

## Chapter Four

“Time to eat Nolan.” Jordan announced as he passed by Nolan’s room. Nolan obediently pulled himself out from his cozy spot under the bed, trying to keep himself steady. For some reason whenever he had moved around today he had felt odd. Breakfast hadn’t seemed good either.

He slowly trudged to the table and sat gingerly in his seat. A sandwich and a bunch of grapes were waiting on a plate next to a glass of water. Nolan prodded the sandwich’s contents. There was ham, some white meat, and some orange cheese. He tentatively took a tiny sip of the water and picked at the food. Jordan noticed from across the table. “You can eat now Nolan.” he assured, mistaking Nolan’s pokiness for waiting for someone to give the word to eat. Nolan didn’t understand, there was no ‘may’ or ‘can’ in his mind, only yes or no, do or don’t. He didn’t want to eat, so why was Jordan telling him that he had to eat?

So he took a little grape and ate it, hoping that that would satisfy Jordan. But it didn’t. “Don’t you like your sandwich?” Jordan asked. Against his will Nolan took a bite and grudgingly swallowed it. He instantly wished that Jordan had never made him eat. It didn’t taste good and it made his stomach ache. He let out a whine and edged his food away from him. This time it was Kitty who saw. “I don’t think Nolan wants his food,” she said, playing with her own food.

Finally someone understood him! He smiled at Kitty, who ignored him. Jordan shook his head. “Just eat Kitty, don’t worry about Nolan.”

“But maybe he doesn’t feel good.” Kitty protested, her blonde pigtails swishing. And indeed, Nolan did not feel well. His head began to spin and the floor lurched under him. He didn’t want to eat, he didn’t want to sit in the bright sun of the dining room. Nolan buried his head under his arms and let out muffled whines. He wanted to back to his room, back in his cozy spot where it was dark and comforting and there was no one to force him to eat his lunch.

“Nolan..” Jordan prodded. Nolan banged his hand on the table and stuffed another awful bite into his mouth. Why was Jordan making him eat? Didn’t he love his brother? He was beginning to feel a slight sense of betrayal. At least Kitty understood him.

Across the table Jordan frowned while chewing his lunch. Nolan thought it was aimed at him, so he ate some more, whining the entire time. Jordan got up abruptly and came over. Nolan let out a little cry. He was trying to eat, but it must not be good enough for Jordan. He moved to take another bite, then felt Jordan’s cold hand on his forehead. He stopped eating, confused.

“Mom,” Jordan called. “Do you know if Nolan is feeling ok? He seems kind of hot.”

Mama was there in a second and put something non edible in his mouth. Nolan barely noticed; his head was starting to hurt intensely and the world suddenly seemed to be spinning around him very fast.

“He has a fever, poor guy. No wonder he doesn’t want to eat,” Mama said. Kitty abandoned her seat and came over. She poked Jordan. “I telled you Nolan don’t feel good.”

“I *know* Kitty.” Jordan replied crossly. Mama gave him a stern look and gently herded Nolan back to his room. She had him get back into bed and pulled the blanket over him. Through his dizziness Nolan was bewildered. What about his food? Jordan had said that he had to eat it, like it or not. And besides, it wasn’t dark and he hadn’t done the Sweeping or anything else that day, so why was he going to bed? He didn’t really want to go to sleep now, and he had things that needed to be done today.

“Sleeping, no.” he attempted feebly. But Mama only kissed him and turned off the light.

So he lay there, trying to concentrate on how the light from his window showed little particles of dust gently falling like nearly invisible snow. He wished he could gather it all up so he could drop it himself, but the particles were not collectable. He fought the sick and sleepy feeling until he could not resist any longer and let sleep come and steal him away from the world.

\*\*\*\*\*

When he woke the sun was still bright on his orange walls and the rather loud noises of ordinary life were coming through his door. His head still hurt, but not in the same pounding and dizzying way. Now it was just a dull pain that throbbed. He carefully made his weak legs go in the direction of the kitchen; he had to find his leftover lunch, and was not about to forget what Jordan had said. Mama intercepted him on the way there and stopped him. “Let’s go sit on the couch,” she said firmly. “Eat?” Nolan ventured. But Mama only gripped his shoulders and led him to the couch in front of the TV. She put a dvd in, then left momentarily.

She was soon back with some crackers and a glass of water. Nolan eagerly bit into a cracker, then set the rest down, somewhat disappointed. It hadn’t made him better, and it tasted nasty. He took a drink of the water, and found that it was just as appalling to his tongue as the crackers.

The movie that Mama had put in started. Nolan instantly identified it as Bambi. He didn’t like it as much as Nemo, but it was good enough for now. He liked that there was more doing and seeing in the movie than seemingly pointless talking. What he disliked was the lack of

dimension and bold colors, and the gray furry thing that was supposed to be a rabbit got annoying sometimes. So did anything that talked too much, but other than that it was decent.

A few seconds into the movie Kitty 'boinged' into the room and cuddled close up next to him to watch. Baby Leah followed with her pacifier in her mouth and struggled up the couch to sit by Kitty. Nolan twitched at the feeling of his little sister snuggled up against his side. He wasn't sure if he liked it at first and wondered if he should move away. He decided not to kick her away, realizing that it was kind of pleasant to have a little warm person sitting next to you on occasion. As time and the movie ticked on Leah fell asleep on Kitty, and Kitty fell asleep against Nolan with her thumb in her mouth and her hand clutching the corner of his his shirt. Nolan was fine with this arrangement for the time being; he had been cold until Kitty came along and substituted herself as a blanket.

Bambi came to an end and Nolan tried another cracker, this one tasted a little better, but he still felt weak and sick. And bored. Being sick was an annoying business, Nolan decided privately. He didn't have the strength to do all of the things that he wanted to, and Mama kept sending him off to do things that weren't part of the normal routine. Why was she doing that all of a sudden? It was all very confusing.

Nolan was beginning to feel very hot under Kitty's limp form so he tried to push her aside. She didn't move much, so he wiggled his way to the floor and got up shakily. He remembered that he hadn't done the Sweeping yet, and cautiously snuck into the kitchen. Mama was nowhere to be seen. He pulled out the broom and started to sweep, hoping that Mama wouldn't come in and stop him from finishing.

His movements seemed slower and clumsier than normal, and he kept brushing the broom through his pile and scattering the crumbs. He finally got angry at it and slammed his broom down on the floor, crying out sharply in frustration. Mama heard and came into the kitchen.

"Bedroom, no!" Nolan exclaimed quickly. He most definitely did not want to go to sleep again. To his surprise, Mama listened and stood at the edge of the kitchen, allowing Nolan to finish. He did, this time being more careful.

When he was finished he neatly put the broom away and let Mama take his hand. She pulled him gently back to his room and gave him the family iPad. She also brought his cup and crackers in and set them next to him. Nolan ignored them and eagerly turned the iPad on. He quickly scrolled through the games and chose the watermelon game. Nolan liked watching the luminescent pieces of fruit rise and fall and rise again. He liked listening to the tinging noises

that his finger made when it touched to screen, and the bang that it made when he touched the black things. He liked that it was different every game, yet still followed the same routine.

Nolan played with it until the battery ran out, never tiring of the music, colors, or flashing lights. When Mama came back in a while later to check on him, he was fast asleep once more.