Quiet Time

by TheMissingDays

Benji is in need of some quiet time, but will he go peacefully.

Hope you enjoy.

The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Quiet Time - Chapter 1

It was so unfair, is all Ben could think as he stared at the back of the front seat in the sedan. It was not fair that his little brother Clark was sitting up front while he was stuck in the backseat in his carseat. All Clark had done was ask and their Mom had said yes, just like that! Even if it was just because she needed to use part of the backseat for groceries, since the trunk was currently occupied by a large box for a plastic kitchen playset Mom had bought for one of their little cousin's birthday, it still wasn't right. Ben should have been the one to sit up front, he was sixteen and his little brother was only ten. When Ben would ask to sit up front though his parents would always say no, reasoning that Ben was too small and still needed to sit in his car seat. The only thing Ben was happy about was that the car seat was Clark's old one that he had inherited a few years back when Clark had outgrown the need for one. It was a clear upgrade from the one Ben had sat in for most of his life. For one it was more modern and didn't sport any jungle animals plastered over it like Ben's had and his parents had deemed that Ben was big enough to go with just a seat belt instead of the harness that his old one had. Still it was horribly humiliating at sixteen to still have to sit in a car seat.

“Clark will you stop that,” Mom chided to her youngest who had been doing nothing but messing with the radio dial the whole way home.

“Sorry,” Clark said sitting back. “I just never get to pick the station since I don't sit up front.”

“Don't get used to it,” Mom said with a nod. “Its just for today.”

“This is why you should have let me sit up front,” Ben said from the backseat.

“Benji don't start,” Mom said with sharp tone. “I'm getting a little tired of that cranky mood you've been in all morning, like I said it's one car ride.”

“You'll get to sit up front someday Benji,” Clark said in a mocking tone as he looked back at Ben.

“Shut up,” Ben barked back, delivering a swift kick to the back of Clark's seat.

“Benji,” Mom gasped. “Do not kick the seat and Clark leave him alone. We are going to have a nice peaceful car ride home, do you two understand? That means no changing the radio station every thirty seconds and no more bickering.”

“Yes Mom,” Clark said.

“Yes Mommy,” Ben said softly from the back. Clark shook his head a little with a smirk. It was always funny to him that while he used Mom and Dad, Ben defaulted to Mommy and Daddy. Ben had of course tried to make the switch, but he would always have to say their names several times before they realized he was trying to get their attention. Ben had of course confronted them about ignoring him. Their Dad had

reassured him that they were not ignoring him, it was probably just that their brains were hardwired to respond to his voice when they heard Mommy and Daddy. Ben's voice hadn't changed one bit since he had been five, still in the high pitched register of a little boy. His parents had said they would try better. Ben had tried a little more but it seemed like it wasn't going to take so he had just reverted back to the easier option. Clark also found it kind of funny that everyone in the family still called him Benji, while at school everyone knew him as Ben. It wasn't that big of a deal though, that's what they had always called him. It was honestly a little hard to even think that Ben was sixteen. His shaggy brown hair and rounded features and big green eyes just seemed to convince anyone that didn't know him that he was just a little boy no more than five or six years old.

Ben sat with his arms crossed looking out at the gray sky of the day, weather that seemed to perfectly match his mood. He then looked down at his shirt that was sporting a large stain that he had gotten from some chocolate ice cream. Which was just great since this was one of the few shirts he actually liked. It was white with a baseball on fire in the center and had a baseball player swinging a bat near the bottom of the hemline. He didn't have a lot of clothes he found acceptable since most of them were hand-me downs or rather hand-me ups from Clark. Making matters worse was that Ben wasn't big enough for the stuff that Clark had worn when he had been eight or nine, most of the clothes were from when Clark had been around five or six. Ben had a plethora of shirts with childish designs and cartoon character on them which he

wouldn't be caught dead wearing to school. The only good thing about today was that his Mom had bought him a few new shirts more appropriate to his age since some of Ben's clothes were starting to show their age, mostly the stuff he would actually wear of course since it was in heavy rotation. It seemed every year that passed his wardrobe started to look more and more juvenile as the things he deemed acceptable had to be thrown out. Ben always complained saying he needed all new clothes. Mom would always tell him that there was no reason to get new clothes when the old ones fit him just fine. All Ben could do was wait to get a few new things when Clark's old clothes got too ratty to wear. And yet there was now a stain on a shirt that he favored – it was all Clark's fault as well.

There Ben had been, minding his own business eating the chocolate ice cream cone his Mom had gotten him at the food court when Clark had backed into him causing the cone to smoosh into Ben's chest. Clark claimed that he hadn't seen Ben, but Ben would not believe him. He had been right there, how could anyone have not seen him despite the fact that Clark had been walking backwards.

The sedan finally pulled into the driveway of the house. The boys got out and helped their Mom carry in the groceries and other bags. After getting them all on the kitchen table Mom looked at her phone to see the time.

“Right so I think its quiet time,” she declared. Both boys groaned. “You know the rules,” Mom said as she lead both boys down the hall to their shared bedroom. As long as both

boys could remember whenever they were off from school their mom had deemed it necessary for them to spend an hour having some quiet time and her rules were strict. She would make them put pajamas on and try to rest. It was her way to get them to take a nap, if they didn't that was fine, but if they did it was a plus in her book. The boys were off for two days for parent teacher conferences. Ben had hoped that by the time he had reached middle school he would no longer have to adhere to such rules yet still found himself a sophomore in high school, being shepherded to his room for an hour of quiet time.

The boys entered their shared room as Ben began to kick his shoes off.

“Okay Clark, about what we talked about yesterday I've decided that you can sit in your bed and read for a bit as long as you are quiet,” Mom said with a nod.

“Awesome,” Clark said as he hurried out of the room to grab the new book he had bought that morning.

“So we can just read now,” Ben said. It was a welcome change, yet he wouldn't be completely happy until he no longer had to do quiet time at all.

“Sorry Benji,” Mom said going over to the dresser. “You are still putting on your pajamas and taking a rest.”

“What,” Ben exclaimed. “That's not fair. If Clark gets to do it than I should too.”

“Clark is not the one that has been cranky all morning

mister.” Ben scowled. He was not cranky, maybe he would accept a little moody, but it should only be expected. She had been the one that didn't let him sleep in on his day off and had instead dragged him off to the stores. Which had been ridiculous that he even had to go. He had stayed home by himself yesterday evening when his Mom had taken Clark to conferences. Ben had been hoping to have the morning to himself to skirt around his parents screen time limits, yet another rule they enforced on him still. “And I don't think I need to remind you of that fit you threw after you got ice cream on your shirt?” Mom added.

“I did not throw a fit,” Ben countered. Sure he had been a little angry at Clark and had let him know that, but the way his Mom recounted it on the car ride home when she had been scolding him, he had been stomping up and down screeching at the top of his lungs. Which was completely untrue. He had only raised his voice when Clark had tried to say it was an accident. “You know Clark bumped into me on purpose don't you?' Ben said.

“It was an accident Benji,” Mom said. “And you know that wouldn't have happened if you had listened to me when I told you to eat your ice cream seated at the table but you decided to get up and walk around with it.”

“You always take his side,” Benji groaned.

“I do not,” Mom said shaking her head. “You're just in a bad mood and need to take a rest, now give me that shirt and your shorts so I can get them in the wash right away,” she said as

she pulled the shirt up over his head.

Clark came back into the room with his book, smirking a little seeing Ben standing in nothing but some briefs with green piping and Spongebob Squarpants on the butt. Clark climbed up the ladder to the top bunk making himself comfortable.

Ben saw that his Mom already had some pajamas set aside for him. They were a dark blue set with a matching top and bottom. They were Pokemon themed and had Pikachu, Squirtle and Bulbasaur's face repeating all over them. Ben grumbled a little as she went to grab the pants out of her hands.

“Ah ah ah,” Mom said lifting the pajamas up high. “Undies too,” Mom said as she presented a pair of padded undies in her other hand towards Ben.

“But I'm not even going to sleep,” Ben pouted.

“You might,” Mom said with some certainty. Given Ben's small stature it was no surprise that he also had a small bladder and still had some little accidents at night. Not enough that he woke up to a soaked bed, but enough to necessitate some protection and the padded training underwear seemed to do the job. Once upon the time they had been shared between the boys when they had both been younger, but Clark had graduated out of them at the age of five and they had belonged solely to Ben since then. Ben grumbled as he quickly took the training undies and walked into the closet to change into them.

When Ben re-emerged from the closet Clark saw that Mom had managed to pick out one of the most infantile pairs. They had alternating red and white stripes with a blue waistband and leg holes and had Elmo's smiling face right on the crotch while on the back an even bigger Elmo with his arms spread wide with the characters name written above in many different colored letters. Clark could only shake his head. He knew Ben hated them and their Mom had offered to get him some Goodnites instead, yet that hadn't been something Ben was willing to try, especially since the only ones that would fit him would be the small ones with Spiderman on them. Clark had thought that it was still a more mature option than the underwear and had said as much to him. Yet Ben had only responded saying that the Goodnites were just glorified pull-ups, at least the trainers were still underwear. Clark didn't necessarily agree, but it was up to Ben what he wore under his pajamas at the end of the day.

Ben saw that Mom had put the pajamas on the bed as he began to walk towards them before his Mom caught him by the back of the waistband

“Not so fast, you know the drill,” she said, a bottle of baby powder already in her hand as she shook three shakes of the powder into the back of his training undies letting the waistband snap back with a white poof of dust. Ben let out a small groan as he turned around taking the bottle of powder from his Mom and pulling the front of the undies out and giving one shake of powder down his front before he let the waistband snap before taking a step back to turn around.

“Benji,” Mom sighed as she then grabbed him by the front waistband pulling him forward two steps grabbing the baby powder from Ben. “Three shakes,” she said as she did the other two shakes herself.

“Mommy,” Ben yelped, embarrassed that his Mom had seen down the front of his underwear.

“If you're going to be that embarrassed then do it right the first time, now get those pajamas on,” she said. Ben got the Pokemon pajamas on while he muttered under his breath while Mom pulled back the covers on the bottom bunk.

“Now under the covers,” Mom said gently as Ben complied letting his Mom tuck him in. “Close your eyes,” she said as she leaned down to give him a kiss to the forehead. Ben shut his eyes tightly as he frowned as if to mock the instruction. Mom then stood up to look at Clark already having his book open.

“Is that the one you got at the store this morning?” she asked.

“Yep,” Clark smiled. “Last one in the series so I'm excited to start.”

“Well enjoy,” Mom said motioning for Clark to lean over so she could give him his own kiss which he did.

“Oh hey Mom,” Clark then called out. His Mom looked back. “Do you think it would be okay if I listened to some music while I read?” Clark asked holding up the holder for his earbuds.

“That's fine, but keep the volume down so you don't disturb your brother,” she said. Clark nodded as he slipped the ear buds into his ears and went back to his book. Mom then left the room closing the door behind her. Clark read for a little bit before leaning over to look down at Ben, who was lying with his with his eyes still open.

“You know Benji,” Clark began. “Mom might come in and check on us and she gonna be mad if you don't even try to rest.”

“Shut up,” Ben scowled.

“I'm just trying to be helpful,” Clark said shaking his head. He didn't understand why Ben always seemed to be in a sour mood at him more often than not. His Dad said not to read to much into it and that it was just something called teenage angst.

“I don't need advice from you,” Ben said with a biting bit of bitterness.

“Are you still mad at me for the ice cream thing?” Clark asked.

“Duh doi genius,” Ben responded sarcastically.

“I already told you it was an accident,” Clark said having now repeated the same sentiment several times already that day.

“You did it on purpose, I know you did,” Ben said. Clark pursed his lips. Why would he have done it on purpose? It made no sense.

“Well whatever,” Clark said, retreating from the side of the railing to go back to his book. “I was only trying to be nice.”

“Yeah right, a spoiled brat like you being nice,” Ben said. Clark furrowed his brow. He took particular umbrage with being called a spoiled brat. He knew he had privileges Ben didn't and he was also well aware of how strict their parents were. He wasn't any happier than Ben was when he found that his friends got to do things that his parents didn't allow, like violent video games and un-monitored access to shows and internet videos. The only reason Clark had the privileges he did was because he had earned them. Even if their parents were stricter than most its not as if they were unreasonable, their expectations were clear. So why did Ben seem to think that Clark was just given everything on a silver platter? Ben could have them too if he acted more maturely. The only brat here was Ben.

“The biggest most spoiled brat in the world,” Ben continued to mock. Clark closed his book having become fed up. He climbed down the ladder walking over to the door. He turned to look at Ben who was now sitting up with a confused look on his face as to what Clark was doing.

“Fine, if you think I'm a brat then I'll just act like one,” Clark said before opening the door to the room. “Mooom,” Clark called out loudly. “Benji won't rest and he keeps calling me names.” Clark then turned back to his brother a smug look of defiance on his face. Their Mom's footsteps could be heard coming closer with a sense of purpose as she strode into the room with a very displeased look.

“Benji, for the last time lay down and close your eyes,” she said.

“But this is so stupid,” Ben whined. Yet his Mom put up her hand.

“If you keep refusing then I guess you'll just have to go to bed early tonight to make up for it, how does seven o'clock sound?” Mom asked, her threat making Ben's expression drop. He made some disgruntled noises before flopping back onto his pillow. “And just to make sure,” Mom added as she took out her phone and set it up on the dresser pointed at the bed. “There,” she said. “Clark you too, back in bed. It's quiet time you don't need to be yelling down the hall just to tattle on Benji.”

“I only got up because he was calling me names,” Clark grumbled as he climbed back up into bed.

“Be that as it may you need to ignore it and not concern yourself with what Benji does,” Mom said. She wasn't fond of them bickering and she also had little patience for them tattling on one another especially if there was no danger present. “Now both of you stay in your beds and settle down or your having an early bedtime.”

“Hey Mom,” Clark piped up as she was about to leave.

“Yes,” Mom said with a little exasperation.

“Did you ever make a decision about that other thing we talked about?” Mom gave a sort of weary look.

“Clark, now's not the time to discuss it.” she said.

“But you said you and Dad would decide after conferences last night and you still haven't told me.” he whined a little as if whatever it had been was keeping him on pins and needles.

“Okay fine,” she sighed. “Me and your father discussed it and we think it would be okay for you to try pushing back your bedtime to nine.” Ben looked over at his Mom with incredulous look.

“I was thinking ten?” Clark said with glint in his eyes.

“ I said nine,” Mom replied.

“Maybe we meet in he middle, say nine thirty,” Clark said still trying to wheel and deal.

“Eight thirty is starting to sound better,” Mom said with a smirk.

“Nine it is,” Clark said as he quickly opened his book back up.

“What!” Benji exclaimed as he sat up no longer able to hold back his protest. “If he gets to stay up then so should I.”

“Not a chance,” Mom said shaking her head. “I don't need to drag him out of bed every morning like you so apparently you need the sleep, and also this is a reward for Clark getting straight A's on his report card.”

“I did too,” Ben countered.

“Sure if you don't count that C- in biology,” Mom said crossing her arms with a raised eyebrow.

“That's only because Mr. Harker hates me.”

“He does not,” Mom said as she cocked her head to the side not for an instant buying into her sons claim that his teacher was conspiring against him. “I talked to Mr. Harker yesterday at conferences and he had nothing but nice things to say about you. He says you're very bright and don't have any problem with the material. The only reason your grade is so low is because you aren't turning assignments in on time.” Ben averted his gaze not able to come up with an excuse to counter it.

“Which is why you will be now using that planner the school gave you to keep track of your assignments and me and Dad will be signing off on it to make sure you are keeping on top of it.” Mom continued.

“Aw c'mon,” Ben whined scrunching up his face.

“Benji, get that grade up and then we'll talk about moving your bedtime back too,” Mom said. “As of right now its staying at eight and it will be even earlier tonight if you don't lay down, close your eyes and rest,” she said. Her final warning causing Ben to groan as he laid back down pulling the covers up under his chin, muttering something under his breath about how was he supposed to do his homework if he had to go to bed so early. His Mom either didn't hear or chose not to engage as she left the room closing the door behind her.

The room became quiet as now neither boy dared to try anything with their Mom's phone recording, unbeknownst to them though she had never actually turned it on. Ben closed

his eyes since he had no other option other than to risk an earlier bedtime than his already outrageous bedtime of eight o' clock. He had his suspicion that he was surely the only sophomore that even had a bedtime which also made it doubly ridiculous that he shared it with his little brother.

As Ben laid in bed, he did find himself drifting off into a light sleep and he only roused himself upon hearing the creaking of wood as he opened his eyes to see Clark descending the ladder. Ben sat up stretching out his arms as he let out a loud yawn noticing the lights were on and his Mom was in the room standing looking out the window. He was a little surprised, he felt as if he had only been lying in the bed for a minute.

“Looks like its not clearing up anytime soon,” Mom said letting the drape fall from her finger. She walked across the room mussing up Ben's sandy brown hair as she walked past him smiling a bit seeing that he had indeed rested. “All right boys, seeing as its raining cats and dogs outside it looks like you're stuck inside for the rest of the day, so I've decided to lift screen restrictions for the rest of the afternoon.”

“Yesss,” both boys cheered as they stood in front of their Mom.

“I call the Playstation,” Clark said raising his hand.

“Hey,” Ben protested at once. Mom sensing another argument put her hand up.

“Benji you had it all afternoon yesterday,” Mom said. “Its

only fair that Clark gets its today." Ben's shoulders slumped with a pouty face. "You can still have the tv in the living room all to yourself," Mom then said as she came around behind Ben kneeling down as she wrapped him up in a hug around the waist.

"Fine," Ben said said still looking rather gloomy. It was true that he had played for more time than he was supposed to yesterday so he probably should have seen this coming. But the tv was not any real consolation prize for him. The parental permissions meant that he wasn't able to watch anything above a certain rating level. They were so low the best the boys could hope for was cartoons which suited Clark just fine or the tamest of tv sitcoms.

"You know I think they added some new episodes of Bluey recently," Mom said smiling as she tickled Ben's sides a little causing the tiny teen to squeal out some giggles.

"Mommy please," Ben said as he separated from her. "I don't even like that show."

"Sure," Mom said with a doubting tone. "C'mon I'll turn it on for you."

Ben rolled his eyes a little. It didn't matter how much he insisted he wasn't a fan his Mom never seemed to believe him. She probably thought he was just trying to act cool as it were. It had all started when Ben had come home from school one day and she had spotted a large Bluey sticker on the front of his sketchbook. It had been put there by another student who had attached stickers to other peoples notebooks

and trapper keepers as well. Mom recognized it as a character from the show some of her friends with younger kids had been talking about, joking that they looked forward to watching it more than their kids did. Seeing it on her sons sketchbook had gotten her curious enough to watch an episode and she had invited Ben to watch with her. He agreed out of curiosity since one of his classmates had put the sticker on his book in the first place. So he wanted to see if there was something to it. It became very clear early on to Ben that the sticker had been an attempt at some sort of ironic joke rather than actual infatuation. Yet during the episode Ben had laughed at a single joke that had seemed to convince his Mom that he liked the show.

“Welp I've got some Fifa to play,” Clark said as he walked out of the room. Ben watched him leave with a jealous gaze.

“C'mon Benji,” Mom said putting a hand on his shoulders. “I'll even let you eat some of the oreo's you picked out at the store for a snack.”

“Okay,” Ben said not being immune to the promise of Oreos. “But let me change first,” he said taking a step towards his dresser.

“What for?” Mom questioned.

“Because I'm in my pajamas,” Ben said as if it should have been obvious.

“Just keep them on,” Mom said with a shrug. “Like I said you guys are stuck inside for the rest of the day, we're not going

anywhere, I already took the clothes you were wearing and threw them in the washing machine, there is no reason to dirty up another outfit.”

“Can't I at least change my underwear?” Benji asked.

“I took the undies too,” Mom said with chuckle. “Besides you've got underwear on already.”

“But they're,” Benji squeaked.

“Their undies and work just the same,” Mom said cutting him off as she took his hand and began to walk him out of the room before stopping in front of the door. “That is unless there is reason you needed to change them,” she said with a questioning look. “Are you wet?”

“No,” Benji mumbled looking somewhat bashful at being asked such a question at his age.

“You aren't fibbing are you?” Mom asked. “Do I need to check myself?'

I'm dry,” Ben yelped putting his free hand over his crotch.

“Okay then,” Mom said with a smile as they walked out of the room.

Ben was lead down the hallway towards the living room. As they walked past the study he could see Clark had already fired up the game system and was sat in a bean bag chair ready to enjoy his uninterrupted afternoon of gaming.

Ben was sat on the couch as his Mom turned on the tv and

then going to one of the several streaming services started up an episode of Bluey for Ben before leaving the room. Ben sat with his head rested on his hand by the armrest of the couch. He looked over to see his sketchbook sitting on the ground. He grabbed it along with a pencil and began to doodle as the cartoon played.

Their parents strict screen time rules meant that the boys had a lot of time to devote to other things. Clark was more athletic so spent time in the backyard honing his soccer skills. Ben on the other hand was more artistic. A month back he had done some scenery paintings of the backyard having set up his easel on the patio to paint the fall colors. He had taken one into school and his art teacher had been impressed enough to enter it into a contest for high school artist. Ben had actually won and that painting now hung framed on the wall of the living room.

Mom came into the living room to see Benji drawing on the couch, she set down some oreos on the coffee table.

“I got you some milk to go with the cookies,” Mom said as she handed Ben a bright blue cup with some monster trucks on it, a cup that had been in use since Ben had been six. There was also a bright red cap with a rubber straw sticking out of it. Neither of the boys was allowed to drink on the furniture unless the cups had secure caps for danger of spills.

“Thanks Mommy,” Ben said setting down his sketchbook and grabbing the cup before reaching over for a cookie. Mom picked up the sketchbook off his lap to see what he was

drawing. She always enjoyed seeing the things he did, even his little doodles were fun. What she saw was one of the characters from the show he was watching being vaporized by a laser blast from a creepy looking alien.

“Benji, you're so talented. I really wish you would use your talents to express yourself in a positive way, rather than drawing mean things like this.”

“I am expressing myself,” Ben said. “I hate this show.” Mom gave a little smirk as she set the sketchbook down on the coffee table before taking seat next to him.

“Well what would you like to watch then?” Mom asked.

“I don't know,” Ben shrugged. “I just want to be able to watch some of the stuff my friends get too.”

“Benji just because some of your friends get to watch whatever they want doesn't mean that it is appropriate for someone your age.” Mom tittered.

“But I'm not even talking about the R rated stuff,” Ben sulked. “You have the ratings set so low that I can't even watch pg-13.” Mom looked at Ben's saddened look. Given his features and size she sometimes forgot how old he really was. Even if he had his moments where he acted younger, he was still a teenager who would be going off into the world on his own sooner rather than later.

“Come here you,” Mom said with a smile as she gathered him up onto her lap.

“Mommy stop,” Ben whined yet still had a small smile on his face.

“Shh shh,” Mom said as she wrapped her arms around his tummy and gave him a kiss to the cheek. Ben would never admit it, but he did sort of like when his parents were affectionate with him and he would permit some light cuddling from time to time, as long as no one else was around to see it.

“You're my good boy right?” Mom said as she moved a hand up to rub his chest a little. “My good boy Benji,” a phrase she had said to him since he had been a very little boy.

Ben put his head back onto her shoulder. “Yeah I am,” he said softly. Mom smiled. That little nap of his had certainly turned his mood around, as she had expected, he had probably just been a little overtired. She also thought back to conferences and how she had been pleased that he was doing well in school and his teachers seemed to be all praise. So it probably wouldn't hurt to give him a little more freedom in certain areas.

“Okay lets do this,” Mom said as she took the remote. She went to Ben's profile and raised the ratings on what he was allowed to watch. She certainly wasn't going to open the floodgates but it was enough to give him more options.

“Really,” Ben said with a big smile on his face.

“I think you've earned it,” she said. Ben took the remote to explore the new options now available to him. He finally

settled on some animated comedy show. Mom sat watching for awhile. The humor in the show was particularly more crass than she had imagined, and for a second she wondered if she was really okay with this. Ben seemed to enjoy it as he laughed at some of the jokes with his little giggle in between sips of milk. That seemed to sway her enough to not rain on his parade. That was as long as he did not go around repeating such language. After a particularly off color joke Mom made a little click of her tongue as she set Ben aside to stand up from the couch. Ben looked up at her a little worried.

“You're not going to let me keep watching are you?” he said with a frown. His Mom gave him a little smile.

“I can't say I approve, but you seem to enjoy it,” she said. “Just don't watch stuff like this in front of Clark, he is much too young.” Ben smiled as his Mom walked towards the kitchen to start making plans for dinner and to change over the laundry.

The day wore on and soon turned to evening as Dad had arrived home and the family gathered for dinner. Ben felt a little weird to be the only one wearing pajamas while the rest of his family still wore their clothes from the day. It also didn't help that he was wearing the bulky training undies underneath as the pajamas did nothing to help conceal them. No one really made any mention of it being weird however. The only time it had even come up was when Ben had went to put his dirty plate in the sink when his Dad had come up behind and grabbed his waistband pulling his pants up seeing that they were nearly halfway down his butt, which took Ben

by surprise.

“Losing your pants there Benji,” Dad had chuckled taking the boys plate out of his hand and depositing it into the sink for him. Later on both of boys were in the living room. Clark was sat in the big easy chair watching a soccer match while Benji was on the couch his sketchbook open and a box of crayons next to him as he worked away taking some breaks to watch the game for a minute or two before going back to his work.

Clark looked over at him for a moment and smiled as he watched Benji make some large strokes with a green crayon. Clark was struck for a moment at how little Ben looked at the moment. He had no doubt that whatever Ben was doing was worlds beyond what any little kid could even hope to muster, yet the scene would have looked no less normal if Ben was sitting there using the crayons to color a page in a coloring book.

“Alright, its bedtime,” Dad announced walking into the living room to stand in front of the boys.

“Mom told you I get to stay up till nine, right?” Clark said a little worried.

“I already know,” Dad said smiling at Clark before looking at Ben. “I was talking to Benji boy here.”

“C'mon Daddy,” Ben said with a pout. “Don't you think its unfair that Clark gets to stay up and I don't.”

“Benjamin,” Dad said with firm voice. Clark pursed his lips a little knowing that tone and the fact that Ben had just been

called by his full name. “Your Mom already explained to you why, so no complaining.”

“But its not fair,” Ben mewled as he crossed his arms in a pout.

“Benji, lets go,” Dad said with a sigh. The man waited a moment to give Ben a chance to comply on his own but it seemed like the teen was rooted in his spot in a show of defiance. “If your legs aren't working. I guess I'll have to carry you,” Dad said picking Benji up off the couch and into his arms. Dad then picked up the sketchbook that had slid off Benji's lap looking at the page he had been drawing on. “Hey this is pretty cool,” Dad said looking at the collage of different textures and colors Ben had been weaving throughout. Ben however just turned his head away from his sketchbook. “Being grumpy like this every night around bed time is only proving our point,” Dad said giving Ben's butt a few soft pats as he carried him out of the living room. Ben was carried into the kitchen where Mom was at the sink doing dishes.

“Someone is here to say goodnight,” Dad announced.

“Is it eigh o' clock already,” Mom said sounding a little surprised as she dried her hands on a dish towel hung on the cabinet. “Where does the day go?”

She came to Dad who was still holding Ben with one arm supporting his butt and the other rubbing his back. She went behind Dad to where Ben had his chin perched resignedly on his Dad's shoulder. She cupped both his cheeks in her hands.

“Good night Benji, I love you,” she cooed giving him a quick peck to the lips before releasing him.

“Love you too.” Ben replied not able to suppress a small yawn.

“Seeing as you already got you pajamas on we can get you right into bed,” Dad chuckled as he began to walk off towards the hallway.

“Don't forget to give him a fresh powdering,” Mom called out.

“I won't,” Dad replied.

Back in his bedroom. Ben stood as his Dad shook some baby powder down his backside before Ben turned around to take the powder to do his front side. Afterwards Ben let out a big yawn.

“Sleepy Benji,” Dad chuckled mussing up his son's hair and taking the bottle of baby powder from his hand. Dad placed the powder back on the dresser before he knelt down to Ben's level. “Come give your old man a hug,” Dad said. Ben walked over to his Dad wrapping his arms around his Dad's neck squeezing him tight.

“Night Daddy love you,” Ben said with a sleepy tone.

“I love you to bud,” Dad replied patting Ben's back a little. Ben was then tucked into bed. His Dad brushed his bangs aside before giving him a kiss to the forehead. “Sweet dreams kiddo,” Dad said. He then went and plugged a night light into the wall. Neither of the boys had a fear of the dark. It was

there more for Clark in case he needed to get out of bed in the middle of the night to use the bathroom. The lights were then shut off and the door closed and Ben was soon fast asleep.

An hour later Clark crept into the room quietly having been reminded by his parents to be quiet as to not wake Ben. Clark wasn't too worried. Ben was a heavy sleeper. Clark smirked as he looked at Ben. His brother sometimes slept in weird positions. At some point Ben had managed to shirk off his blanket and was now on his bed with his legs tucked underneath himself with his butt resting on top looking like he was doing some yoga pose. His shirt had raised up to his belly button while the waist of his pants had slunk down far off to fully expose the colorful letters of Elmo's name while Elmo himself looked as if he were peering out over Ben's waistband.

Clark took off his pants getting down to just his boxer briefs. He looked over at Ben again lit up by the light coming in from the hallway. Clark then noticed Ben's hand laying flat on his pillow. His thumb sticking out close enough that the tip was touching Ben's lip. Clark walked over and gently formed his brother's hand into a fist keeping his thumb sticking out. Then as gently as he could he nudged Ben's hand so that his thumb went into his mouth.

Ben stirred and Clark stood back thinking that Ben was going to wake up. But to his surprise Ben stayed asleep as his legs folded out from under him so that he was lying flat on his stomach, his lips formed a seal around the thumb and he began to suck on it. Clark had to stifle back a laugh.

Clark then went and closed the door blocking out the light from the hallway. He walked back over to the bed smiling as Ben was still sucking on his thumb completely asleep. Clark took the blanket and covered Ben up before ascending the ladder to his own bed.

As Clark laid in his bed he could still hear the sounds of his brother softly suckling on his thumb below. That's my big brother Clark though as he smiled before closing his eyes.

Chapter 2

Benji's Christmas Eve Snafu. - Chapter 2

Note: This story is a continuation from this story below. Its not absolutely necessary to read it first but it helps!

It was the afternoon of Christmas Eve day as Clark walked down to his bedroom. He paused a moment seeing the door was cracked a little. He took a quick little peak inside to see Ben sitting in the middle of the floor with his back turned to the door. Clark smiled a little seeing his older brother had several of Clark's action figures set in front of him. He watched for a moment as Ben made one of the action figures collide into the other one.

“That's what you get King Cobra,” Ben said somewhat quietly. Clark shook his head a little. This wasn't a new revelation to Clark. He knew Ben still played with the toys in the room from time to time, although he would never admit to it. It had been lucky for Ben though that Clark had been in their room a few days ago when Mom had been cleaning up a little searching for things to get rid off. She had happened upon the box of Clark's old action figures picking them up.

“You still use these?” she asked.

“No,” Clark had responded.

“Then you won't mind donating them?” Mom had asked.

“I don't play with them, but Benji does,” Clark had then admitted. However Mom hadn't really reacted surprised hearing that her sixteen year old son played with the toys. She had just set them back down before moving on. It seemed that everybody else in the family was aware that Ben still had some childish traits and no one seemed to pay any mind to it. Ben seemed to be the only one who insisted on anything different. Yet actions always spoke louder than words.

Clark gave a couple of knocks to the door announcing his presence before striding into the room. He smirked a little seeing Ben flustered, as he pushed the toys away to make it seem like he hadn't been playing with him.

“Playing with some toys,” Clark said, although not in a mocking or mean way.

“No,” Ben replied quickly. “I was just using them as models.” Clark saw Ben's sketchpad nearby and could see he had been sketching something. It was probably true that what it had started as, but Clark knew that Ben's attention span had a habit of wandering. He knew Ben was always starting things before getting himself utterly distracted.

“Mom said its time for us to get dressed for church,” Clark then mentioned. “She said she already set out our outfits.” Clark looked around the room before seeing two piles of clothes set on top of the dresser. He walked over and handed Ben his pile before grabbing his own. Ben let out a sigh as he took off his shirt. Clark decided to go to the bathroom to change. Neither of the boys had a problem getting changed in

front of one another, however Clark had begun to notice some differences were starting to take place. Ben was the same as ever still looking every bit like a little boy, it was Clark who was beginning to change. Clark was beginning to feel it was a little weird for them to keep changing in the room together. He didn't really want Ben to notice. After getting changed into his khaki's and green polo he walked back in the room to find Ben sat once again on the floor wearing just his blue polo and a pair of Car's themed undie's with Lightning McQueen smiling on the back. Ben was drawing in his sketchbook.

“Aren't you going to put on pants?” Clark asked. Ben looked up from his book looking as if he had legitimately forgot.

“Oh yeah,” Ben mumbled getting up and putting on his pants.

“Scatterbrain,” Clark said under his breath. Honestly Clark was starting to feel like he was the older brother these days. Clark had never really regarded Ben as his older brother all that much. Only that Ben was of course ahead of him in school. It had almost felt like they were more equals, yet more and more Clark was starting to feel as if he was actually older. Not just in a physical sense but emotionally as well. Clark often wondered what Ben acted like around his friends, because at home he certainly didn't act like a sixteen year old. For goodness sakes Clark had babysat Ben...well not really. But it was about as close as one could get without actually doing it. Their parents had been going to an office Christmas party that night. No mention of anyone being put in charge had been made. Although before they had left Mom had

pulled Clark aside. She had made it clear that Clark was not in charge and that both boys were old enough to take care of themselves for a few hours. But she had requested that Clark at least remind Ben to go to bed on time.

“I don't think he will actually listen to me,” Clark had said.

“I just said remind him,” Mom said. “If he doesn't its not your problem.”

“I guess,” Clark said.

“Also don't worry about going to bed yourself, you can stay up till we get back, shouldn't be too long after nine anyways. You know your Dad doesn't exactly like these office party's and it will be better to have someone watching the house.”

“Well don't you think Benji should do that?” Clark had asked. Ben was older after all. Mom had just shook her head.

“You know Benji, he would never be able to stay awake.” Their parents had then left. The night had been a normal one. Both of the boys were sat in the living room watching some tv when eight had rolled around.

“Hey Ben its eight you know,” Clark had said with some hesitancy. “Don't you think you should go to bed?” Ben had glared at him. “I'm just saying Mom said you needed to go to bed on time.”

“You're not in charge of me,” Ben replied looking a little angry.

“I never said I was,” Clark had said putting his hands up.

“Just didn't want you to get in trouble over it was all.” Ben gave a dismissive click with his tongue. “Well whatever,” Clark said. “Like you said I'm not in charge. But you could at least put on your pajamas and then when Mom and Dad get home run to your bed to make it look like you had been asleep.” Ben was silent for a moment as he mulled over the idea.

“I guess that isn't the worst idea,” Ben had said.

“Cool I'll help with the powder,” Clark said getting up.

“Uh I can do it myself,” Ben said.

“You'll get it all over if you try to do the back by yourself,” Clark chuckled.

“I guess,” Ben said, it wasn't as if Clark was lying. Benji got himself dressed in some dino themed padded undies and some Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles pajamas, not giving a second thought to the fact that Clark stood watching. Once Clark helped him get powdered the boys returned to the living room. It wasn't even eight thirty when Clark looked over to see Ben already asleep on the couch. When Clark heard the garage door opening he shook Ben. Yet his brother seemed unable to get up thanks to being the heavy sleeper he was. Clark then had an idea that would keep Ben out of trouble and might just score Clark some brownie points. Clark lifted Ben off of the sofa into his arms to make his way to the bedroom. Despite Ben being small, it was no easy feat for ten year old to carry him. Clark struggled as he had to carry him so that Ben was laid out in his arms as if Clark was

carrying him out of burning building. He had only made it to the entrance of the hallway before being discovered by his Dad.

“Whats going on here?” Dad had said as he came over and took Ben out of Clark's arms. Ben stirred a little but just rested his head onto his Dad's shoulder unaware of what had been happening.

“Uh well he didn't want to go to bed, but he's been asleep on the couch for like an hour already,” Clark said.

“I see,” Dad said. “I didn't expect him to do it, but did you get him to put on his pajamas?”

“Not really,” Clark said. “I just suggested it. I did help him with the powder though.”

“Good job,” Dad said as he rubbed Ben's back a little. “Looks like you did the hard part and the rest just took care of itself.” Dad then departed carrying Ben off to bed.

Back in the present Ben had pulled on his tan khaki's as there Mom came into the room.

“Oh you're already dressed,” she said looking a little surprised.

“You told me too didn't you,” Ben said shrugging.

“I only said that to Clark, I was going to talk to you about something first,” she said. Ben raised an eyebrow. Clark was also a little surprised. He did remember then that his Mom had told him to get dressed. He had just assumed that meant

Benji as well. Clark then saw something that made him laugh.

“I see London I see France, I see Benji's underpants,” Clark sang.

“What are you saying,” Ben scowled. Clark then reached out worming his finger through a large hole on Ben's butt where one could see the smiling corner of Lightning McQueen's face.

“You got a hole,” Clark snickered.

“Huh,” Ben said as he craned his head to try and see for himself. His Mom however grabbed him by the arms holding him still as she knelt down.

“Oh no, your pants are ripped,” she said with a groan. “What in the world are you going to wear now?”

“I can just wear some jeans,” Ben said not seeing the big deal.

“You are not wearing jeans to church,” Mom said dismissing the idea straight out. “I'll have to see if you have something else,” she said as she walked over to the closet turning on the light before she began digging. Ben just stood with his arms crossed. He didn't know what his Mom expected to find. He didn't have another pair of dress pants. They only went to church like twice a year so the boys pretty much had one nice outfit – its not like they needed more. His Mom reappeared with some clothes in her hands. “Clark please go and get your coat on,” she said as she came and sat on Ben's bed. Clark nodded as he left the room. “Okay Benji let me help you get dressed.”

“I can dress myself,” Ben said taking a step back.

“You're going to need some help with this outfit, plus there was something I wanted to talk to you about,” she said as she got up from the bed and went into a bag that she had brought with her before pulling out a package. Ben's eyes went wide as he saw the words “Goodnites” across the top.

“I'm not wearing that,” Ben sputtered.

“Its just in case. The service is going to be long and I don't want you up and out of your seat. Besides it will be hard for you to take off this outfit now.”

“But I'm not even sleeping,” Ben mewled.

“Benji, I think this is a good idea especially after what happened at the movie theater.” Ben balked. It hadn't even been that bad.

The situation his Mom had been referring to had happened a couple of days ago. Dad had asked Ben if he had heard anything about a movie currently playing. Of course Ben had, it was a pretty hot topic among his friends. Ben had been interested but it was rated R – so Ben had never inquired about seeing it.

“It sounds cool and everything,” Ben had said. His Dad had then smiled and asked if Ben would want to go see it with him. “You'd really take me,” Ben had said with some surprise.

“Sure,” Dad had said. “I like a good action movie as much as the next guy and I think you're old enough to handle it.”

“I want to see it too,” Clark had interjected.

“I don't think so sweetie,” Mom piped up. “I think this is more of a thing for Dad and Benji.”

“That's not fair,” Clark had grumbled.

“Its perfectly fair,” Dad had then said. “Benji didn't get to go to R rated movies when he was your age either.”

With that Ben and his Dad had driven to the movie theater. Ben had gotten himself a large soda to go along with the tub of popcorn he and his Dad had shared. The movie had been great, and Ben was excited that he would be able to talk to his friends about it. Yet on the car ride home Ben had begun to get antsy. The soda had gone through him and as he sat in his carseat he could only put his legs together.

“We're almost there, just hang on,” Dad had said. Getting home Ben had rushed inside. He had made it to the toilet just in time, yet there was a small wet patch on his shorts. He thought it wasn't even noticeable yet his Mom had seemed to see it right away.

“Did you have an accident?” she had asked looking at him.

“No,” Ben said his face going a little red. His mom just sighed before she knelt down and pulled his pants down to ankles. “Mommy,” Ben had yelped. His Mom just sighed as she lifted his legs up to get the pants out from under him as she noted the the little wet patch on the front of his UFO themed undies.

“Go and change,” was all she had said. Ben hadn't heard anything more about the incident, until now that was.

“You can't make me wear that,” Ben whined looking at the Spiderman themed pull-up – it didn't matter what it said on the package, that's what it was. Just then Dad poked his head into the room.

“Are we ready yet,” he said sounding a little impatient. “We gotta get going.”

“Benji is refusing to get dressed,” Mom said in an exasperated tone as she went on to explain the full situation to Dad.

“Go get Clark in the car,” Dad said with a nod as he entered the room. “I'll take care of this.” Mom got up and exited as Dad took a seat on the bed in front of Ben.

“Benjamin,” Dad said with his authoritative tone. “You need to put on the clothes your Mother set out for you.

“I'm not wearing that, you can't make me,” Ben moaned.

“You have till the count of three,” Dad said, his face dire. Ben crossed his arms with a furrowed brow. He was calling his Dad's bluff. “1...2....3” Dad said, yet Ben didn't move an inch keeping himself firmly rooted in his spot. “Okay then,” Dad said wasting no time as he pulled Ben forward. He got his shirt off him easily as Ben tried to move away but his Dad was too strong as he caught Ben around the stomach and pulled him up onto his lap. He got Ben's pants off despite the teen's struggles. He then set him down in between his legs

closing his knees to keep Ben in place while he unceremoniously got his undies off.

“Daddy stop it, I'm naked,” he whined.

“Relax,” Dad dismissed. “You don't have anything I don't. Besides I wouldn't have to do this if you had just listened in the first place.”

“But I don't wanna wear it,” Ben protested.

“Benjamin, that's enough,” Dad said adopting a stern tone. “We aren't trying to be mean, we just want to ensure we don't have a bigger problem down the line.” Dad then took the pull-up as he released Ben from between his legs. “Now are you going to do this yourself or do I have to put it on you like a baby?” Ben snatched the Spiderman themed pull-up from his Dad. He put it on all the while muttering under his breath.

“I'm not doing the powder,” Ben said. “I don't want to smell.”

“That's fine,” Dad said nodding. “Its just in case, we don't expect you to use it. Now lets see about the rest of this outfit.” He picked up a long sleeve white dress shirt as he helped Ben put it on. His Dad then proceeded to button it up for him. Ben grimaced a little as he pulled at the peter pan collar after his Dad did up the top button. His Dad then picked up a pair of bright blue shorts holding them out for Ben to step into.

“These are shorts,” Ben mewled as his Dad went about tucking his shirt in before finally buttoning them.

“Yeah, I think this was Clark's Easter outfit a couple of years

ago, but its what we got," Dad said. "It'll be warm enough in the church so it shouldn't be a big problem." Ben looked down to see that the shorts didn't have any belt loops and just an elastic waistband. Before he could point out the obvious problem he looked to see his Dad had a pair of red suspenders in his hand.

"Suspenders," Ben groused.

"Don't want your pants to fall," Dad chuckled as he spun Ben around to attach the clip to the back of his pants before facing him forward to clasp them to the front. "And a bow tie," Dad said as he clipped a red bow tie to the front.

"I look stupid," Ben grumbled looking down at his outfit.

"You look nice," Dad said. "Now put on your socks we have to get going." Dad then left as Ben pulled on some socks. He then went out of his room to the front door where his Mom was waiting.

"Mommy I can't wear shorts," he said seizing upon his last ditch effort at avoiding going out dressed as he was. "Its like twenty degrees out."

"You can just wear your snowsuit," Mom said going to the closet.

"No Mommy not the snowsuit," Ben said a hint of dread overtaking him as he saw his Mom pull it out. The snowsuit was a relic from Ben's own childhood. He never wore it and would avoid any potential situation in which his Mom might deem it necessary. It was powder blue and had brightly

colored cars all over it. The hood even had two little bear like ears on top. Ben wasn't sure why, but there they were.

“Its all we got to cover your legs.” Mom reasoned as she held it out to him. Ben begrudgingly took it out of her hands as he worked his legs and arms through the holes, he knew if he refused they would just put it on him themselves. Mom then knelt down and zipped it up before pulling the hood up over his head.

“I'm not wearing the hood,” Ben spat pulling it off. He went and grabbed his black beanie instead. Ben then went and grabbed his shoes. He plopped on the ground to get his shoes on. The snow suit was extra puffy though which made it hard for him to even reach.

“Don't put your shoes on,” Mom said. Ben looked up at her confused. “You'll just have to take them off again to remove your snowsuit anyways. Wait until we get to church.”

“How am I supposed to get to the car then?” Ben asked. Did they actually expect him to walk around in just his socks?

“I'll just carry you,” Dad said plucking Ben off the ground.

“Daddy nooo,” Ben said squirming.

“Benji hush,” Dad said. “We're already behind because of you.” Ben was carried out to the car. His Dad set him into his car seat. Ben went to try and get his seat belt but the arms were so poofy that he didn't have a full range of motion. He tried to pull the belt and grab it with his other hand yet missed as the seat belt retracted back hitting the plastic of the

car loudly.. His Dad then reached in and did the seat belt for him.

The ride to church was quick as it seemed Dad was intent to make up for lost time, they eventually pulled into the parking lot. Once they had parked Ben got his seat belt off by himself and opened his door yet stopped when he saw the slush on the ground of the parking lot and his feet with only socks. He grumbled wondering how he was even going to get into the church, that was until his Dad pulled him out of the car and put him on his hip.

“Daddy no,” Ben mewled at the embarrassment of being carried through the parking lot.

“Benji you don't have your shoes on,” Dad chuckled.

“Not my fault,” was all Ben could mumble. Once they were inside Dad set him down on a chair in the front entrance way as Mom came up with his shoes. Ben quickly unzipped his snow suit. His Mom gave him his shoes so he could get them on.

“Do you want to use the bathroom before the service starts?” Mom then asked. “Your Dad could help you with your outfit.”

“No,” Ben seethed through clenched teeth. Just what did they take him for? It had been like ten minutes since they left.

“Ok,” Mom said in a calming manner before readjusting his bow tie a little.

“I was wondering when you would get here,” a voice then

said. Ben looked up to see his grandma standing in a green sparkly dress, her graying hair done up in curls as two dangly earring bobbed from her ears. “You boys look so nice,” Grandma said affectionately as she surveyed her two grandsons done up in their Sunday best. Although she did raise an eyebrow upon seeing Ben's shorts. “I don't know if its really shorts weather, Benji dear,” she said.

“We had a little problem with his other outfit,” Mom sighed. “So we had to improvise.”

“You still look great Benji,” Grandma said with a warm smile. The family then made their way into the church and sat in a pew. Ben found himself in between his Mom and Clark. About halfway through the service both boys had grown bored. Each of them grateful they only had to do this twice a year. Mom leaned down at one point asking Ben if he needed to use the bathroom. Ben had shook his head as Clark could only snicker. Later on Ben found himself waking up slumped against his Mom. When had he fallen asleep? The service was ending as music was being played as the priest exited towards the back as the rest of the congregation began to get up and filter out. Ben panicked a little. Falling asleep like this could be disastrous. He pushed down on his pants a little just to make sure, thankfully he was dry. The last thing he needed was to actually use the training pants. If that happened this might become a regular thing! Mom was talking to grandma while Clark flipped through one of the hymn books with a bored expression.

“Is it over?” Benji asked.

“Yes, sleepy head,” Mom chuckled. “Its over we can go now.” As they got up grandma then suddenly clapped her hands.

“Don't leave yet,” she said. “They are doing a Christmas eve visit with Santa and I think I know two boys who should go say hi. They are doing pictures too.”

“That sounds great,” Mom enthused. Both boys looked back with glum expressions. Neither of them believed in Santa anymore and Mom knew that. But she took after her own Mother as the two woman seemed excited by the prospect of getting a nice picture. The two woman were big on Christmas traditions, one of them being an annual visit to the mall to see Santa. Clark had still believed a year ago which had meant Ben needed to play along every year as to not ruin the magic for his little brother. That year though Mom hadn't made them go, that was until now.

“Mom, c'mon,” Clark whined a little.

“Clark hush,” Mom said, knowing what he was going to say. “It doesn't matter what you believe, its for the picture.”

Both of the boys resigned themselves to their fate. Mom was a photo fiend. She was the type upon walking into the theme park to make everyone pose at the entrance for a photo despite the group wanting to get to the attractions right away. Clark and Ben followed Mom and Grandma to a line near the back where a Santa was sitting at the front with a large sack next to him. There was a photographer and a kiosk set up to purchase the photos. A sign also showed that some of the proceeds would go to charity. Mom shooed them on to go get

into line. As the boys stood Clark let out a little sigh.

“I'm a way too old for this,” he complained.

“If anyone is too old for this, its me,” Ben grouched.

“Yeah well everyone thinks you're a little kid anyways,” Clark said. “I look too old for this, so its more embarrassing.”

“That's not true,” Ben spat back insulted by the insinuation that he looked like a little kid.

“Yeah it is,” Clark said with a snarky grin. Ben gave Clark a kick to the shin.

“Ow what was that for?” Clark yipped.

“You know what,” Ben grumbled.

“I was just saying this was easier for you,” Clark said crossing his arms. “If anything I'm a little jealous that you just get to skirt under the radar.”

“I don't look like a little kid,” Ben said puckering his lips a little.

“I'll prove it to you,” Clark said with a smirk.

“How?” Ben said sounding a little nervous.

“You'll see,” Clark said. Ben really didn't like the direction this was going. Yet he just told himself that there was nothing Clark could do. Sure Ben was small for his age, but that didn't mean he really looked like a little kid. Even if he knew that it was true, he got mistaken for one all the time, but what

was he supposed to do, not deny it all? When it was the boys turn Clark immediately snatched up his brothers hand pulling him forward. “C'mon Benji its our turn, no reason to be scared,” he said making himself appear to be an older brother helping his nervous little brother go and see Santa. The photographer who was dressed as an elf smiled.

“Its alright sweetie,” she cooed leading the boys over to the Santa. “Here's Benji Santa,” she said having heard Ben's name from Clark.

“Oh Benji I've been waiting to talk to you,” Santa said in a jovial manner. Ben could only roll his eyes at the shtick. Before he could even say anything the photographer lifted Ben up under his armpits plopping hims down on Santa's lap.

“I'll just stand,” Ben went to say, but was stopped as Santa placed a hand on his tummy and another hand on his back.

“Hang on there,” Santa laughed. “We have to take a picture first,” he said pointing to he camera. The photographer then placed Clark on the side of the chair.

“Your big brother will stand right here, okay,” she said smiling at Ben as she then went behind the camera. “Okay big smile.” Ben frowned. Clark had totally passed him off as a little kid. It was infuriating. “Benji you gotta smile,” the photographer enthused.

“Good boys smile big for the camera,” Santa then said. Ben gave a glare towards Clark who had a dumb toothy grin plastered on his face. Ben had no choice but to smile for the

camera, if only to put an end to this stupid charade. Ben was ready to get down after the picture but Santa was still holding him.

“So Benji have you been a good boy this year?” Santa asked. Ben went to protest before shutting his mouth tight, as he glared at Clark for getting him into the situation where they all took him for a little kid. “A little nervous still?” Santa said gently before turning to Clark on the other side. “Well big brother has Benji been a good boy?”

“Oh sure he's been a perfect angel,” Clark answered having to hold back his laughter.

“A good boy,” Santa cheered, looking back at Ben. “Remind Santa again what is the present you want most for Christmas?” Ben actually found himself smirking a little. Here was his chance to stop this treatment.

“A 6000 series htx blaster premium gaming laptop with a ultra core processor,” Ben said confidently. It had been the only thing he had asked for when his Mom had questioned him what he wanted for Christmas. Ben had even gone as far to print out the product page exactly just so his parents couldn't mess it up. Although Ben wasn't so sure he was going to get it. Both of his parents had seemed rather hesitant about it, not that they didn't trust Ben but more so out of how enormously expensive it was. Ben needed it though. His friends had all moved on from playing video games on consoles. They were all in on computer gaming and the family computer was too old to be able to play the games

they did.

The man playing Santa looked a little surprised expecting to hear the name of some sort of toy come out of Ben's mouth.

“I guess I'll see what I can do,” he said sounding a little unsure of promising something like that to a the little boy he took Ben for. “In the meantime though since you've been such a good boy I've got a little present here for you.” Santa said reaching into a bag and giving Ben a small wrapped present.

“Um thanks,” Ben said finally being released from Santa's lap.

“Told ya,” Clark snickered as the two of them made their way through the crowd to find their parents so they could leave.

“That's only because you lied to them,” Ben scowled. If Clark hadn't said said anything he probably wouldn't have been treated like that.

“I barely said anything.” Clark said. “And it wasn't even that bad, look you even got a present out of it.”

“Its probably something stupid,” Ben said shaking the box a little.

“At least I won't have to do that anymore,” Clark said nodding with certainty. “Next year I'll be eleven there's no way Mom'll make me ever visit Santa again.”

“She made me do it and I'm older than you,” Ben said countering Clark's reasoning.

“Yeah,” Clark said thinking for a moment. “They'll probably just make you do it by yourself next year,” Clark laughed.

“They would not,” Ben yelped. There was no way his parents would do that. They only made him because of Clark. His parents knew how old he was, and they let him do plenty of things they didn't let Clark do. Still...sometimes it did feel like they treated Clark like he was the older brother. The boys found their Mother and Grandma fawning over the photo they had purchased.

“Look how cute it is,” Mom said showing the boys who looked on with muted expressions. Both of them feeling a little uneasy with how much it looked like they were enjoying themselves in the photo. Ben groused at how big he was smiling, it was a totally fake smile of course yet his Mom and Grandma couldn't even tell the difference. Even Clark looked happy, probably laughing at Ben more than anything. Dad appeared with Clark's coat and Ben's snow suit in hand. Clark got on his coat while Dad assisted Ben in pulling on the snow suit.

“Where is your hat?” Dad asked as he finished zipping Ben up. Ben's hands went to his side as if he even had pockets.

“I gave it to Mommy,” Ben said looking around.

“I don't think you did, it wasn't with our stuff,” Dad said.

“I though I did,” Ben replied not having the faintest idea where it could be.

“Retrace your steps in your head,” Dad said being no stranger

to Ben's penchant for being a little absentminded sometimes. Ben remembered back to before the service. He had gotten his snow suit off and then..."

"I set it on the chair," Ben said turning around to see the seat he had been sitting in then. The chairs were empty with no hat in sight.

"Looks like its gone," Dad said. "Good thing we have more at home," he said not thinking it was a big deal. "You'll just have to go with the hood." he said pulling up the hood of the snowsuit with the bear ears over Ben's head.

"No Daddy not the hood," Ben whined.

"Its cold Benji," Dad said snapping the hood into place over Ben's chin. "Its important to cover your head.

"I'm putting on my shoes," Ben mumbled taking a seat on the ground, not wanting to be carried again. Dad just nodded not having a problem with Ben's insistence. They after all weren't in a hurry anymore. The family was soon ready to leave and Ben was happy to finally leave getting to the car he once again needed help getting his seat belt on except this time Mom told Clark to do it. Ben tried to get the seat belt on himself instead of letting Clark help.

"Hold still," Clark said placing a firm hand on Ben's chest as he pulled the seat belt snapping Ben in. Clark then sat in his own seat as Ben pouted. "Are you going to open that?" Clark asked pointing at the small present in Ben's hands. Ben ripped open the package before opening the small box which

contained a stuffed reindeer. Ben's face contorted as he let it drop to the wayside. He hadn't been expecting much. “Don't you want it?” Clark questioned.

“Uh no,” Ben said turning his head to watch out the window. Clark picked it up stowing it away for later.

Upon getting home Ben made for his room. He wanted to get the clothes off as soon as possible. He struggled with his suspenders but managed to get them off. He got the shirt and shorts off quickly, but before he could finally get the pull-up off his Mom walked into the room.

“Benji don't throw the clothes on the ground,” she tutted picking the clothes up.

“I'm never wearing that again,” Ben grumbled. He went to his dresser before his Mom stopped him.

“Is is dry?” she asked knowing what he was going to do.

“Yes,” Ben yipped.

“Good,” Mom said. “Then keep it on.”

“What, why?” Ben exclaimed. They were at home now there was no reason to keep it on.

“Because you're going to bed soon anyways.”

“Can't I just wear the underwear,” Ben asked.

“Oh Benji,” Mom sighed. “Those undies are so old, they've been through the wash hundreds of times. They are worn out. So me and Dad just want you to switch over to the

disposables.”

“I don't want to wear those though,” Ben said crossing his arm in a pout. Mom let her head lilt to the side.

“Benji do you really want to go to the store to have to buy a whole new set of toddler undies?” Mom said using the most babyish term she could to describe the undies just to get Ben to see some reason. Ben's face reddened a little.

“I guess not,” he mumbled.

“Good,” Mom said as she began to pull out the pull-ups and setting them in Ben's drawer. Ben then moved on to his second point of protest.

“Why do I have to go to bed? Its a holiday,” he said noting the clock said seven-fifty. Ten minutes before his eight o' clock bedtime.

“I said you were going soon,” Mom said as she placed a box on Ben's bed. “We still have some photo's to take, so you get to stay up late tonight.”

Ben groaned, he knew what his Mom was referring to and what was in the box. Every year she bought the family matching pajama sets and they would then take pictures in front of the tree on Christmas eve night. Ben remembered last year when everyone had been given plaid night shirts complete with stocking caps to wear.

“Its tradition,” Mom said in a sing song voice. “Your pajamas are in there so get them on and meet us in the living room.”

she then grabbed some baby powder and helped Ben powder the inside of his pull-up before leaving since he was going to sleep in the pajamas he was about to put on. Ben went over to the box dreading whatever abomination his Mom had selected that year. He opened the box to find a fleece pair of footie pajamas complete with rubber soles and a but flap on the back. They were blue and covered with images of smiling snowmen and snowflakes. Ben let out a long sigh. At least Clark was going to be wearing the same thing, even he was not spared this indignity. Ben got the pajamas on before making his way down to the living room where he was met with a shock. The rest of his family were in there pajamas as well. His Mom had on a nightgown with the same designs that were on Ben's own pajamas. His Dad's pants matched yet his shirt was white with the outline of a snowman on the front and standing right next to him was Clark who matched with his Dad. Ben was the only one in the infantile footie pajamas.

“Why do I have to wear this but Clark doesn't?” Ben stomped looking angrily at Clark.

“That's what they look like in your size,” Mom said looking a tad sympathetic.

“Its just for pictures, Benji,” Dad said. “You don't have to wear them all the time if you don' want too.” Ben only puffed out his cheeks. Yet he had no choice as well as his Dad and brother, they all had to comply with Mom traditions. It was the holidays after all. They then proceeded to take lots of family pictures. Standing in front of the tree, sitting in front of the tree. One with Mom and Dad and with just Clark and

Benji, which had been the worst when Ben's parents had him sit in Clark's lap.

“I'm older,” Ben protested. “Clark should have to sit in my lap.”

“He wouldn't fit Benji,” Mom chuckled. Clark had already grabbed Ben from behind and pulled him into his lap holding the squirming boy around the tummy.

“Remember what Santa told you,” Clark giggled. “Good boys smile for the camera.”

Ben gave Clark a hard elbow.

“Ow,” Clark yelped before poking Ben's sides hard with his fingers.

“Stop,” Ben cried out with a pained whimper.

“Clark do not hurt your brother,” Mom scolded.

“He started it,” Clark complained.

“Clark, listen to your mother,” Dad then said sternly, neither parent having seen Ben's opening attack. “If you boys would settle down then we could be done all the faster.”

Both boys stopped, each of them wanting to be done with pictures. Once Mom had taken the picture Ben was finally released as she stood up when he heard Clark laugh.

“You have a butt-flap,” Clark crowed grabbing onto the flap.

“Leave me alone,” Ben growled as he went to move away

which subsequently made the butt flap come undone in Clark's grip exposing the Spiderman pull-ups that Ben wore underneath. Clark looked a little surprised. He had no idea Ben had even been wearing them in the first place.

“You're wearing the pull-ups now?” Clark questioned.

“Don't look,” Ben whimpered as he fruitlessly try to reattach the butt flap to no avail.

“They are not pull-ups,” Mom said kneeling down as she reattached Ben's flap. “Benji's going to switch over to overnight pants since those undies are getting old,” she said as then smoothed out the fabric on Ben's shoulders in a calming manner.

“Finally done with the toddler undies eh Benji,” Dad said sounding almost proud as he mussed up Ben's hair. As if he were congratulating Ben for being a “big boy” like the pull-ups were somehow more mature.

Ben made a disdainful grunt moving his head away.

“Okay who is going to carry in the cookies this year,” Mom said. Both of the boys pointed at the other one.

“Its Benji's turn this year,” Dad said. “If I remember correctly Clark did it last year and spilled the tray and the milk on the carpet.”

“It was an accident,” Clark said.

“Good thing the older brother is doing it this year then,” Dad said.

“Benji the tray is in the kitchen go get it,” Mom instructed. With a huff Ben walked off to retrieve the tray. It was so stupid, neither he nor Clark even believed in Santa Claus anymore so why did she still insist on this? As Ben walked down the hallway with the tray his Mom was taking pictures that no doubt made it look like he still believed Santa was going to eat the cookies. After he set them down by the fireplace. Mom had Ben and Clark pose as if they were looking up the chimney. Mom finally put away her camera to the relief of the boys.

“Nine o' clock,” Dad said looking at his watch. “Its bedtime Benji.”

“But its a holiday,” Ben protested. “I should be able to stay up.”

“We need to be up early tomorrow to open gifts and eat breakfast and get to Grandma's on time,” Mom said. Ben shook his head as he began to walk off. At least she hadn't said something about being asleep so Santa Claus could come. Ben then noticed Clark wasn't following.

“What about Clark?” Ben then questioned, it was after all his bedtime as well.

“Clark asked if he could help set out presents this year,” Dad said. “He'll be right up when we're done.”

“Well then I should too,” Ben said.

“Benji its well past your bedtime,” Mom countered. “You got to stay up late so its only fair that Clark does too. So lets go

I'll come tuck you in."

"I don't need to be tucked in," Ben muttered. His Mom did not seem to agree as she grabbed his hand and walked him down to his room. Clark and Dad then got started arranging presents under the tree before Mom returned a little later. When they were done Clark had to admit it was a pretty good display with all the festive wrapping paper twinkling under the lights. Both of the brothers were certainly in for a haul this year.

"All right," Dad then said mussing up Clark's hair. "Now its time for you to go hop into bed." he said.

"Awww can't I just stay up," Clark said agreeing with Ben that it was kind of silly that they even had bedtimes since it was the holidays. Mom was quick to reiterate that they had to get started early tomorrow.

"Maybe we should let Clark stay up," Dad then said surprising Clark a little. "Me and your Mom were just going to cuddle up on the couch with some hot chocolate and enjoy the lights, want to join us?" Dad then offered although Clark could tell his Dad was joking.

"I'd rather go to bed then watch you guys make out," Clark said with a sickened look which caused Dad to chuckle. As Clark walked into his room he smiled a little seeing Ben already asleep in his bed with his thumb secure in between his lips as Ben suckled away unaware. After the first time Clark had slipped Ben's thumb into his mouth while he had slept, Clark had only done it one other time before losing

interest. So it had surprised him when he came the next night to find that it had somehow made it their on its own. Clark had felt somewhat guilty upon realizing that Ben sucked his thumb most nights now, worrying that it was his fault that his brother had turned into a night-time thumb sucker. He had felt so guilty that he had even decided to make mention of it to their mother. He had taken a picture and then showed it to their mom as if it was all one big joke that Clark had caught Ben doing. Surprisingly Mom didn't seem to react at all brushing it off as nothing to worry about.

“Oh he's doing that again?” she had said before going back to reading her book.

“Again?” Clark had questioned.

“He goes through phases,” Mom had then said. Which seemed to give Clark some comfort. He didn't remember a time when he had ever witnessed Ben suck his thumb, but if their Mom wasn't phased then maybe it wasn't something to worry about. Ben didn't even know he did it, he only started after he fell asleep and somehow his thumb was always out of his mouth by the time he woke up. Clark and Ben certainly had their fights and teased one another from time to time, but Clark knew there were things that were best left unsaid. Besides Clark actually found it kind of cute when he saw Ben sleeping peacefully as he suckled away on his thumb. Part of him wanted to get a pacifier just to see if Ben would suck on it as well. In fact Clark felt a pacifier would go along perfectly with the scene of Ben in his footie pajamas asleep. Clark then spotted the small stuffed animal Ben had received

from Santa at the church, tossed to the wayside on the floor. He picked it up and tucked it in under the crook of Ben's arm. Clark could only chuckle at how the stuffed animal only the made the sight more perfect.. Clark then climbed up into his bunk. He wondered if Ben would say anything upon finding himself cuddling a stuffed animal the next morning, no probably not.

Chapter 3

A Very Benji Christmas - Chapter 3

Note: This Story is a direct continuation of "Benji's Christmas Eve Snafu" which you can find here along with its prequel.

https://www.deviantart.com/themissingdays/gallery/95081071/benji-stories

Ben stirred, although something felt off as he opened his bleary eyes he could see the hallway in front of him but he was moving one way and it was moving the other. He raised up to see his Dad was carrying him.

“Whats going on? Put me down,” Ben said a little alarmed as he began wriggle.

“Oh you're up,” Dad said setting Ben onto his feet.

“Why were you carrying me?” Ben questioned looking a little annoyed.

“I tried waking you up several time now,” Dad said. “Everybody wants to open presents and we can't start without you. Figured if we put you on the couch you'd eventually come to.”

“I'm up now,” Ben grumbled as he rolled his shoulders. He really didn't appreciate being carried around.

“Great, then lets go open presents,” Dad said with a smile.

As Ben went to follow he stopped for a moment becoming aware of the feeling around his groin. It was the first time he had woken up in his new disposable nighttime wear. He was wet of course and it certainly felt different than the training undies he was used to. Usually the undies would be a little cold and he could feel a little dampness on the front yet with the overnight pants, as his Mom called them, there was no dampness. They felt a little heavier on his waist and bulkier. Whats more the footed sleeper he was wearing did very little to hide the obvious bulge of the now swollen pull-ups.

“Something wrong?” Dad asked noticing Ben had stopped.

“No nothing,” Ben said as he walked quickly to get in front of his Dad. He could feel the material rubbing up against his inner thighs and Ben couldn't ignore the swishing sound that he made with every step as the paper material rubbed up against the fabric of his pajamas. Ben felt a little embarrassed by all of it as he stepped into the living room where his Mom and Clark were. He felt like everyone could hear it and see it, but if they did, no one seemed to act like it.

“Okay lets get a picture by the cookies and then gifts,” Mom said holding up her camera. Clark groaned. He was too excited for pictures, yet Mom just motioned for him to go with a smile. Clark was surprised to see Ben standing next to the tray. Ben put on a big surprised face bringing both hands up to his cheeks.

“What are you doing?” Clark snickered. Ben shook his head a little.

“If I just sit there smiling it will look like I actually believe this,” Ben said. “But if I make a big exaggerated face people will see that this is all one big joke.” Clark was surprised to hear Ben's explanation, he was struck a little by how much sense it made. Of course a bigger goofier reaction made the photo funny, not cute, showing that the boys were in on the charade. Clark then picked up one of the half eaten cookies and adopted the biggest most surprised look he could as he pointed at it with Ben looking on with his own goofy expression. Mom seemed fine with the boys doing a funny photo and after taking her picture finally released the boys from the photo op to start. They dug into their stockings, finding a ton of candy they could gorge themselves on as well as some little trinkets. Mom then brought over two large bags with tissue paper coming out the top. Ben looked at the bag a little wearily as it was Sesame Street themed. He looked over to see Clark had a similar bag except his had a big chunky looking bulldozer on the front.

“These are from Great Aunt Edith,” Mom said. The bags certainly made a little more sense now. Great Aunt Edith was the oldest relative they had and she wasn't exactly all there. Most of the time the boys saw her she would call them by the wrong names. Ben removed the paper before pulling out a stuffed stuffed Elmo doll. There was also a Sesame Street coloring book along with a set of crayons. Ben sat on the ground looking over the gift with some gloom. Just how old did she think he was?

“What do you got there boys?” Dad asked, although he

looked amused.

“A coloring book I guess,” Ben said.

“She got me Play-Doh,” Clark said scrunching up his face a little holding the playset in his hands.

“Oh you know she's old and a little confused. Don't hold it against her” Mom said with a sigh. “And you know it looks like she actually thought about you when she picked out those gifts.” Both boys looked at their Mom with confused looks. “See, Benji, she knows you're artistic so she got you a coloring book,” Mom went on. “And Clark she must have heard how you like to do things with your hands.”

“Just make sure you say thank you when you see her today,” Dad chuckled. Both boys nodded as they replaced the things back into the bag, both of them thinking that they would never use the contents within.

“Oh these too,” Mom said as she handed the boys a bundle of fabric wrapped with a piece of ribbon. “She knitted one for all the cousins.” Ben and Clark undid the ribbons only to met with the sight of a hand knit Christmas sweater. Clark's had a red and black striped motif along with the silhouette of a sleigh and reindeer interspersed throughout. Ben's was worse however as it was bright green and had the large face of a cute reindeer on it complete with a red pom pom nose. “You are going to wear those to Grandma's house today.” Mom then said. Both boys looked back aghast. “All of your cousins will have theirs on too.” Mom said. “She worked hard on all of them.” Mom said shutting down any protest before it could

begin. Both boys groaned yet set the sweaters aside as they were ready to move on to the actual presents.

As Ben opened his presents he was finding that he was pretty happy. His parents had gotten him some new art supplies and had even gotten him a pastel set which he was pretty excited about. He also got some nice headphones he could use to listen to music while he used the stuff which was something he had been needing. He got some new hoodies as well and a couple of shirts that could replace more of Clark's old ones. His parents had also bought him several new manga volumes from a series he was reading. Clark too was overall happy with his haul of some new sports equipment and a brand new pair of soccer shoes. His parents had also gotten him a circuit set which he looked at with some interest and some new video games to boot.

Mom then placed a box in front of both boys noting it was from Grandma. Both boys reacted with indifference. Their Grandma always bought them clothes, and not the kind they were necessarily excited by. As Ben opened his box he saw a handwritten note on the front. To my wonderful grandson who is becoming a handsome young man it read. Ben put aside the note not thinking much of it. Inside the box he found a checkered button up shirt and a pair of tan khakis, which he was actually happy to see since it would replace the one's he had that had a hole in it, ensuring he wouldn't be subject to the outfit he had been made to wear yesterday. There was also a package of black socks. Ben then spotted one more thing at the bottom. He pulled it out to see it was a

package of plain white briefs.

“Pffft,” Clark chortled as he saw Ben holding up the package. “She got you tightie whiteys.”

“Shut up,” Ben scowled. “She probably got you the same thing.”

“Nope,” Clark smirked holding up a package of black boxer briefs.

“Did you tell her to get these,” Ben then said shooting a suspicious look at his Mom.

“No,” Mom said chuckling a little at the accusation. “I don't discuss your underwear choices.” Ben bit his tongue at his Mom's use of the word choices. Its not like he chose to wear Clark's old cartoon briefs.

“Guess she just knows your style,” Clark said. “But don't worry you can have these after I grow out of them, although I don't think they'll fit.”

“Are we done,” Ben said standing up in a huff ready to leave the room.

“Not quite,” Mom said.

“Its time for the grand finale,” Dad said getting up as he left the room. “Okay Clark close your eyes,” Dad then called out. Ben watched as his Dad wheeled in an electric scooter. Dad gave Clark the go ahead to open his eyes.

“A scooter!” Clark exclaimed getting up as he ran over to his

gift.

“All ready and fully charged,” Mom smiled.

“Can I go try it out?” Clark asked excitedly.

“I shoveled the driveway early this morning just for you,” Dad said patting Clark on the shoulder.

“Awesome,” Clark cheered as he took the handlebars and wheeled it out towards the front door.

“Put on a coat and helmet,” Mom called after him shaking her head a little. “Alright Benji ready for yours?” Ben nodded as his Mom set a wrapped box on the coffee table. Ben felt his hands shaking a little. Could it be? Had they actually gotten him the laptop he had wanted. He tore open the paper only to see that it was a digital tablet. “Your art teacher recommended something like this at conferences,” Mom said smiling. “He said it would be good for you to have something you could use to experiment with instead of having drag out supplies all the time. He said more and more artist are going digital these days.”

Ben felt a little disappointed but not enough to show it. The tablet was certainly nice and he had been interested in them for sometime. The laptop had been a long shot anyways. The tablet would certainly be cool to use as he thought about the possibilities now before him, he could even try his hand out at animation. Although as he looked at the box he noticed that it probably wouldn't be able to run on the family computer.

“Is something wrong?” Mom asked.

“Oh no,” Ben said shaking his head not wanting to appear ungrateful. “Its just that I don't think this will work on the computer, it might be too old.”

“I see,” Mom said with a frown.

“That's a shame,” Dad said. “Maybe this will help though.” Another package was then placed in front of Ben. The boy looked shocked as he looked at both of his parents. Had they really? He tore into the package to see the laptop staring back at him. It was the one he had wanted, the exact one. They even had included some gift cards that he could use to buy some games for it.

“You got it, oh my god,” Ben said holding his hands to his heads. He ran and hugged both of his parents.

“Now Benji be careful with that thing, you already know how expensive it was.” Dad said.

“I will,” Ben said. “I'm going to go set it up right now.”

“Why don't we eat breakfast first,” Mom said. Ben frowned but nodded all the same. The laptop was his now, its not like it was going to disappear. Clark was called in from outside and the family sat down for a Christmas morning breakfast of pancakes and sausage. Ben was excited to get to his computer but the homemade blueberry pancakes were definitely a favorite and he ended up eating four of them. Breakfast soon concluded as Clark pulled his Dad outside to show him how great the scooter was. Ben took his plate to the sink where his

Mom started to wash up.

“Benji one second,” Mom called after him as she motioned him over to the sink.

“What?” Ben asked wondering what she could possibly need from him.

“I want to see how things went last night,” Mom said grabbing the zipper of his pajamas and pulling it down.

“Mommy,” Ben yelped as the cold air hit his exposed midsection.

“I just want to see how they held up,” Mom said. Ben's face went red as he looked down to see the pull-up on display. Seeing how much it had swelled up with his own eyes only made Ben feel all the more embarrassed.

“Looks like it did the trick,” Mom said. “No leaks and not even damp on the outside,” she said pressing a finger on the front.

“Mommy seriously,” Ben grumbled as he took a step back and pulling the zipper back up.

“It was the first night I just wanted to check, are they more comfortable?”

“They're fine,” Ben said furrowing his brow.

“Good, but you should probably change out of that and take a quick shower too,” Mom said. “Take your gifts with you on your way.” Ben walked off towards the living room. He didn't

need to be told to change.

He set his gifts on the bed before taking off the pajamas. He then walked across the hall and took a shower making sure to go heavy on the soap so any scent of lingering baby powder was gone. He then got out and dried off. He wrapped the large towel around himself before going back to his room. He went to his dresser to grab some clothes. As he opened his underwear drawer he dug through looking through his colorful options to find something that wasn't too juvenile. He picked up a pair of Mario undies which just might be the most mature thing he had. He then looked back at his gifts. He put the undies back before finding the box with his Grandma's gift. He tore open the package of white briefs, donning a brand new crisp pair. He looked at himself in the large mirror on top of the dresser. He spun around to get a look from all sides. He knew these types of underwear were seen as less mature than boxers, but given what he usually had they were a step up. Ben then went back to his bed grabbing the computer. He just couldn't wait anymore.

He sat on his floor opening the box and getting his new laptop out. It was even more beautiful than the picture. Ben turned it on, pleased to find that it was already fully charged. He set the password and a few other customizations before he was on his home screen. Ben then saw that the game storefront was already installed. He signed in seeing that his account still had the games he had bought ages ago still on it. They were all games he had liked when he had been much younger than even Clark. Ben then picked up the gift cards

and entered them in loading up his digital wallet. He knew the first game he was downloading. It was the one his friends were always playing together, Full Clip. He knew they would be surprised when they learned he could finally join in. As he went to click buy he was stopped. A message popped up saying that his age rating was too low and he would need a password to continue. It had been so long that he didn't even remember that his parents had put parental controls on the account. Ben frowned. What in the world was he going to do now, it was doubtful his parents even remembered the password. Just then his Mom came into the room with his sweater in hand.

“So excited to play with your new toy that you couldn't even get dressed all the way,” she said with a smirk.

“Oh I guess,” Ben said with a nervous chuckle.

“That's okay,” Mom said. “Just get dressed soon.”

“Hey Mommy,” Ben then said. “Um I kind of have a little problem.” his Mom looked at him with some interest. “Its just I want to download this game but there are still parental locks on the account from awhile back and I need the password.

“Lets see this game first,” Mom said as she knelt down beside him to see the screen. “M for mature,” Mom said with a raised eyebrow.

“Well yeah, but all my friends play it,” Ben said. “And you let me go to that R-rated movie so whats the difference.”

“Movies and games are different,” Mom said. “These games

are maybe more than me and your Dad are comfortable with."

"Oh come on," Ben said with a pout. "Everybody else my age gets to play them, Its not fair."

Mom stood up thinking for a moment. As she contemplated the idea.

"You know Benji me and your Dad had a long talk about getting this computer for you in the first place and whether you were ready to handle."

"Fine," Ben shouted cutting of his Mom. "If you're going to be like that then I'll just do something else and be miserable." His Mom took in a breath at his sudden change in mood.

"Benji give me that laptop right now," she said issuing a stern command. Ben looked up at his Mom thinking he had pushed it too far.

"Um I'm sorry I'll just..." he said walking back his tone.

"Benji now," Mom said with her hands outstretched. Ben looked on with resignation as he lifted the laptop up to hand it to his Mom. He hung his head low as some tears bubbled up in his eyes. He had just gotten the thing and now it was being taken away, this would probably go down as the worst Christmas ever. Which made it all the more surprising when his Mom set the laptop back down in front of him after a few moments. The truth was she had never had the intention of refusing him yet she hadn't appreciated Ben's sudden outburst. He really could have a temper sometimes and his Mom was not about to let that slide.

“Now if you had let me finish, I was about to say me and your Dad have been happy with how you've been doing in school lately and you have been keeping up a good attitude which shows us that you are probably mature enough for us to let you do things we haven't allowed in the past.” Mom said. Ben looked at the computer screen to see the game was already downloading. “Just ask nicely next time.”

“R-really,” Ben stammered as he looked at his Mom.

“Now I'm not saying this means you get to do whatever you want, we'll still be keeping an eye on what you boys are up to but we do trust you.”

“Thank you than you thank you,” Ben said as he went and hugged his Mom. She smiled as she hugged him finding him so irresistibly cute at the moment as his feet hopped up and down while he hugged her. When he was like this she could tell he was at his happiest, so excited that his body could do nothing but wiggle with the excitement befitting a happy little boy rather than a sixteen year old. Mom was happy for the moment. Her boys were growing up and displays like this were becoming all the more rare. Ben gave his Mom a big kiss to the cheek before he went back to the computer laying flat on his stomach. His Mom shook her head a little seeing that Ben probably had no notion of putting on clothes at the moment. Some part of her did want to take a picture of the cute scene but knew doing so would probably dampen the mood.

“You need to be dressed and ready to go in an hour,” she said.

“Uh huh,” Ben said not taking his eyes of the screen.

“Benji its going to take awhile for that game to download so get dressed now.”

“Oh ok,” Ben said as he stood up. Mom went to leave before stopping as she saw the bag from Aunt Edith sitting on the bed.

“And while you wait why don't you color a page in that coloring book Aunt Edith got you,” she suggested.

“I think I can find something better to do,” Ben said rolling his eyes.

“Benji I want you too,” Mom re-iterated. “I want to take a picture of you with it to show to her.”

“Mommy,” Ben whined a little being beset with such a childish task.

“I'm going to have Clark make something with his play-doh as well,” Mom said clarifying that this was not just something she was asking only of Ben. “It will show her that you liked the gift.”

“But I don't” Ben grumbled. Mom put a hand on her hip.

“It won't kill you to color one little picture to make an old woman happy, this might be her last Christmas you know.”

“Fine,” Ben sighed. Mom then walked to the door before turning back for a moment.

“And make it look nice, no scribbling,” she said before finally

leaving.

“Who cares,” Ben muttered “She already thinks I'm a little kid why do I have to make it look good.” Ben got himself some jeans snapping then together before getting a shirt and finally pulling on the reindeer sweater. As he looked at himself the sweater really made him look like a little kid, but at least he wouldn't be the only one wearing something like it. Ben then looked at the computer noting the download was half way done. Ben got out the coloring book finding a picture of Elmo and the Cookie Monster with a big pile of cookies between them. Ben grabbed the crayons setting to work. By the time he was done he looked with some satisfaction having even gone so far as to get the texture just right on the fur. As much as he had detested the task at first he had found it had been a little fun...but only a little. He looked back to see that his game was ready to go. Ben smiled as he fired it up. He played for some time getting used to the controls as he played through the single player campaign. He was so engrossed that he didn't even notice Clark come walking in.

“Whatcha playin?” Clark asked looking at the computer screen before his eyes widened. “No way is that Full Clip?”

“Yep,” Ben said smiling.

“Can I try?” Clark asked.

“Sorry,” Ben said shutting the top. “Mom said I have to keep it to myself.” She hadn't actually said that, but it was probably true.

“That's –“ Clark began before pausing. He knew Ben was right about their parents wishes yet he didn't exactly appreciate the smug satisfaction he had detected from Ben. “Anyways we're leaving soon so Mom told me to come and get you and not to forget your coloring book,” Clark said grabbing the coloring book off the ground. “You made sure to color a pretty picture, right?” Clark chuckled.

“Hardy har har,” Ben said rolling his eyes as she snatched the open book out of Clark's hands. “I know she made you play with the play doh too.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Clark said as the boys made their way to the kitchen.

“Great you're both dressed,” Mom said with a smile. “Benji did you do your coloring?”

“Yes,” Ben said with some moodiness as he handed over the coloring book.

“Its wonderful,” Mom said as she tore it out of the book. “Hold it out in front of yourself for the picture so we can show Aunt Edith.”

“Wait a minute,” Clark said suddenly remembering something as he ran off. He returned a few moments later with the Elmo stuffie. “She also gave him this.”

“Oh I suppose she did,” Mom said with a nod. She then took the picture hanging it up on the fridge.

“Okay Benji hold Elmo and stand in front of the fridge.”

“Do I hafta?” Ben whined finding it to be all the more embarrassing now that the stuffie was in play.

“Yes you do.” Mom said. Ben rolled his eyes as he took Elmo into his arms. “Now give him a big hug and smile,” Mom cooed. Ben glared at his Mom. “Its for the picture,” Mom said with a smirk. Ben let out a sigh before he cuddled the Elmo doll to his face with a big smile as his Mom took the picture. She smiled looking at the result. She knew Ben had been faking it but there was no denying how absolutely adorable he looked in the photo.

“Okay Clark, your turn.” Mom said. She had Clark sit at the table where the playset was set out. She made Clark hold up the creation he had made with the tools yet she had to take two photos since Clark looked too sarcastic in the first one.

Once it was done the boys got on their jackets and shoes and then the family was off to Grandma's house. On the car ride Ben sat in his car seat listening to some music with his new headphones. It had been awhile since he had been able to do it since he had lost his earbuds and his parents refused to buy him new ones if he was just going to lose them, they had been the third pair he had lost. He looked over to see Clark playing with a rubiks cube. Clark had of course already solved it, he had looked up the solution on line but that wasn't the point. Clark liked to time himself to see how fast he could do it, he called it speed cubing. Ben had heard about it when he had been Clark's age but had found the idea kind of stupid. What was the point? It was about an hour long car ride to Grandma's house. Grandma lived in a large farmhouse out in

the country. Mom was always telling her it was time to sell the house and move somewhere smaller, but Grandma had her pride. Getting inside there was a lot of commotion and there were tantalizing smells wafting out of the kitchen. As the family came into the large living room they began to go around as greetings were exchanged between Aunts, Uncles and cousins.

“Look whose here,” Grandma said seizing both of the brothers up into a hug as she gave each of them a kiss to the cheek. “Did Santa bring you everything you wanted?” she asked.

“Yeah it was great,” Clark smiled.

“Um thank you for the clothes,” Ben said dutifully as both boys had been reminded to say thank you.

“Hopefully you like them,” Grandma said. “I'm not exactly up on trends.”

“They were good,” Clark said. “And Benji loved the undies. He's wearing a pair of them right now, he just couldn't wait.” Clark laughed, slapping Ben on the back. Ben's face went red.

“That nice dear,” Grandma said not sensing Ben's embarrassment at the comment as she patted him on the head before her attention was called away by the dinging of a timer. Ben shot Clark a hard stare.

“What was that for?” Ben growled.

“It made her happy to hear how excited you were with your

new undies," Clark said. Ben had been feeling somewhat happy that morning to finally have underwear that wasn't plastered with cartoon characters yet with Clark's comment he did feel a little silly that he had worn them, it really did make him sound like an excited little kid getting his first pair of big boy undies. Still wearing an old pair might have made it look like he actually preferred them.

"Keep it to yourself," Ben seethed as he went to walk off yet both boys were caught by their Mom.

"You both need to go and thank Aunt Edith for the gifts," she said pointing to the elderly woman sat in the corner of the room in a rocking chair. She had their little cousin Tabby who was two years old in her arms. Both boys approached as the woman smiled.

"Hi Aunt Edith," Ben said loudly knowing the woman was hard of hearing. The old woman smiled.

"Oh Benji dear, how are you?" she asked. Ben gave a small smile, at least she knew his name.

"Thank you for the sweaters," Clark said. "They're very comfy." The older woman looked at Clark for a moment.

"Oh Ronnie when did you get here?" she asked. "Mother is looking for you in the kitchen."

"Ronnie?" Clark questioned. Mom was standing a bit to the side and intervened.

"That isn't Uncle Ron, Aunt Edith this is Clark do your

remember?”

“Oh yes Clark, how is the first grade going? Are you learning a lot?” The woman asked.

“I'm in fifth,” Clark said with an awkward look.

“That's right,” Aunt Edith said. “My the time flies?”

“The boys really liked the gifts you got them,” Mom said pulling out her phone. She showed the pictures of the boys to Aunt Edith who seemed pleased with them. Mom gave the boys a nod signaling that they could leave. As Ben walked away he heard the older woman cooing over his photo. He just hoped his Mom didn't show it to anyone else. Ben and Clark spotted two more of their cousins over in the side room which Grandma called the sun room as it had a curved window along the wall that let in lots of natural light.

There was James who was nine but would be turning ten soon so he and Clark were pretty close, and then there was Jame's little brother Tommy who was five. Ben saw that they each sported their own garish Christmas sweaters. Although he was a little perturbed to see that James was similar to Clark's while his own was more in line with Tommy's which sported a large snowman.

“Hey dude,” Clark greeted James who was playing on a tablet on the couch. “You get that for Christmas?”

“Pretty cool right,” the blonde haired boy said with a smile that made the freckles across his nose scrunch up a little. “You get anything good? Clark nodded telling James about

his new scooter.

“What about you Benji, get a lot of cool toys, maybe some Paw Patrol figures?” James said with a smirk. Ben wasn't a big fan of James. He seemed to be intent on teasing Ben, often making remarks about how he must be a little kid. Ben would complain to his Mom and she would just tell him it was because James was just a kid and wanted to assert himself, Ben should just ignore him and soon enough the boy would lose interest. Ben had often wanted to protest more but the idea of asking for his Mom's help to deal with a nine year old wasn't exactly the age affirming action.

“Benji got a new laptop,” Clark mentioned.

“Oh good now you can play your baby games,” James snickered.

“He was playing Full Clip this morning,” Clark said. Jame's eyes went wide.

“No way, my Mom won't even let me play that game,” James said.

“Well its not for little kids,” Ben said. James tried to sputter something out yet was interrupted as Tommy collided into Ben wrapping him in a hug.

“Benjii,” he crowed. “Come and see my dino's,” the small boy said as he practically dragged Ben off. As bad as James could be Tommy might be worse, not that he meant to be. But seeing Ben be a similar size to himself only seemed to make the connection in his mind that he was the perfect playmate

for the little boy. Things soon settled as Clark and James sat on the couch with his tablet while Benji sat on the ground listening to Tommy hold up each dinosaur going through every single fact he knew about them. Ben nodded along trying to be nice and at least look interested.

“Tommy be nice and share your toys with Benji,” James said sounding like an older brother yet its true purpose being a condescending remark aimed at Ben. “He likes dinosaurs too.” Ben shot his cousin a glare.

“You want to be the triceratops?” Tommy asked holding the figure out towards Ben. “You could also be the stegosaurus just not the t-rex since that's the one I'm using.”

“That's alright,” Ben said. “I'll just watch you.” Ben was cautious with Tommy. The kid had a way of pulling Ben into his games. It always started off as a small appeasement on Ben's part and before he knew it he had spent the whole day playing games with the kid. The last time they had visited their cousins, Ben had taken Tommy over to the sandbox at the park under the auspice of keeping an eye on him while the adults visited over at the picnic tables. Two hours later Ben was on his hands and knees crawling around the sandbox as he and Tommy dug trenches and made sandcastles. Ben hadn't even realized how sucked in he had been until his Mom had spent a good deal of time brushing sand off of him when it had been time for them to leave.

Ben decided to extricate himself before he found himself playing dinosaurs. He didn't really want to wander into the

living room with the other adults who would only ask him the most boring and inane questions about how school was going, but he guessed it was better than giving James more ammo. Before Ben could leave however he was stopped by another one of his cousins entering into the room.

“Benji long time no see,” the girl said bending down to hug Ben.

“Hey Haley,” Ben smiled. Haley was his eighteen year old cousin who was a freshman in college. They were the oldest of the cousins and had naturally been the closest with one another. She then went and grabbed both Clark and Jame's heads giving them each a kiss on top as the boys whined a little. Tommy then went and jumped on her back laughing as she gave him a piggyback ride.

Grandma then came in to announce that it was time to eat. Ben moved through the line loading up his plate. If there was one thing that showed everyone that Ben was a teenager it was his appetite. He could pack away a lot of food and yet much to his Mom's amazement he never seemed to gain weight from it. The adults were set up in the dining room at the big table, while the kids were in the kitchen. There were two tables. There was a small card table with three spots and then further back was an even smaller plastic table that was meant for little kids to do crafts on. Name cards were already placed on the table. As Ben circled around the card table he didn't see his name. He felt some dread as he looked over at the toddler table. He groaned upon seeing his name card set there on the end. He shook his head. This must have been a

prank by James no doubt.

“Find your spot?” Grandma asked coming up behind him.

“I think someone moved my card,” Ben said setting his plate on the table in front of his card.

“Oh I actually put that there,” Grandma said. Ben blinked not sure he had heard her right. “We're going to have Tabby and Tommy sit here too and we need someone older to sit here to keep an eye on the younger ones. You don't mind do you?”

“Umm well,” Ben said with some apprehension. He did in fact mind. Even if his Grandma was asking him since he was one of the oldest cousin's here he also knew it was more likely because he would fit perfectly in the chair and wouldn't find the table too small. Just then his Aunt Diane came in carrying Tabby who was now only wearing a diaper, setting her in her seat and placing a plate of cut up food in front of her.

“Oh Benji are you sitting here?” she asked.

“I guess,” Ben mumbled.

“I thought he could keep an eye on the younger ones.” Grandma said.

“He doesn't need to do that,” Aunt Diane said. “I was going to sit out here anyways.”

“Oh dear take a break,” Grandma said. “Benji here can watch her for a little bit, right?” Grandma said placing her hands on his shoulders.

“Sure,” Ben said, although he didn't exactly sound confident. He had never babysat before in his life and he was utterly clueless when it came to babies.

“Well I hate to impose on you,” Aunt Diane said. “But if you think you're up to it, I would appreciate it and there might just be ten bucks in it for you.”

“Yeah sure,” Ben said sitting down. He could always use ten bucks.

“You don't have to do much,” Aunt Diane said. “She can eat by herself pretty much and I removed her clothes so even if she gets messy its not a big deal.”

Ben nodded. If she could eat by herself then there probably wasn't much for him to do. It would be easy money. Aunt Diane left. Tabby lifted up her fork with some mashed potatoes sticking it into her mouth.

“Good job Tabby,” Ben praised as the little girl smiled back. James and Clark then took their seats, thankfully James didn't seem to have a comment at the moment or rather didn't want to say anything since their Mom, Aunt Val was right there carrying Tommy's plate for him.

“I don't want to sit there,” Tommy whined seeing his spot.

“You're little,” James said. “That's where little kids sit,” he said smiling at Ben who only rolled his eyes.

“Tommy this is your spot sweetie,” Aunt Val said ignoring Jame's comment. “And look Benji is also sitting here so its

not the little kids table," she said giving Ben a smile. Tommy was not swayed as he whined a little more. Haley upon seeing the commotion lifted up her own name card.

"Here Tommy, you can have my spot," she said as she went and sat down at the toddler table looking a little silly sitting in the small chair. "I want to talk to Benji anyways."

Tommy was overjoyed at the development as he took a seat at the card table with the other big boys. As they ate Ben found out that Haley did actually want to talk to him about something. She had brought a bunch of brochures from her school to show Ben. Haley at one point seeing that Tabby was getting messier than her mother anticipated got the little girl onto her lap as she helped her eat.

"So what do you think looks pretty cool, right?" Haley said referring to the brochures Ben was looking at.

"Yeah, I mean a lot of these classes do sound cool," Ben said. The brochures were all about the art program at the college.

"You can totally mix and match too, they let you create your own degree so you don't have to just concentrate on one discipline. Have you thought about college?"

"Not really," Ben said. In truth he was kind of putting it off. It seemed so far away and though he would never admit to it, he felt a little scared at the prospect. It just seemed like a lot, he wondered if he would be able to handle it. As the meal progressed Haley pretty much talked non-stop about how cool college life was, the freedom and discovery and part of

Ben liked hearing about it all. At some point Clark and James finished and went off somewhere else. Tommy also walked away at some point and returned some time later with Jame's tablet in hand.

“Oh Tommy did you get that for Christmas?” Haley asked. Tommy looked up for a moment before looking back down. Ben could tell he was avoiding the question. The kid couldn't lie and knew well enough if he told the truth about who it belonged too Haley might just take it away deeming him too little to play with something so expensive. Ben smirked. He wasn't going to say anything, it was after all none of his business.

“You little thief,” James bellowed standing in the doorway to the kitchen seeing his little brother with his prized Christmas gift in his hands.

“I was just looking at it,” Tommy said holding it to his chest covetously.

“Dad already told you that you are not allowed to touch it,” James said stomping towards the table standing across from Tommy with Ben in between.

“I'm not gunna break it,” Tommy whined.

“Give it back,” James growled as he reached across the table in an attempt to grab it out of Tommy's hands. However as James lunged across the table he accidentally hit the glass of water in front of Ben sending the cup clattering over and the water spilling into Ben's lap. Ben stood up with a start putting

his hands up in the air as he looked down at his crotch to see the water soaking his pants. Ben grabbed some napkins trying to wipe it away. Haley got up and placed Tabby into a playpen in the living room before coming back into the kitchen she plucked the tablet out of Tommy's hands and placed it on the counter.

“Tommy you can't take things that don't belong to you,” she said. “And James you need to grab some napkins and wipe up this water.” she ordered as she took control of the situation to stop her younger cousins from anymore further squabbling. She then looked over at Ben who was fruitlessly trying to dry his pants but to no avail. “Are you okay Benji?” she asked.

“I'm fine, just wet,” Ben grumbled. “I'm going to go dry off in the bathroom,” he said walking out of the kitchen. Ben made his way down the hall towards the bathroom as his Dad came in from another door.

“Oh hey Benji how's it going,” Dad asked before his eyes saw Ben's pants. “Oh Benji,” his Dad sighed. “Did you have an accident?” Ben's eyes went wide at his Dad's question yet it really did look like he had wet his pants.

“No its –“ Ben stammered but before he could get the words out his Dad grabbed him by the wrist walking towards the bathroom.

“I'll help you get cleaned up,” Dad said as he pulled Ben into the small bathroom. His Dad went and sat on the toilet pulling Ben in front of him.

“Daddy stop, I didn't,” Ben tried to explain.

“Now Benji,” Dad said grabbing Ben by the front waistband pulling him a little closer as he then went and unsnapped the button on his pants. “If you're going to have little accidents like this we might need to think about wearing the pull-ups when we are out of the house.”

“No Daddy,” Ben whined yet his Dad carried on not realizing what the boy was protesting.

“I know its not always your fault,” Dad said pulling Ben's pants down. “But if we can't trust you to make it to the bathroom on time then it may be necessary.” Dad said as he got the pants off from under Ben's feet before he went and hooked his thumbs into the waistband of his undies.

“Daddy stop,” Ben shrieked as he grabbed his Dads hand in an effort to stop him from pulling down his underwear. His Dad then paused as he looked at the underwear noticing they were dry.

“Oh you aren't wet,” Dad said a little confused withdrawing his hands.

“I told you,” Ben mewled taking a step back. “James spilled some water and it got on me.”

Dad smiled apologetically. He could see that he had indeed embarrassed his son a fair bit to the point that the boy had some tears in his eyes he was trying to fight back.

“Awww I'm sorry Benji,” Dad said as he picked Ben up

putting him on his lap, not for a moment thinking how strange it was to do such a thing to his teenage son. Ben's appearance just made it hard for his parents not to react in such a manner. For Ben's part he didn't resist as he let his Dad give him a hug with a reassuring pat on his back. “I just got worried about you having an accident.”

“Well I didn't,” Ben grumbled as his Dad released him and Ben slid down off his lap.

“Let me help you dry these pants out,” Dad said getting up. He went under the sink finding a hair dryer which he plugged into the wall before hanging the pants up on the towel rack. “In the meantime why don't you use the bathroom so you don't actually have an accident.” Ben huffed a little but found he did have to go. His Dad's back was turned so Ben used the toilet although it was still kind of awkward. Once he washed his hands he found he had nothing to do but stand around waiting for his Dad to finish drying the pants. Ben tried to pull down his sweater a little but found that it didn't have a lot of stretch and only covered the top half of his underwear.

“Those the new undies your Grandma got you?” Dad asked as he looked over at him.

“Um yeah,” Ben squeaked, feeling a little self conscious at the moment. If anything he should feel more mature since his Dad knew about the usual undies he wore and the tightie whiteys were certainly more mature than that. Despite that though, Ben was starting to feel all the more babyish in them. Like somehow everybody felt like it was a really big deal for

him to be wearing them, a symbol that the little boy was now a big kid.

“They look good on you,” Dad smiled, yet the comment only intensified Ben's feeling. “Here's your pants need help getting them on?” Dad asked taking them down now dry from the towel rack.

“I can put on my own pants,” Ben grumbled as he snatched them out of his Dad's hand.

“Alright Alright,” Dad chuckled as he left the bathroom leaving Ben to finish up. Ben grumbled as he got his pants back on. How could his Dad just assume he had an accident like that? Not too mention it was the first conclusion that came to mind. He didn't have accidents, it was just the one time after the movie theater, were they ever going to let him live that down? As Ben walked out of the bathroom his Mom spotted him, she had been looking for him.

“There you are Benji,” she said walking up to him with his coat and shoes in hand. “Get ready to go outside.”

“Do I really have to,” Ben whined knowing full well what was happening. Every Christmas the cousins would be shooed out into the yard to build a snowman together and of course that meant pictures.

“Its tradition,” Mom said handing him in his coat. “Even Haley is going.” Ben got his jacket and shoes on and went and met the rest of his cousins out in the backyard. “Let us know when you're done,” Mom called before going back in

the kitchen to help clean up. Some time later Mom stood at the sink which had a window looking into the backyard where she could see the group working. Haley, Clark and James were working on the snowman and already had the body built up while Haley was decorating the face. She then looked over to see Ben and Tommy off to the side. They were running around throwing snow at one another and rolling around to boot. She shook her head a little thinking she should have thought to bring Ben's snow suit along if he was going to roll around in the snow like that. She was overall happy that he was being nice enough to play with Tommy, although the smile on his face at the moment showed that he was having just as much fun. She didn't have a problem with Ben still having some childish traits. He was very grown up in many ways so there was no worry about letting him indulge sometimes instead of pushing him to be more mature all the time. She did wish he was a little more open about it, but he was still a teenager and could be self-conscious, all in all it seemed to help him blow off stress. So she wouldn't make mention of it, she never did when Ben did things that would be expected of someone much younger, as long as it wasn't him throwing a little tantrum. Such as that morning when she had seen the picture he colored. She had been surprised to see that he had put some effort into it.

The snowman was eventually finished as the adults made their way outside to take pictures of all the cousins' gathered. Afterwards everybody went inside. Ben and Tommy were stopped at the door however.

“Your pants are going to be soaked once that snow melts,” Mom said looking at the two of them covered head to toe in snowy white powder. Ben looked down at himself with a wince realizing that it was true.

“Tommy you're going to need to change,” Aunt Val said.

“What are we going to do about you?” Mom said looking at Ben.

“He could borrow something from James,” Aunt Val then suggested since she and her family were staying overnight at Grandmas.

“I suppose,” Mom said. Ben just gave a nod, he didn't really have any other option. Ben followed his Aunt with Tommy up to the guest room.

“All right you two get those pants off before they drip on the carpet anymore,” Val said as she began to dig through the suitcase. Ben got his pants off feeling a little awkward, but he was thankful that his aunt wouldn't see him in a pair of his cartoon undies.

“We match,” Tommy then said. Ben looked at his little cousin who stood lifting up his shirt a little to reveal that he too was wearing white briefs. Ben's eyes widened a little as he saw that they did indeed match down to the blue line going around the waistband with the brand name printed out. Ben hadn't taken much notice until that point, but the brand name belonged to a chain of stores that catered exclusively to young children's clothing.

“Well of course you do,” Aunt Val said. “Benji is a real big kid. Remember what I told you this morning when you unwrapped your gift from Grandma, these are big kid undies, if you're wearing them then you have to act like one.” Ben pursed his lips, the idea that his grandma had grabbed two identical packs of underwear, one meant for Tommy and one for him only made his face redden.

“I remember,” Tommy said smiling. “I need to act like a big kid and not make a fuss.”

“That's right,” Aunt Val smiled kissing her son on the cheek. “Here Benji try these,” Aunt Val then said as she let some jeans unfold. It was clear as soon as they unfurled that the only way they would fit Ben was with a belt and that wouldn't help with how long the legs were. “Oh um these might actually be too big,” she said as she told him to wait a moment going back to the suitcase. “Maybe Tommy's sweats will fit,” Aunt Val said handing them to Ben who didn't waste anytime in ruminating on the fact he was borrowing clothes from his five year old cousin. He got them on quickly. They were snug but were just a plain pair of gray sweatpants. Aunt Val pulled out a green pair of corduroy pants for Tommy to wear and Ben was glad he wasn't wearing anything like that.

“Thanks for the pants,” Ben said as his Aunt gave him a smile. Ben walked out of the room making his way back downstairs. He looked around but didn't see Clark or James anywhere.

“Benji,” he heard his Mom call out. “Did your Aunt find

something for you?”

“Oh um yeah,” Ben said pointing to the sweat pants.

“Well good,” Mom said before handing him a plate stacked with cookies and brownies. “All the kids went to the basement why don't you take this down there for everyone to share,” Mom said.

Benji took the plate walking towards the basement. It was the room where the cousin's would gather to hang out when they were all at Grandma's house. As he walked down he saw Clark and James sat at a table with the tablet propped up with a video about speed cubes playing. Both of the boys had cubes and were watching the video as they turned their own cubes. Further back Haley was on the couch with Tabby in her lap. Two more of Benji's cousins had arrived. The twin girls Mallory and Lisa were there cooing at the baby. Benji went over and set the dessert plate on the coffee table as the tv played some Christmas special.

“Hey Benji,” Mallory said. Benji looked a little surprised as he looked up at the twelve year old girl. The last time he had seen her she had been shorter than Clark, but now was even taller than him.

“Oh hey,” Benji said. “You um got tall.”

“Yep,” Mallory said as she struck a pose.” Hit my growth spurt.”

“We both did,” Lisa said as she stood up next to her sister.

“And you're still fun sized,” Mallory said as she pulled Benji close snuggling him.

“Little Benji,” Lisa cooed as she joined in sandwiching Ben between the two of them.

“Quit it,” Ben groaned as she slipped out between the two of them.

“Wonder if he is as ticklish as the others?” Mallory then said with a mischievous look. Ben gave them a questioning look. Haley was the one that spoke up.

“Before you got down here they had Clark and James on the ground under a tickle attack,” Ben smirked thinking he would have liked to see that before he shot an alarmed look at the girls.

“Don't,” he squeaked crossing his arms with his hands under his armpits.

“Oh don't worry Benji,” Lisa laughed.

“We know you're our big cousin we only do that to the little ones,” Mallory said. “Like that one,” she said pointing to Tommy who had wandered down to the basement unaware of the fate that awaited him. The girls then stalked off having identified their prey. Moments later Ben heard Tommy shrieking and giggling. Haley shook her head turning her attention back towards Tabby.

“Silly cousin's,” she said as she played with the babies hands. Ben took a seat on the couch grabbing one of the cookies.

The girls returned soon after and they busied themselves playing with the baby. Ben was becoming a little bored as he watched the tired Christmas special on the tv. He wondered if they would be leaving soon as he was eager to get back to his laptop. He wanted to try out the new tablet as well. He would certainly have plenty of time knowing that his parents were not going to enforce a bedtime tonight. They didn't have anywhere to be tomorrow and it was a holiday after all. There would be plenty of time later in the week to get the boys back on their sleep schedule as their Mom put it. Tommy then came up to the group.

“Want to see my cars?” Tommy asked.

“We already saw your racetrack,” Mallory said as Lisa nodded. Tommy then looked to Haley.

“Its so cool Tommy,” she said nodding to the racetrack set up in the corner. “I'm watching Tabby right now though, I'll come see it later.” Tommy looked back a little disappointed.

“Benji,” he then said looking hopeful at his cousin who had been his de-facto playmate that day.

“Okay, okay,” Ben sighed. “I'll look.” He got up from the couch following Tommy who was enthusiastic to show off one of his new toys. Ben had to admit it was kind of cool. It was a hot wheels track with loops and curves That all met in the middle of a six way intersection. Tommy set one of the cars on the track as it went through the launcher in the middle sending the car shooting around the track. He then put another one on and the cars eventually met crashing into one

another. “Help me put more on,” Tommy said. “I can't do it fast enough by myself.” Ben agreed taking a car and setting it on the track as Tommy did the same.

As Ben and Tommy played for some time, James got up from the table saying he had to go to the bathroom.

“Sure,” Clark said as he sat back resting his hands from the intense races the boys had been having with one another. Clark looked over to see Tommy and Ben playing with the race track, both of them laughing as they were on their hands and knees grabbing up cars as they flew off the track. Clark had seen Ben come down to the basement, that had been awhile ago, had he really been playing with Tommy the whole time?

Clark then noticed something that made him chuckle. As the boys moved around their shirts rode up a little to reveal their matching waistbands. Clark realized that they were in fact wearing the same underwear. No doubt Tommy had gotten them from Grandma just as Ben had. Had she really bought them the same ones? A strange thought then occurred to Clark as he watched the two of them playing. Ben was in fact the second oldest kid in the room but to anyone looking around they would just assume that he was the same age as Tommy. It would then only stand to reason that they would assume Clark was Ben's older brother. As the thought passed Clark's mind he was reminded of what Uncle Hank, Jame's Dad, had said to James as they had gone down into the basement, reminding James to watch his little brother. Clark then imagined what it would have been like if his own Dad

had said the same thing to him, referring to Ben. How would Clark have reacted? Annoyed like James, surely not. Clark thought for a moment what kind of big brother he would be if Ben was actually younger than him. He liked to imagine he would be the responsible type. He would always be there to help his parents out with his little brother. Honestly it really wasn't all that hard to imagine. It certainly felt like that sometimes. Just then Ben got up making his way to the stairs.

“Hey Benji where you goin?” Clark asked as Ben walked past the table.

“Oh I'm going upstairs to get another cookie,” Ben said pointing off towards the now empty plate he had brought with him. “The girls ate the other ones.”

“You can have mine,” Clark said nodding towards the cookie that sat on a napkin on the table in front of him. Ben just shrugged as he stepped up to the table to take the cookie. Clark grabbed him lifting Ben up into his lap so he was now sat facing towards the table.

“Hey what are you...” Ben gasped as he wiggled to get free.

“You need to eat your cookie at the table,” Clark chuckled as he had his arms around Ben's tummy.

“Let me go,” Ben demanded.

“Once you eat your cookie I'll let you up,” Clark said. “Want me to hold it for you,” Clark asked bringing the cookie to Ben's mouth.

“No,” Ben growled grabbing the cookie out of Clark's hand. He began to eat the cookie seeing that Clark had no intention of releasing him until the task was complete, Clark could tell he was trying to shove as much of it into his mouth as he could.

“Okay I'm done now let me go,” Ben said, his mouth now full of cookie.

“Finish chewing,” Clark said sweetly as if he had to remind Ben to chew all his food. Ben grumbled as he chewed. After a minute he finally swallowed.

“Let me go,” Ben said.

“Oh whoops lets wipe your face first,” Clark said noting the crumbs on the corner of Ben's mouth. He took the napkin and wiped Ben's face as his older brother groaned. “There nice and clean,” Clark said letting Ben go. Ben looked at his brother with an angered look. “Need something else Benji?” Clark asked.

Ben shook his head as he retreated back towards where Tommy was. As Ben sat on the floor he looked over at Clark who had now returned to his activity with James. He wondered what the hell that had all been about. He began to think that Clark had been acting a little strange all day. There had been the thing with Grandma and telling her about the underwear and now the whole cookie thing. Just what the heck was he thinking. Ben then thought that it had all really started that morning after Clark saw Ben playing the Full Clip game on his laptop. Thats when Clark had made the

comment about the coloring book and had meddled further with the Elmo stuffie. Was that what this was all about. Was Clark somehow jealous that Ben got to play a violent game and he didn't.

Grandma then called down the stairs for everyone to come upstairs as it was time for a toast. The kids walked up to the living room where all the adults were gathered Shot glasses of alcohol were being distributed to the adults while the kids were getting sparkling cider.

“Here,” Dad said offering a shot glass filled with a brown liquid to Ben.

“This is for me?” Ben said looking at his Dad with some shock.

“Yeah go ahead,” Dad smiled. Ben looked down at the adult drink in his hand.

“Dear,” Mom said. “I don't think...”

“Its one shot,” Dad said cutting her off. “Whats the harm?” Mom looked at Ben before shaking her head a little.

“I mean if you don't want me too,” Ben said growing suspicious that this might be some sort of test, yet his Mom then gave him a smile.

“Your Dad is right,” she said patting him on the head. “One sip wont kill you.” Ben smiled. He looked over at Clark and James who had their sparkling cider. Clark looked just as surprised as he had been. Ben gave him a smirk before

turning away. Grandma then made some speech about how grateful she was to have the family together and all that other kind of stuff that people said during the holidays. Everyone then raised their glasses with a Merry Christmas. Ben knocked back the drink the way he had seen the other adults do. As the drink hit his tongue he tasted the bitterness swallowing it quickly before coughing.

“Like it?” Dad laughed smacking Ben on the back a few times.

“That'll put some hair on your chest,” Uncle Hank laughed. Ben winced a few times as the taste lingered in his mouth. Why on earth did people drink this stuff?

Afterwards there was some plans made to put on a movie down in the basement for the kids. Clark and James were going to build a blanket fort to go along with it. Tommy asked Ben if he was coming which Ben refused. After his little foray into the adult world he was feeling like going back into the basement was real kids stuff. As the rest of the cousins retreated back into the basement Ben spent his time visiting with his Aunt's and Uncles. It became apparent that his Mom had bragged about him winning the art contest as he got a lot of questions about it along with the same old questions about how school was going. Ben was a little bored after awhile and started thinking about going back into the basement. Instead though he sat on the couch next to his Dad and some of his Uncles as they watched a football game. Ben was feeling dreadfully tired. He wondered if it was from the alcohol, was he drunk?. It hadn't been that much though. Ben

closed his eyes for a moment and the next thing he knew he was being nudged awake.

“Benji wake up sweetie we're going to leave soon,” his Mom said softly. Ben raised up wiping his eyes a little. The couch was now abandoned and the T.V was off. He could see through the kitchen that some of the adults were at a table playing cards. Ben let out a yawn wondering how long he had been asleep for. “C'mon honey,” Mom said as she lead him out to the living room. Ben was fighting to keep his eyes open as his Mom lead him up some stairs.

“What are we doing?” Ben asked drowsily as his Mom lead him into his Grandma's room. He went and sat on the bed being so tired that the only thing he wanted to do was lay back down and go to sleep.

“I want you to get dressed for bed now,” Mom said setting down her bag and pulling out a pair of pajamas and one of the pull-ups setting them on the bed next to bed.

“I don't wanna wear pajamas,” Ben whined with his eyes still closed.

“Benji you can barely keep your eyes open,” Mom chuckled. “The minute you're back in the car you're going to pass out again. So I want you to wear some protection on the way home.”

Ben grunted a little as he went to flop down on his side yet his Mom caught him sitting him back upright as she pulled his shirt and sweater off, figuring the cold air might wake him

up a little.

“I'm going to use the bathroom so get dressed,” she said before turning around to use the en suite bathroom. When she came back out she just sighed. Ben had gotten as far as taking off his pants and was now in just his underwear curled up on the bed asleep. “What am I going to do with you,” she said grabbing Ben's legs and pulling them out straight. It was clear that Ben was not going to be able to rouse himself from sleep. She got his underwear off before getting the pull-up up to his knees. She put a little baby powder in them before getting them up around his waist. She then looked at the pajamas realizing what she had grabbed in her haste to leave that morning. It was probably better that Ben was asleep as he would no doubt have objections. But what did it matter, they were among family.

They were an old pair of Winnie the Pooh themed pajamas. The shirt had blue sleeves with thin red lines and red cuffs and a collar. The body was white and sported Pooh bear in his nightshirt and cap sleeping peacefully on a crescent moon with a pot of honey clutched to his chest. The back had Pooh and his friend marching in a line across the bottom of the shirt. The pants matched the sleeves and also had small bumblebees throughout buzzing in-between the thin red lines.

Mom got Ben dressed in his pajamas the boy having remained asleep throughout. Dad then poked his head in.

“Cars packed you ready?” he asked.

“Yes,” she said before motioning towards Ben on the bed. “I

don't think Benji is going to be able to get himself to the car though,”

Dad came into the room shaking his head a little. “He must be in a food coma,” Dad laughed. “I saw him scarf down three plates at dinner.”

“Or maybe its the alcohol,” Mom said with just a hint of annoyance. Dad chuckled in response as he went and picked Ben up off the bed resting him against his chest as Ben's cheek found its way to rest atop his Dad's shoulder.

Clark rounded the corner of the hallway after grabbing his coat to see his parents at the front door saying goodbyes to their relatives as Ben was asleep in his Dad's arms. Clark watched as Aunt Edith approached she rubbed Ben's back a little.

“They are so precious at this age,” she remarked obviously having no idea how old Ben was. Mom and Dad gave each other an amused look.

“They sure are,” Dad said with a smirk. Clark saw that Aunt Edith had caused Ben's shirt to ride up and was resting atop the waistband of his pull-up revealing what he was wearing underneath.

“Oh Ben's pants,” Mom then said realizing he had changed them at one point.

“I hung them up in the bathroom to dry,” Aunt Val said.

“I'll get them,” Clark offered running upstairs. When he

returned with Ben's now dry pants he saw Grandma was covering Ben up with a fleece blanket. “Don't want the little dear to get cold on the way home,” she said. Clark watched as Ben stirred a little. His arm then came out from under the blanket. Clark's eyes widened, surely Ben wasn't about too. Before the thought could even finish Ben's thumb plopped into his mouth as he began to suck. Yet none of the adults seemed to have any reaction to it. It was almost as if this was completely normal. Clark shook his head a little. He certainly wouldn't be telling Ben about this in the morning.

They then left, Clark watched Ben as he slept. He kept his thumb in his mouth pretty much the whole way home. Only when they pulled into the driveway did his thumb fall out of his mouth. Once inside Ben was put to bed. Clark stayed up a little longer to try out his new video games before he started to feel sleepy. He walked into the room to find Ben was still fast asleep although he was not sucking his thumb. Clark then smiled seeing his perfect opportunity. He pulled the pacifier out of his pocket.

It belonged to Tabby. He had seen it when he went to retrieve Ben's pants. It had been sitting out on the counter along with several others. He knew it was wrong to steal, but she had so many, surely she wouldn't miss one. Clark went over to the bed kneeling down. His teased Ben's lip with the nipple before he felt felt it be suctioned out of his hand. Clark had to hold his hands up to his mouth to muffle his gasp. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. Ben was sucking on a pacifier still asleep. Clark then saw the Elmo doll on the ground. He

picked it up and lifted up Ben arm nestling it beneath him. To his surprise Ben's arm wrapped around the doll pulling it to his chest.

It was all too perfect of a scene. Clark got undressed before grabbing his phone and took a picture. As he looked at the photo of his older brother with a pacifier in his mouth hugging his stuffie, Clark frowned a little. He deleted the photo. As amusing as it was he felt like he was being a little manipulative. Its not like Ben had chosen to sleep like this, Clark had just taken advantage of his childish instincts. Clark then took the pacifier out of Ben's mouth tossing it into the trash can near the desk. He held back on taking Elmo though. Ben had it nestled so close that any attempt to extract it might actually wake him up. He knew Ben wouldn't say anything about it anyways. Clark then climbed up the ladder giving one last look at Benji whose thumb had replaced the pacifier between his lips.

“Merry Christmas Benji,” Clark said softly before getting under the coves of his bed.