitz!"

Skye crossed her arms, "Yeah Fitz! She won't be a mad scientist! She'll be one that totally changes
the world with her sciencey brain and smartness."

Jemma grinned at her and nodded in solidarity. Fitz raised his hands in concession, "Okay, you're
right. Sorry Simmons."

They went back to building their sandcastle and Skye placed Alice and Rapunzel right outside it so
that they looked like they were guarding it.

Lincoln seriously studied their work, "We should build a moat."

They all agreed and started digging out a moat. Jemma turned to her and said, "You should come
over to my house today. We can play with my chemistry set."

"I'm going to sign up for dance class today. Maybe I can after though?"

Jemma nodded, "Okay! I'll ask my-"

She was cut off by a high pitched scream and they all looked over to the monkey bars to find Gracie
sprawled out on the sand underneath it. She was crying and clutching her arm and Skye winced in
sympathy when she realized that she must have fallen off.

Teachers and other kids were running towards Gracie, Fitz and Jemma had already gotten up and ran
over to the scene, but before Lincoln bolted off, he looked at her, "Are you coming? I wanna see
what happened."

Skye shook her head, "I don't want to be in the way. I'll just finish the moat."

Lincoln shrugged and ran over to the monkey bars, where a big group of people were standing
around Gracie while the teachers tried to control the situation.

She went back to digging out the moat and hoped that Gracie was okay. She was probably scared
and wanted her mom and dad right now. She knew that if she fell down and hurt herself, she
wouldn't want everyone staring at her and she would want May and Phil to be there.

She finished the moat quicker than she thought she would and grabbed Alice and Rapunzel to
reposition them. She glanced back to the monkey bars and saw that some of the teachers were trying
to call their kids in so she stood up to try and find Mrs. Peliski because Ms. Hill wasn't back yet.

After struggling for a few moments, she finally caught sight of her and went to make her way
towards the rest of her class when she felt someone roughly grab her around the waist.

She tried to scream but then something was placed over her mouth. It smelt sickly sweet and her
vision started to go hazy as tiredness swept through her. Her heart was pounding crazily and she tried
kicking her feet towards the person holding her in an attempt to get away but all of her energy
seemed to be quickly vanishing.
She uselessly slapped the hands gripping her waist, a desperate last attempt to get free, but it seemed to have no effect, and against her will, her eyes slid shut.
Chapter 26

Chapter Notes

Here's to editing while wine drunk!

Phil had been having an easy morning and that's how he knew that something had to go wrong.

He never had easy mornings.

All he'd seen in the pediatric wing of the hospital was a couple of common colds, a sprained ankle from an overly enthusiastic soccer player, and most recently, a girl with a broken arm. There was nothing serious, and although he knew that he should be happy that the children in his town were healthy, he knew that there was always something that had to go wrong. That's just how it was.

After having a little too much time on his hands, he went to go check on May in the physical therapy wing. Walking in, he looked around and couldn't spot her, but he did see familiar strawberry blonde hair.

He walked up to her and smiled, "Hey Pep, you seen May around?"

Pepper looked up from her chart and smiled at him. Unlike most people in this stressful hospital environment, Pepper's smiles were always genuine. He always tried to be a positive person but sometimes this place could get to him. He had never seen Pepper lose her cool and he's known her for years.

"She's with a patient right now. Mr. Smith finally had his hip surgery a little while ago and she's running through some exercises with him," She said, perching her pen behind her ear and placing a hand on her hip.

"Oh, if she finishes before my lunch break is over, could you ask her to meet me in my office? If not, could you let her know I stopped by?"

"Sure Coulson. How's everything going at home? Your little girl all settled in?"

It was impossible to keep the grin off his face as he thought of Skye. She had told him that she loved him this morning. Of course, she had said it to May and him before but that was for both of them. It felt a little different when she was saying it to just him.

"She's great Pep. It was a bit of an adjustment at first but I can't imagine her not being there."

Pepper smiled and patted him on the arm, "Aw that's great. You got any pictures? I love kids."

He nodded and pulled out his phone, eagerly tapping into his photo gallery to find a specific picture.

Saturday morning, he had taught Skye what a 'selfie' was. Actually, he had had no idea what that had been until the week before when he had seen Natasha making weird faces at her phone. After asking her about it, she had patiently explained to him what the hell she was doing. Skye had still been a little upset about wetting the bed and she had been so adorable in her tiara and Captain America outfit, that he had handed her his phone and showed her how to work the camera.
Skye was surprisingly really good at using his phone. She had fiddled with it a little bit and then took some pictures, some with normal smiles and some with silly faces, before figuring out how to download an app that allowed her to change the background of her pictures.

It had been a little humbling to find that his six-year old knew more about technology than he did.

Finally, he found the photo he was looking for. Skye was smiling brightly, her tiara was sitting crookedly on her head, and the top of her Captain America outfit was peaking up at the bottom of the screen. Her warm brown eyes looked happy and she was smiling so big that all of her teeth were visible.

He smiled at the picture and handed his phone to Pepper, who studied the photo and visibly melted. She took it and looked at the picture, "Aww! Oh my God Phil, she’s adorable!"

"Thanks Pep. She's going to sign up for dance class today after school. She says that she wants to dance like Natasha," He said proudly, taking his phone back and shoving it into his pocket.

"So she's getting along nicely with Nat and Trip?"

"They adore her. Natasha played a big role in her feeling comfortable in our home."

"Well that's great. Let us know if you ever need a babysitter, Tony and I are thinking about maybe starting a family soon and we could use all the practice we can get."

Phil smiled at the thought of Tony trying to wrangle in a kid of his own. "Sure thing. She's not too keen on meeting strangers but I think she'll love you guys."

Pepper smirked at him, "Plus, you and May would get some alone time. How long has it been since you've had a date night?"

It took a moment for him to think back and realize that they hadn't gone on a proper date since the beginning of the last summer when Wanda and Pietro had been home. "Too long Pep."

She playfully pushed his arm, "You need to take your wife out Coulson! Show her how much you love her!"

He totally agreed. May did so much for him and the family, she deserved to be treated. He gave her a sheepish look, "I know. Maybe in a week or two when Skye is more comfortable with May and I not being around her."

"Sounds good. Give me a call or something and we'll figure it out," Pepper said, pausing to wave at a pair of women, one of them using crutches, before turning back to him. "I gotta go. I'm working with a basketball player who tore her ACL and she’s an absolute dream to work with. I'll let May know you stopped by."

"Thanks Pepper. Tell Tony I said hello."

"Will do!" He watched her approach the two women before heading back to his office. He grabbed a sandwich and a bottle of water from his fridge and sat down at his desk to eat while looking over some papers.

His lunch break was nearly over when his phone started ringing. He ruefully set the last bite of his sandwich down and answered it without looking at the screen.

"Hello?"
"Am I speaking to Phil Coulson?" The voice was unfamiliar and the fact that she knew his name had him sitting up in alarm.

"Yes, what can I do for you?"

There was a slight pause before the woman answered him, "I'm Officer Anderson with the police department," Dread snuck up on him, making his heart beat fast and his palms feel slick with sweat. "It seems that Skye is missing."

Phil opened his mouth but no words came out. His thoughts were racing and it felt like ice was splashing through his veins.

"What do you mean it *seems* like my daughter is missing. What the hell happened? She's at school!" He shouted, pushing his way out of his chair and running back towards the physical therapy wing.

"Well sir, there was an incident during recess. The teachers were distracted while trying to assist another student who broke her arm and when everything got sorted out, they couldn't find Skye. We're investigating the situation right now. How soon can you get to the police station?"

Phil heard what she was saying but he couldn't comprehend it. It didn't make sense that Skye would've wandered away from school. She didn't like strangers, so she never would've left with one, and she didn't like being in new situations or places.

He actively fought against the thought that Skye had been taken, not even wanting to consider it, but the thought still remained no matter how hard he tried to push it away.

Officer Anderson’s voice in his ear drew him out of his thoughts, "Sir? Are you still there?"

He was running down the hallway now and patients, nurses, and doctors were staring at him and giving him strange looks. He was completely focused on the swinging doors to the physical therapy wing and it was hard to catch a breath but he managed to say, "I'm here. I'll get there as soon as I can."

"I see here that you have two other children, Triplett and Natasha, I can send a squad car to their school and have them meet you here at the station, would that be okay?"

"Yeah, yes, yes that'd be great," He said, unable to focus on his conversation when all he wanted to do was find Melinda so that they could go find Skye, who was hopefully just wandering around her school unaccounted for, and they could put this day behind them.

"Okay sir, I-" Phil hung up before the officer finished her sentence. Usually, he would never do anything so rude but he couldn't control himself. He couldn't listen to that officer talk anymore.

His heart was beating erratically and he burst through the doors, most likely looking like a lunatic, and his eyes were instantly drawn to Melinda.

She was sitting at the front desk filling out some paperwork when she looked up and spotted him, "Hey babe, Pepper said you stopped by earlier. I was just about to go and… what's wrong?"

Looking at her, words escaped him. It was impossible to look her in the eye and tell her that their daughter was unaccounted for and that the police were involved. His silence prompted her to stand up and rush over to him. "Phil?"

"It's Skye."
Natasha’s history teacher was sick so they were lucky enough to have been given the most laid-back substitute on the planet. He had given them an easy worksheet that everyone had completed in about five minutes and had let them talk for the remainder of the class. She, Clint, Bucky, and Steve had all moved their desks so that they were sitting in a small circle facing each other.

Clint was waving his hands around enthusiastically and telling them, in an overly-dramatic voice, about the massive fight he had gotten into with his brother yesterday. "I just can't stand him sometimes, you know?"

Steve and Bucky looked at each other and shook their heads, "We don't have brothers dude."

Clint looked over to her, "You know what I'm talking about, right?"

Nat considered it for a second, "Actually, Trip, Pietro and I get along pretty well. I think I've only fought with Trip once and I've never actually gotten into a fight with Pietro before, we've just had some little arguments."

Clint groaned in frustration and let his head fall forward onto the desk, "Consider yourselves lucky."

Steve clapped a hand to his back, "It's okay man. A couple more years and we're all out of here."

Natasha nodded and reached over to flick the back of his head, "You know that you can stay at my house if it ever gets too much. My parents love you and Skye keeps asking when you're going to come over."

Clint thanked her before straightening up and smiling, "How's the little munchkin?"

She smiled, happy to have any excuse to talk about her favorite little sister, "She's great. She started calling mom and dad, 'mommy' and 'daddy'. It's adorable."

Bucky smiled softly, "She's such a cute kid."

Nat agreed with him. She was pretty fond of children in general, she helped her dance instructors teach the younger kids sometimes and actually found herself enjoying it, but she absolutely loved Skye. "Yeah, she's going to sign up for dance class today."

Clint made an exaggerated mushy face, "Aw, little Skye wants to be just like her big sister."

Natasha punched him in the arm, smiling in satisfaction when he hissed and rubbed a hand over the spot, "Ouch Red, that's a good thing."

Steve nodded, "Yeah, you're a great role model. It's good that she wants to be like you."

Bucky agreed, "Yeah, and can you imagine that kiddo running around in a little tutu?"

Her heart melted a bit at the thought, knowing that Skye was adorable in everything she did. She just hoped that Skye would enjoy dancing as much as she did.

Dancing had always calmed her down and allowed her to clear her mind of all the negative things that were going on inside of her, so she hoped that it would help Skye like it helped her. Even if it didn't, she hoped that her sister had fun anyways.

She was about to say something back when there was a knock on the classroom door. The substitute opened it and a police officer walked in causing her and everyone else to straighten up and look
The police officer whispered to the substitute and then said, "Is there a Natasha in here?"

Everyone turned to look at her and she was too surprised to even give them a dirty look like she normally would have. Steve poked her arm and worriedly whispered, "What did you do?!"

She shrugged, grabbed her bag, and stood up. As she walked towards the officer, the whole class went, "Ooooo," and she shook off her surprise enough to throw them all a glare.

"What's going on?" She asked, stopping in front of the substitute and police officer.

He didn't say anything, just motioned for her to follow him. She was confused but did as she was told, following him to another classroom and waiting as he walked in and came back out with Trip, confusion clear on his face.

Her brother stopped next to her and refused to budge, "Listen man, I'm not going anywhere with you until you tell us what's going on."

The officer gave them a sympathetic look that Natasha hated, "I'm sorry, but your foster sibling is missing. Your parents are waiting for you at the station, now if you'll come with me, I'll give you a ride there."

He started walking down the hall, clearly assuming they were following him, but she and Trip just stood there in shock. They looked at each other for a long moment before hastily trying to catch up with the officer.

Trip grabbed onto his arm, "What do you mean? Wanda and Pietro are over in Europe right now. Why would we be going to the police station? Shouldn't we be going to the airport?"

They got to the police car and he opened the back door for them but she refused to get in until he answered Trip's question and it seemed like Trip had the same idea.

The officer sighed, "Your older foster siblings are fine. It's your younger one, Skye, that's missing."

They both looked at each other in shock and silently got into the car.

It was a quiet ride, the silence thick and heavy, and once they reached the police station, they followed to officer inside. She spotted her mom and dad at the same time that Trip did and they both ran over to them. Their dad was pacing back and forth and their mom was standing stoically in front of a desk, glaring at the woman sitting there.

"Mom! What's going?"

Her mom turned around, saw them both running to her, and quickly walked over to meet them halfway. She pulled them both into a hug and she leaned into her before feeling her dad wrap his arms around all of them.

"They can't find Skye."

Natasha sucked in a breath. She had been clutching onto the hope that this had all been a terrible mistake, but hearing her mom say those words solidified everything.

"What do you mean? Did she run away?" Natasha couldn't imagine that ever happening but the other option was way worse and she refused to even consider it. There was no way that Skye had
been kidnapped.

Her dad pulled away and everyone stepped out of the embrace, "We don't know. There are officers at the school going over where she last was, and Officer Anderson is going over the school's surveillance that they sent over right now. We just have to wait."

They all sat down but that lasted for about four seconds before her dad started pacing again and her mom wandered back up to the desk where the officer, who she was assuming was Officer Anderson, was typing away on her computer.

Her family wasn’t good at waiting.

She started biting her nails, something she only did when she was nervous, and anxiously shook her foot while Trip stared blankly at the floor.

That went on for about five more minutes, with everyone doing their best to shake off their nervous energy, before two officers walked in the doors. One of them was holding something familiar and she immediately rushed over to him and angrily shouted, "Where did you get that? That's not yours!"

She yanked the large bag out of his hands, not even regretting her behavior towards the officers.

She felt her mom step up beside her, "What's going on?"

Nat held up the clear bag, the two dolls nestled inside it on full display, and her mom's face harden.

"Skye would never leave these behind. She didn't run away mom!"

Her mom’s hands closed into tight fists, "We don't know that yet Nat."

She shook her head in disbelief, not sure why wasn't her mom listening to her. Skye would never, ever leave behind Alice or Rapunzel. She loved them too much. She slept with them, dressed them, and brought them everywhere. She even talked to them for God's sake. There was no way that Skye would leave them behind or forget about them.

She was about to say something back when Officer Anderson spoke up, "I've got something!"

They all rushed over and she gave her family a look, "I'm sorry, but you guys aren't really supposed to see this, just the officers."

Her dad stepped close to Officer Anderson, "That's my daughter you're talking about, so you better play the damn footage."

Natasha was impressed. She'd never heard her dad talk like that.

The officer gave him a look but didn't stop them when they leaned forward to look at her computer screen. Everything was in black and white and the officer pointed to a small figure playing in the sand with two dolls in her hand. "There she is. About a minute ago, a little girl fell off the monkey bars and broke her arm, that's why everyone is huddled over there. Skye seems to be the only one not there."

They watched as she glanced over her shoulder, stood up, grabbed her dolls, and went to take a step forward when someone in a baseball cap appeared out of nowhere and grabbed her roughly around the waist. Skye visibly stiffened and tried to get away but then the person put something over Skye's mouth. Her attempts to escape slowly weakened and after the longest minute in her life, she watched as Skye went limp. Nat involuntarily whimpered, trying to process what she’d just seen and figure out who would do that to any child, let alone her sister.
The person hurried off, keeping their heads down so that their baseball cap covered their face, and the only thing that remained was Skye’s dolls lying forgotten in the sand.

The officer spoke up again, "The person who took her must have known about the school's surveillance cameras."

Natasha looked up and saw her dad rubbing her mom's shoulders soothingly, but they all looked like she felt. Shocked, upset, scared, and extremely pissed off.

Her mom stepped forward and leaned in close to Officer Anderson's face. She couldn't see her mom's face but she was assuming it was pretty scary based on how the officer leaned away in fear, "Where's our little girl?"

The officer stuttered, "We aren't sure ma'am but I guarantee you that she’s our top priority. We have officers creating road blocks across town and there’s been an amber alert. We'll do our best to find her ma'am."

Her mom didn't say anything but backed off, giving the officer enough room to take a breath and go back to typing on her computer.

Natasha looked to her parents. They both weren't the type to show when they were freaking out but Nat knew the signs. Her mom got more stoic than usual and her dad fidgeted and paced around a lot. Natasha knew that if they were freaking out, she should be freaking out, because if they couldn't control the situation, she didn't know who could.
Chapter 27

Ever so slowly, Skye started to become aware of her surroundings. She didn't open her eyes, but she felt something soft beneath her and she felt warm and cozy. She was almost able to roll over and fall back asleep but the giant, splitting ache in her head made it impossible and by recognizing that pain, everything came rushing back to her.

Her heart started beating erratically and her eyes flew open as she jerked awake. Looking around, she saw that she was in a nice room, lying on a bed. The walls were light green and other than the bed and some big letters spelling out ‘Daisy’ on the wall, the room was pretty bare.

Leaping up and out of the bed, she rushed to the door, hoping to find her way out of wherever she was. But when she tried to turn the doorknob, it wouldn't budge. She made a frustrated noise and started twisting it harder, her frustration growing exponentially when it wouldn’t open.

All she wanted was to get back to her family but she didn’t know where she was and the dumb door wouldn’t open, so she ran over to the only window in the room. When she tried to push it, it wouldn’t open, and when she looked closer, she noticed that there were screws holding it in place.

She turned around in a circle but couldn't find any other way out, and that realization caused her eyes to start welling up with tears. Her brain felt slightly foggy and she was having a hard time remembering what had happened but she racked her brain for anything to hint at where she was or who had taken her.

She would do anything right now to be with her parents and brother and sister. She wanted her family and her dolls, and when she looked around, she suddenly remembered how Alice and Rapunzel had been with her, she was even more upset to find that they were nowhere to be seen.

She was starting to lose control over herself and her mind was racing and before she could completely spiral, her hand reflexively went to her neck and she breathed in a sigh of relief when she felt the warm metal of her moon necklace still hanging there reassuringly. Rubbing the pendant between her fingers helped to calm her down a bit.

As she stood in the middle of the room, clutching at her necklace, she heard heavy footsteps approaching. She looked around in panic, frantically noting that there was nowhere to hide. The bed was too low to the ground to climb under, so she backed into the far corner of the room and slid down the wall, pulling her knees to her chest and hiding her face in her knees in an attempt to make herself as small as possible.

The doorknob jiggled and then she heard the door creak as it slowly opened up. She refused to look up, hoping that if she pretended she was somewhere else, the person would just leave her alone.

A distinctly male voice suddenly said, "Hello."

She tried to make herself even smaller by tugging her legs closer to her but it was impossible. She unwrapped one arm from around her legs, trying to ignore how her hands were shaking as she brought it to her chest and grabbed her necklace.

She didn't say anything in response, not only because she didn’t like talking to strangers, but she especially didn’t feel like talking to strangers that stole her. The more thought she put into it, the more she wondered if this would count as kidnapping. She wondered if the fact that she was a foster kid and therefore not really anyone’s actual kid would make it so that it wouldn’t count as one. Another
part of her brain told her that that was silly; she was still a kid, even if she didn’t belong to anybody, so it probably did still count as a kidnapping.

That thought made her throat start to constrict.

She heard footsteps heading her way and whimpered in fear, cringing into the wall, and the voice spoke up again, "Shhh it's okay Daisy."

Her face scrunched up in confusion, not sure who he was talking to. For a split second, she wondered if this person was a past foster father, but no one had ever called her Daisy before. Her name was Skye and before that it was Mary Sue, it had never been Daisy.

The footsteps stopped right in front of her and she felt her whole body start to shake with fear.

"Daisy?"

Her fear was pushed to the side for a moment as a giant wave of fiery anger swept through her. It was a stupid thing to be angry about. She should feel angry that this person had kidnapped her and took her away from her family and friends, but that mostly just scared her and made her feel panicky. It made her angry that he stole her and he didn't even know her name.

She could feel the words making their way up her throat, angry words that wouldn't do anyone any good, so she squashed them down. Yelling at grown-ups usually made them mad or yell back or hurt her. She didn't know what this guy wanted and she didn't want to do anything that could get her hurt.

Her kneecaps were digging painfully into her cheekbones and the air was getting hot around her when the voice spoke up again, "I can see that you're a little upset right now. How about I go get some food for you and then we can talk?"

He phrased it as a question and she didn't know what he expected her to say but she was wholly determined that she wasn't going to say anything.

She didn't hear him move for a couple of seconds but finally she heard his footsteps retreat and then the door opened and closed again. Before she could even consider running after him and trying to get away, a lock on the door firmly clicked into place. She kept her head down for a little bit, just in case he was pretending, but when she didn't hear anything, she looked up and was relieved to see that the room was empty.

Jumping up, she inspected the room again, hoping that there was a way out that she had missed before. She rechecked the window and door, heart sinking when they were both firmly shut and locked. A thorough search under the bed found that nothing was there. There was a chair sitting in the other corner of the room with a blanket thrown over it but other than that and the letters spelling out ‘Daisy’ on the wall, nothing else was in there.

She forced herself to calm down and think.

After squeezing her necklace in an attempt to soothe herself, she remembered that the man had said that he would be back. A plan started forming in her mind and she thought that maybe she could slip through the door when he came back, run out, and get help. Her palms started to get sweaty and she could still feel her heart pounding crazily in her chest at the thought but she needed to try.

She looked around and figured that standing behind the door would probably work best. That way, he wouldn't see her when he opened the door, which could help her sneak out.

She quickly hid behind the door when she heard footsteps approaching again along with the sound
of the man humming a song. The sound made her think of Phil, which made her feel like there was a giant knot in her stomach.

Taking a deep breath, she told herself to focus. She made sure she stayed quiet and held her breath as the doorknob jiggled again. When the door unlocked and then opened, she saw a tall figure take three steps into the room and look around as she peered through the tiny crack between the wall and open door.

"Daisy?"

She quietly observed him and saw him set a tray down on the floor before moving toward the bed. He started to crouch down, she assumed it was so that he could look under it to try to find her, but she didn't wait to find out. She bolted out the door and found herself in a dark hallway. The unfamiliar surroundings struck fear into her heart, reinforcing the fact that she was in a strange place with a strange person, but she didn’t let that stop her.

She kept running, even when she heard the man shout behind her.

Even though she didn't know where she was, she made sure to look for a door. After scrambling around for a long moment, she found one, yanked it open, and whimpered when she saw that it only led to a bathroom. She kept running and involuntarily glanced back when she heard footsteps getting closer behind her.

A tall, nicely-dressed man with longish brown hair was chasing after her. That's all she managed to see about her kidnapper before she turned back around and forced her legs to move faster.

She looked around frantically and saw another door. This one looked more promising since it was right next to a window that allowed her to see a street with a couple houses around her, which made her think that she might be in a neighborhood. She bolted towards the door, wrapped her hand around the doorknob, and grunted in frustration when she discovered that it was locked. With shaking fingers, she managed to unlock the deadbolt and throw open the door. It banged against the wall and the wave of relief that washed over her made her knees weak.

The bright light hurt her eyes but she still moved forward out of the house, aiming for anywhere but where she was.

She made it three steps before two hands wrapped around her waist and dragged her back into the darkness. Ice cold dread shot through her and she started screaming, hoping that someone, anyone, would hear her.

The man lifted her with one arm and held her back to his chest as she kicked and flailed her arms around, screaming as loudly as she could, but it didn't seem to faze him. He just quickly closed and locked the door with his other hand and started making his way back to the room.

She heard him sigh deeply before saying, "Now, now Daisy. You don't want to do that."

Her throat was starting to hurt from screaming and she stopped for a second to take a deep breath and yell, "That's. Not. My. Name!" She punctuated each word with a kick, letting the red hot anger coursing through her take over.

He didn't seem to acknowledge her as he walked back into the room, firmly locked the door, and set her down. She scrambled away from him and backed up until she hit a wall.

The man turned back to her and she finally got a good look at his face. He looked old, she thought, with dark eyes with wrinkles all along his face. He was smoothing out his fancy jacket when he took
a deep breath, looked up, and smiled at her. This caught her off guard and she wondered how he could even smile right now.

"Please don't try to run Daisy. I've been waiting to meet you for a very long time."

She felt angry tears well up in her eyes and spill over as she crossed her arms and stomped her foot, "My name isn't Daisy!"

An angry look passed over the man's face before he shook it off, but she noticed it and it caused her to shrink back in fear.

"Yes it is. That was your name when you were a little baby."

Skye's face scrunched up in confusion and she tried to focus on what he was saying but her heart was beating so fast and she was breathing too quickly to respond or think. Since she couldn't say anything, she just tried to focus on trying to calm down her breathing since her mom wasn't here to help her if she had another panic attack.

The man spoke up again, and while his voice wasn't unpleasant, it still made her want to rip her hair out, "My name's Cal and I'm your father."

Hearing that only confirmed what Skye already knew: that this guy was crazy. There was no way that what he was saying was true, so that meant that he was crazy. Actually, he was already crazy because he kidnapped her and people who aren't nuts don't go around stealing people.

She shook her head. He was a bad man, and bad people lied, and she wouldn’t let this dumb lie get in her head.

Her breathing wasn't getting any slower but it wasn't getting any quicker either, so that was a good thing. Tears were still leaking out of her eyes and there was a knot in her tummy that felt like it was getting tighter and tighter.

She wanted her mom and her dad and her brother and sister. She wanted to be back in her room, under her warm blankets, and staring up at the light green stars on her ceiling as her parents read her a story.

The man kept talking and she wished that he would stop, "I hoped that we could meet under different circumstances but unfortunately this is the best I could do. Do you like your room? It's only temporary of course. We'll be leaving here soon enough to start over somewhere else, as a family."

Her breath hitched as he told her that he was going to take her away. A small part of her recognized that that meant that they were still near or in her town, but a bigger part of her panicked at the thought of being further away from where her family could find her.

The man was still talking, but she put her hands over her ears and started humming a Tangled song so that she couldn't hear him. She shook her head, closed her eyes, and hummed, telling herself that May and Phil were going to save her. They loved her and they were probably looking for her right now, she just had to wait for them to find her. She focused so hard on that thought, ignoring everything else that was going on around her, and finally felt her breathing start to slow down fractionally.

Once she managed to drag in a deep breath, she could hear the man, Cal, talking louder in an attempt to get her to listen but she just wanted it all to stop. She started crying harder and any progress that she had just made with her breathing didn't matter anymore. She could feel her throat constricting and her breathing quicken and it felt so scary and familiar that she knew that she was having a panic attack.
attack.

She sobbed hard and wished that her mom and dad were here to help her. Every time she tried to suck in air, it felt like she was choking and she realized that she was in a losing battle. Her vision started to get fuzzy and when her eyes started to close, she welcomed it.

When she woke up again, she hoped that everything that had happened before was just a dream. Her eyes felt heavy and dry as she opened them and any hope that she was feeling died right away. A glance through the window told her that it was now dark outside and she wondered how long had she been asleep. She tightly grasped the blankets wrapped around her and paused at the soft material between her fingers.

She knew that she had been on the floor by the wall when she had passed out… which meant that the man, Cal, had carried her to the bed.

Her skin prickled and she felt dirty as she frantically hopped off the bed and walked over to the window. Even though it was dark outside, there was a streetlamp nearby that casted enough of a dim light for her to be able to make out a couple of things.

There was a house on either side of her. One looked like no one lived there since the plants were dead and the grass was way overgrown, but the other house looked promising. The grass was neat and there were toys strewn all over the lawn. It had a miniature playground and a swing set that looked like it was used a lot, and she hoped that maybe someone would be out there when it was light out and they would see her.

The sound of the door opening caught her off guard and she jerked around. The man's head poked inside and he smiled when he spotted her, causing her to cringe and take an involuntary step away from him.

He stepped into the room, taking care to lock the door behind him, and motioned to the tray that was sitting on the floor. It had a sandwich on it and a glass of water and her stomach rolled just looking at the food.

"Aren't you hungry?"

She refused to answer him. She told herself that sometimes it was better to just say nothing, and she grabbed onto her moon pendant and told herself to be brave like May thought she could be.

It was quiet for too long, her palms were getting sweaty and she was tapping her foot against the floor to give her something to do, so she managed to force herself to stare the man in the eye and shakily asked, "Why did you take me?"

He made to step closer to her, and even though she was trying to be brave, she huddled closer to the wall. He saw that and stopped moving, which made her sigh in relief.

The man started playing with his hands, looking kind of nervous, and that made her angry again. He had no reason to be nervous, he wasn't the one who had been kidnapped.

"Well, like I said earlier, I'm your father."

"No you aren't!" Skye managed to shout over her choking anger and fear.
She didn't even care that she was yelling at a grown-up and she tried to look brave but she didn't think that it was working so well.

"Yes I am! I am! You were taken away from me!" He said, his voice getting louder and louder, and she cowered away from him. He saw and visibly tried to calm himself down.

Skye was shaking with anger and fear and she realized that she hated this man and his stupid lies.

"No you aren't! May and Phil are my mom and dad!"

"No they aren't Daisy, you were taken from me and given to the nuns at that orphanage. You're mine."

Skye didn't believe him but arguing wasn't getting her anywhere, so she thought that maybe humoring him would be better, "If you're my dad, where's my mom?"

The man, Cal, she had to keep reminding herself that he had a name, looked pained before he answered, "She died giving birth to you. You look just like her. My Daisy."

Skye was about to say that that wasn't her name but she had already said that and it didn't seem to be helping. She didn't know what to do with the information he had given her. If her birth-mom was dead, it would make sense that she had been given up, but Skye didn't want to believe that this man was her father.

Phil was her father.

Phil loved her higher than the sky and more than all the water in the ocean, and more than chocolate chip cookies. He made her feel safe and loved and happy. He played dress up with her and helped her feel better when she got hurt. That's what real dads did.

This man wasn't a dad. Dad's didn't kidnap people, or scare them, or make them have panic attacks and pass out, so she refused to believe him.

Even though she thought that, he seemed to get angry when she said that he wasn't her dad, so she steered clear of that. She was pretty good at evading topics that would result in someone yelling at her or her getting hurt, so instead she asked, "If you're my dad, where have you been?"

He tried to step closer to her but she held her hands up and he stopped. He looked away and straightened his tie before looking back at her. "When you were born, they tried to take you away from me. I had just lost your mother, I wasn't going to lose you too, so I did some bad things and ran away with you." He said earnestly, clearly trying to get her to understand, but she wasn't having it. "They were catching up to us, so I left you at the orphanage. I was going to come back for you in a day or two, when things were safer, but then they caught me. They locked me up and I wasn't allowed out until about two weeks ago."

He took a deep breath, trying to get himself back under control, while Skye stayed silent and tried to process everything.

After he gulped down a few deep breaths, she gave her a wobbly smile, "As soon as I was free, I looked for you Daisy. I was so happy when I found you but I couldn't get you until now. Those people kept you too close but now we're finally together."

Skye heard what he was saying, she understood the words, but they held no meaning for her.

He opened his mouth again and she shook her head, not wanting to hear anything else. She
couldn’t…do this. She wanted her mom and her dad. She wanted Trip and Nattie and Alice and Rapunzel. She wanted to be in her room, in her comfy pajamas, with May and Phil reading her a bedtime story and giving her a kiss goodnight. She didn't like this man, he was scaring her and although he tried to act like he was nice, nice people didn't kidnap you and lock you up.

She shut her eyes and squeezed her necklace tightly in her hand. "Could you…could you go away?" She whispered.

Her eyes were closed so she couldn't see his expression but he was quiet for long enough that she started to wonder if he’d silently left. But when he finally spoke up, his voice was soft and Skye hated it, "Okay. Maybe we can talk more tomorrow?"

Skye couldn't force herself to answer and she heard him sigh and walk towards the door, "Okay Daisy. Goodnight."

The door clicked shut and she let out a loud breath, feeling the knot in her tummy loosen slightly.

The only thing she could think of was that she wanted to go home.

She tugged the sheets off the bed and laid down on the floor, curling up on her side so that she was staring at the green wall. Tears dripped onto her cheeks and she didn't try to stop them.

Out of everything that he had said, the way that he had repeatedly called her Daisy stuck in her head. She wasn’t Daisy.

Her whole life, she had been trying to figure out who she was. First she was Mary Sue, the stupid foster kid with no parents and no friends. No one had loved her as she’d been stuck in the orphanage and put into foster families left and right. When she’d been four, she’d decided that she wasn't Mary Sue, she was Skye.

Skye was much better than Mary Sue but it was still hard to try and figure out who she was when she was being called names and was being put down by every family who took her in. When she started living with May and Phil, she had finally started to feel like herself. She didn't have to spend all of her time being scared, she could focus on becoming who she was meant to be. She finally felt like Skye and she wasn't going to let some mean man tell her that that wasn’t who she was.

She knew who she was, and it wasn't his Daisy.

She had too many thoughts swirling around in her brain, so she stayed awake until her eyes couldn't stay open any longer, and then she gladly welcomed the comfort of sleep.
May felt like her blood was boiling and she was going to explode.

Skye had been gone for hours and they still had no leads. The officers had reluctantly told them that all of Skye's past foster families had airtight alibis and she couldn't think of anyone else who would take her. There was no ransom call or note and they had nothing to go off of.

She knew she was getting on the officers’ nerves and she knew that it would probably be better if she let them do their job without getting in their way but she couldn't stop herself. Her baby was out there, all alone with some stranger. The overriding thought swirling around in her mind was that Skye had been through too much already, why was this happening to her?

Currently, she was sitting between Natasha and Trip, who were both fidgeting. Phil had gone to get them coffee and May suspected that he just needed something to do. A part of her wished that she had been the one to go grab their coffee, just so she could have some small chance of taking her mind off of what was going on, but Natasha was leaning into her side as she stroked her hair and if she didn’t keep intermittently squeezing Trip’s arm, his lip was going to start bleeding if he kept worrying it with his teeth.

The idleness did nothing to keep her mind from worrying about Skye.

She had so many questions that she needed answers to. Was Skye hurt? Had she eaten? Was she cold? Was she being hurt? Ignored? She couldn't even think about anything worse than that. She wouldn't.

Her baby was prone to panic attacks and she desperately hoped that Skye didn't have one because she didn't want her to go through that alone. She promptly berated herself for that thought because of course Skye would be panicking right now.

A small bit of relief swept through her as Phil came back into the room and handed her a cup of coffee. She couldn't drink it but she took it from him just because she wanted him to know that she was grateful, before standing up and motioning for him to follow her to the other side of the room so that they were away from the kids but still within sight.

She leaned into him, heavily resting her forehead on his chest, "What're we going to do?"

"We're doing everything we can," He said, voice clearly strained, as he ran comforting fingers through her hair.

"I feel like we should be doing more."

"I know."

It was comforting that Phil was here and completely understood how she was feeling. She didn’t know what she would do if she didn’t have him.

After taking in a deep, shaky breath, she leaned back and looked up at him, "What're we missing Phil? We're missing something, I can feel it."

He nodded and she watched as the gears in his head started turning. He was thinking of something, and from the determined set of his mouth, it was important.
It took a long moment before he seemed to come to a conclusion but then he gently pushed her back a little and held her at arm's length, "They said that they checked all of Skye's past foster families, right?"

May nodded, not quite sure what point he was trying to make.

Phil gave her a questioning look, "What about, and hear me out here, what about her biological parents?"

The stress was obviously getting to him because he knew as well as she did that Skye's file had literally nothing in there about her birth parents.

He grabbed her hand and started leading her towards Officer Anderson's desk, "I know what you're thinking, I can see it, but hear me out. We don't know much about her real parents because she was left on the doorsteps of the orphanage but we *do* know that she was a few days old when she was abandoned. What if we could look into hospital records and see if any newborns match up with that time frame? We might be able to track down her real parents!"

While she wasn't sure anything would actually turn up, having any sort of plan at this point was better than the sitting around and waiting that they were doing right now. If she were being honest with herself, at this point nothing could hurt, so she held on tightly to his hand as they walked up to Officer Anderson's desk and Phil told her about his idea.

It mildly surprised her when the officer actually considered it, mentioned how that might be a viable lead, and disappeared to go speak with some of the detectives assigned to the case.

She couldn't force herself to smile, not when her baby was still missing, but she squeezed Phil's hand tightly, hoping that he would understand how relieved she was that they finally had some sort of lead.

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When Skye woke up, she immediately rolled over and tried to go back to sleep.

Sleeping was way better than being awake. She didn't want to be here and she *definitely* didn't want to be in the same house as Crazy Cal, which is what she had decided to call him. ‘Cal’ felt too personal and there was no way she was ever going to call him her dad, so Crazy Cal it was.

When she deemed it impossible to go back to sleep, she groaned and forced herself to get up. She wondered if May and Phil were looking for her and if they missed her like she missed them.

Bright light was blasting into the room and she squinted until her eyes adjusted before she wandered over to the window. Looking around the backyard, she froze when she saw movement from the neighbor's house. A girl, who looked about three years older than her, was playing outside with an older man who looked to be her father.

Before she knew it, she was banging on the glass windowpane and a small seed of hope started to take root inside her. The neighbors didn’t even glance her way. Her palm smacked against the glass and the loud noise it made caused her to stop and realize that Crazy Cal would probably be able to hear her.

The thought of him catching her caused panic to rush through her, stamping down what little hope had started to grow. What if this was her only chance to get away before he decided to move her? He had said that they were going to go somewhere else and live together as a family, and the thought of
that made her feel sick. She already *had* a family.

She forced herself to calm down and think.

This window wouldn't open…but maybe the one in the bathroom would. She ran to the door and started banging on it, "Hey! I have to go potty! Hey!"

She kept banging on the door until she heard him unlock it. She barely had time to take a step back before the door was swinging open, narrowly missing smacking her in the face. Crazy Cal was smiling at her, and she scrambled back even further away from him as he shut the door and locked it again.

"Did you sleep okay?" He asked, and the worst part was that he sounded genuinely interested in her answer.

She avoided his gaze and mumbled, "I have to go potty."

"Oh! Yes, of course. Do you… want to take a shower too? You might feel better if you're in some clean clothes."

She would feel better when she was away from him but she needed to get to the bathroom. Plus, the sound of the shower running might be able to let her make some noise without him hearing her.

So, of course she nodded and watched as he walked over to the chair and threw the blanket off of it, revealing a small bag that he rifled through before producing a handful of new clothes, walking back to her, and offering her the clothing. She didn't want to reach towards him and get any closer but she knew that she had to, so she quickly reached out and grabbed the new clothes, making sure that her hand never touched his.

He unlocked the door and led her to the bathroom, staying uncomfortably close to her until they reached their destination. She walked inside and blocked the doorway so that he couldn't get in before expectantly staring up at him.

He looked confused for a second before saying, "Oh, uh, I'll wait out here. Do you need anything else?"

Skye thought about it. If he was going to wait outside the door, there was no way that she would be able to yell to the neighbors, even with the water running. She needed something louder.

She fidgeted and braced herself, "I listen to music when I'm in the shower."

He quietly stared down at her and she immediately feared that she had asked for too much and that he was going to yell at her and hurt her. Her heart started pounding wildly in her chest and she swallowed roughly as she took a tiny step back.

"I don't know…" He said, rubbing a hand over the back of his neck.

If her plan was going to work, she *needed* music to mask the sound of her voice. Unshed tears made her eyes sting and a huge knot formed in her tummy when she thought about what she was about to say.

"Please… dad? I can't shower without any music on."

Those words burned like fire in her throat and she felt like she had betrayed Phil but she hoped that he would forgive her. Luckily, he visibly cracked at that, "Okay, but I'll have to play it from out here.
because I can't give you the phone. I'm sorry Daisy."

"No, that's okay. Play Mulan music please," She said quickly before shutting the door in his face.

She sagged against the door for a second, not believing that she had just done that. The stinging tears in her eyes finally fell onto her cheeks and she didn't try to stop them.

After taking a deep breath, she looked around the small bathroom. She really did have to go to the bathroom, so she did that before switching the shower on. As soon as the water started running, she heard music start to play on the other side of the door, but it wasn't loud enough, "I can't hear it! Make it louder!"

He said something that she couldn't make out but fortunately the music got louder and she sighed in relief as she scanned the room. There was a window next to the toilet that was facing the same way that her room was, so she could still see the neighbors playing outside.

She climbed onto the toilet and inspected the window, noting how it wasn't screwed shut like the one in her room but that it only opened a little ways since it was the kind of window that you had to crank open.

Quickly, she cranked it open as far as it would go and was grateful to see that her arm would fit through it. She started waving her arm frantically, hoping that the neighbors would notice her, but her heart sank when they paid her no attention.

Grunting in frustration, she casted an anxious glance back to the door. It wouldn't lock without a key, so she would have to be careful because Crazy Cal could walk in at any time.

She turned back to the window, stuck her hand out as far as it would go, and waved it around. "Hey! Help! Help me please! Hello?" She whisper-yelled, but she evidently wasn't loud enough since she still went unnoticed.

The sound of her voice made her wince and she hoped that she wasn't being too loud. Her anxiety increased exponentially and she desperately hoped that Crazy Cal hadn't heard her. Spurred on by her nerves, she started hitting the side of the house with her hand, hoping that that would be louder than her yelling had been.

Her eyes widened when the girl finally looked over to see where the noise was coming from. She waved frantically and hoped that the girl could see her.

The girl tugged on her dad's shirt and pointed towards her, and she kept waving and started chanting, "Please, please, please."

Not wanting to lose this one opportunity to get help, she grabbed the shirt that Crazy Cal had given her to change into, stuck it out the window, and waved it around frantically.

The father and daughter looked around, clearly unsure as to what was going on, and she saw the older man say something to his daughter before he started to walk in her direction. He climbed over the fence separating their yards and she whimpered out of relief.

Thankfully, Crazy Cal didn't seem to know that anything was going on.

"Hey, are you okay?" The guy was now a couple feet away from her and she could see the confused look on his face.

He was talking at a normal volume and Skye frantically shushed him as she nervously looked back
"Daisy? Are you okay?" Crazy Cal asked, concern evident in his voice, which made her scrunch her nose up in disgust.

Thinking quickly, she hastily said, "Um… I was just singing! Can you change the song? I don't really like this one!"

She didn't bother to listen to what he said in response, just noted how he obediently changed the song for her. She was still crying but she whispered to the guy, "Please, you have to help me! I want to go home!"

The guy moved closer and peered at her through the small crack in the window, "What's going on?"

Skye hiccupped and forced herself to calm down, not wanting to mess up her chance to get away because she was too hysterical. So she roughly rubbed her face and took in a deep, shuddering breath, before saying, "This guy kidnapped me! He took me from school! My name's Skye and I want to go home! Please! You have to help me!"

The guy's eyes widened and he craned his head to try to get a better look at her, "What?" He shot a glance back to where his daughter was waiting for him and turned back to her, "Okay. Sweetie, it'll be okay. I'm going to call the cops alright? Hang tight."

She nodded and sagged a little in relief and the suffocating fear that had been weighing on her lightened a little, "Thank you!"

He took a cell phone out of his pocket and pressed a couple of numbers, "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head, "No, but-"

She was interrupted by Crazy Cal's voice, "You almost done in there?"

Again, the guy tried to look into the window but she waved him off, "You need to go! He can't see you!"

She turned to the door and shouted, "Almost done!"

After shooting one more look to the man who would hopefully help her get out of here, she hopped off the toilet lid. She quickly changed into the outfit that Crazy Cal had given her and reached into the shower to dampen her face and hair a little bit so it'd look like she'd actually been showering. It took all of her willpower to not shudder and cringe at the feeling of the clothes that Crazy Cal had given her, feeling dirty at wearing something he had specifically picked out for her.

She quickly pulled her boots back on and hopped up on the toilet again, unable to leave the bathroom without at least seeing if the man had kept his word and was calling the police. The guy was back in his yard but he was staring at the window with his phone to his ear, clearly talking to someone. The giant rush of hope she felt caused her knees to feel weak and she had to shut her eyes and just breathe for a second to get herself under control.

She jumped off of the toilet and wrapped her hand around her necklace, grasping at the damp moon pendant dangling from her neck. She hoped that with that guy’s help, she would be back with her family soon.
May was leaning over Officer Anderson’s shoulder, wanting to be right there if any new developments came up. She knew that if someone was leaning over her like she was doing, she would literally break their arm, but Officer Anderson hadn’t said anything so she assumed that it was okay.

"Okay, so it seems like there were multiple births that occurred in the area during the time frame that you gave me. We narrowed down the results tremendously by plugging in some key information and we think we have a hit. A woman died giving birth to a baby girl about two days before Skye was dropped off at St. Agnes’. The hospital alerted social services because they were concerned about the father’s ability to take care of the baby. Apparently he was a known drug user and had a violent past, and police reports say that he attacked an officer and ran away with the baby. They caught up with him a couple days later but couldn't find the child. This could be our guy."

May sucked in a breath. This man sounded dangerous and she didn't want to think about her baby being taken by him.

"What's his name?" Phil asked as placed a comforting hand on her arm.

The officer looked up at them, "Calvin Zabo. I've alerted every officer in the area and had his picture sent to the local news station so if anyone see's him, we'll know about it."

It was a relief to finally have a lead and have something to focus on that could help them find Skye. It was still nerve-wracking and terrifying to learn about how dangerous the person who had her daughter could be but she focused on the fact that they were gaining ground with the case.

They went back to Trip and Natasha to give them the simplest version of the information they’d just gotten so that they didn’t scare them. They all sat down in silence, digesting the new developments, and waited for someone to call in.

Out of nowhere, there was a flurry of motion coming from Officer Anderson's desk. May shot up, barely noticing when the rest of her family stood up beside her, and then quickly made her way to the desk to find a handful of officers strapping on some gear and speaking to one another.

"What's going on?" She asked, reaching out and grabbing onto Officer Anderson’s arm.

The officer hesitated to answer, obviously not wanting or able to give away certain information, but May tightened her grip on her arm and let her desperation show. After a few of the longest moments of her life, Officer Anderson seemed to relent because she pulled her away from the rest of the officers and quietly murmured, "We got a call from a man saying that a little girl named Skye was in a house a couple of blocks away. She told him that she was kidnapped and the man who called in provided an accurate description of her." Officer Anderson reached out to gently take her hand off of her arm and give it a squeeze, "We’ve got her."

She felt her knees buckle and she grabbed onto Phil to help support her. He wrapped an arm around her waist and she leaned into him a little bit.

"We're going to get her right now but we aren't sure if he's armed. If you'll just wait here-

Officer Anderson must be crazy if she thought that she was just going to sit by and wait for them to bring her little girl back. There a was no way in hell she was going to just wait around when Skye was so close .

Apparently, Phil had been thinking the same thing, because he interrupted the officer, "We aren't waiting here, we're coming with you."
"No sir, you really should-"

May silenced her, "Listen, I know you're just trying to do your job here but you're talking about our little girl okay? We aren't going to sit here and wait while you go and get her. Now, you can either take us with you or we'll just follow you in our own car. What's it going to be?"

The officer gave her an exasperated look but didn't protest.

Natasha and Trip made a move to follow them but Phil stopped them both, "Sorry guys but you need to stay here."

"What? No! We want to go with you!" Trip argued.

"I know you do Trip but it could be dangerous. We don't want you getting hurt or have to worry about you when we need to be focused on Skye."

He looked like he was about to protest again but then Natasha grabbed his arm and said, "We'll wait here but please keep us updated."

May leaned in and kissed their foreheads before following Officer Anderson to her squad car. They climbed into the back and she grabbed onto Phil's hand as they made their way to Skye.

Skye was back in her room, sitting against the wall while Crazy Cal was sitting a couple of feet away, talking to her.

"It's going to be great Daisy. We can finally be a family."

She absently nodded at him and stared at the door, only focusing on where May and Phil were and if they were going to find her soon.

He kept talking, not seeming to notice that she wasn’t paying attention, "We can paint your room whatever color you want and we can get you a puppy. Do you like puppies?"

Skye nodded again and continued to stare at the door. She started to worry that maybe the guy hadn’t called the police and that no one was coming to get her.

"I know that this situation isn't ideal but I really want us to be a family Daisy. I want this to work."

That got her to finally look away from the door and towards him. He sounded serious and that made an unidentifiable combination of feelings erupt in her chest because he was saying what she had been thinking just a couple of weeks ago. She had wanted a family, somewhere to belong, and for someone to love her.

She felt confused and for a brief moment, she wondered if maybe Crazy Cal wasn’t as crazy as she thought he was. She knew what it was like to desperately want a family. Normal people didn't kidnap other people so that they could have a family, no matter how desperate they were. Skye had never made someone feel unsafe just because she wanted someone to love her. It wasn't right.

With that thought, she went back to staring at the door, but now she felt different than before. She was still angry and scared but now she felt a teeny, tiny bit of sympathy for the man across from her. She hated that she felt that way, it was easier to just be angry.
He didn’t seem to notice her slight shift in demeanor, because he kept talking, "Yes, we'll find you a nice puppy and he can sleep with you at night. We'll have to get new identities but I'll enroll you in a nice school and you'll make some new friends. It'll be-

Without warning, the door slammed open, causing her to scream in fear. People dressed in black stormed in and they had big, scary guns pointed at Crazy Cal. She covered her head with her hands and pulled her knees closer to her chest but kept her eyes on the scene unfolding before her.

One of them spoke, "Sir, I need you to step away from the little girl and send her over here."

Cal slowly stood up and threateningly growled, "No."

One of them started to slowly move towards her but Crazy Cal stepped in front of her, effectively blocking her from them, "Stay where you are."

"Sir, you're surrounded, so please just give us the girl. We don't want anyone to get hurt."

She saw Crazy Cal's hand slowly inch towards his hip but before he could grab whatever he was reaching for, the men in black all tensed up, widening their stances and refocusing their scary guns at him.

Skye whimpered in fear, not liking how thick and tense the atmosphere was.

Crazy Cal tilted his head a little bit towards her but kept his gaze on the people in black, "It's okay Daisy, don't worry."

The man spoke up again, "Don't do anything stupid, we don't want anyone to get hurt."

Crazy Cal didn't listen to him and instead, he reached his hand again towards his hip. Skye had no clue what he was reaching for but she hoped that he would just stop and let her go. There was no way he was going to be able to get out of here, the men in black were blocking the door and did not look like they were willing to let Crazy Cal just get away.

"I won't let you take her from me again."

"Sir! Put your hands where we can see them right now!"

Another man turned towards her, "It's going to be okay Skye."

"Don't call her that!" Crazy Cal shouted.

The man turned to him, "You don't want her to be seeing this, do you?"

Crazy Cal tilted his head towards her again, "Daisy, close your eyes. It's going to be okay."

She couldn't shut her eyes, the only part of her that would move was her hand, which was rubbing over her moon pendant.

After that, Skye lost track of what was going on. There was a lot of shouting and she covered her ears because it was starting to hurt her head. She saw the man in black move closer to Crazy Cal and that wasn't a good thing to do, because he went berserk and, for the third time, reached for something by his hip. He quickly tugged up his shirt and Skye was able to see a glint of silver before a loud bang filled the room.

She screamed again and started crying harder.
She felt detached as she watched Crazy Cal fall limply to the ground and land on his back. His head lollled to the side and faced her. There was blood pouring out of his neck and she could see his chest rising up and down erratically. He reached a hand out towards her and she huddled closer to the wall, trying to stay as far away from him as possible.

His lips moved for a second and then she saw his chest stop moving.

His eyes fell shut as blood continued to pool onto the floor. The puddle was getting closer to her and she watched as it spread onto her pant leg and then onto the bottom of her shirt.

She looked back to Crazy Cal's face and knew that he was dead. It seemed like death was always following her, and that was the last thought that flitted through her mind before she opened her mouth and screamed and screamed and screamed.
Chapter 29

Skye wasn't really sure what happened after that.

Someone slowly started to move closer to her but she couldn’t focus on anything other than the dead body in front of her.

Crazy Cal was dead. She didn't like him and he had kidnapped her but she didn’t think that he deserved to be dead. His blood was on her pants and shirt and it was starting to get sticky and cold and he was dead.

She was shivering even though her skin felt like it was on fire and her throat was starting to hurt badly enough that she finally stopped screaming.

It felt like she wasn't there inside of her body. She was seeing everything in a daze and wasn’t sure what was happening. There were voices and movement going on around her but she wasn’t able to focus on anything.

The person closest to her was saying something to her but she couldn't hear what it was, everything sounded muted and distorted. A hand reached towards her and that snapped her out of her daze. Flinching back, she looked at the person whose hand was extended towards her and found that it was one of the people in black.

As she tried to lean away from them, she came to the conclusion that she didn’t like the people in black very much. It was very clear that they were dangerous and she definitely didn’t trust them.

He said something else but she didn't hear him, her mind just wouldn’t process his words. She saw him sigh and reach for her again but this time he didn't stop when she flinched back, he just grabbed her gently and lifted her up. She tried to scream again but her throat was raw so nothing really came out, but that didn't stop her from kicking and hitting at the guy.

It didn't seem to have any effect and her fists and feet just ricocheted right off of him.

Before she knew it, he was carrying her outside and she was squinting in the bright sunlight. As her eyes adjusted, she felt herself being placed on an uncomfortable cot in an ambulance. A woman in a uniform reached for her and she jerked away and whimpered in both fear and annoyance, frustrated that no one would leave her alone.

A different hand reached for her and flinched again, but before she could try to run away, her eyes focused and she found that she recognized the ring that decorated this hand.

She looked up to find a worried May, with Phil standing right beside her. They were both wearing similar looks of nervousness and apprehensive relief on their faces. She knew that she should be happy and ecstatic that she was back with her family, but she just felt empty, and she didn’t know what was going on.

May went to put her hand on Skye's arm, clearly to offer her comfort, but she involuntarily jerked away. Seeing this, May changed directions and placed it on the cot beside her instead and said, "Skye, you need to let the paramedic look over you. She's going to make sure that you're alright, okay? She's very nice and won't hurt you, I promise."

Finally, it seemed like her mind was able to understand what people were saying to her, so she processed what she was being told and took a couple of seconds to understand what was being asked
of her. She had to let the lady look over her, she was nice and wouldn't hurt her. May promised, and May never broke her promises.

She didn't say anything, but when the paramedic reached for her again, she forced herself to sit still and let her check her over. Having a stranger’s hands all over her made her skin crawl and it took all of her willpower to sit still, the only thing that kept her from bolting away was the fact that May had told her that she needed to do it so that they would know that she was okay.

As she was being examined, she knew she should say something. She should tell them how much she had missed them and that she was happy that they had found her, but her voice wasn't working. Whenever she went to say something, it felt like she was being strangled. Words were clawing their way up her throat and if she let them out, she didn't know what would happen, so she decided that it was safer to just stay silent.

She still felt detached from herself but it was getting better. She was now aware of everything going on around her but it didn't make her feel any more like herself.

The paramedic finished what she was doing and she heard her tell May and Phil that she was fine but she didn't feel fine.

Another woman, this one in a police uniform, walked over and gave her a warm smile, but Skye was too busy wondering who she was to acknowledge her.

The lady said something to her but she had stopped listening once the paramedic had said that she was done. She stared blankly at the officer until she recognized that she wasn't going to get a greeting from her and then turned to May and Phil before saying something else. May nodded at the officer and turned back to her, leaning forward until Skye focused on her, "Skye? Officer Anderson needs a quick statement from you okay? Then we can take you home."

All she wanted to do was go home, so she focused on the officer and tried to listen to what she said.

"Hello Skye. We just need you to confirm or deny that the man inside, Calvin Zabo, was the man who kidnapped and restrained you."

She focused on the words that were being spoken to her, and she knew that if she answered she could go home, but she couldn't make her voice work.

The officer lady smiled gently at her, "Okay, if it was him who took you, nod your head, if it was someone else, shake your head."

Skye nodded at her and the lady thanked her before turning to May and Phil to talk again. Skye ignored her, knowing that now that she had answered the question and she could go home now.

Officer Anderson was talking to her but she was only half listening and was mostly focused on Skye. May's heart ached as she studied her little girl. The blank look in her eyes was like a punch to her stomach and all she wanted to do was wrap the little girl up in a hug but she knew that Skye still needed some space.

She was still trying to recover from everything that had happened. When they had arrived on scene, the officers had forced them to stay outside by the car while most of them went into the house. She thought that those minutes of unknown silence were going to be the worst part but she had been completely wrong.
There had been gunshots and three police officers had had to restrain her and Phil from rushing into the house. There was distant screaming coming from inside the house and May could feel her heart breaking and tears ran down her face as she listened to it.

Then a tall officer had carried a kicking Skye out of the house. May had spotted the blood on Skye’s clothes and her heart had literally stopped. She couldn't catch her breath and the police officer holding her back couldn't stop her from rushing to the ambulance that Skye was set in. She was desperate to see if she was alright and to hold her but when she had leaned in to hug the little girl, Skye had flinched back. It would be a lie to say that it hadn't hurt but she had shaken it off and focused solely on Skye. She had looked her over and couldn't find any injuries but she had needed the paramedic to check and make sure.

Officer Anderson put a hand on her arm and pulled her back to the present. She focused on her and listened as the officer's voice lowered as she told them what happened. May checked to make sure that Skye couldn't hear but that didn't seem to be a problem because the little girl appeared to be staring off into space. Her heart clenched at the sight.

Officer Anderson had told them what went on in the house and was now telling them what would be happening in the future, "The case is pretty much closed. Now that Skye identified Calvin Zabo as her kidnapper, we don't have to continue investigating. Usually we would need Skye to issue a more formal statement but I don't think the judge will push her for it. It's a relatively simple case and you should be able to take her home now."

She nodded and Phil said, "Okay, thank you."

"Just doing my job sir. I'll have an officer bring Natasha and Trip back to your house in your car. Let me know when you're ready to leave and I'll drop you off at your house."

The officer nodded at them and then walked away. She glanced at Phil before taking a deep breath and turning back to Skye, who was still staring blankly ahead of her with drooping eyelids. Her adrenaline must have started to wear off.

She moved closer but made sure not to touch Skye, not wanting to make her feel uncomfortable or nervous. She wanted Skye to feel like she was in control here.

"You feeling sleepy?"

The little girl didn't say anything but she started to sway a little.

Phil stepped closer, to catch her if she fell, but May put a hand on his arm. He looked at her and then back at Skye before saying, "Why don't you lie down sweetheart? It's okay to take a nap."

She watched as Skye fought to stay awake but eventually she slowly laid down on the cot and closed her eyes. She watched as her breathing deepened and her whole body relaxed.

Phil wrapped an arm around her and she turned and hugged him tightly, "I thought…"

"I know," He said, placing a kiss on the top of her head.

She pressed her face against his chest. "The gunshots…” Her voice cracked against her own will.

"I know. Me too."

They stood there for a couple of minutes, finding solace in each other, before she let out a deep breath, "Let's go home."
He nodded and leaned into the ambulance to gently pick Skye up. He held her close as they went and found Officer Anderson to tell her that they were ready to leave.

They both sat in the backseat of the police car and Phil made sure that Skye was in a comfortable position before Officer Anderson drove off.

She knew that the paramedic had a said that Skye was fine but she needed to see for herself. She gently grabbed Skye's arm and inspected it, then she did the same with her other arm, and then both of her legs. It hadn't escaped her attention that Skye was wearing a different set of clothes, but when she carefully pulled up Skye's shirt to exam her belly and waist, she didn't see any bruises or marks even though her clothes were stained with blood.

After completing her inspection and feeling content with the results, she leaned forward and pressed a kiss to Skye's forehead, feeling like she could finally breathe again.

Officer Anderson pulled up to their house and they thanked her before getting out of the car and walking to their front door. She followed Phil up to Skye's room and watched as he set her down on her bed and pulled her sheets over her tiny body. She grabbed the desk chair and pulled it up close to the bed and sat on it, knowing that she wasn't going to take her eyes off of Skye until she woke up. She didn't know if she would ever feel comfortable leaving Skye alone again.

Phil walked up with the chair that belonged to the desk in their room and set it on the other side of the bed. They both sat there and watched Skye sleep for a couple of minutes before they heard the front door slam open and two sets of feet run up the stairs. She looked over to the door and saw Natasha and Trip run up and halt when they reached the doorway. They looked in and Trip looked like he was about to say something but she quickly got up and shushed them before leading them down the hallway so that they could talk without waking Skye up.

Natasha was still looking at Skye's doorway when she said, "Mom is she okay?"

"She will be."

Trip gave her a look, "What happened?"

She took a deep breath and hurriedly told them what had happened, running through the vague details and not mentioning the violent or scary parts. Her kids listened raptly and when she finished, they didn't say anything.

"Listen guys, she's been through a lot and I don't want to overwhelm her when she wakes up, so I think it would be best if you guys waited to see her until after we've talked to her."

Natasha was about to protest but May gently squeezed her shoulder, "I know you don't want to wait but I think it would be best for Skye."

Natasha and Trip looked at each other before both of them reluctantly nodded.

"Thanks guys, I know this has been hard on you both."

Trip shook his head, "Not as hard as it was on Skye. I wish we could erase all of this from her memory."

May leaned in, kissed his forehead, and said, "Me too sweetie."

She pulled Natasha towards her and squeezed her into a tight hug, "You guys have both been troopers, and I know that we can help her get-" She instantly stopped when she heard a scream come
from Skye's room. Natasha and Trip looked like they wanted to go investigate but she gave them a look and they stayed where they were before she ran into Skye's room.

Skye's own hoarse scream woke her up and she was very happy that it did.

Her dream had been very, very scary. Crazy Cal had been lying on the floor in a pool of his own blood. In her dream, he had reached towards her like he had before and mumbled something before closing his eyes. This time though, instead of sitting still, she found herself crawling closer to his body. She leaned in close to his face and when she was about to lean back, his eyes flew open and the hand that had been reaching for her had shot up and tightly grabbed her arm. She screamed in her dream, and apparently she had in real life, because she woke herself up.

Shooting up, she scrambled scrambling back until she hit her head on her headboard. She grabbed the back of her head and looked around.

Her doll house was sitting on the floor across from her bed and seeing her familiar blue walls helped to calm her down a bit. The last thing she remembered was falling asleep on the uncomfortable cot in the ambulance, and when she looked to her right, she recoiled when she saw someone sitting in a chair beside her. For a second she could swear that it was Crazy Cal but then she looked closer and saw that it was just Phil.

He gave her a gentle smile and said, "It's okay sweetheart, you're home and you're safe."

Quiet footsteps coming from the hallway captured her attention and she turned to look just in time to see May run into her room. Her mom stopped short when she saw her, and glanced at Phil before smiling and slowly walking closer.

May stopped when she got to the left side of her bed, sat down on a chair, and leaned forward a little, "Hey baby, how're you feeling?"

Skye didn't say anything in response. She was telling herself that it was because her throat was still a little sore, but if she was being honest with herself, it was partially because she didn't know what to say and partially because she couldn't get the words to move past the giant lump in her throat.

Thankfully, her silence didn't seem to faze May or Phil. She saw May's fingers twitch towards her but she stopped herself in time to not touch her, "We were so scared Skye. God, we were so afraid that we wouldn't get there-"

Skye held her hands up, silently asking for her to stop, and May immediately listened.

She couldn't hear this. She hadn't meant to make May scared, she hadn't even known that May could get scared. She, on the other hand, got scared all the time.

Saying that she was afraid didn't seem to encompass everything that she was feeling at this moment though. She was afraid and angry, she felt restless and tired at the same time, and there was so much going on inside of her that she couldn't even tell what each emotion was.

Whatever she was feeling, it was bubbling up inside her. Everything was accumulating and she had been so frightened that she would never be able to see her family again and she still didn't feel safe even though she was with her mom and dad, and that made her feel even worse.

She couldn't stop the tears, just like she couldn't stop the frustrated scream that escaped from her. It
hurt when it broke free since her throat was still raw and aching, but it made her feel better so she screamed again. She grabbed the sheets in front of her and screamed one more time, with tears streaming down her face, and it helped release some of the restlessness inside of her.

Once she was done, she took a deep breath and looked back to May.

May didn't seem like she was mad at her for being so loud, she just looked concerned, sympathetic, and kind of like she was going to cry. Guilt churned in her stomach, and when she glanced over to Phil and saw that he had a similar look on his face, that guilt intensified.

"Did that help?" He earnestly asked, tilting his head towards her.

She considered it and nodded.

He reached forward and grabbed a pillow that had fallen to the floor before setting it on the bed in front of her. She gave him a questioning look, unsure what she was supposed to do.

"You can hit it, if you’d like."

He wanted her… to hit the pillow? Maybe she wasn't hearing him right.

He pushed the pillow a little closer to her, "You can hit it if you want to. I know your throat is sore and this might help you feel better."

Skye stared at the pillow for a second before weakly punching it and then looking back to Phil, who arched his eyebrow and said, "I know you can do better than that."

Skye looked back to the pillow and punched it harder, finding that it did make her feel a little better. She hit it again and again and soon enough she was sobbing again and she didn't even know why, there was just so much going on inside of her.

After one more weak punch, she threw the pillow onto the floor and sagged a little.

She stared at her hands until she heard May speak up, "We're sorry Skye. We're sorry that you went through that and we're sorry that you don't feel safe anymore. We would both do anything to go back and stop that from happening and-"

May was babbling and it was throwing Skye off because she's never heard her babble before, she was always so calm and collected.

Hearing May sound so afraid and unsure of herself made something in Skye break and she couldn't take it anymore. She abruptly stood up on her bed, causing May to stop talking, and before she could think about it, she was taking a step forward and leaping over to May. Her mom caught her, she always did, and Skye quickly wrapped herself around her. Her legs and arms tightened around May’s waist and neck and she buried her face in the crook of her neck. She felt an arm wind tightly around her back and a hand started to comb through her hair, a familiar action that comforted her.

Finally, after all this time, felt safe. Wrapped up in May's arms, she finally felt like she was home and everything that had happened for the past two days didn't feel like it was going to completely overwhelm her. It was still there of course, but now she was able to push it to the back of her mind by focusing on May's flowery scent and how soft her skin was.

She pressed her face closer to May's neck and took a deep breath, feeling the tightness in her throat loosen, the knot in her tummy start to unravel, and her tears slow down.
She twisted her head a little so that only her forehead was resting against May's shoulder. Tightening her hold on her, she let out a deep breath and raspily whispered, "I missed you."

May squeezed her tightly and since she was so close, Skye was able to hear her breath catch for a moment before she hoarsely replied, "I missed you too. We all did."

She pressed her face impossibly closer to May and heard her say, "I love you. I love you so much. We both do."

They sat like that for a couple of minutes, with May whispering soothing words into her ear and pressing kisses to the top of her head, and Skye felt herself slowly relax as she listened to May's steady heartbeat.

She was home. She was with her family. She was safe. She kept repeating that in her mind and it helped to comfort her.

"It's almost dinner time sweetheart. Why don't you go take a shower and I'll make your favorite? Spaghetti and meatballs," Phil said softly so that he didn’t startle her.

Turning her head to look at him, she nodded and unwrapped one of her arms from May’s neck to give him a thumbs up. He smiled at her, stood up, and made his way over so that he could stoop down and press a kiss to the top of her head, "I love you."

She reached up, pressed a hand against his cheek, and watched as he turned his head and kissed her palm before walking out the door.

May continued stroking her hair, "I don't know about you, but I'm pretty hungry. Let's get you cleaned up and then we can help Phil finish dinner, okay?"

Skye nodded, held on as they stood up, and clung to May when she went to set her down. For now, there was no way that Skye wanted to let go. May just repositioned her and grabbed some pajamas from her dresser before walking down the hall and into the bathroom. After putting the pajamas onto the counter and turning the water on, she went to set Skye down again but, yet again, she refused to let go.

"It's shower time Skye," May prodded her, gently swaying from side and running a comforting hand down her back.

Skye nodded but didn't make a move to loosen her grip.

"Are you going to get down?"

After steeling herself, she took a deep breath, loosened her hold on May, and let herself be set down. She mechanically took off her clothes and handed them to May, who gave them a quick glance before saying, "I'm just going to throw everything away."

Skye sadly stared at her boots, which didn’t go unnoticed, "I'll get you some new ones baby."

Nodding in relief, she pulled back the shower curtain and stepped in. She quickly washed her hair and body, periodically peeking through the curtains to make sure that May was still there, and was relieved to find that she always was.

She finished her shower, turned the water off, and stepped out and into the towel May was holding open for her. After she was dried off and all cozy in her pajamas, she turned around and let May comb through her hair. She felt ten times better now that she was clean and in her own clothes.
Once her hair was detangled, she turned back around and looked up at May, who leaned down to brush her bangs out of her eyes, "Feel a little better?"

Skye nodded.

"Good. Let's go to the kitchen."

May turned to walk out of the bathroom and Skye scurried after her and tightly gripped her pant leg with both hands. She felt May's hand come down rest soothingly on the top of her head and that helped her calm down a little bit.

They made their way to the kitchen, Skye practically on top of May, and she immediately saw Phil stirring two different pots on the stovetop. They walked right up to him and he grinned down at her, "Dinner's almost ready."

May pecked his cheek, "I'll set the table."

Her mom stepped away so Skye transferred her grip from her leg to Phil's. He held the spoon that he was stirring with to his left hand so that he could run his other one over her damp hair. She kept one hand clenched tightly to his leg and raised up the other one, wiggling her fingers and silently asking to be picked up. He set the spoon down, lifted her up, and placed her on his hip. She wrapped an arm around his neck, set her chin on his shoulder, and watched May set the table behind him.

The Tangled song that he was humming off-key was nice and helped her to feel relaxed and calm.

As he moved over to the sink to strain the water from the spaghetti noodles, she heard footsteps descending from the staircase. She tore her eyes away from May to find Natasha and Trip approaching cautiously.

They walked into the kitchen and stood a couple of feet away from her and Phil, which she thought was slightly odd compared to how they usually behaved. She stared at them and waited to see what they would do, and after a long pause filled with thick silence, Trip stepped forward and held something in front of him, "Here Skye. I kept them safe with me."

She was lightning fast as she reached forward and gingerly took Alice and Rapunzel away from him. She cradled the dolls to her chest after making sure that they were okay, and then looked back to Trip. She tugged her lips up into a half-smile, hoping he knew how grateful she was, and he leaned forward and ruffled her hair, "I'm happy you're back and safe."

She nodded and he grinned at her before joining May in the dining room.

Once Trip was out of sight, she turned to Natasha. They both stared at each other and she felt Phil walk back over to the stove but she didn't take her eyes off of Nattie. She wondered if her sister was going to say anything but then she considered that Natasha might not feel like talking. She could understand that.

Natasha fidgeted from foot to foot and looked away from her, causing Skye to scrunch her nose up in confusion because she wasn't really sure what her sister was thinking. When Natasha looked back, Skye saw something she had never seen before: her sister was silently crying.

Skye wiggled around until Phil set her down. She kept her dolls in her hand and walked over to Nattie, who gave her a questioning look but remained silent. She looked at her Rapunzel doll and smoothed out her hair before offering her to Natasha. Her dolls always helped to make her feel better, and she thought that maybe they could help Nattie too. Her sister looked at it for a second before taking Rapunzel from her and holding the doll against her chest, still crying silently.
Skye didn't know why Natasha was crying, she just knew that she didn't like seeing her upset, but she wasn't sure what she could do to make it better. She thought about it for a second before taking a step forward and wrapping her arms around Nattie's waist. Hugs usually helped.

Natasha didn't move for a moment and Skye was about to pull back and pretend that this hadn’t happened, but then she heard a sob escape from Natasha and felt arms wrap around her back. Her sister unexpectedly tugged her closer and Skye lost her footing until they ended up tumbling to the floor, with Skye landing mostly on top of her sister but Natasha didn't seem to mind so Skye didn't mind either.

She leaned back a little so that she could look at Natasha's face and saw that she still had tears running down her cheeks. Lifting a hand up, she wiped the tears away. Natasha gave her a wobbly smile and said, "I was so scared Skye. I missed you so much."

Natasha's words made her feel like she was going to cry but she forced herself not to because she had already cried a lot today. Instead, she reached for Natasha's hand and placed it over her chest. Whenever she was upset, it made her feel better when she could feel May or Phil's heartbeat and she hoped that it would help Natasha too.

It seemed to do the trick because her tears stopped and, took a deep breath, and leaned forward to press a kiss to her forehead, "I love you."

She pressed a kiss to one cheek, "I love you," and then the other, "I love you," and then to her nose, "I love you."

Hearing those words made her want to explode with happiness and break down and dissolve into a puddle of tears at the same time. Instead of doing either, she leaned forward wrapped herself tighter around her sister.

"I love you too."
Chapter 30

Once their little cuddle session was over, Natasha stood up and offered her a hand, which she gladly took. After her sister hauled her up, she watched as Nattie hastily ran a hand over her face and cleared her throat, "So uh, you need any help dad?"

Phil had been doing a pretty good job of staying out of the way and letting them have their moment but when she turned around and looked at him, he was giving the two of them a meaningful look. He handed Natasha a bowl full of spaghetti sauce and gave Skye a bowl full of noodles, "Can you bring these into dining room please?"

Both girls nodded and set their respective bowls onto the table. After Natasha took a seat in her normal chair, Skye paused to shoot a long look at her usual seat. It looked like it was too far away from her mom, and she glanced at May and then back to her empty seat before making the decision to abandon her normal seat and make her way over to May.

She climbed onto her mom’s lap and made herself comfortable, all the while avoiding looking at May’s face. Arms wrapped around her waist and she leaned back against May's chest. Once Phil brought in some garlic bread and set it on the table, that was everyone’s cue to start reaching for their food. She silently watched as May piled a bunch of food onto one plate, grabbed an extra fork, handed it to her, and motioned for her to eat off the plate. Skye guessed that they were sharing, which she did not mind in the least.

Her tummy panged with hunger and she realized that she hadn't eaten in awhile. Before she knew it, she was quickly shoveling food into her mouth, eager to put an end to her hunger pains.

Her hair kept getting in the way, sneaking into her mouth and dipping into her spaghetti sauce, and she continually pushed it out of her face in frustration until May set her fork down and gently pulled her hair back and into a ponytail. She made an appreciative noise and kept eating.

When she finally started to feel full, she set her fork down and watched as everyone else kept eating. It was unusually quiet but Skye didn't really mind, she was just happy that she was back with her family again.

She burrowed closer to May and inhaled her flowery scent, letting the familiar smell relax her even further. May kept one arm around her waist while the other held her fork, and she watched as the older woman twirled some spaghetti around her fork, idly wondering if she could teach her how to do that.

Out of the blue, there was a loud knocking at the door. Skye leaned further back into May and whimpered, fearful of the sudden loud noise. It made her think of the gunshots and the blood and she forced herself to think of happy things so that the bad images would go away.

"Were we expecting anybody?" Phil asked uncertainly.

May shook her head and Phil motioned for them to stay there while he got up and answered the door. Skye grabbed onto May’s arm, not liking that they didn't know who it was.

May gently grabbed her hand and slowly pried her fingers from her arm. She hadn't realized that she had been holding onto May so tightly and she felt slightly guilty as her mom pressed a kiss to the back of her hand before intertwining their pinkies.

She couldn't see Phil but she could clearly hear him when he said, "What the…what are you guys
Natasha's eyes widened comically and then she was jumping away from the table and bolting towards the door, with Trip following closely behind her. May went to stand up and set Skye on the ground but that was not something that she was going to let happen, so she bent her legs so that they wouldn't touch the floor until May lifted her back up and set her on her hip.

They made their way into the living room just as she heard a female voice say, "Are you kidding? We got on a plane as soon as you told us what happened."

May made a surprised sound when she saw who was standing in the doorway and Skye peered around her and saw that Natasha was wrapped around Wanda and Trip was clapping Pietro on the back. Phil was staring at the twins with so much confusion and disbelief on his face that it almost made her laugh, and she thought that she probably had the same look on her face too considering the twins were supposed to be halfway across the world right now.

The twins turned around when they heard May and immediately rushed towards them. Skye wasn't exactly sure why they were there, she was just happy that she could finally meet them, but that didn't mean that she wasn't nervous. Meeting them on the computer was different than meeting them in real life and she really wanted them to like her.

"How are you guys here? I told you that I would keep you updated on what was going on, you didn't need to fly all the way home!" May asked, the surprise clearly evident in her voice.

Wanda shrugged, "We talked to our advisers and told them what was happening and they said we could take the rest of the week off. We'll fly back on Saturday and meet them in Germany."

"You didn't honestly think that we would just stand by and wait, did you?" Pietro added.

Skye was still a little confused, not sure what was going on, and she felt May sigh, "You can't blame me for hoping."

The twins suddenly focused their attention on her and she pressed herself a little closer to May and grabbed her moon pendant, rubbing it between her fingers.

Wanda rushed forward again and wrapped her arms around her. She stiffened a little but then reminded herself that this was her sister and she would never hurt her, so she relaxed and cautiously placed a hand on Wanda's back.

"Skye! We were so worried! Are you okay?"

It finally hit her that they had come back because they had been worried about her. She wasn't sure how far away Spain was but she knew that it was on a whole different continent, and it was absolutely mind-boggling to her that they had come all the way back home because she had been taken. Tears stung in her eyes even as she felt warmth flood through her, knowing that that feeling was love.

She swallowed thickly and nodded.

Wanda pulled away and quickly Pietro took her place. He hugged her tightly, or as tightly as he could with May slightly in the way, before stepping back and standing next to his sister.
"We're so happy that you're alright Skye," Pietro said earnestly.

Skye nodded and swallowed again, kind of wanting to switch subjects. She was happy that her brother and sister were here but she wished that they would stop reminding her of what happened since she was trying so hard to forget it.

Pietro seemed to sense that because he changed the subject and zeroed in on her hand, "You're wearing the necklace! Do you like it?"

The metal of her moon pendant was warm from her rubbing it for so long, and she let go of it so that she could tilt her head down and look at the beautiful necklace. They must not have gotten her letter yet, so they didn't know how much she loved her present. She didn't just like it, "I love it."

Wanda and Pietro smiled widely at her, "It looks lovely on you Skye. I'm happy you like it," Wanda said before pausing and looking around, "Were we interrupting something?"

"We were just finishing dinner, There's some left over if you're hungry," Phil said, and then motioned towards their bags, "I'll put these in the guest room. Wanda, you mind sleeping with Nat? I haven't gotten around to putting two beds in there since Skye moved in."

Wanda shook her head and put an arm around Natasha's shoulder, "Nope, it'll give us a chance to catch up." Nattie grinned and pulled her into the dining room. Everyone else followed and May sat down with Skye in her lap again. She watched as Wanda and Pietro grabbed a plate, started eating, and dove into comfortable conversation with everyone.

Skye was content to watch everything go on around her.

She was happy that Wanda and Pietro were here so that she could finally talk and play with them. She thought about how she wanted to play with them on the swings at the playground and her happiness dimmed a little. If she went to the playground with Wanda and Pietro, May or Phil might be there with her, and she didn't want to go anywhere without them. The thought of being away from them was distressing and she didn't even realize that she was squeezing May's arm until she felt her mom gently grab her hand.

She blushed a little and yanked her arm back, but before she could feel too bad, May pressed a kiss to the top of her head and made her feel better. She watched as everyone shared a mysterious look, which she had no idea the meaning of, but it made her feel weird because she didn't know what they were thinking.

"You want to go play in the playroom Skye? We can watch Tangled and color," Natasha asked, reaching over to poke her tummy.

"I love coloring," Pietro added.

Wanda nodded in agreement, "And I love Tangled."

Movies and coloring with her siblings sounded really fun but she uncertainly looked over to Phil and then up at May. "Um…I don't know…"

May ran a comforting hand over her hair, "Phil and I can go play too."

Skye nodded at that, relieved that she wouldn't have to make a choice between being with her siblings or being with her parents. May didn't even bother trying to set her on the ground again, she just placed her on her hip and led everyone up to the playroom.
Natasha watched as Skye clung to their mom. She had been hanging off of either her or her dad for the whole night and Natasha really couldn't blame her. She didn't know exactly what had happened, but she knew that if *she* had been kidnapped, she would be doing to same thing.

They walked into the playroom and everyone sat on the ground while she put Tangled into the DVD player and turned everything on. She hoped that Skye's favorite movie would help make her feel a little better.

Once the movie started playing, she turned back around and grabbed a bunch of crayons, paper, markers, and coloring books. Everyone was sitting in a fairly loose circle so she squeezed in between her dad and Wanda before placing all the materials in the center of the circle so that everyone could reach the supplies.

Her art skills weren't *terrible* and she wanted to draw something for Skye, so she grabbed a white sheet of paper and a pencil and started sketching.

After a bit, her mom's voice pulled her away from her concentration when she announced, "I'm going to grab some water, anyone else want some?"

Pietro and Trip raised their hands and when her tried to gently push Skye off of her lap, the little girl whined and reached out to tightly grasp her shirt. It took a kiss to the side of her head and some gentle prying for her to finally let go and even still, she immediately crawled over to her dad and clambered into his lap. He shifted a bit so that he was sitting cross-legged and she could settle more comfortably against him.

Natasha noticed that Skye wasn't coloring anything, so she grabbed the Spongebob coloring book and a box of crayons and handed them to her. Skye stared at them for a little bit before taking everything from her and setting them on the ground in front of her, pulling out a crayon, and coloring in Squidward.

Her heart ached to see Skye acting so distant and cautious with her family in her own home. She knew that Skye would be different after everything she went through, she knew that, but it still hurt her to see. She wanted her sister to know that they were here for her and that they were going to do everything they could to help her feel safe again. Basically, she just really wanted her to know that she was loved, and she knew that it could take a while but she was determined to make that happen.

Everyone else had stopped coloring twenty minutes ago but Skye saw that Natasha was still focused on her drawing while the rest of them were watching Tangled for the second time. She was sitting in Phil's lap and he was gently swaying them as they watched the movie, creating such a relaxed atmosphere that her eyes were starting to feel heavy.

Whenever a song would come on, Wanda would lean towards her and sing it dramatically. At this moment, Wanda was using a blue marker as a makeshift microphone and was singing passionately to her, and she couldn't keep the small smile off of her face. She hadn't known that Wanda had such a nice singing voice.

Her oldest sister stood up and started making dramatic hand gestures to accompany her singing before fixing her gaze on Natasha. The redhead shook her head and held her hands up to ward Wanda off, "No. Wanda, no!"
Wanda paid her no mind, instead, she leaned over to Natasha and held out the marker. Nattie glanced over to her before her sister sighed, stood up, took the marker from Wanda, and started using it as a microphone as she sang. Wanda smiled smugly, grabbed a red marker, and sang along with Nattie.

She felt her lips tug up into a bigger smile as she watched them sing together. They looked silly and Natasha's raspier voice harmonized with Wanda's clear voice in a pretty way. The song was over too soon and Skye found herself excited for the next one to come on so that she could hear them sing again.

She didn't know when it happened, but suddenly she was being gently shaken awake. She didn't remember falling asleep and when she opened her eyes, she saw that the movie was nearing an end. May and Phil were both looking at her while everyone else was still watching the movie.

May leaned over and brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "Bedtime sweetie."

She shook her head, "I don't wanna go to sleep."

She didn’t. Wanda and Pietro were here and she wanted to spend as much time as possible with them, plus she was back with her family and she just wanted to be around them. If she was being honest though, the main reason she didn't want to go to sleep was because of the nightmares she knew was waiting for her. She didn't want to close her eyes because she knew that there were bad things in her mind that were waiting for her to fall asleep so that they could attack.

Phil gently tapped her knee to get her attention, "How about we just read you some stories instead? I know everyone else is pretty tired and they're ready to go to bed."

Skye didn't see the pointed look that Phil gave everyone else, all she saw was Pietro yawn loudly and stretch his arms over his head, "Oh yeah, I'm beat."

Natasha nodded and rubbed her eyes, "So tired."

"Can barely keep my eyes open," Trip agreed.

"Jeez, how late is it? I'm usually asleep by now," Wanda said, looking at her wrist to check the time even though she wasn't wearing a watch.

She didn't want everyone else to stay awake just because she didn't want to fall asleep, so she reluctantly nodded at Phil.

"Okay, everyone say goodnight."

Phil stood up and lifted Skye with him, and this time, she let him set her on the ground. Trip got up and gave her a hug, "G'night Skye. Sleep tight." She hugged him back and watched him walk out the door towards his room.

Wanda was next and she knelt down so that they could see eye-to-eye, "Goodnight Skye. Maybe tomorrow we can hang out some more and get to know each other a little better?" Skye nodded and was happy to see Wanda’s happy smile before leaning in and giving her a hug.

When Wanda stood up, Pietro took her place, "Nighty night little one. I hope you have good dreams." She hoped for that too and gave him a grin and a quick hug.
The twins gave her one last smile and waved before exiting the room. Natasha stood in front of her and held out her pinky, and she easily reached out and wrapped hers around her sisters.

"I drew something for you маленькая звезда," She said softly, holding up a piece of paper which Skye took it from her. She sucked in a breath when she saw the picture that had been drawn for her.

It was common knowledge that her sister was a great artist, but Skye hadn't know that she was this good. The drawing was of her playing with Alice. She was kneeling on the floor in her room, in front of her dollhouse, with Alice in her hand. She was wearing her moon necklace and had on the outfit that she had worn to Nattie's dance recital. It was drawn in pencil and it looked so real.

She studied it for a long moment and then gingerly held it to her chest, making sure that she didn't wrinkle it in the process. She looked back up to Natasha, who was fidgeting nervously in front of her.

"So, uh, do you like it?"

How could she not like it? It was amazing. She wanted to hang it on her wall and look at it every day. She didn't know if words would properly express what she was feeling, they usually never did, so she rushed forward and hugged her sister instead. She made sure that her drawing was safe before squishing her face against Natasha's stomach.

"I'll take that as a yes," Natasha said, chuckling, as she wrapped her up into a tight hug.

She nodded and pressed even closer.

Natasha stepped out of the embrace and untangled their pinkies, "G'night Skye. I'll see you tomorrow. Love you." She blew her a kiss before walking out the door and to her room.

Her mom walked over to her and affectionately brushed her hair out of her eyes, "Let's go kiddo."

When she reached up and wiggled her fingers, May dutifully picked her up. She rested her head on her shoulder and watched Phil walk behind them to her room. When they walked in, Skye looked around and was a little surprised to see how much bigger her room looked compared to normal. It seemed to be too empty and lonely and she wondered if it had always felt like this.

She didn't want to sleep in here by herself.

May tried to set her down on her bed but Skye clung to her. It seemed like this was becoming a routine for them.

"It's time to go to sleep Skye," Her mom mumbled, rubbing soothing circles on her back.

She knew that it was bedtime but that didn't mean she had to like it.

"I don't want to sleep."

"You have to go to sleep sweetie."

Skye shook her head again, feeling her frustration levels rising because they didn't get it. They didn't understand. Skye didn't even fully understand, she just knew that if she closed her eyes, she would see bad things. She knew it.

Tears welled up in her eyes and she couldn't stop them from falling. They didn't understand and she needed them to understand.
"No! I don't want to go to sleep! I don't want to see it!" She pressed her face against May's neck and didn't try to stop her tears, angry at the whole situation.

It was silent for a long moment and then her mom was gently patting her back and making soothing noises, "Okay, you don't have to go to sleep. We could still read you some stories though, right?"

Skye thought it over and finally nodded. She missed them reading to her. She lifted her head and took a deep, shuddering breath, "Can...can we go in your room?"

Phil walked up to her and he pressed a kiss to the top of her head, "Of course we can sweetheart." She handed him her new picture and he walked over to her shelf, set it down, and grabbed a bunch of books before leading them out of her room and into theirs.

This time when May went to set her down, she let go and flopped onto the bed. She scooted back and pulled the blankets over her legs as May grabbed some clothes and disappeared back down the hallway and Phil sat down on the bed next to her, "Let's see what we've got here."

He spread the books out onto the bed and considered them for a minute before looking to her, "We've got some good material here. I'm partial to Stella Luna but the choice is all yours."

She looked at the books and pointed to The Lorax, "Dr. Suess please."

Phil nodded seriously, "Excellent choice."

She grinned and he situated himself so that he was leaning against the headboard. He picked up the book, but before he opened it, he looked over to her, "Skye?"

"Mhm?"

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders and she leaned into him, "You know I love you right?"

"I know Daddy," She murmured as she cuddled closer to him.

She knew without a doubt that he loved her and it felt right to call Phil her dad. She found herself remembering what Crazy Cal had said to her, about him being her dad, and she thought that that might have been true. He could've been her father, he certainly seemed to think so, but she didn't think that he knew the first thing about being a dad. Not like Phil did. Phil didn't do bad things, or make her do things she didn't want to, or scare her.

Thinking about Crazy Cal made a knot form in her tummy so she forced herself to stop before it got worse.

Phil kissed the top of her head and grinned at her, "Do you want to know how much?"

When she nodded, he said, "I love you higher than the sky and more than all the water in the ocean."

Skye peered up at him, "And more than chocolate chip cookies?"

"Waaayy more than chocolate chip cookies, and I love those a lot."

She hunkered back down and pulled the blankets a little further up her legs, "I love you too."

Phil smiled, "How about we start this story? I haven't read it in awhile and it's one of my favorites."

She nodded and Phil opened up the book and started reading. They only got one sentence in before May wandered back in, wearing her pajamas and holding Alice in her hand. She sat on Skye's other
side and handed Alice to her, which she gratefully took and cradled in her arms.

Phil made sure that she was comfortable before picking up where he left off.

She made it through three and a half stories before she eventually nodded off.

The first time Skye jerked awake from a nightmare, May and Phil were both awake and sitting next to her. May was reading a book and Phil was going over some papers and they both dropped what they were doing and turned to comfort her. It took a solid thirty minutes before she calmed down enough to lie back down and fall asleep cuddled against May.

The second time she pulled herself out of a nightmare and gasped awake, the lights were off and she ended up waking May and Phil with her cries. This one was worse than the one before and she practically choked Phil when she lunged at him and wrapped her arms around his neck. He didn't seem to mind; he just whispered soothing words in her ear and rubbed her back comfortably.

May turned the lamp on, and when Skye calmed down a little bit, started reading her Goodnight Moon. Skye was afraid to close her eyes again, but eventually it happened even though she fought against it.

The third time it happened, she bolted up and gasped for breath. May and Phil didn't wake up, but she heard a noise come from the floor on May's side of the bed.

When she caught her breath, she leaned over and was surprised to see that Natasha was curled up in blankets and resting on the carpet. Her sister was rubbing her eyes and blearily looking up at her.

Skye blinked away the tears in her eyes, glanced around, and saw a pair of feet sticking out on the floor by the end of the bed. She made sure that May and Phil were still sleeping before slowly crawling to the end of the bed and looking over it.

Trip had a pillow over his head and a blanket tangled between his legs. His arms were curled close to his chest and he looked kind of cold and very silly.

A faint snore came from Phil's side of the bed and she looked back to him and got close to his face but found that the sound wasn't coming from him. She peered over his side of the bed and saw Wanda and Pietro there. Pietro's arm was thrown over Wanda's face and she had tugged Pietro's blanket off of him and was wrapped snugly between two blankets.

Natasha poked her head up and looked at her. Her voice was raspier than normal, "You okay?"

Skye shrugged. Nattie gave her a look and hauled herself onto the bed. She put a finger to her lips so that Natasha would know to be quiet. She had already woken Phil and May up more than she wanted to and she felt bad.

Natasha nodded at her and slowly climbed closer before tugging on Skye so that she would lie back down. She situated herself back between May and Phil and Natasha lied down next to May and
pulled Skye close to her, "Go back to sleep маленькая звезда. I'll try to chase your nightmares away."

She fell back asleep to the feeling of Natasha gently stroking her hair, and this time, she stayed asleep.
Chapter 31

When Skye opened her eyes, she was extremely disoriented and it didn’t feel like she was on a mattress.

As she brushed her hair out of her face and looked around, she found that somehow she had ended up on top of May and Natasha. Her upper body was snuggled on top of May’s chest while her legs were tangled between Nattie’s, so she was lying diagonally across both of them with Alice in her hand. Everyone was still asleep except for Phil, who was gone. Trip had taken his place and was curled into a tight ball, cuddling a pillow to his chest.

It was very quiet except for the occasional soft snore coming from Trip or Pietro. She kind of wanted to get up and go see Phil but she didn't want to walk all the way there by herself.

She laid her head back down on May's chest and tried to go back to sleep but it didn't work. When she closed her eyes, she saw things she didn't like, so she quickly opened them back up and took a deep breath. Reminding herself that she was safe with her family helped to calm her down a bit.

Slowly, she untangled her legs from Natasha’s and settled herself so that she was completely on top of May. With nothing else to do, she studied her. One arm was thrown over her head and the other was hanging off the side of the bed. Her mouth was slightly open and Skye could see her eyes moving behind her closed eyelids. She wondered if that meant that she was having a bad dream or if your eyes did that when you were dreaming about good things too.

She gently rose and fell with each of May's breaths as she considered that and finally decided to stay on the safe side and wake May up just in case she was having a bad dream. She wished that someone would wake her up whenever she was having a nightmare and she didn't want May to be scared.

Reaching up, she firmly poked May on the cheek and scrunched her nose up when nothing happened. So, she poked her again, this time a little harder. She watched as May slowly woke up. Her eyelids fluttered and she grumbled before finally opening her eyes and looking around.

"Were you having a bad dream?" She whispered, leaning in close.

It took a moment for May to focus on her, "I don't think so."

Guilt caused her to blush and she looked away and mumbled, "Sorry."

May reached up and brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "No problem baby, now I get to spend more time with you."

Hearing that made her feel a tiny bit better about waking her up, "Can we go downstairs?"

Her mom carefully sat up and Skye ended up in her lap. They both looked around the room and took everything in.

Her two oldest siblings were still on the floor; Pietro had stolen his blanket back and was lying on his stomach while Wanda's head was on the floor instead of her pillow and her hair was covering most of her face. Trip was still curled into a tight ball on Phil's side of the bed and Skye watched as Nattie rolled over and accidentally kicked his shin. Her brother made an annoyed sound and curled into an even tighter ball.
"I didn't know we were having a sleepover."

It felt nice having everyone in one place, so she just shrugged in response.

Her mom eased carefully off the bed before walking over to Wanda and gently sliding her pillow under her head and fixing everyone's blankets so that they were covered properly. Once she was done, she came back over to her, leaned in, and softly asked, "Did you sleep alright?"

Skye shrugged again and tried not to think of her nightmares. They made her tummy feel uneasy, so instead she avoided answering at all, "Can we go downstairs?"

"Sure, let's go find Phil."

She nodded, tightened her grip on Alice, and reached up, pleased when her mom picked her up and so that she could wrap herself around the older woman. She rested her head on May's shoulder and they both went downstairs. The closer they got to the kitchen, the more clearly she could hear Phil singing softly and off key, which made her grin a little.

When they made it into the kitchen, she was completely unsurprised to find him leaning over a griddle, flipping pancakes and wearing his flowery apron. May walked up to him and he kissed her cheek before turning smiling at her, "You sleep okay?"

Skye shrugged again and forced herself to focus on the smell of pancakes rather than her nightmares. Phil exchanged a look with May before leaning in to kiss her forehead.

May jostled her a little bit so that she could get her attention, "So, we called Jiaying last night and she said that she could come over later so that you two can talk, is that okay?"

Jay was nice, liked to play with her dolls with her, and didn’t make her talk about things she didn’t want to, so she didn't mind if she came over, "Okay."

Great, she'll come over around six tonight. You guys can talk in your room again if you want."

Skye nodded absentmindedly and put her head back on her mom’s shoulder, who swayed gently back and forth for a couple of minutes. She listened to Phil sing his song and grinned a little when his voice cracked over some of the words.

Her small grin immediately slipped away when her mom stroked her hair and said, "I've got to take a shower. It's better to grab one before everyone else wakes up and steals the hot water."

May pressed a kiss to the top of her head and tried to set her down, which was the exact opposite of what Skye wanted, so she pressed herself closer to her mom and refused to be put on the ground, "No! Don't leave me Mommy."

Her mom made a surprised sound and wrapped her arms around her in a tight hug, "Skye, I'm not leaving you, I'll never leave you. You know that right? I'm just going to take a shower and then I'll be right back."

Skye gripped her tighter. She didn't want May to leave her, she wanted to stay with her forever and the thought of her being away made a knot form in her tummy.

"Why don't you help Phil with the pancakes?" May asked before leaning in close and whispering in her ear, "They always taste better when you help. Don't tell him I said that."
"What was that?" Phil asked.

"Nothing babe."

Skye reluctantly nodded and leaned back so that she and May were face to face, "Okay."

"Good girl. I love you Skye, to the moon and back-"

Skye finished for her, like she always did, "More than all the stars in the sky."

May leaned forward and rubbed their noses together, "Always."

She nodded and turned so that Phil could reach over, grab her, place her on his hip, and hand her the spatula. Watching May walk back up the stairs caused an empty feeling to take root in her chest. She didn't like being so far away from May.

Phil pulled her attention away from her thoughts, "How about we put some chocolate chips in these bad boys? What do you say sweetheart?"

Skye nodded and reached over to carefully set Alice down on the counter so that she could hold the bag of chocolate chips that Phil offered her. He poured the batter and she gingerly placed the chips on the pancakes and then helped him flip them. He kept singing as they cooked and when they finished, he turned the griddle off and put the dirty dishes in the sink while she rested her head on his shoulder.

He was humming a slow song and out of nowhere, held out a hand to her. She stared at it and gave him a questioning look, wondering if he wanted a high five or something. He shook his hand a little and that prompted Skye to place her hand in his.

He gave her a wide smile and then started dancing around the kitchen. She was pretty sure that Phil was making up the song as he went, but it was nice and it made the empty feeling in her chest vanish a little bit. He spun them around and even managed to lower her a little so that it looked like she was being dipped.

"Skye, you are a fantastic dancer. You should teach a class," He said after he finished his song.

She gave him a look, "I didn't do anything Daddy, you were the one dancing."

"It's all about the lead partner and you are an excellent leader. You should teach Trip how to slow dance. That kid has two left feet."

Skye wasn't sure what that meant but she assumed that it wasn't good. She shrugged and Phil leaned in to kiss her forehead before grabbing the plate of pancakes and putting tin-foil over it to keep them warm.

He placed a frying pan on the stove top and Skye held onto him as he leaned forward, grabbed bacon out of the fridge, and turned to her, "Let's see how fast everyone gets down here when they smell bacon."

As soon as he placed the strips of bacon onto the pan, she heard footsteps on the staircase and Phil gave her a surprised look, "That was faster than I thought."

When she checked to see who it was, her mom was walking towards them, hair damp and cheeks still flushed from the warm water, "Smells good guys."
"We're waiting to see who wanders down here first."

It was Pietro. His light hair was sticking up in every direction and he looked like he was still half asleep. He grunted out a good morning before grabbing some orange juice and collapsing into a chair at the table.

Natasha was next. She looked more awake than Pietro did as she made her way into the kitchen and standing on her toes to give Skye a kiss on the cheek. She grabbed a bottle of water and made her way into the dining room to flick Pietro on the top of his head and plop unceremoniously into her seat.

A few minutes, Wanda *skipped* down the stairs, looking utterly awake and refreshed. She happily said good morning to everyone. May and Phil hugged her, Skye waved, Natasha threw her a dirty look, and Pietro grunted in her general direction.

Trip was the last one to make his way down the staircase. Phil had already finished making the bacon and was setting everything on the table. She was still in his arms and was holding the plate full of pancakes, which she carefully set in the middle of the table. When Phil sat down and settled her on his lap, she was glad that he hadn’t tried to make her sit by herself.

Her dad handed her a plate with a chocolate chip pancake and some bacon on it, and scooted the maple syrup over to her. She grabbed it and poured some over her plate as everyone else was grabbing their food.

She looked at her plate full of food, picked up her fork, and tried to cut a piece of pancake without getting her hands all sticky. She lifted the fork to her mouth but before she bit into it, her stomach rolled. It was pretty easy to ignore her stomach because she loved chocolate chip pancakes, so she placed the food in her mouth and started chewing.

Her yummiest and most delicious breakfast food of choice felt like a giant chunk of sawdust in her mouth. It was impossible to swallow and it felt like her tummy was too full even though she hadn't eaten since dinner. She chewed on it until she couldn't anymore and then forced herself to swallow it.

When the lump of food finally made its way to her stomach, she set her fork down. There was no way she could eat anymore.

"You want something else?" Her mom asked, giving her a worried look.

Skye shook her head and leaned back against her dad, "M'not hungry."

He gently tapped her knee, "You need to eat sweetheart. How about an apple?"

The thought of eating anything made her stomach feel a little queasy so she stubbornly shook her head.

Her dad pushed her glass of orange juice in front of her, "Why don't you drink this now so that your tummy isn't completely empty. You might be hungry a little later."

She stared at her glass and reluctantly nodded. She grabbed it, held it up to her lips, and forced herself to drink a few sips. After a quarter of her glass was gone, she looked up and saw that everyone was staring at her with worried looks on their faces, so she made herself give them a smile before setting the glass back down.

May was still looking at her kind of funny, "When you start to feel hungry, you tell us okay? We'll make you something."
Skye nodded and started playing with the hand that Phil wasn't using to eat with so she had a reason to not look at her family’s concerned faces. The conversation started back up and Skye listened contentedly before realizing that today was Wednesday. She should be in school right now and she was supposed to go see Ward today.

She straightened up in alarm and craned her neck so that she could look up at her dad, "It's a school day."

"Don't worry, it's okay that you’re not in school right now. We called them and took care of everything. You won't have to go back until you're ready."

That was a relief, she really didn't want to go back. She just wanted to stay here forever and ever and never leave.

She looked over to Natasha and Trip, who were both shoveling bacon into their mouths, and asked, "What about them?"

Phil leaned down and pressed a kiss to the top of her head, "They’re good too."

"Am I still going to see Ward today?"

Her parents shared a look and her mom said, "I don't think so baby, unless you really want to. How about we reschedule it for later?"

She let out a relieved breath, "Okay."

Her mom smiled at her and everyone went back to eating, except for her. The thought of eating food made her feel sick.

"What do you wanna do today Skye?" Pietro asked around a mouthful of food.

She shrugged.

Pietro swallowed and grinned at her, "You ever play Monopoly?"

Everyone else at the table groaned and Skye sat up straighter in interest, "No, what's that?"

That was how they ended up on the playroom floor, Monopoly money all over the place, and Trip throwing all of them dirty looks. He huffed and glared at them, "You guys are ganging up on me, aren't you?"

From her mom’s lap, Skye spoke up, "No Trip, I promise."

He gave her a look that clearly said he was unconvinced, "Are you sure?"

She nodded confidently. She wasn't really sure how to play this game, she mainly just handed Pietro one dollar bills and he handed her houses to put on the board, but she was pretty sure she wasn't ganging up on Trip.

He blew out a breath, "Okay, then I must just be really bad at this."

Natasha elbowed him in the stomach, "Tell us something we don't know."

Trip rolled his eyes and Skye felt her lips tug up into a half-smile. This game was confusing, but Pietro liked it and everyone else seemed to be having fun, so she was enjoying herself. It felt really nice to have everyone here.
The game went on forever; they didn't even finish it, they just called it a draw. Pietro insisted that he would have won if they would've finished the game properly and Trip was disagreeing, saying that since Pietro was the banker, he had more access to the money and was more likely to be cheating. It was funny to watch their bantering.

She, Wanda and May were picking up the pieces of the game and putting them back in the box. They stuffed everything haphazardly in there and May handed Wanda the box so that she could set it on the game shelf.

As she absentmindedly helped Wanda pick up the game, she watched Trip and Pietro play-wrestle on the ground. Natasha reached down to tickle Pietro, who gave her a betrayed look, before Nattie started laughing.

Skye was enjoying herself, she even started to consider joining in on the fun, when she heard a loud crashing noise.

"Oops. Sorry guys," Wanda muttered as she crouched down to pick up the fallen Monopoly box.

The loud noise hurled her back into that house, with Crazy Cal standing in front of her and the big men in black pointing guns at him. Her breathing rate increased and her heart felt like it was crashing into her ribcage. Blood started rushing through her ears and she couldn't hear anything. She saw everything happen again in slow motion: Crazy Cal falling backwards, him reaching towards her, his blood spreading slowly on the carpet surrounding her.

There was so much blood.

She whimpered, put her hands on her head, and started rocking back and forth in May's lap, trying as hard as she could to push the images out of her head.

It wasn't working; she was having trouble catching her breath and her throat started to close up.

Someone said her name but it sounded like it was coming from far away. It gave her something to focus on it and she slowly became semi-aware of what was going on around her. At some point, her mom had turned her around so that she was facing her, and was now speaking softly, "Skye, it's okay, Wanda just dropped the board game. It's okay, come back to us baby. It's alright."

May kept repeating reassuring words over and over and Skye focused in on her gentle voice. The images finally started to fade from her mind and her mom carefully lifted up her hand and placed it over her chest. She could feel May's heart beating strongly against her palm and she actively tried to match her breathing with May's and was finally able to get enough oxygen into her lungs.

Tears welled up in her eyes and spilled onto her cheeks. She threw her arms around her mom’s neck as she started to sob.

Her mom’s gentle fingers carded through her hair and helped to make her feel a little better.

"What's wrong with me?"

Her hands paused and then moved away from her hair before gently grabbing the sides of her face and prompting her to look up. She obliged and stared up at her.

May brushed tears off of her cheek, "There's nothing wrong with you Skye. You've been through a lot and it's okay to react this way. I promise, there's nothing wrong with you."

Skye didn't think that she believed her and she didn't think it was normal to panic because your sister
dropped a stupid board game on the floor.

"It's okay sweetie, you're okay," May said, pressing a bunch of tiny kisses to her forehead.

They sat in silence for a couple of minutes before Skye sniffled, straightened up, and looked around. Everyone else had left the room, which made her feel a little better because she didn't want her family to think that she was weird or a problem.

May stood up, kept her in her arms, and walked out of the playroom and into the bathroom. Skye kept her face pressed against the crook of her mom's neck until she felt a tap on her shoulder. When she looked up, she saw that May was holding a wet washcloth and let her wipe the tears off of her face, which left her feeling a lot better.

"Better?" Her mom asked, pushed her hair back and setting a gentle hand on her shoulder.

Skye nodded, and when her mom opened up her arms, she leaned forward and hugged her tightly.

"There's nothing wrong with you Skye. A lot has happened and there are a lot of things that we need to work through, but we're here for you and Jay will be here to help you and we can get through it together. I love you baby."

Skye sniffled and said in a wobbly voice, "I love you too."

"How about we go get some lunch? You must be hungry, you didn't eat breakfast."

Her tummy did feel uncomfortably empty and she wanted to go see everyone, so she nodded.

When they made their way into the kitchen, everyone else was already in there. Phil looked over to them, "We're making lunch guys, you're just in time."

And that was it. No one said anything about what happened and Skye was eternally grateful. Even still, she saw Phil give May a look, and Skye scrunched her nose up at their silent communication.

After her mom and dad finished their weird silent talk, her dad turned to her and asked, "You ever make macaroni and cheese before?"

She shook her head and he grinned at her, "Wanda's a pro at it-"

Pietro spinned around and interrupted him, "Yeah, it's what we live off of."

Her dad sighed, looked up at the ceiling, and continued, "You wanna help her out?"

She nodded and went over to Wanda, who was standing by the stove-top. She passed Nattie and Pietro, who were cutting up fruit and putting it into a bowl, and Trip and Phil, who were making sandwiches. Wanda smiled down at her, "Hey little one. Let me teach you the ways of the ancient craft of macaroni and cheese making."

Skye grinned up at her and stood on her tip toes so that she could peer over the counter. It wasn't really working. Even on tip toes, her head just cleared the top of the counter, so she hopped up and down until Wanda laughed and reached down, "May I?"

Skye considered it, shrugged, and lifted her arms up so that her sister could pick her up and set her on the counter by the stove-top.

"Be careful, it's hot over here."
She made sure that she didn't lean over to stove-top while Wanda moved to pot over so that it was closer to her. When she peered into it, she saw that there were noodles in the boiling water. Wanda handed her a wooden spoon, "You wanna stir this?"

Skye nodded and took the spoon from her before carefully stirring the noodles.

Wanda nodded in appreciation, "I'd say we've got another minute or two before they're done." She tapped her knee and leaned against the countertop, "So little sis, what do you like to do for fun?"

Skye was a little surprised by the question but considered it seriously, "I like to play with my dollies and color and watch Spongebob."

Wanda leaned closer, "That's interesting. I, personally, love watching Spongebob and I have to say that Squidward is my favorite."

Skye shook her head in disbelief, "What? But he's so grumpy all the time!"

"Yeah, but I think that he's funny. Who's your favorite?"

They considered the pros and cons of each character as they finished making their part of lunch. They joined everyone at the table, and this time she climbed onto Wanda's lap before her handed her a plate full of food.

It hadn't really hit her until now, but she was hungry. Her tummy felt empty and she regretted not eating breakfast, so she was excited to dig in. She picked up her fork and scooped up some macaroni and cheese, but as soon as she brought it up to her mouth, she started to feel nauseous.

Her hunger vanished quickly so she set her fork down and reached for her glass of water instead. Wanda was reaching around her to grab some fruit off of her plate, so she made sure to be careful when she brought it up to her mouth, she started to feel nauseous.

Her mom noticed that she wasn't eating and gave her a questioning look. To which she just shrugged. She honestly had no explanation for why she couldn’t seem to eat.

Her mom crooked a finger at her, obviously wanting her to go over to her, so she obliged. May picked her up and set her on her lap before leaning in close and whispering, "Why aren't you eating baby?"

"I can't," she whispered back.

May gave her a puzzled look, "Why not?"

"I don't know, I just can't. My tummy won't let me."

Her mom started to look worried, which made her feel a little bad. "Can you try to eat a little bit?" May asked, scooting a small bowl of fruit her way.

Skye made a face at the fruit and highly doubted she'd be able to eat any of it.

"You really need to eat something sweetie. Can you try? For me?"

Even though she didn’t really want to, she could try to her mom. She picked up a strawberry and
forced herself to chew it, and even though the thought of swallowing it made her feel sick, she did it. The smile her mom gave her was worth it.

For the rest of lunch, she leaned back and listened to the conversations going on around her. May would occasionally push a piece of fruit her way and she would force herself to eat it even though her tummy protested the whole time.

When they finished lunch, Wanda looked over to her, "Spongebob's usually on right now Skye. Want to watch it with me?"

She nodded happily and slid off of May's lap before tugging on her hand. Once she made sure that May was following her, she grabbed onto Wanda's hand and wandered into the living room.
When they made it to the living room, they found that Spongebob wasn't on so they all watched Frozen instead. She was snuggled between her dad and Wanda on the couch, while her mom sat on the opposite side of her sister. The rest of her siblings were scattered around the room, and Nattie was sitting cross-legged, leaning back against the couch directly in front of her. Nattie would periodically tickle her feet and she would react by curling them up under her before stretching them back out a couple minutes later, only for Natasha to repeat the whole thing.

Halfway through the movie, Natasha looked back at them and wiggled her phone in her hand, "Is it okay if Clint, Steve, and Bucky come over? They want to see Skye."

Her mom pondered over it before finally relenting, "Only for an hour or two. Jiaying will be here soon and I don't want there to be too many distractions. And only if it's alright with Skye."

Nattie turned to her and raised a questioning eyebrow.

She thought about it as she snuggled closer into her dad’s side. She liked Nattie's friends, they were nice to her and sometimes they called her a princess, so she gave her sister a nod.

Stretching upwards, she leaned forward and whispered so that she wouldn’t interrupt the movie, "I left Alice in the kitchen. Can we got get her?"

"You can go grab her sweetie, I'll pause the movie for you,” Her dad replied, already reaching for the remote.

She didn't think he understood what she was saying since her whole point in asking was that she didn't want to go into the kitchen by herself. When it became clear that Phil wasn't catching on, she slowly peered into the kitchen. It looked dark and empty, so she swallowed thickly and sat back, "I'll just wait."

Her dad gave her a strange look but didn't question it. Then Wanda was shifting next to her and gaining her attention, "I was going to go get some water, I can grab her for you."

She gave her sister a grateful look, and was very happy when Wanda smiled back at her, stood up, and made her way into the kitchen. She came back with a glass of water in one hand and Alice in the other.

"Thanks Wanda," She said, taking the doll from her and holding Alice to her chest. Her sister just put her arm around Skye's shoulder in response.

By the time the doorbell rang, Frozen was over and they had moved on to watching Lilo and Stitch, as per Skye's request. Her dad paused the movie as Natasha jumped up and ran off to answer the door.

She braced herself for the loud voices that usually came with Nattie's friends coming over, but they never came. Clint, Steve, and Bucky silently filed into the house, which was kind of off-putting by how odd it was. Bucky said something to Nattie and she motioned towards the living room.

Clint was the first one to spot Pietro, and his eyes lit up even as he crossed his arm in front of his chest, "No one told me the circus was in town."

"Nice to see you too Clinton."
Clint rolled his eyes and then he spotted her on the couch, "Hey princess."

She waved to him and then Bucky spoke up, "Hey Skye, what're you guys doing today?"

"We're watching Lilo and Stitch. You just missed Frozen," She answered, helpfully pointing to the t.v. screen.

She watched as Bucky lightly hit Steve in the stomach, "You hear that pal? We just missed your favorite movie."

Steve hit him back before saying, "Is it okay if we watch it with you?"

She nodded enthusiastically, and Steve smiled at her before they all sat themselves down on the floor by Nattie.

"Wanda, quit hogging Skye over there. Will you come sit with us princess?" Clint asked, turning around to look at her and flick Wanda's knee.

"Hey, she's my sister, I can hog her if I want to," Wanda said, flicking him on his forehead in retaliation.

Wanda leaned forward and whispered to her, "This couch is too comfy anyways, let's move this party to the floor."

It made her happy to hear that her sister would go with her to sit with the boys, since she didn't want to make Wanda feel bad if she went to sit on the floor, and she didn't want Clint to feel bad if she stayed with Wanda.

Awkwardly, they scooted off the couch and onto the floor. Skye wiggled her way between Nattie and Bucky while Wanda sat on Nattie's other side. From her spot, she could easily lean back against her dad's legs and when he reached out and ran a hand over the top of her head, she sighed in content.

They watched the movie but after a little bit, she started to lose interest and looked around the room instead. Rather than feeling crowded, the room felt cozy with ten people inside it. When she looked behind her, her mom was leaning her head on her dad's shoulder, and they both looked very comfortable. Trip had moved and was now draped over the arm of the couch, dozing lightly. Pietro was lounging in the chair, tearing up his granola bar wrapper into tiny pieces, and throwing them at Trip. Clint and Steve were lying on their backs, facing the t.v. screen, and Natasha and Wanda were whispering to each other every couple of minutes.

Everyone looked happy and content, which was familiar, but she felt a little restless. When she looked over to Bucky, he was already looking back at her, and she jumped in surprise.

He leaned close and whispered, "Are you okay?"

Right now she felt okay, she was comfortable and safe with her family and friends around her. She didn't feel okay when she thought about anything that had happened in the past few days, or when she was about to be left alone, or when something reminded her of Crazy Cal. Because of this, she wasn't really sure how to answer, so she shrugged.

She was expecting to see the worried look that everyone had started wearing around her on Bucky's face, but it wasn't there. Instead, he had this look in his eyes that made her feel like he just understood how she was feeling right now.
"You will be. I know you will," He whispered, reaching out to comfortingly pat her knee.

Skye scrunched her nose up, "How do you know that?"

He grinned at her and shrugged, "I just do."

That sounded a lot like something that people just said, and she gave him a doubtful look. Bucky shook his head and leaned in a little closer, "Because you're brave and strong and you have all these people here that are willing to help you. You'll be okay little princess, I know you will."

The complete confidence in his voice had Skye starting to believe him. She nodded at him and he smiled down at her before looking back to the t.v. screen.

She combed her fingers through Alice's hair and thought about what Bucky said. He thought that she was going to be okay, that she was brave and strong, and she didn't know if he was right about that, but she would try to be those things.

She made Alice climb up Bucky's prosthetic arm and start to do back flips off of his shoulder. When he noticed, he started making sound effects for the doll, which caught Clint’s attention. He sat up and made his way over to them, "Hey Skye, you know what Alice needs? Her own castle."

Alice did deserve her own castle and she smiled happily when Clint asked, "You guys have any Lego's? I'm about to build the greatest castle you have ever seen."

Interest in the castle seemed to spread and Natasha and Steve both moved towards them so that they could be involved. Skye tried to remember where she had put her legos and when it came back to her, she excitedly pointed to the staircase, "There's some in the playroom!"

"I'll show you." Nattie said as she elbowed him and then tugged him up and towards the stairs.

In no time, they were trudging back down with a plastic bin full of Lego's. After seeing this, everyone abandoned the movie, crowded around, and helped build a castle out of Lego's.

By the time they finished, Alice was standing in the middle of a multicolored Lego castle, complete with tall towers and a makeshift drawbridge and May was gently nudging Steve, Bucky, and Clint towards the door and telling them that it was time for them to leave. After admiring their work for a long moment, the boys reluctantly started gathering their things to leave.

Clint turned to her and held out a hand, which she gently high-fived, before he said, "Mission accomplished."

She firmly nodded in agreement.

Steve smiled and waved, "See you later Skye, it was fun hanging out." She smiled back at him and watched him say goodbye to everyone else.

Clint leaned in and tousled her hair, "Later princess. Next time I come over, we're going to renovate that castle so that it has a movie room." Skye had no idea how he was going to do that but she was excited to find out, so she smiled and nodded happily.

"I'll see you later Skye," Bucky said, as he shoved Clint out of the way and moved so that he was standing in front of her. He crouched down a little so that she didn't have to crane her neck to look at him, "Remember what I said okay? You'll be alright little princess, even if it doesn't feel like it right now."
Skye swallowed thickly and hoped that he was right. She took a step forward, quickly hugged him around the waist, and stepped back before he could hug her back. He didn’t seem to mind the odd way she hugged him since he was smiling happily down at her.

He straightened up and said goodbye to everyone else and then the three of them walked out the door and were gone.

"We've got about twenty minutes until Jiaying gets here. Are you hungry?" Her mom asked.

She shook her head and watched as her mom looked over to her dad and had this weird silent conversation between them. After a moment, her dad turned and smiled at her, "I'm pretty hungry. You wanna help me make dinner until Jay gets here?"

She nodded, plucked Alice out of her castle, and took her dad’s hand as they walked into the kitchen with her mom following after them. Distantly, she heard Pietro say that they were going to go outside and play some football, and when she glanced back, she saw her siblings elbowing and shoving each other out the backdoor.

While her mom set her on the counter, her dad reached into the fridge and grabbed some things for dinner. May reached out and brushed her hair away from her eyes and said, "So, you know how Natasha was with you the last time you talked to Jay?"

"Mhmm."

"How would you feel if it was just you and Jay talking this time?"

Skye tilted her head, "Just the two of us?"

May nodded and started running her fingers through her hair, and she easily leaned into the touch. "Yeah. I think it might help if you talk to Jay one-on-one. What’re your feelings about that?"

Skye didn't want to be alone and she liked Jay and all, but she barely knew her, so she bit her lip and shook her head.

"What if we leave your bedroom door open and Phil and I sit in the hallway. That way if you need us, we can hear you call for us," Her mom asked softly, moving her hand from her hair and gently cupping her cheek.

Skye considered it. She still didn't want to be left completely alone with Jay, even though the thought of having May and Phil within calling distance helped her feel a little better.

"How about you try that out and if you don't like it, I'll go and stay in your room with you?"

"So… if I don't like it, you'll come in and sit with me while I talk to Jay?"

Her mom nodded.

"Do you promise?"

Her mom solemnly held out her pinky, "I pinky promise. You can't break pinky promises, I'm pretty sure it's illegal to do that."

Skye interlocked their pinkies, "Okay, I'll try it."

When her mom leaned forward and kissed her forehead, she wrapped her arms around her neck and latched onto her. She heard her mom breathe out a laugh and felt her straighten up, this time with
Skye in her arms. May readjusted her so that she was comfortable while she looked over to Phil, who was cutting up vegetables and putting them into a big salad bowl while humming to himself.

"Are you sure you aren't hungry?" Her mom asked, poking her on the thigh to get her attention.

The tight feeling in her tummy had her nodding confidently.

"We're going to save you a plate anyways, okay? You might be hungry when you're done talking to Jay."

She shrugged and nodded even though she didn't think that her appetite would return. It worried her a little bit that she didn't know what was wrong with her tummy. Idly, she wondered if she was sick again, and shuddered at the thought. She **hated** being sick.

She hung out with May and Phil in the kitchen until their doorbell rang. May glanced at her and they made their way out of the kitchen to answer it. When they unlocked the door and pulled it open, Jiaying was waiting on the other side with a big smile on her face.

"Hey Skye, it's so nice to see you again."

Skye tightened her hold on her mom with one hand and waved with the other even though Alice was in it.

"It smells great in here! Did I interrupt dinner?" Jay asked.

"No, Phil's preparing it right now." Her mom answered before jostling her a bit and saying "Skye's not hungry though, are you baby?"

She shook her head and missed the pointed look May gave Jay.

Jay looked back to her, "Really? It smells so good though! Did you have a big lunch? Sometimes when I do that, I'm not hungry for dinner."

She shook her head again and her mom answered for her, "No, she didn't really eat lunch either."

Jay seemed to file that knowledge away and then cheerfully changed the subject, "Well, are you ready to go upstairs Skye?"

"You'll wait in the hallway right?" She quietly asked her mom as she absentmindedly twirled a some of her mom’s silky hair around her finger.

Her mom kissed her cheek, "Of course sweetie, I promised you didn't I?"

Satisfied with her answer, she nodded and they all made their way upstairs, where her mom set her down outside her room. She pointed to a spot by Natasha's door, "I'll wait over here, okay? Call me if you need me."

Skye nodded and forced her legs to carry her into her room, even though her chest felt like it was getting emptier and emptier the further she got from her mom.

Jay followed her and Skye was grateful when she left the door halfway open. Once they were settled, with her resting stiffly on her bed and Jay pulling her desk chair over so that she could sit next to her. It was quiet for a long moment before Jay took a pad of paper and a pen out of her bag and smiled at her, "So Skye, I hear you've had a pretty scary past few days."

She swallowed thickly and nodded.
"Do you maybe want to talk about what happened?" Jay asked, crossing her legs and looking quite comfortable across from her.

Skye vigorously shook her head. She had been keeping her mind off of what happened and it had been going pretty well for her, so she really didn't want to think about it.

"Okay. When your mom called me yesterday, she said that it kind of seemed like you were afraid of being alone. Do you think she's right?"

Skye didn't have to think about it, she knew that her mom was right, so she nodded.

"Why do you think you're afraid of that Skye?"

She forced images of Crazy Cal out of her head and mumbled, "I don't know."

"Do you think it might be because you think something bad might happen?"

Tears started welling up in her eyes and she looked away from Jay and took a couple of deep breaths.

"It's okay if you cry, there's nothing wrong with that," Jay murmured comfortingly.

She stubbornly shook her head and rubbed her eyes with her fists, "I cry a lot here and I don't want to anymore."

"Why's that?"

"Because families don't like crybabies."

She heard pen on paper and looked back to see Jay writing something down before glancing up at her, "Skye, I'm going to say the first part of a sentence and if you don't mind, can you finish it with what you think your best answer is?"

Skye nodded, confident she could do this because she completed fill-in-the-blank questions for Ms. Hill all the time.

Jay smiled at her, "Okay, here it is. 'I don't want to cry in front of my family because…'"

Skye thought about it for a second, scratched her arm, rubbed her nose with her sleeve, and looked around her room, before finally mumbling, "Because crying is a problem, and I don't want to be a problem because families don't like it when kids are difficult."

"So you think that if you cry a lot, this family will… what? Send you back to the orphanage?"

She nodded.

"Skye, I've talked with your parents and they've assured me that they are never going to send you back to St. Agnes'. Don't you believe them?" Jay implored.

She looked away from Jay's empathetic eyes and down at her comforter. She trusted May and Phil a lot, more than she'd ever trusted anyone in her whole entire life… but she was still plagued with 'what-ifs'. What if they got tired of her and sent her back? What if they start to think that she's too much of a problem? What if she's not worth all the trouble? In the past three weeks alone she had had multiple breakdowns, a panic attack that had made them come get her from school early, and she had been kidnapped.
That was a lot of problems for just one, dumb kid.

"I want to believe them," She finally said.

"Good, that's good Skye. What do you think it would take for you to believe them completely?"

She wasn't sure what it would take and a large part of her was pretty sure she was just being stupid about this. May and Phil had told her multiple times that they weren't going to send her back to the orphanage…but that was before the bad thing had happened.

"Why don't we come back to that later. How have you been doing since you got back home?" Jay asked.

It was starting to feel a little discouraging that she had no answers to these questions.

"Sorry, let me clarify that a little bit. Did you have any nightmares last night?"

Skye shuddered when she thought about her nightmares, "Yes."

"Do you remember what they were about?"

Skye bit her lip, hard enough to make her wince, before saying, "Yes."

"Can you tell me about them?"

Telling her about her nightmares would make her think about all the bad things that happened, so she really didn’t want to say anything. Jay seemed to sense this, because she leaned towards her and comforting patted her knee, "Skye, I know that it's probably scary and upsetting to talk to me about what happened, but talking about it can really help you start to feel better. You don't have to tell me anything that you don't want to, but this could help you start to heal. It's completely up to you Skye."

She could refuse to talk about anything and Jay wouldn't mind, she could tell from the look in her eyes and the truthfulness in her voice. She wanted to start feeling better and to feel like herself again, so if Jay was right about talking helping, she could try it out.

She took a deep breath, "They're mostly the same. There's a loud bang and then Crazy Cal falls down in front of me and there's so much blood around me, it's all I can see."

"Good Skye. Now, is 'Crazy Cal' the person who took you?"

Skye nodded.

"And the loud bang that you hear, is that a gunshot?"

"The men in black shot him."

Jay tilted her head, "Do you know who the men in black are?"

She shook her head, all she knew was that they were scary.

"They're the police."

It made sense that the men in black were the police, and she wondered why she hadn’t made that connection before.

"Can you think of why the police were there?"
She mindlessly fiddled with her blanket and brought Alice closer to her, "To…come and get me?"

"Yes, do you know what the police's job is supposed to be?"

At her old school, a police lady came into her class and talked to them about safety, "To keep people safe."

"Do you think that they kept you safe?" Jay asked.

Her mind was suddenly assaulted by images of them bursting through the door and yelling. Their voices were so loud and they looked scary, not safe. It started to become difficult to catch her breath, so she shoved the images out of her brain. When she focused, she noticed that Jay was staring at her.

"Has that been happening a lot Skye?"

"What?"

Jay put a hand over her chest and made it look like she was taking a deep breath, "When you think about what happened, do you have trouble breathing?"

She nodded.

Jay wrote something down and then leaned forward, "You're mom told me that you had a panic attack earlier today, was that because you were thinking about what happened two days ago?"

"Yeah."

"When you think about what happened, do you try to make yourself forget or think about something else?"

"Yes."

"Does that help you?"

"It helps for a little while."

Jay smiled sadly, "But it always comes back, doesn't it?"

Skye nodded again.

"That's because trying to push away those bad memories isn't good for you Skye. I know that it's scary, but if you don't face up to those memories, you won't be able to start moving past this horrible situation. I know that that seems impossible right now but that's what I'm here for. For now, I'm going to teach you some things that you can do to help you out when you start to feel overwhelmed, like when you had your panic attack. Does that sound okay?"

If there was a way to stop her panic attacks, she wanted to know what it was, "Yes please."

"Alright, if you feel yourself start to feel overwhelmed, what you should do first is try to figure out where these feelings are coming from. Do you know what caused your panic attack earlier?"

Skye blushed a little but answered, "Wanda dropped a board game."

"Okay, can you maybe think back to why that scared you?"

When she thought back, what stood out most in her mind was that when Wanda had dropped the
game, it had crashed to the ground, "The noise was loud."

"What did it remind you of?"

She played with her fingers and looked at her bedspread, "The loud noises that happened in the room."

"So you were reminded of something that happened in the past. That's a key part that I need you to remember, okay Skye? These events that are making you anxious happened in the past, so they can't harm you anymore." She let that sink in before continuing, "The second thing you should do, after figuring out where your feelings are coming from, is acknowledge that you are feeling anxious. It's okay to feel panicky and scared, but it's important to know that even though you're afraid, you're not in any danger. Does that make sense?"

"Yeah, it does."

"So you should tell yourself that you're safe and not in any danger. After that, you should try to control your breathing. Do you want to know a trick for that?"

She nodded eagerly.

"You inhale for four seconds, hold your breath for three seconds, and then exhale for four seconds. Can you try that?"

She sucked in a breath and made sure it lasted for four seconds, then she held it for three seconds, and then she slowly exhaled. It was slow and required some concentration, but she could do it.

Jay smiled approvingly at her, "Good job Skye. Can you tell me what the three steps that I told you were?"

Skye held up one finger, "Figure out why I'm feeling the way I am." She held up another finger, "Tell myself that I'm safe." She held up a third finger, "Do the breathing thing."

"Good. And you inhale for how long?"

Skye held up four fingers, "Four seconds."

Jay nodded, "And you hold your breath for how long?"

"Three seconds."

"Excellent Skye. Now when you start to feel like you're about to have a panic attack or even if you just start to feel overwhelmed, you can do those three steps and it should help you gain back some control."

She made sure to repeat the steps in her head over and over so that she wouldn't forget them.

Jay glanced at her watch, "We have a little more time left, is there anything else you want to talk about?"

She didn't really feel like talking anymore and she felt drained from thinking about her bad dreams, so she shook her head and squeezed her moon pendant tightly between her fingers. Jay’s eyes zeroed in on the movement and she tilted her head curiously, "Is that a new necklace?"

Nodding, she moved her hand so that she could proudly show it off, "Yeah, Wanda and Pietro got it for me."
Jay moved from her chair to sit on the bed next to her, carefully examined her necklace, and smiled, "It's very beautiful, that was kind of them."

Skye couldn't help but grin a little, "Yeah, they're nice."

"Do you like having them here?"

She nodded enthusiastically, "I wish they could stay here all the time and then we could all be here together forever."

Jay breathed out a soft laugh, "That's a wonderful thing to wish for Skye. Does it make you feel bad when you think about them having to leave again?"

"Yeah, I wish they didn't have to go."

"I know. It would be cool if they could stay here all the time right?" When she nodded, Jay continued, "But you know that they aren't disappearing forever right? Even when they're gone, they still love you and miss you. They'll be back once they're done with school and you guys can be together again."

The thought of them leaving made her feel sad, so she looked away and quietly asked, "Can I go see my mommy now?"

"Of course you can, let's go," Jay said, standing up and motioning for her to do the same.

She ran out the door ahead of Jay and saw her mom and dad sitting in the hall by Natasha's bedroom door. When they spotted her, they both stood up and smiled, which prompted her to run even faster towards them.

Even though it hadn't happened yet, May kept expecting to hear Skye call her into her room. She could only hear the occasional murmur coming from Skye's room and she hadn't heard any crying, so she assumed that everything was going well.

Skye might be doing fine, but she was a nervous wreck. Skye wasn't eating and she was way clingier than normal. She had seen how the little girl didn't even want to go into the kitchen by herself, how was she going to go back to school?

She really hoped that Jiaying would be able to help.

Phil had joined her after he had finished making dinner and had served it to the kids. He had saved a plate for the three of them and sat down beside her. They were both unusually quiet as they waited for the session to be over.

Finally, Skye ran out of her room and they both quickly stood up. It was easy to tell when their little girl spotted them, because she started running even faster, her little legs moving quicker than she'd ever seen. Thankfully, she didn't see any tears and her daughter looked relatively calm, so she assumed that she wasn't upset.

Skye was a step or two away before she jumped, and May reached out, caught her, and settled her in her arms, "How'd it go?"

“Okay,” Skye mumbled, wrapping her arms around her neck and setting her head on her shoulder.
She looked over to Phil and he gave her a helpless look before leaning down and placing a kiss on the top of Skye's head. Jiaying made her way over to them and smiled, which she took that as a good sign.

Jay pulled her bag tighter over her shoulder, "Sorry if that lasted a little longer than usual. You're probably pretty hungry by now, huh Skye?"

Skye shook her hand and her stomach dropped a little. Skye really needed to eat something.

She gave Phil a look and he cleared his throat before saying, "Everyone came back inside after their game was over, you want to go see what they're up to Skye?"

Skye lifted her head up and looked over to Phil. He smiled at her and May could feel Skye's hesitance before she said, "Okay."

Phil grinned and reached over to take her out of May's arms. She watched as Skye wrapped herself around Phil and waved to her before they both made their way down the staircase.

Once they were out of sight, she turned around and seriously said, "Give it to me straight Jay."

She watched Jay let out a big breath, "I'm pretty sure she has PTSD. It was probably already there due to her past but this incident has increased her symptoms. From what I've seen, she's probably developed some separation anxiety, which would explain why she doesn't want to leave you or Phil."

That made sense but May was still worried about her eating patterns, "Why won't she eat?"

"She's stressed. Anxious. Those feelings can manifest and cause her to feel physically ill. It's probably preventing her from eating and from sleeping too."

Jay took a breath and stared her straight in the eye, "The good thing is that we're getting Skye the help she needs immediately after this experience. It's better to deal with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as quickly as possible so that it doesn't become more internalized or get worse. Skye needs to confront what happened to her. Right now, she's ignoring it. She won't think about it and once I introduce a topic, she'll vaguely speak about it and then clam up. I didn't expect to have a heart-to-heart on our first session, even I'm not that good," Jay paused to grin a little, "But I think it would be best if I come over again tomorrow. She's not going to like it, but she needs to talk about what happened to her. Honestly Mel, I don't think she understands half of what went on and she needs an explanation. Some things might be better if she hears it from you."

May found herself nodding along to what Jiaying was saying. She would do anything she could to help Skye, "Like what?"

She and Jay started to slowly walk down the staircase, "Well, most children don't know what death really is or what it means. Skye has been subjected to it and it might help her if she understands what happens when someone dies."

May wasn't really sure how to appropriately explain death to a six year old but she would damn well try her hardest. "Okay, anything else?"

"Skye just needs to know that you're here for her. She thinks that with everything that's happened, you might be considering taking her back to the orphanage."

May stopped short, "What? We would never."
"I know that Mel, but Skye's doubting everything right now. She needs reassurance and to feel safe."

May nodded even as her heart started aching. She just wanted Skye to feel safe and happy again.

"Thanks Jay. Same time tomorrow?"

Jay nodded and reached to open the door, "Yep, I'll be here."

They shook each other's hands and said their goodbye's before Jay walked out the door and May shut it behind her. She leaned her forehead against the door for a moment to get her bearings. She took a deep breath, turned around, and was met with the sight of everyone sitting at the dining room table. There was construction paper and crayons everywhere and Skye was sitting on Phil's lap, absentmindedly drawing on a piece of paper but she didn't look like she was focusing too hard on it.

May wasn't sure what she was going to do. She wasn't equipped to deal with this sort of thing, and for just a minute, she let herself loose her cool and think about how out of her depth she was.

Before her thoughts got too out of control, she took a deep, calming breath. Skye needed her and she would do anything and everything in her power to help her little girl.

At that moment, Skye looked up and spotted her. She raised her little hand and started waving May over, a ghost of a smile on her face. She smiled, straightened up, and made her way over to her family.
Skye was tired.

She was so tired but she didn’t want to go to sleep.

Part of her knew what would be waiting for her when she closed her eyes and she wasn’t eager to see the images that her mind could conjure up. She would rather stay up and deal with the consequences of being tired and cranky.

She had taken a shower, faithfully ignoring how the warmth and steam made her already heavy eyelids feel heavier, and had put on her comfy footie pajamas. After refusing to eat, her mom had given her a glass of milk and a worried look, and now she still had five minutes until bedtime and she was not going to waste them.

Right now, she was sitting on the bed in Nattie's room. It had taken her a couple of minutes to feel comfortable without her mom and dad in there with her, but she kept reminding herself that they were right down the hall, and finally she had been able to relax a bit. Both of her sisters were on the bed with her, laughing happily and telling Skye stories about their pasts. She was listening avidly and trying to ignore the fact that her parents would be looking for her soon so that they could put her to bed.

Wanda was in the middle of a story, with her hands were waving around and her eyes bright and excited. "And then she starts yelling at me in Russian! I have no idea what she's saying, but from her tone, it wasn't anything good-"

Natasha holds up a hand and interrupts her, "It wasn't bad Skye, don't listen to her."

"Oookay. Because it didn't sound like you were paying me a bunch of compliments now did it?" Wanda asked, her eyebrows raised doubtfully.

When Nattie went to respond, there was a knock at the door, and she stuck her tongue out at Wanda before yelling at whoever it was to come in. Skye had a hunch about who was there, so she crawled into Nattie's lap and watched, unsurprised, as her mom walked into the room and announced, "Bedtime Skye."

"Do I have to?" She asked, whining a bit and grabbing onto her sister's arm.

"I'm sorry baby, but yes. You've already stayed up later than you usually do. Come on, I'll read you a story."

Her mom held out her hand but Skye stayed where she was, looking up at Nattie and giving her a pleading look and hoping that she’d be able to help negotiate with her mom.

Her sister gave her an apologetic look, "Sorry маленькая звезда. Mom's in charge."

A quick glance to Wanda proved that her oldest sister agreed with Nattie, she was nodding her head, even as sympathy showed plain as day on her face. She let out a breath of defeat, and wasn’t going to try to pretend that she was going to be able to win this argument against May. She was the mommy so she made the rules, but that didn’t mean that she liked this particular rule.

She moved as slowly as possible; crawling out of Natasha's lap, sliding off the bed, and trudging towards her mom. The older woman wiggled her fingers and Skye grabbed her hand before they
both made their way down the hall.

They were about to turn into her room when she halted.

When she peered into her room, she saw Phil waiting in there with some books in hand. He spotted her and grinned but she couldn't grin back. She didn't want to sleep in her room all by herself; it was going to be dark and it was scary and she didn't want to do it.

She tugged on her mom’s hand to get her attention but couldn't look her in the eye, "I don't want to sleep in here."

"We'll stay in here until you fall asleep baby, it'll be okay."

She tightened her grip on her mom’s hand and swallowed thickly. She knew she would be having some nightmares tonight and she didn't want to wake up all alone, and her mom didn’t get it. If she had to, she could probably fall asleep in there with her parents by her side, but she didn't want to wake up in the middle of the night all by herself. She couldn't.

Please," she whispered, wincing when her voice cracked on that stupid, pathetic word. She was being a problem right now, she knew it, but she couldn't help it.

Her mom squeezed her hand before gently tugging her down the hallway, towards her’s and Phil's room. Heavy footsteps behind them signaled to her that her dad was following after them, and she kept her head down as May led her into their room. Without wasting any time, she climbed onto the bed and sat cross-legged near the top-middle part of it. She was in bed because it was bedtime, but that didn't mean she had to fall asleep.

Her mom and dad shared a look, and she wished that she had the power to decode their private language because they had been communicating by looks ever since she came back to them. Her dad sat down beside her with some books in hand and felt the bed dip down on her other side, telling her that her mom was sitting next to her too.

She waited for her dad to open a book and start reading to her but when that didn't happen, she scrunched up her nose and looked quizzically at him. He was studying her, and after a moment, he opened his mouth and looked like he was about to say something before shutting it again.

He reached over and smoothed her hair down before giving her a small smile, "You know we love you, right?"

She nodded, knowing that he loved her more than chocolate chip cookies, higher than the sky, more than all the water in the ocean. She knew that her mom loved her to the moon and back and more than all the stars in the sky. They told her that they loved her all the time and she believed them.

He let out a breath, "Good, because we love you very much. You know that we are never going to take you back to St. Agnes' right?"

She had started to believe them…but that was before. It was before she had been taken and scared them. Now she was afraid to be alone, had nightmares all the time, and had trouble breathing when she thought about the bad things. They told her that there was nothing wrong with her but she didn't know if that was true.

If she thought that she had been a problem before , that was nothing compared to now.

She looked down at her knees and grabbed onto her moon pendant, rubbing it between her fingers, a familiar action that comforted her.
Her dad reached out to brush some of her hair away from her face and said, "Skye, we're never taking you back there. We said that before and we'll say it again and again until you believe us. A lot has changed but that hasn't."

Her eyes stayed downcast as she mumbled, "Why?"

"What do you mean?" Her mom asked.

It was tough to put her thoughts into words, she’d never been very good at it, but she tried her best, "Why do you want to keep me? I was a problem before but I'm an even bigger one now! It doesn't make sense!"

She hadn't meant to make her voice so loud, and she winced as she spoke and forced herself to try the breathing exercise that Jay taught her.

When her dad spoke again, his voice was soft and a little confused, "What are you talking about Skye? You're not a problem, why would you think that?"

How could she not think that? She knew she was a handful. Difficult, needy, and annoying. She had been called all those things before. Sister Margaret had said that she was hard to place in new homes, no one wanted a kid like her and if they did, she ruined everything after a couple of weeks. She was never the right fit and she always did something to screw it up. She was bad at school, she didn't learn as fast as the other kids and that was a problem for her teachers. She took up too much space at the orphanage; played with the other kid’s toys and used precious hot water when she showered.

Her whole life, she had been told how much of a problem she was, and she believed it.

She felt tears well up in her eyes at the memories and she couldn't stop them when they fell onto her cheeks, but she forced herself to take a breath and make sure her voice didn't waver when she responded, "Because I am! A lot of bad things happened and it's all my fault!"

A gentle hand under her chin and prompted her to look up at her dad, "You can't think like that Skye, you are not a problem. We love you and you're a part of this family, and we don't give up on family. We're never taking you back to that place no matter what happens, I promise okay?"

Skye wanted to believe him. She wanted to believe him so badly, and he sounded so sincere and genuine that she found herself caving. Phil and May always kept their promises and he had promised that they weren't going to take her back. They’ve never lied to her before but it was just so weird for her to consider that someone would want her, baggage and all.

She didn't want to get her hopes up but she couldn't help it.

"You promise?" She held out her pinky, because her mom told her that you weren't allowed to break pinky promises ever.

Her dad curled his pinky around hers, "I promise sweetheart."

She pulled her pinky back and threw her arms around his neck, resting her head on his shoulder when he pulled her closer. Her tears stopped as he rubbed a soothing had down her back. She believed him, even though she had believed other families before when they had told her that, and maybe she was crazy for trusting him, but she was going to do it anyways.

He leaned back a little and pressed a kiss to the side of her head, "Now, what do you think about The Cat in the Hat? It's a classic."
After rubbing the last of her tears away, she nodded and settled back against the headboard. She felt better now that she knew she was going to be staying here with her family but that didn't mean she wanted to fall asleep. Her mom pulled the sheets up and over her legs before leaning forward and kissing her cheek. When she snuggled back against a pillow, her dad smiled at her, opened up the blue book, and started reading from it.

For a short while, Skye was doing a really good job of evading sleep. When her eyelids would start to droop, she would subtly pinch her arm and that would wake her up again. She was doing so well…until her mom started running her fingers through her hair. It felt nice and when her mom gently tugged her so that she was lying down, she couldn't find it in herself to protest.

She told herself that she could stay awake even if she was lying down and that's what she did… for about four more minutes until her eyelids shut against her will.

She woke up crying.

The room was dark and tears were leaking from her eyes. She didn't scream this time so she guessed that that was better than the last time but it was the same nightmare as before; a loud bang, the blood, the hand grabbing her arm, her waking up right after. She could still feel the tight grip that Crazy Cal had on her arm in her dream.

She looked around and saw that her parents were still asleep. A part of her was relieved that she hadn't woken them, she always felt guilty when she did that, while another part of her wished that they were awake so that she could hug them.

She wiped her nose with her arm and tried to stop her tears, which didn't work very well, so she took a deep breath and moved closer to her mom. The older woman was lying on her side facing her, so she pressed herself close to her chest and rested her head against her neck.

She sniffled and tried to go back to sleep, which didn't work very well either. When she shifted a little bit, her mom twitched and she froze. She stayed still and hoped that she hadn't woken her up.

Her mom made a sleepy sound, ran a hand down her back, and her voice was gravelly and sleepy when she mumbled, "You okay baby?"

She shrugged and burrowed back against her mom, feeling warm and safe.

Gentle fingers combed through her hair, which helped her relax even further. Her tears finally stopped and her mom tugged her even closer, "Bad dream?"

She nodded and made a soft, surprised noise when her mom pulled her up so that they were face to face, "Can you go back to sleep?"

When she shook her head, her mom glanced over to her dad’s sleeping form before leaning in and whispering, "You want some hot chocolate?"

She nodded enthusiastically and silently followed her mom out of bed, happy to have an excuse to avoid falling back asleep. When she glanced back to see if they had woken her dad, she was pleased to find that he was still sleeping, mouth hanging open and arm thrown over the side of the bed. Satisfied, she looked back over to her mom, reached up, and pathetically wiggled her fingers until her mom’s picked her up. She rested her head on her shoulder as they made their way through the dark house.
They ended up in the kitchen, with her mom setting her onto the counter so that she could start making their hot chocolate. She watched her move around the kitchen and then helped her place mini-marshmallows on top of their drinks before her mom set her down and led her into the living room. They both sat on the couch, turned on the t.v., and changed the channel so that Spongebob was playing. She sipped her drink and watched the show for a few minutes, feeling her mom’s eyes on her the whole time.

From the corner of her eye, she saw her mom set her cup down and fully turn to face her. She followed suit and turned her body so that they were facing each other, not quite sure what was going on but willing to play along.

Her mom looked like she was thinking really hard about something so she stayed quiet until she figured it out.

It seemed like her mom seemed to come to some conclusion, because she reached forward and brushed Skye's bangs out of her eyes before saying, "You wanna talk about your bad dream?"

She didn't really want to think about it, let alone talk about her nightmare, so she glanced away and pretended to watch the show again. Her mom sighed and softly said, "It can make you feel better to talk about it baby."

Jay had said that too and it made her think that if two of the smartest people she knew were agreeing, then maybe they were right? Either way, it couldn't make things worse to talk about her dreams.

She took a deep breath and launched into it, "It's when I was in the room and the people in black came in. They were really loud and they shot him at him. He fell down and he just looks over to me and there's so much blood Mommy. It's all around me and it has that smell you know? Like old pennies. He closes his eyes and his chest doesn't move anymore and I can feel myself moving towards him. I don't know why I do that, I tell myself to stay still, but I don't. When I lean forward, his eyes open up and his hand grabs onto my arm and that's usually when I wake up."

She shudders as she recalls her nightmare, and she swears that she can still feel his hand on her arm, like in her dream, but she knows that that's stupid.

Her mom scooted closer and looked like she wanted to reach out to her but decided against it at the last second, "That's pretty scary baby, but you know that that's just a dream right? He can't ever hurt you again."

She didn't answer, just crawled over and sat on her mom’s lap. When familiar fingers started running through her hair, she relaxed a little and rested her head against her chest.

"Skye? Do you know what happens when someone dies?"

She knew what had happened when the Harvey’s had died, "People's chests stop moving so they can't breathe and they don't wake up right away, no matter how many times you call their name."

There was a pause, and then, "Well...yes, but there's more to it than that. When someone dies, they'll never wake up again."

Skye lifted her head away from her mom’s chest and looked up, "...Never?"

"Never. So you know that what happens in your dream can never happen in real life, right?" Her mom said reassuringly.

She took a few seconds to mull that over. If you never woke up after you died, where did you go? If
Crazy Cal never woke up then that meant that he would never be able to find her again. He wouldn't be able to take her away from her family and he wouldn't be able to scare her. Part of her felt bad that this realization made her feel a lot better.

She twirled a finger around her mom’s soft hair and said, "So…he can't get me again?"

Her mom pressed a kiss on the top of her head, "No baby, he can't get you again. Phil and I are going to do everything we can to make sure that you never have to go through anything like that ever again, okay? We'll keep you safe."

She nodded and felt a giant weight lift off of her shoulders. Knowing that Crazy Cal could never get to her again helped her breathe better.

They sat there for a little while, with the soft voices from the television in the background causing her eyelids to start to droop. She tried to force them back open, focused on Spongebob, and tried to latch onto his silly voice to keep her awake but she couldn't. Her mom's hands felt really nice running through her hair and she was so tired. She couldn't stay awake any longer, so she shifted so that her head was resting on her mom’s shoulder, pressed her face against the her neck, and fell asleep.

May had been waiting for Skye to fall asleep. The little girl had barely been able to keep her eyes open but she had to hand it to her, her kid was stubborn. She had stayed awake longer than May had thought she would.

When she felt Skye go limp against her, she shifted a little so that she was sure that Skye wouldn't accidently fall over. She cradled Skye's head so that it didn't fall off her shoulder and wrapped her other hand around her back to keep her steady. She didn't want to move just yet and risk waking the little girl up when she was barely unconscious.

She watched the yellow sponge make underwater hamburgers and thought about her talk with Skye. She knew that Skye probably had a lot more questions about death, that her sleepiness had kept her from voicing all of her thoughts, and she was kind of relieved about that. She needed a little bit more time to come up with what she wanted to tell her. She wasn't a religious person but children seemed to be comforted by the thought of an afterlife. A place where people went when they died and were happy and safe. She couldn't tell Skye that if places like that did exist, her kidnapper would probably wouldn't be there, but would be in hell. Skye didn't need to know that.

Skye was old enough to grasp the basic concepts of death; a dead person can't come back to life, they were gone for good. She wasn't really sure what else she could tell Skye without scarring her any more than she already was.

She and Phil had had a brief conversation on what they should tell Skye but they hadn't come to a concrete conclusion, and she would have to bring it up to him tomorrow so that they would deal with it together.

She was pretty sure that Skye was now deeply asleep, so she slowly stood up with the little girl in her arms. After turning the t.v. off and leaving their mugs where they were so that she could clean them up in the morning, she made her way upstairs, shutting lights off as she went and sneaking back into her room. Phil was still sleeping and was now snoring softly, and she carefully reached down to tug his arm back onto the bed so that it wouldn’t fall asleep from dangling over the bedside.

She placed Skye gently in the middle of the bed and pulled the sheets up so that they covered her
little body, before carefully getting into the bed beside her and falling back asleep.
Chapter 34

Skye accidently woke herself up when she rolled over and collided with another sleeping body. Groaning, she opened her eyes to find her dad rubbing her shoulder and sleepily smiling at her. She rubbed her eyes and waved at him before taking in her surroundings.

It was dark outside, her mom was still soundly asleep, and a glance at the digital clock on the bedside table told her that it was 5:43 in the morning. It was only a little earlier than when she usually woke up, so she sat up and stifled a yawn. Her dad did the same and when he got out of bed, he gave her a questioning look.

She carefully stood up and gingerly made her way to the edge of the bed, reaching her arms up and making grabby hands. Her dad picked her up and she sleepily rested her head on his shoulder as they made their way downstairs. After her talk with her mom last night, she hadn't had any more nightmares, but she still felt like she hadn't gotten any rest at all.

Instead of going to the kitchen like normal, they ended up in the living room. Her dad must've sensed her confusion, because he whispered to her, "Too early for breakfast. How about we make some scrambled eggs in a little while for everyone when they start to wake up for school?"

Nodding, she got comfortable on his lap while he sat on the couch and turned the television on, making sure the volume was low enough to not wake up anyone else. She absentmindedly watched her dad’s show and existed in the state between being asleep and awake until they both heard footsteps softly coming down the stairs about an hour later.

She looked over just as Wanda collapsed onto the couch. Her sister was grinning at them and looked fully awake, and Skye couldn’t help but wish that she felt like Wanda looked right now.

Her sister reached over and pushed her hair behind her shoulder, "Surprised you're not making breakfast right now Dad."

"We were waiting for it to get a little later. I guess now's a good time to start cooking, huh Skye? Nat and Trip will be down soon for school."

His hand rubbed soft circles on her back and she tightened her hold around his neck, "Do I have to go to school?"

"No sweetheart, you'll go back next week. Is that alright?"

She didn't ever want to go back to school, but she didn't think that her family would like hearing her say that, so she just nodded weakly.

Wanda got comfortable on the couch while they stood up and made their way into the kitchen. He went to set her down on the counter but she tightened her hold on him, so he patted her back and repositioned her so that he was supporting her with one arm rather than two. Somehow, he managed to pull out everything he needed for omelets and she hummed to herself as he started cooking.

While the eggs were cooking, he popped some pieces of bread into the toaster. She tapped his shoulder to get his attention, "Daddy?"

Before he answered, he took the frying pan off the stove, transferred the completed scrambled eggs onto a plate, and covered it with tin-foil. He placed the pan in the sink and turned his head so that he was looking over to her, "Yeah sweetheart?"
"Is mommy always right?"

Her dad chuckled a little bit before grabbing the toast that had popped up from the toaster and setting it on a plate, "That’s what I’ve learned throughout the years. Why?"

She took a breath and said, "Because she said that since Crazy Cal is dead, he can’t come and take me away again. She said that you guys were going to keep me safe…was she right?"

He moved her so that they were face to face and banded an arm across her back so that she could lean back and look into his face, "She was absolutely right Skye."

She had had a feeling that her mom was right, she had never given her a reason to doubt her before, but it made her feel better to know that her dad thought the same thing.

"You're safe now, I'll keep you safe sweetheart."

She was still anxious and super tired but for the moment, she felt relieved and safe, so she hugged him close and rested her head on his shoulder as he finished making breakfast. At some point, Wanda wandered in and helped by cutting up some fruit and when they were done, they set everything on the table.

Her stomach growled loudly as she sat on Phil's lap, and she quickly grabbed a piece of toast with jam on it. She knew that she was hungry, which was why she was so confused when she bit into her toast and her stomach roiled in protest.

While she was preoccupied with her body’s inability to make a decision about whether it was hungry or not, her mom came downstairs and joined them at the table. She gave her a smile when she saw that she was eating, and leaned over to press a kiss to her forehead before grabbing a plate.

Ten minutes later, Natasha and Trip came thundering down the stairs. Her brother glanced at his phone and they rushed towards the table and shouted, "Go, go, go! Hunter's here already!"

Natasha tossed Trip a piece of buttered toast, which he easily caught and shoved into his mouth, while she stuffed a huge bite of an omelet into hers.

"See you later guys," Trip mumbled around the food in his mouth, grabbing another piece of toast and an apple.

Natasha nodded, readjusted her backpack, and grabbed a handful of blueberries before throwing them into her mouth and swallowing them. Her mom rolled her eyes at them and fondly said, "You guys are animals. Have a great day at school."

They nodded hastily and started to run out of the room but she slid off of her dad’s lap and followed after them without thinking, "Wait!"

She grabbed onto Nattie's backpack and Trip's arm and tugged, successfully getting them to stop and look back at her. Once she saw that she had their attention, she let go and took a small step back before quietly murmuring, "Um, be careful okay?"

Natasha and Trip shared a look and then crouched down in front of her. Her sister reached forward and cupped her cheek, "You got it маленькая звезда."

"Maybe we can all go to the park today after school," Her brother suggested. When he saw her glance back to their parents, he added, "I know mom and dad love playing on the monkey bars. They can come too."
With the knowledge that her parents would go with her, she nodded. Trip leaned forward a little and hugged her tentatively, and she tightly hugged him back and hoped that he would be safe at school.

Next she hugged Natasha, and she grinned a bit when she felt her sister place a kiss to the top of her head, "We gotta go Skye but you have fun with Wanda and Pietro today, okay? We'll see you later."

"Okay, bye!"

She watched them stand up and smile at her before jogging out the door. This time when she made her way back to the table, she climbed onto her mom’s lap. As she reached out to grab her mom’s arm and wrap them around her waist, she realized that Pietro still wasn’t awake yet.

Wanda set down her fork and looked over to them, "What’s the plan for today?"

Her dad glanced at her mom and Skye saw them share one of their secret looks. It reminded her that she should ask Wanda if she knew their private language and if she could teach it to her.

"Well, I thought maybe us girls could go shopping. I want to spoil you before you have to go back Wanda."

She looked over and saw Wanda's face scrunch up a little, "Mom, you don't have to."

"I want to okay? We don't see each other enough."

Her dad cleared his throat, "Pietro and I are going to be working on a secret mission today… if he ever wakes up."

Skye perked up, "A secret mission?"

"Yep, it's a surprise," Her dad said seriously.

She leaned forward in interest, "What is it?"

"I can’t tell you sweetheart, then it wouldn’t be a surprise now would it? You’ll find out when you come back home from your fun day, I promise."

She groaned and leaned back against her mom, pouting slightly and hoping her dad would give in and tell her what the surprise was. Wanda smiled at her, "Don't worry Skye, we'll have a lot of fun. Maybe we can go catch a movie too!"

Her eyes widened at the prospect of watching a movie at the theater. She had watched plenty of movies at home or in the orphanage but she'd never been to an actual theater to see one before. Squirming in excitement, she looked up at her mom pleadingly, "Really?"

"I think we can fit in a movie," Her mom said, and Skye couldn't help but smile. She was going to see an actual movie in an actual movie theater.

They finished up breakfast and quickly got dressed for the day, trying unsuccessfully to stamp down her nerves about leaving her house today.

She felt safe in her home and there were a lot of bad things that could happen if she left, but then she remembered what May and Phil both told her, about how they would keep her safe, and she used that the help settle her nerves. If she stuck close to her family, she would be fine.

By the time they made their way back downstairs, dressed and ready for the day, Pietro was finally awake and was eating a bowl of cereal and some fruit at the table. He looked up when he heard them
walking towards him and smiled, "Morning guys."

Skye waved and her mom gave him a smile, "Good morning sweetie."

While her mom sat down next to her brother and started chatting with him, she made her way over to where her dad was sitting on the couch, watching t.v. She climbed onto the couch next to him and he easily threw an arm around her shoulders, "Daddy?"

"Yes?"

She moved so that she was sitting on his lap and facing him and put both of her hands on either side of his face, widened her eyes, and stuck out her bottom lip, "Will you tell me what the surprise is?"

Her dad made a pained noise, "Oh no, not the puppy eyes! Please put those away."

Leaning in close, she kissed his cheek, "Please? I love you Daddy."

He desperately looked over to the kitchen and called out, "Melinda! I need reinforcements. Our daughter is breaking down my resolve."

"Come on Skye, you don't want to ruin the surprise," Her mom said, barely able to conceal her laugh as she made her way over to them.

Skye couldn't really find it in her to be upset that her plan hadn't worked, since Phil had said that she was their daughter. They always told her that they loved her and that she was a part of the family but this felt different. This left her feeling warm and happy.

Wanda’s entrance into the living room distracted her for a moment but then she was sighing dramatically and gently patting her dad’s cheek, "Don't worry Daddy, I still love you even though you won't tell me."

He grinned and ran his hand over her head, "Thank you Skye, I love you too."

Wanda sat down beside her and scooted closer to her so that she could study her bracelets. She grabbed onto one that was made from three strands of soft, dark leather that were braided together, and Wanda said, "I got that one when we were in Paris, isn't it cute? Maybe when your wrist is a little bigger you can borrow it."

She nodded enthusiastically and listened as her sister told her the story behind each of her jewelry pieces. She got a little distracted when her mom sidled up close to her dad and quietly whispered, "I don't know if this is such a good idea."

Making sure that she wasn’t noticed, she shifted a little to hear better and continued to not along to what Wanda was saying as she strained to listen to her parents’ conversation.

"Jay said that it would be good for her to get back into the real world. She can't hide in the house her whole life Mel, it'll be alright."

"I know, I just don't want to stress her out any more than she already is."

"Just keep her close, let her know that she's safe, and make sure to have fun."

They stopped talking and Skye focused back on what her sister was saying, "...and this one came from the same shop where we got your necklace."

She perked up and grabbed her moon pendant, "I love my necklace."
Wanda leaned over and wrapped an arm around her shoulders, "I'm glad you like it, it looks great on you."

She smiled a little and leaned into her side, reaching up to start playing with her long hair as she thought about what she had heard.

Begrudgingly, she admitted to herself that her dad was right. She couldn’t hide at home for her whole life, but that didn't mean she didn't want to. But if she never left the house, she wouldn't be able to see her friends at school, and if she had to leave the house, she was happy that her mom would be by her side. She kind of wished her dad was coming with them too though.

Wanda patted her thigh and she looked over and saw that her parents waiting for her by the door, so she quickly ran over to them, wrapped her arms around her dad’s waist, and pushed her face into his stomach, "Bye."

"Have fun sweetheart, I'll see you later," He said, smoothing a hand down her hair.

She nodded, grabbed onto her mom’s hand, and walked outside.

It was incredibly bright out, and she had to squint her eyes until they adjusted. She felt exposed without the walls of her home protecting her, so she quickly climbed into the car and snuggled into the safety of her car seat. Wanda took the seat next to her, helped buckle her in, and held her hand. She smiled gratefully at her as her mom got into the driver’s seat, put on some Disney songs, and pulled out of the driveway.

She softly sang along with the songs, played with the numerous bracelets on Wanda's arm, and listened to her mom and sister talk on the way to the mall.

Right now, she felt alright and happy. Her mom kept smiling back at her in the mirror and she liked hearing the gentle banter going on between her and Wanda.

Her warm and fuzzy feelings started to fade and then disappeared when they pulled into the mall parking lot. She had to force herself to reach out and open the door and reluctantly slid out of the car so that she could grab onto her mom’s hand. She swallowed thickly as she looked apprehensively around the parking lot. It felt weird being away from her home, but her mom was with her and she had promised to keep her safe, so she took a deep breath and followed them towards the entrance.

It was still kind of early and there weren't a lot of people roaming around the mall but she still stepped back so that she was partially hidden behind her mom’s legs.

"I don't think I like it here Mommy."

Her mom crouched down, brushed her bangs out of her eyes, made a sympathetic sound and said, "Why don't we give it a shot and if you still don't like it, we can leave?"

Wanda knelt down beside her and gave her a kind smile, "I think that our first stop should be the toy store, don't you? I think Alice might want a new friend, huh?"

"Alice does like making friends…"

"Let's go find her a friend, Little Monkey."

When her mom went to stand up, Skye threw herself at her. She hummed in satisfaction and wove her arms around her mom’s neck as she stood up with her in her arms. Her mom pressed a kiss to her cheek and she snuggled closer, feeling a little better about being around so many strangers in a public
The group walked further into the mall and turned into a toy store. The store was pretty empty but it was filled to the brim with different types of toys, and as she looked around, her eyes widened and she couldn't stop her mouth from curving into a small smile.

A man in a yellow polo walked up to them, and even though he had friendly smile on his face, she shrunk back against her mom.

"Is there anything I can help you with today?"

"Actually, we're looking for a doll for my little sister. Can you point us in the right direction?" Wanda said easily, giving the man a bright smile.

The man motioned for them to follow him down an aisle, "Here are all of our dolls. We've got all their accessories and some stuffed animals in the next aisle. Let me know if you need any help, my name's Johnny."

Her mom thanked him and she watched him walk away until her sister’s voice drew her attention away, "Let's see if there are any dolls worthy enough to be Alice's friend."

She nodded seriously and studied the toys in front of her. Her eyes moved past the princess dolls, she already had Rapunzel, and settled on some other lifelike dolls. She immediately zeroed in on a doll with long, dark, wavy hair. The doll had green eyes, a red-ish pink dress, and looked like eerily similar to her sister.

She pointed to it and her mom leaned down so that she could grab it, "This one looks like you Wanda."

"Huh. It does, doesn't it?" Wanda murmured, studying the doll with a critical eye.

Skye nodded and hugged it close to her.

"You like that one?" Her mom asked.

With their decision quickly made, they walked over to the cash registers and she turned to Wanda, "Now when you go away, I can still play with you."

Wanda looked a little sad but smiled at her anyways.

Her mom had to gently coax her into setting the doll down onto the counter, and when she did, the employee swiftly rang it up. He was about to put it in a bag when her mom stopped him, "You don't need to bag it, we'll just carry it around. Could you cut off the tags though?"

The man nodded, cut off all the tags, and handed the doll back to her. She hugged it close to her chest while her mom thanked the man and walked out of the store.

"You okay?" Her mom asked.

She took a moment to take stock of how she was feeling.

She was happy that she got a new doll, especially one that looked like Wanda, and felt warm and safe wrapped around her mom. She still felt a little weary of being around a bunch of strangers and in an unfamiliar environment but it wasn't too bad.

When she nodded, her mom gave her a grin and pressed a kiss to the top of her nose, "Let's see if we
can find you some new boots."

Skye found herself enjoying their day.

They had been able to find her a pair of cool new black boots and Wanda picked out some new shirts for her. They had wandered into almost every store they walked past and Skye made sure she stayed safe and secure in her mom’s arms.

They were walking through a fairly large store right now. Wanda was looking at some dresses while Skye and May were casually trailing after her. She held her new doll tightly in one hand while the other one was wrapped snugly around her mom’s neck.

A dress on the rack beside her caught her eyes and she froze up when she saw a familiar design. The dress was dark blue and instead of having polka dots, it was decorated with small daisies.

She shut her eyes, saw the letters spelling out 'Daisy' on the wall in the room she had been trapped in, and tightened her hold around her mom’s neck. She idly wondered if her mom could hear her heart beating since it was crashing wildly against her ribcage. As she attempted to steady her breathing, she tried to force the images out of her head.

It upset her that she had lost control of herself over a bunch of flowers on a silly dress, and it helped a little when she felt her mom rub a soothing hand down her back, "Skye?"

She shook her head and tried to do what Jay had instructed her to do when she felt panicky. She told herself that she was safe and wasn't in any danger, that she was in a store with her mom and her sister, and inhaled for four seconds, held her breath for three, and exhaled for four more seconds. She repeated that until she felt herself calm down and she didn't feel too upset anymore.

Her mom jostled her a little bit so that she would look at her, "What's wrong?"

Instead of speaking, she simply pointed to the dress. Her mom turned to look at it and raised an eyebrow, "You…don't like it?"

She shook her head and whispered, "He said my name was Daisy."

"What do you mean baby?"

It felt like all of her energy had been sapped from her, and her head drooped onto her mom’s shoulder as she mumbled, "He kept calling me Daisy even though I told him that it wasn't my name."

Her mom caught on and squeezed her tightly, "Oh. I'm sorry sweetie."

She started swaying them gently and Skye just nodded. She felt better with her mom holding her and periodically kissing the side of her head, so she gathered enough strength to lift her head back up and say, "I don't like that name. I like 'Skye' better."

"I do too. I think 'Skye' is the perfect name for you."

She nodded seriously and readjusted her grip on her new doll, "Yeah, me too."
Skye came out of the movie theater with wide eyes and a wonderstruck smile, "That was so cool! That screen was the size of the whole wall! I didn't even know they could be that big."

After they’d finished shopping, they’d caught a funny animated movie. She had been a little nervous when the room had gotten dark but she had started to feel better after the movie started and distracted her. Now that she knew how awesome the movie theater was, she wanted to go back and watch another one, but they were already heading towards the parking lot.

"I'm glad you liked it baby. Maybe we can convince your daddy to take us to the movies again next weekend."

Skye nodded eagerly.

They made it to the car and her mom set her in her booster seat so that she could help Wanda put all the bags in the back of the car. Her sister climbed into the backseat with her and helped her buckle in while her mom got in the front, turned on the music, and pulled out of the parking lot.

Frozen songs were playing and when there was a duet, Wanda would sing one part and she would sing the other, and she found out that her sister had a really pretty voice and she liked singing with her.

"What should her name be?" She asked, handing her sister her new doll.

Wanda carefully held the doll out in front of her and examined it, "Hmm… She kind of looks like a Mara, doesn't she?"

Studying her doll, she repeated the name in her head a few times before nodding, "Mara's a perfect name."

Her sister grinned and handed the doll back. She hugged Mara close to her and went back to singing softly until her mom called her name to get her attention, "I'm very proud of you Skye. I know today was a little scary but you stuck it out and I'm very impressed."

She blushed at the praise and couldn't help but smile. "Thanks Mommy, do you think they're done with the surprise yet?"

"I'm not sure sweetie."

Wanda bumped her shoulder, "I'll text Pietro and find out."

Skye watched as she tapped a quick message on her phone and waited anxiously for Pietro to respond. Wanda put a hand on her knee to stop her foot from jiggling, and gave her a reassuring smile, "Don't worry, he's usually glued to his phone."

Sure enough, her phone vibrate a couple seconds later and Skye leaned over to try and see what it said. The screen was too dim for her to read, but Wanda said, "He said that they finished a couple of minutes ago."

Skye bounced around in her seat for the remainder of the ride, excited to get home and see the surprise.
When they finally pulled into their driveway, Wanda helped her unbuckle herself and eagerly she slid out of the car. A different car door slammed behind her and she reached back in surprise and grabbed onto Wanda's hand when she heard the loud noise. Her sister hopped out of the car, lifted her up, and nonchalantly placed Skye on her hip like she did it all the time. Feeling slightly reassured, she wrapped an arm around her neck and they walked around the car to see who it was.

Natasha was talking towards them while Trip was grabbing his things and getting out of Hunter's car. She let out a relieved breath when she realized that they got home at the same time that her siblings did and the loud noise was just them. Bobbi was sitting in the front seat and when she made eye contact with her, she smiled and moved to get out of the car. Hunter gave Bobbi a weird look and said something but Bobbi just pointed in her direction and hopped out.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw her mom step up beside them, and Natasha grinned and stopped in front of them, "Hey guys, did you have fun today Skye?"

She nodded happily and shifted her attention to Bobbi, who stopped beside them and reached out to tap the tip of her nose, "Hi Skye, how're you doing?"

"I'm okay. We went to a movie theater today! It was super cool Bobbi."

Natasha gave their mom a playfully hurt look, "I can't believe you wouldn't let me skip school and then you went and saw a movie without me."

"You've missed enough school this month."

Natasha sighed and Skye felt bad for having fun without her, "I'm sorry Nattie."

"It's okay Skye, we'll just have to see a movie together some other time."

"Mommy said that we can convince daddy to take us next weekend."

Natasha slowly smiled, "Between the two of us, there's no way he'll be able to say no."

Skye hoped that she was right because she really wanted to go back there.

Trip and Hunter both appeared and Hunter said hello to everyone before turning to her, "Hey princess, is that a new dolly?"

She held her doll in front of her so that everyone could see, "Yeah, this is Mara."

Hunter studied her, "She's very pretty. I think Alice is going to like her."

"I chose her because she looks like Wanda. Don't you think so?"

Hunter nodded, "You did a spot on job." He looked to Bobbi, "Sorry guys, but we've got to head out. I've got to pick my little sister up from middle school and she gets mad when we're late. Let's go Bob."

Bobbi gave everyone a smile before saying goodbye. Hunter did the same, they both made their way back to his car, and Skye waved as he drove off.

Trip turned to their mom and asked, "Did dad finish the oomph!" He was interrupted when Natasha elbowed him in the stomach. He gave her a wounded look and she tilted her head in her direction. His eyes widened a little and he gently rubbed the spot that Natasha had elbowed, "Sorry."

Skye had momentarily forgotten her surprise but Trip mentioning it made all of her excitement rush
back. She wiggled around until Wanda set her on the ground and then she grabbed onto her mom's hand and started tugging on it, "Can we go inside now?"

It only took a few impatient tugs on her hand for her mom to chuckle and lead her towards the door. When they walked inside, she immediately saw her dad and Pietro in the living room. She let go of her mom’s hand and ran towards her dad, who was sitting on the couch with his head was tilted back and his eyes closed. She didn't know if he was asleep or not but that didn't stop her from jumping onto the couch and scrambling onto his lap.

Resting both hands on her stomach, she leaned on them so that she could stretch up and tried to look up at his face. He groaned and gently took her hands off his stomach and held them in his hands instead, but didn't open his eyes.

"Can I see the surprise?"

"What surprise?" He asked, opening up one eye to peer at her.

She sat back, perplexed. She was sure that her dad said that he and Pietro were going to be working on a secret mission today and Wanda had told her that Pietro had texted her and said that the surprise was done.

Tilting her head, she poked his cheek and asked, "Are you messing with me?"

He sat up and smiled at her, "Yeah, I am. Hey, is that a new doll friend?"

She nodded and hastily shoved Mara into his hands, "Yeah, this is Mara. Can I see the surprise now?"

He held the doll up and looked her over, "She's a very pretty doll. She kind of looks like Wanda, doesn't she?"

She let out an exasperated breath, "Daddy, come on."

"Yeah dad, the anticipation’s getting to her,” Nattie said, and Skye could hear the smile in her voice.

Her dad relented and stood up, picking her up with him and placing her on his hip. She eagerly tapped his shoulder and looked around, huffing when she didn't see anything new.

"It's outside baby,” Her mom helpfully supplied.

Her dad started making his way to the backdoor and she squinted in an attempt to be able to see through the wall, which didn't work.

When they finally walked through the door, she let out a high pitch squeal and squirmed around until her dad set her down so that she could run over to the surprise.

It was a play structure, complete with a slide, monkey bars, swings, and a little climbing wall. She ran over to the swings and pulled herself onto one, smiling madly as she admired her new little playground.

She loved it. Now when Jemma and Fitz came over, they could play out here. She could already see them racing across the monkey bars and down the slide.

Idly, she wondered if her dad would fit on the slide, and laughed at the mental image.

Thinking about her dad made her remember that he and Pietro had made this for her. She was pretty
sure that they didn't build everything by themselves, they probably bought it and set it up for her, but that didn't matter. They had built this because they thought she would like it and she felt a little overwhelmed by all the warm and fuzzy emotions rushing through her.

When she looked up, her family was happily watching her, and she hopped off the swing and ran back over to her dad. She wrapped her arms around his waist and shouted, "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"You're welcome sweetheart. I'm glad you like it," He said, smoothing hand over her head and squeezing her tightly.

"It's awesome!" She stepped away from him and threw an arm around Pietro’s waist, grinning when he leaned down to hug her back, "Thanks Pietro."

"You're welcome kiddo. Can I help you test out the swings?"

She nodded, grabbed his hand, pulled him over to the swing set, and sat down, "Will you push me?"

In response, her brother gently pulled her back and then pushed the swing forward. Natasha, Trip and Wanda came over and checked out the little playground. Wanda sat on the other swing and Nattie pushed her while Trip attempted to climb up the slide. He kept falling down and it made her smile. Her parents moved over and sat down on at the patio table and fondly watched them.

Her brother pushed her for a little while and then asked her if she would push him, so they switched spots and she leaned into the swing in an attempt to get it moving. It didn’t work very well, the swing barely moved, and Nattie laughed and came over to help her.

After a little while, they moved away from the swings and Trip held her up so that she could make her way across the monkey bars.

They played on the new playground until it started to get dark and their parents told them that it was time to go inside. Reluctantly, she headed in and everyone collapsed in the living room.

She grabbed Mara and wiggled herself in between her mom and dad on the couch.

"Jay will be here in a couple of minute's sweetie," Her mom told her, reaching over to brush her hair out of her eyes.

She nodded and leaned back against the couch. She liked Jiaying a lot but she didn't really like talking about what had happened. She didn't like thinking about it and she didn't know how bringing it back up would help her feel better, so she wasn’t too excited about her therapist coming over.

The shrill ring of the doorbell interrupted their show, and she pulled Mara close to her chest and cuddled into her dad’s side while her mom answered the door. Jiaying cheerfully stepped inside and chatted with her mom for a moment before making her way into the living room and greeting everyone.

"Hey Skye, do you want to head up to your room so we can get started?"

She begrudgingly nodded, slid off the couch, walked over to her mom, and grabbed her hand, "Will you wait in the hallway again?"

"Of course sweetie," Her mom said, squeezing her hand and leaning down to press a kiss to the top of her head.
The group made their way upstairs and she reluctantly let go of her mom's hand so that she could head into her room. She climbed onto her bed and watched Jay drag her desk chair over to her.

Jay situated herself and smiled kindly, "It's nice to see you again Skye. How have you been?"

She shrugged, "I'm okay."

"That's great to hear. So, is there anything in particular that you'd like to talk about today?"

She knew that Jay wanted to talk about the bad thing that had happened but she didn't really want to, so she held up Mara, "I got a new doll, her name's Mara. Wanda named her for me."

Jay leaned forward and inspected the doll, "That's a very pretty friend you've got there."

Skye pulled Mara closer to her, "Thanks." She paused, "Um, I went to a movie theater today. It was really big."

"That's great Skye, but maybe we could talk about-"

She cut her off, "My dad made me a playground outside. It has a slide and swings and monkey bars."

Jay tilted her head and studied her but remained silent.

It was too quiet, and she felt like she needed to fill the silence, "I saw Bobbi and Hunter earlier. They're Trip's friends and they're really nice. They say that I'm a princess. I like them."

"That's really great but I know what you're doing honey."

Skye innocently widened her eyes, "What do you mean?"

Jay observed her and was silent for a long moment, and Skye twiddled her thumbs and waited for her to say something. Finally, Jay uncrossed her legs and stood up, "Why don't we try something different today. Do you have something to color with?"

"We're going to color?" She asked, perking up.

Jay nodded and Skye jumped off of her bed and ran over to her desk. She would happily color with Jay instead of talk about what happened to her. As she pulled out some paper and crayons, Jay moved the desk chair back over and motioned for her to sit in it.

As soon as she was comfortably situated at her desk, she looked up at Jay, unsure about what she wanted her to do. Jay leaned against the wall and smiled at her, "Now, think about what makes you happy. Think really hard and then draw it out, okay? I'm going to go grab a chair real fast while you work on that."

Skye nodded and focused on her piece of paper. She drew her picture and at some point, she heard Jay come back into the room and sit next to her. When she was finished, she set her crayon down and looked up to Jay, who looked her drawing over and smiled, "Can you explain your picture to me?"

Nodding, she pointed to the figures in the middle, "That's my family, see? There's Mommy and Daddy and next to them is Trip, Nattie, Wanda, and Pietro."

"They make you really happy?"
"Yeah, they're the best," She said happily.

"You like having them around, don't you?"

She grinned and nodded.

Jay pointed to the corner of her paper, "What's that?"

"That's the playground down the street. My friends are right there, see? Jemma and Fitz are playing on the swings and Lincoln is on the slide."

Jay nodded and pointed to the other corner of the paper, "And that's a book?"

"This is a beautiful picture Skye, Jay said warmly.

"Thanks," Skye murmured, tucking her chin to her chest in content.

Jay grabbed a clean piece of paper and placed it in front of her, "Now, why don't you think about what makes you nervous and draw that out?"

Skye nodded and started drawing after a moment of hesitation.

For the rest of their session, she drew out things that made her nervous, sad, and excited. It was kind of fun, much more fun that just sitting there talking to Jay like they normally would’ve done. Once she completed her picture, she would go over it with Jay, who would ask her questions about certain things.

Lastly, Jay asked her to draw out what made her scared.

She finished her drawing and hastily pushed it towards Jay, who carefully studied it and looked over to her, "There are a lot of dark colors in this one compared to your happy picture."

Skye just shrugged and Jay pointed to the main part of the picture, "What's this Skye?"

She had tried to draw the room that she was kept in with Crazy Cal, so her picture had a room with 'Daisy' written on a wall, and she had drawn a big black blob standing tall with pointy claws for hands. There were giant stick figures facing off with the blob and there was a large x-mark over the only window in the room and over the door.

Pointing to the big black blob, she mumbled, "That's Crazy Cal."

"Good Skye, keep going," Jay encouraged.

She sighed, "Those are the people in black and they're all really mean and scary, almost as scary as Crazy Cal. He thinks that he's going to be okay because he has his big claws to keep him safe but the people in black are tougher than him, see? He can't leave and run away because the window doesn't work and neither does the door, so he's trapped."

Jay nodded sympathetically, "It must be pretty scary to be trapped somewhere you don't want to be, huh?"

Skye nodded and traced the window with her fingertip, "Yeah, it's very scary. You should be able to leave if you want to."

"That's true Skye. If someone feels uncomfortable or unsafe in a certain situation, they should be able to leave or get away."
She agreed, "Yeah, they should."

Jay pointed to the black blob, "Why did you color this whole thing in black?"

"Because there weren't any good things about him. He said he was my dad but he took me away and wouldn't let me leave. You said that if you don't like being somewhere, you should be able to leave, but he wouldn't let me. He was bad and he doesn't deserve pretty colors."

Jay tilted her head, "I see. You also colored the room in gray, why's that?"

Skye thought about why she did that, "Because it was bad in there. I didn't like it."

"Did you feel safe in there?"

Skye aggressively shook her head. She *never* felt safe being in there.

Jay grabbed another clean piece of paper and put it in front of her, "Why don't you draw *your* house here."

She nodded and grabbed a blue crayon and drew out a square. She added a front porch, the porch swing, and windows before adding a big triangle roof. She even added the mailbox up front. She colored everything in and showed it to Jay.

"This looks great Skye, just like your house. Now, are you safe in this house?"

She didn't even hesitate, "Yes."

Jay smiled warmly at her, "Why don't you write that down right here on the roof? Write out that you're safe here and there are no bad people in this house."

She grabbed a red crayon and wrote on the roof before presenting it to Jay, "Can you read it to me Skye?"

She pulled the piece of paper closer to her, "This house is safe and it is a good place to live. There are no bad people in here."

"That's great Skye. I want you to remember this whenever you think about the bad house okay? You aren't in the bad place anymore and you're safe in this house. How about we hang this up on your wall?"

She rifled through her drawers until she found some tape and Jay helped her hang up the house and her happy picture on the wall over her desk.

They stepped back and admired her work. The bright colors in her drawings made her feel happy and even though they didn’t say too much, she felt a lot better after her therapy session.

Jay leaned towards her and held out her hand, "That's lovely Skye. I'm afraid that's all the time we have for today, let's go see your mom."

Skye smiled at her, took her offered hand, and lead Jay out of the room.
Chapter 36

Her mom was in the same spot that she had been the last time Skye had talked to Jay, a little ways down the hallway and sitting quietly. She stood up when Skye walked towards her and smiled warmly, which caused her to let go of Jay's hand and eagerly grab onto her mom's, "We colored."

"Well, that sounds like fun sweetie," Her mom said fondly, reaching forward to brush her bangs out of her eyes.

"Do you want to see? I did really good, Jay said so."

She watched her mom glance over to Jay, who nodded, and then followed after her into her room. She led them over to her desk and pointed to her wall, feeling a rush of anxiety when her mom carefully looked at each drawing.

She hoped that her mom liked her pictures, she'd worked super hard on them, but she felt her hope falling away when her mom stayed silent. Worriedly, she glanced back over her pictures, wondering if she had hung up the wrong ones, but her ‘happy’ picture and house were still hanging up above her desk, somewhat askew but where she had left them.

"You don't like them," She noted simply, fidgeting from foot to foot.

Her mom quickly turned to her, and Skye saw that her eyes were watery. Oh god, her pictures were so bad that she made her mom want to cry. Why did Jay lie to her and tell her that they were good? She looked at her feet and grabbed her moon pendant, trying to fight off her own tears.

A hand on her chin gently forced her to look up and into her mom’s dark eyes, "No Skye, I love them. I love them so much, they're beautiful."

"Really?"

Her mom nodded and leaned in to kiss the top of her head, "Really."

She watched as her mom took a step closer to study the drawings, and when she put her hands on the desk to lean in, she slipped on one of Skye's other pictures. She moved her hands to take a look, and Skye curiously stepped closer to see which one it was. Her mom was holding her ‘sad’ picture, staring at it intensely.

She helpfully pointed to it, "That's my 'sad' picture."

Then she pointed out her other ones, "That's my 'nervous' picture, that's my 'excited' picture, and that's my 'scared' picture." She motioned to her 'scared' picture really quickly and then tried to get her mom's attention back onto her 'excited' picture, which only kind of worked.

Her mom stared at the 'scared' drawing for a couple of seconds before giving Jay a look and moving back to studying her 'happy' picture, "These are all great baby. Phil’s almost done with dinner. Are you hungry? You didn't eat much at lunch."

She had pretty much given up on trying to eat. For the past couple days, she hadn't been able to do it and she wasn't really sure why. When she thought about food she felt hungry but when she went to eat, her tummy wouldn't let her. It was very frustrating and she was sick of it.

When she shrugged, her mom gave Jay a concerned look.
Jay stepped towards her, "Skye, I have a little assignment for you, okay?"

She gave her a skeptical look, "Like homework?"

"Kind of, but not as hard. Actually, I think you might enjoy it."

"Okay, I guess."

"When you have a particularly strong emotion, like when you're super happy or very angry, sit down and draw it out okay?"

She scrunched up her nose, "So… my homework is to just…draw?"

Jay gave her a fond smile, "Yes, that's it. There's one other thing too."

Skye liked the idea of drawing pictures for homework, but she knew that there had to be a catch, "What is it?"

Jay looked over to her mom and then back to her, "You need to eat your meals Skye." She held up a hand when she saw Skye start to protest, "I know your tummy feels like it doesn't want to eat, but you need to okay? You don't have to eat all of it but you need to eat a portion of every meal. If you do, it'll start conditioning your tummy to start eating again until we deal with your stress, which we will work on the next time I see you, okay?"

She looked over and saw May nodding along and decided that Jay's request wasn't that bad. She didn't have to eat her whole meal, just some of it, so she nodded. Her mom smiled in relief and reached forward to pull Skye closer to her, "Let's go see if Phil needs any help."

They walked Jay back downstairs and said goodbye before making their way into the kitchen. Her dad and Wanda were in there while everyone else was in the living room. Natasha was working on homework while Trip and Pietro were arguing over the remote. Her mom walked up to her dad and she let go of her hand to grab onto his leg.

Her mom kissed his cheek, "It smells good in here."

She nodded in agreement and her dad bent down to smooth his hand over her head, "Thanks guys, just finishing up the mashed potatoes. The steak is already done."

Her mom moved over to see what Wanda was doing and she stayed with her dad, content to allow him to keep running a hand over her hair, "How was talking with Jay?"

"It was good, I got to color."

"That sounds fun sweetheart. Maybe you could show me what you drew after dinner."

She nodded and hugged herself closer to his leg, waiting patiently as he stirred the boiling potatoes. She patted his knee to the rhythm of a Tangled song as he cooked.

He gently tapped the top of her head, "Gotta head over to the sink sweetie."

She nodded and closely followed him over to the sink. As he strained the potatoes, she walked in a close circle around him, dragging her hand across his knees. He finished at the sink and made to move back to the stovetop but she put her feet on top of his. He looked down at her and wrapped an arm around her back so that she wouldn't fall before he took exaggerated steps back to the stovetop.

She circled around him again until he was done making the mashed potatoes and then hopped back
onto his feet as he brought everything over to the table. It was fun to try and keep her balance while he walked.

"Alright alright little girl, ride's over." He picked her up and set her on her chair at the table. Everyone else came and sat at the table and grabbed some plates while her mom pushed a plate her way and helped her cut up her steak.

She stared at her plate and Jay’s words played through her mind, so she scooped up some mashed potatoes and put them in her mouth. She swallowed it even though her tummy wasn’t really happy about it.

She ate some more of her mashed potatoes, two forkfuls of steak, and half of her salad before setting her fork down and pushing her plate away. She wondered if she ate enough and looked over to her mom to find out, who nodded at her and gave her a smile before looking back over to Wanda to finish their conversation.

She felt proud of herself for doing the assignment that Jay had given her, even if she did feel a little queasy.

Her mom looked back over to her, "Skye, I got a phone call today from Grant's foster parents. They wanted to know if tomorrow would be a good day for them to bring Grant over after school. What do you think about that?"

Skye straightened up at the mention of Ward. She really wanted to see him and make sure that he was okay, "Yeah, tomorrow's good."

"Alright, I'll call them back after dinner. He gets out of school around 2:30 though, so they won't be over until the afternoon."

She nodded and looked back to her half-full plate, feeling incredibly nervous all of a sudden. She wanted to see Ward but she also didn't at the same time, which left her slightly confused about her feelings.

She listened to her family talk at the table and then sat on the kitchen counter while they did the dishes and helped by drying some of them off. Her nerves about seeing Ward tomorrow were making her tummy feel all fluttery and she remembered the other part of her assignment from Jay, "Mommy, can I go color?"

Her mom put the last plate away and turned to her, "Sure baby, just for a half hour though alright? Then it's shower time and bed."

She nodded and started to shuffle towards the edge of the counter so that she could jump down but Pietro grabbed her and set her down before she could. She looked up at him and he winked at her, "I love coloring."

Wanda walked up behind him and added, "Me too."

She looked back to her mom, who waved them out of the kitchen, so Pietro grabbed her hand and they made their way upstairs and into her room. She pulled out some construction paper and markers and handed them to the twins before they all sat down and started drawing on their own respective papers.

Slowly, she drew out her 'nervous' picture and when she was done, she carefully set it on her desk. Her drawing made her feel a little better, so instead of drawing another picture, she scooted over and leaned into Pietro. He looked like he was drawing a cartoon, "That looks like the comics in the
newspaper that Daddy gives me.

Pietro glanced at her and gave her a grin, "Thanks, I used to draw comics for my high school's paper."

She pointed at the cartoon puppy on his paper, which was sitting back on its hind legs with its tongue lolling lazily out of its mouth, "I like your doggy."

"You can have it when I'm done, little one. Just let me add some color."

She nodded and eagerly watched him color in his picture with colored pencils rather than markers. Idly, she wondered if everyone in her family was naturally awesome at drawing and if she would magically be able to draw since she was now part of the family.

When he finished the picture and handed it to her, she took a few long moments to admire it before grabbing some of her tape and hanging it up above her headboard.

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Skye had been nervous all day.

She had woken up earlier than she usually did and had stared at her dad until he woke up and brought her downstairs to help make breakfast. She had said goodbye to Trip and Nattie before they went to school, played with her dolls with Wanda, made lunch with her mom, and watched Spongebob with her dad. Now she was sitting on the front porch with her parents while the twins had gone see some friends for a little bit. She was halfheartedly playing with Alice and Mara while anxiously waiting for Ward to show up.

Unconsciously, she kept jiggling her foot, and her mom would smooth a hand over head to help calm her down. It worked a little bit but she still felt nervous.

Finally, a car pulled into their driveway and she hastily stood up and grabbed onto her mom's hand. A nice-looking lady got out of the driver's seat and opened up the backdoor. She saw Grant hop out and lean back in, and she wondered what he was doing until she saw a smaller boy slide out of the car. He looked like he was a little younger than she was and he had a bright smile on his face.

Her mom started making her way to the group and Skye gripped her hand tightly and walked a little behind her.

The nice-looking lady smiled at them before leaning in to give her mom a quick hug, "Mel! It's so great to see you!"

"It's nice to see you too Jane." Her mom leaned down and held out a hand, "You must be Grant." Ward stared at her hand for a couple of seconds before shaking it and then she turned to the younger boy, "And you must be Thomas."

The little boy, Thomas, enthusiastically shook her mom’s hand while she kept her gaze averted from Ward’s. She felt butterflies in her tummy and she was kind of scared to see his expression when looked at her.

The older woman, Jane, bent down in front of her, "Hello Skye, it's great to meet you."

She tightened her hold on her mom's hand and waved at Jane with her other one, "Hi."
After a beat of silence, her mom gently tugged on her hand, "Well, let's head inside. We've got a really fun playroom that you three can go hangout in."

Thomas started jumping up and down in excitement, "Do you have Lego's? I love Lego's."

"We sure do."

Thomas started pulling Jane inside and they all went into the house and the grown-ups left them in the playroom. She sat down on the floor and Thomas sat down next to her and immediately asked, "Can I play with your Lego's?"

She nodded and pulled a plastic bin over towards him, "Yeah, they're really fun. You should make a really big castle."

He nodded seriously and put his whole focus on the little plastic bricks.

She took a deep breath and finally looked up to see Ward standing by the doorway, staring at her. She couldn't tell what he was feeling because his face was neutral and perfectly expressionless, but at least he wasn't yelling at her. Bracing herself, she slowly stood up and made her way over to him, "Hi."

He stared at her for a couple of seconds while she fidgeted from foot to foot, "You broke your promise."

She sucked in a breath and looked away. She did break her promise but her mom had said that it was okay to break a promise when someone was being hurt, but even though she was very sure that her mom was right, she still felt guilty for doing it.

Grabbing onto her moon necklace for confidence, she said, "Yeah, I did. I'm really sorry Ward, I--"

He cut her off by holding up a hand, and she swallowed thickly and stopped talking. Ward glanced over to Thomas and she followed his gaze to find that the little boy was smiling and building a tall tower.

"It's okay. I should actually thank you, I think," He said softly.

She jerked back in surprise and looked at him, unsure if she'd heard him right, "Um what?"

"Look at my little brother. He's happy and he doesn't have any bruises, we don't have to make our own dinner, and we don't get ignored anymore. I don't have to hide him when my older brother is around and we don't have to lie to our teachers. We're both together and safe."

She processed everything and it didn't sound like he was angry but she had to make sure, "So...you aren't mad at me?"

He gave her a tiny but genuine smile, "I was at first, I was really mad at you." She swallowed thickly but he continued, "But then Tommy and I got to live together and this family is really nice to us. I guess I just realized that...it was good that you told."

Skye let out a huge sigh of relief. It felt like a giant weight lifted off of her shoulders and she could finally breathe properly again, "So we can still be friends?"

Ward laughed a little, "Yeah, we can be friends."

She smiled real big, happy that he wasn’t mad at her and he still wanted to be friends. It turns out that
she had been nervous over nothing. "Good, because I like playing with you."

"Yeah, I like playing with you too," He said, reaching out to shove her gently.

She was about to say something when Thomas interrupted them, "Do you guys want to help with the castle? I'm thinking about adding some blocks to make it bigger."

Grant walked over, sat down by Thomas, and motioned for her to join them. She did without hesitation and motioned to another plastic bin, "We have blocks over there. Let's see how tall we can make the tower before it falls over."
Chapter 37

When Skye woke up the next morning, she was relieved to find that she had only had one nightmare during the night, and had been able to quickly fall back asleep after her dad had calmed her down and told her a silly story.

Stretching out, she fished around for Rapunzel in the bed until she grabbed the doll and looked from side to side and to see that her parents were still sleeping. She had asked them if she could sleep with them again last night and they had let her, relieved that they hadn't forced her to sleep in her own bed.

Holding Rapunzel up in front of her face, she stared up at her and thought about the day before.

She had played with Ward and Thomas for an hour or two before they had to leave. After some begging, they had managed to set up another playdate before saying their goodbyes. Natasha and Trip had come home and had played outside on the new playground with her until Wanda and Pietro got back. Then they had moved into the playroom to play games and she gotten spend some quality time with all of her siblings, which had been very nice. At dinner, she’d forced herself to eat half of her meal, which had made her parents really happy. She hadn't had to talk to Jay, who wasn't supposed to come back over until Sunday, and she was kind of happy about that.

It had been a really good day, but she didn't know if today was going to be a good day because Wanda and Pietro had to leave. They had explained to her yesterday that they had to fly back to Europe to join their school group but she didn't want them to leave her.

She pulled Rapunzel back to her chest, sat up, slowly crawled to the end of the bed, and slid off of it before tiptoeing down the hall. Quietly, she stopped in front of Nattie's door and slowly twisted the doorknob so it didn’t make any noise. When she poked her head inside, she found that the room was still pretty dark. She quickly and silently made her way towards the bed. Nattie was lying on her side facing Wanda, who was sprawled out on her back with an arm over her head.

She slowly climbed onto the bed, sat down between the two, and stared at Wanda's sleeping face. A pang of sadness hit her; she didn't want Wanda and Pietro to leave today.

Wanda groaned and shifted, so Skye leaned over her and loudly whispered, "Are you waking up?"

"Okay, good," She said, sitting back on her heels.

Rolling over, Wanda motioned her forward and Skye crawled over and laid down next to her. She rested her head against her sister's chest and they stayed like that for a couple of minutes before Wanda asked, "What's up buttercup?"

"I don't want you and Pietro to go away," She mumbled pitifully, clenching her sister’s pajama shirt tightly in her fist as if that alone could keep her there.

"Me neither," Wanda replied softly, running comforting fingers through her hair.

"If you don't want to, then don't leave."

"School costs a lot and I have to go back, but the semester’s over in about a month and a half and then we'll be back for a whole month and we can have fun together."
Skye nodded even though she was still sad, "Okay. I'll miss you."

She jumped a little when she heard a groggy voice speak up from behind her, "Me too."

Twisting around in her sister’s arm, she looked over to find Natasha rubbing her eyes and stretching her legs out.

Nattie looked over to the bedside table and whipped back around, "Oh my god, it's 6:30 in the morning. It's Saturday and it's 6:30 in the morning and my eyes are open. What's going on?"

"Go back to sleep Nat," Wanda said, chuckling slightly.

Nattie groaned again and sat up, "I can't. I'm awake now. Besides, I don't wanna miss the sister-time you've got going on here." She focused on Skye and reached out to poke her forehead, "Where'd this little monkey come from?"

Skye shrugged, "Mommy and daddy are still sleeping."

"How did you and Rapunzel sleep?" Nattie asked, scooting over to cuddle closer.

She handed her doll over to her sister, "Good. Rapunzel missed Alice and Mara though."

Natasha took the doll and gave her some comforting words, "It's okay Rapunzel."

"Did you say dad was still sleeping?" Wanda asked, sitting up and pulling her up with her.

She nodded and reached over to take Rapunzel away from Nattie and tucked her under her arm.

"Let's make breakfast. Dad always makes it for us."

Skye nodded immediately, she always helped make breakfast anyways, and Natasha contemplated it, "Yeah, but only if I don't have to make the bacon. I always get burned when I do that."

Wanda nodded and started nudging her out of bed, "Whatever, I'll do that. Let's go."

Natasha groaned, "I hate waking up." She threw the covers off her legs and got out of bed anyways.

They all made their way to the kitchen and she helped Wanda make pancakes while Nattie cut up some fruit. They put smiley-faces in the pancakes with chocolate chips and Natasha used her phone to play some upbeat music. She didn't know the words to the song but she giggled as Wanda used the spatula to serenade Nattie.

As Wanda made the bacon, she sat on the counter and tried to braid Natasha's hair. She wasn't very good at braiding, definitely not as good as Nattie was, but it was still fun to try.

The bacon was almost done when she heard footsteps coming towards them from the staircase. Natasha shook the haphazard braid out of her hair and moved to sit on the counter next to her.

She heard her dad’s voice from the living room, "Hey guys, have you seen Skye?" He quickly walked into the kitchen, instantly spotted her, and visibly relaxed, "There she is."

Smiling, she waved happily at him. He glanced around the kitchen and Natasha turned off the music, "You made breakfast?"

"Yeah, Nattie was too afraid to do the bacon though, so Wanda did it,” She said, nodding enthusiastically.
Natasha turned to her, "I wasn't afraid Skye, I just didn't want to suffer bodily harm."

"Oh, sorry Nattie," She said apologetically while Wanda dramatically rolled her eyes.

Her dad stepped outside to grab the newspaper before coming back in and waving to towards her, "Comics?"

She nodded and he picked her up from the counter and brought her over to the table, where she slowly read through the comics while Wanda finished with the bacon. When everything was brought to the table, she made herself eat half of her plate, which was becoming routine, and talked to Wanda about her adventures in Europe.

Soon enough, everyone was sitting at the table. When she had voiced her astonishment at her brothers being up so early, her dad had informed her that they had to leave to go to the airport in two hours and they still needed to pack.

When they finished breakfast, she followed Wanda and Natasha back up to their room and watched her pack with a heavy heart. Luckily, her sister’s wouldn’t let her feel too sad for too long. They made sure she was involved in their conversation and kept cracking jokes. When Wanda had everything in her suitcase, her sister snagged her from her seat on the bed and unceremoniously plopped her on top of it to help her shit it, which had her giggling.

The rest of the time blew by way too fast, and Skye stuck incredibly close to Wanda or Pietro until the moment their parents hustled them out to the door and into the car, not wanting to waste even a second. Pietro climbed in beside her and sang Disney songs with her while she tightly held his hand. She had to force herself to try to stop being so sad so that she could be happy that the twins were still here for now.

She squeezed his hand even tighter when they pulled into the parking garage to park the car. Even though it was daytime, it was dim in there and she didn't like how unsettled it made her feel. When her dad helped her out of the car, she raised her arms and jumped up and down until he caught her and placed her on his hip.

They made their way through the parking garage and she glanced around nervously, "I don't like it in here."

Her dad comfortingly rubbed her back and Wanda reached out to hold her hand. They stepped into an elevator and she instantly felt better once the scary parking lot disappeared behind the elevator doors. She calmed down as they got out of the elevator and waited in line to get Wanda and Pietro’s luggage checked in. Her dad set her down so that he could help handle the bags and she ran over to her mom and latched onto her leg. There were too many people in here for her to feel safe enough to stand around on her own, they were all rushing around and kept bumping into each other, and her mom’s fingers ran through her hair to help her feel better.

After what felt like forever, they finished up and started walking towards the escalator. She shuffled clumsily beside her mom, refusing to loosen her tight grip on her mom’s pant let, until her mom stopped and stooped down to pick her up before hurrying after the rest of their family. They all rode up the escalator and Skye thought about asking to be put down so that she could ride up it by herself but she felt safe in her mom’s arms and didn't want to risk it.

They walked for a pretty long time and the closer people got to her, the tighter she wrapped her arms around her mom's neck. After a particularly tight squeeze, her mom pulled her around so that they were face to face, "Are you okay?"
She just nodded, put her head on her mom's shoulder, and pressed her face into her neck so that she couldn't see all the people around her.

After a minute or two, she felt them stop walking and looked up. There were a bunch of people in lines, who were slowly putting their things in plastic bins and walking through giant metal detectors. She gave her mom a questioning look, unsure as to why they had stopped, and the older woman shifted her a little, "This is as far as we can go."

She made a distressed sound, "What? No!"

She wiggled around until her mom set her down and ran over to Wanda, "Don't leave Wanda, I don't want you to go!" She threw her arms around her sister's waist and pressed her face against her tummy. She held on tight and hoped that by doing that, Wanda and Pietro wouldn't be able to leave. It wasn’t a very good plan, but she hoped it would work nonetheless.

Arms wrapped around her and Wanda hugged her tight, "I have to leave little one, I'm sorry."

Tears welled up in her eyes and she couldn't stop them from trickling down her face. She shook her head and felt Wanda gently push her back before crouching down in front of her, 'I'm sorry Skye but we have to go. I wish you could come with us."

"But you're my family and family isn't supposed to leave each other!" She yelled miserably, running a hand over her face to wipe away her tears.

Pietro moved over and crouched down beside Wanda, "We are your family, and us being away from each other won't change that, okay? That'll never change."

She sniffled and gave him an uncertain look, "What if you're gone so long that you forget about me?"

Pietro breathed out a laugh and pulled her in for a hug, "That will never happen."

Wanda softly patted her back, "Yeah, it's not like we'll never speak again. We can talk on the phone all the time and arrange video chats and we'll be back before you know it."

"Do you promise?" She asked, stepping out of Pietro’s hug to hold out her pinky and wait for her sister to take it.

Wanda grinned at her and intertwined their pinkies, "Yes, I promise."

Wanda leaned in and kissed her cheek and Pietro brushed the tears off her cheeks. She sniffled, "Okay, I'll miss you though."

Pietro pushed her hair behind her shoulder and tapped her nose, "I'll miss you too little one."

She saw Wanda hastily wipe her eyes before the twins both stood up. She tried to stop crying but couldn't, so she stepped back and watched as everyone else said goodbye. Wanda tried to look like she wasn't crying but Skye knew that she was, but she ignored it to try and make her feel better.

Everyone looked so incredibly sad and she didn't like it.

She hugged Wanda and Pietro one more time and watched as they slowly made their way through security.

She leaned back against Phil's legs and watched them walk through the giant metal detector and grab
their things from their bins. They turned back and smiled at them, waved, and then disappeared into a crowd of people.

She grabbed onto her moon pendant and held back a sob.

Her dad reached down and put both hands on her shoulders, "Are you alright Skye?"

She gave him a half-hearted shrug, and he leaned down, picked her up, and hugged her close. The cuddle helped her feel slightly better and she wrapped her arms tightly around his neck and rested her head on his shoulder.

They started walking back to the car and she looked over, saw her mom walking beside them, and reached out a hand, glad when she took it, held it tightly, and gave it a reassuring squeeze.

Skye woke up when her dad gently pulled her out of her booster seat. She blinked a couple of times and squinted in the sunlight. The last thing she remembered was watching the cars go by out of her window and she should've known she'd have fallen asleep. Crying always made her tired.

She let her dad carry her inside and didn't say anything when he set her down on the couch. He made sure she was comfortable before leaving her to watch t.v. with her siblings until it was dinnertime and then she forced herself to eat. She could only eat a quarter of her meal rather than half of it, which caused guilt to eat away at her.

After dinner, her mom took her upstairs and sat with her while she showered. She had been extra quiet since they had all left the airport and Skye wondered if her mom didn't like talking when she was upset. She pondered over that as she finished up, put on her pajamas, and followed her mom back into her room. She grabbed Mara and turned around so that her mom could detangle her hair.

The fact that Wanda and Pietro were gone still made her heart feel heavy, and when she looked over to her desk and saw her crayons sitting in a messy pile on it, she asked, "Can I color?"

"Sure sweetie, I'm almost done," Her mom said, gently pulling the comb through her hair a few more times until she finished. She immediately jogged over to her desk, sat down, and started drawing, acutely aware of her mom watching her from the bed.

She glanced over, tilted her head, and asked, "Are you sad too?"

"Yes," Her mom nodded and gave her a sad smile, "I miss the twins when they're gone but I know that they're happy where they are. That makes me feel better."

It made her feel sad that her mom was sad too, so she held out a blank piece of paper, "You can draw a 'sad' picture if you want to."

Her mom stood up and gently took the sheet of paper from her, "Thank you, I think I will."

She grinned, happy that her mom would do this with her, and her mom picked her up, sat down at the desk chair, placed her on her lap, and grabbed a green crayon. They both colored for a little while and when Skye finished her drawing, she sat back to look it over.

Her mom noticed that she was done and leaned over a bit to take a peek. She pointed to the prominent figure in the middle of the paper and asked, "What's that baby?"
Skye pulled it closer and traced the figure lying on the ground, "The person is so sad and upset that they pass out. That's what it's called right? When you can't breathe normally and then you go to sleep?"

"Yeah, it's also called fainting." Her mom pulled her a little closer and gave her a worried look, "How do you know about that Skye? Did you see it on t.v.??"

"No, I did it once," She said simply, continuing to trace her drawing with her fingertip.

"That must have been pretty scary baby. When did it happen?"

Her finger paused and leaned further into her mom, "When I was in the room and he was talking to me… I was getting upset and I think I had a panic attack like at school that one day. I don't know, but I couldn't breathe and you weren't there to help me so I guess I just passed out. It wasn't very fun."

She started tracing her finger over her drawing again but flinched when her mom's fist came down on the desk. It made her pink lamp fall over and she scrambled off of her lap, afraid she had said something wrong. When she looked over to her, her mom's eyes were squeezed shut and she was breathing fast, her chest rising and falling a little too quickly, and when she spoke, her voice was quiet and low. It was kind of scary, "He did that to you? He made you feel so panicked that you couldn't breathe and passed out?"

She didn't say anything but she felt something wet hit her check and realized that she was crying. She held Mara tightly to her chest and backed up until her back hit the wall. She had never seen May like this, she was so mad.

"I'm not mad at you baby, I swear. I'm mad at him for what he did, for what he put you through… And I'm mad at myself. I couldn't help you. I couldn't… I couldn't do anything. You were missing and I couldn't do anything to help you, you were by yourself and you needed me and I couldn't help you. I'm sorry Skye."

Gradually, she relaxed as she studied her mom. Her shoulders were hunched inward but she was looking at her desperately. Her eyes were all watery again and Skye couldn't believe that her mom felt that way. She rushed forward and wrapped her arms around her neck and collapsed on top of her.

Her mom hugged her back tightly and combed her fingers through her damp hair, "I'm sorry baby, I didn't mean to scare you."

"It's okay." She pressed her face into her mom's shoulder and whispered, "It's okay."

"It isn't okay, you should never be afraid of Phil and I. I should have never responded that way and I want you to know that I'll try to never do that again. I..."
want you to know that you're safe around us and don't have to be scared."

Her mom sounded serious so Skye nodded seriously, "I already know that Mommy."

It kind of looked like her mom was going to cry again but Skye pretended not to see, just like she did at the airport with Wanda, “I love you sweetie. To the moon and back-" 

Skye finished for her, "More than all the stars in the sky." 

Finally, her mom's lips tugged up into a small smile and she pulled Skye closer for another hug.
"Skye? How do you feel about starting school tomorrow? What do you think about that?"

Jay was staring at her intently as she tried to focus on her drawing. She was sitting at her desk with Jay sitting beside her, absentmindedly coloring and talking at the same time. She had been avoiding this question because she really, really didn't want to go to school. Knowing that her friends were waiting to see her made her kind of want to go back but that wasn’t enough to override the anxiety she felt when she thought about being left at school.

That was where she had been taken, and it didn’t feel very safe anymore.

She tilted her head, determinedly stared at her paper, and shrugged. When Jay remained frustratingly quiet, she huffed and mumbled, "I don't want to go."

From the corner of her eye, she saw Jay leaned towards her, "Why don't you want to? Remember what we talked about earlier? Let's try to use our words."

She nodded and grabbed a blue crayon to color in her sky, "Sorry, I don't want to because the bad thing happened there."

"Thank you for using your words. Do you think another bad thing will happen if you go back there?"

"Yeah, I want to stay here with my Mom and Dad. It's safe here," She said softly, coloring just a little too roughly with her crayon.

"I know you do but you can't hide at home forever Skye. There are so many beautiful things to see in the world."

Instead of responding, she nodded absently and kept coloring. Jay tried again, "When you think about going to school, what do you feel?"

Setting her crayon down, she looked over to Jay and shrugged again, "I don't know. A bunch of feelings. It's not mad or sad, I don't know what it's called."

"Does it make you feel uneasy?"

Skye gave her a questioning look and Jay grinned a little, "That means uncomfortable and restless."

She thought about it and even though she felt kind of uncomfortable, there was more to it than that, "Maybe a little bit but there's other stuff too."

"How about… apprehensive?" Jay asked.

Hearing a new, big word left her feeling a little confused, "What's that mean?"

"It's when you're afraid and nervous that something bad could happen to you. For example, I feel apprehensive when I go on airplanes because I'm scared and nervous that it'll crash."

Skye mouthed the word, thought about it for a long moment, and then nodded. The definition that Jay had given her pretty much summed up what she was feeling, "Yes, I feel app…apprehensive."

Picking her crayon back up, she started coloring again as Jay leaned back in her seat, "It's okay to
feel like that Skye. You're emotions are valid and understandable but remember what I said earlier? About allowing yourself to be afraid but also knowing that you're not in any real danger?"

“Yeah.”

"If you feel yourself getting overwhelmed tomorrow, just practice the three steps that I taught you and remind yourself that you are not in any danger, alright?"

Skye finished her picture and looked it over, "Okay."

Pushing her picture away, she scrunched her nose up and asked, "I really have to go?"

Jay gave her a sympathetic look, "Yes, don't you miss your friends?"

She couldn't help but smile at the thought of Jemma, Fitz, and Lincoln, "Yeah, it's been forever since I saw them." Her smile slipped off her face when a thought crossed her mind, "What do I tell them?"

"You can tell them whatever you want Skye. If telling them something makes you uncomfortable, you don't have to say it, no matter how many times they ask you. If you don't want to talk about it, then don't. Your friends should respect that. If you do want to tell them what happened, then it's perfectly fine to do that. This is all up to you."

Skye grabbed onto her moon pendant and thought about what Jay said. She knew that Jemma and Fitz would probably ask a lot of questions, that's just how they were, and she wondered if Jay was right. She wondered if she decided to tell them nothing that they would respect that. She wasn't sure what she wanted to do yet but she hoped that her friends would be okay with whatever she decided.

Grabbing another piece of paper, she started drawing a smiley face, "Okay. Do you think they'll still like me?"

Jay put a gentle hand on her paper and Skye looked over to her, "You've been through a lot and that might have changed you a little bit, but deep down, you're still you. I think that they would be pretty dumb if they didn't like you anymore."

Grinning a little, she thought that if Jay had known her friends, she would have known they were not dumb. Not even close.

"Okay."

"Did your Mommy and Daddy talk to you about school tomorrow?"

She nodded and Jay asked, "What did they tell you?"

She set down her crayon, "They said that we were going to go in early to talk to Ms. Hill and that if I got too scared during the day, they will come get me, but they want me to try and stay at school all day."

"Good. I want you to try and stay at school all day too. If you start to feel overwhelmed, try your exercises. If that doesn't help, then it's alright for you to call your parents, okay?"

When she nodded, Jay smiled at her, "I think that's all we have time for."

Throwing her crayons into her box, she stood up and ran out into the hallway, where she knew her parents were waiting for her.
A shift in the bed woke her up. She rubbed her eyes and saw her dad getting out of bed. He glanced back, saw her, and gave her an apologetic look, "I didn't mean to wake you."

Shaking her head, she sat up, and reached for him. When he picked her up, she shut her eyes, set her head on his shoulder, and felt him carry her towards the kitchen.

She hadn't realized she had fallen back asleep until she woke up when the toast popped out of the toaster. Her dad’s strong arms were still holding her close, making her feel safe and warm, and he swayed gently from side to side as he took the toast out of the toaster.

"I don't want to go to school," She mumbled, rubbing her eyes blearily.

He set the toast on a plate and ran his hand over her head, "I know sweetheart, but you need to."

She put her head back on his shoulder, "I know."

She stayed with him while he made breakfast and refused to be put down when he tried to set her on the counter. There was a large knot taking root in her tummy and she told herself that she was only going to school. She would be able to see her friends and she told herself that she liked it there, so she shouldn’t be so worried.

Going over what Jay had told her helped her to feel a bit better. She wasn't in any danger, she was in control, and she could call her parents if it felt like too much.

Her mom came into the kitchen, spotted them, and plucked Skye out of Phil's arms, "I need a hug from my baby."

"Why?" She asked, quickly wrapping herself around her mom.

Her mom leaned back and looked at her, "I just want one. Do I need a reason?"

Shaking her head, she hugged herself closer to her mom, and when she heard her parents start to talk softly to each other, she let their voices wash over her and help her relax.

They finished making breakfast and when they sat down at the table, she stayed in her mom's arms and pulled her plate closer to her even though she didn't feel like eating. Since she had gotten her assignment from Jay, she had found that it had gotten easier and easier to eat, but today she didn't think that she could do it.

As she stared at her plate, she felt her mom gently pat her thigh, "Are you going to eat sweetie?"

Reluctantly, she picked up a piece of toast and gave it weary look, "I'm not hungry."

Her mom soothingly combed her fingers through her hair, "Why don't you try? Remember what Jay said?"

Skye nodded and bit off a small piece of toast. She chewed and forced herself to swallow it before setting the rest of the toast back onto her plate. Her mom pushed her glass of orange juice towards her and Skye grabbed it and took a few sips before pushing it back. She looked over to her dad and saw that he looked worried but he didn't say anything.

For the next couple of minutes, her mom encouraged her to eat little pieces of her meal. Skye would force them down her throat because it made her parents happy and she knew that she should
probably eat. After another bite of toast and three strawberries, she resolutely shook her head. Her tummy wasn't very happy.

Her mom pressed a kiss to the top of her head and sat in silence while her parents finished their breakfasts. She heard footsteps coming towards them and saw Natasha rubbing her eyes.

"You're up earlier than usual," Her mom noted.

Natasha shrugged and sat down, "Yeah well, don't tell yourself that it'll be fine if you finish your homework in the morning. I've been up since five."

Her dad chuckled, "Did you finish it?"

Her sister threw him a dirty look, "Yeah, but at what cost Dad?" Nattie looked longingly at his mug, "Can I have some coffee?"

Her dad stood up and grabbed his empty plate, "Yeah, grab yourself some decaf."

Nattie groaned, "Dad, come on." She followed him into the kitchen and Skye could hear her bugging him about coffee.

Skye couldn't help but grin as she craned her neck to try to look at them. Her mom smiled down at her and stood up with her in her arms, "We have to get dressed if we're going to get to school early."

She nodded and watched as her mom turned to the kitchen, "Phil!"

"Yeah I know!" He shouted back.

Her mom brought her upstairs to get dressed. She put on her new boots because they made her feel tough and she could use a little help feeling brave. Her mom put her hair into two braids and helped her get her backpack ready before sending her back downstairs so that she could go get ready.

Skye jumped onto the couch next to Natasha, who was sitting on the couch, aggressively flipping through a notebook, "What're you doing?"

"Math test today. My teacher is a sadist," Natasha muttered, not looking away from her notes even though she was flipping through them too quickly to actually read everything on them.

"What does that mean?" She questioned, scrunching her nose up in confusion.

"What does 'sadist' mean?"

"What does ‘sadist’ mean?"

Natasha finally looked up and away from her notebook, "Oh. Um, just know that it isn't a good thing. Don't tell mom I said it around you."

She nodded and sat back to watch her sister get back to frantically flipping through her notes. Nat was working through a problem when she sighed deeply, shut her notebook, and shoved it into her backpack, "This is useless." She looked over to her and tilted her head, "You excited about going back to school?"

She shrugged.

Nattie scooted closer to her, "You get to see your friends again. That should be fun."

Skye nodded halfheartedly, "Yeah, I missed them."
"Just focus on having fun today at school. When you get home, we can play on your new playground together," Natasha said comfortingly as she put an arm around her shoulder.

Skye leaned into her sister and told herself that she would focus on having fun at school because she was excited to see her friends again but she wasn't excited to be so far away from her parents.

Her parents finally came downstairs and they all said goodbye to Natasha before getting into the car and heading to school. Skye tried her best to sing along to the songs but she was too nervous, she she eventually stopped and stared out the window instead.

They parked in the school parking lot and her dad helped her get out of her booster seat. She slid out of the car, stood between her parents, and grabbed onto their hands. The further into the school they got, the tighter she gripped their hands. She kind of expected the school to seem scary, especially after what happened here, but it was the same as it always was. It was brightly lit and had art hanging along the hallway walls and didn't look scary at all.

They walked into Ms. Hill's room and saw her leaning over her desk. She looked up when they walked in and hastily stood up, "Hey guys, good morning."

Her parents said hello and Skye waved. Ms. Hill made her way over to them and for some reason, she looked kind of nervous. She kept wringing her hands and brushing her hair away from her face, and finally her teacher stopped in front of her and crouched down a little, "Hey Skye."

"Hi, Ms. Hill."

Ms. Hill breathed in deeply before standing up and smiling, "Why don't you set your stuff down on your desk?"

Skye nodded and went to quickly put her stuff away, narrowly avoiding walking directly into a chair in her haste. When she came back, she heard her mom say, "I promise Maria, we don't blame you. You couldn't have known that the one time you had a meeting, something bad would happen."

Ms. Hill nodded while Skye walked up to her mom and grabbed her hand again. Her teacher motioned for them to sit down in front of her desk and they all did so. Instead of sitting in the empty seat to the right of her mom, she clambered into her lap, grabbed hands, and wrapped them around her waist.

Her teacher situated herself in front of them and looked at her, "I'm happy you're back Skye. We've all missed you in class."

She gave her a small grin. She had missed class too.

"It's a good day too because we're teaming up with the cafeteria workers and are going to be making green eggs and ham, like in the storybook."

Skye perked up, "How do you make eggs green?"

Ms. Hill leaned forward and conspiratorially whispered, "We'll have to find out in class now won't we?"

She felt her lips tug up into a smile and leaned back against her. Ms. Hill sat back as well, glanced at her parents, and then looked back to her, "Do you have any questions?"

She did have one question, but she didn’t want to seem like a baby for asking, so she grabbed her moon pendant and looked up at her mom. When she nodded encouragingly at her, she took a deep
breath before turning back to her teacher, "Um… Can I… Can I stay with you at recess?"

Ms. Hill gave her a gentle smile and glanced at her parents before softly saying, "Of course you can. We'll figure out something fun to do."

Skye let out a sigh of relief and nodded.

Her dad rubbed the back of his neck and said, "We just want to know that if Skye needs us, she'll be able to contact us."

"Yeah, she's been doing very well but in case something happens, we would like to know as soon as possible," Her mom added.

Ms. Hill was nodding along to what they were saying, "Of course. If Skye needs you, she'll be able to get to you. I have a phone here in the classroom as well as my cell phone. She'll be able to reach you."

Her mom ran comforting fingers through her hair, "Hear that? If you need us, just ask Ms. Hill alright?"

She nodded and Ms. Hill handed her some papers, "Here are some worksheets that Skye should complete at home. We went through two more letters this past week and worked on our subtraction."

"Piece of cake. I'm great at subtraction. We can work through this together," Her dad said, turning to her and waving the sheets around in his hand.

Skye scrunched up her nose at the thought of having extra homework.

He reached forward and brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "Sorry sweetheart, you've got do your homework so you can be smart and become a super secret spy."

She blew her hair out of her faces and straightened up indignantly, "I don't want to be a spy Daddy, I want to be queen of the whole world."

"Well you have to be smart to be queen of the world too," He said, chuckling to himself.

That made sense to her, so she gave a sigh of defeat and pressed herself closer to her mom. Ms. Hill smiled at her, "Kids should start walking in in about ten minutes, so maybe you should start saying goodbye. I'll wait outside."

Her teacher stood up, smiled at all of them, and walked outside. She kept the door open and Skye heard her start talking to the teacher across the hall.

Her mom set her on the ground and she and her dad both stood up. She knew that they were going to be going soon, so she latched onto her mom's leg, "Don't leave me."

"I'm sorry baby but we can't stay," Her mom said gently, putting a comforting hand on the top of her head.

Skye felt her eyes well up with tears and she held on tighter, "But I don't want you to go."

Her mom shifted a bit and suddenly she was being hauled up and into her arms. She situated herself so that they were face to face and she saw her dad move closer so that he could put a hand on her back.

Her mom looked at her seriously and Skye focused on looking into her eyes because that was what
you did when someone was having a serious conversation with you, "Skye, I know that it's a little scary to come back here but you're very safe. You're going to have a lot of fun with your friends today. And you get to make green eggs and ham! I'm kind of jealous."

"You can stay and make it with me," She mumbled, wrapping her arms around her neck.

Her mom leaned in and pressed a kiss to her forehead, "That's a very nice offer but we can't sweetie, you know that."

Skye did know that, but that didn't mean she liked it one bit.

The tears that had been welling up in her eyes finally spilled over, "But I don't want to stay here! Can't we go home? I want to go home."

She watched as her mom gave her dad a helpless look and he stepped closer so that his face was in her line of sight, "You need to stay in school sweetheart. You like school remember? All your friends are here and you love hanging out with them." He held a palm against her cheek, "If you need us, you tell Ms. Hill alright?"

Skye sniffled and nodded. Her mom shifted her so that she could wipe away her tears and press a kiss to her damp cheek, "You'll be fine baby. And remember, I love you to the moon and back-"

Skye finished for her, "More than all the stars in the sky."

Her mom nodded and smiled at her, "Forever."

Skye leaned in and hugged her, feeling better when her mom squeezed her tightly. She shut her eyes for a couple of seconds and breathed in her flowery scent before leaning back and feeling like if her parents thought she could do it, she could get through the day. She reached over to her dad and made grabby hands until he plucked her out of her mom's arms and held her close for a hug. He smoothed a hand over her hair and whispered, "You'll be fine sweetheart, I know you will."

Nodding, she took a deep breath. She was going to be fine, everyone kept saying so. She told herself to be brave, leaned back, and tried to smile at him. When he kissed her forehead and set her down, she straightened out her clothes and let out a breath.

Her parents smiled proudly at her and leaned down for one more hug before making their way out the door. They paused at the doorway and turned back to her. Her mom blew her a kiss and said, "Have a wonderful day baby. We'll see you at pickup time."

It took everything in her to nod and wave at them, and then she watched them disappear out the door and down the hallway.

She would be fine.

And she’d keep repeating that in her head until it came true.
Skye was only alone in the classroom for a minute or two before kids started trickling in. First came Gracie, whose arm was now in a cast, who walked over to Skye and asked if she wanted to sign it. Of course she said yes, grabbed a marker, and wrote her name down. Then some more kids slowly made their way into the room. They all said hi but then went to their respective desks and started putting their things away, so she said hi back and then ignored them.

Her nerves grew the longer it took her friends to arrive, so she sat down and started doodling in one of her notebooks. She was just starting to truly focus on her drawing when she heard the chair at the desk next to her scrape back and she knew that Lincoln was there. Taking a deep breath for bravery, she looked over and found him staring at her.

She set her pencil down and tried to smile at him, "Hi."

"Hey," He said, dropping his backpack to the ground and leaning precariously back in his chair.

He studied her for a couple more seconds before he grabbed his bag and started to put his things away, "You were gone all week. You missed two letters."

"Yeah, Ms. Hill gave me worksheets to take home and work on."

Lincoln gave her a sympathetic look as he tried to shove his overstuffed pencil pouch into his desk, "That's a lot of homework."

Skye could feel her tension start to melt away. Lincoln hadn't said anything about what had happened and he was treating her like he usually did, so maybe everything was going to be alright like everyone had been telling her. She felt her fake smile turn into a real one, "I know. My dad said he'd help me though. He says I have to be smart if I want to become queen of the world."

Lincoln gave her a look that clearly said she was crazy, "You can't be queen of the whole world! Maybe just in one place but not the world!"

She turned in her seat so she was fully facing him and stuck her tongue out, "Watch me."

He considered that, shrugged, and grinned at her, "Can I be king of the world?"

She thought about it; Lincoln was nice and it would be fun to rule the world together, so she said, "Okay, but you have to do everything I say. I'm going to be in charge."

Lincoln nodded seriously, "Okay. What are your rules going to be?"

"Rules?" She asked, scrunching up her nose in confusion.

He gave her an exasperated look, "Yeah, if you're going to rule the world, you need to have some rules for people to follow. If they break the rules, they have to go to jail."

That idea had never occurred to her before and suddenly she was glad to have Lincoln as the person who would rule with her because sometimes she forgets about those things. She thought off the top of her head, "Well my first rule is that all parents have to let their kids have ice cream before dinner."

"That's a good one. My mom doesn't let me do that."

"Mine doesn't either. My next rule would be… no more homework! Ever!"
Lincoln smiled at her and for the next couple of minutes they both came up with their own set of rules for when they took over the world. Skye felt herself relaxing more and more as their easy conversation flowed. Maybe everyone was right and she would be fine at school. She still missed her parents but she would see them in a little while. She started to feel sad when she thought about how far away she was from them but then she made herself focus on her conversation with Lincoln and she soon forgot about feeling sad.

Lincoln had started to write down their list of rules and they already had fifteen done before she heard someone calling her name. She looked over and saw Jemma and Fitz pushing their way over to her. She smiled at them and waited for them to get close enough before saying, "Hey guys."

Jemma gave her a disbelieving look, "'Hey guys'? You were gone, like, all week!"

Fitz nodded along, "Yeah, Jemma's mom told us what happened."

Jemma pulled a chair over and sat down by her, "Yeah, it was super scary! We went to go see if Gracie was alright and you were just gone! I was so worried about you."

Skye felt herself start to tense up again. She had hoped that Jemma and Fitz would have reacted like Lincoln had, but it was becoming obvious that that wouldn't happen. They were just curious, which she understood, she just wish they were a little bit better at noticing when she didn't want to talk about something.

She tried to say something, maybe to change the subject or tell them she was alright, but they wouldn't let her get a word in. Fitz had pulled up a chair and he and Jemma were both talking so quickly.

"Were you scared?" Fitz asked.

Jemma elbowed him, "Of course she was scared Fitz! She was kidnapped!"

"Well you don't have to yell at me Jemma. Besides, I wasn't asking you now was I?"

"I'm just saying that that was a dumb question." Jemma turned back to her, "What happened? My mom said that the police had to come and get you."

Fitz eyes lit up when Jemma brought up the police, "Were they wearing their uniforms? Did you get to ride in a police car?"

Skye didn't want to think about what happened to her, she just wanted to focus on making it through this school day, and her two friends weren't making it easy. She desperately looked over to Lincoln and luckily he seemed to understand, because he nodded at her and loudly said, "Guys!"

Miraculously, Jemma and Fitz stayed silent for a couple of seconds and then turned to her. She prepared herself for another onslaught of questions, but that didn't happen. Instead, Jemma's face crumpled and she said, "I'm sorry Skye, we didn't mean to make you feel bad."

Fitz nodded, "Yeah, we just want to know if you're alright."

Skye breathed in deeply and made sure that she had calmed down before saying, "Yeah, I'm alright. But I have a bunch of homework that I have to make up, so that's kind of dumb."
Just like that, the topic changed and her friends began chattering about all the assignment she had missed. Jemma and Fitz took Lincoln's gentle warning to heart and didn't bring up what happened again.

They had story time on the reading rug and then did their math and history lesson before they got released for lunch. Skye stayed close to Ms. Hill when they all walked down the hallway and into the cafeteria but her teacher didn't seem to mind and her friends didn't ask why. She tried to eat half of the lunch that her dad had packed for her but she couldn't. When Fitz asked for her goldfish, she gave them to him, and when Lizzie asked if she wanted the other half of her sandwich, Skye eagerly gave it to her.

She felt bad for not eating all of her lunch but her tummy was uneasy and she didn’t want to make herself feel sick.

After lunch, they all went back to the classroom and did their reading and writing lesson. They worked on a different letter, W, and wrote down a bunch of words that began with it. Skye thought that W's were easy to learn because they couldn't trick you and become silent, not like the 'K' in know or the 'B' in dumb.

Before recess, when they were working on their reading lesson, Skye spent fifteen minutes with Ms. Hill for one-on-one time. They both sat next to each other at a table that was a little excluded from the rest of the class. Ms. Hill would point out words and Skye would sound them out to her. So far, it wasn't going very well.

She sighed and threw her hands up in the air, "This is impossible Ms. Hill. I'm too dumb to understand it."

Ms. Hill set the paper down and turned to her, "Skye, I don't let my students call a nyone dumb, especially themselves." Ms. Hill gave her a pointed look and Skye blushed a little and nodded. Ms. Hill put a gentle hand on her shoulder, "It's okay that you don't understand this right now because that's what I'm here for. I'm here to help you understand the material, and you will, in your own time."

Skye nodded again but didn't know if Ms. Hill would be able to help her read these words. They were hard and her brain refused to cooperate.

Ms. Hill gave her a smile and picked the paper back up. She pointed to the last word that Skye had tried to sound out, "Okay, let's sound this out letter by letter."

Skye sounded out each letter as her teacher pointed to them and then put them all together, "Friend! It says friend!" She scrunched up her nose and stared accusingly at the word, "Why is it spelled like that? It looks like it should say fry-end."

Ms. Hill laughed, "I don't know, some words just look really weird don't they?"

Skye nodded and they finished the last four words on her worksheet. Before she could stand and go back to her desk, Ms. Hill stopped her, "How have you been feeling so far?"

Skye considered it. She had been feeling fine for most of the day, except when her parents had left her and Jemma and Fitz had asked so many questions. She had been so busy that she had actually forgotten what had happened and that she was nervous about being back at school.

"I'm good," She said, and her voice held a bit of shock because she honestly didn’t think she was going to be fine.
"That's great to hear. I was thinking that for recess I could bring out some sidewalk chalk for you to play with? I usually sit on the bench with the other teachers and there's a lot of space for you to draw on."

"Okay! I love drawing."

Ms. Hill stood up, "Then it's a deal. Why don't you head back to your seat and put your things away. Recess is in a couple minutes."

Skye nodded and returned to her desk. Lincoln had already finished his reading lesson, he was super good at words, and was talking to the boy who sat next to him, Mathew. When she sat down, he looked over and grinned, "I'm so excited for recess. I'm going to climb on top of the covered slide today. You should try with me."

"You're not supposed to do that."

He leaned in and whispered, "I'm going to do it when the teachers aren't looking. Come on! It'll be fun!"

Skye shook her head, "I'm going to draw with chalk."

Lincoln leaned back and gave her a dubious look, "Where are you going to get chalk?"

"Ms. Hill is bringing it out for me."

"Really? Maybe I could climb onto the slide and then draw with you?"

"Okay. I could distract the teachers for a couple of minutes so that you could climb onto the slide."

He gave her a big smile, "Yes! You're the best."

Skye smiled back and focused on putting her things away in her desk. She was kind of nervous about recess. That was when she had been taken and the bad thing had happened. She told herself that nothing bad could happen to her when she was with Ms. Hill and forced herself to focus on being happy that she would get to draw on the sidewalk with chalk. She had been able to do that at the orphanage and it had been pretty fun.

Ms. Hill told them to line up and get ready to leave for recess so she raced to the door and got in line. Fitz was the line leader so she stood between Jemma and Lincoln as they walked out the door and to the playground. Everyone ran off as soon as they got to the play area but she stayed by Ms. Hill. Lincoln waved to her as he ran to one of the slides and she waved back. Jemma and Fitz looked back and had confused looks on their faces when they saw that she wasn't following them. They turned back around and came up to her, "Aren't you coming?"

She looked up to Ms. Hill, who set down a big box full of chalk onto the sidewalk before sitting down on the bench a foot away with the other teachers. She turned back to her friends and shook her head, "No, I'm going to draw here instead."

Her two friends gave each other a look and Skye thought that they knew that she was too scared to leave Ms. Hill's side, and then they looked back to her and Fitz said, "Can we draw with you?"

She was happy that they didn't say anything about her being a scaredy-cat and nodded eagerly. They all sat down on the sidewalk and started to draw. Jemma wanted to draw a really big picture so they decided to draw an underwater scene. She stared drawing little fishies while Fitz drew out a boat and Jemma sketched out a really big whale. She looked up when she heard someone calling her name.
and saw Lincoln standing by the covered slide and giving her a thumbs up. She nodded at him and turned to the teachers, "Hey! Can you show us how to draw a turtle?"

Ms. Hill and Mrs. Drew turned to her but Mr. Little kept surveying the kids playing on the playground. She grabbed a green piece of chalk, stood up, and walked over to him, "Mr. Little, can you draw a turtle for me?"

She made a hand motion behind her back and pointed towards the other two teachers, which her friends caught. She was lucky they were so smart because they caught on super fast and before she knew it, she heard Jemma ask Ms. Hill if she could help her with her whale and Fitz ask Mrs. Drew if she could help him draw a fishing pole for his fisherman.

Mr. Little took the chalk from her and said, "Sure, sea turtles are difficult to draw sometimes because they don't have feet, they have weird little flippers. I'll show you."

Skye nodded and watched as he leaned down and drew a mini-turtle on the sidewalk by his feet. She glanced up and saw Lincoln sitting on top of the slide. He was smiling and she could see that he was talking to Mathew and another boy from a different class. He looked over and she made a hand motion for him to get down. He nodded and she watched him carefully climb off the slide before turning back to Mr. Little as soon as he said, "See? You think you can draw something like that on your big picture over there?"

Skye nodded and took the chalk back from him, "Yep, thank you Mr. Little. You're a good drawer."

He smiled at her and she sat back down by her friends and continued coloring. When they finished their underwater picture, they started working on something different. One of them would lie on the ground, someone else would trace them, and then they would color in the outline of their bodies. Skye was drawing fairy wings onto her outline when she looked up and froze.

There was a man walking in the sand over by the swing set. His back was to her and she didn't know who he was, all she could see was Crazy Cal. She had been playing in the sand by the swing set when he had taken her.

Her breathing sped up and she saw Jemma turn to look at her from the corner of her eye. She tried to shove the bad thoughts out of her head but it didn’t work, it was only getting harder to breath, so she quickly stood up and went over to Ms. Hill. She tugged on her teacher's shirt sleeve and pointed at the man. She saw Ms. Hill glance over to where she was pointing and quickly turn back to her, "That's just Mr. Little, see? He's going to tell one of the students to stop twirling around on the swings. It's alright Skye."

Skye tried to force air down her throat as she looked back to the man. Now that Ms. Hill said something, she could clearly see that the figure had blonde hair rather than brown hair and was way shorter than Crazy Cal had been.

Ms. Hill was right. It was just Mr. Little.

She told herself to calm down and went through the exercises that Jay had given her to do when she felt overwhelmed. She told herself that she was safe and she did the breathing exercise that Jay had taught her. Her heart rate slowly returned to normal and she found that she could finally draw enough air into her lungs. With her breathing under control, she looked over and saw that Ms. Hill and Mrs. Drew were both giving her concerned looks and she blushed in embarrassment. She had almost had a complete panic attack in front of everyone.

Ms. Hill reached towards her, probably to offer some sort of comfort, but Skye jerked back. She just
wanted to go back to coloring and forget that this happened. Ms. Hill pulled her hand back and asked, "Are you okay?"

Skye nodded and looked at the ground.

"Do you want me to call your parents?"

Skye thought about it. She really missed her mom and dad but she knew that they wanted her to try and stay at school all day, and she wanted them to be proud of her, so she shook her head and sat back down by her friends. She determinedly started at her piece of chalk for a minute or two before looking up to find that Jemma and Fitz were staring at her.

In addition to the embarrassment she already felt, annoyance crept up on her when she saw that her friends were scrutinizing her.

"What?" She snapped at them.

Fitz immediately went back to drawing but Jemma crawled over to her and whispered so that no one else could hear, "Was that a panic attack?"

Skye just stared at her, unwilling and too upset to speak.

Jemma whispered again, "My cousin has those and one time she had one while I was staying at her house."

Skye continued to say nothing, stare at her friend, and wonder what was she getting at.

Jemma let out a breath of frustration, "What I'm saying is that it's okay if it was one. There's nothing wrong with that. My mommy says that panic attacks make people feel really bad. Are you okay?"

Just like that, her annoyance disappeared and she felt tired. Her friend wasn't making fun of her or thought that she was weird, she was just making sure that she was alright. Jemma and Fitz both talked a lot but they still had trouble communicating their thoughts in a plain and understandable way. They were sometimes too excited about something to see that a topic was making her uncomfortable but that didn't mean that they didn't care about her. She sighed and leaned in close to her friend, "I'm okay. I just… can't breathe sometimes when I get nervous about something. I don't know why."

Jemma put her hand on her arm, "How do you get it to stop?"

Skye put a hand on her chest so that Jemma could see her breathe in, "You breathe in for four seconds, hold your breath for three seconds, and then breathe out for four seconds. It helps me a lot."

She watched as Jemma tried to mimic her and smiled when her friend grinned at her, "That's not as easy as I thought it would be."

"Yeah, it helps me focus so that I can breathe again."

Jemma sat back on her heels and nodded determinedly, "Okay. If that happens again, now I know how to help you."

Skye suddenly felt a rush of affection towards her friend. She bumped her shoulder against Jemma's and smiled, "Thanks."

They kept drawing until it was time to go back inside and Skye held Jemma's hand on the way back
to the classroom. She sat at her desk and Ms. Hill taught them their Word of the Week, and she groaned when her teacher told them that their homework was to use their Word of the Week, which was 'vendor', in three different sentences. Skye sighed and added that to her never-ending pile of homework.

Ms. Hill told them that they would be watching a video about whales until it was time to go home so they all hurried over to the reading rug and got comfortable while their teacher set up the t.v. Skye liked watching the video so much that she didn't even realize it was time to go home until Ms. Hill clapped and told them to line up. She quickly gathered her things and shoved them into her backpack before getting in line by Jemma and Fitz, excited to see her mom and dad.

They said goodbye to Lincoln and watched as he got onto his bus before following Ms. Hill to the front of the school. She bounced on her toes as she stood by her teacher and her friends and looked for her parents. Jemma tugged on her sleeve, "I see my mom over there. I'll see you tomorrow okay?"

Skye nodded before she remembered something, "Oh! My dad built me a playground in our backyard! You guys should come over and play sometime!"

Fitz smiled real big, "Does it have a slide?"

Skye nodded proudly and Fitz's smile grew even bigger, "I'm in."

Jemma rolled her eyes, "I'll ask my mom to call yours."

"Okay, I'll see you guys tomorrow!"

They both waved and ran off. She scanned the busy area and spotted her walking towards her. She knew that her dad had to work but she had still hoped that he would be here to pick her up. She shook off her disappointment, waved to her mom, and was about to run off and meet her when she noticed how many people were in the way. She surveyed the crowd and decided that it would be safer for her to stay by Ms. Hill and wait for her mom to get to her.

Her mom walked up the steps and smiled at her and Skye rushed forward and jumped into her arms. Her mom caught her and hauled her up and into her arms, "I missed you baby."

Pressing her face into her mom’s neck, she squeezed her into a tight hug. She had been okay at school today but she felt way better being with her mom, "I missed you too."

May leaned back so that she could get a look at her, "How was your day?"

She shrugged and pushed her face further into her mom’s neck. When it became clear she wasn’t going to say anything, she felt her mom take a couple of steps forward and greet Ms. Hill, "Hey Maria, how was everything?"

"Skye was great today. There was a little incident during recess but when I asked if she wanted to call you, she said no."

Her mom lowered her voice but Skye could hear her anyways, "Should I be concerned?"

"No, it was just a very mild panic attack. It only lasted for about two minutes before she calmed herself down. She was great today. We went over some new words as well. Skye? Do you want to tell your mom our Word of the Week?"

Skye picked her head up, "It's 'vendor.' Do you want to know what that means?"
Her mom smiled at her and reached up to brush her bangs out of her eyes, "I would love if you would tell me."

Skye grinned and recited what Ms. Hill had told them earlier, "It's a person who sells something to you."

She saw Ms. Hill smile from the corner of her eye, "Very good Skye! Don't forget to do your homework alright?"

Skye nodded and everyone said goodbye before they made their way back to the car. Her mom repositioned her in her arms so that she could open the backdoor and set her into her booster seat. As she was buckling her in, she asked, "Did you have fun with your friends?"

Skye nodded and started swinging her feet back and forth, "Yeah. Is it okay if they come over and play on my new playground?"

Her mom finished with the seat straps and leaned forward to press a kiss to Skye's forehead, "I don't see why not. I'll call their parents when we get home and see if it's alright with them."

She grinned and watched as her shut her door and got into the driver's seat. She turned the music up and Skye sang along to Beauty and the Beast songs as they made their way back home.

Without warning, her mom turned the music down but before she could protest, she heard that her phone was ringing.

"Hello?"

She paused as she listened to what the other person was saying before speaking up, "Oh that's great sweetie. I'm glad you're all settled… Everyone's fine back here. We all miss you guys."

Skye guessed that she was talking to either Wanda or Pietro and she wiggled around in her seat and tried to listen to what she was saying, "Take a lot of pictures all right?... Have fun but make sure to focus on your schoolwork… No, I know you can handle yourself I just want to make sure you're getting all your work caught up… Yeah, I just picked her up from school… Good. She's right here… Okay, I love you. Here she is."

Her mom reached back and handed her the phone, "Wanda wants to talk to you."

Skye eagerly took the phone from her and put it to her ear, "Hello?"

"Hey little one! How was school?"

Skye couldn't stop the smile that took over her face. She had missed her sister's voice, "It was okay. I have a lot of homework though."

Wanda made a sympathetic sound, "That doesn't sound very fun. I know how you feel, I have a bunch of homework too."

Skye felt sympathy flash through her. Wanda was in college, not elementary school, so her homework must be way harder than her, "I'm sorry. I miss you Wanda."

"Oh Skye, I miss you too. Pietro's in a class right now but if he were here, he would say the same thing."

"When he gets back, will you tell him that I miss him?"
She heard rustling on the other line and waited for Wanda to say something, "Of course I will. How about we video chat sometime this week? Then we can both see each other's faces."

"Yes!"

Wanda laughed, "Okay, give the phone back to mom and we'll set up a time. Oh! And give Mara a kiss for me! I love you Skye."

Skye breathed in sharply in surprise. This was the first time that Wanda had ever said that to her, but she didn’t hesitate to respond, "I love you too."

She could hear the smile in her sister's voice when she said, "Goodbye little one, we'll see each other real soon."

Skye begrudgingly said, "Bye Wanda," before handing the phone back to her mom. She only half listened to the rest of the conversation because she was distracted by Wanda's declaration of love. It made her feel all warm inside when she thought about it.

Wanda loved her and she loved Wanda. She just wished that the twins would hurry up with school and get back home already.
Skye sat with her mom at the table and dutifully did her homework. It was easier to get most of it done before Nattie and Trip got home because when they were around, she didn't really want to focus, she just wanted to play with them instead.

She had finished her Word of the Week homework and her mom was now helping her with one of her letter worksheets. They were almost finished when the front door flew open. Trip walked in with a smile and made his way directly to the refrigerator to grab something to eat. Natasha trudged in behind him and dropped her backpack to the ground. Skye set her pencil down and watched her sister walk to the table and plopped down next to her.

Nattie placed her arms on the table and dropped her head to land on top of them. Her mom leaned over and smoothed out the red-head's hair, "Rough day?"

They got only a grunt in response.

"Was it the math test?" Her mom asked, making a soothing noise and continuing to run comforting fingers through her hair.

Nat nodded, sighed, and picked up her head, "I'm not saying that math should be illegal, but if it was, I wouldn't be opposed to it."

Skye nodded in sympathy, "Tell me about it."

Her sister looked over to her and laughed a little, "You've got math troubles too? What're you working on?"

Sitting up straighter, she pushed her letter homework away from her, "Subtraction."

Nattie nodded, "Those were the days. You wanna go play outside with me? I think I need some time on the swings."

Looking over to her mom, she silently asked for permission. Her mom let out a breath and grabbed her homework, "Okay, but we're finishing this later alright? You have a lot of catch-up work."

Nodding happily, she jumped out of her chair, tugged on Natasha's hand, and urged her to stand up. Her sister obliged and they made their way outside. They each sat on a swing and silently enjoyed each other's company for a couple of minutes.

It felt nice to spend some alone time with her sister. She swung herself slowly, never getting too far from the ground, but she didn't mind.

"How was school?" Natasha asked, breaking the serene silence they had been sitting in.

Skye thought about how she should answer. She knew that she could tell her parents about anything, but sometimes she didn't tell them things because she didn't want them to worry about her. For some reason, it was a little different with Natasha. She could just talk to her and her sister would dutifully listen and give her advice if she wanted it. She still told her parents mostly everything, but she didn't want to tell them that she hadn't eaten her lunch or that she had felt really bad when Jemma and Fitz had interrogated her this morning.

Making up her mind, she looked over to her sister and simply stated, "Something's wrong with me
Nattie.

Her sister kept swinging but sharply turned towards her, "What do you mean?"

Skye shrugged, "I don't know but I can't eat. Daddy packed me a really good lunch but I couldn't eat it. I felt bad."

Natasha slowed her swing down a little, "That happens to me sometimes, especially during finals week. It's probably because you're nervous. Were you nervous about going back to school?"

"Yeah, I like it there but it still scares me."

"There's nothing wrong with you Skye, you just don't eat when you're nervous or stressed. Some people overeat when they're nervous and some people just don't eat at all. It sucks but it happens."

She thought that she was getting sick again or that she had become permanently damaged after getting kidnapped, but apparently Nattie had this problem sometimes too. Skye pushed her feet against the ground and swung back, "So it'll go away?"

"Yeah, once you start to relax a little bit. You'll be alright маленькая звезда."

Skye turned her focus back onto her swing and thought about what Natasha had said. She just needed to relax. What was kind of confusing was that she had thought that she was starting to relax. She looked back over to her sister, "I don't know how to relax."

Nattie laughed, "What makes you feel peaceful?"

"I like drawing… playing with my dolls and… being with Mommy and Daddy. That makes me happy."

Natasha put on her Serious Thinking Face, and after a long moment, she shook her head and said, "You already do all that stuff a lot. Maybe we should try something new."

"Okay, like what?"

Her sister jumped off of her swing and stepped behind her. Skye twisted her head around and grinned when Natasha started pushing her. She swung her legs so that she could go higher.

After a minute or two, she heard Natasha clap her hands together and she slowed to a stop and turned back to look at her, "I know! You should ride a bike! I used to do that all the time when I felt upset because you're, like, in total control. How's that sound?"

Skye quickly turned back around and hid her face from her sister. She had never ridden a bike without training wheels before. They had had three bikes at the orphanage but none of them had training wheels, so she had never been able to use them. One time she had tried, but she had fallen off and some of the other kids had laughed at her. Thinking back on it, she didn't think that that experience would be considered peaceful or relaxing.

Determinedly, she stared ahead of her in an attempt to avoid the conversation, but then Natasha entered her field of vision. When she didn’t say anything, Nattie finally muttered, "Yeah that was a dumb idea anyways. Let me think of something else."

Hearing her sister call her idea dumb got her to finally look up at her. "It wasn't dumb! I just… can't ride a bike." She said, mumbling the last part quietly enough that her sister couldn’t hear her.
"What?"

Skye sighed and spoke in a slightly louder voice, "I can't ride a bike."

They stared at each other for a moment and she started to feel a hot flush of embarrassment creep up her cheeks but then Natasha grinned at her, "Why didn't you say so? We can teach you."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Listen, not knowing how to ride a bike isn't a bad thing. I didn't learn until I came to live here and I was ten. The people I used to live with never even gave me a bike with training wheels."

Slowly, her embarrassment melted away. She didn't know why she thought Natasha would make fun of her. Her sister never made her feel bad, she always made her feel better.

The prospect of actually learning how to ride a bike left her feeling excited, too excited to stay sitting down, so she hopped out of her swing and asked, "Was it easy to learn?"

Natasha started to make her way inside and Skye followed after her, "I'm not going to lie, I fell down a few times before I got the hang of it, but it was totally worth it. Besides, you're living with the best teachers in town."

She smiled happily and when they entered the house, her sister looked around and started making her way into the living room where their mom was looking at some papers. They both stood in front of the chair their mom was sitting in until she looked up at them. She gave Natasha a pointed look, "What're you up to? You have that look on your face."

"Nothing bad, I promise, but we do need to go to the store. Like, right now."

Her mom tilted her head and looked over to her but she just shrugged. She thought that she was going to learn how to ride a bike, not go to the store. Her mom looked back to Natasha, "Why?"

Her sister wrapped an arm around her shoulders and she leaned into her, "We're going to teach Skye how to ride a bike and she needs a bike for that to happen. My old one is too big for her."

Their mom studied them for a long moment, and Skye thought that she was going to say no, but then she watched as her mom slowly smiled and said, "Let's go then."

Skye grinned and high-fived her sister as their mom grabbed her keys from the counter and shouted up the staircase, "Trip! We're going to get Skye a bike! Want to come?"

Footsteps thundered overhead and then Trip’s head poked over the railing, "What'd you say?"

Their mom jingled her keys, "We're going to get Skye a bike. Do you want to come with us or stay here?"

Trip grinned and started making his way down the staircase, "Let's go."

Skye smiled and held Natasha's hand on the way to the car.

As she stared wide-eyed at the row of bikes they were standing before, she realized that this was going to be a little trickier than she had thought. She hadn’t realized that there were going to be so many to choose from, and she was having trouble picking which one she wanted.
Her brother and sister had wandered into the next aisle to look at the bikes over there, and she wrapped an arm around her mom as she started to feel a little overwhelmed. Her mom was holding her up so that she could see the bikes that were hanging on the rack above her and she kept looking back to two bikes: one was a light blue bike with light green tassels and the other was a white bike with pink tassels and a pink basket on the front. She liked the white one because then she could put her dolls in the basket and they could go on a ride with her, but she also liked the blue one because it had a bell on the handlebars.

Decisions were hard.

Her mom saw her looking at the two and set her down so that she could grab them and put them on the ground in front of her, "Which one?"

Skye stared at them for a little longer, hoping that an answer would come to her out of nowhere, and then got distracted when she heard Natasha giggling from the next aisle. Her mom gave her a look, "I bet they're doing something they're not supposed to be doing."

Her mom took her hand and they both walked over to see what was going on.

They stopped when they reached the next aisle and saw the scene before them. Trip was riding around on a bike that was obviously too small for him. It was white with blue flowers, blue tassels and a basket and a bell. He had a pink helmet sitting crookedly on his head and was riding circles around Nattie, who was laughing and kept trying to push him off his seat. They both stopped what they were doing why Skye pointed and said, "I want that one!"

Her siblings paused and gave them sheepish looks before Trip slowly got off of the bike and smiled at her, "Good because I, ah, was just testing it out for you."

"Sure you were," Her mom said doubtfully.

Skye stood by the bike and ran her fingers through the tassels until her mom gently her towards the seat, "Why don't you hop on and see if you like it?"

Very unsure of herself, she nevertheless stepped up to it and put her hands on the handlebars. Trip held the bike steady and Skye gave him a grateful look as she climbed on. She wobbled a little bit even though Trip was holding the bike for her, and she was gripping the handlebars so tightly between her fists that her knuckles were starting to ache a bit. She didn't really know what she was testing it out for, but she liked it and the seat felt comfy and the basket looked cool, so she nodded and hopped off.

She tugged on her mom’s hand, "I like it."

"Trip, will you carry that for us? And try not to ride it around the store please,” Her mom said, giving her a small smile and lightly squeezing her hand.

Trip raised two fingers to his forehead in a mock salute and their mom rolled her eyes fondly and started leading her down the aisle, "Let's find a helmet and some other safety gear for you."

Skye had changed her mind.

She didn't want to learn how to ride a bike anymore, and she told herself that it had nothing to do with the fact that she was sitting precariously on top of her bike and staring at the sidewalk in front of
her, it was just because riding bikes didn't even seem that fun anyways.

Her dad had been waiting for them when they gotten home and had been extremely excited to teach her how to ride her bike. He had helped her put on her elbow-pads and knee-pads and had clipped her helmet snugly onto her head. They brought the bike out onto the sidewalk in front of the house and right now, they were teaching her what to do.

Her dad held her bike steady while she sat on it and her mom was leaning down and talking to her, "You've ridden with training wheels before, right?"

Skye swallowed nervously and nodded.

Phil smiled, "This is basically the same thing except now you kind of have to balance yourself. Don't lean too far to the left or right and you should be fine sweetheart."

"And if you want to stop, push your feet backwards and it'll stop. Try it out," Trip added.

Skye pushed her pedals the wrong way, felt them resist, and assumed that those were the brakes. She nodded and Natasha reached forwards and ran her hand over her helmet, "You'll do great маленькая звезда. Just remember to be brave and that it's alright if you fall. I fell a couple times before I got the hang of things."

"Speaking of falling, if you need to, fall onto the grass and not the sidewalk okay?" Her mom said, and her voice was a little higher pitched than normal, which caused Skye to wonder if she was a little worried too.

Skye nodded and looked at her family. They were all smiling at her and even though she was nervous, she smiled back at them. She was nervous and excited to be learning this. She felt bulky and a little awkward with all this protective gear covering her but it helped make her feel a little safer so she didn't mind.

"I'll hold onto your bike until you feel comfortable enough to tell me to let go okay?" Said her dad.

"Okay, don't let go until I tell you though."

"You got it sweetheart. Alright everyone, back up."

Her family took a step back and her dad said, "Okay, start pushing the pedals."

Skye did as she was told and slowly started to move forward. She felt wobbly and yelped, "It doesn't feel very safe Daddy."

Her dad was walking calmly beside her and soothingly said, "I know, but it's easier once you go a little faster. Come on Skye, let's go."

She pushed her legs faster and her dad started to jog beside her. The quicker she pedaled, the less wobbly she felt and before she knew it, she was feeling secure enough to grin happily. The wind felt nice on her face and she kind of wanted to try to do it on her own, "You can let go now Daddy."

"Are you sure?" Her dad asked, still holding on tightly.

She nodded slightly, "Yep, let go."

He released his hold on the bike and Skye was so happy to be riding a bike on her own that she forgot to feel nervous. She went a couple of feet before she started to wobble and then she started to
She panicked a little. She remembered what Trip told her and pushed her feet back to stop and it worked a little too well because she stopped too abruptly and stumbled forward. Unable to regain her balance, she fell off the bike and tumbled gracelessly onto the grass.

She heard footsteps running toward her and looked up to find her dad right in front of her with everyone else peering around him. He reached forward and gently pulled her up, "Are you alright?"

She smiled at him, immediately shaking off his concern, "Did you see that? I rode on a bike by myself! Can I try again?"

Her dad brushed some dirt off her forearm and smiled at back at her mom, who reached forward and straightened her helmet, "Mommy! Did you see me? I did it all by myself!"

"I sure did baby, it was very impressive. You did great!" Her mom said proudly, giving her a smile as she checked her over for scrapes or bruises.

Skye smiled, picked up her bike, and jumped up and down, "Can I try again?"

Her mom held the bike while Skye sat on it and she helped her turn around and face the house, "Of course you can. Ready?"

After she nodded, she started pushing on her pedals. Her mom kept her bike steady until she felt comfortable enough to lean forward and say, "Okay, you can let go now."

Her mom let go and Skye kept riding forward. She was still smiling and her cheeks were starting to hurt but she didn't care. She was riding a bike by herself! Never in her life had she felt this completely in control with what happened to her and she was proud of herself for learning something new. Excited energy ran through her and she could help but laugh happily.

When she arrived back in front of her house, she applied the brakes, and this time she was gentler and didn't fall when she came to a stop. She swung her legs over, got off her bike, and set it gently on the ground. She jumped up and down in excitement and looked over to see her family making their way towards her. She ran over and met them halfway, "I did it! I did it on my own!"

Natasha reached out and high-fived her, "You did great маленькая звезда! You fell a lot less than I did."

"Yeah Skye, you're a natural," Her dad said proudly

Trip smiled at her, "Let me grab my bike and we can ride together!"

He ran towards the garage with Nattie trailing after him shouting, "Wait for me! Will you grab mine too?"

Shaking her head at her siblings silly antics, she looked back to her parents when her mom leaned forward and brushed her hair over her shoulders, "I'm so proud of you Skye. You got back up and kept trying even though you fell down."

Her dad nodded in agreement, "You did real good sweetheart, how do you feel?"

Skye's smile was still on her face and her cheeks were really starting to ache but she didn't even care. She was bursting with happiness and she couldn't remember the last time she had felt this way, "I feel awesome! I rode a bike by myself!"

Trip and Natasha emerged from the garage, pushing their bikes and laughing about somethings. Her
mom leaned down and pressed a kiss to her cheek, "You sure did baby."

Her brother and sister stopped beside them and Trip grinned at her, "Come on Skye."

She looked back to her parents and they waved her on, so she picked her bike back up and watched her siblings ride circles around her parents. She laughed and got back onto her bike.
Skye was excited to go home. She had gradually relaxed at school throughout the week and even though she still stuck fairly close to Ms. Hill at recess, she felt pretty comfortable in class and at lunch. Throughout the whole week she had only had two incidents this week, once that Monday at recess and yesterday in the parking lot when her mom had picked her up and someone had slammed the door really loudly right next to her. Both times she had been able to calm herself down and Jay had told her that she was improving a lot, which made Skye feel proud of herself.

It was Friday and her mom had said that Jemma and Fitz could come home with them and play for a couple of hours. She was so excited that Ms. Hill had had to remind her to focus during their one-on-one time. She had apologized profusely but it had still been hard for her to sit still and focus on her schoolwork.

They only had a few more minutes left in class and Ms. Hill was reading them a story, so they were all sitting on the reading rug. She was sitting in between Lincoln and Jemma, trying to stay still and focus on the story, but she was having a difficult time. Her teacher was reading Horton Hears a Who, she had read half yesterday and she was finishing the second half today. Skye really liked the story and all the silly pictures so she put her hands on her knees to stop her legs from moving around and distracting her.

Ms. Hill finally finished her story, told them to grab their things, and line up at the door. Quickly, she ran over to her desk and grabbed her backpack. She had stuffed all of her things into it earlier and it was ready to go. She got into line, stood behind Jemma, and grabbed her hand. She held her friend's hand as they said goodbye to Lincoln and watched him get onto his bus. They dutifully followed Ms. Hill to the front of the school and watched as the rest of her class ran off to find their parents. Skye stood by her teacher and looked for her mom with her friends standing next to her.

She looked up to Ms. Hill, "Jemma and Fitz are coming over to my house to play."

"That sounds like fun guys! I hope you have a wonderful time." Ms. Hill looked up from them and pointed, "Your mom's over there Skye."

Skye waved at her mom and turned back to her teacher, "Bye Ms. Hill!"

Fitz nodded and hitched his backpack higher onto his back, "Yeah, bye Ms. Hill!"

Their teacher laughed and smiled at them, "Bye you three! Have fun!"

They all waved and ran off. She stopped in front of her mom, wrapped her arms around her waist, pressed her face against her stomach, and let go after a couple of seconds. She stepped back and her mom kept one arm wrapped around her shoulders, "How was school? Did you guys learn anything?"

Jemma jumped up and down, "We learned that if you dare Lincoln to jump off the top of the monkey bars, he will."

Fitz nodded along with her and her mom chuckled, "Did you learn anything educational?"

"In art class, we learned how to make houses out of popsicle sticks," Fitz said.

Her mom chuckled again and started herding them towards the car, "Well that sounds fun."
Skye nodded, "It was. We painted them today and can take them home on Monday. I made mine for you Mommy."

"Thank you baby, I'm very excited to see it."

Her mom opened up the backseat and Skye waited for Jemma and Fitz to climb in before she plopped down into her own booster seat. Her mom leaned across her and helped her friends buckle in before getting into the driver's seat and starting the car.

As she pulled out of the parking lot, her mom glanced back at them through the mirror and asked, "What do you guys think about us stopping for some ice cream?"

Skye squealed while Fitz and Jemma both started swinging their feet excitedly and shouting, "Yes!"

Her mom laughed and turned up the music before focusing on the road again. She sang Aladdin songs with her friends until her mom turned into an ice cream parlor and parked the car. They all scrambled out of the car and Skye held her mom's hand as they walked into the ice cream shop.

It was cold in the building and she couldn't help but shiver as she joined her friends by the display counter. All three of them pressed their faces against the glass but they were all too short to see the flavors. Noticing this, her mom grabbed Fitz and set him on one hip and then carefully lifted Jemma and put her on her other hip before leaning over so that they could peer into the display. Skye waited patiently and ignored the small flare of jealousy that surged through her at the sight of Jemma and Fitz taking all of her mom's attention.

She knew that her mom was just being nice and wasn’t favoring her friends over her.

Once her friends picked out their flavors, her mom set them down and then picked her up. She wrapped an arm around her mom's neck, hugged her close, leaned over, and looked at all the different flavors. She decided on the peanut butter cup flavored ice cream and pointed at it so that her mom would know.

Her mom nodded and ordered for her while Jemma and Fitz stepped close to the counter and ordered for themselves.

They ran around the shop until their ice cream was ready and then carefully grabbed it from the employee. She wrapped an arm around her mom's waist, "Thanks Mommy."

Jemma and Fitz both nodded and Jemma said, "Yeah, thank you."

Her mom smiled and led them back outside and towards the car, "You're very welcome, just be careful when you eat it."

They all nodded seriously and helped each other hold their ice creams while her mom helped buckle them in. Some of Fitz's ice cream dripped onto his shirt, but other than that, they were all very careful.

By the time her mom pulled into their driveway, they had all finished their ice cream and were wiggling around in their seats. Her mom helped them get out and they followed her to the front door and into the house. Without pausing, her mom walked to the back door and opened it, "Go run off some of that ice cream."

They all ran outside and started climbing around on her new playground, racing to see who could climb the rock wall the fastest and making their way down the slide and across the monkey bars.
Fitz kept swinging across the monkey bars while Jemma and Skye both sat down on the swings.

"Your dad built this for you?" Fitz asked, grunting as he reached out to grab the next bar.

Skye nodded proudly, "Yeah. My brother, Pietro, helped him."

"Where's your brother at?" Jemma asked.

Skye swung her legs back and forth so that her swing would go higher, "He's in Europe with my other sister, Wanda."

Jemma stopped and twisted her swing around so that she spun around in a circle, "Why are they over there?"

"They're learning things at schools over there."

"That sounds like fun."

"Yeah, but I miss them. I wish they were back here."

Jemma stopped her swing and studied her as she swung by her, "I'm sorry."

Slowing her swing down, she came to a stop and looked at her friends, "Thanks, but it's alright. They really like it over there and we talk all the time. I video chatted with them on Wednesday."

Jemma pushed off the ground and started swinging again, "That's nice. I want to meet them when they come back. Your family is so cool."

Smiling brightly, she had to agree with her friend; her family was cool.

When she went back to swinging, it wasn’t long until Fitz wandered over and asked if she could use her swing. She hopped off so that he could get on, made her way over to the monkey bars, and started climbing across them.

She played around on her jungle gym for a couple of minutes before she heard Fitz's voice, which was louder than it normally was, so she curiously wandered over and saw her friends quickly talking back and forth, which was normal.

Fitz was waving one hand around while the other was wrapped tightly around the chain of the swing to keep him steady, "Come on Simmons, I dared you to do it. That means you have to."

Skye stood to the side and wrinkled her nose in confusion, "Do what?"

"I dared her to jump off the swing while it's high up but she won't," Fitz said tauntingly.

Skye crossed her arms, "She doesn't have to do it if she doesn't want to."

Jemma nodded appreciatively and motioned to her, "See Fitz?"

"It's a dare! She has to do it, that's the rules."

"No she doesn't! If she wants to do it, she can, but if she doesn't want to do it, she shouldn't have to," She said forcefully, taking a step towards Fitz and crossing her arms.

Jemma stopped swinging, "Yeah, I don't want to. It's too high up."
Fitz forcefully sighed and rolled his eyes at them, "You're both scaredy cats. Watch this."

Jemma got off her swing and stood next to Skye. They both watched as Fitz swung up really high and precariously scooted forward on his seat. He smirked at them before jumping off the swing and landing a couple of feet in front of it. When he landed, he stumbled a little bit and fell to his knees, causing her and Jemma to rush forward and help him to stand up.

Jemma brushed some dirt off his shirt sleeve, "See Fitz? You shouldn't have done that."

"No that was fun! It didn't even hurt!" He shouted, grinning widely.

Skye casually pointed at his right knee and huffed, "Your knee is bleeding."

Fitz and Jemma both leaned down and looked at his knee. He let out a breath and she grabbed his hand to stop him from reaching out and poking the scrape, "Oh yeah. Maybe I should get a bandaid."

Jemma gave him a look like she thought that he was crazy, "Come on."

Skye led them both inside and called for out, "Mommy! Fitz needs a bandaid!"

Her mom poked her head into the room and assessed the situation. She pointed to the kitchen, "Can you wet some paper towels? I'll go grab a bandaid."

Skye nodded, led her friends into the kitchen, and stood on her tiptoes so she could reach the roll of paper towels. She grabbed it and ripped some off the roll before sticking it under the sink, turning it on, and getting them wet. When she heard her mom walk into the kitchen, she turned around in time to see her pick up Fitz and set him on the counter. He held up the bottom of his shorts so that they wouldn't get any blood on them while her mom looked at his cut.

She handed her mom the damp paper towels and she thanked her before gently cleaning Fitz's knee. He hissed but didn't complain or cry and Skye thought that he was being very brave. Her mom put some ointment onto his knee before putting a Spongebob bandaid over his cut.

Once he was all cleaned up, Fitz leaned in and gave her mom a hug and she smoothed a hand over his head before saying, "You were very tough."

Fitz nodded, visibly proud of himself, and Skye stamped down her feelings of jealousy at seeing him cuddling her mom. She reminded herself that her friend was hurt and her mom was just helping him and that she shouldn't be feeling this way.

Her friend hopped off the counter and stumbled a bit before catching his footing and making his way over to her and Jemma, "Can we go play in your playroom?"

Skye silently asked permission from her mom, who nodded, so she grinned, "Yeah! Trip taught me how to set up the t.v. so that we can play Mario Cart!"

Her friends both made excited noises before following her upstairs.

She and her friends had been playing happily in the playroom when they heard the doorbell ring. They all groaned and set their crayons down.

"I don't want to go," Fitz whined loudly.
Jemma nodded, "Yeah, me neither."

Skye knew that they couldn't stay the night, otherwise she would've asked, but Jiaying was coming over in a little while and she didn't really want her friends to know that she was seeing a therapist. She didn't think that they would care that much but she would rather it be kept a secret.

She led them out of the playroom and they all waved at Nattie when she slipped by them and headed towards the bathroom, "Maybe we can play again tomorrow?"

Fitz nodded eagerly, "Yeah! We should go to the castle playground! I'll bring my ball so we can play footie again."

"Okay, I'll ask my mom."

They walked down the stairs and saw Jemma's mom waiting for them. She smiled at the three of them and then turned to Fitz, "I'm going to walk you home Leo."

He nodded and grabbed her hand as Jemma walked up and hugged her mom before asking, "Can we all go to the castle playground tomorrow?"

Jemma's mom raised a questioning eyebrow at May and her mom considered it, "I can take them if you're busy."

Jemma's mom smiled and grabbed onto Jemma's hand, "Thank you! I can drop them off around noon if that's okay?"

"Sounds perfect."

Skye wrapped an arm around her mom's leg and smiled at her friends, "Bye guys!"

They waved at her and said goodbye before walking out the door and down the street. Her mom shut the door and turned to her, "Did you have fun?"

Skye nodded and tried to climb up her mom, who chuckled, grabbed her, and picked her up so that they were face to face. Skye wrapped her arms around her neck and leaned forward to hug her, "I love you."

"I love you too baby," Her mom responded softly, hugging her back tightly.

Hearing her mom say that made her earlier feelings of jealousy seem silly. She knew her mom loved her but it had just been weird seeing her be affectionate around another kid that wasn't her. May was her mom and this was her family. She had waited way too long to get one and she didn't like sharing them with other people.

Suddenly the door opened up and her dad walked in. He stopped short when he saw them standing so close to the doorway, hugging.

"There are two of my favorite girls," He said, smiling.

He leaned forward and kissed May before turning to her and tickling her tummy. Skye giggled and reached towards him until he took her from her mom's arms and held her close, "How was your day sweetheart?"

She hugged him and leaned back, "It was really fun."

"That's great. Why don't you tell me about it while we make dinner? If we start now, we can finish
Skye set her fork down with a pleased smile. She had eaten *all* of her chicken, most of her green beans, and about half of her salad. When she glanced over to her dad and pointed proudly at her plate, he gave her a smile and a thumbs-up, "I'm very proud of you sweetheart."

Sitting back in her chair, she happily patted her belly. She hadn't eaten this much in a long time and, thankfully, her tummy didn't even hurt.

She waited until everyone was done and then picked up her dirty dishes and brought them over to the sink. Trip set her on the counter and she watched as everyone helped put the clean dishes away and the dirty dishes into the dishwasher. Nattie handed her clean glasses and she put them in the cabinet next to her head until they finished cleaning up and all made their way into the living room.

After plopping onto the couch, she snuggled between her parents and had been watching t.v. for two whole minutes when the doorbell rang. She groaned and got up to open the door with her mom.

Jay greeted them with a smile when they opened up the door, "Hey guys!"

They said hello and headed upstairs to Skye's room. Her mom started to follow them but Skye turned around and shook her head, "You don't have to wait in the hallway Mommy."

Her mom stopped short and quickly glanced over to Jay before smiling at her, "Okay, well, we'll be down here if you need us."

Skye nodded and led Jay up to her room, where she already had paper and crayons set out and waiting for them on her floor. She sat down by her supplies and Jay got comfortable next to her, "How are you feeling today?"

"I'm happy. I finished my dinner!"

Jay leaned back on her hands, "That is wonderful news!"

Skye smiled proudly and grabbed a yellow crayon, "Thanks."

"So, how was today? Did you have any incidents?"

"No, I even played a little ways away from Ms. Hill on the playground. I was scared but I told myself that I wasn't in any danger, just like you told me."

"That's great Skye! Do you still have your nightmares?"

Skye set her crayon down and stared at her hands, "Yeah, I still have them. I don't like sleeping alone so I still sleep with Mommy and Daddy."

Jay nodded empathetically, "That's okay Skye. You're making progress and that's amazing. We're taking baby steps and they're paying off. We'll get there."

It was a little surprising how easily it was to just implicitly trust what Jay was telling her, but she did. The older woman had helped her with a lot, especially with understanding what had happened when she had been kidnapped. She helped her process the events that had left her confused and made her
feel like she wasn't broken. It was still slightly confusing and scary to think about, but when she thought about Crazy Cal and what had taken place, it didn't overwhelm her like it did before.

Jay grabbed a sheet of paper and started to absentmindedly color on it, "So, what did you do today?"

"My friends came over and we had ice cream and played on my new playground!"

"That sounds like a lot of fun. How did that go?"

"Fitz jumped off the swings and hurt his knee so Mommy had to fix him."

Jay must have heard something in her voice because she tilted her head in a familiar way and asked, "Was he alright?"

Skye nodded as nonchalantly as possible, "Yeah he was fine. Mommy gave him a Spongebob bandaid and a hug for being tough."

"Did seeing you mom take care of Leo upset you?"

It was silent for a few long, agonizing seconds as Skye wondered if Jay could read her mind. She grabbed onto her moon pendant and muttered, "Well I didn't like it."

"Why not?"

Thinking about her reasons for feeling this way made Skye feel mad at herself. It was stupid and selfish to feel jealous over her mom taking care of Fitz, she knew that, but that didn't stop her.

She kept her eyes averted from Jay's, "Because she's my mom! Not his!"

Jay leaned back at her voice and she cringed a bit. She hadn't meant to make her voice that loud, "I'm sorry."

It felt like eternity as Jay studied her, and Skye tried not to squirm under her gaze, and sighed when Jay finally spoke up, "Do you mind if your mom and dad join us?"

Nodding, she jumped up and ran out of the room. She made her way downstairs and her dad made a surprised sound when he saw her, "Is everything okay sweetheart?"

She nodded, stopped in front of them by the couch, grabbed both their hands, and tugged, "Jay said she wants you to come join us."

Her parents looked at each other before standing up and letting Skye lead them to her room. She sat back down on the floor and her parents followed suit while Jay smiled at them, "Thank you for joining us. Skye mentioned something and I thought it would be better if we talked about it with you here."

Both of her parents nodded and looked expectantly at her and Skye grabbed onto her mom's pinky in response. It felt a little different with her parents listening in on her session with Jay but Skye shook it off. Jay gave her a pointed look and kept talking, "Skye, do you maybe want to tell your mom what you were feeling today?"

Her mom squeezed her pinky and Skye glanced down at their connected pinkies and swallowed thickly. She didn't want her mom to be mad at her for feeling bad things about her friends, so she
stayed silent even when her mom tightened her hold in her pinky.

Jay cleared her throat, "Well, she said that she felt a little jealous when she saw you taking care of Leo."

Her dad reached over and rubbed her back while her mom asked, "Why baby?"

"Because you're my mom, not his."

Her mom reached forward and brushed her bangs out of her eyes, "I was still your mom when I was taking care of Fitz, wasn't I?"

Skye reluctantly nodded, "Yeah."

Her dad poked her arm to get her attention and said, "We'll always be your parents Skye, no matter what. Even when we're taking care of someone else, we're still your parents."

She knew that and she also knew that her jealous feelings were irrational, but she couldn't stop herself from having them. She let out a harsh breath and grumbled in frustration, "I've just... waited a really long time to have a Mommy and Daddy like you guys and I don't want to share."

She crawled over and settled herself in her dad's lap before wrapping his arms around her waist and leaning back against him. She felt guilty for saying her bad thoughts out loud but it made her feel better being close to her dad.

Her mom schooted over so that she was facing them, leaned in close, and kissed her forehead, "You share us with Natasha, Trip, Wanda, and Pietro and you seem fine with that."

It was true, she never felt jealous when her parents paid attention to her siblings because her mom and dad were their mom and dad too.

Her dad swayed from side to side, "Listen sweetheart, sometimes your mom and I are going to pay attention to other kids or other people but that doesn't mean we love you any less. You're our little baby and we love you always."

Skye let out a breath at his words. She knew that her feelings of jealousy were unnecessary but it made her feel better hearing them say that she had nothing to worry about. She tightened her hold on her dad's hands around her waist and leaned forward towards her mom.

Her mom rubbed their noses together and Skye grinned, "I love you."

"We love you too."
Her mom and dad had been acting weird all week.

It had started right after her therapy session. They all had walked Jay downstairs and Skye had said goodbye to her before her parents asked her to go hang out with Nattie and Trip while they asked Jay something. She had slowly walked into the living room and hadn't heard their distant voices until she was sitting on the couch between her siblings. No matter how hard she tried to listen in on their conversation, she was unable to tell what their soft voices were saying. She had sighed, snuggled close to Nattie's side, and focused on the t.v., effectively forgetting about how strange her parents were acting.

But then their odd behavior had carried on throughout the weekend and into the week.

On Saturday, her mom had taken her and her friends to the castle playground and it had been super fun. Fitz had brought his ball so they had played soccer for a little while before playing freeze tag with some of the other kids that were around. Every time she had looked over to make sure her mom was still there, she was talking on the phone. The first time she looked over, her mom was sitting on the bench and talking calmly. The second time, she had looked more engaged in her conversation, waving her hands around and pushing her hair out of her face. The third time, she was up and walking around.

When they had finished playing, Skye had ran over to her, and once her mom saw her coming towards her, she said something into her phone and quickly put it away. Skye thought that that was weird but she was having too much fun with her friends to really care. Plus, her mom had smiled at her and hugged her tight, so she knew that she wasn't mad at her, and that was good enough for her.

On Sunday, some stranger had come over to their house.

Skye had been sitting at the table doing homework with her dad while Nattie and Trip were over at their friends’ houses. He was helping her with her math when the doorbell rang, causing her mom to spring up from the couch and make her way over to the door. Skye looked over to her dad and he gave her a clueless look, so she just shrugged and went back to trying to solve her subtraction problem.

The door shut and she got distracted when an unfamiliar voice got closer to her, so she set her pencil down and turned around in her chair to see what was going on.

Her mom was walking next to a nice looking lady who had gray hair and glasses perched on the tip of her nose. The stranger was smiling and carrying a clipboard with a giant stack of paper on top of it. She didn't know what they were saying, but she saw her mom point out the living room and the stranger looked around and inspected everything closely.

"…and here is our dining room. Over there is our kitchen,” Her mom said as she made her way towards them, helpfully pointing out each room.
Standing up from her seat, she scurried over to her mom, wrapped an arm around her leg, and tugged on her hand to get her attention. She didn't want to talk in front of the stranger but she really wanted to know what was going on, so she hoped that her mom understood her silent question.

Luckily, she and her mom were always on the same wavelength, because she looked down at her and said, “Hey baby, this is Mrs. Jefferson. She's going to be looking around our house.”

Mrs. Jefferson leaned down and held out her hand, "It's a pleasure to meet you Skye."

Reaching forward a bit hesitantly, she shook her hand and wondered how she knew her name. She figured that her mom had told Mrs. Jefferson about her, which made her feel happy and smile as she took her hand back and waved.

Mrs. Jefferson looked around, "I really like your house, would it be okay if you showed me around? I think you would be an excellent tour guide."

When she looked to her mom for direction, she got an encouraging nod, so she nodded and said, “Okay.”

Skye tugged on her mom's hand and pointed at the table, "This is our table where we eat all our food. I do my homework here too even though it's not really fun, but Mommy and Daddy help me with the hard stuff."

"That's very helpful of them. Do you like your school?"

"Yeah. My teacher is super cool and my friends are awesome! Two of them live next door so we play all the time." She said smiling, unable to stop herself from bragging a little.

Mrs. Jefferson smiled and Skye walked into the kitchen and made a grand gesture with her arms, "This is our kitchen."

They walked around and she hovered by her mom while Mrs. Jefferson inspected everything, she even wrote some things down on her notepad. Once she was done scribbling some things down, she looked out the kitchen window and pointed, "Is that a playground?"

"Yeah! My Daddy and brother built it for me!"

"Well that was very nice of them."

Skye nodded and watched as Mrs. Jefferson kept looking around the kitchen. She wasn’t sure what she was looking for but when she gave her mom a questioning look, she just smiled back at her. Shrugging, she led them out of the kitchen and up the staircase. She watched as Mrs. Jefferson inspected all of the pictures on the wall and Skye made sure to point at the picture that her dad had just hung up of her, Nattie, and Trip at Natasha's dance recital.

Turning towards the playroom, she opened the door and walked inside, "This is our playroom."

"This looks like a fun room! Do you play in here a lot?" Mrs. Jefferson asked.

"Yeah, I play games with Nattie and Trip and I like to color in here. We have a bunch of crayons and coloring books."

Mrs. Jefferson nodded and walked around the room. Skye noticed that she did that a lot.

They finished with the playroom and Skye pointed out her siblings’ rooms before leading them into
her room. She pushed open her door and waited for everyone to file in.

Mrs. Jefferson asked, "Is it alright if I look around?"

Skye nodded and followed the older lady as she walked around her room. She felt kind of nervous about some stranger looking at all her stuff, but Mrs. Jefferson never touched her things and that made her feel better.

Mrs. Jefferson stopped in front of her dollhouse and Skye looked at all her dolls lying around it, wishing she would’ve at least picked up her things a little because it looked very messy. Sighing, she stooped down, picked up Alice, and held the doll close to her chest.

Mrs. Jefferson smiled at her, "You like dolls?"

"Yeah."

"Would you mind introducing me?" She asked, motioning towards the dolls lying around them.

Her eyes lit up and she jumped at the opportunity to introduce her dolls to someone who was interested, "This is Alice. My sister gave her to me and she's a ballerina just like her. Alice lives in the dollhouse with her family but she sleeps with me at night."

She sat down on the floor and Mrs. Jefferson clambered down next to her while her mom stayed by the doorway and watched them.

Skye picked up another doll, "This is Perrie. She's Alice's best friend and she likes Nattie a lot."

She carefully picked up all of her dolls and introduced them to Mrs. Jefferson. She told her their names and some things about each doll. Mrs. Jefferson seemed genuinely interested in hearing everything she had to say and Skye found herself enjoying their conversation.

When she set down her last doll, Mrs. Jefferson gave her another smile and said, "You have a lot of beautiful friends here Skye. Do you like living here?"

The question startled her and she looked up and scrunched up her face at the random question, "Yeah, I love it here."

Mrs. Jefferson tilted her head, "I saw your picture over there on the wall. The one with the house that said you were safe here. Do you feel safe here?"

Skye picked up Alice again, held her close to her chest, and wondered where all of these questions were coming from, "Yes, I love it here and I love my family and I never want to leave."

Her earlier comfort started to disappear at the weird questions that Mrs. Jefferson was asking, and she looked over to her mom for a clue about what was going on. But, her mom didn't seem to be phased by the odd questions so Skye decided to shake it off. When she looked back, Mrs. Jefferson was standing up so Skye followed suit.

"Well, I think I've seen everything I need to see."

They both made their way over to her mom and Skye reached up and made grabby hands. Shaking her head fondly, her mom picked her up and cuddled her close before Mrs. Jefferson's voice caused them to look over, "Here you go. Just fill these out and send them in and you should get a phone call shortly after. If everything's in order, this is the last step in completing the process."
Her mom took the papers that Mrs. Jefferson offered her and folded them over so that Skye couldn't see what they said. She didn't really know what they were talking about, but then again, she never really knew what grown-ups were saying anyways.

She set her head on her mom's shoulder and tuned out their voices until they walked downstairs and said goodbye. After Mrs. Jefferson left, her mom brought her back to the dining room and joined her dad in helping her with her homework. She pushed her visit to the back of her mind so that she could focus on her dumb math homework.

Things went back to being relatively normal for the rest of the week. Skye would sometimes catch her parents talking to each other and they would stop when she got close to them.

On Tuesday she was watching Spongebob and wanted a juice box, so she made her way into the kitchen. She stopped short when she saw her whole family in the dining room, sitting around the table and talking to each other. They had all stopped when they spotted her and she couldn't help but feel left out, even when they all smiled at her and talked to her when she joined them.

Her family was acting weird and she didn't know what was going on and it was driving her crazy. She talked about it with Jay but that hadn't really calmed her nerves. Her therapist had just told her that everything would be alright, which hadn't helped her at all.

It was Thursday night and Skye couldn't take it anymore. She knew her family was hiding something from her and the longer their strange behavior went on, the more nervous and upset she got. What if they were mad at her? She didn't remember doing anything bad but maybe it was something she couldn't remember. What if they were getting tired of her? Skye's tummy felt like it had a giant knot in it when she thought about that.

She finally exploded when she walked into her parent’s bedroom to ask them a question about the t.v. remote. They had been talking and had stopped short when she walked into the room. They both greeted her happily but she knew they were hiding something.

She crossed her arms indignantly, "What's going on?"

Her parents glanced at each other before smiling at her. Her mom pushed a strand of hair behind her ears, "Nothing's going on baby."

Skye wanted to believe her but she knew that her mom was lying.

Her mom never lied.

Her eyes started to well up with tears, "You're lying!" She stomped her foot and couldn't stop her tears from falling, "You're lying to me! I know something's going on! You're keeping a secret from me!"

Her parents looked at each other again and Skye started talking before they could say anything. This whole week, her nervousness had been building and she really needed to know what was going on, "Did I do something wrong? Are you mad at me? I don't think I did anything bad but I'm sorry if I did! I didn't mean to!"

She sniffled and angrily ran a hand over her cheeks, not exactly sure why she was crying but her tears just made her feel more helpless. She didn't like feeling this way.
Her dad held his hands out towards her, "We aren't mad at you Skye. We're sorry, we just…" He glanced back at her mom, who nodded at him, before saying, “You're right. We were lying to you.”

Skye sucked in a breath. She knew it.

Her mom motioned her forward and she cautiously climbed onto the bed, "So… I didn't do anything wrong?"

"No baby, you've been perfect."

"Then what's going on?" She asked, sitting down across from her parents.

Her mom gave her dad a helpless look before she let out a big breath and her shoulders sagged a little, "We're sorry we've been hiding something from you but it's not bad, I promise."

Her dad nodded, "We were going to tell you tomorrow. Wanda and Pietro were going to be on video chat and we were going to make your favorite dinner…"

Skye scrunched up her nose, confused about what they were telling her. She felt relieved that her parents weren't mad at her but she was still wasn’t sure what was going on, "What?"

Her mom took a deep breath, "Skye, we love you so much. You know that. And we wanted to ask you if you'd like to be a part of our family? Officially."

She paused and processed what her mom had said. She was still confused and she stared at her mom and raised an eyebrow, "I thought… I already was?"

Her parents both laughed, and while they both sounded kind of nervous, it was genuine. Her dad reached out and pulled her closer to them. He pressed a kiss to the top of her head and said, "You are sweetheart. You definitely are. What we're saying is that we would like to adopt you."

She'd waited so long to hear those words that it didn't feel real. She stared dumbly at him and questioned, "You want to adopt me?"

"We would like that very much."

A slow smile spread across her face as the gravity of the situation settled around her. They wanted to adopt her! They weren't mad at her and nothing was wrong, they had just been acting weird because they were trying to adopt her and wanted to keep it a secret until tomorrow.

A thought suddenly crossed her mind and she sat up straighter, "Will anything be different?"

Her mom shook her head, "Not really, everything would stay exactly the same except we would be your parents on paper too."

Skye felt herself start to smile again and she slowly stood up on the bed before looking down at her parents, "You want to adopt me and be my Mommy and Daddy forever, for real?"

They both nodded and smiled at her and even though she knew what she had just seen, she couldn't believe it. Well actually, she could believe it. This family had felt like hers for awhile now. She had gotten so comfortable around them that it hadn't really crossed her mind that they could take it a step further and adopt her. She was happy to just live in the moment but this was one of the best things that had ever happened to her.

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes!" She screamed, jumping up and down on the bed.
She could hardly contain her excitement and tackled her dad when he held his arms open for her. She launched herself at him causing him to fall back and her to land on top of him. He started tickling her sides and she shrieked with laughter before wriggling around until she could crawl off him and hide on her mom’s lap. Her mom wrapped her arms around her waist and Skye held them against her. She sighed in contentment as she felt her mom press a kiss to the top of her head and hold her closer, "We're so happy."

Skye's cheeks were starting to hurt from smiling so much but she didn't even care, "Me too."

Her dad sat up and she grabbed onto his hand as her mom rocked them from side to side. They all sat contentedly in silence until she saw Nattie and Trip poke their heads into the room.

Natasha stepped inside first, "We heard loud voices and laughter. We're assuming everyone's alright."

Skye nodded excitedly and she heard her dad say, "Skye said yes."

Trip smirked as he made his way over to them, "Of course she did, how could she not? We're awesome."

Natasha nodded and both of them climbed onto the bed and joined them. Nattie reached forward and brushed Skye's bangs out of her eyes, an action so familiar that it was immediately comforting to her, "Welcome to the family маленькaя звезда."

Skye's couldn't stop smiling and suddenly she thought of something, "I have a last name now."

She never thought she would have one of those.

Her mom squeezed her arms tighter around her waist, "You sure do."

Skye looked around at her family and couldn't believe how incredibly lucky she was. Never in a million years did she think that she would have her own family, let alone one that she absolutely loved, and here she was surrounded by two loving parents. She never really wanted brothers or sisters but she had managed to acquire the four most amazing siblings she could have ever asked for. She had imagined that this would happen to her, dreamed of it mostly at nights in the orphanage, but she never thought it actually would.

She didn't know what she did to deserve all of this but she wasn't going to question it. Her family was smiling at her and they loved her and they wanted her.

Her dad reached over and ran a hand over her hair, "Welcome to the family, Skye Coulson."

End Notes

Gimme your thoughts pls! Thank you so much for reading! xx

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