Teddy & Ben: Orientation

by andlat

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Chapter 1

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He surveyed the dorm room, appraising it and approving of what he saw. Everything looked perfect. Well, almost everything, he thought as his gaze shifted over to the untouched other side of the room. He had gotten everything unpacked and set up, even made his bed, and his roommate still wasn't here?

“I guess it's not that late.” He murmured, even as he began to imagine a whole semester of having a dorm to himself. Hanging out in his boxers, having friends – or even a girl – over. He smiled at the thought.

“Um, excuse me?” He turned toward the door, his smile growing as he realized that cute little voice had a cute little face to go with it. A little boy stood at the open door, wearing jeans and even a Woodcreek University hoodie. Adorable.

“Hey there! Are you lost, little guy?”

“No, I'm-”

“Oh, Mommy and Daddy are lost, huh?” He chuckled and crossed the room, kneeling down. “Don't worry. We'll find them. Do you know your big brother's name?”

“Quit. I'm-”

“I know, it's scary being all alone, but we'll find them.”
“Stop interrupting and just listen!”

“My name's Ben. What's yours?” The boy seemed to relax. He had to be no more than four or five. He probably idolized his big brother, so Mom or Dad had gotten him a matching WU hoodie.

“My name's Theodore Barr“ He chuckled and took the boy's hand in his to shake it.

“And how old are you, buddy? Are you five?”

“Stop.” Even with a hardened face, the boy's voice was the very epitome of a cute little boy's. “I'm your-”

“Oh, we need to find your people, don't we?” He tousled the boy's hair. “Am I being goofy?”

“What is wrong with you?”

“Just a goofy, goofy guy? A goofy, goofy guy?” Overcome by the boy's adorable confusion, he pulled him into his clutches.

“Hey! What are you- stop!” Ben pulled up the boy's hoodie just enough to expose his chubby little tummy tum. “Let me-EEE!” The boy squealed and bucked as Ben blew a raspberry right into his belly button. That only encouraged Ben more and he blew three more into his belly in rapid succession, the boy giggling and squirming uncontrollably to the point that he kicked off one of his shoes. “Oopsie!” He said in that same goofy voice, reaching over with ease and removing the boy's other shoe before tugging off his dirty white socks as well. “Sure hope you're not ticklish here!”

“Stop! Listen, I nee- hee hee hee hee!” The boy's protests once again dissolved into helpless soprano giggles as he was tickled.

Finally, he relented and let the toddler indignantly get to his feet. He grabbed him before he got out of reach and smiled at the pouting face so close to his own.

“Oh! I have an idea. Let's go to the RA. He'll help you find Mommy and Daddy.”

“Listen to me! I am not some little-” Ben had already gotten to his feet and he picked up the little guy, playfully holding him upside down. “Hey!”

“Oops, this side up. We'll have to write that on your forehead.”

“What is wrong with you!?”

“Shh, we want to be quiet in the halls.” The boy obeyed, though he still pushed and squirmed against Ben's shoulder and side, trying to get free of Ben's clutches. With Theodore in his arms, Ben almost ran into a couple suitcases sitting right by their door. Who left those there?

“Put me down!”

“There might be sharp stuff on the floor, buddy. We don't want your little tootsies to get hurt.”

“I swear to god…” The boy snarled under his breath.

“Hey, Josh.” Ben said, knocking on the open door. “I've got a lost little guy here.” Josh looked from Ben to Theodore in his

arms. He quickly hid his amusement with an expression of surprise.

“Uh” Josh said. “That's Theodore. He's your roommate.”

~ T & B ~

“I said I'm sorry, dude.” Ben called as Theodore stormed down the hall. “You look like you're like four. Shit, it's not medical is it? Am I an asshole?”

“It's not medical, but yes, you are an asshole.” Ben hurried forward and caught his wrist.

“We gotta talk about this, man. We're gonna be roommates.” Thedore remained silent for a moment, but he did not try to pull away.

“Talk about what?” Theodore asked sullenly.

"Well," Ben shrugged. "How about the fact that you let me think you were five for like twenty minutes before I finally found out the truth."

"I tried to tell you!"

"Shh, remember? Quiet in the hall." Theodore was clearly upset.

“I did.” Ben's heart melted. He sounded so cute when he whispered. There was no way this kid was actually his age.

“But still.”

“You kept interrupting.”

“Well” Ben shrugged. “Can you blame me?” Theodore fumed. “I… I guess you're so used to seeing yourself every day, you don't realize how”

“Not another word.”

“Alright, we can talk about it later.” He noticed that they were right by the bathroom. “In all this excitement, have you even peed since you got here?” Theodore stared up at Ben, trying to gauge if that was a joke about his size. It did not seem like the sort of thing two roommates would say to each other, but he did have to pee.

“Guess I can go.” He said, standing up and groaning under his breath as Ben followed him into the bathroom. He thought about ducking into a stall to avoid his new roommate, but Ben was so close behind him, he knew he could never get inside without Ben interfering.

To his surprise, Ben remained silent, taking a urinal that left one empty between them. He was still between Theodore and the door, but that was just him being paranoid.

Even though the lowest urinal was perfectly placed for him, Theodore had to stand up on his toes to reach the sink. It could have been worse, he knew. Once again, Ben seemed to be acting perfectly normal, almost a completely different guy.

“Do you have classes the first day?” Ben asked. Theodore nearly jumped.

“Yeah, an 8 AM lecture too.”

“My sister says every college gives all the early classes to freshmen.” Ben said. “I lucked out, but that probably means I'll get double slammed with ‘em next semester.” Theodore nodded, drying his hands on his jeans. He looked past Ben.

“Huh.”

“What?”

“This one's got a bathtub instead of just showers.”

“Yep.” Ben said, which struck Theodore as odd. “That's why we're in here.”

Theodore did not stand a chance. Ben was on him before he could even fully understand what he had just said. He tried to push Ben away, but that just got his hoodie stuck over his head. All he could see was the maroon cotton as he felt his jeans and underwear come down. A muffled yelp came out of the hoodie as Ben gave the squirming boy a smack on his baby smooth bottom. He pulled the hoodie the rest of the way off, leaving a furious Theodore in nothing but a t-shirt.

“What the fuck is wrong with you?” Ben sighed and put a hand over Theodore's mouth, loving the way his cheek felt. No peach fuzz, just soft little boy skin.

“Use language like that one more time and your mouth is getting a bath too. Understand?” Theodore snarled behind his hand. With a sigh, Ben pulled him forward until his face was in his chest. “Little boys” swat! “Listen” swat! “To Daddy.” Swat!

"You are not my daddy."

“I will be though. You're staying in Daddy's room-” his voice trailed off as he noticed Theodore's t-shirt. “What is this anyway? Oak Ridge Elementary Gym class?”

“It's old.”

“But it still fits you. And look! Teddy written on your back. It's obviously yours, isn't it, Teddy?”

“Do not call me that!” Ben yanked him against his shoulder and gave his naked bottom three firm swats.

“Do not raise your voice to Daddy again. Your name is Teddy. That's the little boy version of Theodore.” Before the newly dubbed Teddy could utter even another syllable of protest, he received a few more swats. “You are a little boy. Your name is Teddy. Little boys listen to Daddy.” Teddy remained silent, hoping that this was all some sort of joke. Like hazing or something. “Repeat what Daddy said.”

“I'm” he gnawed on his bottom lip to get it to stop trembling. “I'm a little boy… my name's Teddy…” he had insisted everyone stop calling him Teddy in what? Fourth grade? “Little boys listen to… to Daddy.” To his surprise, Ben hugged him.

“That was very good.” He said softly. “Now, Daddy's gonna take your shirt off and then you'll get a bath. We need to wash all the dust from traveling off you so you can start your new school year all squeaky clean.” Teddy nodded. “And that means Daddy's gonna have to bathe you-”

“What?”

“Shh, no yelling, Teddy.” Ben said, though it sounded now like a gentle reminder. “You're a little boy. Little boys don't bathe themselves. Daddy bathes his little boy.”

“Everywhere?”

“Yes, from your head to your toes, your bottom, your bits, everywhere. That's Daddy's job.” He covered Teddy's mouth with a hand. “Remember, little boys listen to Daddy. That means no more talking for now. Nod if you understand.” Teddy shook his head. He did not understand any of this! “Well,” Ben said with a slight chuckle. “It's hard to listen to Daddy if you're babbling over him, isn't it?” Teddy glared at him, but he could not say anything with a big hand over his mouth. “Now, Daddy's gonna take your shirt off and then it's into the tub with little Teddy!” He pulled the shirt up over his head and gave his cheek a kiss. Theodore took a step back, but Ben pulled him right back into his arms. He had been apprehensive about taking showers in a public bathroom, but this? This was so much worse than he could have imagined! Here he was, completely naked and pinned to his roommate's side as he filled the bathtub up. He had to do something!

“Uh, Daddy?” He said hesitantly.

“Shh, no talking, Teddy.” He smiled at the tiny boy beside him. He looked so sweet and vulnerable as he waited for the tub to fill. “How about we sing your bathtime song?” Theodore did not like the sound of that! “Jump in the bathtub, time to get clean! You'll be the cleanest you've ever been!

Soap and bubbles filling up the tub, soon you'll jump inside and scrub, scrub, scrub!" Theodore squirmed as Ben mimed scrubbing his tummy with his free hand. "I know it's scary being away from home, but you're lucky you have such a caring Daddy to take care of you."

"No!" Theodore exclaimed, jerking away from Ben. "What's scary is I have some psycho trying to give me a bath!" Ben calmly turned off the tub.

"Alright, you don't want a bath, that's ok." He calmly stood up, seeming almost taller than before. Theodore realized he had just gotten used to him kneeling down to his level.

"You're not mad?"

"Nope." Ben said with a shrug. "No hard feelings?" Relief washed over Theodore and he turned around to grab his clothes. Ben struck.

"Hey! Let me go!" Theodore expected to land in the tub, but Ben surprised him by heading toward the wooden bathroom door. He stepped out into the hall and deposited Theodore down on the carpet.

"You can come back inside when you're ready to be a good little boy." He closed himself inside the bathroom.

Theodore's heart raced. He was naked in the hall. He had planned to ask Ben for the code to their dorm room lock when they first met, but obviously, had not found an opportunity yet. His suitcases were still outside the room, but he did not like the idea of running all the way to the other

side of the dorm naked. He was trapped.

“You can come in when you say who you are, what you are, and who I am.” Ben called through the door.

“You're a total asshole.” Theodore replied, wishing he had the nerve to say it more loudly than a mumble. He would wait him out. That was all there was to it.

It did not take long for his nerve to fail. He was naked and he could hear voices coming from all directions. How long would it be before someone noticed? Maybe they could help, but did he really want to risk it? Maybe… he shuddered. Maybe he should just admit defeat and fight back later. He sighed and knocked on the door.

“Who is it?” The door opened a crack. Theodore shoved his fingers through the gap, but he could not force it open any more. “Who is it?” Ben repeated, much more treacly sweet and sing-song.

“Um, uh, Teddy?”

“And what are you, Teddy?”

“A little boy.” He mumbled.

“And who am I?”

“Daddy.” He sighed.

“Move your fingers, Teddy.” Ben said. Theodore obeyed, relieved that he was about to get back inside. He'd played his game. The door closed.

“Hey! I said what you wanted me to.”

“But you didn't sound like you meant it.” Teddy pounded on the door.

“Let me in.”

“Nope. Not until you-” Teddy heard the voices down the hall grow closer. He was running out of time! There was no way he was letting them come around the corner and see him naked.

“Daddy!” He yelled in a shrill panic. “Please, let me in. I'm a little boy, Daddy. My name is Teddy!” The words poured out of him as tears welled up in his eyes. The door opened and he dove inside, practically into Ben's arms.

“Aw, little baby Teddy. Daddy's here. It's no fun when Daddy has to teach you a lesson, is it? No, it isn't.” He hugged him close, rubbing his back. “It's a lot easier just to listen to Daddy and be a good little boy right away.” He carried the sniffling Teddy over to the bathtub and gently set him in. “Now, I'm gonna give you a bath. You just sit here. No more talking. If Daddy asks you a question, you can nod your head for yes, daddy and shake your head for no, daddy. Understand?” Teddy nodded. “Perfect.”

Ben looked over Teddy appraisingly. Tiny little feet, chubby little tummy, a cute button nose. He found himself wondering if he had showered in gym class. He doubted it. The boy could dress maturely, but naked, he looked for all the world like a boy of four or five. Ben quietly logged that away for

later.

“You've got a shaggy mop on your head, Teddy.” Ben said, gently easing Teddy back so that the bath wet it. “Which is probably why you've got no hair anywhere else. It all migrated onto your head, huh?” He laughed. “Daddy's just being silly. You're too little for hair anywhere else, right?” Holding his head, he made him nod before sitting him back up. In truth, Theodore had been told to get a haircut before he left and he had forgotten. He was indeed shaggy, not that he would have told Ben that, even if he was allowed to speak. Would he put him outside again if he misbehaved? Teddy resisted a little as Ben lifted one of his arms. “No, no. Let Daddy check you.” He said. He could smell Teddy's deodorant. He'd have to scrub that off. It was too mature a smell for a boy who was barely bigger than a baby. Constant care from his new Daddy would be all he would need to avoid stinking.

The next ten minutes were torment for Theodore. All he could do was sit there while Ben thoroughly scrubbed every inch of him, getting between his toes, behind his ears, and every nook and cranny he could find.

“Jump in the bathtub, time to get clean! You'll be the cleanest you've ever been! Soap and bubbles filling up the tub, soon you'll jump inside and scrub, scrub, scrub!” Ben sang again, making Teddy squirm and squeal with giggles as he tickled him. Theodore could not remember being this ticklish in years, but something about Ben rendered him immobilized with giggles.

“Alright, kiddo.” Ben said. “All that's left is your potty parts.”

“Potty parts?”

“Shh, no talking. That means your bumbum and your winky.” He pulled Teddy forward and began to scrub his butt. “Gotta get you squeaky clean all over.” The next few minutes were even more uncomfortable as Ben scrubbed his new roommate's privates before finally declaring him clean. “Now we just gotta dry you off!” He grabbed a towel and held it out in his arms. Theodore sighed and stepped into reach, the towel wrapping around him.

“Aren't we done? All my stuff's just sitting in the hall.”

“Are you a squeaky clean little boy, Teddy?”

“Yes.”

“Are you sure?”

“Yes!”

“I don't hear you squeaking!”

“Squeak.” Teddy said irritably. Ben smirked and tickled behind his knees. “Hehehehee.”

“I guess squealy clean is close enough.” Ben remarked, standing up. “Keep that towel wrapped around you.”

“Fine.”

“Are you sure you're all clean?”

“Yes!”

` “You still sound pretty surly. Do I need to get you back in the tub?”

“No.”

“Then what do you say?”

“Huh?” He thought quickly. “Uh, thank you, Daddy? I'm a squeaky clean little boy?” This guy was psychotic!

“I knew you'd figure it out.” He kissed Theodore's cheek. “I expect you to still be a good little boy when we get back to Daddy's room.”

“Isn't it our room?” Ben looked as if he had not even thought about that.

“No,” he said pensively. “I think it's Daddy's room and you're just living with Daddy.”

“That's not fair.” Theodore yelped as he was lifted off the floor.

“Daddy can't always give in to his little Teddy's whims.” Ben said, carrying him in one arm out of the bathroom.

Theodore watched every door nervously, certain someone would come out and see him being carried down the hall.

“This is only for today.” Ben said.

“What is?”

“Carrying you! That towel's a little big, but once we get you a cute little bathrobe, you'll be able to walk without me having

to worry you're tripping.” He paused. “Unless you like being carried.” Theodore remained silent. “Bear ears would be a little too on the nose, but how about a shark fin on the hood? That'd be cool, right?” He smiled at his stoic little boy, brushing a bit of his hair out of his face and kissing his cheek. If he looked this adorable now, how had he looked as an actual little boy?

“Don't kiss me!” Ben gave his bottom a swat, but did not say anything until they reached the door of their room.

“This is all your stuff, huh?” Theodore was so upset about the kiss, he could only nod as Ben looked over the suitcases by the door. “Well, let's get it inside.” He set Theodore down in the middle of the dorm room, facing the open door. “You are gonna stand right here and not move a single muscle, do you understand?”

“But”

“Nope. No words except yes, daddy, unless you want to stand here without your towel. Is that what you want, Teddy?” He stared at Ben. Was he supposed to say ýes, daddy'? He shook his head, hoping Ben would accept that. “Alright.” He adjusted the towel on Teddy's shoulders. “No moving. Understand?”

“Yes, daddy.” He barely whispered. Ben nodded and made quick work of bringing in his suitcases. He looked approvingly down at Teddy before kneeling down to meet his eyes.

“Rule number one, the most important rule of all, is that you are a little boy and little boys listen to Daddy. Understand?” Teddy nodded. “Say yes, daddy.”

“Yes, daddy.”

“Show me you understand. Repeat the rule.”

“Imma little boy and little boys listen to daddy.” He said as quickly as he could. Ben nodded. It was better than nothing.

“Now,” He got to his feet and closed the door. “Your lips are turning blue, so let's get that wet towel off.” Theodore had barely been holding it around himself, so Ben was more than able to whisk it off. He chuckled as Theodore covered himself. “Daddy just gave you a bath. He's seen your winky. And washed it.”

“But, well,”

“We're going to be living together-”

“I'd still like to get dressed.” He waited for Ben to say no, but managed to hide his surprise when Ben unzipped his suitcase.

“Hmm”

“What is it?”

"Are you sure this is your stuff, Teddy? I think something went wrong and you got someone else's suitcases!" Ben chuckled. "There must be some guy on another floor confused by all the underoos and footie jammies he's got!"

“What? No, this is my stuff.” He hurried over, right into Ben's

clutches.

Teddy spent the next few minutes on the floor squirming, giggling, and squealing as Ben tickled him and gave him tummy kiss after tummy kiss. Finally, Ben picked him up off of the floor and cradled him, albeit a little awkwardly, in his arms.

“Who's a good little boy?” He cooed.

“Me.” Teddy was still panting from the prolonged tickling.

“You what?”

“Uh, me, daddy?” He felt Ben's chest rumble as he chuckled.

“No, cutie. What are you?”

“A… little boy.”

“Say it three times fast.” Ben said, sitting down and putting Teddy on his lap. “Or did I need to give you a spanking?”

“I'm a little boy, I'm a little boy, I'm a little boy.”

“Very good. What about Daddy?” He pointed to himself.

“You're Daddy.”

“Right.” Ben grinned. “But am I little?”

“No.”

“Right! Good boy.” He kissed Teddy's cheek. “Now, what was rule number one?”

“I'm a little boy and little boys listen to Daddy.”

“Very good! Now, these suitcases of yours are full of clothes that look a lot like Daddy's.”

“Well, yeah, we're room-”

“Shh. Little boys listen to Daddy.” He smiled and leaned in close to the boy on his knee. “Eyes are watching, ears are listening.” He sang softly. “Voices quiet, bodies calm. This is how we listen, this is how we listen. To Daddy, to Daddy.” This guy was insane! “Are you ready to listen, Teddy?”

“Yes.”

“Uh-uh. The first bit of the song said eyes are watching. Look at Daddy.”

“I'm listening.” Teddy glared up at Ben.

“Good. None of these clothes are appropriate for a little boy. So you will not wear anything in these suitcases. Because Daddy says so.” He tapped Teddy's nose. “Give me a little nod and say yes, daddy if you understand.”

“Yes, daddy.” Ben could not decide if it was harder to hear him or see the nod.

“One more time. Nice nod and an even nicer ‘yes, daddy'.”

“Yes, daddy.” Teddy said with irritation, nodding cartoonishly. “You're not my dad. You're just a crazy guy.”

“Hmm” Ben said and Teddy regretted it immediately. “That's true. You do have a Mommy and Daddy at home, don't you?”

“They're Mom and Dad.”

“That won't work.” Ben said. “From now on,” he pulled Teddy up and onto his lap as if it was the easiest thing in the world. “From now on, they're Mommy and Daddy and I'll be Dada.”

“What? No!”

“Shh, what's rule number one?” Teddy frowned and tried to get off of Ben's lap. “What's rule number one, Teddy?” He used the boy's efforts to get off his lap to flip him over onto his belly, now across his lap. He raised his hand. “Teddy?”

“I'm a little boy and little boys need to listen to Daddy.” Teddy said desperately. Whack! “I mean Dada!”

“That's right.” Ben all but purred. “I know you're old enough to learn quickly, even with all these changes.”

“So you know how old I am!” Teddy arched his back and tried to turn to look at Ben.

“Of course I do.” Ben said frankly.

“So-”

“But” he gave Teddy's bottom a firm pat to silence him. “Age doesn't mean anything. The second you turn sixteen, do they let you drive a car? No, you have to pass a test first.”

“A test?”

“Shh. Eyes are watching, ears are listening, voices quiet, bodies calm. This is how we listen” Teddy groaned, listening to his roommate sing the entire song. “What's rule number

one?” If this really was a test, he saw only one way out.

“I'm a little boy and little boys listen to Dada.”

“Very good.” A knock at the door startled the both of them, but it earned Teddy an opportunity to wiggle off of Ben's lap. Who was it? Part of him wanted to run to the door to beg whoever it was for help, but he was naked. Plus, what if it didn't work? What if this was Ben's accomplice or something?

“Hi there!” Ben threw the door open, smirking at how Teddy covered his crotch out of sight of whoever it was. He wanted to peek around the door at least until he heard the chirp of the delivery person's device. It was an Amazon delivery? “Thank you!” Ben closed the door, holding a big brown box. “Best part about a college town is same day delivery.”

“Can I get dressed yet?”

“What do you think this is?” Ben laughed. “Can you show me how good you can sit?” Teddy fumed, but sat down on the floor. Ben joined him. “I know you're excited about presents.” He said, ripping open the box. “So we're gonna do yes, dada and no, dada until I say, understand?”

“Yes, dada.” Teddy said.

“Such a good little boy I have.” He smiled. “You want to get dressed, so let's start with these.” He pulled out a plastic package with a grinning toddler with curly hair and chubby cheeks.

“What are those?” Teddy blurted out.

“Your underpants, silly.” Ben said.

“Cottontails training underwear?” He blushed as he realized Ben loved hearing him read the full name. “You can't be serious! I wear boxer briefs.”

“I checked your sizes while you were throwing a fit about your bath. I know they'll fit.” He tore open the package. “Let's see… we've got a racecar pair, dinos, and jungle. You can pick which one you want.”

“None of them!” Ben knew he would respond that way, but it made it no easier to pull him over and swat his bottom. “Ow! Stop!”

“See? No fun being naked, is it?” He grabbed the first pair his hand fell on, the racecars, and worked them up Teddy's squirming legs.

“Stop! Stop!” Teddy screamed. Ben retrieved another item from the box and pushed the pacifier into Teddy's mouth. “Mmf!”

“Suck on it.”

“No!”

“Suck on it.” Ben repeated, part of him wondering what someone passing by in the hall might think. Teddy growled, but complied, making a face at the rubbery taste. “There we go. Keep sucking. Why do you think Dada got you a pacifier?”

“Cuz you think I'm a baby.”

“That's not true!” Ben said defensively. “I just bought you these nice new big boy undies.” Big boy undies? Teddy had worn boxer briefs for years. These weird-feeling briefs were not big boy anything. “Come on. Why do you think I bought you a pacifier?”

“I don't know.”

“It's to help you remember that listening is more important than talking.”

“That's ridiculous!”

“We're gonna go back to yes, dada and no, dada until you calm down.” Ben said with a swat to Teddy's bottom. “Do you like your new undies?”

“No, dada.” Teddy said immediately. Ben chuckled.

“Well, maybe you just haven't seen them yet.” He stood up and carried Teddy over to the mirror he had set up before his baby roommate had even arrived. The juxtaposition between Ben in his hoodies and jeans and Teddy in just colorful briefs with the pacifier in his mouth could not have been more striking. His shaggy mop only made him look more like a toddler. Maybe I should've listened to Mom and got my hair cut. He thought.

Teddy pulled away from Ben, pacifier falling from his mouth.

“This is ridiculous! I need my clothes. I am your roommate, not some fucking little… I don't even… toddler! You're crazy! You can't treat me like this!”

“Teddy.” Ben said.

“No. My name is Theodore! I am eighteen years old.”

“You're acting like you're eighteen months-”

“Quit! I’m talking. You need to listen.” Ben could not help but admire how adorable Teddy looked. His face had gotten so red, even his shoulders were pink and he did not look intimidating at all in nothing but a pair of training briefs. “Stop smirking at me. You need to take this seriously.”

“Alright.” Ben said mildly. “Let's talk.”

“Huh?”

“How about you explain to me how you think things should be.”

“Can-” Teddy seemed taken aback. “Can't I get dressed first?”

“No. This is so important to you, I guess.” Ben shrugged. “Besides, we're roommates, so we're going to see each other in our underwear.”

“Look,” Theodore sighed. He had to be as reasonable as possible, in spite of everything that had transpired. “Let's just start over from square one or whatever.” Ben nodded.

“Sounds good to me.” He said mildly. “What does that mean to you?” Teddy sighed loudly.

“We're equals. You mind your business, I mind mine. You let me unpack and we forget this whole thing ever happened. We get settled and start classes. We're in college. That's… yeah,

that's it, I guess.” Ben nodded again. How could he seem so threatening when he was this calm? Almost unnervingly calm.”How's that sound to you?”

“Open.”

“Huh?”

“You got to say your piece, so now it's my turn. Your pacifier will help you listen.” Teddy did not like the sound of that. “Open.”

“Buh” was all he got out as Ben pulled him into his lap and pushed the pacifier as far into his mouth as it would go.

“Here's my proposal. You are a very little boy. You've allowed me to give you a bath and dress you in your training pants, so I know you know you're a very little boy. I know you thought college would be a grand opportunity to be big, but you're not big. I know it doesn't seem fair, but this is the way things are. You're a little boy and I'm Dada. Dada knows what's best for his little boy and it's not open for debate.” Holding Teddy in his arms, he managed to retrieve a canary yellow blanket decorated with tractors and construction vehicles from the box. “Now, you look chilly, aren't you, Teddy?”

“This isn't fair.”

“That's not what I asked you. Do you want your blankie or not?”

“Seriously-” Ben swatted his rump.

“Fine. No blankie while we call your Mommy and Daddy.”

“What!?” Stunned, he was unprepared for Ben to pick him up with a hand under each arm and – inspired by the racecar briefs Teddy wore – run around the room, making car noises and weaving the dangling, struggling boy through a variety of imaginary obstacles. They ended up at his desk, where his laptop was already set up.

“What did you mean you're calling my mom and dad?”

“Mommy and Daddy.” Ben corrected.

“You need to start explaining right now.” Teddy snarled. To his surprise, Ben did.

“Over the summer, they reached out to me because they were worried about who your roommate might be.” That did make sense, Teddy thought. They had always been overprotective. “They just wanted to make sure I'd be a good roommate and watch out for you.” He leaned down and kissed Teddy's cheek, even though he tried to pull away. “And Dada's doing that, isn't he?” He said in an overly loving voice. “Teddy's had a bath and he's wearing big boy undies, isn't he?”

“No.”

“That's right. You're wearing Cottontails, aren't you?” Teddy remained silent. “But they fit your bubble butt and your little dinky wink and you're a big boy, aren't you?" Teddy fumed, but that was all he could do. Ben was bigger than him and it was clear he could do whatever he wanted, so Teddy sat there and sucked sullenly on his pacifier as Ben called his parents,

finding some comfort in the fact that the hand Ben used to hold the pacifier in his mouth hid it from his parents. "Teddy's having a lot of big feelings right now being away from home, so I'll do the talking for him. We're getting all settled in and we're very excited for classes to start."

“It's a big change for him, but we're glad you're there to help him ease his way into being on his own.” Teddy whimpered into the pacifier and Ben's hand. “Oh, would you mind helping him get a haircut? We want to make sure he-”

“Makes a good first impression. Got it!” Ben said, grinning. He grabbed Teddy's hand and made him wave. “We'd better get going. Bye Mommy and Daddy!” His hand slipped slightly and Teddy spat the pacifier out.

“Mom! Da-” the call ended.

“That wasn't your inside voice, Teddy.” Ben said, landing a couple of swats on his checkered bottom.

“They're my parents.”

“I know. You were excited to see Mommy and Daddy. Maybe we can call them again at bedtime.” He got to his feet, still holding Teddy in the air. “But we've gotta get you dressed, little guy!”

“Can I wear my clothes?” Teddy asked. Ben chuckled.

“And what do you call your undies?”

“I wear boxer briefs.”

“That's just silly.” Ben said. “We already confirmed your luggage got mixed up with another boy's. But don't worry, after we get your hair cut, we'll go shopping!”

To Teddy's relief, he ended up in a pair of Hawaiian print shorts and a grey tank top that said tropical vibes. Compared to his training pants, it seemed mature.

“Can you be a big boy for Dada or do we need to use your paci to go out to the car?”

“Big boy.” Teddy said morosely.

“Now that means holding Dada's hand and using your manners. Do you know what your manners are?” Teddy wanted to roll his eyes.

“Please and thank you?” He said irritably.

“That's a good start. You also need to use ‘yes, dada’ and ‘no, dada'. Understand?”

“Yes, Dada.” Ben smiled and stroked his cheek affectionately.

“You're so soft and you've still got this cute little pudge in your cheeks. You never apologized, y'know.”

“For what?”

“For lying to Dada and saying you're big.” He played with Teddy's face as he tried to protest. “For saying you're Dada's roommate. You'll be sleeping in Dada's room, but that's only because you're a little little boy, isn't it?” Teddy forced himself to nod. “So here's what we're gonna do. Can you

listen to Dada?" Teddy nodded again. "How do you let Dada know?"

"Yes, dada."

"And what's the first rule?"

"I'm a little boy and little boys listen to Dada."

"Good." Ben cooed. "Now, do you want Dada to help you apologize?"

"No." He said. "Dada."

"Well!" Ben chuckled. "Guess that means you can do it yourself?" Teddy sighed.

"Fine, help me."

"Alright, repeat after me." He took Teddy's chin and forced him to look right into his eyes. With his cheeks mushed forward like this, he looked so much like the little boy he was going to make him into, even if it took all semester. With how many changes there had already been, he doubted it would. "I'm sorry, Dada."

"I'm sorry, Dada."

"For lying and saying I'm big."

"For lying and saying I'm big."

They continued in that fashion until Ben was satisfied. He released Teddy and slapped his knees.

"Let's get going, kiddo! Bet you're excited to get that mop cut

off, huh?”

“Yes, dada.” Ben smiled and picked him up.

“We're running behind, so Dada's gonna carry you.” He waited for Teddy to object, but he was chastised enough to keep it in, at least for now.

Ben only put him down when they reached his car. He slid Teddy into the backseat and buckled him in, setting the child lock on the door.

“And away we go!” Ben declared grandly from the driver's seat, turning on a playlist of little kid songs. This guy is absolutely psycho, Teddy thought as Itsy Bitsy Spider began to play.

Ever since he turned ten, Theodore had had his hair cut at the same barbershop as his dad, Clyde's in his hometown. As they pulled up to Lil Monkey Makeovers, he knew this haircut would be different.

~ T & B ~

“Alright, Teddy, up you come!” Without even hesitating, the stylist picked him up and set him on the rocket ship.

“Gotta get the Before and After.” Ben said, snapping a photo of Teddy on the childish seat. “It's first day of school tomorrow!”

“Oh, wow!” She said. “Are you gonna be-” she paused as she studied the boy before her. “Not quite kindergarten, so must be preschool, huh?”

“College.” Teddy said icily. He was small, but there was no way he was preschooler small! To his surprise, she smiled and reached under his arm to tickle him. His squeal was so loud, even Ben seemed startled.

“Uh-huh. I'm sure.” She said, whisking the barber cape over him.

The haircut itself would have been pretty mundane if not for the fact he was sitting in a rocketship, wearing training underwear, and being talked to like he was four. He even had to force a smile for Ben to take the after photo once the stylist had tied a green balloon around his wrist.

“Put me down.” Teddy demanded as Ben lifted him out of the rocketship and set him against his chest. He could smell his deodorant, cologne? Something masculine.

“We're just going next door.” Ben's chest rumbled as he spoke, holding Teddy to his chest until he released him to put him in the seat in the shopping cart. “Now for clothes shopping.” He said, giving Teddy's cheek a little pinch. “God, I need to keep you this baby soft forever.”

“I am not a baby.” Teddy mumbled. Ben's lips tightened and he pulled a familiar bit of plastic from the pocket of his hoodie.

“Suck on that until your big feelings pass.” Almost before Teddy had even had the thought, Ben chuckled. “And if you spit it out, remember we're at the store. I can buy you plenty of new pacis.” He fixed Teddy with a look. “And suck on it.

Don't just hold it in your mouth.” He waited right there at the entrance for Teddy to obey. He nodded in approval. “Alright, which way to the little boys department?”

“Little boys?”

“Yep. You're a little boy. Dada gave you your bath, remember?” He kissed the top of Teddy's head. “Besides, your Cottontails were training briefs, not training panties, right?” Teddy wanted to point out it just said training underwear, but he knew he needed to pick his battles. “Let's get a cart. Dada's gonna need lots and lots of appropriate clothes for his special little boy.”

With Teddy sitting in the cart, Ben did not feel any need to go quick. He touched and kissed and caressed the little boy, cooing down at him a constant litany of baby talk comments about how cute and soft and little he was. He was almost relieved when Ben stepped away to look at a rack of toddler t-shirts.

“You know I have to go to class tomorrow.” He said. Ben smiled at him.

“You're so sweet, helping Dada. But I heard you tell the nice lady at the hair place all about it, so I didn't forget.”

“I'm not wearing a Sesame Street shirt to Intro to Philosophy.” He snarled. He knew Ben would not like that even before he came over and grabbed Teddy's hands.

“I'm a fussy baby, yes, I am!” He sang, making Teddy dance. He looked over at a few hoodies. “Here's what we'll do. Some

boring hoodies with fun colorful tees underneath. Sound good?" Teddy seemed almost taken aback.

"Uh, sure." Ben smiled and tapped his nose with a finger. "I mean, yes, Dada."

The forest green and black sweatshirts Ben grabbed were acceptable enough that Teddy even let a blue and white Baby Shark hoodie go into the cart. Ben paused and looked over the cart. T-shirts, pants, the hoodies. It was a good start.

"Obviously my little boy needs undies, don't you?" He pushed the cart past pack after pack of boxer briefs before coming to a big sign that said 'little boys underwear'. "This is right where we need to be, huh?" He leaned in to kiss Teddy, but the small boy pulled away as much as the cart's bench seat would allow.

"You can't be serious." He muttered.

"You only have three pairs at home, Teddy." Ben said. "That's just not enough. What's rule number one?"

"I'm a little boy and little boys listen to Dada."

"Eyes are watching, ears are listening." Ben sang, pointing to each body part. "Voice's quiet, body's calm. This is how we listen, this is how we listen. To Dada. To Dada."

"I am!" Ben shook his head.

"That's not listening. That's throwing a temper tantrum." He covered Teddy's mouth with a hand. "One more outburst and you won't like it." He looked right into the small boy's eyes.

“Do you really want to risk an upset Dada?”

“No” came the muffled reply. Ben did not turn away or remove his hand until Teddy mumbled in defeat. “No, Dada.”

“Good boy.” He looked over the underwear on display. “Look at this! Sesame Street! Elmo, Big Bird, oh, but those aren't training underwear.” He grinned at Teddy. “Maybe in a while when you're bigger, huh?” His gaze fell on the perfect package. “Cottontails Bunnydale. Oh, we have a winner!” Teddy looked at the package of rolled up briefs, six pairs of underwear festooned with little bunnies and the Bunnydale logo. That would be two-thirds of his underwear!

“No. Please, not those, Dada.” He whined.

“I think they're perfect.”

“No! I'm eighteen years old!”

“You're not acting like it. Dada's eighteen and I don't fuss about my underwear.” He tore open the package, holding up a pale yellow pair with white bunnies on it. “They'll fit and that's all that matters.”

“But… no! You can't! You can't!”

“We're getting them.” Ben said, tossing the opened package in the cart. “But maybe you're too little for big boy underwear.”

“That's not big boy-”

“Maybe you need diapers.” The cart began to move.

“Ok! I'll wear the underwear!”

“What kind of underwear?” The cart kept moving.

“Big boy undies?”

“What brand?”

“Cottontails.” He stammered. Ben nodded.

“I figured you would, but I still think we need to swing by the diaper aisle.”

“Why?” Rather than answer, Ben grabbed a pack of Pull-ups. He smiled as Teddy became even cuter as his eyes widened as he saw the Pull-ups. He wouldn't dare, would he? Underoos were one thing, but diapers?

“You don't wet the bed, do you?”

“What? No.” He stammered.

“You're not fibbing?”

“I don't wet the bed.” Ben leaned in close.

“You promise? I'm still having trouble believing you.” Why was he doing this? Suddenly, it dawned on him.

“I” it still was tough to get himself to actually say it. This guy was a nutcase! “I don't wet the bed, Dada.”

“That's better.” He studied the Pull-ups thoughtfully. “I guess your Cottontails will catch any little spurts.” He mused to himself. “We'll come back if you start having accidents.”

Ben seemed confident that the cart would contain Teddy. He began to roam farther and farther away from the cart as he shopped, each and every thing he brought over only solidifying further that he saw Teddy as a toddler, not his roommate.

“These are so cute, maybe you should even try them on!” Ben said, showing him a white fire truck pajama set. “And so soft.” He rubbed the shorts leg against Teddy's cheek. “These are a for sure.” He put them in the cart. “Let's see what else we can find.” Teddy watched him carefully, making sure he was getting farther away from the cart. Time to make his escape!

Teddy wiggled and squirmed his way out of the seat, nearly losing his shorts in the process. He pulled them back up over his checkered training briefs, promising himself he would put his own clothes back on as soon as he got back to campus. How far of a walk was it? It did not matter. He would walk twenty miles if it meant getting away from Ben.

He jumped down to the floor, almost certain Ben would come running. He took off running himself, adrenaline rushing through him as he hurried for the exit.

“Are you lost, little guy?”

“No.” He said, not even stopping to look back at the woman who asked. She lunged and grabbed his wrist.

“Come on.” She said, “I'll help you find your mommy or daddy.”

Theodore tried to pull away as her grip shifted from his wrist to his hand and began to lead him over to the customer service desk.

“Is green your favorite color?” She asked, admiring the balloon still tied around his wrist with more sincerity than any adult ever should.

“You need to listen to me.”

“I know being lost is scary.” She picked him up and set him on a red plastic chair.

“No, stop. My name is Theodore. Theodore Barr. I'm eighteen years old, I'm an incoming freshman at Woodcreek. You've gotta help me get away from my crazy roommate.”

“That's quite the story. You must be a very imaginative little boy. We'll get you where you need to be, don't you worry.” She dialed into the intercom. “Attention, shoppers. We have a lost little boy waiting at the front of the store.”

“Screw this.” Theodore muttered, sliding off the chair.

“We need to wait here.” The woman said. “That's the first rule of being lost. Stay right where you are.” She returned him to the chair and sat next to him. “Are you shopping with your mommy or your daddy today?”

“Look.” He took a deep breath. “I just need you to listen. I am not a little kid. I am not lost. I am a college student and I just want to get back to campus so I can figure out how to get out of my situation.” He felt like his tone was clear, calm, and

convincing. “Can you help me or at least stop trying to reunite me with a parent who is not-”

“Teddy!”

“God damn it.” Theodore turned to see Ben coming right for him.

“Is this your person?” The woman asked, smiling warmly.

“He's my roommate” Theodore said at the exact same moment that Ben said “I'm his dada.” Ben scooped him up and kissed his cheek.

“So soft.” Ben whispered. Teddy looked past him at the now full cart. What had he done? He didn't even know what was in there. He should have stayed with Ben! “Thank you so much for finding him. He got away from me!” He chuckled. “Dada's little escape artist.”

“Please. This is the guy I was telling you about!”

“Yep. Dada.” She smiled warmly at him. “Bye-bye, Teddy!”

“Please! No!” She did not even seem to register his despair as Ben put him back in the cart and they left the store.

“Dada's got a surprise for you.” Ben said with a grin. “While you were busy with that nice woman, I got it all set up in the car.” Teddy had a sneaking suspicion what it would be, but that did not lessen the sting of seeing a car seat waiting for him.

“Oh, great.” He muttered.

“This isn't the surprise.” Ben said with a laugh. “This was just a necessity.” He dug into one of his many, many bags and pulled out a pair of green headphones. They had spikes along the top as if they were made out of a plastic dinosaur. “Ta da!” He slid them over Teddy's head. “Can you hear me?” He asked in an exaggerated voice.

“Yes.” Theodore said in annoyance. At least Ben's voice was muffled now. He watched as Ben pulled out his phone, making a very angry face in case he tried to take a photo. What Ben had planned though was far worse.

“If you're happy and you know it” a chorus of children began to sing. Almost out of reflex, Theodore tried to pull off the headphones, but Ben grabbed his hands and returned them to his lap. His lips moved, but Theodore could not hear a word he said. He bucked in the car seat as Ben shoved a hand down the front of his shorts and cupped his bulge. As Ben smiled, Theodore realized he had asked him if he had peed his training briefs. He glared up at him. Another surprise came as Ben pulled the headphones off his head just as the kids were urging anyone happy to stomp their feet.

“Here's the rule, Teddy. Only Dada can take your headphones off. If you take them off or do something like shake your head so they fall off, we'll march right back into that store to get you diapers. Do you understand?” Theodore knew what he expected to hear.

“Yes, dada.” He said. The headphones went back on and Theodore felt trapped as he listened to children sing song

after song as Ben loaded the car and drove them back to campus.

The headphones remained on as they returned to their dorm room. Ben took Teddy's shorts off him and he stood there in his racecar briefs and sleeveless shirt as Ben set up a playpen right in the middle of the floor where anyone walking by could see Teddy. In went a few baby toys and then Teddy himself joined them as Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star played. He groaned. He felt even more trapped now than he had in the car seat. Then inspiration struck. Josh the RA! He had told Ben that he was the same age as him. There was no way he would let Ben keep Teddy as a toddler!

Getting to his feet, he walked over to the side of the playpen. Did Ben really think this would keep him contained? The walls were barely even two feet tall! He swung a leg over and Ben immediately grabbed him. He put him back in the center, waving a soft toy as if to remind him of what he wanted him to do. Ben's mouth moved, but all Teddy could hear was baby songs playing in his ears. They weren't loud, but they were at just the right volume to block out the outside world and remind him that they were playing. He frowned, disappointed by how quickly he had been thwarted. He would need to bide his time.

He watched Ben closely, waiting for him to let his guard down. Watching him proved to be torment as he set to work putting sheets on Teddy's bed.

“No!” Teddy yelled, not even caring how loudly. He would

not let Ben put those bullshit Bunnydale bedsheets on his bed. His outburst immediately drew Ben over and the headphones came off. “You are not putting those… those…”

“Shh.” Ben pressed a finger to Teddy's trembling lips. “It's hard to tell how loud you're being when you're listening to your music, baby.”

“It's not my- that's not important. I-”

“Shh shh shh.” Ben said insistently, picking Teddy up and setting him against his shoulder, rubbing his back. “What's the first rule?”

“Imma little boy and little boys listen to Dada.” Teddy said at once, glad he at least got a break from the cloyingly sweet music, even if it was for humiliations like this.

“We're gonna make a new rule, Teddy.” Ben said. “From now on, just to make sure you don't yell and scare Dada like you did, you always whisper. Let's try it. Do you like your new rule?”

“Yes, Dada.” It was the only thing he could say.

“Little bit softer than that, sweetie.”

“Yes, Dada.”

“Oh, so good.” He smiled and kissed Teddy's cheek. “Mwah! Dada loves giving his little boy lots and lots of kisses!” He kissed him again. “Alright, back to your music, sweetie.”

“No, please.” He made sure to whisper, but the headphones

came back over and he felt like his whispers were drowned out by Row, Row, Row Your Boat. All he could do was sit in the playpen and watch as Ben finished decking his bed out with those toddler bed sheets. “Oh, yeah. Take a photo.” He muttered, watching Ben pull out his phone. The music suddenly stopped in the middle of ‘How Much is that Doggy in the Window?'.

“Sleepy baby, time for bed.” A woman's voice sang softly. “Puffy pillow, rest your head.”

“No, no, no!” Teddy yelled. He reached up to push the headphones off his head, but stopped. Did he want to risk it? Ben smiled down at him warmly, walking toward him with a baby bottle in one hand. Where had that come from? Ben picked him up and, settling him against the crook of his arm, pushed the bottle into Teddy's lips as he was trying to demand answers. Ben's lips moved, but Teddy could not hear anything other than the lullaby. He felt warm milk on his tongue and realized he was sucking on the bottle. Out of the corner of his eye, he could see that the dorm room door was wide open. Anyone walking by could see him being bottlefed in nothing but a tank top and toddler underwear. This was not how college was supposed to go!

Almost the instant the bottle emptied, Ben moved him to his shoulder and thumped his back. Teddy wanted to yell at him, but all he was able to do was burp. He was surprised he could hear it over the lullabies playing. In one fluid motion, Ben moved him from his shoulder down onto the mattress, the brightly colored sheets and blanket coming up and over

Teddy. He glared up at Ben, who simply leaned down and kissed his cheek.

He wiggled around the blanket, trying to get his arms free to hopefully make an escape, but he felt his eyelids grow heavy. So much had happened today; he hadn't realized how tired he was.

~ T & B ~

The next thing Teddy knew, he was awake. There was a pacifier moving steadily in his mouth. He sat up, rubbing his eyes. How long had it been? There was no clock around and he didn't have his phone to check. The sun seemed significantly lower. He rubbed at his eyes, trying to figure out what was different.

“Hey there, buddy.” Ben said, smiling down at him. “Did you have a nice nap?”

“What time-”

“Shh, shh, shh. Remember the rule?”

“Yes, dada.” Teddy dropped the volume of his voice, rubbing sleepily at his eyes. “What time is it?”

“Almost dinnertime.” Ben said. “Ready to get up?” Not waiting for an answer, he picked Teddy up and took him over to the corner where a plastic training potty waited. Teddy rolled his eyes.

“Can't I use the normal bathroom?” He asked, wishing a whisper could sound as acidic as he wanted it to.

“Why? You have your very own special potty right here.” Ben pulled down Teddy's underwear and his butt made contact with the plastic potty. “Go ahead and make your peepees, little guy.” He smiled. “You were so insistent in the store about not needing Pull-ups, so I know you know how to go peepee on the big boy potty.”

“This has to stop.” Teddy muttered, watching Ben dig in the closet. He looked from him to the open door. Did he dare make a run for it? Sure, he'd rather not be in just his tank top and embarrassing underwear, but that had to be evidence that Dada- no, Ben - was absolutely crazy.

“All done going potty?” Ben asked, walking over. Teddy groaned. He had missed his chance. Closing his eyes to forget that Ben was kneeling in front of him, he peed into the plastic bowl. “Oh, what a good boy!” Ben praised. “Any more?”

“No.” He whispered. Ben nodded and lifted him to his feet.

“Do you want to pull up your Cottontails or have Dada do it?” Teddy immediately bent over and tugged them up, refusing to give him the chance. “Good boy!’ Ben grabbed his wrists and raised his arms over his head. “Yay! Teddy went peepee on the potty!” He chuckled. “But look at that pouty lip. What's wrong, Teddy?”

“This isn't fair! I'm eighteen years old-”

“You want your music, huh?”

“No! I want you to listen.” Ben sighed.

“Sweetie, we already talked about this. You” his finger landed on Teddy's chest. “Are a very little boy. I” his finger came to his own chest. “Am Dada. I know what's best for you. More than you probably even realize. This is not something you can pout and tantrum your way out of. Even if I let you scream and shout and make your face all red and tear-stained, you know what would happen? You'd still be a little boy.”

“That isn't fair!” Teddy hissed.

“You're right, but that's life, isn't it?” Teddy blinked. Ben chuckled. “Trust me, Teddy.”

“Theodore-”

“Don't interrupt. Dada knows what's best for you. Now, let's get that shirt off so we can go to dinner.”

“What?”

“Well, yeah. You don't want to go to the dining hall in just your shirt and undies, do you?”

“But-” Ben kneeled down and pulled Teddy toward him. Teddy tried to squirm away, but Ben pulled his shirt up over his head.

“Chubby cheeks, soft and squishy and perfect for kissing.” Ben murmured. “Itty bitty feet with their jelly bean toes. Marshmallow tummy.”

“Let me go!” Ben caught his hand.

“And baby hands. You're cute enough to eat, Teddy!” He squeezed him against his broad chest. “I just gave you a compliment, baby. What do you say?”

“Thank you, dada.” He muttered. The door had been open all day. Why was no one coming to save him?

“Alright, let's get your headphones back on while I'm getting you dressed. Cottontail bum on the floor please.” He set Teddy down on the floor.

“Do I have to listen to music?”

“Of course not. You can sing for Dada if you want.” He smiled and waited for Teddy to make it clear he wasn't going to sing. On went his headphones.

“Shake, shake, shake, shake your sillies out!” The song in his ears sang incessantly as Ben carried Teddy down the stairs in a pair of white pajamas with fire trucks all over them. He sighed and Ben kissed his cheek, his mouth moving silently.

“You too, dada.” Teddy said. Why had he said that? He didn't know what Ben had said.

The dining hall was full of chattering students buzzing about the upcoming term. Friends were catching up, new relationships were being forged, and more than a few were thrilled to finally be away from Mom and Dad and out on their own. All Teddy could hear was cheerful baby songs as Ben managed to carry him through the line.

Even once they found a table, Teddy only moved from Ben's

shoulder to his lap. He looked up at him pleadingly, but Ben only smiled and kissed his cheek. His mouth moved and he rubbed his back. What did he want him to say? Teddy searched Ben's face for any indication of what he had asked, but he felt self-conscious as it truly sunk in how mature Ben looked while he sat on his lap in little boy pajama shorts and a matching t-shirt.

“No, dada.” He said, hoping it was the right answer. A fork with noodles came toward his face.

With the headphones on, all he could do was watch the fork so he'd be ready for it when it came toward his mouth. He used to claim he had eclectic music tastes and listened to ‘everything', but it was sinking in that all he would hear while Ben was in control was baby songs. He was on his third version of If You're Happy and You Know It when suddenly the hand on his back shifted and he moved from a sitting position to almost reclining.

“Wha?” was all he got out before he saw a baby bottle coming toward him. “No!” Ben's voice was muffled, but he could just barely make out the words.

“Baby needs his milk.” He pushed the bottle into his mouth. Teddy knew there was only one way out, but with the slow trickle of the bottle, he would be stuck here for several minutes, being bottlefed. What did you do your first night of college? Oh, I was bottlefed by my psycho roommate.

Worse, once he finished it, Ben lifted him to his shoulder and rubbed his back. Twenty four hours ago, he had been hanging

out with his friends. Now he was being burped in fire truck pajamas as Wheels on the Bus played.

With dinner done, they returned to the dorm. To Teddy's relief, the headphones came off as Ben closed the door.

“You were such a good boy for dada.” He said, smiling as he stepped out of his jeans. Teddy looked away, even if it felt silly. Ben had seen him naked, but it still felt right to not look at Ben in his boxer briefs. “On a normal night, it'll be bed after dindins.” He said as he put on a pair of plaid pajama pants. “But tonight, we've got a dorm floor icebreaker.” He walked over, pleased Teddy had not moved an inch from where he had left him. “What's the first rule, Teddy?”

“I'm a little boy and little boys listen to Dada.”

“That's right. For this icebreaker, you're gonna be doing a lot of listening. So much listening! Do you think you should have a pacifier to help you remember to listen and not to yell?” Ted frowned, getting exactly what he was implying.

“I know to listen.” He said.

“Do you remember the listening song from earlier?”

“Uh… ears are listening?”

“Close. Here, dada will sing a line and then Teddy repeats it. Understand?” Teddy nodded. “Use your words.”

“Yes, dada.”

“Say it like a sweet little boy with a marshmallow tummy

should.” He lifted Teddy's shirt and gave his tummy a kiss.

“Yes, dada!”

“Much better. Now, eyes are watching, ears are listening.” He sang softly. Teddy repeated. “Voices quiet, bodies calm. This is how we listen, this is how we listen. To Dada, to Dada.” Ben gave him a loving squeeze. “You're a really good singer, Teddy.”

“Thanks.”

“So do you think you'll need your pacifier?”

“No, dada.” He said. “But it's an icebreaker, right, so I'll need to talk, right?” Ben considered this. It was possible he had expected to do all of the talking.

“You may speak when spoken to.” He laughed. “That feels so formal. How about this? Dada will let you know when it's your turn to talk.” He gave Teddy another hug and a big kiss. “Little boys listen to dada, after all, don't they?”

“Yeah, dada.” Teddy mumbled.

The icebreaker was standard 'getting to know you' fare. At least, it would have been if Teddy wasn't sitting on Ben's lap. Almost everyone wore hoodies, t-shirts, sweatpants, typical college student clothes, but no one else was in a matching t-shirt and shorts festooned in fire trucks. More than anything, Teddy felt anxious. Maybe this was a bad idea. Maybe he should have pretended to be too tired. Maybe-

No. This made no sense. He had always made fun of his

friends for being wimps. 'Blood Harvest: Beginnings scared you? You had to hit the chicken button at the haunted hay ride?' Now he had to fight the urge to bury his face in Ben's chest. What was wrong with him? How had Ben gotten in his head like this?

"Can't I get off your lap?" He asked before realizing he was asking permission from a guy his own age. This whole room was just people his own age, except maybe Josh the RA. Ben's arm held him tight and he only succeeded in looking like a squirming toddler, thanks to the mirror across the room from them.

"You need to stay right here." Ben said, punctuating it with a kiss to Teddy's cheek. "We're gonna start soon and I don't want to lose you."

"Alright, everyone!" Josh called out as if he had been waiting for Ben's cue. "Let's settle in a circle and do Two Truths and a Lie." A chorus of groans met this. "I know, I know, but it's all I could come up with. Let's start with" he pointed to a girl about a quarter of the circle away from Ben and Teddy. "Chloe. You say your truths and lie and then whoever can shout out which one's the lie." He shrugged and stuck his hands into his hoodie pocket. "Or we can vote or whatever."

"Ok, well." Chloe smiled at everyone. "Hi, my name's Chloe. I'm originally from Westhaven." She laughed. "Neither of those count, okay? Uh"

Teddy hardly listened, trying to figure out what he was going to do when it got to him. What would happen when it got to

Ben? What if Ben tried to pass off 'Teddy's a baby' as one of his truths? Obviously, Teddy had to beat him to it and set the record straight. He tried to surreptitiously check Ben's pocket for a pacifier, bottle, or something else to silence him.

"Hey, my name's Colton." The boy on Ben's right said. "I like to ski, I won the state bowling tournament two years in a row, and I was born in Madrid." Teddy had to think fast!

"It's skiing." Chloe declared with certainty. Colton smirked and nodded.

"Alright, who's next?" Josh asked, looking at Teddy and Ben with a slight inquisitive air. Teddy's hand flew up.

"Guess that answers that!" Ben said with a laugh. He gave Teddy a squeeze. "Go ahead, buddy."

"Hi, my name's Ted."

"Speak up, sweetie." A girl on the other side of the circle said. "It's a big group." Teddy winced and tried again.

"Hi, my name's Ted." He felt like he was yelling, but it was no louder than anyone else had been. "Theodore, but you can call me Ted." Had Ben's hand just moved? Maybe it was just his imagination. "So, uh, I was named after my grandfather. I'm"

"Still can't hear him!" A mean guy near the girl who had asked him to speak up said.

"Be nice, Preston." She said. "Try just a little bit louder, Teddy." Obviously she could heard me. He thought. "My

name's Ted!" He felt like he was bellowing now. "I was named after my grandpa. I have never been outside the US." Was that lie too obvious? He just wanted to get through this. "And... I'm eighteen years old." That would make it clear to everyone, he thought. Ben's hand definitely moved this time, pulling him snug against his chest so he could kiss his cheek.

"Nice job, baby." He whispered.

"I think that one's obvious." Preston said. "There's no way he's eighteen."

"Be nice." The girl hissed, though she had a smile as she looked at Teddy. "Did he get it right?"

"No!" Teddy felt panic grip him.

"How old are you really, Teddy?" Chloe asked. He looked from face to face. How was this happening?

"I really am eighteen! I am!" He yelled, fighting to get away from Ben. The ground fell away as Ben got to his feet, turning Teddy so that his chest was against Ben's shoulder.

"Alright, I think he's overtired." Ben said, talking loudly to be heard over the completely panic-stricken boy in his arms. "We'd better call it a night. Teddy will see you all in the morning!"

"No! No! Dada! No!" Everyone chuckled as Teddy's voice faded down the hall.

By the time they were in their room, Teddy had fallen into a numb silence. No one in there had seen him as anything other

than a little boy. What was he going to do? Everyone had just watched Ben carry him away as if he really was a toddler.

"No." He mumbled as he saw the headphones coming toward him.

"Your music will help you fall asleep." Ben said.

"I don't want it."

"Aw, so sleepy, you don't even know what you're saying." Ben said, slipping the headphones over Teddy's ears.

"Sleepy babies, time for bed." A voice sang as Ben eased Teddy down onto his bed. "Close your eyes, rest your head."

"No, no." Teddy mumbled.

"The sun's gone down and so must you. May your sweetest dreams come true." He felt something press against his lips and he yawned, allowing it into his mouth. He began to suckle, unsure if it was a pacifier or another bottle. All he knew was warmth spread throughout his body as he succumbed to sleep.

It was dark. Teddy sat up and looked around. His headphones had fallen off. Somehow he knew that was the only reason he was awake. He gazed across the room at the barely visible lump on the other bed, breathing deeply and steadily. Dada was asleep. This was his chance. Get out of bed, sneak to the door, then find someone, anyone to save him. Everyone on this floor would probably take him back to Dada, but there had to be someone!

Maybe I should wait until morning, he thought. Surely Dada wouldn't prevent him from going to class. Mom and Dad - his real mom and dad - were paying a lot of money for college. They had not intervened earlier, true, but they probably did not understand the full gravity of the situation. I can't wait until morning, he decided.

In the dark of an unfamiliar place, he misjudged the end of the bed and fell to the floor with an oomph. He froze as he heard Dada's breathing change. Shit, he thought.

"Teddy?" He did not dare to move a muscle, trying to see across the room. "Did you have a nightmare?" Teddy felt like he could hear his heart pounding. "Hm." Shit! He thought again as Dada sat up. What was he going to do?

He was still trying to decide when Dada came over and picked him up. He kissed the top of his head.

"Did you take your headphones off?"

"No, dada. They fell off." He heard Dada chuckle.

"Alright, let's get back to bed." He kept holding onto Teddy until the pacifier was back in his mouth and the headphones had been returned to his head. Teddy sucked on it, surprised by how much calmer he felt. Hadn't he been trying to escape a moment ago? It would just have to wait until morning.

His steady sucking rhythm was interrupted as he realized Dada was not putting him back in his bed. Instead, they both returned to Dada's bed and Teddy found his cheek pressed up against Dada's bare chest. He felt Dada's breathing slow as he

almost immediately fell back asleep. With his arms wrapped around him, Teddy realized he would be stuck here against Dada's bare chest until morning. By the third lullaby from his headphones, Teddy was fast asleep too, nuzzling just a teensy bit more into Dada.