Not So Short

by TheMissingDays

A very special thanks to for commissioning this story and supplying the premise as well as suggestions and feedback. I hope everyone enjoys the story as much as I enjoyed writing it.

The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

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Orion let out a sigh as he stood next to his parents in the driveway. He could feel a certain sense of dread. If anything he should have been happy. Here he was about to spend the weekend at his Uncle and Aunts house. He liked his Uncle Terrence a good deal and his step Aunt Tilly was always bubbly and cheery. Not too mention their house was huge. It was three stories and had lots of rooms situated on a large parcel of land. Orion's Aunt and Uncle were very well off. It was always a good to be able to spend some time in the lap of luxury and his relatives were the generous sort. What filled him with some dread was his cousins.

He liked his youngest cousin Gemma, who was Aunt Tilly's from a previous marriage. She was five, and a total doll. She seemed to like Orion a lot and wanted all of his attention. Orion didn't so much mind. Although it would be nice to get the same kind of attention from a girl his own age. It was the other two that annoyed him.

Greg was fourteen and Silas was twelve. Given their ages Orion at eighteen should not have any problem with them. However they knew how to push his buttons, and it was something they took glee in doing. It was really only one button. Orion was one of the shortest kids in his class, certainly the shortest among the boys, who were all a full head taller than him if not more. He was still taller than Greg and Silas though, a fact that did not seem to deter them in the

slightest. It had been awhile since he had last seen his cousins and he was nervous that Greg, the older cousin might have just caught up to him.

“Ori you look like you got your head in the clouds.” Mom said patting him on the shoulder to get his attention.

“Please don't call me that,” Orion winced. It was the nickname his parents had always said to him. When he had turned thirteen though he had insisted on going by just Orion. If Greg and Silas heard the nickname it would only serve as more ammo.

“Oh sorry slip of the tongue,” Mom said. She knew he preferred Orion, it just sounded more mature. Orion went to great lengths to minimize his insecurity with his size. He always dressed in nicer clothes opting for pants and polo's. He kept his hair on the shorter side and styled. He always wanted to present himself in the most mature light possible. It did help somewhat.

The family made their way up the front walk and knocked on the door. They were greeted and ushered into the entryway of the house. As they stood greeting with Terrence and Tilly Orion looked up at the curved stairway that lead upstairs. He saw Greg and Silas up on the stairs. He let out a breath of relief seeing that Greg was still a few inches shorter than him.

“Well lets not just stand here all day. We got the patio all set up.” Tilly said leading them through the house.

“You gotta see my new grill bro,” Terrence said slapping Dad

on the back.

“Oh yeah can't wait to see the new one,” Dad replied.

“Boys and their toys,” Mom said giving a rolling of the eyes in Tilly's direction which she chuckled in response too.

Before long Orion was sat with his parents on the patio. Tall glasses of ice tea on the table in front of them as Terrence showed Dad his top of the line grill with all its fancy widgets. Thankfully Greg and Silas had opted to go play soccer in the yard.

“I love what you've done with the garden,” Mom gushed talking about Tilly's impressive garden that had stylish hedges and rose bushes, it resembled a hedge maze in a way.

“Oh it took for ever but I really like how it turned out,” Tilly said. Mom's eyes then wandered over to the barn with its fence off in the distance.

“And Princess Sparklegem looks majestic as always,” Mom said referring to the unicorn that was trotting proudly with its pink mane and horn shining in the sun.

“You know I've always wondered what do you feed a thing like that?” Dad mused.

“Same as any other horse,” Terrence shrugged. Orion watched the majestic steed for a moment. He had never seen a unicorn up close like this before, not even at a zoo. His Aunt and Uncle were rich. So of course they would be able to buy such a pet. Although he did find it a little ridiculous that

they had gotten it for the five year old Gemma. She couldn't even take care of something like that at her age. Orion assumed that they just paid someone to do it. Rich people, right.

“Orion why don't you go spend sometime with your cousin's” Mom then suggested.

“I'm fine,” Orion said. Mom gave him a knowing look.

“We're here visiting, so go visit.” Mom said. Orion stood up with some surliness. He didn't want to but Mom's message had been clear.

“Gemma has been talking about you all morning,” Tilly then said with a smile. Orion gave her a smirk. Grateful that she was giving him an out from having to go and spend time with Greg and Silas. His Mom hadn't said which cousin he had to spend time with.

“I guess,” Orion said. He looked out not seeing the small girl anywhere. He then looked over to the garden. He could have sworn he saw her running off in that direction earlier. Orion made his way through the garden finding himself in a small center area that was surrounded by the tall hedges. In the middle he saw Gemma sat upon a blanket with a plastic tea set in front of her. She giggled as she whispered something, her two little blonde pigtails bouncing a little.

“Hey Gemma,” Orion said.

“Orion,” she gasped as she looked at him almost as if he had caught her talking to someone.

“Who are you talking too?” Orion asked. Gemma gave a cheeky smile.

“No one,” she said in a sing song voice. “Would you like to have some tea.” Orion gave a half-frown.

“Uh probably not,” he said feeling a tad bit guilty to see the sad look appear on Gemma's face.

“Oh,” she said quietly. “Cuz I'm too little to play with, right?”

“Its not that,” Orion replied quickly. “More like I'm too big.” Gemma looked at him with a questioning look. “You see. Your brothers kind of like to tease me, and I'm trying to get through today without that happening. If they saw me playing tea with you I would never hear the end of it.”

“I get it,” Gemma said. “They won't play with me either, cuz I'm too little they say.”

“Aww man,” Orion said hating the fact that he was acting just like his smaller tormentors. “That sucks.”

“Its okay,” Gemma smiled getting to her feet and patting Orion on the shoulder. “Daddy says even though they bigger I'm still more ma...ma.”

“Mature?” Orion guessed.

“That's it,” Gemma smiled. Orion laughed a little. He certainly agreed. Even though she was a little girl, Gemma possessed a certain way about her. His mother often described her as the little miss of the manor and Orion thought it was a perfect title for her.

“Maybe you could show me around the garden or we could go see your unicorn?” Orion suggested.

“That's okay,” Gemma said. “I'm having tea right now with my friend,”

“Friend?” Orion asked looking around.

“Yep, he's right here,” she said pointing to a small plaster gnome. Orion looked at the stout figure. It was a classic gnome. A blue shirt with a golden belt buckle, a long white beard, along with a black pipe held up in one of its hands and complete with a tall red cone hat. “He's my best friend, he always plays with me.”

“I see,” Orion said feeling a little sad to hear that Gemma considered her best friend to be a plaster gnome. “So like what do you guys even do together?”

“We have tea and talk,” Gemma replied.

“Yeah, I guess you do most of the talking though, right?” Orion chuckled giving knock to the gnomes hat.

“He talks plenty, he even grants wishes for me,” Gemma said taking a pretend sip of tea from her glass.

“Wishes eh?” Orion said looking at Gemma who didn't reply. “Well if you got any extra wishes could you ask him to make me taller?”

“Maybe, promise to play with me later?” Gemma asked with a coy smile on her face

“Yeah, sure, later then,” Orion said.

“I'll talk to him,” Gemma said. Orion got to his feet, if only things were that easy. Seeing as Gemma was pre-occupied with her tea party Orion traipsed his way back out of the garden. His parents were still on the patio. His Mom spotted him and walked up to him.

“Hey why don't you go play soccer with the boys,” she said.

“I'd rather not,” Orion grumbled.

“Oh don't be like that, it would be fun,” Mom said.

“I'm not a little kid, you can't just shoo me off to play with a ball and expect me to have fun,” Orion countered.

“I know you're not a little kid. I'm just saying it would be nice for you to play with your cousins.” Mom said crossing her arms.

“They're jerks,” Orion said flatly.

“Oh for goodness sakes,” Mom said waving her hand. “You're older than the both of them. Don't let them under your skin.” Orion grimaced. She made it sound so easy. “Look,” Mom said taking on a more gentle tone. “Just assert yourself a little, ignore their teasing, and before long they'll lose interest in trying to gang up on you.”

“Alright,” Orion said with a sigh.

“That's the spirit,” Mom called after him as he walked off as if she were cheering him on. Orion approached the boys out

in the yard. The ball came rolling towards his feet. Orion bent down picking the ball up in his hands.

“You guys playing soccer?” Orion asked.

“Yeah,” Greg the older of the two said. “What about it?” he said snapping his head off to the side as if he were whipping bangs out of his face. Which he didn't need to do since his curly brown hair was high up on his head in a broccoli cut.

“Maybe I'll join,” Orion said. Silas the younger cousin flashed a cheeky smile dotted with a dimple that no doubt got him out of trouble on more than one occasion.

“You sure you can keep up with us shrimp?” Silas said. Orion gave them an annoyed look as he whispered silently to himself to assert himself.

“I'm taller than both of you,” Orion shot back trying his best to look as if the comment hadn't bothered him in the slightest.

“Yeah, but we're normal sized for our age,” Silas said. “You're short.”

“I guarantee I'm faster than both of you,” Orion said. Silas looked as if he was about to retort but was silenced as Greg held up hand.

“Alright then,” he said as a competitive glare lit up on his face. “Silas get in the goal. Lets see how good our big cousin is,” he said placing extra emphasis on the word big.

Silas snickered as he went and got himself in position in front of the plastic goal.

“Shorties start,” Greg said.

“Uh huh,” Orion said as he set the ball on the ground. He wasn't un-athletic, in fact in Orion's estimation he wasn't half bad at soccer. He had trouble keeping up with kids his age in some regards, but he was on more equal footing with Greg. They had the same leg span. He might not be able to dominate him but Orion knew just being able to keep up with Greg would probably annoy the boy to no end. He didn't need to win, just keep up.

It became clear early on that Silas wasn't even going to attempt to stop Greg's shots. Orion had to double his efforts just to keep the score even enough. Somewhere in the halfway mark he noticed something change. Greg didn't seem to be as serious as he once had been. He was even laughing more as if this was a friendly game. Silas even seemed to start playing more fair as he began to actually try and stop Greg from scoring. Orion started to enjoy the competition more, as if there wasn't as much pressure. Both Greg and Orion were panting hard after a while.

“Alright I need a break,” Greg announced as he plopped onto the ground. “You're pretty good,” he said looking up at Orion who was shocked to actually hear something resembling a compliment. No scratch that, it was a compliment. “So do you like play on a team at school or something?” Greg then asked.

“No,” Orion chortled.

“You should,” Greg then said. “You would be pretty good

probably.”

“I think its a little late for that,” Orion smirked. He was a senior who would be graduating in two months, it was too late to start a high school sports career.

“What are you talking about?” Greg asked looking somewhat befuddled.

“Never mind,” Orion said with a wave of his hand. He was still a little on guard that this sudden change in Greg was nothing more than a ruse.

“Can someone else be goalie,” Silas whined walking up to the other two. “Orion you do it.”

“Yeah, I think I'm done,” Orion said he was more than a little tired. Not too mention he almost felt like he was standing on a cliff and the boys were seconds away from pushing him over. They were leading him on – he just knew it

“What? Why?” Silas whined further. “C'mon we're having fun.” Orion stood up a little straighter. Now he knew something was up with these two.

“To tell you the truth I only came out here because my Mom insisted I try to play nice with you two,” Orion said crossing his arms. “I think I've hit my quota.”

“Play nice?” Greg asked. “Whats that supposed to mean, when have we ever not been nice?” Orion laughed.

“What you mean when you're not trying to make fun of me for being short, calling me shrimp and short stack all the

time.” Orion bit his tongue a little. Just what was he even doing by reminding them of all this. At this point he was practically asking for it. However he was a little befuddled to see Greg and Silas looking back at him with confused looks.

“Why would we call you that?” Greg asked. “You're just as tall as me.” Orion merely rolled his eyes.

“Okay hah hah guys,” he said. “Look I played nice but now I'm done, so we can just stay out of each other's way for the rest of the day.”

“No keep playing,” Silas said. Orion let out a sigh. As he pulled at the collar of his shirt. He looked down noticing how disheveled his clothes looked. They also felt a little baggier than usual no doubt thanks to the all the sweat. It was like with every movement he could feel the fabric brush up against his skin.

“I'm done,” Orion said. “I'm not exactly dressed for this, and now I'm sweaty and feel gross.”

“No idea why you dressed like that,” Greg said getting up from the ground. “But hang on one sec.” he said as she jogged over to a cooler and retrieved some bottles of sports drinks. He tossed one over to Orion who caught it.

“What's this?” Orion asked looking at the drink in his hands with a puzzled expression.

“Its to help you cool down,” Greg smirked. “And well look I don't know where you got the idea we were being mean to you but take it as like an apology or whatever or like a peace

offering. You know just to say that we're cool."

"Uh sure," Orion said as he opened up the drink. "I guess I'll think about it." he said before walking away guzzling the drink which did indeed quench his thirst. He decided to try and get himself cleaned off a little in the bathroom as he walked past the adults on the patio.

"Having fun?" Mom asked not even looking at him.

"Suuuure," Orion said with a hint of sarcasm. His thoughts were elsewhere however as he made his way into the house, not even paying any mind to Uncle Terrence making some kind of comment about how he wished he was that age again just to have some more energy. Orion wandered the halls looking for the bathroom as he continued to ruminate on how weird Greg and Silas had been acting. They had actually been nice. But that wasn't right. They were jerks, they had always been jerks. Orion walked into the bathroom having chugged the remains of his drink. He turned on the faucet and began to splash some water in his face. He noticed how smooth his cheeks felt. He remembered that morning he had to asked his Dad to borrow some shaving cream. As Orion scrubbed his face a little he was taken aback by how close of a shave he had gotten. His cheeks never felt like this usually. Maybe he should ask his Dad what brand he used. Orion then grabbed a hand towel and dried off his face. As he looked up into the mirror he came to a cold stop. He did a double take before his mouth went down a little. His eyes widened as he blinked but no matter how many times he did, the image staring back at him never went back to normal. Something had changed.

Orion continued to look at himself not trusting that the image in the mirror was real. He brought his hands up to his face again going over his features. His skin looked softer. His face ever so slightly rounder. He then noticed how his shirt was baggier and this time he could not chalk it up to being sweatier. He lifted up the shirt. His torso was skinnier, the definition of his eighteen year old frame having disappeared and being replaced with a slender physique. The hair that was on his chest and stomach were gone. He then lifted up his arm noticing something else. His armpit was completely bare, not like it had been shaved but as if there had never been hair there to begin with. Orion yelped. He looked like a kid, no older than Silas. He had to get help, something was incredibly wrong here. He came tearing out of the bathroom in a panic as he ran right into his Mom.

“Orion watch where,” she began to say before coming to a pause looking at him up and down.

“M-Mom help me,” Orion sputtered.

“What in the world do you think you are doing?” she asked.

“I don't know this just happened,” Orion said holding his arms out. Mom gave a disapproving tut.

“Why are you wearing your father's clothes,” Mom then said. Orion's head went back as if he had just been slapped.

“Wha –“ he breathed out.

“It's cute when you're little, I think you're a little too old,” she said crossing her arms. “Oh and you got grass stain's on the

pants," she said grabbing at the pant leg. "Great now I'm going to have to wash them."

"Mom these are my clothes," Orion said.

"Orion, enough," Mom said shaking her head. "Go and change this instant, and hurry up lunch is going to be ready soon." His Mom all but ushered him to the stairs despite his protest. "Now go, enough horsing around."

"But Mom," Orion yelped.

"I said enough," his Mom said with her stern voice. "I don't know whats gotten into you but if you don't stop I'll put you on a time out. Is that what you want? Want me to have to treat you like a little boy?"

Orion was silent as he looked at his Mom. She was completely clueless, but how could she be? Orion stomped up the stairs. He went down the hall until he found the room with their overnight bags stashed away. He needed a minute to stop his panicking, that would do him no good. He went to his suitcase and found an unfamiliar set of clothes within. It was a t-shirt with a sports logo and some cargo pants. Something which he would have worn around middle school right before he adopted his more mature and formal style.

Orion pulled off the shirt taking a minute to once again look at his more slender frame. He then took off the pants. As he stood in a pair of boxers his hand went nervously towards the waistband. He pulled it out to inspect. His mouth dropped a little. It had also changed. He had lost some of the girth and

the hair was non-existent. He groaned. He should have expected it given everything else. Orion pulled on the change of clothes. He steeled himself enough to go down stairs. Surely someone had to notice something? He walked into the kitchen. There was a bowl of potato salad and some plates on the counter.

“Hey you look up to the task,” Uncle Terrence said coming into the kitchen and picking up the bowl of potato salad. “Think you can carry those plates out to the patio?”

“Uncle T,” Orion said walking up to the man. “Do you notice anything different about me?” his Uncle looked him up and down.

“You look the same as when you got here. Although I was a little surprised to see how much you've grown since I last saw you. Much taller.”

“Taller!” Orion yelped as his voice cracked. His face went red as his hands went to cover his mouth. No way! Had his voice just cracked?

“Yeah that'll happen,” Uncle Terrence chuckled trying to alleviate Orion's embarrassment. “All part of the change, you got hair under those arm's yet?”

“Yes, I mean no, well...” Orion trailed off as he followed his Uncle out to the patio.

“All in due time,” Uncle Terrence laughed.

“What in due time?' Aunt Tilly asked from the table.

“Oh you know changes,” Uncle Terrence said. “Just some guy talk.”

“Less said about that the better,” Mom tutted. Dad laughed.

“The mama bear doesn't like to think about her little cub growing up,” he said.

“Oh yeah, Tilly was the same way when Greg started,” Uncle Terrence noted. As Orion sat down he looked up to see Greg across from him. He did a double take realizing that Greg now had a few inches on him.

“He's only twelve years old,” Mom said. “He's still a kid, no matter what he says.”

“Twelve year olds aren't kids,” Silas piped up. “We're preteens.” he said looking towards Orion as if he would back him up.

“Okay okay,” Aunt Tilly said patting Silas on the arm. “Maybe we should find something else to talk about, I think we might be embarrassing more than one person at this table.”

“Oh sure,” Mom laughed as she followed suit patting Orion on his arm.

“So Orion, you're about to be done with sixth grade, Silas's class is going on a end of the school camping trip, do you do anything like that at your school?”

“I-I don't know,” Orion muttered.

“No they just do a cookout thing on the last day,” Mom said.

As the conversation veered into school Orion stopped listening as he tried to take stock of his situation. He had to figure out what was going on. He looked at everyone at the table. The adults were he same as ever. Greg and Silas were the same as well except for the fact that now Orion was considered the same age as Silas. Gemma as well seemed unchanged. So it was really only Orion. He was younger and everyone seemed to think that's how it had always been. Orion knew that everything had been normal that morning on the drive over. So something must have happened at the house.

Orion's eyes then went wide as he remembered that Greg had given him the drink. Had that been it? As Orion thought more it began to make sense. They had been acting nice to get him to drop his guard so he wouldn't think anything when they gave him that drink. That had to be it...they drugged him. Orion looked at Greg catching his gaze with a stony glare. Greg stared back a moment before averting his gaze. That seemed to seal the deal for Orion as he was now so sure of the other boys guilt.

What had they drugged him with, and why was no one else reacting to the changes? Were his parents in on this? No that was impossible. Why would they do this? Orion was nothing if not the model son. He got good grades, helped out around the house. Just last week his Mom was already excitedly talking about going shopping for things for his dorm room come fall and she was already planning a graduation party. He had even gotten accepted into a good college, his parents

were proud of him why would they want to take that away?

“So I was thinking tomorrow the boys could all go down to the laser tag place,” Uncle Terrence said.

“Greg and Silas really like it. What do you think Orion, sound like fun?”

“Isn't there an age limit?” Aunt Tilly asked. “Like you have to be old enough?”

“10 and up,” Greg said. “Orion is just old enough.”

“I'm older than you,” Orion sneered.

“Huh,” Greg said looking genuinely confused.

“I know what you two did,” Orion growled as he gave a death stare to the two other boys.

“What are you talking about dude?” Greg asked shaking his head.

“Ori hun,” Mom said placing hand on his shoulder. “Why don't you take a deep breath.”

“For real man,” Greg said looking annoyed. “All I said was you were old enough.” Orion could no longer contain his anger. He was sure that Greg had something to do with this and to now have the gall to keep acting innocent was making Orion see red.

“TELL THE TRUTH ASSHOLE!” Orion roared as he leapt to his feet slamming the table with his fist. The room went silent as all eyes zeroed in on Orion.

“Do something,” Mom said giving Dad a look.

“On it,” Dad said placing his napkin down before going over to Orion and grabbing him by the arm as he pulled him away from the table. “We need to have a little talk,” Dad said. Orion struggled against his father as he was lead to the stairs.

“Get off of me,” he screeched. “You have to believe me, this is their fault, their the ones.” Orion slipped his arm out of his Dads grip at the door. He whirled around, fully ready to go and tackle Greg to the ground, beat him until he admitted it. Orion stopped dead in his tracks however as he saw Greg. The fourteen year old who had been there was gone. He was now replaced by a person who looked no older than eight or nine. His broccoli haircut was now a mop of slightly curly hair and his face was rounder.

“Why's he mad at me?” the younger boy asked, his voice having lost the burgeoning lower register and replaced with a high falsetto“I didn't do anything.” he said looking towards his step-mother with an upset look.

“I know sweetie,” Tilly said putting an arm around him.

“Is he going to get a spanking?” Silas asked with a cheekier smile showing off a missing tooth as he now looked like he was even younger than his previously older brother.

“Silas mind your business,” Uncle Terrence chided.

“Lets go now young man,” Dad said re-taking Orion's arm. His Dad lead him up to the guestroom before closing the door. “What in the world has gotten into you?”

“Dad, you gotta believe me,” Orion pleaded.

“Orion enough,” Dad said holding up a hand. “You're ten years old. You are the oldest kid here, and behaving like that to your younger cousin's is unacceptable.

“Ten!?” Orion gasped. “But you said I was twelve.”

Dad didn't seem to react to Orion's comment as he glazed right over to continue on his dressing down.

“You are going to fix that attitude or you can kiss the trip to the Funzone tomorrow with everyone else goodbye.”

Orion blinked. He knew that the Funzone was a place that sported a five story indoor playground and arcade attached. It was a place that lots of younger kids went for their birthday parties. But wasn't the plan to go laser tagging? Orion didn't question the change as he was subjected to a long lecture from his Dad about being polite especially as a guest in someone else's house.

“Do you understand?” Dad asked having come to the end of his spiel.

“Yes,” Orion grumbled as he sat on the bed.

“Good, you can sit here and cool down for a bit,” Dad said going for the door. “I'll come check on you later, hopefully you lose the attitude,” Dad said before exiting as he closed the door. Which was fine with Orion he needed time alone to think.

Time passed as Orion paced around the room. His grand

theory had just blown up in his face. As he examined every moment of his day thus far, he couldn't find anything to make this make sense. As the facts stood only he, Greg and Silas were being changed and nobody else seemed to notice. If this truly was tied to the drink he had chugged then why had Greg and Silas also drank them? Unless they hadn't know either. Orion shook his head at the thought. His theory about the drinks was falling apart. Too many things would have had to line up for that to be the culprit. Then what was it?

Orion then thought about what had happened earlier. He had arrived and had some ice tea, could that be it? He didn't put much into the theory. Once again he couldn't see any of the adults being behind this. Greg and Silas had not drank any of the ice tea either. He then remembered he had went and seen Gemma. Could she be behind this? Orion actually laughed out loud at the idea. She was five years old, what could she possibly do? Orion groaned as he plopped onto the ground crossing his legs as he put his face into his hands. He sat there for awhile, his mind feeling completely burnt out.

Orion heard the door open as some footsteps approached, he didn't lift his head.

“Ori buddy, feeling better?” his Dad asked.

“Not really,” Orion mumbled.

“C'mon kiddo,” Dad said mussing up his hair. “You'll feel better once we get back out there and I'm expecting you to apologize.” Orion sighed getting to his feet. He paused though as his Dad stood up to see that he was now much

taller than him. Orion looked around and realized he had gotten shorter again.

“Oh no,” Orion mewled. “It happened again.”

“What happened?” Dad asked looking at him with a smirk. Orion pursed his lips as he shook his head.

“Nothing,” he said. It wouldn't do any good to try and explain this. As they walked down the hallway Orion caught himself in the mirror that was in the hallway. He looked significantly younger now. No more than eight years old. Rosy little cheeks and lips that seemed to be formed into a pucker. His hair had also taken on a moppish look. When the hell had it happened? Orion moved past the mirror he couldn't get caught up wallowing about this. He had things to do. He had to find Greg and Silas. If they were getting younger like him then it only made sense they would notice it like he had. Coming back out on the patio he could see that the plates from lunch had been cleared away. Uncle Terrence was sitting off to the side by another empty chair, two beer bottles on the ground, one of them no doubt belonging to his father. Aunt Tilly and Mom were sat at the table with books of dresses spread out between them. Orion knew his Aunt did some fashion work. He didn't see any of the other kids around.

“Orion got something to say?' His Dad said pushing him a little forward. Orion took in a deep breath.

“I'm sorry for yelling at lunch,” he said. The adults all seemed to smile and nod along. “Uh where is Greg so I can apologize to him too?”

“Oh where did he get off too,” Aunt Tilly said bringing a hand up to her chin as she looked around. “He must be around here somewhere? Maybe try the garden?” Orion didn't wait as he walked off towards the garden area.

Approaching the perimeter he couldn't hear any voices. He went in deeper. As he walked through he noticed that it was taking him longer to find the center area than it had before. The deeper he got the higher the hedges seemed to get. Then again he was shorter than he had been that morning. Eventually he made it to the center area. There was no one there, even Gemma's tea set had been removed. The gnome sat there alone. Orion walked up to him and knelt down.

“So you like real or something?” he asked the plaster gnome, remembering that Gemma had called him her friend. The gnome only looked back at him with glassy eyes. “Tch, yeah guess that was a stupid question,” Orion said, honestly for a moment he had actually expected for the gnome to burst to life. Orion fell back onto his butt ruminating for a moment. He needed to try and find some sort of thread to pick up. It seemed Greg and Silas were all he had, and if they were in the same boat as him how much help could they possibly be?

“Ori there you are,” he heard his Mom call out. Orion turned around to see his Mom standing a couple of paces away with her hands on her hip, yet she didn't look angry. “Did you find a friend back here?”

“Huh no,” Orion said standing up and facing his mother. “Just looking for Greg.”

“Greg is still napping sweetheart,” Mom said.

“Nap?” Orion questioned. He knew Greg was perceived as younger than he was, but he had still seemed a little old for a nap. Orion then froze as he looked at his Mom. She now towered over him as he came up to about her thigh. That morning they had been the same height.

“Of course, Greggy takes a nap just like you did. You just woke up first. I'm sure he'll be up soon. Lets go, I don't want you back here by yourself. You need to stay where an adult can see you.”

“I-I wha” Orion sputtered. He spun around looking at the gnome. He was just as tall as the small gnome now. He couldn't figure out when he had shrunk. When he had came out here he had definitely been taller than the gnome.

“Something wrong?” Mom asked. “Oh I think I know that look. Are you wet?” Orion looked back at his Mom with an alarmed look.

“W-Wet?” He stammered. Just then a new feeling overtook him. He looked down at his pants. There was a bulge in the front and he could feel something bulky and cold against his groin. He squirmed a little and heard a definitive crinkle emanate from within the pants. Oh no no no he didn't want to believe it. His Mom came over and knelt down as she grabbed at the waist of his pants. They still looked like the shorts he had been wearing before except now the top was sporting a cloth covered elastic waistband. Orion looked on in horror as his Mom pulled down the front enough to fully

reveal a diaper that was more than a little wet.

“Thought so,” she said pulling the shorts back up as she swooped him up and began to carry him out of the garden. “I think I left your diaper bag in the living room.” Orion struggled trying to get loose as he protested. He didn't have a diaper bag and he definitely hadn't been wearing one a minute ago. As they walked past the adults on the patio they all gave a sort of knowing smirk.

“He's always a little fussy after his nap,” Orion heard his Dad mention. Orion let out another long whimper. He wasn't fussy, he hadn't even taken a nap. Getting into the living room Mom picked up a bag and laid Orion down on the floor. He tried to roll away but his Mom had a hand placed on his chest that was too strong for him to get out from under. He looked over to the see the dark green bag decorated with foxes and bears. The name “Ori” was stitched across the top. His Mom flipped open the top. Orion's eyes went a little wide seeing the row of neatly packed away diapers within. His Mom plucked one out of the line and pulled out a couple of other items.

“Hush now,” Mom said gently as she plopped a pacifier into his mouth. “Mommy's going to give you a quick change and then you can go play.” Orion froze as he felt his Mom pull his shorts down he would have continued protesting but he had become so preoccupied by the strange sensation in his mouth. His tongue swirled around the nipple before his lips seemed to seal. His tongue took up a natural feeling position and the pacifier began to bob up and down. He felt himself calm

down quickly. That was until he felt a cold wipe hit his groin. Orion let out a squeak of surprise.

“Almost done honeybear,” Mom cooed as she continued to wipe his down. His ankles were then crossed and lifted up as his Mom slid another diaper under him. She powdered him before taping the new diaper up and then lifted him off the ground and went back out to the patio without his shorts. Orion's face burned with embarrassment at being seen with just a diaper and shirt on. None of the adults made so much of a mention of it. His Dad was in the grass with a hose in his hand filling up a kiddie pool with water. Orion didn't question why his Dad was doing such a thing as his mind was on other matters. Mom took a seat next to Aunt Tilly at the table keeping Orion nestled on her lap.

“Mommy let me go,” Orion whined not at all finding it strange that he had just called her Mommy.

“Ori shhh,” Mom said calmly as she replaced the pacifier back in his mouth. “Here play with Mommy's phone for a bit,” she said taking her phone out of her purse and setting it in his lap. Orion grasped it up quickly. Perfect. He could use the internet to find out what exactly was going on. Surely there had to be something on there. Even if before if he had read about something like this he would have dismissed it as foolishness. He clicked on the web browser symbol wondering what he would even search for. He supposed 'anti-aging drugs' was as good a place as any. However as he looked at the keyboard display he came to a startling realization. None of it made a lick of sense.

All the letters looked like an alien language. Orion frowned from behind the pacifier. Even if he still knew his letters which he did, and their location on the keyboard that would make it possible for him to type in his search there was absolutely no way he would be able to decipher the results. Another idea then came to him. He could still type things out. So maybe he could type out a message such as help I'm not a baby or I'm really eighteen. His Mom thought he was a baby so if he managed to type something like that out then perhaps that would be enough to alert the adults that something was up. Orion never got the chance though as the patio door opened and Uncle Terrence stepped out.

“The boys are up,” Uncle Terrence announced. Orion looked up in shock to see that Uncle Terrence had a toddler on each hip and they were buck naked. He set them down on the ground.

“Why are they naked?” Tilly asked with a sort amused and befuddled tone.

“Its nice day, we thought the boys would like to swim,” Uncle Terrence said.

“Oh so that's why he is filling up the pool,” Mom said looking back at her husband with the hose still in hand.

“What do you think boys want to go for a swim?” Uncle Terrence asked kneeling down in between the two of them. Orion couldn't believe what he was seeing. Greg and Silas had turned into babies just like him. Greg was a little taller than Silas. His shaggy curls had morphed into short tufts of

light brown hair. He smiled at his Dad not feeling a sense of modesty.

“We swthim,” he cheered with a lisp. Silas who was looking a little unbalanced raised his hand in the air causing him to wobble a little more.

“I go,” he said as if he was asking for permission.

“Go ahead,” Uncle Terrence said pointing. “I think the pool is already. Both boys toddled off with excited shrieks. Uncle Terrence stood up watching his boys run off and splash down into the pool. He then looked over to Ori in his Mom's lap.

“Ori, I bet you want to go join them too don'tcha?” he smiled. Orion was about to refuse yet his Mom answered for him.

“I think he does,” she said tickling him a little causing him to giggle which all the adults took as a yes. Mom took the phone out of his hand and carried him out to the plastic kiddie pool.

“Hey Ori you getting in?” Dad asked.

“I wish someone had told me this was the plan,” Mom said as she handed Orion over to his Dad. “I wouldn't have put him in a fresh diaper otherwise. Hang on one moment I'll be back.” she walked off back towards the house. Dad was holding Orion bouncing him up and down a little.

“You're going to have so much fun, yes you are, yes you are,” Dad cooed with some obnoxious baby talk. Orion didn't respond instead he was completely focused on Greg and Silas

who were rolling around in the pool. He couldn't understand why they were acting like this. Weren't they embarrassed at being naked in front of everybody? Why weren't they freaking out about suddenly becoming babies? They surely had to be putting on some sort of act. Mom returned with the package of baby wipes as Dad set Orion on the grass. Mom quickly removed Orion's shirt.

“Wait, no,” Orion yelped realizing what was happening yet his Mom was too quick as she quickly un-taped his diaper. Orion let out another squeak as the air hit him. Mom then quickly wiped away the powder.

“Okay all ready,” Mom said as she lifted him up under his armpits before depositing him into the cold water which caused Orion to let out another yelp. Orion brought his knees up to his chest wrapping his arms around his legs.

“Go on Ori. Look how much fun Greggy and Silas are having,” his Dad said.

“I'm cold,” Orion whined. His Dad then pointed the hose at him letting the stream of water shower over him.

“Stoooop,” Orion mewled covering his head.

“The more wet you get, the less cold you'll be,” Dad chuckled turning the hose off. Aunt Tilly came over dumping a bin of rubber floating whales into the pool that Greg and Silas snatched up immediately into their hands. Greg seemed to have already mastered squeezing the whale to fill it up and then using it to squirt water. A concept that seemed lost on

Silas who tried fruitlessly to copy his brother. Orion watched the two boys. Had they really become total babies. No that couldn't be. Orion was still thinking like himself, why would it be different for them? He then got a sneaking suspicion that they were covering something up. As soon as the thought crossed his mind he knew that must be it. They did have something to do with this, but then why change themselves unless... a lightbulb went off in Orion's head. Something had gone wrong.

Whatever Greg and Silas had been planning had backfired on them and now they were waiting for a chance to fix it, no doubt the plan being to leave Orion as he was. It would be so like them too, they were experts at covering their tracks. All their little jabs and tricks at Orion's expense over the years had seen them not get so much as a talking too since they were well versed in putting on little innocent faces if confronted. It was one of the things that made them so darn annoying. If Orion was going to get answers from them he was going to have to wait. They would never come clean, not with their parents all standing around the pool.

“C'mon Ori why don't you play with the whale?” Mom said kneeling down next to him as she took one of the whales and filled it with water. Orion took it out of his Mom's hands. He then smiled as he squirted her with water. “You cheeky little monkey, getting Mommy wet,” she said as she paid him back by giving him a tickle to his armpits. Orion giggled as he filled the whale again before squirting in his Dad's direction. Greg caught on and soon he and Orion were squirting at the

adults continuously.

“I'm gonna be soaked if I stay here,” Aunt Tilly said laughing as she moved back.

“I think you're right,” Mom said. The adults then all retreated back to the patio out of range of the whales. Orion smiled. They weren't that far away, they would still be able to keep a close eye on the boys, but most importantly they were out of earshot. Orion dropped the whale as the adults went back to relaxing.

“Alright enough,” Orion said looking at Greg and Silas. “I want some answers, what did you guys do?” Greg looked at Orion with a blank expression while Silas was chewing on one of the rubber whales shooting water into his mouth. Orion crossed his arms as he gave a look back to the adults before leaning in towards Greg. “Look, they can't hear us, you don't have to pretend anymore. I won't tell either. I just want to fix this alright. We can let bygones be bygones after that.”

Greg smiled and for a brief moment Orion believed he had gotten through to him. That was until Greg splashed water right into his face.

“Hey knock it off,” Orion yelped wiping the water from his face. Orion splashed him back which caused Greg to laugh. Before long the two boys were splashing one another with reckless abandon. At some point Silas got in the middle and to Orion's surprise he began to bawl, just like a baby, after getting water splashed in his face. Aunt Tilly was over in a

flash lifting him out of the water into a towel as she gave him some gentle shushing rocking him back and forth. Silas's cries subsided soon after.

“There, there, baby,” Aunt Tilly cooed. “Those big boys were getting too rough weren't they?” Silas responded with a babyish gurgle. “Are you done with the pool?”

“Poo,” Silas said as he stretched back towards the pool.

“Okay,” Aunt Tilly said placing him back in the water before she looked at Greg and Orion. “Boys be careful, especially with Silas he is littler than you.”

“Sowwy Mommy,” Greg responded.

“I'll keep an eye on them,” Uncle Terrence announced as he set a lawn chair near the pool and taking a seat. “No more roughhousing boys.” Both Orion and Greg nodded.

As they went back to playing in the water Orion seemed to have forgotten what he was supposed to be doing. He and the Greg were much more preoccupied crawling around the pool on their stomachs and throwing the whales up into the air to watch them splash in the water which seemed to be massively interesting. Any thoughts towards modesty or embarrassment had completely evaporated from Orion. After some time the boys were removed from the pool each of them getting wrapped up into towels before being set down on a large blanket. Each boy was given a sippy cup full of lemonade Silas's having a rubber top and handles while the other two had hard plastic spouts. Orion sat drinking out of his own

sippy cup. The lemonade tasted amazing and Orion didn't stop drinking until it was all gone. He dropped the sippy cup with an “Ahhh” there was nothing like a cool drink on a hot day. Suddenly Orion felt himself lifted up and brought into his Dad's arms.

“Alright you nakey little boy, lets get you some clothes,” he said as he carried Orion off into the house. Getting into the guest room Orion was placed on the ground, his towel spread out around him as he waited for his Dad to gather up the diapering supplies out of the bag. Orion was absentmindedly sucking on the pacifier. It was normal enough, he usually did suck his pacifier when he was getting his diaper changed. His Dad had his ankles in the air and his butt raised over a diaper. As Orion was lowered down and given a powdering he looked over at the assembled suitcases. There were only two of them plus the diaper bag, but wait that wasn't right. As his Dad was taping the diaper up something suddenly clicked in his mind. Hadn't he and his Dad been up in this room before? Yeah, they had. Except Orion hadn't been small like this.

As the cloudy memory came back, it suddenly became clear his Dad had been mad at him, he had been older too. As the realization from this sudden memory became clearer Orion remembered more. He was back, he wasn't a baby, he was eighteen. Dad then lifted Orion up onto his feet as he went to his own suitcase and pulled out some clothes.

“Dad!” Orion suddenly yelped. His Dad looked at him with a smirk.

“What's up pal?” his Dad asked picking the pacifier that had flown out of Orion's mouth off the floor.

“W-What are you doing?” Orion stammered. He had wanted to say much more but frankly his mind hadn't yet caught up with his mouth.

“Getting you dressed,” Dad said. “What do you think, jammies sound good for the rest of the day?”

Orion shook his head. He didn't need help getting dressed and he especially shouldn't be wearing any of this stuff.

“I don't need that,” Orion spat. “Or this,” he said pointing to the diaper currently taped around his waist.

“Don't worry,” Dad smiled. “Bedtime is still a long way off, but there's no harm in wearing your jammies for the rest of the day, I know you like how soft and comfy they are. Plus we're not going anywhere for the rest of the day.”

“D-D-D” Orion stuttered he tried to form the word out of his mouth. “D-Daddy, I don't need a diaper. Don'cha rememba?” he said. It felt like his mouth was forming words independently from what he meant to say in his head. Dad chuckled a little at Orion's comment. He obviously took Orion's comment about remembering as a misplaced phrase. Orion was just repeating a phrase he had heard and used it out of place. Totally normal behavior for kids still learning how to talk.

“Ori buddy, you need to wear your diaper, no taking it off. I don't want a repeat of last night, and we're going to put your

jammies on so you're nice and comfy and can get back to playing.” Dad said as he lifted Orion off the ground plopping him on the bed before grabbing up his legs to thread them into the pajamas. Orion could only groan. His Dad was completely oblivious. There was absolutely no way around that. He wasn't going to be talking his way out of this. When his Dad was finished Orion found himself dressed in a one piece footie pajama.

They were red and had a firetruck patch on the right breast. They also zipped up in the back. The fabric was light and soft and hugged Orion's frame, highlighting the pudgy baby fat that was now present. The worst part of all being that the outline of the diaper underneath was perhaps more pronounced and noticeable than ever before. Orion was carried back downstairs, the whole time he was thinking over the afternoon. How could he have acted like that in the pool? Yet it hadn't been acting he hadn't been putting on any kind of show. He had for a time forgotten that he wasn't a baby. Is that what had happened to Greg and Silas too? Had the reason why they had not been able to tell him what was happening is because they had forgotten?

“Oh you put him in his pajamas?” Mom asked as Orion was carried into the kitchen where Mom and Aunt Tilly were washing up some dishes.

“I figured we're not going anywhere,” Dad said.

“Looks like you and Terrence had the same idea,” Aunt Tilly chuckled. “He put the boys in their jammies too, there in the

playroom right now. I bet Ori would like to join them. Gemma is there too, finally done with her nap."

"I don't know, he is in kind of weird mood right now." Dad smirked as he bounced Orion up and down looking at Orion as if he expected the boy to demand that he wanted to play. "He was a little fussy about getting his jammies on. Even tried to insist that he didn't need a diaper."

"Oh Ori, what are we going to do with you," Mom said patting Orion on the back before giving him a kiss to the cheek. "He's been taking off his diaper by himself," Mom then said looking over at Aunt Tilly.

"Sounds like all the signs are there," Aunt Tilly said in a knowing manner.

"I was thinking the same thing too," Mom mused.

"Signs of what?" Dad asked sounding out of the loop.

"That he is ready for potty training, duh," Mom said giving her husband a playful tap on the head.

"Oh you think," Dad asked looking at Orion with a raised eyebrow. "Guess I wouldn't mind not having to change diaper's anymore. This kid can make some stinkers."

Orion frowned. He hated how the adults were all talking about him like he wasn't even in the room. Given his height it seemed to happen more often than not, even as a highschooler, it didn't seem to stop people from doing it since he always got regarded as much younger than he was. It

grated on him more than anything else. Thankfully the conversation seemed to end as Dad ferried Orion down a long hallway. He came to a room at the end that had a baby gate in the doorway. Dad put Orion over the gate setting him onto some soft carpeted ground.

“Room for one more?” Dad asked.

“Sure more the merrier,” Uncle Terrence said from the ground with Silas in his lap while Greg was running after Gemma who had a balloon on a string, both of them shrieking in delight. As Orion looked around the room he could certainly see this was the playroom and given that his Aunt and Uncle were loaded this room reflected that.

The walls of the room were done up with murals of a sun and rainbows which went the light blue carpet. There were bins chock full of toys up against the wall. In the center of the room was a foam jungle gym that was low to the ground. Appropriate only for small toddlers as it probably wouldn't hold the weigh of anyone over fifty pounds and low enough to the ground that even if one fell from the top it wouldn't be much of a drop. There was also a brightly colored plastic play set with a slide attached. Orion noticed that the stairs could be folded up to deny access to the top, probably so the kids couldn't climb it unless an adult wanted them too. In the corner of the room was a small wooden playhouse as well with a blue roof, yellow siding, and a pink door. The green shutters were open and Orion could see there was a blue plastic counter with sink attached to the wall.

“Ori,” Gemma more or less shrieked as she ran over to him picking him up rather awkwardly as she wasn't exactly strong enough to lift him more than a few centimeters off the ground before twirling him around. “We can play all together now.”

“Gemma, be careful with him,” Uncle Terrence said as a gentle reminder. “He's little, remember. “

“Okay Daddy,” Gemma said releasing a frazzled Orion who stumbled back before falling on his butt. He looked back and saw that his Dad had disappeared from the doorway. Orion got to his feet having a moment of shock as he looked at Gemma standing in front of him, he only came up to her chest. She was a good deal taller than him now, to the point he had to look up to see her face.

“I got to run to the bathroom,” Uncle Terrence said as he walked over and stepped over the baby gate. “You think you kids can stay out of trouble for a minute.” Greg had gotten himself interested in some chunky toy trucks while Silas held onto the side of the jungle gym as he sidled around the perimeter on his wobbly legs.

“I can watch them Daddy,” Gemma announced.

“Thanks for being a big girl princess,” Uncle Terrence smiled before walking off.

“So what do you want to play first?” Gemma asked. Orion didn't reply, he instead was looking at Silas and then to Greg. Both of the boys were indeed dressed in their pajamas. Silas's were green with the stencil of a bears face on the chest and

Greg wore a plain blue sleeper with rubber soles on the feet. Orion also knew they were both diapered like him.

“You want to play trucks?” Gemma asked noticing Orion watching Greg.

“Tucks,” Silas said as he toddled over losing balance half way over and crawling the rest of way before taking a seat next to Greg. Orion shook his head. He marched over to the two boys. He had to get them to snap out of it.

“Hey Greg c'mon wake up already,” he said as he tapped Greg's shoulder.

“Stop,” Greg mewled as he moved his shoulder out the way as he continued to load up blocks into the back of the dump truck. Orion then looked at Silas.

“Silas seriously. You guys can't like this. You're wearing diapers.” Orion huffed. “I know you know this is wrong.” Silas was too busy chewing on the plastic block to even give a response.

“Is Greg not sharing?” Gemma asked coming up to the group. “Greggy you have to share, Ori is a guest.” Gemma said taking on an authoritative tone of a bossy big sister. Greg looked up at her. He gave a sour look but handed over one of the dump trucks to Gemma.

“There Ori, you can play with this one,” she said offering the toy to Orion. The boy just let his head flop back as he gave out a pained moan before flopping onto his butt.

“I don't want to play with that,” Orion said crossing his arms.

“There's lots of stuff to play with,” Gemma said. “We can play in my house if you want.”

“I don't want to play anything,” Orion said through gritted teeth.

“You don't wanna have fun?” Gemma asked then sounding kind of nervous.

“How can I?” Orion exploded. “These are all baby toys and I'm not a baby! These two idiots did something and now they can't even remember. Which is just so typical of them and now I'm gonna be stuck like this.”

“So you're not having fun?” Gemma then asked.

“No, I'm not,” Orion said with a roll of his eyes. “I'm eighteen and not a single person believes me.” Orion knew that Gemma was like everyone else and thought this was all normal, but it did feel good to vent.

“Oh okay,” she said. Orion looked at her noticing that she was backing away. Her face had kind of a sad look on it. The same kind a child would have if they had been caught with their hand in the cookie jar. “I gotta go do something,” she said before she rushed over to the baby gate. She was tall enough to bend over it and unlock it before she rushed off. Orion cocked his head.

That had been a strange reaction. What in the world did she need to do? Why had she looked sad? Just then Orion's

mouth dropped. Did she believe him? But why, no one else did, it seemed he was the only one that knew something was up unless...she had something to do with it.

Orion shook his head. No that wasn't possible. She was a little girl, what could she have possibly done? But the more he thought about it, the more it made sense. She was the only one who had reacted strangely when being told. He got to his feet and ran out of the room. He had to find her, see if she knew something.

He ran down the long hallway which was a little different now that he had to account for the exra bulk in-between his legs. He got out to the living room. He saw the door to the patio was open he walked up to it and saw Gemma walking across the yard and disappearing into the garden. Orion followed. He made his way through the hedge like maze, being the third time that day, he had a pretty good idea of where to go. As he got closer to the center he could hear two voices speaking.

One of them was Gemma but the other he did not recognize. He came to the final corner before he poked his head around, stopping in his tracks. Gemma was standing and in front of her was the gnome except he was moving and talking.

“He's not happy, you said they would have fun,” Gemma said.

“Right right,” the gnome said. “You got your wish, things take time, time.” the gnome said.

“So you promise he'll have fun?” Gemma asked sounding

unconvinced.

“Of course, of course. Gnomes always make good, make good.” the gnome said laughing as he did so.

“I didn't ask you to make them babies,” Gemma then said putting her hands on her hips.

“I gave you what you asked for, just as you said, as you said,” The gnome said. Orion gasped. He had gotten over his shock of seeing and honest to god gnome. Now he had just heard the answer he had been looking for all day. The gnome peered behind Gemma as she spun around. Orion came marching out behind the hedge.

“You did this?” he roared. “This is all your fault?”

“Um well no,” Gemma said shaking her head. “I didn't wish for this.” Orion gritted his teeth. He couldn't believe that the whole wish thing Gemma had told him that morning had been for real. “I only wished that you guys wouldn't think that you were too old to play with me,” she said.

“Quiet right, quiet right,” the gnome said. “Only way to do that was to make you younger, younger.” Orion looked from Gemma who looked like she was on the verge of crying and back to the gnome who was taking a drag off his pipe. Orion brought his thumb and forefinger up to his face as he rubbed the bridge of his nose.

“Okay,” he said taking a deep breath. He had figured out what was going on, now he needed solutions. “Gemma you can wish for things, so just wish for me and Greg and Silas to go

back to normal."

"I can't," Gemma then said looking down at the ground. Orion looked back at her as his eyes bugged out.

"I'm not asking –" Orion began.

"No more wishes," the gnome interjected. "She got three, three. Used them all up."

"On what!?" Orion stammered looking at the girl. He only noticed one thing out of place, the fact that him and his cousin's were now much younger, what else could she have wished for.

"I wished for Princess Sparklegem first," Gemma said. Orion blinked in astonishment. The unicorn had been a wish? How could he not have noticed that? Everyone had just accepted it as completely normal. It suddenly dawned on him then why no one had batted an eye to him suddenly getting younger. Part of the magic must make it so no one realizes. "And then I wanted people to play with and my third wish I used for you." Orion had not listened to what Gemma had said as his mind was searching for a solution.

"Alright you," Orion said walking up to the gnome. "This is all your fault so you gotta fix it."

"Can't," the gnome said. "Wishes gone, poof, finito."

"You're magic just do something, wave around your wand or whatever it is you do," Orion demanded.

"No more wishes. Sorry boy. I can't do magic without wishes.

I don't have unlimited magic you know. This is how it works, how it works.” he said laughing as if what Orion had asked him was a ridiculous request that merited laughter.

“Okay well don't I get like three wishes then?” he asked. “Since I know you're real now or whatever.”

“Nope nope,” the gnome then said.

“Hey,” Orion yelped.

“She is special,” the gnome said motioning towards Gemma. “Pure of heart, passed the test you see. You? Not so much, not so much.” Orion felt fairly offended at the implication. Sure he wasn't exactly a saint, but he was still a good person. Orion stared at the ground in deep concentration. There had to be something here, something he could do.

“This doesn't make sense,” Orion said more to himself.

“Gnome magic does exactly what it must. No mistake, no mistake,” the gnome said looking somewhat bothered.

“Oh yeah,” Orion said standing up straight puffing out his chest a little.

“Yeah, yeah,” the gnome said sticking out his stomach a little as if to meet Orion's challenge.

“Then how come I remember and Greg and Silas don't? Your magic must not be the that good.” Orion said.

The gnome laughed a little. “The spell is finished with them, its still working on you. The last wish, last wish.”

“Last wish?” Orion questioned he looked at Gemma.

“My last wish was for you,” Gemma said meekly. Orion was about to ask what it had been yet he didn't get the chance.

“There you are,” Mom's voice rang out. Orion turned around to see his Mom walking up to him. She picked him up immediately. “Ori this is the second time I've had to come and get you from this garden.”

“Wait Mommy, the gnome he's alive,” Orion said. He pointed back towards the gnome. This was perfect. Once his Mom saw the gnome talking and moving around she would have to believe him. His Mom smiled.

“Oh you came out here to see your friend again?” Mom asked. Orion looked back at her like she was crazy. He turned his head to see that the gnome had turned back into plaster, no longer alive. “Is that why you keep coming out here?”

“No, he's real. He made me a baby,” Orion cried out.

“That's a nice game honey,” Mom said. “I guess I'll have to thank him for giving me the cutest little two year old on the planet,” Mom said kissing Orion on the cheek.

“Nooo Mommy,” Orion whined.

“You can play more with him tomorrow but for now its back to the playroom,” she said as she began walking back with Gemma following. “Gemma dear you need to be more careful with the babies, you left the gate wide open when you left.”

“Sorry Aunty,” Gemma said. Getting back into the kitchen a look of relief came over Aunt Tilly's face upon seeing Mom with Orion in her arms.

“Oh thank goodness you found him,” Tilly said. “Where was he?”

“In the garden,” Mom said. “Seems he's taken a liking to that gnome you have out there.”

“Oh that old thing?” Tilly laughed. “I got it at a garage sale for like a dollar, if he likes it so much you guys can have it.” Gemma looked up a little alarmed.

“That's not necessary,” Mom laughed. “I wouldn't even have anywhere to put it.”

“I'm just glad he's okay,” Tilly said then giving an exasperated stare back to her husband. “This never would have happened if someone had been watching the kids.”

“I was gone for like a minute,” Uncle Terrence said.

“Its fine,” Mom said. “He's completely unharmed. I think I'll take him back to the playroom and then stick around, I haven't even seen it yet.”

“Oh really, you simply must c'mon I'll show you,” Aunt Tilly said. Orion was brought back to the playroom and set on the ground while Aunt Tilly and his Mom went around the room checking out everything.

“Um so are you mad at me?” Gemma asked kneeling down next to Orion.

“What do you think,” Orion spat back. Gemma moved back a little. She then got up and walked to the gate.

“Gemma where are you going?” Tilly asked.

“Can I go play in my room?” Gemma then asked.

“That's fine dear, just make sure you close the gate.” Gemma nodded. She left the room making sure to follow her mother's instructions.

“Oh boy,” Mom said approaching Orion a little later as she noticed he had done nothing but sulk since coming back. “Looks like someone really wants to go back and play with their new friend.” Orion was then picked up. “There's lots of fun things to do in here,” Mom said as she looked at him. Orion felt his lip start to quiver. He was completely trapped. No one could help him. What was he supposed to do against magic? Orion opened his mouth he felt like screaming instead what came out was the sound of crying.

Out of nowhere Orion felt tears start to stream down his cheeks. He couldn't stop it. He felt his Mom hold him close as his head laid against her shoulder. He kept on crying. He felt a pacifier enter his mouth. He didn't want it yet his mouth closed around it out of instinct. As he continued to cry he heard his Mom's soft coo's that sounded so pleasant and calm. The motion of her bouncing him up and down slightly also felt reassuring in a way. Before long Orion felt his tears dry up. The uncontrollable urge to cry subsided. He kept his head against his Mom, continuing to suck on the pacifier. Her warmth felt nice. His Mom then walked over to the play set.

She set him on top near the edge of the slide.

“Why don't you go down the slide for Mommy hmm,” she said. Orion looked at his Mom with his brow furrowed. “Can't you do it?” she then asked. Orion felt a little indignant at the comment. Of course he could. He pushed himself forward reaching the bottom as he fell a little backwards. “Good job you did it,” Mom said in an overly happy way. Orion sat up, he felt a smile form on his lips behind the pacifier. Honestly it felt nice to hear his Mom praise him so enthusiastically even if it was for something so simple. Babies have it easy he thought, if that's all they have to do to get a little praise. Orion stood up going back around and climbing up the stairs.

“Oh Mommy's big boy climbed up all by himself,” Mom cooed again. The smile increased on Orion's lips this time accompanied by a slight giggle. He hadn't heard her sound this proud of him since getting an acceptance letter from the college. The difference being this time he barely had to do anything. He went down the slide again.

“Weeee,” Mom cheered. Orion found himself jumping to his feet as his Mom's happy mood infected him. Soon enough Greg and Silas had migrated over, going down the slide in rapid succession. The repetitive activity never seemed to lose its luster in their eyes. Orion and Greg even went down together on some go arounds. The boys attention eventually wandered. Orion and Greg were tearing across the room shouting and shrieking at the top of their lungs each of them wielding a stuffie in hand. Orion had a stuffed dog while

Greg had a rabbit, they were making their respective animals chase after one another. Silas could not participate thanks to his wobbly legs and instead was much happier playing with some squeak toys.

As Orion ran he came to a stop. He felt the front of his diaper get warm. He looked down with a hint of concern. Had he just wet himself? A feeling of embarrassment overtook him yet a moment later it seemed to fade. What did it matter? Its not like there was anything he could do about it at this point. He smiled. There was a certain comfort in the thought. He saw that Greg had run into the playhouse. Orion barreled through the door. They both screamed as they scrambled out after one another. This was all that mattered to him at the moment. He was having fun.

Eventually the two boys were on top of the jungle gym when Orion was lifted up into his Mom's arms.

“I think its time for dinner,” she said.

“No Mommy I wanna pway,” Orion mewled.

“Its time to get food in that tum-tum,” Mom said in a sing song voice. Aunt Tilly had Silas on her hip and was holding Greg's hand as she walked up to the pair.

“You boys can play lots more after dinner,” Aunt Tilly reassured. She then looked at the stuffed dog Orion was still clutching. “Do you like that puppy?”

Orion looked at the dog. He nodded. He did like the dog. He had always wanted one, hadn't he?

“Then you can keep that one,” Aunt Tilly said.

“You don't need to to do that,” Mom said quickly.

“Don't even think twice about it,” Aunt Tilly said. “These kids have enough toys. They wont miss one.”

“What do you say Ori?” Mom then asked.

“Thank you,” Orion chirped, which was met with a heart melting aww by Aunt Tilly.

At dinner Orion's pajamas were pulled down around his waist. Greg and Silas were in highchairs while Orion was sat on his Dad's lap with a bib around his neck. Dad fed Orion food from his plate.

“Here comes the train,” Dad said holding the fork to Orion's mouth which he opened wide taking all of the contents into his mouth. “Woah big bite. Such a good eater for Daddy.”

Orion should have been embarrassed by the commentary but like before he was soaking up the praise like a sponge. Another forkful of food was coming at him, yet Orion turned his face getting some sauce on his face.

“Not hungry?” Dad asked putting down the fork as he used the bib to wipe Orion's face.

“Mhmm,” Orion hummed. His Dad then handed him his sippy cup.

“Finish your juice then,” Dad said. Orion leaned back into his Dad as he drank the juice. Sitting in his Dad's lap while he

drank made him feel very content. All his needs had been taken care of. There was absolutely nothing to worry about. As his Dad ate his own food, Orion's eyes wandered before landing on Gemma. The girl sat picking at her food. A saddened look on her face. Orion stopped drinking for a moment. He was starting to feel kind of bad. She was no doubt bothered by how upset he had been at her. Maybe he had been justified in his anger at the time, yet with how he felt at the moment maybe this wasn't the worst thing in the world. He had just had the most fun he had in a long time. It wasn't as if she had done this thinking she was going to hurt anyone. She had just been lonely. In fact if Orion had just sucked it up and played with her and weathered a couple of snide comments from the boys, this probably would have never happened. Did he somehow deserve this? No, not really but Gemma didn't deserve to feel like she did either. Orion decided right then he was going to have to apologize to her, just best not to do it at the dinner table.

The meal then concluded and Orion was excited at the prospect of returning to the playroom.

“Its such a nice night out,” Dad said. “Maybe we should let the kids run around outside and catch the lightning bugs.”

“The boys are already in their pajama's,” Mom countered.

“Big deal,” Dad said with a guffaw. He pulled Orion's pajamas off of him. “Its warm enough that they'll be fine in just diapers.”

“Not a bad idea,” Uncle Terrence said as he removed Greg

from his highchair and followed suit in getting his pajamas off.

“Speaking of diapers, I think someone needs a new one,” Dad said as he took Orion upstairs to the guest room. On the floor Orion gave no mind to his Dad changing his diaper. He was far more preoccupied with the dog stuffie he was holding up above his face.

It was a quick change and Orion soon found himself in the grass chasing after the lightning bugs. He noticed how sensitive he now was. It was as if he could feel every blade of grass beneath his feet. He went to clap his hand around a bug but it escaped. He frowned. This would certainly be easier with a net. He looked around spying Gemma walking out onto the grass with several nets. He ran up to her.

“Can I use one?” he asked pointing.

“Oh sure,” she said handing one over. “They for everybody.

“Thanks,” Orion said as he did a test swing. He then went to run back into the yard before stopping. He looked back to see Gemma still standing in her spot. He walked back up to her.

“You goin ta play?' Orion asked. Gemma looked at him with some surprise.

“You want me to play...with you?” she asked.

“Uh huh,” Orion nodded.

“I thought you were mad at me?” Gemma questioned.

“I was,” Orion said. “Not anymore.”

“If you want me too,” Gemma then said still looking hesitant.

“I do, it fun,” he said grabbing Gemma's hand. “This is what you wished for.” With that Orion and Gemma ran into the yard. They caught lots of firefly's and put them into a jar. It had been nearly an hour before Orion found himself sitting in the grass. The jar was clasped in his hands as he watched the bugs light up. He found his eyes drooping as if the bugs were casting a spell on him. It was his Mom who picked him up.

“I think someone is getting sleepy,” she said softly. Orion shook his head. Sure, he was tired but he wasn't going to admit. They walked past the table as Mom took the jar and set it on the table.

“Lets get a picture,” Aunt Tilly said appearing with a camera in hand.

“Oh that sounds like a great idea,” Mom agreed. Aunt Tilly then began directing.

“Lets put them in a line tallest too shortest,” Tilly suggested. Orion felt himself bristle at hearing the word shortest. He was a little surprised to find himself standing in a line with his cousins right next to Gemma. He looked over at Greg and was shocked to see that he was actually a little taller than him with Silas sitting on his butt on the end.

“Hey Ori is kind of tall,” Uncle Terrence said. “I mean he and Greggy are the same age but he looks older.”

“At his last check up the doctor said he was in the top percentile of height for his age,” Dad said sounding like he was bragging.

“I don't know where he gets it,” Mom said. “But he's going to be tall.” Orion felt a smile break out across his face. He then remembered something Gemma had said earlier. That she had used her last wish on him. Was that it? Had it been the joke he had made in the garden that morning. Had she wished for him to be taller?

Orion didn't have a chance to confirm his theory however because as soon as the picture was taken he found himself swept back up into his Mom's arms. They were following his Uncle into the house who had Silas already asleep cradled in his arms.

“Think you could get a bottle ready?” Mom asked to Dad who nodded and went into the house. Orion was brought up to the guest room. His Mom laid him on the ground and un-taped the diaper.

“Lets get you changed into a overnight diaper,” she said narrating more to herself. She covered him in some rash cream and gave him a powdering before taping the new diaper on. As Orion felt it go around him he could tell this diaper was thicker than the other ones. His Mom then got him dressed back up in his pajamas. There was a knock on the door as Aunt Tilly poked her head in with Greg on her hip. He made a grab at the hemline of her shirt before Aunt Tilly pulled his hands away.

“Just wait a moment Greggy,” she said before turning her attention towards Mom. “If you want I think it would be ok for Greg and Ori to share a crib tonight.”

“That's alright,” Mom said. “We're going to turn in early anyways, it was a long drive. We'll keep him in the bed with us” Aunt Tilly accepted the answer with a nod.

Dad then came into the room and set a bottle on the bed before turning on the tv and laying on the bed. Mom did the same cradling Orion in her arms. She lowered the bottle as Orion began to suckle. The milk was warm and it seemed to make Orion feel all the more snugly. He felt his body relax and his eyes close. The thoughts of wishes played across Orion's mind. He thought about the fact that Gemma had only wished for people to play with that wouldn't think they were too big for her. Did that mean perhaps that when they returned home that Orion would be back to normal? After all he didn't see Gemma everyday maybe the wish only counted while he was here. Orion didn't much mind though if he didn't change back. He was perfectly content with how things were. Not too mention he was never going to have to be the short kid again.