Satisfaction Guaranteed

by TheMissingDays

Max finds himself in a strange situation.

The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 1 - Chapter 1

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Max Barnes sat on the bench at the back of Declan Lake High. Classes were done for the day. Max leaned back on the bench listening to his cousin Maddie talking endlessly to him through his phone about her trigonometry teacher who in her words totally had it out for her. Max was only half listening as he stared up at the sky noting the dark gray clouds that had gathered. He was hoping he would be able to make it home before the rain started. A worry he would not have anymore after the upcoming weekend when his Dad would take him down to the DMV for his road test, which he was confident in passing. He would finally have his license.

“Max are you listening?” Maddie said on the other side of the phone.

“Huh,” Max said sitting up. “Yeah I'm listening.”

Maddie made a skeptical noise on the line. They had known each other their whole lives and being that they were both sixteen years old they had grown to be more like brother and sister than cousins. However she had moved about two hours away a couple of years ago so they hadn't spent as much time together as of late, regardless she knew how easy it was for Max to drift off into the clouds.

“So the big day is coming up, you ready?” Maddie asked changing the subject.

“Yeah, I'm picking up my tux on Sunday,” Max replied.

“Cutting it kind of close,” Maddie said in a chiding tone. “You do remember its next weekend right?”

“I had to get some last minute alterations done,” Max explained.

“And how about your speech Mr. best man?” Maddie asked.

“I'm almost done, just got to come up with a snappy ending,” Max said. In truth though he hadn't even written one line of it. It was certainly not for lack of trying. He had started and stopped half a dozen times yet found it hard to write out.

In many ways Max was happy about his dad's upcoming wedding and had been honored when his dad had asked him to be his best man. Sheila Jones, his father's fiancee and Max's soon to be stepmom was a warm and inviting person. She and his Dad had been dating for the last three years and in all that time she had been nothing but nice to Max. When the happy couple had gotten engaged Sheila had sat Max down and had assured him that she wasn't going to come and try to replace his mom and make demands of him. Max hadn't really worried about such a thing. His own mom had left the picture shortly after he was born and neither he nor his Dad had heard a peep from her in the last sixteen years, there wasn't anyone for Sheila to try and replace. As far as Max was concerned he had never had anyone to call mom before.

Sheila had gone on to tell Max that she would be there for him and support him just as she would do for her own children. She finally had ended the conversation by telling him that she didn't expect him to start calling her Mom or anything but if he felt comfortable she wouldn't mind at all, she had noted the last part with a hopeful look on her face.

True to her word Sheila had given Max his space keeping the door open for him to come to her in his own time. This had put to rest any of the worries some of Max's friends had put into his head with their own horror stories of step parents coming in and changing things around. Not too mention she truly made Max's dad the happiest Max had ever seen him. Max was truly happy to welcome Sheila into his life. He didn't even have problems with her youngest son Brandon who was eight years old. He was an optimistic soul with a big smile and cheery laugh that lit up any room. Brandon had taken to calling Max's father Dad just as soon as the engagement ring was on his Mom's finger. He had also come to regard Max as an older brother in little time. Perhaps what had brought them close in the first place was that they discovered they had a shared source of negativity, namely Sheila's older son, Trevor.

It had been about six months ago shortly after the Jone's had moved in with Max and his dad. Max had come home to find Brandon curled up in a ball in the hallway. Max had sat next to the boy to see what had him so down. Brandon had shown Max the Spider man figure that Trevor had busted the head off of. Brandon couldn't understand why his brother always

had to be jerk. Max had offered the explanation that some people were just like that. It offered little comfort to Brandon at the time. Brandon was convinced that Trevor just hated him or something. Max had then revealed to Brandon that Trevor wasn't nice to him either. Brandon had been shocked to find this out. Trevor and Max were the same age after all so how could Trevor be mean to someone the same age as him? Max hadn't gone into an explanation and had instead invited the younger boy into his room to play some video games. In no time Max had the boy giggling and bouncing around with a controller in his hand as the two of them layed waste to virtual zombies. After that Brandon had really taken to Max and often would come to him for comfort and fun. Max was happy to most of the time humor the boy as he did enjoy having him around.

If it wasn't for Trevor the upcoming joining of the two families would have been a fairy tale union. Max and Trevor had of course known one another but their paths had never crossed much in school, they were sequestered in their own social circles away from one another. That was until their parents started dating.

At first it hadn't been much. Trevor would pick on Max from time to time. Max had of course told his Dad and to the adult's credit if either he or Sheila witnessed Trevor's behavior they had been quick to step in and put a stop to it, which only made Trevor sneakier. Things had really ramped up however after the two boys had been forced to live together. Being the same age it had sparked something in

each boy as if they were in a way battling for territory, to maintain the status each one had in their own family.

For much of Max's childhood his Dad had been working to get his own plumbing business off the ground. The long hours had meant that he had not been able to spend much time with Max. Yet the time had paid off and in recent years he had been able to take a step back from the day to day minutiae and the business was booming which had afforded him the ability to buy a good sized residence. Which had come in handy when the new occupants had moved in. There was enough space to afford each boy their own room. It was a small blessing for Max who couldn't even begin to imagine having to share a room with his bully of a soon to be stepbrother.

“Earth to Max” Maddie's voice rang out.

“Yeah, yeah I'm here,” Max abruptly replied as he focused back in.

“Anyways I gotta go,” Maddie said winding down the conversation. “But its going to be great to see you again gosh its been months hasn't it. You'll save me a dance right?” she asked.

“It'll be better than being dragged out to the floor by Great Aunt Mary,” Max said with sigh thinking about having to be a dance partner for the old lady who had a penchant for stepping on his toes.

“Maybe if I dance with you all night I won't get passed

around to each and every old lady in the joint."

"I'll try to," Maddie laughed. "But I'm not staying all night you know."

"What, where are you going?" Max asked.

"Oh, your Dad asked if I would be cool taking Brandon home when it started getting late."

"Geez he asked you to babysit," Max said with some annoyance feeling his dad had put Maddie on the spot.

"I don't mind, Brandon is a sweet kid and besides I just have put him to bed, pretty easy peasy," Maddie said clearly showing she was happy to volunteer. "Besides by that time people will start getting tipsy and well you know its not really fun to be the only sober person in a room with a bunch of drunks."

"Yeah I hear you," Max said. The two of them said their goodbyes and Max hung up. Max put his head back and closed his eyes for a moment. He really had to get his speech written tonight. Just as he was about to get up a voice sounded from behind.

"Hey Maxi-pad," Trevor said sitting on the bench next to Max. "Just the dork I was looking for."

Max opened his eyes to see Trevor's face exhibiting a sort of fake smile. Max rolled his eyes looking at his soon to be stepbrother. Max was a typical average sixteen year old in his own estimation. Although Maddie had told him with his

brown dusty blonde hair and deep green eyes that the girls would be all over him if he showed a little confidence. Yet sitting next to Trevor he looked small. Trevor was a hulking mass. His frizzy black hair that sprung out from his head and square jaw made him look all the bigger. There was no wonder he was a big part of the defense for the high school football team as a linebacker.

“What do you want,” Max scowled.

“Listen your Dad and my Mom are out of the house for once at the same time and with Brandon at daycare that means the house is empty. So I was going to take Jenny over for some alone time.” Trevor said.

“I don't really care what you do with your girlfriend. Just don't bother me alright,” Max said moving to get up before Trevor put his arm around him and pulling him close as if they were discussing something as two close friends.

“Yeah except with you being there it will kind of mess with the ambiance, so you should find something to do outside the house for awhile.” Trevor said with a grin.

“Its my house you can't tell me what to do,” Max said with an angry look. Trevor now wrapped his arm around Max's neck pulling Max's head to his chest.

“Now now, we can do this the easy way or the hard way. Either I pound you right here until you agree or you can be a good brother and do me a solid.”

“Get off me asshole,” Max said trying to break free from

Trevor's grip to no avail.

“Its a pretty easy choice here Max. And if you are at the the house I'll just flatten you again tonight,” Trevor said with a laugh almost as if he enjoyed the idea of Max defying him just so Trevor had an excuse to put him in his place.

“Whats going on here,” another voice said. Max felt Trevor loosen his grip as Max sat up shaking his neck out before turning to see his friend John standing near the bench. Max and John's Dad's had started the business together so naturally the two boys had been friends since before they could talk.

“Nothing much,” Trevor said getting up from the bench. “Just ironing out some plans with my bro here,” Trevor said. “See ya later Max,” Trevor said with a smirk as he walked off. John was a good deal more athletic than Max and a hair taller. It wasn't as if he would be an even match for Trevor if they did come to blows but Trevor never picked on Max if their was an audience, that was, except for Brandon.

Max got up from the bench with scowl as he watched Trevor walk off.

“Can't believe I have to be related to that guy,” Max grumbled. John put a hand on Max's shoulder.

“Are you finally going to take me up on the offer of coming to the weight room with me?” John asked. Max gave John a weary look. According to John all Max had to do was deck Trevor in the face once and that would be good enough to get

him to back off. He was always trying to get Max to come lift weights with him to bulk up.

“Like I told you hundred times Trevor is a freak.” Max said lifting his bag onto his shoulder. “Even if I worked out for a year it wouldn't be enough. There is simply too great of a difference.”

“You gotta do something,” John said. “Or he is just going to keep walking all over you.”

“I just wish there was something I could do. Really anything that would help, I would,” Max said a great desire having formed in him for his wish to come true. John was silent for a moment.

“Hey what are you doing right now?” John asked.

“Nothing really,” Max said. He certainly wasn't going to go back to his house after all.

“You should come and check out my Uncle's store,” John suggested. Max looked at his friend with a curious look. John had certainly never mentioned his Uncle having a store or an Uncle that lived in town for that matter.

“What kind of store?” Max asked fully expecting John to say it was some health store that sold supplements or something.

“Its a joke store or rather a magic shop,” John said as if he wasn't sure himself.

“Really,” Max said. “What you think I should put a whoopee cushion under his chair. Yeah that would really show him.”

Max said laughing a little at the absurdity of the suggestion.

“Or you could hit him with some itching powder,” John suggested with a chuckle. “Listen he sells a lot of stuff, wouldn't hurt to take a look.”

Max though on it for a moment. Such a thing wouldn't do much except invite an even greater reprisal from Trevor.

“I guess,” Max said not seeing the harm in going and taking a look. Its not as if he had anywhere else to go.

The boys began to walk into town talking about nothing in particular.

“Oh yeah,” John piped up. “You never told me about what happened with Emily.” John was of course referring to Emily Chambers. A girl that had lived down the street from Max and who he had a massive crush on. After some pushing from John and some coaching from Maddie, Max had finally gained enough courage to ask her to the upcoming fall dance.

“Well,” Max said with some hesitation. “She said no.” Max then recounted the event to John how when he had asked her she had smiled only to tell him that she had already said yes to Frank Hewell. But how she had also told him that if she had known he was going to ask her she would of said yes since she admitted to thinking he was cute.

“That sucks,” John said. “But hey at least you know now that she thinks you're cute. Besides just because she is going to the dance with Frank doesn't mean they are going to start going out. It sounds like you still got a shot.”

Max and John continued to walk until John pointed out their destination. Max followed to where John was pointing. It was a strange building to say the least. So strange that Max was shocked that he had never noticed the building before. It was nestled between two other little shops that littered the main street of town. Each filled with knick knacks and other sorts of crafty products. There were candle and soap stores, jewelry stores, and a scrap book store to name a few. What they didn't have was any sort of place that sold anything half-way useful. For that you needed a car.

Max reasoned that since he didn't come downtown all that often he must have just never noticed it before. Still it was strange. The store looked more like a very old house. It had a wooden porch that wrapped around it. The house seemed to rise up becoming skinnier the higher it got ending with round spire that had a window overlooking the street. To Max the style of the house combined with the fact that it was showing signs of age made it seem like this place had been plucked from some other place and time and plopped here on the street.

Walking up the stairs each step let out a loud creak. As John opened the door Max looked up to see the wooden sigh hanging up above “Fishell Curios” it said as it swung gently in the breeze.

The inside was dingy and dark the only light coming in from the few windows. It was a large room Filled with wooden crates filled with all sorts of things. Some had whoopie cushions joy buzzers wax lips and other such staples. The

walls were adorned with novelty costumes and other sorts of gags. John lead Max to the back of the store to a large l-shaped counter that had a cash register on it. Behind was a wall filled with all sorts of books and instructional magic dvd's. To the side behind the counter was a doorway covered by a curtain.

“Yo Uncle Fish,” John called out placing his hands on the counter. Max stood a little further back as he looked at the dust that was layered onto the counter. Maybe it was because John had known what to expect that lead him act like none of this was strange. Yet to Max everything about this place seemed bizarre. The curtain was pushed aside and a man stepped through. He had a skinny gaunt face. He was bald on top of his head with a horseshoe strip of hair going around the sides. A long wispy beard hung from his face reaching down to his chest. The first thing that Max was struck by was the man's eyes. They were so intense that when he stared at you it was as if you could only look at his eyes. The other thing that stood out was the man's attire. He was wearing a suit jacket that looked like it had just been pulled from storage. Max could see the fraying on the edges of the sleeves. Under his jacket he appeared to be wearing a black vest with dull golden buttons.

“Whats all this now?” the man said looking at the two boys. “Who are you?”

“Its me your nephew, Uncle Fish,” John said as if he were telling the man the most obvious thing in the world. The man pulled a pair of gold rimmed spectacles from his pocket and

put them on squinting at John.

“Oh yes John how can I help?” the man said with a nod. Max was once again thinking this was strange. It was one thing to not be able to see clearly but John and this man were supposedly related. Could the man really not have deduced it was John before putting on his glasses?

“I brought you a customer, this is my friend Max.” John said pointing at Max who approached the counter.

“Welcome young man, I am Mr. Fishell proprietor of the strange and wondrous,” Fishell said holding his arms out. “So tell me what is it you want?”

“Well I don't really know if there is anything here that can help me.” Max said looking around the store.

“Sir I didn't ask you what you wanted to purchase, I asked what you wanted?” Fishell said as he gave Max and intense stare.

“I uh well...” Max stammered not sure what he was supposed to say.

“Max needs something to put a bully in his place,” John said.

“Bully problems, eh,” Fishell said looking at Max with interest. “Tell me more,”

“Well actually this bully is my soon to be stepbrother,” Max said.

“Oh so you want to break up a marriage then?” Fishell asked.

“No,” Max yelped. “My stepmom is great and she makes my Dad happy and her other kid is awesome as well. If anything I want this marriage to work, I just don't see how that can happen with Trevor in the picture.”

“Tell me more about this Trevor,” Fishell said grinning for the first time. Max talked for awhile about all the things Trevor did to him. The ways he beat him up, manipulated, and took advantage of him at every turn. How Max had to keep it from his dad for fear of putting strain on his relationship with Sheila, how Max wished he could do something about it especially if it meant he could make things easier for Brandon as well. As Max came to an end he found it strange to be getting this honest with a man he had just met minutes ago, yet in a strange way he felt at ease telling Mr. Fishell all this, it was cathartic in a way.

“So basically, yeah that's the whole story,” Max said. Almost as if he came out of a daze he looked around to see that John had walked off at some point and was across the store browsing through some shelves before he held up a rubber chicken and held it up so Max could see with a smile.

Max returned with a small smile as he looked back at Mr. Fishell.

“It seems to me your problem is very simple,” Fishell said. “You and Trevor are like two animals battling for control over territory.”

“I don't care about all that macho shit,” Max said. “Honestly I just want him to leave me alone.”

“Trevor will not leave you alone,” Mr. Fishell said. “And as you just told me I think you care more than you admit. Think about this, before your Dad and his Mom started dating he was probably top dog around his house. The one his Mother leaned on to be responsible and the one his little brother feared. Now you come along, Trevor see's you as a threat to his status. So he has to put you in your place and he will not let you forget where that is.”

Max casted his eye's askance, was that really what it all boiled down too?”

“You on the other hand also have reasons to want him out of the way.” Fishell said. “You want your dad to be happy and you have found to have some affection for your soon to be family.”

As Max listened he was kind of taken aback by how accurate Fishell had interpreted everything.

“What you want is family harmony, but given the makeup of your family that is an incompatible idea, so we simply need to change it.

Mr. Fishell disappeared back behind the curtain and Max could hear some clattering going on before Mr. Fishell returned carrying something covered by a sheet and in his other hand he clutched some sort of item. Fishell set both items on the counter.

“This is the answer to your problem,” Fishell said holding up the smaller object. It was a shiny chrome. It was rectangular

except on the end where it narrowed into a small tube like shape. On the device was a red knob that had numbers printed on it and then two buttons one red and one green.

“So what is it?” Max asked.

“Well as I said you and Trevor's problem's stem from being the same age,” Mr. Fishell said. “This device allows you to change that. Simply turn the knob to the number of years you would like to take away and then hit this red button while pointing it at Trevor.”

Max looked at Fishell with strained look. Was this guy serious? After Max had told him all about his very real problems this guy was going to joke around with him.

“Did you really think I would fall for this?” Max asked.

“This is no trick Mr. Barnes,” Fishell said with some tutting. “I have one iron clad rule as a proprietor and that is satisfaction guaranteed.”

Max crossed his arms although he did find it strange that Fishell had called him by his last name, not remembering having ever given it to the man.

“A demonstration then,” Fishell said not allowing Max to dwell on his thoughts. Fishell pulled the blanket from the object he had carried out from earlier Max found himself looking at a cage that contained a big rat in it.“Now as I said you just turn this knob,” Fishell said turning the knob so that it was on two. “And then you press the green button,” As Fishell did that a large thick puff of smoke shot out of the

device.

Max watched with fascination. The smoke was strange it was so thick he couldn't see anything through it and even stranger the smoke didn't seem to act normal either. It stayed within the confines of the cage as if it were being held in there by the bars. After a minute the smoke seemed to clear up. Max peered into the cage at first not seeing anything. It wasn't until he looked closer that he saw a little rat no bigger than the palm of his hand, certainly a far cry from the bigger rodent that had been there before.

“No way,” Max said looking at the rat with a stunned awe.

“Now to reverse this change you hit the red button,” Fishell said clicking the other button. A blue smoke then shot out once again making it impossible to see in the cage. Once the smoke had cleared Max saw the same large rat now in the cage from before. He sat stunned for a moment. This was not possible yet he had just seen two impossible things happen before his eyes. The possibilities came to Max in an instant, he thought about making Trevor into a kid like an eleven or twelve year old. That wouldn't be too bad after all and it would be enough to get him out of Max's way. Yet as Max thought more on it he began to see a possible problem. Trevor was bad enough as a teenager what would making him into a preteen accomplish? Even turning him into a kid around Brandon's age didn't seem good enough, he would probably be the most annoying brat on the planet. That's when Max came to the idea of sending Trevor back to toddlerdom. The very idea of Trevor confined to a playpen playing with some

blocks, pacifier in his mouth was almost enough to send Max into hysterical laughing. However as great as that seemed there was still an issue preventing Max from swiping the device up right there.

“This is amazing, really,” Max said with a sigh. “But I think if Trevor suddenly turned into a baby it might freak out his Mom and my Dad. It would certainly cause them both a lot of stress.”

“Not too worry,” Fishell said. “This device is far more powerful than it seems. The only people who will know anything has changed will be the people who witness the transformation. As long as they don't see, it will seem as if nothing is amiss.”

Max put his hands on the counter looking at the device with some seriousness. He was really considering this. But part of him was saying no. As funny as it would be to see Trevor as a little baby, part of him was seeing how cruel it might be.

“Shall I wrap it up for you?” Fishell said pulling out a plastic bag.

“No,” Max said shaking his head. “For one I think it might be too mean. Just thinking about being trapped in a babies body as a teenager, it sounds horrifying.”

"No worries,” Fishell chuckled. “Trevor will remain himself after the transformation but with some time he will begin to change. His thoughts and emotions will begin to match whatever new age he had been set too. You get everything.

Trevor will realize that you have beaten him giving you the satisfaction you are owed for all the misery he has caused you and within time it won't really matter to Trevor what you did because he will have adjusted to his new life and it will seem natural and right in his mind. And who is too say you are not doing him a favor?

Max looked up at Mr. Fishell with a raised eyebrow.

“This Trevor seems to hold some resentment or something and he seems to be taking it out on you. With this he'll have to grow up again with two loving parents and two older brothers who can keep an eye on him, that doesn't exactly sound like the pits of hell, now does it?” Fishell said with a smirk.

It seemed Mr. Fishell had an answer for every worry Max had and if Max was being honest this whole thing seemed better by the second.

“I don't have a lot of money,” Max said figuring that a device capable of such things was going to be exorbitantly expensive.

“Twenty dollars,” Mr. Fishell said.

“W-what?” Max said as his eyes widened.

“Surprised?” Fishell asked.

“Of course,” Max said. “I mean something like this would be highly valued and sought after. People would pay millions of dollars for it, and you're going to give it to me for twenty dollars?”

Yes," Mr. Fishell said shrugging his shoulders. "I do not sell products to be a wealthy man. I couldn't. My devices have a way of finding their way to the people that need them, and so it seems this one has found its way to you."

Max looked at the device. Shining bright in the dimness of the store, this was it the answer to all his problems in front of him. He took out his wallet and gave the man a twenty dollar bill.

"You getting something?" John asked returning to the counter just as Mr. Fishell bagged the device and handed it to Max.

Max said nothing feeling a little guilty. What was John going to think when he heard what Max was going to do? Then again John was always telling him to put Trevor in his place and he was the one that brought Max to this shop. Had John known that his Uncle carried products like this? Thankfully John's phone rang as he fished it out of his pocket. He answered it and Max could tell he was being hit by a barrage of questions on the other line.

"No...I'm with Max...I'll be home soon...So what?" John answered. He gave a tired look towards Max. "I gotta go, Mom's on the warpath," He said holding the phone away from his ear for a moment before walking out of the store as he could be heard still arguing with his mom on the line.

"One more thing," Mr. Fishell said. "That device only has four charges on it. Each button press uses one up so use them wisely."

“Got it,” Max said as he exited the store. As he walked down onto the sidewalk he felt a small raindrop. He decided to run back home hoping to make it back before the rain started. Five minutes from his front door he got caught in the downpour. As Max walked in the rain not seeing much point in running anymore he began to think about the device in the plastic bag he held in hand. Maybe it was the cold water mixed with the fact he was no longer standing in front of Mr. Fishell's intense gaze and smooth talking but Max couldn't help but feel like he had been swindled. The further he got away from the store the closer he seemed to be to reality. Of course this device did not work. Everything he had seen in the store with the rat had been nothing more than some smoke and mirrors illusion. Mr. Fishell ran a magic shop. There was no doubt he had stuff in there that could lead the viewer to believe they had just seen something extraordinary. That's how he got people to buy stuff. Max came to his garage going up to the keypad and hitting in the code. As the first door opened in the three car garage Max saw Sheila's car parked. He looked down at his phone confirming the time as five O'clock. So it made sense that Sheila was back from her hairdresser job and had picked Brandon up from after school daycare.

Max walked into the garage and looked at the other car that was parked on the far side. His pride and joy. It was a 1970 Oldsmobile 442. Max had been at a car show with his Dad back when he had been around eight years old when he had seen a car just like it. For some reason Max had been taken with car and could not stop talking about it. His Dad had then

showed up with one a few months later. However it had been nothing like the one he had seen on the day. This one had been nothing but a hunk of junk. Rusted all over and an interior that was ripped and torn. His Dad had apparently gotten a great deal on the vehicle and thought this could be a project car for him and Max to work on. They had spent years working on it bit by bit. It had been something that had brought them closer. Max's Dad had promised him the car when he got his license and if he put in the work. As the Max looked at the sleek blue muscle car he smiled, in two days it would be all his. He hadn't even driven it yet since he wanted it to be more special when he did actually get his license. He could just imagine himself pulling up to school on Monday. Maybe Emily would change her mind and go to the dance with him after seeing him look so cool in his ride.

Max walked into the house coming into the kitchen to see Sheila at the sink washing some dishes.

“Hey Max, looks like you got caught in the rain,” Shelia said looking him up and down. She smiled a little flashing her pearly white teeth. She stood at the same height as Max. She had brown hair that she had put blonde streaks in. Her skin still had the summer tan intact. “I was just about to do a load of laundry, if you want you could throw that stuff in their too.”

“T hats alright, “ Max said. “I got a load I gotta do anyways, I'll just wait until you're done.” Max didn't like having her do things like that for him. It wasn't that he thought she was trying to mother him or anything, more so that he felt guilty whenever she tried to take care of him like she did for her

own boys. He felt like he was bothering her.

“Suit yourself,” Sheila said going back to the dishes. Max headed upstairs to his room. The room was nothing fancy. There was a queen sized bed, a bookshelf and a desk near the door. He also had a full length mirror in the corner near his window. A baseball bat was leaned up against his wall. A remnant from when he had been in little league. He took of his wet stuff putting it in the hamper and throwing on some sweatpants and plain black t-shirt. He took a seat at his desk near his door. He took the device out of the plastic bag as he leaned in his chair. He played a little with the knob. He chuckled a little to himself. Mr. Fishell had really pulled one over on him. He was thinking about going back to the store and asking to see how the man had pulled off the trick. Maybe if Max could buy the trick cage he could do the same trick on Brandon.

Max noticed his door creak open a little before Brandon's head poked in.

“Come in,” Max said with a grin setting the device on his desk. Brandon came in holding a board game box in his hands. Brandon had a round face that accentuated the dimples on his cheeks when he smiled. He had curly brown hair yet unlike Trevor his Mom kept it cut down so that it only poofed out a little.

“I was just wondering if you would want to play?” Brandon asked looking a little sheepish. “That is if you're not busy.”

“Sure we can play,” Max said with a smirk seeing that

Brandon was holding RISK in his hands a game Max had taught him how to play last weekend. “We can play on the floor,” Max said getting up and sitting cross legged on the ground at the foot of the bed.

“Okay, but I want to be green,” Brandon said with a big smile as he sat across from Max eagerly setting up the board and pieces.

The boys had been playing for awhile when Trevor walked by Max's open door. He snickered a little as he walked in.

“Good to see you little boys getting along so well,” Trevor said. “Playing one of your games I see.”

“We aren't little boys,” Brandon said defensively. “This is risk its not for little kids.”

“Its a little kids game if little kids are playing it,” Trevor replied placing his hand on top of Brandon's head and pushing down a little forcing Brandon to scrunch up a little. “But your right, this isn't a little kids game maybe I want to play.” Trevor said.

“You can't” Brandon said. “Its just me and Max.”

“Hey now don't be mean,” Trevor said kneeling down. “Don't tell me you're going to replace me as your big brother. You know choosing Max is a real downgrade,” Trevor said looking over at Max. Trevor then reached over to one of Brandon's pieces and flicked it off the board. “Watch out you're going to lose Mexico,” Trevor said with a laugh.

“Stop,” Brandon moaned as he picked the piece back up and replaced it.

“Can you just stop bothering everyone?” Max said with a huff having reached his tolerance.

“No need to get so testy there Maxi-pad,” Trevor said standing up. “I was just seeing what you two were up too.”

“Great, now you know,” Max said getting to his feet not liking having to look up at Trevor peering down at him. Yet even on his feet Trevor was still a head taller than him. “Just get out of my room. I don't go into yours.”

If there was one agreement between Max and Trevor it was that they left each other alone in their respective rooms as if those spaces were out of bounds to the other.

“Whatever,” Trevor said as he began to leave. He paused for a moment spying the device on Max's desk. “What's this?” he asked picking the shiny chrome device into his hands.

“Put that down,” Max said as he made a grab for it. Trevor pulled it back and shoved Max back with his free hand.

“I'm just curious, geez,” Trevor said fiddling with the knob a little. “Not like I'm going to break it.” As the words left Trevor's mouth Max heard a snap and saw the red knob now in Trevor's hand having been snapped off. “Whoops,” Trevor said. It was perfectly apparent that he had meant to do it. This wasn't the first time he had broken something of Max's and then played innocent. Max could no longer take it. He had had enough. He looked over and saw the bat leaning against

the wall. He picked it up and held it in the air.

“Put it down and get out,” Max growled. Trevor looked at him with an amused look.

“Or what you gonna hit me,” Trevor said almost as if he were daring Max to take a swing. Max took a step forward, maybe he should? As John said maybe it was time for him to take a stand. As Max reared the the bat back he noticed that Trevor had the device aimed at him, before Max could swing Trevor hit the button.

A huge puff of smoke shot out hitting Max in the face. Max flailed back feeling the smoke force its way down into his lungs. He tried to breathe but found he couldn't. He began to cough as he tried to get air. Max stumbled back he opened his eyes to find he couldn't see anything through the thick smoke. He closed his eyes as they watered burning from the smoke. He swung the bat wildly trying to dissipate the smoke but to no avail. As he stumbled back he felt his bat hit something followed by the sound of shattering glass. Max took another step and felt a sharp pain stab into his foot. Max let out a surprised yelp as he fell back onto his butt. After a few more moments of panic the smoke finally seemed to clear. Max opened his eyes still coughing as he took in deep breaths. After calming himself down enough to bring his breathing back to normal he opened his eyes to see Brandon and Trevor both staring at him. Their mouths were hanging open as if they had seen a ghost.

“M-max is that you?” Brandon said sounding as if he was

unsure. Max furrowed his brows in confusion. What was that supposed to mean? Of course it was him. Before Max could say anything Sheila came running into the room a frazzled look on her face.

“What is going on in here? I heard something break.” Sheila said looking over the room. Max looked over to see the sound he had heard was him hitting his mirror. He looked around the ground to see he was sitting in front of a pile of broken glass shards. “Oh my gosh,” Sheila gasped seeing the glass. “Max are you okay?” she said walking over to him. To Max's shock she scooped him off the ground one arm under his knees and the other supporting his back as if she were cradling him. When had she gotten so strong? Sheila sat on the bed still cradling Max.

“Are you cut,” Sheila asked pulling up Max's pants legs which had been covering each of Max's feet.

“Oh dear looks like you got a small one,” Sheila said lifting up Max's right foot. It was then that Max realized something was off. He looked at his foot as he scanned his body. He was smaller. It was undeniable. He realized then that his clothes were definitely baggier as well.

“Mom is Max okay?” Brandon asked sounding as if he were scared.

“He'll be fine honey,” Sheila said. “Its just a small cut. Now can someone please tell me what happened. Why is the mirror broken and glass all over?”

“Its Max he...” Trevor began to say.

“Max did you break the mirror?” Sheila asked cutting off Trevor before he could finish.

“Y-yeah,” Max said before stopping at hearing his voice. It definitely sounded different higher pitched and he could also feel the difference in his throat when he spoke.

Sheila let out a sigh looking at the bat on the floor putting together the pieces all at once.

“Why were you swinging a bat in the house?” Sheila asked giving Max a questioning look. Max stared back. Why was she so worried about the glass, couldn't she see what was obviously so apparent to the boys?

“Mom can't you see Max is...” Trevor once again began to say.

“What I can see is Max was swinging a bat around inside the house and you did nothing to stop him,” Sheila said.

“What,” Trevor said with a bewildered look.

“Trevor you are the oldest,” Shelia said with some annoyance as she stood up still holding Max in her arms. “You need to be more responsible than this.”

“But Max is,” Trevor once again tried to counter.

“Still a kid,” Sheila said finishing Trevor's sentence however it was certainly not been what he was about to say. “Honestly Trevor me and Craig expect you to help us keep an eye on these two,” Sheila said as she made her way to the door

before stopping. “Since you saw fit not to do anything earlier you can clean up this mess,” Shelia said motioning towards the glass before leaving the room. She carried Max into the bathroom setting him on the counter. Max looked at his legs dangling from the counter. Everything was so strange now in the house since his perspective had now changed.

“Okay lets take a look,” Shelia said speaking to him in a very calm tone as she bent down pulling the pant leg back up over his foot. “Max why are you wearing such big clothes?” Shelia asked however she didn't seem phased when Max could offer no response. “I'll need to go get some tweezers,” Shelia said standing back up. “You sit tight.”

Shelia left the bathroom. Max then turned slowly to look at himself in the mirror. Upon seeing himself he let out a little yelp bringing his hands up to his face. The traces of facial hair were gone as well any of the pimples or blemishes leaving him completely smooth. His face was rounder and his features were all smaller. The most noticeable change was his hair. It was blonder now having lost a lot of the dusty brown color and it was much longer reaching down to his shoulders in a mop. As Max looked at himself he could see that no doubt he looked just as he had when he was younger. His body was also much different. The clothes he was wearing had been a tad baggy on him as a sixteen year old but now with a new scrawnier frame he was swimming in them.

“What the hell,” Max whispered to himself. As he sat staring at himself one thing became crystal clear. Mr. Fishell hadn't tricked him, far from it.

Chapter 2

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 2 - Chapter 2

Chapter 2

Sheila had plucked out the small glass shard in Max's foot and cleaned up the cut finishing with a band-aid before releasing him back into the hall. Max felt like he was in a daze. He couldn't believe the predicament he now found himself in. How could this be real?

“Max that's you right?” 'Brandon said. Max shook his head coming out of his haze to see the other boy standing in front of him.

“Yeah its me,” Max said, the sound of his voice still sounding foreign to himself.

“But you're small, whats going on?” Brandon said. Max looked back at Brandon who was now only a few inches shorter than him when before he had only come up to his chest.

“I can't explain right now,” 'Max said pushing past the other boy to his room. There was only one thing on his mind. Getting the device back and reversing the change. Max came into his room and started to look around. However much to his ire he couldn't find the device anywhere. He turned around to see Brandon standing in the doorway watching him.

“Brandon listen to me very carefully,” Max said putting his hands on Brandon's shoulders. “That thing that Trevor had in his hand the one that shot out that smoke did you see what happened to it after I left.”

“Oh that thing,” Brandon said with a glint of pride in his eye knowing what Max was referring to. “Trevor put it in his pocket.”

Max let out a groan. That was the last thing he needed to hear. Max marched down to Trevor's room with Brandon following behind, swinging the door open as if he were an outlaw entering into a saloon.

“Give it back,” Max demanded walking right up to Trevor who was sitting on the edge of his bed.

“You mean this thing?” Trevor asked holding the device in his hand.

“Yes,” Max yelped grabbing for the device yet Trevor quickly pulled it out of reach getting to his feet. Max took a step back seeing how incredibly big Trevor now seemed to him. “Trevor please, I need it,” Max mewled.

“I'll give it back,” Trevor said, surprising Max with his agreement. “But first I want some answers. Just what the hell is going on here.”

Max pursed his lips for a moment. He didn't see any problem with explaining what was happening after all if he had seen something like this he would understandably want some answers as well. Max then told Trevor and Brandon what the

device was and where he had gotten something like it in the first place.

“So this thing actually made you get younger,” Trevor said looking at the device in his hand with some interest. There was no room for any skepticism after what they had all witnessed.

“Yeah,” Max said. “But it can change me back too, so now that I've answered your question can I have it back?”

“Hang on though, why didn't Mom seem to notice?” Trevor asked.

“Well I think that only people who witness the change will remember. Everyone else will think its normal. At least that what the guy said.” Max answered.

“So that's why she was acting so weird,” Trevor muttered to himself.

“Can I have it back now,” Max said growing annoyed with all the questions.

“One last question,” Trevor said his eye's narrowing a little. “Why did you buy this thing?”

“Well umm I uhh,” Max stammered.

“I knew it,” Trevor said with an accusatory glance. “You were going to use it on me, weren't you?”

“No that's not true,” Max protested. “I didn't even think the stupid thing would work. I thought that the guy had tricked

me.”

“But you still bought it anyways,” Trevor said crossing his arms “So how old were you planning on making me?”

“I don't know,” Max said letting his arms slump a little. “Like I said I didn't think it was going to work. So does it really matter?”

“This was a really rotten plan even for you,” Trevor said shaking his head.

“For me?” Max said with some offense. “If you weren't such a jerk all the time I would have never even considered it.”

“So you admit you were going to try?” Trevor said like a lawyer who had just got caught a criminal in a lie on the stand.

“Look Trevor, the guy at the store got into my head okay. He was saying all this stuff about how us being the same age was the problem how we were simply just in each others way. I see now how stupid that was, I'm sorry.” Max said as he hung his head low realizing just how much of a terrible thing he had planned on doing when he had bought the device.

“Well he wasn't wrong,” Trevor said causing Max to lift his head surprised. “That guy was right. We are in each other's way so maybe this is the answer.”

“Trevor you can't,” Max said as a cold feeling overtook him realizing what Trevor was saying.

“I think I can,” Trevor said. “Even if you didn't think it would

work the fact is that it did. If the situation was reversed you wouldn't change me back either."

"No," Max squeaked.

"And hey look at it this way you still look a little older than Brandon so you're still not the youngest and now you guys can play together all you want. Doesn't that sound fun Maxi-pad," Trevor said with a big smirk before he raised his eyebrows. "Although I think I need a new nickname for you as that one is a little inappropriate for a little boy like you."

"Trevor you can't do this, I won't let you," Max said gritting his teeth. Trevor gave Max a devious look before picking him up. Max squirmed but couldn't break fee. Trevor carried Max back to his room. He set Max on the ground in front of his door.

"I think those clothes are a little big," Trevor said. Max looked down noticing the pants and boxers he was wearing had slipped down his waist. "Let me help," Trevor said lifting Max back up as he grabbed the waistband of the sweatpants and hooked them on the hanger on the back of Max's door. As Max hung in the air he kicked his feet trying to get free.

"See Max this is going to work," Trevor said with a laugh. "Now we each have our own place in our little family. Don't worry you'll see how great it is to be my little brother. The only rule is you don't bother me and I won't have any reason to pound you into dust," Trevor said with a smile before giving Max's cheek a couple of gentle swats. With that Trevor left closing Max's door leaving him hanging helplessly in the

air. A moment later Max felt his door open.

“Max?” Brandon said walking in the door.

“Help,” Max whimpered as Brandon turned around to see him on the back of the door. Brandon panicked for a moment looking around before grabbing the chair by the desk and pulling it over to the door. Being able to put his feet on the chair gave Max enough stability to work the back of the sweatpants off of the hook allowing him to free himself.

“Are you okay?” Brandon asked.

“I'm fine,” Max spat back as he took a seat on his bed. Max looked at Brandon who was shuffling looking uncomfortable. Max frowned a little seeing that he had taken his frustrations out on Brandon.

“Thanks,” Max said more gently. “For the help.” Brandon seemed to perk up a little from the reassurance. Max put his face in his hands trying to figure out what he was going to do. There was no way he could let this stand.

“So did that thing really make you younger?” Brandon asked.

“Yes,” Max said with a groan flopping back onto his bed with his hands splayed out at his sides. “I need to get it back so I can reverse it. But you heard Trevor.”

“You should tell Mom to get it back for you,” Brandon suggested. Max lifted his head a little to give Brandon a skeptical look.

“That would never work. You saw how she acted. That device

changes things. The only reason you and Trevor know is because you saw it happen. Everyone else will believe I've always been like this. Besides even if she did believe me Trevor would just play dumb. I mean who would ever believe such a thing existed." Max said feeling a hopeless feeling begin to inflect into his words.

"Um Max," Brandon uttered.

"What?" Max said with a weary sigh.

"Your pants," Brandon said giggling a little. Max sat up to see his sweatpants down around his knees. The already too big waistband had been stretched out even more and when he had walked over to the bed they had completely fallen off. Max stood up holding his underwear up just before they slipped as well. Max pulled the sweatpants up high.

"This is a problem," Max grumbled as he waddled over to his dresser. He figured maybe he still had some older smaller clothes he could wear pushed down into his drawers. As he opened one drawer he immediately sensed something was different.

"What the," Max breathed as he began to open each and every drawer confirming his suspicions. As he looked over at the clothes contained within he picked up a t-shirt that had the symbol for the avengers on it. These were not his clothes. He had never seen them before in his life. Was the device to blame for this as well. Max grabbed the shirt and then a pair of plain jeans. He looked into the underwear drawer to find some solid colored briefs and some boxer briefs that were

adorned with superheroes and mine craft imagery. Max turned his nose up and grabbed a pair of plain blue briefs thinking that on some level they weren't as bad as the boxers with their designs. He quickly got dressed. As he turned around he jumped a little seeing Brandon having forgotten he was even still there. He could see that Brandon had turned his head as to not watch him get dressed.

“I'm done,” Max said a little sheepishly. Brandon turned back to look at him as he took in Max's new outfit.

“When did you get new clothes?” Brandon asked knowing just as Max did that these were not clothes he had owned before.

“I don't know they were just in my dresser,” Max answered as he looked back at the open drawers with a perplexed look.

“Your room is different too,” Brandon observed.

“Really,” Max said as he looked around. At first he hadn't realized but now taking a closer look it seemed Brandon was telling the truth. His bed was the same as were the walls and the general placement of the furniture, but Max could now see things were definitely different. For one his bookshelf was still there but as he looked at the contents, everything was different. The books were now things that a kid in grade school would be interested in reading and Max also saw some comic books stacked up on a shelf. He remembered when he had been younger his Dad would always make a stop at the comic book store on Saturday afternoons when he would take Max to the office with him in the morning which is the only

time his Dad could find to do a lot of the office work he couldn't do during the week. Yet when Max had turned twelve he had stopped reading comics altogether and had sold off his modest collection. Max leafed through a couple of the books. Some of them were the same but a lot of them were different than the ones he had had. Max then turned around walking over to his desk. His expensive laptop that he had bought last year was gone and now he saw a carrying case with the local elementary school emblem embroidered on the front. He opened it up to see a basic cheap laptop which the elementary school and middle schools assigned to students. Max also saw that hanging on the back of the chair was a backpack however this too wasn't the black one he usually used this one was instead a plain red one that didn't seem to have a lot of stuff in it which was different from his own which would have been stuffed with heavy books.

Max began to pace back and forth in deep thought. Had the device really done all this? He racked his brain trying to remember everything about the events that had transpired. It hadn't been an instant change. He was certain that even after he had been regressed his room had been the same. Could it be that after everyone had left that's when the room had changed? Max was staring to see just how powerful the device was. If there was one thing that he was sure of it wasn't something someone like Trevor should have. Just then Max heard a car pull into the driveway. He ran to his window to see his

Dad walking towards the front door. Max bolted out of his

room.

He didn't care what changes he had seen. If there was one person who would see that something was wrong it was his Dad. He was his Dad after all, he had known Max all his life, no way the device could change that.

Max ran down the hall as he bounded down the stairs where he could see his Dad walking through the front door.

“Dad!” Max yelped as he ran down the steps. Getting close to the bottom Max hit the tender spot on his foot where the glass had stabbed him. He felt a jolt of pain shoot up his leg as he fell forward a little but to everyone else it would have looked like he had leapt. His Dad looked surprised but was able to catch him with little problem.

“Woah there, Super Max.” His Dad said calling him by a nickname he hadn't used in years. Max hugged his Dad tightly. For some reason it felt great, for a moment it felt like all his problems weren't so big, that everything was going to be okay. His Dad was here to fix everything.

“I'm happy to see you too buddy,” Dad said slightly taken aback by the greeting as he set Max back on his feet on the bottom step. “But I think you might be getting a little big to have me catch you like that, I'm getting to be an old man you know,” Dad said with a chuckle.

“But can't you see?” Max asked looking at his Dad with panicked look. “I'm small.” Max said holding his arms up.

“Not that small,” his Dad said ruffling his hair up a little with

his hand. Max was starting to be hit by the cold realization that his Dad didn't see anything wrong.

“No, this is bad,” Max said he began to feel his heart start to beat faster. He looked at his Dad who seemed to be the same as ever. He was a tall man with a balding head and some stubble that hadn't been shaved in a couple of days which allowed a few stray gray hairs to stick out in his whiskers. The only difference from when Max had seen him this morning was the fact that now he only came up to about his Dad's stomach and he had to look up to see his face.

“Did you say something bad happened?” his Dad asked with a hint of concern in his expression. Max stood trying to find the words but simply couldn't.

“He is probably referring to this afternoon,” Sheila said coming into the front hall from the kitchen.

“What happened this afternoon,” Dad said a sense of dread in his voice.

“Well Max was apparently swinging around a baseball bat and hit the mirror in his room causing it to shatter and he got a little piece in his foot.

“A bat?” Dad said with some surprise as he gave Max a look that said I can't believe you did that.

“Now now, Craig it was just an accident, I'm sure he didn't mean to break anything. I think him and Brandon were just playing around.”

“That's not an excuse,” Dad said putting his hands on his hips. With his tone and demeanor Max knew his Dad was a little upset with him.

“Dear, please,” Sheila said putting her hand up. “It was an accident and everybody is okay. Besides apparently Trevor was in the room and did nothing to stop it, if anything he is the one I'm disappointed in.”

“Its not Trevor's job to go around making sure everything Max does is okay.” Dad said turning towards Sheila. “Besides you don't need to coddle Max like this. At ten he is plenty old enough to know better.”

“Craig,” Sheila said slowly as she gave Max's Dad a weary look. Dad pursed his lips before letting out a defeated sigh.

“At the very least there is one thing that needs to happen,” Dad said turning back to Max. “Don't you think you owe your Mom an apology for causing some un-needed trouble?

Max hung his head. Sure he had caused her some stress but its not like he didn't have a good reason, not that he would ever be able to convince them of the truth. At the same time though he did feel bad for causing her trouble especially since she had been so empathetic towards him after and even now.

“Sorry Sheila,” Max said as he looked up. He saw his Dad and Shelia exchange a look with one another as if they were looking at each other to confirm that the other had noticed the same thing.

“Its okay, it was just an accident,” Sheila said with an awkward smile. “Anyways I got dinner ready so how about everyone come and eat while its hot.”

“Hey, I could get used to this,” Dad said with chuckle. “My wife having a hot meal ready on the table for me when I get home from a long day at the office.” Dad said putting his arm around Sheila.

“Don't get used to it,” Sheila said as she and Dad walked off towards the kitchen giggling to themselves like two schoolkids on their first date.

At dinner Max sat picking at his food with his fork with his head down. His appetite was gone and he was feeling hopeless about everything.

“Max,” Sheila's voice rang out as he looked up to see her standing next to him with a pitcher of juice in her hand. “You want something to drink?”

“Yes,” Max said as he watched her pour the red liquid into his glass. “Thanks Sheila,” Max replied watching as she gave him a small forced kind of smile as if something bothered her about what he had said. Sheila then took a seat next to Brandon. “Whats up with that look?” Sheila asked looking at her youngest who seemed to have a strange expression of confusion on his face.

“Um well,” Brandon began rather hesitantly. “Don't you and Dad think anything is weird?”

“About what?” Sheila asked. Brandon fell silent looking like

he didn't actually want to say what was on his mind.

“Its okay buddy,” Dad said giving Brandon a reassuring look. “You can tell us, you're among family.”

“It's Max,” Brandon finally said. “He's small.”

“Brandon,” Sheila said with a gasp. “That's not a nice thing to say. Max is a perfectly normal size for his age.”

Dad let out a little laugh.

“In a few years he'll be taller than me I bet,” Dad said ruffling Max's hair.

“That's not what I mean,” Brandon yelped out. “I mean he's younger than he was this morning. Don't you remember?”

“Looks the same to me,” Dad said giving Max a thoughtful once over.

“But its true,” Brandon said with some frustration. “He was the same age as Trevor but then Trevor used some weird thing on him that shot out smoke and now Max is younger...and Trevor wont let him change back,” Brandon said pointing an accusatory finger at the older boy who had a scowl on his face.

“Brandon knock it off,” Trevor growled which caused Brandon to shrink down in his chair a little.

“Well Trevor is it true?” Dad asked. “Did you really magically shrink Max?” Trevor let out a sigh as he waved his hand in the air.

“Its just some stupid game Max and Brandon are playing, they've been annoying me all afternoon with it.” Trevor said doing his best to look as if he had heard it all before.

“Brandon, really,” Sheila said with some annoyance.

“But its true,” Brandon mewled.

“Its all well and good for you and Max to use your imaginations to play games,” Sheila said putting a hand on Brandon's head as if it were and off switch. “But we do not play games at the table.”

Brandon's face fell into a pout as the conversation turned towards some other mundane thing. Max looked over at Brandon and gave him a small smile as if to say thanks for trying. Even though he knew that's exactly how it would play out Max was still grateful that Brandon had even attempted to help him. Dinner winded down as Sheila got up and started clearing away some dishes.

“Max are you okay?” Dad asked looking at the practically untouched food on Max's plate. “You barely touched your dinner.”

“I'm just not hungry,” Max said in a tone that came across as him moping.

“Max, your Mom worked hard to make that, you need to eat some of it,” his Dad said placing some extra emphasis on the word Mom.

“Its okay if he's not hungry, there is no need for him to force

himself to eat," Sheila interjected rather quickly whisking Max's plate away. Dad sat back in his chair with a slight groan giving Max a sort of ponderous look.

"Okay," Sheila said clapping her hands. "Dinner is over so its homework time. Max, Brandon, remember to bring your completed work to me or your Dad so we can sign off on your planners."

"You don't have to remind me every night," Brandon said with some gruffness as he got up from the table walking off towards the stairs to go up to his room.

"And Trevor it would be nice if you could actually do your homework for once," Sheila said with a nagging plea.

"That's what study hall is for," Trevor said as he stretched back in his chair.

Max sulked off to his own room happy to have the opportunity to be alone. He came into his room and collapsed into the chair at his desk closing his eyes for a moment. It seemed the adrenaline from this afternoon had left him causing him to feel fatigued. Just then Max heard his door creak open. He looked over to see Brandon approach his desk holding a piece of paper in his hand.

"What's up?" Max asked rubbing his eyes.

"Um well, I have to do the second part of that assignment tonight and you said last night you would help me with it," Brandon said sounding as if he knew that he was bothering Max. "But I get if you don't want to," Brandon added quickly.

“Its fine,” Max said with a sigh motioning for Brandon to hand over the sheet. Max spent the next fifteen minutes walking Brandon through the worksheet which seemed centered around identifying contractions.

“So does it make sense?” Max asked.

“Yeah, I get it,” Brandon said with a smile as he took the paper into his hands. “Thanks for always helping me with stuff,” Brandon said.

“Hey I'm going to be your brother so I'll always help you out,” Max said with a grin. “That's what we big brothers are for.”

“Not all of them,”' Brandon said casting his eyes towards Trevor's room across the hall.

“Just the good ones,” Max said with small laugh.

“Um Max are you gonna be okay?” Brandon said worry inflecting his voice. “You know being small?”

“Yeah I'll be fine,” Max said summoning up some confidence. “Its not like I'm planning on staying like this, I just need to find some way to get that thing back from Trevor.”

“Mhmm,” Brandon said. “I'm still glad though that even though you got younger you're still old enough to be my big brother.” Brandon said with a smile. “But I still want you to change back soon.”

“Thanks B,” Max said giving Brandon a light punch to his shoulder. “But before that I guess I got homework of my

own," Max said getting up from the desk and grabbing the backpack on the back of his chair.

"But you went to high school today," Brandon said watching as Max dumped the contents of the backpack out onto his bed. There were a few notebooks and some workbooks for Math and English as well as a couple of folders.

"Like I said that device changed things so as far as the world is concerned I'm not in high school anymore, although to be honest I'm not exactly sure what grade I'm even in anymore." Max said. He surveyed the contents of the bag laid out before him. He spotted a red folder that had the words

"Take Home" in big letters across the front further down their was more writing that read. "Max Barnes Fifth Grade Mr. Lazoo"

"Fifth Grade" Max said wrinkling his nose a little. His stomach twisted a little realizing that he had been reduced to an elementary schooler.

"Oh you got Mr. Lazoo," Brandon said reading the folder along with Max.

"Is he new?" Max asked not remembering the name from when he had actually attended the school himself.

"He was there last year too," Brandon replied. Max opened the folder to see a couple of papers mainly concerning logging into different websites that were often used for homework as well as a weekly schedule that outlined what days of the week he had P.E, art, and music class. Max then

spotted another book that said “My Planner” on it which was also labeled with his name and grade. He opened it up to see that each page was one week and had boxes with the date and listed assignments he was supposed to do and other miscellaneous task such as permission slips that needed to be signed or things he needed to bring in. He looked at the previous days to see Dad's or Shelia's signatures signing off on the bottom of each day. He turned to the current day to see that there was something written.

“Connections, pages 65 and 66,” Max read out loud. “What the hell is that?”

“Its math,” Brandon said as he eagerly grabbed the purple workbook and showing it to Max obviously happy to be of some help. Max took the book with some weariness. He flipped through the book some before going to the desk and grabbing a pencil.

“Guess I should get to work” Max said as he flipped to the page he was supposed to do. Brandon left the room leaving Max to his task. Max looked at the questions on the page. It all seemed pretty simple multiplication and division problems yet Max was having one issue. He knew how to get the answer but the way that the book wanted him to show his work was something he didn't quite understand. It seemed to Max that the book wanted him to break down the problems completely and then solve them. Max pushed some air out through his nose. He just did the problems normally as he always did. Sure, maybe given some time he might be able to figure out the exact way the book wanted him to solve the

problems but he wasn't going to sit there all night working on this. After all it didn't really matter. In his estimation he was going to be back to normal soon anyways. Part of him even wondered why he was doing the homework in the first place.

He gave a look across the hall at Trevor's room, seeing the light was on underneath the door crack. Max knew he just needed to sneak into Trevor's room while he wasn't there to get the device back. That was if Trevor was keeping it in there, it was also a possibility that Trevor would carry the device on him. Max knew though that Trevor would slip up eventually, he after all wasn't a meticulous person Max just needed to wait for his opportunity, he needed to be careful though. If he alerted Trevor to the fact that he was waiting for him to get careless he would be put on guard, which was the last thing Max needed.

Max was finishing up the homework as he penciled in the answer to the last problem when his Dad appeared in his doorway.

“Hey bud, hows the homework going?” Dad asked.

“I'm done,” Max said pushing the booklet away from him.

“Let's see it then,” Dad said walking into the room and shutting the door behind him. He grabbed the booklet and looked it over for a moment. He then took a pen out of the cup of pens and pencils on Max's desk and signed that days box in Max's planner.

“Good work,” Dad said.

“I guess,” Max said gathering up the things on his bed and putting them back into the backpack. He was feeling a little weird with the whole thing. Doing fifth grader homework and having his Dad sign off on it. He didn't really remember having to do that when he had actually been in fifth grade. As Max turned back to hang the backpack back on the chair he felt his legs go wobbly as he stumbled forward.

“Whoa there,” his Dad said catching him before he fell. “You okay? You didn't hit your head when you were swinging that bat around did you?”

“No,” Max said standing up and brushing his Dad's hands away. “I'm just really tired, it was a long day.”

Max wasn't lying. He had been feeling exceptionally tired the whole time he had been doing the homework, so much so that he had been fighting to keep his eyes open. His limbs were starting to feel like wet noodles as well.

“You look pretty tired,” Dad remarked as he looked at his phone. “You got about an hour and half before bedtime but maybe it wouldn't hurt to get your pj's on and hit the hay early.”

“Bedtime?” Max said looking at his Dad with an incredulous look. Max hadn't had a set bedtime for awhile. Most nights he was up until one or two in the morning.

“9:30 is a pretty generous bedtime,” Dad said. “Sheila makes Brandon go to bed at eight thirty and he's only two years younger than you.”

“Yeah, I know,” Max said shaking his head a little for a moment forgetting that he was now ten years old.

“Anyways,” Dad said. “I was wondering if I could talk to you for a minute?”

Max just gave a shrug as he turned to face his Dad noticing the man looked a little uneasy.

“Its just I was wondering,” his Dad began. “Why you all of sudden switched from Mom back to Sheila.”

“Wha-” Max said not really grasping what his Dad was asking.

“I just noticed you were calling her Sheila again,” Dad reiterated.

“That's her name isn't it?” Max asked.

“But you've been calling her Mom for the last six months without a problem,” Dad said. Max was surprised to hear this. Never once had he called Sheila mom. When their parents had first started dating Max and Trevor had referred to each other's parent with Mr. Barnes, and Mrs. Jones respectively. It was only after their parents had gotten engaged that they had put their foots down saying they could not refer to them in such a formal way if they were going to be a family. Both parents had made clear that they didn't expect their prospective step children to call them Mom and Dad but they had to at least use their first names. Max and Trevor had kept to a first name basis with their soon to be step parent. The only one who hadn't was Brandon who had switched over to

calling Craig Dad almost immediately. Max had never even considered calling Sheila mom. But as he put the pieces together he had no doubts this was another change that had been brought upon by the powers of the device. It did make sense in some way. At sixteen he felt it would have been weird to all of sudden start referring to Sheila as Mom but perhaps if he had been younger like Brandon it wouldn't have been as strange a concept.

“Is it because the wedding is getting closer?” Dad asked. Max bit his lower lip for a moment.

“Its not that, its just...” Max said trailing off not able to come up with any sort of rational excuse.

“Look buddy,” Dad continued. “I know it took you a little while to warm up to the idea and you felt a little awkward at first, but Sheila was really happy to hear you call her Mom. It made her feel like you had accepted her as family.” Dad walked over to Max and put a hand on his shoulder. “Do ya think you could go back to calling her Mom, you know she loves you as if you were one of her own.”

“Yeah I can,” Max said looking off to the side. It didn't really matter to him, as he continued to cling to the idea that all of this was temporary.

“That's my guy,” Dad said as he ruffled Max's hair. “Now get ready for bed.”

“But you said nine thirty,” Max protested.

“Right,” his Dad smirked. “I just said get ready not that you

had to go to sleep."

Dad then left the room.

Max grumbled a little as he turned to his dresser and started going through the drawers coming upon his pajama drawer. He was getting a little annoyed with the kid treatment. As he went through the clothes he was at least happy to see that none of it looked particularly kiddie. He pulled out a fleece pair of black and blue checkered pants and a plain black long sleeve shirt. He put them on before laying on his bed looking up at the ceiling fan spinning above him. He had come to the conclusion that he wasn't going to be changing back tonight. The idea of going to school tomorrow didn't exactly sit well with him. As he continued to watch the spinning fan he felt his eyes close. He was so exhausted after all. Before long he had fallen into a state somewhere between sleep and awake. The next thing he remembered was coming out of sleep just a little feeling someone lifting up his legs and shifting him underneath the covers. Yet he was far too sleepy to even open his eyes. He then felt the covers pulled up over him before someone kissed him on the forehead and he heard the click of his lights being switched off. Max curled up underneath the covers before surrendering to a deep slumber. The next thing he knew he was being shaken awake by his shoulder. Max opened his eyes to see his Dad standing next to his bed.

"Time to get up sport," Dad said. "Its time to go to school."

Chapter 3

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 3 - Chapter 3

Chapter 3

Max gripped the straps of his backpack as he walked side by side with Brandon into Declan Lake Elementary for the first time in six years. As he looked around he could see it hadn't really changed all that much.

“I'll see you after school,” Brandon said as they came to an intersection of halls. Brandon began to walk off.

“Hey wait,” Max said causing Brandon to stop and look at him.

“You wouldn't happen to know where Mr. Lazoo's classroom is?” Max asked looking around unsure.

“Not really,” Brandon said scrunching up his face. “The fifth grade classrooms are that way,” Brandon said pointing in the opposite direction from where he was headed. “We could go to the office and ask,” Brandon suggested.

“That's okay,” Max said with a wave of his hand. “I'll find it.” Brandon gave him a shrug before walking off. As Max began to walk in the direction he had been pointed in he was starting to get nervous. He had been trying to keep himself calm all morning running through every scenario in his head. He felt like a new kid on his first day. Yet Max knew that

everyone here was going to act like he had been a student here for awhile. They were going to expect him to know things which was giving Max more worries on top of the ones he already had. The only thing Max could do was tell himself he just had to get through today. Coming into a hallway Max looked around seeing other kids who looked similar to his age. They were at lockers putting away coats and book bags. Max walked along the row of lockers wondering what he was going to do.

“Hey Max,” a kid came up slapping a hand on his shoulder. The boy was smiling at him with two front teeth that looked a little too big for his mouth. He had short hair that was buzzed down and he had freckles across his nose.

“Uh hey,” Max said awkwardly not having the faintest idea who this kid was.

“So did you ask?” the boy asked.

“About what?” Max asked looking back confused.

“You coming over to my house for a sleepover this weekend,” the boy said his expression turning serious.

“Oh well no I didn't,” Max said looking around a little awkwardly. The other boy gave a sort of huff.

“You said you would.” the other boy replied crossing his arms.

“Sorry I just forgot,” Max said which was as close to the the truth as could be.

“Well you can just ask tonight,” the boy said with an

expectant look. “I could have my Mom call your Dad just so you don't forget again.”

Max twisted his mouth up a little. He could just agree so this kid would stop bothering him, after all Max had no plans on being a kid through the weekend. But on the other hand if he wasn't able to get the device back before tomorrow and this kid's Mom did call what would happen if Max's Dad said yes? Max cringed at the thought. There was no way he was going to some kid's house for a sleepover.

“Actually I can't,” Max said coming up with an excuse to nip this in the bud. “My Dad said I'm busy this weekend.”

“Aww man,” the other boy groaned as he swirled his head around.

“Sorry,” Max said. “Maybe another time.”

The other boy looked like he was about to say something but they were interrupted.

“Max, Calvin, class is starting,” said a man standing in the hallway near a classroom door. Max looked up to see the man who had spoken looked like a teacher. He was on the younger side. He had slicked back blonde hair and a bristly mustache on his upper lip. He was wearing a blue polo and had a lanyard with and id card around his neck.

“Okay Mr. Lazoo.” the other boy who Max presumed to be Calvin said as he walked over to one of the lockers. Max noticed that most of the other kids had left the hallway. Max looked around for a moment before walking up to his

supposed friend.

“Hey Calvin help me out which locker is mine?” Max asked. Calvin paused for a moment and gave Max a weirded out look.

“Its right here,” Calvin said slapping the locker next to his. “Where it always is.”

Max nodded as he opened the locker thankful that they didn't have combination locks in elementary school. Max put his bag up. He looked over to see Calvin grabbing the books and folders from his bag. Max did the same as he followed Calvin into the classroom. Max looked around the room to see there were three groups of ten desk in the room each one facing another. Max had managed to figure out where his locker was now he just had to figure out where he was supposed to sit. As Max took a couple step into the room he saw that there were paper name placards on each desk. Max wandered around a minute reading off all the names before he finally found his name written on one. He quickly went up to it and opened the top and deposited his stuff inside before closing the top of the desk and sitting down at the seat. He let out a sigh of relief, at least he had been able to get this far.

The bell rang as the intercom came on and the principal came on to welcome everyone and start the announcements Max only half listened as he looked around taking in his surroundings. Then the principal lead the school through the pledge of allegiance before signing off. The kids were then instructed by Mr. Lazoo to pass their homework forward.

Max followed suit with the others who got out their books and tore out the page as Mr. Lazoo collected the stacks from each group of desk.

“All right,” Mr. Lazoo said. “Now I need you all to take out a blank piece of paper.” There was an audible groan from the class. “Now now, you have nothing to worry about if you've been keeping up with the reading.”

Max got out a piece of paper not really sure what was happening.

“Okay so yesterday we read chapter three of In the Sun so number your papers one through ten,” Mr. Lazoo instructed. “Question one what was Misty keeping in the box?”

Max looked around completely out of the loop as he watched the rest of the class begin to write. Was this from a book? He had never heard of it before. Mr. Lazoo then moved onto the next question as Max scrambled to write something down. He was just as lost with the rest of the questions writing down random answers. Once the quiz had finished the teacher once again collected the papers.

Mr. Lazoo then went to the board and they started reviewing the chapter. As the lesson went on Max became aware that he had most likely gotten every question on the test wrong.

“Max?” Mr. Lazoo said as Max focused back in. “What did you think about that?” Mr. Lazoo asked.

“Sorry, about what?” Max asked not having heard the previous question. He was actually finding it hard to even

follow the conversation. Mr. Lazoo gave a sort of weary look towards the boy.

“About what Conrad's mother said to him in the kitchen?” Mr. Lazoo asked.

Max gritted his teeth as he felt his nerves come on. He wasn't used to feeling like a fish out of water when it came to school like this.

“I guess it was okay,” Max said a little unsure hoping if he gave a vague enough answer that would be enough to make it sound like he knew what was happening.

“But it wasn't okay,” another girl blurted out from across the room. This was thankfully enough for Mr. Lazoo to turn his attention off of Max. The lesson came to an end as Mr. Lazoo instructed the class to take out the book they had just been discussing and there would be twenty minutes of independent reading where they were to start chapter four. Max opened his desk to find his own copy. As everyone began to read Mr. Lazoo went and sat behind his desk as he started grading papers. Max looked at the book. Perhaps he could read through the first four chapters in twenty minutes time, just so he was caught up, in case it came up again later in the day. He was confident since he was usually a fast reader. As Max read he was struck by a peculiar thing, it seemed he wasn't able to read as fast as usual. He found it strange since this book had pretty large print and the language wasn't all that complicated. He brushed it aside as him being under a lot of stress at the moment. By the time the teacher called an end,

Max had only made it to the beginning of the chapter he had been supposed to be reading.

Next up was math. As Max listened he started to understand the method in which he had been supposed to use to solve the problems from the previous night's homework. Yet he came away as seeing it useless since doing it the way he was used to was faster and had less steps involved. Finally the bell rang as all the kids began to pack up their things for morning recess.

“You're playing soccer with us again, right?” Calvin asked as he sidled up to Max.

“Uh sure,” Max said. In truth he wasn't all that enthused with the idea, but on the other hand maybe running around some would help him calm down a little and help him work his nerves down. The two boys made their way towards the door.

“Max a moment,” Mr. Lazoo called out as Max turned around seeing the teacher beckon him over. Max turned back to go and stand by the teacher's desk. He had never actually been called to have a talk with a teacher before in his life. Mr. Lazoo waited until the classroom was empty.

“Hey bud I just wanted to talk to you for a moment,” Mr. Lazoo said.

“Am I in trouble or something?” Max asked.

“No,” Mr. Lazoo said before holding up the homework from last night and Max's quiz. “But I got some questions for you. First off about this quiz. You know I'm a little surprised to see

you got every single question wrong.”

Max gulped.

“You know these questions are supposed to be easy if you actually do the reading, you are doing the reading?”

“Y-yeah of course,” Max lied.

“Well I did see you looking at the book during independent reading time so I guess you were doing something. Which is why I'm a little confused at this quiz. If you're having trouble keeping up you need to tell me,” Mr. Lazoo said.

“There's no problem,”' Max interjected. “Its just that...I don't know I was just having trouble concentrating is all.”

Mr. Lazoo leaned back in his chair a little slightly jerking his head to the side as if what Max said made some sort of sense to him.

“Well you'll do better on the next one, right?” Mr. Lazoo said with grin.

“Of course,” Max said nodding quickly.

“The other thing I wanted to ask you about was this homework.”

“Did I get all that wrong too,” Max said gloomily.

“No,” Mr. Lazoo said. “The answer's are all correct in fact.” Max looked up confused. If it was right then what was the problem? “Its just you didn't use the correct method to get your answers. Did your Dad or someone help you with this?"

Max was about to say no but thought better of it for a moment.

“Yeah,” Max said taking the excuse that had been served up to him.

“I thought so,” Mr. Lazoo said. “Look the funny thing is a lot of parents struggle with doing things the new way since that's not how they learned it. But I really need you to do it the way we do in class okay?”

“Yeah I get it,” Max said. He wasn't sure why he was feeling so anxious about this. None of this mattered, this wasn't his life. Yet he couldn't deny he felt some shame in listening to Mr. Lazoo reprimand him.

“Max are you okay,” Mr. Lazoo asked noticing Max's demeanor.

“Yeah, I'm fine,” Max said meekly.

“I just noticed all morning you've seemed a little lost, you're not acting like your self. You know if there is something going on you can talk to me about it,” Mr. Lazoo said looking at Max with a soft expression.

“No,” Max said looking off to the side. Mr. Lazoo leaned forward in his chair as he regarded Max in front of him.

“Your Dad is getting married next weekend, right?”

“Huh,” Max looked at the man. “Oh yeah he is.”

“You nervous about it?” Mr. Lazoo asked putting his elbows

on his knees as he leaned forward.

“No,” Max said furrowing his brow.

“Its okay if you are,” Mr. Lazoo said. “Its a big change after all, your step mom has two kids right?”

Max nodded. “You told the class your Dad was getting married but you haven't talked about your new siblings very much. Are they boys? Girls? Are they older?”

“They're both boys, one of them is eight and the other is sixteen,” Max said a hint of resentment coming off of him as he said Trevor's age.

“So you're about to become the middle child eh?” Mr. Lazoo asked sitting back in his chair.

“I guess,” Max said wincing a little as if it pained him to confirm his new spot in the family. He was so put off by the fact that he silently reaffirmed to himself that he was not going to let that happen.

“You get along with them?” Mr. Lazoo asked.

“Brandon, my younger brother is great,” Max piped up, feeling some eagerness to talk about Brandon. “And Trevor my older...brother,” Max began but trailed off, the words older brother leaving a bitter taste in Max's mouth.

“Harder to get along with,” Mr. Lazoo said finishing Max's thought in a much nicer way than he would have. Max looked at the teacher for a moment as he realized that Mr. Lazoo had coaxed him into talking about his real problem. Why was he

even having this discussion? His problems had nothing to do with the wedding. How had he all of sudden found himself talking to this guy about all of this.

“I'm not nervous, really.” Max said doubling down. “I didn't really sleep well last night, that's all.”

“Well a proper nights sleep is important,” Mr. Lazoo said. “Maybe you just need to run around a little and wake up, huh? Mr. Lazoo said.

“Yeah, probably,” Max said hoping this was the end of the conversation.

“Okay, get going,” Mr. Lazoo said motioning with his head towards the door. Max made a hasty exit as he walked outside to the playground where the rest of his classmates were. He walked around for a bit just trying to clear his head before he heard Calvin calling out his name in the soccer field where a bunch of other kids were gathered. He trotted out to the field knowing Calvin probably wasn't going to leave him alone. As Max began to play he found it rather easy. These kids didn't take it as seriously as the jocks in gym class. In fact it seemed that the game mostly consisted of kids from opposite teams punting the ball as far down the field to the opposite side as everyone moved in a herd to get to the ball before it was punted back the other way.

As recess came to an end Max found himself panting having worked up a good sweat. All in all he did feel a little better having gotten a break from all the anxiety of the morning. As the morning proceeded on he felt himself getting more into

the groove even finding himself goofing off with Calvin a little as they sat in the corner where they were supposed to be reviewing spelling words together. Lunchtime finally came. Max grabbed the camo lunchbox he had been given by Sheila that morning and walked in line to the cafeteria. He followed Calvin's lead and sat at the same table as him. The other kids at the table didn't seem to think anything was weird so Max figured this was normal. As he sat listening in on the conversation he was picking up the names of his other supposed friends.

“I thought it was alright,” another kid named Ryan said referring to some superhero movie the kids were discussing. “Have you seen it yet, Max?” Ryan said turning his attention towards Max.

“Huh oh no, not yet,” Max said. He hadn't really kept up with the superhero movies. He stopped paying attention to them shortly after he had stopped reading comics.

“What are you talking about,” another boy named Henry said. “You watched it at my house last week.”

“I did,” Max said realizing he had walked into another contradiction. He sat for a moment looking at the confused look the other kids had on their faces. “Well I guess it wasn't that great if I can't remember much about it,” Max said recovering from his blunder as best he could.

“I didn't like it, except for the fight scene at the end,” Calvin announced thankfully taking the heat off of Max. The rest of the table seemed to agree as the conversation moved on. Max

sat taking some breaths to try and push his anxiety that had flared up again.

“You gonna eat?” Calvin asked noticing Max hadn't even so much as opened his lunchbox.

“Oh yeah,” Max said as he unzipped the top having forgotten he even had a lunch. As he began to empty the contents he was curious to see what Sheila had packed for him. Usually Max would just go down to the gas station and grab something to eat there on his lunch break enjoying the quietness it afforded him. Max took out a ham and cheese sandwich, a juice box, a banana, and a pudding cup. All in all it wasn't the worst though it did make him feel a tinge childish especially the juice box. Max then saw at the bottom of the bag was a handwritten note he picked up it read “You can handle anything, Love Sheila” Max smiled a little for some reason. This little handwritten note made him feel a tiny bit happy a welcome bit of reassurance from his roller coaster of a morning. That was until he noticed a scribble right before Sheila's name he squinted a little to see what was underneath, he could just barely make out that it had been the letter M. It appeared that Sheila had begun to write out Mom before deciding against it. Max grimaced feeling guilty. Sheila had made that decision no doubt because of him the previous night.

Max began to think about how different she had been last night compared to her usual behavior towards him. He was reminded of what his Dad had said to him last night. How calling her Mom had made her feel like Max had accepted

her as family. Max wondered, if that was the truth than how had she felt when he had been a teenager? Various examples began to spring to mind of how Sheila had tried to get closer to him. All the little things she would offer to do for him. Like his laundry or trying to give him some pocket money for lunch or even offering to take him clothes shopping. He even remembered how the day Emily had refused his invitation to the dance he had come home feeling pretty low. Sheila had been able to tell something was bothering him. She had tried to get him to open up a little but Max had rebuffed her advances as he always had, keeping her at arms length at all times.

But now things were different. It seemed being younger had made his behavior less resistant. Maybe it was because being younger, he had to rely on adults more than when he had been in high school. In this reality Max had been more open to accepting her care. As Max thought about yesterday he could see that Sheila had probably wanted to be someone that Max could depend on. She had defended him a lot yesterday, it seemed she really did care about him. As Max's guilt deepened he made a promise right then and there. When he got back to normal he was going to make an effort to let Sheila in a little more. He wasn't going to start calling her Mom or anything, but just show her that he did consider her a part of his family, he owed her that much at least.

Lunch came to an end and then it was back outside for more recess, this time Max and his friends had elected to play tag on the playground equipment, that was until they got a

talking to for running on the playground equipment. The afternoon went by rather smoothly. Mr. Lazoo showed the kids a slideshow of South America before having them work on a geography worksheet. The day ended with art class. Max found himself painting a picture he had apparently started last week. At the end of the class the teacher had even praised him saying the work he had done that day had shown real improvement. Max was overjoyed when it finally came time to get his stuff and go home for the day. He was feeling relieved until he walked out the front doors and was faced with another problem. What was he supposed to do to get home?

Max could see some vans and buses parked in a lane. He spotted the van emblazoned with the logo for the daycare Brandon went to after school, did he also go there? Max thought back to what he had done after school when he had actually been that age. He had always been picked up by an older lady who ran an in home babysitting service in her house. That's where he had gone after school since kindergarten yet by the time he reached fifth grade she had only picked him up and dropped him off at his house. Max stood frozen for a moment deciding he should just try to walk home, it wasn't far after all. He walked past the daycare van making eye contact with the staff person standing by the side of the van with a clipboard in her hand. He made eye contact with her as he walked on by. She didn't say a word so Max was confident that he did not attend alongside Brandon. Max reached the sidewalk just outside school property when he came to a stop a hand grabbing his shoulder.

“Max where are you going?” a girl's voice said. Max turned around and looked the source of the voice with shock. Standing before him was Emily Chambers his crush, and the girl he had asked out to the fall dance just a couple of weeks ago. “Why weren't you at our spot?” she asked panting a little as it looked like she had ran to catch up to him.

“Wha,” Max breathed as his eyes bugged out a little.

“Are you trying to get me in trouble with your Dad or something?” Emily asked as she put her hands on her hips, a goofy smile on her face.

“What spot are you talking about?” Max asked regaining his composure.

“The spot,” Emily said pointing up towards a tree at the front of the school. “You know the spot we always meet up at when I pick you up to walk you home from school, that thing I've done since you were in kindergarten.”

“But why?” Max asked.

“Why else,” Emily said being slightly confused by Max's obvious cluelessness. “Because I'm your babysitter.”

Babysitter,” Max stammered out before his voice caught in his throat while his stomach simultaneously flipped over.

“Well its been awhile since I've had to watch you now that you are older and especially since now your Dad has Trevor around but don't throw away all our good times just like that.” Emily said as she placed an arm around Max's shoulders and

began to lead him down the sidewalk. “But you know your Dad did mention they were considering pulling Brandon out of daycare and was wondering if I was interested in doing some afternoon babysitting again.”

Max felt his face heat up. He was still reeling from the revelation that this girl, his crush since forever, had been his babysitter and that she was now walking him home since he obviously wasn't trusted enough to get their on his own. Nothing else about Max's demotion had hit him quite as hard as this.

As they walked along she began to make small talk asking Max about his day which Max could only offer one or two words answer's too feeling that same feeling of nervousness when he had asked her to the dance. He looked up at her for a moment his attraction to her was still intact. The way her auburn hair flowed down past her shoulders. The cute way she laughed and smiled at him and the fact that she had her arm around him were becoming a little too much for Max.

“Ahh I love fall,” Emily mused. “The turning of the leaves that cool crisp smell of the air. Football games and fall dances.” Max's ears perked up at the mention of the dance.

“Are you going to the dance?” Max asked a little sheepishly.

“Yeah I got a date,” Emily said wistfully.

“Oh so is he like your boyfriend or something?” Max asked. Emily let a out a laugh.

“He's nice and everything but not really boyfriend material

for me," Emily said.

"So then why would you go with him?" Max asked with some bitterness.

"No one else asked me," Emily said with a shrug.

"Maybe someone else wants to ask you, but their too nervous," Max said his voice getting quieter with every word. Max looked up at Emily for a moment as their eyes locked.

"Are you trying to ask me to the dance?" Emily said with a smile.

"What! No I ummm well," Max stammered as he became tongue tied. He looked down at the ground as he felt his face go flush. He heard Emily giggle.

"You are too cute," Emily said as she pulled him closer to her side in a hug. "Its a shame you aren't in high school. I can only imagine how handsome you are going to be, the girls wont be able to resist."

"Yeah I bet," Max muttered under his breath feeling completely foolish. What had he even been thinking saying all that stuff? On the other hand Max was feeling a little bit of hope. Emily had just confirmed she didn't think all that much about her date. Maybe when Max got back to normal he could convince her to change her mind. The duo finally arrived at Max's house.

"Here's your stop," Emily said. "Looks like no one is home."

"Makes sense," Max said. "Sheila and Brandon will be home

around five and I don't really know where Trevor is."

"Probably at school, there is a game tonight," Emily said.

"Oh yeah," Max said remembering that Trevor was on the team.

"Hey Max you want me to come in for awhile?" Emily asked. "I could make you a snack."

"No that's fine," Max sputtered taking a step away from her. As much as he wanted to say yes getting the opportunity to spend time alone with his crush, her comment about making him a snack only confirmed that she would be their under the auspice of watching over him a dynamic he was in no way comfortable with.

"Well alright," Emily said with a grin. "But if you do feel lonely I'm right down the street, kay."

Max nodded as she gave him a wave before walking off to her own house. Max got into he house letting out a large groan as he let his backpack slide off his back. He slumped against the door as he slid down until he was sitting on the ground. He closed his eyes for a moment resting his head against the door. He was exhausted again. Just then he snapped his head forward opening his eyes as a thought came to him, he was alone in the house. Max got from the ground and raced up the stairs going directly to Trevor's room. Max looked around the room not seeing the device, of course it wasn't going to be that easy. Max began to open the drawers of the large dresser in Trevor's room which had a large mirror

across its back. The top filled with sticks of deodorant, some money and a picture of Trevor's girlfriend. Max felt himself wracked with nerves every little creak in the house making his heart leap thinking someone was going to catch him. He felt for a moment that he was a little brother snooping around in his older brother's room. Max had dug through all the drawers finding nothing. Max then went over to the closet and looked through some of the boxes still coming up empty handed. Max came out fell down onto the ground realizing the device was not in the room, he flopped onto his side with a defeated moan, that's when he spotted it.

Underneath Trevor's bed was a small wood grain box. Max crawled under the bed and pulled the box out from under. It was plain and had a small gold clasp with a mini lock on it. The lock was undone. Max felt his hands shake a little as he opened the top. Max grimaced as soon as he saw the box was empty. Max let the box roll out of his hands as made a growl of frustration. He could only conclude that Trevor had the device on him. What could Max have really expected. It had only been a day of course Trevor was going to keep it with him. However as Max thought on things he realized that Trevor wouldn't be able to keep it on him at all times. He probably didn't sleep with the thing. As Max looked at the empty box he thought that maybe this is where Trevor kept the thing. Max gathered up the box and placed it under the bed just as he had found it. He then went around tidying up the room, erasing any trace that he had been in there. Max then went downstairs and turned on the tv. There was absolutely nothing for him to do at the moment he just had to

wait.

As Max brought up the streaming program he clicked on his own profile as he always did. Except it wasn't the same. Instead of all the shows he usually watched his recommendations were filled with cartoons and tween sitcoms. Max let out a sigh. He was about to click over to the search bar and just search up something he regularly watched but his curiosity seemed to get the better of him as he went back to his watch list, he couldn't help but wonder what his ten year old self watched. As he highlighted one of the selections it began to auto play a preview of the cartoon.

As Max watched for a minute he found himself drawn in. The show was doing a good job at keeping his interest and Max even laughed at a few moments, for a cartoon it wasn't half bad. Max sat back on the couch getting comfier. He found the idea of turning on something more mature no longer appealed to him. He was enjoying what he was watching and Max was feeling relaxed at the moment so he though that something he didn't need to pay much attention to was fitting at the moment. He decided to finish the episode at least.

It was'nt until Max heard the door that lead to the garage open and Max could see from the living room that Brandon and Sheila had arrived home that Max realized he had just sat watching cartoons completely losing track of time. It was like he was coming out of some sort of daze as he fumbled for the remote switching off the tv.

“Max, we got you dinner,” Sheila called out from the kitchen.

Max slinked into the kitchen taking a seat at the table. He was glad that no one had found him watching cartoons. Sheila set a bag in front of Max along with a drink. Max scrunched up his nose a little recognizing it at once as a kids meal.

“How was school honey?” Sheila asked not taking much notice of Max's reaction as she sorted through the day's mail.

“Fine,” Max said as he took the contents out of the bag. As much as he wanted to make a fuss he knew it was pointless, what could he expect after all? Max looked at the small burger and fries before him, this was never going to fill him up he thought as he grabbed at the cup and took a drink. What he had expected was a soda instead it was lemonade. Max ate the meal in front of him in silence as he was finishing his Dad walked in through the garage.

“I see dinner's done,” Dad said surveying the table. “I guess that means we're ready to go?”

“Go where?” Max asked.

“Its Friday night we're going to the football game of course,” Dad said. “We gotta go cheer on Trevor.”

Max twisted up the corner of his mouth. He never went to the football games. Its not that he hated sports or anything it just wasn't his scene. Moreso the very idea of going and cheering for Trevor was anger inducing.

“I don't want to go,” Max said.

“What are you talking about, of course you're going, just like

every Friday," Dad said.

"No," Max said rather forcefully. His Dad furrowed his brow a little looking at Max with a stern look, before he let his face soften into a more neutral expression.

"Everyone else is going and you can't stay home alone," Dad said.

"But I was just home alone after school." Max retorted.

"Right, for like an hour and it was daytime. We're going to be gone until late and its going to be dark." Dad said.

"But," Max protested before his Dad put up a hand.

"But nothing, I know you think you're big and grown now because I let you stay home after school alone on occasion, but that doesn't mean you are old enough to be alone that long or at night."

Max pursed his lips in a huff. Becoming more frustrated by the moment. As the rest of the family got up and got on their coats to head to the game. Max went to walk out the door before his Dad stopped him once again reminding him to put on a coat.

"I don't need a coat," Max said annoyed as he went out into the garage. His Dad was about to call him back in and force him to put on a coat but was stopped when Sheila placed a hand on his shoulder.

"Lets not start a fight," she said with a knowing look as she grabbed Max's coat and placed it in her large canvas bag.

Meanwhile Max got into the back seat of the car fuming.

“Are you mad?” Brandon asked.

“What do you think?” Max spat out at the younger boy. He watched as Brandon shrank down a little. It reminded Max of how Brandon reacted whenever Trevor threatened him. Max let out a heavy sigh.

“Hey Brandon,” Max said extending a hand and placing it gently on Brandon's shoulder. “I'm sorry. I'm just going through a lot right now. But I'm not mad at you, okay?”

Brandon nodded still looking a little sheepish.

“C'mon don't look at me like that,” Max said with a grin. “I really need a brother whose got my back, can I count on you?” Max said as he extended out his hand. Brandon hesitated a moment before smiling and clasping Max's hand as they shoulder bumped.

“I'll help,” Brandon said enthused to hear that Max was counting on him.

“Thanks dude,” Max said giving him a thumbs up.

Soon enough Max was sitting in the bleachers at the high school football field between his Dad and Sheila. Brandon had ran off to play with his friends. Sheila had told Max he was free to go run around with his friends as well but Max had refused, content to sit in the stands and stew about. Everything about being here was making Max feel all the more angry and sad at the same time. Being at the high

school, seeing all the people he went to school with regularly and being in a situation where he was now removed from it all, it was like seeing his old life, the one Trevor had barred him from. It was as if he was being mocked from behind some bars, as if he was told he wasn't coming back.

Max had his arms wrapped around himself shivering from the air of the cold autumn night. He knew he was being stubborn but he wasn't going to let his Dad win the earlier argument. In his mind Max was asserting himself. He didn't need someone to tell him to put on a coat, or walk him home from school. He didn't need someone to tell him when to go to bed or do his homework. He also didn't need someone telling him how to do math problems or ask him why he didn't know any the answers to a stupid quiz about a stupid book. Max was not a kid and he wasn't going to be treated like one. Max watched as during one play Trevor busted through the offensive line and landed a sack on the opposing teams quarterback.

“Yeah big hit Trevor,” Dad said shouting as he got to his feet amid the applause from the stand. He looked back at Max and Sheila.

“Feeling a little chilly there son?” Dad asked.

“No,” Max grumbled. Dad only smirked.

“I'm gonna hit the bathroom and check on Brandon anyone need anything?” Dad asked. Sheila said she was fine whiled Max said nothing. Dad left the stands leaving Max alone with his soon to be stepmom. A gust of wind blew causing Max to hug himself tighter as he shivered more.

“Oh for heaven's sake,” Sheila said grabbing the coat out from her bag and draping it across Max's shoulders. “You don't need to be so proud, you'll just make yourself more miserable.”

At first Max wanted to shirk off the coat but on the other hand it was warm and he was cold.

“Thanks,” Max said pulling the coat tighter around himself.

“Don't mention it,” Sheila smiled. “Just looking out for you.”

Max couldn't help but feel a bit of that guilt he had felt that day at school when he had been thinking about how Sheila was always trying to get closer to him and how he had rebuffed her advances at every turn. He looked at her for a moment as she watched the game with a smile on her face. Max felt he should try and say something to her, but what?

“Um thanks for making lunch for me today,” Max said looking at the ground before he could see her reaction.

“Oh,” Sheila said surprised by the sudden thank you for something she seemingly did every day. “You like what I packed, right?” Sheila asked not quite sure how to react. “If there is anything you don't like let me know.”

“No,” Max replied quickly. “It...was really good.” Max said once again feeling a little weird with the whole exchange. “And thanks for the note too,” Max said after a moment.

“You read those?” Sheila asked with small laugh. “I thought you probably just threw them away like Brandon does.”

“Actually I kind of really needed it today,” Max admitted his ears going a little red.

“Glad it helped,” Sheila said. She was hesitant to really show how happy she was by Max's admission. She after all didn't want to embarrass him and cause him to pull back.

“You know...” Max began before coming to a pause wondering if he really wanted to broach the subject at hand. “Its just you can sign them as Mom if you want too.”

Sheila let out a sigh.

“Did your Dad talk to you about that?” she asked.

“Yeah, he did.” Max said. Sheila rubbed the bridge of her nose for few seconds obviously a little perturbed before turning and looking at Max.

“Listen honey, I told your Dad not to have that little chat with you. I don't want you to force yourself to do anything you aren't comfortable with. Like I said I don't want you to feel like I'm trying to replace your Mom.”

“It's not like that,” Max said as frowned a little. As he looked at her calm sympathetic expression he felt like he just wanted to tell her everything that was on his mind, but he fought against it.

“Go on you can tell me,” Sheila said as she gave Max a couple rubs on his back. She could see through him like a glass wall, it was apparent there was something on his mind.

“I don't know my Mom so its not like there is anyone for you

to replace," Max said being drawn in by Sheila's empathetic demeanor, it was the same as it had been with Mr. Lazoo earlier that day when he had started opening up to the teacher, except this time Max couldn't stop himself. "I guess I don't really know what its like to have a Mom so that's why it felt kind of weird, but I think you're super nice and everything." Max said. "I guess if I have to have a Mom, I'm happy that its going to be you."

Sheila didn't respond

"Sorry," Max squeaked as he pulled the collar of the jacket up over his eyes. He felt completely embarrassed at what he had just said. However heartfelt and elegant that had sounded in his mind he knew it had come out sounding awkward and dumb. She must think he was a total dork. Max felt Sheila's arms wrap around him as she pulled him into a hug.

"That was the sweetest thing you have ever said to me," Sheila said before planting a kiss on top of his head. "Thanks for telling me that," She said releasing him but still keeping an arm around him. Max wanted to pull away but stopped himself. She felt so warm and he was cold, or at least that's what he told himself. Dad came back a few minutes later.

"Everything okay here?" he asked noticing the change.

"Just fine," Sheila said not making any more comments on the situation.

As the game dragged on. During the last play of the night a downpour had started drenching all in attendance. Max

finally arrived back home once again sopping wet, his jacket not having done much to keep him dry. The fact that he had sat for so long refusing the jacket had not given him much time to warm up. To say Max was frigidly cold would be an understatement. Max went into his room and took off all his clothes depositing them into his hamper. As he went to his drawers he opened them with shaking hands. He looked in his underwear drawer and for a moment he looked at the boxer's with the superhero designs on them. For some reason it seemed to appeal to him in a way. Max shook his head and instead grabbed another pair of solid colored briefs before going to his pajama drawer. He dug through before coming upon a pair of pajamas that looked exceptionally warm. The only problem was that the pants were blue and had pictures of rockets and moons on them. The shirt that went along with it was white with the picture of a cartoonish astronaut on it while the sleeves were the same design as the pants. Max grimaced for a moment before he put them on. He was cold and these looked like the warmest thing he had.

Max sat on his bed. He looked over at his bookshelf and grabbed one of the comic books on his shelf. As he flipped through it he wasn't really reading it as his mind was somewhere else. He was thinking about the best way to get the device back. It was clear that his best shot would be sneaking into Trevor's room at night and hoping to find the device without waking Trevor. Max looked at a panel in his comic book that showed a scene of a robber in a store, Max's eyes widened. The store! Of course how could he have been so stupid? He didn't need to do all this sneaking around. He

just needed to go back to the store and get another one from Mr. Fishell. Just then there was a knock on Max's door as his Dad walked in.

“Hey bud, me and Brandon are going to watch a movie, want to join us?”

“No thanks,” Max said still brimming with excitement at his new plan. “ I kind of just want to read right now.”

“I won't argue with that,” Dad said with a smirk as he ruffled Max's hair. “Just don't stay up all night reading, remember bed by eleven on the weekends.”

“I won't,” Max said. “Wait, Dad,” Max called out as his Dad went to leave.

“What's up bud? Dad asked.

“I was just wondering if tomorrow we could go to a store here in town?” Max asked realizing he was going to need a ride.

“What store?” Dad asked curious to what his ten year old son could want from a store in this town.

“The magic shop,” Max said. His Dad looked completely confused.

“What magic shop?” His Dad asked.

“I think it was called something like Fishell curios or something like that. Its between a candle store and some jewelry shop I think.

“Max I think your confused. There is no magic shop anywhere in this town.”

“Yes there is I was there yesterday.” Max replied a small inkling of worry forming.

“You went downtown?” Dad said raising his eyebrows. “By yourself?”

“Uh no that's not what I meant,” Max said quickly seeing his Dad's expression turn serious. “I mean a friend told me about it yesterday,”

His Dad's expression relaxed a little.

“Your friend must be mistaken, I know for a fact there is no magic shop.” Dad said. Max looked down for a moment. That couldn't be right, there had to be one. Sure he hadn't been aware of it but he never went into town that often. But his Dad's office was there so he must have noticed it at some point.

“Maybe you should ask your friend on Monday?” Dad offered. “You probably just didn't hear them right.”

“Yeah...I'll do that,” Max said.

“You know though,” Dad mused a little. “If you're interested in magic I'm sure there is a place like that in the city we could go check it out if you want.”

“No its okay, I was just curious about this particular place,” Max answered.

“Okay,” Dad said with a shrug. “Let me know if you change your mind though, no harm in checking out a new hobby.”

With that Dad left. Max got up and got on to the school laptop. He had to dig through his backpack to find the sheet with all the login in info on it first. He got on to the internet and looked for anything on Fishell curios but came up empty. Max figured a guy like Mr. Fishell just didn't use the internet, he seemed the type. Max then searched up age regression devices. That was a dead end as well as he only found anti aging supplements and creams. Max shut the laptop with some frustration. He was thirsty and decided to go get a glass of water. Coming out of his room into the hallway he ran into Trevor who was going to his own room. Both of them came to a standstill as they looked at one another.

“Nice jammies twerp,” Trevor smirked. Max glared at him as he went to walk past. Trevor stuck out his arm stopping Max before using his arm to scuttle Max in front of himself.

“What do you want?” Max asked still maintaining an air of defiance.

“Just wanted to see how your first day of school was,” Trevor said with innocent look.

“Like you care,” Max grumbled.

“You are my little brother after all,” Trevor said. “So maybe I do,”

“You just want to hear how miserable I am,” Max said. Trevor let out a sigh.

“Really Max I know this isn't how you envisioned things turning out, but this is how it is. You should look at it for the opportunity it is.” Trevor said as if he were sympathizing with Max's situation as a bystander instead of the person responsible for it in the first place.

“Opportunity,” Max said as he scrunched up his face.

“Sure,” Trevor said. “You got some time now, you could use it to work on yourself a little maybe do things differently. Maybe if you put some thought into it by the time you're sixteen again you wont be such a dork,” Trevor said with a sickly smirk. “Maybe if you ask nicely I might even give you some pointers.”

Max gritted his teeth. Trevor really knew how to get under his skin. Trevor wanted him on his hands and knee's begging for his help.

“As if,” Max said with some surliness as he walked past Trevor.

“That was the olive branch Maxie boy, maybe you should accept it,” Trevor said as Max walked down the stairs.

Max was once again fuming as he walked into the kitchen. Like hell he would ever accept an offer like that, most of all from Trevor of all people. Max got a cup of water from the faucet and chugged it down. He put the glass down gripping it tightly before letting it go. He went back to the foot of stairs and stopped for a moment seeing Trevor's closed door. The light still on underneath. Max looked around the front

entryway. He turned off the light cloaking himself in darkness as he sat on the bench near the door giving himself the perfect view of the door at the top of the stairs. Tonight was the night. He was going to sit here and wait for Trevor to go to sleep. Then he would make his move. As Max sat on his stakeout he began to think about how he was going to do it. The device still had three charges on it. Maybe he could hit Trevor with it in his sleep. Max then wondered if Trevor would even know what happened if it happened while he slept. Probably not. Max then decided if he was going to do that he would wake Trevor first just so Trevor could know what it was like. He wanted Trevor to experience all of the misery he had put Max through. Yet as Max pondered his plan he began to feel a little odd about it. Should he really do it? That was the kind of thinking that got him into this situation in the first place after all. Maybe he should just leave well enough alone.

Max decided that whatever he did the first thing should be changing himself back immediately. As Max continued to think on things he felt his eyelids start to droop. His first day of fifth grade had really been a roller coaster and he had been tired before all that anyways, perhaps a side effect of the regression process, it must take a lot of energy for the body to revert like it had.

As Max got sleepier he was jolted awake by the light turning on. He looked up to see Sheila with a dozing Brandon in her arms.

“Oh Max you scared me,” she said. “What are you doing

sitting in the dark all alone?”

“Im just...” Max stammered a little. “Thinking.”

Sheila gave him a little smirk.

“Well then I won't disturb you, have a good night.” she said as she began to make her way upstairs.

“Good night,” Max said. Brandon opened his eyes a little and gave Max a small smile as he gave him a sleepy wave. Max waved back waiting until she had turned the corner to turn the lights back off. Max continued to wait. Trevor's light was still on. Max began to get impatient. Just how long was Trevor going to stay up? Wasn't he tired after the game? Max put his head against the wall letting his eyes close again. He kept sitting forward with a jolt fighting off the creeping drowsiness. But soon enough he let his eyes close as his head dropped forward.

Max awoke opening his eyes just enough to realize someone was carrying him up the stairs.

“Dad?” Max said as he tried to get out from under his grogginess.

“Sorry to wake you,” Dad said, as Max felt him rub his back a little. Max was unable to open his eyes fully. His head felt so heavy as he let it flop back down onto his Dad's shoulder. As they entered Max's room his Dad pulled back the cover's on Max's bed and layed him in the soft bed with a small groan.

“You're getting so big on me,” Dad said.

“Dad...wait,” Max moaned a little.

“Shhh,” Dad said as he pulled the covers up over Max. “Go back to sleep kiddo. Its late.”

Max couldn't find the energy to wake up as he felt his Dad brush his hair out of his eyes before giving him a peck on the forehead. His Dad walked out of the room closing the door behind him. Max tried to push one last time to wake up but his sleepiness was too strong and he gave in as he did the previous night, missing his opportunity once again.

Chapter 4

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 4 - Chapter 4

Chapter 4

Max awoke in his bed shooting up with a jolt. He looked around realizing it was morning. He let a growl, angry at himself for falling asleep. He got out of bed running into the hallway thinking maybe Trevor was still asleep. Much to his dismay he saw Trevor's door open and the teenager was gone. Max let out a sigh, it appeared he was going to be ten for a little longer. With nothing left to do Max sulked down to the kitchen. Sheila was drinking some coffee at the counter while she scrolled through her phone. Max could hear the tv on in the living room and judging from the sound, Brandon was there watching cartoons. Max took a seat at the table staring out the window with some melancholy. He couldn't believe he let his chance pass by like this.

“Good morning sweetie,” Sheila said. “Want some cereal?”

“I guess,” Max responded. Sheila gave him a couple of choices and then set out a bowl in front of Max. The boy ate in silence. After finishing he got up and placed his bowl in the sink. He was about to head back up to his room to get dressed and formulate a new plan when Sheila stopped him.

“You know I was thinking we should get you a haircut,” she said as she picked up a strand of Max's long blonde hair.

“Maybe later,” Max said staring sideways.

“I think now is better,” Sheila said as she pulled out one of the chairs and patted the seat beckoning Max to take a seat. “Its a good time anyways, after I'm done you can jump right in the shower. Plus with a week's time that will give your hair time to grow in a little for the wedding.”

Max puckered his lips a little before taking a seat, she wasn't wrong after all. Sheila told Max to wait while she went and grabbed her stuff. She returned a minute later with her bag that contained all her equipment she used at work as a hairdresser. She draped a large towel over him and spritzed his hair with a spray bottle before she began to cut away with some scissors. Max noticed she was cutting a lot of hair and she hadn't even asked him what kind of haircut he wanted. Yet Max figured he would just let her do whatever, she was a professional after all. After some time Sheila put her scissors down and starting using a comb to style his hair.

“What do you think?” She asked holding a mirror in front of his face. Max saw that she had indeed cut a lot of his hair and then had combed it out so he was left with a wavy comb over. He fought back the frown beginning to form on his lips and instead forced a smile.

“Its great,” Max said. In truth it wasn't a bad haircut, but to the sixteen year old in the chair he couldn't help but think about how it made him look all the more like a kid.

“Alright let me just shave down the back a little and then you're free,” Sheila said as she turned on a pair of electric

clippers and started to work. The door to the garage opened as Dad and Trevor walked in, both of them looking pleased.

“So how did it go?” Sheila asked as she continued to shave Max.

“I got it,” Trevor said holding up a piece of plastic that Max at once realized was a driver's license. Max grimaced a little realizing where they had been. He had forgotten all about it himself. Today was the day Max was supposed to have gotten his own license.

“Congratulations,” Sheila said as she paused for a moment to go and give Trevor a hug before returning to her task. Max glowered seeing Trevor hold his license, he held his tongue though. He thought for a moment and wondered that when he used the device to change back would that also change the timeline back to normal, would he find his own license in his wallet? As Max considered the possibility he though it would be a nice consolation to get the license without taking the test.

“And now for the real prize,” Dad said as he went over to the hooks that contained the car keys. He took one down and presented it to Trevor. “The car is all yours,”

“Really,” Trevor said completely surprised.

“Of course I promised didn't I,” Dad said. Max's jaw fell as he watched his Dad hand over the car key to the Oldsmobile to Trevor.

“What!?” Max exploded as he shot up from the chair.

“Goodness, Max,” Sheila said as she placed a hand on his shoulder and pushed him back to sitting on the chair. “I almost cut a bald streak into your head.”

“B-but that's my car, you promised it to me,” Max said. His Dad looked at him with a bewildered look.

“What are you saying?” Dad asked.

“I'm the one that helped with it,” Max continued. “You only got it because of me in the first place.”

“True I did get it thinking we could work on it together,” Dad said. “But Max you know full well you haven't lifted a finger to help me out.”

Max was stunned to hear his Dad say that, however it only took him a moment to realize what was going on, the device had once again changed things. Max remembered when his Dad had first bought the car he had been eager to help, yet being eight years old his Dad had only let him do small stuff like holding a flashlight for him while he worked under the hood. Max had become bored and had lost interest. It wasn't until he was thirteen when he had walked into the garage to find his Dad working on the car alone. It was at that time that Max's Dad had asked him for a socket wrench and had let him unscrew some bolts. Getting more hands on with the project had reignited Max's interest and it was from then on that Max had taken a more direct role in restoring the car. Yet now that Max was ten that had never happened.

“I extended an offer to both of you boys about two years ago

to help me out with the car," Dad continued. "Trevor is the only one who took me up on that offer coming over on the weekends."

"I did," Trevor said his words sounding more like a statement than a question yet he was still surprised to hear all of this himself.

"Yeah and you were a big help but I will say these past six months since you've been living here have been a blessing. I never would have had the car done without all the help. So you put in the work you get the prize," Dad said with a proud smile in Trevor's direction. Max's heart sank. Could all this be true? In his memories by the time his Dad had started dating Sheila the car had already become a project between himself and his Dad, he couldn't even remember his Dad offering Trevor the chance to help out.

"That's awesome, Trevor," Sheila said having finished cutting Max's hair and was packing up her stuff. "We were planning to do lunch at the Lighthouse Cafe today maybe you could drive all of us there in your new car."

"Actually I had plans to hang out with Jenny guess I'll be picking her up for a cruise," Trevor said as he tossed the keys up in the air and caught them.

"Trevor," Sheila said with annoyance. "We were planning to do something as a family for once. Your girlfriend can wait a bit, you see her every day already."

"Oh come on Sheila," Dad said giving Trevor a pat on the

back. “He's sixteen and he just got a car. Let him have some fun with his girlfriend.”

“Fine,” Sheila said with a wave of her hand. “But when we get back you're giving me a ride into town.” Sheila said. Trevor pulled out his phone as he walked up the stairs The shower could be heard a moment later. Max sat in the chair. The thought of Trevor driving around in his car ruining it with his Trevor-ness was making Max absolutely sick to his stomach.

“Hey Super Max you're looking pretty spiffy with that new haircut,” Dad said as he walked over to Max to observe his new look.

“Doesn't he though,” Sheila said as she stood by Dad to admire her work. “He is gonna be so handsome in his tux.”

“Looks like my junior groomsman is going to upstage even me,” Dad said with a chuckle.

“Junior groomsman,” Max said with a dazed look as he if he was trying to decipher what his Dad had just said.

“You know your part,” Dad said with a matter of fact tone. “Don't tell me you're backing out,”

“I'm the best man,” Max said slowly.

“No, Uncle Denny is my best man,” Dad said looking at Max with some concern. “Are you alright? These past couple of days it seems like you are living on some other planet.”

“But I was going to give a speech,” Max said as he felt a

certain mix of sadness and regret fill him. He didn't know why he was saying it, he had never even written the thing, yet at that moment it seemed important to him.

“Is that what all this is about,” Sheila chimed in. “You know you can still make a speech even if you're not the best man. In fact I would like that very much. I think it would be very sweet of you,”

“Yeah bud,” Dad smiled. “Just remember though you'll be in front of a lot of people so you should write out what you are going to say first, and you should probably show it to someone else first. I bet your cousin Maddie could help you with it.”

“Oh okay,” Max said in a sort of daze.

“Alright, young man you're free to go,” Sheila said as she took the towel off of Max. “Go hit the shower so we can go to lunch.”

Max walked up the stairs he felt completely dejected it seemed in one moment he had lost so much. He lost his car and his spot in the wedding at his Dad's side. As he made his way down the hall his sadness turned into anger. As Max was about to go into the bathroom Brandon came out of his room.

“Hey Max,” Brandon said. Max looked at him with strange look. It was enough to send a shiver down Brandon's spine.

“Are you okay?” Brandon said almost as if he could sense that Max was about to fly off the handle.

“No, I'm not,” Max said as he turned away looking at Trevor's closed door. Max took off walking towards Trevor's door. This had gone on long enough. Max all but kicked Trevor's door open.

Trevor was drying his hair with a towel and was shirtless only wearing a pair of jeans at the moment.

“Get out perv,” Trevor said with scowl. Max was about to demand the device back fully ready to launch himself at Trevor if and when he refused. Max took a step in the room and then stopped. There on Trevor's dresser sitting atop a shirt was the device. Max and Trevor both looked at it before slowly turning their gaze so that they stared at one another. Without so much of a word between the two of them they both dashed towards the device. Since Max had been closer he had been able to grab it before Trevor could. Max's face lit up, finally he had what he wanted, that was until he realized that Trevor was now charging straight for him. Acting on pure instinct Max pointed the device at Trevor and hit the button releasing a puff of smoke at his charging attacker stopping him in his tracks.

Max watched in stunned fascination as the smoke wrapped itself around Trevor sending him stumbling back. Max saw that the smoke much like it had with the rat in the shop, stuck to Trevor as if it were some sort of cocoon he could hear Trevor coughing from within. After a minute the smoke dissipated and Max could see the changes that had taken place. Gone was the hulking linebacker that had been there a moment earlier. Trevor was now shorter and his physique was

replaced with a smaller frame that was only starting to show signs of a toned muscular form. Trevor's face had become smaller as well , His square jaw was now little more than a slightly chubby rounded face. His hair much like Max's had grown out as well leaving him with a curly nest of hair reaching down to his shoulders. Trevor took a moment to look at his new body. However after one last cough he and Max locked eyes.

“You are so dead,” Trevor said in a voice that was on the cusp of cracking, his teeth being bared like fangs. Trevor leapt forward tackling Max to the ground. The boys struggled with one another.

“Get off of me,” Max yelled out. Even though Trevor was now smaller he was still bigger than Max and he still edged him out in the strength department. Max flung one of his arms free feeling the device be thrown across the room. Trevor had him pinned while Max was using his free arm and had it wrapped awkwardly around Trevor's neck.

A moment later both boys felt themselves pulled apart.

“What in the world is going on here?” Dad shouted as both boys retreated back getting to their feet.

Neither boy gave a response as they caught their breath.

“Does anyone have anything to say? Dad said crossing his arms.

Both boys took a moment to try and come up with some explanation, they both were well aware they couldn't actually

say what had really happened.

“Trevor he...” Max began before falling silent not having the faintest excuse he could offer.

“Max just barged in here while I was changing and attacked me,” Trevor interjected.

“Max is that true?” Dad said turning to look at his son. Before Max could answer Sheila appeared.

“Whats going on?” she asked coming and standing next to Craig.

“Apparently Max attacked Trevor,” Dad said annoyed with the whole situation.

“I did not,” Max said. If anything Trevor had attacked him.

“He did too,” Trevor snarled back. Max and Trevor went back an forth a couple more times.

“Enough,” Dad said throwing up a hand silencing the bickering. “You boys have been at it with one another all week, and quite frankly I think its time to put an end to this. Perhaps both of you should be grounded for the next week.”

“What!” both boys shouted in unison.

Or,” Sheila said with her eyes closed and her head tilted to the side. “You both agree to put an end to it right here and now.”

“Thats right,” Dad agreed. “Bury the hatchet here and now or be grounded, what's it going to be?”

Max and Trevor looked at each other for a moment.

“Fine,” Trevor said letting his scowl fade.

“Whatever,” Max said shaking his head.

“Great then I want to see you shake on it,” Dad said.

Trevor extended his hand out first. Max took it with some surliness as they shook once before breaking off both of them figuring it was better to get their parents off of their backs for the moment.

“Wondeful,” Sheila said with some relief. “Now why don't both of you finish getting ready so we can all go and enjoy lunch together.”

“I already told you I'm not going, I have a date with my girlfriend,” Trevor said absent-mindedly. Sheila turned her head slowly towards Trevor before her head cocked to the side.

“Girlfriend?” Sheila asked with raised eyebrows. “What girlfriend?

Max watched as Trevor's face shifted from confusion to realizing what had just happened as he got a first taste of what had been happening to Max for the last two days.

“I uhhh,” Trevor stammered.

“Don't go all mama bear on the kid now,” Dad said with a chuckle as Sheila shot back an un-amused look. “He's twelve years old, he's a sixth grader now, it isn't all that crazy to

think he's gotten himself a little girlfriend."

"Whats her name?" Sheila asked as she interrogated Trevor.

"Its ummm..." Trevor began. "I don't really have a girlfriend I guess," Trevor muttered out.

"Looks like you embarrassed him," Dad said giving smile towards his fiancee. Sheila let out a sigh as she placed a hand on Trevor's shoulder.

"I didn't mean too," Sheila said. "Its just sometimes it feels like you are growing up so fast."

Trevor rolled his eyes.

"Look if everyone is done talking about my love life can you all get out," Trevor said. "I was in the middle of changing you know."

"Okay," Sheila said before grinning a little. "But you know Trevor if you want the girls to notice you it might help if you wore clothes that fit you,"

Trevor looked down to see the jeans he had been wearing were now gathered at his knees. He pulled them up his face going a little red.

"And you know we should do something about this nest of hair you have," She said picking at the ends of his hair. "I have my stuff out already c'mon I'll give you a haircut right now," Sheila said as she lead Trevor out of the room as he held his pants up.

“And you were going to take a shower right?” Dad asked ushering Max out of the room. Max let out a huff as he went into the bathroom and got in the shower. As the water ran over Max he slammed his fist again the side of the wall. How did stuff like this always happen to Trevor? Max had hit him with the device and yet he still ended up older and stronger, why didn't he get younger than Max? Max could only deduce that Trevor really had broken the stupid thing. There was a knock at the door before Max heard it open.

“Max I'm putting clothes on the counter for you,” Dad said.

“I don't need you to pick out clothes for me,” Max said with some gruffness.

“I'm hurrying you along, we are all waiting on you.” Dad replied before shutting the door. Max got out of the shower and toweled off. He looked at the clothes on the counter noticing the Minecraft boxer briefs on top of the pile. Max rolled his eyes as he took them with a huff and put them on. They did make him feel marginally more grown up than the regular briefs, the juvenile design withstanding. As Max put on the rest of the outfit he found it lacking. He was wearing a pair of black jeans along with a white shirt that had a skateboarding dog on it with the words “Certified Shredder” written on it in an acid neon green and blue font. Max stalked over to his room and went into his closet he grabbed a plaid button up shirt and put it on and finished the outfit off with a black beanie he found on the ground. As he looked in the mirror he found that for the first time he was wearing something that could pass as mature that is if it wasn't for the

shirt.

“Max lets go,” Dad shouted from downstairs. Max slunk downstairs having had his fill of being reprimanded like a kid for the day.

The family ate lunch at the Lighthouse Cafe a restaurant that got its namesake from the spiral lighthouse that sat outside on a cliff overlooking the lake. Max sat at the table looking over at Trevor. Sheila had certainly tamed his wild hair and with his new haircut it made Trevor look all the more boyish than he had appeared right after his regression. Max wondered for a moment why he hadn't changed himself back. Yet Max didn't dwell on that mystery very long as he was handed a kids menu by the waiter, for kids ten and under of course. Max had raised objections to being relegated to the kids menu while Trevor had been given the adult menu but his Dad had shut him down.

“You don't eat that much,” Dad had said. “Plus you get a coupon for free ice cream if you order off the kids menu.”

After lunch the family had gone out to the well manicured lawn and gotten ice cream from a stand and were sitting on a bench enjoying their selection. Max had gotten up and wandered over to the lighthouse.

He walked up the metal spiral staircase coming out on the platform up top. He sat down letting his legs dangle over the side as he rested his head between the bars of the railing. He was somewhat disappointed in himself as he had realized in the flurry of activity that morning he had completely

forgotten that the device was laying on the ground in Trevor's room. He had missed his chance, again. Max looked down to see the bench where Sheila and Brandon were sat. He looked a little further to see Trevor off a little ways in the lawn. Max looked on confused as he watched Trevor sprinting back and forth for a moment. Trevor then gave a couple of hops before he walked over to his Mom and said something to her. Sheila then took out her phone and with a signal Trevor set off sprinting before he came back to her as she handed him the phone. Trevor looked at it as a small smile came to his face. Max could not fathom what he was even doing.

“Wondering where you had gotten off to,” Max heard hid Dad say as he turned to see his Dad come out onto the platform. Max groaned a little fully expecting that his Dad was going to chide him for coming up here without permission. However he did no such thing. Dad came up and leaned against the railing looking out over the railing. They sat in silence for awhile.

“Hey come over here,” Dad said beckoning Max to his side. The boy got up and went to his Dad who put his arm around him. “So want to tell me whats going on with you?”

“Huh,” Max said looking up at his Dad. “What do you mean?”

Dad gave Max an all knowing look.

“You've just seemed out of sorts all of sudden, so whats on your mind?” Dad asked.

“Nothing really,” Max sighed as he looked down at the lawn.

“You know Max I know you and Trevor have been having some issues adjusting to one another, and it hasn't been all that long since they moved in...” His Dad started.

“Its not that,” Max said with a glum demeanor. His Dad stayed silent for a moment before he spoke again.

“I've always kind of regretted not being able to spend as much time with you when you were younger,” Dad said. Max paused for a moment as he saw a melancholic look on his Dad's face as the man continued to stare out at the lake. This wasn't the first time his Dad had mentioned such a thing. He had expressed his regret to Max on more than one occasion. Max did not hold any resentment towards his Dad however. He knew his Dad had been working hard to provide for him and he also knew that his Dad had tried hard to make those times when he did have time for Max special.

“But you know now that I don't have to work all the time I want to focus on spending more time with you and the others. So how about this, when spring comes and it warms up maybe we should all take a camping trip just the boys, I'll even take you guys out of school a day early, does that sound fun?” Dad asked giving Max an expectant grin.

“Yeah, sounds cool,” Max said mustering up a smile. It was not a totally fake smile. Seeing his Dad happy like this did make Max feel good. After a few more minutes they made their way down. Max spotted Brandon off to the side. The boy was swinging around a stick by himself.

“What are you doing dude?” Max asked. Brandon looked up

at him.

“Playing with this stick,” Brandon said as he gave the stick another swing through the air.

“Pretty cool,” Max said with a chuckle. He scanned the ground around him before spying another stick on the ground.

“Think you can take me?” Max asked as he picked up the other stick and struck a fighting stance.

“You're going down,” Brandon squealed as he charged at Max. The boys fought with their sticks each imagining themselves as knights in shining armor perched upon a hilltop engaged in an epic battle for lord and country. Max was just as engrossed in the game as Brandon for the moment not remembering that he was a teenager well past the point of playing pretend games.

“What are you two doing?” Trevor said standing off to the side having been watching for a moment.

“We're having a sword fight,” Brandon replied as he swung his stick at Max which was blocked.

“Oh yeah,” Trevor said showing a small hint of interest as he picked up his own stick. “And just who said you could be on these lands?” Trevor said pointing the stick at the other two.

“Me and Max will take you on,” Brandon said.

“Bring it,” Trevor said with a self assured grin. Max and Brandon charged forward. As the boys continued fighting neither of them realized it was perhaps the first time the three

of them had ever done anything all together. For the moment they were enjoying themselves.

Trevor swung his stick haphazardly and struck Brandon on the hand hard. Brandon let out a yelp as he dropped his stick. He crouched down holding his injured hand close to his chest. The other two boys came to a stop.

“Brandon you okay?” Max said with some concern. Brandon only whimpered a little in response.

“Nice going,” Max said giving Trevor an accusatory look.

“I didn't mean too,” Trevor said furrowing his brow. “It was an accident.”

“Why do you have to ruin everything,” Max spat back. Trevor's mouth twisted up a little before he rolled his eyes.

“Whatever,” he said as he tossed his stick aside and walked off. Max knelt down to Brandon's level.

“Hey B, are you okay?” Max asked again. Brandon looked up at him, his eyes a little watery.

“Yeah I think so,” Brandon said wiping his eyes. “Did Trevor leave?”

“He left,” Max said looking around not seeing Trevor anywhere in view.

“Oh,” Brandon said his face looking a little sad.

“Hey don't worry about him,” Max said. “He's just a jerk.” Brandon shook his head a little as he stood up.

“He said it was just an accident,” Brandon said almost as if he were defending Trevor. Max was about to say something before Sheila came up behind them.

“Its time to go boys,” she said. Neither boy said anything as they followed Sheila back to the parking lot where Dad and Trevor were waiting at the car.

“You all ready, its game time,” Dad said.

“I'm definitely scoring a touchdown today,” Brandon said a look of determination on his face. Max looked at Brandon confused for a moment at what was happening until he remembered that it was Saturday afternoon which is when Brandon played flag football. Max had gone to one or two of the games before, he guessed since now that he was ten that he always went to the games since he was'nt allowed to stay home alone for long.

“That's what I like to hear, lets hurry we still have to swing back home,” Dad said giving a gentle slap to Brandon's back.

“No need,” Sheila said as she opened the trunk of the car and began to pull some shirts out. “I already grabbed the boy's shirts.” Sheila tossed the each boy a different colored shirt. Max held the yellow shirt up in front of him. It had the words “Declan Lake Youth Flag Football” spelled out on it along with a tree overlooking a lake, the towns symbol on it. Max looked over at Trevor who was looking at his own shirt which was purple. They looked at one another for a moment, both of them looking back at one another with a surprised look.

“I don't want to play,” Max said at once balling up his shirt. He never agreed to this. The idea of playing flag football with a bunch of other kids somehow filled him with a sense of dread. His feelings of self-conspicuousness at being made to do things kids did welling up inside of him.

“Max you made a commitment when you joined the team,” Dad said.

“I did not,” Max shot back.

“Yes you did, you were the one who wanted to sign up,” Dad replied.

“I...did?” Max said scrunching up his face. Max wondered if that was true. He had never played flag football before. When he had actually been ten he had always played baseball alongside his friend Jon.

“When we signed up Brandon and Trevor you said you wanted to try it to,” Sheila said. “You said it would be better than sitting on the sidelines watching.”

“Well I don't want to play anymore,” Max said feeling as if he were being railroaded.

“You can't quit,” Dad said. “Its only the second game of the season. So enough bellyaching and get your shirt on.”

Max shook his head in dis-belief as he saw Brandon and Trevor had already taken off their shirts and had the uniforms on. Max gave a side-eyed look at Trevor, why was he going along with this?

“No,” Max said shaking his head his temper reaching a boiling point. He wasn't going to be told what to do anymore.

“Max,” Dad began with a stern lecturing voice.

“I said no,” Max shouted. “I'm not fucking playing.”

Everyone came to a stop as all eyes looked at Max. Brandon had a wide eyed look on his face. Trevor's expression was somewhere in between impressed and amused. Sheila had a worried expression. Max then looked at his Dad who stared back at him with a stony look.

“Thats it,” Dad said as he grabbed Max by the arm and walked him off to a more secluded area not far away. Dad stood in front of Max. As the boy looked up at his Dad. Max had his fist clenched and he was gritting his teeth, as if he were ready to fight.

“I don't know whats gotten into you all of a sudden but it ends now,” Dad barked. As Max stood he couldn't help but feel hit with a jolt of shock. His Dad had never yelled at him like this when he had been a kid, then again he had been pretty well behaved back then, he had argued with his Dad before no doubt, but he had been older then and the idea of talking back to an authority figure hadn't been quite as scary as a concept.

“You are going to put this shirt on, and stop throwing a temper tantrum like a little toddler” his Dad continued holding up the yellow t-shirt. “Then you are going to march back over there and apologize for being so rude.”

Max un-clenched his fist. His Dads authoritative dressing down making him feel intimated and scared completely defusing his rebellious demeanor. Max could feel some tears bubbling up in his eyes as he put his head down in an effort to keep from breaking down. If anything Max was feeling so small right now as if he were actually a kid.

“You are going to fix that attitude or there will be major consequences for you, do you understand me young man?” Dad said finishing his orders. Dad stood waiting for a response which Max could not offer. Max wiped away some tears while he sniffled. Dad let his posture relax as he pulled Max into a hug. Max wanted to pull away but found he couldn't. Instead he wrapped his own arms around his Dad's torso as he pushed his face into his Dad's stomach where no one could see the tears flowing from his eyes.

“Its going to be okay,” Dad said as he stroked Max's hair. His line had been drawn in the sand and he knew that now Max needed comfort. “Now why don't you tell me whats going on, I know you didn't fly off the handle like that over football,” Dad said. Max shook his head keeping his face against his Dad. He couldn't tell him the real reason, they would never believe him. Even if he somehow found a way to tell them, what was he supposed to do. Get the device and change himself back in front of his Dad and Sheila? It would only have disastrous outcomes. If that happened Max knew he would have to come clean about his original intentions. Both parents would be furious with both him and Trevor. It would only serve to put a strain on their relationship. Max knew that

it would most likely put an end to the marriage. How could he do that to his Dad or Sheila?

“I can't,” Max whimpered. His Dad then knelt down and wiped away a stray tear from Max's face before putting his hands on Max's shoulder.

“Buddy I can't help you unless you tell me what's going on,” Dad said in a gentle and calming tone.

“It's just...everything is changing so fast,” Max said. In his mind that was the truth concerning the root of his problem.

“I know bud. Its been a lot to take in and with the wedding its been nothing but chaos,” Dad said with a sympathetic smile. “But you know its going to be over soon and then things will calm down and I promise that you'll get used to it. You'll see what a great thing this all is.”

In some ways it felt like his Dad was telling him he would get used to being a ten year old kid again, but there was no way he could ever get used to this. There was nothing else for Max to do but comply. He took off his shirt replacing it with the uniform.

“All right ready to go back,” Dad said placing his arm around Max.

Max could only nod his resistance having been completely drained out of him. Getting back to the car Max apologized as his Dad had stated.

“That's okay, everybody loses their cool sometimes,” Sheila

said giving Max a squeeze on his arm. The rest of the family got into the car. As Max followed a little behind Trevor who had not opened the door yet.

“Guess you're going to be the problem child,” Trevor laughed.

“Just shut up,” Max grumbled being in no mood to tolerate any of Trevor's snide remarks. Instead Max found it a good time to ask a question that had been on his mind. “Why haven't you changed back?

“I don't know how,” Trevor said seemingly unbothered. Max blinked in astonishment.

“Wait Trevor...” Max began to say before Trevor put a hand up cutting him off.

“Later,” Trevor responded as he opened the passenger door and got in. Max followed sitting down in his seat and putting on his seat belt. His mood having brightened a little. Trevor had just confirmed that he didn't know how to work the device since Max hadn't included that in his explanation. Max let out a breath feeling a little lighter. There was light at the end of the tunnel, he had a bargaining chip to use now.

Chapter 5

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 5 - Chapter 5

Chapter 5

To say that Max would rather be anywhere else was an understatement as he found himself on one of the soccer fields outside of the elementary school. He readjusted the white belt with flags hanging at his sides that was around his waist. Max looked over to the sidelines to see his Dad and Brandon watching as the younger kids had played their games before the older kids took to the field. Sheila was off at another field watching Trevor's game. Max's Dad gave him a wave as Max gave him a halfhearted wave back.

They had already played three quarters and the fourth quarter was winding down, Max was eagerly awaiting the final whistle. As he walked over to the team huddle so the coach could decide the next play, Max noted just how dirty he was, dirt staining his shirt and was mixing in with the sweat on his forehead. He hadn't even really been putting in that much effort so it was somewhat surprising to him. Max joined the huddle as the coach had a whiteboard in his hands.

“Alright guys if we score here we can pull ahead and then we just need to defend and run down the clock,” the coach said as he began to draw out the play. “Okay Jonas and Max I want you too running into the end zone,” the coach then turned to Max's friend Calvin who was playing quarterback.

“Throw it to whichever one of them is open.” With that the coach broke the huddle as the boys made their way to the line.

“I'm throwing it to you so make sure you're open,” Calvin said as he walked beside Max.

“Just throw it to Jonas,” Max said not wanting the pressure.

“He's a total butterfingers,” Calvin remarked. “Besides you would have gotten the last one if you had been looking.”

Max blushed a little remembering an earlier play where he had been told to receive. He had run as fast as he could but didn't think to look, the play had ended in an incomplete pass after the ball had hit Max in the back of the head.

“Just be open cause its coming right for you,” Calvin said again as they made their way to the line. Max got into position, his heart was beating with anticipation and nervousness. As the play began Max took off running. Calvin was counting on him, it had been a long time since Max had felt like this. Even as a teenager he hadn't come across many situations where someone had put their trust in him. As Max crossed into the end zone he turned to see the ball up in the air coming straight for him. As he could see it the ball was going too high. Max had never been the athletic type yet in that moment he leapt into the air raising his arms into the air he felt the soft foam of the ball touch his fingers as he clasped his hands around the ball pulling it close to himself before he came crashing down to the ground onto his back. A whistle sounded as Max laidd on the ground. He could feel the stampede of feet rushing towards him and a moment later

several of his teammates had dog piled onto him in celebration. There were some more whistles.

“All right guys let him up,” the coach said as Max felt the other boys get off of him. The coach knelt down. “You okay?”

Max nodded as the coach helped him up off the ground dusting off his back. “Heck of a catch Max,” the coach praised. Max looked down but a smile had crept onto his face. “What do you say we go and put this one to bed?”

Max nodded running back to the join the team in the huddle. The game came to an end with Max's team being the winners. Max was walking off the field with Calvin at his side. Calvin was talking at a million miles per hour yet Max wasn't really paying attention.

“So you think that will work, right?” Calvin said looking at Max.

“Yeah I guess,” Max said realizing that Calvin had been asking him something yet he didn't have the foggiest idea of what it had been.

“Cool,” Calvin said running off. Max could only shrug seeing that whatever it had been Calvin had been satisfied with Max's answer. Max walked up to his Dad and Brandon.

“What a catch,” Dad said a broad smile on his face. “You really went for it.”

“T-thanks,” Max said not being able to help the smile on his face. For some reason his Dad's praise was really getting to

him in a good way. He couldn't help but feel happy about it. Just then Max saw Calvin walk over with a woman who he presumed to be his Mom who was carrying another little boy who couldn't be any older than four.

“Hey Craig,” the woman said in a friendly manner.

“Ann how are you,” Dad said.

“Oh just fine,” Ann said. “So it sounds like the boys here want to have a sleepover tonight, would that be okay with you, it would be at my house of course.”

Max's stomach dropped, is that what Calvin had been talking about?

“Hmmm,” Dad said with a frown and shrug. “I don't see why not, I'll bring him around after dinner say around six or so.”

“Wonderful,” Ann said. “just remember the next one is at your house,” she said with a smirk.

“Of course,” Dad said with a chuckle. With the plans solidified Ann and Calvin took their leave. Max was left feeling completely walked over. His Dad hadn't even asked him if he wanted to go. In truth though from the brief conversation Max was starting to get the sense that he and Calvin apparently regularly had sleepovers, so why should his Dad think this time was any different. Sheila came over with Trevor in tow.

“How did things go over there?” Dad asked.

“They lost,” Sheila said putting a hand on Trevor's head.

“Can't win them all,” Dad said. Trevor gave a non-nonchalant look as if he weren't in the mood to hear any platitudes.

“How did Max do?” Sheila asked.

“He scored the winning touchdown,” Brandon blurted out looking at Max with a degree of pride.

“Max look at you,” Sheila said with a smile.

“It wasn't that big of deal,” Max said as he rubbed the back of his head and looked down at the ground. Part of him loved all the praise yet there was another part of him that felt a little overwhelmed by it. Max straightened up a little realizing he was acting like some bashful little kid. “Its just flag football,” Max muttered under his breath.

As the family drove back home Max couldn't help but notice Trevor who was staring out the window with deflated look. Maybe it was all starting to hit him. Max didn't need to imagine what Trevor was likely thinking about. That morning he had been in top physical shape and a varsity football star and now he couldn't even win a flag football game, not too mention he had also lost his girlfriend. Max put his head back into the headrest. Perhaps Trevor was at the point where he could be reasoned with.

“Okay you boys are filthy,” Sheila said upon coming into the house. “All of you need a shower.”

“I'm going last,” Brandon stated.

“Alright pig,” Sheila chuckled as she mussed up Brandon's

hair. “Guess its between you two,” Sheila said turning to Max and Trevor.

“I'll go first,” Trevor said as he slunk up the stairs.

“Max while Trevor is in the shower why don't you go and pack a bag for your sleepover,” Dad suggested.

“Sure,” Max said remembering he had been signed up for a sleepover that night. As Max went into his room he got out a bag from his closet and started to put clothes into it before stopping. What was he even doing? There was no way he was going to a sleepover. Max tossed the bag to the side catching sight of himself in a the mirror on his dresser. He could see that there was dirt on his face and as he looked at his shirt and pants it wasn't much better. He took of the shirt and used it to try and wipe some of the dirt off of his face yet it only served to smear it around more. Just then Max heard the door to the bathroom open in the hallway before he heard Trevor's door close. Max grabbed another shirt off of his floor and threw it on before walking into the hallway to go to Trevor's room.

“What are you doing?” Brandon asked. Max turned to see Brandon standing at the top of the stairs.

“I need to talk to Trevor,” Max said beginning to turn the doorknob.

“Stop,” Brandon yelped as he ran towards Max grabbing his hand.

“B what are...” Max said shocked at the boy's reaction.

“Don't go in there,” Brandon said as he looked at Max with a worried look.

“I just need to talk to Trevor,” Max said.

“You guys are just gonna end up fighting, and every time that happens one of you ends up younger,” Brandon said with a pleading tone. “I...don't like it.”

Max cleared his throat seeing what Brandon was so concerned about.

“I promise we won't fight, I just have to talk to Trevor about one quick thing,” Max said giving Brandon some reassurance.

“Promise?” Brandon asked.

“Promise,” Max said. “Just a talk.”

Brandon looked at the doorknob where he and Max's hands were still. He gave a little sigh before he let go of the knob. Max gave him a smile before opening the door. Upon walking in Max was met with the sight of Trevor standing in his room in nothing but a pair of plain white underwear.

“Do you ever knock?” Trevor said with a scowl.

“S-sorry,” Max stammered.

“Whatever just close the door will you,” Trevor said grabbing a pair of sweatpants out of his drawer. Max shuffled in with Brandon slipping in behind him as he closed the door. Max kind of wanted to laugh at seeing Trevor being reduced to such juvenile underwear much like he had been, but he held

back, not wanting to anger Trevor before they talked.

“So what do you want,” Trevor said as he sat on his bed.

“You liking your new wardrobe?” Max asked. Truthfully he was just trying to gauge Trevor's feelings about his own regression, but Max would be lying if he said there wasn't a small dig contained within his words.

“At least they aren't Minecraft briefs,” Trevor said as he pulled on the sweatpants. Max looked back aghast. “Noticed your waistband sticking out at one point,” Trevor said with a snicker. “You got some batman underoo's in your closet too?”

“I'm wearing boxers,” Max retorted before shaking his head as he realized he had been drawn into perhaps the stupidest argument of his life. “Look I didn't come here to talk about underwear.”

Trevor didn't offer a response as he put on a shirt before he opened one of his drawers and took the device out.

“I can guess you're here to talk about this?” Trevor said. Max nodded his head.

“Look I think we can both agree that things have gotten out of control,” Max began. Trevor gave a sort of acknowledging look making Max feel like this was going in the right direction. “I want a truce, okay?” Max said.

“What did you have in mind?' Trevor asked leaning up against his dresser.

“That thing has only two more uses on it,” Max said plainly.

“We use it to change ourselves back and then put this whole thing behind us.” Trevor looked at the device in his hands the corner of his mouth twisting down.

“Actually I don't think I'm changing back,” Trevor said.

Max blinked a couple of times in complete astonishment.

“You can't actually like being twelve again,” Max said.

“No, its not that, but I'm better off now,” Trevor said.

“What do you mean?” Max asked still in shock at hearing Trevor's decision.

Trevor gave a little sigh.

“Maybe you don't remember this since you and I didn't really pay attention to each other before our parents started dating but when I was thirteen I took a bike off a jump and broke my leg,” Trevor explained. Max had a faint memory of seeing Trevor in a cast at one point. “I hid it from my Mom because I didn't want to get in trouble, but hiding a broken leg is kind of hard and she eventually found out. Only problem was I had messed it up even worse trying to hide it and the doctor told me it wasn't going to heal right. It really only bothers me if I have to stand for a long time, which is the reason I had to tell your Dad I couldn't be one of his groomsman.”

Max listened seeing where Trevor was going with all of this.

“It also holds me back in football a little, coach told me it probably is going to affect my chances at a scholarship for college which in turns completely squashes my chances in the

NFL. But now that I'm twelve again that injury never happened and my leg is as good as new."

Max now realized why Trevor had been running around at the restaurant and having his Mom time him on her phone. As Max continued to think he could certainly see where Trevor was coming from even if his idea that he was going to be in the NFL sounded more like the aspirations of child rather than someone who was being reasonable with their expectations.

"That's great for you Trevor, really," Max said. "If you want to stay like this then I won't stop you, I'll just change myself back and then we can go our separate ways and leave each other alone. You can even keep that device and use the last charge yourself if you change your mind."

"Mmm," Trevor said shaking his head. "Nah, that won't really work for me."

"W-what," Max stammered.

"I don't really like the idea of you becoming my older brother," Trevor said. "Besides if I let you change back I don't really get anything out of it. I mean you heard your Dad this morning. That car in the garage is a pretty sweet ride and as long as I go out there and screw in a few bolts I'll get it back when I'm sixteen."

"I could help with it too you know," Max countered.

"Yeah, but you're still two years younger than me. When I'm sixteen again you'll only be fourteen so why would he

promise you a car before me?”

“You don't even know how to drive a stick,” Max said, although that was hardly an argument for the moment.

“True, but I got time to learn,” Trevor said sitting on the edge of his bed with a shrug. Max was silent for a moment. Trevor was being completely unreasonable at this point.

“Trevor you can't do this,” Max said his voice low as if he were a dormant volcano about to burst.

“I can and I will,” Trevor said. “I didn't start this, you did when you bought the thing and I think we both know you weren't planning to shave a few year off of me, you were going to go further than I did, right?” Trevor said with a look of superiority. “So with that out there, I don't think it would be right of me to let you squirm out of this. As your older brother I think its my duty to make sure you know there are consequences to your actions.”

Max looked up, his temper flaring from Trevor's remark.

“You are not my older brother,” Max said before launching himself at Trevor. Max had Trevor pinned onto the bed as he held him by the shoulders, to his surprise Trevor wasn't fighting back. Max was feeling confident. With Trevor being regressed having lost his buffed out physique it seemed like they were now on more equal ground. “I am not staying like this, you are not going to push me around anymore,” Max shouted.

“Ok I get it, you don't want to be ten anymore,” Trevor said.

Max straightened up a little thinking for a moment that he had actually gotten through to Trevor that was until he realized Trevor still had the device in his hand. Max looked over to see Trevor had the device aimed at him. Before Max could say another word Trevor pressed the button shooting out a cloud of smoke.

Max tried to move back but was too late as he fell back onto the bed. He felt the smoke once again force its way into his lungs a burning sensation exploding in his chest. As Max gasped for air he thrashed around fruitlessly trying to clear the smoke. He could feel a weird sensation overtake his body, he had felt it the last time but this time it seemed stronger as he could feel a warm sensation overtake his body as if he were turning into goo. Finally the smoke cleared as Max gagged trying to take a breath and cough at the same time. He opened his eyes to see Trevor had gotten off the bed and was standing at the foot of the bed.

“Why did you do that,” Brandon yelped as he stood next to Trevor.

“You heard him,” Trevor said. “He didn't want to be ten anymore so I gave him what he wanted.”

“That's not what he meant,” Brandon argued.

“You want to join him?” Trevor asked pointing the device at Brandon.

“N-no,” Brandon stammered taking a step back.

Max got to his feet shakily. He looked across the room and

saw himself in the mirror. Looking back at him was an entirely unrecognizable version of himself. His face had remains of baby fat which rounded out his cheeks, the dirt still on his face from earlier. His nose had turned button like. His hair was once again long reaching down to his shoulders and had gone completely blond losing any of the brown coloring. As Max took a wobbly step forward he tripped falling flat on his face as his pants and underwear were now around his feet. Max shirked off the pants and got back to his feet. The shirt he had been wearing was now long enough that it reached down to his knees.

“You made me a baby,” Max squeaked in dis-belief.

“You look old enough to be potty trained,” Trevor reasoned with a smirk before his face turned more serious. “But if you ever come at me again, I'll use the last charge on this thing to send you back to diapers.”

Max blinked not able to say a word.

“Understand,” Trevor said putting his face up to Max's “This whole thing is over, this is what you get so get used to it.”

Max felt the strength in his legs go as he crumpled onto the bed. Trevor grabbed the back of his over sized shirt and carried him over to the door as if Max were a suitcase and plopped him into the hallway. Brandon scurried over to Max's side as they watched Trevor close the door. Max got to his feet as he looked up at Brandon which was something he wasn't used to. He only came up to Brandon's chest now.

“B-B-Brandon,” Max uttered before a wave of emotion hit him like a ton of bricks. There was no stopping it as Max's face scrunched up and he began to cry full force complete with loud wails.

“Don't cry,” Brandon said looking flustered. “Its going to be okay.”

Max was unmoved by Brandon's words as he continued to sob. Brandon was frozen in his spot unsure of what to do.

“What's going on up here,” Max turned around to see Sheila at the top of the stairs. As soon as she saw him she moved swiftly to scoop him up into her arms. “Oh honey whats the matter?” Sheila asked as she brought Max's head down toward her shoulder stroking the back of his head. Max continued to cry unable to get any sort of control over his emotions which seemed overwhelming at the moment.

“Brandon were you being mean to him?” Sheila said giving an accusatory look towards Brandon.

“I wasn't,” Brandon said his face still painted with worry.

“Shh, shhh, honey its alright,” Sheila continued trying to calm Max down and it was starting to work as Max's wails and sobs subsided and he was now only whimpering a little.

“Now how about you tell me what's got you in such a state?” Sheila said as she shifted Max over to her hip so she could look at him. “Tell me the truth was Brandon being mean to you?” she asked raising her eyebrow a little.

“N-no,” Max stammered as he shook his head.

“Well that's good,” Sheila said with a grin. “So why were you crying?” Max couldn't really offer an answer. He already knew how far the truth would get him.

“I don't know,” Max muttered.

“Just having some big feelings then,” Sheila said as she put Max back onto his feet. “That happens sometimes, especially when certain little boys miss their naps,” Sheila said giving Max a boop to his nose. Sheila knelt down with a confused look finally taking notice of Max's wardrobe. “Where on earth did you get this shirt?” Sheila asked lifting up the hem of the shirt enough to see that Max was naked underneath.

Max squealed a little as he grabbed the shirt and pulled it down to cover himself.

“Brandon did you put this on him?” Sheila asked.

“Um no,” Brandon replied.

“Well no matter,” Sheila said as she grabbed Max's hand and started to lead him down the hallway towards the bathroom. “We were going to put you in the tub anyways.” Max's eyes widened as he realized what was about to happen.

Max stood awkwardly in the bathroom as Sheila turned on the bath faucet. He didn't know what to do. His options were limited. He knew she wouldn't let him refuse even if he threw a tantrum. At the same time he was incredibly nervous at the prospect of being given a bath, especially by Sheila of all

people.

“Okay arms up,” Sheila said turning around to face him. Max knew there was no resisting as he raised his shaking arms. In one quick motion Sheila had the shirt off. Max quickly covered himself with his hands. He looked down to see his new body, the little bit of baby fat on his stomach without so much of a hint of even peach fuzz on his body.

“You really got yourself dirty running around on that playground at the game didn't you?” Sheila asked with a laugh. “Okay upsey daisy,” Sheila said as she picked Max up off the ground eliciting a small yelp of surprise from Max before Sheila deposited him into the bathtub before plugging up the drain as the water began to rise. Max shrunk up into a ball trying his best to maintain his modesty.

“Okay you want bubbles?” Sheila asked holding up a bottle of soap with the image of a bear covered in bubbles.

“Yes,” Max squeaked, realizing that the bubbles would cover him up.

“What do you say,” Sheila asked.

“Please,” Max said desperate for her to pour it in already.

“Good boy,” she said with a smile as she patted him on the head and dumped the soap in. It only took a few moments for the bubbles to foam up which finally let Max uncurl. Sheila came back over to the tub with a cloth and dunked it into the water.

“My, my Max,” Sheila said as she began to wipe the dirt off of his face. “Was Brandon letting you roll around in the dirt at the playground when he took you over there?”

Max let out a little moan as the full weight of his new reality began to hit him. He hadn't played in the football game making a winning touchdown. No, he had been at the playground instead. It wasn't hard to put together with Sheila's comments. The playground had been close enough that his parents had probably thought it would be fine for Max to go as long as he was accompanied by Brandon, his soon to be little brother who as far as everyone was concerned was older than him now.

Sheila wasted no time as she began to wipe down his arms and chest going as far as his stomach. She then pulled out some shampoo and began to lather up Max's hair. Sheila was a hairdresser by trade so she knew just the right way to massage the shampoo into Max's hair and if he was being honest it did feel good.

“You have such long hair,” Sheila commented. “We'll have to get it cut soon, hmm.”

Max twisted his mouth down into a frown as Sheila put his head back and dumped water over his hair washing out the shampoo.

“Still feeling a little down?” Sheila asked noticing Max's less than happy expression. “Here why don't we get some toys.” Sheila pulled a small boat out of a basket of bath toys and plopped it into the water she then took a plastic frog out and

wound it up before setting it into the water as its legs began to rotate and it swam across the water. Max made no move towards the toys despite feeling the smallest urge to push the boat along the water forming in him, he did have other things on his mind at the moment.

“How old am I?” Max asked. Sheila gave him a sort of questioning look.

“Did you forget?” Sheila asked.

“I guess,” Max offered as a response.

“Well lets count it out,” Sheila said lifting one of Max's hands out of the water.

“One,” Sheila said as she lifted up one of Max's fingers. “Two,” she said continuing to count and lifting up a finger with each number until she got to four. “Four, there now you know.”

Sheila let go of his hand as Max kept his hand held up with the four fingers. He stared at it with a sense of dread before he let his hand drop into the water. How could he have ended up like this? Two days ago he had been sixteen years old on the cusp of getting a driver's license and now he wasn't even in kindergarten yet. Max put his face into his hands.

“Max darling,” Sheila said stroking his hair a little. “I know you're feeling a little sad right now why don't you play with your toys for a little bit, you'll cheer up in no time.”

Max just replied with a sad groan.

“Hey c'mon I made all these bubbles for you and you're not even going to try a little.” Sheila said putting as much cheerfulness in her voice as she could. Max removed his hands and looked at her with a look that could only be described as pitiful. Sheila gave him a sympathetic smile as she scooped up some bubbles and fashioned them into a beard on Max's face.

“Why Mr. Max I think you need a shave,” she said with a chuckle. Max however looked down at the water.

“I want to get out,” Max said. Sheila looked at Max for a moment.

“Okay,” she said as she poured some water over Max rinsing the bubble beard off of him. As the water drained Sheila unfolded a towel and wrapped Max up in it lifting him out of the tub. She walked out into the hallway carrying Max who had his head over her shoulder, to find Brandon standing in the hallway.

“Tubs all yours hun,” Sheila said to Brandon.

“Is Max okay?” Brandon asked.

“It seems he's a little sad,” Sheila said giving Max a few pats on his back. “But I think he'll be right as rain in no time.”

“Oh ok,” Brandon said as he walked off towards the bathroom. Sheila entered into Max's room and set him down. The first thing that Max noticed was how different his room was now having changed once again. The wall were still cream colored but everything else was changed. His desk was

gone instead replaced by toy box that had stickers on it spelling out “Max's Toys” on its black exterior. The walls were adorned with some posters with Mickey Mouse and one with monkey hanging in a tree along with a fabric puppy dog hung on the wall over his bed. He looked at his bed to see it was now smaller and had wooden railings along it. His bed sheets were decorated with cutesy pastel forest animals. Sheila walked into Max's closet and came out with a hanger with a pair of footed sleepers on it. As she took it off Max could see it was green and had little yellow, green and orange spikes going up the back. There was also a hood attached that made it look like a dinosaur head complete with eyes and some teeth.

“How do jammies sound for rest of the day?” Sheila asked yet the question was rhetorical in nature as she set the sleeper onto Max's bed. Max scrunched up his face looking at it. “Just one more thing,” Sheila said as she went over to the dresser and opened one of the drawers. Max's heart stopped as a cold possibility came to him. He was four years old now, what if he wasn't potty trained? Max watched with baited breath as Sheila dug around waiting for the moment when she pulled out a pull-up or even worse a full on diaper. Much to Max's relief Sheila produced a pair of underwear. His relief was short lived however when he saw they had a blue waistband and had many different colored shapes of dinosaurs all over them.

“You can go all dino tonight,” Sheila said with a grin as she came over and unwrapped Max's towel leaving him

completely naked. Max made no attempt to cover himself. He had nothing left to hide.

As he put his hands on her shoulders and stepped into the undies he felt that he should be completely embarrassed yet he didn't. Something in him was telling him this was right. Sheila pulled the undies up to his waist and made an adjustment to the waistband before grabbing the pajamas and helping Max into them before pulling up the zipper and buttoning the fabric tab at top. She then pulled the hood up over his head before standing up.

“There,” Sheila said sitting at the foot of the bed with Max standing in front of her. “A proper dinosaur.”

Max could only put his head down.

“You know its really hard to see you so sad like this,” Sheila said picking Max up and placing him on her leg as she held him close. “Why don't you tell me whats gotten you so down?”

“I'm not sad,” Max said. “Can I just be alone?” Max asked.

Sheila gave him a small smile.

“Of course dear,” Sheila said setting Max onto the ground. “But if you feel like talking or just need a hug I'm always here for you.”

Max let his lips curl up into a smile for only a second before turning them back down as she left, her words making him feel slightly better. Max walked around the room a little

inspecting all the changes. He went through the drawers of his dresser seeing all the toddler-ish clothing contained within. He opened the underwear drawer to see it filled with nothing but pairs of briefs all decorated with brightly colored designs. He dug through it a little just to make sure there were no pull-ups contained within. Even though he was wearing underwear now he couldn't be completely sure about nighttime as he couldn't remember at what age he had been fully potty trained. After confirming there was no such thing in the drawer Max went and sat on the carpet. He was feeling overwhelmingly tired again as he had the first time he went through a regression. His head was a jumble of thoughts as he tried to think of something to do.

“Hey,” a voice sounded out.

Max looked up to see Brandon standing in the doorway his hair still a little wet.

“Hey,” Max said his voice filled with doom and gloom.

“Your room changed again,” Brandon said as he walked in looking around.

“Yep,” Max said resigned. Brandon sat on the floor across from Max.

“You have to tell Mom and Dad,” Brandon said. “You cant stay like this.”

“I can't,” Max said.

“Why not?” Brandon asked his voice rising a little. “They'll

make Trevor give it back if we tell them the truth."

"B just think about it." Max said. "Even if by some miracle they believed us and actually got the thing back from Trevor, there is only one charge left on the device. That means if I changed back Trevor would still be twelve."

"So what," Brandon said. "He likes being twelve he said so himself."

"Yeah but they would know the truth about whats been going on. They would be furious with us. It would be a huge mess" Max said. "They'd probably break up...I don't want that."

Brandon was silent for a moment as he took it all in.

"What are you going to do?" Brandon asked. Max put his face into his hands with a groan.

"I don't know anymore," Max said feeling like he wanted to cry. Max felt Brandon put a hand on his shoulder.

"I'll help," Brandon said. Max looked up at him remembering the conversation they had had in the car the previous night, Max was happy to see that Brandon was going to keep his promise.

"Thanks," Max said. Brandon then got up and began to wander around the room. He walked over to the toy box and opened it up.

"You have Spiderman," Brandon exclaimed holding up a Spiderman action figure. "I have Iron man so we can play together."

“What?” Max said cocking his head to the side.

“Well I can see you feel sad right now, and when I'm sad you always play with me and I feel better, so I just thought I could make you feel better if I played with you.” Brandon said. Max was about to reject Brandon's offer but stopped himself upon seeing the hopeful look in the boys face. As terrible as all of this had been for Max, Brandon was having to go through a lot of changes too, the fact that he was an innocent bystander in all of this made it all the worse. Perhaps Max reasoned they could make one another feel better.

“Sure,” Max said resting his chin on his hand with smirk. “That would make me feel better.”

“Okay,” Brandon said as his face lit up. “I have to go find mine in my room but I'll be right back.”

With that Brandon scurried out of the room not before tossing the spider man toy into Max's lap.

Max got up off the ground and looked into the toy box for the first time, he began to dig around seeing all sorts of things. There were toy cars, dinosaur and animal figures a couple of other action figures. Ideas began to spring to Max's mind as he began to pull out a few things. Max was standing with all his selections at his feet. He was getting impatient waiting for Brandon to come back. Just how long was it going to take him to find one toy? Max started to swing Spiderman through the air as he waited making the thwiip sound with his mouth before he came to a sudden stop. What on earth was he doing? A strange mix of anxiety welled up in Max's chest and

his stomach was a flutter with butterflies. Not only had he been totally into the idea of playing with toys, he had begun to think about scenarios in his head while pulling out the toys. He had been absolutely delighted by the idea of Brandon playing with him. It wasn't that Max didn't like spending time with Brandon, it was just Max was starting to feel like playing with the toys was a benefit to Max moreso than Brandon, as if Brandon had really become the older kid in the situation like Max had been in the past. There positions had switched as Max felt the same self conscious awkwardness he had felt with Emily yesterday.

Max threw the Spiderman toy in the hall almost as if it was cursed. The figure hit the wall with a thud.

“Woah now,” Trevor said coming into the doorway having been walking in the hallway unbeknownst to Max. “Don't tell me your throwing a little temper tantrum in here.”

Max glared at Trevor.

“Anyways its not good to be throwing things,” Trevor said taking no notice of the look Max was giving him. “Now go pick up your toy. You almost hit me ya know.”

“Good,” Max replied. Trevor chuckled a little as he shook his head. He went and picked Max up from behind and carried him into the hall setting him down before going and standing in front of him the toy between the two of them.

“Max pick up your toy,” Trevor said.

“No,” Max stated standing his ground.

“I'm going to be your big brother so you need to learn to listen, I'm only going to ask nicely one more time” Trevor said with a sigh. “Max pick up your toy.”

“And if I don't?” Max sneered.

“Well I suppose then I'll just have to spank you,” Trevor said with a shrug. Max's eyes widened as he looked up at Trevor who now towered over him. He didn't put it past Trevor to do something like that, in fact it wouldn't really be all that different from all the other times Trevor had pushed him around or punched him in the arm, yet standing there now there was something new. Max became scared by the threat. Never once before had Max ever been scared of Trevor or what he would do.

“S-sorry,” Max stammered as he picked up the toy holding it close to his chest.

“Now if you don't want to play with that you should put it away,” Trevor said with an overly sweet tone. Max walked back into his room and put the action figure back into his toy box.

“Good job,” Trevor said kneeling down to Max's level and placing a hand up for a high five. Max gave him a limp slap on his hand.

“See that wasn't so hard, things work out so much better if you're a good listener.” Trevor said as he patted Max on the head rather roughly a few times.

“Trevor, please let me turn back,” Max pleaded in a soft voice.

“No can do little bro, we're well past that, remember consequences of our actions” Trevor said. “Besides you're much more agreeable this way. You just concentrate on being a good obedient little boy that I know you can be and you'll see its not too bad.” Trevor gave Max a little flick to the forehead with a snicker before he got up and walked out of the room. Max stood in his room with his head down in total defeat.

“Okay I got it,” Brandon said reappearing with his Iron Man toy in his hand before he took notice of Max. “You okay?”

Max shook his head as if he were in a daze.

“Yeah, I'm fine.” Max said.

“Oh did you get more toys out?” Brandon said noticing the other items Max had set out.

“Yeah I guess, hey look Brandon I don't really want to play anymore,” Max said feeling very uncomfortable with the idea of playing with the toys.

“How come?” Brandon asked with some concern.

“Its just...well I..I just can't,” Max said filled with guilt at letting Brandon down.

Max backed out of the room before slumping off towards the stairs. As he descended the stairs he found it almost surreal at how high he had to reach to place his hand on the railing. He came down into the front hallway. Max had his hands on either side of his head. Just what was going on? Sure when he

had been ten he had felt some strange emotions but now it seemed so much stronger, it was downright becoming overwhelming. Is this what Mr. Fishell had meant when he said the mind would change and it would all start to seem natural? Was Max beginning to think more like a four year old. As Max ruminated on his situation he was taken by complete surprise when someone suddenly lifted him up from behind.

“I caught a Max-a-saurus rex,” Dad said as he had Max cradled in his arms. Max was taken aback by how small he now felt in his Dad's arms as his Dad seemed to hold him effortlessly. “I hear there is a sad little dino stalking around these parts, is that you?”

Max made no response.

“Aha I see, well then take this,” Dad said flashing a mischievous grin before he began to tickle the boy in his arms. Max was helpless as he let out some squeals and giggles.

“Stop please,” Max said breathlessly as he grabbed onto his Dad's hand. Max having to use of both his hands just to stop one of his Dads.

“Feeling better.” Dad asked. Max shot his Dad a frown, of course he didn't feel any better.

“Maybe some grub will do you good,” Dad said. “We got pizza.”

Dad carried Max into the kitchen setting him down at the

table as Sheila called Trevor and Brandon down. Max watched as his Dad set two small square pieces of cheese pizza in front of Max before going over to the cupboards for a moment and returning with a plastic cup that had firetrucks all over it with a red cap. Dad twisted the cap and Max saw a rubber straw pop up from a compartment on the top. Max grimaced at it a little the only consolation being that it wasn't a sippy cup. Dinner proceeded on with Max not taking a single bite of his food, in all honesty he simply didn't have an appetite. Max wondered for a moment if that was another side effect of the regression remembering that the first time he hadn't been hungry either. Max instead spent most of his time shooting dirty looks at Trevor who seemed to be ignoring them altogether.

“Max eat your food before it gets cold,” Dad said.

“I'm not hungry,” Max said. “I would like to be excused.” Max said with the faintest hint of a lisp.

“Oh Max that was very polite,” Sheila said impressed by his manners.

“Yes it was,” Dad agreed. “But you can't get up from the table until you take at least four bites.”

Max let out a little huff in response to the condescending nature of his Dad's terms. As if Max couldn't tell when he was hungry or not.

Max picked up the square of pizza and quickly took his four bites making a disgusted face as the pizza tasted like dust in

his mouth.

“There I'm done,” Max said.

“Then you may leave,” Dad said with a nod. Max slid out of the chair and went to the living room sitting in the middle of the couch. He let himself blank out. There was nothing he could do, every scheme or plan he could try to concoct now had the added danger that if he failed he was done for, there was only one charge left and their was now such a gulf between him and Trevor it seemed impassable.

After awhile Max's Dad came into the living room taking a seat right next to Max as he flipped on the tv. Soon after Sheila came in and sat on the other side opening her e-reader. Max considered getting up and moving, yet sitting between the two of them somehow was making him feel better as if there was some sense of safety away from all of his troubles that had been circling around him for the past few days. Max could feel his eyes starting to droop as he gave in and let his head rest against his Dad's shoulder. Dad lifted up his arm and put it around Max. With Max's new small size his Dad's arm seemed to engulf him. Max had to try harder to keep his eyes open. He was using all his might to try and concentrate on the home improvement show his Dad was watching yet even as a teenager he had found them boring yet tolerable, now as a four year old it seemed to only be amplified at how dull it was. At some point Max had slipped down and had his head in his Dad's lap and his body curled up into a little ball.

“I think our little dino is tuckered out,” Dad had quipped.

Max sat up a little realizing he had nodded off just for a moment.

“Well he did miss his nap today,” Sheila chimed in.

“Hmmm I suppose its not too early,” Dad said checking the time on his phone. “Probably wouldn't hurt to get someone into bed.” Max made a small grunt. He wasn't exactly against the idea, he was tired enough. However he didn't appreciate being talked over like this.“So whose it going to be tonight, Max, me or Mommy?”

M-mommy,” Max stammered a little taken aback by the babyish moniker.

“Good choice,” Sheila said with some eagerness as she scooped Max off of the couch.

“Looks like someone is turning into a Momma's boy,” Dad said with a chuckle.

“Don't get jealous now,” Sheila said with a playful look in Dad's direction.

“Mommy,” Max said again has the reality began to wash over him. Was that really what he had been calling her. Sheila smiled at him.

“I just love hearing someone call me that again,” Sheila said as she began to carry Max up the stairs. They arrived in Max's room soon after. She walked over to a rocking chair in the corner of the room and took a seat with Max on her lap. A small bookshelf sat near by.

“You already have jammies on so I guess we just need a nice story and then we'll be all ready to head to dreamland,” Sheila said as she grabbed a book from the shelf.

“How about this one tonight?” Sheila said. Max looked at the cover. There were some bears on the front and the words at the top read “Billy Bear and the Big Birthday,” Max could only frown a little.

Sheila opened the book and began to read in a soft and gentle voice, the only light in the room coming from a single bulb in an overhead lamp. As Max sat listening to the story just waiting for it to be over he found his head naturally relax into Sheila. Her soothing voice and warmth of her body combined with the gentle rocking of the chair was too much for the already exhausted Max to fight against. Right before he drifted off to sleep for good, a strange thought occurred to him. That morning when he woke up he had been ten years old, never in his wildest dreams could he have imagined that he would be ending the day as a four year old. Yet if this level of peacefulness was now something that would be afforded to him, then perhaps it wouldn't be too bad. Yet Max knew deep down that he was just trying to cope. If he didn't do something soon he knew he might just end up stuck like this.

Chapter 6

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 6 - Chapter 6

Max crept slowly down the hall, it was the dead of night and there was a thunderstorm raging outside. Each flash of lighting illuminating the darkened hallway followed by the loud boom of thunder, each one making his heart jump. He made his way to Trevor's room and slowly began to open the door. He got on the ground and began to army crawl as if he were a spy on a secret mission. He could hear Trevor snoring softly in his bed. Max made his way under the bed to where the small oak box was. Max with his hands shaky slowly opened the box seeing that it was not secured in any way. Inside he found his prize, the device. He couldn't believe it was this easy.

He picked the device up into his hands as it seemed to glow ethereally in the night. Just then Max felt hands on his ankles as he was pulled out from under the bed. He flipped over to see Trevor standing tall over him like a lighthouse on a dark cliff and Max was ship down in the water.

“You really want those diapers don't you,” Trevor growled as he pinned Max on the ground with his foot, his face in an animalistic sneer.

“Get off of me,” Max cried out trying to remove Trevor's foot but to no avail. Max felt scared as he felt like he couldn't breath.

“I'll be taking that,” Trevor said as he reached down for the device.

“No,” Max said as he gritted teeth.

Max pressed the button,

The smoke shot up engulfing Trevor as it had before. Max scrambled to his feet. The door burst open as Dad, Sheila and Brandon came in. The smoke disappeared from Trevor to reveal he was now a baby in nothing more than snow white diaper. The group stood in silence before Trevor let out an ear piercing screech.

“Oh my god Trevor,” Sheila exclaimed as she went and picked up the crying Trevor into her arms.

“Max what have you done?” Sheila exclaimed looking directly at Max still sitting on the floor catching his breath.

“Max how could you?” Brandon said a betrayed look on his face.

“You turn him back this instant,” Dad demanded a furious look on his face.

“I-I can't,” Max said looking at the device in his hands. “It wont work any more.”

“Craig this isn't going to work,” Sheila said with a saddened look on her face. “C'mon Brandon we're leaving.” Sheila said taking Brandon's hand and walking towards the door with Trevor in her arms.

“Wait, Sheila don't leave,” Dad said but Sheila only gave him a slow shake of her head before walking out the door. Dad turned to look at Max his expression had turned into one of dis-belief.

“Dad,” Max squeaked. “I'm sorry I didn't mean too.”

“Max I can't even stand to look at you anymore,” Dad said with a sad resignation as he turned his back and walked out of the room.

“Dad no,” Max cried. “You have to believe me, don't leave.” Max cried out as he crawled across the floor before freezing at the sound of glass cracking. Max looked down at the ground to see the floor now resembled cracked grass. On the other side was nothing but darkness all consuming. Max made one more small move before the glass shattered beneath him he let out one last scream before he was swallowed by the darkness.

Max awoke thrashing in his bed. He came to a stop letting his arms and legs flop out as he took in heavy deep breaths. Thank God it had only been a dream. Max sat up with a deep groan as he rubbed the sides of his face. He pulled his hand back surprised to feel some wetness on his face. Had he been crying in his sleep? The dream had felt so real. Max was relieved that's all it had been. Unfortunately for Max as he looked around his room the part where he had gotten turned into a four year old had not been a dream. Max looked down to see he was indeed still wearing the dinosaur sleeper he had been put in the previous night. As his eyes scanned down he

saw it. There was a faint dark spot on the comforter. Max immediately became aware of the cold wet feeling on his lower half.

“No, no, no,” Max panicked as he kicked the covers off of himself. As he looked the full disaster came into view as he saw he was sitting in a rather large dark spot. It was even apparent against the green background of his sleeper what he had done. Max climbed over the bed railings rushing to the foot of his bed. He grabbed the blankets and attempted to pull them off. The blankets were tucked under the mattress as Max pulled as hard as he could with one last yank they came out from under the mattress which caused Max to stumble back falling onto his butt.

Just then his door opened as Sheila walked in.

“Already awake I see,” Sheila said in a bright cheerful mood. Max looked up at her, his jaw open and his eyes wide. Sheila's gaze went to Max's mattress as he watched her expression turn into concern.

“Oh dear,” she said.

“I'm sorry,” Max said shooting up from the ground. “I didn't mean to.”

Max could start to feel tears welling up in his eyes. The shame of what he had done becoming too much to bear.

“Of course you didn't,” Sheila said as she walked over to where Max stood and gathered up the blankets setting them back on the bed. “That's why its called an accident.” Sheila

then knelt down to Max's level. “Don't worry about anything, okay,” Sheila said as she brushed away some of Max's bangs. “But lets get you cleaned up,”

Sheila put her hand on the back of Max's head and lead him to the bathroom where she stripped off his pajamas and undies. She then ran a washcloth under some warm water before she went to work wiping him down. Max had his eyes closed just waiting for the absolutely mortifying experience to end. Sheila, after she was done had Max wait in the bathroom before she returned with some clothes. She knelt down and held out a pair of underwear with a black waistband and train tracks all over them with Thomas the Tank Engine's smiling face prominently displayed on the back. Max stepped into them begrudgingly, he just had to keep telling himself that at least they were underwear and not something worse. She then put a long sleeve gray shirt on him that had paw prints all over it except for the middle where there was a little white polar bear cub that stuck out since it was made of a fluffy white material different than the rest of the shirt. She finally put him in a pair of black track pants which Max was grateful to have at least one item of clothing that didn't make him feel completely baby-ish. Sheila then gathered up the soiled clothes and bed sheets.

“I'll wash those,” Max piped up forgetting for a moment that he was now four years old, having just reacted as he always did when Sheila offered to do laundry for him.

“You just let Mommy take care of this,” Sheila said with a chuckle. “But if you want to help put them in you can.”

Max nodded with a frown as he followed her to the laundry room. Sheila put the bundle of blankets into the washer and poured in some detergent. She then lifted up Max and told him to press the button to turn on the washer which he did. Sheila then set him on the ground clapping her hands together.

“There all done, wasn't so bad was it?” Sheila asked.

“I guess not,” Max muttered, but he really hadn't done much to help. “Thanks Mommy,” Max said having to force himself to call her Mommy remembering last night that that seemed to be what was expected. Sheila gave him a warm smile. Max felt it wasn't the worst thing in the world as it did seem to make her happy and strangely enough it felt sort of natural after he had said it.

“Okay, lets get some breakfast and then I'm going to get yo that haircut so you look nice and dapper for today.”

“Huh,” Max chimed picking up on the fact that something must be happening today if Sheila was so concerned with how he looked.

“I just want you to look your best today, I'm taking you and Brandon to the store to pick up your outfits for the wedding,” Sheila said as she walked Max to the kitchen.

After breakfast Max once again found himself sitting in a chair in the middle of the kitchen as Sheila cut his hair. After she finished she held a mirror up for Max. She had cut off a lot of the length but had left it in a sort of layered bob haircut. Sheila removed the covering from Max allowing him out of

the chair.

“There all done, I'm going to clean up and then we can hit the road, why don't you go watch cartoons with Brandon,” Sheila said. Max shrugged as he began to walk to the living room.

Just then the door to the garage opened and Dad came walking in with Trevor following behind they seemed to be mid-conversation.

“If you think you're interested I would welcome the help,” Dad said.

“Whats all this then?” Sheila asked noticing the stain on Dad's old t-shirt he was wearing.

“Oh I was working on the car and Trevor said he liked to help,” Dad said with a grin.

“Getting interested in cars, are we?” Sheila said looking at Trevor with some intrigue.

“Its a pretty sweet car,” Trevor enthused which caused Dad to smile. As Max listened he could see that Trevor was wasting no time in positioning himself to get the car. It only took Max another moment to realize that something was off however. Taking into consideration the timeline of events, if Max was four years old then there shouldn't even be a car in the first place. Max pushed past his Dad into the garage where he was met by the sight of the car he and his Dad had spent years restoring yet now it looked very different.

It was not unrecognizable to Max however, it looked like it

had when his Dad had first bought it. A rust bucket with very little work done to it. Max blinked in astonishment for a moment, why was it here, this didn't make sense. Dad, Sheila and Trevor followed into the garage.

“I still have no idea why you even bought this thing,” Sheila walking around the unimpressive vehicle.

“I though it would be a good project for me and the boys,” Dad answered.

“You didn't even know if any of them were interested,” Sheila countered.

“I don't know it just seemed right at the time, besides I have my helper now,” Dad said placing a hand on Trevor's shoulder. “With the two of us working together we can make this girl shine,” Dad said with a look of fatherly pride on his face. “And you know if you take this seriously I might just end up giving you the keys, that is when you get your license.” Dad said giving Trevor a nudge with his elbow.

“Craig,” Sheila said with a sort of perplexed look. “Don't go and promise him a car, he's only twelve years old.”

“Its not like its going to get done over night, so if he sticks with it then why not.” Dad said.

“Oh I'm definitely going to stick with it,” Trevor said placing his hands on the hood of the car as if he were holding a precious item.

“You can't,” Max yelped. “That car is mine.”

Dad gave a little sigh as he picked Max up into his arms.

“I thought we were done with the mine, mine, mine attidude,” Dad said. “Max we don't just get things because we want them.”

“B-but you bought it for me,” Max sputtered. Dad shook his head.

“Like I said, I bought it for all three of you, if you want to help you can.” Dad said.

“Yeah Max you can help,” Trevor said with a smirk. “You can hold the flashlight if you want.”

Max shot off a scowl in Trevor's direction. He could feel his temper rising at an alarmingly fast rate, even faster than the time in the parking lot.

“Trevor can't help,” Max declared a pouty look appearing on his face.

“And why is that?” Dad asked.

“He just wants it so I don't get it,” Max said his voice rising as his anger overtook him. “That's what he always does, cuz he is the biggest jerk ever,” Max shouted looking at Trevor as he gritted his teeth.

“So that's how its going to be,” Dad said before turning on his heels and walking back into the house where he sat Max on the bottom step. Max looked up at his Dad with some confusion.

“That was not a very nice thing to say,” Dad said putting his hands on his hips.

“Its true,” Max said shooting to his feet. “Why are you being nice to him?”

“Sit down,” Dad said in a stern voice. Max found himself obeying without a thought, his Dad's commanding tone hitting something in Max that told him not to disobey. “From this moment on you are now on a timeout,” his Dad stated.

Max's mouth fell open. As if he would stand for such a thing. Max got back too his feet.

“Max,” Dad said his voice rising a little. Max tried to resist but the same feeling of fear of disobeying that he had experienced with Trevor the previous day came back causing Max to sit back down.

“If you get up again you will get time added on,” Dad said. “Now I don't know where you got the idea that you can go around here telling other people what they can and can't do. We are a family around here and that means sometimes you are going to have to share things. Also you are never allowed to call people names that is very rude, do you understand me?” Dad asked.

“Yes,” Max grumbled as he put his chin in his hands.

“You can get up when an adult tells you your time is up, is that understood?” Dad asked. Max gave no response he just casted his eyes downward, if anything he just wanted to cry again but did his best to hold back.

Dad seemed satisfied as he walked away and began to make himself a cup of coffee. Sheila and Trevor came into the kitchen. Trevor walked up the stairs patting Max on the head as he walked past. Max jerked his head away as he smoothed out his hair. Sheila gave Dad a pat on his back as she walked past him to get her own cup of coffee.

“I do hope you don't have him sitting there all day, I still need to take him to the store with me,” Sheila said.

“You really want to be taking Mr. Sourpants over there with you?” Dad asked.

“Now, now don't be so hard on him,” Sheila said. “He's been having a rough morning,”

“Oh yeah,” Dad said with a raised eyebrow. Max watched as Sheila leaned in and whispered something into his Dad's ear. It didn't take a genius to figure out what she was saying. Max felt his stomach twist into a knot knowing that his Dad was being informed of how he had woken up that morning. Dad looked over at Max with a sympathetic look. Max looked away not able to bear the shame of it all. He heard his Dad's footsteps approach. His Dad knelt down and began to stroke the side of his head.

“Oh buddy,” Dad said.

“I'm sorry,” Max whispered as he looked into his Dad's understanding expression.

“It's alright,” his Dad said as he gave him a hug. “I know you'll do better.”

Max wasn't sure if his Dad was referring to the wet bed or the outburst in the garage, he supposed it could be for both. Yet for Max he was only sorry about the bed. He had meant every word he had said in the garage.

“Alright,” Dad said. “You can get up now only if you promise me that you will be on your best behavior for your Mommy at the store.”

“I will,” Max said with a sigh cringing slightly at having to make such a promise in the first place. Dad then pulled some shoes over from nearby and began to put them on Max's feet. They were bright red and had a picture of a fire truck on the side above the heel. Max watched as his Dad secured the velcro tab which were made to look like fat water hoses.

“All right looks like we are good to go,” Sheila said with a big smile as she had gone and fetched Brandon from the living room. Going out into the garage Max looked at the car again. He couldn't help but feel some resentment towards it. What had once been a symbol of the bond between his Dad and him had been tainted. Sheila placed a hand on Max's head as they walked past as if she could tell it bothered him to even look at it. Out in the driveway Max watched as Brandon opened up the door to the backseat of the car. Brandon paused for a moment and gave a sort uncomfortable look towards Max before he got into the car. As Max came up to the door he saw what had caused the reaction from Brandon.

Sitting in the backseat was a full blown car seat. It was

modern looking, the fabric covering the seat was bright orange. What was the worst part for Max was it wasn't just a booster seat with a seat belt. It came complete with a whole harness. Max stood frozen in his spot for a moment. Sheila picked him up from behind and set him in the seat. She then snapped the straps at his chest before buckling

them into the bottom. Max felt constricted or rather secured which was the point.

“Max honey I know you haven't been having the greatest start to your day but lets try to put that all behind us,” Sheila said seeing Max's rather perturbed expression. Max looked up at her the corner of his mouth upturned a little before falling back into a frown as he looked at away at the ground.

As they began driving Max looked over at Brandon. He was growing incredibly jealous at seeing him sitting in a normal seat. Brandon had just graduated out of the booster seat not too long ago, but even when he had one it had just been the seat only. Max couldn't believe he had taken something as simple as sitting in a normal car seat for granted. Brandon was playing on his tablet. He looked over at Max for a moment before returning his gaze back to his tablet. For some reason this made Max grow a little anxious. Brandon had been pretty supportive up to this point which had been somewhat reassuring for Max, but it seemed Brandon had been distant that morning. Max couldn't be sure if it was all in head but he worried that Brandon was mad at him or something, after Max had refused to play with him the previous night.

As Max though on this he became nervous. What if Brandon was starting to view him more as a little kid? Brandon had really taken to looking up to Max as an older brother, but now that that was gone. What if Brandon was starting to actually regard him as a little brother? At eight years old Max could certainly see a certain aloofness start to form in Brandon towards him, after all what eight year old would actually want to hang around a four year old?

Max had become so engulfed in these thoughts that he didn't even realize that much time had passed and it had only felt like a few minutes had passed before Sheila announced they had arrived. Sheila parked and then opened the door on Max's side first.

“Hop to it Brandon,” Sheila said noticing her son was still entranced in his tablet.

“But I want to finish this level,” Brandon whined a little furiously swiping away at his tablet.

“You got two minutes,” Sheila said as she unstrapped Max and lifted him out of his car seat and set him down in the parking lot before shutting the door.

“So Max I wondering if we could chat a little before going into the store?” Sheila said as she knelt down. Max nodded a little curious as to what she had to say.

“How do you feel?” Sheila asked giving Max the same sort of empathetic look she had given him on the football bleachers Friday night.

“Fine,” Max replied. Sheila nodded her head.

“I want to talk to you about what happened in the garage this morning,” Sheila then said.

Max felt his stomach twist up a little. It dawned on him who he was talking too. He had insulted Trevor however tame it had been he could not disregard that Trevor was Sheila's son. Max came to the conclusion that she was none too pleased to hear her oldest son be called names especially by Max who was not hers.

“You seemed pretty angry back there and I want to know why you felt that way?” Sheila said still being pleasant.

“I'm really sorry,” Max said with a slight quiver in his voice. “I promise I won't say things like dat anymore.”

“T hats good to hear,” Sheila said as she rubbed Max's arm. “But that's not what we are talking about.”

“Huh,” Max said furrowing his brow a little.

“I'm just concerned,” Sheila said.

“Con...cerened?” Max asked not following at all what she was getting at.

“Hmmm, how to say this so you'll understand.” Sheila mused as she though a moment. “It means I think you are feeling something that you don't know what to do about.” Max averted his gaze. He certainly was feeling a lot of things but it wasn't something that he felt anyone could help him with.

“Max did it scare you when your Dad said he was going to give Trevor that car?” Sheila asked. “Maybe you felt like your Dad liked Trevor more?”

Max stuck his tongue into his cheek a little. Was scared the right word? Maybe it was, but not for Sheila's reason, more so that Max felt like his old life was slipping through his fingers. He felt like he was on the precipice of a great cliff that was about to break out from under him and one wrong move is all it would take to send him falling towards the bottom.

“Maybe,” Max said in whisper allowing himself to be the tiniest bit open about his feelings.

“You know you should never worry about such a thing,” Sheila remarked. “When me and your Dad first started dating he talked about you a whole lot, you are his whole world.” Max couldn't help but grin a little.

“But you know all of our worlds are about to get a little bigger, or rather they already have. It used to be that I just had two wonderful boys of my own to care about, but now I have three, and I couldn't be happier about that.” Sheila said before wrapping her arms around Max and pulling him in for a big hug. Max found himself nuzzling into Sheila a little. She certainly had a way with the words. These past few days had certainly revealed to Max that she somehow always knew what to say to make him feel better. It was solidified in Max that she did truly care for him as much as Brandon and Trevor.

“And you know what?” Sheila said as she released Max. “If

your Dad can give Trevor a car then I don't see why I can't get you one."

"What?" Max said a little surprised.

"Well sure, if you are a good boy in the clothing store then I will get you a car," Sheila said extending her pinky out to Max. "Its a promise."

Max wrapped his pinky around hers. He didn't believe for a second she would actually get him a car and its not like she actually understood the real issue with the car in question, yet Max could see she really was trying to make him feel better. Brandon appeared from around the other side of the car having finished his game.

"Looks like we are ready to go," Sheila said. "Why don't you boys meet me at the door while I grab my purse," Sheila said as she went to the drivers door. The boys began to walk off. "And Brandon make sure you hold Max's hand," Sheila called out.

Without a word Brandon took Max's hand and began to walk towards the door. Max felt completely embarrassed at the fact that Brandon had been placed in charge of him. It had probably been the same way yesterday when the two of them had supposedly been at the playground yet Max had only heard about it, actually experiencing the change in dynamic was on a whole other level. As they got to the door he felt Brandon's grip loosen so that Max was able to pull his hand away. Brandon didn't seem to think it was strange until he looked at Max whose face could best be described as

uncomfortable.

“What's the matter?” Brandon asked.

“Nothing,” Max muttered as he massaged his hand. “I just don't like my hand being held.”

“My Mom told me to,” Brandon said with a shrug.

“Yeah, whatever,” Max said under his breath as his face morphed into a pout. Brandon looked at Max for a moment with an unsure expression, it seemed he was about to say something but was cut off by his Mom arriving to the door. Sheila brought the boys into the store. As Max looked around he could see wedding dresses all over the place as well as some formal wear on some mannequins. He was then reminded of how yesterday he had found out he had been demoted from his Dad's best man to a junior groomsman which he still didn't exactly know what that was. Sheila approached the front desk and talked to one of the salespeople. The employee had the group of them follow her to the back of the store where there was some couches and an area with three mirrors next to each other. Max assumed this is where the brides tried on their dresses for their friends and family. Nearby were two changing rooms with velvet curtains hung in front of them.

“Okay I'll be back in a moment with the outfits,” the employee said before she disappeared into the back. Max was sat on the couch next to Sheila. Meanwhile Brandon was in front of the three mirrors spinning around to look at himself in each mirror.

“Now I know you boys probably don't want to be here all day,” Sheila said. “So no fussing, just put on the outfits so we can make sure they fit and we'll be out of here right quick.”

“Sure,” Brandon said still playing in front of the mirrors.

Max sat on the couch laying his head back into the cushion with a disinterested look on his face.

“Max sweetie did you hear me?” Sheila asked. “Remember you promised to be a good boy for me.”

“Yes Mommy,” Max muttered. Max froze a moment before he covered his mouth. He had just said it with little thought, as if had been the most natural thing in the world. The salesperson reappeared with two clothing bags from the back.

“This one is for is for him,” the salesperson said motioning towards Brandon as she handed it to Sheila. “And this one is for the big boy on the couch,” she said holding up the other bag.

“Brandon I'll help you first,” Sheila said holding up the bag as Brandon pulled himself away from the mirrors. Sheila motioned towards one of the dressing rooms which Brandon then entered disappearing behind the curtain. “If its not too much trouble could you keep an eye on him while I help his brother get dressed.” Sheila asked the employee referring to Max on the couch.

“I don't mind at all,” the woman said with a smile. “If you want I could help him get dressed, just to make things a little easier.”

“That would be really helpful,” Sheila said. “You hear that Max this nice lady is going to help you.”

Max frowned a little. He hadn't even really got used to Sheila dressing him and now it was going to be some lady he didn't even know. Its not like he even needed help he was perfectly capable of dressing himself. Max got off the couch and walked into the other dressing room. He had decided to go along with it if it meant they could leave sooner. The woman followed him in and hung the clothing bag up on a hook before unzipping it.

“Lets start with the shirt,” she said. “Arm's up.”

Max lifted his arms meaning to grab the back of his shirt and pull it off himself but the woman had been too fast and pulled the shirt off of him. She then turned around and pulled a normal white button down shirt out of the bag and threaded his arms through it. Max started to do the buttons in an effort to show the lady that he could do it on his own. The only problem was that it was becoming very apparent to Max that he couldn't .It just seemed like the button wouldn't go through the hole.

“Let me help,” the woman said taking over as Max sat puzzled at to why he didn't seem able to do it himself. Next the woman wasted no time in pulling down the track pants Max was wearing and having him lift his feet to remove them completely. Max had been taken by surprise but thankfully the white shirt he was wearing was long enough to cover up the embarrassing pair of underwear he was wearing. The

woman pulled out a pair of pants and helped Max put them on. Max noticed two things at once.

First of all the pants had an elastic waistband second was the color was off. Max's suit beforehand had been a dark navy blue in line with his Dad's and the rest of the groomsman tuxes. Max's pants were a light powder blue. The woman tucked the shirt into the pants before going back to the bag and digging around a little before she produced a pair of suspenders that were also a powder blue. After she got them attached she took a few moments to check the sleeves and the pant legs ensuing they were the correct length. She then brought out a bow tie which was a clip on and slid it onto Max's collar. Max looked in the mirror. He felt completely silly as he looked at his outfit, it really couldn't get any worse.

“And the final touch,” the woman said as she placed a beret on his head that was the same color as the pants, suspenders, and bow tie. Max looked at himself in the mirror. “This is adorable,” the woman said as she knelt down behind him with her hands on his shoulders. Max felt so infantile. He was still a groomsman in some respect so why couldn't he just wear a suit like the rest of them?

“Lets see if your Mommy is ready to be surprised,” the woman said as she went and poked her head out the curtain. “Okay she's ready,” she said turning around. “Oh but one more thing.”

The woman then pulled something out of the bag and knelt down to Max's level. It was a small pillow. She slipped a

small elastic band that was under the pillow over his wrist which made it so he couldn't drop the pillow. Max felt his heart drop putting together the pieces in his head. He was no longer a groomsman, junior or otherwise, he was the ring bearer.

“Showtime,” the salesperson said as she lead Max through the curtain holding the pillow in his hands. Max stood in front of Sheila and Brandon who was wearing a normal suit. Max was still in shock over his demotion. As he looked at Brandon he immediately felt mortified as it looked like Brandon was just as surprised to see Max's attire as he had been himself. Max looked slowly over to Sheila and was shocked yet again to see her reaction.

“Oh my god,” she said as if the air had been knocked out of her. “You are so...precious,” she said with as a cooing smile spread across her face. As Max looked a little closer he couldn't really tell but it almost looked as if she had small tears in her eyes. “I need a picture,” Sheila said as she made Brandon go and stand next to Max. She took the picture however Max was not able to muster a smile but tried to not show how upset he was with the situation.

Once both boys had gotten back into their normal clothes Sheila paid for the outfits and had them in the trunk and Max back in his car seat as they began to drive again. As Max sat strapped into his seat he could feel the urge to cry coming on fast. He had fallen so far from sixteen year old best man to four year old ring bearer, it was dizzying how fast it had all happened. He was really starting to notice just how fast

emotions changed on him now. He needed to fight back, plus he didn't want anyone to see him cry, especially Brandon. In Max's estimation Brandon was already starting to treat him differently, no doubt from Max's behavior that he had already witnessed. It was no longer a question for Max. Brandon didn't see him as an older brother.

Sheila drove to the store and walked with the boys into the front entrance. She got a cart and without a word lifted Max into the child's seat.

“I wanna walk,” Max protested. Sheila gave him a sort of funny look before smirking.

“Okay, but on one condition,” Sheila said holding up a finger. “You have to hold Brandon's hand okay, I don't want you wandering off.”

Max looked over to Brandon who gave him a shrug as if to say he didn't really mind. Max slumped his shoulders.

“I'll sit,” Max muttered. He didn't want a repeat of the parking lot, not too mention the idea of being put under Brandon's charge was still a bridge too far for Max to accept. Sheila picked up some groceries before heading into another section of the store where they finally came to a stop in the toy department.

“What are we doing here?” Brandon asked sounding as if he was trying to not get his hopes up. Sheila smiled as she looked at Max.

“I know its not like the one in the garage, but I did promise

you a car," Sheila said as she lifted Max out of the cart and set him on the ground. "Both of you can pick out one of the rc cars."

"Really," Brandon said jumping up and down a little.

"Of course," Sheila said. "But make sure you thank Max. He was so well behaved that he earned it for both of you."

"Thank you than you thank you," Brandon said giving Max a excited hug before racing off to look at all the options. In some ways Max felt good about Brandon's reaction. As if Max had done something good for Brandon as he had done so often in the past.

"Well see anything you like?" Sheila asked. Max looked at the shelves containing several different types of RC cars before shaking his head. It wasn't as if he was disappointed he had not believed for a second that Sheila was actually going to buy him a car, but its not as if he could make himself be excited by this.

"This one looks cool," Sheila said picking up a package that had an orange dump truck in it along with some googly eyes and a big smile plastered on the front. Max shook his head. "There are lots of choices," Sheila said putting the box back on the shelf. "Go ahead and get whichever one you want."

Max looked at all his options. He knew Sheila was going to insist he get one so he might as well pick something out. As Max walked down the aisle nothing really appealed to him. He was searching for the one that the was the cheapest to

ensure that Sheila didn't spend a lot of money on something he wasn't even going to use.

Max then came to a stop he had come to a section that had cars that looked like their real life counterparts. There were Lamborghinis and Ferraris, police cars, and firetrucks yet the one that had caught Max's eye was the one that looked just like the car in the garage, in fact it was almost carbon copy of how the car had looked a day ago. Max picked it up admiring it for a moment.

“Oh Max that looks just like the one in the garage,” Sheila said noticing that Max had picked something out. “Although this one is much nicer. Is that the one you want?”

“Y-Yeah if its okay,” Max said.

“Of course sweetie,” Sheila said picking Max up and placing him back in the seat of the cart letting him hold the car in his hands.

Back at home Brandon had been excited to open the cars up and drive them around, and Max was starting to feel some excitement at the prospect himself. Sheila had taken them out but had delivered the bad news that the cars needed to charge first which had certainly disappointed the boys. Sheila however had told them they could eat lunch first while they waited. It was a quick lunch as each boy was eager to play. It wasn't long before the boys were released out onto the patio with their vehicles. Max found himself laughing and shouting freely as he maneuvered his car all around going under the patio furniture and racing from one side to the other. Max

was also delighted to find that his car was faster than Brandon's all terrain one, however Max did find it endlessly amusing to watch Brandon's flip itself up into the air by rotating its front axle. The boys were zipping their cars through an obstacle course they had set up when Trevor came walking around the back. He was a little sweaty, apparently he had learned that he now had friends in the neighborhood and he had been at one of their houses playing football. He watched Max and Brandon drive their cars around for a moment.

“Let me have a try,” Trevor said walking up to Brandon.

“No,” Brandon said holding his controller defensively. “I'm playing with it.”

“Don't be selfish,” Trevor said snatching the remote out of Brandon's hands. “I just want to try it out”

“Trevor give it back,” Brandon whined as he tried to get the remote back from Trevor but to no avail as Trevor held the controller out of Brandon's reach. Max watched feeling a little nervous. What if Trevor tried to take his next? Max thought about going and getting Sheila but dismissed the idea a moment later realizing that would be what a little kid would do. Max decided to take matters into his own hands. He was'nt a little kid, he was going to protect Brandon all on his own. Max maneuvered his car so that it was aimed at Trevor. He sent his car rocketing towards Trevor crashing into his foot.

“Owww,” Trevor yelped lifting his foot up. He looked over to

see Max smirking at him satisfied at the outcome. Trevor then furrowed his brow before bring his foot down hard on top of Max's car a loud crunch sounded out.

“My car,” Max cried out as he ran over and picked up the broken car from the ground.

“You should watch where you're driving,” Trevor said. Max held the car in his hands. The top of the car had come off turning it into a convertible and it looked like the motor was now sticking out from the bottom. Max put the car back on the ground and gave it some gas but the car just let out a little whir not moving an inch. Max could feel the hot tears coming to his eyes as he began to whimper.

“Mooom,” Brandon yelled going to the door. Sheila appeared a moment later. “Trevor broke Max's car.”

“I didn't mean too,” Trevor said quickly. “He drove it right into my foot.”

Sheila gave an exasperated look towards Trevor as she walked over to Max who was still trying to make the car go.

“Oh no,” Sheila said putting hand on Max's back. Max let his controller fall to the ground, it was hopeless. He looked over at Sheila he could no longer hold back as he began to cry putting his face into her shoulder. Sheila picked him up before gathering up the car.

“Trevor took my remote,” Brandon said.

“Give it back to your brother,” Sheila said with a sigh. “And

be more careful.”

Trevor gave the remote back to Brandon before sauntering off. Sheila carried Max into the house. She set the car onto the counter.

“Its going to be okay,” Sheila said rubbing Max's back a little.

“No its not,” Max mewled. “It broke.”

“It doesn't look that bad,” Sheila said. “I think your Daddy can fix it.”

“Really?” Max asked lifting his head up.

“Sure,” Sheila said. “You know he can fix anything.”

“Can I ask him now?” Max asked.

“Well he had to run into the office for a work emergency,” Sheila said. Max let out a groan. “But you know what, I think someone is a little tired, you had a pretty big morning. So lets go take a nap and then by the time you wake up he should be back.”

“No nap,” Max grimaced.

“Sorry squirt,” Sheila said with a chuckle as she made her way to the stairs. “You missed your nap yesterday so you definitely need to take one today. Sheila brought Max into his room. She pulled back his covers and plopped him in the bed. Without a word she removed Max's pants before pulling the covers up over him and tucking him in.

“Now you just close those eyes and take a rest,” she said

softly before she pushed his bangs out of the way and gave him a kiss on the forehead before leaving the room shutting the door behind her. Max closed his eyes.

He wasn't really sure if he was tired because of the effects of the regression or if everything else that had happened was starting to take its toll. He was getting slightly worried though. If anything had become clear he was really starting to act younger. It didn't take much now to send him into tears and he was quick to seek comfort from his parents. Max knew he had to resist, whatever sort of effect the device was having he needed to assert more control.

Max felt like he had only just closed his eyes before he was being awoken by Sheila.

“C'mon Max wakey wakey,” Sheila said pulling the covers back.. “You've been asleep for awhile.”

“Really,” Max asked as he sat up rubbing his eyes. He came to attention as Sheila put a hand on the bed checking to see if it was wet. Max's heart gave a jump thinking he had wet the bed again.

“Looks like this morning was just a fluke,” Sheila said with some relief. “Why don't you go try the potty though,” Sheila said. Max got out of the bed grumbling a little under his breath. He did need to go but its not like he needed to be reminded. After finishing up Max walked downstairs still a little bleary eyed and groggy.

“Hey Max your Daddy is home,” Sheila said gathering up the

car from the counter and handing it over to him. “Want to see if he can fix your car?”

“Where is he?” Max asked looking around.

“In the garage,” Sheila answered leading Max over to the door. She opened the door and poked her head out. “Someone's got a question for you,” she said to Dad.

Sheila motioned that it was okay for Max to go out, yet Max came to a standstill realizing he didn't have any pants on and was just wearing a shirt and the pair of Thomas the tank engine undies.

“Go on,” Sheila said giving Max a little nudge into the garage. Max saw his Dad sitting at his workbench. Finding himself standing in front of his Dad made Max feel completely embarrassed having his Dad see him like this.

“Whats up buddy,” his Dad said, although Max couldn't ignore the amused smirk on his Dad's face. Max tried to say something but felt the words catch in his throat. “What'cha got there?” Dad asked noticing the heap in Max's hands.

“Its my car,” Max said finding his voice. “But it broke, do you think you could fix it?”

“Lets take a look,” Dad said beckoning Max over. Dad took the pieces from Max and set them on his work bench before grabbing Max and sitting him on his lap. Dad then started to sort through the pieces. “Looks like quite the wreck,” Dad mused.

“Trevor stepped on it,” Max said with some indignation.

“Did he do that on purpose?” Dad asked. Max pursed his lips a little. As much as he wanted to say yes, he did hold back. It after all wasn't outside of the realm of possibility that it had initially been an accident, yet Max was sure that even if Trevor hadn't meant too he had been all too pleased with the outcome.

“I don't know,” Max finally grumbled. Max watched as his Dad examined the motor. With some force his Dad was easily able to snap the motor back into place.

“Try it now,” Dad instructed. Max picked up the remote and gave it some juice. To Max's delight the car took off across the workbench. Dad was quick to catch it in his hand before it drove right off the workbench.

“All right lets see what we can do about this,” Dad said holding up the top of the car. It had broken off pretty cleanly and was all in one piece so it wasn't hard for Dad to position it in the spot it had broken from. After getting it positioned he took some super glue and applied it. “Okay Max hold it in place but not too hard,” Dad said as he put Max's hands on top of the car. They waited for a minute before Dad let Max lift his hands.

“There good as new,” Dad said as he gave a small tug at the top just too make sure it was secure. “One little change though,” Dad said as he popped out the driver's side window which had a crack in it. “When you got a ride like this you gotta drive with the window down and the radio blaring.”

Max smiled as he took the car into his hands, it looked as good as new. For a moment he really did believe that his Dad could fix anything. “Looks like we fixed your car right up,” Dad chuckled. “You know this car looks awfully similar to the one behind me, is that why you chose it?”

“Yes,” Max admitted.

“Well maybe you can help me out with the big one sometime since you are such a good helper,” Dad said ruffling up Max's hair.

Max let out a huff as he leaned back into his Dad.

“You just want Trevor's help,” Max said gloomily.

“Max,” Dad said in a gentle tone as he wrapped his arms around Max. “Just because I do stuff with Trevor or Brandon doesn't mean I don't want to do stuff with you. In fact I want to do just about everything with you.”

“Really?” Max asked. It wasn't as if he doubted his Dad's words, but it did feel reassuring to hear it out loud.

“Of course,” Dad said. “Why wouldn't I? You're my little buddy from day one. I will always want you around. I feel like I've done nothing but work, and I'm sad thinking about everything I've had miss with you. But I don't have to work as much anymore so I'm not going to miss out anymore. Trevor and Brandon too. We are going to do so much fun stuff together its going to be great. You like the sound of that?”

“Yeah,” Max said looking up at his Dad.

“Good to hear, now how about you show me how good of a driver you are.” Dad said.

Moments later Max was out in the driveway standing next to his Dad as he drove his car making it zip around.

Max had no intention of staying four, there was no way he was just going to sit back and let Trevor get his way. For the moment though he was happy as he looked up at his Dad who smiled back at him proudly.

Chapter 7

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 7 - Chapter 7

Chapter 7

Max let out a grunt as he pushed against the harness of his car seat. He let out a sigh as he put his head back against the headrest concluding that he was not going to get comfortable sitting in the seat. As he sat watching the passing scenery out the car window he let out another sigh.

“You okay back there?” his Dad asked from the driver's seat.

“Yeah,” Max muttered, but he really wasn't. He though that maybe his second day as a four year old might go just a bit better than yesterday however his morning had not exactly gone off without a hitch. If anyone else was asked they would say it had gone better but Max wasn't exactly in the mood for optimism at this point.

His Dad had woken him up early that morning. Max had been in a mood already since last night. A mood that had been brought on when he had been put to bed at his new bedtime of eight' o clock, which was even earlier than Brandon, another point that cemented him as the youngest in the house. Max didn't think he was going to be able to fall asleep that early, especially since he had already taken a nap that day. Much to his dismay he hadn't even made it through the bedtime story that Sheila had read to him before he dozed off.

As Max put together the pieces of what had happened the previous night in the light of the morning he quickly found that there were more pressing matters. He had ripped off his covers checking to make sure he hadn't wet his bed. He found the bed to be dry but his bladder was not going to hold out for long as Max leapt out of the bed and scurried to the bathroom. He had been dressed in another pair of footie pajamas. In his panic Max had fruitlessly fumbled around with the zipper, first he had trouble getting the fabric clasp undone and then when he had finally grabbed onto the zipper he ripped it down as fast as he could but in that moment he had burst. Max had watched in horror as a dark spot formed on the front of his underwear. He didn't know what to do as he stood blinking in dis-belief at what had just happened. His Dad came into the bathroom a moment later with some clothes in his hands.

“Yikes,” Dad had said sucking some air in through his teeth seeing what had just happened. Max looked at his Dad. The corners of his mouth turning down as his lower lip stuck out in a quiver.

“I-I couldn't...” Max whimpered. His Dad had been quick to his side as Max had crouched down putting his face into his knee's in shame.

“Its okay,” his Dad said with some sympathy as he gave him a couple of pats on the back. “At least you made it out of the bed this time,” Dad had said with a chuckle. A consolation that did little to improve Max's mood. His Dad had gotten him cleaned up before putting him in a blue and white striped

shirt and a pair of denim overalls.

Max was then brought down to the kitchen where he was given a bowl of cereal that he ate sitting next to Brandon. Sheila was rushing about packing two lunch bags.

“Trevor for the last time, get up,” She shouted up the stairs. A solitary groan could be heard from upstairs. “We're going to be late,” Sheila huffed. Dad put a hand on her shoulder.

“I can take Brandon and Max in with me,” Dad suggested.

“That'll just make you late too,” Sheila said.

“Nonsense, I'm the boss I can't be late,” Dad said with a chuckle. “Besides its on the way for me.”

“If you can,” Sheila had said. Dad turned around to Max and Brandon at the table.

“You hear that guys I'm taking you with me.” Dad had said. With the arrangements made Brandon had gathered up his lunch and backpack while Dad got Max's shoes on and then put a green puffy jacket on him which he zipped up all the way. Getting to the car Dad opened the passenger seat to reveal another car seat that was meant for Max in his car. As Max looked at it he felt this one was even worse than the one in Sheila's car as this one was decorated with characters from some pre-schooler show that Max was not familiar with.

Back in the present Max fidgeted against the harness once again. The fact that he was wearing a puffy jacket was half the reason he wasn't able to get comfortable and he was

starting to get too warm. He was actually sort of grateful when his Dad had pulled into a parking lot coming to a stop, since it meant Max was going to be released, that was until he looked to see where they were. Max hadn't given much thought as to what his day would entail but his stomach dropped to the floor when he saw they were now in front of the local daycare. Dad got out of the car and opened the passenger door and got Max out of the car seat setting him on the ground. His Dad then held his hand as they walked in through the front doors. Max had only been inside once or twice when he had been asked to pick up Brandon after school.

As they walked down one of the hallways Max saw the room he had gone too to collect his little brother. The room was empty since it was meant for the older kids that came after school. Max and his Dad finally came to a room near the back of the building. His Dad opened the door and Max was hit by an absolute sensory overload. The room was loud as their were kids loudly playing, some music was playing out of a speaker. The room itself was large and the noise seemed to reverberate. The walls had rainbows and pastel animals painted on it. There was a large carpeted area near the back. In front of the room was a group of small oblong shaped tables with mini blue chairs. In the middle of the room was a common area where most of the kids were congregated playing with all sorts of toys and art supplies. Max and his Dad were approached by a heavy set woman with red hair that was pulled back into a tight ponytail, She had a tablet in her hand.

“Mr. Barnes good to see you this morning” she said handing the tablet over to Dad as he made a couple of swipes on the screen before handing it back.

“All signed in Ms. Lola,” Dad said.

“Everything looks good,” Ms. Lola said looking over the tablet for a moment before turning her attention on Max.

“And how is Max this morning?” she asked with a big broad smile.

“Well he's been in a strange mood lately,” Dad said looking down at Max with half amused half concerned look.

“Oh I'm sorry to hear that,” the woman said before kneeling down to Max's level and taking both of his hands into hers. “Not feeling ourselves are we?” Max pursed his lips a little. She didn't know how true her statement was. “No matter though,” Ms. Lola said releasing Max's hands. “We have lots of fun things planned today so I'm sure you'll be feeling your bright cheery self in no time.” With that declaration Ms. Lola stood up and gave a farewell as she went to greet another parent who had just arrived.

Max's Dad lead him over to an area with cubbies up against the wall. Max saw there was one with his name on it. His Dad unzipped his coat and helped him take it off before he hung it up.

“Alright kiddo I'm outta here, have a good day.” Dad said rising to his feet. Max grabbed onto his hand.

“Daddy...I mean Dad wait,” Max squeaked. His Dad looked down at him surprised.

“Whats up?” Dad asked.

“I don't want to be here. Can't I just go to the office with you?” Max pleaded. “I promise I'll be good.”

“Sorry buddy,” Dad said kneeling back down as he ruffled Max's hair. “As much as I would love to spend the whole day with you, I gotta go to work and you have to be at school today so you can learn lots of things and become really smart.”

Max let out a small groan as he took a cursory glance towards the rest of the classroom, he found himself thinking that he would rather be back in the fifth grade right now, heck at this point he would find kindergarten better than this.

“Remember Max positive thinking,” Dad said. “If you think your going to have a bad day, you probably will. So just look on the bright side, you do that and before you know it will be time to go home.”

Max could only look back at his Dad with an unconvinced look.

“Now give me a hug so I can leave,” Dad said. Max gave his Dad a tight hug. In that moment he thought if he hugged him tight enough he wouldn't be able to leave. His Dad was able to peel Max off of him before standing up.

“C'mon looks like there is tons of fun stuff going on over

here," Dad said walking Max over to the common area where the other kids were. Max stood on the edge looking dismally at the other kids playing. "Hop to it," Dad said giving Max a playful swat on his behind. Max turned to see his Dad walking towards the door giving him one last wave before he exited leaving Max alone to spend his first day in preschool.

Max walked around the periphery of the room before he eventually wandered into a small corner that had a few bean bag chairs on the ground with a bin of stuffed animals behind them. Max took a seat laying back in the seat that he seemed to be sinking into. Max sat back up again with some effort. Looking around the room he started putting things into perspective. Maybe he had been acting rather dramatic about the whole thing? This was preschool after all, it probably wouldn't be as hard as the day he had spent in fifth grade, they certainly weren't going to expect that much out of him. He just needed to keep his head down and he could probably get through this without much bother. Max looked over and saw a rack of books. He took one and laid back into the bean bag chair as he opened the book and began reading just to pass the time.

As Max read through the pages he started to become disinterested in the words on the page as his focus started to move towards the pictures. As Max came to the end of book it was only then that he realized he hadn't even read a single word since page two. However Max didn't have much time to dwell on this as he heard his name be called out excitedly from somewhere else in the room. Before he could even see

who it had been he found himself being pounced upon by another child. Max sank into the chair under the weight of his unknown attacker. It was only a moment before he felt the weight lift off of him as Max rolled out of the beanbag chair onto the carpet which allowed him to sit up.

“TJ be careful,” a woman's voice chided. Max looked to see a woman and a little boy standing above him. The boy who had jumped on him had curly black hair, his big droopy eyes were casted down as his red lips were formed into a sort of pucker. It didn't take Max long to realize he did in fact recognize these people. It was his friend Calvin's Mom and the boy who had jumped on him had been the boy she had been holding in her arms at the football game.

“Sorry about that Max,” Calvin's Mom Ann said as she helped Max off the ground. “Tj you need to apologize to your friend for jumping on him.” she said addressing the little boy to her side.

“Soo-rrry,” Tj said in a somewhat insincere way. Ann smiled and hugged the little boy before she went to go and talk to Ms. Lola. Max stood regarding Tj for a moment, he felt it an odd coincidence that now that he was younger he was supposedly friends with the little brother of the kid he was friends with when he had been turned ten. He hadn't even known these people existed a couple of days ago. Unlike with Emily whom he had been neighbors with, there was absolutely no prior connection. Max could only draw the conclusion that it was coincidence. Max sat back down into the beanbag chair thinking for a moment. Whereas before

there had seemed to be some rhyme and reason to the changes that the use of the device brought on, now inconsistencies seemed to be popping up, the biggest one being that the car that should not exist now was still in the garage back home.

“Let's go play,” Tj said.

“No thanks,” Max said. “I'm going to sit an read for a now.”

“That boring,” Tj said puffing up his cheeks a little.

“You don't have to stay,” Max said shooting the other boy a weary look wanting little to nothing to do with the other kids in the room.

“But I wanna play with you,” Tj said. He grabbed Max's wrist and pulled him onto his feet not willing to take no for an answer. Tj all but dragged Max over to the common area before finally releasing him.

“Lets play with the blocks,” Tj suggested as he went over to a bin of wooden blocks that two other girls were currently hovering over. Max found himself following, knowing that if he didn't Tj was just going to pester him. Honestly Max could see a resemblance between Tj and Calvin. The older brother had been rather forward as well, yet he hadn't been as pushy as his younger brother. As Tj went to grab a block one of the girls pulled the bin away.

“I want the blocks,” Tj said.

“You can't have them,” one of the girls with pigtails in her

hair said. “We're playing with them.”

“Not fair,” Tj said with a pout.

“Play with us,” the other girl suggested.

“What are you playing?” Tj asked his demeanor instantly switching.

“House,” the pig tailed girl said. Tj though for a moment looking to Max who only shrugged, he didn't really care either way, its not like Max was going to play anyways.

“Okay,” Tj said having been given the go ahead.

“Great,” the girl said clapping her hands with a smile. “I'm the Mom and Clara is my daughter,” the girl said pointing to the pig tailed girl.

“I'm in high school,” Clara stated. “One of you guys has to be the dad,”

“I'll do it,” Tj said raising his hand.

“Okay,” the other girl said. “Max you can be Clara's boyfriend,” she said with a coy smile. Max's eye's bulged out, no way in hell was he going to do that, even if it was just pretend.

“No way,” Max protested rather loudly.

“Gross,” Clara said wrinkling her nose. “I don't want a boyfriend.” The other girl let out sigh and crossed her arms as she thought for a moment.

“Fine,” the girl said. “Then Max can be our puppy.”

Max rolled his eyes at the suggestion.

“You're my puppy now, so you need to listen to me,” Clara said putting her hands on her hips. “Sit,” she commanded. Max sat on the ground going along with the game for the moment. However Clara seemed less than satisfied with Max sitting on the ground cross legged.

“Not like that,” Clara criticized. “Like a dog.”

Max pushed some air through his nose before he got onto his feet and sat his butt on the ground in a more doglike manner. He figured she wouldn't stop making demands if he didn't play the right way.

“Good puppy,” Clara said giving Max a couple pats to the head.

“We need a doghouse,” the other girl mentioned.

“I'll build it,” Tj piped up diving into the bin of blocks finally getting to do what he had wanted to do from the start. He set the blocks down on the ground creating a three sided square outline on the ground.

“Okay honey please put your puppy in his house,” the other girl said to Clara when Tj had finished his job.

“Okay Mom,” Clara said imitating a sort of surly attitude of a teen when asked to do chores.

“In your house,” Clara said as she grabbed Max by one of the

straps of his overalls and pulled him over to the house which Max crawled into. He was more than okay with the arrangement. Maybe they would leave him alone now. As the rest of them continued playing Max was laying on his back looking up at the ceiling in his own thoughts. He was doing a sort of mental check on himself. He was pleased that he was still resistant to the idea of playing this game, if anything it meant he was still himself. He had been rather worried as he recounted the events of yesterday. Not wanting to even think about the bed wetting incident, Max instead thought about being put on timeout. Just as he had with Trevor and the toy he had let himself be swayed by his Dad's authority once again. All it had taken was a simple tone and Max had obeyed completely intimidated by the show of his Dad's role as the authority figure, just like any other little kid. But Max's spiral into a more childlike mindset wasn't just limited to when he was in trouble. As much as he had told himself he didn't want the RC car, as soon as Sheila had placed it into his hands at the store Max had thought of nothing but getting home and playing with it, which he had done rather happily at that.

“Puppy, dinnertime,” Clara said busting Max from his thoughts. Max looked to see the girls had placed a small plastic plate on the ground piled high with fake food. Max furrowed his brow a little. He was really starting to get a little more than annoyed that he was letting himself be bossed around by literal preschoolers. Luckily for him the music that had been playing in the room had been shut off as Ms. Lola announced it was time to clean up and head to the tables. Ms.

Lola and her aide Ms. Bell went around the room supervising the kids cleaning up. Max and Tj picked up the blocks themselves before heading off and taking a seat at one of the tables.

“We'll play family again,” Clara said to the two of them before scurrying off to her own table.

“Not if we get the blocks first,” Tj muttered giving Max a self assured smirk. Max managed a small smile, it seemed like his older brother Tj was somewhat of schemer in his own right. Max had found that he had gotten on rather easily with Calvin, if Tj was anything like him then perhaps if Max was going to be forced to socialize with anyone he could certainly do worse than Tj, it might just be tolerable enough.

Once all the kids had taken a seat Ms. Lola stood in front of the table with a large whiteboard easel in back of her and a square table in front. Set out on the table was pot and next to it was some dirt and a watering can.

“Okay class today we are going to learn a little science,” Ms. Lola said. “Now can anyone tell me what this is?” She said holding a small white seed in her hand for all the class to see.

“A booger,” another kid shouted off which caused the class of kids to erupt into a giggle.

“Not quite,” Ms. Lola said with a sort of forced smile. “Lets remember to raise our hands if we know the answer,” Another girl was called upon and gave the correct answer, that it was a seed.

“Very good,” Ms. Lola praised. “Now who knows what we get from seeds.”

Max kind of checked out of the lesson as he just sort of stared off into space as Ms. Lola explained all about seeds and plants. She placed the seed into the pot and asked the kids what they needed for the plant to grow, the kids had gotten dirt and water since those two things were present on the table however they seemed stumped as to what the third thing could be.

“Max how about it, you've been pretty quiet,” Ms. Lola said zeroing in on him. “What else does a plant need besides dirt and water to grow.”

Max blinked to attention. This was just like the time when he had been called on in Mr. Lazoo's class except this time he knew the answer.

“Sunlight,” Max said nonchalantly.

“Very good,” Ms. Lola said beaming. “That is correct. Very good job.”

Max was a little put off by the praise. He watched as Ms. Lola walked over to a chart with all the students names on it. “I think that deserves a gold star,” she said as she placed a star next to his name on the chart. Max looked at the chart somewhat mystified and for a moment wondered what that meant before stopping himself and concluding he didn't care.

Ms. Lola then held up some pieces of paper to show the class. On one piece of paper was a flower, a sun, some water drops

and a pile of dirt that were all colored in with crayon. Ms. Lola explained to the class that they were going to do a little project. They each received a blank piece of paper as well as one with all the pictures on it. She then demonstrated that once the pictures were colored they would cut them out before gluing them onto the blank piece of paper just as she was showing them how. After she finished the kids were free to color there own pictures as bins of crayons were set at each table.

Max looked derisively at the assignment in front of him. He took a crayon and began to color in the stem of the flower. He wasn't really paying much attention as he sort of scribbled in the picture not really caring what it looked like.

“Max, I really like the colors you're using,” Ms. Bell the teacher's aide said looking over his shoulder.

“But lets try to stay inside of the lines, kay?

“Oh um sure,” Max said a little embarrassed at having to be reminded. He started to color a little slower yet found he was actually becoming a little impatient. It felt so much easier just to scribble in the color not caring if it was inside the line. Max stopped himself. He took in a deep breath and began to concentrate. He found that the crayon felt somewhat cumbersome in his hand but he could only chalk that up to his reduced dexterity. Max eventually finished up and took some scissors to begin cutting out all the parts. It seemed his ability with the scissors was even worse than the crayon as he was finding the simple task somewhat difficult, but as long as

he went slowly he was able to get everything cut out somewhat neat. Max then went about getting everything glued into place. As Max finished he sat back looking at what he had done. It was perfectly acceptable for a four year old yet Max could only think of how sloppy it looked. Had it turned out like this out of apathy towards the task or was this really the level of his abilities now? Max couldn't really put his finger on it. He hadn't really noticed any sort of regression in his skills but as he thought about it, more examples started to spring to mind. They had been little things but put all together it was starting to paint a clear picture.

“Oh Max that's lovely,” Ms. Lola said looking at his picture. “Are you done, should I put it in your take home folder?”

“I guess,” Max said scrunching up his face a little as he pushed the paper towards the teacher.

“Your Mommy and Daddy are getting married this weekend aren't they?” Ms. Lola asked.

“Yeah,” Max said pushing out the memory of the outfit he had to wear for the event.

“You know flowers are a great gift for brides, maybe you could give it to your Mommy as a wedding gift?” Ms. Lola suggested.

“Maybe,” Max said laughing a little nervously. He hadn't even though about getting any sort of gift for his Dad or Sheila.

After the rest of the class was finished Ms. Lola gathered

them all on the carpet sitting in a circle.

“Okay, we've learned a lot about plants this morning,” Ms. Lola said. “And to help you all remember we have a little song and dance, so first I'll need a flower.”

The kids all raised their hands except for Max of course. She then proceeded to pick out someone to take the part of water and dirt each part having a certain action to do that went along with the song.

“Now we just need our light,” Ms. Lola announced as she looked out among the children who had their hands waving in the air before she settled her gaze on Max who was sitting with his chin in his hands. “I think I'll pick the only one who knew the answer, come on up Max,” she said. Max sort of gave a bothered look but got up in front of the class. “You are going to be perfect since you are certainly a little ray of sunlight this morning,” she said with a chuckle. The teacher then had the kids up front act as examples for the corresponding actions. The flower stood hands up straight in the air, the dirt clapped their hands together like making a ball out of clay. The rain wiggled their fingers as they moved their hands downward and finally the sun held their arms out at their sides with a big smile on their face. Max did as he was told except for the smiling part that was. Ms. Lola then began the music as the kids put all the moves together corresponding to the lyrics of the song. Max felt completely foolish as he went through the motions, this really was the worst. As the song came to the end the kids shouted “again, again,” which Ms. Lola was only too happy to grant as the

song started up again and. Max stood in line with the rest of the kids dancing along to the song. He was only going along with it as to not bring attention to himself.

After that Ms. Lola quieted down the class and had them seated on the carpet as she took an over sized book out and sat in a chair and read the class a story. As Max sat listening he realized once again that by the time the story came to an end he had only been focusing on the pictures.

The kids were then lead back to the tables as it was time for lunch, which Max found to be a welcome distraction. Max looked at the tray of food that had been set in front of him. It was a simple pb&j sandwich with some carrot sticks and a carton of milk. Max devoured the meal as it seemed his appetite was finally returning to him. He sat back feeling quite sated by the food even though his initial thought had been that it was a rather meager meal. Ms. Lola then announced it was time for a potty break and then nap time. It was only then that Max realized he actually really needed to go. He scurried over to where the line was forming so that he could near the front. The very idea of having an accident here in the daytime no less filling him with a sense of dread. In the bathroom Max had been able to fanalgle the straps of his overalls loose with little problem but it seemed putting them back on was more of a problem. He just couldn't get the buckles to snap onto the buttons. Finally Ms. Bell had come into the bathroom after most of the other kids had left to find Max still struggling. She hadn't even so much as asked if Max needed help before she took it upon herself to do it for him.

“There you go,” she said with a grin.

“Thanks,” Max said as his shoulder's slumped at the idea that he hadn't even been able to something as simple as put on a pair of overalls.

Back in the room Max laid down on one of the mats that had been placed on the floor. He pulled the blanket up over his head. He closed his eyes luxuriating in the moment where he was being left alone for the first time today. He did not think he would fall asleep but did nonetheless finding that being under the cover seemed to give him a moment of peace in which he didn't have to think about all his problems.

Max awoke a while later sitting up. Some kids were up moving around while others were still just waking up. Max let out a yawn before coming to a stop. He could feel it in his bladder, he needed to go again. Max got up from his mat with a start. How could he have to go again, he couldn't have been asleep that long? Max looked around in a panic not sure what to do. He saw Ms. Lola and Ms. Bell across the room waking some other kids up. He supposed he would have to ask to go to the bathroom but as he took a step he realized he didn't have time as the pressure was worse than he had originally thought. Max looked at the door. He decided he was just going to have to make a run for it and if there was going to be a punishment for that he would just have to take it as it was preferable to having a pants wetting accident. Max made a move for the door but to his horror it seemed there was no chance, as every step seemed to make the situation more dire. Max stopped scrunching his legs together in an effort to hold

it, but he was far too gone. Max felt the warmth begin to spread powerless to stop the flow until it was done. Max looked down to see a rather large wet spot on his pants. It had been another boy who had first noticed.

“Ms. Bell,” the boy called out loudly catching the attention of the assistant teacher who came walking over. “Max had a accident,” the boy said rather loudly.

“Shhhh,” Max hissed as he felt as if every eye in the room had been drawn to him.

“Lets not be too loud,” Ms. Bell told the other boy with a pleasant smile. “Go and join the others on the carpet,” she instructed before turning her attention towards Max.

“I...I,” Max stammered not sure what excuse he could muster.

“Its alright,” Ms. Bell said taking Max by the hand. “Just come with me and we'll get you all cleaned up,” she said. Max was lead up to the front area and taken behind the front desk area into an employee only area. Ms. Bell opened the door to a private bathroom and ushered him inside.

“Wait right there and I'll be back with your change of clothes,” Ms. Bell instructed. Max stood in the bathroom waiting for her to return. He was taking in deep breaths in an effort to control himself from breaking down and crying. His head a jumble of juxtaposed thoughts and feeling. He found himself wanting his Dad or Sheila yet at the same time reeling from those desires. He was sixteen this shouldn't be happening to him, whats more wasn't he supposed to be potty

trained even as a four year old, why did this seem to keep happening too him? Ms. Bell returned with a bundle of clothes in her hands.

“I got good news and bad news,” she announced. “It seems we never got another change of clothes for you after last weeks mud puddle fiasco,” Ms. Bell stated. “But no fear as I got some stuff from the lost and found that should fit you just fine.”

Max stood motionless as Ms. Bell unhooked the straps of his overalls pulling them down to his ankles and helping him step out of them.

“It looks like your shirt is fine, but we'll need to do something with these undies she said before she unceremoniously pulled them down. Max squeaked a little not only from the fact that he now felt completely exposed in front of a practical stranger but also from the shock of the cold air. She then proceeded to wipe Max down with a wet wipe, Max wanted to protest and tell her he could do it himself but found he couldn't bring himself to utter a word.

“All right, all clean,” Ms. Bell said with an overabundance of cheeriness no doubt trying to undercut the absolute shame Max was undoubtedly feeling. “Lets get you dressed,” Ms. Bell said picking something out of the pile of clothes she had brought with her. Max's heart skipped a beat upon seeing what she was now holding in her hand.

“No...” Max said taking a step back seeing her holding out a disposable pair of training pants. Ms. Bell gave him a

sympathetic look.

“I know you're a big boy, but I don't have any spare undies for you,” she said as she lifted him up on the counter.

“Bu-uut,” Max whimpered as he watched her begin to thread his dangling legs through the garment.

“Its just for today,” Ms. Bell said as she pulled it up to his knees before lifting him down onto the ground again and pulling it up to just under his bellybutton. “You can still use the potty, just let me or Ms. Lola know if you have to go.”

Next she got a pair of gray sweatpants on Max. He found them to be a little tighter than he was used too, the worst part being that it was easy to tell what he was wearing underneath since their was now an unmistakable bulge. Ms. Bell then took him back to the classroom where Ms. Lola was leading the kids through a simple addition and subtraction activity.

Afterwards the kids were released to play for the rest of the day. Max retreated back to the reading corner where he curled up into one of the beanbag chairs. He was completely deflated. The fact that he was now wearing a pull-up was something he couldn't ignore. The slight crinkle that seemed to accompany every small movement making it all the worse.

“I got blocks we can play,” Tj said appearing with the bin of blocks in his arms.

“I don't wanna play,” Max grumbled.

“You gotta play,” Tj said as he set the blocks on the ground

and pulled on Max's arm to get him off the chair. Max resisted as the boys struggled against one another.

“Leave me alone,” Max finally spat out pulling his arm away. Tj looked at him as if he were about to cry. Ms. Lola noticed the commotion and walked over to the two boys.

“What seems to be the problem here?” she asked.

“Max yelled at me,” Tj said crossing his arms. “I just wanted to play.”

“I see,” Ms. Lola said. “You were just trying to be nice?” Tj nodded.

“Max,” Ms. Lola said. “Tj was being nice, so why did you yell at him?”

“I told him I didn't want to play,” Max said crossing his arms. “But he wouldn't leave me alone.”

Ms. Lola nodded along.

“Tj,” Ms. Lola said in a gentle tone. “I know that you were being a good friend but when someone tells you they don't want to play you need to listen to them, I think Max wants to be alone right now.”

“Oh okay,” Tj said with a sort of disappointed expression as he picked up the bin and walked off to another part of the room.

“Max honey, you seem a little upset, do you need a hug?” Ms. Lola asked.

“No,” Max said as he sat back. Ms. Lola gave him another smile as she placed a hand on his knee.

“Want to tell me whats the matter?” she asked. Max could feel himself wanting to get up and let her hug him. He pushed the feeling down. He wasn't going to let himself be pulled in again. This was the exact kind of thing he had to resist.

“No,” Max said as he curled up into a ball. “I wanna be alone.”

“If that's what you want,” Ms. Lola said with a sigh. “Me and Ms. Bell are right over there okay.”

Max was content just to sit in his ball. He wasn't going to let his mood be brightened up with a hug and then go run off to play like some little kid. He was going to stay just like this until it was time to go home.

Some time passed as Max stayed as he was. He heard some footsteps approach.

“Max look who I found,” Ms. Lola said cheerily. Max uncurled just enough to look up to see Ms. Lola with Brandon standing next to her. Max squeaked a little before curling back up. “Don't you want to say hi?” Ms. Lola asked. Max rotated so his back was to the teacher and Brandon.

“No go away,” Max whined. He couldn't face Brandon right now. He already thought Max was a little kid now, what would he think if he found out that Max had an accident? Did Brandon know about the other ones?

“What's gotten into you?” Ms. Lola said with a chuckle as she knelt down and rubbed Max's back a little as if to coax him to unfurl from his ball. “You always beg me to go to the big kid room to see Brandon when he gets here and I always have to tell you no, and now when I bring him here, you wont even say hi.”

“Why is he here,” Max mewled a little.

“I though he could make you feel better,” Ms. Lola said. “He is your big brother after all.”

Brandon being referred to as his big brother only made Max feel all the more small. “Sorry,” Ms. Lola said talking to Brandon. “He's been like this all afternoon, I guess my plan is not going to work. You can go back to your room.”

“If its okay, could I just stay here?” Brandon asked.

“That's fine,” Ms. Lola said “I'll let the teacher in your room know.”

With that Brandon took a seat on the beanbag chair next to Max. Both of the boys sat in silence for a good while.

“You should just go,” Max said breaking the long silence.

“I don't wanna,” Brandon said. “I'll stay until you feel better.”

“You don't have to,” Max muttered from within his ball.

“It sounds like you're having a bad day,” Brandon replied. “And when I have a bad day you always would sit with me.” Max sat up immediately with some urgency. Just how much

had they told him?

“They didn't tell you did they?” Max asked in a panic.

“Umm some stuff,” Brandon said sounding unsure as he said it. Max watched as Brandon's eyes wandered down to Max's pants. Could Brandon tell what he was wearing underneath his pants?

It was only then that Max realized the back of his shirt had ridden up a little in the back. Max reached back feeling the papery material of the pull-up that was on display for anyone behind him to see, which meant that Brandon had no doubt seen it already, not too mention Max was wearing completely different pants than he had been that morning. Brandon was smart enough to be able to put two and two together even if Ms. Lola had not already explicitly told him. Max felt his face flush red.

“Noooo,” Max groaned as he buried his face into the bean bag chair his humiliation having been on full display in front of Brandon.

“I mean you're not the only one in this room,” Brandon said in an attempt to downplay Max's apparent embarrassment. However Brandon's appeasements were paper thin for Max. Any suspicions Max had about how Brandon viewed him now were cold hard facts.

“Max I don't care, really.” Brandon said. Max lifted himself up sinking back into the bean bag chair as he brought his knees to his chest and putting his head down.

“What am I gonna do,” Max muttered more to himself than anything.

“Don't say that,” Brandon said. “You're Max, you're my big brother you always know what to do.”

Max shot a glare in Brandon's direction. He hoped that Brandon wasn't trying to be condescending.

“Some big brother I am,” Max grumbled.

“Well I still think you are,” Brandon said looking a little downtrodden. Max looked at him for a moment feeling somewhat guilty. Maybe he had been projecting his own insecurities on Brandon a little too much.

“Look at me B,” Max said. “I don't think I can really be a big brother anymore.”

“So what, you're small,” Brandon said. “That doesn't mean anything.” Max cocked his head a little giving Brandon a mystified look.

“You can just be my little big brother and I'll be the big little brother,” Brandon said giving Max the sort of self assured smile he would give Max whenever he thought he had the right answer to a homework question but was still waiting for Max to confirm whether it was right or not.

“I guess,” Max said with a small smirk.

“So then there's no problem,” Brandon said as he rolled over onto Max's bean bag chair before putting an arm around him. Max let himself slump up against Brandon. He felt reassured

with Brandon's arm around him. If anything he certainly felt like a little brother who was being comforted by his older sibling at the moment. Max should have wanted to pull away to resist these feelings but given how his day had been going he needed it at the moment.

A little while later Tj came back over not satisfied at not being able to play with Max.

“I got the blocks and some cars,” Tj said hoping that the added toys would be enough to convince Max to play with him. Max however was not anymore enthused by the idea.

“Hmmm, I don't think Max really wants to play right now,” Brandon said. “But I can.” he said taking a seat on the carpet as he took some blocks out and began stacking them. As Max watched from his chair he could see that Brandon was pretty patient with Tj, letting the younger boy take the lead in what happened. It was much the same way Max had often played around with Brandon letting the younger boy come up with all the scenarios and going along with whatever idea he had. As Max continued to watch he started to feel a little desire to play with the other boys. Even if Max had felt silly sometimes he found that playing with Brandon was something he didn't find bothersome. It was fun spending time with him.

Max joined in the circle as Tj was breathlessly explaining some idea to Brandon. Max picked up one of the cars and placed them inside one of the block buildings.

“Why did you put that there?” Tj asked noticing what Max

had done.

“Oh ummm...well I thought it could be like a secret base for the cars,” Max said feeling a little nervous that Tj was going to be mad at him. Tj's face lit up like an idea had just came to him.

“Then we need a base for the evil cars too,” Tj said taking some blocks out and building another base.

“Good idea Max,” Brandon said placing some more of the “good cars” into the base. Max smiled a little pleased that his idea had elicited some positive reaction. The boys played all afternoon having the good and evil cars fight one another, that was until they found some rubber bouncy balls mixed in with the blocks and decided that they were aliens and the cars were going to need to join forces to stop the extraterrestrial threat.

Max was rebuilding the base after it suffered some damage from a ball attack when his attention was torn away upon hearing his and Brandon's name be called out. Max looked over to see Ms. Lola standing over by the door Max then noticed that Sheila was there. He jumped up and scurried over to her.

“Mommy,” he said wrapping his arms around her. Max was really happy to see her for some reason, a sort of relief spreading through him.

“Hey darling have a good day?” Sheila said as she lifted Max up. Max panicked for a moment having completely forgotten

he was wearing a pull-up. He watched in real time as Sheila noticed something was off. He felt her give two pats to his behind. She didn't make any sort of reaction but Max could see it in her eyes that she had figured it out. Max should have wanted to be put down immediately feeling the fresh wave of embarrassment wash over him instead he merely put his face into her shoulder to hide his reddening cheeks.

“We had some rough patches today,” Ms. Lola said. “But Brandon helped make Max feel better,” the teacher reported.

“So that's why you're here,” Sheila said giving Brandon a pat on the head.

“On another note,” Ms. Lola said. “We discovered that we never got another change of clothes for Max.”

Max buried his face a little deeper. The conversation was really making him feel incredibly infantile. Ms. Lola went on to explain the entire sordid affair to Sheila. After a few more moments of talking the women said their goodbyes. Max was feeling incredibly relieved to be finally leaving the daycare for the day. As soon as they got home Max made for the stairs.

“Where are you racing off too?” Sheila asked seeing Max make a beeline for the stairs.

“I want to change,” Max said with a huff at having to explain himself. Sheila looked at him for a moment. Max started to worry that she was going to tell him just to keep on what he was wearing.

“Give me one minute and then I'll come help you,” Sheila said.

“I-I can do it myself,” Max stammered a slight tinge of indignation.

“Ok,” Sheila said with a nod. “But bring those pants down with you so I can wash and return them.”

Max took off for his room closing the door behind him. He took off his pants and the pull-up as fast as he could. He went to the drawer and grabbed some other clothes not paying attention to what it looked like, any underwear was preferable to what he had been wearing. He went to put on the underwear but found it was hard for him to stand on one leg. He finally sat down on the ground and put on the underwear and the pants. It was childish for him to have to sit on the ground to get dressed but Max didn't dwell on it too much as he was alone in his room with no witnesses. Max grabbed the sweatpants he was meant to bring back downstairs and then looked at the pull-up still on the ground. He didn't know what to do with it. He opted just to pick it up and stuff it into the laundry hamper in his room. It wasn't a proper place for it, but it would be eventually discovered and its not like anyone would get mad at him for putting it in there. Max though he might as well use his age to get away with something for once.

Max walked downstairs to the kitchen putting the pants on the counter. Sheila was on the phone as she seemed to be getting things out to make dinner.

“I don't think its something to worry about at this point...do you have any left?” Sheila said in mid-conversation. Max began to become slightly worried, he couldn't help but feel this conversation was about him. “We are out of milk so pick some up,” Sheila then said. Max let a out a sigh of relief it seemed she was just talking about groceries. Max went into the living room to see Brandon watching some tv. He climbed up onto the couch and decided just to watch some tv alongside his brother.

Before long Dad arrived home and dinner was served shortly after. Max practically inhaled his food even asking for seconds.

“I've never seen you eat so much,” Dad had laughed. After dinner Sheila sent Brandon and Trevor upstairs to do homework. Max smiled a little seeing the annoyed look on Trevor's face. Now that he was twelve even he had to listen to his Mom. Max found he didn't really know what to do with himself now. Sheila had offered to turn on a show for him but Max had refused. She wouldn't let him watch what he wanted anyways. A small part did want to take her up on the offer. He had after all enjoyed the cartoons he had watched with Brandon. But Max was not about to willingly indulge the childish impulses that were beginning to form in him. Max wandered upstairs. He walked down the hallway coming to a stop at Trevor's room where he found Trevor sat on his bed with a math book open.

“What?” Trevor asked noticing Max standing in the doorway.

“Enjoying your homework,” Max said with a snide look on his face. Trevor got off the bed and walked over to the door. Max felt a small twinge of fear thinking Trevor was going to hit him or something.

“Enjoying wetting the bed?” Trevor asked with a smirk before shutting the door in the flabbergasted Max's face. Max scowled, how had he even found out about that? Max slunk off deflated having once again been one upped by Trevor. Max then saw Brandon's door was also open. Max walked over finding Brandon at a desk, a perplexed look on his face as he stared down at a piece of paper.

“Need help?” Max asked hopeful that Brandon would agree.

“Yeah,” Brandon said looking relieved.

Max approached the desk happy to have something that would help him feel like his normal self.

“I'm not sure about this one,” Brandon said pointing at one of the questions. As Max looked at it he was able to deduce that Brandon just had to circle the word that didn't belong. Max took the paper into his hands. He could read it all just fine, but for some reason he could quite grasp what the answer was, it all seemed so fuzzy to him.

There you are,” Dad said as Max turned around to see his Dad walk into the room. “You shouldn't be bothering Brandon when he is trying to do his homework,” Dad said as he scooped Max up into his arms.

“I'm helping,” Max said with some offense. Dad took the

paper out of Max's hands and looked at it.

“You having some trouble with number six?” Dad asked looking at Brandon.

“A little,” Brandon answered.

“Alright Max, whats the answer,” Dad asked playfully. Max looked back at the paper still not really sure.

“This one,” Max said pointing to one of the words hoping his guess was correct.

“Bzzzt, sorry but thanks for playing,” Dad said setting the paper down on Brandon's desk. His Dad then proceeded to explain the answer to Brandon.

“You get it now?” Dad asked.

“Yeah, thanks,” Brandon said cheerfully as he went back to work.

“ As for you its getting close to bedtime,” Dad said looking at Max as he walked out of the room.

“It is not,” Max protested. He knew he had a bedtime of eight but it wasn't that late.

“But it is a bath night,” Dad countered. “Which means its the tub for you mister.”

As Max sat in the bathtub letting his Dad lather shampoo in his hair Max was feeling incredibly awkward, even more so than when Sheila had given him a bath. Maybe it was because Max actually had memories of his Dad giving him a bath.

The familiarity of the situation was not comforting in the slightest. It only seemed to make Max feel his regression all the stronger. Just as Sheila had done Dad tried to get Max to play with some toys. Max found he had zero desire to do so, which was a positive in his book after his day at preschool when he had found himself getting pulled into playing with toys all afternoon. The bath came to an end and Max's Dad had him wrapped in a towel and brought him to his room tossing him onto the bed.

“Pj time,” Dad said grabbing some pajamas that had been sitting on top of the dresser already. “How about monster trucks?” Dad asked as his Dad unfolded the pajamas. The pants were black and had pictures of monster trucks dotted all over them. The sleeves of the shirt were identical to the pants, the body of the shirt was white and had the image of a large Monster truck kicking up some mud on it.

“Whatever,” Max said still not happy with his new wardrobe.

“But before that we need to have a little chat,” Dad said taking a seat next to Max.

Max sat up, he certainly didn't like the sound of this. “Heard you had another accident today?” Dad said. The word “another” stung Max a little. It was bad enough that he had even had one. “I have something I want you to wear tonight and I don't want any fussing,” Dad said.

Max's heart sank, he already knew what was coming even before his Dad had revealed the pull-up to Max.

“Nooo,” Max mewled. “I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I won't have anymore accidents, I promise.” Max whimpered as he leapt off the bed backing away from his Dad. His Dad let out a little sigh before giving Max a sympathetic look.

“No one is mad at you,” Dad said. “There is no reason to be sorry.” Dad said putting the pull-up down and walking over to Max and kneeling down to his level.

“But I don't need it,” Max said with a shuddering breath. “I can use the potty.”

“I know you can, I'm the one that potty trained you,” Dad said with a chuckle. Max's face went a little red. “Listen buddy, when you're a kid your body goes through lots of changes really fast, its just part of growing up. Now sometimes those changes cause our bodies to do funny stuff. That's all this is. You might find that in a couple of days you won't need them anymore.”

Max took in a deep breath stopping himself from breaking down in tears.

“But right now you need it,” Dad said. “I can't have you waking up in a wet bed every morning and I don't want you stressing yourself out worrying about that either, so do you think you can be a big boy for me?”

The irony of his Dad's statement was not lost on Max however he did find some hope in his Dad's words. Max realized his body had gone through massive changes in a short amount of time. Maybe that was the explanation why?

Not just the fact that his bladder was smaller now which would explain his bathroom troubles, but everything else too. The reason why he wasn't able to get the snaps on his overalls on an off, why he had trouble cutting out a picture, and the myriad of other things that Max found difficult now, it was the reason behind everything. Max simply wasn't used to his smaller body yet.

Dad grabbed the pull-up from the bed and held it out for Max to step in. With his head hung low Max balanced himself by putting his hands on his Dad's shoulders and stepped into the crinkly undergarment.

“I got it,” Max said as he stopped his Dad from pulling it up. Max pulled it up himself, at least he could do that.

“Good job,” Dad said giving a final tug at the waistband of the pull-up before proceeding to pull Max into a hug. “Its going to be alright, I promise,” his Dad said giving Max a few pats on his padded behind. Max felt somewhat reassured with his Dad's words and the hug but he didn't really appreciate the butt pats. Feeling the soft material against his skin almost felt like a confirmation that this was the proper order of things. Max's Dad then helped him into the pajamas before lifting him and tossing him onto the bed again.

“And there goes Super Max flying through the air,” Dad said with a laugh. Yet this elicited no joy from Max who could be best described as sullen at the moment.

“C'mon Max don't be looking all pitiful at me like that,” Dad said. Max rolled his head a little letting his head rest looking

downward. “You know maybe it would cheer you up if I told you that I have a surprise coming up for you this week,” Dad said with an intriguing tone.

Max looked up, a little curious as to what his Dad could mean. “It will be happening Friday night?” Dad said seeing that he had reeled Max in.

“What is it?” Max asked.

“Can't tell that would ruin the surprise, but you'll love it.” Dad said. Max was going to try and get the answer from his Dad when they were interrupted.

“Craig can you come here a second I need your help,” Sheila called from downstairs.

“Be right there,” Dad called back. “Sit tight bud I'll be back in a minute, why don't you pick out a book for your bedtime story,” Dad said before walking out of the room. Max sat on his bed not really interested in the task his Dad had given for him. He was too caught up in thinking about what it could be that his Dad had up his sleeve. Max only knew one thing for certain, whatever it was there was no way he was going to like it.

Chapter 8

Satisfaction Guaranteed Part 8 - Chapter 8

It was Friday night as Max was up in his room. There seemed to be some commotion going around the house at the moment. Max was content to stay out of it. Just then his Dad came walking into the room with a backpack in his hands.

“Hey sport,” Dad said going to the dresser and pulling out some pajamas and stuffing them into the backpack.

“What are you doing?” Max asked seeing that he was somehow involved in whatever was happening.

“Packing your bag,” Dad said before he grabbed a pull-up out of the blue plastic package that was prominently displayed on top of the dresser and placing it into the bag. Max grimaced at the sight. He hated the fact that they were even still in the house. Max had actually made great strides. Although it had felt like a long road even if it had just been a couple of days. Much to Max's displeasure his parents had made him wear them during the day on Tuesday and Wednesday. There had been a couple of close calls but Max had quickly adapted and by Thursday it had been decided he didn't need them during the day anymore. Night time had been a different story as no matter what he did he was still waking up wet. The worst thing however is that his Dad had already told him he would be wearing one to the wedding since it was going to be a long day, something which Max was actually dreading.

“C'mon you're leaving soon,” Dad said walking out of the room. Max was caught off guard by the announcement. No one had ever told him anything about going anywhere. Max caught up to his Dad in the kitchen. Sheila was there combing Brandon's hair as the boy fussed about it. Max finally took notice that everyone was dressed rather nicely. Dad was in a button down shirt while Sheila was wearing a rather nice dress. Brandon had on a collared shirt that was tucked into some khaki pants.

“Where am I going?” Max finally asked. His Dad turned around looking at him somewhat amused.

“Did no one tell you?” Dad asked.

“No,” Max said crossing his arms. Dad let out a little chuckle.

“Remember when I said I had a surprise for you?” Dad asked.

“Yeah,” Max asked with some hesitation.

“Tonight you get to go to the Henderson's place,” Dad said. Max made no reaction. Just who in the world were the Hendersons?

“Whose that?” Max asked.

“You know,” Dad said shaking his head a little. “Tj's house...surprise,” Dad said waving his hands a little. Max pursed his lips a little. That was the surprise? Max couldn't help but feel a little let down. He saw Tj everyday and even though Max had found him to be good company its not like he was exactly excited to spend time with him.

“Where is everyone else going?” Max asked since it was perfectly obvious that they were all going somewhere without him.

“Tonight is the rehearsal dinner,” Dad replied. Max figured it was something like that, yet it still seemed strange that he wasn't going.

“I'd rather go to the Henderson's,” Brandon grumbled pulling at the collar of his shirt.

“No complaining,” Sheila said fussing with Brandon's collar a little. “We have a lot of relatives that have come in from out of town and they want to see you.”

“Plus we are rehearsing for tomorrow, so you have to come since you're in the wedding,” Dad said patting Brandon on the back.

“I am too,” Max said. He still wasn't thrilled about being the ring bearer but it was a part nonetheless.

“Don't worry, Brandon will know what to do tomorrow and he'll help you out,” Dad said.

“I should still get to come,” Max said furrowing his brow.

“Max believe me you aren't missing out,” Dad said giving Max a reassuring look. “Its going to be a lot of boring adults standing around and talking, you'll have a lot more fun playing with Tj.”

Max exhaled some air through his nose. Fat freaking chance was all he could think. Dad and Sheila then began going

through a checklist of things they needed to remember to bring as Max walked out of the kitchen. Going past the living room, Max spotted Trevor near a bookshelf in the living room. He was dressed up as well. Max stopped for a moment seeing that Trevor had a picture frame in his hand. He watched as Trevor looked at it with some sort of intrigue before setting it down. Max hid behind the wall so he wouldn't be seen. After he heard Trevor leave Max entered the room going over to the bookshelf to see what Trevor had been looking at.

Max looked at the picture it was of all them standing in front of tree. Max actually remembered when it had been taken. It was the first time Sheila and Dad had brought the kids together for a group activity. They had gone to a local park for a picnic. Trevor and Max had know each other already of course but it had been the first time Max had met Brandon.

Brandon of course looked the same in the picture has he had that day smiling with one front tooth missing, Trevor and Max were different however. Trevor looked closer to an eight or nine years old rather than the fourteen year old he had been at the time, Max was even more unrecognizable. There he was being held in his Dad's arms his chubby little arms held above his head and gleeful smile on his face. He looked like a baby not even two years old.

A chill went down Max's spine as he looked at the picture. It served as just another reminder of the power of the device. Another though then entered Max's head. What if Trevor made good on his threat? If Max was reduced even more in

age that could bring upon even bigger changes. As it stood right now it seemed that the changes were still keeping in line with how things had been. But what if Max was reduced to a newborn? He wasn't quite sure how long after he was born his real Mom left but it certainly wouldn't leave much room for his Dad and Sheila to date, much less get engaged. As Max tried to wrap his head around the logistics of the timeline another sort of revelation came to him. It seemed clear that some things were mixed up. The car for instance should not be in the garage if things were happening as they should. Max could only assume that the device was broken in some way, which was all the more reason that he could not let Trevor use it again. Who knows how much could change if that were to happen? What if something happened that would make it impossible for Max's real Mom and Dad to meet, was something like that possible? Could Max cease to be?

The doorbell then rang which caused Max to jump a little. He heard the door open before his Dad called out for him. Max made for the front door wondering who it could be, wasn't he supposed to go to Tj's house, it seemed kind of silly for him to be picked up by one of the Henderson's if his family could just drop him off on the way. As Max rounded the corner he was met with a shock as he saw Emily standing with his Dad.

“Look whose here,” Dad said.

“Emily,” Max stammered.

“Hey squirt,” Emily smiled. “Ready to go?”

“Go?” Max repeated back.

“Geez Max did you forget already,” Dad said. “You are going to Tj's house, Emily is babysitting there tonight.”

Max felt his stomach drop so fast that if he looked down he would be sure to see it there on the ground. It had been bad enough when he had been ten to hear that she had babysat him in the past. To actually have to experience being under the supervision of his crush was going to be too much to handle.

“Emily we can't thank you enough,” Sheila said entering into the front hallway handing her the backpack Dad had packed for Max. “We didn't really know what we were going to do when you told us you were already babysitting for the Henderson's tonight.”

“Its a good thing Tj and Max are friends,” Emily said. “Mrs. Henderson thought it was a great idea for me to bring Max along.”

“Still four kids is a lot,” Sheila said with some concern. “Are you sure you'll be able to handle it?”

“It shouldn't be a problem,” Emily said waving her hand. “Calvin is old enough to take care himself pretty much and Abby loves helping me out. I think I just have to worry about Max and Tj.”

“Here's what we owe you for that little creature over there,” Dad said handing Emily some money. Emily looked at it with some surprise.

“Its more than usual but just consider it hazard pay,” Dad

chuckled. Emily smiled and thanked Dad.

“Alright bud time to go,” Dad said as he went over to Max and lead him over to the front door and began to get Max's shoes on. “I want you on your best behavior tonight, understand?” Dad asked.

Max nodded his head, He was feeling a little too shell shocked to speak at the moment.

“Oh he'll be fine,” Emily said. “Max never gives me any trouble, he's my favorite little guy after all.” Emily said smiling at Max whose face reddened.

Minutes later Max found himself walking down the sidewalk next to Emily, he hadn't been able to utter a single word to her and found himself in a sort of waking daze.

“Woah,” Emily said grabbing Max by the back of his shirt stopping him. Max looked up to see they were at a crosswalk as a car zoomed past. “You were almost a Max pancake,” Emily chuckled. “Remember we have to hold hands when we cross the street,” Emily said as she grabbed Max's hand. Max felt his heart start to beat fast. Even when they had made it to the other side Emily still held hold of his hand. As Max looked up at her he still found he was smitten by her. Which in some ways should have been a good thing, his sixteen year old emotions were still intact, yet knowing what was in store for the night was not helping.

“Whats up with you?” Emily asked as she noticed him staring. “You are usually so chatty.”

“I'm fine,” Max managed to whisper. As they continued on they walked past a yard that had Halloween decorations set out.

“Halloween is soon, do you have a costume picked out yet?” Emily asked squeezing Max's hand.

“No,” Max said, not at all enthused by the idea of being made to go trick or treating.

“Oh well lets see if we can come up with something,” Emily said with some enthusiasm. “Let's think,” Emily said pausing for a moment. “Do you have a favorite animal maybe? Like a lion or maybe a dinosaur?”

“I don't want to be an animal.” Max said wrinkling his nose. Being dressed up in a cutesy costume like that and then having to walk around in public made him feel humiliated just imagining it.

“Hmmm, well you like superheroes, right? Maybe you could be Spiderman?” Emily said gesturing towards Max's shirt which had a kiddie version of the web slinger displayed on it.

“Yeah I guess,” Max said agreeing just so Emily would stop with the suggestions, not too mention something with a mask would be preferable.

“Whatever you choose just make sure you come by my house,” Emily said. “I'll make sure to give you extra candy.”

Max forced a little smile as he looked up at her. The thought of her doting on him did make his heart flutter a little. Before

long the two of them finally came upon a house as Emily walked with Max up to the front door and rang the doorbell.

The door opened and Max saw it was Calvin who answered.

“Come in,” Calvin said with a disinterested demeanor. Max found it strange to see Calvin looking as he always had, it felt like Max hadn't seen him in years almost like he was an old face from a lifetime ago. As they stepped into the house Max heard another voice call out Emily's name excitedly. A girl with black hair in braids and wearing a pair of glasses came running and embraced Emily in a hug.

“Hey Abby you ready to help me out tonight?” Emily asked.

“Yep,” Abby replied back. The girl looked to be about the same age as Brandon, Max wondered if they knew one another. Ann came walking behind her daughter looking rather elegant.

“I certainly hope you can help Emily out tonight, she is going to have her hands full,” Ann said.

“Me and Abby can handle it,” Emily said. “I just need to thank you again for letting me bring Max.”

“Max is always welcome here,” Ann said smiling down at the boy. “He and Tj are such good friends so how could I say no, plus I do owe Sheila one for taking Tj off of my hands a couple of weeks back.”

A man came around the corner Max could see the resemblance between him and Calvin. The man who Max

presumed to be Mr. Henderson had Tj in his arms.

“Max,” Tj shouted excitedly as he began to squirm which made Mr. Henderson put him on the ground. “Lets go play,” Tj said grabbing Max's arm and yanking him along to the living room area before leading Max over to a corner that had a plastic castle with knights and dragon figurines set atop it. Max didn't understand what Tj was so excited about. They had just seen one another only a few hours ago

“You can be the knights I'll be the dragons,” Tj said sitting by the castle taking a green roaring dragon into his hand. Max sat down picking up one of the knights into his hands. He had learned that it was easier to go along with Tj's whims than it was to refuse. If there was one word to describe his new friend it was tenacious, and he did not take no for an answer when it came to playing together. The boys began to play as Max gave a half-hearted effort to play in Tj's game, still Tj didn't seem to mind and was pleased to have his playmate around. After some time Emily came into the room.

“Alright boys dinner is ready so lets get those hands washed.”

“But we're playing,” Tj whined a little as he made a dragon crash into the side of the castle. Max got up and began walking towards the bathroom, hoping that Tj would follow suit. He wanted to feel as if he could help Emily rather than being someone she had to look after. The plan seemed to work as Tj followed along after a moment seeing that Max was already gone.

Dinner was some meatloaf with some pea's and carrots that

Ann had prepared before leaving.

“I hate peas,” Tj said flicking the offending food away with his fork.

“You need to eat your veggies so you can grow big and strong,” Emily said. Tj seemed unswayed by the reasoning. Max then made a point to take a huge bite of the veggies on his plate.

“Look at Max he is eating all his veggies,” Emily said. Tj looked at Max with a ponderous expression as Max made another show of taking another mouthful. “I guess Max is going to get bigger first,” Emily said in a “if that's what you want” kind of way.

“Nuh uh,” Tj said with a hurried look as he began to dig into his own food which caused him to choke and cough a little.

“Slow bites buddy,” Emily chided. “Eating it fast doesn't do you any good.”

Max smiled a little, Tj had taken the bait. It had felt like he and Emily had been working together to achieve a goal.

“I'm gonna be big,” Tj said proudly. “And den I'll be the penny back like Calvin.”

Calvin gave a derisive snort.

“Its quarterback,” Calvin corrected.

“Is that your position?” Emily asked. Calvin nodded. At the talk about football Max found himself curious about

something.

“Did you win the game?” Max asked. Calvin raised an eyebrow. “I mean last week at flag football?” Max clarified.

“Oh that,” Calvin said as a bothered look appeared on his face. “We lost.”

“Can't win every time,” Emily chimed in. “You'll get em next time.”

“We would've have won,” Calvin added. “But I had to throw to this kid Jonas on our last drive and he can't catch.”

Max was surprised to hear this. Maybe he was a little more athletic than he had ever given himself credit for.

“I wish I was on a different team,” Calvin grumbled. He looked at Max for a moment. “It would be cool if I could be on a team with Trevor he's really good.”

“Oh you know Trevor?” Emily asked.

“Not really but he friends with one of my friend's big brother,” Calvin explained. “I actually got to play a game with them when I was over at my friends house last Sunday. They let me play quarterback and Trevor said I was really good.” Calvin said with some pride. Max was shocked to hear that Trevor had actually been nice to someone, then again Trevor did have plenty of friends so he had to be nice to some people.

“You're lucky Max,” Calvin said. “Trevor is going to be your brother he'll probably be able to teach you all about football.”

Max was annoyed at the insinuation. Like he would ever ask Trevor to teach him something.

“Trevor is an ass,” Max said his anger towards Trevor once again spilling out.

“Max,” Emily exclaimed although Max could hear she was trying to stifle some laughter. “We don't say naughty words like that,” she said after taking a moment to gather her composure. “Don't make me put you on timeout.”

“S-sorry” Max stammered as he covered his face a little. He felt his cheeks going a red just thinking about Emily putting him on timeout.

Dinner came to an end. Calvin went up to his room to play video games. Tj had pretty much dragged Max back to the play area in the living room to continue their game. After washing up Emily appeared with Abby in tow.

“Hey you two maybe we should do something all together?” Emily suggested. Max was happy to hear this if it meant he didn't have to keep playing with the toys to appease Tj. He went and stood next to Emily.

“Like what?” Tj asked.

“Lets play restaurant,” Abby suggested.

“I wanna be the chef,” Tj yelped as he stood up and raced over to the plastic kitchen that was set up.

“I'll be the waitress,” Abby said as she grabbed the small plastic table and moved it so it was in the center of the living

room.

“What about me and Max?” Emily asked.

“You can be the customers,” Abby said. “You could be on a date.”

Max felt his face go flush at the suggestion.

“Me and Max on a date,” Emily gasped as she pulled Max close to her side in a side hug. “I love it.”

“I'll show you to your table,” Abby said as she lead Emily and Max to the table which had two red plastic chairs sat across from one another.

“Max,” Abby said giving the boy a nudge with her elbow. “Be a gentleman and pull out the chair for the lady.”

“S-sure,” Max said as he pulled out the chair.

“Thank you darling,” Emily said as she took a seat. Max then took his own seat.

“Our specials tonight are steak or a burger,” Abby said as she began writing on a little notepad.

“Steak sounds great,” Emily said.

“And for the gentleman?” Abby asked.

“I'll have steak too,” Max said since it was the more mature choice.

“Sorry we are out of steak,” Abby said.

“The burger then,” Max muttered.

“Great I'll get your order in.” Abby said. She walked over to the kitchen and ripped off a piece of paper and gave to Tj who started banging together plastic pans and knives. Abby then disappeared out of the room. Max sat in his chair as his knees shook, he looked at Emily across from him. She was watching Tj at the kitchen with an amused look on her face. Max had imagined this scenario so many times in his head. Being on a date with Emily had been a dream of his, he could have never imagined that it would be like this though. Max shook his head. He was being foolish. This wasn't a real date.

“This is such a fancy restaurant darling,” Emily said with an overly affectionate tone as if they were sitting at the four seasons.

“I guess,” Max said. He didn't really know what to do. He was trying hard to stay calm as his heart felt like it was going to beat out of his chest. As much as he kept telling himself it wasn't real he just couldn't seem to settle his nerves.

“Are you okay?” Emily asked. “Are you nervous? Do you need to go potty?”

“No,” Max yelped as he hid his face in his hands.

“You know when you take a lady on a date you gotta be confident,” Emily said with a chuckle. “You gotta impress your date. This is a really fancy restaurant so you must have a cool job that pays a lot.”

“Maybe,” Max said as he sat up straight.

“So let me guess,” Emily said. “I bet you're astronaut right?”

“Sure,” Max said feeling a little silly at going along with the game.

“Wow,” Emily said as if she were actually impressed. “Have you been to the moon?”

“I've gone too Mars,” Max exclaimed. He knew it was stupid to act like this, but it seemed to make Emily happy.

“That's so far,” Emily said with a laugh before she gave Max a warm smile. Max's heart was sent aflutter at seeing her smile like that at him. If all he had to do to get that sort of reaction out of her was to act like a cute little kid he was all for it.

“The steak and the burger,” Abby said returning to the table with some plastic food on tiny plates.

“Enjoy your meal,” she said. Emily pretended to eat the steak. Max poked at the burger with the fork a little.

“How was everything?” Abby asked returning to the table before even a minute had passed.

“My compliments to the chef,” Abby said.

“That meal will be one million dollars,” Abby said placing a slip of paper on the table with some scribbles on it.

“Oh good thing my boyfriend is an astronaut,” Emily said. Max gave a nervous laugh hearing Emily refer to him as her boyfriend.

“Here Max,” Abby said placing a plastic ring on the table. “You can propose to Emily now.”

“Pro-pose,” Max stammered being caught completely off guard.

“Yeah ask her to marry you,” Abby said excitedly. “It will be so romantic.”

“Marry,” Max exclaimed as his eyes bugged out. He knew it was just a game but the prospect of actually asking her made butterflies fill his stomach.

“I don't think so,” Emily said obviously picking up on Max's discomfort.

“But we were going to have a wedding,” Abby said glumly as her plans were squashed.

“We haven't even finished our first date yet,” Emily shrugged. “You know its normal after dinner to go to a movie what do you guys say, we'll have some popcorn.”

“I wanna watch,” Tj said running over to the table.

“It can be like a movie theater,” Abby said. “I'll make the popcorn.”

“Why don't you let me help with that part,” Emily smirked. The group made their way to the kitchen as Emily began to make some popcorn in the microwave. She then took down some bowls and filled them up.

“Okay you all go sit down and I'll bring the popcorn out,”

Abby said.

“Sounds good,” Emily said. “But lets see if Calvin wants to join in. Emily went and called for Calvin who upon hearing what was going on decided to join in. As the group made their way to the living room Abby stopped them in the entrance way.

“You need tickets,” Abby said as she tore out slips off paper from her notepad.

“Abby c'mon,” Calvin said annoyed.

“We are playing movie theater,” Emily said. “So she is right you need a ticket.” Calvin rolled his eyes a little as he accepted the slip of paper from his sister. After they had been seated Emily turned on the tv and started looking for a movie as Abby made several trips to and from the kitchen to give everyone their own bowl of popcorn. Once Abby was finally done and seated Emily started a movie.

Max saw that she had put on some kids movie, he wasn't going to complain though. Grateful that the movie didn't seem like it was meant for little kids more or less something Max would watch with Brandon some times, although he had never seen this one.

Calvin and Abby were both sat in their own recliners while Max and Tj were sat on each side of Emily who was in the middle of the couch.

“Tj you have to move,” Abby said.

“Why?” Tj said looking at his sister confused.

“Because Emily and Max are on a date you can't sit by them.”

“I want to sit next to Emily too,” Tj protested.

“Tj,” Abby chided upset that he was ruining her little game of pretend.

“It's okay,” Abby said as she put an arm around Tj. “Me and Max don't mind right?' she said looking down at Max who only shook his head. As the movie played Max couldn't help but notice that after he had finished his popcorn Tj had snuggled up to Emily. Surprisingly Max found himself feeling a little jealous as if Tj was intruding. Max stopped himself, that was stupid. Tj was just a little kid after all he was supposed to do stuff like that. As Max looked up at Emily he found himself wanting to do the same. But he knew he wasn't supposed to give into those types of feelings, they were the thing he was fighting against. Yet maybe it would be okay, just this once? After all who was he to deny himself such a thing, maybe it was time to start taking just a little advantage to the way people saw him.

With some hesitancy Max cuddled a little closer to Emily who without so much as a word just put an arm around him as if giving him permission. Max felt so warm and comfortable snuggled up close to his crush that he didn't even notice his eyes start to droop a little after a bit.

As the movie came to an end Emily looked down and admired the two little boys sleeping. Tj's head was on her leg

and Max's head was laying on her chest both of them curled up against her. She felt it a shame to have to wake them up.

Max felt a gentle shaking awake him as his eyes slowly opened. He shot up realizing he had fallen asleep on Emily. Max upon getting over the fact where he had fallen asleep looked down at his pants breathing a sigh of relief to see that he had thankfully not had another accident. He watched as Emily woke up Tj.

“I think its time for two little monkeys to get their jammies on and get into a proper bed, hmmm?” Emily said standing up from the couch.

“I'm not tired,” Tj said as he rubbed his eyes.

“You were just asleep,” Calvin snorted.

“Was not,” Tj spat back. “I was just restin my eyes is all.”

“Be that as it may its ten o'clock, its late” Emily said. Max grimaced a little hearing that it was now considered late for him to be up at this hour.

“I can't go to bed yet,” Max said. “Can't I just wait until we leave?”

“We are still going to be here for a couple of hours, and you need all the sleep you can get for tomorrow” Emily said. “Now no more discussion lets go,”

Emily lead the two boys upstairs. She had each of them use the bathroom and then helped them brush their teeth before going into Tj's room. Max looked around it seemed to be a

pretty normal room for a little kid but one question was on his mind.

“Where am I going to sleep?” Max asked.

“You and Tj can share the bed,” Emily said. “It will be like a mini sleepover.”

“I've never had a sleepover before,” Tj said excited by the prospect.

“Lets see what looks like a good book for a bedtime story,” Emily said looking over at a bookshelf in the room.

“I wanna pick it,” Tj demanded.

“Tj, Max is your guest don't you think it would be polite to let him pick?” Emily asked. Tj looked unwilling to concede. “How about we have a little competition then?” Emily suggested. “Whichever one of you gets down to their undies first gets to pick out a book.”

“I'm going to win,” Tj said running over and standing next to Max who was feeling a little awkward about getting undressed, especially in front of Emily.

“Okay...3...2...1...go,” Emily exclaimed. As soon as she said it Tj was already squirming out of his shirt. Max's awkwardness seemed to disappear as he was overtaken by a desire to best Tj. He didn't want Emily thinking he was some little kid incapable of getting undressed by himself. Tj ran into some trouble as he struggled to get his jeans undone. Max was only wearing sweatpants so he had them off in no time flat.

“Don't forget the socks,” Emily said. Max plopped down on the ground and removed his socks before standing back up in just a pair of underwear decorated with images of footballs and baseballs. As the cold air hit him he finally realized that he was standing in front of his crush in nothing but his underwear. He wrapped his arms around his chest feeling exposed all of sudden.

“And we have a winner,” Emily said patting Max on the head.

“No fair,” Tj grumbled as he kicked his pants with his foot.

“No grousing,” Emily chided. “Tj go and pick out some pajamas while I help Max first,”

Tj went over to his dresser opening one of the drawers as he began to dig around. Emily grabbed the backpack that Max's Dad had packed. “Lets see what we got,” Emily said kneeling on the ground in front of Max before starting to unpack the bag.

Max then remembered the pull-up within the bag. He went to say something to try and stop her but to his horror she was already holding the pull-up in her hand. Emily looked at Max with a curious look noticing his frazzled expression.

“I-I don't need it,” Max squeaked. Emily just smiled.

“Tj don't forget to grab a pull-up,” she said.

“I won't,” Tj said back completely unbothered by her request.

“See,” Emily said softly. “Its not just you.”

“I can put it on,” Max said grabbing the crinkly thing from her hands as he walked behind her trading places with Tj. Max got his underwear off and the pull-up on in record time. Emily turned to see him standing there looking shy.

“Good job bud,” she said before adjusting a few spots where the waistband had rolled up. “Come over here and lay down now,” Emily said patting the ground where she had laid out the footed sleeper that was meant for Max. They were bright red with blue around the arm cuffs and collar.

“I-I can put them on,” Max said.

“Oh come on let me help,” Emily said grabbing Max by the wrist and leading him to in front of her before having him lay on top of the pajamas. Max felt incredibly babyish laying on the ground in just a pair of training pants.

“Here goes the first foot,” Emily said lifting up Max's leg before she began to tickle the bottom of Max's foot, which caused Max to giggle and writhe about on the ground before she threaded his leg into the pant leg. She proceeded to do the same with Max's other foot.

“And now the tummy,” she cooed before tickling Max's stomach which elicited more giggles from Max. It was so embarrassing for Max, try as he might not to laugh he just couldn't help it. Emily then zipped up the sleeper and buttoned the clasp at top.

“Me next me next,” Tj said as he handed his own pair of footed sleeper's toward Emily.

“Ok, ok,” Emily said before glancing back towards Max. “Go and pick out a story.” she said. Max walked over to the bookshelf looking at the books on the shelf with the sounds of Tj laughing manically behind him as Emily tickled him. Max looked through all the titles. He was just going to grab a random book not really caring what it was, yet the idea of bringing it over to Emily to read was a little hard to swallow. She was going to think whatever he picked out was something he actually wanted.

“Hey whats taking so long over there,” Max heard Emily call out as he turned around to see her and Tj now dressed in his own pajamas standing waiting for him.

“Oh um I can't decide,” Max said. Tj wasted no time in running over to the shelf and grabbing a book right away.

“Read this one,” he said holding the book up.

“Tj it was supposed to be Max's choice,” Emily tutted.

“Its fine,” Max interjected. “We can read that one.”

“If thats okay with you,” Emily said.” Alright boys hop in,” Emily said pulling back the covers on Tj's bed. Tj ran over jumping into the bed. Max walked over with some apprehension before crawling into the bed next to Tj. Emily tucked both Max and Tj in before taking a seat on the side of the bed and holding up the book so each of them could see. The book was called “The Friendly Fire Truck” and it had a picture of a firetruck with eyes and a big smile plastered across the front. As Emily began to read Max found himself

starting to relax. Listening to Emily read in her gentle tone gave Max a certain sense of peace and in some ways he was captivated by the story, but only because she was the one reading it, at least that's what he told himself.

“And then the fire truck drove down the road as the people cheered for their hero, the end,” Emily said as she finished reading the book.

“Read another one,” Tj said.

“No can do,” Emily said with a smirk. “Its already late and its time to close those eyes.”

Tj groaned a little. Max was also a little disappointed he felt he could listen to Emily read the dictionary at that point.

“But I'm not tired,” Tj whined.

“Tell ya what,” Emily said. “I'll turn off the lights and then I'll sit over in the corner and play some music for awhile does that sound good.”

“Don't forget the nightlight,” Tj said.

“Of course,” Emily said.

Not long after Max found himself laying in the bed listening to the soothing sounds of some lullaby music playing out of a speaker. Tj was fast asleep next to him. Max looked over at the darkened room. The only two light sources being the night light plugged into an outlet in the wall and the light from Emily's phone that lit up her face. Max admired her for a moment. She looked up and Max closed his eyes quickly. It

was a bizarre situation he had found himself in. Here he was tucked into a bed with his crush sitting in the corner of the room. Max wondered if when he got back to being sixteen he would be able to actually ask her out on a date after tonight. It had after all been a very embarrassing and awkward night for Max. Even with that in mind it hadn't really been all that bad though. At the very least Max hadn't wet his pants in front of her. Although she had seen him wearing a pull-up, a reminder he didn't need as he heard a crinkle when he curled up his legs a little under the covers.

Max felt as though he was spinning his wheels all week, being forced to go along with living his life as a four year old. But what else was he supposed to do? At this point all he could do was bide his time, and wait for Trevor to get careless. He really couldn't afford to mess up again, there was only one charge left on that device, one last shot. With these thoughts laying heavy on his mind Max eventually fell asleep.

He awoke a little later to the sound of feet walking across the carpet. The lullaby music was gone.

“C'mon Max its time to go,” Emily whispered. Max sat up still kind of tired. To his surprise Emily lifted him up into her arms. Max didn't try and fight it however as he rested his head on her shoulder and closed his eyes again. He felt her carry him downstairs. Max could hear Emily and Ann talking in hushed whispers, something about a car was said. Max didn't really pay much attention. He was still too groggy and Emily was so incredibly warm at that moment. Before long Max felt the cool air of the night as he came too a little. He

opened his eyes a little to see they were outside in the dark. He closed his eyes again The rhythmic bouncing and sway of being carried by Emily as she walked was pulling Max back into sleep. He then felt them come to a stop and heard the chime of a doorbell. A door opened.

“Oh Emily you carried him all the way back,” Sheila said.

“He just couldn't seem to wake up,” Emily whispered with a chuckle.

“You should have called,” Sheila whispered back. “Craig would have picked you up.”

“Max is pretty light so it wasn't a problem,” Emily whispered. “Plus I though we would beat you guys home.”

“Well I can take him off your hands,” Sheila said.

“I wouldn't mind carrying him up to his room,” Emily whispered. “I would hate to wake him.”

“Go ahead dear,” Sheila said. Max felt Emily carry him up the stairs to his room before laying him down in his own bed and pulling some covers up over him. Max finally opened his eyes.

“Oh sorry to wake you,” Emily whispered. Max frowned a little. He should have woken up sooner, he thought of what a nuisance it must have been for her to carry him all the way back.

“I'm sorry you had to carry me back,” Max said.

“That's alright I was happy to do it,” Emily said taking a seat on the edge of the bed.

“Thanks for being so nice to me,” Max said feeling very foolish about the whole thing.

“Why wouldn't I be?” Emily said with a little laugh as if Max had said some ridiculous thing. “You were such a perfect gentleman tonight, why I felt it was my duty to make sure my date got home safely,” Emily said giving Max a boop on his nose.

“Oh yeah,” Max said remembering their little game.

“Now you just remember all that stuff for when you start wanting to take girls out on dates for real,” Emily said with a grin. “You know a long time from now when you don't think girls got cooties.”

“I don't think that,” Max said furrowing his brow. His stomach twisted up a little with the implication that it was going to be a long time before he was going to actually ask a girl out.

Max sat up in his bed an idea popping into his head, a way to show her he was more mature than she took him for. Although he was a little hesitant to even ask.

“Don't people usually kiss at the end of a date,” Max asked looking at Emily with a shy expression.

“You want to give me a kiss?” Emily asked raising an eyebrow.

“Sure,” Max said fidgeting with the blanket. “If its okay.” Emily was silent for a moment before she giggled a little.

“Okay Romeo,” she said turning her head and pointing to her cheek. Max could feel his heartbeat in his chest as he leaned over and gave her a quick peck on her cheek. Afterwards he flopped back onto his pillow and hid his face. Could he have possibly been more of dork?

“Awww,” Emily cooed. “That was a very nice kiss.” Emily then leaned down and tucked Max in properly. “My turn,” she said leaning down and giving Max a kiss on his forehead. “Good night and sweet dreams,” she said softly before getting up and walking out of the room. Max felt the spot on his forehead where she had kissed him. A huge smile spread across his face. He made a decision right then and there that when he turned back to sixteen the very first thing he was going to do was run down to Emily's house and ask her out on a proper date.

Chapter 9

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 9 - Chapter 9

Chapter 9

The big day had finally arrived, it was the morning of the wedding. Max was standing in his room a fresh pull-up around his waist as his Dad began unpacking Max's outfit for the day. Max looked down seeing the smiling face of Mickey Mouse looking back at him. Max really did want to protest, this was ridiculous. He hadn't had a day time accident since Monday. He knew his Dad was just playing it safe, but on the other hand Max felt he had proven himself enough not to wear the stupid thing. Still Max wasn't going to put up a fuss. He had already decided that today of all days he was for once going to try and not think about his regression. He was going to play his role dutifully, he didn't want to cause any extra stress for his Dad or Sheila, today was about them.

His Dad got him dressed in his outfit complete with the powder blue beret. Max looked at himself in the mirror. Somehow it was even worse than it had been at the store. As Max looked at himself from all sides in the mirror he swore that anyone would be able to tell what he was wearing under his pants, then again he was probably just hyper focused on it. At the very least with his shirt tucked in he didn't need to worry about the pull-up sticking up out of his pants.

“You coming champ,” Dad said standing in the doorway.

“Yeah,” Max muttered as he followed his Dad down the stairs. He could hear a lot of voices in the kitchen. His Uncle Denny and Aunt Carla had come by while Max had been eating breakfast, along with their kids; his sixteen year old cousin Maddie who he was really close to and her six year old brother Ian who Max didn't know all that well since he had been really young when his Aunt and Uncle had moved away. Max walked into the kitchen to see Sheila in a satin bathrobe along with some of her bridesmaids at the counter getting together all their makeup to take to the venue. Upon Max's arrival he was met with some adoring coo's from all the woman gathered who couldn't help but comment how adorable and cute he looked in his outfit.

“Max you look great,” Maddie said as she knelt down in front of him. “All the little girls are going to want to dance with you today I bet.”

“For sure,” Dad said giving Max a slap on the back. “Max here is quite the Casanova, heard he was putting the moves on the babysitter last night.” Max looked at his Dad with wide eyes.

“How did you...” he said before his words caught in his throat.

“Emily said they played restaurant at the Henderson's place and her and Max were on a date,” Dad said pretty much regaling the entire room with his exploits from the previous night. “Apparently he even asked her for a kiss last night.” Dad said laughing. Which was met with another chorus of coos.

“Aww Max are you in love with your babysitter?” Maddie asked smiling at him.

“Stooop,” Max whined as he pulled the brim of his hat down over his eyes as his face went flush.

“Craig, hush now,” Sheila said not being able to help laugh a little bit herself. “You are embarrassing him.” Sheila said as she went and re-adjusted Max's bow tie a little. “You just ignore them Max, there is nothing wrong with having a little crush, besides we all love Emily.”

“Oh Emily is your babysitter,” Maddie commented. “I should see if she wants to hang out while I'm in town.”

“And look at these two handsome men,” Aunt Karla exclaimed as everyone's attention turned towards the stairs as Trevor and Brandon came down in their suits. Max took the opportunity now that everyone's attention was off of him to retreat to the living room. He found his cousin Ian sat on the sofa. He was watching some cartoons on the tv. Max took a seat on the other end of the couch still furious with his Dad for being such a blabbermouth about the whole thing. Max couldn't decide whether to cut his Dad and Emily a little slack or just be mad. From their perspective Max had just been a little kid expressing his affection in a cute and innocent form of impression of doing what he though adults did on dates, but that wasn't true. The way Emily made him feel was the same as it had ever been, in fact last night had been important for Max, it had reinvigorated his resolve. After a long week he felt like he had been in a way settling

in, accepting his new life as an inevitability. But now he knew there was still hope, he hadn't lost grasp of his old self yet.

Trevor and Brandon came into the living room, which seemed to be the popular spot to find reprieve from the gaggle of admirers in the kitchen all hopped up on wedding day energy. Brandon joined the other two boys on the couch sitting in the middle of them while Trevor stood leaning against a wall scrolling through his phone. As Max looked at him a thought occurred to him. He wondered if Trevor had the device on him? With all the wedding stuff going on maybe he had forgotten? He and Max had sort of stayed out of each other's way for most of the week. They hadn't even spoken since the beginning of the week. Max could almost feel an anxious energy rise up. The curiosity was killing him. He knew he needed to keep a low profile but he couldn't resist anymore, he just had to check. Max slid off the couch trying to walk as casually as possible to the stairs.

“Where do you think you're going?” Trevor asked causing Max to freeze in his spot. After a moment Max spun around.

“I hafta use the bathroom,” Max said.

“The bathroom is over there,” Trevor said pointing behind him. Just then one of the bridesmaids entered into the bathroom and shut the door. Max couldn't believe his luck.

“Someone is in there,” Max said. Trevor smirked a little before sliding his phone into his pocket.

“I guess I'll just take you to the one upstairs,” Trevor said

walking over to Max.

“I can do it myself,” Max said nervously.

“Nonsense,” Trevor said picking Max up into his arms. “We all know little monkey Maxie has been having a hard time with the potty lately, so he needs the grown ups to help. Wouldn't want you to wet your pants again, do we?”

Max could hear Ian let out a little snicker from the couch. Max tried to squirm out of Trevor's hold but Trevor was much too strong. Max considered yelling out loud enough to get attention from one of the adults yet he held back. First of all he didn't want to admit that he needed an adult to help him, second he didn't want to cause trouble, not today. Max continued to try and break free the best he could as Trevor carried him up the stairs. Finally Trevor put him down in front of the bathroom door upstairs.

“You must really have to go with all that squirming,” Trevor said.

“I do not,” Max protested.

“Oh,” Trevor said in an overly surprised voice. “Did you already use your little diapee?” Trevor said with a baby-talk voice as he gave Max a swat on the behind causing a crinkle to ring out.

Max covered his behind as he glared at Trevor.

“I didn't, I just don't have to go anymore,” Max muttered. Trevor laughed a little.

“Well I already knew that,” Trevor said. “I know what you were doing.”

“I wasn't doing anything,” Max said.

“You were coming up here looking for this,” Trevor said as he pulled the device out of his pocket holding it mockingly up in the air. Max frowned looking down at the ground. “What, not going to beg me to let you change back?” Trevor asked.

“Whats the point.” Max asked. “You wouldn't listen anyways.”

“Look at you,” Trevor said. “I knew you would accept things sooner or later. Although you know,” Trevor said ominously as he looked at the device and then at Max. “Maybe I should just use the last shot. Get it over with.” Max took a step back as fear filled his eyes.

“W-why,” Max whimpered a little fully believing that Trevor was actually going to do it.

“Having to carry this thing around is getting to be a bother. If I use it now then that is done and I won't have to worry about you trying to get it back.”

Max felt the breath go out of his chest as he watched Trevor twirl the device in his hand as if he was trying to decide if he was going to go through with it or not.

“Trevor, Max, come down here please,” Sheila's voice called from downstairs. Trevor just smirked as he put the device back into his pocket before walking down the stairs. Max followed, the safest place for him right now was in front of

the adults. Max was feeling shaky, would Trevor actually just do something like that?

As they got to the living room the adults had all migrated from the kitchen.

“I guess this is it,” Sheila said some nervousness in her voice. “I'll see you at the church,” Sheila said as she and Dad gave each other a quick kiss. Sheila then turned to see Trevor. “Where is your tie?” she asked. Trevor pulled a rolled up tie out of his pocket.

“Put it on I want a picture of you boys together,” Sheila said.

“I don't know how,” Trevor mumbled looking slightly embarrassed.

“I got it,” Dad said as he walked over to Trevor and took the tie from his hand, before wrapping it around Trevor's collar. Dad then proceeded to instruct Trevor through the steps on how to tie it, a moment that Sheila wasted no time in documenting with her phone.

“There you go,” Dad said as he tightened up the tie.

“Thanks,” Trevor said still looking rather awkward with the whole exchange. Afterwards the boys were made to stand while Sheila and Aunt Carla seemed to take thousands of photos. Sheila then left with her entourage leaving just the boys behind.

“We should get going too,” Dad announced as the group made their way to the garage to get loaded into the car. Max

couldn't help but notice that his Dad was carrying the backpack that he used to pack stuff for Max. It left Max feeling just a tad bit insulted. It was bad enough that they had made him wear a pull-up and the fact that they were expecting him not to keep it dry was only adding salt to the wound. In the car Max was of course in his car seat with Brandon in the back seat. Max watched with jealousy as Trevor got into the front seat.

They arrived at the church. Parking next to Uncle Denny's car. Maddie was already waiting and it was her who opened the door and got Max unbuckled. Dad handed Maddie the backpack and the car keys before he knelt down in front of Max.

“Alright bud I'm going to go now, just stick with Maddie and she'll help you get into place when the time comes.” Dad said before giving Max a big tight hug.

“Um good luck,” Max said. His Dad smiled and mussed up his hair a little before walking off with Max's Uncle.

“Lets get you two into place,” Maddie said putting a hand onto both Max and Brandon's head. The group walked into the church as they got into the entry way Trevor broke off from the group.

“Where are you going?” Maddie asked. Trevor looked at her a befuddled look on his face. It was then that Max realized that Maddie and Trevor had been classmates at one point just as Max had been. In fact when Maddie had moved away they had all been twelve years old, the same age that Trevor now

was. Max wondered if this was the first time Trevor had come into contact with someone he had once been the same age as.

“I'm going to go sit down,” Trevor said annoyed at having to explain himself. “I'm not in the wedding.”

“Oh right,” Maddie said.

“I'm gonna go too,” Ian said with some smug self satisfaction.

“Oh no you don't'” Maddie said grabbing him by the shoulder. “You're sticking with me until Mom comes and gets you.”

Maddie lead the three boys into a side room where they would wait until the ceremony began. There were some chairs set up along the side but other than that the room was pretty barren. Max took a seat in one of the chairs as Maddie took a seat next to him.

“Do you need to go potty?” Maddie asked.

“No,” Max yelped with a scandalized look.

“Okay,” Maddie said in a sort of all knowing way. Max got up from the chair. It was bad enough with the baby treatment he had received from Emily yet in some ways it was almost worse getting it from Maddie. They had practically grown up together. Max could even remember a time when they had both been in training pants. The thought of her seeing him in one now left Max with a deeply humiliating feeling in his stomach. He wasn't going to let her see him like this. Max walked over to where Brandon was. He and Ian had started

up a game of tag.

“You wanna play?” Brandon asked Max.

Max was going to refuse at first until Ian tagged him telling him he was now it. Before Max even had time to think he found himself running after the other two boys.

After some time the door opened and another woman appeared with a little girl in a pink ruffled dress at her side. The little girl's eyes lit up as she ran into the room making a beeline straight for Brandon.

“Brandon,” she shouted excitedly wrapping him in a hug.

“Hey Kendall,” Brandon said with a smile.

“The flower girl is here,” the woman announced.

“Brandon is this your cousin?” Maddie asked.

“Yep,” Brandon said. Max didn't recognize these two people. He hadn't really met much of Sheila's family as most of them lived out of state.

“I love your dress,” Maddie said regarding the young girls dress.

“I'm just like a princess,” Kendall said as she gave a little twirl.

“I can see that,” Maddie said with a smile. “How old are you?”

“Four,” Kendall said holding four fingers in the air.

“Really, you and Max are the same age,” Maddie said pulling Max in closer.

“So this is Craig's boy?” the woman who had brought Kendall into the room said as she knelt down between Max and Kendall. “Don't you look cute,” she said looking over Max's outfit. “And Brandon you look absolutely dashing in that suit.”

“Thanks Aunt Suzy,” Brandon said with a toothy grin.

“Anyways I think the ceremony is going to start soon so they want everyone in their places.” the woman said as she took Kendall's hand before walking out of the room.

“Looks like its showtime,” Maddie said standing from her chair. They found Aunt Carla outside as she collected Ian. Maddie then took Brandon and Max to a hallway just outside of the chapel entrance. A woman with a clipboard in her hands was waiting.

“Great we have our ring bearer and the handler,” the wedding planner said before handing Max a pillow which had a two rings already placed on it. The wedding planner then got all the people lined up. Kendall was first and Max and Brandon were second in the line in front of all the groomsman and bridesmaids.

“You're not taking a ring?” Max asked looking over at Brandon.

“Nope,” Brandon said shaking his head. “They told me my job was to make sure you got down the aisle and didn't drop

anything.” Max furrowed his brow. He wasn't even trusted enough to do this on his own. “I guess my job is pretty easy, since I don't have to worry about you.” Brandon said out of an effort to make Max feel better.

The music began as first Kendall went down the aisle tossing her flower petals from the basket. Max didn't think much as the wedding planner waved him and Brandon on. As they came to the start of the aisle Max heard some audible awws' and it was then that he realized that a lot of his family was in the audience. As he walked down the aisle he couldn't help but notice a few of the faces in the crowd. They were all looking at him with adoring looks. Max winced a little and stared straight ahead. As they got closer Max saw his Dad smiling at him. Max then looked over as saw Sheila. Max was struck by how different she looked, she was absolutely glowing all done up with her hair and wedding dress. Max gave a smile. He had to remember who this was all for. Brandon and Max came to a stop in front of the altar. Brandon picked up the rings from the pillow and handed them to Max's Uncle before he then ushered Max to their seats in the pew next to Maddie.

“You did such a good job,” Maddie whispered as she put her arm around Max.

“Thanks,” Max replied. Max settled in watching the rest of the wedding proceed. It was clear to him that he wasn't going to be turning back today. He decided that if that was how it was going to be he was going to try and not think about his problems for one day. When he did change back all the

photos of the day and peoples memories would be changed, all except for his. Max wanted to be present in the moment. He didn't want to remember how embarrassed he was, he wanted this to be a good memory.

It finally came time for the vows, Max couldn't see sitting down and he stood up going to his tiptoes but the people in front of him were too tall and he could only see from little slits of space between them. Max considered for a moment standing on the pew but knew that would cause a disturbance. He frowned a little still trying to get a good look. Maddie took notice.

“Come with me,” Maddie whispered taking Max's hand and leading him over to the side before lifting Max up onto her hip. Max was happy that he now could see but it still felt weird to be held in his cousin's arms. Still Max got to see Sheila and his Dad say their vows and give each other the rings. The priest finally announced them married and he watched as his parents kissed before walking down the aisle as the crowd applauded. Maddie put Max down and they went back to their seats to wait to leave. Brandon hugged Max lifting him off the ground.

“We're really brothers now,” Brandon said excitedly. “Oh sorry,” Brandon said looking apologetic as he put Max back on the ground.

“Its fine,” Max said giving him a grin letting Brandon know there was no offense.

“Okay you two lets go see your parents,” Maddie said as she

lead Brandon and Max into the receiving line. Making their way to the front of the line Max's Dad spotted him first.

“There's my guy,” Dad said as he lifted Max up and gave him a big hug. “You did a great job buddy,” Dad said.

“Thanks,” Max said looking at his Dad's proud expression. It really did wonders for Max to see his Dad so happy, in some ways it made the whole thing worth it for Max.

“Let me see my ring bearer,” Sheila said as Dad passed Max over to her. “You were perfect,” Sheila complimented. “I'm so happy that I get to call you my kid,” Sheila said setting Max on the ground as she knelt in front of him. Max hesitated a moment before mustering up a big smile for her.

“You're the best mommy ever,” he said putting his arms out wide. He was laying it on extra thick. Sheila wrapped him up in a big hug before giving him a kiss on the cheek. She released him and Max could see some tears in the corner of her eyes. It had been an embarrassing action for Max to do but he knew it would make Sheila happy and it was her day after all. Max would just count his little performance as his wedding gift.

Maddie lead Max and Brandon over to the side as they waited for the rest of the guest to file out of the chapel. Then it was time for pictures. Max did his best to smile for the photo's. Which was especially hard during the times when he was being photographed in situations that highlighted him, such as when he had been made to pose with Kendall as the flower girl and ring bearer. The absolute worst one had been a

picture with him and Trevor and Brandon when the photographer had made Max sit on Trevor's knee.

“Smile big Maxie,” Trevor had said knowing full well that he was really pushing Max's buttons. After what felt like an eternity the photo shoot finally came to an end and Max found himself walking down the street with Maddie and Brandon. Of course Maddie had insisted on holding his hand the whole way. The banquet hall was only a couple of doors down from the church. It wasn't a long walk and eventually they entered into the banquet hall.

“Hey Max,” Maddie said coming to a stop. “How are you doing? Do you need to go to the potty?”

Max pulled his hand a way with a flustered look.

“Stop asking me that,” Max said. It hadn't been the first time she had asked but for some reason with Maddie everything just hit differently. Perhaps it was because they had been close. They had grown up with each other. So whenever Maddie treated him like the four year old everyone took him for it was distressing for Max.

“I just don't want you to have an accident,” Maddie said with some concern.

“You're not my babysitter,” Max countered.

“Your Dad asked me to keep an eye on you so I kind of am,” Maddie said. Max frowned, so that's how it was going to be. “Don't tell me you prefer Emily to your own cousin?” Maddie said with an amused look.

“No...thats not...” Max stammered frazzled.

“Max doesn't need people reminding him to go to the bathroom,” Brandon interjected. “He doesn't have accidents like that.” Maddie looked at Brandon thoughtfully before turning her attention back on Max.

"Ok, I wont ask anymore, but you promise to tell me if you need help, okay?” Maddie asked. Max gave her a nod as she turned to enter into the main room Max looked over at Brandon and mouthed “Thank you” at him. Brandon grinned and gave Max a thumbs up.

Before long Max found himself seated at a table, a hard plastic booster seat on his chair. As Max looked around at the others at the table he could see it was definitely a kids table. Max was sat in between Brandon and Maddie. Kendall and Ian were also at the table along with Kendall's Mom and Dad. Max looked around the room seeing Trevor was seated at a different table. It seemed completely unfair to Max but on the other hand he was glad they were not sat at the same table.

The speeches began and as Max watched his Uncle give the best man speech he felt a little disappointed. If Max was being honest he felt his Uncle's speech was better than anything he would have written but still Max was left wishing he had actually written something. As Max began to think on this he realized that when he did manage to change back all of this would also change. He would have been the one that gave a speech. Max just hoped in the new reality he gave a good speech and didn't embarrass himself.

A meal was then served. First was a salad yet Max found that all the kids were being served some carrot and celery sticks with a side of ranch instead of the nice salad all of the older people got. Max was a little miffed. The salad looked pretty good, although he held himself back from making a fuss as he took one of the carrots in his hand. It was just food he kept telling himself.

“Wait a minute,” Aunt Carla said getting up from her seat and coming behind Max. She took the cloth napkin and tied it around Max's neck in the form of a makeshift bib.

“I don't need a bib,” Max protested.

“Its just in case,” Aunt Carla said. “You don't want to get a stain on your outfit now do you? They have to give those clothes back to the store.”

“Kendall is doing it too,” Brandon's aunt said as she tied a napkin around the little girl's neck.

“Ian let me help you with yours,” Aunt Carla said making her way over to her own son.

“I'm not wearing a bib,” Ian said shrinking down a little and sounding like he was on the verge of throwing a tantrum.

“Fine,” Aunt Carla relented. “I guess your shirt isn't a rental. But one spill and you're getting one.”

Max noticed Brandon looking a little nervous that he was next. Neither of the adults brought it up though. But Max could see he started being extra careful with his food. Max

finished his veggies sitting back a little. He looked down at the bib, it was still snow white. If anything he was far more conscious now of keeping it clean, just to prove that he didn't need it. Max looked over at Maddie's plate to see that she had moved aside two of the cherry tomatoes that had been on her plate. Max was still hungry and he was eyeing them rather inconspicuously.

“You like tomatoes?” Maddie asked.

“Uh huh,” Max said nodding. He knew full well that Maddie wasn't a fan, in fact on more than one occasion she had given Max a tomato that she didn't want and Max would always give her his pickles. That had always been the arrangement between the two of them.

“You can have mine,” Maddie said placing them onto Max's plate. Max took one into his hand and bit into it. The juice bursted out of the bottom staining into his bib. Max looked down with a frown. He was kicking himself for being so careless, now everyone was going to think he really did need a bib. Max ate the other tomato this time putting the whole thing in his mouth at once being careful to not make another mistake.

The plates were then cleared away. Max was sipping his lemonade as he looked to his side noticing that Brandon and Ian seemed to be hitting it off.

“Mom, can I have some quarters?” Ian asked.

“What for?” Aunt Carla asked.

“Me and Brandon want to go play the arcade games,” Ian said referring to the few arcade cabinets they had seen near the bar area of the banquet hall.

“After the meal is over,” Aunt Carla had said.

“You're coming too, right?” Brandon asked Max.

“Don't invite a baby,” Ian said. Max immediately felt his stomach twist up a little being referred to as such by his six year old cousin.

“He's not a baby,” Brandon said almost as if he were a mediator.

“Sure he is, he wets his pants doesn't he?” Ian said. Max felt his face go red and he couldn't help but notice upon hearing this that Kendall smirked a little.

“He does not,” Brandon said with some assertiveness.

“That's not what Trevor said,” Ian countered almost as if Max was on some sort of trial.

“Trevor was lying,” Brandon said. Max felt like he was going to die from humiliation listening to the conversation play out. He then felt Maddie put her hand on his shoulder.

“Ian stop that right now,” she said the annoyance in her voice plain to hear. “Or maybe I should tell everyone here a little secret about you.”

“Stop it,” Ian said his face going slightly pale.

“Maddie,” Aunt Carla said raising her eyebrow.

“Fine, fine,” Maddie said as she shrugged. “But apologize to Max for teasing him.”

“Mom,” Ian said looking to Aunt Carla for support. Aunt Carla merely nodded to show that she was in favor of Maddie.

“Fine, I'm sorry Max,” Ian grumbled. The servers came around setting entree's down in front of the table which made for a good distraction from everything that had just taken place.

Max looked at the food set in front of him. It was two large chicken tenders and a bowl of mac and cheese. Max saw that Brandon had the same thing, Kendall and Ian had grilled cheese sandwiches instead. Max looked and saw that Maddie had some salmon with asparagus. As everyone ate Max picked at the chicken looking at the salmon Maddie had on her plate. He remembered that it was the dish he had picked when he had filled out the invitation his Dad had given him.

“What's the matter, don't you like chicken?” Maddie asked noticing Max hadn't really touched the food in front of him.

“Huh...no its fine,” Max said picking up one of the tender's and taking a bite.

“You want some fish?” Maddie asked having noticed Max looking at her plate. Max had tried to refuse but Maddie had already cut off a small piece she then fed it too him off of her fork.

“You like it?” Maddie asked.

Mhmm," Max said smiling as he chewed it. He was happy to find he still liked it and it was a welcome reprieve from the usual sorts of food he was eating these days.

"Here," Maddie said as she took half of her portion and plopped it on his plate before she cut it up into little pieces.

"But that's yours," Max said feeling a little guilty that she was giving him her food.

"That's okay, I still got half plus..." Maddie said as she picked up one of the tenders on Max's plate and placing it on hers "I'll take this too so now we're even."

Max was a little taken aback, but happy all the same. Even if he was now four it felt like the dynamic between him and Maddie hadn't changed all that much. She was still his cousin, his friend.

As people finished their meal Sheila appeared at the table to greet the guest and to check in on Max and Brandon.

"Max did you eat some salmon?" Sheila asked noticing his plate.

"I gave him some of mine," Maddie said. "He loved it."

"I didn't know you had such a sophisticated palette," Sheila chuckled as she petted the top of Max's head. "Maybe I can get a little more adventurous with dinner."

"Ugh, we have to eat fish?" Brandon commented scrunching up his face which elicited some more chuckles from the adults.

“Mom can me and Brandon go now?” Ian interjected.

“Where are you going?” Sheila asked looking at Brandon with some curiosity.

“I promised the boys they could go and play the video games,” Aunt Carla said with a sigh.

“I can go, right?” Brandon said getting up from his seat. “Max is coming too.” Brandon added putting a possessive arm around Max.

“I don't see why not, sounds fun” Sheila said. “You're going to need some money though.”

“I got it, don't worry,” Aunt Carla said.

“Its no problem,” Sheila said. “You and Denny are already doing so much for me, I'd be more than happy to get some quarters for the boys.” Sheila then kneeled down and put an arm around both Max and Brandon pulling them in so all three of their cheeks were touching. “Besides two of these gamers are mine anyways.”

Aunt Carla let out a sigh before giving in, Sheila was insisting and it was her day after all. Max followed along as Sheila took the three boys with her out to the bar area. She went up to the bartender pulling some cash out of her purse and was given a sizable amount of quarters in exchange. She gave Ian and Brandon an equal share before they ran off to the arcade games. She then turned and presented Max with his own pile.

“Here you go,” she said. Max took a step back and shook his head.

“I don't wanna play,” Max said. Sheila looked a little surprised at his reaction.

“Are you sure?” Sheila asked. “It looks like lots of fun.”

Max didn't really want to play at the arcade. He wasn't a kid like Brandon and Ian, he didn't need to be entertained like this.

“Really, I don't want to,” Max said asserting himself once again.

“Okay, I certainly wont force you,” Sheila said looking a tad bit concerned. She then slipped the quarters into Max's pocket. “Keep these for later, just in case you change your mind.”

Max gave her a small smile.

“While I got you here, how are you doing?” Sheila asked. Max looked back confused. What was she concerned about? “Have you been to the potty lately?” Sheila asked.

“No not really,” Max responded flustered by the sudden question.

“I see,” Sheila said. “C'mon I'll take you right now.”

“No, that's okay,” Max stammered.

“It's fine,” Sheila said extending her hand to him. “I need a little break anyways.”

Max took her hand. Her sudden questioning had made him realize that he actually did need to go, and somewhat urgently at that. He was a little worried that he hadn't even really noticed. They were walking down a side hall when suddenly Uncle Denny appeared.

“Hey Sheila the Dj has some questions for you,” Uncle Denny said.

“Oh shoot,” Shelia said with an exasperated sigh. “I just need to run Max to the bathroom and then I'll be right there.”

“I can take him,” Uncle Denny offered.

“If its not too much of a problem,” Sheila mused.

“Of course not,” Uncle Denny said. “Plus this way he doesn't need to get dragged into the ladies room,” Uncle Denny chuckled before looking down at Max. “Sounds good right little man.”

Max looked down before nodding. He really hated these types of conversations. Sheila gave her thanks before rushing back into the fray. Max followed his Uncle into the restroom as they came to a stop at the urinal that was meant for little kids since it was lower to the ground. Max began to fiddle with the buckles of his suspenders, he was becoming a little panicked since now he really had to go.

“Let me help,” his Uncle said as he knelt down unbuckling the straps. He then stuck his thumbs into Max's waistband and pulled down his pants and the pull-up in one motion all the way down to his ankles. Max felt himself freeze up

immediately not really expecting the sudden exposure. “Their you go,” his Uncle said standing back up.

Max immediately positioned himself in front of the urinal.

“Lift your shirt up,” his Uncle reminded him. Max did as he was told. As he stood there he was making a silent prayer that no one else walked in to see him like this. Max finished with his business quickly and pulled up the pull-up and his pants before his Uncle could help.

“We gotta fix your shirt,” his Uncle said as he began to tuck the shirt back into Max's waistband before putting his suspender's back on. His Uncle then lifted him up at the sink counter so Max could wash his hand. “All good?” Uncle Denny asked.

“Um yeah, thanks,” Max said still feeling his ears burning red hot. His Uncle then lead him out of the bathroom back into the hallway where they were met by Aunt Carla.

“There you are,” she said grabbing Max's hand. “They need you on the dance floor.”

Max was confused, what did they need him for? Moments later he found himself standing in the middle of the dance floor by himself.

“And now the ringbearer and the flowergirl are going to share a dance,” the Dj said over the microphone. Max's eyes went wide. Suzie lead Kendall out so that she was now standing in front of Max. She instructed Max on where to place his hands and had Kendall put hers on Max's shoulders. Some music

began playing. Max stood frozen yet Kendall began to sway side to side which caused Max to do the same. Max was hoping for a hole to appear and just swallow him up right there. Kendall on the other hand seemed to be enjoying herself immensely given all the attention. Max however closed his eyes. He couldn't bear to see all the adoring faces that were staring at them, however he could still hear the coos and awws of the audience and the myriad of camera shutter sounds. Thankfully the music switched to something more lively as the Dj opened up the rest of the dancefloor to the guests. Max made a hasty retreat and found an area off to the side with some chairs. He put his face in his hands hoping that he wasn't going to have to do anything like that again for the rest of the day. He had promised himself to go along with everything for the sake of his parents, but he could only take so much humiliation in one day. As Max sat on the chair wallowing he heard someone take a seat next to him.

“Hey dude,” the voice said. Max knew this voice. Max looked up quickly to see Jon sitting next to him. Max's jaw fell open a little. He couldn't believe it was Jon, his best friend. He felt like it had been forever since he had seen him.

“How's my little buddy doing?” Jon asked with a smile. “Feels like I haven't seen you in ages.”

Max blinked a few times just to make sure he wasn't seeing things. Max wasted no time as he got on his knees on the chair so that he was face level with his friend. Max placed both of his hands on Jon's shoulders.

“I need your help,” Max said.

Chapter 10

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 10 - Chapter 10

Max's heart was beating as he looked at Jon. A flurry of thoughts came to his mind. If anyone could help him it would have to be Jon. He was the one that suggested going to the shop in the first place, it was his Uncle that had sold Max the device. If there was anyone who wouldn't dismiss him out of hand surely it would have to be his best friend. Jon had the connection, Max could sidestep Trevor completely.

“Sure what do you need?” Jon asked a little amused to see Max so serious.

“I need to talk to your Uncle right now, today,” Max said.

“My Uncle?” Jon asked completely confused. “I have a couple of those, which one.”

“Mr. Fishell,” Max responded. Jon cocked his head a little not grasping who Max was even talking about. “The one with the magic store,” Max said.

“I don't have an Uncle Fishell.” Jon said. Max slumped back on his knees. What was Jon even saying that couldn't be true.

“You have to remember,” Max said. “We were at the store together, you brought me there. I think it was like two weeks ago on a Thursday.”

“Ohh,” Jon said as if he had just remembered. “Yeah I do

remember that."

Max's heart leapt a little.

"But we didn't go to a magic store," Jon said. "I remember your Dad had brought you around the office and I took you down the street, you know to the candy store. But neither of my Uncles owns that store, their both truck drivers and they live in Florida."

Max felt the blood drain from his face. Just what was happening here? Was this some change brought on by the device? But how and why? Max was dazed a little, he looked around the room unsure of what to do. That's when he noticed Trevor across the way looking at him intently.

"Max are you okay?" Jon asked. "You don't look so good."

"I think I'm gonna be sick," Max said. The room was spinning and the loud music coming from the dance floor had become overbearing causing Max to cover his ears. Jon immediately got an alarmed look on his face.

"Lets go somewhere more quiet," Jon said picking Max up off the chair and whisking him back into the side hall where the bathrooms were located. Jon brought him over to some water fountains.

"Why don't you try drinking some water," Jon suggested. Max nodded as he let Jon hold him up so he could get a drink. Jon then set him on the ground looking at him with some concern. Max was feeling a lot better as the cool drink had done him good.

“Feeling better?” Jon asked.

“I'm fine,” Max said although to anyone looking he looked like a sad little kid.

“You don't look fine,” Jon said. “C'mon dude its a wedding, you should be out there tearing it up on the dance floor having the time of your life. So whats got you looking so down?”

“Nobody believes me,” Max grumbled.

“Sorry dude, but I really don't have an Uncle Fish or whatever.” Jon said with a chuckle.

“Not that,” Max said stamping his foot. Maybe Jon was telling the truth maybe the device had changed things, but Max wasn't ready to give up. Jon let out a little sigh. “I bought a thing, it can change people's age,” Max said. “I know it sounds crazy but I'm not really four and Trevor isn't twelve. We're sixteen.”

“Wow, that sounds like quite the device,” Jon commented.

“If I get it back I can change back but Trevor took it and he won't give it back.” Max said.

“I see,” Jon said as he knelt down on Max's level sounding as if he were pretending to humor Max and his little game and not as if he actually believed him. “Is Trevor picking on you?”

“You could get it back from him,” Max said, ignoring the idea that Jon didn't believe him. “He has it in his pocket.” Max had to try something, Jon could easily stand up to Trevor now.

Max then felt a pull on the back of his suspenders as he felt his feet leave the ground a little.

“What are you saying to people?” Trevor said as he pulled Max back. Max stumbled on his feet as he felt Trevor let go off him before he fell onto his butt. Trevor was now standing over him, he looked mad as hell. “I'm getting real sick and tired of this,” Trevor said grabbing onto one of Max's suspenders. “If you won't stop then I'll make you.”

“Now wait just a minute,” Jon barked grabbing onto Trevor's arm and pulling him away from Max so that now Jon was between the two of them. “I don't know what you're thinking gives you the right to do that,” Jon said as he prodded Trevor's chest with his finger before Jon pointed to Max behind him. “But that kid right there is like a little brother to me, and if you think I'm going to sit here and listen to you threaten him like that, you've got another thing coming.”

Trevor looked shocked as if he was realizing for the first time that Jon was in fact bigger than him now. Jon turned around as he went and picked Max up off the ground brushing him off a little.

“You alright?” Jon asked putting a hand on Max's shoulder.

“Y-yeah,” Max said his voice shaky from the massive amount of fear that had just washed over him. Jon then turned back around to look at Trevor.

“Did you take something from him?” Jon asked. Trevor was silent but Max could see the gear's turning in his head then

Trevor put an apologetic look on his face.

“No I didn't, really,” Trevor said. Jon looked unconvinced he let out a little sigh as he turned back to Max and knelt down to his level.

“You know taking stuff from a kid is one thing but then to go and react like that, I know you guys are brother and everything and siblings squabble but this is over the top.” Jon said as he readjusted Max's bow tie and outfit so it wasn't as disheveled looking. “Maybe its time I have a little chat with your Mom,” Jon said.

However neither Max nor Trevor were actually listening to what Jon was saying. They were looking at one another. Max felt his eyes go wide as he saw Trevor pull the device out of his pocket and aim it at Jon. Trevor silently formed the words “poof” as he used his first hand to pantomime an explosion.

“No,” Max yelped jumping in between Trevor and Jon. Trevor quickly slipped the device back into his pocket. “Don't tell, I was lying” Max said. His heart was beating fast. “I was just making it all up, it was a game,” Max said looking at Jon.

“I'm sorry really,” Trevor said. “You're right I completely overreacted. Its just Max has been playing this game all this week and its gotten to the point where people actually start to think I took something from him.”

Jon stood with his hands on his hips as he looked from Max to Trevor. He groaned a little as if he were mulling something over in his head.

“Still,” Jon said. “Its pretty normal for little kids to do stuff like this, shouldn't you be used to it, I mean didn't Brandon ever play games like this?”

“Not really,” Trevor said as a smirk appeared on his face. “Max has such an imagination sometimes.”

“I guess I'll let it slide this time,” Jon said crossing his arms. “But really Trevor you're the older brother, you gotta act like it,”

“I know, I know,” Trevor said almost as if he were really trying to appease Jon in some way.

“Oops,” Jon said picking up some quarters of the ground that had come out of Max's pocket. “You're losing some money,” Jon said as he placed the quarters into Max's hand.

“My quarters,” Max said softly to himself before he clasped onto Jon's arm. “I want to go to the arcade, come play with me,” Max said as he started to pull Jon away.

“Huh, arcade...well sure,” Jon said as he allowed Max to lead him away. It wasn't that Max wanted to go to the arcade, he just wanted Jon as far away from Trevor as possible. Max couldn't help but feel Trevor was beginning to get trigger happy. Or rather he knew he had something to hold over Max. Whether or not Trevor had been serious in his threat of hitting Jon with the device, it was a scenario that Max had to avoid at all cost. He couldn't bear the though of Jon getting tangled up in this mess. Whats worse there would be no way out of it at that point. The device would be useless after that. There

was no helping it at this point, Max knew he couldn't let anyone else get involved, least of all his friends.

Getting to the arcade there were four machines set up. Brandon and Ian were sitting at the racing game each of them at a cabinet racing against one another.

“Which one do you want to play?” Jon asked. Max approached one of the cabinets that had enough for two players. Jon began to fish into his pocket for some money.

“I got it,” Max said depositing two of his quarters into the machine.

“Guess its on you then,” Jon chuckled. Max had to stand on his tiptoes just be able to see the screen and grab onto the joystick. Jon grabbed a bar stool that was nearby pulling it over to the machine before lifting Max onto it.

“Better?” Jon asked.

“Um yeah...thanks,” Max said. The two of them began to play. It was a side scrolling beat'em up. Max pulled out the rest of his quarters setting them onto the control panel between him an Jon. The joystick and buttons were big enough that Max didn't have much difficulty controlling the game. Time passed as he and Jon made their way through the game mowing down all the enemies as they worked together. Each of them depositing another quarter from the pile into the machine when they died. Max was actually having fun as both he and Jon were laughing together and shouting at the screen. Eventually they made it all the way to the final boss.

By that time Ian and Brandon had come over to watch having exhausted their supply of quarters.

“He's almost dead hit him,” Jon shouted. Max moved in and used the last of his super moves delivering the killing blow to the boss.

“Yeaaah,” Jon shouted putting both of his arms in the air. The two of them sat back for a moment basking in their victory as the credits rolled.

“You beat it,” Brandon said as if he had just witnessed an impossible task.

“Of course, Jon was playing he did all of the hard stuff.” Ian said.

“I wouldn't say that, Max's score is way higher than mine,” Jon said looking at the two scores displayed next to one another. “You're pretty good at this Max,” Jon said impressed at Max's display of skill. “I bet you guys play a lot of video games together at home,” Jon said looking at Brandon.

“Not really,” Brandon said. “We haven't really played together in awhile. But when we do play Max usually wins.”

Max sort of frowned a little. When was the last time he and Brandon had played a video game? It had certainly been before the change when Max had still been sixteen.

“Really,” Jon said. “Maybe we should enter Max into some tournaments, whaddya say buddy want to be a pro gamer?”

Max laughed a little at the idea. Sure he could see it now, the

four year old e-sports pro.

“Hmmm looks like you only got two quarters left,” Jon said picking the remains of the pile that Max had set out. “What do you want to use them on?” Jon asked looking around.

Max shrugged looking at the rest of the machines.

“Here try this,” Jon said walking over to a claw machine. “Maybe you can win a prize.”

Max took a quarter from Jon and put it in. As he began to move the claw around he spotted a stuffed parrot sitting close to the chute. It seemed easy enough to get. Max positioned the claw and watched it go down. As he watched the parrot rise he felt a certain sense of anticipation, he was going to get it, and that made him happy. He was imagining already having it in his hands that was until he watched it fall out of the grip of the claw. Max let his arms slump as he watched the claw go over the chute empty handed.

“Aww tough break,” Jon said. “You were close try again.”

Max stepped back from the machine with a moan. What was the point? He was just going to waste another quarter. He really wanted the parrot but it was hopeless. Jon watched Max for a moment before he put in the last quarter himself and moved the claw back over to the parrot. He put the claw down near the parrot's head which was the largest part of the stuffed bird. The claw grasped it but it fell through again but Jon had moved it enough so that when the parrot dropped it hit the side of the chute sending it tumbling down into the

hole. Jon took the parrot out and presented it to Max.

“See sometimes you gotta keep trying, even if it seems hard.” Jon said. Max took the parrot looking at it as if it were some sacred item.

“I can have it?” Max asked.

“Of course it was your quarter,” Jon said.

“T-thanks,” Max said as he hugged the parrot. It made him feel good. It was a gift, from his friend and that was what made it important to him.

“Guess we're all tapped out,” Jon mused looking to Brandon and Ian. With no more money they made their way back to the main room, Max was still hugging his stuffie. Maddie saw them walk in and approached.

“Hey Max lets dance,” she said with a big smile.

“I don't know how,” Max said taking a step back. It was true Max had never been a skilled dancer.

“It's easy,” Maddie said shaking her head a little. “I'll show you. Oh who is this?” Maddie asked noticing the stuffed animal Max was clutching.

“Oh Jon won it for me,” Max said although now he was feeling a little silly that he had been holding on to it.

“You know I think parrots like to dance too, you could bring him along,” Maddie suggested.

Max shook his head. He was feeling rather foolish now, not

realizing that he had gotten really caught up with this parrot yet he didn't loosen his grip at all.

“Come with me,” Maddie said as she took Max over to some chairs to the side of the dance floor and pulled out the backpack that Dad had given Maddie at the beginning of the day. “We'll keep him here so he is nice and safe,” Maddie said as Max let her take the parrot from his hands and place it into the bag. “Now you're coming to dance with me, right?” Maddie asked. Max looked askance he still didn't want to go.

“I'll go too,” Jon said speaking up.

“Me too,” Brandon joined in.

“Well I guess,” Ian said putting his hands in his pockets.

“See looks like we got a whole group,” Maddie said. “So now you gotta come.”

Max let out a sigh as he let Maddie lead him out to the center of the dance floor. Max stood awkwardly looking around. Jon, Brandon and Ian all started to dance although Brandon and Ian were more or less jumping around.

“C'mon Max do something,” Maddie said she waved her arms in the air.

“I don't know how,” Max stated again.

“I'll show you,” Maddie said taking his hands. She swung his arms in rhythm with the music. “Now just move your feet.” Maddie instructed. Max did what she asked. He could only imagine how dumb and uncoordinated he looked. But as he

looked around he could see no one in their group was particularity skilled in dancing so it seemed he wasn't the only one. As Max continued his fear being downplayed he started to have a little fun and before long he was hopping up and down on the dance floor to each new song that came on laughing along with the rest of the group. Various relatives came in an out joining in with the raucous group, Even Sheila and Dad were drawn in at one point. Max wasn't sure how long they had done this for, he had lost all track of time. For once he had completely forgotten about his problems and was having fun.

A slow song then came on and Max found himself completely exhausted as he plopped down on the floor. His hair was plastered to his forehead with sweat.

“Need a break?” Maddie asked as she knelt down. Max nodded. Before he could even get to his feet Maddie had scooped him up. She took him over to one of the chairs at the side and set him down. She dug around in his bag and pulled out his water bottle with the retractable straw and gave it to him. Max drank all of it as he had become incredibly thirsty and he hadn't drank anything since the meal which had been hours ago. As Max looked around he noticed that it had gotten dark outside, he wondered just how long he had been out on the dance floor. He was a bit surprised all in all. The wedding hadn't started until noon but it seemed the afternoon had just flown by in the blink of an eye.

“You want some more?” Maddie asked as she shook the water bottle.

Max nodded.

“Be right back,” Maddie said as she went off towards the bar area to refill the water bottle. As Max sat waiting he looked out onto the dance floor. He spotted Brandon who had his arms wrapped around his Mom. They were dancing along to the slow song. Brandon was looking up at her smiling as Sheila was saying something to him as she she stroked his hair. Max couldn't help but smile, it was a sweet scene to say the least. He was happy looking at them knowing that he could officially call them family. Max's Dad plopped down on the seat next to him.

“You were a dancing machine out there,” Dad chuckled as he put an arm around Max. If anything Max should have felt a little embarrassed by the whole thing but at the end of the day he had fun, let his hair down a little as it were, it was a party after all. Maddie came back and gave Max the water bottle he began to drink some more albeit a little more slowly as he let his head rest up against his Dad. He really did need a break and with his Dad next to him he was feeling rather comfortable so much so he didn't even realize that he had fallen asleep, that was until he was being shaken awake by Maddie.

“Hey Max wake up we're going to leave now,” she said. Max sat up rubbing his eyes.

“Huh...leave...where,” Max said still not fully awake.

“We're going home,” Maddie answered as Max looked around. The banquet hall had emptied out as some guest were

collecting their belongings and the staff was working on tear down. As Max followed Maddie into the bar area he could see that most of the party had moved here. Maddie lead Max over to where Brandon and Ian were near the door. It was then that Max remembered his conversation with Maddie over the phone, how she had told him she was going to be taking Brandon home early. Max grimaced a little figuring out he was now included among her charges for the night.

“Okay wait here a moment,” Maddie said before disappearing into the crowd. Max was none too pleased about this arrangement. He didn't want to be babysat by his cousin nor be lumped into the same group with his little brother and cousin. Max looked around and spotted Trevor in the bar area, a soda cup in his hand as he was talking and laughing with two other boys who looked similar to one another. Max was staring daggers at Trevor, it was really unfair that Trevor got to stay, they were the same age after all...not that any of the adults knew that.

“Wha'tcha looking at?” Brandon asked noticing Max was focused on something.

“Nothing,” Max said with some bitterness as he turned away. Brandon looked to where Max had been looking.

“Thats weird,” Brandon commented after a moment.

“Huh?” Max said his curiosity being peaked. “You know those two?”

“Yeah they're my cousins Tommy and Carson, they're twins,”

Brandon said. “Its just funny is all.”

“Funny,” Max remarked not understanding what Brandon was getting at.

“Well yeah, Trevor hanging out with them I mean,” Brandon clarified. “Every time we would go and see them Trevor would complain because they always tried to hang around him and he would say they were annoying, but it looks like their getting along now.” Max watched Trevor with his own cousins now. They did seem to be having a good time as they were all laughing and roughhousing a little.

“How old are they?” Max asked.

“They're eleven,” Brandon answered confirming Max's suspicions. It was sort of remarkable in a way. Max had been so preoccupied with his own changing personality to that of a four year old that he never gave much though to it. Could it be that Trevor was also becoming more like a twelve year old now? Max wondered if he even realized it?

Just then Maddie reappeared with Dad and Sheila and Aunt Carla. The parents all said good night to their kids and reminded each of them to mind Maddie who was now carrying a Styrofoam food container.

They moved outside to wait for Dad and Uncle Denny to return with the car they had walked off to retrieve. Upon arriving Dad lifted up Max and placed him into his car seat strapping him in.

“I'll see you in the morning alright,” Dad said handing Max

the stuffed parrot Jon had won for him.

“Daddy can't I stay,” Max whined a little before biting his tongue upon realizing how he had just referred to his Dad.

“Sorry champ its getting late you gotta go and get into bed.” Dad said before giving Max a kiss on top of his head before shutting the door. Max puffed up his cheeks a little. He could feel some frustration starting to rise up in his chest. In fact he wanted to throw the parrot to the ground in anger but he was able to stop himself. He wasn't going to throw a tantrum. That would only confirm he was becoming more of little kid.

As they drove back home Max watched the passing street lights from out the window. He felt his eyes start to close again. The quietness of the car seemed so peaceful and so different to the loud music he had been listening to for the last couple of hours, the ringing in his ears subsiding. It wasn't until they got home that Max roused himself from sleep due to the overhead lights in the car coming on as Brandon and Ian exited. Maddie came around and unbuckled him. Max slunk out of his seat and climbed out of the car. T hats when he noticed the feeling that he had come to be familiar with. He came to a stop looking down at his pants. He had wet himself again.

“I got cake for you guys,” Maddie said holding the styrofoam container in her hand. “But first you all need to to get ready for bed okay.” Max walked with them through the garage to the door doing his best to walk as normally as possible. As soon as they were inside he bolted up the stairs to his room

shutting the door behind him as he entered. He threw the beret off his head and started to attack his suspender's. He had avoided having Maddie see him in a pull-up all day and he couldn't fail right now, especially her seeing him in a wet one. However Max was finding he still couldn't get the suspender's undone. He just didn't possess the strength in his tiny fingers to unclasp the straps, no doubt they were designed this way. He gave up and tried pulling on the straps as hard as he could but to no avail. The clamps were holing tight and the straps themselves were very stretchy. Just then his door opened surprising Max who lost his grip on the straps which made snap back onto his shoulders.

“Yoww,” Max yelped feeling the sharp sting of the straps.

“Let me give you hand their squirt,” Maddie said as she came over and easily undid the straps.

“I got it,” Max said trying to take back over.

“Shh shh,” Maddie said as she completely removed the straps. “I need to make sure these clothes get back in the bag.” she said. Then it happened.

Maddie pulled Max's pants down to his ankles exposing the training pants. Max let out a little squeak. Yet Maddie seemed to not take any notice as she lifted up his feet taking the pants out from under him. She then started on his shirt unbuttoning it. Max was locked up. Maybe she hadn't noticed that it was wet but as she got the shirt off of him he looked down to discover how noticeable it actually was. He hadn't just had a minor accident he had completely flooded the thing which

had caused it to swell up considerably. Not too mention there was the spot with designs that would fade when wet. They were completely gone replaced with a pale yellowish tint.

“Lets get those socks,” Maddie said lifting Max up onto his bed and laying him flat on his back. Max felt his face go red. Here he was on full display if there had been a chance that Maddie hadn't noticed there was now no denying it. After she pulled his socks off giving his feet a small tickle Maddie looked at him.

“Looks like you need a fresh one,” Maddie said. Max covered his face that had flushed red. There it was, confirmation in all its glory.

There was no question in Max's mind now, she now saw him as nothing more than a pants wetting little kid. Maddie walked over to the dresser and grabbed a fresh pull-up from the pack and some wipes. She had expected Max to get up from the bed but as she turned around she saw him still laying on the bed covering his face. She figured he just must be tired since as soon as she had started helping him he had just let her take over completely. She went to the bed and tore open the sides of the pull-up before giving him a quick wipe down. Max was mortified beyond all belief he couldn't even move as he just lay frozen on the bed. Maddie then threaded his legs into the new pull-up and pulled it up to his knees.

“C'mon Max I need a little help here,” Maddie quipped. “Or maybe you're too tired for cake.”

Max let out a groan as he stood up from the bed. There was

no point anymore. His dignity was gone. Maddie pulled the crinkly garment up thinking it had been her promise of cake that had spurred Max into motion.

“Whats up with that look?” Maddie asked noticing Max's forlorn look. Max was suddenly overcome with a rush of emotion. He was so sick and tired of not being able to say what was on his mind. Of always having to dance around the issue. But right now he could, because there was one thing that was the problem.

“I don't wanna wear it,” Max said. “I don't need it.” Maddie looked at him for a moment before giving him an understanding look.

“Hey its not a big deal,” Maddie began.

“It is,” Max spat back before stopping himself. “Sorry,” he said after a moment his voice becoming meek.

“Well your Daddy already told me about the sort of week you've been having.” Maddie said.

“Oh,” Max said as he hung his head. If she knew all that then he knew what came next. She was going to give him the reasons of why he needed pull-ups for the time being.

“It sounds like to me that your just going through a little rough patch, so here is my idea. I say this week me and you can work together to kick this thing and get you back on track, whaddya say?” Maddie asked. Max cocked his head a little. What did she mean work together? This week? She lived four hours away how could she possibly help him?

“This week?” Max questioned.

“Did nobody tell you?” Maddie asked. “Your parents are going on their honeymoon tomorrow they'll be gone for a whole week. And while they are gone me and my Mom and Dad and Ian are going to be staying here while Trevor and Brandon go and visit their grandparents.”

Max though on this information for a moment. Try as he might he couldn't really remember ever having heard of any such plans.

“So I think this can be our project, it will be a good surprise for your parents when they get back, how does that sound?”

It was such an infantile goal to be sure but for some reason Max was happy to hear that Maddie was intent on helping him. It would be as if she was going to help him restore a small part of dignity he had lost.

Maddie then got Max dressed in some pajamas. They were yellow with blue cuffs and they had all sorts of construction vehicles on them. As Max looked at them he found them to be skin tight and didn't do anything to hide the pull-up he was wearing. As Maddie lead him out of the room he got self-conscious in being seen in such an outfit. He wasn't too worried about Brandon since it was old news to him, but what would Ian say? Much to Max's surprise as they went to Brandon's room to collect the other two who were also in their pajamas, Ian didn't make a single comment. As they made their way down to the kitchen where Maddie had the cake waiting Max caught sight of some material sticking out

of Ian's waistband which now made everything make much more sense. He and Ian were in the same boat. It didn't do much for Max's pride to know that he and his six year old cousin shared this particular trait but at least it meant that the boy would not be teasing Max about it. The boys ate their cake at the table. Brandon and Ian still seemed to be in high spirits from all the excitement of the day Max however had faded fast and was fighting to stay awake at the table. He had caught himself at one point right before he face planted into his cake.

“Maddie can me and Ian watch a movie?” Brandon asked.

“Hmmm, I don't think that should be a problem,” Maddie said shooting a glance at the clock. Maddie then wiped Max's face for him seeing that he had already abandoned his piece of cake that was not even half eaten before picking him up into her arms. “You guys finish up and decide what you want to watch while I put Max to bed.”

Max rested his head on Maddie's shoulder as she took him up to his room. He didn't have the energy in him to protest, he knew he would last maybe a minute or two into the movie before he inevitably fell asleep. All in all his bed sounded great at the moment. Maddie put Max into his bed. However seemingly out of nowhere a sudden thought struck Max. He recalled the confrontation between himself and Trevor that day at the wedding and earlier that morning. What if it had been enough to put it into Trevor's head to hit Max with the last charge? Max became scared. If he fell asleep now it would give Trevor the perfect opportunity to do so when he

got home. All he would have to do was wait for everyone to go to sleep and then come into Max's room. Max sat up in the bed.

“I can't go to sleep,” Max said.

“Oh buddy, I know you want to stay up and watch the movie but you were falling asleep at the table,” Maddie smirked.

“Its not that I...” Max said not really sure what excuse he could offer it was then that he noticed Maddie was unfurling a sleeping bag.

“What's that?” Max asked.

“Its my sleeping bag,” Maddie chuckled. “I'm bunking with you tonight, but just for tonight. Now lay down and I'll read you a story, kay.” Maddie said as she went over to the bookshelf.

Max layed back into his bed letting out a sigh of relief. It was a welcome bit of news. With Maddie in the room Trevor wouldn't dare try anything. He knew just as well as Max that if he was discovered not even he would be able to wriggle out of the storm of trouble that would accompany it. Maddie came back having picked out a book. She snuggled in close to Max and began to read. Max let his eyes close. Maybe things were starting to look up a little as he thought about the upcoming week. Maddie had promised to help him with his nighttime troubles and maybe having a goal to work towards would be good, in a way it would be something that would be getting Max back to normal, which would probably be good

for his mental state. Not too mention the thought of a whole week without Trevor was the icing on top. A whole week laid in front of him to come up with a plan. Max fell asleep quickly a glimmer of hope held fast in his mind.

Chapter 11

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Part 11 - Chapter 11

Max was standing in Brandon's room as he watched his new little brother pack up a suitcase with everything he felt he was going to need for a week at his grandparents, which included his Nintendo Switch and a half a dozen different games, a couple of action figures, some books that mostly consisted of comic books and about ten bags of candy that Brandon and Ian had gone around last night at the wedding and collected from the tables when they had been left by other guest. As Max looked at it all he smirked. It was a good thing that Sheila had seen fit to pack Brandon's clothes herself.

“I think that's everything,” Brandon said as he closed the suitcase and zipped it up.

“You seem excited,” Max said with a small smile.

“I love going to my grandparents place, plus they already promised to take us to the water park with some of my cousins,” Brandon said, the anticipation on his face noticeable. “I wish you could come,” Brandon said casting a regretful look at Max.

“Thanks but I'm more than happy to be staying here,” Max said.

“Awww it's really fun they have all these awesome slides and this really big one you go down in a tube you even go uphill

in it," Brandon said as if he were trying to sell Max on it.

"That sound cool," Max admitted. "But you're forgetting that if I did go I would only be allowed in the kiddie pool area," Max said. Brandon's enthusiasm faltered.

"Oh yeah," Brandon said frowning a little. "I guess I kind of forgot."

"Its not that big of deal," Max said feeling slightly guilty for raining on Brandon's parade. "You know maybe you can ask Mom and Dad if we could go to a water park this summer. It could still be fun, even if I'm only allowed on the little kid slides." Max said forcing a smile. Brandon didn't say anything as he looked at Max with a gloomy look.

"You think you're still going to be a little kid then huh," Brandon said like he had just been given some bad news. Max hadn't been thinking of it from that angle, but now that it had been said out loud Max couldn't deny that it was plausible. Maybe Max had resigned himself to his fate? Maybe it was time to give up and pick up the pieces where they had fallen?

"It's a possibility," Max sighed kicking at the ground a little.

"Hang on though," Brandon said, his optimistic demeanor returning. "Trevor's going to be gone for the whole week too. You can find where he hid the device and change yourself back and he won't even know you did it."

"I don't think so," Max said. "I might have pushed it at the wedding with Trevor. He is back on his guard. He's going to

bring it with him," Max said. Brandon bit his lower lip for a moment.

"If he brings it," Brandon started talking slow. "I could steal it, hide it from him and then when we get back I can give it to you."

Max's eyes went wide, it didn't even take him a minute to imagine how awful of a plan that was. Trevor would know immediately if it went missing from his suitcase and there would be only one person to lay the blame on. He would surely get it back and who knows what he would do then. Max thought for a minute about the two of them returning with Brandon being reduced to a babbling baby. Whats worse Max wouldn't even know anything had happened. Brandon would be alone in dealing with it, and there would be absolutely no helping him.

"No," Max said grabbing onto Brandon's shoulders.

"Why not?" Brandon asked looking back confused. "I mean it will be in his suitcase, it'll be easy."

Max was starting to panic a little becoming overcome by a sense of impending doom.

"Listen to me," Max said, a deeply serious look on his face. "This is the one time I'm going to pull rank on you. As your older brother I absolutely forbid you from touching that thing. Even if it is sitting right out in the open, don't touch it."

"Max really I can do it," Brandon said thoroughly unmoved by the order that had just been issued to him. Max was now

scared that nothing he could say would sway Brandon. He began to shake. He was becoming so worked up in fact that he felt he was mere seconds from bursting out crying.

“Please B,” Max shuddered as he wrapped his arms around Brandon and buried his face into his chest. “I don't want you to get hurt.”

There was silence for a moment and then Max felt Brandon put a hand on his head and another on his back.

“Okay, I'll listen to you, I promise.” Brandon said softly. Max nuzzled a little more into Brandon. It was comforting as Max felt the shaking in his body subside and the fear in him fade. He felt as if Brandon was comforting him, protecting him. Which was ironic as it was the other way around. Max released Brandon feeling relief. He knew his brother wasn't the kind of person to go back on a serious promise like this.

“Just have fun, and don't worry about me, I'll be okay.” Max said. “And I promise you that come summer I definitely won't be a four year old and we'll go to that water park and have the best day ever.”

“Yeah of course,” Brandon said. Just then Sheila appeared.

“Brandon are you ready?” She asked looking a little hurried.

“Yep all ready,” Brandon replied grabbing his suitcase.

“Great, cause we are late.” Sheila said rushing off.

Max followed Brandon down the stairs. They were met by Dad in the kitchen.

“Hey B, why don't you go throw that in the car,” Dad said opening the door to the garage.

“Sure Dad,” Brandon said dragging his suitcase into the garage. Dad then knelt down to Max's level.

“Okay Max we're leaving now. We will be back in one week,” Dad said holding up a finger.

“I got it,” Max said rolling his eyes a little. He could no longer keep track of how many times Sheila and Dad had gone over this with him. When he had been eating breakfast Dad had even brought out a calendar and had made Max count the number of days out with him when they would return. The point had been made. Dad smiled a little mussing up Max's hair a little.

“Geez at least act like you're going to miss me,” Dad said. “I'm gonna miss you a whole lot.”

“I'll miss you too,” Max said. “And I'll be fine.”

“Okay then,” Dad said as he wrapped him up in a big bear hug lifting off the ground and spinning him around a little before carrying Max out to the driveway to where the car was waiting. Dad then set him on the ground near his Aunt and Uncle and cousins who had gathered to bid farewell. Sheila came out with Trevor in tow.

“Okay I gave you all the numbers and info right,” Sheila said double checking with Aunt Carla.

“We have everything don't worry,” Aunt Carla reassured her.

“Trevor lets go,” Sheila said.

“I'm coming geez,” Trevor grumbled as he closed the trunk coming to the open passenger seat. Just then he stopped his eyes going wide. “I forgot something I gotta go get it,” Trevor exclaimed as he looked straight at Max.

“There is no time, we are going to miss the flights if we are any later,” Sheila said as she ushered Trevor into the car.

“No Mom wait its really important,” Trevor said in sort of a panic as he tried to push past his Mom.

“Too bad,” Sheila said as she pretty much forced Trevor into the car. “Whatever it is you'll have to survive a week without it,” Sheila said before shutting the door. She then turned towards Max.

“Bye bye, sweetie we'll be back soon,” She said before giving him a quick kiss before rushing over to her door and getting in the car. They pulled out as everyone waved watching them drive off. As soon as they were gone

Max bolted inside and ran up the stairs. It couldn't be? Trevor had looked right at him when he had said it. Had it finally happened? Had Trevor slipped up? Max ran into Trevor's room. His heart was racing. He immediately got on the floor looking for the small wooden box under the bed, it wasn't there. Max frowned a little. Yet another though came to him. What if Trevor had moved it while packing intending to bring it with him, both of the boys had been rushed to get ready. What if Trevor had misplaced it while packing. Max began

looking all over the room every nook and cranny he could think of. He came up empty handed. There was only one last place to check. Max went over to the dresser pulling out the contents of each drawer just in case Trevor must have set it down and then forgot, that just had to be it, there was nothing else Trevor could have forgotten that would have gotten that kind of reaction out of him. Max came to a third drawer on the bottom pulling out and tossing all of the contents behind him. He had to be sure, if there was even a small chance he couldn't let it pass by him, and then he saw it.

It was the small box stuffed away in the corner of the drawer. Max reached out with shaky hands. It was here it just had to be. He picked up the box and began to slowly lift open the lid with baited breath. He caught sight of a metal glint and the shape of the device within.

“What do you think you are doing,” Maddie called out causing Max to snap the lid shut with jolt as he looked up to see Maddie standing in the door with her hands on her hip. “Max why did you pull all these clothes out?” Maddie asked taking a couple steps into the room as she looked at the clothes now strewn about the room. She then looked at him again with a exasperated look.

“What is that?” she asked noticing the box in his hands. “I don't think you should be messing with Trevor's stuff you know,” she said as she began to reach out no doubt to take the box from his hands.

“Its mine,” Max yelped as he ducked under her grasp before

dashing out of the room.

“Max hang on,” Maddie said, yet Max got into his room shutting the door behind him. He put the box onto his bed. He had it, he had seen it, it was finally back in his hands. He flipped open the box. He saw the shiny metal shape of the device and wasted no time in grabbing it. He knew Maddie was right on his heels, he needed to work fast if he was going to do this without anyone seeing him. Max's door swung open as Maddie marched into the room.

“What has gotten into you?” she asked.

“I-I-I,” Max stammered before falling silent as he now looked at his upheld hand for the first time taking a close look at what he held. His heart stopped as he unfolded his hand to see he was not holding the device in his hand. What he was holding had the same shape of course and it was shiny too but that's because it was wrapped in tinfoil.

“What is this,” Maddie said as she plucked it from his hand looking at it curiously. Max then watched as she peeled off the tinfoil revealing a digital thermometer. Max looked back at the box on his bed there was something else in there. He looked inside picking up a piece of paper that had some writing on it. Max looked at it for a moment taking some time to decipher it as he had found that his ability to read had been deteriorating rapidly by the day. Yet he still had enough left that after a moment he could decipher what was written. It was one word.

Gotcha

*ÿý*Max let the note drop from his hand his jaw dropping.

“What is all this?” Maddie asked still deeply confused by everything.

“It's nothing,” Max said as he felt his legs give out as he plopped down onto the ground. How could he had fallen for this? Thinking back on it, Trevor had been totally over-acting, and Max had taken the bait hook line and sinker. How could Max have been so naive, so gullible?

“Well, lets go,” Maddie said after a minute as she tossed the thermometer back into the box along with the tinfoil.

“I don't wanna go anywhere,” Max said in a far off tone.

“Oh no you don't,” Maddie said lifting him up underneath his arms to his feet as she began to move him from side to side as if Max were a puppet that she was manipulating as she walked him back across the hallway. “You made the mess and you are certainly going to help me clean it up. I'm staying in that room this week and I'm not getting Trevor blaming me when he gets back and finds it a mess.”

She got Max back into Trevor's room before she picked up one of the shirts and folded it up.

“Here you go,” Maddie said placing the shirt into Max's hands. “I'll fold you put them back in the drawer. Max put the shirt back into the drawer. He was on autopilot like some robot just putting the clothes back that Maddie handed to him. His mind was a thousand miles away. He had felt like a chance had slipped though his fingers, it took him awhile to

admit that there had never been a chance in the first place. The clean up was soon done.

“Okay, looks like we got that done,” Maddie said clapping her hand together as if she were getting dust off of them. “So what should we do next, we got the whole day ahead of us.”

Max stood frowning. He really just wanted to go to his room and mope by himself. Suddenly and idea struck him. There was something that had been bothering him since he had been ten, when he had talked to his Dad and asked him about going to the magic shop. It had come up again when he had talked to Jon at the wedding. He needed to go into town, to the place where the shop had been. Max was not ready to accept what had been told to him. In his mind his Dad had been mistaken its not like that was outside the realm of possibility, that he had never noticed the unassuming building, and as far as Jon went Max just had to believe that something had gone screwy. It wouldn't be the first time something that should'nt be had happened with the device. Max was convinced the thing was malfunctioning anyways. He had stood in that store with his own two feet there was no way it was gone, yet Max was going to need a ride.

“I wanna go somewhere,” Max said “Please, please,” Max said putting his hands together as he begged, which caused Maddie to smirk.

“Let me guess you want to go to the park?” Maddie asked. Max shook his head.

“I want to go to town,” Max replied.

“What in the world do you want there?” she asked cocking her head. Max balked a little. He had to think of something convincing. He couldn't tell her what he really wanted. He needed to tell her something that a four year old would actually want but as Max tried to think of something he was coming up empty, there really was nothing in town he could want, which is something Maddie knew as well. Suddenly Max remembered his conversation with Jon.

“The candy store,” Max squeaked. In reality it was just a pharmacy but all the kids would go there for the large selection of candy they sold.

“Mmmm,” Maddie thought for a moment. “Yeah we could do that,” Maddie said a small smile appearing on her lips as she looked at Max as an idea came to her mind. “But first you gotta help me with something if you want to earn a trip to the candy store.”

“Aww c'mon,” Max said throwing up his hands a little. “I just helped you clean this room.”

Max really didn't like the fact that he had to ask for permission to go where he wanted now.

“You mean I helped you clean the mess you made,” Maddie countered raising an eyebrow. “It won't be hard I promise, it'll be fun.”

“Fine,” Max muttered.

Maddie took Max down to the kitchen stopping on the way to grab a piece of paper and some markers from Brandon's room.

At the table Maddie drew a large rectangle in the middle of the paper before separating it into seven boxes.

“Okay I want you to draw some pictures,” Maddie said pushing the paper towards Max.

“What is this?” Max asked.

“You'll see when its done,” Maddie said.

“I'm not good at drawing, Max said pushing the paper back towards Maddie. “You do it,”

“Its easy,” Maddie said taking the paper back. She started to doodle. First she drew a sun some clouds and some hills. She then put a rainbow at the top. “Okay now you color it in.”

Max looked at the paper with a weary look. He didn't want to participate in Maddie's little art project.

“No thanks,” Max said.

“Hey now you're supposed to be helping,” Maddie said laughing a little. “I guess someone doesn't want to go to the candy store,” she said with a shrug.

“Okay, okay,” Max said with some panic as he uncapped a marker and began coloring in the hills.

“Remember stay in the lines,” Maddie said. “It has to look nice and neat.”

Max colored in all the things Maddie had drawn. He did his best to make it look neat, yet he was finding that his ability to stay within the lines was even worse than it had been the

previous week at preschool. The marker felt awkward and big in his hand. He had to take it slow, he needed to ensure it was good enough for Maddie to take him into town. He finally finished setting his last marker down. Maddie set down her phone which she had been tapping away at while he had been coloring.

“Its beautiful,” Maddie said as she tickled Max a little causing him to giggle. As soon as she stopped Max let out a little huff. He hated being tickled and he hated the fact that it made him laugh.

“Have you figured out what this is yet?” Maddie asked uncapping a black marker.

“No, not really,” Max said. He was just a tiny bit curious, this was no simple picture, that much was obvious from the mysterious object at the center.

“Remember how I said me and you were going to work on that little issue of yours?” Maddie said. “This is your potty chart, we'll keep track of how you do this week with this.”

Max's face went a little red.

“I don't need a potty chart,” Max said with some offense. “I'm potty trained already.” Max's statement seemed right to him. He had deduced that this whole wetting the bed business was new in everybody's memories. Both of his parents had seemed rather surprised when it started and his Dad did have to go to the store to get the pull-ups.

“I suppose,” Maddie said as she uncapped a marker and wrote

something on the page. “Then we'll call it Max's chart of awesomeness,” Maddie said pointing to each word she had wrote as she said it. Max could only grimace a little looking at the paper. The fact that he now had a potty chart in and of itself was humiliating enough it was only made worse by the fact that he had helped make it, completely unwittingly at that. First Trevor's prank and now this, how dumb could he possibly get?

“Are we done now?” Max asked.

“Yep, we just had to make this before we went,” Maddie said.

“How come?” Max asked not seeing how the two things were connected.

“When you asked to go to the candy store it gave me this idea. Every morning you wake up dry you'll get sticker and a piece of candy,” Maddie explained. “So now that we got this made we can go to the store and you can pick out your rewards. Speaking of which,” Maddie said getting up from the table. “Why don't we get you on the potty before we go.” Max got up and made his way to the bathroom without waiting for her to follow.

“I can do it myself,” he said with some huffiness.

“Alright,” Maddie chuckled. “I'll go get Ian then.”

Max was a little more than annoyed when Maddie's reminder proved to be an actually good idea since he did have to go. Max finished his business in the bathroom and came out to the front hall to see Maddie and Ian already waiting. Maddie

already had Max's puffy green jacket in her hands.

“I don't need a coat,” Max declared trying to push past Maddie.

“Yeah right,” Maddie said grabbing Max from behind and getting the coat on him and zipped up. As Max sat on the ground watching Maddie put his shoes on for him he hadn't really expected that to work but he had to try and assert himself a little.

Once everybody was ready Maddie got Max and Ian loaded into the car and they were off into town. Ian was listing off all the candy he was going to get for himself.

“Mom gave me five dollars for you to spend,” Maddie said. “So I don't think you'll be able to get everything on your list.” Ian fell silent his excitement having been dampened.

“What are you getting?” Ian then asked turning to Max.

“I don't know,” Max said with a shrug. This lead Ian to talking non-stop at Max about all the different types of candies he should get. Max listened with some patience yet candy was the farthest thing from his mind. He had other objectives to consider. Maddie parked the car in a backlot behind some storefronts. They walked down the sidewalk before arriving at their destination. Inside the store in the large candy section Max walked alongside Maddie as she pointed out choices to him. Max just agreed with whatever choice was presented to him, he wanted to get out of here as fast a possible. Ian however was taking his time painstakingly

putting back and picking up items so that he was within his spending limit. After what had seemed like hours to Max, Ian had finally been happy with his selection. They paid and walked back out onto the street.

“Can we go play at the park?” Ian asked.

“Yeah why not,” Maddie said with a shrug. Max looked back with an alarmed look. They couldn't go to the park, that was in the opposite direction from where he needed to go.

“Wait, I wanna go this way,” Max said pointing.

“For what?” Maddie asked with a questioning look.

“I gotta see something,” Max said.

“There is nothing to see down there,” Maddie said shaking her head as she began to take a step towards Max. “C'mon lets go to the park, it will be fun.”

Max took a step back.

“Maax,” Maddie said as if she could sense what was about to happen. Max needed to go this was too important. He turned on his heels and bolted off down the sidewalk.

“Max stop,” Maddie yelled out, however Max didn't listen. He ran as fast as he could, he felt like he was running for his life. Max turned a corner before he felt himself slam into someone. Max fell back onto his butt grabbing his face letting out a pained groan.

“Max?” a familiar voice said. Max looked up to see Emily

standing over him with a surprised look on her face.

“Are you okay?” Emily asked as she got him to his feet and began to dust him off a little. “What are you doing here? Where are your parents? Are you lost?” Emily asked question after question trying to figure what was going on. Max shook himself out of his momentary daze.

“I gotta go,” Max said as he went to take off again. Just then he felt two hands grab him and lift him up under his armpits.

“Gotcha,” Maddie exclaimed out of breath.

“Maddie!” Emily exclaimed.

“Oh Emily, what are you doing here?” Maddie said surprised.

“I was running some errands and then Max just ran into me, what are you doing?” Emily asked.

“I don't even know,” Maddie said with a weary tone. “We were at the pharmacy getting candy and then Max just took off.”

“Where were you going?” Emily asked looking at Max with a small awkward laugh.

“Yeah I would like to know that myself?” Maddie asked. “What have you got to say for yourself?”

Max squirmed as he tried to wriggle out of Maddie's grip.

“I have to go, let go of me,” Max said working himself up into a near hysterical state. Maddie set Max on the ground still keeping hold of him by the arms as she knelt down in

front of him.

“Max you stop this,” Maddie said. “Or we will go home right now and you'll be on timeout for the rest of the afternoon.” Max gave up. He was caught. There was no use in angering Maddie any further.

“I'm sorry,” Max said. “But you have to believe me I have to find this place...please,” Max said already starting to feel some desperate tears come to his eyes. Maddie looked at him with a serious expression for a moment before closing her eyes and shaking her head.

“Fine,” she said. “Only to satisfy my own curiosity, we'll go. But you have to promise not to run off again.”

“Yeah, yeah. I promise,” Max said nodding his head feverishly.

“Mind if I tag along?” Emily asked. “I kinda want to see where this is going.”

“More the merrier,” Maddie said getting to her feet as she threw up her hands.

Max took the lead as the rest followed. Ian had a sucker in his mouth and seemed unbothered by the detour as Maddie and Emily seemed to be catching up with one another. Max had lead them down several streets and he was coming up on the last corner. His anticipation was sky high. He knew as soon as he turned the corner he would see the store and he would finally be able to put this whole mess to rest. As Max turned the corner he came to a stop.

“What,” Max whispered as he ran a little ahead. He was now standing in front of the spot where the store had been. Yet it wasn't there instead in between the other two storefronts was nothing more than an empty lot.

“Is this it?” Emily asked looking around confused.

“No, it was here, it was right here,” Max said looking around wildly. This wasn't possible. He knew this was the right place. But as he looked at the lot there was not a shred of evidence that there had ever been a building here.

“What was here...Max what are you looking for?” Maddie asked. Yet Max could not answer. His mouth curled down. It was too much. His plan had been dashed away. It felt like his world was falling apart. Max could no longer hold back as he began to cry.

“I want Daddy,” the words dribbling out of Max's mouth without a hint of recognition of what he was saying. It was the truth. He found himself wishing for his Dad to appear and sweep him up into his arms in a hug that would make Max feel like he was going to be okay.

“Oh Max,” Maddie said picking him up into her arms. “Is that what this was all about. Were you trying to find your Dad's office hoping he was there.”

Max continued to wail. He had tried to keep his expectations low. After all everything was telling him that no such place existed, yet being met with the reality for himself was a hard pill to swallow.

“Lets go to the park, I'm sure you'll feel better after running around a little bit,” Maddie said in a gentle tone. Emily decided to tag along. On their way to the park Max managed to calm down. He kept his face buried into Maddie's shoulder. He was embarrassed at having made such a display in front of Maddie and especially in front of Emily.

At the park Maddie and Emily seemingly made it their mission to cheer Max up. They went down the slides with him and tried to get him to play and run around on the playground equipment all with a sense of optimism and cheeriness. Max could not be moved from his gloomy demeanor however and it was apparent he was just going through the motions. Finally Max found himself in a baby swing as Maddie pushed him. Ian was next to him swinging on his own in one of the normal swings. Max kept staring forward with no regard to his surroundings as Maddie and Emily chatted away behind him. After awhile Maddie stopped the swing and lifted Max up into his arms.

“I think its time for us to head back,” she said. “I think someone needs a nap soon.”

“Sure,” Emily said. “This was fun though I'll text you later and let you know about tonight,” Emily said before turning her attention on Max. “Feel better munchkin,” she said ruffling up Max's hair a little before she left.

The rest of the day plodded on. After dinner Max wandered into the living room. He looked over and noticed the large bookshelf in the room. It had some books on it but was

mostly filled with decorations and pictures. Max stood looking at all the photos. He looked at one of him and his Dad. Max was wearing a life preserver and looked to be a little younger than he was now. His Dad was kneeling down next to him with a fish in his hand. Max could have sworn that this picture had existed before, except it had been on his Dad's desk at work. Max looked down at the date mark and saw it was dated only a year ago. But that couldn't be right he knew this picture was familiar. Upon looking closer though he noticed he could see Brandon on the shoreline in the background. Max's gaze then turned to another picture. He was a baby in this one. Trevor was also in the picture. He was holding a dandelion in front of Max's face. Trevor had a big dumb smile on his own face while Max appeared seconds from trying to eat the dandelion.

“Hey Max,” Aunt Carla called out breaking Max's attention away from the pictures. “Why don't you come get a little drink in the kitchen,” she suggested.

“No thank you,” Max said.

“Okay, but this is your last chance for the night,” she said.

“Huh?” Max questioned confused by her comment. Aunt Carla gave him a little smile.

“Its seven o clock bedtime is in an hour and I don't want you drinking anymore liquids tonight.” Aunt Carla said. “So maybe you should come and get one now just to make sure you aren't thirsty later. “

“Okay,” Max said with some resignation understanding now what this had all been about. He went into the kitchen and took the small glass of water his Aunt offered to him. Then she announced it was time for him to take a bath. Max had gotten used to getting bathed and he gave no resistance as he let his Aunt bathe him, yet he still didn't play with any of the toys that floated in the water. After getting him out and drying him off his Aunt then pointed to the toilet.

“Alrighty hop up,” she said.

“I don't hafta go,” Max said. His Aunt smiled a little before lifting him up herself and plopping him down onto the toilet.

“You may not have to go, but I want you to sit on the toilet twenty minutes before we get you into bed, just to make sure,” Aunt Carla explained as she took out her phone before propping it up on the counter. “Here you can watch some cartoons on my phone while I go and get your bed made and some jammies out,” Aunt Carla then chuckled a little. “You know I used to do this with Maddie when she was your age.”

As Aunt Carla left the bathroom Max found that he did actually somewhat remember he and Maddie doing something like this back when they had both been little during those times he would stay the night at his Aunt and Uncles house, perhaps the same age Max was now or maybe even younger. One of them would sit on a training potty while the other would be on the toilet. Except back then his Aunt had gotten a portable DVD player for them to watch instead of a phone. Still Max felt incredibly awkward in the

moment. As much as he was all for not wetting the bed anymore,the similarity with his current situation and the one back then just rubbed him the wrong way.

Max sat on the toilet with his chin in his hands. Thinking about what he had discovered that day. He knew now that the only way out of this situation meant he was going to have to go through Trevor. It made him feel completely hopeless. Max tried to push aside this feeling as he knew it would probably just make him want to cry again. He focused in on the phone. His Aunt had pulled up a playlist full of animated children's songs. Max rolled his eyes a little thinking this was going to be a long twenty minutes. However no more than five minutes had passed and Max had completely forgotten everything he had been thinking about. Instead he had become fully focused on the phone. Currently it was playing a song about clapping your hands together and every time the animated seal on screen sang out to clap hands together Max did so giggling each and every time.

“Looks like someone is having fun,” Aunt Carla said causing Max let out a startled squeak upon seeing her walk into the bathroom. Max shirked down a little. He had completely lost track of time and he was now wondering just how long he had been sitting on the toilet for. Aunt Carla picked up the phone looking at the time. “You can get up now,” she said motioning towards Max; had it really been twenty minutes already?” Aunt Carla then held out the pull-up in her hand for Max to step into. As she pulled it up around his waist Max gave a derisive look down at it. “Do you not like Mickey

Mouse?” Aunt Carla asked noticing Max's less than pleased look.

“I don't wanna wear it,” Max grumbled venting his frustration. “It makes me feel like a baby.”

“Nobody thinks you're a baby,” Aunt Carla said. “You know lots of kids wet the bed, way more than you think, and a lot of them are older than you.”

Max looked up at his Aunt with a look that would tell anyone he was unswayed. He knew she was just trying to instill some confidence in him but his situation was unlike any other. Aunt Carla knelt down with a plan.

“Hey if I tell you a secret, you promise not to say anything?” she asked.

“Yeah, sure,” Max said shrugging his shoulder's though he was a little curious as to what she had to say.

“Ian wets the bed too, and he's not a baby right? He's a big kid,” Aunt Carla said.

“Oh,” Max said unable to muster any sort of reaction. Of course he had already known that. Besides it wasn't exactly what he needed to hear at the moment.

“So I guess he does all this stuff to then?” Max asked as he looked at his Aunt's expectant expression. Max didn't really want confirmation though, knowing it would probably only make him feel worse about the whole thing. He was sixteen not six after all. There was no comfort in knowing he shared

a bedtime routine with a bedwetting six year old.

“No not really,” Aunt Carla responded. “You see some kids wet the bed even after they are potty trained and its just something they'll grow out of eventually, its very common actually. But that's not your problem. Your Daddy tells me that all this started not so long ago for you, right? You weren't having this problem a couple of weeks ago were you?”

“Umm no, I guess not,” Max said having sort of deduced that earlier.

“Well your Daddy seems to think you've been a little stressed out lately, you think that's true Max, have you been feeling like everything is a little crazy?” Aunt Carla asked stroking Max's hair a little.

“Maybe,” Max said frowning a little.

“I think I agree with your Daddy and Mommy,” Aunt Carla said. “The best thing you can do for yourself is to just relax. I know a lot of things have been changing, but its going to be okay, you'll see.” Aunt Carla said picking Max up into her arms and carrying him into his room. Max's Aunt got him dressed into some pajamas and then got him into bed.

“Did you pick these out to read?” Aunt Carla asked noticing a small stack of books on Max's bed.

“Maddie bought those today,” Max said. At the pharmacy in addition to the candy Maddie had found some children's books for sale. Max had given no opinion on wanting them but Maddie had insisted on getting them for him.

“That was nice of her, guess she wanted to read them to you,” Aunt Carla said flipping through them. “But since she isn't here I guess I get to read you the first one.”

“Where is she?” Max asked realizing that after dinner she had pretty much disappeared which seemed weird to Max as she hadn't left him alone all day.

“Oh she went to go hang out with some friends,” Aunt Carla said. That bit of news hit Max in a strange way. He felt completely demoted at the moment. He should be hanging out with his friends. Instead here he was wearing training pants and a pair of Buzz Lightyear themed pajamas and being put to bed.

“This one looks fun,” Aunt Carla said holding up a book with a googly eyed alien on the front. Max issued a non-commital grunt which had been good enough for his Aunt. She got on the bed next to him putting her arm around him and snuggling him close. Max allowed his head to rest on her chest as she opened the book and began to read. Max began to think a little on what she had been saying about stress and all that. Max could certainly attest to being stressed out by everything that had been happening. It certainly had been doing him no favors as he had been scrambling to react to all the changes.

The facts were this, the shop was gone and Trevor had the device with him. Max was going to remain four years old for the rest of the week and there was nothing he could do about it. Max actually found some relief in that. Maybe he should

take his Aunt's advice and just relax. What else was there to do? Sure he didn't exactly enjoy the little kid treatment but at the end of the day he was the only one embarrassed about it. Everyone else thought it was completely normal. Besides when he did finally change back nobody would remember a single thing about it.

Max let a out a little sigh as he nuzzled a little more into his Aunt. The sound of her rhythmic heartbeat and her soft and gentle tone as she read to him seemed to be lulling him into a drowsy state. Before long she had finished the story and she tucked him in along with the parrot Jon had won for him. As Max closed his eyes he found himself instinctively clutching to the parrot as he drifted off to sleep.

Of course the next morning he had woken up wet again but he tried to remain optimistic telling himself that things were not going to change overnight even if initially they had.

Max was finishing up his breakfast of scrambled eggs and sausage which was kind of strange for a Monday morning. Usually his own parents were rushing to get to work and get all the kids to school that they didn't have time to sit down for breakfast like this. It seemed though that his Uncle and Aunt weren't going into work and their kids were not going to school so they probably had time. Not too mention Max knew his Uncle had cooked it and he was a self professed breakfast food extraordinaire, so it was pretty good.

“Max lets go play,” Ian said getting up from the table. Apparently without Brandon or any other kids his age around

Ian had decided that Max was fine enough company.

“Ian please ask to be excused before you get up,” Aunt Carla tutted.

“Fine,” Ian said taking a seat at the table. “Can me and Max be excused.” Ian said taking it upon himself to ask for Max.

“If you are both done than yes you can,” Aunt Carla said. “Thank you for asking.”

Something weird was going on. Max expected his Aunt to be getting him ready for preschool yet nobody seemed to be in any rush to go anywhere.

“Um don't I hafta go to school?” Max asked wondering if they had forgotten.

“You don't go to school,” Ian laughed. For a split second Max thought something had changed before remembering that the device hadn't been used and he most certainly did go to school.

“Max goes to 4k everyday just like you go to school,” Maddie said to Ian.

“That's right,” Aunt Carla said. “And I hear he is quite the scholar,” she added before addressing Max. “You're not going so don't worry.”

“I'm not?” Max questioned. It wasn't that he actually wanted to go, he was just a little surprised was all.

“Sure,” Aunt Carla said. “Maddie and Ian don't have to go to

school this week, and neither do Trevor and Brandon so your parents thought it was only fair that you get the week off too."

Max was happy to hear he got the week off of preschool. He didn't have to go along with any of stupid activities or lessons and he didn't have to play with Tj either, Yet Max found himself feeling a little guilty about his feelings. If there was one thing that he had come to not mind too much it was playing with Tj.

"Let's go," Ian said dragging Max off. At first Max was going to refuse but then he remembered he was supposed to not be stressing out about this kind of stuff, he just had to go with it.

As the week went on Max was finding himself feeling a lot more relaxed. He was having a good time spending time with his cousins. On more than one occasion Max had found himself swept up in whatever game he and Ian were playing that he would forget half the time that he wasn't four. The most fun though had been when they had played hide and go seek, even Maddie had joined in. Max was always the first one found though since he couldn't help but giggle when he was hiding.

One night Max's Uncle had even taken him and Ian to a movie. Max had thought at first that it was going to be boring since it was a kids movie but had come home buzzing with excitement as he breathlessly recounted the entire plot to Maddie. Although Max had ended up feeling a little sick shortly afterwards since he had eaten a ton popcorn. Something which Aunt Carla had gotten a little annoyed with

Uncle Denny about letting Max do such a thing in the first place. Max had also gotten used to his new bedtime routine. It was funny though that he actually preferred when Maddie was the one to sit with him while he was on the toilet for the last time before being put to bed. Maddie would usually sit on the counter texting away and then she would inevitability start gossiping out loud to Max about all the things that were going on with her friends. It was just like she would do whenever they had talked on the phone. Max was happy to listen..

“Oh sorry,” she would say. “You'll understand stuff like this when you're older.”

In a weird way it made Max feel just a little bit normal listening to her talk to him like she had when they were sixteen.

It was Friday night and Max found himself on his hands and knees in front Maddie begging her with his hands clasped together.

“Pleaaase,” Max pleaded. “No more pull-ups.” Maddie stood looking at Max with her arms crossed. She glanced towards the chart they had made at the beginning of the week. Monday and Tuesday Max had woken up wet. Wednesday however Max had managed to wake up and just barely make it to the bathroom in time which had earned him his first happy face sticker. Thursday and Friday had proved to be successful for Max as he had woken up dry.

“Well I guess you've been on a pretty good streak,” Maddie

said as she went to the dresser and pulled out a pair of underwear for Max. “Alright I think you've earned a shot.” she said as she knelt down and held the underwear out for Max to step in. Max got them on and was pretty pleased about the whole thing. “Now don't pee pee on the puppy,” Maddie cooed as she pointed to the underwear. Max looked down to see that he was wearing a pair of paw patrol underwear. A portrait of the firefighting dalmation Marshall smiling on the front. Max huffed a little. It couldn't have been more of a condescending comment even if she had meant it. Maddie then went and got some pajamas out.

“You can match tonight,” Maddie said with some enthusiasm as Max could see she had also gotten out a pair of paw patrol pajamas. Max had then gotten into bed and Maddie read him a story. Overall Max was just happy to finally not have to wear a pull-up to bed.

Max awoke the next morning to a hand on his chest shaking him awake.

“Max wake up buddy,” the familiar voice of his Dad said. Max shot up seeing his Dad standing next to his bedside.

“Daddy,” Max yelped as he jumped into his Dad's arms wrapping his own arms around his Dad's neck. His Dad hugged Max tightly.

“Guess you missed me,” his Dad chuckled. “Did you have fun with your cousins,” Dad asked.

Max released his Dad and leaned back a little in his arms.

“Um yeah it was...fun,” Max said feeling a little silly at how he had reacted to seeing his Dad. He couldn't help it though. He had in fact started to miss him a lot.

“I hear you've been working hard,” Dad said looking at the chart on Max's wall.

“Oh yeah, that,” Max said.

“Lets see how you did,” Dad said putting Max on the ground. Dad then pulled Max's waistband forward and looked down. “Maax,” Dad said in a low tone, making Max a little nervous at first, that was until his Dad let the waistband of his pajamas snap back and he looked up at Max with a big smile. “Dry as the desert.”

“R-really,” Max stammered as he now pulled the waistband of his pants back and looked down confirming it himself. “I-I did it,” Max said a little surprised.

“I'm so proud of you,” Dad said picking Max up into the air and holding him above his head twirling him around a little. “Alright champ hurry and go to the potty,” Dad said putting Max onto the ground once again. Max scurried off to the bathroom. Afterwards Dad helped him get dressed before they went downstairs. Max was eager to share the news with Maddie, he was bursting with excitement. The though that at sixteen he shouldn't feel so proud of his accomplishment did'nt cross his mind once. Maddie seemed exceptionally pleased to hear the news as was Aunt Carla. Max was practically drowning in the good feelings all the praise was bringing on. Sheila then walked into the house with Trevor

and Brandon in tow. Max ran towards Sheila giving her a big hug. She covered his face in kisses which made Max giggle with each one. Max was struck by just how much he had missed his parents and Brandon, the only person he hadn't was of course Trevor.

It then came time for Aunt Carla and Uncle Denny to leave as farewells were exchanged. Max was sad to see them go but happy to have his family back home. Dad and Sheila then had all the boys sit on the couch in the living room. Each kid received a souvenir t-shirt from the island Dad and Sheila had honeymooned on.

“But thats not all we have some presents for you guys,” Dad said.

“Presents?” Brandon asked.

“Yep,” Sheila said. “We got each of you something as a way to say thanks for being so great. We know it wasn't easy on you boys with all the wedding stuff.” Sheila then turned around and picked up a box that was wrapped up. She then looked around a little bit before looking at Dad.

“I have Trevor's but where are Brandon and Max's?” Sheila asked. Dad smacked his forehead a little.

“Sorry I carried them in with a bunch of other stuff and I set them in their rooms I didn't know we were planning to open them all together.”

“Well no matter,” Sheila said. “Here Trevor I guess you can open yours first. Trevor took the gift and began to unwrap it

before stopping as his eyes went wide.

“No way!” he exclaimed before quickly unwrapping the rest of the box before holding it up. Max saw that it was a brand new laptop, and it was a nice one to boot. “You really got this for me!?”

“Thank your Dad,” Sheila said with a smirk. “He's the one that insisted.”

“I overheard you talking to one of your friends that your old tablet couldn't run the games you guys wanted to play together.” Trevor stood up in front of Dad still surprised at what he had received.

“Um...thanks Dad...its really great,” Trevor said a little hesitant. Dad sort of looked a little shocked before he smiled.

“Don't mention it,” Dad said putting a hand on Trevor's shoulder.

“Can I go open mine now?” Brandon asked as he squirmed on the couch antsy.

“Of course,” Sheila said. Brandon was up in a flash as he tore up the stairs. Max walked up to his own room. He knew whatever gift they got him would be to the taste of a four year old so he wasn't all that eager. Coming into his room he saw a paper bag with some tissue paper in it. Next to that was a larger square package. Max first looked in the bag. It was a large bag and when he pulled out what was inside he found out why. It was a large stuffed tiger. Max held the tiger so that there heads were level, the body of the tiger stretched all the

way down to Max's shins. Max hugged it for a moment, it was pretty soft. Still it was a stuffed animal. Max heaved the tiger onto his bed before he took the box off the bed before setting it on the ground. He unwrapped it to find it was an action figure set. There were several dinosaurs along with some human figures and some vehicles like a jeep and a helicopter. Max frowned a little. He felt a little cheated. It took him a moment to tell himself that his parents had only gotten this stuff for him because they truly believed he would really like it. It was the thought that counted, and he did feel grateful that they had tried their best.

“Hey big guy what do you think?” Dad asked standing in Max's doorway. Max stood up putting a big smile on his face.

“I love it, this tiger is so big,” Max said grabbing the tiger off of the bed and giving it a big hug. “And I got so many dinosaurs,” Max said jumping up and down a little, selling it as best as he could. His Dad smiled before sitting on the ground lifting the box off the ground.

“Lets get this open,” Dad said as he began to open the box. Max sat on the ground across from his Dad who was pulling out each of the figures setting them on the ground. Once Dad had emptied the contents of the box he saw that Max was just staring at them. “Do you not like it?” Dad asked.

“No, I do,” Max squeaked as he jerked to attention. “I was just deciding which one to play with first,” Max said quickly as he took the Tyrannosaurus figure into his hand. “This one is cool,” Max said as he made the figure start to stomp across

the carpet.

“Do you know that one's name?” Dad asked.

“Yeah, its the t-rex,” Max said before letting out a roar imitating the ferocious creature.

“How about this one?” Dad asked holding up another of the figures.

“Brontosaurus,” Max answered.

“That's right,” Dad said with a smirk as he picked up another. “Okay my little paleontologist, how about this one?”

Max looked at it for a moment before shaking his head.

“I don't know,” Max said not having the foggiest idea of its name.

“Yeah, me either,” Dad said. “I just think its funny since it has a bill like a duck,” Dad said pointing to its head.

“It qaucks,” Max said smiling a little.

“Maybe it does,” Dad said laughing.

“And the T-rex eats him,” Max said making the tyrannosaurus bite the other dinosaur. After awhile Max was totally wrapped up in playing with the dinosaurs with his Dad.

“Oh no don't eat me,” Dad said as he pushed the jeep along the carpet. Max let out a roar and slammed the dino figure on top of the jeep eliciting squeals of laughter from Max.

“Craig I need your help lifting for a minute,” Sheila called

out from downstairs.

“Alright, I'll be right there,” Dad called back as he got to his feet. “You keep having fun and I'm going to get something whipped up for lunch,” Dad said giving Max a grin before leaving. Max was sad, he wanted his Dad to stay and play more. A moment later Max seemed to snap back to attention. What had he been doing? Max let out a groan. That time he had slipped way too fast. He guessed that a whole week of going along with the little kid treatment had reduced his ability to resist, or perhaps the changes were starting to become more permanent. Max shuddered a little, just how much time did he have left before he started thinking like a four year old all the time? There was no two ways about it, he had to do something and soon. Just then Brandon appeared.

“Hey Max what'cha doin?” Brandon asked walking into the room and crouching down to get a closer look at the figurines.

“Nutthin really,” Max said.

“Is this what you got?” Brandon asked picking up one of the figures. “These are really cool.”

“Yeah and I also got that,” Max said motioning over to the stuffed tiger on his bed. “What did you get?” Max asked.

“You gotta come see,” Brandon said with a look of pure excitement. “Its so cool.”

Max followed Brandon into his room. Brandon had a large assortment of items laid out on his bed.

“What is it?” Max asked.

“Its a spy kit,” Brandon said as he began to pick up all of the tools. “Its got a magnifying glass, a fingerprint kit, some invisible ink, oh and this is the coolest thing,” Brandon said holding up something that appeared to be a small screen and another small square object. “Its a spy cam,” Brandon said as he gave Max the screen and pointed the camera around the room. Max looked at the screen and could see that it was indeed a video of whatever Brandon was pointing at.

“I tried putting the camera up here and then going down stairs but it says it didn't have enough range,” Brandon said. “But still its pretty cool.”

Max was then struck by an idea.

“Hey can I borrow this?” Max asked.

“Hmmm,” Brandon hummed while pursing his lips. “I kind of wanted to play with it more a little first.”

“Please, I need it,” Max said. “I could use it to find out where Trevor is keeping that device. With this I would finally be able to get it back.” Max said a hopeful look on his face.

“You want to spy on Trevor?” Brandon asked.

“Well yeah, I guess,” Max said a hopeful look on his face. Brandon was silent for a moment before a mischievous look formed on his face.

“It would be like we were really spies,” Brandon said.

“Yeah,” Max said as he got the same mischievous expression. “Lets be spies.”

Chapter 12

Satisfaction Guaranteed: Final - Chapter 12

Max and Brandon were in the living room playing together after lunch. Max had his new dinosaur toys while Brandon had some of his spy supplies. Max had thought nothing of the fact that he had been excited to keep playing with his new toys and hadn't given an ounce of worry to letting himself have fun. Currently in the game Max was a super villain with his army of dino's and Brandon had to stop him. Max at that moment had the tv remote in his hand which wasn't a remote but a controller that would shoot off missiles from space. He was running across the living room laughing maniacally as he did so.

“You're done,” Brandon said snatching Max up and holding him from behind as he began to drag him over to the coffee table. Max was trying to break free but Brandon was too strong. Suddenly Max didn't think this game was all that fun anymore. As Brandon released him Max fell to his knees. He curled up into a little ball hiding his pouting face from Brandon.

“Now you're arrested,” Brandon declared sitting down next to the little evil genius. Max let out a whiny moan as he pulled his knee's tighter to his chest. Brandon was being so unfair right now.

“What's with you?” Brandon asked noticing that Max might

have been a little upset.

“I don't wanna be arrested,” Max grumbled.

“It's just part of the game,” Brandon said. “And now that your arrested we gotta take your fingerprints.

“Fingerprints?” Max asked unfurling from his shell.

“Yep,” Brandon said grabbing an ink pad. He took Max's thumb and pressed it into the pad before pressing his thumb onto a piece of paper with five squares on it. “See, look its your thumb.”

“Do more,” Max said hopping a little finding it fun to get his fingerprints done. Brandon proceeded to do the rest of Max's fingers. Sheila came into the living room to tidy up a little.

“Mommy look,” Max said taking the slip of paper over to her to show it off. “Its my fingers.”

“Oh look at that,” Sheila said smiling as she looked the slip of paper.

“I'm a supervillian,” Max said feeling pretty cool about it. “But I gotsa arrested so now I have to be in jail,” Max said some dourness on his voice.

“I'm so sorry to hear that,” Sheila said kneeling down and cuddling Max a little. “I'm sure you'll escape though, right?”

“Uh huh,” Max said smiling. “My dino's are gonna help.”

“I'll be looking forward to watching that on the news,” Sheila said with a chuckle.

Just then Trevor came into the room holding his laptop with his shoes on.

“Going somewhere?” Sheila asked noticing that Trevor looked like he was heading for the door.

“Oh well I was going to go to Kyle's house so we could play some video games together,” Trevor said.

“Craig...I mean Dad already said it was okay,” Trevor added quickly.

“Okay,” Sheila said with a nod. “Just be careful with that laptop and be back by seven.”

“I will,” Trevor said with some surliness as he went out the door.

Max and Brandon were staring at each other having both heard that Trevor was out of the house. Brandon motioned with his head towards the stairs as Max nodded having come out of whatever mind space he had just been occupying and back to his regular self. Max and Brandon shuffled out of the living room. They got the spy camera and went into Trevor's room. It took a bit but finally they found a good spot that would give them a good look of the room up on a shelf. They put the camera in between some books. Max worried that Trevor might spot it yet he told himself that Trevor doesn't even read, so he probably wouldn't even look at the bookshelf. Max gave one final look at the screen. It wasn't great quality but it would do.

“So you think this will work?” Brandon asked.

“It will,” Max said nodding his head with full confidence. The day seemed to drag on. Max was a total mix of excitement and nerves. The thought of finally getting back to normal was all he could think about however there was still a nagging doubt that he would fail and there wouldn't be any second chances. Yet as Max had learned in the previous week it was best for him to try and relax. Nighttime had finally rolled around and there was no sign of Trevor. Max was becoming worried that it would be bedtime soon. He was already starting to feel a little tired as he had become accustomed to his new sleep schedule. He knew that if he was put to bed there was a good chance he wouldn't be able to stop himself from falling asleep.

Max was sitting on the floor in his room. He was hugging his new stuffed tiger ruminating on his thoughts. Sheila appeared in Max's doorway.

“Hey sweetie, its about an hour before bedtime,” she said. “I heard from Carla about what you guys started doing this past week and I think its a great idea if we keep it up. So if you want a drink now is your last chance and why don't you pick out some books to look at while you're sitting on the potty.”

“Kay,” Max responded in monotone. As Sheila walked away he heard her stop.

“Trevor what in the world,” Max heard Sheila say out in the hallway. “I though you went to Kyle's to play video games. Why on earth are you covered in dirt?”

“Some other guys came over and we decided to play some

football.” Trevor explained.

“I guess I should be happy you weren't glued to a screen all day,” Sheila said with a sigh. “But you are absolutely filthy and you are tracking dirt all over, so get into the shower immediately and try not to make an even bigger mess please.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Trevor responded to his Mom's request that he obviously perceived as nagging. Max heard Trevor go into his room shutting the door. Max got to his feet and scurried over to the screen connected to the camera switching it on as a video feed of Trevor came on the screen. He saw Trevor put his laptop onto his desk before he grabbed his phone out of his pocket and began scrolling through it. Just then the words “Low battery” flashed in the corner of the video screen.

“C'mon, c'mon,” Max said through gritted teeth hoping it had enough power to last. Trevor then put down his phone as he walked over to his bed. Trevor reached into his pocket and pulled something else out. Max squinted at the screen trying to see what it was. He then saw Trevor put whatever it was into his pillowcase. The screen then went black as a symbol of a battery with a line through it blinked onto the screen.

Max put it down. He had seen enough. It had to be the device that Trevor had put into his pillowcase, what else could it be? Trevor then came out of his room and went into the bathroom. Max's heart was beating out of his chest. Max then heard the shower turn on. He stood up, this was it. Max went over to Trevor's room his heart was beating so fast he could feel it reverberating off the side of his head. Max closed the

door behind him. If the device was truly there he didn't want anyone to see him use it. Max climbed up onto the bed and crawled over to the pillow. He stuck his hand inside feeling around before his hand touched something. Max grasped it pulling it out. There in his hand was the device, it was the real deal this time, he had done it. Max's face broke out into a smile as he stood up. He was finally going to change back.

For a second Max considered running out of the room and finding Brandon before changing back, Max then hesitated. Maybe it would be better if Brandon didn't know. Although as Max thought about it more this whole experience had brought them closer and it would be a shame to lose all that. Max also had to consider that if he changed back right now how would that effect the chain of events? Brandon would still remember Trevor being older, he would know about the device. Would it be that Max had regressed Trevor unprovoked? Would Brandon be okay with that? Max stood up. Brandon deserved the whole truth so he should do it in front of him. After all this was as much Brandon's victory as it was Max's, he really could not have done it without him. As Max was about to hop off the bed the door opened and Trevor came walking in. Max froze.

Trevor didn't notice him as he walked to his dresser grabbing a clean shirt that he had forgotten to take with him. He then looked up and noticed Max standing on the bed and what it is he had in his hand. Trevor froze a moment before a split second later snapping into action as he came charging at Max.

At first Max felt himself instinctively pointing the device at

Trevor his thumb going over the button. Yet Max stopped himself, he couldn't do that, there was only one charge left. As he felt Trevor's hands close in on him, Max tossed the device into the air to the side of the room. No matter what he couldn't let Trevor get his hands on it, if that happened it was all over and Max would be sent on a one way street to infancy. Max felt Trevor shove him down. Yet he immediately stopped seeing what Max had done. Trevor instantly started making his way towards the device. As Trevor was at the foot of his bed he had his back turned. Max got to his feet and took off running before launching himself into the air landing on Trevor's back as he wrapped his arms around Trevor's neck. The sudden impact of Max's weight was enough to knock Trevor off balance as he stumbled a bit before landing on his hands and knees. Trevor crawled forward a little to where the device was snatching it up. With his free hand he reached around grabbing Max by the shirt attempting to pull him off. Max on the other hand had Trevor in a death grip but he knew it was only a matter of time before Trevor pulled him off and then hit him with the last charge. Completely out of options Max did the only thing he could. He opened his mouth wide before biting down as hard as he could onto Trevor's shoulder.

“Aaagh,” Trevor yelped as Max tasted a trace of blood hit his tongue. Trevor's arm that was holding him up gave out as he fell onto the ground.

ÿýCRUNCH

The sound rang out in the room as both boys came to a stop.

The sound was followed by a high pitched whine before a sudden and loud pop, smoke exploded out engulfing both boys. Max rolled back as quickly as he could scurrying back a little. He began to cough as he felt some smoke fill his nostrils. Yet it wasn't as bad as it had been before. He opened his eyes and found he could still see through the light haze that surrounded him. From where Max was he could see that Trevor had become completely engulfed in the smoke and he could hear him coughing just as Max had before during the previous transformation. Max shut his eyes, even if he wasn't completely engulfed in smoke like Trevor, it was still enough to sting his eyes. Max let out a few haggard coughs before he opened his eyes again blinking a few time before the smoke disappeared completely. He sat taking in some deep breaths. He looked over to where Trevor had been seeing some clothes in a pile on the ground.

Max saw some movement underneath the clothes before he saw the head of a little toddler pop out. Max was shocked. The toddler had chubby cheeks and a little button nose, two big watery eyes complete with a head full of curly black hair.

“Trevow,” Max whispered noticing at once that his own voice had changed again and he found it hard to say Trevor's name. Max then looked down at himself. The clothes he had been wearing appearing now too big for him. Max looked at his hands to see that they had become chubbier and less defined. As Max felt his face he could tell it was rounder and chubbier just as Trevor's was. It was clear to Max now. Both he and Trevor had gotten younger. Once again they were back to

being the same age. A twist brought on by the fact that Max hadn't gotten hit by the full impact of the smoke, unlike Trevor.

Both of the boys sat looking at each other in a stunned silence. Trevor moved his arm a little tossing the device that he had still clasped in his hand into the center between the two of them. The device was truly broken, bent and cracked open. Then as if they were mirror images of one another both of their faces crumpled up before letting out loud wails as tears began to stream down both of their faces. It only took a moment for Dad and Sheila to come running into the room. Both of them seemed completely confused looking at the scene in front of them.

“What in the world?” Sheila asked. Another second later both parents had their respective child bundled up into their arms.

“Whats with these clothes?” Dad asked noticing both boys were dressed oddly in clothes that were too big for them.

“Trevor is all dirty as well,” Sheila said shaking her head as she tried to wipe a little of the dirt from Trevor's face. Both parents just looked at one another as they tried to comfort the crying children in their arms.

“Brandon,” Sheila called out. Brandon came walking into the room looking around just as bewildered as everyone else. “Did you have something to do with this?” Sheila asked.

“With what?” Brandon asked.

“Why are Trevor and Max playing in the guest room and why

on earth are they wearing these clothes?" Sheila asked her suspicions falling on the clueless kid.

“I don't know,” Brandon said.

“You expect me to believe they did all this themselves,” Sheila countered.

“I didn't do it,” Brandon said shaking his head. Sheila let out a little huff.

“He's telling the truth,” Dad interjected. “Brandon was in the kitchen with me until just a minute ago. I think Max and Trevor got into this mischief all on their own,” Dad said with a chuckle. “I guess we should have known there would be some chaos with a pair of two year old's in the house.”

“You're right, sorry Brandon,” Sheila said giving Brandon an apologetic smile. “Guess I need to give Trevor a bath before bed,” Sheila said as she exited the room with a still crying Trevor in her arms.

“Alright Max lets get you sorted as well,” Dad said looking at Max who gave another whimper. Dad then came to a stop looking at the ground. “What is this?” he asked leaning down and picking the device up off the ground. Dad gave a look towards Brandon who sort of threw up his arms. Dad merely shrugged tossing it into the small metal trashcan in the corner.

Dad carried Max into his room. Max looked around seeing that the room had been completely remade over. The walls were painted blue with fluffy clouds. Max's bed was gone and now there were two cribs in the room. Above each crib were

colored letters on the wall, one spelling out “Max” and the other spelling out “Trevor”. There were two rocking chairs in the room as well. Colored bins filled with toys were sat on a rack and there was also a small bookshelf, as well as a dresser with a mirror on top that was near a changing table with diapers and other supplies stowed away underneath. Dad placed Max onto the changing table before he pulled the shirt and pants off of him he then laid Max back before stripping the underwear that had been hanging loosely off of his waist.

“Are these your's” Dad asked holding the farm animal themed underwear up looking at Brandon with a smirk.

“Those are definitely not mine,” Brandon said putting his hands up defensively.

“They must have found a stash of old clothes your Mom keeps around,” Dad said as he took the clothes away and went into the closet. Max sat up, he looked over to the mirror where he could see his face. His hair had gone completely blond and had feathered out with a soft airy look. His face was now rounder and his nose was small. Max's lips also had a red color and they seemed to pucker out naturally. Looking at the reflection was a final confirmation for Max, he was a baby. Max turned looking at Brandon who was standing next to the changing table.

“Bandon,” Max mewled still finding it hard to form certain syllables. “Help.”

“Are you cold?” Brandon smiled. “Don't worry Dad's getting you some jammies that will be warm.” Brandon said before

booping Max on the nose.

Max started to whimper again as new tears came to his eyes.

“Wait, hey don't cry,” Brandon said becoming alarmed. Dad came back over.

“More tear's Max,” Dad said as he pushed Max back onto his back.

“S-sorry,” Brandon stammered. “I was trying to help.”

“It's okay,” Dad said with a reassuring voice. Max then felt his Dad slip something into his mouth. As Max's tongue touched it he could tell immediately that it was a pacifier. Max was going to spit it out. He was stopped however as his mouth seemed to react on its own taking a single suck on the object. Max then took another and one more final one before he started to suckle. It brought on an incredibly overwhelming sense of comfort to him.

“So Brandon want to help?” Dad asked. “You know I don't think I've ever seen you change a diaper before.”

“Eughh diapers are gross,” Brandon said scrunching up his face.

“Oh really,” Dad said. “Well you know your brothers go through a lot of them and me and your Mom were kind of thinking we could just put you in charge of changing all of them.”

“What! No way,” Brandon said sounding very concerned.

“Okay okay, I was only kidding,” Dad said with a laugh. “But you are the older brother and I think you're old enough to help out so lets make a deal. You don't have to help with the messy ones but pitch in here and there, I also think that you could handle getting the garbage out to the curb on Sunday night and I know your Mom would appreciate you keeping your room tidy.”

Brandon was silent for a moment as he mulled over what Dad had said.

“Well I guess that doesn't sound too bad,” Brandon said.

“Hey if you do all that as well as a couple of other little things here and there I think we could see about getting you an allowance...maybe ten bucks a week.”

“Ten bucks! I can do that,” Brandon said eager at the prospect.

“Great, you can start now, just watch what I do,” Dad said as he took a diaper out and unfolded it. Dad began narrating every step. First he lifted Max up by his ankles and slid the diaper under him before taking some powder and sprinkling the diaper. He then set Max down before he took some lotion and spread it into all the nooks and crannies before giving another light dusting onto Max's skin. “Okay you're up,” Dad said as he let Brandon come and stand in front of him. “Just lift up the front and secure it with the tapes.” Dad instructed.

Brandon pulled the front of the diaper between Max's legs as Dad helped keep it into place as Brandon stuck the tapes into place. Max suckled harder on the pacifier. His Dad's narration

had been bad enough and now with Brandon being the one that was taping the diaper up, Max couldn't help but feel completely mortified.

“You did great,” Dad said as he rubbed the tapes of the diaper making sure they were secure.

“I guess it was pretty easy,” Brandon said.

“You're free to go,” Dad said lifting Max off the table and sitting in one of the rocking chairs with Max in his lap. “Its jammie time Max.”

“Night Max,” Brandon said patting Max on the head before giving him a kiss on the side of his head. “We can play tomorrow,” Brandon said smiling. Max furrowed his brow a little as he laid his head back into his Dad's chest. There was no doubt, Brandon hadn't seen the last transformation. In his mind Max and Trevor were babies and it had never been different. Brandon left as Dad got Max into a sleeper zipping him up in the back before cradling him as Dad began to rock gently in the chair.

“You and Trevor certainly got into some trouble with one another, huh,” Dad sad as he looked down at Max softly stroking his hair. Max gave another soft whimper as he nuzzled into his Dad. What was he going to do now? Brandon didn't remember anymore, the device was useless, and Max and Trevor were the only ones who knew what had happened.

Dad readjusted the boy so Max now had his face in his chest still letting out little whimpers and moans.

“No more tears,” Dad said as he gently rubbed Max's back. “Whatever trouble you boys were in its all over now, I got you.”

Max laid his head against his Dad. He thought about taking the pacifier out of his mouth but it was actually helping him keep it together. With the gentle rocking motion and his Dad's tender touch Max had actually found himself calming down.

“Its going to be okay,” Dad said, there was silence for a moment before Dad started talking again. “You know I didn't know what I was going to do. Back when you came along and then I suddenly found myself on my own. “Dad said in a sort of reminiscent way. “It wouldn't have been so bad though just the two of us,” Dad added with a chuckle. “Still I was worried, especially about you. Not a lot of family around and just me and you, not to mention I was still working a lot more, I just kept thinking about how lonely you were going to be.” Dad said with some melancholy.

Max thought about what his Dad was saying. He wasn't wrong. Max certainly knew that it had been lonely sometimes for him and his Dad, but it wasn't so bad, Max had gotten along just fine.

“But then Sheila came along,” Dad said his tone taking on a more happy tone. “And Brandon and Trevor too, it was then that I knew we would be okay. We really lucked out didn't we kiddo?” Dad looked down at Max as if he was waiting for him to respond as if this was an actual conversation between them and not his Dad rambling on. “I got a wife and three

awesome kids," Dad continued, his gentle and quite cadence was actually working almost like a lullaby to Max as he was feeling a little drowsy an all too familiar side effect of the regression "And you get a Mommy and a responsible older brother and another brother your age, I already know you two are going to get into no shortage of mischief together," Dad chuckled. Max let out a yawn as his pacifier slipped out of his mouth. Dad got up from the chair and took Max over to one of the cribs tucking him in.

"You know I think you and Trevor might be getting too big for cribs," Dad said looking down thoughtfully at Max. "Maybe its time to start thinking about getting you two into some big boy beds, hmm." Dad said before slipping the pacifier back into Max's mouth which he started to suckle on again without a hint of resistance. Max gave a sort of moan which came out sounding more like an agreeing coo to his Dad's suggestion. It wasn't that he had been excited by the idea of a "big boy" bed as his Dad had put it. At the same time Max wasn't exactly thrilled to be in a crib at the moment.

"Lots more fun tomorrow big guy," Dad said before giving Max a kiss on the forehead. As Dad left the room Max heard him exchange a few words with Sheila before she walked into the room with Trevor fresh from his bath. Max watched as Trevor was put on the changing table. Max could tell Trevor wasn't okay with what was happening either but to anyone else he looked like he was just a fussy little baby.

"Now now Trevor," Sheila said popping a pacifier into his mouth. Max watched as Trevor went through the same

emotions he had. Trevor's face screwed up as he was about to spit it out. Then one suckle, two and then a third before the pacifier was then going up and down as Trevor suckled away. He gave out small groans and whimpers as his Mom diapered him up and then got him into his own sleeper for the night before putting him into his own crib. “Good night my dear,” Sheila whispered giving a Trevor a kiss. Sheila then stood looking towards Max.

“Still awake?” Sheila asked as she smiled walking over to Max. “Close those eyes darling,” Sheila cooed before giving Max his own kiss. He closed his eyes as he listened to Sheila walk across the room and click something on before leaving the room as she closed the door behind her. Max opened his eyes to see that Sheila had switched on a light that was casting a dim blue and green mixture of colors against the wall. Max looked over and saw Trevor staring back at him through the bars of his own crib. The bars gave Max the impression that they were prisoners which seemed appropriate, they were both stuck. Trevor scowled before rolling over showing Max his back. Max let out a little huff from behind his pacifier as he rolled over onto his own side. If anything this was all Trevor's fault what was he doing looking at Max like that? However Max then though on it a little more. Maybe some of it was his fault too? It had after all been Max's idea in the first place, sure Trevor did share a brunt of the blame but Max knew he could no longer act as if he were completely innocent. They each could have made different choices at so many opportunities and would have avoided this outcome, but they hadn't and now here they

were. The battle of wills was over.

Max pulled his stuffed tiger closer cuddling it. As he thought more and more about it he finally realized something, his original plan had come to fruition. Trevor was a baby contained within a crib with a pacifier between his lips. Except now so was he. Max began to think again on what his Dad had been saying. All that stuff about how great it was that they had ended up where they were. There was some comfort in that. Yet there were some things still bothering Max. His Dad had talked about meeting Sheila right after Max had been born, but that didn't exactly work out though. Through his other regressions the timeline had always been maintained. Dad and Sheila had dated for three years and then got married, yet as things stood now that was no longer true. Max had been born and then his Dad had met Sheila. As far as Max could tell they were still married as evident by the stuffed tiger they had brought back for him from the honeymoon as well as the stuffed parrot that sat in Max's crib which Jon had gotten for him at the wedding. As Max tried to grapple with the changing logistics and timelines he felt himself get a little frazzled, before suddenly another thought came to his mind; did it really matter anymore?

The question resounded again in Max's mind. Did it really matter what had happened to the sequence of events? As it stood now his Dad was married and Max loved Sheila as if she had always been his Mom and he knew Brandon would be a better big brother than Trevor ever could have been, and with him now being a baby how much trouble could he really

cause? Everything just seemed to be falling into place for Max. There was no use in thinking about what had been or where things had changed, it wouldn't make a lick of difference to his current situation. He and Trevor had finally been caught by karma and perhaps they had gotten what they deserved. As long as Max framed it like that he felt he didn't need to hold so much resentment. He cuddled his tiger closer. The pacifier loosened a little from his lips as it began to droop out of his mouth. Max would be sixteen again one day, but he had a lot of growing up to do in the meantime. It was certainly going to be different the second time around but he knew there were plenty of people around he could turn to for support so why worry so much. Who knows, it could be fun.

It was the next morning as Max found himself strapped into a highchair next to Trevor who was in his own highchair. Both boys were dressed in t-shirts and diapers. A bowl of oatmeal was on the tray in front of each of them with bibs around their necks. Max picked up the sippy cup in front of him and drank some milk out of the rubbery spout before putting it down as a little milk dribbled down his chin onto his bib. He picked up his spoon and scooped the last mouthful of oatmeal out of the bowl bringing it up to his mouth. His coordination wasn't the greatest and he got some of it smeared on his face but he managed to get most of it into his mouth. He didn't seem to have a care in the world at the moment as he chewed a little, the taste of brown sugar dancing across his taste buds. There was no use in trying to fight anything, he was content to let himself ease into his new toddler lifestyle. He had learned enough from the past regressions that there wasn't

much use in fighting. This was going to be his new normal whether he tried to resist it or not.

Max looked over at Trevor who did not seem to share Max's laisez-faire attitude. His bib was a good deal messier than Max's own. He had basically refused to eat or drink anything so Sheila had opted to spoon feed him herself.

“Here comes the airplane,” Sheila said as she brought the spoon with the glop of oatmeal on it closer to Trevor's face. Trevor mewled and at the last moment turned his cheek causing the spoon to collide into his cheek. “Trevor,” Sheila said with a sigh as she scraped the glop back into the spoon. “What are you being so fussy for?”

"Guah,” Trevor let out a sound of protest before being silenced as Sheila popped the spoon into his mouth. Trevor furrowed his brows as his lips puckered before swallowing the oatmeal disgruntled.

“What am I going to do with you,” Sheila said loading up another spoonful. “Look at Max he's already finished,” Sheila said shooting a smile in Max's direction as Max finished the rest of his milk before putting the cup down returning Sheila's smile, which caused her to reach over and rustle his hair.

Sheila got another mouthful into Trevor's mouth as she started to feed him more quickly not giving him a chance snap his mouth shut tight. Trevor could do nothing but accept the mouthful's with a defeated look on his face. Dad then came into the kitchen standing next to Sheila.

“How are my boys this morning?” Dad asked.

“One of them is being difficult,” Sheila said. Dad looked over at Trevor.

“You making things hard on Mommy Trev,” Dad said tickling Trevor which caused him to giggle giving Sheila an opening for another spoonful of oatmeal.

“I don't know whats gotten into him,” Sheila said. “He's usually such a good eater.”

“And what about the other little terror,” Dad said looking at Max.

“He's not a terror,” Sheila said. “Max has been a perfect angel he ate all his breakfast like a good boy.”

“Looks like he got more on his face than in his mouth,” Dad said with a chuckle as he wiped the residue off of Max's face with his bib.

“At least he ate it by himself,” Sheila said.

“All by your self huh,” Dad said taking the tray away and unbuckling Max as he lifted him high in the air above his head which caused Max to squeal in delight. His Dad then brought him down as Max cuddled into his Dad's shoulder. Max felt his Dad give him a couple of pats on his diapered behind which caused a couple of happy chirps from Max.

“You're going into the office this morning right,” Sheila asked.

“Yeah,” Dad said with a sigh. “Apparently we got to meet

with this client and it couldn't wait until Monday."

"Darn," Sheila said. "I have to get Brandon over to swim lessons this morning and then I was hoping to go to the grocery store, I guess I'll just have to take Max and Trevor with me."

"I'll drop Brandon off, and then I'll swing back and take Max into the office with me if that helps," Dad said.

"That would be big help," Sheila smiled.

"Whaddya say Max want to go into the office with your old man?"

Max nodded.

"Jon will be around too, I bet he'll be happy to shirk off whatever his Dad's got him doing to take you over to the park." Dad said. Max remembered that it was Sunday morning. Every week Jon and Max would go into the office to clean up for a couple of hours, which gave them pocket money for the week.

"Jon," Max squeaked happily as he clapped his hands together.

"I don't think you should be using Jon as free babysitting," Sheila said with a skeptical tone.

"Ahh, he'll be on the clock so he gets paid either way," Dad said. "Plus he's always telling me he's happy to hang out with Max, even calls him his little brother."

Dad carried Max over to the stairs near the front door before calling out for Brandon to get ready so he could drop him off at swimming lessons. Brandon came down the stairs a second later with a pull string bag on his shoulders.

“I'm all ready,” Brandon said.

“Aren't you going to put your suit on?” Dad asked.

“I just change there,” Brandon said as he turned a little to show Dad the bag on his back. “Its too cold to walk around in a swimsuit outside.”

“Whaddya mean, don't you guys just go jump into the lake?” Dad said obviously making a joke.

“Its an indoor pool,” Brandon said rolling his eyes a little but smiling nonetheless.

“Oh okay,” Dad said sarcastically. “Go on and get in the car I'll meet you out there.”

Dad then took Max into the living room setting him down into a pack and play that was set up. Max stood up hanging onto the side to steady himself on the uneven ground.

“All right squirt I'll be back to get you in a bit,” Dad said before he picked up a pacifier from the coffee table and slipped it into Max's mouth which Max took without any resistance before he let himself flop down onto his diapered bottom. As Max looked down he noticed his diaper was bulkier and he could tell he had used it a little. He didn't dwell on it though, someone would change him eventually,

instead he started playing with some blocks that were nearby. He found it satisfying to stack them on top of one another. A minute later Sheila came into the room and deposited Trevor into the playpen across from Max.

“Now you two boys play nice while Mommy cleans up breakfast,” Sheila said. “And then I suppose we'll go get pants on you guys since we've all got places to be this morning.”

Sheila left the room leaving Max and Trevor alone safely confined in the playpen. Max looked up at Trevor for a moment who was sucking on his own pacifier while wearing a sort of grumpy scowl. Max went back to playing with his blocks not paying Trevor any mind.

“Do somethwing,” Trevor said as he spit out his pacifier.

“What?” Max asked letting his own paci fall out of his mouth.

“Chwange us back,” Trevor said in demanding tone.

“It bwoke,” Max said looking down as he continued to play with the blocks.

“Get a new one,” Trevor replied. Max simply shook his head.

“Storwe gone...poof,” Max said making an exploding motion with both of his hands.

“So what...do we do,” Trevor said yet it wasn't a really a question.

“Gwow up” Max said with a shrug. There was silence then all of a sudden a small plastic car flew into Max's block tower.

Max looked up to see Trevor smirking a little satisfied at his sabotage. Yet Max didn't get mad, instead he built the blocks back up quickly before tossing the car back towards Trevor.

“Again,” Max said with a smile. Trevor gave a dumbfounded sort of look before he threw the car back at the block tower knocking it down again. Max let out a little squeal of excitement as he clapped his hands together.

“Again again,” Max said as he built another block tower. Trevor went along with it as he tossed the car again, this time both boys began to giggle at the sight and sound. Soon both of them were stacking the blocks and then crashing assorted toys into them each time letting out some uncontrollable laughter. They both seemed to find this endlessly entertaining, it was fun and at that moment that was all that seemed to matter.

The months marched on. Max had been a little worried about how easy it was going to be to adjust but he found he was settling quite nicely into his new life. Trevor had been a little moody at first but even he seemed to be adapting and seemed to be in a better mood these days more often than not. It wasn't as if they didn't have their moments. On one particular day both Trevor and Max had wanted to play with the pirate ship toy. Trevor had pushed Max down to take it himself. Max however wasn't going to let himself be pushed around and in short order Max and Trevor were fighting for possession pulling it between themselves. Dad had been quick to intervene however and eventually both boys were happily playing together.

To Max there was more good than bad, he especially liked it on the occasions that Emily would babysit. She would always give him lots of kisses not being able to resist his dimples when he smiled at her. Although Max would get a little jealous when he would see her snuggling with Trevor, he would always try to get in between them and push them apart. Max's jealousy would be short lived though as Emily would always have both of them cuddled up with her no problem as both boys would be reduced to giggles with kisses and tickles. Life had just gotten easier.

It was a cool summer afternoon as Max was in his Dad's lap on the couch as his Dad flipped through some mail. Max was playing around with a fidget toy that Brandon had given him earlier that day. Max's eyes drifted towards what was in his Dad's hand, he spotted a colorful looking flyer that had pictures of water slides and other attractions advertising the nearest water park. Something clicked in Max's mind as he reached out suddenly grabbing at the flyer taking it into his hands.

“You like that one huh,” Dad said. Max looked as if he were studying the flyer. Something about it seemed important to Max.

“I want dis,” Max said.

“Sure you can have that flyer,” Dad said chuckling a little. Max looked up at his Dad shaking his head.

“No, I wanta go,” Max said handing the flyer to his Dad.

“Hmm,” Dad said contemplatively as he now looked at it. “We'll see,” Dad finally said before setting it aside. Just then Brandon appeared to see if Max wanted to go into the backyard to play with a ball which Max obliged forgetting about the flyer which had seemed so important a moment ago. He didn't have time to think about that especially if Brandon was taking him outside to play.

It was a few weeks later that the family was packed up into the car and headed off to the water park. In the little kids area Max and Trevor were climbing through a playset that looked like a submarine in a shallow pool. There were streams of water shooting all over the place. Trevor and Max were poking there head out of the many holes where Brandon seemed to always be waiting to surprise them on the outside which would cause the boys to squeal with laughter before ducking back in. Max wasn't quite sure how Brandon always seemed to be there when they popped out but in his mind Brandon was a big kid so it was possible for him to perform such feats. Max and Trevor decided to go near the back climbing up some steps before taking a ride on the small slide at the back together before splashing down into the water.

“Thought you could escape?” Brandon said surprising both Max and Trevor before splashing some water at them. Both boys let out a laugh.

“You wet,” Trevor said standing up and splashed water back at Brandon but couldn't do it as well as his older brother. Max joined Trevor in splashing Brandon who played along making it seem like they were getting him really good. Max and

Trevor then felt a hand come to rest on the top of their heads. Max looked up to see it was his Dad smiling down at him.

“You boys having fun?” Dad asked

“We splashin,” Max said causing Dad to laugh a little.

“You guys have some saggy swimsuits,” Dad said seeing that Max and Trevor's swimsuits were sagging down enough to show a good portion of the swim diapers they were both wearing.

“You especially Trevor, you don't have a surprise back there do you,” Dad said picking up Trevor and pulling back the waistband of his diaper to take a peek inside. “Phew you're still clean,” Dad said before readjusting Trevor onto his hip. “Now how about you,” Dad said leaning down a little to do the same check on Max who was still clean as well. Dad then picked up Max so that he had both boys in his arms on each hip.

“Daddy, slide,” Max said pointing as he squirmed a little to try and get down.

“We're going to take a little break,” Dad said. “Mommy wants to put more sunscreen on you two.”

“Yuckly,” Trevor said scrunching up his face as he covered his eyes.

“No mucky,” Max whined.

“Mommy isn't going let you get burned up,” Dad said as he carried the boys out of the kiddie area over to near the wave

pool where there was a sea of chairs set up. The family had all their stuff set up on some lounge chairs. Sheila was there ready to receive them as Dad set both of the little boys down on the ground in front of her.

“Oh dear it looks like we need new diapers,” Sheila said noticing the same thing Dad had.

“I already checked,” Dad said. “They're both fine.”

“It wouldn't hurt to get a fresh change for the afternoon,” Sheila said as she dug two new swim diapers out of the bag. Both parents got to work removing the boys swimsuits and diapers. Max felt a tinge of embarrassment at getting changed out in the open. It was strange to him, he didn't know why, this was completely normal after all, still he was happy when he had a new diaper and his swim trunks were back on. Both parents then got Max and Trevor slathered in a fresh coating of sunscreen which both boys fussed a little during.

Dad stood up and looked at Brandon who was finishing up with a spray on sunscreen that his Mom had given him to apply while the parents had been working on the toddlers.

“Well B I think its time for us to go take a ride on the Hydronator,” Dad said pointing off into the distance towards a towering water slide.

“I'm ready,” Brandon said pumping his fist a little.

“I go,” Max said as he went to follow.

“Sorry buddy,” Dad said as he ruffled up Max's feathery hair.

“You're a little too short for this one.”

Max frowned a little moving his head back.

“Its okay Max,” Brandon said patting him on the shoulder. “You can go on it when you're older.”

“'kay,” Max said accepting their refusal of letting him come along with some moroseness. Max watched his Dad and Brandon walk off, some part of him felt there was something deeply unfair about the whole thing.

“Hey you two,” Sheila said bringing Max's and Trevor attention to her as she took each of their hands into one of hers. “Why don't we go get you something yummy to cool down with.” Sheila said standing up still holding their hands as the three of them walked over to a concession stand. Sheila bought a large cup of shaved ice that was colored brightly red with some syrup. She took Max and Trevor back to the lounge chair sitting them next to one another. She put matching bucket hats on their heads before setting the shaved ice down between them giving each of them a spoon. Max and Trevor shared the sweet treat staining their faces with the red color in the process. Once they were done Sheila did her best to wipe their faces but their mouths still had the faint staining around them. Sheila then took them over to a splash pad. There was a large umbrella in the middle that had water cascading down its sides. Max and Trevor were having a good time running through it.

“Get close and smile for the camera,” Sheila said as she was knelt down with her phone in her hand. Max and Trevor

didn't give a second thought as they embraced pressing their cheeks together as they smiled. Sheila took several pictures. “Awww thats a keeper,” Sheila cooed as Max and Trevor took off back to the umbrella. Max let out a squeal as he ran under the water once again. As far as he could tell this was best day ever.

Six Years Later

Max came to a halt as he looked around the grounds of the county fair that he had come to with his family. A little bit ago he had been walking around some craft tents with his parents and brothers. It had been boring to say the least so he, Brandon, and Trevor had started to play tag in between the booths. As Max looked around now at the crowds of people around him he realized while running he had become separated. Not one to worry Max began walking, he figured he would eventually find the rest of his group. As Max walked past a section where there was a car show going on he came to a stop again. A little ways from him he saw a shiny blue car that seemed to sparkle under the sun. Max didn't have much interest in cars, yet as he approached this car something in him seem entranced by it. Max was circling the car now as he looked at it.

“You like it?” An older man who was standing near the car asked. Max looked up at the man blinking a little as he felt like he had just come out of dream or something.

“Y-yeah,” Max stuttered. “Its really cool.”

“It really is,” the man said. “Its an Oldsmobile 442 1970.”

“This is just wow,” Max said with a sort of breathless admiration.

“Hey kid show me your hands,” the man said. Max held his hands up to the man thinking it was a weird request.”

“They look clean enough,” the man said with a nod. “Want to sit in the driver's seat.”

“C-can I,” Max stammered.

“Sure,” the man said opening up the door. “Not many kids these days seem to appreciate stuff like this, but you seem into it.”

“Thanks,” Max said as he got into the drivers seat as the man closed the door. Max gripped the steering wheel. The man leaned down as he started to point all the things inside the car out to Max.

“Just imagine yourself now,” the man said. “Cruising down that wide open road.”

Max smiled as he could almost see it. Sitting in the car seemed to be recalling something in his memories, something about this felt familiar.

“There you are,” Dads voice sounded out as Max looked over to see his Dad now standing near the car. “What are you doing in there?”

“You must be Dad,” the man said standing up. “Your boy seemed rather taken with the car so I thought I would let him try it out, hope you don't mind.”

“Well as long as he got permission,” Dad said leaning down to the drivers window. “So what do you think”

“This car is really cool,” Max said smiling at his Dad.

“Lots of really cool cars out here,” Dad replied.

No” Max said shaking his head as he stared straight ahead. “This one is amazing.”

“You like it that much?” Dad asked.

“There is just something about it,” Max said.

“The kid knows what he's talking about,” the man said. Dad and the man began to talk more yet Max wasn't even listening. In his mind he was cruising down a road with the window down, the engine roaring and the radio blaring.

“All right Max lets go,” Dad said as Max came to from his daydream. “Your Mom still thinks your lost, so we should get back.”

“Oh uh right,” Max said as he got out of the car and thanked the man again.

“Here,” the man said handing Dad a slip of paper. “That's the number for the guy I was telling you about, he might have something you could use.”

“Great,” Dad said taking the paper before shaking the mans hand. “That should help. I've been thinking for awhile that its about time to start a little project.” Dad said as he looked down at Max with a thoughtful expression.

“Its a lot of work especially in the beginning,” the man said. “But totally worth it.”

“I have three boys so I think I'll have plenty of help.” Dad said.

As Max and his Dad walked back Max asked his Dad what he had been talking about.

“Nothing much,” Dad responded. “Just an idea I had was all.”

Max and his Dad rejoined with the rest of the family.

“Just how far off was he?” Sheila asked since it had taken a bit of time for them to return.

“Not far,” Dad said. “But we found something interesting on the way back.”

“Interesting?” Sheila asked with a raise of the eyebrow.

“I'll tell you later,” Dad said with a smirk.

Later on the Max was sat on a blanket in a field in front of a stage. They had just finished eating lunch and were now waiting for a show to start. Max had an old beat up phone in his hand that Brandon had given to him as a hand me down. Max was playing a game. He let out a groan as he let it flop into his lap. Max had once again lost. He had been trying to beat this certain level for a week.

“Still having trouble?” Brandon asked noticing Max's disappointment.

“I can't do it,” Max muttered before looking at Brandon for a

moment. “Can you do it?

“I'll try,” Brandon said taking the phone and began playing. Max watched as Brandon played, it was quite impressive. Brandon was really good, better than Max could ever hope to be. In no time Brandon had gotten past the part that had seemed to give Max so much trouble.

“You did it,” Max said as Brandon gave him back the phone.

“No promblemo,” Brandon said. Max continued playing. He was happy that someone like Brandon was around. Brandon just seemed to be able to do anything. Whenever Max had trouble with a game Brandon always could help him get past it, or if he was having trouble with homework he could always ask his brother for help and even during those times when Max was sad or upset Brandon always seemed to be able to cheer him up. Max was truly grateful to have a big brother like that.

Max paused as he stood up looking towards his parents.

“I have to go to the bathroom,” Max said.

“Me too,” Trevor piped up from behind. Sheila just nodded her head.

“Brandon can you take your brothers to the porta-potties.

“We aren't little kids,” Trevor protested. “We can go by ourselves.”

“Yeah,”' Max agreed. Sheila however looked unconvinced. “Mom c'mon,” Max said. “There just over there,” Max said

pointing to a row of porta potties a little ways away.

“Fine, but stay together,” Sheila said. The boys walked off. Max was drying his hands after finishing up when he noticed Trevor standing nearby staring at a group of teenagers who were hanging out. Max went and stood next to Trevor for a moment.

“Hey Max, do you remember being older?” Trevor asked not breaking his gaze. Max was a little surprised at the question.

“Yeah sort of,” Max said. It was the truth. He and Trevor both had the sense that they had once been older than they were. Outside of one or two times they hadn't really talked about it though. Whenever Max did find himself thinking about it he found that his memories were fuzzy, disconnected and dreamlike in a way that didn't make much sense. He had brief memories of being taller than Brandon and he also remembered at some point Trevor had towered over him. He guessed it was the same for Trevor as well. However the one thing both boys knew for sure was that they had been angry at one another.

“You know sometimes I get the feeling that it was all my fault,” Trevor said. “Like I caused it.”

“Really,” Max said in a quiet voice as he shuffled a little uncomfortably. Max had always felt like it had been his fault not Trevor's, like everything that happened was because he had done something.

“Maybe it was both our faults,” Max said. Trevor was silent for a moment before he nodded and looked at Max.

“Could be but still...I'm sorry for whatever I did,” Trevor said.

“Me too,” Max said.

“Lets go I don't want to miss the start of the show,” Trevor said as he took the lead. As the boys walked back both of them felt lighter in a sense. There had been a sense of guilt in each of them for a long time that had just been lifted. As if there conversation had finally put something to rest. As they walked past a row of park benches Max came to a stop looking back for a moment.

“Hurry up,” Trevor said.

“Yeah you go on ahead.” Max said now turning around. “I'll catch up.”

“Okay, but don't blame me if you get in trouble,” Trevor said ominously as he walked off. Max made his way back and took a seat on one of the benches. For some reason he had caught sight of the person sitting on the other end and he had felt compelled to come back. The person in question was an older gentleman. He had a long scraggly beard and was wearing a sort of frayed and old looking vest. The man was swinging a pocket watch on a chain seemingly not having taken notice of Max. The man then stopped the watch slipping it into his pocket before looking over at Max with a smile.

“Mr. Barnes, we meet again,” the man said. At that moment a

whole flood of memories came back to Max. He could suddenly remember everything that had happened. He knew the man as well, it was none other than Mr. Fishell.

“You remember me,” Max said feeling somewhat gobsmacked as he felt like he had just gotten off a wild roller coaster ride.

“Why of course,” Mr. Fishell said. “I remember the faces of all my customers. So tell me did you resolve that little issue of yours?”

“Issue,” Max said more or less repeating the word back as if it were another language.

“If I remember correctly you were unhappy with a situation within your family,” Mr. Fishell said. “So I sold you something to help bring about some harmony. Did it work, are you happy?”

Max began to take stock of how things had been versus how they were now, was he happy? His Dad was sure happy and Max also had a loving mother and an amazing big brother in Brandon and then there was Trevor. As Max recounted, it seemed strange remembering at how he had felt about Trevor, as things stood now they seemed to actually get along. It wasn't all sunshine and rainbows they still squabbled with one another from time to time. But if they ever really got into it that usually meant they were both in the wrong. Such as last week when they had been arguing about something that Max couldn't even remember and they had started wrestling with one another which had caused a lamp to fall down and

break. It had gotten them both an earful from Sheila before she had sent each of them to their rooms to wait until Dad got home. Yet it was normal for brothers to squabble from time to time. Max and Trevor were practically best friends these days.

If Max was being honest with himself there was only one answer. Yes he was happy with how things had turned out. Maybe he had lost some stuff along the way, but he had gained so many other wonderful things as well. Max simply couldn't imagine having it any other way.

“I guess it did work out,” Max finally said with a smile.

“Good, I'm glad,” Mr. Fishell said. Max sort of cocked his head a little as he regarded the man.

“Did you know all this was going to happen, I mean really just who are you?” Max asked.

“I cannot tell the future Mr. Barnes,” Mr. Fishell said with a chuckle. “I am a person just as you are. But I will say I had a feeling you would get what you were seeking.”

“Oh c'mon, you had to know somehow,” Max said. “I mean you can't expect me to believe you're just some guy.”

“Like I said I am just a man who gets people what they need. I told you on the day that I sold you that device that I had one promise I could make about my wares, do you remember what it was?”

Max did remember, it had been a simple promise.

“Satisfaction guaranteed,” Max smirked.

“Indeed,” Mr. Fishell said with a wink. Max nodded as he hopped off the bench. He gave a wave and said goodbye to Mr. Fishell. As Max walked back to where his family was some music started to play from the stage. Max started running not wanting to miss the start of the concert. As he ran Max could feel all the old memories begin to fade back to the fuzzy dreamlike quality they had been only a minute before. As Max got back he saw that Trevor was standing on a cooler with his Mom's hand on his back supporting him so he could see over the people. Max tried to get a better look at the stage but couldn't seem to find a window through the crowd of people. Just then his Dad came from behind lifting him up and putting Max on his shoulders. From up on Max's perch he found that he now had a great view.

“You okay up there?” Dad asked.

“Its perfect,” Max said as he smiled.

The End