Summary

Jeff had never imagined that his wife would lose their entire life together. He'd never even imagined that she was still alive. But when he meets a complete stranger in his wife's skin, can he accept it for what it is and fight to bring her memories back?
Chapter 1

Jeff kicked and struggled in their grasp, blind as to where they were taking him but knowing anyway. He had to get away, get back to his boys and look after them. Wherever he was, it wasn’t safe. Not if the man he expected was around.

“Well,” The exact voice he didn’t want to hear started as he was forced down into a seat, “The great Jeff Tracy.”

He flinched as the sack was pulled from his head, the sudden brightness of the room blinding him for a moment. Glaring at the man sat across from him, Jeff rolled his shoulders, “What the hell do you want?”

Pressing his fingertips together, the Hood sat back in his seat, “Now, now, I’m here to do you a favour,”

He pulled the drawer open and lifted out a holoprojector, setting it on the dark mahogany between them as he looked Jeff dead in the eye. Wordlessly, he turned the hologram on, not daring to miss the look on the other man’s face when he realised what he was showing him. The other man shook his head, his tired eyes widening at the video, “No. That’s not possible. Where did you get this?”

The Hood sat forward, his smile cruel and hard, “I took it myself.”

Pushing himself to his feet, Jeff lunged forward, “Where is she?”

“Ah ah ah,” The Hood warned as he was pulled back into his seat, “You should be grateful Jeff, I plucked her from the water before you could even start searching for her.” He tutted and sat back in his seat, taunting Jeff with his eyes, “Too busy saving other lives to save your own wife.”

Jeff glared at the Hood, his steel blue eyes hard and cold, “It wasn’t like that.” He had been the only one to hear her final words, the words that she knew were to be her last. Her instructions left no room for argument as she had yelled above the winds to save the others and to look after the boys.

He’d never been one to ignore his wife.

The Hood shrugged, pushing his seat away to stand and stroll around the space behind the desk, “You see Jeff, that was exactly what it looked like to me, a man, leaving his wife to drown in the sea.” He paused and turned back to where two of his minions were pinning Jeff in his seat, “Is that not what it was?”

“The fall alone should have killed her!” Jeff snapped back, trying to lunge forward, not wanting to hear the lies that spouted from the Hood’s mouth, “There was nothing I could do to get to her in time!”
“Well,” The Hood stated, “You’re obviously wrong somewhere.”

Jeff shook his head, Lee and Val had been there, they’d heard his scream for Lucy as she’d been pushed over the cliff by an uprooted sapling. It was chance that they’d been there to stop him from going over after her. They shouldn’t have even been there, Lee was meant to be on the moon, and Val only helping as part of the GDF. Neither of them should have to have seen their best friend die, not in that fashion.

“All this is besides the point,” The Hood waved his hand in a dismissive fashion, “Lucille survived the fall, those cliffs were always used as a diving spot, the water was plenty deep enough.”

“What happened to her?” Jeff snarled, wanting answers more than anything, “Why didn’t she find us?”

The Hood smiled and shook his head, “She didn’t remember Jeff.” He paused, leaning over the desk as he dropped his voice, “The human mind is a complex thing.” He smirked, as if he was enjoying sharing the news, “If you leave someone without air for long enough, or hit their head hard enough, memories have a bad habit of getting lost.”

“Though,” He continued, standing straight again, “It is an excellent chance for someone to start afresh, a new name, a new job, and no memories of who they once were.” He gestured to the holovid, still playing in a loop on the edge of the desk, “So she became an art teacher, got a house, new friends.”

Jeff shook his head, one thing still not adding up, “Why are you telling me all this? What do you achieve from it all?”

“You have two options, Jeff,” The Hood explained as he sunk back into his seat, “Go home, forget all about this, leave her to carry on her life as if nothing happened.” He paused and pushed the holovid forward, “Or, I will take you to her, and you can try to get her to remember.”

Jeff nodded as it slotted into place, “And not tell the boys where I am.”

The Hood smiled, “Yes, leave your precious island, your machines, and your son’s alone to wonder just where you’ve gone.”

“They’d only follow me--”

Jeff was cut off by the door being flung open and two minions pushed to the floor, “You’ve got nowhere to run, Hood.”

The Hood scoffed as he stood up, “You’ve said that before Colonel Casey, I wouldn’t be so certain.”

Before any more could be said, the room filled with smoke and a wicked cackle. Jeff ducked away from the source of the smoke bomb, coughing as he screwed his eyes shut. Someone gripped his forearm, dragging him away from the cloud that had consumed them. His eyes stung as he was pulled into the fresh air, part from the smoke, part from the blinding sunlight.

“Val,” He coughed, “We have one helluva situation.”
Val Casey sat back and folded her arms, “And how do you know that he’s telling the truth? I mean, the Hood isn’t exactly known for being helpful.”

She raised an eyebrow as Jeff shook his head, “He thinks IR will be weaker without me there, that it’ll be easier to take ahold. I can’t give the boys false hope Val, but equally, I have to try and get her back.”

Val sighed and shook her head, “I still don’t believe it, there’s so many things that don’t add up.”

Jeff nodded in agreement, he was still taking the news in himself, though he wasn’t sure he’d fully believe it until he had seen the evidence for himself. He couldn’t believe that she didn’t remember everything they had had together, all the things they had gone through as a couple. Val reached across the space and squeezed his shoulder, “It might not be as easy as walking up to her and everything’s fixed, you do realise that, don’t you?”

Jeff shrugged, “I can but hope.”

Val shook her head, “Jeff, you can’t. This is exactly why we aren’t going to tell the boys, you can’t get your hopes up any more than you’re getting theirs up.” She looked to him pleadingly, “I won’t watch one of my oldest friends go through all that again, not when it almost destroyed you last time.”

Jeff looked up with a small smile, he rested his hand over Val’s and nodded, “I won’t let it Val, I’ll be alright.”

She still wasn’t convinced, what Jeff Tracy said, and what Jeff Tracy did were two vastly different things. If Lucy was alive, and if she didn’t remember him at first sight, Val wasn’t sure what Jeff would do. It could crush him, was her instinctive thought, or it could leave him happier than she had seen him in almost thirteen years.

“You just worry about the Hood and the boys,” Jeff told her, “We don’t know if he’ll try and go after them, try and tell them the truth or something. They can’t find out, it’s imperative Val.”

She nodded, “I get it Jeff, I’ll handle it. You have to be careful though, do you understand?”

Jeff rolled his eyes at her fussing, “You’re worse than my mother,” He uttered as he stood, “I can manage my half--”

“I have to worry about you,” Val cut him off, giving him a stern look. Both knew that Jeff only listened to four people in the world, one was his Mother, one was stuck on the moon, and the third had no idea who he was. Leaving just her to knock some sense into him. Lucy and Lee would never forgive her if she let something happen to Jeff. It was her duty to look after him, talk him out of any half brained plans.

So why was she letting him go to Lucy?

“Are you sure that address isn’t just a trap?” She asked him, looking to the note in his hand, “It could just be--”

“No,” Jeff shook his head, “I have a feeling.”
She had to scoff, oh yes, Jeff’s infamous ‘sixth sense’ that couldn’t be argued with. It was probably best to not question him on his feeling, but she had to be sure.

“I want to come with you, just to check it out,” She told him, leaving no room for argument, “That way if it is a trap, you’ve got back up.”

Jeff sighed as he stood, giving her a single nod as he took out the note, “Let’s go then.”

She stood and snatched the note from him, knowing better than to let him drive her machines.

“I hope we’re not going to regret this,” She sighed as she walked past Jeff, “Or I’m going to have some serious words with the Hood.”

Jeff turned to follow her, his voice as hard as his eyes when he spoke, “Not if I get to him first.”
“Remember your projects are due in by five o’clock on Monday!” Ms Thomas called over the general chatter of the class as they packed their things away, “If you need any last minute help or advice, you all know where my office is.”

She turned to begin tidying up her paints from the class, knowing better than to leave them to dry up. The door behind her creaked open when it was pushed open, “Hey Mom.”

“Shouldn’t you be in class?”

“Study period.” Sally responded as she hopped up onto a stool, “I’m ahead with all my work any way.”

“You can always do more,” Lucy told her as she dumped the paints in the sink, “Or are you after something?”

Sally smiled to her mother sweetly, leaning forward precariously on the stool, “Please will you come down to music and help me with this composition? I’ve been working on it all week and I’m just stuck.”

Lucy looked around the mess of the room before turning back to her only child, “If you help me tidy up, then I’ll help you.”

Sally sighed, throwing her head back in despair as she groaned, “Isn’t it the cleaners job to do that?”

Lucy folded her arms and raised an eyebrow at her daughter, “You’re not above helping miss.”

Sally bit her lip as she hopped down from the stool, trying not to giggle at the streak of yellow her mother had just painted on her arm. Lucy was trained in the art of face reading though, and Sally’s smirk told her something was funny. Following her daughter’s gaze, Lucy looked down to her arm and groaned, “You could have warned me!”

“And miss the fun of you putting paint all up your arm?” Sally raised an eyebrow, “No way.”

Lucy smiled as her daughter pulled her sleeves up and went to the sink, “I’ll wash if you put away.”

She followed her daughter to the sink, wrapping an arm around her shoulders and squeezing gently as her thumb came up to her cheek, painting a pink stripe right down to her jaw, “Great idea.”

“Mom!” Sally exclaimed with a laugh, “I have to go to class after this!”

Lucy washed her hands, picking up the cloth by the sink and soaking it, “It’ll wash off.” She wiped Sally’s cheek, scrubbing a little too hard on purpose, waiting for her to push her away.

“Mo-om.” Sally groaned, “Stop it.”
Both were quiet as the tannoy buzzed out an announcement, “Can Ms Thomas come to the main reception please?”

Sally raised her eyebrows, “Uh oh,” She sang, “Mom’s in trouble.”

“You get on with that,” Lucy ignored her, “I’ll be back soon and then we can go to the music department for you.”

“Thanks Mom!” Sally called with a smile as Lucy collected her bag and headed off to where she had been called.

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Jeff looked to Val as they were shown into an office to wait for Lucille, “I hope this is right.”

“You’re not the only one,” Val uttered as she leant on the wall, “Have you thought what you’re going to do if this doesn’t work?”

Jeff shrugged, “I’ll worry about that if it comes to it.”

Val opened her mouth to argue, knowing that he was likely to be disappointed. As the Hood had pointed out to him, the mind was complex, she doubted that one look would be all it took for Lucille to remember everything. They weren’t even sure that she was the same Lucille they had both known from the air force and Tracy Industries, *their* Lucille had never shown an interest in working with children. Of course, she had loved their boys and had chosen to look after them full time, putting her engineering design career on hold until International Rescue had come about.

Before she could speak, the door was pushed open, Jeff stood from his seat, his jaw dropping. Val’s eyes widened in surprise, it was her.

“Lucille,” Jeff breathed, “Oh god, Luce --”

The woman looked between them, a bemused expression crossing her face, “Can I help you guys?”

Jeff stopped in stunned silence, as Val had expected he wasn’t taking it as well as he had promised. Taking control of the situation, Val stepped forward, extending her hand, “Ms Thomas, my name’s Val Casey, I’m part of the GDF,” She glanced back to Jeff, “This is one of my associates that is charged with liaising with international organisations.”

Lucy looked between them with a frown, “Is there a problem? Have I done something?”

Turning back to Lucy, Val smiled reassuringly and shook her head, “Not at all, we just wanted to ask a couple of questions about your past. I’ve been told that you moved here twelve years ago, yes?”

Relaxing a little, Lucy nodded, moving to sit on one of the sofa’s that lined the room, “Yeah, erm, I had an accident just before that, lost my memory of everything. Nobody was looking for me, so I got a new identity, a new name, a new life,” She shrugged and looked around her, “I’ve just worked my
way up from there really.”

“And you remember nothing from before that?” Val asked her gently, “No dreams, flashbacks, nothing?”

Lucy shook her head again, “I wish there was,” She sighed and stood up, “There’s just nothing, I have no idea who I used to be.” Looking over her shoulder back out to the bustling corridor, she smiled softly, “I am who I am now though.”

“And are you happy?” Val asked.

After a moment, Lucy nodded, “Oh yes, of course I’m happy, I have everything I could possibly need.” She hesitated as the man behind Val stood and stormed out of the room. Looking back to Val she frowned, “Is there something I need to know?”

Val watched Jeff go with careful eyes, there had only ever been one thing in his life that could truly upset him the way he just had been. Only one person could cause him to lose his cool as he just had.

“Forgive my colleague,” Val stated as she looked back to Lucy, “He’s had a hard time of it all recently.”

Lucy nodded, “I hope things get better for him,” She looked towards the door, “He seemed awfully quiet when I came in.”

Val wanted to groan, as was the norm, Jeff had dropped her in his mess to sort out. She’d spend the rest of the day wondering just why she’d let him talk her into this. 

*Because she was your best friend too.* A small voice niggled in her head, “Yeah,” Val sighed to herself as she looked up to the woman she recognised but didn’t know, “He’s just had a shock is all, he’ll be fine.”

Lucy looked sympathetically towards the door, “I hope he’s alright,” She paused, blushing as she looked back to Val, “Some surprises can take you awfully off guard.”

Smiling, Val nodded in agreement. It was exactly something that their Lucy would have said, and that she had said at least with one of the boys on the way.

When she looked back, Lucy was smiling, “You tell him from me, some of the best surprises are some of the scariest ones at first.”

Resisting the urge to laugh, Val stood with another gentle smile, “I will be sure to, thank you Luce.” She paused at the door, one hand stretched out to pull it open, when a thought hit her, “You wouldn’t have any idea who Jeff Tracy was, would you?”

She kept her shoulder straight, despite her disappointment, when Lucy shook her head, “No, I’m sorry. Oh, and it’s just Lucy, that’s all it’s been for as long as I can remember.”

“Don’t worry.” Val forced a smile, hiding her sinking heart. She pulled the door open, “Thank you for your time, Lucy.”
As she stepped out of the door, she blew out a long breath, this wasn’t going to be easy at all. She spotted Jeff, pacing in the corridor, uttering to himself. If they weren’t careful, the normally cool headed business man was going to cause them serious problems.

Heading towards him, she grabbed his arm, not stopping to talk and instead dragging him along back to the car.

“Get in,” She uttered, pushing him towards the passenger door as she skirted around the bonnet. Pulling the door open with a little too much force, she slipped in, glaring at Jeff as she slammed the door. He didn’t look at her, instead choosing to face forward with his arms folded like a scolded child.

“That,” Val started, “Was not good. How are we meant to do this if you won’t even stand in the same room as her?”

Jeff shook his head, “She didn’t even know me Val. She’s a complete stranger!”

“So are you to her!” Val snapped back, “Get your fucking act together Jeff, otherwise you’re never going to get your wife back and the Hood has got what he bloody wanted.”

“What do you want me to do Val!?” Jeff snapped back, “Do you think it’s easy watching my wife who doesn’t know me?”

Val had her response ready, low and quiet as she murmured, “And do you think it’s easy talking to my best friend as if I never knew her?” She started the engine with a sigh, “This is what we’re going to do --”
Chapter 3

In memory of Sylvia Anderson, the original voice of Lady Penelope and the voice of Aunt Sylvia in the new episodes. RIP M'Lady.

Chapter 3

“I understand -- yes, that’s right. You’ve been very helpful. -- Yes, thank you. -- Goodbye.” Jeff sighed as he hung up the call, “More of the same, anything could trigger memories, but it seems the most likely to work is repeating memories.”

Val sat up from where she had been lounging on the arm chair, “You and Luce spent so much time together, where do we even start with that?”

Jeff sighed as he leant back in his seat, “The only place to start,” He looked across to Val, his eyes tired and heavy, “The beginning.”

“It won’t be easy,” Val murmured, still aware of his earlier reaction, “We don’t know how long it might take.”

Jeff nodded, “I’ll have to hide from the boys, if they found out that she’s alive but doesn’t remember…” He trailed off with a shake of his head, “I don’t want to think about what that would do to them.”

“I’ll do what I can,” Val sighed reluctantly, “But I can’t promise anything.”

He looked to his oldest friend and smiled softly, “Thanks, for everything. I shouldn’t have lost it earlier, I didn’t think it would be that hard.”

“Forget it,” Val murmured, “Neither of us realised just how hard this would be.” She met his gaze, “Are you sure you don’t want the boys to know?”

Jeff stood, turning to look out over the darkness of the city in the full length window of the penthouse, “It’ll be a distraction if they know. They’d be too interested in what was going on here that they’d lose focus on the rescues.”

He saw Val raise a sceptical eyebrow in the reflection, “And you vanishing won’t be a distraction?”

Jeff sighed, closing his eyes to try and ignore the look she was giving him. Yes, he felt guilty for just vanishing, but he couldn’t see any other way. Surely a temporary disappearance was the better of the two options? Val could reassure them, Grandma would keep an eye on them for him.

“They’ll realise soon enough that they can manage without me,” He replied, “It’ll only be temporary.”
Val sat forward, “Just how temporary though, Jeff?” She met his gaze in the glass and could see it was already niggling him, “Those boys have already lost their mother, Alan barely remembers her. Don’t forget how hard that was on them.”

She resisted the urge to add how he had abandoned them during those first few weeks, how he’d hidden away from his sons when they needed him most. He was already hurting enough, she could see that.

“I know, it’ll be hard for them,” He murmured eventually, “Don’t think it won’t be hard for me though, they’re my world, I’d do anything for them to be happy. You should know that Val.”

As he turned back to her, Val saw it, for the first time, he looked truly old. His eyes were a darker blue than normal, heavier and more creased around the edges than she was used to. His shoulders sagged in a way that she rarely ever saw and he was leaning on the window as a support.

His voice cracked as he rested his head against the glass, “I just want us to be a family again.”

Val stood and walked over to him, wrapping an arm around his shoulders, “And you will be, just don’t go fooling yourself into thinking it’ll only take a few days.”

She shoved him gently with a smile, “It’ll be like highschool all over again.”

Jeff smiled ruefully, “But hopefully a little faster.”

Val nodded, “Exactly. Make her fall in love with you all over again, you’re still the same fox you always were, you can still flirt your way through anything.”

She laughed at the face Jeff pulled, “Do you know what you’re making me sound like?”

“Yes,” She grinned, pulling away, “You didn’t get the ‘most girlfriends award’ in highschool for any other reason.”

Jeff rolled his eyes with a smile, “The pair of us were blind.”

“You don’t need to tell me that,” Val laughed, “I could see all along.”

Jeff sighed, looking back out to the city as Val pulled away. He couldn’t help but imagine the woman he had seen, alone in her bed somewhere completely unaware of what family she had. The thought of her being so alone scared him slightly, anything could happen to her and who would be there to notice?

Val turned towards the sofa’s, “Stop worrying Jeff, she’ll be fine. You should get some sleep, we have a lot to plan tomorrow.”

Jeff nodded, “I’ll go in a minute.”

He looked back to the city, wishing things were as simple a they had once been. If only he’d never come up with the idea or International Rescue, Luce may never had died then. His only hope was that his boys could forgive him for what he planned to do.
Sally sighed dramatically as she dropped her plate into the sink and reached for the rubber gloves, “My point is, you never came back! You promised that you’d help me with this composition.”

“And I will!” Lucy exclaimed as she scooped the remainders of the night’s lasagne into a tub for freezing, “What’s stopping us from doing it now?”

“I had plans,” Sally sighed, “And now I’m going to have to change those plans.”

Lucy rolled her eyes, “I’m sure that’s not the end of the world.”

Sally smiled as her mother nudged her with her hip, “No, I just like being a pain.”

“I never would have guessed.” Lucy tutted as she shut the freezer, “I’ll do the dishes later, you go and get your music and we’ll see what we can do.”

Sally grinned as she pulled the gloves off, “Thanks Mom!”

Lucy shook her head as her daughter sprinted off to her room, so enthusiastic about life and the things she loved. She’d had nothing but praise from her teachers, the perfect student they had called her. Despite the shock of having her, they had all told Lucy what a good job she had done of bringing her daughter up alone. She herself had been surprised at just how naturally motherhood had come to her. It had never seemed as hard as everyone made it out to be, everything just came to her as she went along. If she could do it all again though, she wouldn’t have it any differently. She may have had plenty of friends at work, but Sally was by far the closest friend she had.

“Are you coming mom?”

Looking up, Lucy smiled, her daughter was already sat at the piano on the far wall of the apartment. She set the lasagna dish in the sink to soak and wiped her hands, “Yeah,” She sighed, “Play what you’ve got so far.”

Sally nodded, looking to the sheets of music she had set out on the stand and setting her fingers off, gliding over the plastic keys. Lucy listened contently, perching on the edge of the stool as she watched the flow of her daughters long fingers.

“Mom?” Sally asked quietly as she continued to play, “How come you never married?”

The question surprised Lucy, they’d never talked about anything like that before. She’d never really thought about it herself, it had never really come up and she’d never met anyone who had taken her fancy.

She rested an arm around her daughter's shoulders, “I can’t say I’ve ever really thought about it Sal.” She rested her head on top of Sally’s, “Why’d you ask?”

Sally shrugged as she finished the music and continued onto another, “Some of the girls were just talking about it today, it got me wondering.”
Lucy shrugged, “I never came across the right man I suppose. Was is bothering you?”

Without hesitation, Sally shook her head, “No, no,” She looked up to her Mom with a smile, “I love it being just you and me. I just wonder sometimes what my Dad was like.”

Lucy smiled softly, stroking a hand down her daughter’s long honey-brown hair, “I do too sweetie,” She sighed and kissed the side of her head, “I’d do anything to find out who your dad was.”

Finally, Sally stopped playing, turning on the stool to wrap her arms around her mother’s neck, “I know you would Mom,” She rested her head against Lucy’s shoulder, “But you and me, we’re an awesome team.”

Lucy smiled and hugged her daughter back just as tightly, “Too right kiddo, and I wouldn’t have it any other way.”

Something in her head niggled her though, and she was quick to add on, “Would you mind if I did meet someone?”

Sally grinned as she looked up, “As long as you’re happy Mom, so am I.”

Lucy smiled and squeezed her daughter tight, “Me too Sal, me too.”
Chapter 4

Vall looked to Jeff as he opened the car door, “Please don’t screw this up?”

Jeff pretended to look offended as he pulled the door back closed a fraction, “How can I screw up buying coffee?”

Val shrugged, shaking her head, “I don’t know, you’d probably be creepy and order her coffee for her without her telling you what she wants.”

Jeff frowned, “When did I ever do that?”

“See,” Val smirked, “You don’t even realise you’re doing it.”

She looked forward, spotting the woman they had been waiting for, sporting the same jeans and blouse style she had always gone for. The only thing that was different, was her hair, up in a knot instead of it’s usual short bob.

“You’d better go,” She nodded towards Luce, “Otherwise you’ll be too late.”

Jeff nodded, slipping out of the car and slamming the door. He crossed the road just behind Luce and entered the coffee shop she seemed to go into daily. The timing was perfect, she was just placing her order as he made it to the counter. Sliding in next to her, he slid a bill across the varnished wood, “Add a cappuccino to that please.” He looked across to the red haired woman and smiled, what he hoped was charmingly, “As an apology for my actions the other day.”

Her face formed into one of understanding, “You needn’t do that,” She insisted, “Ms Casey explained your situation to me.”

Glancing sideways out of the window Jeff narrowed his eyes, “Did she now?”

Luce bit her lip, “Oh goodness, I’ve not cause any trouble have I? I didn’t mean to--”

“No,” Jeff cut her off, “Not at all. I just didn’t expect her to mention it to you.”

“Oh, right.”

There was a moment of silence between the two, each looking for somewhere to look other than at the other. Jeff cursed himself, trying to recall just what he had done as the teenage flirt he was apparently known as. He never remembered it being hard, so why was it so different now?

He was saved by the waiter, setting their drinks down on the counter, “One double chocolate mocha, and one cappuccino.”

“Thank you,” They both smiled, each taking their drink. Jeff looked to Lucy as she shrugged her bag back onto her shoulder, “So, you never liked the taste of proper coffee?”
Biting her lip, Lucy shook her head, “No, the taste was always too much for me.” She nodded to his drink, “Not like you though.”

Jeff smiled, “A business man needs his coffee.”

Lucy raised an eyebrow, “Business?”

He nodded again, “I have a big role in Tracy Industries.” He explained briefly, holding the door of the shop as she stepped through, “And you’re a teacher, of what?”

Lucy slipped through the doors and out onto the sidewalk, only pausing to let him catch up, “Art, mostly,” She shrugged, “I help out with music when I’m needed.”

Jeff smiled, unsurprised by her choice of subjects, “Do you enjoy it?”

Again she shrugged, “I guess,” She pointed to a crossing, signalling that they would be using it, “I love the kids, and I enjoy art…” She trailed off with a shake of her head.

“It’s hard work?” Jeff offered

“Partly,” She nodded, “and partly, I feel like there should be something more, like I’m missing something.”

Jeff watched her as they paused at the crossing, her auburn hair shone in the sunlight, as it always had. Her brown eyes though, they held a sadness that Jeff had never seen before, and he wasn’t sure she knew it was there.

She went to step out, and out of habit Jeff looked again to see just if it was clear. He stepped out after her, following her pathway towards the school.

“If you don’t like it,” He started as they fell into step again, “Why do you stay?”

Her steps slowed as she looked up to him, her facing saying she didn’t know, but her words insisting she was fine, “The kids love me, and it’s a financially stable job, which is what I need.”

She slowed as they reached the entrance gates to the school, Jeff turned to face her, “If you’re not happy, money is no reason to stay. I’m certain you could find another job someplace else.”

Lucy nodded, “Maybe, but I’m settled here,” She looked up to him, “After my start, a move would just be too much.”

Jeff could see her reasoning, this woman still didn’t know who she was and she was too afraid to try and find out. Maybe he had got himself into an uphill struggle.

She turned to leave, “If you come this way every morning, I’ll buy the drinks tomorrow?”

He smiled, maybe it wouldn’t be after all, “That would be lovely.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow then…” She trailed off, only then realising she didn’t know his name.

“Jeff,” He supplied, “You can call me Jeff.”
She nodded once, “I’ll see you tomorrow Jeff.”

“I look forward to it, Lucy.”

He watched her go for a moment before continuing along the sidewalk, pulling out his comms and opening a line to Casey. She had said that she’d wait for him outside of the school, but as far as he could see, she was nowhere in sight.

“Where--” He started, only to be cut off almost immediately.

“Jeff you need to go and clear out that pent house,” She told him, “Clean it, wipe it, get rid of anything on the security.”

“Val?” He frowned, she sounded worried.

She blew out a long breath, making the line crackle before she spoke, “Scott rang me just after you got out of the car, wanted me to help in the search.” Jeff could hear the tension in her voice, “I had to head to the nearest airport and tell them I was on my way, if I didn’t know where you were that is what I would have done, they’d have been sceptical otherwise.” She explained in a rush.

Listening carefully Jeff could hear the engines of one of his jets, he raised an eyebrow to himself, “And how are you going to explain being in a TI jet?”

“I told them I’d gone to meet you at one of the offices.” She replied without missing a beat, “Now listen, if you’re not careful, the boys are going to have found you before you can make any sort of move. I don’t know why the hell we aren’t telling them, but if you’re insistent that we do things your way, then you’d better do just as I say.”

Jeff uttered a curse, “Right. I’ll go and shift everything, where are you going?”

“To help in the search for your ship.” She uttered back, “The boys would find it too suspicious if I didn’t help.”

Jeff nodded, “Okay, just be careful, and see if you can try and call them off.”

“What chance do I have of that?” Val shook her head, “They’re your boys.”

“Tell them I’d want their resources focused elsewhere.” Jeff told her, “They’ll listen to that.”

Val sighed, knowing it wouldn’t be as simple as just telling them anything. The boys were going to grieve, and she needed to make sure that nothing dangerous happened to them in that process, at least the best she could. Jeff just didn’t understand what his vanishing would do to them, he knew his boys were alive and well. All his boys knew was that their father was gone, possibly to never come home.

“I’ll do what I can Jeff, but I can’t promise anything for you.” She sighed, “I have to go, just get on with sorting the penthouse out.”

Before he could respond she had hung up, much more worried about stopping the boys from doing anything irrational before she could get to them.
Chapter 5

Sally frowned as her mother checked over her shoulder for the fifth time that evening, “What’s got you worried?”

Jumping a little, Lucy looked back to her daughter, “What? I have no idea—”

“Pull the other one Mom,” Sally rolled her eyes, “That’s the fifth time you’ve looked behind us since we left school.”

Lucy ducked her head, feeling foolish for getting caught out by her daughter. She shook her head, hoping to look reassuring as she lifted her bag higher onto her shoulder, “It’s nothing, I was just hoping to see someone.”

Looking forward again, Sally shrugged, “That sounds like half a story, but okay.”

Lucy laughed with a shake of her head, glad that Sally was willing to accept what she was given and leave it at that. She didn’t really know the man that had bought her coffee that morning, something about him though had struck a chord with her. It wasn’t the time to be thinking about that though, Sally would be leaving for a trip to Florida a few hours later and there was an important conversation they needed to have.

“I talked with your tutors today,” She started, watching her daughter to try and gauge her reaction.

“You’re a teacher at my school-- one of the smallest schools in the county--” Sally shrugged, “I’d be surprised if you didn’t talk with some of my tutors on a daily basis.”

Lucy sighed, “They think you could jump ahead at High School if you did a bit of work over the summer.”

She looked to Sally and raised an eyebrow when she didn’t respond, “Don’t you think that’d be good? You’d be able to make new friends, and do more subjects you enjoy.”

Sally shook her head, “I guess.”

Lucy sighed, “Sal, I know you want to be homeschooled, but you know it’s not feasible right now.”

There was so much she wished she could give her daughter, so many little things that she wished she could do. A school teacher's wage was better than it once had been, but it was still far from enough. Even Sally’s trip to Florida had been a push financially.

Sally scuffed her shoe on the sidewalk, “I know, I’m sorry, I shouldn’t try and make you feel guilty.” She looked up, “What if the people in my new class don’t like me though Mom? Because I’m younger, and I’m smarter. That’s why all the girls are horrid to me now.”
“I know,” Lucy sighed as they turned into the apartment building and started up the stairs, “But you have to do what’s best for you.”

Sally rolled her eyes, “So you always tell me.” She paused, as they walked across the hallway to their door, “It’s not so easy when it leaves you lonely and with no friends.”

Unlocking the door, Lucy squeezed her daughter’s shoulder, “One day, you’ll have lots of friends, and you’ll wonder why you were worrying.”

Sally smiled slightly, “I guess you’re right Mom.”

Lucy laughed, “Of course I am! Mothers are always right.”

She looked down as her phone buzzed, “I’ve just got to get this, it’s Mia.”

Sally pulled a face, “I thought you fell out with her?”

Lucy shook her head, “We sorted it out.”

She turned away, pretending to ignore her daughters roll of the eyes as she answered the call.

“Hey Mia,”

“Lucy!” Mia exclaimed, “It’s been far too long since we went out for coffee, you wouldn’t fancy meeting up at that place on your way to work tomorrow? We can catch up whilst we walk in.”

Lucy sat down on the sofa, watching as Sally dumped her bag and headed into her room. She hid a sigh as she shook her head at her daughter, “That would be nice, with everything going on at the moment, I’ve not had chance to come and see you.”

Mia laughed, “Oh, don’t worry about that! We’ll get chance at some point, and Sally’s away this week isn’t she?”

“Yes,” Lucy glanced in the direction of her daughter’s room, “She’s just gone to finish packing now, then I’ll have to take her to the airport.”

Mia sounded a little too pleased when she replied, “It’ll be nice for you to have a break.”

Lucy sighed as she kicked off her shoes and curled up on the sofa. Yes, she would enjoy the free time, but equally she knew she would miss the company of her best friend.

“I guess,” She murmured, “It’ll be strange having the apartment to myself.”

Mia tutted, making Lucy roll her eyes, “Enjoy it whilst you can Lucy!”

Lucy sighed, so many people just didn’t understand, Sally was her life. Without that little girl in her life, Lucy was sure she’d be at a loss for what to do with herself. Sally was her reason for settling down with a job, and not running away to try and work out just who she was.

“I will,” She eventually replied, “It’ll mostly be touching up jobs though. I have far too much that needs doing at home.”
“Well, I think you should take the time off to relax,” Mia insisted, “Treat yourself Lucy! We could go out or something.”

Pulling a face as Sally stepped out of her bedroom with her bag, Lucy rolled her eyes at the look she was given. She wasn’t sure just why Sally didn’t like the teaching assistant that had helped Lucy when she had first started, but there was obviously something about her that unsettled Sally.

“I’ll think about it,” Lucy told Mia, “I need to take Sally now.”

Sally frowned and looked at her watch, they still had three hours before they had to be at the airport. Lucy smiled at her confusing, knowing that the rare treat of a meal out would be appreciated.

“Okay,” Mia replied, “Have a good evening and I’ll see you tomorrow.”

“Bye.” Lucy was quick to hand up and smile to Sally, “Thank you for saving me from that.”

Shrugging, Sally turned to the fridge, “I don’t see why you put up with her if you obviously don’t like her.”

“She’s a nice person,” Lucy defended, “She just seems a little … strange, at times.”

She pushed herself up from the sofa and grabbed her keys from the table, “Are you ready to go? Sure you’ve got everything?”

Sally slipped her juice back into the fridge, “Mom, there’s like, another three hours before we have to be at the airport.”

Lucy smiled as she slipped her shoes back on, “Just enough time to go out for dinner before we leave then.”

Sally beamed, “Seriously?”

Lucy shrugged teasingly, “Seeing as we haven’t been out since Christmas…” She trailed off, knowing that Sally wouldn’t argue. It wasn’t the first time she had seen her daughter’s excitement and wished that it was something she could do more often to treat her. As they stepped out into the hallway, Sally paused and looked up to her mother, “Y’know, this doesn’t mean you can have any house parties whilst I’m gone?”

Lucy laughed and snapped her fingers, “Darn, and here was me thinking I’d have all the eligible bachelors over for dinner!”

“Only if they’re fit,” Sally smiled, “Then I might consider turning a blind eye.”

Shaking her head Lucy squeezed her daughter’s shoulders, “Oh I’m going to miss you this week.”
Jeff stood by the door of the coffee shop, watching the passers by as he wondered just where Lucy lived. He smiled to himself as he thought back to the old farm house they had bought together. All the space they could possibly want for their growing family with rooms to spare. They had been fortunate in life, with their money and reputation, yet he and Lucy had agreed that an honest upbringing would be the best policy for the boys. Spoiling them would have been an easy way to stop all the temper tantrums before they even started, but he was glad they had stuck by their word and was sure that their boys were better for it.

“Hey,” Lucy smiled widely as she stepped up to Jeff, “I’ve not kept you waiting long have I?”

Jeff shook his head, holding the door for her, “No, not at all.”

She bit her lip as she stepped into the shop, a little surprised by his manners, “So chivalry isn’t dead?”

Jeff laughed softly, a deep sound, “I see it more as common decency, personally.”

Lucy blushed, “Either way, it is appreciated.”

They stepped forward in the queue, Lucy making sure that she got slightly in front of him to make the order before he could.

“I can pay,” Jeff insisted, “Please?”

Lucy bit her lip, knowing that it would be a help if he bought the drinks, even if it was only a few dollars.

“I promised I’d pay,” She told him, “I can’t go back now.”

Jeff slipped a card across the counter, silver and gold, “And you also said that you needed to be financially stable.”

Lucy looked up from the card with a frown, “A couple of drinks wouldn’t hurt.”

Jeff handed her a drink as he took his, “Trust me, I can afford it.”

She followed him out of the shop and then sighed, “Thank you, I’ve just had to pay for my daughter to go away on this trip to Florida and, well, it’s left me a little short this month.”

Jeff spluttered on his coffee, burning his mouth and throat as he swallowed. His eyes widened as he tried to recover himself. A daughter? After five boys, Lucy finally had a daughter? He swallowed hard again as another thought hit home. What if it wasn’t his daughter?

“It’s no problem,” He eventually replied, just before she got confused, “We all get like that
sometimes. What has she gone to Florida for?”

Lucy smiled proudly as they walked, “To see the old NASA base,” She shook her head in amusement, “Anything that flies will catch that girls interest.”

Jeff smiled in slight relief, she sure sounded like a Tracy at least. He looked to Lucy and couldn’t help but wonder just what the girl was like. Was she like any of her brothers, or was she more of a girl? It sounded like she had her mother’s love of flying. Did that mean she’d take after Scott? NASA though, that was more up John’s street.

He shook his head to clear the thoughts, questions would have to wait, too much of an interest would probably cause trouble.

“I’m sure she’ll enjoy it.” He told her, beginning to wonder if she’d be home alone, “Is she away for long?”

“She’ll be back Monday night,” Lucy nodded, “I’m going to use the time to get some odd jobs done around the house, the washing machine needs fixing first of all.”

He only hesitated for a brief moment, taking the time to decide if offering to help was being too forward, “Would you like me to take a look?”

She looked up in surprise, leaving him worried that he had offered too much too soon, but as her smile faded in, he relaxed.

“If you think you can fix it, I’d really appreciate it,” She slowed her step a little, “I keep meaning to get it looked at, but repair men are so expensive.”

Jeff nodded in understanding, “If I can fix it, I will, but I can’t promise anything.”

He looked up as they reached the school entrance, “Shall we say, eleven ish tomorrow?”

“That would be perfect,” Lucy smiled, “Erm,” She pulled a pen and paper from her bag, noting down her phone number, “Text me and I’ll reply with my address.”

“Sure thing,” Jeff stepped back, “I’ll see you tomorrow,”

Lucy raised her hand in a half wave as she turned down the school pathway. She tried to ignore the butterflies in her stomach, knowing that it was nothing more than a guy offering to help. They’d barely known each other for a day.

Shaking her head, Lucy glanced back to see Jeff begin to turn away. A hand on her shoulder made her turn back towards the school.

“Oh, so you did go past the coffee shop this morning?” Mia asked, pointing to the paper cup in Lucy’s hand, “You just couldn’t be bothered waiting for me.”

Opening her mouth to defend herself Lucy shook her head, “No, Mia, I’m sorry. I completely forgot, with taking Sally last night.” She glanced back again, “I’m sorry, I met someone else and it went completely out of my head.”
“Someone else?” Mia raised an eyebrow, “Who?”

Lucy shrugged heading to the staff room, “Just a guy, he bought me coffee yesterday and I offered to buy him one this morning.”

Mia folded her arms, “So it was prearranged?”

“Not entirely!” Lucy exclaimed, “I didn’t intentionally ditch you for this guy!”

Mia scoffed, “Of course you didn’t.”

“I didn’t!” Lucy insisted, “Why would I Mia? You’re the one that’s looked after me since I got here.”

Mia turned to walk away, “Forget it Lucy, I know where I’m not wanted.”

Tutting, Lucy shook her head and headed towards her class, she could deal with Mia later.

*

Lucy looked up from her dinner as the holocom rang, she reached out and swiped to answer, “Hey stranger,”

Sally laughed and rolled her eyes, “It’s been a day Mom.”

“Well you look like you’re enjoying it,” Lucy smiled, Sally certainly hadn’t stopped grinning since she’d answered.

“It’s great Mom!” Sally nodded, “They showed us all the math behind everything today, and they’re going to show us the rocket designs tomorrow. I got to talk loads to the guys about all their research they’re doing, it’s amazing.”

Settling back as her daughter chattered on about all she’d seen during the day, Lucy relaxed finally forgetting about Mia’s outburst earlier. At least one of them was having a good time.

“There’s just one thing,” Sally’s face suddenly fell, “One of the professors I was talking to, I can’t remember her name, but she really really wanted me to come to their summer camp here.”

Lucy sighed, “Oh Sal, sweetie, you know I would, but--”

“Wait!” Sally smiled, “Listen first Mom. She’s offered to fund me, I told her some of my ideas and stuff, y’know like about the lighter engines I designed, and the safety pod designs. If you’ll sign the papers, she will pay for me to go.”

Lucy sat up, “They liked your ideas that much?”

Sally nodded, her face bright, “Yeah, they’re gonna help me work on some ideas over summer, I don’t have to pay for anything.” She paused, “Mom, this could fast track me to some of the best places in the world… I cou--”

“Woah,” Lucy stopped her, “Don’t go getting ahead of yourself missy.”
Sally looked down, “I know Mom, but, it’d be awesome and I’d learn so much from it.”

She looked out to her window, in the far distance she could see the lights of what had once been a launch site. Lucy smiled at her face of awe, “It’ll be a long time away from home.”

“You could come and visit though,” Sally pointed out, “Please Mom?”

Lucy smiled and nodded, “I’ll look over the papers when you come home and have a see, okay?”

Sally laughed in joy, “Thank you Mom! Thank you thank you!”

Lucy nodded, glad that she could make her daughter happy in some small way. She looked across as the com buzzed, “I’ve got another call coming in sweet, I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

Sally nodded, “Good night Mom.”

“Good night Sal.” Lucy sighed, changing over the call, “Hello?”

“Lucy!” Mia exclaimed, “How was your day? I feel like I’ve hardly spoken to you.”

Lucy hesitated, thrown by the other woman’s change of tune, “Mia? I’m fine, thanks.”

“Good.” Mia replied, “Listen, about this morning, I’ve forgiven you so we can put all that nonsense behind us and get on, alright?”

“Well--”

“Good, well, I’ll see you on Monday.”

Just as sudden as the conversation had started, Lucy was once again left alone in the apartment.
“Casey,” Val answered her phone on the second ring as Jeff slipped into his car.

“Hey,” He greeted her, “You ignored my calls last night.”

He could practically hear the roll of her eyes as she responded, “I’m sorry I spent the majority of yesterday trying to talk your boys out of looking for you.”

Jeff sighed as he pulled onto the main road, “I’m not doing this lightly.”

“Sure you’re not,” Val snapped, “You’re doing it for your bloody heart.”

“I didn’t ring to argue Val,” Jeff uttered, “This is important.”

He could tell her temper was short from her huff, “It had better be quick because I’m busy Jeff.”

“Doing what?” He frowned, hadn’t she just told him she was on the island? She had told him that she had booked time off of the GDF to help sort the boys out.

“Looking for you.” She snapped again, “Okay? Because I’m your friend and if I’m going to make these boys believe that you’re really gone, I have to do certain things.”

“Oh.”

She sighed, letting it out long and slowly, “What do you want?”

His news suddenly seemed much less important. The rest of his family was grieving whilst he celebrated his discovery.

“I have a daughter.” He stated softly, “Well, Lucy does, and she sounds like a Tracy.”

His statement hung in the air for a long moment before Val sighed, “That’s… great. I’m pleased for you.”

“I’m going to see Lucy now,” Jeff explained, “Sally… my daughter, is away so I’m going to try and find out some things.”

Val swallowed and nodded, “Well, I hope you find what you’re after.”

“I’m sorry,” Jeff murmured as he pulled up at the address Lucy had given him. Guilt gnawed at him as it truly sunk in just how hard the entire situation was for everyone.

“It’s fine,” Val sighed, “Forget it, okay? Go and find out about your daughter, I want to hear all about it when I ring you later. That’s an order.”

Looking up to the apartment building, Jeff nodded, “FAB.”

He slipped out of the car and jogged to catch the door before it swung shut after the man that had just walked in. Checking the message again, he looked to the list of floors and decided to take the stairs,
it was only two floors up after all.

He knocked on the door marked with 42 and waited for a moment before trying again. When there was still no answer, he tried the handle. The door swung open with a gently push, letting free the music that was playing somewhere in the apartment. It led him to the kitchen, he had seen the same scene before him in the past, autumn red hair up in a knot, mop in hand, and music blaring as she danced along.

He leant in the doorway smiling, only clearing his throat as the song came to an end. She gasped and spun to face him, her face colouring a bright red as she realised just what he’d seen. Looking to her wrist, her eyes widened, “I didn’t realise it was that time,” She bit her lip, “I didn’t keep you waiting outside did I?”

Jeff shook his head, “No, don’t worry.” He nodded to the machine behind her, “Is that the culprit you want me to look at?”

Stepping out of the way, Lucy nodded, “Please, I’m not sure what’s wrong with it other than it doesn’t seem to wash.” She turned to the counter, “Do you want a drink?”

He paused in pulling the machine away from the wall, “Coffee would be great thanks.”

She turned to the cupboard to look for the instant coffee sachets, “So, do you do much handiwork at Tracy Industries?”

He hesitated as he looked back to her, “Well, not really.” He paused as he pulled the washer forward, “I used to, back in the beginning.”

“Now it’s all office work?” Lucy guessed as she stirred the coffee.

Crouching behind the washer, Jeff nodded, “Yeah, mostly, though I do get to do some test flights every now and again.”

“You’re a pilot?” Lucy raised an eyebrow, “Wow.”

He looked away with a chuckle, “You could say that… three years in the USAF taught me a thing or two.”

Lucy tried to hide her surprise, but couldn’t help the question that slipped from her lips, “Is there anything you can’t do?”

Jeff shrugged as he stood up, “Maybe one or two things.”

She laughed, “And here was me thinking you were modest too.”

She handed him the coffee, looking to the machine, “That was a quick look?”

He looked over his shoulder as he swallowed a mouthful of the hot drink, “I think it’s something to do with the piping between the machine and the mains, have you a wrench?”

Lucy nodded, “Yeah, I’ve got a tool box here,” She crouched to look under the sink, pulling out a
black box and laying out on the floor before snapping it open, “Here you go.”

Taking the wrench, Jeff reached down behind the machine to undo the clip that held the pipe in place.

“So, if you have a tool box,” He started, grunting with the effort of undoing the clip, “Why can’t you do this?”

He smiled as Lucy laughed, “Whilst I am capable with a wrench, a washing machine isn’t something I am experienced with.”

Jeff shook his head with a chuckle, of course Lucy was capable, she’d spent half her life taking planes apart and putting them back together. She had done more maintenance around the farm house than he had, normally on things that were working perfectly fine.

Finally the clip gave and the pipe loosened, Jeff gasped as he reached out to grab the pipe too late as the pressure caused it to flick upwards, spraying cold water all over him.

Lucy gasped, reaching out for the stopcock under the sink, shutting off the water as Jeff spluttered. She turned to look back to him, biting her lip as he wiped the water from his face. His t-shirt was soaked, clinging tight to his body leaving little to imagination. It was obvious that he had been very fit as a young man, and there was no denying that he still looked after himself.

As he looked up, she turned away, muttering something about getting him a towel to dry off with.

Jeff smiled as Lucy turned away, her cheeks already colouring red. He turned to the sink, peeling the t-shirt away from his body to wring it out.

“Here,” Lucy held out one of her towels, trying to make sure she was looking at his face and not anything else.

Jeff smiled as he took the towel, rubbing the base of his neck where his hair kept dripping, “Thanks,” He looked to where the water had sprayed, “Sorry, looks like you’re going to have to mop again.”

“I have a good mind to make you do it!” She teased.

Jeff gasped in fake shock, “Me !? When you didn’t have the forethought to switch the water off?”

“You didn’t tell me you were taking off that pipe!” She argued with a grin, “How on earth was I meant to know?”

Caught out, Jeff rolled his eyes, “I guess we’ll just both have to do it then.”

He turned back to the machine, reaching down to the water inlet, “Ahh, got it… oh… erm…” He cleared his throat as he stood up, holding out the item to Lucy.

Lucy gasped, covering her mouth with her hand as she swore silently. She snatched the knickers from his hand a little too quickly, stuffing them into her pocket. Her eyes looked anywhere but at
him, but she couldn’t help but catch glimpses of his shirtless body.

“I’ll pretend it was a pair of socks or something,” Jeff sniggered as he began to reattach the pipe, “It’s not like I’ve never seen them before.”

Lucy couldn’t help but laugh at his comment, “Dare I ask just where you’ve seen my underwear before?”

“No!” Jeff exclaimed, standing up too quickly and banging his head on the counter top, “Ouch!”

Lucy was quick to grab the bag of frozen vegetables from the freezer and wrap it in Jeff’s discarded towel, she passed it to him biting her lip, “Are you okay?”

He sighed, “I didn’t mean… it wasn’t…”

She laughed and shook her head, “I know, I was winding you up, you daft date.”

“Oh,” His face fell in realisation, “Now I do feel like an idiot.”

“Not as bad as I feel, I could have done what you did!” Lucy shook her head, “I appreciate it though.”

Jeff smiled, “Not at all,” He nudged her, “It’s nice to be a knight in shining armour.”

He watched and Lucy laughed, turning away to busy herself with something. Her cheeks were a soft pink, and he didn’t miss the sideways glance she gave him as she shook out his t-shirt.

“I’ll go and hang this out for you,” She stated, “You make yourself comfortable, then I’ll make some more drinks.”

Jeff nodded and stepped through to the lounge, he smiled at the photos on the cabinet, a whole life that he had never known about. There was no mistaking the face of the girl in the images for a Tracy, her piercing blue eyes the same as the ones he saw every day. He swallowed hard and reached out to touch the frame, only to pull back when he heard Lucy coming through.

“This is your daughter?” He asked, “Sally, wasn’t it?”

Lucy smiled and nodded, setting the drinks down on the coffee table she came to stand next to him, “Yeah, that’s her. We’re each other’s best friends.”

“You said she’s gone away, right?” Jeff asked, turning back to the sofa and taking a seat.

Following him back to sit down, Lucy sighed, “Yeah, she called lastnight, NASA have offered her a place on the summer camp.”

Jeff looked to her with raised eyebrows, “Really?” The more he learnt about Sally, the more sure he was that she was his daughter.

Nodding as she took a sip of her tea, Lucy smiled proudly, “Yeah, she works hard and has lots of design ideas.”

Jeff smiled, “That sounds brilliant, is that what she wants to go into?”
Lucy shrugged, “I don’t know, she says so, but she’s still young I don’t want her to put all her eggs in one basket.”

Jeff’s shoulders sank in realisation, of course, that was why he was there -- money. She could only afford to get by now. They didn’t have the money they should have, a college tuition wouldn’t come as simply as it had for his sons.

“If it’s what she wants to go for,” He started, “Or, whatever she wants to go for, I’d be happy to help… financially, if you need it.”

Lucy was quick to shake her head, refusing to accept help from a near stranger, “I could never accept…”

“Please,” Jeff sat forward, “I have more than enough money for myself, I would like it to go somewhere good.”

Lucy looked down, ashamed to know she needed the help but still not comfortable in accepting it where it was offered. She set her mug down and sat back into the sofa, “So, tell me more about yourself, Jeff.”

Matching her relaxed posture, Jeff smiled, “Well…”
Chapter 8

Sally looked up as her Mom walked into the lounge, “Have you seen the t-shirt I got from NASA?”

She looked back to the book she was flicking through as Lucy nodded. As she flicked the page her eyes widened, “Oh my-- ewww-- Mom! What have you been drawing!?”

Lucy turned from where she was loading the washer, her mouth dropping as she realised just which book Sally was looking at. Crossing the space in one stride, she snatched the book up and slammed it closed, “Did I say you could look at that!?”

“Who’s the guy?” Sally ignored her question, “Have you been seeing someone?”

Lucy hugged the book, frowning at the face Sally was pulling, “It’s none of your business.”

“But--” Sally complained, “Mom, surely I have a right to know if you’re dating him.”

“We’re not dating.” Lucy tutted, “We’re just been for a couple of coffee’s, he fixed the washer, and we went out for dinner.”

“Dinner normally means a date.” Sally pointed out, “Just sayin’.”

Lucy sighed, “It was categorically *not* a date.”

“So,” Sally sat forward with a smirk, “You’re just drawing seminaked sketches of a guy that you’re ‘not dating’… that’s just a *little* weird, y’know?”

Rolling her eyes, Lucy shook her head, “I am a grown woman, I can draw what I like.”

“But it’s *weird* Mom.” Sally emphasised, “Like, he’s *old*.”

“Haven’t you got homework to do?” Lucy sighed, as her phone buzzed.

Sally groaned as Lucy smiled at the message, “It’s him isn’t it?”

Lucy glanced up for a moment before looking back to the message, “What does it matter to you?” She grinned as she muttered her reply to herself, “Would love to meet up for coffee, but some of us have children to look after!”

“I’m big enough to look after myself,” Sally mumbled as she hopped off of the stool, “If you really *want* to go out, you should.”

Lucy looked up, her thumb hovering over the send button, “Are you sure?”

Sally shrugged, she had noticed her Mom had been brighter since she had come home from NASA the week before. This guy though, he was news to her. If he was making her Mom happy though,
she wouldn’t complain too soon.

“Yeah, why not?”

Setting her phone down and sitting opposite Sally, Lucy sat forward, “You’re not upset are you?”

Sally shook her head in confusion, “No?”

Lucy sighed in relief, glad that the sudden news hadn’t surprised her too much. She had intended to tell Sally eventually, the time just hadn’t been right. Reaching across, Lucy took Sally’s hand, “You’re still number one, you know that don’t you?”

“Of course I am,” Sally grinned, “What do we need men for?”

Lucy laughed as she sent a new message, “One day you’ll understand.”

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Jeff smiled as Lucy stepped into the coffee shop, she spotted him almost immediately and walked over to the table hidden away in the corner, “Hey.”

He stood and pulled the seat out for her, “I wasn’t sure that you’d be able to make it, is Sally alright on her own?”

Lucy sighed as she sat down, “I leave her own her own far too much really, but she insists she doesn’t mind.”

Jeff looked down to his coffee, smiling softly at the memory of the boys insisting the same thing. It hadn’t been until he’d found Alan having nightmares during a thunderstorm that he realised just how badly his boys actually needed them, despite their insistence that they were fine. He looked up to Lucy, “Sometimes what they say and what they mean are two different things,”

Nodding, Lucy took a sip of her drink, “I know, I try to talk to her about it, but she just clams up.”

Snorting Jeff shook his head, thinking about his eldest, “Sounds like someone I know.”

Lucy looked to him as she set her drink on the table, “Oh?”

Over the times they had met, Jeff had spent little time discussing his life. All he focus had been on her, and Lucy wasn’t sure whether she loved it or found it worrying. She hoped that her prompt would give her something to go on.

He smiled across the table to her, “He’s just a kid, always puts everyone else first,” Jeff sighed and sat back, “But doesn’t always look after himself… When someone tries to help, he’s excellent at shutting them off.”

Lucy laughed, “That sounds just like Sally.”

“She won’t grow out of it,” Jeff warned, “You’ll have to find a way to get through to her.”
Sitting forward, Lucy raised an eyebrow, “So how did you get through to your friend?”

Jeff shifted uncomfortably, truth be told, he had never been able to get Scott to talk. She had always been the one that could get him to vent and let out his true feelings. As the years had passed, Jeff had come to realise that his bad cop routine had been what had pushed his eldest away. That was why Scott never talked about emotions, at least, never since Luce had died. Jeff would forever regret the way he had been with his eldest, always insisting that he grew up and behaved like an adult. He just wished he could have been there more for Scott, he didn’t deserve his son’s worship, not when he had missed far too much of his growing up.

“I didn’t,” He admitted quietly, “I was never much good with emotions.” He sighed as he watched her, picking his words carefully, “His mother was always good with that, she was the only one that I used to ever talk to.”

“Used to?” Lucy murmured back.

His hand covered hers on the table, “She died, a long time ago.”

“I’m sorry,” Lucy whispered, stroking her thumb over the rough skin of his hand.

“Don’t be,” He smiled softly back, “It wasn’t your fault.”

Lucy ducked her head, not sure what to reply to him. He was still keeping his private life shady and she knew better than to push for information.

Jeff watched her thumb as it stroked gently over the rough skin of his hand. He wished she would realise what she was doing. She wasn’t her though, she had no idea who he was or what her actions towards him meant. The woman across from him didn’t know that, whenever they held hands, her thumb automatically started that up, down motion on his hand. She was oblivious to how she was driving him crazy.

“You said the other day,” He started quietly, “That it’s been just you and Sally all this time.”

Lucy smiled and nodded, “You don’t need to worry about anyone else encroaching.”

Jeff chuckled and shook his head, “And what gives you the impression I was worried about that?”

Dropping her gaze, Lucy blushed, “Sorry, just something Sal said…” She hesitated looking back to Jeff, “She thinks we’re... dating?”

Raising an eyebrow, Jeff leant across the table, “Oh?”

It was hard to ignore the flip in his stomach at the mention. He wanted to chide himself, he was a grown man, so why was he still getting the same rush as he had as a teenager?

“Sorry,” Lucy uttered, “I shouldn’t have said anything. Sal... I mean, it’s jus--”

“Is that what you would like?” Jeff asked, squeezing her hand gently, “To be official?”

Lucy smiled as she looked up to him, “Well, if you asked, I wouldn’t say no.”
“Well then,” Jeff grinned, “Will you be my,” He paused, girlfriend sounded too childish for two grown adults.

“Partner?” Lucy supplied with a laugh.

Jeff nodded, “Thank you. Will you be my partner?”

“I would love to be.” Lucy grinned.

Jeff stood, both their drinks now finished. He held his hand out to her, “So, how about a walk, seeing as the weather’s so nice?”

Lucy laughed as she stood and took his hand, she didn’t know how he knew she had been looking forward to going for a walk. It had been too long since she had had chance to wander down to the park to sit and sketch.

“That would be lovely,” Lucy murmured, following out of the cafe, “I couldn’t think of anything better.”
“At least let me walk you to the door,” Jeff smiled as Lucy let herself into the apartment, “It’d give me peace of mind.”

Lucy smiled and held the door, “Alright then, you can come and see what mischief Sally’s been up to.”

Jeff laughed and stepped in behind her, “I’m sure she can’t be that bad,”

Lucy raised her eyebrows, daring him to carry on with his sentence. He hadn’t seen the mess that she had come home to on her birthday, when Sally had tried to make a cake.

“Okay,” Jeff smiled as they started up the stairs, “I’ll believe you.”

“It’s normally with the right intentions,” Lucy admitted, smiling, “But she doesn’t always think through what she’s doing.”

Jeff nodded, it sounded all too familiar from his experiences with the five boys.

“Thank you for this afternoon,” Lucy smiled as they crossed the hallway to her door, “It’s been lovely.”

“You’re very welcome,” Jeff murmured, wrapping an arm around her waist, “If you’re ever short of something to do, you only have to call.”

Lucy raised an eyebrow, “I might take you up on that offer.”

Jeff chuckled, “Well it’s always there.”

There was a scent in the air, warm, and hot with spice, “Something smells good.”

Lucy looked to the door, “I think it’s chilli heated up from last night.”

Jeff’s stomach almost rumbled at the thought of his wife’s chilli, “That sounds delicious.”

“Would you like to come in?” She offered, “I’m sure Sally could share with us.”

Jeff shook his head, “I won’t say no to coming in, stealing your food does seem a little mean though.”

Lucy laughed, reaching out for the door handle. She hesitated as Jeff’s hand reached out to hers, “Before we go in,” He started, “Can I…” He trailed off as his fingers brushed her cheek. That childish flip of his stomach was back with the feeling of excitement as he tilted her chin up and leant in.
Lucy smiled as their lips pressed together, his much softer than she would have expected. She could still smell the coffee on his lips as her arms wrapped around his neck. Pulling back for a moment, she shook her head slightly, “I’ve been waiting for that.”

“I hope I didn’t keep you waiting too long,” Jeff smiled, holding her close.

Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes bright as she replied, “Not at all.” She glanced to the door, “I should probably go and make sure she doesn’t burn anything.”

Clearing his throat, Jeff stepped back, “Yeah, you have a good night, and I’ll meet you tomorrow at the coffee shop?”

“Sounds perfect,” She smiled, reaching to the door handle, “Good night.”

Leaning down to steal one more kiss, Jeff smiled, “Good night Lucy.”

Sally looked up as her Mom stepped in the door, “I made some chicken curry for you.”

Lucy raised an eyebrow as she set her bag on the sofa, “Curry? My, your repertoire is expanding.”

She laughed as Sally threw her a glare, “Don’t be mean.”

“I’m not!” Lucy defended, “It was a compliment.”

Sally smirked and slid a bowl across the table, “Eat it before it gets cold.”

Lucy pulled a stool out and sat down, “Alright, I’m eating.”

Sally sat opposite her Mom, drawing patterns in a puddle of water on the bench top. She glanced across to her Mom, biting her lip, “Did you have a good time?”

Lucy paused, looking up, “Yeah, what makes you ask?”

Sally shrugged and looked back to the worktop, she didn’t want to admit that Mrs Kern had helped with the dinner, or that she had let slip about where Lucy had really been. The old lady next door was always nice, but she often didn’t realise when her help became just too much.

“Sal?” Lucy tilted her head to the side, “What is it?”

Shifting, Sally sighed, “Well, I had some help with the dinner.”

Lucy smiled, “Mrs Kern came around?”

“And I bet she asked all about where I was?”

Sally nodded, “She pretty much answered the question herself though.”

“That wouldn’t surprise me,” Lucy murmured, watching Sally, “But that’s not what’s worrying
“No,” Sally admitted quietly, “It was more what she said afterwards.”

Lucy sighed, knowing that Mrs Kern was rather good at saying the wrong things, albeit, unintentionally.

“Go on,” She encouraged, “What did she say?”

Sally looked up, her eyebrows furrowed and her bottom lip stuck out the smallest fraction more than normal, “You’re not gonna start going off with him all the time and… well, leave me?”

Lucy gave her a soft look, reaching out to take Sally’s hand, “No Sal, never.” She tutted as she squeezed her daughter's hands, “I thought you would know that. I thought we’d talked about this the other week before you went to NASA?”

Sally shrugged, “I dunno, I know I said as long as you were happy… but I didn’t think about what would happen if you ended up with someone else.”

Lucy stood up and moved around the work top to pull Sally into a tight hug, “Now listen, nobody is going to come between you and me, right?” She kissed her daughter’s hair, “I might spend a little more time away, but I’m not going to shut you out. If you rang me whilst I was out, I promise, I would drop everything and come and get you. Alright?”

Sally leant into her Mom’s shoulder, “So, you’re not gonna marry a new guy and ride off into the sunset?”

Lucy laughed, “At least, not without you having a say in it!”

Sally smiled a little, “Okay, I guess I can live with that.”

Lucy kissed her daughter’s hair again, “I promise Sal, you get a say in whatever happens.”

“Thanks Mom,” Sally squeezed her tightly, “I guess I shouldn’t listen to Mrs Kern?”

Nodding slowly, Lucy smiled, “I’d take whatever she says with a pinch of salt.”

Sally grinned, “Okay.” She looked around the kitchen, “I suppose I’d better tidy up.”

Lucy shook her head, “It’s fine, you made it all, I’ll tidy up.”

Sally perked up, “Thanks Mom!”

Lucy smiled as Sally ran off, and turned to the stack of dishes with a sigh, rubbing her stomach before pulling on the rubber gloves.
Rubbing her eyes, Sally stuck her head around her bedroom door. From where she was stood she could see the strip of light under the bathroom door, it was far too early for her Mom to be up and getting ready for work. It was still a little early for her to be getting ready for swim practice.

Trying to stay quiet, she padded over to the bathroom, knocking lightly on the door, “Mom?”

A dry hacking noise was the only response she got for a minute, before a hoarse reply answered, “I’m fine Sal, go back to bed.”

“I was going to get ready for swim practice Mom,” Sally called back, “Are you okay?”

There was a soft uttering before a quiet curse from her Mom, “Yeah, I’m fine sweetie.”

Sally stepped back as the lock flicked and the door was pulled open. She pulled a pade as she looked to her Mom’s pale face, “Geez Mom, you look rough.”

“Thanks.” Lucy croaked, “I’ve not slept yet.”

“I think you should go back to bed.”

Lucy shook her head, spinning to run back to the toilet as acid burnt her throat.

Sally pulled a face and slipped into her Mom’s bedroom, picking up her phone from the bedside table. She scrolled through the contacts trying to remember the name of the guy that she had been seeing.

“Ah,” She smiled as she press dial.

His voice sounded groggy as he answered the voice only call, “Lucy? Is everything okay?”

“Hi, it’s Sally,” Sally answered, “Is that Jeff?”

“Sally?” It sounded like his brain was still catching up with what he was hearing, “Where’s your Mom?”

“I just saw her in the bathroom, she looks really ill.” Sally explained, “I don’t think she’s fit to look after herself today, but I really have to go to swim practice before school and I don’t want to leave her alone.”

“Right,” He was beginning to sound more awake, “Okay, I can be there in half an hour?”

Sally smiled in relief, “That would be great, thanks.”

Just as the call cut out, the bedroom door opened, “What are you doing in here?”

“I was trying to find you some medicine.” Sally quickly told her, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” Lucy nodded with a small smile, “You worry about yourself, I’ll still be here when you get home.”

Sally wasn’t convinced entirely, but stepped past her Mom and into the lounge anyway, knowing better than to argue.

Exactly half an hour later, Sally pulled the apartment door open, “Thanks for coming, mister.”

“Call me Jeff,” He smiled to her, “What’s wrong with your mom?”

“I think she’s been sick all night,” Sally shrugged, going back to her toast, “She’s been in and out of the bathroom since I got up.” She looked to the clock, “And I’m going to have to run, or else I’ll never make the swim team.”

Jeff smiled, “Have you got everything you need?”

Looking over her shoulder as she lifted her bag, Sally smiled, “You’re not my dad.”

Jeff laughed, “Alright, but I can still look out for you, okay?”

She smiled back to him, “Thanks, but I think I can manage.” She opened the door, “Bye!”

Before Jeff could even reply, she had rushed out of the door. He shook his head to himself and looked towards the one door that was ajar. Looking back to the kitchen Jeff sighed and set about looking for the cupboard with the glasses in.

He chuckled softly to himself when he opened the first lower cupboard, Luce had always hated
having the pots and pans in the top cupboards where she couldn’t reach them. Taking one of the smaller glasses he filled it with water before slipping towards the open door.

“Knock knock?” He murmured, pushing the door slightly, “Lucy? Are you awake?”
There was a soft moan from inside, and the sound of shuffling in the bed. He peaked his head around the door, “Lucy?” He asked again as she rolled over, pushing the duvet away from herself.
“Sa-- Oh my god!” She exclaimed, grabbing at the duvet and pulling it back up over herself as Jeff turned away, “I’m sorry! I didn’t realise…” He trailed off as Lucy groaned, “I’m gonna be sick.”
Thinking quick, Jeff grabbed the bathrobe from the back of the door and wrapped it around her before pulling her up and guiding her towards the bathroom just in time for Lucy to wretch over the sink.

Jeff combed her hair back from her face, rubbing her back as her stomach emptied its contents. She groaned as she pulled back, “What are you doing here?”
He held her close, feeling her forehead for a fever as he turned on the tap, “Sally rang me at half past four asking if I could come and look after you.”
Lucy pushed past him towards the door, “My daughter fusses too much.”
Jeff followed her, “Your daughter is just looking out for you.”
Lucy paused and looked back to him, “She let you into my apartment and left you to look after me, without telling me.”

Rolling his eyes, Jeff stepped forward, “Look, I’m sorry, I didn’t realise you were naked. We’re both adults though, and I’m sure we’ve both seen it all before…” He trailed off as Lucy shifted uncomfortably.
She turned towards the bedroom, “I’m going to be late for work.”
“You are not going to work.” Jeff warned taking hold of her shoulders and directing her towards her bedroom, “Back to bed with you.”
She sighed, accepting the order for what it was and letting him guide her to her room, “I didn’t imagine that this would be how we spent our second meeting.”
Jeff kissed her hair, “Don’t worry about it, have some water, and get some rest.”
She smiled tiredly as she sunk down on the bed and accepted the glass of water he held out to her, “Thank you.”
“You’re welcome,” He smiled back, “What do you think it is?”
Lucy shrugged as she set the glass down and lay back against her pillows, “I think it was the curry Sally made,” She glanced up to him, “But don’t tell her that.”
Jeff pursed his lips to hide a smile as he nodded, “Certainly not.” He brushed her hair back as she pulled the covers up, “You’ve got a temperature.”
“I’m freezing,” She whispered closing her eyes, “I hate being ill.”
“I know,” Jeff smirked, “Keep taking sips of that water, I’ll go and clean up the bathroom.”
She shook her head, “You don’t have to do that.”
“No, but I’m going to.” He replied, “Anything else I can do?”
Smiling softly as her eyes drifted shut, “Not right now, thank you.”
Jeff perched on the edge of the bed and combed her hair back with his fingers, “Okay.”
Her breathing leveled after a few moments and he smiled softly, “Maybe I’ll just stay here awhile.”
Jeff looked up from the toast he was buttering as the bedroom door opened, he smiled softly to Lucy as she stepped out, cocooned in a blanket as well as a set of pyjamas. He held out a plate towards her, “Think you can stomach this?”

She nodded wordlessly, taking the plate with a small smile and shuffling towards the sofa. Curling up at one end of the three-seater, Lucy watched Jeff as she picked at her toast, “Thank you.”

He looked up from where he was wiping down the work surface and smiled back to her, “It’s fine, I’m happy to help.”

She smiled and looked to her plate, “I’m not sure I can eat this.”

“Try a little,” Jeff encouraged, it wasn’t the first time he’d seen food poisoning, “It’s something to line your stomach.”

Lucy tutted and rolled her eyes, “That’s a parent’s lie if I’ve ever heard one.”

Jeff laughed and shrugged, “I can’t help it, after five kids it just becomes automatic.”

Lucy winced, “ Five ?”

Jeff nodded, “Yeah, they’re all adults now though, more or less anyway.”

“Wow,” Lucy smiled, “And I thought just Sally was a pain.”

“It’s easier than you expect,” Jeff told her as he sat down at the far end of the sofa, “They’re pretty good at--” He trailed off as his phone rang, “Oh, I’ve got to get this.”

Lucy nodded, “Sure, you can go in my room if you want.”

“Thanks,” He stood and answered the call as he headed to Lucy’s room, “Val?”

“Your sons are going to be the death of me.” Val snapped back, “First that whole fiasco with the Hood.”

“The one with the seaquakes?” Jeff asked, “And the solar collector in Taipei?”

“That would be it,” Val uttered, “You do know that the world council are still debating on what the outcome would have been had the boys not have done what they did?”

Jeff sighed, “Yes Val, you think I should go and tell them just where to shove their ideas. We talked that through. What else has happened?”

“Then, last week there was the space mine that Alan had to disable.” She told him, “ Alan . He’s just a kid Jeff and he’s up there risking his life--”

“A space mine?” Jeff asked, “he had helped decommission them all at the end of the global conflict, “There shouldn’t have been any left.”
“Well there were.” Val replied, “Alright?”

Jeff opened his mouth but was unable to speak, he’d never heard Val snap at him as she was doing. She rarely got mad, in fact, he was sure her anger had only ever been as a result of fear.

He sunk down on the edge of the bed as it clicked into place. Something had happened, he was sure of it, something bad.

“What happened Val?” He murmured, “God, please, tell me it’s not--”

She sighed down the line, “I’ve just had to drag Scott from the island to a GDF specialist hospital to treat him for radiation poisoning. Do you know why? Because he got careless and stupid.”

Jeff cursed quietly, standing and beginning to pace, “Will he be okay?”

“It’ll take a few days for him to get over it,” Val murmured, “But after that he should start to get better.”

“It’s my fault,” Jeff uttered, “If I was there--”

“I know.” Val stated, “If you were here he wouldn’t be being so stupid trying to save the world.”

“What do I do?” Jeff whispered, “I can’t… it’s not fair to vanish from here now.”

“Yes, so I guess I’ll just have to knock some sense into him whilst you’re not here.” Val snapped again, “Because someone has to.”

Jeff’s shoulders sunk, “What am I meant to do Val? Do you expect me to choose between my wife and my sons?”

“I don’t know what I expect you to do.” Val uttered, “I don’t know what to do with you at all any more Jeff, there had to be a more sensible way around all of this.”

“Well this made the most sense to me.” Jeff snapped back, “They’ve still got each other! They’ve still got you, and Mother!”

“But they haven’t got you!” Val yelled, “As far as they know, they are orphans, Jeff.”

“I’ve not got time for this.” Jeff sighed, “I’ve got to look after Lucy.”

He hung up as he stood and headed back into the lounge, forcing a smile to Lucy as he sat back down.

“Sorted?” She asked quietly.

“Kind of,” Jeff smiled to her, “How are you feeling?”

She shrugged, “A little better, I still feel really tired though.”

Jeff stood again, moving closer to her to feel her temperature, “You’re still a little warm.”

She smiled sleepily, the same soft face she had always had as she was falling asleep, “I don’t feel as
“Let’s get you back to bed,” Jeff murmured softly, “Then I’ll make some dinner for Sally that won’t give her food poisoning.”

Lucy laughed as she shifted to get up, “That’s probably a good idea.” She sighed as she leant on Jeff, “I wonder how her swim trials went.”

“I didn’t know she did swimming too,” Jeff smiled as he guided her to the bedroom, “It seems like she does a bit of everything.”

Lucy smiled, “Oh she does, swimming and art are just hobbies really, she enjoys her music, but space and flying is where her heart really lies.”

Jeff chuckled, “As long as she enjoys it.”

“Yeah,” Lucy sighed as she sunk into the bed, “She does, she likes keepin’ busy.”

Jeff smiled, “I don’t see a problem with that.”

“No,” Lucy murmured, “I wish she’d settle a little and make some friends.”

Jeff frowned, “Does she not get on with others?”

Lucy shrugged, “When she gets to know them she does, but she’s always in her books.” She sighed, fighting a yawn, “And I don’t really help, being a teacher at the school, ‘nd I’ve not got enough money to buy her the nice stuff she deserves.”

Jeff sighed, “I wish I could do something for you both.”

As she began to doze off, Lucy smiled, “You do ‘nough jus’ bein’ here.”

Jeff chuckled and brushed her hair back, not sure that she heard him whisper, “But I could do so much more.”

He looked up as there was a knock on the apartment door and stood to answer it. He sucked in a breath as a woman swept in, only pausing when she realised that it wasn’t Lucy who had answered.

“You,” He uttered, “What are you doing here?”

The woman smiled, “Why, hello Jeff.”

He shook his head, dropping his voice as he stepped forward, “You should not be here, you can’t be here, you’re not allowed near Luce.”

“Lucille Tracy died thirteen years ago Jeff, the woman that lives here hasn’t got a restraining order against me.” She smiled at him looking around, “Where is darling Lucy?”

“It’s none of your business,” Jeff uttered with a glare, “She is not your darling.”

The woman paused and looked to him, she seemed to think about his argument, “I wouldn’t be so sure about that Jeff, I’m the one that’s always been here to look out for her and that got her a job.”
“That doesn’t give you any rights to anything.”

Jeff turned as the young girl stepped through the door with her mother’s glare on her face, “Go away Mia, you’re not wanted here.”

Mia’s eyes narrowed, “It’s none of your business kid, this is adult stuff.”

Throwing her bag onto the sofa, Sally folded her arms and stepped up to stand between Jeff and Mia, “You’re in my home.” Sally stated slowly. Jeff bit his lip to hide a smile, there was no doubt that she was her mother’s daughter.

“You’re in my home,” Sally repeated, “And I want you to get the hell out.”

Mia tutted, “I’m Lucy’s friend, there’s nothing either of you can do to change that.”

Jeff stepped forward, squaring up to Mia, “You will not hurt her, not like you did before.”

Mia looked him up and down, “We’ll see.”

She swept out of the apartment leaving Jeff and Sally alone.

“How’s Mom?” Sally asked as the door clicked shut and she looked towards her mother’s bedroom.

Jeff followed her gaze and nodded, “She’s better than she was, she’d just gone back to sleep when she got here.” He raised an eyebrow as Sally looked back to him, “You’re home early.”

She shrugged as she flopped down on the sofa, “I didn’t feel like going to my last class.”

Jeff folded his arms and raised an eyebrow, “Why?”

Shrugging again, Sally looked away, “I just didn’t.”

Jeff sighed and sat down next to her, lounging back, “Did the swim trials not go well?”

Her shoulders sunk and she bought her knees up to her chest, a tell tale sign that she was much more upset than she was letting on. Reaching out, he squeezed her shoulder, “Want to talk about it?”

She sighed and glanced sideways at him, “I completely screwed up, came last, and didn’t make the team. The girls at school were right, I’m hopeless.”

Jeff frowned, “I don’t think that’s true. Your Mom’s told me how great you are at your music, and how smart you are.”

Sally shrugged and sat back, only speaking after a long silence, “What did you mean when you told Mia that she wouldn’t hurt Mom again?”

Jeff swallowed as he looked to Sally, he thought he’d been quiet enough for her to not hear him, “I… If I told you, you wouldn’t believe me.”

She raised an eyebrow, “You were just calling me smart.”
“And you are.” Jeff nodded, “Okay, so maybe I’ve not told the whole truth about who I am.”

Sally folded her arms, “I don’t even know who you are. Mom’s told me hardly anything about you.”

He smiled to her, “You just need to know that I’m on your side, okay? Mia’s trouble, I’ve met her type before.” He stood up, “I need to really talk to your Mom before I tell you the whole story, but I’m trying to do what’s best for all of us.”

Sally nodded as she watched him, “Okay, I trust you.”

Nodding jeff looked to the kitchen, “Now, how about a bolognese for dinner?”
Chapter 12

Jeff sighed as he sunk down on his bed, reaching out to the light-type to call Lucy. She had just woken up as he had been leaving and he had promised to call as soon as he’d got in.

“Hey,” She answered on the third ring, “Did you get home okay?”

He nodded, “Yeah, how’re you feeling?”

“Better,” She smiled tiredly, “Still a bit rough, but much better than I was.”

“Good,” Jeff relaxed as he sat back, “Call me if you need me, okay? I don’t care what time of night it is.”

“I will, thank you,” She glanced at something to her side before looking back to Jeff, “And thank you for sorting Sally out.”

“Glad to help.” Jeff smiled, “She’s a good kid, you’ve done a great job with her.”

Lucy ducked her head, “Well I’ve tried my best with her.” She looked off to the side again, “I’m going to have to go, I’ll talk to you tomorrow.”

“Alright, goodnight Lucy.”

She looked up with a shy smile, “Goodnight Jeff.”

No sooner had the call cut out, Jeff was redialling a different person, she took a little longer to answer the call than Lucy had, but after their blows earlier, he had expected it.

“Listen,” He started before Val could speak, “I’m sorry for the way I snapped earlier. I know I should be there, that he’s my son and I should be there to knock sense into him. I wish I was Val.”

She sighed and shifted, “He’s through the worst of it, stopped throwing his guts up and his fever’s going down slowly. I think we treated him in time to prevent the worse symptoms.”

Jeff bowed his head in relief, “Thank you.”

“What did you want?” Val asked, “I know you wouldn’t have just called to apologise.”

He looked up to her and shook his head, “You remember Mia?”

“As in Luce’s stalker that kidnapped…” She trailed off with a frown, “Who was it she kidnapped?”

“John.” Jeff told her, “Lured him away in the mall and locked him in a store cupboard.”

Val nodded, “That’s when you all moved out to the farm permanently.”

“Yeah,” Jeff sighed, “But that wasn’t what I wanted to tell you about her.”

Val sat back and shook her head, “No. She can’t be there?”

Jeff nodded slowly, “Yeah.”
“But--”

“Lucy isn’t Luce,” Jeff shrugged, “There’s no restraining order, it ended with her death.”

Val swore, “What do we do?”

Jeff shrugged, “Sally doesn’t like her, so that helps, but apparently she helped Lucy a lot when she started out here.”

“So they’re close.” Val summed up, “Great.”

“I’m just going to have to hope that she doesn’t try anything before I talk Lucy around.” Jeff sighed, “This is all a mess.”

“You’re telling me?” Val raised an eyebrow, “Well, it’s too late to back out now.”

“Yeah,” Jeff sighed, “I know.”

Val sat forward, “I’ll get someone to keep an eye on Mia from a distance, but I can’t promise anything.”

“Thanks Val, I owe you big style.” Jeff smiled, “How are the boys otherwise?”

Val smiled, her anger melting away a little, at least he had asked how they were. She knew he hadn’t completely forgotten about them, it just seemed like it had. Jeff would never forget his family, that was why he was doing what he was. All he had ever wanted was for them to all be happy, but as had happened in the past, his attempts to make them happy had actually, had the opposite effect.

“They’re doing okay.” She murmured, settling back in her bed, “Still beating themselves up about you vanishing, but I’ve said what I can and it’s better than what it was.

“I just hope that they don’t do something stupid again.” Jeff told her.

“They won’t.” Val sighed, “They’ve learnt from Scott’s mistake.”

Jeff raised an eyebrow at her, “Have you not paid any attention to them since they were growing up? The same mistake happened five or six times between them before they learnt.”

Val laughed, thinking back to what was known as the ‘year of the cream cakes’, “Oh goodness, like with the cream cakes.”

“Exactly like that.” Jeff nodded, “And I’m still not even sure that mom learnt to not put cream on warm cakes.”

Val shook her head, “I think that’s reason alone for you to go home, those poor boys will be malnourished if you’re not careful!”

Jeff gave out a short bark of laughter before sighing, the realisation of just what he was missing finally sinking in, “They won’t hate me will they?”
“I think they’ll be mad.” Val stated, “But they’ll forgive you once you get to explain.”

Jeff shook his head, “I suppose I can’t blame them.”

“They’ll come around, especially if you end up how you intend.” Val offered, “Get some sleep, it’s late and you’ve got to keep your head straight so you don’t slip up.”

“You’re right.” Jeff sighed, hiding a yawn, “Night.”

“Night Jeff.”

The light-type flickered out, leaving Jeff alone in the darkness.
Jeff glanced up and down the street with a frown as he took Lucy’s hand, “What’s with all the roadworks?”

Lucy stepped out onto the crossing ahead of him with a shake of her head, “Something about improving our internet supply.” She told him, “Though I don’t see what the problem is, I’ve never had an issue with ours.”

Jeff shook his head, “That’s modern technology for you though, we have to keep on top of it.”

Lucy smiled, “I wasn’t complaining.” She looked forward, “Where are we going anyway, I’ve only got an hour before I’ve got to be back at the school.”

“An hour is plenty,” Jeff assured looking ahead in the street, “Are you sure Sally didn’t want to come?”

“She’s got to finish a science project,” Lucy shook her head, “Though she did ask if you’d come and make bolognese again.”

Jeff laughed, “I’m glad it went down well.”

“Well?” Lucy asked incredulously, “She didn’t stop talking about it for the rest of the night, and the last three weeks.” She grinned as she turned to face him, starting to walk backwards so she could watch him as she spoke, “You are welcome to come and cook any time you like.”

Jeff laughed and turned her around to walk straight again, “Tell me when you want me and I’ll be around.” He paused and then added, “But not tonight.”

Lucy frowned up to him, “Why? What’s tonight?”

He raised an eyebrow with a grin, “I am taking you out for dinner.”

Her eyes widened and she stumbled over her words, “Jeff! You… I…”

He stopped her and turned to face her in the street, “What?”

He smiled, her cheeks had coloured pink as she looked up to him as she stumbled over her words, “You keep doing all this stuff… but what have I done for you?”

Shaking his head he tucked her hair back, “You have been you.” He murmured. For a long moment it was just the two of them in the middle of the pathway, the rest of the world faded to nothing, “I wouldn’t want anything more.”

Standing on her tip toes, Lucy kissed his cheek, “Keep saying things like that and you can’t go wrong.”

Jeff laughed and wrapped an arm around her, guiding her forward again, “I’ve had a lot of practice.”
She raised an eyebrow as Jeff held the door for her, “How so?”

He chuckled again, “It was a long time ago, before my wife.”

Her mouth formed an oval of understanding, “You were the high school flirt?”

Tutting he rolled his eyes, “I suppose that’s one way of putting it.”

Lucy laughed as she turned to the selection of lunches, “Oh I’ll have to hear all about that.”

Squeezing her shoulder Jeff shook his head, “I’ll tell you whatever you like once you’ve decided what you’d like for lunch.”

He watched her look over the selection of food on offer, smiling at the shine of her eyes that were so eager to take in the world around them. It had never surprised him that she was so brilliant at her art. She always took in every little detail around her, and it always showed in her art.

Sighing as his phone buzzed Jeff kissed Lucy’s hair and held out his wallet, “Get me a toastie, I need to take this call outside.”

She turned to him, “Okay, no problem.”

“Val?” He answered as he slipped out of the cafe.

“I’m in trouble.” Val told him, “And so are the boys.”

Jeff was instantly on high alert, “What is it?”

“I’ve been suspended from the GDF, pending investigation after a rescue went wrong.”

Jeff could hear her banging around in the kitchen, no doubt stress eating, maybe stress baking, either was possible.

“In short,” Val continued, “It involved a GDF convoy, a bridge that should not have collapsed, and the boys being sloppy.”

“Why were they sloppy?” Jeff asked, it wasn’t like them to let things slip, especially not where the GDF were involved.

Val sighed and the banging ceased for a moment, “They’d had a run of rescues, I suspect they’d just wanted to get home at that point.”

Jeff nodded to himself, “Who’s called you out on it?”

“This new second in command I told you about,” Val uttered with distaste, “Janus.” She sighed, “I’m not worried about that though, Penny is already looking into him, she thinks he’s up to something.”

Jeff frowned, beginning to pace up and down the pathway in front of the cafe, “What is it?”

“He’s out to get the boys,” Val explained, “Practically grounded them. I’m worried that he’s going to get hold of the monthly reports.”

Pausing mid stride Jeff shook his head, “Why would that be a problem?”
Val sighed and sank down in her armchair, “I’ve just got their reports for last month, there was an unexplained launch of Thunderbird Three.”

“Well haven’t you asked them?”

“I’ve not had chance!” Val exclaimed, “I barely got to look over the reports, but from what I saw, Alan launched and went to Thunderbird Five. This was the day that I called you saying they weren’t responding to any call outs.”

She shook her head, “If he sees that, I think he’s going to call them up on it.”

Jeff sighed down the line, “What can I do?”

“I don’t know.” Val uttered, her anger flaring up. He wasn’t there so there wasn’t exactly anything he could do to help.

“I’m sorry,” He murmured back, “I’m starting to regret all of this.”

Resisting the urge to snap at him, Val rubbed her face with her hand, “What’s going on there?”

Jeff hesitated, “I’ve asked Lucy out for dinner.”

Val groaned, “Just as it was the first time around.” She huffed, “We all know what comes after this.”

Jeff rolled his eyes, “We do have Sally to consider. I don’t even know if she’ll invite me back.”

Val cackled, “Jeff Tracy, you liar!” She paused suddenly and frowned, “And you’ve better go to a pharmacy before you pick her up tonight, I’m not sure even I can get a parcel to you that quick.”

“Wha-- Parm-- Oh har har Val.” Jeff uttered, “We won’t be doing any of that tonight.”

“Well do it just in case!” She yelled down the phone, “I’m too old for any more Tracy offspring.” She sighed and nodded, “Though it’s probably wise to avoid it, at least until you’ve told her. It’d be like betrayal if you didn’t tell her.”

“Yeah,” Jeff sighed, “I’d better get back to her, she’ll be wondering where I am.”

Val smiled to herself as she said her goodbyes to Jeff, “And remember!” She added, “Pharmacy!”

She reached for her light-type as he hung up, “Now, how fast can we get a packet of one hundred condoms to him?”
Chapter 14

Lucy let out a small whimper as she sunk down on her bed, “What the hell do I wear to the Tamrin?”

“You mean, the most expensive restaurant in the state?” Sally grinned from the doorway.

Lucy looked around, she’d told Sally that she was going out, but she hadn’t had chance to tell her the details. So how did she know?

“I think I’ve got just the thing for you in my wardrobe.” Sally smirked, “Stay there.”

Lucy sat forward, trying to peek out of the door and see what her daughter was bringing back. More importantly, she wanted answers.

“Tada!” Sally smiled as she held up a knee-length navy dress.

Lucy’s jaw dropped as she stood up, “Where the hell did you get this?”

Sally smiled as her mother reached out to the dress and felt the material, chiffon Jeff had told her, and lace at the top.

“Jeff bought it after you’d left this morning,” Sally explained, “Bought shoes too.”

Lucy looked to Sally, “Really? Oh my goodness, how did he…”

“Magic.” Sally shrugged, “At least, that was what he said.”

Lucy took the dress and turned to the mirror, it seemed like it would be a good fit. The label was an expensive one and she couldn’t help but feel that she should repay Jeff for all his kindness.

“Well?” Sally asked, “What do you think?”

“It’s gorgeous.” Lucy murmured, not sure quite what else to say.

Sally rolled her eyes, “Well put it on then!”

She looked up as Sally stepped out of the room before looking back to the dress, “Wow.”

Once she’d got the dress on and had curled her hair over her shoulder, Lucy looked to her full length mirror, “Sal! Where are the shoes?”

The door cracked open and there was a small gasp, “Wow, you look amazing Mom!”

She held out the black strappy heels, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you this dressed up.”

Lucy smiled to her daughter, “You really think so?”

“So you’re going with Jeff?” Sally asked, “And what am I supposed to do? Do I wait up for you? I know it’s the weekend and all, but it would be nice to know what’s going on.”
Looking up as she slipped on her shoes Lucy laughed, “Are you going to give me a curfew?”

Sally shrugged, “Maybe, shall we say eleven?”

Lucy laughed, “That early!”?

Sally hopped up onto the chest of drawers, “Seriously though Mom, you’ll be careful right? Like, you won’t… y’know, let yourself get into trouble.”

Lucy smiled and stepped over to her daughter, “I’ll text you every hour, okay? I don’t know what’s going to happen, but I’ll make sure you know, before I even leave the restaurant, okay?”

Sally nodded, reassured that everything would be fine, “That sounds good.”

Lucy still wasn’t quite convinced though as she ran her fingers through her daughter's hair, “If...like I went back to Jeff’s… or if I maybe asked him here… would that… y’know, would you mind?”

Sally shrugged, “I dunno, I don’t mind.”

Lucy sighed with a smile, “I’ll take that as a no.”

“No!” Sally exclaimed sitting straighter, “No, it’s your night Mom, you guys should… have fun.”

Lucy hesitated, “So I can bring him back?”

Sally smiled, “On the condition that, ten years down the line, if I bring a guy home you can’t kick him out.”

Laughing, Lucy nodded, “It’s a deal.” She kissed her daughter’s hair as the buzzer sounded, “That’ll be Jeff, will you let him in?”

Sally hugged her mothers shoulders with a smile, “Sure thing.”

She hopped down from the cabinet and headed to the lounge, lifting the phone from the hook, “Hello?”

“Oh Sally, it’s me, be a dear and let me up.”

Sally sighed, “Well, I’ll have to check with Mom first.” She held the phone to her shoulder, “Mom? It’s Mia!”

Lucy sighed, as she went to take the phone from Sally, “Go to the window and keep an eye out for Jeff please.”

Sally nodded and headed off as Lucy held the phone to her ear, “Mia, what can I do for you?”

“Lucy, I don’t know why your daughter won’t let me up.” Mia sighed, “I bought chinese and a movie for us, it’s too long since we’ve had a night in.”

Lucy’s shoulders sunk, “Mia, I can’t, not tonight, I’m going out for a meal.”

“A meal out?” Mia asked, “On your wage?”
Lucy tutted, “Mia, a friend’s taking me.”

“Which friend? I thought I was your friend?” Mia snapped.

“You are,” Lucy sighed in exasperation, “It’s just, I’m going with Jeff.”

“Jeff? Is this a date? Lucy--”

“I have to go and get ready.” Lucy cut her off, “Bye.”

“Oh my--” Sally uttered as Lucy passed her, “Mom! There’s a limo just pulled up out there!”

“A what?” Lucy’s eyes widened as she looked over Sally’s shoulder, “Oh my goodness.” She looked to Sally, “I can’t do this, where the hell did he get a limo from?”

Both looked around as the buzzer sounded. Sally grinned, “That’ll be him.”

Lucy blew out a long breath as she stood straight, “Okay, this is going to be fine. There won’t be a problem. We’re just two adults having a grown up meal.”

“Mom, you’re stressing.” Sally pointed out as she flopped back on the sofa, “Relax.”

“Relax?” Lucy looked to her daughter, “Excuse you but--”

“Wow.”

Lucy looked to the door sucking in a breath, “Jeff.”

“Lucy,” He cleared his throat, “You look, wonderful.”

Sally pulled a face, “That’s my cue to leave.” Both adults smirked at Sally as she got up, “Have a good night.”

“Goodnight Sweetie,” Lucy smiled, calling after her, “No house parties!”

Jeff laughed as he held an arm out to Lucy, “Shall we?”

“Let’s.” Lucy smiled as she picked up her purse, glancing once more to Sally’s room before they slipped out of the door.

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“Would you like to come in?” Lucy murmured before she stepped out of the limo, “We could have a coffee.”

Jeff smiled, “Or more wine.”

“Are you trying to make me an alcoholic?” Lucy giggled, “Sally said she wouldn’t mind if you stayed.”

Jeff raised an eyebrow, “Is that an invitation?”
Lucy smirked as she stepped out of the limo, “Come and find out.”

Jeff laughed as he followed her into the block of apartments, “I love you when you’re drunk.”

“I’m not drunk!” She exclaimed, “I’m a little tipsy.”

He kissed her cheek, “Of course.”

She guided him upstairs and to her door, taking three attempts at unlocking the apartment before Jeff took the key from her, “Allow me.”

She sighed and handed over the key, “I don’t normally drink much.”

“I’d noticed.” Jeff nodded, regretting allowing her to ask for the second bottle of wine. He wasn’t sure he’d seen her as drunk as she was since they had married, she’s always managed to hold her drink normally.

As she pulled him onto the sofa he was reminded that the whole situation was anything but normal. He sat down and allowed her to curl up against him, kissing her hair as her fingers began to play with the first fastened button of his shirt. Taking her hand he kissed her fingertips, “I love you.”

She looked up to him, her honey-gold eyes wide, “I love you too.” Shifting to sit up, she pressed her lips to his, her hand ghosting up his neck and to the back of his hair. He smiled and kissed her back, his hand slipped down to her waist and over her back resting there as he pushed her towards him. She smiled against his skin as her lips trailed along his jaw, leaning forward into him as he encouraged her on. He followed her as she shifted into a more comfortable position, ensuring his lips did not pull away from hers.

“You know,” She breathed as she pulled back, “I wouldn’t be doing this if I were sober.”

Jeff chuckled as his lips sucked at her collarbone, “Really?”

She pulled away from him, her lips brushing along his cheek to his ear as she giggled, “I’m a virgin.”

Jeff sighed as he pushed her away, knowing in his head that he couldn’t sleep with her, not until she was sober. Not until she knew the truth.

“Jeff?” Of course she’d instantly picked up on his change of mood, “What is it?”

He sighed and kissed her cheek, running a hand through her hair as he shook his head, “We can’t, not tonight.”


Jeff shook his head holding her wrists, “No, you did nothing honey,” He sighed again and wiped his thumb over her cheek, “We’re both drunk though, and it wouldn’t be fair, and…” He paused, “I need to tell you something first. Just not tonight.”

She looked down, “Okay.”
Using his forefinger, he guided her chin towards him. “Lucy, I wish I could, and dear god I want to, but you have to trust me when I say it wouldn’t be right.”

She slowly looked up to him, “So you would?”

He smiled and kissed her briefly, “If we were sober, yes.”

“But you can’t go,” She pouted, “It’s so late, and dark, and it’s not safe to walk home.” Lucy smiled with a sigh, “Well would you like to stay anyway?”

Jeff raised an eyebrow, “Would you like me to?”

“Well, I’ve invited you up, it seems a shame to send you away again, even if you won’t sleep with me.”

Jeff kissed her cheek again, pulling her hips close to his, “Trust me, it’s not that I don’t want to.” “I believe you.” She smiled standing up and holding out her hand, “Come on.”

Jeff wasn’t going to argue as he stood and took her hand, “Lead the way.”
Chapter 15

Sighing as he rolled over in the bed, Jeff smiled as Lucy wriggled closer to him, mumbling something unintelligible as he hugged her. She pushed him away, shaking her head, this time sounding more clear, “Boys! Come back … water.”

Jeff shifted to sit up as she kicked at the sheets twisted around her legs, “Hey, Luce,” He reached out to brushed her hair back, “Luce, you’re dreaming honey. It’s okay.”

“No!” She muttered, her whole body twisting and turning away from him, “No! Save him!”

She sobbed in her sleep as she cried out again, Jeff pulled her up into his arms, “Luce, it’s alright, it’s all fine.”

She gasped, pulling back from Jeff as she jolted awake. He held his hands up in surrender, “Lucy, you were dreaming. It’s okay.”

Breathing heavily, she moved back into his arms, “Just a dream.” She murmured as Jeff stroked her hair, “It wasn’t real.”

Jeff nodded, “It’s okay.”

“There was this boy,” She started, “He was only a little kid. And… and… I was at the beach with him and some other kids, and they were in the water.”

Jeff held her close as she welled up again, kissing her hair as he reassured her it was alright. She shook her head again, “I pulled him from the water Jeff, and he was gone.” She choked on a sob and looked up to him, “He was dead.” Her eyes were wide and brimmed with tears as she looked up to him, “But he had these eyes, this big beautiful brown eyes.”

He wrapped her in his arms, hugging her tight as his heart thudded in his chest. There had been so many times that she had taken the boys down to the beach as young children. Jeff didn’t dare to think which of his brown eyed boys she meant.

“It was just a dream.” He murmured to her, not sure what else he could say about the sons she didn’t know.

He kept talking softly as they lay back into the pillows and she fell back asleep.

Jeff stayed awake though, his mind churning with the thought of his boys haunting his wife’s dreams. He held her close through the night until he did eventually drift off after her.

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Lucy sighed with a smile as a pair of lips pressed to her hair, “Good morning.”
Jeff chuckled softly, “How’s your head?”

She smiled as she rested her head on his shoulder, “Surprisingly, okay.”

He squeezed her tight, “And you’re okay? That dream that woke you--”

She nodded, “It’s okay, was just a dream.”

“Exactly.” He kissed her briefly, “I had a wonderful night, thank you.”

“I should be thanking you,” Lucy smiled sleepily, “I don’t think I’ve ever had such good food.”

Jeff smiled, wishing she could remember all those times they had gone out to all those fancy restaurants. He wished she could remember all the times she had said she wished she could just have a home cooked meal.

“I’m glad you enjoyed it,” Jeff murmured, “I wanted you to be able to relax.”

“And I did.” Lucy whispered leaning up to kiss his cheek, “Would you like a shower?”

Jeff laughed softly, “Is that implying something?”

“No!” Lucy exclaimed with a giggle, “Oh goodness, no, not at all.”

“But if you don’t mind,” He hugged her again, “I would like to freshen up.”

She nodded, “There’s a spare bathrobe on the door, help yourself to anything in there.”

“Thanks,” Jeff kissed her cheek, “I won’t be long.”

Lucy smiled, “I’ll go and put a coffee on.”

Sighing as she stepped into the kitchen, Lucy raised an eyebrow at Sally, “You’re up early.”

She shrugged to her mother, “I got your text but didn’t hear you come in, I had to get up to check you were back.”

Lucy stifled a giggle, “I’m surprised you didn’t hear,”

“Oh my god Mom!” Sally exclaimed covering her ears, “I did not need to hear that.”

Lucy laughed and shook her head, “No, nothing happened, he just stayed the night.”

Rolling her eyes Sally tutted, “Whatever you say Mom.”

Lucy smiled, “Was everything alright here? Mrs Kern didn’t come around did she?”

Sally shrugged, “Well I didn’t answer the door if she did.”

Lucy gasped, chasing her daughter around the counter to catch her daughter and hug her from behind, “That’s very very naughty Miss Thomas.” She kissed Sally’s cheek, “If anyone asks, you were out at a friends.”
Sally laughed and pulled away from her mother, jumping over the back of the sofa to switch the tv on. Lucy looked up from pouring juice as the news channel flicked on, “Leave that for a second Sal.”

“Why?” Sally complained, “The news is boring.”

Lucy waved her hand at her, “It’s an adult thing, we have to know what’s going on in the world.”

Sighing, Sally looked to the tv and listened to the reporter.

“Jeff Tracy’s son’s have given a press report overnight, asking for help in finding their missing father. It is apparent that the billionaire ex-astronaut has been missing for a number of months now, following the disappearance of his plane. The five young men have requested that anyone who be--”

“Hey,” Sally sat up as a picture came on the screen, “He looks like…”

“Morning Sally.” Jeff smiled as he stepped out of the bedroom. His smile faded as he heard the news report. He looked to Lucy pleadingly, her hand over her mouth told him everything he needed to know as the news report continued.

“The disappearance of their father leaves the boys orphaned after the death of their mother thirteen years ago. Lucille Tracy was blown over a cliff whilst trying to assist in the evacuation of a village about to be hit by hurricane Enid.”

Jeff was grateful that Sally missed the photo that came up on the screen, it had been the last family photo taken before Scott and John had left for boarding school. Looking to Lucy, he knew she’d seen it, and recognised it, there was a look in her eye as he stepped foward.

“I think… you should leave.” Lucy whispered, looking down to the drinks she had poured.

He stepped forward, “Lucy,”

Her voice was a deadly whisper as she looked up to him, “Get your stuff, and go.”

“Please,” He begged, “Let me explain.”

“Get out!” She shrieked, reaching out to shove him in the direction of the door, “Go! Now!” She kept pushing him until he was out of the door, and she took the chance to slam it behind him. He sighed and turned back, looking down at the bathrobe that covered him, “Lucy, please?”

He sucked in a hopeful breath as the door swung open, only to sigh quietly as his clothes were flung at him.

“I hate you!” Lucy yelled, “I bet you’ve been laughing all this time! What sort of sick pleasure did you get from all of this?” She sobbed and stepped back into the apartment, “Well you can go and tell your sons what an adventure you’ve been having! Go on! Go!”

She slammed the door again, turning to lean against it as she sobbed.

“Mom?” Sally asked softly, “Is there anything I can do?”
Lucy shook her head as she stood, “Just leave me alone Sally.” She snapped, striding to her room and slamming the door.

Curling up on the bed, she closed her eyes, only for the image from the news reel to flash up in her head. She couldn’t understand how it was possible, how it could be her in that image. It would be impossible to forget having five sons, she was certain. Yet, she recognised them, all a little older than they had been in her dream, but all the same boys. All smiling, all happy.

“It doesn’t make sense.” She whispered, reaching out to pull the pillow he had slept on close, as she again closed her eyes.

Jeff sighed as he sunk down the door, holding his clothes in one hand as he felt for his phone. Cursing silently, he looked to the door, not daring to knock again and ask for his phone back. He had to be grateful that he still had his watch.

“Val,” He sighed when she answered, “I’m in major trouble.”
Chapter 16

Lucy reached out as the phone flashed up on the bedside table, she knew hers was still in her purse from the previous night. Reaching out she picked up the phone, squinting at the message on the screen--

*I’ll be a couple of hours, got held up with the boys. Will explain when there. Val.*

Lucy sighed and set the phone down, something about the tone of the text and the name ringing a bell. She shook her head, trying to clear it of all the images that came to mind. Pushing the sheets back, she sat up and headed to the lounge.

The tv was still on, the news channel still reporting the latest news updates. She could see Sally still sat there, her back to her. Lucy frowned as the girl’s arm reached up to her face and there was a small siffle.

“Sal?” She murmured, stepping forward, only then realising how she had snapped earlier, “Oh, Sally.” She sighed and sat down next to her daughter, pulling her into a hug, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean to yell at you.”

Sally sniffed and shrugged, a pointy elbow digging into Lucy’s ribs, “It’s ‘kay Mom, you were mad.”

“That’s no excuse,” Lucy murmured as she kissed Sally’s hair, “I shouldn’t have yelled.”

“Honestly Mom, don’t worry,” Sally smiled to her, “I was just cross for you really. How could he lie like that?”

“I don’t know.” Lucy sighed, “I wish I did Sal.”

Sally hugged her mother back, “It’s okay, you and me will be fine.”

“Course we will,” Lucy smiled, “We always have been.” She gave Sally a little shove, “Go on, homework.”

Sally hesitated as she stood up, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

“I’ll be fine,” Lucy nodded, “Go on, and I’ll take you out for a coffee later.”

She sighed and sat back in the cushions as Sally shut her bedroom door. The news reel caught her eye as the picture from earlier flashed up.

“More now on the disappearance of Jeff Tracy’s disappearance.” The news reporter paused, “It is just thirteen years since his wife, Lucille died in hurricane Enid, leaving their five sons behind.” She
looked down the camera, “More now from Ben.”

“Thank you Lisa,” The reporter answered, “I’m here, outside of the original headquarters of Tracy Industries. The business was originally started by his wife, but after her death, Jeff took on the business and used the money to start the International Rescue organisation.”

Sighing Lucy turned the TV off. She looked to the light-type on the coffee table hesitantly.

“Oh just get on with it.” She muttered, taking the tablet and opening up an online search.

Swallowing as she tapped onto the image results, Lucy let out a little gasp, covering her mouth with her hand. She sniffed and shook her head, “It’s not possible.” She whispered, “I can’t be.”

All the images were publicity photos, or official family photos, posed just right to be published by the press. She shook her head and bit her lip, not understanding how the woman in the picture could be her.

“It doesn’t make sense,” She uttered, “Why does none of it make sense?”

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Jeff looked up as the door shut, “Hey, I came as soon as I could.”

He shook his head at Val, “I’ve screwed up, hugely.”

Val sighed, “I’ll get the scotch.”

Jeff shook his head, “I don’t want a flaming drink Val, I want it to all be right I want her to understand and know what all this is about.” He pressed the heels of his hands into his eyes, “I have made a huge mess.” He sucked in a jagged breath, “She hates me. Sally hates me. It’s only a matter of time before I get found by the press,” He scoffed, “No, forget that last one, I don’t bloody care about that.”

“Here,” Val held out a tumbler, “Drink.”

Jeff sighed and took the drink, sipping the dark amber liquid, “What do I do Val.”

“Oh geez,” Val sighed, sitting down in the armchair facing him, “You have got it bad.”

“She’s my wife Val!” Jeff exclaimed, “She should know me. I shouldn’t have to dance around the facts and be careful about sleeping with her.”

Val raised her eyebrows, “When were the pair of you ever careful about sleeping together.”

“Val.” Jeff glared, “You’re not funny.”

She sat forward and slammed down her tumbler, “Well what the hell do you want me to do Jeff? I tried to talk you out of this, I told you that it wouldn’t go well. Being you though, it had to go your way, didn’t it?”
“Alright!” Jeff snapped back, “I was wrong! Okay? Is that what you wanted to hear? That I was wrong?”

Val shook her head, “No Jeff, I know, it’s not your fault.”

“But it is,” He uttered, “If I’d have done it your way, then maybe…”

“Maybe you would have never gotten to this stage.” Val pointed out, “Alright? Maybe, she would have run a mile and called the police. We don’t know.”

Jeff shook his head, swiping at his eyes, “I just want her back Val. I want my Luce, that understood and listened, and talked…” His breath shook as he bowed his head, “It’s not fair.”

“Oh Jeff,” Val sighed standing up and perching on the arm of his chair, “Come on now, it’ll all work out.”

“I don’t see how.” He sighed, closing his eyes.

Val squeezed his shoulder, “I was going to wait to tell you, but the GDF bought the Hood into custody today.”

“What?” Jeff looked up, with a frown, wiping the liquid from his eyes, “How?”

“It’s a long story,” Val smiled, “But I think he may be able to answer a few questions.”
“Well, hello Jeff.” The man in the seat smirked, “How nice to see you alive.”

Jeff looked to Val, “What does he mean?”

“Your sons,” He answered for her, “Believe I am responsible for your death.”

Jeff’s head swung back and forth as he tried to comprehend what was being said, “What? They believe I’m…” He trailed off, his face paling.

Val stepped forward, “If you know what’s good for you Hood, you’ll shut up now.”

“They think I’m dead?” Jeff whispered, not quite able to take in the news, “But…”

“It’s a long story, but they think there hasn’t been any confirmed sightings of you.” Val sighed and folded her arms, “Leading for them to believe that you haven’t vanished… rather that you’ve died.”

Jeff sunk down in the hard plastic chair, “No.”

“Oh, yes,” The Hood smiled, “So whilst you’ve been on your wild goose chase, your son’s believe that your ‘crash’ killed you.”

Jeff looked to Val, “Really?”

She nodded wordlessly, “Yeah, I’m afraid so.”

Jeff sat forward shaking his head as he pressed the sides of his hands to his mouth in a triangle. Whilst he had known the whole situation was a mess, he had never realised that it was that much of a mess. He went to stand, “I need to go--”

“No,” Val pushed him back down in the seat, “You’re too far in now to back out, so you’re going to get your act together and we’re going to find out just how much he knows.”

The Hood scoffed as sat back in his seat, “And what makes you believe I know anything?”

“We know you were there.” Val turned to him, pulling out her own seat and stepping up to sit on the back, “The day Luce went over the cliff.”

“I was on the other side of the town.”

“That’s a lie.” Jeff shook his head, “I saw your machine take off and fly over us just before she went over.”

“Tell us what happened,” Val leant forward, “Or that stint in prison may well end up doubling.”

The Hood eyed her up, taking his time to work out how the deal could be of benefit to him. Eventually he sighed and nodded, “Alright, I’ll tell you my version of events,”
“You can start after I’d finished chasing you.” Val told him, “We know what happened there.”

The Hood nodded, “Very well. After I’d taken off, I caught sight of the boat just beyond the cliffs, I would liked to make it clear that she signaled me. Not the other way around.”

Val nodded, assuring him that she’d taken in the information, but not seeing how it linked to the situation.

“She was requesting my help out of her situation, it seemed that she knew who I was, and what I wanted… it wasn’t until she was about to board my ship that she saw Luce…”

“You can call her Mrs Tracy.” Jeff uttered in warning.

The Hood glared but continued, “Very well… When she saw Mrs Tracy go over the cliff, she jumped from my ladder and into the water. I didn’t realised until they were on the ship who either woman was.”

“So who was the woman that rescued Lucy?” Val asked, “How did she know you?”

The Hood smiled, “She had done her research it seemed, she knew plenty enough about International Rescue,” He looked to Jeff, “And you Tracy’s as it happens.”

“A name.” Val stated slowly but loudly, “Give us a name, Hood.”

Sitting back in his seat, the Hood smiled confidently, “I know the lady as Miss Erebus, however, I believe you know her as Mia.”

* 

Lucy looked up at the knock on the classroom door, “Come in.” She sighed as she flicked over the page of the assignment she was marking.

“Lucy,” An unwanted voice sighed, “What on earth is wrong? Everyone can’t help but talk about how you’ve been these last couple of days.”

Lucy shook her head, refusing to look up as she uttered, “I’m fine.”

“I’m not entirely convinced.” Mia folded her arms, “Come on Lucy, you can tell me.”

Lucy slammed her pen down, “And what if I don’t want to tell you? What then Mia?”

“Luce,” Mia murmured in disapproval, “After all I’ve done for you? You still feel you can’t tell me anything?”

Lucy rubbed her face with her hand, “It’s not like that Mia.” She frowned and looked up, “And when have you ever called me ‘Luce’.” She paused, “Nobody’s ever called me that… except…”

Mia stood straighter, “It’s only a friendly pet name.”

Lucy shook her head, “No, no it’s not.” She pushed her seat back and stood, “You know something don’t you?”
Mia stepped back as Lucy stepped around the desk, “About what?”

Lucy sucked in a breath, it had been the second thing Jeff had called her when they had met in that office. Everyone else had only ever called her one thing, no matter how long she’d known them. Luce had been something that had come about with Jeff.

“There has to be a shorter name for Lucille?” Mia asked, “Isn’t there?”

Lucy looked up as Jeff slung an arm around her shoulders, “Luce, to those that are friends with her.”

Lucy looked up with a small gasp, “You do know.”

“Oh for goodness sake Lucy,” Mia rolled her eyes, “What’s your problem?”

“You know who I was!” Lucy yelled, “You knew who I was and never bothered to tell me!”

Shaking her head Lucy grabbed her bag, “I have to go.”

She ran through the town, not caring where she was going. She needed to get away from everything, it didn’t matter that it was pouring with rain, or that she didn’t have a coat. All she wanted was for things to go back to normal, back to when she was just Ms Thomas the art teacher. There was too much that didn’t make sense to her, she couldn’t understand why both Jeff and Mia had lied to her, or what the flashes she kept seeing meant.

She sobbed as she sunk down on a bench, pressing the heels of her hands into her eyes as another image appeared behind her eyelids.

“Luce, it’s pouring with rain!” Jeff laughed as she dragged him out to the verandah.

She pulled him out into the downpour, wrapping her arms around his neck and tiptoeing to kiss him. The rain was warm down her back as he pulled her close.

“I love you, Jeff Tracy.”

She smiled as his face relaxed in understanding and his hand slipped around to her belly, “Running out of ways to tell me you’re pregnant?” He laughed softly.

“Lucy?”

She looked up at the call, shivering as she realised that the rain wasn’t warm, it was cold like ice pricks down her back. She sniffed and wiped her face, not sure which of the dampness was tears and which was from the rain.

“God Lucy,” A coat was wrapped tightly around her, “You’re frozen.”
She let him guide her to the car and accepted the help into the passenger seat before he went around to the drivers side.

Jeff turned up the heating to full as he turned to Lucy, “I was just coming to see you at home.”

She sniffed and shook her head, “Not home.”

“Okay,” Jeff nodded, “Do you want to come back to mine then? I can run you a bath and…”

She nodded instinctively, anywhere sounded better than home. Jeff sighed and squeezed her shoulder, “It’s going to be okay Lucy, we can work something out.”
Jeff knocked on the bathroom door lightly, “Lucy, can I come in?” He called, “I’ve got a bathrobe for you.”

He stepped back as the lock on the door clicked and the handle turned. Lucy stepped out wrapped in a towel and offered him a weak smile, “Is that the one I kicked you out in?”

He smiled softly, “Yeah.”

Holding it open for her, Jeff tried to hide his surprise when she turned away and dropped the towel before slipping on the soft robe. “Thank you.” She sighed as she tied the belt, “And, I’m sorry.”

Jeff shook his head, turning her back to face him, “I shouldn’t have kept secrets, Lucy, I didn’t mean to--”

“No,” She cut him off quietly, “I’m sorry.” She took a breath and shrugged, “I was scared and confused. I didn’t want to believe it at first, I’ve been so happy with Sally, the thought of changing all over again…” She trailed off, ducking her head as she wrapped her arms around herself, “I didn’t want the last twelve years to be a lie.”

He stepped closer to her, reaching his hand up to brush her wet hair away but stopping at the last minute, “They’re not.” He murmured, “None of it is a lie, it’s just what it is.”

She sniffed and looked up to him, “I’m so confused, I--” She pressed the heel of her hand to her head, screwing her eyes shut, “I keep having these… these flashes, and it’s like it’s a whole different life, I just don’t understand it. Why can’t I remember?”

This time Jeff didn’t stop himself as his fingers brushed her cheek, “I don’t know Luce,” He whispered, “I wish I did, but I don’t.”

She stepped into his chest, “Can you forgive me?”

Hesitantly, he wrapped his arms around her, “There’s nothing to forgive really.”

He rubbed her back gently, trying to work out what to say or do. Guiding her to the sofa, he sat down with her curled into his side.

“None of this is your fault, okay?” He told her, “You didn’t make this happen Lucy.”

She pulled back and wiped her eyes with a sniff, “What did then? Why can’t I remember who I was?” She sucked in a breath and looked towards the cabinet next to the tv, “Why can’t I remember you?”

Jeff sat up and took her hands, waiting until he had her attention before starting to explain what had happened on the cliffs.

When Jeff finished Lucy bit her lip, shaking her head, “So Mia was out to get me all along?”
“I’m sorry,” Jeff sighed, “I suppose it’s not what you want to hear.”

“I just don’t understand why she’d do that.” Lucy murmured, “I guess Sally always was right.”

Jeff shook his head, “Don’t blame yourself.”

She looked up to him, “So, you never knew I was here?”

Jeff shook his head, dropping his gaze as he whispered, “No, I thought you’d died and that there wasn’t a body to be found.”

Lucy reached out to squeeze his hand, “Take some of your own advice.” She whispered, “It’s not your fault.”

Jeff smiled to her, “I know, I just wish I could have done something.”

“And you did,” Lucy told him, reaching out to her bag on the table. Taking out the phone, she loaded an image and held it out to Jeff, “You raised five beautiful boys to be lovely young men.”

Jeff laughed softly, “That was where I left it.”

Ducking her head, Lucy blushed, “I couldn’t help but have a look, sorry.”

“You’re entirely entitled to look at pictures of your son’s.” Jeff stated, only after adding, “Sorry, you probably--”

“It’s fine,” Lucy smiled before frowning, “Did you know… Had I told you about Sally?”

Jeff shook his head, “No, I didn’t know until I came here and found you.”

“God, I can’t believe this.” Lucy breathed as she stood up, “How could I forget all of this?”

Jeff reached out for her hand, his fingers squeezing hers gently, “It’s a lot to take in.”

She looked back to him, “I just… I need a break from everything right now.”

“Take the rest of the week off then,” Jeff told her, “I can give you some money to cover anything you need.”

“Jeff,” She sighed, “I can’t… we’re not back on the terms we were before.” She shook her head, “Everything’s changed since I found out.”

“I know,” Jeff nodded, “I’ll wait though, as long as you need me to. I’m fine to wait.”

She smiled softly to him, “Thank you.”

“Lucy,” He sighed, standing to face her, “I’m going to stay as long as you need me to, okay? If you’ve got questions, I’ll answer them. If you need money, I’ll give it to you.”

“I don’t want your money,” Lucy sighed, “That’s not what I’m asking.”

“You’ve been managing Sally on your own for the last twelve years,” Jeff murmured, “Thirteen if you count the pregnancy. I think you’re owed some support.”

She smiled tiredly, “If it’d make you feel better.”
“It would.” Jeff murmured, “Please.”

“Okay,” She nodded, “Thank you.”

Both looked up sharply as something beeped in the kitchen. Jeff sighed, “That’ll be the dryer, I stuck your clothes in.”

Lucy smiled, “You didn’t have to do that.”

“I couldn’t let you go home soaked through.” He told her turning to get the clothes, “It was no trouble.”

She took her clothes from him and kissed his cheek, “Thank you.”

He smiled as she took the clothes into the bathroom. Once the door was firmly shut, he turned to the photoalbum he had snuck away with him. He slipped it onto Lucy’s bag, hoping it’d be of some comfort to her when she found it.

Lucy sighed as she stepped out of the bathroom, “Thank you.”

Jeff shook his head, “It’s no problem.” He stepped forward hesitantly, “You’ll call right?”

She nodded, “Yeah, don’t worry, I won’t go vanishing again.”

“Okay,” He forced a smile, not sure that he was completely okay with her leaving. It was yet another reminder of how badly he’d screwed up and how far he was from fixing everything.

“You should call the boys,” She murmured as she lifted her bag, “Let them know that you’re alright and you just need some time away.”

Jeff sighed, “I’ll see, it might not be so easy to explain.”

Lucy paused by the door, “You’d know better than me.”

Jeff’s shoulders sunk as he realised just what she was saying. He looked over to her, his eyes soft with regret, “One day you’ll know too.”

“Maybe.” She smiled back, “I’d better get back, Sally will be worried.”

Jeff nodded, “Okay, night.”

“Good night Jeff.”
Chapter 19

Sally looked up as the door opened and sighed in relief, “Mom! I was starting to worry.”

She resisted the urge to run into her arms and walked over calmly to hug her. Lucy sighed and hugged her daughter back, “I’m sorry baby, I am so, so sorry.”

Sally frowned and pulled back to look to her mother, “What? What’s wrong?”

Lucy sighed and shook her head, it was all so complicated to explain to Sally, she didn’t have any idea how she’d take it.

“I need to tell you something, and I need you to try and understand.” She explained, “Please?”

Without hesitation, Sally nodded, “Of course I will Mom,” She followed her over to the sofa, “What is it?”

Lucy sighed as she sat down, noticing something in her bag that hadn’t been there earlier as she set it down on the floor, “Jeff wasn’t here just to try and make a fool of us,” She pulled Sally close to her and hugged her, “He didn’t just leave his son’s for the hell of it.”

Sally leant into her mother’s shoulder with a frown, “Why did he then?”

Lucy sighed again and closed her eyes, “Since the other day, when we saw that news report about Jeff… I’ve been getting these memories.”

Sally looked up with wide eyes, “What? Like from before you had me?”

Lucy nodded, “Yeah, from before my amnesia.”

“Well what did you see?” Sally asked, her voice raising in pitch as she sat straighter, “Was it to do with Jeff?”

Lucy bit her lip and nodded, “Yeah.” She knew Sally wouldn’t like the news, but it was only fair to tell her, “That’s why he was here Sal, I’m married to him…” She brushed her fingers over her daughter’s cheek, “He’s your Dad.”

“What?” Sally exclaimed, “That di-- he’s my Dad?”

Lucy frowned at her daughter, not missing the slip of her tongue, “You watch your language young lady.”

“But Mom!” Sally shook her head, “He lied to us!”

“With reason,” Lucy nodded, “He thought I was dead Sally. He didn’t want to freak me out by suddenly appearing and telling me the whole story.”

Sally pulled away, “That still doesn’t make what he did right Mom!”

Lucy sighed, knowing that Sally wouldn’t be so easily won around by her arguments. She could see
Jeff’s reasoning -- not that she agreed with it -- and had just about forgiven him despite what he had done. It was clear Sally was going to take much more talking around.

“I’m not saying it did,” Lucy reasoned, “But hindsight is twenty-twenty, he realises his mistakes now and wants to make up for it.”

Sally still hesitated, clearly not comfortable in the way things were panning out. Lucy saw her shift and sighed, “There was something else too.”

Sally looked up, “What?”

“Well,” Lucy shifted, “There’s actually a few things.”

Sally hesitantly sat back on the sofa, sitting cross legged to face her mother, “What is it?”

Lucy smiled and shook her head, “I owe you an apology.” She kissed Sally’s hair, “You were right about Mia, I found out today that she actually knows all about who I was.”

“She knew you?” Sally asked with wide eyes, “And she never told us?”

Lucy nodded quietly, “Yeah, I’m not sure of the details, but she’s known who I was this whole time.”

Sally hugged her mother tightly, “That’s okay, we don’t need her for anything.”

“I know.” Lucy sighed.

She wanted to tell the little girl about the brothers she didn’t know, make sure she knew and understood it all.

“Sal, I know you’re still mad at Je-- your Dad,” She paused as Sally huffed quietly, “But you haven’t got any reason to be mad at the rest of your family.”

Sally frowned and looked up, her features shifting from confusion, to careful thought, to understanding before she spoke, “Jeff Tracy has five son’s.” She stated.

“Yes,” Lucy breathed, “You’ve got five big brothers Sal.”

Sally let out a long breath, “But… I…”

Lucy sighed and hugged her tightly, “I know, it’s a big shock, but it doesn’t change how much I love you, okay? You’re still my little girl and I promise nothing is going to change.”

“Five brothers?” Sally murmured, “Do they know about me?”

Lucy shook her head, “I assume not sweetie, I’m afraid I don’t really know.”

Sally thought for a moment before realising, “Oh.” Her mother didn’t remember anything from just before she was born, her mother had been as clueless as her about the rest of their family. She looked up to Lucy with a frown, only then noticing the tears in her eyes, “You don’t remember them?”
Lucy sniffed and tried to blink back the tears as she shook her head, “No, I don’t. I wish I did Sal, but I don’t remember them at all and I can’t tell you anything about them.”

“That’s okay,” Sally murmured, “It’s not your fault.”

Lucy shook as she held in a sob, still feeling responsible for her daughter not knowing her family. Sally sighed and climbed up from the sofa, going to route in her mother’s handbag for some tissues.

She frowned at the book she didn’t recognise, pulling it out with a packet of tissues before sitting back up on the sofa., “What’s this?” She asked quietly, her hand brushing over the tree design on the front cover.

Lucy frowned at the book, “How did that get in there?”

Sally sat back and opened the cover, “Wow, is that you Mom?”

Wiping her eyes, Lucy leant over to look at the book. She couldn’t help but frown at the image there, not remembering it ever being taken, and not understanding how Jeff would have found a picture from the day Sally had been born. Her eyes softened as she saw the date in the bottom corner, and she realised that the baby was wrapped in blue against her hospital gown.

“Yeah,” She murmured to Sally, “That’s me, and…” She trailed off, tears springing to her eyes again when she realised she didn’t know the baby’s name, her baby’s name.

“Scott.” Sally stated, making Lucy frown in confusion. Before she asked how her daughter knew, she caught sight of the holotab in front of her. “I looked it up.” Sally explained, “The eldest Tracy brother spent some time training in the USAF before leaving to pursue a career in the restarted International Rescue.”

Lucy sighed with a small smile, resting her cheek on her daughter’s head as she read the article for herself, “Scott,” She murmured softly looking to the photo album and scanning over the other pictures on the page. There were two of her and Jeff with the new baby, one posed and smiling naturally, and the other, a precious moment caught between the small family when they didn’t know anyone was looking.

“That’s cute.” Sally smiled pointing to the last picture, baby Scott, fist in mouth and dressed in his baby-grow that read *Daddy’s little pilot*.

Lucy sighed, wondering to herself who had taken the photos and how she couldn’t remember any of her baby boys. She couldn’t see how it was fair that her family were strangers to her, she knew nothing about any of the people she had once loved.

Sally leant into her mother, “Are you okay?”

Forcing a smile Lucy nodded, “Yeah, I’m fine.” She kissed her daughter’s hair, repeating softly, “I’m fine.” She blew out a breath, “How about we go and put pj’s on and look through this in my room? I’ll order pizza for tea.”

Sally looked up with a nod, “Okay.”
Lucy sighed as Sally jumped up to head to her room, leaving her to look back to the photo album. She reached to her bag, pulling out her phone and texting Jeff --

*Thank you for the photos, and everything else. Lucy.*

She hesitated before sending the message, debating whether to add a kiss to the end of the message. Eventually she added a small x before pressing send.

There was a sigh from her side as Sally came back in, “You’re still talking to him?”

Lucy raised an eyebrow, “He had his reasons Sal,” She told her, “And he is your dad.”

Sally huffed, “I think he should have just told us, he’s a --”

“Go and find the pizza menu.” Lucy cut her off with a sigh, knowing that it would would be a long time before she got her to come around to the idea of Jeff.
Chapter 20

Sally looked up to her Mom as they walked through the town, “You really didn’t have to buy me lunch, I could have waited until we got home.”

She was used to forgoing meals out, instead being used to -- and sometimes preferring -- meals at home instead. Lucy still shook her head though, and Sally knew even before she spoke what she was going to say, “It’s fine, I like treating my little girl every now and again.”

It was the same reasoning she had been giving Sally the whole morning whilst they had been out clothes shopping. Sally wouldn’t complain, but she couldn’t help but wonder where her mother had gotten the money from all of a sudden.

It suddenly clicked into place for Sally when she caught her Mom looking at the ring she had never worn, “He gave you money? Like he can buy you back?”

Lucy sighed as she realised she’d been caught out by Sally, “He offered, he said he felt he owed it to me to treat you.”

“That’s why you took the week off work?” Sally raised an eyebrow, “In fact, the last two weeks wasn’t it?”

“That was because I needed to get my head around things,” Lucy reasoned, “I needed some time to myself.”

“For what?” Sally asked, not understanding why she had to go to school if her mother didn’t have to go to work.

Rolling her eyes, Lucy looked to Sally, “To get my head around things.”

“Like--” Sally stopped suddenly, making Lucy look up.

“Now hear me out before you start yelling.”

Lucy shook her head and pulled Sally forward, “I don’t want to hear it Mia, I know enough for my liking.”

“Lucy,” The other woman growled, “That’s not very polite. Think of all I’ve done for you.”

“What you’ve done for me is keep me away from my family.” Lucy snapped back, “If you really were a friend you would have told someone much, much sooner.” She only paused to look back at Mia, “You were never a friend to me, not really.”

Mia raised her eyebrows, “Is that how you really feel?”

Lucy didn’t reply, choosing instead to take Sally’s hand and lead her away.

Mia growled, lunging forward to grab Lucy by the shoulders and pull her away from Sally before pushing her towards the road.
Lucy registered Sally’s scream as she fell towards the road, there was nothing she could do to get herself out of the way of the truck headed towards her. She let out a small gasp as someone grabbed her arm and pulled her upright onto the very edge of the sidewalk, pulling her close as the truck passed with a bluster of wind.

“I’ve got you,” He murmured, “It’s okay.”

She looked up as her guided her around, jabbing a finger in the direction of Mia, “You stay away from my wife. If I ever catch you near her again, you’ll have more to worry about than a prison sentence.”

Mia huffed and turned away storming off as Sally ran over, “Mom! Mommy!”

Lucy crouched to catch her daughter in her arms, “Sal, it’s okay. I’m okay.”

She looked up at the hand on her shoulder, “Are you sure you’re okay?”

Biting her lip Lucy nodded, “Thank you.” She could tell his smile was forced as he squeezed her shoulder and felt obliged to add, “Come back to ours.” He hesitated, about to shake his head before she added, “Please Jeff, I don’t want to think what she’ll do if she comes back.”

He sighed and nodded, holding out a hand to help her up, “Okay.”

“Thank you.” She sighed, leaning into his side as she wrapped an arm around Sally’s shoulders.

*

By the time they got back to the apartment, it was clear Sally’s shock had worn off. Lucy didn’t dare count the number of times she had glared at Jeff on the walk home and hoped that she would be more easily won over after his act of heroism.

“I’m going to my room,” Sally announced as they stepped through the door, “Tell me when he’s gone.”

Lucy gave Jeff an apologetic look as she headed to the kitchen and Sally’s music began to boom through her bedroom door.

“Still not a fan of me then?” Jeff guessed as he followed Lucy.

She shook her head, “I’m afraid not. Sorry that she’s being so rude, I’ll talk to her later.”

Jeff shrugged as he leant on the far side of the counter to Lucy, “I’ll put it down to Tracy stubbornness.”

Lucy laughed as she turned on the kettle, “Are they all like that?”

Jeff nodded with a smirk, “Pretty much.” He shook his head, “They grow out of it soon enough.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” Lucy sighed.
Both were quiet for a long minute as the kettle boiled, Lucy turned away as she began to make coffee. Interest got the better of her as she tried to work out just how he’d been there at that time.

“What were you doing in town?”

Jeff shrugged and looked down to the countertop, like a school child that had been scolded, “I hadn’t heard from you all week, and I wanted to know what you were okay.” He admitted, “I was on my way to come and see you.”

Lucy smiled as she looked in the fridge for some milk, “A text would have done the job.”

He hesitated as she looked around to him, having found the milk, a smile still playing on her lips as he stuttered before finally getting out, “I wanted to see you.”

Ducking her head, Lucy blushed a soft pink before answering, “I wanted to see you too.”

Stepping around the counter, Jeff pulled her into his arms, “Then why didn’t you call?”

Lucy sighed and rested her chin on his chest to look up to him. She dropped her voice as she spoke, “I didn’t know what to say…” She hesitated, “And m-- our daughter thinks you’re the worst person in the world right now.”

“You’ve told her?” Jeff guessed as he went to kiss her cheek, pulling back at the last minute as she flinched away.

Lucy sighed, “Yeah, and now everything you do has a double meaning.”

Jeff glanced towards the bedroom door the music was coming from, “Should I talk to her?”

“You’re welcome to try,” Lucy murmured, “But I can’t promise she’ll take it well.”

“We can hope.” Jeff sighed, “You finish making the coffee, hopefully I won’t be too long.”

“Good luck!” Lucy called after him as he headed to the room.

Knocking lightly on the bedroom door, Jeff sucked in a breath as the volume of music lowered and the handle turned. He stepped back as the door opened a crack and offered a smile to Sally, “Hey, I--”

The moment she realised who it was, Sally went to slam the door, only to be stopped by Jeff’s foot, “Give me two minutes to talk then you can slam the door in my face as hard as you like.”

She paused, frowning at him, “Make it one minute.”

“Deal.” Jeff nodded, knowing agreeing to the younger person’s terms usually worked better with kids.

She sighed and stepped back, allowing him into her room. He looked around the small space, decorated with pale pinks and blues. The white outline of a tree against the blue wall caught his attention first, it branched out over the bed, photo’s cut out and pinned to the wall along the branches
in the place of leaves.

“Mom painted it herself,” Sally offered, “Just after I was born she said.”

Jeff smiled as he looked back to the photos, knowing it was just the thing Lucy would always have done. He could see the desk on the far wall, pages in textbooks marked with post-it-notes and sheets of music, pens and pencils all packed into a cup on the shelf that wouldn’t fit any more. It was a Tracy desk alright, he didn’t need to ask to know how many long hours of work had gone on at that desk.

“So?” She prompted, and Jeff had to stop himself from smiling at how like Scott she looked with her frown and folded arms. He gestured to the daybed, “Wouldn’t you like to sit down?”

She huffed but accepted the suggestion, flopping down on the bed still watching him, “Go on.”

Jeff sighed as he crouched in front of Sally, “Listen, I know you’re piss--” He paused and sighed, “Don’t tell your mom I said that.”

The corner of her mouth twitched up in a small smile, just as Lucy always did when she was trying not to smile.

“Okay,” He started again, “So you’re cross with me because I didn’t tell you or your Mom who I really was.” He sighed and reached forward to her hands, “And I get that Sally, I know what I’ve done wrong. I want to fix it, and apologise, and make it right Sally. Can you give me that chance?”

She looked down not having missed his big, rough, hands resting on her knee, outstretched to her. Hesitantly, she placed her hands in his, “I guess.”

His thumbs ran over the smooth skin across the backs of her hands, “I know you’ve had a lot to take in, and I don’t want you to be stuck wondering when I can tell you what you want to know.”

She sighed and nodded, “Okay, I guess that would be good. Mom can’t… she showed me the photo album, but she couldn’t tell me much. Just, stories that could have fitted to any family.”

Her lips pursed as she looked up to him, “Five brothers is a lot, how do you remember them all?”

Jeff laughed softly, “I’ll write you a list.”

“Thanks.” Sally smiled back, “Y’know, you’re not all bad really.”

Jeff squeezed her hands gently, “But you’re still pi-- angry?”

Sally nodded, “You want to make up for it?”

Jeff sighed and nodded, “In any way possible.”

“Take us out for dinner and then stay the night.” Sally stated.

Jeff recognised the demand for what it really was though, he’d heard that change in tone before. The false confidence hiding the fear of something much darker. Jeff raised an eyebrow, “You don’t want to talk to your Mom about that first?”
Sally looked up to the doorway, “Mom?”

Jeff looked round in surprise, smiling helplessly when he found Lucy leant in the doorway with her coffee.

“As it’s not a school night, I don’t see why not.” She smiled, “Your choice of menu Sal.”

The young girl jumped up with a hiss of, “Yes!” As she headed out to the kitchen. Jeff smiled as he stood, “Well, that went better than expected.”

He reached out to the mug in Lucy’s hands, taking it and taking a sip.

“Hey!” Lucy exclaimed, lightly hitting his arm, “That was mine!”

Jeff looked to the mug as he pulled it from his lips, a look of confusion morphing to one of embarrassment, “Oh, I’m sorry Lucy, I didn’t think--” He sighed, “It was just an instinct.”

She shook her head with a smile, “It’s fine, don’t worry.” She reached up to wipe a drop from his lip. He smiled and caught her hand, kissing her fingers lightly.

“How about chinese?” A call came from the kitchen.

Both sighed as they looked to each other, Lucy ducked her head and Jeff knew she was blushing. He turned to the kitchen, with a last glance to Lucy, “Sounds perfect Sally.”
Jeff smiled as Sally collected the empty food boxes and stood up, “You know the best thing about take out? No washing up.”

Lucy laughed softly as Sally went, “She enjoys washing up really.”

“Wow,” Jeff uttered, “I don’t think I’ve ever met a kid like that.”

“It’s therapeutic!” Sally called back from the kitchen.

Jeff chuckled as he lifted an arm around Lucy. She’d been subconsciously shifting closer to him through the meal until her head rested on his shoulder.

“This has been nice.” She murmured closing her eyes. He looked down to her, his fingers combing lightly through her hair, “Are you okay?”

“Hmm?” She looked up, “Yeah, why wouldn’t I be?”

He watched her closely, examining the creases in her skin that had formed over the years, “Just checking.”

She shifted to sit up a little but ensured that she was still close enough to him, “Is this about before?” She whispered.

Jeff pulled her into him as he breathed, “Yeah.”

“I’m fine,” She assured him, “It was just a shock.”

“I almost lost you again.” Jeff whispered, “If--”

“Hey,” She murmured, “No if’s. It didn’t happen so you don’t need to worry.” She leant up to kiss his cheek, “Fate obviously has something in store for us.”

Jeff smiled softly, of course she believed fate would play it’s hand, his Luce always had so there shouldn’t have been any doubt about Lucy.

She looked up as Sally came back, “Are you going to do the piano Mom?”

Lucy sighed, “Why don’t you play tonight sweetie?”

Jeff nudged Lucy, “No, I agree with Sal, you should play.”

Lucy huffed as she looked to Jeff, “Are you going to force me?”

“Oh come on,” Jeff murmured, “It has been thirteen years.”

Lucy smiled, her cheeks brightening as she nodded, “That explains a lot.”
“Yeah it does,” Sally huffed as she turned to the upright piano, “You know she made me learn how to play.”

“She made everyone learn to play,” Jeff smiled as he leant on the wood of the piano, “Though you didn’t force paino on them all.”

“So what do they play?” Sally asked, perching on the end of the stool.

“Well,” Jeff sighed, “After piano, there’s guitars, drums, and a saxophone.”

“Wow, you virtually have your own band.” Sally grinned.

Jeff nodded with a grin, “Though Virgil’s the only one that plays regularly.”

He watched Lucy as she smiled and began to play, her fingers flowing over the keys as Jeff listened silently.

The three of them sat around the piano for what felt like only minutes as they chatted away, playing music happily. It was only when Sally began to yawn, leaning into her mother, did they realised how late it had gotten.

“I think it’s time you went to bed,” Lucy murmured, rubbing her daughter's arm, “Don’t you think?”

Sally sighed and stretched, stiff from sitting on the stool for so long, “Okay Mom,” She yawned again as she stood, “I’ll see you both in-the-morning.”

“Night Sally,” Jeff called as Lucy looked around to him with raised eyebrows.

She smiled as she stood and went over to him, “Sounds like you’ve got the approval to stay.”

Jeff smiled as he kissed Lucy’s hair, “Would you like me to stay?”

“I would love nothing more,” Lucy murmured, “But we can’t have you sleeping on the sofa.”

Jeff sighed as he wrapped his arms around her waist, “Is that so?”

Lucy nodded quietly, “Just for the company tonight though.” She murmured looking up to him, “I don’t think…”

She trailed off with a sigh as Jeff leant down to kiss her cheek before speaking, “You tell me what you want, and I won’t question it.”

She blushed a soft pink as she looked up through her eyelashes, “Thank you.”

He could see her hesitating, looking towards her bedroom and then back, “Go on, I’ll be through in a minute.”

He headed to the kitchen as she went to her bedroom, he sighed as he took out a glass just to give her some time. Space was what she needed, some space and some time.
“Just nerves,” He murmured as he turned on the tap, he shook his head as he realised that Lucy wasn’t the only one with nerves, “Geez, get it together man.” He uttered, downing the glass of water, “It’s nothing you haven’t done before.”

Lucy blew out a long breath as she wrapped her bathrobe around her, “He’s seen it before,” She whispered to herself as she combed through her hair, “You’re being silly Luce.” Pausing mid stroke, she pulled the comb from her hair and set it down on the dresser, her hands shaking too violently to do anything. Breathing deeply, she closed her eyes as she heard a light knock on the door. His footsteps were gentle but loud in the quietness of the room as he made his way over to her. She hadn’t expected his hands to trail down her arms to cover hers, but managed to stop herself from jumping when he did.

“Are you alright?” He murmured in her ear, his rough fingers caressing gently over the backs of her hands, “Did you need a bit longer?”

She turned her head to the side, her eye still only able to see his shoulder as she relaxed back into him, “No,” She finally whispered, “No, it’s okay.”

They both turned to the bed, each stepping to one side to pull back the covers, both perfectly in time. Lucy had to smile as she caught his eye across the bed, a part of her wanted to ask, wanted to know what normally happened when they went to bed. She sucked in a breath as she reached to the belt of the bathrobe, he busied himself with pulling off his own clothes before climbing into the bed.

He stretched an arm out across the bed as she self-consciously climbed in next to him, pulling the sheets up as she rested her head on his arm. As she sunk into the mattress she finally realised just how tired she was, her eyes began to droop as he kissed her hair and all she heard was a soft whisper as she fell asleep.

“Sweet dreams Lucy.”

*

Jeff sighed as Lucy shifted against him, a sleepy sigh coming softly from her lips as she settled again. He smiled softly to himself, bringing the arm her head was rested on up to curl around her protectively. Outside he could hear the morning chorus beginning to come to life but for once, he had no interest in getting up to meet the day.

At least, not until he realised…

“Lucy,” He murmured softly, “Let me up honey.”

She sighed again, mumbling something that sounded like ‘No’ as she rubbed his leg with her foot that had hooked over him. She smiled sleepily as he kissed her hair, his hand taking hers that was rested on his chest. As he lightly moved her hand off of him, she frowned, yawning as she opened her eyes to glare at him, “Where do you think you’re going?” She replaced her hand on his chest and used her leg that was hooked over him to pull him closer.

“Lucy,” He groaned, leaning down to kiss her nose, “Please let me go.”
“No.” She smiled stubbornly, “Not unless you give me a good reason.”

Jeff sighed as he shook his head, “The children do not get their stubbornness from me.”

“Tell me!” Lucy persisted, “What is it?”

Jeff couldn’t help but laugh at the confusion on her face, once upon a time she would have been on top of him before he was even fully awake. He pulled her close to him, leaning down to catch her lips with his and not giving her chance to pull away.

At first she was reluctant to respond, she went to pull back but a gentle finger tilted her chin towards him, encouraging her closer as she closed her eyes. His lips were soft against hers as his hand reached up to tuck her hair back before holding her head gently. She shifted, moving to sit up so she could get closer, when she realised…

“Oh,” She breathed pulling away.

Jeff sighed, “Sorry, I know--” He was cut off with another kiss as she went to straddle his hips, he pulled back, fixing Lucy with a look, “Sally…”

“Won’t be up until lunch time, unlike someone else I know.” Lucy murmured before he could finish.

He smiled and leant forward to kiss her briefly before pulling back again, “Oh, and how thin are the walls?”

Lucy raised an eyebrow, “I can be quiet.”

Jeff laughed softly, as he pulled her close to him, “Oh, we’ll see about that.”
Lucy laughed as she went to put the milk back in the fridge, “Do you ever stop?”

Jeff paused from kissing her neck, “Fi-- Six kids, you go figure.”

She smiled as she turned to face him, linking her hands at the back of his neck as she went to kiss him. Her head rested on his shoulder as he rubbed her back, “Everything okay?”

“I love you.” She sighed.

Jeff laughed softly, “Well, I’m glad you’re saying that and not that you hate me.”

Lucy smiled and turned back to the bacon in the pan, “A lot of things have come to light since I said that.”

Jeff smirked as he leant over to whisper, “Does that include the fact that I’m great in bed.”

“Oh my goodness!” Lucy exclaimed with a laugh, “Are you always this terrible?”

Jeff didn’t get chance to answer as there was a sleepy mumble from the lounge, “Terrible at what?”

“You’re up early.” Jeff stated with a smile. Sally shrugged as she hopped up onto a stool, “The bacon smelt good.”

Jeff smirked as Lucy ducked her head, going unusually quiet as she focussed on taking the breakfast from the pan, “Well, I’m going to have to nip and ring Val, she’ll be wondering where I am.”

Lucy looked over to him and shook her head, fixing him with a look that promised he’d be in trouble later. He smiled as he stepped into the bedroom, closing the door behind him as he went to find his phone.

“So, it went well then?” Sally asked looking back to her mother, “Guessing from those looks you’ve been giving each other for the last ten minutes.”

Lucy ducked her head with a small laugh, “Yeah, that’s one way of putting it.”

Sally pulled a face, “You did it didn’t you?”

“Well,” Lucy smirked with a laugh at her daughter's expression “Oh Sal, don’t look at me like that.”

“Really Mom,” Sally sighed, “I did not need to know about that.”

Lucy smiled and stepped around the counter to hug her daughter, “Thank you for letting him stay. You have no idea how happy it makes me.”

Sally smiled and rested her hand over her mother’s, “I just wanted to see you happy.”

Lucy gave her daughter a soft look, “I should be making sure that you are happy.”

“It’s fine,” Sally mumbled, resting her head on Lucy’s shoulder, “I am happy, that you’re alive, that
you found dad and…” She shrugged, “Y’know what I mean.”

“Go on, tell me.” Lucy murmured, “What?”

Sally rolled her eyes with a huff, not wanting to admit that really Jeff wasn’t as bad as she had originally made out. She still wasn’t sure she could forgive him entirely, but if he was making her Mom happy, Sally wasn’t sure she could fault him.

“He’s a good guy really,” Sally sighed, glancing towards the door, “He means well with what he does.”

Lucy sighed, “I think that was all he ever meant to do, he just didn’t think it all through so well.”

Sally shrugged, “Well he should have.”

Deciding that she’d get nowhere with her daughter, Lucy nodded to the TV, “Go and see what’s on the news.”

Sally sighed and did as her mother asked, flicking over to the news channel, “Are we going shopping later?

“Why?” Lucy looked up, “What do you need?”

“More sketching paper,” Sally explained, “I’ve almost used up that last pad with those designs for NASA, but I have a new idea.”

Lucy nodded, “Well we need some milk and bre--”

“-- Jeff Tracy has been living in this small town for the last few months, using an alias…”

“Jeff!” Lucy yelled, turning off the cooker and stepping around to the lounge, “Oh god.”

“Hang on Val,” Jeff murmured as he opened the bedroom door, “What is--” His face fell as his eyes caught the news report, “Damn.”

“What do we do?” Lucy asked, “If they find you…” She looked to Sally worriedly. Jeff nodded, “Let me talk to Val.”

“What is it Jeff?” Val sighed as he turned back to the phone.

Jeff rolled his eyes, “It’s not my fault.”

“What?” Val tutted, “Have you--”

“Mia’s ratted me out to the media, they’re looking for me.” Jeff ran a hand through his hair, “If--”

Val cursed at the other end of the line, uttering something to someone away from the phone before returning her attention to Jeff, “Okay, so you’re going to keep low and stay hidden whilst I work on making sure the boys don’t find out.”

“What about--”
“Lucy and Sally should go out,” Val replied, “Or do whatever they normally do on a Sunday, grocery shopping you said.”

“But wha--”

“You stay.” She repeated slowly, “If you step out of that apartment the media will find you and I’ll have no way of stopping the boys from finding you.” She sighed, “I’m going to do what I can Jeff, but I won’t make any promises.”

“Thank you,” Jeff sighed, “And I’m sorry for dragging you into this whole mess Val.”

She huffed at the other end of the line, “It’s what I normally do.” He knew she was secretly smiling at the other end of the line as she added, “Go on, get on with whatever and I’ll keep you up-to-date with what I can do.”

Jeff sighed as she hung up and turned to Lucy, “I can’t leave the apartment, I think Mia’s tipped them off after yesterday and if they find me before I talk to the boys…” He trailed off.

Lucy nodded, “Okay, well, we need to go grocery shopping in town, if we go soon, we can come back and it’ll be fine, yeah?”

Jeff took her hands, “Calm down,” He murmured, “We’ll sort it.”

She sighed and rested her head on his shoulder, “I’m sorry.”

Jeff shook his head, “You’ve been through a lot over the last couple of days,” He tilted her chin up to face him, “Don’t worry.” He rubbed her arm, “I’m going to have to go home though, I mean to the Island, I have to tell the boys before they find out some other way.”

Lucy frowned, “You’re leaving.”

He smiled softly, shaking his head, “You’d be welcome to come too.”

She looked back to Sally, “What do you think kid?”

Sally shrugged, “Tropical Island versus here? Is there any competition?”

Both adults laughed, “That answers that then.”

* 

“Colonel Casey,” John answered the holocall, glancing away from the news reports, “What can I do for you?”

“Is that a news report you’re looking at?” Val asked as she leant back in her seat. John nodded in response, “It claims--”

“Don’t listen to it,” Val warned, “You’ve got enough to worry about without added speculation. I think you should focus on the typhoons.”

John nodded, “They’re just finishing up, hopefully they’ll be home in time for lunch.”
“How are they for flying hours?” Val asked, knowing typhoon season was always hard for the boys. She always offered the GDF’s help where she could but knew that the Tracy stubbornness would sometimes get in the way.

“Alan and Gordon are fine,” John explained, “But by the time they’re back, Scott and Virgil will need covering.”

“I’ll sort it.” Val nodded, watching his hologram carefully as he glanced off to the side again, “Are you okay?”

“It’s just bugging me,” John sighed, “I wish we knew if it was him.”

Val sighed, “I wish I could say John, but you need to focus on what’s important right now.”

John looked to the status symbols of his brothers, “The rescue.”

“Yeah.” Val nodded, “And in the mean time, I’ll do what I can.”

John managed a small smile, “Thanks Aunt Val.”

Val sighed as she ended the holocall, “I hope you guys can forgive me.”
Chapter 23

Jeff reached out for his phone as it vibrated, automatically assuming that it would be Lucy texting him. He opened the message, his smile fading as he read over the message --

*It’s a shame that you ruined everything for me. If you’d have left us be, there perhaps wouldn’t have been a problem. Both you and your sons messed everything up though, so now I’ll have to get my revenge.*

*I tried to warn you, but you wouldn’t listen. Now the whole town will pay.*

*I am Erebus, I am the darkness.*

Jeff closed the message, bringing up his contact list. Before he could press dial, a call came in from Lucy.

“Lucy,” He breathed, answering without hesitation, “Where--”

“Jeff!” She exclaimed, “Sally’s vanished. I turned around for a second and she was just gone.”

“Okay,” Jeff sighed walking over to the window, “Where were you?”

“Walking down the street.” Lucy explained, “But Jeff, that’s not all,”

Jeff’s shoulders sunk as he reached the window with Lucy’s words, “The town’s falling to pieces, sinkholes are opening up everywhere.”

Jeff shook his head slowly, “The whole town.” He gulped in a breath of air and returned his attention to the phone, “Luce, you need to get somewhere safe.” He turned, grabbing his jacket as he continued, “Think, where aren’t there any roads?”

“Why roads?” Lucy frowned as she picked her way through the cracked pavement.

“It was the roadworks,” Jeff explained, “You know how we said there were a lot?”

Lucy paused, “It was Mia that told me about them, you think she…”

“Yeah,” Jeff sighed, “Listen, get as many people as you can to the park, there should be okay. I am going to call Val and get help.” He paused, “Then I will go and find Sally.”

“Jeff,” Lucy stopped him before he hung up, “Be careful.”

He sighed and nodded to himself, “And you Lucy.”

He ended the call and immediately redialed as he pulled on his shoes, “Val, we’re in trouble.”

Val Casey sighed and shook her head, “Jeff it’s been three quarters of an hour, how can you be in
“Can you get a satellite image of the town?” Jeff asked as he grabbed Lucy’s keys and headed out of the apartment, “Because sinkholes have opened up everywhere.” He paused as he started down the stairs, “And Sally’s vanished. I need the GDF to--”

“You can stop right there mister.” Val stopped him, “You will not tell me what you want the GDF to do. You have been in charge of this whole thing the entire time and it’s just gone--” She stopped herself, letting out a heavy sigh and hanging up on Jeff.

Standing up she began to pace, muttering to herself about how many times he’d screwed up in the past months. All she could think about was all the times she had been there to save his back side and how few times he’d done the same. The boys had suffered enough, and it seemed like Lucy and Sally had accepted the truth.

She turned back to her desk, uttering as she started a call, “I’m doing it my way this time.”

“Aunt Val.” John seemed surprised to hear from her so soon after her first call, “What is--”

“I haven’t any answers for you John.” She told him, “I need a favour though.”

John nodded quickly, “Go ahead.”

“I need you to do a full scan of these coordinates.” She swiped to send over the town's details, “Down is the direction I’m looking in.”

John paused as he started the scan, “Isn’t that the town that was on the news earlier?”

“I know,” Val sighed, “But I don’t know any more right now.” She saw his face fall as he read over what Thunderbird Five’s scanners were giving him, “Aunt Val, that whole town is going to fall in on itself,” He looked to her, “It’s built on a really old cave system, and there’s all these weakened points on the surface leading straight through to the system below.”

She could see his confusion as he finished, “It looks like someone’s...”

“Sabotaged it?” Val nodded, thinking quick, “Right, how far out are your brothers?”

“They’re half way home.” John told her, “But--”

She sighed, “I know they’re over their flying hours John, but the GDF can’t handle this on their own.” She paused, glancing to the photo on her desk, “I’m going to check things out, to see if I can find who’s done this. I’m going to need some help though.”

She could see John thinking about it, knowing that he wouldn’t deny her help if she asked for it.

“Okay, I’ll reroute them now.” He replied, “I’d tell them to go home and get the pods, but it looks like those caves have water pools at the bottom, if someone falls we might need Thunderbird Four.”

“Good idea” Val smiled, “I’ll see them there.”
“FAB.” John sighed, ending the call.

Val grabbed her coat, pulling it on as she rushed out of the base and to the air strip, calling on her radio that she needed an emergency take off.

*

Jeff swung around as he heard rubble begin to crumble, his eyes widened as the building he was stood next to began to topple. Some force pushed him out of the way, and both stumbled to the ground, inches clear of where the rubble landed.

“Don’t just stand there if a building’s about to fall on you!” Lucy yelled at him.

He shook his head, “What are you doing here? I thought I told you to go to the park?”

“No thank you for just saving your life?” She raised an eyebrow as she stood, trying to brush off some of the dust, “I’m trying to find m-- our daughter.” She sighed and looked up to him as he stood, “Besides, the boys just got here.”

She smiled briefly as he screwed up his face, uttering some curse under his breath, “Okay, well we need to find Sally, then we’ll deal with the boys.”

Lucy nodded, “She knows how to handle herself, she’ll be fine.”

Jeff wrapped an arm around her, “It’ll be fine.”

“Where do we look first?” Lucy asked, “She could be anywhere in the town.”

Jeff nodded, “I know, I’ve been working my way up and down the streets but so far no sign.”

Both looked around as there was a shriek from nearby, but neither could see where it had come from.

“That was her,” Lucy stated, “It had to be.”

Jeff nodded, “Over there, the hole by the car park.”

Lucy followed him, “Why would she go down there?”

“I don’t know.” Jeff murmured, as he began to notice the footprints in the mud, “She’s with someone.”

“Mom!” Another shriek came from below them. Lucy bolted forward, pushing past Jeff as she sprinted into the cavern.

“Lucy!” Jeff yelled after her, starting to follow.

Her sneakers slipped in the mud of the slope leading into the cavern, sending her sliding into the cave. She pushed herself up, not caring about the mud on her jeans or her top, just wanting to get to
“Sal.” She breathed, looking to the woman that had hold of her daughter, “Let her go!”

She didn’t look away as Jeff stopped next to her, wrapping an arm around her shoulders to stop her from launching forward.

“Let her go Mia,” Jeff warned, “You leave her out of this.”

Mia laughed, “You want me to let her go? Alright then.” She stepped backwards towards the edge of the ground, “I’ll let her go.”

“No!” Lucy shrieked, rushing forward to the cliff edge, just in time to see the splash of water at the bottom. Jeff Lunged after her, grabbing her hand as the ground began to give way beneath her feet.

“No!” Lucy shrieked as she fell, pulling tight on Jeff’s hand as he fell to the ground, leaning over the edge of the underground cliff.

“I’d say how nice it is to see you again, but I’d be lying.”

She laughed and tucked her hair behind her ear, “I have Jeff, I’ve done what I set out to do.”

“Mia.” A voice echoed from the mouth of the cave, “I’d say how nice it is to see you again, but I’d be lying.”

“Oh,” Mia stood, “Stop calling me Mia.” She grinned as she looked between Jeff, struggling to keep hold of Lucy, and Val, “I am Erebus, I am the darkness that is going to haunt the rest of your lives.”
Chapter 24

Jeff tried to lean further over the cliff, freezing when more of the edge began to crumble away. He looked to Lucy and swallowed, “Hold on Lucy.” He told her, trying to work something out.

Her hand inched down his, “Jeff,” She breathed, “Oh my god, Jeff!”

His hand strained to grip hers tighter, “Hold on, I’m going to pull you up.”

“Oh, are you now?” A voice behind them asked as a gun safety clicked, “It seems I’m in the perfect position to get rid of you both once and for all.”

“Don’t. You. Dare.” Val Casey stopped her from behind, “I will shoot you Mia, you have done enough harm to the people of this town that my motive will not be questioned.”

Mia laughed, turning to Val but keeping her own gun trained on Jeff, “What do you think I care? I’m going to bring the Tracy’s to their knees, just as I always set out to do. Nothing else matters now.”

Val looked past the woman to Jeff, on his belly reaching over the cliff, trying to save Lucy. She wasn’t their Lucy in so many ways, but Jeff still loved her all the same, and she couldn’t help but wonder how it would all work out.

Erebus turned to Jeff, “How easy it would be to just—” She pulled her leg back, taking a perfect aim at Jeff’s side. Below them, Lucy screamed out, crying for Sally and cursing the woman that was trying to kill them.

Jeff dug his toes into the soft ground, praying it would be enough to hold until Val came up with an idea. He looked down to Lucy and shook his head, “I’m so sorry for this.”

She smiled up to him, “You don’t need to be,” She reached up with her free hand, hoping to get a better grip, “Would you believe,” She murmured, glancing back to the lake below, “I understand it all now.” She laughed at herself, “It looks like another trip over a cliff was all I needed to remember it all.”

Jeff’s eyes widened as another kick landed in his side, “Luce?”

She laughed to hide her tears, “What an honour it has been, Jeff Tracy, to fall in love with you all over again.”

Jeff shook his head, blinking hard as his hands gripped hers, “I’m not going to let you go.”

“Let them go Mia, you’ve not gotten your way before, and I won’t let you now.” Val warned, “Why do you have to do all this?”

“Why?” Mia scoffed, “Why do you think!?” She gestured towards Jeff, “I love that woman, and she never loved me back. I would have given her the world and she threw it back in my face.”

Val shook her head, “She told you as fairly as she could, you were never meant to get hurt.”
“You can’t pull me up,” Lucy whispered as Val reasoned with Mia, “And if you try you’ll just go down with me.”

Over her shoulder, Jeff saw the ripples of the water, a yellow shadow hovering just below the surface. He sighed in relief as a second shadow appeared from under the yellow machine, a silent thumbs up through the water assuring him that everything was okay, and a wave telling him to let Lucy go.

“Basic training,” He whispered to Lucy, “Jump into water, head up, back straight--”

“Yeah,” She breathed reaching up his arm again, “I know the drill.”

He winced as Mia spat a curse at Val and returned to kicking him, “Then don’t panic, and let go.”

“I love you.” Lucy whispered as her hand slipped down again and her grip loosened. Behind him Mia laughed wickedly, thinking that she had won her sick game.

Val’s shoulders sank as Jeff cried out and Mia cackled, she knew that it could only mean one thing, Lucy was gone.

“You’re sick.” She spat, lunging forward as Mia went to kick Jeff again, just as he tried to stand. Grabbing the other woman’s hair, Val pulled hard, yanking her away from her closest friend, and taking her chance to snatch the gun, throwing it away from them, “You are going to pay for everything you have done to this family.” Val uttered, pushing the woman away from the cliff and towards the entrance, keeping her gun trained on her, “I don’t care if you got away with all your tricks before, I’m here now, and I’m going to make sure you rot in jail for what you’ve done to my family.” She only paused when a shadow fell across the nearest hole leading into the cavern, “Scott, get out of here, it’s not safe.”

“Not until you guys get out.” Scott snapped back, eyeing the woman between him and his aunt. He frowned as he tried to place her, something told him she was trouble, she had been part of the reason for their move to the island… “You’re that mad woman that kidnapped John when we were kids.”

“Oh, well done.” Mia grinned as she turned to face Scott, “I remember you, the little brat that wanted to kick me in the shins.”

“You’re lucky that’s all he wanted to do.” Jeff uttered from behind Val as he picked up the discarded gun, attracting Scott’s attention.

Mia turned back to Jeff, glaring, “So what? You’re not going to shoot me.”

“No,” Jeff shook his head, with a sigh, “I won’t.”

He held the gun, as if examining its weight as he held it, thinking about all the damage a little thing could do as he added, “I wouldn’t ever.”

“John?” Scott murmured, opening his comm line, “Are you seeing this?”
“Yeah,” John replied quietly, “And I can see Gordon too, and you’re not going to believe who he’s picked up either.”

Scott shook his head, “What do you mean?”

Looking between the two holograms in front of him, John sighed and shook his head. He wasn’t sure he was seeing right himself, “You’d have to see it to believe it.” He looked up as a third message alert sounded, “Go ahead Alan.”

“Virgil and I have got the north corner sorted, but there’s still the east corner of the shopping palaza to organise and evac,” Alan explained, “We could do with a hand.”

“Scott, did you get that?” John asked.

“FAB.” Scott responded, still watching his father from a distance, “I’ll pick up Gordon on my way.”

Scott looked across to his father, earning a nod from him, assuring that he wasn’t going to disappear just as he had done before.

Jeff watched Scott go and looked back to Mia, wincing as he stepped forward, “This family has done nothing to you Mia.”

Mia shook her head, “You stole her off of me Jeff. We could have been perfect together.”

Val scoffed, “Trust me Mia, nobody has anything on Lucy and Jeff, they’re the power couple of the century.”

Before Mia could respond, three armed men ran into the cavern, following a woman in a blue suit, “Put your hands up where we can see them!”

Mia’s face twisted as she glared at Jeff and Val, “You’ll regret not killing me.”

Jeff looked past Mia to the woman that had led the guards into the cavern, “Kayo.”

She looked from the woman being arrested to the man that called her name, her shoulders sinking in relief. Everyone had been right, it hadn’t been her fault that he had vanished, her uncle hadn’t killed the man she saw as a second father.

Sprinting across the small space, she threw herself at him, hardly noticing his wince as she hugged him tight.

“I’m so mad with you!” She uttered in his ear, “We thought you were dead! I thought that the Hood had--”

Jeff hugged her tight, “I’m sorry,” He murmured back, “I promise I’ll explain everything to you all.”

She pulled back from him, giving him a hard glare, “You better, don’t think I won’t be coming to find you once we’ve cleared the town.”

Jeff nodded, “I’m not vanishing again.”

She still hesitated as she turned towards where Mia was being taken away, “You’d better not.”
Lucy coughed and spluttered as the water drained from the airlock, she had tried not to breathe as she had entered the water, but it had come up sooner than expected.

“Just take it easy,” The boy that had swam to her aid told her, “You’re gonna be fine.”

She pushed him off, “Sally. Did you get Sally?”

He hesitated, hands still outstretched to help her, “Yeah, she’s right here,” He reached up to key open the second part of the compartment, “Hey there Sally, how’re you doin’?”

She was wrapped in a foil blanket shivering, her honey-brown hair matted with mud, “Mom!”

Lucy laughed and hugged her daughter close, glancing back to the boy with a grateful smile, “Thank you Gordon.”

He looked stunned for a moment before shrugging with a smile, “It’s just my job.”

When she looked up to him again, he really looked at her hard, trying to see the woman underneath the dirt and the water. Her eyes were what made him pause, there was something familiar and warm about them. He felt like he should know her, but he knew, they’d never been to the town before, he hardly knew anyone outside of his family.

\textit{It’s not possible}. He told himself as he turned towards the cockpit, “We’ll have you back on dry land in no time.”

Lucy smiled to him as he slipped through to the cockpit, turning back to Sally as she hugged her tight, “Are you alright?”

Sally nodded, sniffling quietly, “Yeah, jus’ cold.” She swiped at her eyes, “I’m sorry Mom, I shouldn’t have let her take me.”

“Hush,” Lucy sighed, “That doesn’t matter now sweetie.”

Sally shook her head and pulled back, “But Mom, I--she...”

“It’s okay, you weren’t to know.” Lucy murmured.

Looking to the front of the little sub, Sally dropped her voice, “He’s one of them isn’t he? One of my brothers?”

Glancing forward, Lucy sighed and nodded, “Yeah, but don’t just say anything yet, okay?”

Sally nodded, “Whatever you say Mom.”

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Stepping out into the light of day, Lucy took a deep breath, she could still smell the rain heavy in the air after the earlier downpour. She looked to Sally, making sure that she was okay as she stepped up onto the dry land. Tucking her into her side, Lucy kissed her daughter's cheek.

“Gordon!” A shout from ahead of them attracted Lucy’s attention.

Scott spotted the yellow of Thunderbird four before he spotted the two women that had just stepped off of the little yellow sub. He had to pause as he watched the woman pull the girl into her side.

“John,” He started, “I think I see what you mean.”

“It’s not possible is it?” John asked, “I mean, we’re not just…”

“No,” Scott shook his head, the parts of the puzzle slotting together in a way that he wasn’t sure was right, “It might explain a lot though.” He blew out a long breath, “I need to get this sorted with Gordon, do our job until everyone’s safe.”

“FAB.” John responded as Scott moved forward.

“Gordon,” Scott ordered his brother, “Head over to the east corner, start on an evac plan, I’ll catch you up in a minute.”

Glancing to the woman, Gordon nodded, “FAB.”

Scott carried on towards Thunderbird Four, stopping just in front of the woman and girl.

She looked up to him, her eyes wide in recognition, as he took her arm. He shook his head in disbelief, “M--”

“Later,” She murmured, squeezing his arm, “Okay? Do your job, save the world like you boys always do.”

Scott still hesitated, “But--” He shook his head again, still trying to take it all in. She sighed and reached up to wrap her arms around his neck, pulling him in for a tight hug, “It’s a very long story Scotty,” She sighed to him, “I can’t believe… so grown up.”

Scott choked on his laugh, “I can’t-- Mom.”

She pulled back and wiped his cheeks, “Go, do your job.”

Scott smiled and nodded, wiping his nose on his sleeve, “Gone.”

Lucy looked down to her daughter, reaching out for her hand, “Want to go and find your Dad?”

Sally looked up to her and then to Scott’s retreating back, “Which brother was he?”

Lucy sighed, crouching to her daughter's level, realising that for all of two minutes, she had forgotten almost completely about her daughter, “Sally, listen, you have to understand something for me.”

“That’s not my question Mom,” Sally tutted with a roll of her eyes, “I get it. Okay?” She shrugged,
“It’s like when I came back from NASA and you spent like the whole day asking me what I’d been up to.” Looking to the little yellow submarine she pulled a face, “Except you’ve got like, what? Twelve years to catch up on?”

Lucy laughed, “Thirteen, almost fourteen.” She sighed and wiped some mud from her daughter’s cheek, “As long as you know, just how much I still love you, okay? You’re still my baby girl and I love you.” She smiled and pulled her daughter in for a hug, squeezing her tight.

Sally wrapped her arms around her Mom, just taking the comfort whilst she could. She looked up as a pair of people came into view.

“Jef-- Dad!” She corrected herself as she pulled away from her mother, stepping around her to go running to the man limping towards them. Throwing herself at him, she hardly noticed his wince.

“Steady kiddo,” He huffed as her wrapped his arms around her, “It’s alright.”

She sniffed as she hugged him tight, “I’m sorry. Really, really sorry.”

He rubbed her back, “Let’s forget it okay?” He bent down on one knee, “Alright? How about a fresh start?”

Sally smiled and nodded, “I’m glad you’re okay.”

He pulled back and brushed her hair off of her face, “What about you? Are you hurt?”

She shook her head, “No, I’m okay. It was a pretty sloppy entry into the water though.”

Jeff laughed, hugging her close again as he shook his head, “I thought you were dead.”

“Yeah, you know how the rest of us felt then.” Val uttered looking up to the woman that had turned to face them.

Lucy’s face lit up as she spotted Val with Jeff, “Val!”

Val laughed as Lucy ran towards her, “Oh my god, Luce.”

They hugged each other tightly, neither sure whether to laugh or cry. Val sighed as she rocked the pair of them gently, she’d spent so long watching from a distance, it was a relief to finally be able to hold her closest friend close.

“How could I even…” Lucy whispered, “Val!”

“I know.” Val murmured back, “I can’t believe it.”

Lucy stepped back, “The boys! I-- They--” She blew out a breath, “Where do we even start?”

Val laughed, “I know!” She looked over Lucy, “You’re frozen, we should get all three of you to a med bay.”

Jeff looked up, “Three?”
Val gave him a stern look, “If those kicks haven’t given you at least some cracked ribs, I’ll be amazed.”

Jeff straightened up, “I’m fine.”

“I’ve seen you wince three times now,” Val told him, “You’re getting checked over.”

“Jeff, just do it,” Lucy sighed as she looked to Sally, “For peace of mind.”

He looked across to her, her hazel eyes soft and pleading and he suddenly remembered why she had always gotten her way.

“Okay,” He nodded, “I’ll come.”

“Good.” Lucy smiled taking his arm, resting her head on his shoulder with a sigh. Jeff smiled and kissed her hair, “Are you alright?”

“The boys.” She stated, “And, you, and… just everything.”

Sally looked up to the woman that had come with Jeff, “So, who are you exactly?”

Val looked down to the little girl with a soft laugh, “You can call me Aunt Val.”

She thought about it for a moment beforeshrugging, “Okay, so are my brothers really part of International rescue?”

“Not just part of it,” Val smiled as she rested her hand on Sally’s shoulder, “They are it.”

“Awesome.” Sally grinned.

Val paused as they reached the mediplane ahead of Jeff and Luce. She turned to face Sally and crouched down, “They’re going to love you, you know? I think they all really wanted a sister. You will have to look out for Scott though, he’ll fuss over you so much.”

Sally grinned, “Really? ’Cause he saw Mom before and completely ignored me.”

Val shook her head with a smile, “They’re all going to have a lot of catching up to do, they won’t mean to ignore you—”

“–But it might happen,” Sally nodded, “Just like when Mom’s got assignments to mark.”

“Exactly.” Val laughed as she stood up, “Now, let’s go and get you checked out.”
Chapter 26

John silenced the other lines as he answered his Aunt’s call, “Colonel Casey.”

“I assume you’ve spoken to Scott,” She started with a stern look, “And that he told you--”

John nodded, cutting her off, “I’ve seen both Scott and Gordon’s feeds--”

“John.” EOS interrupted, “I have finished running scans of the biometric data.”

Val frowned, “John? Who’s that?”

“Nobody.” John told her, “It’s--”

“I am not nobody John.” EOS again interrupted, “You told me so.”

Val looked to John and raised an eyebrow, “If whoever that is means the biometrics of the two women your brother saved, then I can tell you all about that.”

“That,” John sighed with a glance over his shoulder to the camera that had appeared, “Is EOS. It is a very long story Aunt Val.”

“A story of which I want the full details.” She warned, “As for the woman you’re wondering about, yes, it’s your mother with her is her daughter, your sister.”

John shook his head in disbelief, “How?”

Val smirked as she shifted back, “It’s a very long story.” She folded her arms, “Your Grandmother and Brains don’t know anything yet so I recommend that you get into that space elevator and bring them in this direction.”

John nodded, “Where should I meet you?”

“I’ll let you know when you’re closer,” Val told him, still trying to work out just how she was going to explain to the others, “It’s all okay though.”

As he began to turn away, John paused and looked back to his Aunt with a small smile, “With the Tracy power couple back in play?” He shook his head, “I don’t doubt it.”

*  

“Ahh, Sally.” Val smiled as she stepped out of her office to find the little girl waiting.

“I feel silly.” Sally complained pulling at the hospital scrubs she was wearing, “Can’t I go home and get something proper?”

Wrapping one arm around her shoulder, Val began to guide Sally to the room her parents were in, “I’ve already sent someone to go and get your clothes.”

Sally paused and frowned, “I hope you warned them not to go in Mom’s secret drawer?”

“Secret drawer?” Val smirked as they continued walking.
“Yep, I’m not allowed to go in it at all.” She smiled as they stepped through a door, “Isn’t that right Mom?”

Lucy looked up to the pair, “What sweetie?”

“Your ‘secret drawer’.” Val smirked, “That nobody’s allowed in.”

Lucy’s face fell for a moment before lighting up again with a grin, “Well at least I won’t be needing to use it any more.”

Vall let out a bark of laughter, “Oh Lucy how I’ve missed you!”

Lucy stood up and hugged her old friend, “I’ve missed you too Val,” She sighed.

“I don’t get it,” Sally murmured as she hopped up on the bed next to where Jeff was fastening his fresh shirt.

“Don’t worry,” Jeff smiled to her, “You get used to the pair of them speaking in code.”

Sally smiled and leant against his shoulder, “Aunt Val’s sent someone to get me some clothes, will we be able to go home and get the rest of my stuff?”

“I’m sure we will,” Jeff nodded stroking her hair, “Why?”

Sally shrugged, “I might not have much stuff, but what I do have I wouldn’t want to get rid of.”

Jeff hugged her close with a smile, “If that’s what you would like, then I promise that I will make sure all of your things come with us to the island.”

Looking up to him Sally grinned, “Really?

He nodded, “Of course, I’m your Dad and I’ve got one hell of a lot of making up to do!”

Sally hugged him back tightly, “Thank you, Je–… Dad.”

Chuckling softly he kissed her hair, “Any time Kiddo.”

Everyone’s attention was drawn to Val as she lifted her wrist, “Scott’s calling, no doubt wondering what’s going on.”

Jeff nodded, “We’re going to have to explain everything.”

“Somewhere neutral would no doubt be best,” Val agreed, “There’s a GDF base not far, I can take one of their meeting rooms.”

“Are you sure?” Lucy frowned, “I always remember—”

Val smiled softly, “They’re not all like those formal offices you always saw me in,” She shook her head, “No, I’ll tell them to meet us there, and get a family room.” She looked up in sudden realisation, “That is providing that the Doctors given you the all clear?”

Jeff sighed and nodded, “No heavy work for three weeks, and I can take over the counter painkillers
if the bruising gets too bad.”

Lucy looked to Val and gave a nod of confirmation, knowing that it would be the only way they’d get off of that carrier plane.

Nodding back, Val answered Scott’s call, “Casey.”


Val smiled to him, “There’s a GDF base a few hundred miles southeast of the town, you boys get cleaned up and I’ll meet you there to explain everything.”

“Wha--”

“John’s already on his way with your Grandmother and Brains.”

“Who’s Brains?” Sally whispered to Jeff.

He smiled as he whispered back, “A scientist that your mother was funding to put through college.”

Her mouth formed a small ‘o’ as she nodded, though Jeff wasn’t certain that she fully understood.

“Okay.” Scott sighed, “Okay, I’ll talk to the others.”

Val smiled to him, “Good. It’ll be fine, you know?”

“I don’t doubt it.” Scott smiled running a hand through his hair, “Alright, we’ll see you guys soon.”

As Scott ended the call he looked to his three brothers heading towards him. Even from a distance he could see Gordon was confused about one thing or another.

“What’s wrong Gords?” He asked as they approached him

“We’ve been asking him that all the way back,” Alan told him, “But he won’t tell us!”

Gordon shrugged, “It’s nothing. I just thought I recognised that woman and the girl.”

“Scott!” Kayo yelled from behind them, coming jogging over, “Guys, it’s your Dad.” She stopped and looked to Scott, “You came out of that cavern, and I went in, Casey had called me to bring a team.”

Scott nodded, “I know, he was in there.”

“What--” The other three brothers exclaimed.

“And when were--” Virgil started

“I was just going to tell you,” Scott told him, “Dad’s here, he was with Aunt Val and… you guys aren’t going to believe me.” He looked to Gordon, “That woman you saved, you recognised her
because…” He sucked in a breath, shaking his head in disbelief, “... Because she’s our Mom.”

Virgil shook his head, “No. No way, that’s not--”

“How?” Alan asked, “I don’t--”

“It was.” Gordon murmured, “That was her. Meaning…” He looked between his brothers and Kayo, “She had a daughter… we have a sister.”

This time it was Scott’s turn to do a double take, “What?”

“The girl that was with her…” He looked to Virgil and then Alan, “She looked like us, her eyes were like John’s, and… she kinda looks like Alan.”

“Hang on,” Kayo held a hand up, “You’re saying, not only are both your parents here, but that you have a sister too?”

Gordon nodded, “If that woman was mom, she had a kid with her, and I heard that girl call her Mom.”

Virgil shook his head, “And this was meant to just be a normal rescue right?”

Scott shrugged, “Is anything ever normal for us?” He sighed and nodded towards the machines, “Come on, the quicker we get cleaned up the quicker we can meet Aunt Val at the GDF base.”

The others nodded, silent in shock as they all headed back towards Thunderbird Two, all wondering just what had been going on.
Jeff looked up, trailing off whatever he had been saying to Sally as Lucy passed in front of them again. He held his arm out, stopping Lucy as she turned to walk back to the other end of the room. She sighed as she looked down to where he sat, “I can’t just sit down and do nothing.”

“Luce, it’ll be fine,” Val assured from her armchair, “They’re not going to be mad at you.”

“But--”

“She’s right Mom.” Sally chipped in, sitting forward on the couch, “I wouldn’t worry about it.” She looked to her father, “Tell me more.”

“Well--” Jeff paused as there was a knock on the frosted glass door. Lucy sucked in a breath turning towards the door as her eyes widened. Val stood, glancing to the family before looking to the door, “Come in.”

The door opened a crack before there was a soft sigh and it opened fully. Lucy gasped, “Ruth!”

The older woman smiled, reaching out to hug Lucy as she stepped forward, “Lucille, look at you.” She held her at arm's length, smiling as she looked over Lucy, “You haven’t changed a bit.”

Lucy ducked her head with a smile before glancing over to Sally, “Maybe, but a lot of other things have.”

Ruth looked past Lucy to the little girl still sat on the sofa next to her father. Her smile faded to a frown as she looked to her son, “Jefferson, Grant, Tracy.”

Taking his cue, Jeff stood, “Mother, I can explain everything.”

“Momma,” A soft murmur came from just inside the doorway, making Lucy look back to the figure that had been frozen there since he had stepped in. She let out a breath as she stepped over to him, he was taller than her by a good few inches and she had to reach up to brush his hair away from his face. He looked tired and strained, as pale and lanky as he always had been.

“Johnny,” She breathed, “Look at you.”

His blue-green eyes were glossy as he placed his cold hands over her, “Momma, I don’t-- you--”

She hushed him, brushing her fingers over his cheeks, “It’s okay.”

“Mom!” There was a shout from the door, making John pull away. Lucy looked around as her other four boys all pushed into the room.

“Mom.” Scott stated again, pulling her into a tight hug and refusing to let got as she hugged him back. She laughed softly, tiptoeing to kiss his cheek, “Oh Scotty,” She sighed, pushing back, “When did you get so tall?”
Scott laughed and stepped to one side, his voice was off as he replied, “You think I got tall? Look at these three!”

He looked back to John as their mother stepped towards the three youngest. He plucked a couple of tissues from the box on the desk and bumped his first brother’s shoulder.

“Thanks,” John uttered taking the tissue offered, “It’s just the--”

“Shock,” Scott nodded, “Yeah, me too. That, and tiredness.”

John managed a watery laugh as he nodded, “Yeah, yeah, just that.”

“You two,” Lucy gasped, looking to the two blond boys, “You’re all grown up and--”

“One of us is,” Gordon grinned, nudging Alan in the ribs, “He’s still just a kid.”

Lucy laughed and hugged him tightly, “Oh Gordon.”

He pulled back from her, checking her over, “Are you alright?”

She smiled and nodded, “Yeah, me and Sal, we’re both fine.”

Gordon let out a little gasp of excitement, spinning around to find his little sister, grinning when before bounding off in her direction.

Lucy looked to Alan, her smile fading as he snuffled, “Allie?”

He looked down with a shrug, “Mom, I--” He looked up again and snuffled, “I don’t…”

She sighed and wrapped him in a tight hug, “You were only four when I left, you were still so tiny and new to the world,” She wiped his cheek, “I wouldn’t expect you to remember sweetie.” She kissed his hair and rubbed his back, “I’ve missed so much Allie, I’m so sorry for everything I’ve missed.”

He snuffled and shrugged, “It’s ‘kay Mom, t’wasn’ your fault.”

She squeezed him tight, “And it wasn’t yours either, okay?”

Alan nodded as he pulled back, looking to John and Scott, “I’m going to talk to them.”

“Okay.” Lucy smiled as he stepped past her.

Lucy looked to the last boy, her Wednesday child, leant against the wall with his head bowed. She slipped her hand into his and squeezed gently, “You’re quiet.”

He still didn’t look up to her as he swiped at his eyes, “‘m fine,” He sniffed and glanced up, “It’s just a bit in my eye.”

“I’ve heard that one before.” Lucy smiled reaching up to ruffle his hair, “Come on, what is it?”

Her hand stroked down the side of his face to his chin, lifting his face to look at her, “Virgil, it’s okay.”

She sighed as she wiped away the tear streaks with her thumbs, “What are we going to do with
He laughed, choking on a sob as he pulled her into a bear hug, “Momma.”

She had to tiptoe to hug him back, he’d gotten so big, all that baby fat replaced with solid, toned, muscle. Her little arms could hardly reach right the way around his broad shoulders as she rubbed his back soothingly, “It’s okay, I’m here.”

She felt his chest shake as he sobbed, “You’re here.”

Nodding she wiped his eyes, “Yeah, and I’m not going anywhere for a long long time.”

He smiled as he pulled back, “Sorry,” He sucked in a breath and wiped his eyes, “I’m bein’ silly.”

She shook her head, reaching to ruffle his hair again, “Not at all.”

He pulled a face as he swatted her hands away, “Mo-om.”

She laughed, “You used to love me messing with your hair!”

Virgil smiled as he hugged her again, whispering, “Yeah, but don’t let the others find out!”

He ducked down with a laugh as someone ruffled his hair from behind, “You mean don’t let those that don’t already know find out.”

Lucy could help but let her mouth drop, “Oh my goodness, Kayo?”

The young woman smiled, ducking her head before looking back to Lucy, “I’ve not changed that much.”

“Yes you have!” Lucy exclaimed, “You’re all grown up!” She looked to Kayo’s long hair, “Your hair, you’ve not…”

Kayo shook her head, “No, I’ve not had it plaited for years.”

Lucy sighed, giving her a look before pulling her in for a hug, “We’ll have to fix that.”

Kayo relaxed into Lucy, “Yeah, I’d like that.”

Lucy rubbed Kayo’s back, “I hope you’ve been keeping those boys in order? Hmm? Like you always did.”

Kayo laughed, “Yeah,” She looked down and sighed, “They found out about my uncle.”

Lucy nodded, “I’ll assume it’s all okay between you.” She followed Kayo’s gaze across to Scott as the young woman nodded, “Yeah, we sorted it.”

Raising an eyebrow, Lucy smiled, “Did you now?”

Kayo laughed and ducked her head, “I’m going to talk to Val.”

“M--m..mrs Tracy.”
Lucy spun around, “Hiram!” She was honestly surprised to see him with the family, she had believed that the family was always too outgoing for the quiet scientist. From what she could remember, he had been considering moving away somewhere, though she couldn’t remember exactly where or why.

He smiled to her nervously, “It’s n--n-n-nice to see you again.”

Lucy grinned, “Oh Brains,” She looked to the rest of her family, “I’m sorry for leaving you with this ruckus.”

Brains managed a small laugh, “Oh no, really, it’s been quite an adventure Mrs-- I mean, Lucy.” He followed her gaze to the brothers, “I’ve grown to quite enjoy life on Tracy Island.”

Lucy raised her eyebrows, “Oh?”

He nodded, “I get much more work done, Mis-- Jeff always ensured that I had everything I need for my experiments.”

Lucy smiled, “Good, after everything you’ve done for us, it’s the least we can do is to look after you.”

She looked up as Virgil chipped in, “I think we’d be lost if it wasn’t for Brains’ help.”

“Oh r-really, I don’t do that much.” Brains insisted.

Lucy smiled and shook her head, “Let’s not get into a debate.”

“I think there’s going to be plenty of discussion soon enough,” Val uttered, pretending to look at her nails.

“Evangeline Casey, do not tell me you knew about this the whole time.” Grandma folded her arms.

Val sighed and pointed at Jeff as she winced, “He dragged me into it!”

“She didn’t try to stop me!” Jeff exclaimed, “She helped.”

Sally leant over and whispered to Gordon, “I thought they were meant to be the adults?”

Gordon shrugged, leaning down to whisper back, “It’s complicated.”

“Everything’s complicated.” Sally replied, “I have a Dad.”

“Hey,” Gordon nudged her in the ribs, “You’ve got us too!”

Sally raised her eyebrows, giving him a look that Gordon recalled his mother giving him many a time, as she responded, “Exactly.”

Gordon laughed, “You know what Sal?” He paused and looked to her, “Can I call you that?”

She smiled and nodded, “It’s what Mom calls me.”

“Well, I think you and I are going to get on just fine.” Gordon winked, “Sal.”
Sally grinned, “Is it fun living on an island? What’s it like?”

“It’s awesome,” Gordon nodded, “I’ll show you all the cool places to hide out, and the neat caves that are--”

“You are not going camping in the caves again,” Scott cut him off, “Last time you did that you ended up with a sprained ankle.”

Sally frowned, “I’ve done worse.”

“Oh god.” Lucy sighed looking to Jeff, “I promise I didn’t neglect her, she just has a habit of hurting herself.”

Jeff laughed and hugged Lucy, “I’ve seen enough to believe you.”

“So you have been with Mom the whole time?” Scott asked, “But you didn’t tell us.”

Lucy looked up to Jeff as he tried to find the words to explain. She held her hand out to her eldest son, “He couldn’t.”

Scott took her hand, giving his father a wary glare, “Why?”

“Because,” Lucy sighed, pulling back from Jeff to stand an equal distance between the two men, “If he had just come to me and told me the half of the story that he knew, I never would have believed him. I probably would have run a mile.” She looked around the room, “It was only a few hours ago that I remembered who you all were and, it was scary enough having a man I’d only known a couple of months, tell me that the dreams I was having weren’t actually dreams.” She sighed and shook her head, “Yes, your father shouldn’t have gone about things the way he did, there were other ways to go about it. Can you honestly say though that you wouldn’t have wanted to come if you knew the truth?” She looked around her family again, “Could any of you?”

Virgil stepped up behind Scott, “She’s right.”

Jeff sighed, looking up, “I’m sorry I did things the way I did.” He looked to his family, “I realise now there would have been other, better, ways.”

“And?” Val prompted, folding her arms.

Jeff sighed and rolled his eyes, “Alright, alright,” His light hearted tone dropped as he looked to his sons, his mother, and his friends, “I missed you all, and I-- I regret ever leaving….” He paused as he looked to Lucy, “Kind of, at least.”

Lucy looked between the pair, “So can we skip the arguments? Kiss and make up?”

Scott sighed, wanting to be mad and to yell out at his father for being so reckless. He wasn’t sure how he could though, he’d bought their Mom back.

He smiled and nodded, “Alright.”

Lucy looked to their hands in hers, and pulled them together, “Thank you.”
Both men sighed, pulling each other in for a hug. Scott sucked in a deep breath as his father patted his back, “I’m still pi--” He was cut off by the cuff around the head he received from Lucy, “Language.”

Everyone looked around as the door slid open and a man cleared his throat, “Ah-hem, Colonel Casey, there’s a situation developing.”

Gordon laughed as he stood up, “Ned Tedford, fancy seeing you again.”
Chapter 28

Jeff sighed, “The press won’t let up until we give them something.”

Lucy held a hand out to Sally, “Come here sweetie.”

“We won’t give them anything today,” Grandma stated as she stood, “They won’t know any more than International Rescue paid a visit to the GDF.” She looked to her grandsons, “It’s not like it hasn’t happened before.”

Scott nodded, “We can take the ‘birds home, get ourselves sorted out, and then we can think of something to tell the press.”

John folded his arms, “There’s one small problem.”

Scott sighed and turned to his red headed brother, “What?”

“The four of you are well over your flying hours.” John pointed out, “You’re flying nowhere until you’ve had some rest.”

“So who’s gonna fly back?” Alan yawned, “Even you can’t remote pilot both ships all the way back.”

“There’s actually more than enough pilots in the room.” Val pointed out as she leant against the wall, “You boys forget John is qualified to pilot all the ships, as am I, and both your parents.”

Lucy stood straighter, a grin spreading across her face, “Oh my goodness, can I--”

“No.” Jeff cut her off, “You’ve not flown in almost fourteen years, and you were bad enough when you were flying daily.”

Val nudged Lucy as she crossed the room, “I’ll let you fly shotgun.”

“Mom, can I fly with you?” Sally asked quietly looking up to her mother.

Lucy smiled and nodded, “Of course.”

“Are you sure Sally can handle Thunderbird One’s speed?” Scott raised an eyebrow, “She’s pretty fast.”

Sally folded her arms, “I was the only one in my class that was brave enough to even get in the NASA centrifuge.” She smiled as she raised her chin, “I think I can handle your tin can.”

John laughed as he brushed past Scott, “That told you.”

Gordon nudged Virgil, “Told you, I like her already.”

Lucy smiled and nudged her daughter, “Hey, by rights, that’s my tin can you’re talking about.”

“I told you we should have put an adjustable seat in.” Brains uttered to Virgil.
Lucy looked around, “You changed the seat?” She threw her head back, “How could you!? I had it in the perfect position and….”

“Mom,” Virgil rested a hand on her shoulder, “We’ll fix it.”

“So, I’m flying Thunderbird One, with Lucy and Sally,” Val started.

Jeff nodded, “John and I will pilot Thunderbird Two,” He raised an eyebrow, “I’m sure you won’t begrudge us leaving Tracy Two here for the time being?”

“I’ll charge you for it.” Val smiled.

“You would.” Jeff sighed, “So are we going?”

Val nodded, “Ned said that Lucy and Sally’s belongings have been bought up and left outside Thunderbird Two.”

Virgil smiled and nodded to Scott, “Told you they wouldn’t try and break into her again.”

“You’ll have to tell me about that,” Jeff started as they began to file out of the room, “In fact, I want to hear about all your missions.”

“I landed on Halle’s Comet Dad!” Alan exclaimed, “Some guy thought he could fly in the Comet’s tail!”

“Our old friend Mister Lemaire,” Scott explained, “We’ve had a few of them about haven’t we?”

John sighed, “Fischler for one.”

Jeff groaned, “What did he do this time?”

“Stabilising fans failed,” Virgil told him, “And his static dampening shields were non-existent.”

“You found out in time, didn’t you?” Lucy asked, her eyes wide, “He could have shut down all Three of your ships if he was--”

“We thought Thunderbird Two was a goner,” Gordon nodded, “Thankfully, I was about to save the day.”

“Nobody likes a showoff Gordon.” Lucy told him as Sally turned to him, “How did you do it?”

“Well you see--”

Lucy smiled and paused, watching her family get ahead as someone else took her hand. She smiled and leant into his chest, “Hey.”

“Thank you,” Jeff murmured to her as he wrapped an arm around her shoulder, “That could have gone really bad if you hadn’t have stepped in.”

“Like Scott said,” She looked up to him, “They’ve not forgiven you, you’ve still got to earn their trust back.”
“And I will.” Jeff nodded, “I will do whatever I have to to prove to them that I’m sorry.”

She smiled and leant up to kiss his cheek, “That’s what I like to hear.”

Jeff rubbed her back as they began to walk, “Are you alright?”

Lucy nodded with a sigh, “It’s strange… in my head, it’s like I’ve got two lives and…” She trailed off with a shrug, “I don’t know.”

“It’s a lot to take in,” Jeff murmured, “I don’t blame you.”

She paused and looked up to him, “I don’t know if I’ll be able to stay on the island permanently.” She started, squeezing his hand, “I mean, Sally and I have a life here now and I can’t just up and leave that.”

She could see him thinking, the slight frown on his face that wasn’t one of anger or upset. Eventually she felt the need to add, “It’s not because I don’t want to be there,” She sighed, rocking on the balls of her feet, “I do Jeff, but it’s a huge change, for me and Sally. I just think it’d be better done gradually.”

Jeff nodded slowly, “I understand.”

“I’m not going to shut you out,” Lucy offered, “I just think that changing so much at once will be overwhelming for Sally, and me.”

Jeff smiled, “As long as you don’t disappear again, I don’t care what you want to do.”

He didn’t expect Lucy to stop that time, and she had to pull him back into her arms. Wrapping his arms around her, he looked closely into her eyes, “What?” He asked softly.

“I want you, and our family.” She told him quietly, her eyes never leaving his, “And I want things to be as we always imagined them to be.”

Jeff smiled and leant down to kiss her, “That sounds perfect.”

Sally looked back as she stepped out into the sunlight with the group, in the hallway she could see her parents looking into each others eyes, “Are they always so soppy?”

Gordon paused and followed her gaze, “You get used to it.”

“Speak for yourself,” Val uttered, “The pair of them are as sickly as the day they fell in love.”

“I think they’re going to be worse than normal.” Virgil sighed, “Y’know, with the reunion and all.”

Alan made a gagging noise, “They’re too old to be like that.”

“Less of the old young man.” Grandma scolded.
Val let out a long, high whistle, “Hey! Lovebirds! We’re losing daylight here!”

The group laughed as Jeff and Lucy pulled apart, each looking bashful at having been caught. Sally turned and followed her brothers towards the two machines landed side-by-side, “Wow, they’re huge.”

“They’re cool right?” Gordon smiled, “Nobody realises just how big they are until they’re up close.”

“I still can’t believe it,” Sally told him, “My family is International Rescue.”

Gordon smiled, “The one and only,” He glanced back, “That’s why we’ve got to be careful with the press y’know.”

Sally nodded, “They’re going to go mad when they find out about me and Mom, aren’t they?”

Gordon shrugged, “Probably, but we’ll sort it out. Mom was always good at putting them in their place, especially when we were little.”

“Yeah,” Scott chipped in, “And even if they cause trouble, we’ll make sure that they don’t pester you.”

Kayo stepped up to Sally’s other side, “And it’s my job to make sure the boys don’t pester you.”

Sally looked to Gordon in question, recognising the older girl from some of the photos but not recalling her ever being mentioned.

“She’s Kayo,” Gordon explained, “We all consider her as another sister.”

“My Dad was head of security for your Mom,” Kayo explained, “So I spent a lot of time with these guys.”

“Cool,” Sally grinned, “I always wanted a sister.”

“Hey!” Gordon exclaimed, “What about us?”

Kayo smiled as she slung an arm around Sally’s shoulders, “Sisters are cooler.”

“Too right.” Sally laughed, holding her hand out for a high-five. Kayo smiled and clapped her hand to Sally’s, “My door’s always open for you Kid, alright?”

“Right.” Sally smiled as she was steered away from the group.

“So, you ready to feel what proper g-force feels like?” Val asked, gesturing to the silver ship. Sally grinned and looked up to her, “Oh yeah.”

“You know,” Val smiled as she helped Sally into the back seat, “We’ve got a saying on Tracy Island.”

“What’s that?” Sally asked as she fastened her restraints, “Is it to do with flying? J-- Dad said that everyone in our family flies.”

Val laughed and nodded, “Yep, and you know what?”
“What?” Sally grinned.

“In this family, being told you fly like a girl, is the best compliment you can get.” Val told her, climbing into the pilot seat, “So pay attention, I’m going to show you how a real pilot flies.”
“All this is yours?” Sally asked as she walked into the villa with Gordon.

He smiled down to her, “Ours Sally.”

Her eyes were wide as she looked around the open space, “It’s beautiful.”

The whole room was bathed in an orange-gold, the evening sunset shining through the glass wall and shadowing the pool below them. Her eyes went to the portraits on the wall, her five brothers and Kayo, all in their uniforms and serious faced.

“No words huh?” Lucy smiled as she joined Sally, “It’s great isn’t it?”

Sally looked up to her mother, “Did you-- was this one of your designs?”

Lucy shrugged, “As an engineer I had a bit of input.”

“ Mostly in the retracting pool, the wall that spins, the picture that tilts, oh, and the seats that disappear.” Gordon grinned, “Cool, huh?”

“Oh now,” Lucy shook her head, “I had a lot of help.”

Sally smiled as she looked around the room, “It’s wonderful.”

“John.”

Everyone looked around at the holoprojector came to life in the centre of the lounge. John uttered a curse quietly as he stepped forward, “Yes, EOS?”

“EOS?” Sally frowned, hopping down into the sunken lounge, “Is that not greek?”

John pulled a face as he looked to her, “Long story, talk later.”

Scott stepped forward next to John, “What is it EOS?”

Sally turned as her mother rested her hands on her shoulders, “Mom, Mia used a greek name didn’t she? I heard her talking, she said Erebrus didn’t she?”

“Erebus.” Lucy corrected gently, her attention taken up by the globe in the centre of the room.

“What does it mean?” Sally insisted.

Jeff glanced to the young girl, “Darkness. It means darkness Sal.”

John paused mid sentence and looked over his shoulder, “How did you know that?”

Jeff hesitated, “I got a message, just before the sinkholes opened up, it was from Mia, she said something like she was the darkness, or, Erebus was the darkness.”
John’s head whipped back around to the hologram in the centre of the room, his tone dangerous as he frowned, “EOS.”

“I am sorry John.” EOS responded, “The name is familiar to me.”

“How?” Scott snapped, “Did you know her EOS? Did you know what she has tried to do to this family?”

The hologram shrunk, as if trying to hide itself from the family, “I--I--”

“EOS,” John’s voice was softer this time, calmer, “You’re not in trouble. Please, just tell us.”

She was quick to reply, “The woman you describe was the woman that found me and helped me become what I was when I came to Thunderbird Five.” She paused briefly before adding, “After our dispute I realised that everything she had told me about you were lies, and that she had been the one using me. Ever since I have been hiding from her on Thunderbird Five and monitoring her using the systems.” She hesitated, “I realise now that she is much like the man you describe as the Hood, but her actions are much more targeted on your family than your actions.”

John nodded slowly, “Okay. We’ll talk about this later.” He looked up to the hologram, “You were telling us about a supply ship heading to a meteor?”

“Thunderbird Three is the only machine that could possibly get to it in time.” EOS explained, “As I was aware your brothers are all over their flying hours I ensured to check every possible option before I called you. I am afraid there is no other option though.”

Alan jumped up, “I can manage!”

“You will not.” Lucy frowned, “Alan you’re--”

“--Fully trained to fly Thunderbird three.” Scott mumbled, “But we don’t send him on his own!”

John looked across to Scott, “I’ll go.”

Lucy frowned at John, “You’re very pale, are you sure--”

“Mom I’ll be fine,” John sighed, “It’s just from coming down before.”

“I could--”

Val’s warning glare was enough to shut Jeff up, “Doctors orders said no hard work.”

Kayo nudged Sally, “Want to go and get the best view?”

Sally grinned and nodded, “Yeah!”

Kayo smiled and lead her over to the window pointing in the general direction of Thunderbird Three, “She launches out of the round house, and heads up like this,” She drew an arch on the glass with her finger, “Right up until you can’t see her.”

“Wow,” Sally grinned, “Can I fly her one day?”
Kayo shrugged, “I think you’ll have to fight Alan for her.”

“I don’t care,” Sally shook her head, “I want to go to space.”

“Say,” Val turned to Lucy as they sat down on one of the sofa’s, “What made you choose Sally as a name?”

Lucy shrugged, looking over to her little girl stood at the window, “I suppose it was still Jeff in my subconscious.”

Val laughed, “Now why wouldn’t that surprise me?”

“It just goes to show that the pair of you never really gave up on each other.” Grandma nodded as she sat down.

Lucy smiled as she looked up to Jeff, “It explains why nobody else ever met my fancy.”

“Now that would have complicated things.” Jeff grimaced.

“So what were you doing there Mom?” Virgil asked as he leant back, “All this time and nobody ever realised.”

“Teaching art,” Lucy explained, “But I think we should wait to discuss it, when we’re all here.”

Grandma nodded in agreement, “It’s late, you boys need to sleep.”

“Aww,” Gordon pouted, “But Grandma, this isn’t like when Lee was here, this is Mom and Dad we’ve just got back.”

Jeff and Lucy both turned to look at Val, each with an identical look of surprise as Lucy asked, “Lee’s back?”

“Wow!” Sally’s exclamation interrupted the discussion, “Look at her go!”

Kayo smiled down to her, “Pretty cool, huh?” She nodded down to the pool, “Want to go for a walk?”

“I didn’t know until the boys told me,” Val insisted, “They had to go and rescue him from Alfie.”

Jeff frowned, “What happened to Alfie?”

“You mean he was still up there?” Lucy asked, “He was up there when I left.”

“Exactly,” Virgil sighed, “He didn’t even want to leave when a meteor strike practically destroyed the whole station.”

“Sorry dad,” Scott sighed, joining the group from where he had been monitoring Thunderbird Three’s take off, “Alfie’s pretty much gone.”

Jeff’s shoulders sunk slightly, but he still smiled to the boys, “Oh well, as long as you got Lee back
safe, that’s all that matters.”

“Oh they did,” Grandma sighed, “They would have spend the entire night sat listening to his stories.”

“He told us some good ones about college,” Gordon grinned, “I’ll have to remember them.”

Lucy stood up, only to have her wrist caught by Jeff, “Where are you going?”

“Just downstairs,” She smiled softly to him, “Don’t worry.”

“On let her go,” Val swatted at Jeff’s hand, “She’s a grown woman, she can do what she likes.”

“Yes, and you boys can come and help make the beds up in the guest rooms.” Grandma nodded to her three remaining Grandsons.

Val looked up to Jeff, “And we shall go and cook dinner.”

Jeff tried not to smile at the hisses of “Yes!” as he got up, to follow Lucy and Val down to the kitchen. He paused at the top of the stairs, looking across the lounge to the boys chatting as they headed up the stairs. Starting to finally realise just how much had changed in the months he had been gone, Jeff’s face fell a little. His boys were all grown up now, and had their own way of running his organisation.

“You’ve got to let them do it their way,” Val sighed from behind him, “You gave up your position when you left.”

Jeff looked back to her and nodded, “Yeah, I’m starting to realise that.” He turned to follow her down to the kitchen, “But some things won’t change.”

Val laughed and nodded, “Yes, and I’m sure they’ll keep you around just for the food.”

Jeff smiled bumping her shoulder with his, “I’m sure they’ll keep me around for more than that!”

He looked out to the pool, three women all sat with their feet in the water. Yes things had changed, but maybe it wasn’t a bad thing.
“What are the pair of you doing out here?” Lucy asked as she hopped down the steps to where the girls were sitting, their feet in the pool. Even from where she stood, Lucy could see Kayo’s wide eyes as she stumbled over her words, “Er, nothing… we’re fine…”

“We were just talking Mom,” Sally stated as she shuffled along, allowing Lucy to sit between them, “It’s weird, until this afternoon we were both special--”

“And you still are!” Lucy cut her off, wrapping an arm around each of the girls, “Both of you are my girls, and I love both of you as much as the other.” She looked to them both as she pulled them close, “Circumstance may have changed, but I still love you both exactly the same as I always did,” She smiled and ruffled Sally’s hair, “So, you just have to learn to get on with your brothers.” She nudged Kayo gently, “And you stop trying to hide everything from everyone.”

Kayo smiled and nodded, “Okay,”

She watched as Sally jumped up, “I’m gonna get a drink.”

Lucy leant back and called after her, “Nothing with too much sugar! You won’t sleep.”

Kayo laughed softly as Sally waved her mother off, Lucy just sighed and shook her head, “You used to be the same once.”

Kayo nodded, “I know.” She leant into Lucy’s side, resting her head on her shoulder, “Thank you Lucy, for so, so much.”

“You were always a daughter to me Kayo,” Lucy murmured, stroking her long dark hair back, “You still are, alright? Nothing is going to change that. And i’m going to be having words with those boys about how they’ve been --ah ah ah, don’t try and defend them, Grandma and Val have already told me all I need to know.” She shook her head, “Your job is entirely different to that of what the boys do, alright, maybe you will contribute to rescues on occasion, but you know how to do security.”

Kayo smiled softly, “I eventually started just going with it to keep them quiet.”

“Well you shouldn’t have had to!” Lucy chided, “You’ve been trained for security and it’s what you should do.”

“Okay,” Kayo nodded, “I’ll remember that.”

“Good.” Lucy kissed her hair, “And it was a brave thing what you did with the Hood.”

Kayo frowned and shook her head, her hands twisting together, “No, it wasn’t. I didn’t do anything.” She bit her lip and looked into the water before continuing, “He was here, and he’d trapped the boys out on rescues. I started the WASP protocol, but he still took his chance to tell them that I was… well, that he’s my uncle.”

“You’re still here though,” Lucy murmured, a small smile playing on her lips, “So it can’t have been
that bad an outcome.”

Kayo shrugged, “I guess not, it was just hard.”

Lucy rubbed her arm, “We can move on now, from him and from Mia, how does that sound?”

Kayo nodded, “Yeah, and with Sally around, things are certainly going to be interesting.”

Lucy laughed as she stood up, holding a hand out to Kayo, “Come on, Jeff and Val were making some dinner.”

Kayo smiled with a groan, “Finally, some edible food!”

They headed back into the lower levels of the villa, the sizzle and pop of hot fat greeting them with the smell of garlic.

Lucy went to look over her husband’s shoulder, using him as a shield from the spitting oil. She smiled and kissed his cheek, “That smells great.”

“It’s ages since we’ve had steak.” Kayo grinned as she hopped up onto a bar stool next to Sally.

She reached out to the holoprojector on the table as it began to fade in, “Hey guys,” She greeted, “How’s it going?”

“It was a quick fix,” John told her, “Brains helped, and we’re on our way home now.”

Sally leant over to look to the hologram, “We’re having steak!”

“Well I hope you save us some!” Alan exclaimed, “I love steak!”

Lucy smiled as she looked back to Jeff, “Since when has Allie been running missions?”

Jeff paused and glanced over his shoulder to the hologram, “I was only training him I swear!”

Lucy stepped back a fraction as Val leant in between them, “After you left they were short of a astronaut, so they sped up the kids training and started him on space rescues.”

“But he’s a kid!” Lucy exclaimed quietly, “He should still be studying.”

“Oh he is,” Kayo chipped in, reminding Lucy that there was no such thing as a private conversation any more, “Grandma made sure of that. She paused and shrugged, “It’s not like we’ve made him go on his own.”

“Who goes on their own where?” Scott asked as he rounded the corner at the bottom of the stairs.

“I was explaining that we don’t send Alan up on his own.” Kayo told him, “Apart from space junk duty.”

Val turned to look at the boys, raising an eyebrow as the three of them shifted uncomfortably and she pointed out, “But even that proved to be a little bit dangerous.”
Scott’s shoulders sank as she leant on the counter, “You can’t just blame us Aunt Val, even you thought all the space mines had been taken care of.”

“Space mine?!” Sally, Lucy, and Jeff all exclaimed.

“But,” Sally frowned, “They were decommissioned after the Global Conflict, and the command centre was taken offline three years later.” She shook her head, “It should have blown up in his face.”

Jeff sighed and looked to Val, “Anything else you want to tell me about?”

“Nope.” Val smiled, “I’ll just let you read the mission reports.”

Jeff shook his head and looked to Lucy, “This family is going to be the death of me.”

“Come and sit down boys,” Lucy laughed as she squeezed Jeff’s arm, “Before your dinners go cold.”

“My,” Grandma smiled as she joined the rest of the family with Brains, “That smells good.”

She frowned as Gordon ducked his head, his lips moving as he uttered something, “What was that Gordon?”

“Oh,” The boy looked up startled, “Nothing Grandma.”

“Shouldn’t we wait for John and Alan?” Sally asked as a plate was set in front of her, “I feel bad eating without them.”

Scott shook his head, “They won’t mind, we’re used to it.”

Lucy frowned, but said nothing as she passed the tray of fries around. She looked up as Jeff leant around her, resting his hand on her back to steady himself as he set a bowl of salad down on the table. He looked down and smiled to her, “Everything okay?”

“Perfect.” She smiled and leant up to kiss him.

Val sighed and set her plate down, “Would the pair of you get a room.”

“It’s our house,” Jeff pointed out with a smile as he sat down, “We can do what we like.”

“Well I’m not responsible for any more God children.” Val uttered, only looking up when several exclamations and a choking cough came from where the boys were sat.

“Aunt Val!” Scott exclaimed, his voice still strangled from choking, “We did not need that mental image.”
Lucy couldn’t help but laugh as Ruth wagged a finger at the boys, “You’re all old enough to know where babies come from.”

She glanced across to Jeff, noticing that whilst his head was bowed, he was in fact trying to hide a snigger. Leaning over, she whispered to him, “That’s our plans for tonight ruined.”

Jeff couldn’t hold in the laugh at her words and shook his head at her in amusement.

Both parents looked up as Val elbowed Lucy, “Besides, these two are too old for more kids, you know what they’re going to be thinking about next?”

Scott raised an eyebrow as he lifted a cube of steak to his mouth, pausing just long enough to ask, “What?” Before taking a bite.

Val’s smile was wicked as she leant forward and replied, “Grandkids.”
“Dad was wondering where you’d vanished off to,” Scott smiled as he set his glass down by the sink, “You can’t seriously be hungry can you?”

Lucy smiled as she turned to Scott, “No, I was going to take it to John, when he tries to escape to his room after they land.” She held the plate of toast out to him, “Unless you want to take it?”

Scott held his hands up, “Nope, I think he’ll tolerate it better from you.”

“Does he get it bad?” Lucy asked as she turned back to buttering the toast, thinking about how Jeff would spend days in bed when he’d returned from space. She glanced up as Scott leant against the counter, folding his arms as he gazed out to the pool, “Kinda,” He started, “He was pretty good at just going to bed and sleeping it off.”

Lucy didn’t miss the tense Scott used, “Was?”

Scott sighed and picked at a thread on his shirt, “Dad vanished into thin air, we didn’t have any idea where he’d gone or if he’d crashed. John blamed himself and refused to leave Thunderbird Five for weeks.” He shrugged, “I guess he didn’t want to give up hope, but he never came down Mom, and when he did, it was hardly for any time at all.”

Lucy set down the knife, “You think it’s going to be bad?”

Scott nodded, “It’s been getting worse, I wouldn’t want to think what would have happened if you hadn’t have come home.”

Lucy sighed, reaching up to Scott’s shoulders, wishing for the hundredth time that her little boy didn’t have to carry the weight that he did. He smiled tiredly to her, his voice was softer as he replied, “I tried to get him to come home, but he always insisted that he was needed on ‘Five.”

“That’s not your fault.” Lucy whispered to him, “Okay? It’s that damn Tracy stubbornness.”

Scott laughed and nodded, “Yeah, I guess it is.”

Both looked up as engines neared, “That’ll be them.”

“I’ll tackle Allie,” Scott smiled, “You get John.”

Lucy nodded, “That sounds like a fair deal.”

Scott hesitated as he went to leave, watching as Lucy put her things away. The corner of his mouth ticked up in a smile at how familiar her actions were despite him viewing them from a different angle.

“Was there something else?” Lucy smiled as she looked over her shoulder.

Scott laughed and shook his head, “No, it’s nothing.”

He turned to head back upstairs with a smile, “It’s nothing.”
Lucy watched him go with a sad smile, he was no longer her little boy that would watch her cooking in awe and excitement.

“Hey Scott!” She heard Alan call from the upper level, signalling it was time for her to go and find John.

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The door was still open a crack, but the room inside was dark as Lucy pushed it further open.

“John?” She murmured, “Johnny, come on sweetie.”

She heard him groan from the bed, his uniform strewn across the floor between her and him. It seemed that he had crashed as soon as he had entered the room. She had been right, he wasn’t fit to go on that mission.

“You need to eat something John.” She murmured, perching on the end of the bed, “Just one slice of toast.”

He shifted slightly, lifting his head from where it had been squashed into the pillow, “Hmm?”

“Here,” Lucy held out the toast to him, “Just this.”

Groaning, he shifted to sit up, “Thanks.”

Lucy smiled, wondering what Scott meant when he had said John wouldn’t tolerate being fussed. She ran a hand through John’s red hair with a smile, “Your Dad used to get it bad too.”

John sighed as he chewed the toast, avoiding her gaze in the darkness, “I kinda bought it upon myself.” He rubbed at his eyes with his fist, “I should’ve come home sooner.”

“Why didn’t you?” Lucy asked softly as he lay back, “We both know we can set ‘Five to relay home.”

John nodded sleepily as he rolled over and rested his head on his arms, “I didn’t want to let Dad down,” He mumbled, “I los’ him, needed to find ‘im too.”

“You wouldn’t have let anyone down,” Lucy sighed, moving the plate and setting it on the bedside table, “He left, that wasn’t your fault Johnny.” She ran a hand through his hair, “None of this wasn’t your fault darling, and we’re all home safe now.”

“Mmm.” Was the only reply she got as she leant down to kiss his hair, “Sweet dreams Johnny.”

She sat with him a while longer, running her hand through his soft hair as he slept. Endless questions ran through her head, mostly wondering when was the last time he had slept in that bed. He was so grown up yet he seemed so small to her all at the same time. It wasn’t hard to see that he was more confident now than he ever had been before, and Lucy couldn’t help but wonder if that was down to her disappearance.
The brush of the door on the carpet made Lucy look up.

“Is he asleep?” Scott whispered softly, stepping back as his mother slipped out of the room.

She nodded wearily to him, “Yeah, he’s upset though, blaming himself for what’s happened.”

Scott tutted quietly, “He’ll come around, he’s tired and—”

“Out of sync.” Lucy smiled, finishing Scott’s sentence, “Yeah, I know.”

Scott looked over his shoulder, along the hallway, “Dad was just taking Sally to bed, I did offer her to go in my room so she was a bit closer to you guys, but she insisted the guest room was fine.”

Lucy nodded, unsurprised, “She should be fine, it won’t be forever.”

Scott frowned, “How do you mean?”

Lucy looked up to him, “She has school, and I have a job. As much as I’d love to, I can’t just leave everything behind.”

Scott looked down, “Oh. I—”

She sighed and pulled him into a hug, tiptoeing to reach his shoulders, “I’m not vanishing off,” She murmured, “Far from it. I just have to get organised before I can settle permanently.”

Scott smiled as he wrapped his arms around her, “I’m not letting you vanish off again,” He sighed as he pressed his face into her hair, “You or dad.”

“Never,” Lucy held him tightly, “We’re going to make things easier, alright?”

Scott nodded into her hair, “Yeah, that sounds good.”

Lucy pulled back, “You go and get some sleep, you’ve have a long day.”

“Thanks,” Scott wiped at his eyes, “Night Mom.”

“Good night sweet.” She kissed his cheek, “I’ll still be here in the morning.”

She turned to the guest room and knocked lightly on the door before letting herself in, “Is everything alright in here?”

She smiled at the pair, stood at the window looking out to the back of the island where Thunderbird two launched from. Sally looked around with a grin, “Dad was just telling me all about the launch procedures.”

Jeff shrugged guiltily as he smiled to Lucy, “She had questions.”

Lucy shook her head, pulling Sally in for a hug, “Are you sure you’ll be okay in here on your own?”

Sally pulled back with a frown, “I’m a big girl Mom.”
Jeff chuckled, “You’ll always be a kid to us.”

Lucy nodded in agreement as she pulled the sheets back for Sally, “We’re just down the corridor if you need us.”

Sally tutted, “I know Mom.”

Lucy kissed her hair, ignoring Sally’s complaint, “Sweet dreams.”

“Night Mom,” Sally yawned, reaching out to hug Jeff, “Night Dad.”

Jeff forced a smile as he kissed Sally’s cheek, “Goodnight sweetheart.”

As she slipped the door closed, Lucy smiled to Jeff, reaching up to wipe his cheek. He smiled and covered her hand with his, “The first night of many.”

“Without a doubt.” Lucy whispered back, “The first night of the rest of our lives.”
Chapter 32

Lucy leapt out of bed at the scream, running along the hallway to the farthest door, not even hesitating in flinging it open.

“Sally.” She breathed, pulling the little girl into her arms, “I’m here, it’s okay, I’m here.”

Sally clutched at her mother’s arms, clinging onto her, ensuring that she was really there, “Mom,” She cried, leaning into her, “Momma.”

Lucy ran her hands up and down her daughter's back, “Shh, hush now sweet, I’m here.”

“It was a dream,” Sally mumbled into Lucy’s shoulder, “A really, really, bad dream.”

Lucy rocked her gently, “It’s okay, you’re safe baby.”

“Sally?” A soft voice murmured from the door, Lucy had expected Jeff, or Scott, to follow her in. She had assumed that John would still be crashed out in his room, not that he would have heard the shriek.

He stepped into the room, “Sally, are you alright?”

Sally looked up at her brother’s question, wiping her eyes, “It’s ‘kay,” She mumbled, “It was about Mia.”

John sunk down at the end of the bed, his forehead creased in thoughtfulness, “Hmm, yeah, she’s a nasty one is Mia.”

Lucy raised an eyebrow, “You remember her?”

John nodded, “Yeah, it’s alright though, she didn’t do any harm, not this time or last time.”

Sally sniffed and looked to her mother, “I dreamt that she pushed you into the road again.”

Lucy kissed her daughter’s hair, “It’s okay, Jeff was there, he pulled me out of the way.”

John frowned, “She pushed Mom into the road?”

Sally nodded taking her pillow and hugging it close to her, “Yeah, when we were in town.”

John’s face darkened, “The little b--” He stopped when Lucy gave him a look, instead sighing, “Want to come in my room Sal?” He offered, “I get the moonlight most of the night so it’s not as dark as in here.”

Sally looked to Lucy, “Can I?”

Lucy looked to John, his hair ruffled and his skin still pale in the darkness, “As long as you’re sure.”

John nodded, “Yeah, Allie always came in my room when I was home, it’s fine.”

Lucy smiled, “Alright.” She kissed Sally’s hair, “You go with John and come and get me if there’s
absolutely anything, alright?”

Sally nodded, “Love you Mom.”

“Love you too sweet.” She hugged her close, “Sleep well.”

Lucy stepped out of the room, hardly surprised to find Jeff and Scott stood talking, “You guys didn’t have to get up.”

Both shrugged, each mumbling something about it being instinct. Lucy smiled and went to lean against Jeff, “She’s fine, just had a nightmare.”

Scott frowned, “Is she alright?”

“Yeah,” Lucy smiled, “John heard her, so she’s going to stop with him tonight.”

Scott nodded with a yawn, “Good, okay, ‘m goin’ back to bed.”

“Night Scott.” Both parents smiled as he headed back to his room.

“I heard you talking,” Jeff murmured, “I didn’t want to interrupt.”

Lucy interlaced her fingers with his as they stepped into their room, “You could have come in, you are her dad.”

Jeff sighed and sunk down on the bed, “I know, I just…” He shrugged and shook his head, “It’s something I never expected and…” He trailed off, laughing at himself as he wiped his eyes, “You’re back Luce,” He sucked in a jagged breath, “I’ve got you back and I thought I’d never see you again.”

Lucy frowned as she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, “Jeff,” She sighed, “Why didn’t you say something?”

He swallowed and shook his head, lifting his arm around her shoulders, “I didn’t realise I… I guess it’s just the shock of it all.” Looking down to her, he brushed his fingers down the side of her face, in the dim light of the lamp, she hardly seemed real. He still couldn’t believe that she was there, back on the island with their little girl of all things.

“I never imagined,” He whispered, “That I’d have you back.” His fingers paused over her cheek, his smile became softer as he leant down to kiss her.

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“Then he had the audacity to try and use a laser cutter! It wasn’t even an access hatch!” Virgil exclaimed as Scott sat down next to him, “Didn’t he?”

Scott gave a nod, still half asleep, “Yeah, yeah, Janus you mean?”

“Yes,” Lucy smiled as she sat down next to Val, “Or rather the guy working for the Hood.”
Scott accepted the glass of juice offered to him by his aunt, downing it on one before wiping his mouth on his arm.

Lucy sighed but said nothing as she leant on the counter with her water, “You managed to fix it though?”

“Of course,” Virgil smiled, “Was the first thing we did when we got home.”

Jeff shook his head as he looked to Val, “I still can’t believe that they found reason to suspend you for investigation.”

Val nodded, “Later found to also be a plot by Janus.”

“Hey, you’re all up.” Gordon greeted as he came in from the pool, “I didn’t hear you.”

Grandma frowned, “What have I told you about drying off before coming in here young man?”

Gordon looked down at the puddle at his feet, “I’ll dry it up later.”

Grandma tutted as Scott threw a kitchen towel at his younger brother, “You can dry it now.”

“Oh leave him.” Lucy defended, “He was excited to come inside, “Right Gordon?”

Taking his cue, Gordon grinned and nodded, “Right.”

“Hey,” Alan grinned as he joined the group, “I’m not the last one up.”

“Actually you are,” Sally challenged coming in from outside with John, “We’ve been down on the beach since before dawn.”

“Aww,” Alan frowned, “That’s not fair.”

“So now we just need to drag Brains up from the labs, and Kayo in from wherever she’s taken Thunderbird S off to--” Virgil started

“I m-m-m-may be able to help with bringing Kayo in.” Brains offered as he reached the bottom of the stairs.

Lucy smiled in his direction as she took the batter she had made earlier from the fridge. Scott leant forward, “How are you going to do that?”

“Ee-each of the ships has a remote pilot option. It wouldn’t be that hard to take control away from K-kkayo and remote Shadow back here.”

“Oh,” Sally chipped in, pointing to the light-type, “We could just ask her.”

“Now that makes much more sense.” Kayo’s hologram grinned, “I’ll be back in five.”
Lucy frowned as she watched the hologram vanished, “But, I didn’t hear anyone launch?”

“Oh, that’s because it’s Thunderbird Shadow.” Alan grinned, “It’s--”

Lucy spun to Jeff, “You built it?!”

“Well,” Jeff shrugged, “Technically Brains and MAX oversaw the building of it.”

Lucy looked to Brains, shaking her head in disbelief, “I back-benched that, it was still just an idea, rough sketches and--”

“Oh, here she comes.” Scott stated looking out to the sky.

Lucy walked over to the window, her steps slow as she looked up to the sky. Her eyes widened as the black jet came into view, “Oh my g-- she’s perfect.” She spun around to Jeff, “Just when I thought you guys couldn’t get any more brilliant.” She looked back and laughed, “Look at it!”

Sally leant over to her brothers, “I don’t think I’ve ever seen her this excited.”

Val laughed as she looked to Sally, “You’ve never seen her around her designs then.”

Sally looked to the plane coming in, “Did Mom design all of the ships?”

“Yeah,” Scott smiled nodding to Brains, “But she had some help.”

Brains shrugged, rubbing the back of his head as he stepped back, “Oh, I didn’t do that m-mmuch, I just ran the numbers and--”

“Don’t be so modest Brains!” Lucy exclaimed as she turned back to making the pancakes, “If it hadn’t have been for you the Thunderbirds wouldn’t be half the machines they are now.”

Shuffling his feet Brains looked down, “It was a joint effort.”

“This whole operation must be a huge team effort,” Sally said, “It’s crazy.”

The boys all laughed, each shaking their heads as Scott leant forward, “It’s part of being a Tracy Sal, you’ve gotta be crazy to be one of us.”

John smiled as he finished his drink, “Speak for yourself.”

Lucy spotted his hands loosening on the glass as she went to pass him, reaching out her hand, she caught the glass in mid air, placing it down on the table before it could smash on the floor. John looked up, confused at first until he caught onto what had happened, he smiled and shook his head, “Oh.”

“You’re not in space any more,” Lucy laughed as she hopped up to sit on the countertop, “Just like your father.”

Jeff looked up from where he was oiling the frying pan, “Hey, that’s just a side effect of being in space.”

Grandma frowned, “One that I have to keep cleaning up!”
“Well you should do what I always did Ruth, and only use plastic!” A gruff voice announced from the stairs, “That way you don’t have to keep buyin’ new mugs every five minutes.”

Val gasped and leaped up from her seat, “Lee!”

He let out a coarse laugh, “Well I never thought I’d see the day.”

“I must say, it is quite a shock to all of us,” Another voice came with the soft click of high heels on the wooden floor, “Lucille, you probably don’t remember me--”

“Penny!” Gordon exclaimed, “What-- when-- how--”

“International Rescue,” EOS interrupted, “I think we have a slight situation.”

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