JoJo

by andlat

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The Costume Box
2024

Chapter 1

JoJo

Jonah sat on the couch. Well, more like lounged. Mom and Dad weren't home, which meant he could spread out. Sprawl, even. He smirked satisfactorily, but sighed as he realized that there was nothing to watch. He groaned. Too early for dinner, he had already done his chores. What was he supposed to do? Home alone, with nothing to do. Even Ninja Zombie Werewolf was not as fun as it had been earlier. Half of the fun, after all, was Mom or Dad reacting at how violent it was.

"Maybe I can make sure my clothes are still ready for tomorrow?" He muttered, sitting up and fixing his t-shirt. He froze. What was that? A car outside? No, that noise clearly came from inside the house. He held perfectly still, not even daring to breathe. Silence. "Great, I'm imagining things." The last syllable faded still in his throat as he heard the distinctive sound of a voice upstairs. "Shit." That was a word he could only use when home alone. "What do I do?" He felt fear grip him, but almost immediately, he imagined how heroic it would be to catch the intruder. "That's crazy." He told himself, but still, part of him believed that he could do it, if it came to it.

Nervously, Jonah got to his feet, toes curling in the carpet as he debated what to do. He had not heard anything since the voice. Maybe he had just imagined things. Maybe someone had walked by outside. Maybe Mom was right and all those energy drinks were making him crazy. It could have been a

million things other than someone breaking in. And how would they have gotten in upstairs? He would've heard them on the roof. And why break in in like the middle of the afternoon?

"Well, guess I gotta go check." He shrugged. It was something to do at least. He downed the last of his energy drink for some extra courage, leaving the can on the floor by the couch, and set off.

As he neared the stairs, he heard voices again. Plural. There were at least two of them and, if they were burglars, they weren't very good ones because they clearly weren't even trying to stay quiet with how much they were laughing. He snuck up the stairs, even dropping down to all fours to move more quietly. He felt like a ninja.

Jonah avoided the spot right above the stairs that always creaked, now confident that the voices were coming from behind the closed door of the guest room. He could hear almost every word now. They sounded like they were about his age. What was going on? He came to the doorknob and turned it as stealthily as he could before throwing it open.

"Ha!" He exclaimed. He had not looked in the guest room in a while, but he would have remembered if it looked like this. There were Mario, Capricorn, and other video game posters on the walls over two beds. On the floor sat two boys around his age, just as he had thought. Their faces looked familiar, like younger versions of Jonah's dad, though the one in the blue and black flame t-shirt had Mom's nose.

"Huh? Oh, hi, Jonah." The other boy, wearing a grey hoodie, said, looking back at the TV. His voice seemed deeper than Jonah's and he seemed like he might be twelve or maybe even thirteen.

"Up from your nap?" The boy in the blue and black shirt asked.

"Na- wha- who are you and why are you in my house?"

"Uh-oh." The grey hoodied boy said with a chuckle. He got to his feet and Jonah suddenly realized he was huge! He could have been a whole two feet taller than him, yet he seemed perfectly fine in the room. "Jonah's a little confused."

"Uh, yeah, I am. How do you know my name? What's going on? Why are you in my house?"

"Is it some game he's playing?" The boy in blue and black asked with the slightest hint of scorn.

"Naw, I think he might have just had a nightmare or something."

"Quit talking about me like-" Jonah yelped as his feet left the floor as the grey hoodied boy lifted him up into the air.

"Jonah the Jet's ready for takeoff!"

"Put me down!" Jonah's feet kicked in the air as he carried him over toward the bed.

"Aaand away you go!" Jonah flew over onto the bed, bouncing twice. Before he could even gather his thoughts, the

boy scooped him up and began swinging him slightly to do it again.

"Stop!" Jonah exclaimed, sailing through the air again to land on the Mario bedspread.

"Why are you doing that on my bed, Reuben?"

"Sorry, Jonah the Flyer. Sounds like Asher the dumb-"

"Hey!"

"Asher National Airport isn't letting you land." He turned and tossed Jonah to the other bed. "But Reuben Airfield is always open!" Jonah bounced and, thinking quickly, kicked out at Reuben -- that was his name, right? -- before he could grab him again.

"Who are you?"

"Aww." Reuben said. "You always feel a little loopy-goofy after a long nap."

"What are you even talking about?"

"Come here, bud." He pulled him over.

"What are you doing!?" He exclaimed, scandalized as this stranger pulled out the back of his shorts.

"Just seeing if you're wearing clean undies." He paused, seemingly unbothered by Jonah's feeble attempts to get free. "Hey, Asher. Are these yours?"

"Hey, quit!" Jonah tried to stop Reuben from pulling his

shorts down to his knees, completely exposing his boxers. Asher got to his feet and looked at Jonah's butt.

"They might be. Mom's always mixing our stuff up."

"Yeah, but she gave your boxers." Reuben laughed. "To Jonah." He laughed again as Asher seemed concerned..

"What's so funny about that?" Jonah asked, annoyed.

"Oh, nothing." Reuben said, giving Jonah's lower back a reassuring rub.

"They're mine anyway."

"Sure they are, kiddo." Reuben said.

"You don't wear boxers." Asher interjected in the same instant.

"Hush, Asher. He's pretending to be big."

"Pretending?" Jonah yanked his shorts back up. "I'm ten."

"You are not!" Asher objected.

"Asher."

"What? I'm only nine. He can't be older than me! He's... he's Jonah."

"It's just a game." Reuben said. "Right, JoJo?"

"I really am ten."

"He can't even count to ten." Asher muttered.

"Can so!"

"Well," Reuben said diplomatically. "That still means I'm older than you. So promise to listen to big brother?"

"Brother? I'm an only child." Jonah was starting to get scared. Yes, they certainly looked like what brothers would look like if he had them, but he didn't. He had never had brothers and now there were two strange boys in the guest room, acting as if it had always been their room.

"Ok, if you say so." Reuben said, giving his head a pat.

"Quit that." Jonah batted him away. "Quit!" He repeated as Reuben sniffed his head. What a freak!

"Huh" was all he said before crossing over to the boy on the beanbag and whispering in his ear.

"Ok." Was that Asher? Jonah thought that was what the older boy had called him.

"Alright, I'm gonna get started on dinner. Ash, do you think you can give him his cee bee you eye?"

"What? Cbui?"

"Haha, you'll learn your alphabet soon, kiddo." Asher said with a chuckle. "C'mon, let's get you in the tub."

"Oops." Reuben said knowingly. "Good luck getting him to cooperate now."

"Tub? You are NOT giving me a bath!" Reuben chuckled.

"There he goes. Good luck." He said in sing-song as he left Asher to it.

"Come on, buddy." Asher said. "Be cool for me, kay?"

"I take showers!"

"Yeah, I know you took a shower with Dad that one time you got all muddy, but-"

"What?!"

"But you love baths. I know you do."

"Who even are you?"

"I'm your brother, silly." Asher's voice suddenly took on a goofy tone. "I know what you need."

"Wha" Asher suddenly lunged and began to tickle Jonah's sides.

"Tickle, tickle, tickle!" No self-respecting ten year old would ever admit he was even capable of imagining being able to emit the squealing giggle that escaped from deep within him as he fell backwards onto the bed. Asher grinned and dove in for the full attack, tickling under Jonah's arms, his sides, his tummy. Jonah had no idea what was going on and could hardly focus on getting to the bottom of it. Seemingly anywhere Asher touched paralyzed him with squeals and childish giggles. He tried to push him away with his feet only to learn the bottoms of his feet were even more ticklish than anywhere else. His only hope was to roll off the bed.

THUMP! Jonah fell to the floor and the tickling stopped.

"Oh, shoot! Are you ok, JoJo?" Jonah got to his feet. Did this

guy -- whoever he was -- just call him JoJo? Mom and Dad hadn't called him that in what? Years!

"I'm fine." He was so focused on fixing his shorts that he did not notice a mischievous grin bloom on Asher's face. In no time flat, Jonah was flat on the floor between the two beds as Asher mercilessly tickled him. "Stop!" Jonah pleaded between squeals, but Asher was relentless. "I'm gonna pee! I'm gonna" his protests dissolved once again into uncontrollable laughter, trapped there until Asher decided to stop. "Stop!"

"I'm not doing anything!" Asher said in that goofy voice that was funny – hilarious even! – all on its own. What is wrong with me? Jonah thought as he wiggled and squirmed. Why am I so ticklish?

"Stop!" He moaned, still squealing and giggling. He could hardly even breathe! "I'm... I'm..." he felt his boxers and shorts grow wet and warm.

"Oh." Asher stared down at the dark spot on Jonah's shorts.

"I tried to tell you!" Jonah said, fighting back tears. He wasn't going to cry in front of this dumb giant nine year old!

“It's ok, bud. You needed a bath anyway. Your hair's stinky!”

“It is not!” If there was one point of pride for Jonah, it was his hair. He had insisted on a Hard Part, just like all the streamers he watched. He ran a self-conscious hand along one of the shaved sides and even through the hair on top, but he resisted the urge to sniff it.

“Well, you're covered in pee.” That, Jonah could not argue. “You were just insisting you're a big boy, so why not prove it and lead the way to the bathroom?” Jonah thought that was a brilliant idea. He broke out into a run, determined to close and lock the door behind him. Then he would shower and make a plan.

Despite walking, Asher reached the bathroom with more than enough time to get inside before Jonah could put his plan into motion. He got the tub filling up and then turned to Jonah.

“C'mon, Jonah. You're drenched in pee. Don't fight me on this, please.” Jonah did fight, but it did very little good as Asher stripped him until the only thing he had left to cover himself with was his own hands. "Seriously, I swear these are mine." Asher muttered. "Mom should label these things so JoJo doesn't pee in them!"

"Hey!"

"You did, kid."

“Why do you keep calling me JoJo?”

“Oh, right, sorry. Jonah.” His patronizing tone and smile made Jonah feel even worse. “Tub's not full yet. Oh, what's that song Mom sings for baths?”

“I dunno.” Asher grabbed Jonah's wrists, pulling his hands away from his crotch. “Hey!”

“I've seen your weiner.” Asher rolled his eyes and began to sing, waving Jonah's hands as if he was dancing. “Jump in the

bathtub, it's time to get clean. I'll be the cleanest kid you've ever seen! The soap and the bubbles are filling up the tub, so I'll jump in the water and scrub, scrub, scrub!" He chuckled. "Cmon, Jonah. You love to shout the scrub part. Let's do it again."

This time, Jonah at least said the scrubs along with Asher, grateful that the tub was now full enough he could climb in.

"Where's the washcloth?" He muttered.

"Right here." Asher held it up. "You're the lucky one. You just gotta sit there and let me scrub you."

"What!?" Jonah shot to his feet. "No way. I can do it myself."

"Hey, Asher, I got a- why is he standing up?" Reuben walked in, sighing as he saw the scene before him.

"I was trying to get him to sit down. He keeps insisting he doesn't need a bath." Reuben swept in and, grabbing Jonah firmly, but still gently, lowered him down to the bottom of the tub.

"Playtime's over, bud. Time to get clean!" He wet the washcloth and began to sing. Another song? "This is the way we wash your arms, wash your arms, wash your arms. This is the way we wash your arms to make you a clean JoJo!"

"He's Jonah tonight."

"Go get him something to wear please." Reuben said. "This is the way we wash your shoulders."

Reuben kept Jonah prisoner for countless verses of the song, even washing his ‘bumbum’ and 'weinie'. Jonah felt like every part of his body had been violated and was cleaner than it had ever been.

“Alright, can you hold your breath while I get your hair wet?” Reuben asked, filling an orange plastic bucket at the tub faucet.

“You better not mess it up. This is the same ‘do as Samurobbie.”

“You've been watching with Asher, huh? Hold your breath!” The bucket of water poured over Jonah's head and he was momentarily immersed in an underwater world. His head felt heavier as the water rushed down him to rejoin the waist-level sea around him.

“Alright, now you can stand up.” Reuben said as the tub drained. He wrapped a towel around Jonah's shoulders and over his head, vigorously rubbing him dry.

"Don't you feel better now that you're all squeaky clean?"

"No." Jonah's voice vibrated from the drying.

"I think that's enough of that. Baths aren't that bad. I know it doesn't make much sense when you always smell like fresh baby, but you still need to be clean."

"I am not a baby!"

"Alright, Mister Big Boy.” The bathroom door opened. “Thanks, Asher. You can just put that there, then can you run

downstairs and check on the food?”

“Sure.” Asher left the bathroom again.

“Now you'll have something clean and dry to wear!” Reuben said cheerfully, giving him one last vigorous rubdown before pulling the towel off of his head. Jonah tried to say something, but the mirror across from him drew his attention.

His hair! Gone was the super cool influencer hairstyle. Now he had hair, hair, and more hair in a chestnut mop all over his head, burying his ears. He thought it was his mop that made his face look softer and rounder, but he realized his cheeks were bigger somehow! He drank in his reflection, growing more and more concerned by the second. What had happened?

The sink, the toilet, everything was the same height compared to him as it had been, but he could not deny that, from his chubby cheeks to his Buddha belly to his pudgy thighs, he looked like a toddler now.

“Alright, kiddo. Time to get dressed.”

“Wha?”

“I know you're really hitting the big boy thing hard today, so that means I expect you to hold still."

"For what?" Jonah slowly returned to the present moment, tearing his eyes away from the horror in the mirror.

"Your diaper, silly!"

"My what?" He sputtered. "I don't wear diapers!"

"Uh-huh. I've changed an awful lot of them for you not to wear 'em."

"What are you even talking about?"

"And you had that soaked nap diaper when I saw you like ten minutes ago!"

"Come on, buddy. I'm the cool brother.” He sat down on the floor, resting his back against the closed door. “Please just let me diaper you so we can go do something more fun."

"But I… I… don’t"

“Did Asher let you use the potty before your bath?” Jonah remained silent, so Reuben drew his own conclusions. "If you really think you're ready for the big boy potty, I'll tell Mommy and Daddy, kay? But for tonight, that butt of yours is staying in diapers." He shrugged. "Unless you want to go right to bed."

“Maybe things would go back to normal then.” Jonah thought out loud as he saw the diaper in Reuben's hand. There was no way he was letting anyone put him in a diaper!

He waited for Reuben to make a move, fully aware that it might be tough to get around him. He had to do something! An hour ago, if that, he had been bored out of his mind on the couch in his favorite t-shirt and shorts, now he was naked in the bathroom with shaggy hair and baby fat!

“Come on, JoJo.” Reuben said gently.

“Don't call me that.” He sighed. “You don't notice anything

weird about me? You are my brother, right?"

"Well, you're being kinda difficult, I guess." Reuben said. To Jonah's surprise, he pulled out his phone.

"What are you doing?" Was he waiting him out? Well, he would be waiting a long time.

"See?" Reuben turned the phone toward Jonah, who saw a video of himself – well, his shaggy haired, chubby diapered self – happily dancing around in a t-shirt and diaper to some song. It sounded familiar to Jonah, but he would never be caught dead enjoying some baby song like that. He stepped toward the phone, trying to make sense of what he was seeing. Triumphant, Reuben grabbed him and put him in a reclining position on the bathroom floor, tickling his sides until all Jonah could do was squeal, giggle, and squirm, entirely reduced to a toddler in that moment.

By the time Jonah was able to catch his breath, the diaper was under him and, for the second time in far too short a span, Reuben was touching his crotch, this time rubbing lotion and powder into his skin.

"You can never smell too clean." Reuben said as Jonah looked up at him, violated.

"I don't need diapers!" Jonah protested, trying to sit up.

"But do you need tickles?" That one word delivered in a goofy voice sent Jonah once again into a spasm of giggles that kept him occupied as Reuben taped the diaper around his waist. He almost covered his face in shame as a coo escaped

his lips. What was wrong with him?

Back on his feet, the diaper pressing against his pudgy thighs, Jonah sniffled as he stared at his reflection, his toddler-like frame only interrupted by the stark white of the diaper. It wasn't even plain white like those Pull-ups he had worn to bed up until a few years ago. Big Bird, Elmo, and Cookie Monster seemed to mock him and call him a baby with their faces perpetually in smiles or laughs. Big Bird seemed to be looking right at the word Pampers. This was a baby diaper, through and through.

"But I'm ten..." He mumbled.

“That's been your game all afternoon.” Reuben said, gently brushing his hair. “You're two, buddy. One, two, JoJo is two.” He held up two fingers. Enough was enough!

“My name! Is not! JoJo!”

“I know!” Reuben replied, matching his tone though only pretending to yell. “You're Jonah, but everyone calls you JoJo. Your diaper bag even says JoJo. It's a nickname.” He pulled the boy in and kissed his chubby cheek. “That means a special name that the people who love you call you.” He kissed him again, giving him a big hug. “I love you, baby JoJo.” He smiled. “Maybe I should ask to room with you. You smell a lot better than Asher.” Jonah did not reply. “But I guess he just farts, you poop your diapers, don't you?”

“Ew!” Jonah protested. Reuben laughed and flipped Jonah onto his back, blowing a raspberry into his tummy. The

smaller boy squealed and laughed, still terribly ticklish.

“Ew! Stinky baby JoJo!” Reuben teased, blowing another raspberry right into his belly button. “Who's a stinky baby? Who's a stinky baby?”

“Me!” Jonah exclaimed, hoping it would make him stop so he could catch his breath. He did, though Jonah felt the back of his diaper get pulled out as Reuben checked if he did actually poop. Would serve you right. Jonah thought, though he wondered if he actually could bring himself to poop his pants. I don't think I'm gonna stick with this long enough to find out. All the same, he was unnerved by just how different he looked. The hair was one thing, the baby fat was another.

“Alright, squirt. Let's go downstairs, huh? Who knows what naughty stuff Asher's got up to without us watching him?” He stood up and Jonah was once again reminded how giant these two intruders were. He was far from the shortest boy in his class, but he felt as if he really was a toddler compared to them. How did they not hit their heads? Mom and Dad were nowhere near as big as these guys were. “You know what to say.” To Jonah's surprise, he did.

“Uppies.” He raised his hands up toward Reuben. What was he doing? He realized he was even bouncing a bit on his feet.

“Shoot, almost forgot. Keep your arms up, bud.” He gathered a blue t-shirt in his hands before pulling it down over Jonah's arms and head. It was only once it was on him, the hem meeting the white diaper waistband that he saw it said lil bro on it. He knew it could be worse, but at the same time, he was

an only child, not someone's little brother! “Ok, now what was that?”

“Uppies.” Jonah said again, unable to shake the sudden desire to be picked up and held by Reuben. I don't even know this guy! He thought, even if he bore a strong resemblance to Dad.

“We're supposed to be working on complete sentences, aren't we?” Reuben said thoughtfully. Isn't anything good enough for this guy? “So say baby JoJo wants uppies'.”

“That's not my name.”

“You don't want to spend all night in an icky bathroom, do you?” The bathroom was impeccably clean, but Reuben had a point.

“Jonah want uppies.” He intoned. The ground rushed away as Reuben picked him up, placing a hand under his diapered bottom as he supported him.

“Want to make a stop in my room to fly onto the bed again?” Reuben asked, planting a kiss on Jonah's chubby cheek.

“No.”

“Okie dokie.”

The next time Jonah's feet touched the ground, they were downstairs. He wobbled a bit, still unaccustomed to his diaper. This thing's gotta go. Even with his chubby belly, he could see the Sesame Street monsters mocking him.

“I'm gonna check on dinner. Are you hungry, JoJo?” He did

not wait for an answer. “How about you go play with Asher?” Yeah, right! I'm getting this stupid diaper- Jonah heard the distinctive sounds of Ninja Zombie Werewolf: Full Moon Fracas in the other room. Excited, he ran toward the sound. Diaper or no diaper, at least some things were still the same!

Whether from his thighs or the diaper, Jonah's legs swung wide and his run was more like a fast waddle.

“Can I play?” He blurted out. Of course he could, it was his game.

“Whoa!” Asher said. “someone's an excited little tater!”

“Tater?”

“Did silly Reuben forget your binky?” He held up a stuffed giraffe that looked like it had been through a minor war. On its face was a plastic circle and a-

Before Jonah could back away, Asher plunged the nipple of the pacifier into his mouth.

“There we go.” Asher’s voice seemed further away and muffled, as if Jonah's head had been wrapped in cotton. He realized he was sucking on the pacifier. He knew it was wrong, but then again, he was in a diaper. That was far more wrong than sucking on his binky, right? “Your hair is always so fluffy after your bath.” Asher said, running his fingers through it. “Fluffy baby JoJo!”

“Can I play?” Jonah asked, pointing to the TV just to make sure Asher understood.

“Sure. You just sit down right here.” Asher grabbed Jonah and situated him on the floor, back up against the couch that Asher plopped down on, lounging in almost the exact position Jonah had been earlier. “You've got your shape blocks and some trucks there.” I don't want these baby toys! “Soft, fluffy baby.” Asher said, feeling Jonah's hair again before resuming his game. “Let's goooo!” It made Jonah nervous just how much that sounded like his voice. Maybe they are my brothers… but I don't have brothers! He noticed the photo on the mantel was no longer his most recent school photo. It was all three of them with him on Reuben's lap, mouth open in a babyish smile-laugh. Oh, no. Clearly he had somehow stumbled into some alternate universe where he was two and had older brothers. Was that even possible? He sucked on his binky nervously, which made him feel a little better. What if he started forgetting his old life? My name is Jonah. Well, that one's still true. He looked up at the screen and watched Asher try – and fail – to kill one of the slime vampires. He's so bad at this game!

“Can I try?”

“Not for babies.” Asher said.

“C'mon.” Asher paused the game and, bending over, poured out a variety of wooden shapes on the floor.

“Go on and sort your block thingies.” He said. “It's like good for your brain and junk.” Jonah sighed and sat back down, staring at his diaper as if it was all the plastic garment's fault.

My name is Jonah, I'm ten years old. My birthday is August

9th. Uh, I like video games, I wear boxers, I hate broccoli. He tried his best to rattle off all the facts of his life, but it was like a test at school. You know everything until you have to prove it. Well, that's one, I guess. My teacher at school is Mr. McMillan. None of this was making him feel better, so he started watching Asher play, snickering into his binky whenever Asher made an especially dumb move.

"Asher, you know you're not supposed to play that while baby JoJo's still up." Reuben came into the room and crossed his arms, even shifting his weight slightly to one side like Mom did. But she's not his mom! Jonah reminded himself.

"It's fine. He's fine. He's got his toys." In fact, Jonah had all but forgotten about the wooden block between his legs, staring up at the TV as Asher played his game.

"At least it's a cute pic." Reuben mumbled as he watched the shaggy haired toddler, the giraffe on his binky swaying back and forth as he sucked. "Finish this match and then turn it off."

“What? Why?”

“Cuz it's not appropriate.”

“Is so! JoJo was asking to play just a minute ago.”

“He doesn't even understand what video games are.”

“Look, I'll prove it!” Asher leaned down and tousled Jonah's hair to get his attention. “Let's goooo!”

“Let's goooo!” Jonah repeated.

“See?”

“He said wet's whoa.”

“Only cuza his binky.” Asher said. Reuben shook his head and sat down on the floor, blocking Jonah's view of the TV.

"JoJo, do you know what shape this is?" He helped up a dark wooden square.

“Square.” Jonah muttered.

“Can you show me where it goes?” He handed it to Jonah. “Game goes off. It's rated T, which means both of you are too little to play it.” He smiled back at Jonah, his voice immediately shifting back to treacly sweetness. “Asher's a baby, isn't he?”

“He is.”

“Hey!”

“Sorry, Asher, two against one.” Reuben smirked at Asher. “And it's really two and a half because little JoJo's so cute!” He attacked!

Jonah was not even sure how long he spent on the living room floor, squealing, squirming, and giggling as Reuben – and even Asher – tickled him, blew raspberries on his tummy, and generally reduced him to a happy toddler. How could he focus enough to repeat the facts about his life when he could barely even move beyond waving his arms and legs around. Before he knew it, it was getting overwhelming and he began to cry, tears rolling down his face as he fought for breath.

“Ok, you're ok.” Through his tears and wails, he could not even be sure who it was who had pulled him into their lap, pushing his binky into his mouth and rocking him back and forth. “It's hard having such big emotions, huh?” The way Asher said it, because it was Asher who was consoling him, Jonah had a feeling he had heard Mom or Dad say that very thing. Jonah felt a surge of panic. Did… did that mean Mom and Dad thought he was two too? He needed to focus, get a phone or something, and get to the bottom of this!

“Can I see your phone?” He asked, trying to sound as innocent as possible. For once, his new looks might come in handy.

“It's time for dinner, silly.” Asher laughed. “Silly baby JoJo.”

“My name's Jonah.” He said.

“That's an old man name.” Asher replied. “You'll be JoJo until… I dunno, until you get married.” He got to his feet, picking Jonah up. “Let's go eat dinner!”

Jonah half-expected a highchair to be waiting for him, but instead, the dinner table just had two more chairs than normal, as if they had always been there. He found himself sitting in between Asher and Reuben as Asher put a lime green silicone bib around his neck.

He was relieved that his food looked the same as theirs, although his chicken was cut up into little cubes and he would rather not have any broccoli. He looked around his plate, realizing that it was made of the same material as his

bib and suction cupped down to the table.

“Where's my fork?” He asked.

“Here.” Reuben said, pulling the binky out of Jonah's mouth.

“No, fork.”

“That's right. No fork for JoJo!” Reuben said with a chuckle. "What's that smell?" Reuben's nose wrinkled. "JoJo, are you a messy baby?" He pulled out the back of Jonah's diaper.

"The best part of having a baby brother is blaming your farts on him." Asher murmured to Jonah.

“I am not pooping this thing.”

“Oh, did Mommy have you use the big boy potty?” Reuben asked, half-listening.

“Can we not discuss JoJo's diapers for just one dinner?” Asher asked, rolling his eyes.

“Eat up, baby JoJo.” Reuben said, grabbing a cube of chicken from Jonah's plate and eating it. “Yummy chicken.”

“And yucky broccoli.” Asher muttered, pushing the offending vegetable with his fork. Yeah, maybe we are brothers. Jonah thought.

“Don't be like that. You know JoJo's like a sponge.” Reuben smiled down at Jonah, theatrically eating a piece of broccoli. “You like broccoli, right?”

“No.”

“It's like eating trees. Like a dinosaur! JoJosaurus Rex.”

“T-rexes didn't eat trees.” Asher remarked philosophically.

“Shush.” Reuben punched Asher's arm. “Eat your broccoli and set a good example.”

“It makes you fart.” Jonah opined.

“Where did you hear that?” Reuben asked.

“I learned it in school.” Jonah replied before realizing how weird that would sound to a boy who thought he was a baby.

“Oh, ok.” The trio returned to eating and Jonah tried to think. Brothers could easily become allies. If he could convince them he was really ten, maybe they would help him figure out how he had gotten so… pudgy.

“JoJo.” Reuben said. “You gotta eat, bud.” Jonah saw that both of their plates were clean. Most of the chicken he had eaten automatically while thinking, but the broccoli remained there. “Here.” He speared one of the florets and brought it to Jonah's lips. Jonah, like any self-respecting toddler, sealed his lips tightly shut. It was a standoff and he was not going to budge. He stared evenly at Reuben and then burst out laughing, squirming and crinkling as Asher tickled the bottom of his foot. His defenses completely shattered, the broccoli easily made its way in.

“Teamwork.” Asher said in celebration as Jonah's whole face wrinkled as he chewed the disgusting green vegetable.

“One more piece.” Reuben said, preparing the fork anew.

“No.” Jonah said, though he knew he was at a disadvantage. He begrudgingly opened his mouth, feeling Asher holding his foot at the ready.

The third piece was one too far. Jonah let it enter his mouth, but then spit it out, letting it tumble down his bib into the waiting pelican pouch at the bottom, where it joined a few pieces of chicken Jonah must have missed his mouth with.

“Alright, well, I think two pieces of broccoli is a record.” Reuben said. “Toddler or table?”

“Uh, table.” Asher replied. Reuben nodded and, grabbing a paper towel, set to work wiping Jonah's face.

“Stop!”

“What? You're a messy eater.” Reuben grabbed a sippy cup and handed it to Jonah. “Here, drink some water. Both hands.” Jonah muttered a home alone word under his breath before drinking some of the water. "Are you a messy baby just like you're a messy eater?” He checked Jonah's diaper. “Good. Remember our deal. Poopy diapers for Mommy and Daddy, not your big brothers.” Jonah almost wished he could poop it right then and there as he watched Asher take the rest of the plates into the kitchen. Wait, that meant Ninja Zombie Werewolf was open! He slid off the chair, almost falling onto all fours thanks to the diaper, but dashed toward the living room as quickly as his legs could take him. He had almost made it when he suddenly tripped. There was not even anything in his way, how had he managed that? He landed on his hands and knees.

“Uh-oh! JoJo down!” Reuben called.

“I'm ok” was what Jonah wanted to say, but he felt something building inside him. It felt almost like a volcano about to erupt. He tried to fight it back, but he found it as impossible to fight as his giggles and squeals during tickle attacks.

Jonah began to wail and bawl loudly, his confusion and frustration over why tripping had hurt so much and why these two strangers were treating him like a baby only making him cry more. Why couldn't he stop? His confusion over that only made him wail more. He could hardly even see around him, all he could feel was the irrepressible urge to bawl and wail and cry, even as he felt his binky push past his lips.

Through tear-filled eyes he could see the binky, the stupid giraffe, and his stupid diaper. He bawled more, realizing it felt good to cry, just like it felt good as one of his brothers picked him up and hugged him close. He calmed down enough to see that it was Reuben, but then began to cry again in frustration. Who were these two? Why did they think he was a baby? I'm big like them! I am!

“Got a little too excited, huh, bud?” Reuben murmured, holding Jonah close as he sat down on the couch. “That looks like it hurt.”

“Uh-huh.” Jonah mumbled around the binky, even though he was not sure why it had. He had tumbled off the bed earlier and hardly felt it. Now a slight trip and he went to pieces?

“Well, how about we do something fun?”

“Play Ninja Zombie Werewolf?”

“I'll read you this book.” He held up a board book with colorful dinosaurs on it.

“That's for babies.”

“Well, you can help me read it like a big boy, kay?”

“Fine.”

Jonah sat there in Reuben's lap as he read the book. Most of it was actual dinosaur facts, but in order to turn the page, Reuben would give Jonah a little squeeze to signal him to dutifully roar around the binky.

“Roar.”

“See, Asher? JoJosaurus rex, the most ferocious toddler of the Triassic.”

“Alright, fine.” Asher said good-naturedly. Reuben smiled, pleased that Asher was playing along for once.

“If your name is baby JoJo, clap your hands.” He sang, grabbing Jonah's hands and clapping them.

"My name is Jonah! Not JoJo! I'm ten years old for god's sake!" All that did was make Reuben change songs.

"Little baby JoJo" Reuben began to sing, bouncing Jonah on his knees. "Bouncing and so happy! Sucking on his binky and being oh so cute!" He lifted the grumbling toddler off of his lap and set him on his feet, grabbing his arms and singing again, bouncing Jonah up and down by his arms in time.

“Little baby JoJo! Bouncing and so happy! Sucking on his binky and looking oh so cute!”

“He does look pretty cute.” Asher said. Reuben grinned.

“Well, now that we've gotten through the temper tantrum and wail for today-”

“I was really hurt!” Jonah protested.

“I think it's time for JoJo to go to bed.”

“What? It's like 5:30.” His protests fell on deaf ears as Reuben resumed singing and bouncing him toward the stairs. Jonah soon found himself back upstairs in Reuben's arms as Reuben carried him toward his bedroom, Asher close behind. Jonah smugly sucked on his binky, curious just how they would react to seeing his bedroom.

Dunno what I expected. He sighed as he saw that his bedroom, which had once resembled what Asher and Reuben had turned the guest room into, was now a bedroom fit for a toddler, from the crib to the changing table, to the bookshelf chock full of picture books and even more toys strewn around the floor. He fought down his disappointment and frustration, almost glad when Reuben declared his diaper still dry enough to avoid a change. All the same, he had a sneaking suspicion the soft yellow pajamas that Asher buttoned up over his Buddha belly were for girls. He had thought there was no way he could look even more like a baby, but with the shorts seeming to make his diaper even more obvious and his shirt tucked into the waistband of the diaper on accident, he felt

like he would be the top result if you Googled baby.

"Jonah the Jet's taking off!" Asher exclaimed, lifting Jonah up and flying him round and round the room before setting him gently in the crib.

“It's not really bedtime, is it?” Jonah asked as his binky was removed and he was given his sippy cup to finish.

“Drink up all your wawa.” Reuben replied. Jonah sighed, but sucking on a binky for as long as he had been was thirsty work and he finished the sippy cup of water.

With the casualness brought on by routine, Asher and Reuben got Jonah on his back against soft sheets with fluffy little lambs cavorting before tucking him in, binky in his mouth once again.

“Time for a bedtime story!” Reuben said in a soft tone just barely above a stage whisper. Jonah rolled his eyes as Reuben began to read him a book of baby animals.

“A baby duck is a duckling. A baby chicken is a chick. A baby dog is a puppy. Those are my favorites. A baby lion is a cub.” Each animal came with a picture that Reuben turned the book to show Jonah. “A baby cat is a kitten.” The grey striped kitten looked a little annoyed, Jonah thought. “And a baby person is JoJo!” Jonah did not think that was part of the book until Reuben turned it toward him and he saw a mirror for the last page. He stared at the wide-eyed toddler with a shaggy brown mop and a binky, the collar of his pastel yellow pajamas poking out of his crib blanket. How could that little

cherub be him? I'm ten!

“Alright, let's leave him to sleep.” Asher suggested. Jonah suspected he just wanted to go play video games, but both of the boys leaned down and kissed his chubby cheeks.

“Sweet dreams, baby JoJo.” They both said. He waited for them to leave, but they remained by his crib, staring down at him. What are they waiting for? He sighed, stuck on his back due to the snug blankets. He closed his eyes, keeping them shut until he heard them leave the room. Perfect.

It took a few minutes, but Jonah burst free of the blankets. He got to his feet, no small feat between the diaper and the soft mattress, but the bars of the crib provided some support. Now, how to get out? He thought he had seen a latch that Asher had used to lock it. Wasn't it over here?

“No, no, baby JoJo.” Reuben's voice was still in the hushed tone, but it still struck Jonah as he strode into the room. “Playtime's done.” He got him back down on the mattress and tucked in, kissed him, and left again. It took three more immediately thwarted attempts before Jonah figured it out: there was a baby monitor. Defeated, he stared up at the ceiling and sucked on his binky. Maybe he could fix this all in the morning. Mom and Dad would get home from work and… his sucking slowed to a steady, gentle rhythm as sleep overtook him.

J *

Jonah sat up, wide awake as a bird sang merrily outside his

window. It… his… everything was back to normal! His room had its posters, dirty clothes on the floor roughly by the hamper, even his Little League trophy by the door was there again. He could vaguely smell baby powder, but that felt like the last vestige of a dream that clings to reality just a bit longer than the rest of it. He kicked off the blanket and his jaw dropped as he saw a diaper, a soggy diaper, taped around his waist. His hands shook as he forced himself to touch it. Scrambling out of bed, he looked over himself, running his hands over his hair, torso, even legs. Everything was back to normal and it really would have been nothing by a dream if not for the diaper. He tore it off, smirking as it fell satisfactorily to the floor. He would have to figure out how to hide that. His pajamas sat folded on top of the dresser and he wondered why he had gone from baby pajamas to just a diaper. It was better not to dwell on it, he figured as he crossed naked to the dresser and triumphantly grabbed a pair of briefs from his drawer. Sure, the diaper was confusing, but his underwear, his room, everything was back. He stepped into his briefs and realized there was one last thing to check. Well, two, but he was not going to run all the way down to the living room in just his briefs to see if the photo had changed back. Just down the hall, though? He could do that without getting dressed.

Jonah almost cried with relief as he saw the guest room had gone back to normal. Bed, random cardboard boxes that had not made it up to the attic quite yet, no sign of his brothers. He froze as he almost felt them walk up behind him, only to turn around and find no one there. He grinned and returned to

his room to get dressed. He would find a way to sneak the diaper out to the trash and then it would all be behind him. Real diaper or not, his nightmare was over. Everything was back to the way it had been.