Elf on the Shelf

by andlat

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The Costume Box
2024

Chapter 1

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“Frosty Sugar Balls or whatever it's called is just as bad for your teeth.”

“Thanks, mom.” Archie said, flashing her a grin with a few spaces. He had just lost one of them a few days ago, so the hole still felt new! She smiled and was about to say something when the whole house seemed to shake.

“Peppermint's here! Peppermint's here.”

“Oh, Casper's up.” Mom said. “Maybe I should have proofread your-” Archie was already gone, eager to see what his stepbrother thought.

“Archie!’ Casper exclaimed.”Look! He's up on the mantel thingy!”

“I see that.” Archie said, not even sure if he could match Casper's enthusiasm. It seemed improper in a way for a boy his age to be nearly bouncing up and down.

“I waited until you were here to read the note. Minty's here for both of us, remember?” Archie did indeed remember. This was their first Christmas together as stepbrothers and

Casper had been shocked to learn that Archie did not have a scout elf. Archie, meanwhile, had been just as surprised to learn that his new stepbrother was enough of a baby to still believe in the whole Elf on the Shelf thing. They were the same age! Archie had learned the truth when he was seven or eight and now, here was Casper, a true blue believer and almost eleven.

“Well, open it.” Archie said. Casper ripped eagerly into the green and red envelope.

“Santa's coming to your neighborhood, I'm watching close to see if you are good. If all goes well and you're the best baby” Casper paused and looked up. “Baby?”

“You'll find something special under the tree.” Archie pointed to the last line of the poem. “He was probably just trying to make it rhyme, right?” Casper nodded.

“Minty knows I'm not a baby.” He seemed a little nervous as he saw instructions at the bottom of the letter. “Turn me over for a fun game.” He did.

“Read it aloud.” Mom said, seeing her son's smile fade.

“Who's this from, here's a hint, your favorite elf named Peppermint.” Casper read. “I missed you, baby, here’s your chance. Welcome me back with a diaper dance?” Archie had to turn away, covering his snort with a cough. Mom gave him a look and then turned her attention back to Casper. “Mom? What's a diaper dance?”

“Well,” she sipped her coffee to stall. “I suppose it's a dance

in a diaper.”

“But-”

“But I – and Peppermint – know you don't wear diapers.”

“He called me baby a couple times.”

“It's probably baby like in a song.” Archie interjected. “Like a term of… what's it called, mom?”

“Term of endearment.” She said. Archie nodded.

“I guess.” Casper said, still a bit upset. “But I don't wear diapers. How can I do a diaper dance?”

“We all know you like to dance.” Mom said, kissing his forehead. “So you'll come up with something. But think about it at school.” Mom looked at her smartwatch. “You both need to get going and neither of you are dressed.” Archie still wore sweatpants and a faded soccer shirt. Casper wore a Sonic pajama shirt and matching briefs. Neither could deny that Mom was right.

Whenever he could throughout the school day, Archie thought back at what a success the first Elf day was. Peppermint – or rather Archie as Peppermint – had called Casper a baby, which fit since he had to be the only one in their whole grade who still did Elf on the Shelf. What was he going to do about the diaper dance? Casper himself had told him stories about the drastic lengths he had gone to to appease Peppermint in past years, so Archie was almost certain that Casper would ask Mom or Dad for diapers as

soon as school was over. He is a baby, after all. Archie thought.

Casper's babyness had become apparent as they got to know each other as Mom and Dad started to 'get serious', as Dad called it. Casper seemed to cling to everything that Archie had declared for babies. By the time of the wedding, Archie had given up on the twin brother he thought he would have since they were only a few months apart. He had a baby brother and that was that.

The wedding itself had been further proof of Baby Casper. Archie had assumed they would dress similarly to the groomsmen – he was, after all, an honorary groomsman in his own mind. Instead, they had worn matching outfits with shorts and bow ties that more closely matched the ringbearer than the adults. Archie felt like a young man in his little brother's clothes. Casper crawled around on the floor with Julian the ringbearer, playing with toy cars. Definitely a baby!

“So, whatcha gonna do?” Archie asked as they walked home. Casper shrugged.

“Diapers are just underwear, right? So I guess I'll dance in my underwear. Minty's kinda weird sometimes.” Archie felt stunned by Casper's simple solution. Maybe he'd underestimated him.

"He said diaper dance.”

“Well, it'll be close enough.” Casper shrugged again. “At least I wear underwear that looks like underwear.” Archie snorted.

“Boxers are underwear. More than diapers.”

“Hi, dad!” The boys said as they walked inside.

“How was school?”

“Good.”

“Did Mom show you Minty's letter?” Casper asked.

“Yeah, seems like he's being mischievous, huh?” Archie admired his dad's ability to sound completely innocent. Dad was the one who had convinced Mom to let Archie play Peppermint as a way of helping ease Casper toward the truth.

“Guess so. I think I have a way to do a diaper dance though.”

“Gonna wear a towel?” Dad laughed and tousled Casper's dark blonde curls.

“Not quite.” Casper said as Archie walked into the kitchen for an afterschool snack. He spied a box of Choco Chunks. Shoot, he was hoping to tag along to the store to get Casper some proper diapers. They would be needed if he was going to prove Casper's babyness.

Heading past the living room, Archie snorted as he spotted Casper dancing in front of the elf in nothing but his Sonic briefs. He was such a dork! Plus, he thought with a smirk, Peppermint isn't going to like that he cheated.

“Hmm.” He headed up to his room and got to work. “Look at baby bust a move! But Santa might disapprove.” He paused and tried to think, counting out syllables on his fingers. Did it

really have to rhyme? “Maybe I can just get close. C'mon, Casper, diaper up. Then you're ready to strut your stuff?” He shrugged. “I guess it's okay.”

“You should put this much effort into your homework.” Dad said with a chuckle as he looked it over.

“Sure, dad.” Archie said. “Uh, can I have money for diapers?”

“What?”

“You know, for Casper? I'll ride my bike and get them myself.” For a moment, he worried Dad might say no.

“You still need to get a real present for your brother.” He said.

"I will!" Archie reassured him. But first things first.

~ E ~

“Are these the biggest baby diapers you have?”

“Um…” The woman smiled down at him, clearly confused.

“They're for my baby brother. I don't know what size he needs, but I know they're the biggest ones.”

“I think these are about as big as they get.” She grabbed a package off the shelf. “They might even fit you.” Archie stared at her in disbelief.

“They're for my baby brother.” He said firmly. She laughed.

“I'm just teasing. Happy holidays!” She laughed again as he hurried up to the front to pay, balking when he saw the cost. Diapers were expensive!

He got back home, hiding the diapers in the garage. Peppermint would deliver them the very next morning, he had decided. He smiled at the happy baby on the package and hoped that Casper would be just as happy in his new diapers. Only babies still believed in Santa, after all.

“Did Peppermint really call you a baby?” He asked Casper in what he hoped sounded like a nonchalant way.

“I think he got a little confused.” Casper said, brushing his teeth. “He's been coming here every year for six years. How could I even be a baby?”

“Could just be a mischievous elf thing, I guess?” Casper smiled at Archie.

“So you do believe.” Archie just shrugged. He still had not decided if Peppermint was going to bring all the diapers all at once or spread them out.

“Nothing rhymes with diaper.” Archie complained as he and Dad set up Peppermint's next pose: sitting on the coffee table, pointing at the red and white package of diapers under the tree.

“It doesn't need to rhyme every time.” Dad said before laughing. “You get my point.”

“Kay.” Archie took care to whisper. He did not want Casper to wake up, though he was not sure if that was because he didn’t want the surprise ruined or if Casper really did seem to believe in elf magic. “Here's what I got. Wow, baby! You can really bust a move! But where's your diaper? A diaper dance

requires baby pants.”

“That kinda rhymed?” Dad said. Archie nodded.

“Look under the tree. Hope they'll last ‘til Christmas Eve!”

“You don't want him to use them, right?” Dad asked.

“Ew. No way.”

“I'm just saying. He might start.” Dad patted his son's back. “And if he does, you're on diaper duty.” Archie made a face. “Oh, and add something like diaper up and boogie down.” Archie added it on. “Ok, off to bed. Last thing I need is for Casper to think you two don't have the same bedtime.”

Morning came and Archie crowed with delight as he saw the snow outside. He raced downstairs.

“Dad! Is-”

“Yep. School's closed.” He said with a smile. Archie pumped his fist in the air, but then he saw Casper standing in the living room, staring at the Christmas tree. Power Rangers undies are basically diapers. Archie thought, eyeing his stepbrother's butt. He took a breath and ran over to Casper.

“Did you hear? We got a snow day!”

“Peppermint brought me diapers.” Casper pointed morosely at the package under the tree. “I'm not a baby, Minty!”

“I'm sure it's just his game.” Mom said reassuringly.

“Yeah. He just wants you to do a diaper dance properly.” Dad

gave Casper a hug. “Here's what we'll do, buckaroo.” The slightest hint of a smile appeared on Casper's face. “You'll wear it just for the dance and then you take it off, kay?” Casper's shoulders rose and fell in a shy shrug.

“How about this?” It was Mom's turn to try to assuage him. “Archie will go outside while you do it.”

“Sure.” Archie rubbed his hands together. Fresh snow and the prospect of a snow day was almost better than seeing his brother wear a diaper! All the same, once Casper joined him and they walked to the biggest sledding hill in town, all Archie could think of was what had happened with the diaper dance?

Over the next few days, Archie got ample opportunity to see Casper put on a diaper and dance. He posed the elf doing some common elf things: fishing for goldfish crackers in the toilet, making powdered sugar snow angels in the kitchen, and even using some of Archie's old action figure accessories to climb the tree as if it was Mount Everest. Each and every day, there was a note that referred to Casper as a baby of no more than two or three. Archie had a stroke of genius and, realizing Casper could not read cursive, started writing them in it so that Mom or Dad had to read aloud the latest message to the baby of the house.

“If Peppermint thinks you're a baby, how come he never notices you taking ‘it’ off?” Archie asked. Casper glared at him.

“I am not a baby.” He snarled. Archie did not ask again,

though he noticed Casper sneaking a few glances at the elf. At one point, Archie left the room and came back to see Casper leaning up against the wall, up on his tiptoes as he whispered to Peppermint in mid-climb.

“I'm not!” He heard. “Please tell Santa.” He rolled his eyes, but realized he needed to make a decision: was it time for the next step?

Casper woke up and noticed a smiling face sitting on top of his dresser. Peppermint was in his room? He frowned as he saw diapers sticking up out of the drawer. His underwear drawer! He blinked and rubbed his eyes.

“Mom? Dad?” He called. He kicked off his blankets and, giving the elf a wide berth, went and grabbed his parents. Archie had alerted them both, but Casper's alarmed state still set them on edge. “What's… what's the note say?” He asked nervously.

“Baby Cassy, please be good.”

“I am!” Casper protested. “Wait, Cassy? No.” He whined. “My name's Casper.”

“Cassy's cute. There's more.” Mom said. “Baby Cassy, please be good. You're not behaving like you should. Babies wear diapers all day long. Taking it off is just plain wrong. Diapers sleeping, diapers at play, Baby Cassy wears diapers all day!”

“So no more underwear?” Casper looked pleadingly at the elf, still taking care not to touch him. “Minty…” He looked down in the drawer for the first time. The only underwear he

had left, he was wearing.

“You said yourself, didn't you? Diapers are underwear.” Archie said, trying to sound reassuring.

“But I'm potty trained! Minty, I'm not a baby!”

“You don't have to use it.” Mom said, giving Archie a look. “You can just pull it down when you use the bathroom and then we can help you or something.”

“We'll figure it out.” Dad said. “If you're still committed to seeing this through?”

“Can… can we at least get rid of the sign?” He pointed to the label renaming his underwear drawer ‘Baby Cassy's Diapers'.

“Yes.” Mom said, tearing it off. “Archie, can you go grab me the oven mitt? I want to move Peppermint so we can at least get these…” she glanced at Casper. “Casper's new underwear put away.” She did what she could to push it in without touching the elf, though she pulled one out. “Here, sweetheart. You might as well start now, don't you think?” By the time Archie came back, Casper had a diaper on.

“Am I gonna have to wear these to Riptide Rapids?” Casper asked shyly.

“I mean, it is before Christmas.” Dad said with a sigh that said he had not thought of that. “But you'll be in your swimsuit for most of that, won't you?” Casper brightened up, though even then, he was nowhere near as happy as Archie. Casper would not be wearing underwear again until

Christmas! And he would have to think of something for Riptide Rapids. Now that Baby Casper was fully here, he had no plans of letting him grow back up for the water park. Hadn't he been too scared to do basically any of the slides last time anyway?

Once again, life returned to normal after the daily Elf excitement, though Casper seemed to check his own butt every few steps. No wonder, Archie thought, it was extra obvious he was diapered!

“I'm gonna have to wear these to school.” Casper whispered to himself that evening as Dad asked them if they had all their homework done for tomorrow morning. “Dad, can I stay home tomorrow?”

“Skipping school seems naughty.” Dad said. “What would Santa say?” Casper pouted and kicked the table, an unusual outburst for him. His glass of milk went tumbling off the edge.

“Casper!” Mom scolded. “Go get a towel to clean that up.” Archie snorted into his chicken as Casper waddled along, the top of his diaper sticking out of his pants.

“He can't help it. Babies are like that.”

“Archie.” Mom said.

“What? Peppermint said so.” And now I know just what tomorrow's rhyme will be. He had been waiting for longer than expected for his clumsy brother to give him an excuse for the other thing he had bought him when he had gotten

those diapers. He winced a bit, remembering the woman who had thought the diapers were for him. What was her problem?

“Another present?” Casper exclaimed the next morning, standing in the living room in his pajama shirt and diaper. I guess Sonic is kinda mature when you're wearing a Sesame Street diaper, Archie thought, still almost giddy that his plan was working so well.

“And this one's wrapped.” Mom said. “The letter says read me first.” She took it from Casper. “Hmm, it's long! From Santa special, here to stay. Now Baby can drink in a safe way. No spills, no drips, just sips so neat. A colorful cup makes it a treat! You press and twist, then take a sip, And off it goes right through your lip! From table to tray or dancing about, Staying closed, staying safe, Baby's juice won't fall out. Morning or night, ready for a baby of two, and filled with little Casper's favorite drink too! Sippy cups, how they delight, Baby Cassy's sipping day and night!”

“That was a lot!” Dad said, giving Archie a look.

“And there's more.” Mom feigned exhaustion. “You've been such a good baby, wearing your diaper! But even good boys have accidents. Hopefully these sippy cups will keep you from spilling, even if you need a drink during your diaper dance! Love, Peppermint” Casper's bottom lip trembled, but a present was a present. He tore at the paper and was greeted by three plastic sippy cups in red, blue, and green.

“You can start using them after school.” Mom said. “Surely Peppermint won't mind you not using them at school.” Casper

nodded, but then remembered he still had to wear a diaper to school.

“I'm not a baby, Peppermint!” He exclaimed, halfway between frustration and fury. He stomped his foot, which Archie found absolutely adorable since he was pantsless, and it seemed almost as if he might insist they all drive to the North Pole and demand answers from Santa. Oh, well. Archie thought. Angry enough to stop believing still worked, right?

“What's it feel like?” Archie asked as they trudged to school. “Wearing diapers all the time?” Casper shrugged and remained silent for so long, Archie was surprised when he spoke.

“I'm gonna get used to them.” He said. “Santa's always watching.”

“Yeah, but this isn't in any of the songs.”

“Santa knows I can handle it.”

“Sure.” Archie said incredulously. “Hey, if anyone at school gives you trouble, you just let me know, kay? Brothers gotta stick together.” Casper smiled, but stopped walking.

“What's gonna happen if Minty doesn't bring my underwear back? Will I be stuck in” his voice dropped to a whisper. “diapers?” Only then did Archie realize he had mentioned Casper's diapers as if they were perfectly normal

“I'm sure Mom and Dad will get you underwear Christmas morning if Peppermint tries to keep your underwear.” He

grinned. “He's a pretty uh mischievous elf, isn't he?” Casper looked at him as if he was trying to decide what to say.

“Yeah, he is.” He said at last.

Archie was at least a little relieved that Casper made it through the day without anyone noticing his diaper. He was thrilled when Dad looked at the mangled remains of Casper's diaper from being pulled down all day and pulled him aside to get him into a 'fresh diaper'. Everyone just accepted he was a baby, Archie thought giddily as Casper returned from his change with one of his new sippy cups in hand. He shot an accusing look at the elf before plopping down beside Archie with a crinkle, the spout of the cup in his mouth. Archie stretched, reveling in how his boxers showed over the top of his pants almost as much as Casper's diaper showed.

Over the next few days, Casper seemed to embrace his sippy cups. He would run around the house, sweatpants drooping halfway down his diapered butt when he bothered to wear pants at all. Archie couldn't be more satisfied. Casper really seemed to be settling in as the baby. He actually laughed rather than pouting the morning that Peppermint was 'wearing’ one of his diapers with a note – a non-rhyming one – about how it was no wonder Casper loved his diapers since they were so warm. Determined to test it, Archie's most daring plot was to sneak into Casper's room and draw a train on the butt of the diaper the sleeping boy was wearing. Minty, holding the marker, insisted that Casper spend the next morning marching around saying ‘choo choo cuz I'm two” over and over. Archie took it as more and more proof that

Casper really was a baby. He even wondered in a more silly moment if he should check Casper's birth certificate just to see if they really were the same age.

Mom and Dad even seemed to see Casper as a baby now. He got his face wiped after meals and though he still used the bathroom, they put his diaper back on for him more often now than he got to do it himself after it nearly fell off one too many times. Most importantly, they only ever called him Cassy.

“My name's Casper!”

“Minty calls you Cassy.” Dad said.

“And even wrote Baby Cassy's Caboose on your butt this morning, didn't he?” Mom added.

“Cassy's just a fun nickname.” Dad said as if it was decided.

All in all, Archie knew Casper had accepted that he was the baby, at least until Christmas. He just needed one last thing to solidify his place: a proper baby bedtime. That was easy enough to accomplish.

“Minty wrote in cursive again!” Casper complained. “Mom, can you read it?” Mom took the note, smiling at the photo attached to it with a paperclip.

“He got a sweet photo.” Mom said. The photo was of Casper asleep, hand by his mouth almost as if he was about to suck his thumb, diaper fully exposed as Peppermint sat nearby, as if posing with the boy's puffy bottom. “See?” She showed

Dad. “Hanging out in Cassy's crib.”

“It's not a crib!”

“Crib like house.” Dad explained.

“What's the note say?”

“Growing boys need lots of sleep” Mom read. “So off to bed without a peep, when the clock says six-thirty. Snug in bed, Cassy must be.”

Casper was not asked if he wanted to play along. Come quarter after six, he was told to brush his teeth and get ready for bed. By six-thirty, he was tucked in and the lights were off. Archie felt a little guilty. He had wanted to do seven-thirty, but six-thirty simply flowed better. He half-expected Mom and Dad to put him to bed at the same time since they were the same age, but they did not even seem to mention it and Archie got several hours of playtime after Casper went to bed. Maybe Casper really was the baby in their eyes.

By day four of the new routine, Casper seemed to have taken it in stride. He's really dedicated! Archie thought, looking at his brother beside him drinking out of a sippy cup with his diaper poking out of his pants. Or maybe he just knows he's a baby. I mean, I would never wear a diaper for weeks like this!

“Alright, Cassy, go brush your teeth for bed.” Dad said, walking past the living room.

“This isn't gonna mess up our trip to Riptide Rapids, is it?” Casper asked.

“Go brush your teeth. No getting distracted.” Dad said. “But no, I don't see why it would. We can work around your bedtime and all that, right?”

“Yeah.” Casper agreed. Archie grinned. Riptide Rapids would be unforgettable.

~ E ~

The day of the trip to Riptide Rapids finally arrived and everyone was excited, Casper especially so.

“Peppermint didn't draw on my diaper.” Casper exclaimed. Archie looked as he waggled his butt at him. Why did it seem like he came to find Archie first thing every morning? Did he still think Peppermint was here for both of them?

“You're right.” He remarked. Casper took off like a shot and found the elf sitting on the coffee table, a little lei around his neck, courtesy of the dollar store.

“Bon voyage, baby.” Casper read.

“It's pronounced voy-azh.” Dad said. “It's French.” Casper nodded.

“Good babies tell Mommy or Daddy when they poop their diaper.” He whimpered in panic. “Minty! I don't poop them!” He dropped down to the elf's level and whispered. “Are you sure I can't have my undies back for the trip?”

“Guess not.” Archie said, even though it was an unofficial family rule to pretend not to hear what Casper whispered to the elf. Casper looked at him as if he was about to say

something, but Mom walked in just then.

“Is everyone ready?” Mom asked. “Casper, ba- buddy, where are your pants?” Archie strolled over to the kitchen, positive Mom had almost called Casper baby.

“Upstairs.”

“Go get them. You're not going to the hotel in just your pajama shirt and diaper.” Casper was about to do exactly that when he spied the bag Mom was holding.

“Is that? Mom! No!” Casper whined. “Not my old diaper bag!”

“Thought I was done packing diapers for trips.” Mom said with a smile. “But this way, we know where they are.”

“Peppermint's not even coming to the hotel.” Casper muttered.

“Even if he doesn't find his way, you know Santa's always watching.” Mom said. She gave him a hug. “But you'll be in a swimsuit most of the time, so it'll be a break from diapers.” What she did not know was Archie could hear them from the kitchen and he had a plan.

“Archie Barchie, are you all packed?” Dad asked. “Shirts, pants, swimsuit, underwear?”

“Yes.”

“How many pairs of underwear?”

“One for every day and a couple spares.” Dad nodded.

“That better be true, otherwise we'll see if Cassy's diapers fit you.” He gave Archie a loving noogie and it wasn't until Dad had left him that Archie realized how weird it was that Dad said it as if he wasn't sure the diapers would fit him. Casper and him were the same size, more or less! He still had a sneaking suspicion that that woman at the pharmacy had thought they were for him.

“Car's loaded.” Dad called. “Everyone aboard for Riptide Rapids!” He made a sound like a train whistle.

“Choo choo cuz I'm two.” Casper said with a giggle. Archie had to turn away to keep from laughing.

“Did you get your sippy cup filled up, Cassy?” Mom asked.

“Oh! No.” He was about to run and do it when Dad grabbed him.

“Here. Mom'll do that. I don't need you getting distracted.”

“What? I wouldn't.” Dad chuckled and picked Casper up.

“How long did it take you to get pants on after Mom asked?” Casper shrugged. “Oof, you're heavy, kiddo.”

“Let me get a photo.” Mom said, juggling her phone and Casper's sippy cup. With the photo taken, Dad carried Casper out to the car as Archie snapped into action, quickly stowing Peppermint in a pocket of his backpack full of car activities.

“You saw Dad carry him. We gotta keep working on the baby.” He told the elf, surprised by how it didn't feel as silly as he would have thought. Peppermint was his partner in

crime after all, the one getting all the blame.

Archie got into the car, smiling at Casper, who was already buckled in and drinking from his sippy cup. Something felt right about how his jeans bulged from his diaper and he contently sucked on the spout.

“You're not gonna poop, are you?”

“What?”

“Peppermint mentioned pooping.”

“Ew. No way. You don't think I'd go that far, do you?” Archie felt relieved.

~ E ~

“Alright, bathroom break!” Dad said, parking the car.

“Race you inside!” Archie declared. Casper was about to take him up on it when Mom grabbed his hand.

“Oh, no you don't.”

“Huh?”

“Do you need to pee?”

“Yeah. Kinda bad.” Mom nodded.

“Then you need to come with me.”

“Huh? Wait, why?”

“Because I'll need to fix your diaper after.”

“I was just gonna tug it down like underwear.”

“You've tried that, remember?” Keeping a tight grip on his hand, she shrugged the blue and red bag onto her shoulder.

“Ugh, not my diaper bag!” Archie snickered as Casper was led by the hand toward the women's restroom. Forget diaper dances, early bedtimes, and sippy cups. This, this was peak baby Cassy.

~ E ~

“What a lovely room!” Mom gushed.

“Looks the same as last year.” Casper remarked, flopping down on the couch and slipping his thumbs into his pants..

“It was nice then too.” Dad said with a smile. “Don't get too comfy." Casper immediately stopped taking his pants off. "We're gonna go get dinner.”

Dinner demonstrated once again how Mom and Dad were starting to not see Casper and Archie as the near twins that they actually were. Archie got to order for himself from the full menu. Casper sat with a coloring page as Mom ordered chicken fingers and macaroni for him, asking the server to fill his sippy cup. Casper did not even bat an eye, though Archie was a little jealous that he had something to do while they waited for their food.

Almost as soon as they got back to the room, Casper was sent to bed. The suite they got every year had a separate room for Archie and Casper, so his early bedtime proved to be no problem at all. Archie stayed up, watching a Christmas movie with Mom and Dad.

He slipped into the bedroom as quietly as he could, though he snorted when he realized Mom had arranged Casper's diapers atop the dresser. Housekeeping would see that and bring them a crib, he thought, almost laughing at the thought. It was a funny idea, actually. A crib at home would have been impossible, but didn't they do cribs in hotels?

He changed into his pajamas and then lay down in an uncomfortable position to keep himself awake. He had played coy when Dad had asked if Peppermint would be making an appearance at the hotel. This was going to be a surprise for the whole family. Once the light went out in the main room, he held his breath and listened for the sound of his parents' door closing. Then he set to work.

"Peppermint!" Casper exclaimed. "You followed us!?"

"He is a magic elf." Dad said, kissing the top of Casper's head.

"Well, he didn't come last year." Casper said, pondering just what this meant. "What does his note say?"

"For a happy Cassy vacation" Dad read. "For babies who love to splash and play, safety first's the only way! Water wings to help you float, and a swim diaper with a boat!" Casper looked like he might faint.

"What's a swim diaper?"

"Just what it sounds like." Dad said, patting the package next to the elf. "It's a pull-up more than a taped diaper, though."

"But Mom said vacation would be a break from diapers."

Casper whined.

“If you don't want to do it-”

“I have to. Don't I?”

“How about this? We'll skip this one and I'll” Dad tried to think. “I'll call Santa and tell him what's going on.” Archie pretended not to listen, but he had accounted for this.

“That's not cheating?”

“It's not.” Dad said, rubbing his back. “Santa knows Cassy's a good boy. You two eat your breakfast, I'll call Santa. Sound good, buckaroo?”

“Do I still gotta do a diaper dance?” Casper whispered to the elf. Peppermint did not answer.

“Got that all sorted away, so why don't you boys go get ready?” Dad said. “Mom's getting her swimsuit on.” Archie, thinking quickly, pretended like he had to go to the bathroom. He waited for only a minute or two before he heard Casper's voice.

“My swimsuit’s ruined!” He had been very busy last night, not only with the elf, but also cutting along the seam of Casper's swimsuit to make sure it was unwearable. He emerged nonchalantly from the bathroom to find both parents examining the damage.

“How did it rip in the suitcase? Did you yank it out of there, Cassy?”

“Well,” Mom said with a sigh. “I guess we'll have to figure something else out.”

“The gift shop?”

“They're overpriced.”

“We won't find another swimsuit in December.”

“You want to swim, right, Cassy?’

“Yes!”

“So bad, nothing'll stop you?”

“Uh-huh!” Casper's face fell as he knew what he was about to wear.

The family stepped into Riptide Rapids proper with Casper wearing his towel around him like a cloak, trying to keep from exposing his water wings and swim diaper for as long as possible.

“Remember, you're not going to be able to go on any of the slides.” Dad said. “But Archie is going to spend the whole day playing with you in the splash zone for…”

“For babies.” Casper moaned. He looked at Archie. “Why are you gonna be there with me?” Archie glanced at both of his parents’ faces and laughed nervously. They knew.

“Because it'll be fun.” He hoped that this would be the extent of his punishment.

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“I don't care if you think green hair is cool.” Mom said with a sigh as they headed back to get dry and dressed – dry, dressed, and diapered in Casper's case – for dinner. “You're washing your hair the second we're back in the room.” Casper pouted and seemed on the verge of a tantrum when Mom ran a bath for him. “Come on, Cassy.” Archie could not believe it, but Casper was subjected to a full bath, followed by a diaper. “Tomorrow will you be more willing to do it yourself?”

“Yes.” Casper said with a sigh.

Three full days of being confined to the splash pad ended up being enough punishment as far as Archie was concerned. He tried to convince Casper to spend an afternoon at the arcade, but Casper had decided swim diapers were better than his regular diapers, – they were thinner, that was for sure! – so they spent as much time as possible in the water. Archie did have fun spraying Casper with some of the water hoses, even if it wasn't as fun getting sprayed back in the face when Casper got his revenge.

“Can't believe we're going home already.” Archie bemoaned as they packed things up.

“I hope you think about what you did.” Mom said, making sure Casper was out of earshot before continuing. “Destroying your brother's swimsuit was a mean thing to do.”

“I know.” Archie agreed remorsefully, though it was a bit surprising that that was seen as mean when Casper had been in diapers all month.

“Tomorrow's the last day for Peppermint. No tricks, no extra rules. Casper's been a very good sport, but you've done enough.”

“Ok.” Archie said. It wasn't like he had any ideas anyway.

“And you're on thin ice with both me and your dad.”

“Figured.” Archie mumbled.

Christmas Eve dawned and Peppermint sat with a note and a little plastic suitcase. Archie had written it in print this time, but Mom still insisted on reading it aloud.

**Dear Cassy,

Happy Christmas Eve! It's time for me to go back to the North Pole, but I'm taking these photos back with me so Santa can see what a good baby you've been. Maybe next Christmas, we can work on potty training and earning big boy undies! **

** Love, Peppermint**

“I didn't get my underwear back? I have to wait a whole year?” Casper exclaimed.

“That can't be right, can it?” Mom said, giving Archie a look. Archie had not expected Casper to connect the dots that quickly. He had to think – and fast.

“You said Peppermint's mischievous, right?”

“Yeah?”

“And he's brought you a lot of presents, right?” Casper nodded. “Well, maybe there's one more under the tree?” Casper dashed over, diapered bottom up high in the air as he looked under the tree. “Keep him looking, mom.” Archie hissed before charging up the stairs as quickly as he could while remaining stealthy.

He was almost certain he had never moved as quickly as he did as he shoved Casper's underwear back into the drawer.

“Casper!” He yelled down the stairs. “Come look!” Casper was so preoccupied, he didn't even notice how red Archie's face was.

“It's in the drawer!” Casper said with a laugh. “Silly Minty!”

“He's a tricky elf.” Archie laughed.

“Yeah.” Casper frowned.

“Did you find it, Cassy?” Mom asked, seeing the hastily stuffed drawer.

“Yeah, mom.” Casper grinned. “Uh, can you get out so I can finally get undies back on?”

“Sure, sweetie.” She left and Archie was about to too when Casper stopped him.

“It was you, wasn't it?”

“Huh?”

“You wrote the notes. You were Peppermint.”

“How'd you… when'd you… yeah.”

“The cursive was smart, but yeah, I recognize your handwriting.”

“Dude. You… you wore diapers for like three weeks.”

“Yeah. They're kinda…” Casper trailed off and shrugged. “I wanted really hard to believe, but after a while, I just kinda” he shrugged again. “Stopped. When you're going to bed at six thirty, you have time to think. And c'mon, dude. Every time Peppermint did something new, Mom and Dad would look at you! You guys suck at secrets.”

“So…” Archie frowned. “Why?”

“Well…” Casper laughed. “I didn't really think you'd be able to keep it secret.”

“There's no way you were just playing along this whole time.”

“Not the whole time.” Casper said before laughing. “I can't believe you actually put up with three days in the splash pad. You love the water slides!”

“It still doesn't make sense. Why not just tell us?”

“Like I said, I wanted to believe. Maybe Santa was just testing me by making it look like it was you or something.” He shrugged. “And it's not like I had to use them.” He laughed. “And like I said, it was a little worth it to make you have to stay with me the whole time at Riptide Rapids. Did you know Mom asked me if I wanted her to hang out with me instead?”

“What?”

“Yep. But I told her I'd feel embarrassed being the biggest kid there if my mom was hanging around.”

“You coulda just told me you knew it was me.”

“You're only saying that now.” Casper teased. “Get out of here. I need to get underwear back on.”