

CHAPTER 9

The lump was starting to become kind of a bother. For some very peculiar reason, it was actually a little bit bigger now, and in a completely different place. Yes, it had moved. And it didn't take long for that to happen, either. A mere two days.

It appeared on her arm at first, and eventually grew large enough that it was fairly noticeable from a far distance. Which is annoying enough, but eventually it decided that it wasn't very comfortable on her arm, and would be much happier somewhere higher up. And so it moved on its own. Her watch was only making this transition more uncomfortable, and so she was forced to put it on her other arm.

Care didn't really like that lump. She *hated* it, in fact. But whenever she tried to show it to Marvin, he would respond with something like "That's cool" or "Wow, it looks like it's gonna explode. You better watch out."

He wasn't a good person to go to, needless to say.

The problem was that nobody else existed, for all Care knew. Anything outside of the school building was irrelevant; she didn't see herself stepping out there ever again. Not that she didn't want to, she just didn't have a choice in the matter.

Marvin wasn't much of a help to Care, sure, but if ever Marvin needed something, Care would be the first to respond and follow orders, lest he resort to doing unimaginably cruel things. It wasn't clear what these things were, but they were most certainly going to happen if she wasn't on her feet every second of the day. While he never said a single thing to imply this, it was a constant fear regardless.

She hadn't yet learned to trust him, or like him, but she could endure him and his behavior *most* of the time.

"Hey, Carlyn," Marvin said, waving for her attention, the door only half open.

At the time Care was just about asleep, though not quite, in what was supposed to be her bedroom. In reality it was just another classroom, probably the one Marvin considered the worst (located next to his favorite, with the two closets). Possibly the smallest one as well; that's what mostly bothered her.

She didn't actually have a bed or anything; Marvin decided that a couple of chairs would suffice (though he was tired at the time, and looking forward to sleeping on his own comfortable bed; not that he would have put much thought into it at any other time).

"Hey! C'mon!" he shouted eagerly.

Care was still pretending to be asleep, though failing.

"I know you're awake," said Marvin. "I could surely and absolutely *fearlessly* sense enthusiasm from the whole other side of our school."

Marvin had a strange way of speaking. He would often misuse words and talk in cryptic ways that even he himself could not understand. His use of the word "fearlessly" is a good example of this; not only did that not make much sense in the context of his sentence, but he didn't even intend for it to make sense. It's a weird and complex thing, and maybe it would be better if left a mystery.

Fortunately for Marvin, that worked to his advantage. Care was so caught up trying to make sense of it that she forgot what she was pretending to do.

"What?" she asked.

"Good," said Marvin. "Get out of bed, we're going underground."

This statement astonished her even further.

"Underground?" she asked.

"To the basement!" Marvin replied. "Get up."

Care sighed.

"Oh," she said.

He was clearly in a good mood that morning, as he often was. It was usually later on in the day that he developed sort of an angry attitude, though not *too* angry. Marvin was never one to get extremely mad at people, unless of course the hungry were after him. When that happened, though, yes - he was mad.

Usually he would just get disappointed, not infuriated. But that was almost as bad.

"Okay, follow me," he said, pulling Care out of the room. It didn't feel much like 'following' to her.

He took an immediate turn to the left, toward the end of the hallway, which was just a little door. Care noticed it before, but it never actually occurred to her that anything was behind it. He ran in that direction, making it to the door and turning the knob anxiously. The door opened.

Marvin took a moment or two to stare inside.

"Look at that," he said. "Isn't that sufficiently?"

Care didn't listen to him. She was busy looking down, as well. It was a stairway, leading to what she assumed was the basement. At the moment it was too dark to see anything else.

Marvin stepped in first, pushing Care aside but afterwards pulling her in with him. It was still incredibly dark, but he didn't hesitate to run with full speed down the stairs, dragging Care along the way. He let go of her half way down, and she stumbled.

"We're here," he said.

He moved his hand along the wall for a few seconds, searching, then flipped a switch. The lights turned on.

Care covered her eyes and tilted her head downward.

"What are you doing?" asked Marvin.

"It's bright."

"So? Look around!"

Marvin did so himself. It wasn't a pretty room, being a basement and all. In one corner was a large cardboard box, probably filled with garbage. It almost spilled out. In the other corner (closest to the staircase) was a closet and a couple of shelves. The shelves were almost empty.

The closet, Marvin remembered, was *completely* empty. He theorized that the large cardboard box may have been filled with its contents a long time ago. Still, it didn't actually matter to him.

On the opposite side of the room was yet another door. It was blocked by a couple of stacked chairs.

Care, her eyes still covered, blindly walked in the direction of this door, believing she was moving toward Marvin. Marvin ran over and stopped her, turning her in the correct direction.

"Don't go in there," he warned.

"In where?"

"That room," Marvin said, pointing at the door. Care turned back around and moved her hands away, glanced for half a second, then quickly put her hands back.

"Why not?" she asked, not actually that interested.

Marvin decided to change the subject.

"So," he began, looking around the room. "You like this place?"

Care wasn't sure how to respond. She most certainly *didn't* like it. But was that a wise thing to say?

"It's okay," she mumbled.

"Okay?" Marvin asked. "Just okay? Are you sure it isn't *conventionally hallucinatory*?"

"Huh?"

"I don't know," Marvin said. "But what could I do to make it better?"

Care just shook her head at him, lifting her hands away at this point.

"What does that mean?" he asked, imitating her gesture.

"I'm not sure."

"You're not sure what it means?"

Care shook her head again and cleared her throat.

"I'm not sure how to make it better," she said in a very quiet, tired voice. She tried to make eye contact, but couldn't do it with the light shining so brightly.

"Oh," said Marvin.

It was quiet for the next several minutes. Marvin continued to walk around the basement - looking under things, behind things, on top of things - like he was looking for something incredibly important. Maybe he *was*.

As interesting as that is, it didn't make much a difference to Care, who was just about ready to explode from the sheer boredom of this adventure. Not to mention she was kind of tired, having just woken up. Though, even if she was neither bored nor tired, her desires wouldn't have been a whole lot different. She still would be pretty much ready to explode.

As she was getting ready to sit down on the staircase, her eyes couldn't help but notice the flat circular object on the top of the shelf next to her.

The same one, actually, that hit her square on the head only two days ago.

It wasn't just any ordinary frisbee, though. In fact, it wasn't *even* a frisbee. It was something much different than that.

And she wanted it.

Since the moment she first saw it, this has been true. Unfortunately, that little "incident" kind of distracted her. Maybe she would have caught it, if it hadn't been moving so damn quickly.

Marvin ran out of things to look under. He turned around and glanced at Care, who happened to be paying most of her attention to something that wasn't him. Clearly she was staring at one of the shelves, on top of which an object sat.

"Oh, yeah," he said, walking toward the shelf now. "I forgot to put that away."

Care stood up.

"No," she said.

Marvin was opening the closet door as she said this, ready to place it inside with the same gentleness as everything else. It wasn't so much for the object's sake as it was for the closet's. He had an unhealthy obsession with closets, and sometimes felt sympathetic for them.

"What?" he asked.

"Um," she began, holding her hands out. She wasn't quite sure what to say right away. "C-can I have it?"

Marvin was a bit befuddled by this request.

"You want *this*?" he replied, holding it up.

"Yes."

"Why?"

"Iâ€¦ just want it."

Marvin laughed.

"Well, you can't just *want* it," he said. "That's approximately silly!"

"Please?" she asked, holding her arms out further now.

Marvin shook his head, smiling.

"Heh, I can't do that." he said, laying the flat object down inside of the closet. "*He's* waiting."

"Who?"

"The closet," he replied, closing the door. "Now, let's go back up. There's nothing really to do down here."

Care nodded, though very slowly. But as Marvin walked away, her eyes did not move.

He noticed, as he was walking up the stairs, that she was not following him. She was a little busy staring at the closed closet door; not even making the smallest movement, just standing there in what looked kind of like a state of shock. This troubled him slightly, not because he cared why, but because it wasn't what he planned out in his mind.

"Clair!" he shouted. "Over here."

Care turned around, with an unhappy though somewhat monotonous expression. Almost ghost-like, actually. She drifted down to the stairway, looking down at the floor.

"Oh, wait," said Marvin, without even a jot of sympathy. "Shut off the light first."

Care didn't like what was going on. She didn't like it at *all*. Her entire life's dream was about to be broken, and there was absolutely nothing that she could do about it. Except mope, of course, which she was already doing a good job at. Not that it was getting Marvin's attention. He didn't have a very easy time reading emotions - unless we're talking about closets, in which case he was very good at it.

It was quite unfortunate, because the consequences of misreading an emotion were colossal. And I don't mean for Marvin.

Now, Care *did* have a chance earlier to retrieve the object that she wanted. A couple of chances, actually. You could consider this to be her own fault. But that didn't seem to occur to her at the time.

"Alright," Marvin said, as they both walked out of the basement and into the hallway. "What do you wanna do with me?"

Care didn't like the sound of that question, or the tone in which he said it. But she wasn't in the proper mood to worry.

"Nothing," she said, bluntly.

Marvin stood in shock.

"Nothing?" he asked. "Nothing at all? Are you sure about that?"

"Yes," Care responded.

"So you're suggesting we sit down, preferably in the library - though it's your choice - and not even talk to each other?"

Care shook her head and faced Marvin, still with a blank expression.

"That's *something*," she said. "I want to do *nothing*."

Marvin was perplexed by this suggestion. He'd never heard a single thing like it before. Nothing? Absolutely nothing? What *is* that? How do you accomplish such a thing? You must always be doing *something*.

It drove him mad, this idea, and so he disallowed it from entering his brain again.

"Okay, okay, yeah," he said, pounding his head with considerable force. "Sure. You do that. Nothing. Okay."

It distracted him so much that he walked off in a fit of complete and utter disarray. Nothing he did would stop the thoughts, and so he decided that it would be better to rest for a while and think about something better; something a little more useful to his life.

Care felt accomplished, but it didn't do much to cheer her up. She walked to her classroom, depressed and disappointed.

Though, surely enough, when she got in there, she did nothing.

