

Right on Cue : "Tough Guy"

by MadeOfSpaces

Art always thought he was pretty tough, until a fight behind the bike shed with new kid Asher doesn't go quite as he'd planned. Six weeks later, Asher's back - and strangely persuasive.

The Costume Box

2026

Chapter 1

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Art pawed absent-mindedly through the shirts on the rack with his one good hand, grumbling in frustration at his useless right arm. It was still trapped in its awkward L-shaped blue cast. It had been six weeks since he broke it, and summer break was already half gone. In just a little over a month, he'd be starting high school. Which meant he had just a few short weeks to think of some way - anyway - to come back from what had happened on the last day of middle school.

He unhooked a black and white two-tone button-up, holding it up for examination. He guessed it was kinda cool. It definitely said more than the unremarkable moth-eaten burgundy t-shirt and baggy jeans he was currently sporting. It was different. Alternative. Perhaps he could pair it with some tastefully scuffed up Levis - maybe even a silver chain? But no. That was definitely trying too hard.

He dropped the hanger, leaving the shirt to drape over the frame. He'd never used to have to try at all. He'd never been the best dressed, or the funniest, and certainly not the tallest - but he was popular all the same. His position as the star pitcher on the baseball team had made sure of that, firmly ensconcing him amongst the school's aspiring 'jocks'.

It was a rare thing for a late bloomer like Art. It wasn't like he was a total runt, but his baby face paired with his single-

digit position on the percentile chart certainly would have made him a victim in any other circumstances. Instead, he'd made it his business to flip the script. Half the kids in his grade had probably been the victim of one of his cruel nicknames or baseless rumours at some point in the last three years - but middle school was a cruel place. It was hunt or be hunted; kill or be killed. Besides, he was doing a lot of those kids a favour. Most of them probably didn't even realise how stupid they looked..

For instance - how did a kid make it to the eighth grade, and still carry around a Pokémon backpack? Especially when your name was Ash! Well, technically it was Asher - but that hardly made a difference. The kid had only joined a couple of weeks before school let out, but he was totally clueless. Apparently he used to be homeschooled or something, but the way Art saw it that was hardly an excuse. One thing had led to another, and eventually Art's latest victim had spouted out some lame retort about his height. It wasn't like it had actually hurt Art's feelings or anything, but then the same kid had gone and brought up his hair. That had been two strikes - and Art never let anyone get to three. He had a reputation to maintain.

That's how he'd ended up in a circle of chanting kids behind the bike shed. He'd had a game plan, of course. It would have been an easy thing. Sure, Asher had a good ten inches on him, but dorks like him were all the same. He'd been standing there all gormless, lanky limbs hanging off him defenselessly like a flummoxed newborn foal. It would have been as easy

as a quick kick to the nuts to get him on the ground, and then a couple of quick stamps in the side. He'd have been crying for mommy. Well...if Art had ever got the chance.

The boy turned his gaze a couple of aisles down the way, glancing at a sign positioned above an array of bright primary colour outfits announcing 'YOUNGER BOYS'. He smirked, wondering if the aisle stocked anything big enough for Asher. Kids came in all shapes and sizes, after all. If they made regular shirts in extra small, why not kiddy stuff in extra large? Perhaps he could find a set of Pikachu pajamas big enough for that dweeb! He allowed himself to fantasise about Asher hopping down the high school's hallway in a big fluffy yellow onesie on the first day, firmly solidifying his reputation as nothing more than a lame baby dork. It would certainly be the talk of the canteen. It might even be enough to make kids forget about the incident behind the bike shed. He just had to figure out how to actually get him to wear it.

Art was just wondering if he had enough time left in the summer to teach himself hypnosis, when he felt a heavy hand fall on his shoulder.

"You know, that haircut makes you look like a little girl." An unfamiliar deep voice drawled confidently. Art spun around - instinctively going to ball up his right hand into a fist - before the feeling of hard plaster and a stabbing pain shooting up to his elbow reminded him it was in a cast. He'd had some wise retort ready, but without the viscous punch to back it up, it suddenly felt stupid.

“You-!” He accused in a helpless whine, trailing off as he found himself standing in Asher’s shadow. The kid had grown. He’d always been taller than Art, but where before he’d stood at a respectable fourteen-year-old average, he’d now very much hit his growth spurt. He was undoubtedly a teenager now: jaw squarer, Adam’s apple bulging, and shoulders filling out into a broad almost-adult frame.

“You....” Art repeated self-consciously, horribly aware of the way his voice squeaked with pre-pubescent meekness; his childish treble trilling a full octave and a half above Asher’s brand-new bossy brass tenor. He retreated a step, running his good left-hand defensively through his thick cascade of mousy brown straight hair. He’d always kept it long, but in the long summer weeks sitting around at home with nothing to do but play one-handed Call of Duty, he’d let it go even more - allowing it to cascade haphazardly all the way down to his shoulders. It was even longer at the back, a particularly shaggy outcrop flopping down even to the bottom of his shoulder blades.

“Got something to say?” Asher teased, crossing his arms with infuriating self-assured smugness.

“You - you know I’m a boy.” Art eventually coughed out, instantly regretting it. He’d have been better off saying nothing at all.

“A little tom-boy, then.” Asher allowed, quickly stepping forward and grabbing Art’s one good hand. He held on tight, boldly brushing Art’s hair out of his eyes with his other hand.

“How’s the arm?”

“You’re the one who broke it, asshole.” Art glowered.

“I didn’t touch you.” Asher laughed off the accusation, playfully poking Art in the tummy . “The way I remember it, you slipped on your own wee-wee.”

The smaller boy couldn’t help but blush. It was true, after all. He’d try to block out the precise details, but it wasn’t the kind of thing you could just forget. He’d just been about to charge Asher - run him down and kick him hard in the crotch - when suddenly he’d frozen up. He’d felt weirdly cold all over, like he’d just had a single large ice-cube slipped down the back of his shirt, and then the next thing he knew there was a warm feeling tingling in his crotch. Then it was running down his leg, then soaking through his pants, and before he knew it he was standing in a puddle of his own making. The whole gaggle of kids who’d come to watch - from 6th graders to 8th - had all burst into cackles of delighted laughter. He’d tried to run, and that’s when he’d slipped and fell - his arm breaking below him with a sickening crunch. It had been the most humiliating moment of his entire life. The only consolation was that he’d managed to keep from crying - at least until he got to the nurse’s office.

“Hey, buddy. I’m not judging!” Asher chortled. “It was just a teensy-weensy accident. Happens all the time to little kids like you.”

“You’re so dumb.” Art hissed back bitterly. “You know when we’re back at school, me and my friends are gonna make

your life hell.”

If Asher was even in the slightest bit worried, he didn’t show it. He tittered, keeping Art’s free hand imprisoned tight in his own as he continued to poke and prod him and stroke at his long brown hair like he was petting an adorable sulking puppy. “Sure you are, bud.”

“Geroff!” Art snapped, trying to stamp and twist and wiggle away, but his broken arm left him pretty much helpless. “I’m serious, you know.”

“I get it. You’re crabby.” Asher decreed, tracing his hand slowly down Art’s side and inching towards the back of his jeans “You got a wet diaper back here or something?”

“Huh?” Art managed to wheeze, before Asher seized the back waistband of his pants - effortlessly tugging them down so they sat slung just below his undies.

Asher could hardly seem to contain his amusement, laughter barely contained behind a tight delighted smirk. “Cool Minecraft undies, little dude!” he praised.

“What the fuck!?” Art yelped, earning him a swift chiding smack atop the fluorescent green underwear now poking up proudly above his mature denim jeans. He gave a cowed yip of frustration, making another vain effort to wiggle away from Asher’s grip - to no avail.

“Language.” Asher tutted, lowering his dark eyebrows in a mature reproachful glare. Art whimpered, some strange part of his subconscious somehow actually feeling guilty for the

swear. “Now, tell me about your little-boy-briefs. Is the Creeper your favourite?”

“They’re boxer-briefs.” Art whinged. “And it’s laundry day...”

“Sure, buddy.” Asher agreed. “But I think we can both agree that little boys who wear Minecraft undies aren’t big enough to wander around the mall by themselves.”

“What are you talking about?” Art groaned in frustration, still extremely aware of his sagging jeans and the fluorescent green underwear displayed above. He cursed his broken arm. If only it was free, he could give Asher a good sock in his dumb smirking mouth.

Asher took a moment to look around, as if making sure no one was watching before he bent down slightly, getting down to Art’s level. “Here’s the deal.” He proposed. “You’ve got two choices. Either you can play nice, and let me babysit you - or else I’ll take those jeans home with me, and you can explain to that nice shop assistant why you’re romping around the boys department in only your Minecraft undies. Oh, and I’ll be taking pictures. Lots of pictures.”

Art was ready to spit in Asher’s stupid dork face - consequences be damned. But then he felt that same icy cold feeling run down the back of his spine. Asher was serious. And right now, he had him exactly where he wanted.

“Whatever.” Art seethed, baby-faced chubby cheeks burning red in shame.

“Whatever, what?” Asher insisted, pulling the smaller boy in closer and seizing up the back of his jeans again. “Whatever, you wanna go pantsless...?”

“No!”

“Then say you want me to babysit.”

Art gulped, hating how powerless he felt. “What does that even mean?” He whined.

“Y’know. Babysitting. I’m looking after you, and you’re getting looked after.”

“So just...I do what you say?”

“Pretty much. Plus it’s all totally 100% anonymous. Unlike Option B....”

The feeling of Asher’s hand slowly creeping towards the back of Art’s waistband forced out a squeak of agreement. “Fine!” he hissed.

“You gotta say it.”

“Fine, you can be my babysitter.” Art mumbled as quickly as possible, staring down at the ground.

“Attaboy!” Asher praised, standing up fully again and starting to walk Art hand-in-hand away from the clothes rack he’d been looking at. Art barely registered where they were headed, his attention still entirely focussed on his bare-underwear. It was just so noticeable. His butt actually felt cold! Worse, with every step the jeans seemed to sway a little

lower, revealing more and more of the bright green Creeper-themed boxer briefs.

“Hey!” He whined, trying to tug Asher back towards the spot where they’d started.

“What is it now, Artie?” Asher sighed, affecting all the exhaustion of a real middle-aged dad traipsing a particularly whiny preschooler around the mall.

The nickname disarmed Art once again, leaving him red-faced and blushing. He stared slack-jawed for a moment, struggling to explain precisely what was wrong. Eventually, that evolved into an adorable bewildered pout - blue eyes blinking bashfully. How had this all gone wrong so fast? “You said...I mean, my jeans...”

“Ohhhh, you want me to pull-up your pants?” Art gave a single shy nod, but Asher just shrugged. “Well, I think you’re okay the way you are.”

“What?” Art whinged, left with no choice but to hobble along. “But you said...you wanted...Why?”

“Well, think of it this way.” Asher explained. “Your cute long hair kinda makes you look like a little girl, doesn’t it.”

Art’s red-cheeks puffed up indignantly. “I’m no-!”

“Don’t interrupt.” Asher scolded, giving the boy’s good arm a punishing extra-hard tug as he continued his lecture. “I guess your clothes make you look a bit more like a boy, but plenty of girls wear jeans and a t-shirt. But if people can see your

little boy undies, it doesn't really leave any doubt - does it?"

"That doesn't make any sense!"

"I'll prove it." Asher retorted at once, hailing down a passing shop assistant. "Excuse me..."

The assistant was a pretty red-haired girl probably just a couple of years older than them - but with his pants almost sagging to the back of his knees and his good hand imprisoned inside Asher's, Art felt about a quarter of his real age. He retreated shyly into Asher's shadow.

"How can I help?" The assistant recited with a vivacious bubbly smile, big green eyes already seeming to single out the smaller, shyer of the two boys like a lioness stalking a lone straggling gazelle. Her name tag read 'CASEY.'

"This little monkey needs some back to school clothes." Asher began to narrate, fully putting an arm around Art and all but dragging him in front so Casey could get a good look. Stupidly, Art failed to co-operate, letting her get an eyeful of his exposed underwear before he managed to twist around. "Could you help us pick out some outfits?"

Casey smiled a broad customer-service smile. "Of course!" She enthused. "How old is he?"

Asher didn't answer right away, instead taking the opportunity to affectionately ruffle Art's hair as if he were a sulking kitten. "See, buddy?" he stage-whispered "She can tell you're a boy."

Casey seemed delighted by the distraction. "Oh, for sure!" She humoured, her voice intermittently raising to a ridiculous baby-talk high-pitch. "You're very handsome. I love your hair!"

"He's worried the kids will think he's a girl." Asher explained on his behalf. "But you're all boy, aren't you Artster?"

"Definitely." Casey agreed with a melodramatic patronising nod. "I think it's cool. Like a viking!" Art grimaced, the comment hitting a little too close to home. Casey had stumbled on the exact reason why he'd let the hair get so long in the first place - imitating the lead singer of a Norwegian heavy metal band he'd got into in the 7th grade. But there was no way he was going to tell Asher that. "I bet he broke his arm playing outside."

"Yup. Baseball." Asher lied. "Well, Tee-ball I guess." Art spun around at that, glaring at Asher with hateful intensity. Tee-ball?!

"Aww, poor baby. A little bird with a broken wing." Casey mused.

"He's starting Kindergarten in the fall."

Art rolled his eyes. Now he'd done it. Asher had had his fun, but now he'd taken it too far. It was ridiculous. There was no way she'd believe it. He might have been a little on the short side, but he still stood roughly at Asher's chest height. This lady was never going to believe he was five years old!

Sure enough, Casey frowned - staring at Asher with a vacant

skeptical blink. But no. As quickly as it had dissipated, her happy, helpful smile re-materialised on her face, stretching extra wide for the adorable kindergartener she was tasked with dolling up for his first day of ‘big boy school’.

“Awesome!” Casey enthused, leading the way towards the ‘YOUNGER BOYS’ aisle. “I’m sure we’ve got the perfect thing...”

For the next ten minutes, Art couldn’t bring himself to do anything but stare straight forward in glassy-eyed horror. Tugged around by his one good arm like a pull-toy on a string, he retreated to bewildered paranoia. There was no way, absolutely no way, that this random woman actually thought he was a kindergartener. No, not even a kindergartener - yet. Asher had said he was starting this fall! The idea was just completely ridiculous. It had to be a set-up. Surely Casey was Asher’s sister, or her cousin, or just some random lady he’d paid to get along with this ridiculous charade.

All the while however, Casey piled her arms high with infantile outfit after infantile outfit - there were stripes and shapes, colourful miss-matched corduroy and kitschy cartoon characters, trains, and planes, and dinosaurs, and dump-trucks, and all manner of infantile little boy horrors - printed, stitched, appliqued, or sewn on everything from t-shirts, to trousers, to overalls, to underwear. There was a veritable hoard of underwear. Art was sure that Asher had chosen to dwell in that particular section for as long as possible, just to try and get a rise out of him. But Art wouldn’t let him have

the satisfaction. Even as he piled on a seventh set of skimpy cartoon briefs, adorned with Winnie the Pooh or Paw Patrol or about eight other pre-school shows, Art said nothing. Afterall, it's not like he'd ever actually have to wear them.

It was only when Asher had actually paid for the clothes, stuffing them in his huge oversized backpack, that Art finally spoke up. He was being frogmarched out the store into the forensic cold white marble of the mall proper when he sneered up at Asher, wanting the bigger kid to know exactly what he thought of the pointless spending spree.

"I can't believe you actually bought all that crap." He mocked, trying to sound suitably disgusted. "I mean. What are you even gonna do with it all."

Asher let out an adoring tut. "Duh. You're gonna wear it!"

"Yeah right. It won't even fit. I don't know what you gave that woman to act like I'm five, but I'm not actually a kindergartener."

"It's all exactly your size, bud." Asher insisted. "We checked. And Casey's a professional."

Art shook his head. "There's no way-"

"We can try some of it on, if you don't believe me." Asher interrupted. "And for the record, I didn't give her anything. Did you ever think that maybe you just give off five-year-old vibes?"

Art was well and truly over it. "This is so dumb." He

complained, staring out hatefully at the crowd of strangers writhing their way through the mall like so many gawking ants. He tried to wriggle his hand away from Asher again, but it was no use. The way he saw it, Asher had very much made his point. How long would he have to stomach parading around with his underwear showing like the dork's personal humiliated dress-up doll?

"I need the toilet." He suddenly declared, noticing a nearby bathroom sign. He wasn't really all that desperate, but Asher couldn't hold his hand forever. Maybe it would be the perfect opportunity to sneak away.

"Gotta go potty?" Asher repeated whimsically, giving Art's hand an encouraging squeeze.

"Dude, don't." Art complained.

"Say it properly, or I won't take you."

Art stayed staring up indignantly for a few more seconds before he reluctantly gave in. It seemed like his only chance, afterall. "I. Gotta. Go. Potty." He intoned emotionlessly. "There. Happy?"

"Good enough!" Asher relented, leading them towards the bathroom sign. Instead of heading towards the gents however, they made a detour - heading further down the hall towards a single occupancy family bathroom.

"What are you doooooing...." Art whined, inadvertently knocking his knees together like a real preschooler desperate to go pee-pee.

“Little kids like you need plenty of help.” Asher explained. “Besides, I’m not letting you loose in there by yourself.” Art could do nothing but grumble. Clearly, the bigger kid was wise to his plot.

The family bathroom was occupied, so they had to wait a little while. It wasn’t really that long of a delay, but in the intervening minutes the vague urge Art had felt before had turned into a real niggling annoyance tickling in his bladder. When the door finally opened, it was everything he could do to avoid seizing his crotch and jumping up and down.

A young mother exited, clutching the hand of a little girl - probably about three or so - not so very differently from the way Asher was holding Art’s. The boy immediately went to scuttle in behind them, not wanting to waste another second, but Asher was content to take his sweet time. He didn’t let him take another step, his grip on his good arm keeping him tethered to the spot like a dog on a rope.

“I’m sorry to bother you, Ma’am.” he suddenly asked the mother, smiling his best polite respectful smile. “But you wouldn’t happen to have a spare diaper, would you?”

Art blinked up at the two of them. What now?

The woman seemed equally taken off guard, surveying the two mismatched boys in front of her. She locked eyes with Asher, blinking in that same far-off skeptical way that Casey had worn when he’d told her Art was starting kindergarten.

“A diaper?” she repeated.

“Yes.” Asher insisted. “I’m really sorry to ask, but I’m all out. I guess I probably should have packed more. But this little stinker gets through them like they’re going out of style!”

The woman turned her glassy eyed stare toward Art, getting a good look at his Minecraft undies still peaking prominently up over his pants. All at once she seemed to understand, letting out a high-pitched sympathetic coo.

“Oh, I see. Poor little sweetie!” She said, starting to dig through the large leather handbag at her side. “Of course, let me see...are Pull-Ups alright for her?” She produced a small pastel pink square. “They won’t hold up like her regular diapers, but they’ll do in a pinch.”

Asher gave a humble smile. “That’s perfect. I can’t thank you enough.” He said, gratefully accepting the puffy pink training pants and quickly ushering Art into the privacy of the family bathroom. “And neither can she!” he added, quickly closing the door.

Art could hardly believe his ears. He shook his head, half in horrified befuddlement and half in furious outrage. “What the fuck!” He squeaked.

“Language!” Asher interrupted him with a small perfunctory swat on his bare undies - but Art had much bigger problems on his mind. He continued on unabated.

“Did she think I was wearing a diaper? Did she think...that I was like a little girl? A baby girl?”

“More like a toddler girl, I think. Maybe two or three.” Asher

shrugged. "But yeah, pretty much."

"What!?" Art exclaimed. "How? Why!?"

Asher couldn't help but relish Art's reaction, finally letting go of his hand. He walked to the other side of the room, crossing his arms and smugly leaning against the wall - pink Pull-Up still in hand. "Suggestion." He revealed, letting the vague explanation sit in the echoey silence of the bathroom for a few moments before he went on. "It's all really pretty simple. I just plant a few seeds, create a few expectations, and most people see what I want them to see."

Art felt his heartbeat rising, a fearful lump growing in his throat. "You mean...you're trying to say...I mean you just convinced that woman that I'm a frikkin toddler! A diaper wearing pants soaking toddler!?"

"Yeah, pretty much. Same way I convinced Casey you're a five-year-old. But really, it's a lot more complicated than that." He put the Pull-Up down on the nearby open changing table, examining his nails. "And a lot more powerful, too. For instance, I've been using it on you all day."

The boy felt a familiar shiver go down his spine. "What? No..."

"Yes." Asher confirmed with a self-satisfied grin. "You've been remarkably compliant, really. Barely took more than a few stern words to have you traipsing around behind me like a good little boy, undies out and all. Although, you can't really ever suggest something totally out of character. There's

gotta be a hook there somewhere, buried in the subconscious. So I guess you could say there's a part of you that wants to be a little boy."

"No...." Art repeated. "That's impossible. You're...you're lying!"

"If you want, I can prove it." Asher shrugged, ominously crossing the room again to stand just a few feet in front of the smaller boy. "Remember your little accident behind the bike shed? Well...in a way, it wasn't really an accident."

Some part of Art already knew what Asher was trying to say, but he couldn't help but hope otherwise. It couldn't be true, could it? Stuff like that was impossible! "You're lying..." he repeated again, impotently, but Asher just kept on talking.

"Did you feel a cold shiver down the back of your neck? Almost like someone had dropped an ice cube down your shirt? Did you feel like you couldn't move for a second? Like you had no choice but to just stand there and...let it all out?" Asher ran his hand through the smaller boy's hair again, petting him like a puppy dog. "Now I'm in there, I can make you do that whenever I want. It's simple, an easy little cue. Elementary really. Like snapping my fingers."

Art shook his head furiously from side to side. "No. That's impossible. You're talking about...hypnosis!"

"You could say that. I'd call it more...a physical response to overwhelming psychological pressure."

Art was terrified. He crossed his legs together, as if that might

possibly help. “Don’t!” he begged. It was ridiculous. It wasn’t true. It couldn’t possibly be. But if it was...

“I won’t.” Asher reassured. “Not today, at least. Since you’ve been such a good boy for me. You just have to do one little thing.”

“What?”

Asher grinned like a great white shark. “Show me your best potty dance.”

“Potty...dance?” Art repeated dumbly, although of course he knew precisely what Asher meant. It was precisely what he’d been fighting the urge to do just seconds before. The only thing holding him back had been his nagging big-boy pride, that blaring uncomfortable voice in the back of his head insisting he should know better.

Asher gave a frustrated tut. “Y’know. It’s easy! Just whatever feels natural when you really really gotta go, but you have to hold it in!”

Art scrunched up his face like he’d been forced to swallow a spoonful of mashed carrots. “I’m not going to...you can’t make me do a potty dance. I’m fourteen years old!”

Asher just shrugged, and pointed back over towards the changing table. “It’s up to you. If you prefer, I guess you could always not hold it in. That’s why I got you the Pull-Ups.”

Art hesitated. It couldn’t be true, could it? It was so

ridiculous. But Casey had been so quick to believe him, and that lady just now had actually seemed to think he was wearing a diaper! A faint, barely perceptible cold sensation shivering down the back of his neck sealed the deal as an even greater desperation in his bladder suddenly seized him. He couldn't pee himself again, he just couldn't! But by now he could have sworn a little bit of pee had already spurted out, making him stand-up straight in terrified attention. He had no choice.

He seized the front of his crotch with his one good hand, eyes opening wide in pleading and lips going dumb slack. He hopped up and down desperately on both feet, looking every bit like a panicked potty-training preschooler. "I gotta go pooooddy!" he heard himself whine in a sugar-sweet babble, eyes fixing needily on his tormenter turned babysitter.

Asher chuckled, satisfied. "Okay, baby boy. Good job for telling me." He praised, gently taking 'Artie' by the hand again and leading him swiftly over to the toilet. He calmly but swiftly pulled down his jeans and underpants in with a single strong tug, hitching up his freshly-minted, empty-headed, good little boy under his armpits to plop him down on the toilet seat and holding him steady there. Artie felt a wave of good feelings wash over him - a strange mix of relief, pride, and reluctant affection for the bigger boy holding him in place. He went pee-pee right on cue. "Oh wow, what a big boy!" Asher reassured, rubbing his arm in encouragement as the toddler-teen blinked stupidly into the middle distance.

It took a moment, but slowly, steadily, Art came to again. Still sat on the toilet, he hardened his gaze - staring accusingly at Asher. "Wh-what did you do to me?" He murmured in disbelief.

"I told you buddy. Power of suggestion." Asher shrugged, as if it was the most natural thing in the world.

His faculties swiftly returning, Art quickly sat up and hopped off the toilet seat. He scurried possessively towards the small pile where his jeans and boxer-briefs lay abandoned, but Asher stopped him in his tracks, grabbing him by his good arm as he passed. "Hang on. You gotta wash your hands first!" He intoned in an infuriating baby-talk sing-song.

"Get off me you freak!" Art yelled horrified, cheeks burning red as he covered himself with his one free hand.

"Aww, buddy. I thought you wanted to do this the easy way?" Asher sympathised. He easily held Art back, getting to the discarded clothes first, balling them up, and tossing them into an automatic wall-mounted trash can. The sensor on the trash activated, and plastic lip cantilevered down, sealing Art's pants away forever.

"No!" Art complained, bare feet padding over to the trash. He tried to yank the flimsy plastic top off the trash - but, half-naked and one handed, it was easy enough for Asher to divert him - pulling him clear away and holding him firmly in place beside the changing table.

"These are your undies here, see?" He encouraged, unzipping

his bag and starting to take one of the infantile sets of briefs they'd bought at the store. He laid it down on the changing table, still in its plastic packaging. "How's Thomas train?" Art suggested, showing off a blue and white pair with the toys iconic face staring out prominently from the butt. "You love Thomas train, don't you bud?"

"N-oh-oh..." Art denied, tears starting to well up as he shook his head ardently from side to side. He could do nothing but shiver helplessly, as Asher unpacked it - relishing the site of his increasingly dismayed expression.

Art couldn't help but catastrophise. Why was Asher going on about Thomas all of a sudden? If he really was capable of hypnosis, then that had to be one of the triggers, right? How could it not be? Surely now it would only be a matter of time before he really was an infantile empty-headed Thomas the Tank Engine obsessive, making train noises with his mouth and running wooden trains around on the floor, no more inhibited than an actual two-year-old.

"I don't know what you're so upset about." Asher tutted, guiding Art back to the toilet seat and sitting him down again so that he could more easily guide the infantile briefs up his legs. "If you weren't such a good boy for me, this could have gone a lot worse."

Art tried to pull himself together, wiping away the few stray tears gathering in the corner of his eye with his good hand as Asher stood him up again and finally brought the briefs fully up into place. The elastic waistband snapped tight and snug

around his butt. “What do you mean?” He sniffled weakly.

Asher didn’t answer at first, forcing Art to stay rooted on the cold tile floor for a few moments as he admired the fit of the toddler briefs. He gave his butt two firm pats, tracing the bubbly cartoon letters that would soon surely be peaking proudly above Art’s pants as he walked him back through the mall. “You’re such a smart boy going potty for me, and all by yourself!” He continued to reinforce. “Smarty Artie in his Artie Pants!”

“Stop it!” Art whined, the increasing panic choking up his voice and making him feel littler and littler. “Just tell me what you mean already.”

“Well, it’s all conditioning.” Asher finally explained. “Psychologically speaking, you’re pretty vulnerable right now. If you’d tried harder to resist, I’d have had to make you have an accident again - and well, I guess then the lovely warm feeling of going pee-pee in your pants probably would have been imprinted a lot more strongly in your psyche. As it is, you want to go potty for me instead! Isn’t that so much better?”

Art shook his head in bewilderment. “I don’t understand.”

“Let’s just say you would have needed a whole pack of these.” Asher explained, picking up the pink Pull-Up from the changing table and stowing it in his backpack. “But let’s not worry about that! This outcome is much better for both of us.”

“What outcome?” Art demanded, letting Asher guide him

over to the sink. He stood over him, taking his one free hand in both of his and scrubbing it clean with warm soap and water.

“Your potty dance!” Asher revealed. “From now on, when you do your potty dance, I’ll know right away if you need to go pee-pee. So there shouldn’t be any little accidents. That is, if you keep being a good boy.”

Art looked absolutely horrified. “You mean...from now on, every time I have to go pee...?” He trailed off. He couldn’t even bring himself to finish the sentence.

“Uh-huh. Isn’t that handy?”

The water still running, Art couldn’t do anything but stare at himself in the mirror. Between the briefs, his long brown hair framing his horrified red-cheeked baby face, and the infantile tears welling in the corner of his eyes, he wasn’t sure even he believed he was fourteen years old anymore. How could Asher have reduced him to this so quickly? Even worse, if he was capable of this, what else could he do?