Softly Off To Sleep

by andlat

Josh claims it's his lumpy bed keeping him up at night. His sister Mandy is certain it's actually video games. Well, if her brother is so delicate, a little lump keeps him up, who is she to argue? Time to make his bed -- and him -- nice and soft.

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Chapter 1

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It began innocently enough, as these things often did. Josh sat at the kitchen table, eating a bowl of cereal and stifling a yawn between every bite. His sister Mandy eyed him as he fought back yet another yawn.

"Why are you always so tired?" She asked.

"Dunno." He replied. "Maybe it's cuz you're always waking us up so early." He looked to his little sister Julie, but she was too busy eating toast to give him any support. She was only six anyway.

"Eight is not early." Mandy said dismissively. "Besides, you should have plenty of time for sleep. Your bedtime's ten, isn't it?" Josh nodded, avoiding her gaze so that she did not know he usually snuck to his computer after lights out and played hours of video games. "So, why are you always so tired?" Josh stood up and went to rinse out his bowl, trying to avoid the question. "Let me. You never do it right." She rinsed his bowl out just like he was doing. "Now, why are you so tired?" He knew she knew the real answer. That was the only reason she was being so stubborn.

"I dunno." He mumbled with a shrug. "I guess my bed's lumpy."

"Lumpy? We'll see about that." With a single-minded determination, she left the kitchen to investigate Josh's room.

Josh followed her, but had trouble keeping up with the long-legged seventeen year old.

Mandy frowned as she saw his pigsty of a room.

"You haven't even made your bed." She said accusingly. Josh tried to respond, but she ignored him, sitting down on his bed. "I don't feel anything." She bounced slightly, testing all over the bed before lying down. "Hmm." She said, staring up at his ceiling. "I guess I can feel a tiny little lump, but" she sat up and fixed her hair. "You must be super delicate for that to keep you up at night."

"Delicate?" She smiled and kissed the top of the twelve year old's head.

"Don't worry. I'll figure something out. Something softer."

"Softer?" Mandy left the room and Josh followed. "What are you talking about?"

"Tell you what," she said. "Since you don't want to go shopping with me, I'll take Julie with me and you can clean your room while we're gone."

"What?"

"It's gotta be better than shopping, right?" Josh agreed, but cleaning his room? Ugh. "You should have plenty of time to get it done. Oh, and strip your bed. Maybe if you wash your sheets and blanket and all that, you'll sleep better." She looked at him expectantly. Since their parents were always so busy with work, she was more or less the mom of the family.

"Understand?"

"Okay." Josh muttered.

"I want it clean." Mandy repeated. "Oh, Julie, are you ready to go shopping with your big sister?" Julie grinned.

"Yep!" Josh wandered back to his room and got to cleaning. How on earth did his boxers end up everywhere? It was a mystery, but he soon had them all corraled in his hamper. Then it was a matter of clearing everything out from under his bed, which reminded him that Mandy had told him to wash his sheets.

"I gotta do everything around here." He muttered, dragging them to the laundry room. Once they were in the wash, he eyed his mattress. He did not see a lump and that had just been an excuse anyway. Only then did he remember that Mandy had called him delicate. What had she meant by that? It was such a weird word, probably meant as an insult. After all, he was a twelve year old boy. Delicate made him think of a little girl. Not like Julie. She was vicious and much more aggressive than her tiny six year old body made it seem. Delicate was... Josh could not think of what exactly.

He had moved his bedclothes to the dryer by the time his sisters returned. So much for enjoying some peace and quiet. He had been cleaning the whole time, like some kind of servant. Like Cinderella, he thought, before dismissing it as a girly thought.