

Eager Beaver

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Eager Beaver is a story that blends mistaken identity and age regression. Cooper Young, a height challenged American boy, recently made the move from America to the small town of Welton, Canada. He joins the Canadian Scouts and after some misunderstanding finds himself in the youngest group, the Beavers. He learns how to have fun, work hard and help his friends.

The Costume Box

2024

Chapter 1

Chapter One - New Kit

Canada's weird. Not in a bad way. It just takes some getting used to. Some things aren't different at all; school still sucks, the sky's still blue, and the milk doesn't come in bags - despite what mom had said. Some things are totally topsy turvy; like how the Mars bars taste more like Milky Way, and how the dollars are all rainbow color, and how my pocket money doesn't go nearly as far. And some things are just a little bit off. Like how I'm going into 'Grade Six' in September, not 'Sixth Grade'; or how the numbers on the speed limit signs go way bigger; or how I used to be a Webelo Scout, but now I'm a Beaver.

It all began the first day we arrived in Welton. It's only a little town, but I think it's pretty cool. Looking out the window as we drove up the mountain approach I saw a waterfall and a white tail deer! We unloaded some boxes at the new house before heading straight down to the community center so I could sign up for Scouts. I remember because I was wearing this dorky t-shirt that mom had picked out on the drive up. It was white, with dark blue arms and a red piped collar - two grinning cartoon beavers pictured with their fluffy brown arms cuddled around each other on the front and the slogan 'HUG IT OUT' printed above in big bubbly letters. It wasn't the kind of thing I'd usually wear, but I'd spilled some ice cream down my front when we stopped for lunch, and mom hadn't wanted to get all the boxes unpacked in the middle of

the trip. She'd picked it off the rack at some gas station just across the border, practically swooning at the sight of it.

"Look, Cooper! It's got beavers!" She'd enthused - crazy for anything with even the slightest hint of a Canada theme.

I'd slipped it on in the backseat, pairing it with my cool navy blue Cub Scout shorts. It wasn't as if I liked the shirt - but it was a lot better than rocking up to my first Scout meeting in Canada with a big brown stain on my tummy.

Still, I felt like a doofus. There were so many kids on the playground, all of them in weird unfamiliar uniforms, and most of them bigger than me. I'd always been kinda short for my age, but with the babyish t-shirt I felt even littler. I ground to a halt mid-step, suddenly feeling very frightened. None of this looked anything like the Scouts I knew. What if I didn't fit in?

"Come on, short stuff!" Dad called back, coaxing me to his side with a pat on his thigh. I tottered reluctantly forward, letting him ruffle my messy nest of brownish-blond hair with his rough calloused hand. "You alright, bud?"

"Yeah..." I managed in a high breathy voice. "Just kinda nervous."

Dad laughed. "Don't be! You're a big brave Webelo, remember?"

I nodded, though I hardly felt assured. Did Canada even have Webelos? I was pretty sure they didn't. I wasn't even sure I was meant to be a Cub anymore. I only had a couple more

months before I was moving up to proper Scouts back home, after all. How did that work in Canada? And what about all my badges? Would I need to start from scratch?

Just at that moment, a sandy haired man in a red button up shirt and a pale brown neckerchief sauntered up towards us. “Hey guys!” he greeted cheerily “How can I help?”

“My son here is looking to join the scouts.” Dad told him. “We just moved up from California.”

“Wow! California!” The red shirted scout master nodded, seemingly impressed “It’s mid season but that should be fine.”

I shifted a little and put my hand in my pocket, a little bit of change jingling, it was a mix of American and Canadian coins. Pulling my hands out, my coins spilled all over the place! Really? This had to happen now? I quickly bent down to pick them up while my Dad and the scoutmaster helped. “Sorry! I got it!” I squeaked.

“So, which program are you looking to join ?” The scoutmaster asked.

Dad raised a confused eyebrow “Program?”

“Well there’s Cubs, and Beavers of course...”

Still scrounging around on the floor, I seized up a Canadian nickel with its little beaver flashing at me.

“Beavers?” I asked him, a little unsure of myself.

“Well, sure bud. Just like your shirt! A beaver is very

important in Canada. It's our national animal!"

"Cool." I nodded. If it was the national animal, those had to be the most important scouts of all, right? Besides, what was the point of joining the cubs if I was only going to have to move in a few months anyway? "I wanna be a Beaver!" I blurted out, giving a dopey grin.

He grinned at me, kneeling down to my eye level and handing me the coins he'd picked up. "Well that's just great! You're in luck. There's one space in the Beaver group left." He stuck out his hand. "I'm Taylor, The Beaver Leader!"

I quickly deposited my loose change into my shorts and grabbed his hand. "I'm Cooper." I shook his hand. "I was in the cub scouts back home."

"Is it alright if I leave him here?" Dad asked. "We just got here, we haven't even unloaded the van yet." He pointed in the direction of the house.

Taylor shrugged his shoulders. "Sure, we can watch him for the meeting, lots of parents around." He grabbed my hand. I know they said Canadians were friendly but this was a little much! "I'll get him his uniform, swing by in an hour?" Dad quickly nodded and disappeared in a flash.

Taylor led me into the building, it was a single story wood cabin. There was a large foyer for events, with a few offices on one side. On the other side were multiple classrooms for what seemed to be a kind of daycare - or maybe a kindergarten classroom. I peered curiously through the

window, but couldn't get a good look before Taylor pulled me into what looked like a nurses' office - except it was filled to the brim with old dusty storage boxes.

"Let's get you all situated then Cooper." Taylor told me, opening a drawer and pulling out a well used leather bound scrapbook. He flipped to a page marked with a ribbon. "What's your last name?"

"Uh it's Young" I stammered. Why was I still so nervous? "Cooper Young." I said slightly more assertively, Taylor jotted that down in the book.

He pointed behind me, where there was a yardstick glued to the wall. "Just stand there please." I did as he asked while he inspected the measurement. "Four feet, on the dot." He wrote that down in his book too.

Now I was confused. Why did he need to know my height? Was there a height requirement for Beavers? Would I need to go back to Cubs?

Taylor led me over to a scale and had me step on it - just like a doctor's visit. He moved some weights around. "Wow, fifty pounds even too!" He took note of that as well and closed the book.

I was really worried now. They weren't going to let me in! "Am I tall enough for Beavers?" I asked him with a tremble in my voice.

Taylor snorted. "Oh you're fine, don't worry about that." I relaxed a little, though I still felt uneasy. Taylor opened a box

and pulled out a little blue bucket hat with a brown rim, plopping it unceremoniously atop my head so that it covered my eyes. I let out a little yip of confusion, Taylor twisting me around and threading my arms into a cozy fleece vest. “There. All suited up.” he observed, readjusting the brim of my hat a little so I could actually see again. “What do you think?”

Taking a few uneasy steps forward, I looked myself over in a nearby mirror, hiding my hands in the pockets of the brown vest and rocking back and forth anxiously on the balls of my feet. I looked pretty silly, my hair spilling out messily around the rim of the bucket hat, but I didn’t want to be rude. “It’s cool.” I lied, managing a half-hearted smile as I fiddled awkwardly with the fabric - trying to conceal the babyish design on my t-shirt.

“Glad to hear it, Coopster.” Taylor chuckled, striding up behind me and leaning down presumptuously to do up my zipper. “That’s the group crest, and the area badge, and the council badge!” he narrated, pointing to a series of intricate patches already sewed onto the chest. “You’ll get your neckerchief and your tail later - but for now you’re still a kit!”

“A kit?” I repeated, the unfamiliar word feeling strange in my mouth.

“It’s like a baby beaver!” Taylor explained, chuckling as he saw my face fall at the “b” word. “Don’t worry, you’ll be a brown-tail soon enough. And you’ll have plenty of time to earn your very own badges, too!”

“I had tons of badges when I was a Webelo.”

“Cool, bud.” Taylor smiled, though I got the impression he didn’t have the slightest idea what I was talking about. “Want to go meet the other Beavers?”

I nodded in agreement, feeling a little embarrassed as Taylor once again took me by the hand - leading me out into the corridor and towards one of the classrooms. The label “PRE-K 2” was pasted to the door in clumsily-colored-in cut-out letters, while the slogan “WELCOME TO THE POND!” and a large picture of a beaver was displayed just below. As Taylor led me inside, I was met immediately with an overwhelming wall of sound; a gaggle of little kids all in bucket hats and vests just like my own running havoc across a preschool classroom. None of them any older than seven or eight, all giggling madly as they chased each other back and forth across a large rainbow-pattern carpet.

I prodded Taylor in the side, attracting his attention. “Where are all the bigger kids?” I mumbled, completely baffled.

“Oh, don’t worry.” Taylor reassured, patting me affectionately on the top of my hat. “Beavers is just for kids your age.” I felt my jowls go loose, my mouth hanging open stupidly like a fish blowing bubbles as it dawned on me that I’d made a terrible mistake! Clearly, Beavers wasn’t the group above Cubs, it was the group below them!

Chapter 2

Chapter Two - Kindie Kids

I gulped, trying to muster the words to explain myself. “I don’t think...” I began, but Taylor had already left my side - striding into the middle of the carpet and clapping his hands together authoritatively.

“River Banks!” he instructed, all the kids freezing mid play and joining hands to form two parallel lines facing inwards towards the leader. I continued to stand motionless by the door, petrified with embarrassment. “Come on, Coop.” Taylor instructed, beckoning me over. “You can join in the opening ceremony. It’s easy. Just copy Laurie.” He indicated a place at the end of the line next to a little boy with a messy mop of golden hair and a brown piece of fabric hanging from the back of his bucket hat. I noticed that the other kids all had similar tails; some in brown, some in blue, and some in white. The brown-tail boy gave a broad excitable smile, holding out a small pudgy hand for me to hold.

Uneasily, I stumbled toward the line and lightly held onto Laurie’s hand; he quickly adjusted and snatched my hand whole heartedly. “Build the dam!” Taylor addressed the room. I didn’t know what to do but another boy reached his hand towards my free one. I watched as the children started to form a circle, so I followed suit.

Taylor waved his hands toward the ground and the brown vested kids let go and knelt down. I stood there for a moment

dumbfounded. “Down here.” Laurie whispered to me. I shot to the ground as everyone stared.

The children raised their hands in some weird fist shape. I tried to mimic them not wanting to stand out and just trying to get through with the odd ritual. Taylor looked around smiling. “Who are you and what do you do?”

The kids sucked in a deep breath, I could almost hear the cheer before they all shouted at the same time. “Beavers, Beavers, Beavers, Sharing, Sharing, Sharing!” I didn’t know what to say and just watched as some of them smiled, while others rolled their eyes. All of them except for me participated. No one seemed to mind though.

The kids started with a quiet chant, apparently building to something big “Oooo.” they hummed, until all at once they jumped up and clapped their hands behind their back. Now I was the only one kneeling! I quickly stood up and made a small clap which caused a couple kids beside me to giggle. Laurie just slapped my back, giving me an amused smile.

Everyone slowly sat cross legged in a circle. Joining this time felt natural. could just sit and listen and explain the mixup to Taylor after the meeting had started. Beside Taylor sat a large stuffed beaver with a bowl in front of it. “It’s time to feed the beaver.” Taylor told the group, one by one the Beavers went up and deposited some money into the bowl.

Once Laurie sat down all eyes were on me. “I-I-I don’t know what to do.” I stammered not realizing how nervous I had gotten during that awkward ceremony.

“Of course, Coop, it’s your first meeting and you’re just a kit.” Taylor answered - using that word again. I grumbled, remembering that he had basically just called me a baby. “We’re collecting the dues, but it’s alright if you don’t have it right now.” He said calmly. “Just come up and pat the Beaver.”

I stood up and walked over to the Beaver. Of course, all eyes were on me, being the no nothing kit. I did have money though. I had plenty of change! In fact, I had better change than the rest of these babies did - I had American money! I shoved my hands back into my pockets and grabbed as much as I could. Out of my pockets rained down coins of all denominations to a jiggly clatter on the classroom floor. The coins swiftly spread out in every direction, easily rolling around. “I got it!” I squeaked again, for the second time that day.

The kids all seemed to jump at once, grabbing up the coins and depositing them into the bowl for me. In truth I hadn’t intended to give all of it to the beaver, but I wasn’t about to fish my Lincoln faced pennies out of the bowl in front of everyone! Embarrassed and red faced enough, I just sat down beside Laurie and tried to hide underneath the brim of my hat while they finished their ceremony.

Taylor finally addressed the group and started the meeting. He briefly went over some updates and things for the group to remember -pretty standard scout stuff to be honest. Taylor then gave me a smile. “I’m sure you have noticed by now but we have a new beaver with us at the pond. Cooper, why don’t you stand up and say hi?”

I knew something like this was going to happen. In the long car journey over, I had even prepared this whole thing about how I was an American scout - but none of that mattered. I wasn't actually joining the Beavers after all. I stood up to address the room. "Hi." I said softly. "I'm Cooper, I just moved here from America." That seemed to get some soft whispers from the crowd. "I was a scout back home, so I wanted to join right away."

"Thank you Coop!" Taylor said, motioning me to sit back down. "Cooper here is joining us as a kit today so please be nice and give him a warm welcome." He looked around the room until his eyes landed on a boy with a white tail attached to his hat and a dark mane of straight hair bunched up behind his neck. "Coop is going to be joining the Kindies lodge so please show him the ropes."

The dark haired boy gave a solemn nod, seeming to take the responsibility very seriously. "No problem!" he sang, offering me the kind of dopey over-enthusiastic grin you might reserve for a helpless new-born kitten struggling to take its first steps. I returned a shy half-smile before averting my eyes to the side, avoiding him.

"Right!" Taylor continued, ushering everyone to their feet with another clap of his hand. "Let's get busy then! Bobcats, gather around so we can talk about the Community Beaver adventure! Kindies, why don't you all introduce yourselves to Cooper?"

I couldn't hide for long. The circle broke up, and I

immediately found myself surrounded on all sides by eager little beaver scouts! Laurie sat up on his knees, staring at me with big adoring green eyes like an expectant panting puppy. A really quite disheveled looking boy with a big brown mud stain on his cheek, a leaf tangled in the knot of red curls sprouting down around his ears, and a blue tail hanging from his hat scooted over to take up position on my left; while the black-haired boy from earlier strode across the circle to stand directly in front of me. Unlike the red-head (and Laurie for that matter), he was relatively well presented; his creaseless navy-blue t-shirt, luxuriant perfectly conditioned hair; and catalog of badges and awards sewed expertly to his vest projecting an air of precocious professionalism.

“I’m Charlie.” he introduced, extending his left hand for me to shake. “But my Beaver name’s Hawkeye.”

“What’s a beaver name?”

“It’s like a special nickname. We’ll give you one one later!” He barrelled on, continuing with the introduction “You already know Laurie...”

“My beaver name’s Tic Tac!” the littlest boy interjected.

“...and that’s Alex.”

“Ringtail.” the red-head added simply, his piping soprano pitch somehow coming across as brusque and mysterious.

“We’re all in the Kinder Egg lodge!” Charlie enthused, indicating an obviously hand-made patch sewed onto the bottom of his vest. It seemed to display a brown egg-shaped

oval set against a green field, the words “WELTON KINDIES!” stitched out above in yellow thread.

“Kinder Egg?” I asked, raising a curious eyebrow.

“It’s our favorite chocolate, so we named the lodge after it.” Charlie explained.

“Want one?” Alex asked, pulling a foil-wrapped chocolate egg from the pocket of his vest. It looked pretty mangled, as if it had been allowed to melt and re-solidify several times, little bits of chocolate visible through the punctured foil.

I looked at it in disgust. “Err, no thanks...” Alex just shrugged, immediately starting to unwrap the foil and nibbling on the exposed chocolate like a crazed raccoon.

“It was a pretty good idea! Now Taylor gives us chocolate whenever we get badges and stuff.” Charlie boasted.

“Plus you get the toys.” Alex added, holding out the half-eaten egg to display a small yellow cylinder concealed within. He pried apart the plastic, seemingly unbothered by the chocolate mashed against his fingers as he retrieved a tiny blue toy car.

“The Bobcats just get stupid stuffed animals.” Charlie continued, a braggadocious smirk forming on his face as he eyed up the other group of Beavers holding conference around one of the low preschool class tables. “Come on!” he prompted, leading the other beavers in jumping quickly to their feet. “We gotta make you a lodge badge!”

“Huh?”

“A lodge badge!” Charlie repeated “It’s easy. You just use felt.”

“Then you can be a Kindie too!” Laurie added, leaning down to embrace me in an unexpected cuddle around the shoulders.

I cringed away, suddenly feeling very self-conscious again. What was I doing? These kids had accepted me without a second thought - but I couldn’t string them along any longer. I was ten! I couldn’t hang out with a bunch of little kids!

“So how old are you, then? Seven?” Charlie asked, compounding my humiliation.

I bit my lip in consternation, searching in vain for the words to explain - but nothing was forthcoming. I struggled to my feet against the weight of Laurie stuck to my arm like a limpet. “I...um...I just need to go talk to Taylor.” I spat out, turning on my heels and leaving the Kindie kids chatting excitedly about their craft project.

As I approached Taylor’s side, however, practicing in my head the exact words I was going to say to clear up this whole mess, I froze up. The beaver leader was standing by the door, talking intently with a boy of around my age - my real age. The boy had short cropped blond hair and piercing green eyes, and he was wearing a dark gray polo shirt with a silver neckerchief secured beneath a woggle featuring a wolf’s head. He was clutching a green and yellow cap in his hand, the same logo of a wolf’s head and the words “WOLF

CUBS” displayed on the front.

“Ahh, Coop. I want you to meet our Keeo, he is going to show you a few things.” Taylor informed me.

I wasn’t sure how to respond. I couldn’t just blurt out I was ten right now! This could be one of my new classmates! What would he do? What would he say? “Um... I... uh...” I stammered, trying to think of some casual way to explain how this was all an innocent mistake.

“Hello.” The boy said, in a bored tone almost as if he didn’t want to associate with me. “I’m supposed to show you the Beaver Salute, Promise and Law”

“I’ll leave you two to do it then.” Taylor decided and walked away, thwarting what seemed like my last chance to explain.

I shifted a little where I stood, what was I even supposed to say to this boy? “Keeo, I, uh.” I stammered again - I was so much more nervous now that I was all alone! I almost missed being back at the table with the Kindies.

The boy tutted, clearly not liking his assigned task. “It’s all pretty simple so you shouldn’t be so nervous.” He held up one hand and held his pinky and ring finger with his thumb and made a peace sign. “You make your hand like this and curl in your top fingers.” He did so. “It’s supposed to look like beaver teeth.” He held it there awkwardly for a moment before tutting again. “Now you do it!” He demanded.

I raised my hand when he raised his voice and made the hand gesture. Why was I doing this at all? Where had Taylor gone?

I looked around the room and saw him helping the other lodge.

“That’s right.” Keo informed me. “Just a couple more things, try to pay attention.”

I snapped my head back to look up to the boy who now had his arms crossed. “The Beaver Law is easy.” He cleared his throat. “A Beaver has fun, works hard and helps family and friends.”

I waited a moment for him to finish but he never continued. “That’s it?” I asked him.

“That’s it, I told you it was easy.” He stood there waiting. “Can you repeat it or do you want to hear it again?”

The boy scouts motto was much more complicated than whatever this law was. “A Beaver works hard and helps family and friends.” I told him, trying to wrap it up quickly so I could see Taylor.

Again he tutted. “And has fun.”

“Excuse me?”

“A Beaver HAS FUN, works hard and helps family and friends.” He repeated. “You didn’t say has fun.”

I rolled my eyes at him. “A Beaver has fun, works hard and helps family and friends.” I stared at him for a moment. “There. I know the Beaver Promise.”

“That was the Beaver Law.” He said, sounding more annoyed.

“Whatever.”

Keo groaned in frustration. “The Beaver Promise is ‘I promise to love God and help take care of the world.’ Now you repeat.”

“I promise to love God and help take care of the world.” I repeated. It was easy - just a condensed form of the boy scout oath.

Keo sighed with relief. “Can you remember all that?” He asked. How young did he think I was?

“Yes, Keo. I got it.” I told him, trying to end the conversation.

He just groaned again and placed his hand on my back, beckoning me back to the Kindies table. “I just need to talk to Taylor.” I told him.

“He’s busy, talk to him later.” Keo grunted as I stumbled back to the preschool table.

“But I-”

“You’re pretty mouthy for a little kid.” he lectured, giving me a disapproving glare.

I shrank back, shuddering in embarrassment. There I was, being scolded by a boy my exact same age - maybe even a little younger! How was I supposed to tell Taylor the truth now? I imagined the scene that would ensue. Welton was only a little place. This Keo boy would probably make it the talk of the whole school!

“Keeo!” Laurie chirped, bounding out of his seat at one of the low plastic chairs and skipping over to cling needily to the Cub Scout’s arm. The bigger boy pushed him away, prying him off as if he were an unwelcome tick.

“Hey, Keeo.” Alex nodded seriously, struggling to cut up a green sheet of felt with a pair of safety scissors.

“I told you guys not to call me that.” The Cub sulked. “You’ve even got the Kit saying it now.”

“But it’s your Beaver name!” Laurie insisted “Just like how I’m Tic Tac, and Charlie’s Hawkeye...”

“My name’s Zach.” the cub scout interrupted. “You know my name’s Zach. You’ve called me Zach ever since you could talk!”

I cocked my head, regarding the two blond boys curiously. I hadn’t noticed before, but now that they were standing right next to each other - Zach still trying to fend off Laurie’s relentless attempts at a cuddle - it was obvious there was a family resemblance. Laurie was almost Zach’s exact adorable mini-me, except that while the older boy kept his hair cropped short and combed back neatly, the littlest Beaver wore his own golden tufts in an unkempt little boy’s shag. From the way they were talking, and the way they were wrestling, it was clear they were brothers.

“But we’re Beavers!” Laurie continued “So we’re meant to use Beaver names!”

“I’m not a Beaver!” Zach countered, letting out a threatening

toothy snarl. Looking a little frightened, Laurie took the hint, finally leaving his brother alone. The bigger boy gave a frustrated sigh, turning authoritatively towards where Alex was still making a hash of cutting up the felt. “What are you doing?” he demanded. “Those scissors aren’t sharp enough. Use the real ones!”

“We’re not allowed.” Charlie explained. “We’re meant to ask a grown-up to help.”

Zach puffed out his cheeks in exasperation, muttering under his breath “Can’t even do anything by themselves.” He soon located a large sharp pair of scissors hidden in a nearby drawer, easily cutting out a small oval from the brown felt, and a slightly larger rectangle from the green. “There. Was that so hard?”

“Thanks, Zach.” Charlie chimed in, offering a shy smile of apology. Zach gave a grave nod, slinking off back towards the other group like a prowling wolf. As soon as he was gone, Charlie offered me an inviting smile, gesturing for me to take a seat by his side. With no better ideas, I obeyed, trying to make myself look as small and inconspicuous as possible as I sank down into the plastic chair. “Do you know how to sew?” Charlie asked, holding up a small needle with a line of yellow thread hanging from the end.

“Oh, yeah.” I confirmed in a tiny breathy voice, slowly nodding. I’d sewed plenty of patches to my cubs scout uniform in my time, after all.

Charlie looked skeptical. “I’ll show you.” he insisted, taking

up the green square and explaining each step in the most basic possible language as he demonstrated his sewing technique. I waited patiently, red-faced and blushing at his patronizing tone, but not quite able to work up the courage to point out that I'd likely learnt to sew when Charlie was still in diapers! Charlie had already stitched out half the letters on the patch before he finally allowed me to have a go - hovering his face just a few inches from my own as if to ensure I did it exactly as he had told me. "Wow, you're doing great Cooper!" he praised. "You must be a natural."

"Thanks." I muttered. "I sewed in scouts back home." I finished up the yellow letters. Mine were much neater than Charlie's, but I wasn't going to redo them all. I looked at the completed badge and eyed the Kindies' vests where they all had the same badge sewn on.

"You can ask your Mom to sew it on your uniform later." Charlie informed me. He held up a safety pin and took the badge. Without asking, he reached his hand into my right vest pocket and pinned it in place. "Here." He finally sat back in his own chair, he was practically on top of me as he admired his own handiwork. "Now you're an official Kindie!"

Chapter 3

Chapter Three - Brown Tail Boy

“Cooper’s a Kindie!” Laurie chimed. Alex similarly gave a nod of approval.

“So what are you? Six?” Charlie asked unprompted, appraising me from head to foot with searching brown eyes.

“Huh?”

“Are you six? Like just finished Kindergarten?”

“Alex is six!” Laurie added.

“That’s why my tail’s blue.” Alex agreed, indicating the blue fabric hanging from his bucket hat. “Brown for five, blue for six and white for seven!”

“Right.” Charlie persisted, still staring right at me. “How old are you? Six?”

I sputtered out a few hesitant incomprehensible mutterings but soon trailed off into silence.

“It’s alright if you’re shy.” Charlie reassured, putting a sympathetic hand over my own. I cringed. It was clear I wasn’t going to simply explain my way out of this group of kids. They didn’t seem to have the best listening skills. How would they ever understand that I was really ten?

I stood up. I had to talk to Taylor and straighten everything out before these kids got any more invested in me being their

new best buddy! Almost at once however the three of them stood up beside me. “I want to talk to Taylor.” I told them as I padded cautiously away, unsettled that they seemed to be following me.

As I walked toward Taylor the three of them trailed behind with bright grins. Taylor saw the incoming beaver scouts and smiled at us. “I see you have your very first badge, Coop!” He praised, poking the brown and green patch pinned to the vest.

I looked at the other lodge, the four other kids staring at me from behind Taylor. Zach was even looking at me. I had become the center of attention once again. “Uh... I... Yeah...” I stammered out, trying to think of a reason why I needed to talk to him alone. I just needed a few moments with no one else around. Was that even possible with him looking after all these kids?

Taylor interrupted my faltering speech, addressing everyone. “Let’s bring the Colony together and go through some skits!” He said. The kids got up and formed another circle around Taylor. Zach took a place on the left beside Laurie, and I sat on his right, while Charlie sat dutifully to my right with Alex sitting next to him.

The Bobcat lodge got up and started into a skit about a pilot and parachutes. It was kinda funny, but I suppressed an annoyed scowl. The meeting was almost half over and I still hadn’t been able to explain the situation to Taylor! At least the Beavers seemed to enjoy the skit. It was obviously

something they had seen before since they knew all the cues. Sighing in resignation, I leaned back on the palm of my hands. I supposed I would just have to wait until after the meeting to explain everything to Taylor. Then everything would be cleared up and I could at least get in the right scouting group for next week.

Once the skit finished I clapped with the other Beavers. Taylor then looked at Charlie. "Can the Kindies perform their skit now?" Charlie, Alex and Laurie all shot up leaving me sitting alone. The three of them performed a simple script describing a battle they just won. It was actually pretty entertaining and kind of made me think it might be fun to try - though the thought of actually doing so prompted a queasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. I clapped for them as they took a bow and sat back down beside me. I felt oddly comforted by their presence, allowing myself to laugh along with them as the Bobcats put on another short skit about an invisible bench.

"Why don't we include Coop in the next one?" Taylor suggested.

"Let's do 'I gotta go wee!'" Laurie shouted out, bouncing up and down excitedly where he sat.

Taylor gave a chuckle. "Zach, Charlie - can you show him?" The two of them looked at each other, Charlie nodding obediently and Zach giving a petulant pre-adolescent roll of his eyes. "I'll give you a few minutes."

"Gotta go wee?" I repeated, making an anxious face.

“It’s easy.” Charlie assured me. “You just gotta tap me on the shoulder and ask to ‘go wee’ - like you have to go to the toilet.” he paused, cracking a thoughtful half-smile as he registered my uneasy expression. “Err...or go potty. Do you say toilet or potty?”

“Toilet.” I hissed, resenting the implication.

“Right. Like you pretend you gotta go to the toilet. When Zach says you can go, you have to jump up and run around the room saying ‘Weeeee!’”

I let out a heavy sigh, already feeling mortified. “What does everyone else do?” I asked, seeing that Laurie and Alex had already laid down flat beside each other on the floor.

“It’s like we’re camping.” Zach growled, reluctantly taking his own place laying next to Alex. “They pass along the message to the scout leader, and back down the line.”

“Got it?” Charlie asked, going to lay next to Laurie.

“I think so...”

“Great. Maybe do a little dance when you ask as well! It’s more realistic that way.”

I gulped, laying down beside Charlie as the Bobcats hushed up and watched us intently, waiting for the skit to begin.

“You start.” Charlie whispered.

“Uhm...” I hummed stupidly, sitting awkwardly up on the carpet and tapping Charlie on the shoulder as I delivered the

line in a shaky quiet voice “I gotta go wee...” I paired the request with a vague wiggle of my hips, squeezing lightly on my crotch.

Charlie sat up at once, “Cooper’s gotta go wee!” he repeated, tapping on Laurie’s shoulder.

“Cooper’s gotta go wee!” the little boy sang, prodding Alex in the side.

“Cooper’s gotta go wee!”

Zach made a gruff animalistic huff of displeasure, masterfully imitating a grizzled hard-nosed scout master “He’ll have to hold it.”

Alex turned back to Laurie, sending the message repeating down the line to Charlie. “You’ll have to hold it!” he reported, grinning from ear to ear. “Now ask again.” he added in a low voice.

“Err...I really gotta go wee!” I chirped, jumping up and down on the carpet a little.

Once again, the message was relayed up the line, Zach repeating back his irksome husky command to hold it. “One more time!” Charlie whispered encouragingly,

“I really really really gotta go wee!” I repeated, hamming up my potty dance as I writhed and wriggled my bottom against the floor.

“Alright, go then!” Zach boomed when the message finally reached him.

There was an awkward silence, both the Kindies and the Bobcats all looking directly at me as the joke reached its climax. Realizing I'd missed my cue, I got to my knees, but froze up before I could get any further. What was I doing? Was I really going to run around the room making a silly noise like a misbehaving toddler? Why had I even taken it this far? It wasn't like anyone was making me!

“Cooper!” Charlie said, louder this time, prodding me in the side. “That’s you!”

I let out a startled whimper, only able to stubbornly shake my head as I knelt petrified in place.

“What’s the joke?” one of the Bobcats, a brown tail, sneered - a hint of precocious preschool-style cruelty in his voice.

“He went wee in his pants!” another Bobcat added, sending his lodge into peels of restless giggles. The Kindies all clambered to their knees, narrowing their brows furiously at the mocking faces of the kids in the other lodge.

“Settle down!” Taylor instructed with a weary wave of his hand. He offered me a concerned frown “Do you wanna finish the skit, Coop?”

“I...um...”

“Don’t you get it?” the leader asked sympathetically, “Want me to explain?”

“Come on Cooper!” Charlie encouraged. “It’s easy, just like I said.”

“Yeah, you can do it!” Laurie echoed, offering me a big grin.

I gulped, the mounting pressure getting too much to resist. At this point, it was almost more embarrassing not to do it. I jumped to my feet, running a short circle around the kneeling Kindies and waving my hands in the air. “Weeeeeee!”

Taylor chuckled, patting me on the hat as I completed my circuit. “Good job, Coop.” he praised “Let’s all give our brave new Kit a big hand!” The whole colony broke into applause, though I noticed that some of the Bobcats were still muttering and giggling conspiratorially to each other. “What a little star!” Taylor praised. “I almost thought you really were about to burst your banks!”

“Thanks...” I muttered, though the compliment was hardly welcome.

“You don’t actually need to go potty, do you Coop?”

My cheeks ruddied an even hotter shade of red “No...”

The leader grinned, patting me on the back “Just checking, bud.”

Taylor gave everyone some time to discuss amongst ourselves, I was relieved at least that the hour was almost over and I would be done with hopefully my last Beaver meeting.

“So what should Cooper’s Beaver Name be?” Alex asked the group.

I panicked for a moment. “That’s okay.” I murmured. “I don’t

really need one.”

“We all have one!” Charlie reassured me. “I’m Hawkeye, Alex is Ringtail and Laurie is Tic Tac.”

“They’re all from the book!” Laurie piped.

“Friends of the forest.” Alex added.

“Exactly!” Charlie confirmed, I still had no idea what they were talking about or what this ‘Friends of the Forest’ book was. It hardly sounded like classic literature.

“I think he’s going to be Bubbles.” Alex suggested.

“Bubbles?” I repeated, that was hardly a name at all.

Laurie thought for a moment. “What about Sunshine?”

He couldn’t be serious, Sunshine was somehow worse than Bubbles. “Sunshi-” I tried to protest but was interrupted.

“Either way there will be a vote for it, the colony decides.” Charlie explained

“That’s a good idea, Charlie.” Taylor praised and patted his head. “We should do that before wrapping up.”

Before I could protest Taylor had already clapped to get everyone’s attention. “I think it’s time our kit got his very own name.” He got Zach to distribute strips of paper. “Put down a friend of the forest who you think is most like our new friend!”

I still had no idea who these friends of the forest were and

why they were so important. The three beavers around me thought for a moment before handing in the papers to Zach who tallied them up. He called over Charlie and whispered something in his ear.

“Well Hawkeye, what’s our friend's Beaver Name?” Taylor asked, everyone looked at me intensely waiting for the answer.

“Rainbow!” Charlie shouted to the group. I could hear a couple snorts from the other lodge. My mouth hung open, I was speechless.

“What do you think, Coop, do you want to be Rainbow?” Taylor asked softly.

I tried to think of a protest. Rainbow must have been for a girl Beaver. Why would people vote for it for me? I shook my head no, not being able to articulate my disgust.

Taylor nodded to Zach who in turn whispered a second time into Charlie’s ear. “The second choice was Sunshine!” Charlie piped, looking for approval.

Sunshine was still a girl's name, there was no way I was going to allow it. “Those names are for girls! I'm a boy.” I complained. “Isn’t there a name like Hawkeye or Ringtail, something more... boyish?”

This caused an unexpected fit of giggles through the group. “Hey! I’m a girl!” Alex shouted at me and slapped my arm.

I just squeaked “You are?”. This caused a loud ruckus, with

kids full on laughing. Alex and I started growing red in the face. Why did I say that?

Taylor clapped again trying to get everyone's attention. "Let's see what the next suggestion is."

I tried to pay attention, but I couldn't help but steal a couple of glances at Alex. He - she, the muckiest, grungiest, most rough and tumble kid in the colony, was a girl? She still had a leaf stuck in her hair!

For a third time Zach whispered to Charlie who this time could anticipate my reaction. "The name is Bubbles." He spoke carefully, looking worried.

I tried to pull my hat down over my face. I somehow knew Alex was the one who wrote that one down. "Coop, buddy? What about Bubbles?"

"I don't like that one either." I grumbled trying not to make another stupid comment.

Zach tried to whisper to Charlie again, but he was loud enough for everyone to hear "Maybe we should call him Rascal, since he's being such a brat."

"Isn't that your Beaver name?" Charlie asked him.

"I told you, I'm not a Beaver!" Zach hissed.

"Zach!" Taylor scolded him, somehow Taylor using his real name felt like a serious accusation. "I think I remember a little Rascal getting quite upset over some mint chocolate chip ice cream." Taylor reminded him. "Remember? You

threw quite the fit!"

Zach puffed his cheeks and looked away from the colony, clearly trying to put that behind him. The white tailed beavers all giggled at Taylor's comment. "That was years ago...and I wasn't that bad!" He contested. Even Charlie tried to hold back a laugh.

"You were bawling your eyes out." the black haired boy commented wryly.

"Shuddup..." Zach groaned, though I thought I saw just the hint of a smile tugging up the corners of his lips.

Taylor considered for a moment as the room calmed down. "Well Cooper, I think Rascal is the only other suggestion from Keoo, how about that?"

Rascal? It was pretty silly, but it didn't sound nearly as bad as Bubbles, Sunshine or Rainbow. "Uh, Okay." I said shyly. I guess I had a Beaver name now - and a pretty embarrassing one at that.

I looked at Alex who was glaring at me. "Sorry about saying Ringtail is a boy's name." I apologized.

She took a deep breath and finally shrugged. "I forgive you." That was easy.

"Alright everyone." Taylor called, his booming baritone breaking through the idle chatter that had begun to bubble up again amongst the Beavers. "Riverbanks!" The kids all jumped to their feet, the two lodges forming parallel lines -

just as they had when I had first arrived. I knew what to do this time, linking hands with Alex on my right and Laurie on my left. “Build the dam!” Taylor called, the lines forming one contiguous circle again “And...lodge.” the leader concluded.

The Beavers all slowly began to sink to the floor, crossing their legs and making a continuous shushing noise with their fingers held against their lips. “Shh, shh, shh.” Eventually the noise faded out, the kids instead beginning to whisper in intense hushed voices “Sleeping, sleeping, sleeping...”

“Great job.” Taylor praised, still standing in the center of the circle. He turned his eyes on me, gesturing for me to get to my feet as he produced a brown tail, a small slide woggle, and a neckerchief decorated in all different shades of blue from out of his pocket. “I think it’s time our little Kit became a full Beaver!” he declared.

I fidgeted uneasily, somehow feeling I was at a momentous juncture. It was only a stupid ceremony - it didn’t mean anything really - but if I really went through with it then I’d officially be a Beaver Scout; the silliest, littlest, youngest scouts of them all. If I was going to tell them I was ten, then now would be my last chance. But how could I? I’d spent the whole session with them! We’d sown a badge, performed a whole stupid skit together, they’d even given me a name! I eyed the brown tail, remembering its meaning. That only made things worse. Did Taylor think I was only five? No, that wasn’t possible. I was just as big as Charlie - and he was seven!

“Come on up, Coop.” Taylor instructed, breaking me out of my thoughts. “Or should I say Rascal?” As if on autopilot, I uncrossed my legs and stumbled clumsily into the center of the circle. It wasn’t like I had any other choice! “Now, make the Beaver salute.” he instructed “Do you remember how?”

“Yeah...” I nodded, holding together my thumb, pinkie, and ring finger and folding over my middle and index. “It’s like beaver teeth.” I recalled.

“That’s right, buddy.” Taylor laughed. “Okay, repeat after me for the Beaver Law. A Beaver has fun...”

“A Beaver has fun.” I repeated in a shaky voice.

“Works hard....”

“Works hard.”

“And helps family and friends...”

“And helps family and friends.”

“Great job, bud. Now for the Beaver promise. I promise to love God...”

“I promise to love God...”

“And help take care of the world.”

“And help take care of the world.” I concluded, my voice cracking just a little in fright. There it was. I had done it.

“And with that, we’ve got our latest Beaver!” Taylor enthused, waving a hand in the air to prompt the other kids to

start clapping as he unfolded the neckerchief and tied it securely around my neck. He tugged it neatly through the woggle, before gently taking me by the shoulders and giving me an avuncular wink “Proud of you, bud.” he praised over the cacophonous clapping. The Kindies especially were really going at it, Alex, Laurie and Charlie sitting up on their knees, yelping and cheering as they waved their hands back and forth.

“Err...thanks.” I squeaked.

He reached behind me, pushing down hard to clip the tail onto a little button on the back of my hat. I felt the fabric flop down atop the tangled thicket of hair clinging to my nape. “There. A proper big-kid brown-tail!”

“Great.” I sighed, trying not to sound too sarcastic.

He took my left hand, shaking it enthusiastically with grown-up business-like authority “Left hand shake for peace.” he explained. At that moment, the applause finally dying down, there were a series of taps against the classroom door. I looked across, seeing my Dad cautiously making his way into the room. “Oh, Mr Young!” Taylor greeted with a smile. “You’re just in time. Little Cooper here just became a full member of the colony!”

My Dad stepped into the room as the kids dispersed with their own parents collecting them. “Oh, that’s great.” He looked around at the kids, seeming rather bewildered. “The scouts are all on the younger side.”

“Not too young for Cooper here.” Taylor told him. “Or should I say Rascal?”

“Rascal?” Dad inquired.

“It’s my Beaver name.” I explained.

“Oh, that’s fitting.” Dad teased.

“How’s the Coopster with reading?” Taylor asked while collecting some documents.

“Reading?” Dad asked incredulously.

“You know.” Taylor lowered his tone to a whisper, but not low enough that I couldn’t hear. “Can he read by himself?” He produced a printed stack of paper that was stapled together, the front of it was a black and white beaver and was titled ‘Friends of the Forest’. So this was the infamous book all the Beavers seemed to be obsessed with. “Don’t worry if he can’t, it makes a great bedtime story.”

“Bedtime story?” I asked, I hadn't been read a bedtime story in years.

“Whoa.” Dad raised his hands. “I think there is some kind of mistake here.” Dad took a look at me in my brown vest and bucket hat. “Just how old do you think my son is?”

Taylor puckered his lips at my Dad’s comment, almost like he had just sucked on a lemon. He chuckled for a moment. “If I’m being honest, I don’t think I asked.” He smiled down apologetically. “I assumed he was five, that’s why we gave him a brown tail.”

“F-f-five?” I stammered. Confirming my worst fears. How could he possibly think I was five? I was ten!

Dad instinctively brought me closer to his side and then finally explained the situation after all this time. “Cooper is actually ten, I think he may be in the wrong program.”

“Oh.” Was all Taylor could say, he even thought about it for a moment. “So he should be a Cub Scout then?” He asked.

“Yes.” I hissed, finally he understood.

Taylor frowned at me and my father. “Well that’s a bit of an issue. Beavers is the only program with an open spot.” He paused for a moment. “I’m sorry, he seemed so enthusiastic about starting that I just assumed he was a newbie. That and his cool Beaver shirt!”

I shuddered, instinctively placing a hand over my zipped up vest. I’d forgotten about that. “So I can’t join scouts?” I asked, disappointed. In all the moves my parents put me through I had always been able to join the local scout group once I got there.

Taylor looked between us. “Tell you what, it’s obvious scouting means a lot to Coop, and I wouldn’t want to deprive him of some weekly fun. He’s still welcome to the Beavers - even if technically he’s too old.”

I was floored by his request! He really wanted me, a ten year old, to join the youngest scout group?

Dad looked skeptical. “Is that allowed?”

“No one has to know. He’s only little, after all.”

“Well...” Dad let out a deep sigh. “If he doesn’t, then what?”

“He could join scouts next January when the new program opens up.” Taylor informed us.

“Next y-year?” I quivered, that was so far away, and I had been in scouts since forever! I looked to Dad for support, surely he could solve this.

Dad looked at me with an unsure expression. “What do you say? Join Beavers or wait until next year?”

I started breathing quickly, this wasn’t fair at all! I just wanted to be a scout, like always. I had been in so many scout groups and redone so many badges. Suddenly my vision blurred and I wiped my eyes with the blue sleeve. How could I be crying at a moment like this? I was just making myself look more and more like a baby!

“Hey, buddy. Don’t worry, Beavers are a lot of fun and you made some new friends today.” Taylor tried to explain.

“I want to be a scout.” I sniveled, sounding like a baby who lost his toy.

“So you are going to join the colony then?” Taylor tried to confirm.

I couldn’t bring myself to say the words, but I wanted to be in scouts and this was my only option. Why did my parents have to move to this tiny town with its itty bitty scout program? I nodded my head, feeling the brown tail russell through my

hair almost as if it was sealing my fate as a Beaver, the youngest of all of them.

Taylor patted my head and handed my Dad a small stack of paper. “Just have him look through this when he gets home.” He knelt down so that we were eye level. “I guess I’ll see you next week, huh Rascal?”

“Y-yeah, I guess.” I murmured to him.

My Dad shrugged his shoulders. “Sure, as long as he’s happy, I guess Cooper can be a Beaver scout this year.” He finally took my hand and we went to leave the classroom together. I sniffed back the last of my tears, seeing Laurie waving at me from across the room - entirely oblivious to my feelings. I gave a single nod of acknowledgment, burying my snot stained face in my dad’s shirt.

“Oh, and Rascal?” Taylor called after me. I turned back uneasily, trying to look attentive. “Good night! And busy building tomorrow.”

“Good night, Taylor!” Some of the remaining kids called back, slapping their hands behind their back in the traditional Beaver greeting.

“Night Taylor...” I mumbled, just barely loud enough for him to hear. He smiled, clapping his hands behind his back in farewell. Summoning the courage to unstick myself from my dad’s side, I did the same - finally managing a smile.