The Rough Patch: Part 1

by TheMissingDays

The first part of a brand new story. Riley is having some troubles in his life. It feels like everything is going off the rails all at once. His parents are supportive, but what happens when things go from bad to worse? Can Riley weather this rough patch that he has found himself in?

This story is going to be different than stuff I've written in the past, but its been something I've wanted to write for a awhile, so I hope you enjoy where it goes.&:þ

The Costume Box
2024

Chapter 1

The Rough Patch: Part 1 - Chapter 1

Back Home

Riley stood with his back against the wall using his hand to mark the the spot against the measuring stick attached to the wall. He turned around to see where he measured up. Looking at the spot where his hand was, he grimaced. He had known where it would be, yet something seemed to tell him something was off. He was short, he knew he was short, he had always been short. It had never really caused problems for him in the past, he had gotten along just fine, at no point could he remember a time where it had even been a problem. He had gone though school with plenty of friends who had never seemed to bring it up and he had also done well with the ladies who had also found no problem with it. It had never been a thing Riley had thought about. Yet now as he looked at the measuring stick it seemed to strike him as weird. Riley examined the tick marks that charted his growth until they just stopped as he could see the other tick marks belonging to his younger brother, Carson continue to go up until Carson had reached a point where he was taller than the stick. Riley just shook his head.

At twenty years old Riley was much too short, Carson was only thirteen and he was double his size. It seemed strange to Riley, he had always though of Carson as his twerpy little brother despite their difference in height. Riley surveyed the tick marks a little closer. They both started off rather neat,

with their names printed out next to them until as they got above Riley's current height when the marks became sloppier and Carson's name was written bigger and albeit a little more sloppy, probably around the time Carson had gotten old enough to write his own name. The tick marks were also thicker. As Riley looked at them he found he could barely even read some of them with how sloppy and smudged they looked. Riley turned around catching himself in the full length mirror across the room. He grimaced a little. His moppish brown hair was getting long enough that it was starting to feather out at the ends. His skin was clear for the most part which would probably be considered a good thing for anyone his age, but given everything else about him it just made him look more like a kid. The only thing about his face that seemed to betray the childlike look was the how puffy and sunken his eyes looked at the moment. Yet the thing that irritated him the most at the moment were the clothes.

He was wearing a navy polo with thin red and yellow lines and a pair of brown pants. It was sort of preppy, which wasn't Riley's style at all. He preferred just t-shirts and jeans or if it was particularly hot out maybe a tank top and some shorts. But it wasn't the style that really bothered him. Riley lifted up the shirt a little to look at the elastic waistband on the pants. He scowled a little letting the shirt drop. The pants did not belong to him in the first place. They were his little cousin's pants that had been mixed up in the laundry after his aunt had visited a few weeks back. Riley had been a little incensed when his Mom had presented them to him to wear. Finding that they fit perfectly had also been a blow to him. He wasn't

exactly sure where she had gotten the shirt from though.

He just couldn't understand why his size seemed to be a sticking out to him more and more these days. However he guessed maybe it was because he was back in his childhood room after having moved out for college. Not too mention it wasn't the same as he had left it. He remembered some weeks ago when his Mom had called asking for permission to redo his room a little. His Aunt had recently moved and was now a lot closer but still far enough away that it was a drive to visit. His Mom had wanted to do Riley's room up for his four year old cousin, Toby so he would have a nice place to sleep. At the time Riley hadn't really cared. He didn't come home much anyways. Looking around though it wasn't as if much had changed. There were some kid friendly posters now on the walls, but the biggest change was the bed. It was a twin sized bed with blue wood while the the spindles of the headboard were painted yellow along with the safety rails alongside firmly identifying it as a bed for a little kid. At least the bed sheets were neutral enough. Riley had been put off upon seeing the thing. He had asked where in the world he was supposed to sleep. His Dad had just said he could use the bed, he was sure Toby wouldn't mind. Riley had only rolled his eyes. Riley had tried to tell his Dad to take off the rails, yet the man had been unmoved, he had said it would be too much trouble to take them off and he would have to get out a drill to take out the screws.

Riley let out a huff of air as he put his back against the wall measuring himself again. How could he still be small enough

to fit into a kids bed much less their clothes. Footsteps approached in the hallway as Carson stopped in the doorway catching sight of what Riley was doing. He leaned against the door frame looking at Riley near the door.

“What are you doing?” Carson asked with an amused look his curly brown hair bouncing a little as he nodded. Riley thought Carson had a stupid haircut although he knew it was popular style, although it had'nt stopped him from calling Carson a broccoli head on occasion.

“N-nothing, “Riley stammered taking a step away from the wall.

“Looked like you were measuring yourself,” Carson said taking a step into the room and leaning over to look closer at the measuring stick. “No changes?”

“Get out will you,” Riley scowled, not having patience to deal with his little brother at the moment. Yet Carson wasn't so little as Riley had to look up at him. Carson then looked at him, his eyebrow raising a little.

“Where did you get that shirt?” Carson asked.

“I don't know,” Riley grumbled. “I just had it.” Carson gave a small hum before he reached out grabbing the back of the collar.

“I think that's my shirt,” he said trying to see if his name was indeed written on the collar, like there Mom had done with all the boys clothes when they were younger to keep them from getting mixed up when the brother's had been a similar size,

which had been years ago.

“Hey, get off,” Riley said as he thrashed about.

“Relax,” Carson said as he tried to get Riley to stay still. “I just want to see.”

Riley was getting angrier by the minute by his brother's incessant meddling. What did it even matter who the shirt had belonged too?

“What's going on here?” the voice of their mother said in a questioning tone that made both boys stop.

“Carson is being a pest,” Riley spat out. Mom gave an accusatory look towards Carson. If there was one thing there Mom was good at it was giving the look.

“I just wanted to see if he was wearing my shirt.” Carson said. “He never lets me borrow his stuff so I don't see why I should share clothes.” It was a weak excuse, but Carson needed something to lessen the accusation that he was indeed being a pest. Mom gave a weary nod of her head as she pulled back her brown hair into a ponytail before securing it with the scrunchie on her wrist.

“I'm the one that gave him that shirt,” Mom said. “So if you want to question anyone it should be me,” she said as if challenging Carson to actually call her decision into question. Mom was on the short side and only had a few inches on Carson and given her slightly plump build she didn't exactly exude a tough exterior, yet both boys knew that when she wanted to be intimidating and hold herself as the authority

figure she was, she found no problem doing so. In fact both boys would freely admit they were more scared of being in trouble with her than their Dad.

“It may just be one of your old shirts, but so what,” Mom continued. “Its not like it would even fit you. And Riley needs something to wear since he doesn't have any other clothes.”

“Because you threw them all out,” Riley yelped accusingly. His Mom then turned looking at him with a sort of tired look.

“And whose fault was that exactly?” she replied back.

“Its not like I caused the bed bug infestation,” Riley grumbled referencing the reason why he was back home in the first place. The apartment he had shared with his friends at school had become infested with bed bugs. The landlord had opted to just fumigate the whole place since the school term had ended. Yet had then informed his tenants that he was ending the lease since the property needed some renovations anyways and he wouldn't be putting the place back up for rent until they were all done. Which had meant that Riley and his roommates had no place to stay.

“That may be true, but you could've brought them with you,” Mom said. “I told you to get rid of everything and get new clothes before you came home. But you chose not too.”

Riley only let out a huff, they had already had this conversation. The only reason he didn't get new clothes was because he thought it was unnecessary. He had never seen a

bed bug before even if his roommates insisted it was true. Riley just hadn't seen any evidence to suggest that it was true. He thought everyone was just being paranoid.

“Can everyone just leave me alone,” Riley said not wanting to get into it with his Mom again. “I'm trying to do my final projects.”

“Sure,” Mom said with a smile. “Carson lets go, I think you have some homework to do?”

Carson groaned as he walked off with his Mom following behind.

Riley closed the door and sat back down at his desk where there were notes and books spread out around an open laptop. He closed his eyes as he rested his head on the back of the chair. He was exhausted. It just seemed everything was going wrong for him at the moment. He had lost his apartment which would not have been that big of a deal except Riley had signed up to take some electives during the summer term which was starting in a couple of weeks, so he really needed to find a new apartment. Not too mention there was his car. The thing had finally died on him. It had thankfully made it all the way home before deciding to become a large metal piece of junk. His Dad had looked it over with one of his friends who was a mechanic and they had declared that the engine was completely beyond saving, lest they rebuild it from scratch, something Riley did not have money for. It would cost less just to buy a new one, so now Riley had to find a new car that he could afford. His Dad's friend had

taken it off his hands and paid Riley what it was worth in scrap – which wasn't much.

Riley let out another groan, all that would have to wait. For right now he had three days to get done with his projects. Riley had an English paper on Shakespeare he hadn't even started writing yet and the final project for his Marine Biology course, which was Riley's major. He had spent a fair amount of money on a research trip which was a good opportunity for him. He didn't ask his parents for help wanting to be thought of as able to take care of himself. Riley picked up some notes before typing on the computer. He had gotten a lot of it done already, yet at the moment he just couldn't seem to concentrate as all his carefully recorded notes and findings melded into a slush in his mind. It had only been twenty minutes before he let out another sigh as he put his head on the desk, not having made very much progress. He didn't hear the door open and was startled when a hand touched his back.

“Did I scare you?” his Mom asked smiling a little.

“Oh no,” Riley said still a little flummoxed.

“So how is it going,” Mom asked looking a the computer screen. “Almost finished?”

“Maybe,” Riley grumbled. “I don't know I just cant seem to get my thoughts straight.” Mom gave him a pondering look for a moment before rubbing his back a little.

“You've been working on this for the past two days nonstop,”

Mom said. “Maybe you should take a rest.”

“I just want to get it done,” Riley said getting up from the chair and grabbing a notebook from the bed and looking over some notes. His Mom grabbed the notebook closing it shut before placing it on the desk.

“Hey,” Riley said with some offense.

“Honey,” Mom said with some patience. “You just admitted that you are burnt out. Pushing yourself isn't going to help. I think going to bed would give you a good recharge. You look tired.”

“I'm not,” Riley insisted looking a the digital clock on the desk. It was only eight thirty.

“What time did you go to bed last night?” Mom questioned.

“I don't know like three or something,” Riley said. His Mom gave him a surprised look.

“And yet I saw you up at six this morning working at the desk,” she said throwing her arms up. “What time do you usually go to bed anyways?”

“Uhh like two or three,” Riley mumbled. The truth was he didn't really have a time when he usually went to sleep. Most of the time he would pass out after drinking or smoking or whenever he felt tired, most of the time it was around two or three.

“All the more reason to hit the hay early,” Mom said with a knowing nod. “You know its not healthy to be running around

on such little sleep. At some point you'll hit a breaking point."

"I guess it wouldn't hurt," Riley said still sounding a little unsure, although he was tired anyways.

"Great," Mom said as she then surprised him by pulling the shirt up over his head before removing it completely.

"What the hell," Riley griped, taking a step back from his Mom.

"Oh sorry," Mom said. "I was just coming up to grab your clothes in the first place. Mostly the pants though."

"What for?" Riley said a little angry as he stomped his foot.

"The pants don't belong to us, their Aunt Yvette's and I need to wash them and get them sent back to her. You've been wearing those clothes for the past two days already." she said as she motioned for him hand over the pants.

"Do I really have too?" Riley grimaced.

"You've slept in just your underwear since middle school," Mom said. "So whats the big deal now?"

Riley went to say something yet he didn't really have an argument. His Mom already knew after all since she had been the one to give them to him. Although he felt like she was being a little dense at the moment. Did he really need to say what the problem was? Riley decided just to get it over with as he took off the pants which was easy since they had an elastic waistband and no buttons.

Riley now stood in his room in nothing but a pair of undies that also belonged to his cousin. They were white briefs with blue piping and a blue waistband. On the front was the spider symbol and on the back was a large graphic of Spiderman himself. As Riley's Mom gathered up the clothes she looked down at him.

“Sorry I don't have any different undies for you,” she said sympathetically. “Those aren't uncomfortable are they.”

“They're fine,” Riley said as he went and got under the covers of the bed feeling embarrassed to be seen in such kiddie underwear, especially at his age. It was mortifying that they even fit him. “I just wish they didn't have Spiderman on them.

“I'm just happy they're comfortable,” Mom said. “We;ll have to get you some stuff more to your taste soon though.” she said as she came over and gave Riley a kiss to the forehead. “Good night sweetie, you'll see after a good nights sleep you'll feel a lot better.” Mom said, she then walked to the door stopping in the doorway, she turned back to look at him. “Riley, I just wanted to say its nice to have you back home, even if its not under the best circumstances.”

“Yeah, sure,” Riley said as he laid back on the bed. His Mom turned off the lights and shut the door. Riley rolled over onto his side. He really was tired. He closed his eyes, his mind still going over all the things he had to do to get back on track. Before long though he had fallen asleep.

Chapter 2

The Rough Patch: Part 2 - Chapter 2

Shopping Trip

Riley came too realizing he was being shaken vigorously.

“C'mon Riley get up,” he heard Carson say. Without even opening his eyes Riley gave a short grunt before pulling his covers tighter and rolling over showing his back to Carson.

“Leave me alone,” Riley growled nuzzling into his pillow, wanting nothing more than to go back to sleep. Carson however did not let up. He grabbed the covers pulling them back quickly. Riley curled up into a ball feeling the sudden coldness hit him. That's when he heard Carson let out a little laugh.

“Nice undies bro,” Carson said. Riley shot up, remembering what he was wearing. He looked down as if to confirm that he was indeed still wearing some Spiderman themed underwear. Riley grabbed the blankets covering up his bottom half.

“Would you just get out of here,” Riley shouted at Carson who still had a somewhat amused look on his face.

“Once you get up,” Carson said. “Its time for breakfast.”

“I'll eat later,” Riley said with annoyance.

“That's not gonna work,” Carson said crossing his arms. “Mom is on some kick right now, and she won't let anyone eat until you're at the table. She says that since you're actually

home for once we should eat all together as a family."

"I'm not hungry," Riley said laying back down on the bed to show he wasn't going to move.

"Well I am," Carson said grabbing the sheets again and pulling them out of Riley's grasp. Riley stood up realizing he wasn't going to be left alone, trying his best to ignore his state of dress as he looked for some clothes to put on. "Seriously Riley hurry," Carson said annoying Riley even further.

"I can't find my clothes," Riley said remembering his Mom having taken the ones he had been wearing to wash. He went over to the dresser in the room hoping to find something, yet opening each drawer revealed them all to be empty.

"This is taking forever," Carson intoned with some urgency. "I'm going to be late for school at this rate."

"I can't walk around like this," Riley replied more so out of annoyance at Carson's whining.

"Well you're not naked so just go with what you have on."' Carson suggested. Riley didn't even have a chance to protest as Carson started pushing him out of the room. Riley tried to fight back but his brother was stronger and was able to effectively herd him out into the hall and down the stairs to the kitchen.

"Knock it off," Riley shouted. Carson finally relented as he just shrugged. Riley rolled back his shoulders feeling as if he had finally gotten his brother off his back, it was too little too late however as he found himself already standing in the

kitchen.

“Oh good, you're here,” Mom said from the kitchen table. “We can eat now.”

“Like this?” Riley sputtered with some indignation.

“Whats the big deal,” his Dad said coming over to the table with a plate of sausages. “We don't mind if you eat in your pajamas.”

“Its weird,” Riley grumbled.

“We're all dressed because we have places to be today,” Dad chuckled pulling out a chair and motioning for Riley to take a seat. “We aren't all on break like you.”

“I have plenty of things to do,” Riley said as he took a seat. His Dad pushed the chair up to the table pushing the arms underneath the table as the wood rubbed against the bottom of the table with a loud screech. “I just didn't have any clothes to put on since someone just had to wash the other ones,” Riley said looking at his Mom with an annoyed look.

“You will be pleased to know that I did find something else for you to wear,” Mom said with a smirk. “You can change after breakfast.”

The rest of the family began to put food on their plate. Riley just decided to eat quickly. He found that his parents were acting funny, not thinking it was in anyway a big deal for him to be at the table in his underwear much less a pair of spider man briefs befitting a young child, but he decided it was

probably for the best – would it really be better if they decided to poke fun at him about it?

Riley grabbed a fork and decided to get some of the sausages his Dad had cooked up to accompany the waffle already on his plate. Even with the chair pushed in as far as it could go, Riley couldn't reach far. He got onto his knees and reached out across the table. It was such a distance that his stomach was laid out on the table as he reached forward.

“Use your table manners and ask us to pass you the tray,” Mom tutted as she lifted the tray and moved it closer to Riley so he didn't need to practically lay across the table to reach.

“Sorry,” Riley grumbled. As he sat back to eat his food. He stabbed a sausage off his plate. The fork felt big in his hand for some odd reason. As he went to bite into the sausage it fell off his fork into his lap. “Shit,” Riley cursed as he picked the sausage up with his hand tossing it back onto his plate.

“Language,” Mom tutted.

“It fell,” Riley said with his brow furrowed.

“That wouldn't happen if you ate over your plate,” Mom then said as if she were talking to a little kid with no table manners. Riley tried to readjust himself. With the way the chair was situated even if he moved as far forward as he could there was still some distance between himself and his plate. He figured he could move the plate forward but then it would be at the edge. One slip and the plate would fall into his lap. Riley elected to sit on his knees and lean over a little.

He began to eat with less trouble.

“Try not to spill anything on the table,” Dad said. “I just got done making it but I haven't had a chance to put a protective coat on it yet, so any spills might stain it.”

“You made this?” Riley questioned. Of course he knew the table was different but to learn that his Dad had made it was somewhat impressive. Riley's Dad was a dentist by trade but had always said he had the heart of a carpenter. He had always been making little woodworking projects in the garage, but to see that he had moved on to larger things like tables was surprising.

“Yeah,” Dad said with some pride as he ran his hand across the table. “I just finished it last week.”

Riley re-situated himself in the chair sitting his butt onto his feet since his knees were starting to hurt a little.

“Did you make new chairs too?” Riley asked. His Dad gave him a quizzical look.

“Nope, these are the same chairs we've always had.”

“They seem bigger,” Riley said examining the chair a little more closely. “And the silverware does too.”

“Nothing has changed with the utensils,” Mom said with a wave of her hand as if to dismiss the thought. “And the chairs are the same too. If your Dad made new one's we would only have one to sit in.”

“What's that supposed to mean?” Dad asked with some fake

offense.

“I'm just saying it would be nice if you finished one project before moving onto the next. I mean just look at this house. It would be nice if the cabinets had doors, you know.”

Riley had heard a lot from his Mom from phone calls about all the renovations his Dad was doing to the house. The upstairs was untouched, as was the living room. It was true though that the cabinets in the kitchen didn't have doors as his Mom had complained. The room that had gotten hit the hardest was the dining room. Everything was draped in plastic and the walls were halfway painted as wood and power tools littered the ground.

“Its the next thing on my list,” Dad said with a weary tone having heard the complaint many times before.

Carson was done eating in short order as he then made off in a rush for school. Dad then went off to go and make some phone calls. Mom was up doing some dishes while Riley finished up. He went to get up but found he couldn't dislodge the chair from under the table no matter how hard he pushed, it was stuck. He finally slid out from the chair and crawled out from under the table. He looked over to see his Mom smirking at him a little.

“What,” he said with some ire.

“Oh nothing,” she chuckled. “Just seeing you was kind of reminding me of when you were younger. Right when you were potty trained you would always walk around in just your

underwear, I guess you were proud or something.”Riley scrunched up his face.

“You said you had clothes for me.” he said wanting to get something on so he didn't have to keep walking around in just his underwear.

“Oh sure, but do you think you could do something for me first?” she asked. Riley gave a shrug to show he was listening. “Its just do you think you could call me Mommy once, you know like when you were little.”

“Huuh,” Riley said as if he hadn't heard her bizarre request.

“Just once,” Mom said with a pleading look. “I kind of miss it and you know I guess I just feel a little sentimental this morning after having the whole family together for a meal.”

Riley was about to refuse until he remembered he was trying to get on his parents good side, there was something he needed to tell them. Maybe going along with his Mom's ridiculous request would put her in a good mood.

“Well what do you want me to say?” he asked shifting awkwardly.

“Did you like breakfast?” his Mom asked. “I made the waffles homemade just for you.”

Riley put on a big smile, although it wasn't real, even if it did make him feel a little nice that his Mom had gone through the trouble for him.

“Breakfast was great, thanks Mommy,” Riley said making his

voice as syrupy as what he had put on the waffles. His Mom let out a laugh.

“Thanks for humoring me,” she said as she hugged him. “It did my heart good to hear someone call me Mommy again.”

“Clothes,” Riley then reminded as his surliness took back over.

“On top of the dryer,” Mom said. Riley nodded as he walked off towards the laundry room.

“Oh Riley one more thing,” Mom then said.

“Whhaaattt,” Riley turned around with a whine yet stopped when he saw what his Mom was holding. In her hand she was holding up a folded piece of paper. “You went through my mail?”

“You left it on the counter,” his Mom replied as she unfolded the paper.

“I was going to talk to you about that,” Riley said meekly.

“How in the world did you rack up four thousand dollars in credit card charges,” she said exasperated.

“It just got out of hand,” Riley said.

“It looks like you charged everything from groceries to rent. Why didn't you pay for this with the money you had.”

“Well,” Riley began although he couldn't tell the truth. He had spent a lot of money on the research trip, that and partying. He realized he had gotten carried away with the

drinking party's he and his roommates threw and his drug habit. He wasn't a druggie though. Its not like he was sniffing lines of coke or nothing, it was just weed. So when it came time to pay for necessities he really had no choice but to charge it, and since he didn't want to have to ask his parents for help he had just opened up another credit card to pay off the balance of the other one. He had a plan though. He was going to get a job that summer since he now had time to hold one down, that was until he found himself back home.

“So what, you were going to ask me and your Dad to pay this?” his Mom asked.

“I just needed a loan,” Riley said quickly. “I was going to get a job and pay you back. That research trip ended costing more than I though.” His Mom looked over the credit card statement with some doubt. He could see that she knew he wasn't telling the whole truth.

“How much money do you have, right now?” his Mom asked placing the paper onto the counter.

“I got five hundred from scrapping the car,” Riley said. His Mom shook her head. “But I need that money to make a payment on a new car.”

“Yeah I suppose you will, guess that means you actually have zero dollars, huh?” his Mom said not without some pity. Riley didn't reply only looking down at the ground. He felt some shame in having gotten in this position.

“I know how proud you can be,” his Mom started. “And I can

also recognize you are going through a bit of a rough patch." she said. Riley looked up at his Mom as he saw a certain glint come to her eye.

"I will pay this off for you," she said.

"Really!" Riley said as his eyes went wide.

"I don't really have a choice. Even college aged kids need some help. But on one condition."

Riley didn't like hearing that one bit. He recognized the look on his Mom's face. She on occasion came up with creative ways to impart lesson's on her sons and Riley could tell she had one come to her. "Since I felt so good hearing you call me Mommy again, I think it would be good for you to start using it again."

"You can't be serious," Riley cringed.

"Why not," his Mom said with a smirk. "It made me happy, and maybe it will remind you that you are not a little kid anymore who can just rely on Mommy to bail him out every time he doesn't think things through." Riley stood with his brows furrowed. His Mom gave a shrug. "Is it really a bad deal? I mean its not like it would be forever. Just until you go back to school for the summer term," his Mom said. "You can't call me Mommy for a couple of weeks for four grand?" Riley shook his head. It was a no brainer, he would be stupid to refuse. Getting this paid off outright took a huge burden off his back.

"I guess not...Mommy," he said. His Mom smiled as she held

a hand to her chest looking as if she had just eaten the worlds most decadent dessert.

“Oh I love it,” she said.

“What was that?” Dad said walking into the kitchen with a strange look on his face. “Did you just call her Mommy?” he asked looking at Riley whose face went red. Mom wasted no time in explaining to Dad what was going on handing over the credit card statement.

“So we made a deal,” Mom said. “Riley is going to call me Mommy for a little bit to remind him that he is not a little kid anymore and we'll take care of this for him.”

“Four thousand dollars,” Dad said as he stared at the statement. He shook his head for a moment setting the paper on the counter. “Its not just your money though, its ours,” he said looking at his wife. “So I should get something too.” he then looked at Riley. “Seeing as Mommy already set the terms I guess I'll just join in.”

“Dad,” Riley said feeling some dread at what was being proposed.

“That's not my name,” Dad said with a smirk. “Do you understand?” Riley went to say something before closing his mouth. He put on a grumpy face as he crossed his arms.

“Yes, Daddy,” he said with a huff. His Dad chuckled.

“You're right,” he said looking at Mom. “It is nice hearing that again.” As embarrassing as it was for Riley to say such

things he knew he was getting off easy. If anything his parents were being quite generous with him. It was not an inconsequential amount of money and despite knowing that his parents were well off he knew they were conservative with their money, lessons that had not managed to ingrain themselves in Riley with his own finances.

“Why don't you go get dressed,” Mom said. “Then we can go to the store and get some clothes.”

“I can't,” Riley said. His Mom looked at him confused thinking he would want to. “Its just I have to get done with this report today,” Riley said. He wasn't making an excuse. His professor was rather set in his ways and would not accept projects electronically, which meant Riley would have to print the thing out and send it in the mail, which meant he needed it in the mail by tomorrow if he was going to meet the due date. His Mom nodded with some understanding. “Plus I don't really have money for clothes,” Riley said a little sheepishly.

“You got money from the car,” his Dad said.

“I sort of need that for other stuff,” Riley said.

“Riley,” Dad said in a certain tone that showed he wasn't going to take that as an excuse. “We're not fronting you anymore money, your gonna have to dip into what you got.”

“You'll just have to buy cheap stuff,” Mom said.

“I guess,” Riley said accepting the situation. He didn't really feel comfortable with his parents paying off his debt in the

first place. “But I can't really go right now, I'll go tomorrow.”

“Me and your Dad are both busy tomorrow, so there won't be a car for you to use.” Mom said.

“I need to get my report done today,” Riley groaned. His Mom let out a sigh.

“I'll just pick stuff up for you then,” Mom offered. Riley rocked his head from side to side mulling over the offer. On one hand it meant having clothes that didn't originally belong to a four year old, but he didn't know if he exactly trusted his Mom to pick out stuff.

“I guess,” Riley finally said. He didn't really have a better option at the moment.

“Just don't get mad if I don't get you the most stylish stuff,” Mom said.

“As long as its cheap,” Riley said. “Now can I please go put some clothes on and get to work.”

“Of course,” Mom said. Riley turned around heading towards the laundry room first.

He saw a pile of clothes on top of the dryer. Riley pulled them down. He unfolded the shirt first. It was a grayish white with some gray stripes on it. The only thing that denoted it was for a little kid was the outline of a bear's face peeking out from the pocket on the breast. Riley shook his head as he put it on. He then grabbed the brown cargo pants. He sighed a little seeing that there were no zippers or buttons instead a

gray band of fabric going around the waist covering the elastic waistband. Riley pulled them on. At least the shirt covered the waistband. He then looked over and saw some of Carson's laundry folded in a basket. He grabbed a pair of the socks and put them on. Pulling them up they came to his knees. Riley opted to push them down so they were gathered around his ankles like puffballs. Finally being dressed he went back to his room to continue his work.

His Mom had been right. It seemed a proper's night rest had done him a world of wonders. His mind felt sharp as he continued to type up his report. It had taken him about four hours but he was finally done. He hit print and then wandered down to the kitchen where the printer was located. He saw that a few pages had printed before coming to a stop. He looked at the screen only to see there was an error message. They were out of ink. Riley went through some of the drawers at the desk only to find they didn't have any extra cartridges. Riley let out a moan. Now he was going to have to go and get more. He could hear his Dad near the front door. Riley walked into the front entryway finding his Dad putting on some shoes.

“Dad can I borrow the car?” Riley asked. His Dad acted liked he hadn't even heard him. “Dad,” Riley repeated a little louder, yet his Dad just carried on. “Hey Dad,” Riley practically shouted. His Dad stood up looking around.

“Its almost as if someone is trying to get my attention,” he said wistfully. Riley's shoulders slumped as he let an audible groan.

“Daddy,” he mumbled.

“Oh hey Riley need something?” his Dad said with a smile.

“Can I borrow the car?” Riley asked.

“What for?”

“We're out of ink and I really need to get my paper printed.” Riley said putting a hand on his hip.

“Sorry bud,” Dad said with a sympathetic glance. “I'm headed out right now and your Mom called and said she wouldn't be back for awhile, so you're gonna be waiting.”

“Great,” Riley said as he put a hand to cover his face. Could nothing just be easy?

“Tell ya what,” his Dad then said. “I have to stop at the store before I head into the office so you can come with me and get what you need, but you'll have to spend the rest of the afternoon with me while I take care of some appointments.”

“I still have a paper to write,” Riley said.

“Bring your laptop with you and you can work on it in my office then,” his Dad suggested.

“I guess that could work,” Riley said.

“Hop to it,” his Dad said. “I'm in a hurry.”

Riley raced upstairs grabbing his stuff. He came downstairs to put on his shoes. As he looked around he didn't see them anywhere, which was weird as he knew he had taken them off

as soon as he had gotten home and he hadn't left the house since then. Riley opened a closet door and began digging around thinking someone had thrown them in there with some of the other old shoes and winter boots that were stored in there.

“Are you ready yet?” his Dad said sounding a little impatient. Riley told him that he couldn't find his shoes anywhere. “Your Mom threw them out,” his Dad informed him. Riley spun around with a shocked look on his face. “She wasn't taking a chance,” his Dad said.

“So now I don't have any shoes,” Riley whined. His Dad frowned as he shook his head.

“I'm sure there is something in here,” his Dad said looking through the closet himself. “Here we go,” his Dad said after a few moments. He set a small pair of sneakers on the ground. Riley scrunched up his face. They were kids shoes to be sure. They were gray with a large yellow Velcro strap with a dump truck on the end. On the sides of the shoe were various other construction vehicles in bright colors. “I think these were an extra pair of Toby's,” Dad said as he lifted up the tongue of the shoe looking at the size. “They should fit you just fine.”

“Does he live here now or something?” Riley said with some sarcasm seeing it was becoming a pattern that his little cousin seemed to have left behind everything Riley seemed to need.

“Your Aunt just left some stuff behind so she didn't have to bring so much stuff with her when they visit,” his Dad said.

“I'm not wearing those,” Riley said crossing his arms.

“Seriously they're just shoes, if you don't put them on I'm leaving without you.” His Dad said looking a little annoyed.

Riley gritted his teeth a little. He really needed the ink. He didn't know when his Mom would return. With some umbrage he put the shoes on much to his Dad's relief. Riley then grabbed his bag which contained his laptop and some notes so he could work on his English paper. He followed his Dad out to the driveway where the family's minivan was parked. Riley didn't know why his Dad still drove the thing. Its not like they were going to have anymore kids, his Dad did say he liked the space though. As Riley walked up to the front door his Dad spoke up.

“Sorry Riley, you're going to have to sit in the back.”

“How come,” Riley said with some suspicion.

“I got a lot of stuff in the car and the front seat is taken.” Riley opened the door to see the front seat was taken up by some building supplies his Dad was using for renovations. Riley gave a huff as he shut the door and then slid open the passenger door. . He was met by the sight of a car seat in one of the seats, no doubt a left over from Toby once again. Riley climbed into the car. The other bucket seat in the middle was gone having been removed. Riley looked to the back to see that the bench seat had also been removed and in its spot was packages of tiles and some wood. Dad was behind peering into the car.

“Oh I forgot I took out the seats to make room for my last run to the hardware store,” his Dad said sucking some air in through his teeth.

“Where am I supposed to sit?” Riley asked. Both of them then looked at the car seat. “Not a chance,” Riley said before his Dad could even suggest it.

“There isn't another spot,” Dad said as he gave a nonplussed look.

“I wouldn't even fit,” Riley argued.

“I don't know,” Dad said with a smirk. Without warning he picked Riley up from behind and whisked him into the seat. Riley was flabbergasted that his Dad had just done that. “Looks like it will work.

“Dad what are you –,” Riley yelped as his Dad clicked the chest harness into place before snapping the two straps into the buckle at his crotch. “Stop, Dad, this is stupid,” Riley continued to protest as he wiggled a little under the straps.

“Seriously Riley, I told you I'm in a hurry and I don't have time to reorganize the whole car.” his Dad said shaking his head a little, but looking somewhat pleased as he gave a tug to the straps seeing they were perfectly secure without being too tight. “If you fit, you sit,” Dad said before he closed the door and got into the driver's seat. Riley tried to fiddle with the straps. If this is how it was going to be then he just wouldn't go and take his chances waiting for his Mom to return. As he went to undo the buckle he found that no matter

how hard he pressed on the red button the straps would not release. He moved his hands up to the chest buckle but found it more complicated, having to push down on the snaps on the top and bottom at the same time. He just simply didn't possess the strength. He couldn't believe he was too weak to actually get free. He had never had trouble like this before. He could open jars no problem and even pill bottles had proved no trouble in the past. Was a car seat so much more secure than the child safe pill bottles?

“Just let me out, I'll go later,” Riley said, yet his Dad was already backing out of the driveway. “Dad I said let me out, hey Dad stop,” Riley protested more.

“Not my name,” Dad said in a sing song voice. Riley sat back in the seat with a scowl on his face. As if he was actually going to use the childish moniker, which would be even worse given the fact he was stuck in a car seat.

Riley wore his scowl the whole ride while his Dad acted like nothing was off as he sang along to the radio. Once they had made it to the store Riley went to try and undo the buckles again. His Dad opened the door and watched him struggle for a moment.

“Need a little help?” Dad finally asked.

“Yes,” Riley spat back.

“Then maybe you should ask nicely,” his Dad said with a raised eyebrow.

“I though you were in a hurry?” Riley said with some

surliness.

“We got time for manners,” Dad chuckled.

“Will you unbuckle me please...” Riley said looking at his Dad who gave him a little smile telling Riley what he wanted to hear. “Daddy,” Riley said through gritted teeth.

“Don't be so cross now,” Dad said as he easily undid the buckles. “ It is a punishment you know, a pretty easy one too. You are learning a very important lesson. I think that you'll definitely think twice before you spend money so freely, especially money you don't have.”

“I get it already,” Riley said as he was freed from the confines of the car seat.

“Lets hope so,” Dad said as Riley jumped down onto the pavement. As they walked towards the store Riley found he was being left behind. As he looked up at his Dad ahead of him, it didn't actually seem like he was walking all that fast. Yet Riley had to break into a jog just to catch up to the man. He finally caught up to him as his Dad was grabbing a shopping cart.

“Hang on a minute,” Riley said stopping to catch his breath.

“We gotta go,” his Dad said with some urgency as he checked his watch.

“Just let me catch my breath,” Riley said taking in some breaths as he rested his hands on his knees.

“Lets do this,” his Dad said before picking Riley up once

again and setting him into the child's seat. It had happened so fast that Riley barely had time to comprehend what had happened as he looked down seeing where he had been sat, his legs now dangling in the air.

“Let me out,” Riley seethed looking at his Dad with an angry look.

“Need I remind you once again we are under a time crunch?” his Dad said looking down at him. “You were already having trouble keeping up, if we go at your pace I'm gonna be late. So just ride in the cart and we'll be done in no time.”

“B-bb,” Riley stammered.

“But nothing,” his Dad said instantly shutting down any protest, but not without some sympathy. “We'll be in an out. Here why don't you tell me what we need first,” his Dad said handing Riley a paper shopping list. Riley was silent as he fumed looking down at the list. “Well,” his Dad said. “Whats the first three things?”

“Milk, bread, and three cans of corn,” Riley grumbled with a sour expression.

“Off we go,” Dad said cheerily as he headed for the first aisle.

Chapter 3

The Rough Patch: Part 3 - Chapter 3

Irrational

Riley walked into his room placing his bag on his desk. He took a seat before getting his laptop out. He had just put in the new ink cartridge he had gotten from the store into the printer. He was still a little miffed at his Dad for what had transpired, what with making him sit in the cart while they had been at the store. His Dad couldn't understand why Riley was making such a big deal out of it. Riley was sure his Dad was just hand waving it a way, but everyone had thought he was a little kid! How could his Dad even deny it? They had been in the aisle with the printer ink where Riley had told him which one to get. His Dad had been a little apprehensive when he saw the price, despite Riley's insistence that he was right. A store employee had approached and asked if they needed assistance. Dad had then asked if he had the right ink.

“My son thinks this is what we need, but I just want to be sure,” Dad had said. The store employee then looked at Riley sitting in the cart and looked a little surprised before smiling.

“He's right,” the store employee said. “He must be pretty smart for a little guy.” Riley had felt his face go red. The employee was around his age if not a little younger and here he was calling Riley a little kid. It was kind of weird in a way. Despite Riley's appearance that was perhaps the first time anyone had mistook him for younger than he was. Which as

Riley thought about it more was a little strange. It should have been a more common occurrence, but he could not remember a time before where it had happened.

Riley shook his head as his laptop was now up and running. He maneuvered over and brought up his report and sent it to the printer. He then went ahead and sent out his final English paper to the professor's inbox. He had been at his Dad's office all afternoon, which had given him plenty of time to get the paper done. He was just grateful he had actually had a solid outline put together so it was just a matter of typing it up. Although, as he thought back to the afternoon it had seemed odd to him that his Dad's receptionist hadn't thought anything was weird about him, greeting him normally. She had worked for his Dad for years so she knew the boys. She hadn't made any mention of Riley's wardrobe. Riley couldn't accept that she just didn't notice. She had looked right at him. Even if she didn't see the little bear on his shirt there was no way she could have missed the shoes. He then wondered why he was so hung up on it in the first place. Would it have been fun to explain that he was actually wearing his four year old cousin's shoes?

Riley went down stairs and got his report put together and in a envelope before walking it out to the mailbox. Putting it in and putting the flag up he let out a sigh of relief, he was finally done with all his work. As he began to walk up the driveway his Mom pulled in. She got out and started pulling some bags out.

“Think you could help me carry?” she asked. Riley walked

over taking a bag before he and his Mom walked into the house. She set her bags on the counter before turning to Riley. “That bag your holding is the stuff I got for you, I want you to change now so I can get the clothes you're wearing into the wash and sent back to Aunt Yvette,” she directed.

“Great,” Riley said walking towards the stairs. “Can't wait to get out of this stuff.” Coming into his room Riley set the stuffed bag onto his bed and dumped it all out.

“Riley,” Mom tutted as she walked into the room, “Now I have to re-fold it all.”

Riley would have responded with an apology not having thought that far ahead yet staring at the pile of clothes made him narrow his eyes in suspicion. The pile of clothes looked...colorful. To his horror as he started pulling things out he could see these clothes were certainly not meant for a college aged student. They were definitely from the kids section.

“These are for kids!” Riley exclaimed. His Mom gave a sigh as she went about folding up some of the clothes.

“This is what they had in your size,” his Mom said. “And these were the cheapest I could find, I only spent about fifty dollars. It was slim pickings I'm afraid.”

Riley furrowed his brow as he held up a bright green shirt with some stars shooting across it. As he continued through the pile he saw more shirts with cutesy graphics on them and matching shorts and pants, full on outfits even.

“You should consider yourself lucky that these will fit you,” his Mom continued. “Kids clothes are cheap since they aren't really going to last long before they're outgrown, so I was able to get a lot of stuff and give you some options.”

Riley let out a disgruntled groan not wanting to look optimistically at the situation. There were some jeans mixed in and a couple of non-descript hoodies, yet it was summer it would be too hot to wear them.

“Here, why don't you change into this,” his Mom said handing him a blue shirt with a large wave and surfboard being ridden by a dog with shades and a pair of blue shorts that went along with it.”

Riley looked at the shirt with some dismay. He was definitely going to look like a kid.

“I'll also be needing those undies you got on, you've been wearing them for two days already. I got you some new ones, but I am sorry to say that the underwear selection was limited.” Mom said as she dug around in the bag a little before pulling out two packages and setting them on the bed.

Riley's mouth dropped a little seeing two packs of briefs on the bed. One was Mickey Mouse themed while the other had characters from some kids show called “The Ninja Friends” but they weren't the cool kind. They were chibified cutesy looking ninjas, In colorful ninja costumes one yellow, one blue, and a red one. They had big black dots for eyes and were smiling.

“You couldn't have gotten boxers?” Riley said with disgust.

“These were two for five. All the boxers I saw were like four sizes up and believe me I looked. And before you complain just know it was either these or some Winnie the Pooh themed ones,” Mom said as she picked up the Mickey mouse package and tore it open, pulling out a pair with Mickey's face repeated all over it stenciled out in different colors, looking like some piece of pop-art. “You did say the one's you are wearing were comfortable, you just wished they didn't have Spiderman on them.”

Riley just looked at his Mom with a look of dis-belief. How could she think he would be okay with this?

“Riley, no one is even going to see them,” she said noting Riley's less than happy look.

“Not if you make me come down to breakfast in my underwear again,” Riley spat.

“You have plenty of clothes now, so it won't happen again. Now why don't you go get changed and I'll fold up the rest of this stuff and get it put away.”

There wasn't much Riley could do at that moment other than walk out of the room towards the bathroom with the outfit in hand. He put the clothes on quickly not even stopping to look at himself in the mirror. Coming back into his room his Mom was putting away the last of the clothes.

“So they fit?” Mom asked giving Riley a once over.

“Yes,” Riley said shaking his head as he sat on his bed.

“Riley I was being serious when I said I did my best,” his Mom said. “If its really that big of a deal I can take you back, just to see for yourself.”

“Its fine,” Riley said laying back on his bed. If his Mom was serious with her offer it could only mean that she was being truthful. Why would she actually try and go out of her way to dress him like a little kid? She had never done anything like that before. There just didn't seem to be a reason Riley could come up with that would make it plausible. If anything his parents were always pushing him and Carson to act maturely.

“Well maybe you should think about finding a job so you can get some money,” his Mom suggested. “Then you can buy more expensive clothes.”

“Whatever,” Riley groaned with a discontent mumble.

“You know Riley I would appreciate if you could act a little less grumpy.” his Mom said with some ire. Riley sat up looking at her as she gave him an expectant look.

“Sorry, Mommy,” Riley said knowing what she wanted to hear. His Mom nodded.

“Better,” she said with a smile. “I'm going to get my money's worth on that one.” She then left him to stew about.

He laid on his bed for awhile wondering what he was going to do. What sort of job could he get – especially without a car? They lived in a suburb, it wasn't like there was a lot

around within walking distance not too mention he only had a few weeks before he had to be back at school for the summer term, who was going to hire him for such a short amount of time? It seemed that the first order of business would be to get the car, then look into temp work. Riley sat up ready to do just that when he felt his stomach gurgle a little. Riley let out a little wince. The past few days he realized he hadn't really been to the bathroom. Then again he hadn't been eating much either, given that he had eaten a large breakfast that morning it seemed nature was now calling. He got up and walked across the hall to the bathroom.

It was a rectangular room. A large counter with a sink sat against the wall with a large mirror above it. Next to that was the toilet and then the bathtub. Riley moved the stool he had been using to stand on when he went pee and lifted the seat. Pulling his pants down he had to sort of climb up onto the toilet. It was a little hard as he found the seat seemed huge. As Riley was trying to situate himself his hand slipped causing him to fall in. He felt his butt submerge into the water. He struggled a little trying to get himself out but couldn't raise himself up with the way his arms were, his struggling only seemed to make him become more tightly wedged. There was then a knock at the door.

“Riley, you okay in there?” he heard his Mom call. Riley continued to struggle without answering. His Mom knocked again a little louder repeating her question. After a few moments Riley heard the door click and then open as his Mom now stood in the doorway. Riley looked over at her

with a defeated look. He was well and truly stuck.

“Mommy, help,” he said not even realizing for a moment that he had just said mommy out of instinct, a part of his brain reverting back to a time when he was helpless to take care of himself and needed his parents. His Mom rushed over and grabbed his wrist pulling him out of the water and onto the ground.

“Are you okay?” his Mom asked quickly grabbing a towel from the rack behind her. Riley snatched it from her hand as he wrapped it around his waist, in an effort to cover up as quickly as possible.

“I'm fine,” Riley said with some anger coming back to his adult mindset. His anger being borne out of the embarrassment of the situation than anything else.

“Fell in huh,” Mom said. Riley could only grunt as he dried his bottom.

“Why is everything so big?” Riley muttered under his breath to himself.

“Must be these new toilets,” his Mom said having caught his comment. Riley looked at her questioningly. “We replaced all the toilets a couple of months back,” she explained. “The other ones were getting kind of old, the new ones are somewhat wider though.”

“Great,” Riley groused. Although his Mom's explanation seemed to make sense as to why he had felt so small on top the toilet. He had never had trouble before. “So now I have to

do a balancing act every time I want to take a shit," Riley said. His Mom cleared her throat a little yet let the curse word slide without a word.

"I'll just call your Dad and see if he can pick up a potty ring from the store on the way home for you."

Riley's mouth twisted up a little, yet he didn't respond. If that was the way it had to be then so be it. It beat falling in again.

"Although he is out golfing with his friends right now so it will be awhile before he gets back," his Mom mentioned. This made Riley let out another groan.

"I kind of need to go now," he said. His Mom looked down at him for a moment and he could see some thought was forming in her mind. He regretted even making the previous comment as he now feared she was about to offer to help him on the toilet herself, which would be incredibly humiliating.

"I think I have something that will work in the meantime," she smiled before going over to the cabinet under the sink. She rummaged around for a few seconds before pulling something out and setting it on the ground. Riley didn't know what he was looking at for a second, before it hit him like a freight train all at once. It had a blue plastic circular base. The lid on top was yellow with a matching color splash guard on the front. There was a menagerie of stickers stuck all around its base ranging from dinosaurs to sesame street characters. It was a training potty.

"I can't use that," Riley exclaimed. He would have actually

been rendered silent if he did not think this was all one big joke.

“I don't think Toby would mind,” Mom said “Aunt Yvette said that he is doing well with the potty training, next time he visits he might not even need it.”

Riley clenched his fist feeling some anger rising up in himself upon realizing that his Mom was indeed not joking.

“You are out of your mind,” Riley shouted. His Mom shook her head a little.

“Honestly,” she said with a tut. “Its not that big of a deal. Its better than falling into the toilet, besides you're lucky you didn't completely fall off and smash your head open.”

“B-b-but,” Riley stammered.

“Riley,” his Mom said with a tone that showed she was not arguing about it any longer. “You'll be in the bathroom so its not like anyone will see. When you're done just make sure to clean it out. You can handle that right?” she asked. Yet she didn't wait for answer, as she patted him on the head and walked out of the bathroom closing the door behind her.

Riley looked over at the training potty with disdain. Like hell he was actually going to use the thing. He tossed the towel and stepped out of the undies and shorts. He climbed back onto the toilet.

So what? He had slipped a little, it had been an accident, his Mom was being too cautious about the whole thing. But that

was just her personality Riley supposed. The reason she had thrown out all his clothes was also because of her cautious nature. Riley did his business and was soon finished. Wiping was difficult as he had to use one hand to grab toilet paper. He figured he could just sit on the seat sideways so he was facing towards the toilet paper roll. As he scooched over he lost his balance once again, except instead of falling in he found himself falling off. With a yelp Riley fell to the side hitting his head against the counter in the process before he landed face first onto the ground. Riley let out a groan feeling some blood in his mouth as his tongue licked a spot on his lip he had bitten down on. A moment later the door opened.

“Oh my gosh!” he heard his Mother gasp. A moment later she had him sat up as she looked him over. “Are you alright?” she asked fussing over him.

“I'm fine,” Riley said as he pushed her hands away. His Mom then stood up surveying the scene. Riley quickly grabbed his clothes and got himself re-dressed.

“Why didn't you just use the potty on the ground?” his mother asked placing her hands on her hips.

“How can you expect me to do that?” Riley said with a scowl. “Its completely stupid.”

“Its not stupid,” his mom said with a sigh. “It was for your safety. To avoid what just happened.”

“I don't need it,” Riley growled.

“You're lucky you didn't crack your head open,” his Mom

said throwing up her arms. “Just what has gotten into you?”

Riley did a double take. What had gotten into him? What had gotten into her? His Mom then rubbed the bridge of her nose for a moment.

“Ever since you've gotten home, you've been acting irrationally,” Mom accused.

“I have not,” Riley protested. “You're the one who are acting irrational. If using a training potty for freaking toddler seems normal to you then you've lost it.”

His Mom was silent for a moment, she winced as a pained look came to her face before she got a serious look on her face.

“Lets go,” she said picking up the training potty in one hand and then grabbing Riley by the arm with the other. She dragged him out of the bathroom as Riley struggled to break free with every step. She came down the steps to the front entryway before bringing Riley through the archway into the living room. There was a large tv up on the wall, an easy chair and a couch further back next to a stone fireplace. Mom pulled Riley to the space behind the couch, where a a pair of french doors lead outside to the deck. Mom then let Riley go as she walked to the corner near the window that looked outside. She set the potty in the corner.

“Since I can't seem to trust you in the privacy of the bathroom this is where you will have to use the potty,” she declared. Riley's eyes went wide as his mouth dropped.

“Are you insane?” Riley shrieked.

“I'm not,” Mom said responding to his question as if it was completely ordinary. “You've shown that you won't pick the safe option on your own so now I will just have to make sure you will. I will be locking the bathroom doors as well, so don't think about trying to sneak around.”

Riley shook his head in dis-belief, this couldn't be real. His Mom walked out of the room leaving Riley stunned into silence. She returned with a small green trashcan that had a triceratops head on the top of an opening along with a package of wet wipes. “You can clean yourself with these if you need to and then throw them in the trashcan.” she instructed setting the wet wipes next to the potty. “Its your responsibility to take out the trash if it is full or is starting to smell.”

Riley's mind was racing as he realized just how deadly serious she was about all this. Part of him was beginning to believe he had hit his head hard enough to knock himself out, this had to be some bizarre dream. He had to think of something, anything he could say to somehow get his Mom to bust out of whatever strange reasoning had brought her to this decision.

“Just because this is now your bathroom, this is still the living room and you need to keep things nice and tidy,” his Mom continued.

“How am I supposed to clean out the toilet if you lock me out of the bathroom?” Riley questioned, thinking he had found

the fatal flaw in her plan. She however smiled.

“You can tell me or Daddy when you are done and we'll clean it for you,” she said. Riley scrunched up his face. Was she really suggesting that she was willing to do such a thing. “And don't think about not telling us, if I find stuff in there, well I don't know what we'll have to do but I can assure you that it won't make this any better. Now any other questions?”

“No,” Riley said crossing his arms.

“Don't forget our deal now,” Mom said with a raised eyebrow. “Don't think I can't go back on it, if you don't play by the rules.”

Riley looked at his Mom with some anger that she would hold that over him, before a moment later staring down at the ground.

“No Mommy,” he said defeated. There was nothing he could say. Riley spent the rest of the day moping around his room. He had tried to get on his laptop only to find the thing was out of battery and he couldn't seem to find the charger. Dinnertime eventually came. Riley was once again sitting on his knees to eat. Most surprising was that Carson and his Dad made no mention of his clothes, as if nothing was amiss. Nor did anyone ask why there was a training potty in the back of the living room now. Riley had decided he was not going to use it, he just needed to figure out what he was going to do instead. After walking around aimlessly for awhile Riley was walking down the hallway towards his room. He stopped in front of the bathroom and jiggled the handle, but it was of

course locked.

“Hey bud,” his Dad said from behind startling Riley a little as he jumped to face his Dad. “Need something?” Riley stammered a little before standing up straight.

“Dad you gotta do something.” Riley said.

“Riley,” his Dad said with a sigh. “That's not my name.” Which only caused Riley to purse his lips.

“Daddy listen, Mommy is being ridiculous.” Riley said, he had to try. Surely the world hadn't gone crazy. His Dad leaned against the wall.

“I know you might think its a little overboard but I agree with your Mom.” his Dad said causing Riley's face to fall. “You have been acting very strange these last few days, and honestly we're getting a little worried.”

“I am not,” Riley protested.

“Then you need to show us that,” his Dad said patiently. “Show us that you can make good choices and then we can think about moving the potty back into the bathroom.” Riley let out a resigned groan. “Speaking of making good choices, perhaps now would be a good time to get ready for bed.”

“I'm not tired,” Riley said with a frown.

“I didn't say you had to go to bed,” his Dad replied. “I just said to get ready, you know get on your pajamas and brush your teeth, I can let you into the bathroom right now since I'm standing here.” his Dad said pulling a key out of his pocket.

“Fine,” Riley muttered. Dad paused as he turned back around to Riley.

“Speaking of brushing teeth, your Mom noticed that you don't seem to have a toothbrush, you have been brushing twice a day, right?” his Dad asked with a questioning look.

“Yeah, sure,” Riley said with some reservations. In truth he didn't brush most nights, since he went to bed whenever he was ready to pass out from whatever he had been imbibing with that night. He always brushed in the morning though – if only to get the taste of the previous night out of his mouth. His toothbrush missing however was news to him. However it was not outside the realm of possibility that he had forgotten to pack his toothbrush, after all he had left his apartment in a haste. “I guess I just forgot it.”

“I see, wait here,” his Dad said walking off and disappearing into his own room at the end of the hall for a moment, before returning. “You're in luck, I just got a new shipment of toothbrushes to hand out to patients. But since I only give them out to kids you'll have to settle for a child's toothbrush.” Dad said as he ripped open some plastic before holding up a small red toothbrush with multicolored stars on the handle. “Check this out,” Dad said as he pressed a button at the base of the brush. Yellow LED lights started flashing in sequence in the middle of three of the stars as a tinny little song played out. “Its to help the kids time their brushing,” Dad said cheerily. Before Riley could say anything his Dad unlocked the bathroom door with a key and ushered Riley in. As Riley stood in the bathroom his Dad walked in behind him, which

made Riley roll his eyes knowing that his Dad wasn't going to leave him alone. His Dad then turned and looked down at him.

“Arms up bud,” Dad said before he grabbed Riley's shirt and pulled it up over his head before tossing it aside. Riley didn't have a chance to respond before his Dad knelt down grabbing at the legs of his shorts.

“And off come the shorts,” Dad said pulling them all the way down.

“What are you doing,” Riley managed to squeak out. His Dad gave him a smile.

“You're getting ready for bed, remember?” his Dad said before he picked Riley up under the armpits and swung him over to the counter setting him on a step stool. “I was just helping you get dressed, which was easy since you sleep in your undies. Now open up and lets see those teeth,” his Dad said putting some toothpaste on the toothbrush.

“I don't need your help getting my clothes off, and I can brush my own teeth,” Riley protested.

“I know you can,” Dad said. “But just for tonight I would like to see in your mouth for myself.”

“What's the big deal?” Riley asked furrowing his brow.

“Well call me worried,” Dad said. “Besides not only as your father but your dentist as well, I think I have every right to take a look and make sure your teeth are looking healthy, when was the last time you had a cleaning?”

“My teeth are fine,” Riley said covering his mouth. “Just leave me alone.”

“Riley seriously,” his Dad said with a weary look. “Let me look, or are you trying to hide some cavities from me?” Riley shook his head keeping his mouth covered. Even if he wasn't most careful brusher he knew he didn't have any cavities. Just then Carson poked his head into the bathroom.

“Whats up?” Dad asked looking at Carson.

“Umm well I was looking for you,” Carson said looking from his Dad to Riley who was standing on a stool in just a pair of mickey mouse undies.

“Did you need something?” Dad asked as Carson focused back in on his Dad.

“Well I have this homework assignment where I have to balance a fake checkbook and I'm having a little trouble. Mom said it would be good to ask you since you are the one who always does the checkbook.” Carson explained.

“Sure, I can help,” Dad said. “Just let me finish up with Riley here.”

“Whats going on exactly?” Carson asked. Riley groaned wanting Carson to just go away already.

“Riley won't let me see inside his mouth,” Dad said shaking his head a little as if Riley was being obstinate over a completely normal request. Dad then looked at Carson as a glint came to his eye.

“Speaking of which, Carson you've been brushing properly right?”

“Yeah, of course,” Carson said. Dad then motioned for Carson to come into the bathroom as he grabbed an electric toothbrush off its charger on the counter. “Then you won't mind if I take a look will you.” Dad said, though it wasn't a question. Dad had already grabbed the toothpaste and put a glob onto the toothbrush. “Lets see those chompers,” Dad chuckled. Carson looked a little awkward for a moment before he relented and opened his mouth. Dad began to brush as he peered into his son's mouth making comments all the way through. “Oh your bicuspids are looking great, and that crown that doctor Verner put in last month is looking good.”

Carson gave some replies but it sounded more like gibberish with a toothbrush in his mouth.

“All right,” Dad said withdrawing the toothbrush after doing a thorough brushing. “Everything looks good, go ahead and rinse.” Carson gave a grateful look as he rinsed out his mouth. “I'll come and help you in a bit,” Dad said as he replaced the electric toothbrush back on its stand and picking up the one meant for Riley.

“Yeah, sure,” Carson said as he made a quick retreat out of the bathroom.

“There see,” Dad said. “Your brother let me do his, now its your turn.” Riley kept his mouth shut as he shook his head no. His Dad let out a sigh. “Guess we're doing it the hard way,” Dad said as he went to stand behind Riley. His Dad wrapped

one around around Riley's chest pinning his arms at his sides. With his other hand his Dad placed a hand on his forehead and pushed down so that Riley's head was forced to look up. The quick motion made Riley's mouth come open, before Riley could close his mouth his Dad had grabbed the toothbrush and stuck it into Riley's mouth and since he was standing on a stool there was'nt much room for him to try and move away. His Dad kept his hand on Riley's forehead so he had to continue looking up at his Dad as the man brushed his teeth, the tinny song playing as he did so.

“Okay looks like your teeth are all clean,” Dad said releasing Riley who proceeded to rinse his mouth out. “Now that your dressed and your teeth are clean I suppose its time to get into bed,” Dad said. Riley gave his Dad a shocked look.

“But you said I just had to get ready,” Riley spat out.

“Sure,” Dad said. “But given how difficult you've been about this whole thing and considering what I've heard from Mommy about your usual sleeping habits, I think it would be a good idea for you to go to sleep now, you know play some catch-up, and hopefully that will help with this mood you've been in.”

“I'm not going to bed,” Riley said straightening out his shoulders and standing up straight. He was twenty years old, he was the one that decided when he went to sleep.

“Oh do you hear that,” Dad said bring a hand up and cupping it to his ear. “There's been an announcement.” Riley's shoulder's slumped hearing the familiar tactic his Dad had

employed in the past whenever he was in an argument with the boys. It was his gentle way of communicating to his sons that it was his way or the highway and any further argument would be met with punishment. Although it had been many years since his Dad had employed it on Riley. The last time being in middle school when his Dad had heard an announcement about Riley doing his homework on Friday's instead of waiting until Sunday night.

“The announcement said it was time for all boys named Riley to get into bed,” Dad said.

“But Daddy,” Riley whined which elicited a smirk from his Dad upon hearing Riley use the childish moniker without a trace of hesitation.

“Sorry bud, it was the announcement,” Dad said before he lifted Riley up and put him over his shoulder and began to carry him out of the bathroom.

“Hey, put me down,” Riley yelped as he squirmed.

“The Daddy express doesn't stop until it gets to the destination,” Dad chuckled as he gave a few playful pats to Riley's behind. Riley went limp realizing his Dad was not going to be talked out of this. He was only grateful that Carson wasn't around to see the sight of his older brother being carried to his room in nothing but a pair of Mickey Mouse undies.

Getting into the room Dad pulled back the covers before laying Riley down and then quickly tucking him in tightly

before taking a seat on the bed himself. His Dad sat in the small space between the headrest and where the yellow safety railing started One leg on the bed and the other on the floor. The only way for Riley to escape was to try and hop over the safety railing or go over his father. Riley figured if he tried his Dad would catch him and put him back into the bed. Would he really do such a thing though? Riley wasn't feeling like he wanted to find out at the moment.

“Just because you put me here, doesn't mean I can actually fall asleep,” Riley groused.

“Maybe we should read something?” Dad suggested.

“I'm a little old for bedtime stories, don't you think?” Riley said sarcastically.

“Nonsense,” Dad said. “Reading before you go to sleep is really good for you. I read for at least an hour before I go to bed,” Dad said. “It would be good for you to develop some healthy bedtime habits too. So lets see what we have here,” Dad said as he looked around the room. His eyes then fell upon a pile of school stuff sitting on the ground next to Riley's bed. “This should do,” Dad said lifting up Riley's marine biology textbook. Riley's face screwed up. The book had been from his intro class. He only kept it around for reference material.

“You're going to read my textbook?” Riley asked with some skepticism.

“Sure,” Dad replied jovially. “It will be nice to see what

you've been learning, most kids like it when there parents take an interest in their studies, and since you're interested in this stuff already it will be a good read for you too."

"I already know everything in that book," Riley grumbled.

"Then I guess it will be good review," Dad said as he opened the book. "Chapter 1, air currents and tides."

Riley rolled his eyes as his Dad began to read. First off this was the most boring chapter in the world and second off his Dad was reading in a dull monotone voice. It was so dull that after a bit Riley's eyes were starting to droop, a bit later Riley's eyes were closed and he was breathing softly, no longer able to hear his Dad's words as he dreamed about floating on the tides.

Chapter 4

The Rough Patch: Part 4 - Chapter 4

Routine

Riley stirred in his bed as sun streamed in through his window. He rolled over still half asleep to block the intruding light, but froze upon feeling something was off. Riley opened his eyes and sat up in his bed, there was some cold feeling. Riley slowly looked down but didn't see anything amiss. He pulled back the comforter and saw it on the bed sheet. A faint small spot. Riley tensed up for a moment in utter confusion. He pulled the sheet to see his Mickey mouse undies. They were wet no doubt, and he was sitting in a darker spot beneath him. Riley was confused for a moment before he finally woke up all the way to realize what had happened. He had wet the bed!

Not a lot, but enough. Riley went into panic mode yet sat motionless on the bed not having the foggiest idea of what to do. His door then opened as his Mom walked again.

“Good morning sunshine,” she said coming to his bedside but falling silent as she stared at his discovery. Riley looked up at his Mom with a shocked look.

“I don't know what happened,” Riley said still in complete shock himself. His Mom took a moment before cocking her head.

“I think I do,” she said with a small smirk. “Don't think I

didn't notice you avoiding the potty yesterday. Well this is what happens when you do that. Plus its incredibly unhealthy." his Mom said sounding as if she was chiding him for eating too much junk food. Riley shook his head a little. Sure, he had avoided using the toilet, but it isn't like he had felt like he was bursting at the seams. It hadn't even crossed his mind when he had been put to bed last night.

"I guess this will serve as a little lesson not to do that in the future," his Mom said uttering her version of I told you so at his dresser as she pulled out clothes for him to wear. "Now hurry up, breakfast is ready and you need to clean yourself up."

"I don't want to go downstairs," Riley said in a worried voice. The idea of his Dad and brother seeing what he had done would be mortifying.

"I had your Dad pick up a second potty for you last night and I already set it up for you upstairs," Mom said. "Its in my room."

"Can't you just put it in here?" Riley whined. If he had to use the dumb thing then at least his room would give him some privacy.

"No can do," Mom said. "The only place upstairs that isn't carpeted is the bathroom, which you're not allowed in, and the spot in my room next to the door leading out to the veranda, now lets go before you get a rash."

Riley followed his Mom down the hall as they came to a stop

in front of his parents door. She pulled out a key and unlocked it.

“What, you're locking all the doors now,” Riley grumbled yet a quick look from his Mom was all that it took to make him straighten up a little.

“I have to lock my door, since the master bathroom only has a slide door and no way to lock it. For that reason you are not allowed in here without me or Daddy.” Mom explained opening the door. Riley gave a silent groan this time careful not to let his Mom hear. Coming into the room there was a large bed in the center against the back wall and a Tv on the opposite side. There was an exercise bike in another corner which had become a makeshift clothes hanger near the sliding door that lead into the master bathroom. Riley looked across the room to the door that lead out to the veranda. In front of it was a small patch of white tile and sitting there was another training potty meant for him. This one was very similar to the one downstairs in color and appearance except it did not have stickers decorating the base. Next to it was a package of wet wipes and small metal trashcan with a swinging top. Riley let out a little sigh, at least this one wasn't as babyish as the other one.

“Hurry up,” Mom said motioning him forward. He approached the thing with apprehension. He looked behind to see his Mom watching.

“Are you really going to watch?” Riley asked sheepishly. Mom blinked as if realizing that she had been staring.

“Once you sit down I'll leave,” she said. “Just give me your undies first so I can get them in the wash.”

Riley gave another breath. He decided just to get this over with. He walked to the toilet and in one quick motion sat down while pulling the undies down so they now sat around his ankles. Riley was thankful for the splash guard as it gave him some coverage to maintain a shred of modesty. Mom walked over and knelt down grabbing the undies and pulling them out from under Riley's feet.

“When you are done get dressed, I've set clothes on my bed for you,” she said tilting her head over to a pile of clothes awaiting Riley on the bed. With that she walked out of the room to give him some privacy.

Riley sat feeling how strange it felt to be sitting so low on the ground, and the fact he was using the bathroom in a room that was not a bathroom. As he started going, hearing the sound from inside the potty felt loud, almost as if the whole world could hear it. When he was done he saw his Mom had set some hand sanitizer out for him. After washing his hands he grabbed the undies from the bed. They were a pair from the other package his Mom had bought yesterday. They had a yellow waistband and piping. On the sides of the front were two ninja throwing stars. On the back were the three ninja friends striking an action pose with big smiles on their faces. Riley put them on quickly not wanting to look at them anymore. He then put on a pair of black shorts with a black shirt that had a big number two on it. Riley looked down at himself. Maybe his Mom hadn't been lying when she had said

she had done her best. This outfit didn't exactly scream little kid. Riley then walked out of the room to find his Mom waiting for him. They stared at each other for a moment before his mom spoke.

“What are you supposed to do?” Mom asked.

“Umm I'm done,” Riley said looking to the side.

“Riley,” Mom chided. Riley frowned a little before looking up at his Mom.

“Can you clean it for me?” Riley said. His Mom crossed her arms and raised an eyebrow at him. “Please mommy,” Riley finally said.

“Of course I will, thank you for asking nicely,” she said with a smile. “Go get some breakfast,” Mom said as she went into her room. Riley went downstairs and found Carson and his Dad already at the table eating. Riley took his usual spot. He ate the bowl of cereal in front of him with some difficulty. That morning he had not gotten his chair pushed in, and it was hard for him to do himself. However he didn't want to actually have to ask for help. He sat up on his knees leaned over the table. He was eating quickly and the spoon still felt large in his hand and his mouth to the point that he spilled a whole spoonful of cereal at one point onto the table in between where his bowl sat and the edge of the table.

“Hey, Riley be careful,” Dad chided as he jumped up as if it was some huge spill and wiped it up. His Dad then looked at Riley a moment before smirking as he wiped some milk from

the corner of Riley's mouth. Riley responded by letting out a huff pulling his head away. “When did you get to be such a messy eater,” Dad chuckled as he pushed Riley's chair in all the way. Dad and Carson soon finished and were getting ready to leave. His Mom then walked down looking dressed for the office she came over and gave Riley a kiss on top of his head.

“Okay, we're all leaving,” she said. “You sure you'll be fine by yourself?” Riley looked at her with a sort of offended look.

“Yes,” he said with some haughtiness. His Mom looked somewhat surprised at his reaction for a moment, as if she hadn't expected it, before a small smile just returned to her face. “Of course you will be,” she said grabbing her purse off the hook by the door that lead to the garage. “But just one reminder, if you need to use the potty...”

“I know, the potty in the living room,” Riley said with some annoyance before his face flushed red a little at the fact he had used the word potty, instead of toilet, he was just grateful Carson hadn't been around to hear that one. His Mom just gave a nod before she left out the door.

Once she was gone Riley found himself with the house to himself. He slid out from under the seat and walked to the living room. He walked to the back area and looked at the training potty sitting there in the corner as if it were waiting for him. Riley let out a sigh turning away from it. He still couldn't get over the fact that his parents were all but forcing him to use such a thing. Where did they get off treating him

like that? Riley decided that today was the day he got his affairs in order. He needed to get into contact with his roomates and start making plans for a new place to live. Maybe one of them already had a place lined up. If he could get out of here as quick as possible that would cut short the time he had to use Mommy and Daddy, and it would get him away from their new potty regimen. Riley went up to his room to grab his phone. As he looked around he couldn't find it anywhere which elicited a groan from him. He really needed the phone. His phone had everything. He didn't know any of his roomates numbers, in this day and age who did? Not too mention he didn't have email addresses either, they always talked through text. He needed his contacts list. As Riley started rooting through his room he also found his wallet was missing. Where could they have gone? He knew he had them when he had arrived home, but he couldn't remember where he had put them. There was only one explanation, his Mom had moved them. It was so like her after all. If she ever found something out of place she would always put it in some spot she deemed its proper spot. The only problem being no one else ever knew what that spot was, not Riley nor his brother or even his Dad. Riley practically tore his room apart with a one track mind focused on finding his lost things. When he had completely exhausted all that, he knew it wasn't in his room. He then moved on.

He went down to the kitchen and began rooting through all the drawers pulling things out and scattering papers on the island counter, yet came up empty handed. He returned upstairs looking at his parents room. He knew he couldn't get

in, yet why would it be in there? His eyes then scanned down the hall landing on Carson's room. Had he taken it? Riley wasn't sure if Carson had been deemed responsible enough for his own phone. Riley had been around thirteen when his parents had given him his first one and Carson had always been jealous of it, constantly begging to borrow it just to play the games his friends with phones did. Riley had let hims use it on rare occasion but most of the time he would refuse, telling Carson he would just have to wait. Would Carson really have taken his phone though? Riley figured he had exhausted all other avenues.

He went into Carson's room. It was neat and normal looking. Riley wondered if his Mom still cleaned it for him. She must, he had always known Carson to be a little messy, then again the last time he had stepped foot in his room had been like three years ago. Riley went about going through the room going through the dresser drawers throwing the clothes out onto the floor and then going through Carson's closet. After a bit he finally came to the conclusion that it was nowhere to be found. Riley would have thought about another place where it could possibly be if not for the pressure in his bladder. Riley clenched his teeth. He knew he wasn't going to be able to hold it forever and he definitely didn't want a repeat of this morning. With no joy he went down to the living room.

Standing in front of the potty he looked around, almost as if to confirm he was alone. With a deep breath he pulled his pants and undies down and sat on the potty. Without anyone around the corner Riley allowed himself to relax as he heard

the trickle emanate from out of the potty. Once he was done he got his pants back on and used some sanitizer on his hands. He looked at the potty now. It was kind of gross that his parents just expected him to leave it like this. He thought for a moment about taking it outside and dumping it. He refused though. If his parents were going to do this to him then he was going to saddle them with the clean up. It then occurred to him that he he could have easily gone outside and whizzed in a bush or something. Riley kicked himself a little, but maybe this was for the best. If he hadn't used the potty his Mom would have probably just accused him of holding it all day. With the unpleasantness over, Riley went and hopped up onto the couch as he laid back. He was still sweaty from searching. As he began to think of any possible places his phone and wallet were he let his eyes close before he fell asleep.

Riley sat up with a start upon hearing the door to the garage open. He looked over at the clock realizing he had been sleeping for a couple of hours, it had only felt like he had closed his eyes for a moment. He got up and wandered into the kitchen to see his Mom at the counter with some mail in her hand.

“What are you doing back?” Riley asked. “I thought you had to work.”

“I can do most of my work from home,” Mom said. “I only have to go into the office occasionally.”

Riley nodded.

“So how has your day gone so far, now that you are officially on break?” Mom asked. “Probably just lounging about like a slug on a rug hmm?”

“Not really,” Riley said. “I spent all morning looking for my wallet and phone.”

“You lost them?” Mom asked looking a little concerned yet at the same time Riley could sense she was about to start telling him how she always tried to tell him to keep his things in one spot so this wouldn't happen.

“You didn't see them anywhere, did you?” Riley asked.

“You're sure you brought them home with you?” his Mom asked.

“Positive,” Riley replied.

“They have to be around here somewhere then.” Mom said with a shrug. There was a pause before his Mom looked at him again. “So how did the potty go?” she asked.

“Oh yeah,” Riley said with a flush of heat coming to his cheeks. “I used it, so Mommy can you please empty it for me.” he said in the way his Mom expected feeling like he could curl up in on himself at any moment. His Mom smiled as she walked over to him. She knelt down and gave him a big hug.

“Thank you,” she said as she pulled back to look at him in the face. Riley was somewhat confused, this seemed a little too affectionate a reaction. “I know its not ideal and its a little

embarrassing," his Mom said. "But I am so happy that you are cooperating. Its makes me relieved to see that you chose the safe option." His Mom then got up grabbing a white bag off of the counter as she walked towards the table. "Were you looking for something to eat?" his Mom asked as she closed some of the drawers in the kitchen before placing the bag on the table. "I got you some lunch," she said.

"Thanks Mommy," Riley said as he went and plopped himself on the chair before his Mom pushed his chair in for him.

"You're very welcome," she said planting a kiss on top of Riley's head before she headed off towards the living room. Riley was happy for some food. He had worked up a hunger searching through the house. It was also nice to have a conversation with his Mom that hadn't turned into an argument. Opening the bag of food Riley discovered she had gotten him a small cheeseburger and fries along with a drink. Riley looked at the meager meal. She could have at least gotten him a large fry or something, yet his Mom wasn't a huge fan of fast food in the first place and she had never let the boys order any of the massive portions that were on offer. In fact when Riley had first gotten his license and some money he had put on a few pounds with his new found freedom. It wasn't until he had found himself quickly finding it was getting harder to button his jeans up that he realized what was happening to his waistline. A nightly run around the neighborhood and cutting back on his portions had fixed that though.

Riley sat eating his food. He grabbed for the drink and took a

sip. He was a little surprised at first. He had expected something carbonated but was instead met with the taste of fruit punch. Riley wrinkled his nose a little. If she was that concerned about sugar could she not have gotten him a diet, its not like the juice was any healthier. Riley decided not to question it though. Its not like he had asked for this. His Mom had done it out of kindness. Riley was finishing up his meal as he heard footsteps in the hallway upstairs. He then heard a pause before doors began to open.

“Riley,” he heard his Mom shout from upstairs. “Get up here this instant.”

Riley let his head roll. Now what was she mad about? He walked upstairs to find his Mom standing in the hallway in front of his room.

“Mind explaining what this is all about,” she said pointing into the room.

“I was looking for my stuff,” Riley said with a tone that showed he understood why she was mad, yet at the same time communicating that he thought she was overeating. “Its just a little mess. Its not like I wasn't going to tidy up.”

“You're going to have to do more than just tidy up,” his Mom said with an exasperated tone.

“Geez, its not that bad,” Riley said walking to his doorway to look inside just to confirm that his Mom was overeating. What he saw shocked him a little. His room looked completely ransacked. Mom shook her head.

“And why on earth were you in Carson's room?” she asked as she went and stood in front of the open door to Riley's little brother's room which was also in complete disarray.

“I thought he might have taken my stuff,” Riley said feeling a little ashamed. Hearing himself say it out loud only seemed to make him realize how strange of an idea it had been. “I'm sorry, I just didn't realize how big of a mess I made.”

Mom stood in the hallway rubbing the bridge of her nose. She went to say something before holding back. She finally looked him in the eyes. She didn't look angry, if anything she looked worried. “You need to clean this up,” Mom said softly.

“Yeah, I will,” Riley said. He went into Carson's room first and began. His Mom came in and gave him a hug.

“Thank you,” she said before walking out of the room. It took Riley the rest of the afternoon to get Carson's room back in order. Riley then started on his own room, after awhile his Mom knocked on his door.

“Hey looks like you got everything cleaned up,” she said walking into the room. She looked around with a smile on her face.

“I guess I went a little overboard,” Riley said wiping some sweat from his brow.

“Bet you're hungry,” Mom said. Riley nodded as he followed her down to the kitchen. Everything goes normally at dinner...almost, they were having meatloaf. Riley was leaning over the table. He was having trouble breaking off pieces of

meat with his fork. His fork slipped coming out of his hand sending it to the side.

“Riley just cut your food with a knife,” Dad said before a moment later taking his own knife and fork and cutting up Riley's piece quickly. Riley made a bothered face but didn't say anything as his Dad went back to his own meal. After dinner Riley found himself wandering around the house. He was lost in thought trying to figure out what to do. It occurred to him that he should ask Carson about his phone. Even if Carson denied taking it, Riley was good at sussing out when he was lying. Riley went to the living room. His Dad was in the easy chair watching a baseball game. He didn't see Carson anywhere.

“Looking for something?” Dad asked noticing Riley.

“I was looking for Carson,” Riley answered as he came and stood beside the chair.

“He's out with some friends right now,” Dad replied. Riley furrowed his brow as he muttered something under his breath. “Say, want to watch this game with me?” Dad asked. Riley looked at the tv screen to see it was the home team playing. He had often watched games with his Dad when he had lived at home.

“Sure, I guess,” Riley shrugged seeing as he had nothing better to do.

“Great,” Dad enthused before he picked Riley up and placed him on his lap.

“Daddy,” Riley groaned as he fidgeted in his Dad's arms.

“Whats up sport?” Dad asked.

“I would prefer to sit on the couch,” Riley muttered. His Dad looked a little disappointed before he gave Riley a small smile.

“Sure,” Dad said releasing Riley who went and promptly sat on the couch. As they watched the game Riley relaxed. It had been awhile since he had watched a game and he still enjoyed it. As the night wore on, Riley and his Dad talked about what was happening in the game. It had seemed forever since Riley felt like he had a normal conversation with his parents. Some time later his Dad looked at his watch before he gave a sigh.

“Alright sport,” Dad said standing up and walking over to stand in front of Riley on the couch. “It looks like its bedtime.”

“Aww c'mon,” Riley whined as his face contorted. Just how long were they going to keep this up. “I went to bed early for two nights, isn't that enough?”

“Two nights isn't going to do anything,” Dad said shaking his head. “Besides you getting a proper amount of sleep has already lightened that mood of yours.” Riley could only scowl, which caused his Dad to laugh a little.

“Now c'mon lets go up to my room so you can use the potty.” Dad said. Riley felt his face go a little red. He wondered for a moment if Mom had told Dad what had happened that morning.

“I don't have to go,” Riley mumbled. He didn't need his parents telling him to use the bathroom before bed.

“We don't want a repeat of this morning,” Dad said. Riley felt his face flush red, of course she had told him. “So lets make sure it doesn't happen again.”

Riley felt a pang of anger rise in his chest. This was so stupid. His parents were being rather cloying and it was really starting to annoy him.

“I'm watching the rest of this game,” Riley said. “I don't need a bedtime.” he said crossing his legs and arms on the couch. Dad let out a little sigh before he grabbed Riley's shirt pulling it up over his head. “Hey stop,” Riley yelped he went to crawl away only to feel his Dad grab his shorts and pull them up lifting Riley up so that he was on his back as his legs flailed in the air.

“If you don't want to get ready yourself, then I'll do it,” Dad said tossing the shorts aside.

“Daddy stop it,” Riley mewled not for a moment realizing he had used Daddy to refer to his father.

“Up we go Ry,” Dad said picking Riley up and carrying him up the stairs. He brought Riley into his room setting him on the ground in front of the potty. Riley stood looking at his Dad.

“You gonna go?” Dad asked motioning towards the potty.

“Could I have some privacy?” Riley asked, his tone showing

he was none too pleased.

“Okay,” Dad said smiling a little as he went into his own bathroom. Riley huffed as he pulled down his underwear and sat on the potty. He should have just walked out of the room, yet his Dad had already shown that he wasn't messing around about this whole bedtime thing. Riley couldn't decide if getting into a fight about bedtime made him look more like a little kid or not. As Riley sat on the toilet he felt the need to go number two. As much as he wanted to avoid it, the time for that was far gone. He scrunched up his face as he felt things happen. How could his parents actually be all onboard in having to deal with this – it was absolutely revolting. Riley grabbed some of the wet wipes and cleaned himself up disposing of the wipes. His Dad came out of the bathroom as Riley was pulling up his undies.

“I see you're done,” Dad noted peeking into the potty. Riley didn't say a word. If his Dad was put off by it he didn't show it. “Now lets get those teeth brushed,” Dad said as he picked Riley up and carried him down the hall, his Dad holding him close to his chest with a hand on Riley's back and his other hand supporting Riley under the butt. Riley heard some footsteps coming down the hall. He craned his head a little to see Carson walking towards them, having just gotten back from his friends house.

“Have a good time?” Dad asked coming to a stop.

“Yeah it was fun,” Carson said. “What are you guys up too?” Carson asked, a hint of awkwardness in his voice.

“Just going to brush our teeth,” Dad said.

“I see,” Carson said before pausing for a moment. “Oh hey The Ninja Friends,” Carson said noting Riley's undies. “I used to watch that show when I was younger. Those are much cooler than the mickey mouse ones,” Carson said laughing a bit.

“Shut up,” Riley spat turning his head to side glare at his brother.

“Hey,” Dad said giving Riley a frown.

“Geez whats your problem?” Carson said a little offended. Riley just grumbled. Even Carson wasn't that dense.

“Don't mind him,” Dad said giving a couple pats to Riley's behind. “He's just cranky since its bedtime.”

“I guess,” Carson said before walking into his room. Dad carried Riley into the bathroom setting him on the counter before he started putting some toothpaste on Riley's toothbrush.

“Open wide,” Dad said with a smile.

“I can do it myself,” Riley said.

“You decided not to do it yourself,” Dad said. “Maybe tomorrow you'll get ready when I tell you.”

Riley looked to the side before opening his mouth letting his Dad brush his teeth to the sound of the song coming from the brush. Afterwards Dad wasted no time in picking Riley back

up and carrying him to his bed. Once he was tucked in his Dad sat on the bed next to him after he had shut off the lights and turned on the lamp light, as he had done the previous night, grabbing the marine biology textbook and flipping through the pages.

“Do you really have to read again?” Riley groused.

“C'mon I'm looking forward to reading this chapter,” Dad said looking genuinely interested. “Can't wait to learn about the invert-a-mays.”

“Invertebrates,” Riley corrected. Dad gave a him a small smile. “But seriously I don't need you reading to me. Just shut off the light already.”

“No can do,” Dad said as he positioned the lamp arm attached to the top of the headboard so that it was lighting up the page. “We're setting good routines, remember.”

Riley gave a derisive click of his tongue. He closed his eyes as his Dad began to read. Maybe if his Dad thought he was asleep he would leave sooner. However Riley's plan never came to fruition, as before long he had really fallen asleep.

Chapter 5

The Rough Patch: Part 5 - Chapter 5

Diagnosis

Riley sat upon the potty in his parents room. He was feeling rather nervous and confused. Just what in the world was happening? It had been three days. Three days of waking up in a wet bed. He had never wet the bed before, even after a night of heavy drinking. To make matter's worse just yesterday he had wet himself during the day. Riley let out an involuntary moan even remembering the incident. He had been standing in the kitchen talking with his Mom. He had asked to use her car for something, in reality he just wanted to get out of the house.

“I don't know if that's such a good idea,” his Mom had said. Something about the way she said it had kind of pissed Riley off. What possible reason could she have to deny him the use of the car?

“You aren't even using it right now,” Riley had protested somewhat abruptly visibly becoming angry at the drop of a dime. Mom had turned to look at him with curious look.

“Have you found your wallet yet?” she had asked raising an eyebrow. Riley went to say something but found himself sputtering for a moment before falling silent. “Thought so,” Mom said as she went back to washing dishes. “I'm not letting you use my car until you find it. If you got pulled over they would arrest you for driving without a license.”

Riley gritted his teeth, what did that matter? He had driven for years and in all that time he hadn't gotten so much as a parking ticket. Riley's eyes then narrowed, it seemed too convenient.

“You hid it, didn't you?” Riley had accused. Mom had merely shook her head.

“Why in the world would I do that?” she had said with a dismissive chuckle.

“Because you don't want me going anywhere or anything,” Riley spat out. His Mom pulled her hands out of the dish water and dried them off in a towel before turning to face him with a hand on her hip.

“And just why would I do that?” his Mom had asked. Riley didn't really have a good answer. He hadn't thought that far ahead. He couldn't really think of a good reason she would have to do such a thing.

“I don't know,” he had mumbled feeling just a tad bit foolish with the accusation. His Mom then had walked over to her work bag hanging on the back of a chair. She pulled out her laptop and sat at the table. After a couple of minutes she called Riley over as she got to her feet. She patted the seat wanting him to sit which Riley did.

Fill this out,” she had said pointing to the computer. Riley began to type, filling in things like his name and social security number as well as some other things. Although things got a little tough when it started asking for his height

and weight which he found he didn't really know, so he had guessed as best as he could. When he was done his Mom pulled the laptop over to where she was sitting. She made a couple of clicks before turning the laptop around to show Riley that whatever it was he had just filled out had been accepted by the DMV.

“There, I just paid for you to get a replacement drivers license,” she had said. “It says it takes about two to three weeks to come, so when you get it, you are free to drive my car,” she had declared. Riley sat in his chair now really feeling stupid for accusing his Mom of hiding his license from him.

“Thanks,” Riley said in a small voice.

“Why don't you look around on the internet for a car while you're here,” she had then said getting up from the table and going back to the sink to finish the dishes.

Riley had proceeded to do just that. Unfortunately it only seemed to make him feel more hopeless. He couldn't find anything that wasn't a total piece of junk within his price range, which was meager at best. Riley got up from the table with a huff.

“Find anything?” his Mom had asked from across the table where she now sat reading a magazine and sipping on some coffee.

“No, I can't afford it,” Riley had said.

“Well maybe you should talk to Daddy about it when he gets

home," she had suggested. "I'm sure you two could work out something. After all, we want you driving in something that is reliable at least."

Riley sighed. He really didn't want to have to ask his parents for help, they were already giving him a lot of money. Just then he felt his crotch go warm. He looked down, startled to see a wet patch appearing on the front of his pants. Riley's mouth dropped. He had just wet himself in the middle of the kitchen. He hadn't even felt the need to go. He looked up from the small puddle on the ground to his Mom who had a worried look on her face.

"I-I-I" Riley stammered. His Mom had gotten to her feet and walked over to him. She picked him up under his armpits and carried him out of the kitchen into the living room. She set him down in front of the potty.

"Mommy I," Riley went to say before his Mom gave him a gently shush.

"Sit down and get yourself cleaned up," she said in a very calm tone. "I'll clean up the floor and get you some clothes."

With that she left the room. Riley took off his pants and undies and sat on the toilet still in dis-belief and it little surprised that his Mom had not seemed to react more. She came back some time later to find Riley with his hands in his face. Riley felt his Mom place a hand on his shoulder. Riley lifted his head to find her kneeling in front of him.

"I don't know what happened," he whimpered.

“It's okay sweetie,” Mom said. “But I think with the fact that you are waking up in a wet bed and this just now, there is something going on with you. So I'm going to be making a doctors appointment for you.”

Riley nodded as he took the clothes from his Mom. That had to be it. Although it didn't give him much comfort to think there was something seriously wrong with him. It didn't really feel like that. He only hoped the doctor could give him something to make this all go away.

Riley was brought back to the present as his Mom walked into the room with clothes in her hands. She set them on her bed before taking a seat and looking at him sitting on the potty.

“Are you done?” Mom asked.

“Y-Yes,” Riley stuttered, not moving an inch. He wasn't about to stand up in front of his Mother.

“Great,” Mom smiled “Then you can get dressed and we will be on our way to the doctor's office. I got you something I want you to wear today.” Riley cocked his head a little wondering what his Mom could be talking about. She proceeded to hold up a pair of undies. Riley stared at them for a moment before he realized what she had been getting at. They seemed normal enough to what he had been wearing at first. They were solid yellow with a blue waistband, they had a picture of a cute little turtle on the crotch. Riley then noticed there was not any piping nor a fly on them. As he looked closer he noticed they were thicker as well. They were

training undies, meant for toddlers.

“No way,” Riley exclaimed. “I'm not wearing that.” Mom's hands fell into her lap as a patient smile came to her face. She had obviously expected the reaction.

“Riley, its just for today, I don't want you having an accident while we are out.” his Mom said reassuringly.

“I won't,” Riley mewled. “It was just one time.”

“Honey you might not be able to control it,” his Mom countered. “Especially if there is something wrong. Just think, no one's going to know and do you really want to have to have wet pants at the doctor's office?”

Riley pursed his lips. Having an accident again during the day would be horrible, especially out in public, but still he hesitated.

“What if the doctor makes me get undressed, she'll see,” he said with a worried voice.

“So what,” his Mom said with a shrug. “She's a doctor, she won't care one bit, I guarantee she's seen stranger things.”

Riley furrowed his brow a little. He very much doubted his Mom's words, yet on the other hand he did have to admit that there was some sense to it. The doctor probably wouldn't comment on it, especially given what he was being seen for.

“Fine,” Riley grumbled taking the training undies from his Mom. He got them on quickly with some understanding that he wasn't really being given a choice. They did feel a little

strange. The extra padding was definitely noticeable. He found that his Mom had also gotten him some cargo shorts and a tye dye shirt that had a sun wearing sunglasses on it with the words “Good Vibes” written out in multicolored bubble letters. As Riley looked at himself in the mirror he saw that the baggier shorts actually did help in hiding the extra bulk. After a quick breakfast Riley found himself out in the driveway. His Mom slid open the door to the van where Riley was once again met with the sight of the car seat his Dad had made him ride in.

“Do I have too,” Riley mewled looking up at his Mom.

“There is nowhere else to sit,” his Mom said with a weary look as she surveyed all the supplies still taking up space in the car. Riley let out a groan as he climbed into the car seat.

“This is so stupid,” he muttered under his breath. He fiddled with the chest straps a little, with some effort he managed to snap them together.

“Its not that bad,” Mom said as she grabbed the straps and buckled them in. “That car seat is top of the line, it looks very comfortable.”

Riley stayed silent as he stewed in discontent. On the car ride there he felt even more like a little kid than he had before. The buckle on his crotch pushing the padding of the training undies against him saw to that.

At the doctors office his Mom wasted no time in getting him unbuckled, she didn't even wait for him to ask for help. Riley

may have wondered how she even knew he wasn't able to get the straps undone himself if it wasn't for the fact that she had grabbed his hand and began walking towards the hospital. Riley was having to put all his effort in just trying to keep up with her. In short order Riley was sitting in a waiting room while his Mom sat next to him filling out the form.

“Shouldn't I be doing that?” Riley asked looking at the clipboard in his Mom's hands.

“I suppose,” Mom said. Yet before she could even hand the it over, Riley heard his name being called.

He was now sitting in an exam room. The nurse was taking some vitals. He looked over at his Mom who was scrolling on her phone. Why was she even in the room? He was plenty old enough not to need a parent in the room with him, heck they hadn't even asked if he wanted her in the room, weren't they supposed too? It then occurred to Riley that the hospital staff probably thought he was a little kid. Riley looked down at the clipboard his Mom had filled out. He saw at the top she had put his correct date of birth. Which only confused Riley. Did they even look at those things? The nurse asked some questions yet they all seemed to be directed towards his Mom rather than him. The nurse left soon after. Riley and his Mom sat silently in the room. He didn't have much to say, rather he was beginning to feel rather nervous. As much as his Mom had tried to reassure him that the doctor wouldn't care about the training undies he was dreading the moment. Although he remembered the last time he had been at the doctor they hadn't even asked him to remove his pants, so maybe he

could get through this without any embarrassment. Then again he was here for bed wetting at twenty years old. Some part of him was actually hoping they found something wrong with him, not horribly wrong of course, just something that would give him an excuse.

Finally the door opened and a doctor came walking in. She had her hair tied back into a ponytail and round spectacles. Riley's first impression was she seemed a little no nonsense, that was until she spoke.

“Hey you two,” she greeted her face exuding warmth.

“Dr. Colleen nice to see you again,” Mom said. It hit Riley strange that his Mom seemed to know this doctor. He had never seen her before in his life.

“And this must be Riley,” the doctor said holding out her hand for Riley to shake. “Your mother has told me so much about you. Its good to finally meet.”

Riley shook her hand with some hesitancy.

“And how is Carson doing?” Dr. Colleen asked looking to Mom.

“Oh he is doing just fine. Growing like a beanstalk still,” Mom laughed.

“Carson?” Riley uttered.

“Carson had strep throat about a month ago, Dr, Colleen is the one that treated him.” Mom said quickly. Riley nodded before picking up what was weird about that. Carson was a

kid, so he would go to a pediatrician, so why was she seeing Riley? Had his Mom brought him to a doctor for kids? He looked at her name tag and saw it just had her name. As Riley thought about it more its not like he saw anything that would denote this being a doctor for kids. They had come to a regular hospital and they had been in a waiting room that had people of all ages in it.

“Whats up?” Mom asked looking at Riley.

“Huh?” Riley said with a gormless look.

“You're squirming,” Mom noted. “Do you need to use the potty?”

“Mommy,” Riley yelped as he felt heat on the back of his neck from being asked such a question in front of the doctor. His face then went completely red upon realizing he had just said mommy.

“There is a family restroom right across the hall if you do,” Dr. Colleen said not seeming to have taken any notice to Riley's choice of vocabulary. Riley was about to deny that he needed to go until a second later he noticed that he did indeed need to go, and rather badly at that.

“Uh sure,” Riley said sliding off the seat and scampering out the door.

Across the hall Riley walked into the restroom. He saw a regular sized toilet and a urinal on the wall. Before spotting a mini sized toilet as well. Riley quickly locked the door and rushed over to the mini toilet. He didn't really have time to

mess around climbing up and getting situated on the normal sized toilet. Even though he knew the small toilet was meant for little kids, its not like anyone would know he had used it.

After he was done Riley walked back into the exam room to find his Mom and the doctor talking. They fell silent as soon as Riley walked into the room as they both turned to look at him. It unnerved Riley a little as if he had just walked into some horror movie about body snatchers. It would kind of make sense if some alien had taken over his Mom, it would certainly explain some things.

“Anyways,” the doctor said “There could be a lot of reasons for sudden bed wetting and the other things you've told me about.”

“Do you think it could be something serious?” Mom asked as she put an arm around Riley pulling him close.

“I don't really want to guess, at this point I think its best for me to do an examine and then we'll go from there.” Dr. Colleen said. “Speaking of which there are some personal questions I will have to ask Riley,” the doctor said flipping over the sheet on her clipboard that Mom had filled out.

“Oh sure,” Mom said getting up from her chair. “I'll leave you to it then,” she said before closing the door and leaving. The doctor then turned and looked at Riley.

“So your Mom says you've been having some accidents?” the doctor said with a reassuring look.

“I guess,” Riley squeaked a little mortified to have to admit it.

“She also mentioned you've been acting a little funny,” the doctor noted.

“So she says,” Riley grumbled. He really didn't think he was acting strange if that was anyone it was the rest of his family. Even Carson was acting kind of funny. Then again as far as Riley could tell, Carson was the only one who seemed to be reacting strange to how their parents were now treating Riley.

“Well your Mom told me that you tore apart two rooms in the house,” the doctor began.

“'That's only because I was looking for my wallet and phone,” Riley interjected.

“I suppose those are important but she seemed under the impression that you didn't even realize what you had done until she pointed it out.”

“I guess,” Riley mumbled.

“Speaking of lost things,” the doctor said. “Do you feel like that is happening a lot, or maybe your feeling a little scatterbrained all of a sudden?”

“Maybe a little,” Riley admitted. “It just feels like everything suddenly blew up in my face and I can't seem to get the pieces back together.”

“Hmmm,” the doctor said as she made some notes on the computer. “Your Mom did mention that a lot of things have been going wrong recently, why don't you tell me about that.”

Riley nodded as he began to tell the doctor about everything,

from his car breaking down to getting evicted from his apartment and the papers he had to scramble to get done.

“That is quite a lot,” the doctor said nodding. “It could certainly be a contributing factor. But for now lets tackle the biggest problem.”

“Um sure,” Riley mumbled knowing what she was referring to.

“So first off all I have some personal questions to ask you and I need you to be one hundred percent honest with me,” the doctor said. “Are you sexually active?”

“Yeah,” Riley said trying to sound as if this wasn't a big deal, and truly it wasn't, yet for some reason it made him uncomfortable.

“Okay and what would you say your orientation is, straight, gay, or bisexual or do you prefer not to answer.”

“Straight,” Riley said with a nod, still trying to sound as if this was a totally casual

conversation.

“When was the last time you were intimate with a partner?” the doctor asked. Riley was silent. Its not that he was embarrassed to answer, the problem was he wasn't exactly sure. It struck him weird. It seemed as he tried to remember the last month it was kind of hazy, as if he could only remember brief snapshots. He couldn't even remember driving home, which probably was why he couldn't find his

wallet or phone. Riley thought back remembering the last time he could say for sure. It had been that girl Tori. He hadn't known her for very long, but they had seemed to click and one thing had lead to another. How long had he been seeing her? Maybe two weeks? As Riley recalled her, he found himself wondering what she was up too. She was a total package as far as he was concerned. She had charisma for days and a totally laid back attitude Riley remembered just wanting to spend all his time with her. She also liked to unwind in many of the same ways Riley did, yet the only thing that made Riley nervous around her was she was definitely into some more experimental stuff than Riley. Still she never pressured him to try anything he didn't want too. Although she had talked him into doing some shrooms with her one night.

“Maybe like three weeks ago,” Riley answered, that seemed right. After the doctor had finished up with some more follow up questions about how Riley felt in general, which he reported he felt mostly fine, she pulled on a glove.

“I guess there is nothing left but the physical exam, so can you take off your pants for me?”

Riley gulped, the moment he had been dreading was finally here. His legs squirmed a little as he became aware of the extra padding in his pants. Closing his eyes he grabbed the waist pants of his shorts and pulled them down, which was easy since they had and elastic waistband. Riley stood still holding his eyes closed. He was just waiting for the doctor to laugh at him standing there at twenty years old wearing

training undies meant for a toddler.

“Um Riley,” the doctor said.

“Y-yes,” Riley stuttered opening his eyes.

“To do the exam I'm going to need you to pull the underwear down too.”

“R-right,” Riley stammered as he quickly pulled the training undies down around his ankles. He was kicking himself a little. If he had just pulled them down along with his shorts he could have avoided her seeing just how truly childish they were in design. However what came next didn't exactly help Riley's embarrassment. He stood looking to the side as the doctor squeezed and prodded at his area, even making him turn his head and cough.

“Alright,” the doctor said removing her glove and rolling back on her chair. “You can put your pants back on.”

Riley quickly got his lower half re-dressed. It couldn't have been more than a minute yet it had felt like an eternity. The doctor then spent some time writing some notes.

“So I didn't find anything to worry about during the examination,” the doctor said.

Just then there was a knock at the door before a nurse entered the room carrying a plastic basket of sorts. The nurse sat down next to Riley as she began to pull things out.

“The last thing I need is a blood draw,” the doctor explained as the nurse tied a rubber band around Riley's arm.

“Are you going to be a brave boy for me?” the nurse asked with a cooing smile. “Should we go get your Mommy and you can hold her hand?”

“No,” Riley said with a shocked look. The nurse obviously having zero clue as to his real age.

“Riley will get by just fine on his own,” the doctor chuckled. Riley proceeded to get his blood drawn. Afterwards the nurse who had done it seemed impressed.

“I don't think I've ever had a blood draw go that smooth before,” she praised as she put a band-aid on Riley that had little dinosaurs on it. “You were so brave I think you deserve a reward,” she said before pulling out a sucker. Riley was a little taken aback as she placed it into his hand. As the nurse left Riley placed the sucker on the desk near him.

“I'll go tell your Mom that we are done, and then I'll be back with the results.” The doctor said as she got up and left the room.

His Mom returned to wait in the room with him. The doctor was gone for awhile. Riley found himself becoming a little bored. Before long he had his head back against the wall with his eyes closed. He would have dozed off if it hadn't been for the doctor coming back into the room. Riley found himself becoming nervous. His mind was racing with what could possibly be wrong with him. The doctor took a seat in a chair with wheels before rolling over so she was in front of Riley and his Mom.

“So I can say that you are perfectly healthy.” the doctor said.

“What,” Riley exclaimed. “That can't be there has to be something wrong with me.”

The doctor smiled before continuing on.

“Maybe perfectly healthy isn't the right word I only mean there isn't anything seriously wrong with you that would deem surgical intervention. Given your symptoms like moments of irrationality and the sudden incontinence, and looking at the results of the blood test, I am diagnosing you with a stress disorder.”

“Stress disorder,” Riley repeated back.

“Exactly,” the doctor said. “Given what you have recently gone through I think your body is reacting to an extreme amount of stress that suddenly hit you all at once. Stress can do weird things to us. It can make us not think very clearly and incontinence is a very common symptom as well.”

“So I just need to relax?” Riley asked. Could it really be so simple?

“Yes and no,” the doctor said. “Your case is a little extreme and will require some proactive measures. I have here a packet of different things you can try,” the doctor said handing a packet of papers to Riley's mom who started looking through it with some interest.

“Some of it may seem a little strange,” the doctor said addressing Riley. “You should try as much of it as possible

and see what works. But Riley," the doctor said giving him a serious look. "It won't work unless you give it a chance. So no matter if you think it a waste of time or silly you have to give it a chance. This won't go away overnight."

Riley frowned a little. He was secretly hoping this was something that he could just take some pills for or something. "As long as you work on reducing his stress, just continue to deal with the bed wetting with some protection and that should clear up in no time. Riley should also have some extra supervision as well to mitigate the irrational behaviors."

"Supervision," Riley cringed repeating the word back.

"Well honey, you aren't thinking clearly all the time right now," the doctor said patting Riley's knee. "So it would be best for your parents to keep a closer eye on you so you don't get yourself in a situation. That means no driving and you should probably keep off the internet."

Riley cocked his head. The driving thing seemed like common sense, but what was up with staying off the internet?

"I had a patient going through something similar in the past," the doctor said sensing Riley's confusion. "He was on the computer one night and then went to bed only to wake up to his bank calling and asking if he had placed an order for a shipping container's worth of jars of peanut butter."

"Well good thing you got done with your projects," Mom said putting a hand on Riley's back.

"I don't think I'm acting weird," Riley said.

“Your Mom did tell me about the incident in the bathroom,” the doctor said. “I think that is the perfect example.”

“That was...” Riley began to protest before falling silent. Something about the way everyone kept insisting that he was acting strange seemed to be hitting home. Both his parents had mentioned independent of one another that he was acting strange. Now that the doctor was saying it as well only seemed to make it more believable. Could it be that he was acting strange, did he just not realize it?

“Riley just remember you need to trust the process and not fight it, or else you'll never get a handle on your stress. Remember even if you think its silly just trust that everyone has your best interest in heart. Also have you ever talked to a doctor about your size?”

“Wha,” Riley said feeling like he was being pulled in two different directions all of a sudden.

“I just mean, you are below average for your age,” the doctor said.

“Its never really come up,” Riley said. He realized in that moment just how strange that was. He was small so why hadn't his doctors in the past ever said anything?

“I could prescribe you something to help with that. Its formula for growth you just mix it into some water and drink it three times a day.” the doctor explained. “Its a little expensive but it would probably be good for you. If you want to try it that is.”

“That would actually be good,” Riley nodded. If the stuff would make him grow he would drink as much of it as he could.

“I guess we can try,” Mom said. Riley felt guilty realizing that his parents were going to have to foot the bill for it, since he didn't have money for an expensive formula. He gave his Mom a meek look as she smiled back at him patting his back.

“Alright this is what you'll need, just don't expect to shoot up to six feet overnight,” the doctor said giving Mom a slip of paper. “You'll have to order it online, but that is what I recommend.”

Riley watched his Mom read the note before she folded it up and slipped it into her purse.

“We're certainly open to trying anything,” Mom said putting a hand on Riley's shoulder as if she were speaking for him.

“I can't believe this,” Riley grumbled. The doctor had been little help in his mind, not only that she had basically just said that he needed someone keeping an eye on him, not to mention she had also agreed with the whole training potty thing. His parents had the approval of a doctor now. No one could argue now that they were being ridiculous.

“I know its a lot,” the doctor said with some sympathy. “But just work on relaxing and you'll be feeling just fine in no time. Get lots of sleep and some fresh air and I think you'll see some improvement.” Riley nodded, it didn't sound hard, he could certainly use some rest and relaxation. The last

couple of years it had felt like he had been working hard and maybe playing a little too hard as well.

Riley found himself back home on the couch in the living room. He had just eaten some lunch with his Mom. They hadn't talked much. She seemed more interested in reading through the thick packet the doctor had given her. Riley didn't have much interest. It had seemed rather straight forward, he just needed to take it easy. What could possibly be in that packet that was so interesting?

Riley grabbed the remote and flipped on the tv. He saw a movie playing in the channel guide that he enjoyed. It was about a hitman who took on the mob by himself. Riley clicked on it thinking it was the perfect thing to relax with. He was met with a screen that said the channel could not be accessed. He tried switching to another channel only to be met with the same screen.

“Hey Mommy,” Riley called out. His Mom entered the living room. “Whats this?” he asked pointing to the tv.

“Oh that's the parental controls,” Mom said shrugging.

“You're not going to let me watch what I want?” Riley exclaimed.

“It's not for you,” Mom said shaking her head. “Me and your father put it on the tv after we caught Carson watching something he shouldn't have.”

“Oh,” Riley said. He gave a small laugh. Why had he instantly thought they had done it because of him? “Well can

you give me the code so I can watch something. I won't tell Carson."

"No can do," Mom said. "Your father didn't read the instructions when he had set it up and he accidentally set it to the highest level and he forgot what he had put in for the password."

"And you haven't fixed it yet?" Riley said with an annoyed look.

"We don't watch that much tv," Mom said. "So it never really bothered us."

Riley rolled his eyes. Of course they hadn't. Although he could see that it was kind of a pointless thing to do. Carson probably could watch whatever he wanted on the internet anyways.

"Great," Riley groaned. "So what am I supposed to watch?"

"Why don't you come up to your room for a moment," Mom said. "I have to talk to you about something." Riley flipped off the tv a little curious as to why he had to go to his room to talk to his Mom.

"You still have those protective undies on right?" His Mom asked as she walked into his room.

"Uh yeah," Riley said wondering why he hadn't taken them off yet. "Guess I can change."

"Keep them on," Mom said.

“What why?” Riley sputtered.

“Well I want you to take a nap right now, so it would probably be best in case you have another accident.”

“I'm not taking a nap,” Riley said as his face screwed up.

“Riley,” Mom said with some sternness in her voice. “You heard the doctor. Its important for you to get lots of rest.”

Riley clenched his teeth. He knew there was no arguing against the doctor's orders, but he had already been going to bed early just how much sleep did they think he needed?

“I'm not a little kid,” Riley said crossing his arms in a pout. His Mom gave a sigh as she shook her head.

“You're certainly acting like one,” she said as she took a knee in front of him. “Any adult would welcome the opportunity to take a nap.”

“Then why don't you take one,” Riley said sarcastically.

“Maybe I will,” his Mom said before grabbing his shorts and pulling them down swiftly.

“Stop doing that,” Riley yelped.

“If you don't like it then maybe you should just cooperate once in awhile,” his Mom said lifting up each foot to grab the shorts out from under him. His Mom then looked up at him. She put a hand on his cheek softly. “Honey, it may not seem like it, but you are sick.”

Riley let out a deep sigh. He guessed that was true, even if he

wasn't exactly feeling under the weather.

“You need the rest,” his Mom said standing up and pulling the covers back. “So climb in and close your eyes.”

Riley got into the bed and got under the covers. He wasn't happy about it, but if taking a nap made him get better than he would take it. His Mom then pulled the covers up and gave him a kiss to the forehead before leaving the room shutting the door behind her.

Chapter 6

The Rough Patch: Part 6 - Chapter 6

Fresh Air

Riley was splayed out on the couch bored out of his mind as a cartoon played on the tv. It had been two days since he had been to the doctor's office and not much had changed – in fact it had just seemed to get worse. For one his Mom and Dad were now even more overbearing. He had an official bedtime of eight o' clock and he had to take a nap as well. His parents were also insistent that setting good bedtime routines were important, since his Mom had read that sticking to a routine would help reduce stress. Every night he was lead upstairs to use the potty in his parents rooms and then he would be taken into the bathroom where his parents would brush his teeth. Anytime Riley tried to protest they would simply remind him of the doctor's orders about needing rest and some supervision, which in Riley's mind was bull, the doctor had never said they needed to brush his teeth for him. It was almost as if they expected him to somehow hurt himself with the toothbrush, what did they think, that he would somehow swallow it? The other thing was his bed wetting had now extended into the daytime. He had wet himself twice in one day! It had gotten to the point where his Mom decreed he needed to wear the protective briefs, as she called them, not just for bed but during the day.

“It was just one accident,” Riley had tried to argue.

“Tell that to the hallway carpet that I've now had to shampoo twice,” Mom had responded which had quickly brought an end to that argument.

Back in the present Riley grabbed the remote flipping the channels. Tv was really the only recreational activity he had, and he couldn't even watch half of the channels. It was mostly restricted to cartoons and some sports, or if he was lucky a nature documentary. He thought that perhaps he could talk his parents into subscribing to a streaming service, at leas that would get around the parental settings. Riley heard the door in the back of the living room opening and then closing, a moment later Carson plopped down on the couch next to Riley.

“Hey whatcha watching?” Carson asked.

“Nothing interesting,” Riley said as he sat up. “Thanks to you that is,” Riley grumbled giving his little brother a spiteful look.

“What's that supposed to mean?” Carson asked, looking at Riley as if he were actually confused.

“Don't act like you don't know,” Riley said.

“I really don't,” Carson replied cocking his head.

“I can't watch anything on this tv because of the stupid parental controls that Mommy and Daddy put on the tv because of you,” Riley said. Carson looked a little surprised as Riley realized what he had just called their parents. It had become such a force of habit for him that most of the time he

didn't even realize he was calling them that. Riley braced for Carson to make fun of him.

“Oh that,” Carson said as the corner of his mouth twisted down. Riley thought it was strange that Carson didn't say anything about the way he had referred to their parents, in fact Carson never said anything about the way Riley was being treated, that was except when he had walked into the living room to find Riley on his potty. He had made a disgusted face waving his hand in front of his face.

“Pee-yoo, somebody crack a window,” Carson had exclaimed.

“Shut up,” Riley had yelled back.

“Carson leave your brother alone,” Mom had said from the couch. “And give him some privacy while he is on the potty.”

“How can I? Its right out in the open,” Carson had complained. Riley had went to protest that it wasn't his fault yet his Mom had stood up before he could say anything.

“Well since you are so interested in Riley's business, you can clean the potty out,” she said. A threat she had made good on. On one hand Riley had taken some glee in seeing Carson walking into the bathroom to clean out the potty with a dour look on his face, on the other hand though it was kind of humiliating that his little brother was cleaning out a a training potty that Riley had used as if he really were a little toddler. The punishment though seemed to work and had stopped Carson from commenting on it again in the future.

“What were you even watching?” Riley asked quick to move

on from his previous comment.

“Ahh you know,” Carson hemmed. “Something I wasn't supposed to I guess.”

Riley put his head back into the couch.

“Why are you even watching tv?” Carson asked. “Just use your phone to watch something.”

“I would if I could find it,” Riley mewled.

“Still missing huh,” Carson said with some sympathy. “You know I'm thinking of upgrading myself,” Carson said after a moment. “I only need like fifty more bucks. Which I should have by next week. Maybe you could have my old one.”

Riley looked over at his brother as if he had just offered Riley a drink of water after being in the desert for days.

“You would really give me your old phone?” Riley asked with a hint of skepticism.

“Well sure, why not,” Carson smiled. “Not like I would need it anymore.”

“Thanks,” Riley said in a small voice, touched by his brothers generosity. “That would be great.” It wouldn't solve the problem of losing his contacts but at least he would have internet access again.

“Anyways,” Carson said getting up. “You should give this show a chance,” Carson said referring to the cartoon currently on the television. “Its pretty decent.”

“Whatever you say,” Riley said with a sarcastic doubt. Carson then left out the back door again, off to hang out with some friends or whatever he did on the weekends. Riley remained on the couch turning his attention back towards the tv. As he watched he found that Carson was right. For a cartoon for kids, it wasn't that bad. Riley could envision himself liking it a lot if he was actually a kid.

After some time his Mom entered into the living room coming and standing in front of Riley.

“Are you going to be a couch potato all day?” she asked.

“There is nothing else to do,” Riley moaned.

“There is plenty to do,” Mom said picking up the remote and turning off the television.

“Hey I was watching that,” Riley protested. “I'm supposed to be relaxing remember.”

“I don't think this is what the doctor had in mind,” Mom said. “You've been cooped up in this house for two days now. You need some fresh air,” Mom said with a definitive nod. “So lets go.”

“Go where?” Riley asked.

“Well they just finished building a new park down the road not too long ago. We could go down there and check it out.” Mom suggested.

“I don't want to go to a park,” Riley said scrunching up his face.

“I'm not taking no for an answer,” Mom said. “So go get your shoes on.”

Riley got up off the couch sensing that arguing was useless. But not before grumbling that they weren't his shoes under his breath. Riley once again found himself strapped into the car seat, which was now starting to feel like his car seat. He had tried to argue with his Mom that he didn't need it since his Dad had finally cleared out the car, yet his Mom was firm. She said it was safer given his size and it kept him secure in case he felt like doing something unsafe. Riley grumbled, they could always justify anything now with his diagnosis. Upon getting to the park Riley got unstrapped and hopped out of the car. He looked across the parking lot at this park his Mom had been all excited about. To the right there were some baseball diamonds and some bleachers. In the way back of the park were some basketball hoops as well as two tennis courts where he could see older people playing a match. Over to the right was a good sized play structure. It was multicolored and had all the bells and whistles, including multiple slides, a bouncy bridge, some monkey bars and at the very top a tall, twisty, tube slide. Also in the play area was a swing set with several swings and some shovels kids could sit on and pull back the levers to dig in the sand as if they were in an excavator of some sort. The only thing that really caught Riley's eye was a rock wall on the playground. It didn't go very high up only to side to side, but he through it was cool that they had one. Going to the climbing gym had been one of the ways he kept in shape back at school. One of his roommates had gotten him into it. Riley found himself

thinking about his friends. He wondered if they had found a new place yet, and why they hadn't gotten in contact with him yet? Then again he could see that it would be kind of hard to do so at the moment, still he was hoping that didn't mean they had just moved on without him, they wouldn't, they had all said they were going to get another place together.

“Wow they really used those tax dollars,” Mom said as she looked around.

“What are we even doing here,” Riley said crossing his arms.

“Like I said, we're getting some fresh air, its good for you,” Mom replied.

“Whatever,” Riley dismissed as he began to walk off before he felt his Mom put a hand on his shoulder.

“Not so fast,” she said as she turned back around to the car and grabbed something from the front seat. “You need a hat,” she said as she plopped a blue bucket hat on top of his head before tightening the strings.

“I don't want a hat,” Riley protested.

“You need to protect yourself in the sun,” Mom said as she donned her own sunhat. “Or if you prefer I could put some sunscreen on you,” Mom said with a sort of look that said she would make good on the threat of having his Mom slather sunscreen on him.

“I'm in the sun all the time,” Riley frowned. “On my research trip I never wore sunscreen and I never got burned.”

“You already had a tan then if I remember,” Mom said. “You're still a little pale from the winter season. Summer just started after all. Besides you should have been wearing something tan or no tan.” Riley huffed seeing no reason to keep arguing, his Mom was just being a Mom at this point. They walked for a little while before coming a to a bench near the playground. Riley hopped up on the bench and crossed his arms. If she was going to make him come outside they could have at least gone somewhere other than a park. What exactly had she expected Riley to do here?

“You want to go on the climbing wall?” Mom asked.

“No,” Riley said with a chortle. She had to be pulling his leg. Like he would actually play on the equipment like some kid.

“Just a suggestion,” Mom said shrugging her shoulders. They sat in silence for a little bit. Riley was becoming bored. There weren't many people around despite it being a nice day in the summer. Riley found himself watching the tennis ball of the two older people farther off as it went back and forth.

“I believe you are our neighbors?” a voice said breaking Riley from his daze. He looked up to see a young looking woman with a large canvas bag on her shoulder. Next to her was curly haired blonde boy who looked around five or six.

“Oh you must be the two who moved into the old Colston place,” Mom said.

“That's us,” the lady smiled. “I'm Julia and this is Nathan,” she said placing a hand on top of the little boy's head.

“I'm Carol,” Mom said extending out her hand. “And this is my son Riley.” Julia looked to Riley.

“Um nice to meet you,” Riley said feeling a little self-conscious for some reason. Julia's eyebrow's raised a little before she smiled.

“I'm sorry I haven't come around for introductions,” Julia said as the women shook hands.

“Oh don't worry, you were busy, we should've come over first,” Mom said.

“It just feels like I haven't gotten a moment to myself,” Julia laughed as Mom joined in no doubt understanding the feeling. “Anyways me and Nathan decided to check out this park since it seemed pretty nice.”

“Me and Riley are doing the same,” Mom said putting an arm around Riley who shirked it off. He after all wasn't here by choice, if it was up to him they wouldn't have left the house.

“So are you settling in?” Mom asked.

“Mommmmy,” Nathan whined pulling on his Mom's hand not letting her respond.

“Nathan,” Julia said wearily. “Sorry he is just eager to play.”

“I see,” Mom said with a smile. “Well why don't the boys play together and we can get to know each other,” Mom then turned to Riley. “Go on Riley why don't you go play with Nathan?”

Riley's eyes widened in astonishment. Just where did she get off telling him to go play with some kid. He was twenty years old for goodness sake's.

“I'm sure you and Nathan can keep each other company while the ladies chat,” Mom said as if she could read his mind. Riley knew there was a double meaning behind her words, only ones he was aware of. What she was really saying was keep Nathan occupied for a awhile.

“Mommy c'mon,” Riley said in a whisper in a knowingly hopeless attempt as a final plea, although to anyone else he probably sounded more like a shy little kid not wanting to leave his Mommy's side.

“It will just be for a little bit,” Mom said giving him a little push forward off the bench. “We're being neighborly.”

“You want to play?” Nathan asked looking curiously at the boy who was to be his playmate. Riley rubbed the back of his neck looking away, the only sound coming from him was one of indecisiveness.

“C'mon,” Nathan said grabbing Riley's wrist pulling him off towards the playground. He gave one last look towards his Mom who seemed to already be engrossed in talking with Julia. Nathan had dragged Riley up the steps of the playground to the the top of the double sides that came off the side before Riley pulled his arm out of the boys grasp.

“Let go,” Riley said which caught Nathan by surprise as he looked at Riley for a moment.

“Wanna go down the slide?” Nathan asked pointing at the bright red slides.

“No thanks,” Riley said with a huff. Of all the situations to find himself in this was ridiculous. A couple of weeks ago he was studying deep sea ecology and now he was sent off to play on the playground by his Mom with a little kid as his companion.

“Why?” Nathan asked with a curious look, finding it strange that one would not want to go down the slide. “Are ya scared or something?”

“I am not scared,” Riley said shaking his head. “I just don't want too.”

“Sounds like you're scared,” Nathan said laughing a little. “Its easy.” he said before grabbing the bar at the top of the slide and swinging himself forwards shooting down the slide. He then stood at the bottom. “C'mon Riley you can do it,” he enthused. Riley rolled his eyes. He didn't want too. Yet Nathan was just going to keep shouting encouragement up towards him if he didn't. Riley walked over to the slide and went down taking no joy in doing so. Getting to the bottom he stayed laying on his back.

“See wasn't that fun,” Nathan said grabbing Riley by the wrist and pulling him up. “Pretty easy too, right?” Riley did not respond, maybe if he just gave Nathan the silent treatment he would eventually leave him alone. “Want to go down the big one next?” Nathan asked pointing towards the spiral tube slide. Riley kept up his silence. “I guess it might be too scary

for a little kid," Nathan said inferring Riley's silence as hesitation.

"I'm older than you," Riley yelped feeling insulted.

"Really, how old are you?" Nathan asked, looking at Riley curiously.

"I-Im old enough," Riley said, not wanting to give the real answer as he looked down at his outfit. A blue and white striped tank top with the graphic of a large race car on the stomach and a pair of blue shorts. He certainly didn't look like his age. There was not a doubt in his mind that everyone who saw him thought he was a little kid.

"Well I am taller, so I'm older," Nathan said standing up tall.

"You are not," Riley said taking a step towards the boy only to find that Nathan was actually taller only if by mere millimeters. Riley muttered under his breath that this kid was just tall for his age.

"Lets play dogs," Nathan then suggested. "I'll be a dog and since you're younger you can be the puppy." Riley gave a dismissive click through his teeth.

"I'm not doing that," Riley said. He knew that Nathan was probably not going to stop. He had decided that Riley was his playmate and that was that.

"Look I'll play with you alright," Riley said. "Just anything but that."

Nathan brought a finger up to his cheek as he began to think.

As Riley waited to hear what the boy decided upon he looked over to his Mom still talking to Julia, they both seemed to be laughing at something. He wondered what they were talking about. He hoped she was enjoying herself now, because later he was really going to give it to her.

“Okay,” Nathan said finally coming to a decision. “Lets play tag, I bet you won't be able to catch me.”

Riley sighed. He supposed it was better than getting roped into some pretend game, and it was a game that actually had rules, not too mention it would be a good opportunity to show Nathan that his sense of superiority over Riley was unfounded.

“Okay,” Riley agreed with a smirk. “But if I catch you then we're done playing and you can't bother me anymore. Deal?” Nathan smiled back nodding his head, assured in confidence no doubt.

Nathan counted down from three before taking off. Riley had a sense of determination to catch the boy quickly. Yet to his dismay Nathan always seemed out of reach. Every time Riley nearly had him in his grasp the boy would climb up something or jump or go shooting off down a slide. As time went on Riley was finding the distance between them growing, he couldn't understand how this was possible. He was physically fit. He had scuba dived in the ocean and had played weekly in a paint balling league with friends and he had no problem keeping up with them so how was some little kid now giving him trouble. Riley was running across the

wood chips when he finally felt his legs give out. He dropped to his knees catching his breath. Nathan turned to see Riley on the ground.

“This is boring,” Nathan said looking down at Riley. “You're never going to catch me.”

“Just let me catch my breath,” Riley said, not wanting to admit defeat. Nathan simply shook his head before helping Riley to his feet. They walked over to their Mothers still conversing at the bench.

“Mommy, I'm bored,” Nathan whined as he went and wormed his way onto his mom's lap.

“How can you possibly be bored?” his mother questioned. “You and Riley looked like you were having plenty of fun.”

“I want to swing,” Nathan said pointing at the swing set.

“Well,” Julia said with a sigh.

“That sounds nice,” Riley's Mom said. “I think me and Riley will join you, he was looking like he needed a little rest anyways,” she said mussing up the hair on top of his head. Riley stepped away giving his mom a hard look. She simply gave him a tight smile cocking her head towards Julia. Riley wasn't sure what she was trying to say, yet what came through loud and clear was he needed to go along with it. Julia and Nathan seemed pleased for the company as the group made their way over to the swings. Nathan wasted no time in grabbing a swing. Next to him was another normal swing while on the other side was a baby swing.

“For Riley,” Nathan said pointing at the baby swing. Riley's voice caught in his throat coming out as a squeak.

“That was very thoughtful of you,” Mom chuckled. Riley's stomach did a flip as he thought his Mom was going to make him sit in it. “But Riley uses the big swing just fine.”

Riley let out a relieved sigh. He had planned on refusing to even sit, yet took a seat on the normal swing that his Mom was standing in back of.

“I need a push Mommy,” Nathan said. Julia gave him a little push to get going before he took over pumping his legs back and forth in sync with the swing. “Like this Riley,” Nathan said as if Riley were looking to him for guidance. Riley looked away wanting to show he wasn't at all interested. His Mom then gave him a push.

“Go on honey, its good exercise,” his Mom said as if he needed to be convinced. “Or do you want Mommy to keep pushing?”

Riley let out a huff as he began to pump his legs to keep the swing going. As stupid as he felt swinging he would feel even worse if he sat there while his Mom kept pushing him making it look like he couldn't do it on his own. After a bit Riley at least began to not mind so much. Swinging like this at least made it so he didn't need to talk with Nathan. In fact as long as he kept swinging on his own it seemed no one really gave him any mind. His Mom and Julia seemed fine talking to one another and Nathan was so preoccupied with swinging higher that he had completely forgotten about being the older kid

who had to show Riley the ropes. As Riley went higher he remembered that he had really liked swinging when he was younger. Suddenly felt his Mom grab the seat of his swing slowing him down.

“Not too high,” she said. “Wouldn't want you to fall.” Riley looked back giving his Mom a scowl.

“You too Nathan,” Julia said grabbing Nathan's swing and slowing him down.

“But I want to go high,” Nathan whined.

“Riley's Mom is right, its dangerous,” Julia echoed. “And if you go high Riley will want to as well so why don't you be a good role model.”

Nathan looked over at Riley for a moment looking annoyed at his presence as if Riley being there was the reason he couldn't go as high as he wanted. A moment later his features softened and he smiled.

“Okay,” he chirped. As they continued to swing. Riley was annoyed. The fact that his Mom would actually think to tell him how high he could swing was completely maddening. He didn't really want to make a scene in front of Julia and Nathan. It was clear that his Mom had never told her how old he was and she had just let her think hat Riley really was some little kid. On the other hand Riley didn't really want her to know either. How could he even begin to explain that he was twenty years old, Given he was dressed. Riley tried to just ignore everything which was hard with Nathan's constant

reminders not to go too high on the swing. After awhile Julia looked at her watch astonished by how much time had passed. She gathered up Nathan before they said their goodbyes.

“It was great getting to know you,” she said.

“We'll have to get together soon again sometime.” Mom added.

“Oh for sure,” Julia said. “The boys seemed to have gotten along great.”

After they had left Riley came to a stop on the swing. He got off spinning around to face his Mom.

“How could you do that?” he spat.

“Do what? We were just spending some time getting to know the neighbors,” his Mom said as if she were clueless.

“And you thought I should get to know a little kid?” Riley asked his sarcasm dripping on every word as he played along.

“Well why not,” his mom said. “You're good with kids.” Riley let out a huff. She always said that. Somehow Riley had always found himself the oldest kid around when his parents got together with friends so he was always tasked with keeping an eye on the younger kids along with another girl in the neighborhood who was two years younger than him. Riley had always complained since these impromptu babysitting arrangements never saw him getting paid, although he guessed it wasn't so bad as he had dated the girl

for awhile when they had both been in high school.

“I don't appreciate you treating me like a little kid,” Riley said. “That lady thought I was younger than her kid. You could have said something.”

“Would you have wanted that?” his Mom asked in a sympathetic tone as she knelt down to his level. He thought for a moment she was going to hug him or something as if she thought he was going to start crying. What she did instead was reach around him pulling his pants up a little, which had undoubtedly slunk down a little showing off the waistband of his padded underwear decorated with pictures of colorful green frogs. It seemed to be the unspoken reason that convinced Riley of the answer.

“No, I guess not,” he said as his cheeks went a little red and he readjusted his pants just to make sure nothing was showing. “But it doesn't mean I want you telling people I'm a little kid.”

“I didn't,” his Mom said standing up. “If you must know we didn't talk about you. I know you may not have appreciated having to keep Nathan entertained but I know his Julia did.” his Mom said as she took his hand and began to lead him back to the car. “Its not easy being a single mother you know, it was apparent she needed a little bit of break. So you should feel good that you helped her out.”

Riley didn't say much, he didn't even protest his mom holding his hand. He hadn't really been paying much attention to what she had been saying. He felt her call his name as she

squeezed his hand. Riley looked up realizing they were back at the car in the parking lot.

“Are you listening?” his Mom asked.

“Um Mommy,” Riley said in a small voice. “I need to go potty,” he said. The words that had been worming their way into his vocabulary from his parents constant use of them passing his lips. His Mom face turned to one of surprise.

“Do you think you can hold it till we get home?” she asked.

“I don't think so,” Riley said scrunching up his legs, completely taken back by how fast the feeling had come on, not too mention how urgent it suddenly felt.

“I see,” his Mom said pursing her lips as she looked around at the the nearly empty parking lot.

“I'll run to the bathroom,” Riley said looking a the bathrooms. They were actually kind of far away and Riley was a little doubtful he would make it, yet he still didn't want to wet his pants.

“I don't want you using the bathroom here,” his Mom said. “Its not safe.”

Riley felt his stomach drop. Was his Mom actually putting him in a situation where he was going to wet himself! “Don't worry,” his Mom quickly added as she went to the trunk of the car opening it up. “I brought your potty just in case,” she said setting it on the ground.

“Y-you can't be serious,” Riley stammered. “At least let me

bring it to the bathroom."

"You just said you don't know it you'll make it. So just use it here so you don't have an accident."

"But someone might see," Riley said through gritted teeth.

"There is no one here," his Mom said looking around. "So hurry up, I don't want you having an accident."

Riley went to say something but only croaked as his mouth had gone dry. It was too much, just how had it come to this. He didn't have time to argue the point though as the pressure in his bladder was becoming more pressing by the second as a little pee slipped out into his undies. There really was no other option now. Riley taking one last look around to see that it truly was deserted around them, pulled his pants down quickly and sat down on his potty. As soon as he was seated his bladder released. Riley's Mom stood off to his side sandwiching Riley in between her and the open car door. It felt like an eternity before Riley was finished even if it was less than a minute. Riley stood up quickly as soon as he was done pulling his pants and undies up as fast as he could. His Mom smiled as she praised him. Riley could only scowl. Paying him no mind, his Mom picked him up and deposited him into the car seat. She didn't even wait a second before she started buckling him in herself.

"Mommy stop it," Riley mewled pushing her hands away. Yet she had already gotten him buckled in completely.

"Someone's grumpy," Mom said in a chiding tone before

grabbing his hand and squirting hand sanitizer on it. “You should take your nap when we get back.”

“I'm not a little kid,” Riley groused.

“You keep saying that like its some revelation,” his Mom said sounding a little annoyed. “We all know you're not a kid.” she said before picking up the potty off the ground and walking of towards a grassy area to dump it out.

“Could have fooled me,” Riley muttered under his breath as he rubbed his hands together to dry up the sanitizer.

Back at home Riley made his way up to his room followed by his Mom.

“Okay sweetie time for that nap,” she said pulling back the covers on his bed. Riley looked at her confused. “Don't act like your surprised, I told you that you were taking one when we got back.”

“I'm not grumpy or tired,” Riley protested.

“Riley,” his Mom said in a knowing tone.

“Fine,” Riley grumbled as his shoulder's slumped. There was no arguing against doctor's orders.

He took off his pants not wanting his Mom to once again take it upon herself to do so. He crawled into bed letting his head hit the pillow with a dour note.

“You'll feel better after a nap,” Mom said with a cheery certainty.

“Like I'm going to fall asleep,” Riley said paying no heed to the fact that he did eventually fall asleep each and every time he was put into bed, despite his continued protest that he was never tired.

“You're really not tired?” Mom asked, the question sounding ominous to Riley, all the same he couldn't help but reiterate that he was not tired.

“There is some stuff the doctor suggested to help,” she said going over to a shopping bag sitting on Riley's desk that had appeared there yesterday, yet Riley had never looked into it. “So tell me, why are you finding it hard to fall asleep?”

Riley thought for a moment. Surely he could come up with something that would show his Mom that it was perfectly normal for him to not be tired in the middle of the day or at his eight o' clock bedtime. He was twenty year's old, even if he was tired its not like he couldn't push through it like any other adult.

“I'm not calm enough I guess,” Riley answered. “I have a lot on my mind.” Which sounded good enough. He did have a lot of adult things on his mind, adult commitments and problems he needed to sort through.

“That makes sense,” Mom said digging through the bag. “I think I have just the thing.” She came back and took a seat on the side of the bed near the head of the bed where the safety rails had an opening. “Okay so remember what the doctor said about being open to things, even if you think its silly.” Riley didn't like the sound of that one bit. “Try this,” Mom

said before Riley felt her slip something into his mouth. He could taste silicone as his tongue moved around inspecting the object that has just intruded into his mouth. It only took him a second to realize it was a pacifier. He spit it out immediately giving his Mom a shocked look.

“What the hell,” Riley exclaimed as he shot up into a sitting position.

“Riley,” Mom said as if she were dealing with a fussy toddler. “You need to keep it in your mouth for it to work.”

“That's for babies,” Riley said looking at the pacifier laying in his lap. It had a white guard with a baby blue handle with a plain white button. “Why would you try to put that in my mouth?”

“The info packet said it would have a calming effect,” Mom said picking it up and looking as if she didn't understand why Riley was freaking out.

“Yeah, for little kids,” Riley countered.

“It specified that it would do the same for adults,” she went on to explain that the packet had gone into the specifics. Apparently with Riley's diagnosis his mind was apt to work in overdrive mode and the best way to counter that was by giving him something to focus on and pacifiers were the perfect thing for that and would cause his brain to release chemicals that would calm his racing thoughts.

“That can't be true,” Riley said sounding a little unsure. Honestly being given an explanation that seemed to have

some scientific backing almost convinced Riley that it wasn't total bunk – but he still wasn't going to accept it whole cloth.

“Remember the doctor said that some of things may seem a little strange but you need to at least try,” his Mom said holding the pacifier up to his mouth. “If it doesn't work then at least we tried, but if it does work then it will help you get over this all the faster, which is what we all want...right?”

Riley let out a muddled sigh as he let his Mom push the pacifier into his mouth.

“Good,” his Mom said smiling a little as Riley laid back. “I got some other stuff here that will help you relax,” she said digging through the bag that she had set on the floor next to the bed. As Riley laid in the bed waiting for his Mom to pull out the next item. He found his tongue still inspected the nipple of the pacifier. It felt foreign in his mouth his lips seemed to settle around it as his mouth seemingly acting on instinct gave it a cursory suckle. He really didn't think it was going to work. It felt like he had to actually concentrate on sucking on it.

“Daddy says its been helpful to read to you at night, seems to send you right to sleep,” Mom said.

“That's only because he reads my textbook,” Riley lisped around the pacifier. “Its so boring.”

“Well maybe this will be more interesting,” she said now holding a book in her hands. “It was recommended in the packet.” It was a picture book. On the front was a cutesy little

white bunny sleeping peacefully in front of a pile of presents. The most curious thing to Riley however was the title. “X Bunny and the Birthday Surprise.”

“X Bunny,” Riley mumbled from behind the pacifier.

“This book is a little different,” Mom began to explain perfectly able to understand the garbled words of pacifier speak.”Anytime there is an X we replace it with your name.” Riley furrowed his brow, this sounded like something for very little kids, why would the doctor have recommended this? Then again the doctors suggestions had also given his Mom the idea about the pacifier.

“Lets start,” Mom said. “Riley Rabbit and the birthday surprise, oh that rhymes,” she said cheerily. Riley couldn't help but roll his eyes. She opened the book, there was a picture of the rabbit hopping around a house that was decorated for a party. “Riley Rabbit was so excited for his birthday party.” His Mom read.

Riley began to stare up at the ceiling. There was no use in trying to argue with his Mom anymore. He knew she was fully committed to trying whatever was in that packet. She was always like that. Growing up she followed things to a T, especially if it was coming from a doctor. She made sure exact dosages were given and at the right time, she always drove the speed limit and she was also the kind of Mom who made sure her kids waited thirty minutes after eating to get back into the pool. Riley decided he was just going to have to bear it for awhile. Once she saw all this didn't work as

intended she would move on to the next thing. Riley stared up at the ceiling, the pacifier resting loosely at the side of his mouth. He only half listened as his Mom read the story of the rabbit getting ready for its birthday party. Guest showed up they ate cake and then decided to play a game of hide and seek.

“Riley closed his eyes. He was very tired but he still wanted to play the game. He began to count back from twenty 20,19,18” Mom read.

As the story went on Riley found there was a lot of counting in the story. There was counting as the rabbit found his friends, counting presents, counting candles, and the rabbit seemed tired all the time. Riley wondered if this was a book to teach kids how to count? As the story went on Riley found his eyes getting heavy just as the rabbits eyes were described doing. Further in he found himself feeling so warm and relaxed just as the rabbit was feeling. The story continued on.

“Riley was fast asleep dreaming of all the fun things he would do when he woke up,” his Mom read as the story came to an end. Yet Riley hadn't heard it. He was already fast asleep the pacifier in his mouth bobbing up and down gently in a steady rhythm.

Chapter 7

The Rough Patch Part 7 - Chapter 7

The Aquarium

Riley felt himself being shaken awake. He opened his eyes groggily to see his Mom standing over him with a wide smile on her face.

“Time to wake up,” she cooed in a soft voice, almost as if she were being careful not to be too loud, perhaps it was the same voice she would use to wake up Riley if she knew he was hungover. Riley closed his eyes turning over in the bed with a groan. “Lets go Riley wakey wakey,” she said a little louder as she went give him another shake.

“Let me sleep,” Riley moaned pulling the blankets tighter around himself.

“Riley you need to get up,” Mom said pulling the covers down to expose his his bare top half. Riley finding that going back to sleep was an impossibility opened his eyes as he sat up in the bed wiping the sleep away from his eyes.

“Why?” he groused. “I'm on break, I'm supposed to be able to sleep in.”

“We're going on a trip today,” his Mom said.

“I don't wanna go,” Riley said as he flopped back down on his pillow.

“Too bad, you're going,” Mom said. “Daddy has to go into

the office today."

Riley let out a curse under his breath. He wanted to protest that he was twenty years old and more than capable of being on his own. Yet he knew Mom would just repeat the doctor's order that he needed some supervision now. Any further protest his Mom would just recall the last time he was left home alone when he had practically torn the house apart. Which was an exaggeration in Riley's eyes – it had only been two rooms.

"I think you'll like where we are going today," Mom said walking over to his dresser and opening the drawers as she gathered up a bundle of clothes.

"Where?" Riley said not actually curious in the slightest.

"To the aquarium," Mom cheerfully said, walking back over to his bedside. "We got a little bit of a drive ahead of us though so the sooner we get on the road the better."

His Mom then unceremoniously pulled the blankets back. Riley let out a little squeak as the cold air hit him. He was wearing a pair of his protective briefs. This particular pair were bright red with a yellow waistband and sporting a large smiling crab on the crotch.

"I need to get these sheets in the wash," his Mom said looking down at him. Riley sat up. With the covers removed he could now really feel just how wet he was. He looked down to see he had completely soaked the undies, so much so that he had even leaked onto the sheets. Riley groaned as he

crawled out of the bed to get out of the wet spot.

“Why does this keep happening?” he said with defeat in his voice as he looked down at the sagging undies that were slipping down around his waist.

“It might be a good thing,” his Mom said pulling the comforter off of the bed completely.

“How can this be good?” Riley moaned. “Its getting worse.”

“Maybe this is a sign that you are just sleeping well,” His Mom suggested. “I guess that pacifier is helping you relax,” she suggested picking up the pacifier she had given him a couple of days ago off the bed and setting it off to the side. Riley gave it a derisive look. His Mom had certainly convinced herself that the pacifier was working. Ever since his nap after the park she would encourage him to use it. At first she had popped it in his mouth when he had been complaining and told him to suck on it for a minute, then it became five minutes and now whenever he was acting grumpy she would would slip it into his mouth and tell him to relax. Riley would always spit it out just as soon as they left him alone. Doing so in front of his parents only got it back in his mouth with the reminder that it was part of his treatment. All Riley really wanted to do was tell them that if anything it was causing him more stress. Although he knew that wouldn't work. His parents were always making comments about how much better his skin was looking, no doubt from getting all that extra sleep, or how much calmer he seemed which they credited the pacifier for.

“Riley are you listening?” his Mom's voice rang out bring him back to the present. Riley looked up at her blinking. “I said my door is unlocked, go and use your potty and I'll bring some clothes for you when I've finished stripping the bed.”

Riley gave a little hum of agreement leaving the room. He made his way quickly down the hall to his Mom's room. He didn't know where Carson was but he certainly didn't want to be seen by his little brother in nothing but a pair of soaked training undies, which is what he was wearing no matter what alternative name his mom gave them. Riley went to his potty taking off the the undies and sitting on his potty. He spent some time using the wipes to clean himself off before he let his bladder release.

“Didn't you go enough already,” he muttered at himself. His Mom then walked into the room with a bundle of clothes in her arms. She sat on the bed across from him.

“Are you finished?” she asked.

“Yes,” Riley said.

“Great then lets get dressed,” she said. Riley gave a little huff. His parents had now started helping him get dressed. They would always help him pull down his shirts or pull up his shorts despite his protest that he didn't need their help. Protest which seemed to fall on deaf ears. At least they never helped with the underwear they always seemed to look away at his insistence. “There is something a little different today,” his Mom said. “I want you to wear this while we are out.” His Mom said holding up a new piece of clothing. Riley's eyes

bulged upon seeing what she was holding up. It was a pull up there was no doubt about it. It had blue tear away sides and Mickey Mouse prominently displayed on the front. There was another spot with a circle and inside the blue outline of Mickey's head. Riley had seen the commercials on the tv and knew exactly what it was for. The design would fade if he had an accident letting anyone who saw it know just what had happened.

“No way,” Riley exclaimed.

“Now Riley,” his Mom said with a calming tone. “We both know your accidents have been getting well...heavier,” she said as if picking her words carefully would lessen the blow. “We've got quite a drive ahead of us and then we'll be walking around the aquarium all afternoon, we might not be able to get to a bathroom right away. The protective briefs are only meant for small accidents. We need to be more proactive in dealing with this. I don't want any leaks and I know you don't either.”

His Mom was talking as if this was all just a minor change. Riley was flabbergasted with how non-nonchalant she seemed about asking him, at twenty years old, to wear something meant for an actual toddler. The training undies were one thing, but this was a whole other level – and there was no other word she could give them to make it sound any less babyish like she had done with the undies calling them protective briefs.

“You can't act like this is normal,” Riley screeched in panic

from upon his potty. “I won't do it, I won't.”

“You're right this isn't normal,” Mom said with some agreement. “But we have to do what we can to mitigate your symptoms,” Mom said, sounding all clinical for a moment. “Now are you going to put these on yourself or...”

Riley glared giving her a cold look. He had to put his foot down. His Mom gave a sigh before standing up. She grabbed him under the armpits and lifted him up in the air. The sudden movement made Riley yelp feeling like a rabbit that had just gotten snatched by a hawk. His Mom set him on the bed before producing his pacifier and slipping it into his gaping mouth.

“Just relax and close your eyes if you don't want to look.” she instructed pushing him back into a lying position.

“Mommy noo,” Riley exclaimed pushing himself up a little as the pacifier flew out of his mouth. His Mom didn't respond as she simply pushed him back down. Riley realized he was naked and covered himself quickly. He had never been this exposed in front of his parents before. Whenever he was on the potty he at least had the splash guard for coverage. His Mom made no mention as she grabbed his legs and within a second had his legs worked through the the pull up as she continued pulling it up. When she reached his crotch she came to a pause.

“Riley you need to move your hands please.” Mom said.

Riley let out a resigned groan as he removed his hands. What

else could he do, the stupid thing was as good as on already. To his Mom's credit she had it pulled up to his waist quickly before pulling him up into a seated position.

“There not so bad,” she said. Riley looked down in utter mortifying shame. He fidgeted a little before freezing upon hearing the slight crinkle. They certainly felt very different from the training undies, thicker in a way Riley hadn't anticipated.

“Arm's up,” Mom said as she held a shirt up over his head. Riley let her put the shirt on doing the best he could to at least look like he was putting it on himself and his Mom wasn't helping. Riley was at least happy with the shirt. His Mom had shown up one day when she had gone into the office with some new shirts for him. There were three of them a blue, red, and a white one which he now wore, and much to Riley's relief they were plain, no cutesy graphics or anything. “I saw these in your size at the store and I thought you would like them,” she had mentioned. Riley had of course thanked her even giving her a big hug just to show his appreciation. Somehow it haf only cemented in his mind that his Mom had been truthful when she had claimed that she had done the best she could initially. It probably was hard to find stuff in his size that wasn't plastered in cute little cartoons or emblazoned with silly sayings that younger kids would probably find funny. He certainly favored the shirts, even yesterday asking his Mom if he could wear one instead of the shirt with sailboats on it, which his Mom had obliged.

“Now for pants,” Mom said cheerily pushing Riley back

down.

“I can put my own pants on,” Riley grumbled. In fact the only thing he wanted was pants at the moment to cover up the embarrassing undergarment he was now forced to wear. Mom didn't stop as she got his legs threaded through before lifting him off the bed onto his feet. Riley could tell something was off about the pants there was a lot of material still hanging off his waist. It wasn't until a moment later Mom lifted up the front and then attached it with a strap over his shoulder that he realized they weren't pants but overalls. Riley was frozen for a moment as his Mom finished doing up the straps. He looked down at the green denim overalls. On the front bib was a embroidered patch of a cute cartoon frog smiling. On each knee was a footprint of the frog. Riley was flummoxed. As if the clothes weren't bad enough on their own it was magnitudes worse now that he was wearing a pull up underneath which only lead Riley to one conclusion. His Mom had dressed him up as a toddler.

“W-what is this,” Riley stammered.

“They're overalls of course,” Mom said. “These will do just great today-,” she began.

“You're making me look like a little kid,” Riley accused balling up his fist as he began to breath heavily with anger. His Mom let her head tilt to the side a little with a sigh.

“If you would let me finish I'll explain, take a deep breath and relax,” she said picking up the pacifier and slipping it into Riley's mouth. Riley didn't immediately spit it out, instead

biting down on the nipple. “I bought these for you when I realized it would be better for you to wear a pull up. They have a habit of sticking up out of waistbands you know and I thought it would be better for you not to have to worry about that, unless you really want to run the risk of everybody seeing. Honestly I don't think it's such a big deal but I know you would probably get embarrassed.”

Riley glared at his Mom, undecided on how to react. He was furious with the outfit yet upon hearing her explanation and thought process it sounded as if she had actually taken his feelings into consideration. It didn't take a mothers intuition to know that he would have been upset about the pull up and it was true what she had said, it would have been a point of embarrassment to find it sticking up over his waistband pushing up his shirt and giving everybody a look. Even with that understanding the overalls themselves were completely infantile with their designs. Riley took the pacifier out of his mouth tossing it on the bed behind him.

“These overalls are stupid,” he grumbled. “You could have just gotten plain ones if you were so worried.”

“I'm sorry,” his Mom replied. “But its the start of summer so they didn't really have much to choose from overalls are more of a fall thing. The only other option were some bright colored shortalls. Would you have preferred that?”

“No,” Riley moaned. “I would prefer not to have to wear anything like this.” he said turning his head away and looking down towards the ground. It was honestly starting to get to

him and he could feel some tears starting to form into his eyes.

“Riley,” his Mom said gently reaching a hand out towards him.

“Just leave me alone,” Riley whimpered turning away. For a moment there was silence before he felt himself be lifted up and plopped on his back on the bed. His Mom was now over him.

“Now now, don't be like that,” she said tenderly as her hands came up and held his face. “I know things are hard, but soon things will be better,” she said as she stroked his hair before she began giving him a flurry of kisses to his cheeks.

“Mommy stop,” Riley said not able to stop himself from giggling a little. “You can't make me feel better about this.”

His Mom came to stop as she looked down at him. “I know this isn't how you thought you would be spending your break, but I need you to be strong and concentrate on getting better, think you can do that?”

Riley gave a small hum, he wasn't going to give his Mom the satisfaction of hearing him say he was okay with any of this. His Mom's hands moved down to his sides before she began to tickle him. Riley couldn't help but let out some screams of laughter as he wiggled under her assault.

“Okay, okay, stop,” he yipped.

“Good,” his Mom said standing up. “Then lets get going.”

They had eaten a quick breakfast. Riley had expected Carson to say something about the way he was dressed but his brother didn't even give so much as a strange look. It sort of unnerved Riley that his brother didn't even react upon seeing him dressed in a pair of frog themed overalls. After breakfast they made their way out to the car which brought Riley to his next problem. The passenger door slid open revealing his car seat. Riley looked at it with a nervous stare. He watched Carson climb into the van taking a seat in the open seat next to the one Riley had been using. Riley went to grab for the front seat before his Mom stopped him standing in front of him with a questioning look on her face.

“Riley hop up into your seat so we can go,” she said as if it was the most normal thing in the world. Riley stepped back as he felt his stomach flutter in embarrassment at the idea of sitting in the car seat, especially in front of Carson, he wasn't even sure if Carson knew that Riley had been using their cousin's car seat.

“I want to sit up front,” Riley said in a soft pleading tone.

“We've been over this,” Mom said. “Its safer in the back.”

“But,” Riley went to protest before his Mom swept him up into her arms before plopping him down into the seat. She then strapped him in quickly as Riley's face went flush. The door was then shut as Riley shot a look at his brother. Carson stared for a moment before shrugging as he placed his earbuds into his ears and turned his attention to his phone.

Riley sat bored as he watched the passing scenery through the

car window. The only thing he had was the radio to listen too. Yet it was the soft rock station his Mom favored which Riley found incredibly bland. After some time they pulled into a gas station.

“I'm gonna get some gas, why don't you boys use the bathroom,” Mom suggested. Riley went to undo the straps of the car seat, yet it seemed even harder now than it had in the past. He couldn't even get the buckle that went across his chest undone. His Mom had come around the side and released him. Riley then went walking off towards the gas station before his Mom called out to wait. Riley turned around to see her pulling the training potty from the back and handing it too Carson.

“Mommy,” Riley yelped as his face went red with embarrassment.

“The toilets in there will be too big for you,” Mom said a matter of factly. “Now go with Carson and he can help you out.”

Riley grumbled under his breath as he followed Carson to the bathrooms. Once getting inside both boys came to a standstill not really sure of the arrangement.

“So should I just set it here,” Carson said placing the potty on the ground in the middle of the bathroom.

“No way,” Riley said grabbing the potty up off the ground. The bathroom was empty but there was no guarantee it would stay that way. Riley could almost imagine how humiliating it

would be to be using his training potty out in the open while other people walked in and out. Riley marched into one of the bigger stalls and closed and locked the door behind him. He set the potty on the ground. He looked over at the toilet. It would certainly take some doing to climb up onto it. Riley figured he would just use his potty and not risk some accident. If he did fall that would only make his Mom fret more. Maybe if he just used the potty instead it might give him some proof to use to make the case that he could be trusted on his own. After all everyone told him he was acting out of sorts. Maybe he was, and now was the perfect time to go along with his parents request, perhaps this was a sign that he was actually improving in a way. Maybe the treatment was actually working, and he was getting better? Riley shook his head. No matter how much they told him all this was necessary, he just couldn't see it. Riley fiddled with the buckles on his overalls for a bit. There was a knock at the door.

“You okay in there?” Carson asked from the other side sounding a little awkward. “Do you like...need some help.”

“I'm fine,” Riley said sounding a little indignant. He managed to finally get the straps off and pulled down his pants. He cringed looking a the pull up he was wearing, he cringed even harder as he pulled it down hearing the accompanying crinkles echo off the walls of the stall. Riley did his business and went to work getting himself re-dressed. Getting the straps off had been somewhat difficult and he was finding it even harder to get them back on.

“Hey Riley, are you almost done,” Carson called from the other side. “You've been in there awhile.”

Riley gave a little huff seeing no other option. He opened the door to find his brother standing in front of it.

“I need some help,” he said through gritted teeth, feeling completely inept.

“Oh sure,” Carson said he quickly re-did Riley's straps. “There easy peasy,” Carson said smiling.

“Well its harder when you're wearing them,” Riley said defending himself.

“Yeah for sure,” Carson said sounding understanding. Yet Riley took no solace in Carson's seeming understanding, that he had to ask his little brother of all people for help was demoralizing.

“Guess I gotta empty that thing,” Carson said wrinkling his nose as he looked at the potty.

“I-I'll do it,” Riley yipped. He picked up the potty and took the two steps to the toilet. When he went to dump it he felt it slipping from his hands. Thankfully Carson had been nearby enough to grab it at the last moment and keep it from going all over the place. The boys returned to the car to see their Mom walking out of the gas station herself.

“Everything go okay in there?” Mom asked with a cheery smile. Riley pursed his lips.

“Yep just great,” Carson said not mentioning that he had

needed to help Riley with his overalls.

“Splendid,” Mom said opening the door. “Lets get this show back on the road.” She said. Riley followed Carson into the car and climbed into his car seat without protest. He went to the do the straps himself but struggled for a moment before Mom moved his hands away and took over getting him buckled. Riley could only give a little grunt as she buckled the belt into place. Getting into the driver's seat she handed the boys some food. Each one of them was given a paper tray with some pizza roll ups in it. Along with some other stuff. Riley immediately noticed the difference. While Carson had been given a bag of chips and a bottle of water Riley had some goldfish crackers and a bottle of apple juice. What was worse is that the apple juice came in a bottle with Spongebob Squarepants head with a spout protruding out of the top. Riley let out a noise of discontent. He and his Mom locked eyes in the rear view mirror. Riley pointed to the bottle of juice with his brows furrowed. His Mom gave a sympathetic look.

“Just drink it,” she said. “A soda would go through you just like that.”

Riley rolled his eyes. Was juice any different? Riley set the juice in the cup holder of the car seat. He wasn't going to drink it. As he ate the pizza roll some of it spilled out the end plopping onto his white shirt. Riley had let out a sigh. His Mom had caught sight of what had happened. She had fretted a little and handed napkins back giving them to Carson and telling him to help Riley wipe up the mess. Carson had begun

yet Riley had been quick to snatch the napkin's away with the insistence that he didn't need help. Mom had been a little upset that Riley now sported a red stain on his shirt. Riley had only responded grumpily that it wasn't that bad, however even he couldn't say it wasn't noticeable. After eating all the other food Riley found he was actually thirsty. Begrudgingly he drank down the bottle. Afterwards he was once again left with nothing to do to pass the time. As he watched the passing traffic his eyes became heavy and he dozed off.

Riley wasn't sure how long he had been asleep, yet he awoke to see Carson going past him to exit the car. Riley rubbed his eyes as he became awake.

“Have a good nap?” his Mom asked as she unbuckled him from the car seat.

“I wasn't asleep,” Riley said. “Just resting my eyes.”

“Mhmm,” Mom said in an all knowing tone as she took his hand and they began to walk across the parking lot towards the aquarium. Riley tried to pull his hand away, yet his Mom's grip was too strong. “Riley stop pulling,” she tutted.

“Then let go of my hand,” Riley said.

“Not while we're in the parking lot. I don't want you wandering off,” she said.

“Why would I do that?” Riley asked with an incredulous tone. His Mom didn't respond as they were already at the front gate. She lead the boys over to a bench.

“Hang out here while I go get tickets,” Mom said before walking off. Riley sat with his arms crossed in a pout. It was becoming apparent to him that today was going to be a long day. He looked over at Carson who had a notebook with him and was writing in it. Carson looked up to see Riley staring.

“Excited for the aquarium?' Carson asked with a smile.

“No,” Riley replied curtly turning his head away.

“I thought you liked stuff like this,” Carson said with a hint of confusion.

“Yeah well once you've been diving in the actual ocean aquariums lose a little bit of luster,” Riley said. “Plus I'm more interested in deep sea stuff, they can't really do a lot of that in an aquarium.”

“How come?” Carson asked. Riley sighed before going into an explanation about the natural conditions of the deep sea and how they were hard to replicate on the surface. Riley noticed that Carson was taking notes on what he said.

“What are you writing?” Riley asked.

“I'm taking notes,” Carson replied.

“For what?” Riley asked cocking his head.

“My project for school. I decided to do a project on the ocean, that's why we're here. I have to actually go some place as part of the requirements and Mom told me she would take me to the aquarium, you know to get photos and maybe talk to some of the staff and stuff. I just hope I can get enough

stuff to get it all done. Its due next week."

Riley's mouth twisted a little. Finding out this trip was more for Carson rather than his Mom's attempt at getting him out of the house was in a weird way relieving. Yet still having to tag along because of his brother's homework was a little irritating. Though it was only because of the implication that Riley had been forced to come since his parents didn't want to leave him home alone. Riley knew that if everything was normal he still might have tagged along if asked. But being forced and dressed how he was made it so that he knew he wouldn't be able to enjoy the day.

"You should have done this sooner," Riley groused. "Like before I got home from break instead of procrastinating," Riley said not able to pass up the chance to get in a dig at his brother.

"I was going to," Carson said defensively. "We were supposed to go weeks ago but then..." Carson came to a stop. Riley looked over at his brother who wore an expression that Riley couldn't quite parse. He looked angry yet at the same time a little hurt. "We got busy," Carson mumbled as he went back to his notebook. Riley sat a little confused by the answer.

What in the world had they gotten so busy with? His Mom nor Dad had mentioned anything like that. From the few times Riley had talked with them on the phone it had sounded like things were normal back home. Riley could only reason that Carson was just being dramatic, surely if something had been happening he would have at least heard about it from his

parents. After all this was a school assignment, his parents always made time to help out if it involved the boys education. If something had prevented that it would have been serious – and Riley would have heard about it.

“You picked the ocean?” Riley asked feeling somewhat guilty for some unknown reason by Carson's last comment.

“Yeah,” Carson said looking up from his notebook.

“Why?” Riley asked shaking his head a little.

“I don't know,” Carson said sounding a little shy at the moment as he looked back down at his notebook doodling a little. “I guess, you were really into it when you were in high school and you used to tell me some stuff sometimes and I always thought it was kind of cool. So when I had to pick a topic I figured it would be an interesting topic.”

“So you want to copy me,” Riley said with a smug look of teasing.

“No,” Carson said defensively. “I just had to come up with something.” Riley gave a small chuckle before he heard his Mom's voice from behind.

“Okay, we're all ready,” she said. Riley then felt her lift him up under the armpits from behind. Before he knew it she had sat back down in a chair. Before Riley could even react she was in front of him buckling some straps that rested on his tummy. Riley looked around realizing in stunned horror that his Mom had just placed him in a stroller.

“W-what is is this?” Riley uttered, his brain still trying to catch up to the current situation.

“I rented it from the aquarium for you,” Mom said before pulling a v-shaped belt down over Riley's shoulders and clicking it into the buckle at his crotch

“Why?” Riley dribbled out.

“We're going to need to get through the whole aquarium today and we don't have all the time in the world, we need to keep up a good pace, so I thought this would be easier for you.”

“I'm not that slow,” Riley yipped bordering on a shriek. “Let me out right now.”

“Riley enough,” Mom said taking his arm and wrapping a blue plastic wristband around his wrist. “Its going to be really crowded in there as well and you know you have a tendency to get washed away in a crowd, and you know with your issues I would feel a whole lot better being able to keep a close eye on you.”

Riley stuttered trying to say something yet he couldn't form any words as his eyes began to get watery.

“Just relax,” Mom said in a soothing tone. “Why don't you use your paci,” she said slipping his pacifier into his mouth. Riley pushed his head back against the stroller as he spit the pacifier out.

“This is stupid,” Riley mewled as he went to undo the straps,

yet no matter how he struggled with them he couldn't get them undone, not too mention he wasn't even entirely sure how they went together? Unlike his car seat there wasn't a big red button signaling to push here. The buckle that held everything together was a plain black circle and had raised ridges where each buckle met. It seemed to get it undone Riley would have to push in all the ridges together towards the center, as he tried to do just that he found it an impossibility. “Let me out,” Riley whined looking up at his Mom with a pleading look.

“Enough of that,” Mom said shooing his hands away from the buckle. She then picked the pacifier up out of his lap and slipped it between Riley's lips. “I want you to use the stroller today,” Mom said not unsympathetically as she stroked the side of his head. “Now keep that in your mouth for a bit and relax.”

Riley averted his eyes frowning around the pacifier.

“C'mon Riley,” Carson said. “You don't have to walk around or nothing today, honestly it sounds pretty cushy.”

Riley could only give a glare towards his brother. Walking through the ticketing gates they came into the main atrium of the aquarium. The sun was shining through the huge skylight. In the middle of the room was a large open area with benches and near the back of the room was a massive glass wall containing a multitude of colorful fish. There were hallways with decorated archways and letters that spelled out the exhibits. Mom was standing with a map in her hand.

“Where should we go first, I wonder?” she said as she gently pushed Riley's stroller back and forth absentmindedly.

“The sharks,” Carson said pointing to a hallway that had what appeared to be broken boards put together haphazardly with large red letters “Castaway Cove” written out overhead. Riley went to chide his brother as he watched him pointing and looking like an excitable little kid. He found himself pausing as he realized he still had the pacifier in his mouth. Riley decided to keep quiet. It wouldn't take a genius to see how making comments that Carson was acting like a little kid would backfire on Riley.

Soon enough Riley found himself being pushed along under the glass tube which the sharks and other fish swam all around. Riley still had the pacifier in his mouth, it was pointless to take it out. He had tried of course but his parents were always keen to put it back in with the reminder that it was good for helping him calm down. The only time he could take it out on his own was when he found himself alone, times like that were becoming increasingly rare. Riley looked up at a mako shark swimming overhead. He gave a small sigh. As he sat watching the fish swim he did actually find himself calm down a little. The ocean had always had that effect on him. Despite everything being around the aquatic creatures did seem to make Riley feel just a bit better.

Riley saw Carson moving along taking a stop by each of the information plaques and taking notes as well as using his phone to take what seemed like a million and one pictures. That's when Riley noticed how dark it was in the tunnel. His

Mom had the stroller pointed straight ahead and Riley could see a particular dark corner near a staff door coming up. He smirked a little, it was perfect.

“You like the sharks?” Riley heard his Mom ask. Riley looked up to see his Mom peering over at him from behind the stroller. Riley smiled and nodded. Mom gave a little smile before she began to push the stroller forward. As they went past the door in the darkened corner. Riley took the pacifier out from his mouth and tossed it as subtly as he could into the darkness. His heart beat in his chest as he waited a couple of seconds expecting to hear his Mom scold him any minute for throwing the pacifier, yet the stroller kept moving forward. Riley sat back with relief as he smiled, happy to finally be rid of the accursed thing. As they kept moving along Riley began to fidget. He was starting to feel restless. He spent some time trying to get the straps undone. When it became abundantly clear that he was not getting them undone he let out a low frustrated grumble. Knowing he was trapped in the stroller until someone let him out was mortifying. Here he was actually stuck in a stroller like a little toddler. The group made their way out of the shark exhibit. Mom came to a stop and came to the front.

“How ya doing?” she asked. “Need to go potty?” Riley felt his face go red.

“Noo,” he yelped with an embarrassed look.

“Just asking,” Mom said.

“I want to get out of this thing,” Riley said pulling at the

straps again.

“We've been over this,” Mom said. “You're staying in there.”

“But Mommy,” Riley groaned as his face scrunched and he pulled his body forward as if the straps themselves were tightening around him.

“Riley,” Mom said with a stern tone as she put a hand on his chest. “Are you really going to throw a little temper tantrum about this?

Riley stopped and slumped back into the chair. It dawned on him that he really had been acting more like a little kid than an adult. Yet what was he supposed to do, his Mom didn't seem to listen to him otherwise.

“Deep breaths honey,” Mom said rubbing his chest a little.

“I'm fine,” Riley grumbled frowning as he did so.

“Maybe you should use your pacifier for a bit,” Mom suggested. She went to grab it when she realized it was nowhere to be found. “What happened?” Mom said in a questioning tone.

“I don't know,” Riley said in his most innocent voice wearing the most blameless expression he could muster. “It must have fallen somewhere.”

“Well no matter,”Mom said with a little chuckle as she disappeared behind the stroller. Riley could hear her digging around in the bag she had brought in with her that was currently hanging on the stroller handle. “Here we go,” Mom

said appearing back in front of Riley with another pacifier in hand. This one had blue guard and an airplane on the button with a red handle. Riley groaned silently as he let his Mom press it into his mouth. Of course she had another one, not that he hadn't known but the fact that she had brought multiple with her annoyed Riley. The implication that she had thought that he might lose one and need a replacement was bad enough, the fact that Riley had only played into that belief had only served to sting him.

“And just so you don't lose this one,” Mom said as she took a strap that was tied to the handle of the pacifier already and clipped the other end onto the bib of Riley's overalls. Riley looked at the strap as he felt a pang of embarrassment hit him realizing that his Mom had just clipped a paci strap onto him. Riley didn't know how to feel. Sure he was angry, but he was also horribly humiliated with the newest accessory. However before he could even think of a retort his Mom had already gotten back up and began to push the stroller along asking Carson what he wanted to see next. Riley sat back in his stroller sucking on the pacifier. He had nothing better do. There was no way he was going to be able to get rid of this thing without his Mom knowing it was intentional now.

“Hey look,” Carson said from behind. “There's a dolphin show.”

Chapter 8

The Rough Patch Part 8 - Chapter 8

The Aquarium 2

Riley rolled his eyes from his stroller as they approached the ticket desk to the dolphin show.

“What do you think Riley,” Mom said peering over the top at Riley in his stroller. “Want to see the dolphins?”

Riley let out a blank “I guess”as his pacifier fell from his mouth as he looked up at his Mom. She seemed to take it as a satisfactory answer and didn't even go to replace the pacifier back into his mouth. Riley figured she took it that he was calm enough to now go with out it. Getting up to the ticketing desk they were greeted by a blue shirted staff person.

“Can we get three tickets for the dolphin show?” Mom asked. The staff person smiled with some affirmation as he typed away at a keyboard before sucking some air in through his teeth.

“Looks like we only have two seats left for this show,” he said

“Is there another time?” Mom asked. The staff person responded with a tight smile.

“I'm afraid not, this is our last show for the day,” he said apologetically. Mom gave a little frown. Riley was a little happy though. He didn't have any interest in seeing some dolphins do some routing that they had been trained to do. In

fact it was his opinion that there was very little substance to gleam from such a thing for a school report, it was completely different than how they acted in the wild. That and he wasn't a particular fan of dolphins in the first place. There were a lot of misconceptions about the creatures which shows like these seemed to instill in the public.

“Oh that's too bad,” Mom said as she turned to look at the boys.

“Darn, I could have gotten some good photos,” Carson said looking disappointed. Mom gave him a sympathetic look before her eyebrows raised upon looking at Riley, she then turned back towards the staff person.

“What if we just needed two seats?” she asked. “I mean could he just sit on my lap, and we would of course pay for three seats” she said motioning towards Riley. The staff person peered over the counter to see Riley sitting in the stroller.

“Yeah, that would be fine,” he said. “And no need to pay extra, the little guy would get in for free anyways.”

“Great,” Mom smiled as she took out her purse and paid. Riley found his face going a little hot at being referred to as the little guy, not too mention the implication of him getting in free as it only confirmed how everyone saw him. The guy truly thought Riley was a little kid – and who could blame him. Mom then wheeled Riley over to the stroller parking area. She got him unstrapped and lifted him up into her arms.

“Mommy,” Riley mewled at being carried like this, especially

in public. “I can walk.”

“You're sitting with me anyways,” Mom said. Riley let out a little growl of anger. “Hush now,” Mom said giving Riley a few pats to his behind as she held him on her hip. “The shows about to start, we need to hurry” she said before lifting up his pacifier and popping it into his mouth. As they found their seats Riley could only grumble on his Mom's lap not even realizing he was suckling away on the pacifier out of instinct. He crossed his arms to show he wasn't happy, his Mom seemed to take no notice as she wrapped her own arms around him holding him close.

The show began and as Riley had expected it was the run of mill dolphin show filled with dolphins jumping through the air and doing tricks. But the obnoxious part came as Mom would grab Riley's hands and clap them together for him after every trick and ask him if he thought that one was cool, as if that would somehow make him start to enjoy the show. Riley gave no response, only frowning behind the pacifier.

The show came to an end and Riley found himself strapped back into the stroller. The group made their way through some more exhibits. In one of the exhibits they came upon a tank containing some stingrays that people could reach in and touch. Carson had immediately gone and and plunged his hand in the water.

“Want to pet the stingrays?” Mom asked looking over at Riley.

“No,” Riley replied curtly.

“Oh come on it will be fun,” Mom coaxed. Riley rolled his eyes. Just what did she take him for? It was like she had forgotten that something like this wasn't exactly a new experience for him. “You know Riley if you keep up this gloomy attitude this day is going to drag on forever. It would do you a world of good to at least try to have some fun.”

Riley let out a sigh, there was some truth in what his Mom said. He had been only focusing on the things that bothered him, then again how could he not. As Riley thought a little more on it an idea came to him. Maybe if he started acting more upbeat his Mom would let him out of the stroller. After all he couldn't pet a stingray from in it.

“Well I guess I could pet one,” Riley said putting on a small smile.

“Great,” Mom said as she knelt down and unbuckled him. Much to Riley's disappointment she d lifted him up opting to hold him in her arms as she sat on the edge of the tank. “Here comes one,” Mom said leaning forward with Riley. With nothing better to do Riley leaned down sticking his hand into the pool and touched the stingray as it glided past. The stingray then went under Carson's fingers.

“Gahh, its slimy,” Carson exclaimed pulling his hand out of the water.

“Of course it is,” Riley said smugly as he then went on to pontificate about the biology of stingrays. As he came to an end he realized at some point Carson had taken out his notebook and was furiously writing. “What are you doing?”

Riley asked.

“Oh I'm just writing this down, it will be good for my paper,” Carson said.

“That's cheating,” Riley said moreso in jest than actually being serious. “You're supposed to be doing the research yourself not just writing down what I say and not giving me any credit.”

“Wha,” Carson hummed as he looked at his brother with some confusion. “I don't think it really matters where I get the information.”

“Riley's right,” Mom said smiling a little. “Your brother is an expert after all.” Riley smiled a little seeing his Mom was playing along.

“Uh huh,” Riley nodded. “You should have to pay me a consulting fee.”

“Yeah, okay,” Carson said sarcastically as he rolled his eyes.

“Carson,” Mom said. “Riley is right, pay him for his time.” Both of the boys looked at their Mom with some surprise. Riley would have never expected her to go along with it this far. For once things felt normal with his Mom respecting his actual stature and not treating him like a little toddler who didn't know anything.

“Um I guess,” Carson said still a little shocked.

“Twenty dollars,” Riley said. “That's my fee.”

“Twenty dollars!” Carson exclaimed. He looked to their Mom who only nodded. A minute later Carson was fishing a couple of bills out of his wallet handing them over to Riley who stuffed it into the front pocket of his overalls. He did feel a little bad about taking the money from Carson, twenty dollars was certainly a bit of change for a thirteen year old. But as Riley saw it, he really did need the money, more than Carson anyways. Riley still had to figure out how to pay for a car with his meager finances and money was money regardless of where it came from. He decided he would pay Carson back when he got his situation under control.

As good as it felt to have his Mom regard him as an adult with a certain set of knowledge, that feeling was short lived as Riley was returned back to the stroller and they began to move on. Still Riley did feel somewhat better. Yet sometime later he began to feel his restlessness flare back up.

They were back in the main area as Carson sat on a bench putting together some of his notes while Mom looked at a map.

“I guess we'll go to the freshwater exhibit next,” Mom suggested. “What do you think of that Riley?” Mom asked regarding her eldest son in his stroller. Riley gave no response as he was busy pushing against the restraints of the stroller. “Whats the matter?” Mom asked. “Doesn't that sound interesting?”

Riley shook his head. “I don't want to go,” Riley whined kicking his feet a little. The freshwater exhibit sounded

dreadfully boring. Riley had always been more interested in saltwater species anyways. Who wanted to look at a bunch of lake fish? Mom knelt down in front of Riley. He expected for her to plop the pacifier back into his mouth yet she made no move to do such a thing instead placing a hand on his knee.

“And what is it that you want to do?” she asked with a smile.

“I want out of this stupid stroller,” Riley said seeing his chance to vent his frustrations. “I've been sitting in it all day.”

“I guess you're right,” Mom said with a nod. Riley was surprised to hear her agree with him. However she stood back up and went behind the stroller. “Carson wait here a moment, I'm gonna take Riley somewhere so he can stretch out his legs a little,” she said. Carson just gave a nod keeping his nose buried in his notebook. Riley wasn't sure why they had to go anywhere, couldn't she just let him where they were? Still he wasn't about to complain if it meant being freed and being able to walk on his own two feet.

They came to a stop in front of a glass door, yet Riley hadn't been able to see where they were headed as his Mom had faced the stroller away from the door.

“Where are we?” Riley asked with some hesitation.

“Someplace where you can burn off that energy,” Mom said as she unbuckled him from the stroller before lifting him up into her arms. His Mom then lifted up the pacifier and slipped it into Riley's mouth. “This will be perfect,” she said as she then opened up the door. Riley could hear the sounds of

children laughing and screaming. He turned around to see they were in a large room. He could see kids and parents all over the place. In the room was a white picket fence perimeter encasing a large area that housed a play area. There were rubber logs and large fish that kids were climbing all over as well as a large play structure with slides and a ball pit. Riley's eyes went wide. Just what was his Mom even thinking? Riley didn't even have a chance to question this as his Mom plopped him down on a counter at the front of the play area.

“Hi there,” a bubble lady in a blue polo said coming up to the desk where a computer sat. “Joining us in the play area.”

“I was hoping to drop him off,” Mom said.

“For sure,” the lady said as she began to type away on the computer. “So our rate for a drop off is thirty an hour does that sound good?' the lady asked.

“I guess,” Mom said as she began digging in her purse for her wallet.

“Oh you pay when you pick him up,” the lady said. “I just need you to sign right here,” the lady said pushing forward a tablet. “And we do ask that you take off his shoes and keep them with you so they don't get lost.” Just then there was the sound of a screaming kid. The staff person then held up a finger with an apologetic smile as she went away to deal with the disturbance. Riley's Mom was busy signing the tablet as Riley finally was able to wrap his head around what was happening.

“What are you doing?” Riley hissed. “You think this is okay?”

“Of course,” Mom said as she went and began to remove Riley's shoes. “You need some time out of the stroller and you can do that here without me having to worry about you getting lost in the crowds.”

“You're going to leave me here?” Riley exclaimed in disbelief.

“I need to get back with Carson so he can continue to work on his project. So I want you to run around here for a bit. I'll come get you once we are done with the freshwater exhibit, so you'll only be here for thirty, forty minutes tops.”

Riley could only blink back in astonishment.

“Its not going to be that bad, you'll see,” Mom said as she popped the pacifier into Riley's mouth, which had been rendered silent by his shock.

“Okay looks like we're all ready,” the lady said returning to the desk. “So Riley ready to have some fun?” she asked looking at the computer screen to confirm his name. Riley could say nothing in return.

“I'll be back soon, okay,” Mom said as she gave Riley a kiss to the cheek. The lady grabbed Riley from behind sliding him across the desk before setting him onto her hip.

“Wave bye bye to Mommy,” she cooed as she bounced him up and down a little. Riley let the pacifier fall from his mouth as he watched his Mom walk out of the room. Upon getting

set on the ground the staff lady then pinned a small yellow button onto Riley's overalls. “This is to let us know you're a drop off and to keep an eye on you,” the woman said. Riley made no response as he was still overwhelmed by all that was happening. “C'mon lets get you playing,” she said taking Riley's hand and leading him out into the center of the play area. “Do you want to go down the slide, or maybe go climbing?” she asked pointing out all the different play equipment that littered the area. Riley didn't say anything opting to walk away without a word.

Looking around he saw lots of other kids some of them with parents while others were like him adorned with their own small yellow buttons. He found a large rubber log and crawled into it before scrunching up inside. He wanted to be somewhere where no one would bother him. He was going to sit here until his Mom came back. There was no way he was actually going to run around and play.

As Riley sat another problem arose. He could feel the pressure building in his bladder. He really needed to go. He wondered what he was supposed to do? He poked his head out through a hole in the top of the log. He didn't see a bathroom anywhere and was left wondering what the other kids did if they needed the bathroom. He saw another blue shirted staff member wandering around supervising the other kids. He toyed with the idea of asking for assistance but relented. He knew his Mom had probably not divulged his age, and they all probably thought he was a little kid. If he did ask to use the bathroom they would probably feel the

need to accompany him and probably try to assist him in the bathroom. Riley then remembered earlier in the day as well when he had needed to ask Carson to help him with the overalls as well. Riley retreated back into the log. He was just going to have to wait. He was determined to do just that. He was an adult, he could hold it. As Riley sat he didn't know how much time had passed and his need for the bathroom was becoming more dire by the minute. Suddenly Riley heard a voice.

“Hey kid are going to move?” Riley was surprised by the sudden voice causing him to jump a little as he turned to see a boy's face hanging down from the hole at the top of the log. Riley felt a spurt escape into his pull-up. A moment later he couldn't stop it as the floodgates released and he felt his crotch go warm as the pull-up began to swell up. Riley looked down with a small groan. He had accidents before, but not like this which he blamed solely on the fact that he had been surprised. As much as he hated it he was somewhat grateful to see that the pull-up had held. If he had been wearing the training undies he would no doubt be sporting a wet spot on his pants.

“Are you going to move?” the other boy asked again completely clueless as to the situation Riley found himself in.

“No, go away,” Riley said furrowing his brow as he scrunched back up to try and figure out what he was going to do now.

“I'm coming in then,” the other boy said worming his body in

through the hole until he was then sitting next to Riley. Looking at the boy Riley estimated that he was around five or six years old, he had black hair that was cut short and lisped a little as he talked since he was missing a tooth. Riley noticed he also had a yellow button pinned onto his red polo shirt. The boy immediately started in with a flurry of questions, what was Riley's name, how old was he and on and on. Riley tried his best to ignore the kid hoping he would eventually give up and leave him alone.

“I'm James by the way,” the boy said smiling.

“Look can you just leave me alone,” Riley said.

“Whats your name,” James asked again.

“Its Riley, happy now?” Riley said with a scowl.

“How old are you?” James asked. Riley lets his head roll to the side. There was no way he was about to answer that question and so remained silent.

“You must be little,” James said pointing at Riley's pacifier dangling on his chest. “Are you hiding because you miss your mommy?”

“No,” Riley yelped as his face went a little red. He grabbed the pacifier and shoved it into the front pocket of his overalls.

“Don't worry your Mommy will be back soon,” James said patting Riley on he shoulder. “My little sister gets sad too when we get left with a babysitter but then we play together and she is happy.”

“I don't miss my Mommy,” Riley said. “I-I mean my Mom,” he quickly stuttered.

“Come and play with me, and then you'll feel better,” James said.

“I don't want to,” Riley repeated for what seemed like the hundredth time.

“Then I'll just sit with you, okay,” James said making himself comfortable. Riley let out a huff of air through his nose. He knew James was just trying to be helpful in the only way he knew how, it was just Riley's luck that the help was not what he really needed at the moment. He needed to find some way to get rid of this kid and sitting in the log wasn't going to work.

“Okay what do you want to play?” Riley asked with a sigh.

“Lets go to the ball pit,” James enthused with a cheeky smile before scurrying out of the log. Riley followed slowly after. As soon as he emerged onto his feet James was waiting and grabbed his hand pulling him along to the play structure. Riley actually smirked a little. The ball pit would be the perfect place to lose James. However as Riley was pulled along he instantly became aware of the soggy pull up between his legs, it felt so swollen and wet. He looked down at one moment expecting it to be noticeable yet the overalls were baggy enough that it didn't appear that anyone would be able to tell.

James pulled Riley up the steps into the mesh enclosed ball

pit. He jumped in pulling Riley along with him. Riley sat up seeing that James had finally let go of his hand. James was jumping all around throwing balls towards Riley telling him to catch. Riley played along for a little bit although with zero enthusiasm hoping that James would get bored soon. The boys spent some time in the ball pit eventually starting to throw balls into the plastic hoop in the corner. Every attempt Riley made at getting to the exit when he thought James wasn't looking was immediately thwarted by James grabbing him from behind before he could crawl out and then jumping backwards, still holding Riley, into the sea of plastic balls. Riley accepted he wasn't going to get out and sat gloomily in the ball pit. If anything he was becoming rather tired out.

“Whats the matter?” James asked looking down at Riley.

“I want to get out,” Riley said.

“Okay,” James said. Riley let out a sigh of relief finally being able to crawl out of the ball pit. “So what do you want to play now?” James asked as the two of them walked to the center of the play area. Riley groaned as he came to a standstill. This was starting to remind him of Nathan in the park. How come Riley seemed to only come into contact with kids who wouldn't take no for an answer.

“We could go down the slides or go crawling through the logs,” James began to say. An idea came to Riley as he remembered what he had done with Nathan in the park.

“Lets race to the slides,” Riley said. James smiled upon hearing that Riley was ready to go along with him. “But on

one condition," Riley said holding up a finger. "If I get there first then you have to leave me alone."

James seemed to agree with the terms of the wager. Riley was a little unsure if he would be able to best James in a footrace if his experience with Nathan was anything to go off. Yet it would be more than simple to find a hiding spot over by the play area.

"Okay I'm ready," James said getting down into a runners position.

"Three, two, one," Riley counted before shouting go. James took off outpacing Riley right away. Just as Riley was about to turn off into another direction he felt himself get lifted off the ground into the air as he let out a yelp. He then looked to see it was his Mom who had grabbed him and now had him on her hip.

"Hey sweetie having fun?" she asked with a smile. Riley stammered a little still surprised at suddenly being grabbed.

"Are you Riley's Mommy?" James asked as he stood looking on.

"I am," Mom said nodding her head. "And who might you be?"

"I'm James. Me and Riley were racing to the slides." the boy said with a proud look.

"I saw that," Mom said before turning to Riley. "It looked like you were having fun. Want to stay and play with your friend

for a bit longer? I could come back later.”

Riley shook his head furiously. How could she even suggest such a thing, not too mention calling James his friend. She knew he was twenty years old so why did she seem to think he would want to stay and play with some kid.

“I see,” Mom chuckled a little. “Want to go back to the aquarium huh, well say goodbye to your friend.” James waved goodbye as Riley was carried back to the entrance. She held him as she paid for the time he had spent in the play area and returning the yellow button. She brought him out of the play area doors where Carson was waiting near the stroller. His Mom set him in the seat before grabbing Riley's shoes from out of the bag stowed away in the bottom.

“Looks like you had some fun in there,” Mom said as she put Riley's shoes back on.

“I did not,” Riley protested loudly.

“Not so loud,” Mom said as she began to strap him back into the stroller. “You can't lie to me mister,” Mom said with an all knowing smile. “I saw you in that ball pit and running around with your friend.”

“He's not my friend, and that was torture,” Riley said furrowing his brows.

“If you say so,” Mom said. “You look a little sweaty for a guy who wasn't having any fun. Why don't you take a sip of water,” Mom said as she produced a plastic water bottle and unscrewed the cap before bringing it up to Riley's lips.

Riley took a sip, since he was actually thirsty.

“Can we leave now,” Riley said in a sour tone.

“Not yet,” Mom said. “We still have a couple of exhibits left to see. Now that you've burned off some energy why don't you sit back and relax for a bit, it seems all that excitement has made you a little cranky, maybe someone is a little tired?” Mom said pulling the pacifier from Riley's front pocket and popping it into his mouth. Riley sat back with a deflated look.

Soon enough they were in another exhibit, this one Arctic themed. Riley however was finding it hard to concentrate as the pull-up he was wearing was starting to become cold and clammy. Making matters worse was the stroller straps pushing it up against his body. Riley could help but fidget and push against the straps but could find no way to get comfortable. While looking at the penguins they came upon a cut out with face holes to make the people look like penguins standing next to one another.

“Oh lets get a picture,” Mom said seeing as the cutout had two face holes. Both boys let out little groans but knew there Mom was going to get her picture whether they liked it or not. Riley was unstrapped from his stroller he walked behind the cut out taking the smaller penguins since it was the one he could reach. Afterwards Riley walked back to the stroller taking a seat, knowing full well he was going to be put back in it anyways. As he sat, he once again began squirming around trying to find a more comfortable position.

“Are you okay sweetie?” Mom asked kneeling in front of Riley.

“I'm fine,” Riley said shifting in his seat.

“Are you sure? You've been fidgeting this whole time,” Mom said as she looked at him with an expression that said she knew something was amiss. “Do you need to go potty?”

“N-no,” Riley stuttered. Even if he did want to go to the bathroom to get the pull-up off he knew his Mom wouldn't let him go alone. The last thing he wanted was for anyone to find out what he had done. He had already resigned himself to the idea that he was going to be stuck in the wet thing until they got home. He would figure out someway to get rid of the thing then.

“Really,” Mom said sounding unconvinced as she then placed her hand on Riley's crotch. The boy's eyes went wide as he tried to scoot back to pull away from the unwelcome intrusion. The next thing he knew his Mom had grabbed onto some of the material and pulled up. Riley was shocked as he heard the sound of snaps coming undone. The overalls had been fitted with snaps in the crotch, Riley wondered how he could not have noticed. He looked on horrified as his soggy pull-up puffed out from the opening right at the spot where the wetness indicator was located. The symbol had of course completely disappeared having been replaced by a darker tinge making it beyond obvious what state Riley's pull-up was in.

“Oh dear looks like you had an accident,” Mom said

completely unfazed by what she was seeing. “All right guess now's a good as time as any,” she said as she plucked Riley out of the stroller not even bothering to re-do the snaps. She grabbed her large bag from the bottom of the stroller and slung it around her arm.

“Carson, I need to take Riley for a change, stick with the stroller until we get back,” she instructed. Carson only grunted as he looked through photo's on his phone. “Carson did you hear me?” Mom asked.

“Yeah, stick with the stroller got it,” Carson said with some preteen annoyance at the nagging. Riley began to whimper a little as his Mom started to walk.

“It'll be okay,” Mom cooed as she placed the pacifier in his mouth and then began to rub his back. “We"ll have you nice and dry in no time.”

Riley could only hide his face in his Mom's shoulder completely overcome with shame. There was no way this day could get any worse.

Chapter 9

The Rough Patch Part 9 - Chapter 9

Aquarium 3

Riley's Mom carried him into the bathroom. Thankfully it was a family restroom so Mom was able to lock the door and ensure that no one else would enter. Mom set Riley down on the ground. Riley looked around. It was a normal bathroom by all accounts. There was a toilet and a sink. There was a diaper changing station folded up against the wall as well as a small bench. The walls were decorated with seaweed and fish. Mom set her bag onto the bench.

“Lets get these shoes off first,” Mom said kneeling down and helping Riley take off his shoes as he steadied himself on her shoulders. Riley was whimpering a little as he stood on the tile floor feeling completely ashamed. He had accidents before, but that had been at home and really it had been only because he didn't want to use the potty when other people were in the room. Each time he always told himself he could hold it until he had the room to himself – that was until he would seemingly just wet himself out of nowhere. Being out in public like this was a totally different feeling. The pull-up was completely different as well. The way if clung to him keeping everything contained as if it was saying it was okay to do this, that was what was expected. Mom seemed to take notice of Riley's discomfort.

“You didn't do anything wrong,” Mom said gently as she

hugged Riley. “Everything is going to be okay.” As she released him Riley gave a little nod back, wiping a tear from his eye. The hug had actually made him feel better. Mom then unbuckled the straps of the overalls pulling them all the way down to Riley's ankles as he lifted up his feet so she could get them off completely. Riley looked down at the pull-up. It was sagging on his waist and felt heavy. Riley let out a deep breath looking up not able to look at the sight. Mom then grabbed Riley's shirt and pulled it up over his head, confusing Riley.

“What are you doing?” Riley bleated. The fact that he was now standing in the middle of the bathroom in nothing but a wet pull up seemingly knocking him out of the pity party he had been wrapped up in.

“I'm helping you get changed,” Mom said as she gathered up the clothes and shoes and setting them on the bench.

“Is it really necessary to take off all my clothes to change a pull-up?” Riley asked with some annoyance.

“You're not putting on another pull-up,” Mom said. Riley looked back at her raising an eyebrow not quite sure what she meant. She then went to the bag and pulled out some sort of mat. She then unfolded the changing station and set the mat on it. Before Riley could question her further as to what she was doing he found himself already lifted up into the air and being set on the table.

“Mommy wha –“ Riley began to ask before he was silenced as his Mom gently pushed him back so he was lying on the

table.

“It will be easier to change you up here,” Mom said before tearing away the sides of the wet pull-up and pulling it out from under.

Riley laid in a state of confusion. It was true that this was how his Mom had put the pull-up on him that morning, but that had been when he had been refusing to put it on. He was more than happy now to put on something dry, even another pull-up. Yet hadn't she just said he wasn't wearing another pull-up?

“Am I going to wear some of the undies,” Riley said with some hopefulness, surprised by the fact that he was actually happy with the idea of being back into training undies.

“Nope,” Mom said stepping away for a moment to dispose of the pull-up. “I'm going to have you wear a diaper for the rest of the time.”

“What,” Riley yelped as he shot up.

“Riley,” Mom gasped as she quickly got back over to the changing station and pushed him back down. “Don't move around like that, you'll fall. You need to stay still.”

Riley was having none of it as he pushed against his Mom trying to get up. His Mom merely shook her head before she fastened him to the table, clicking the safety strap across his chest.

“Mommy nooo,” Riley mewled puckering his lips into a

whine.

“Then you should have stayed still,” Mom said as she went and grabbed some things out of her bag. “Although you were always a wiggler,” she said with a hint of reminiscence. returning to the table and giving Riley a little tickle to his stomach.

“It was just one accident,” Riley said going into a panic. “I won't have another one, I promise,”

Riley then heard some plastic snap open, a second later he let out a little squeal upon feeling the cold touch of a wipe against his groin.

“I'm not punishing you for having an accident,” Mom said continuing to wipe Riley down even lifting his legs up to wipe down his backside. “I was going to have you wear a diaper anyways.”

Riley went to try and undo the strap against his chest before his Mom grabbed his hands away and set them above his head with a stern look.

“But why –“ Riley began to question before letting out another yelp of surprise upon feeling another cold sensation hit him as his Mom began to spread around some cream.

“We're going to be here for a bit longer and then we have a long trip home,” Mom continued with her explanation. “There will be traffic for sure and I also don't want to be stopping at night for bathroom breaks. I don't really trust the pull-ups to not leak and this way I won't have to wake you to

change you when we get home. Its going to be well past your bedtime you know, so I want you to try fall asleep in the car. That's why I'm getting you dressed for bed now."

Riley couldn't really focus on what his Mom was saying as he was far more concerned by the feeling of his Mom spreading the lotion through every nook and cranny of his most sensitive region. Riley let out a mortified little whimper.

"Oh quit being so dramatic," Mom said with a chuckle. "I'm your Mommy this is nothing new to me."

Riley let out a grunt. How could she even say that? He was twenty years old, not some little baby, There was no way he wasn't going to be weirded out by this. Mom finished as she used a wipe to clean her hands. Riley then heard the ominous crinkle. He looked over to see her with the unfolded diaper in her hand. Riley began to kick his legs in protest.

"Riley," Mom said with stern look. Riley lips turned down as he went limp like a wet noodle. There was nothing he could do to stop this. Mom grabbed his ankles and lifted them up before sliding the diaper under him before pushing his legs apart. She then pulled the front of the diaper up before securing it with the tapes. "There all done," Mom said in a sing song voice as she unbuckled him and lifted him off the table, setting him down barefoot onto the cold tile floor. "Don't you feel better that you're all dry now?"

Riley scowled as he turned his head away. His Mom busied herself with packing up the supplies. Riley looked down at the diaper. It had pictures of baby Sesame Street characters

on it. It was a bona fide baby diaper. Riley was shocked. How could he even fit into something like this. He squirmed a little feeling the bulk in between his legs. He thought the pull-ups had been bulky but these were on a whole different level. Just then another harrowing thought crossed his mind. His Mom had said something about getting him ready for bed. Yet Riley never wore pajamas, just underwear and for tonight the diaper would be his underwear. Did that mean she was actually going to take him out of the bathroom in just a diaper? Riley felt his stomach drop at the thought of being sat in his stroller in nothing but a baby diaper.

“Mommy please don't make me go out there in just a diaper,” he said with a quivering voice. Mom turned around with a perplexed look.

“What are you talking about?” Mom asked cocking her head to the side.

“Um well you said I was getting dressed for bed,” Riley said fidgeting with his hands out of anxiety.

“Oh, don't worry,” Mom said with a laugh as she took a seat at the bench digging through her bag. “I brought some jammies along for you to wear.” She said pulling out a bundle from the bag. “Now come here so I can help you put them on,” she said motioning him over to the bench. Riley walked over with some relief, that was downplayed by the crinkle of the diaper and the way he could feel the back sway from side to side with every step. His Mom then picked him up setting Riley onto her lap.

She let the fabric unfurl as she threaded Riley legs into the clothing. As his Mom pulled the legs up Riley felt his feet come to a stop. He looked down to see that his feet were now encased in fabric. She then got his arms into some sleeves before setting him on the ground. Riley pursed his lips seeing he was wearing a footed sleeper. He was annoyed that she would put him in such an infantile get up. The sleeper was white and blue striped and there was a pastel sailboat prominently displayed on the chest. Riley felt her then zip him up in the back. As the sleeper tightened around him he noticed it was very soft, yet was not baggy in the slightest. The bulge of the diaper was beyond noticeable. Still the clothes were not uncomfortable. Riley wondered what was taking so long as his Mom seemed to be fiddling with something at the back of his neck. After a few moment he heard some buttons snapping together.

“There, all done,” Mom announced. She then picked up her bag and then picked up Riley putting him on her hip. “And one more thing,” Mom said as she fished the pacifier from her bag. She attached the strap to his collar before slipping the pacifier into Riley's mouth.

As they made their way back to the stroller, Riley knew he probably looked like a total baby. He began to dread what Carson was going to say when he saw him. Getting back to the stroller Mom placed Riley back into his seat. Riley's gaze met Carson who was looking at him.

“You changed his clothes?” Carson questioned.

“Riley is going to sleep on the way home, so I put him in some jammies,” Mom explained. Carson stared at Riley for a moment longer. As Riley sat in his stroller he could feel the anticipation of Carson's next question. Surely he noticed the bulge. Riley's stomach was tightening as he feared the next question from Carson's mouth.

“I think its time to get some dinner, you boys hungry?” Mom then said.

“I'm starving,” Carson said rubbing his stomach, losing whatever interest he had in examining his brother's new outfit. Riley took a deep breath as he was wheeled away, thankful that if Carson had noticed he had not said anything.

The three came into a large cafeteria. It was pretty crowded with families all dining. Riley wasn't sure what time it was but they had been at the aquarium for awhile at that point and given how busy it was he could certainly see that it was probably around a normal time for dinner. The group approached the queue for ordering as they got to the front Mom positioned Riley so that he was faced staring off to the side. Riley's mouth twisted up a little. How was he supposed to see the menu? He couldn't really hear what was being said over the crowd, yet a few moments later he was being wheeled away not once having been asked what he wanted to eat. They moved down the counter and the food was placed on a tray and Carson was entrusted to carry but not without a reminder from Mom to be careful with it, which was met by a gruff “I got it” by Carson. They came into the dining area where the tables were.

“Its pretty packed in here,” Mom noted. As Riley scanned the area he could see how true that was there didn't seem to be an open table anywhere.

“There's a table there,” Carson said pointing across the room. “But there's only two seats.”

“That'll work,” Mom said. “Riley can eat in his stroller.”

Riley held the side of his head against his hand. He had been hoping to at least be able to sit in a normal chair to eat for at least once today. Riley was set at the side of the table as Carson and Mom took the seats opposite one another. Mom had gotten a salad while Carson had a burger and fries. Riley noticed a white bag that had some little fish on it with the words “Little Fin's Meal” on the bag. Riley furrowed his brow realizing that his Mom had ordered a kids meal for him.

“Why do I have to eat that?” Riley whined as his Mom began to pull food out of it.

“No complaining now,” Mom said. “You barely eat what we give you at home and they really jack the prices up on food here.” she explained as she began to unwrap a sandwich from a wrapper. “I'm not going to spend a bunch of money on a meal you won't even eat half off, besides I want you to save some room for after dinner.” Riley was handed a pre-packaged pb&j sandwich that was circular and had the crust cut off of it. Riley looked at the small sandwich with some disdain.

“Oh hang on one moment,” Mom then said plucking the

sandwich from Riley's hand before he could take a bite and setting it onto her plate. She then got up and returned a moment later. Riley felt her put something over his head obstructing his vision for a moment before it was pulled down. Riley looked down to see his Mom had put a plastic disposable bib on him complete with images of cute whales and octopuses and sharks all smiling happily.

“A bib,” Riley breathed out in shock.

“You've been a little sloppy eating lately,” Mom said. “I don't want you getting anymore stains on your clothes today.”

Riley scrunched up his face. He thought about chucking the sandwich back at his Mom, but where would that get him? No doubt a scolding and an empty belly to boot. Riley begrudgingly bit into the sandwich, he was going to eat it fast if that meant the bib came off sooner. As Riley was in the process of eating he took a chomp into the center of the sandwich where most of the jelly was, tearing off the mouthful, a glob of jelly hung before falling straight onto his bib. Riley looked down at the glob with some ire. It was the last thing he needed. His Mom would no doubt take it as proof that he needed the bib. Riley ate a little slower just to make sure that the bib did not get any dirtier.

“How was your sandwich?” Mom asked leaning over to wipe up the glob of jelly on his bib once she noticed he had finished.

“It was small,” Riley mumbled.

“Have some carrots,” Mom said pulling out a bag of small carrots from the bag before she ripped them open and handed them to Riley. He took one out and began to eat, at least he didn't have to worry about any surprise spills with carrots. As the meal proceeded Mom and Carson were talking about the things they had seen. Riley stayed quiet even when they would try to include him. All he really wanted was to go home, he was starting to feel a little tired. Soon Mom and Carson had finally finished their meals.

“Oh that salad was huge,” Mom said as she gathered up the trash onto the plastic tray. “You full Riley?”

“No,” Riley said. “I'm still hungry,” he complained. He wasn't too hungry but still wanted to make a point that his Mom couldn't just give him portions meant for a kid and expect it to fill him up.

“Well you did get some applesauce too,” Mom said pulling a container of applesauce out of the bag before opening it up and putting a spoon in it. “I have to go get something so in the meantime maybe Carson could help you,” she said standing up and grabbing her bag from beneath the stroller.

“Uh okay,” Carson said picking up the container and going to hand it to Riley, unsure of why their Mom couldn't do it herself.

“Carson,” Mom said putting her hand out to stop him. “You need to help him with the spoon.”

Both boys eyes went a little wide as they looked at their Mom.

“He doesn't need too,” Riley yelped. “I can eat it by myself.”

“Absolutely not,” Mom said. “You're not sitting at the table and if I let you hold that you might drop it and get it all over your jammies. I don't have another change for you.” Riley and Carson exchanged nervous looks. “I'll be back in five minutes, Carson help him,” Mom said sternly giving Carson a serious look before she left.

“Well, here it comes,” Carson said sheepishly as he moved the spoon loaded with applesauce towards Riley.

“Stop,” Riley mewled, turning his face away causing the applesauce to smear on his cheek.

“Hey don't do that,” Carson sighed.

“You don't have to feed it to me,” Riley whined. “I'm not a baby.”

“I know that,” Carson said with some frustration as he used a napkin to wipe Riley's face. “But Mom told me I had too. Besides you already told her you were still hungry so she'll just do it herself when she comes back.”

Riley could only glare back at Carson, not willing to be swayed by any reasoning his brother could offer.

“Just eat it nicely so we can get this over with. If you keep moving around then you will really look like a baby with applesauce all over your face.” Carson said.

Riley looked down for a moment with scowl, He then looked up at his brother who had a pleading look on his face with

another spoonful of applesauce ready. Riley could see that Carson was just as uncomfortable with this as he was.

“Fine,” Riley said opening his mouth to receive the spoonful. Riley was now curious. It seemed that Carson was not at all onboard with the things that had been happening with Riley. He certainly never did anything to support his parents decisions. Riley was thinking that maybe he could ask him if he knew if something else was going on. Had their parents ever talked to Carson about Riley's diagnosis or treatment plan? However Riley wasn't even give a chance to interrogate his little brother. Carson was shoveling the applesauce into Riley's mouth at a rapid pace, no doubt in an effort to be done with the task that had been put upon him. At one point Carson shoveled another spoonful into Riley's already full mouth, causing Riley to choke out a small cough sending a bit of applesauce to dribble down his chin.

“Too fast,” Riley said still coughing.

“Sorry,” Carson said apologetically. “Are you okay?”

“I'm fine,” Riley groused. After a few more spoonfuls the applesauce was gone.

“I guess you've eaten enough that Mom will be satisfied,” Carson said with some relief as he threw the container into the bag. “Here for your face,” Carson said handing Riley a napkin. Riley wiped his face. He then looked at his brother, wanting to ask him what he thought about everything that was happening, yet he didn't get a chance as their Mom returned.

“All done with the applesauce I see,” Mom said as she removed the bib from Riley's neck. “Was your brother a good helper?"

“Sure,” Riley said, knowing it would be something that neither boy would ever bring up again.

“I got something for you,” Mom said as she set a bottle onto the table.

“What is that?” Riley said as his lip curled fearing the answer.

“Its for you,” Mom said. “The formula the doctor prescribed finally arrived. You'll be drinking it after every meal. Figured it would be good for you to start now.”

“But that's a baby bottle,” Riley exclaimed.

“We're going to hit up one more exhibit,” Mom said. “So instead of us sitting here and waiting for you to finish you can work on it while we walk.”

“But its a bottle,” Riley reiterated his Mom's explanation not at all answering his original protest.

“Riley, you've been in that stroller all day,” Mom said as if it should be perfectly obvious how the the two things were connected. “So you know it can get a little bumpy sometimes. That formula is very expensive and I don't want you spilling any of it.” she said picking up the bottle and handing it to him.

“I won't do it,” Riley said pushing the bottle away. “I won't drink out of a bottle for a baby.”

“Well I'm sorry, I didn't really have anything else on hand, this was all I could find in the back of the cupboard, we didn't have any sippy cups on hand, so you're just going to have to bear with it.”

Riley shook his head. There were several options he could think of before arriving at this one.

“Its very important that you drink all of this, its to help you grow,” Mom said as her voice grew more authoritative. “If you won't drink it yourself then I will have no choice but to hold you in my arms on a bench out there in the main room and feed it to you myself,” she said. Riley's stomach turned over imagining being in his Mom's arms as she fed him a bottle with all those people passing by.

“Its your choice,” Mom said as she held out the bottle towards him. Riley didn't want to comply he wanted to grab the bottle right out of his Mom's hand and chuck it. But her threat loomed in the air, and Riley could tell it was no mere empty threat. With everything that had been going on, he knew his Mom would do it.

Riley took the bottle into his hands. He looked at the white liquid inside. The bottle itself was plain no cutesy little decorations adorning it. In fact he did sort of recognize it from when Carson had been a baby. He wondered why his Mom had even kept this around. He looked at his Mom who looked on waiting for him to start drinking. Riley brought the nipple up to his mouth and began to suck. Mom gave a nod, satisfied.

“Make sure to drink all of that,” Mom said as she began to push the stroller. “Or I will take over.”

It took Riley a minute to get a good rhythm. It wasn't that much different than the pacifier, and before long a steady stream of formula was coming out. Riley still found it too slow for his liking and no matter how hard he sucked he couldn't get a ton out at once. It was going to take some time to empty the bottle. The other problem was Riley wasn't a huge fan of the formula. It didn't taste terrible but it wasn't good. It was sort of watery mixed with a chalky texture, that was covered up by a strong vanilla taste. Still Riley would happily drink gallons of the stuff if it meant he would increase in size.

Riley settled into a good rhythm as they walked through the exhibit. It was on creatures with bio- luminescence which meant it was dark, something that gave Riley some relief. He could drink the bottle without people looking at him. About halfway through Riley realized he was sucking on air. He removed the bottle from his mouth taking a look, it was finally empty.

“All done,” Mom said noticing as she took the bottle from Riley's hand and gave it shake to make sure it was empty. “So how did it taste?” Mom said as she stowed the bottle away into the bag.

“It wasn't bad,” Riley said as he stretched out his jaw a little. “But it was'nt good either.”

“You'll get used to it,” Mom said as she gave him a smile still

knelt down in front of him.

“I guess,” Riley said in a gloomy monotone.

“Just remember how important it is, we want you to grow,” Mom said. “In fact I think its already starting to work. Did your feet get bigger?” Mom asked as she tickled one of Riley's feet. Riley let out a little giggle.

“Mommy stop it,” Riley said as his face went a little red.

“Okay okay,” Mom said. “You won't have to drink anymore until the morning. Its pretty dark in here you know,” Mom said looking around while she stood up. “Maybe you could close your eyes and fall asleep before we get back to the car, its getting close to your bedtime.”

Fat chance, was all Riley could think. He definitely wasn't going to fall asleep here or in the car. He didn't need a bedtime and now seemed like he perfect opportunity to prove it. As they continued to walk through the exhibit though Riley's eyes began to droop, he fought it off but it was starting to get hard to resist thankfully they came to the end and walked back out into the main atrium that was lit up brightly.

“I think we made it through everything,” Carson said.

“I sure hope so, my feet are killing me,” Mom said.

“I just need a moment to organize my stuff,” Carson said taking a seat on a bench and opening his notebook. Mom looked down at Riley, she frowned a little seeing he was still

awake.

“Okay, while you do that, me and Riley will hit up the gift shop, so meet us there when you're done.”

Riley rolled his eyes as he was pushed along. There Mom was a gift shop fiend and would always make a stop to pick up souvenirs and knick knacks at every opportunity, much to their Dads disapproval. In the gift shop Mom was certainly taking her time. Curiously they seemed to be stopped for a long time in front of one group of shelves. Riley looked over to see playsets all organized nicely onto the shelves. He wondered why she was even looking at stuff like this.

“What do you think of this one,” Mom said showing Riley a playset that had a boat and some action figures of divers and sea creatures included. He wondered why she was even asking his opinion. “Toby might like this one too,” she then mentioned. Riley gave a shrug. He guessed she was getting their cousin a birthday gift or something. Or perhaps she was buying toys for him to play with when he visited since so much of his stuff was already at the house although Riley hadn't noticed any toys.

They then went past shirts and mugs and other normal gift shop fare before coming up to display in the middle of store that had many large marine animal stuffies all arranged on a circular display.

“Oh Riley look at these aren't they adorable,” Mom cooed as she came into view in front of the stroller. “We saw a lot of these animals today, didn't we?” she asked pinching a stuffed

walrus. “Which one did you like the most, you never told me? Riley looked on with a bored expression. “You liked the sharks today didn't you,” she asked picking up a stuffed shark.

“I mean I guess the sharks were cool,” Riley said, who didn't like seeing sharks? “But I also liked the sea turtles they had.” Riley had always had a soft spot for sea turtles. Back in high school when he had gotten serious with his interest in the ocean he had been elated to find a nearby group that was accepting volunteers to help baby sea turtles make it to the sea upon hatching. He had begged his Dad to drive him hours over the state line to volunteer. His Dad had finally agreed. It had been an awesome experience for him and had all but solidified his desire to go into marine biology in the first place.

“Those are both really good” Mom then said as she picked up one of the turtle stuffies “I know you had to put up with a lot today so maybe we should just get both.” Riley didn't even have a chance to respond before his Mom disappeared back behind the stroller with the stuffed animals. Riley scowled. What in the world would even make her think that giving him some stuffed animals was something he wanted. If he had known that answering that question was making it look like he was requesting a certain stuffed animal he wouldn't have answered at all.

Carson then appeared having finished up his work.

“I see you've been shopping,” he said raising an eyebrow.

“We've been finding lots of good things,” Mom said before

taking a shirt and laying it on Carson. “Will this fit you?” she asked.

“Uh yeah I guess,” Carson said lifting the shirt off of himself and handing it back. “Are you done shopping?”

“Yep just gotta pay and then we can go,” Mom said.

“I'm gonna hit up the bathroom one last time then,” Carson said before looking down at Riley. “Do you want to go to?” Carson said giving Riley an awkward look. “You know one last time before we leave.”

“You don't need to worry about Riley,” Mom said. Riley felt his stomach flutter as if he knew what she was about to say. “He's got a diaper on so he'll be fine.”

Riley felt his breath catch in his throat as his face went hot as if he had just eaten the spiciest pepper in the world. He watched as Carson's gaze went to Riley's crotch. Riley looked down as well. Had Carson really not noticed? The bulge was pronounced and Riley could swear it was bigger now that he was sitting down.

“I see,” Carson said with a raised eyebrow before walking off towards the bathroom. Shortly after Riley found himself sat on a bench outside next to his Mom. They had just returned the stroller and were now waiting for Carson to come back. It was dark out already. Sitting out in the night air Riley was humiliated. He couldn't believe his Mom had told Carson about the diaper.

“That was a fun day, huh,” Mom remarked as she looked over

at her son in his footie pajamas. Riley just furrowed his brow refusing to even look at her. “I know that look,” Mom said. “Someone must be grumpy.” Riley could not stay silent any longer.

“Why would you tell him that?” Riley spat out, glaring at his Mom.

“Tell who what?” Mom questioned. “Carson?”

“Yes,” Riley said. “He didn't need to know about the diaper. I shouldn't even be wearing it.”

Mom clicked her tongue a little.

“I though he already knew,” she said. Riley only grunted. Her comment not making him feel any less angry. “I am sorry that I embarrassed you,” she said with a sigh before she reached over putting her arm around Riley and pulling him close. “I really didn't mean too.”

Riley let out a huff of air. A little apology wasn't about to make him forgive her, not just for the diaper, but everything else too. Mom began to rub Riley's arm.

“I know today was a lot for you and I did notice that you were doing your best to put up with it. I just hope you understand that I was making decisions based upon your best interest.”

As much as Riley was still upset with her, he couldn't deny that this was having a strangely comforting effect on him. “I really wanted this to be a good day for you, but that doesn't

mean I can just ignore everything else. I really am trying my best here, so do you think you can forgive me?" his Mom asked.

As Riley looked up at his Mom staring down at him with a gentle look, he found his anger dissipating.

"I forgive you," Riley mumbled as he, without a thought nuzzled into his Mom's side. He knew his Mom could go a little overboard sometimes that was the same as ever.

"And you don't need to worry about Carson, he would never make fun of you. You're his big brother he looks up to you. I think the whole reason he even chose to do a project on the ocean was because of you." Mom said.

"Yeah," Riley hummed. "He might have mentioned that."

"Everything is going to be okay," Mom reassured. "Someday this will all be behind us."

Riley took comfort in his Mom's words. He had to believe that what she said was true. Some day this would all be nothing but memories. Yet Riley then thought that if anyone brought any of this up in the future there would be hell to pay.

Carson finally returned a few minutes later and the group was back at the car. Mom had Riley strapped back into his car seat. She took the turtle stuffie and worked its flippers through the straps saying it could act like a blanket for Riley. With how big the stuffed animal was the only part of Riley that was visible was his head.

“Don't forget I want you to fall asleep on the way home,” Mom reminded as she slipped the pacifier into Riley's mouth. After they had driven for a bit Mom looked in the rear-view mirror to see Riley still awake.

“Aren't you tired yet?” Mom asked. Riley shook his head vehemently. He was determined to stay awake the whole ride home. “Maybe this will help.” Mom said clicking on her phone. The speakers then began to play out some soft music before a voice came on. It began to narrate a story called the Happy Little Fox. As Riley listened he started to be reminded of the stories his parents would read to him at bedtime. This one in particular bearing a striking resemblance to the Riley Rabbit story. There were lots of mentions of taking deep breaths and the closing of eyes and how tired the fox was. Riley fought on. He wasn't going to be lulled to sleep by some stupid story. But as the story went on he found he couldn't resist as his eyes began to droop. As the story was drawing to the end Mom looked up into the rear view mirror. She saw Riley and Carson both fast asleep. Carson with his head back and mouth wide open and Riley with his head slumped against the side of the car seat and his pacifier bobbing up and down gently in his mouth. Mom then switched off the story.

“Phew, glad that's over,” she said chuckling softly to herself. “Any more of that and I would have fallen asleep.”

Chapter 10

The Rough Patch Part 10 - Chapter 10

The Upset and the Plan

10

Riley sat on the floor of the living room as his boredom droned on. He looked down to see Mickey Mouse's face smiling back at him on the pull-up he was wearing. He couldn't believe this is what it had come to. There was not a doubt in his mind ever since yesterday at the aquarium things had changed.

His Mom had woken him up that morning. Riley had been a little grumpy to find himself still in a diaper and the footie pajamas's he had been dressed in, he had been hoping it had all been a bad dream. The diaper had of course been wet and droopy, the yellow line having completely turned blue. His Mom hadn't said much about it only happy that Riley had not woken up with any leaks. She had gotten him undressed and then set him off down the hallway stark naked to go and use his potty in her room. Whats worse is that when she appeared with his clothes she had only given him a t-shirt and another pull-up. Riley had of course protested but Mom had only reasoned that the pull-up was more absorbent and his accidents were becoming more frequent and she didn't want to have to do more loads of laundry. She then went on to say that it would be better for Riley to go without pants for the day so she and Dad could help keep track of the accidents,

instead of having to interrogate whether or not Riley had one. Riley had been against it of course, but Mom was not too be swayed. She seemed to not understand why Riley was making a big deal out of it. Its not like anyone didn't know he needed them and besides they were all family.

Afterwards Riley had been taken down to breakfast. He had his usual difficulties in eating, a reminder of it on his shirt which still had a damp spot that he had dribbled milk on, but at least Mom hadn't made him wear a bib. Another new thing was the bottle Mom had set on the table for him after he had finished his cereal.

“Why do I have to drink it out of a bottle?” Riley had asked.

“Because its expensive,” Dad had said placing his newspaper down to look at Riley. “And we want it in you, not on you,” Dad said placing a finger on the wet spot of Riley's shirt before lifting his newspaper back up.

“Besides,” Mom had then chimed in. “You need to drink it slow, drinking that stuff too fast will make you sick, the bottle will help with that.” Riley just sat glaring at the bottle. “If you don't drink it, I can always take over,” Mom then said. Riley had then taken the bottle and began to drink. After he was done his Mom had finally excused him.

Riley continued to sit in the living room. He really needed to do something to alleviate his boredom, he looked around the room and spied a metal bucket near the fireplace. He got up and looked in it finding canisters of tennis balls in it. Apparently Carson had taken up tennis recently. Riley seeing

nothing better to do took one of the tennis balls sitting in the bucket and began to toss it up and catch it. He had noticed that his hand eye coordination had been slipping, which could account for his sloppy eating habits among other things. Riley figured he should work on it. It was no doubt a symptom of his acute stress disorder and if he was going to get better he should try to work on it. After some time Riley was finding he was improving, he was able to toss the ball from one hand to the other and not drop it too much. Riley started to feel some hope. This was surely a good work out for his hands and maybe with some time he would finally be strong enough to snap together the buckles of the car seat, or better yet he would be able to take them off. Maybe if he was able to do that his parents would no longer be able to force him to sit in it. Riley was feeling so confident that he walked under the archway of the living room out into the front hall.

The front hall would be a good area to practice. There was the front door to his back and then the stairs that lead upstairs. Further down was a hallway leading into an intersection where the downstairs bathroom was located. To the right of the bathroom lead back into the living room while the opposite direction lead to the kitchen where he could hear his Dad banging around busy with some home improvement project. To Riley's left was another archway leading to the dining room. As Riley looked around he was sure this was a good place to practice, there was nothing that would be knocked over by the ball if he did lose control of it. Riley began to bounce the ball onto the ground sending it high up before catching it.

“Riley what are you doing?” he heard his Dad call out from the kitchen.

“Just bouncing a ball,” Riley said with an innocent tone. He waited for his Dad to tell him to knock it off.

“Alright, but be careful,” Dad then said as he went back to whatever it was he was doing. Riley smirked, happy for once to be left to his own devices.

Riley bounced his ball for a little longer. He was starting to get quite raucous with it. Slamming it harder against the ground as his confidence grew increasing the pitter patter of his barefeet against the hardwood as he scurried to catch it before it hit the ground again. On a particular wild bounce , Riley had missed catching it as he watched the ball bounce off into the dining room. Riley rolled his eyes. He had a real streak going which was now broken.

Riley went into the dining room which was still draped all in plastic. Wooden beams were leaned up against the wall. There were power tools all across the floor as well as some paint cans and boards that had been cut down to size. Riley looked around to see where his ball had gotten off too. He began to walk around. He did'nt see the ball anywhere so he figured it must have rolled under something. He began to look at the floor to make a hypothetical path the ball might have followed. His eyes came to an area on the other side of the room where he saw his ball up against the wall blocked by a stack of wooden beams laid against the wall. Riley began to walk over. He had been so focused on retrieving his

ball that he didn't notice the table saw in his path, that was until he tripped over it banging his shin against a steel metal arm. Riley stammered forward as he grabbed at one of the boards to stop himself from falling, yet that only made matters worse as the board then slid away sending Riley, and all the other boards clambering down to the ground with a loud crash.

Riley sat up dusting himself off before examining his throbbing shin which now had a nice bruise beginning to form. He heard hurried footsteps from the kitchen before his Dad appeared in the entrance way leading to the kitchen.

“Are you alright?” Dad asked concerned as he came over and scooped Riley off the ground.

“Yeah I think so,” Riley said still a little dazed.

“What were you even doing in here?”

“I was just getting my ball,” Riley said pointing at the tennis ball still on the ground. Dad frowned a little as he looked at Riley.

“You shouldn't be walking around in here,” Dad said. “Especially without shoes, you could cut your feet.” Dad said as he carried Riley back into the kitchen before setting him on the ground. “Are you sure you're okay? You didn't hit your head did you?

“I'm okay really,” Riley said rolling his shoulder a little.

“Are you sure you're not cut anywhere?” Dad asked as he

fussed over Riley.

“Daddy,” Riley said stepping away. “I told you I am fine.” Dad came to a stop before smirking.

“Okay I get it,” he said. “But no going back into the dining room while its under construction. That's not a good place for you to be playing in.”

Riley frowned a little at his Dad using the word “playing” that wasn't what he had been doing.

“I know,” Dad then said. “What would you say to helping me out here for a bit in the kitchen? I'm getting your mother her cabinet doors. I bet with your help we could have it done by the time she gets home from the store.”

Riley looked around the kitchen, the mystery of what his Dad was doing in there having been solved.

“I guess,” Riley said, not like he had anything better to do.

“Great,” Dad said with a smile. Riley then spent most of the morning helping his Dad in the kitchen. Although it mostly boiled down to holding tools for his Dad and giving him the one he asked for. Despite all that Riley felt some normalcy between himself and his Dad. It wasn't as if Riley had never had to help his Dad out before with projects although it had been a couple of years but at least his Dad wasn't treating him like some pants wetting little kid. That was until his Dad told Riley he needed to take a potty break. Riley had been a little cross about the whole thing, his Dad hadn't even asked him if he needed to go only saying he HAD to go and sit on the

potty. Still it might have been a good call as Riley had ended up using it. He was still a little embarrassed having to ask his parents to empty it out for him, but afterwards they were back at it, and by the time Mom came home they had just gotten done securing the last door.

“It looks great,” Mom said entering the kitchen with a plastic bag in her hand. “Simply wonderful.”

“Well I had some help,” Dad said picking Riley up from behind and holding him against his chest with an arm around Riley's midsection and another arm under Riley's knees “Riley helped me all morning I couldn't have gotten done as quick without him.”

“Daddy,” Riley welped. “Put me down.” Yet Riley's protest were ignored as his Mom came closer.

“Oh did you help Daddy,” Mom cooed as she grabbed one of his feet and tickled it causing the boy to squeal with laughter. “You did such a good job.” As Riley continued to giggle he was able to pull his foot away.

“Will you stop that,” Riley said annoyed as he caught his breath.

“Oh someone sounds cranky,” Mom said with a smirk. “You must have worked up an appetite doing all that work.”

“I know I did,” Dad said with a chuckle.

“And you will be pleased to know I picked up lunch, its from that new bbq place that just opened up.”

“Hey that's going to hit the spot,” Dad said as he set Riley into a chair at the table before pushing the chair all the way in. Riley sat in the chair with a grumpy look as his parents started to pull out plates. He found it was totally demeaning how they had just treated him. He wondered if they even remembered how old he was? On the other hand though he just had to chalk it up to them being his parents, they would never stop seeing him as their little boy an opinion they had said on more than one occasion – that's just how parents were.

“Okay Riley,” he heard his Mom say. “I picked up some stuff for you at the store.”

Riley groaned a little, that was never a good thing.

“Like what,” Riley asked with some hesitation.

“You've been complaining a lot about how hard it was to use the silverware since it was so big so I got you something more your size,” Mom said as she placed a small plastic spoon and fork on the table next to Riley both of them decorated with cartoon sharks. “This should help you not get so messy at mealtime.”

Riley looked at the silverware as his face scrunched up. He looked to his Mom who had an expectant smile on her face.

“Um thanks,” Riley said. He picked up the fork into his hand. It was true that it actually felt easier to hold, but did it have to be so kiddie? He realized though that his Mom probably thought he would actually like the sharks. His Mom then set a plate in front of him. There was a serving of some pulled

pork, green beans, and mac and cheese all arranged nicely into small little servings. Riley frowned, it certainly looked like a plate someone would dish up for a little kid. His Mom then set a glass with some purple liquid in it.

“What is that?” Riley asked.

“Its grape juice,” Mom said as she set down the jug in the center of the table. “Its good for you.”

“That looks good,” Dad said as he sat down with his own plate food before grabbing the jug and pouring himself a glass. That hadn't really been Riley's point though. He would have much preferred a soda. He realized it had been weeks since he had one. He had been mostly drinking water, milk, or juice since he had gotten home.

“Can't I have like a soda or something?” Riley asked.

“We don't have any,” Dad replied. “No one here drinks it.” Riley's Mom then set a bottle on the table near his glass of juice.

“And here is your formula,” Mom said taking a seat herself. “You can work on that after lunch.”

Riley glared at the bottle. He hated that they made him drink out of it. If they trusted him to drink out of a normal glass they why did they insist on the bottle. He then recalled the explanation he had been given that morning which sounded like total BS anyways. He could feel some anger bubbling up inside of him. All of the changes that were happening seemed to be taking their toll. As things went on it just kept getting

worse everything that had happened yesterday at the aquarium not withstanding but even today. Here he was now eating lunch with his parents with some utensils fit for a little kid in nothing but a shirt and pull-up and there was a bottle waiting for him as well. Riley pushed down his anger opting just to eat. The food did look good after all. As Riley ate he listened as his parents talked.

“I have to hit up the hardware store soon,” Dad mentioned. “Do you also think I should get some of that other stuff we talked about?”

“Oh well,” Mom said looking a little indecisive for a moment. “Maybe we should just wait and see how things go first.”

Riley held a scoop of pork that he was about to eat a little ways from his mouth becoming curious as to what his parents were discussing.

“What stuff?” he asked as his hand went a little limp dumping the sauce covered pork onto his shirt.

“Riley,” Mom gasped grabbing a napkin and reaching over to wipe Riley's shirt. “Hold your food over your plate please.”

“Looks like that shirt is going into the wash,” Dad chuckled.

“Maybe we should get you a bib too,” Mom said. His Mom's comment had been the straw to break the back, Riley could no longer hold back. He snapped.

“Stop it,” he screamed grabbing the napkin from his Mom and slamming it on the table.

“Riley don't yell,” Mom chided.

“No,” Riley screamed as his face went red. “I'll yell if I damn well please. I am not some little kid you can tell what to do.”

“Riley just relax,” Dad said as if Riley had a weapon and he was trying to talk him down.

“I don't need you to tell me to relax, and I don't need you to tell me how to eat or wipe my shirt.” Riley then grabbed the fork. “And I don't need a toddler fork either,” he said bending the fork in half before it snapped in two. “And I damn well don't need to drink out of a bottle for a baby,” he screeched slapping the bottle away. In Riley's rage his hand also made contact with the glass of juice knocking it over spilling its contents on the table.

“Aw geez,” Dad said getting to his feet to move out of the way of the juice that was headed for his pants and grabbing some napkins from the holder in the center and sopping up the juice. He removed the napkins a moment later yet a purple stain was still present. “Great its stained,” he said exasperated. Riley didn't really care, all his frustrations that had been building up had finally broken loose and there didn't seem to be any containing them. Without a word Riley's Mom got up and then grabbed Riley under his armpits hoisting him up into the air. She carried him to the back of the living room as Riley struggled to get free. She then set him on his feet in front of a corner.

“That is quite enough of that,” she said before pointing to the corner. “Now turn around and put your nose in that corner.”

“You can't--” Riley growled before his Mom cut him off.

“I can't what? Put you in a timeout? Well that's exactly what I'm doing.”

“That's for little kids,” Riley shouted.

“Which is what you are behaving like,” Mom barked which seemed to make Riley freeze up. “If that is how you are going to act then that is how you will be punished. Or if you prefer I could always take you across my knee first.”

Riley was breathing heavy from all the yelling. As he looked at his Mom he could tell she was angry. It had been a long time since he had seen her this mad, she hadn't even been this upset when she had discovered the credit card bill. With how mad she was there was not a doubt in Riley's mind that she would actually go through with spanking him if he continued to push it.

“What's it going to be, your choice,” Mom said placing her hands on her hips. With some shaky knees Riley turned around facing the corner. “Nose on the wall,” Mom ordered. Riley complied putting his face up against the corner. “You will stay there until I say you can move,” Mom said before leaving the room assured that her son was complying with a punishment he had not done since elementary school.

As Riley stood in the corner he could hear his parents talking in the kitchen although he couldn't make out what they were saying. Riley's breathing returned to normal and with it he began to think about what had just happened. How in the

world had he blown up like that, it wasn't like him at all. Sure he had been a little grumpy and upset over the past couple of weeks. But to explode like that was really out of the norm. Riley viewed himself as a fairly laid back person. It suddenly hit him that his emotions had been out of whack for a awhile. It seemed they came on quickly and very intensely. One minute he was happy and the next he would feel sad or angry and then it would seem to fade just as quickly. Maybe his parents and the doctors were right. He really was acting strangely. Riley wasn't sure how long he had been in the corner before he heard his Mom's footsteps approaching from behind, but it had been awhile.

“Ready to be done?” Mom asked. Riley turned around to face her.

“I'm sorry,” he said as his head hung low. He really did feel ashamed of how he had acted. His Mom let out a sigh as she patted his head.

“I know you are,” she said softly. “That was really not like you at all.” she said as she grabbed the bottom of his shirt that was still stained with barbecue sauce and lifted it up over his head before putting an green tank top with blue stripes on him. “Your time out is over,” Mom said picking him up into her arms. “But you still need to drink your formula,”

Riley was carried out into the kitchen where he saw his Dad cleaning up his tools. Riley looked over at the table that still sported a large purple stain.

“Do you have something to say to Daddy?” Mom asked.

Riley looked at his Dad with big puppy dog eyes filled with shame.

“I'm sorry I stained your table,” Riley said.

“That's alright,” Dad said with a smile as he mussed up Riley hair. “It will give me a chance to use my new power sander.”

With the apologies out of the way Mom grabbed the bottle from the table and brought Riley back into the living room. Riley expected to be placed on the couch to drink his bottle yet found himself cradled in his Mom's arms on the couch. He looked up at her horrified seeing she had the bottle held and was bringing it closer to his mouth.

“Mommy no,” Riley whined turning his head away. “I can drink it myself.”

“You made it perfectly clear in the kitchen you weren't going to do it on your own,” Mom said. “I told you if you refused I would take over.”

“But,” Riley went to protest before getting cut off.

“But nothing,” Mom said. “Maybe this will teach you to do what you're told, now no more talking and drink up,” Mom said bringing the nipple to Riley's lips. Riley let out a little groan before letting his Mom place the bottle into his mouth before he started sucking. Riley closed his eyes as he continued to drink. It was incredibly weird to have his Mom stare down at him while she hummed some vaguely familiar melody. After some time Riley finished the bottle as his Mom removed it from his mouth before sitting him up. She gave

him a couple pats to the back which actually caused him to burp a little bit of formula that had been left in his mouth dribbled out onto his chin. His Mom took a cloth and wiped his chin for him.

“Good job,” she said as she continued to rub his back. Riley sat for a moment before out of nowhere he started to sniffle as tears came to his eyes. “Oh sweetie whats wrong?” Mom cooed as she wrapped him up in her arms.

“I don't know,” Riley whimpered putting his face against his Mom's shoulder. “Nothing is working.” He didn't know where this was coming from it had just seemingly popped out of nowhere. His Mom began to make shushing sounds as she continued to rub his back and rock him gently from side to side. After a minute Riley lifted up his head as his Mom let him sit up again.

“Sorry,” Riley said wiping the last of the tears from his eyes. “I don't know what happened.”

His Mom let out a little sigh as she checked her phone.

“You're probably just a little overtired. You'll feel better after your nap.”

Riley nodded, he certainly was feeling a little all over the place. “But first lets try the potty, okay,” Mom said as she set him on the ground and gave his padded behind a couple pats sending him on his way. Riley went to the back of the living room where his potty was. He pulled down his training pants before taking a seat. His Mom left the room before coming

back a moment later with something in her hand. She knelt down in front of Riley with a smile.

“Are you done?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Riley said with a mopey demeanor.

“Great,” Mom said as she lifted Riley off the seat by his hands before grabbing the pull-up and pulling it up Riley's waist. “Hey whats with that long face?” Mom asked noticing that Riley had given no protest and was just standing still. “You've made it through the morning without any accidents so far.”

“It doesn't mean I'm getting better,” Riley said. “I'm getting worse.”

Mom gave a weak smile.

“Well I did want to talk to you about that a little,” she said. Riley felt some fluttering in his stomach. Oh great what now? “Me and Daddy have noticed that you've been struggling a little more, we discussed it and have decided we need to be a little more proactive in dealing with your issues, and this will help,” Mom said revealing the calendar she held in her hands. It was ocean themed although not child themed instead just featured a photograph of some sea life for each month. Mom pinned it up on the wall near the potty. That month featured a picture of a fish peeking out of an anemone.

“So what I'm thinking is we can use the calendar to keep track of your accidents,” Mom said. “If you go the whole day without an accident then we'll put a sticker on that day,” she

explained, holding up a sheet of stickers with smiley faces on them. “Me and Daddy will help to remind you, I want you to sit on your potty once every hour.”

Riley's mouth hung open a little as the pieces fell into place. It was all too clear now why his Mom had put him in a pull-up that morning and also why she hadn't given him pants. They were putting him on a potty training regimen.

“You're potty training me,” Riley said in dis-belief.

“Call it what you want,” Mom said. “I talked with your doctor and she thought it would be a good idea to introduce some structure and give you some motivation to keep dry.”

“This is only works on toddlers,” Riley said crossing his arms with a sour look.

“Hey now,” Mom said putting her hands on Riley's hips. “You know why they potty train toddler's like this?” Mom asked raising an eyebrow as Riley looked back with a furrowed brow. “Because its so simple that even toddlers can do it, and most importantly it works,” Mom said booping Riley on the nose. Riley let out a huff of air as he side eyed the calendar that was too be his potty training chart. It filled him with embarrassment as he thought about it being hung up for everyone to see.

“The calendar will be a good visualization to show your progress, also I know getting to put a sticker up isn't all that much of a reward like it would be for a toddler. So me and Daddy have discussed it and have come up with something to

motivate you that's more to your speed."

Riley looked back at his Mom with some interest, wondering what she had in mind.

"Well what were you thinking?" Riley mumbled.

"Each day you get a sticker we'll add fifty dollars to your car fund," Mom said. Riley looked back at his Mom with surprise as she continued on. "And as an added bonus for each week with no accidents we'll add a one hundred dollar bonus, even if this only takes a week that's a pretty good chunk of change. We also wont count naptimes and overnight. So you just have to worry about the daytime."

Riley quickly crunched the numbers in his head. It was true, even one week would give him a considerable boost to his car fund.

"And no cheating and fibbing accidents just to get more money." Mom said somewhat accusingly.

"I wouldn't do that," Riley yelped. "I want this to be over more than anyone."

"So then you're on board?" Mom asked.

"Yeah of course," Riley said. He began to think about everything his parents had been doing. It was true that he detested pretty much all of it and thought it was ridiculous, but in that moment he could see that his parents had been doing what they thought was best to help him. Even if they were mistaken there hearts were in the right place, they did

care about him. “Umm thanks Mommy, this is really great,” Riley said playing with the hem of his shirt as he felt a little shy about thanking his Mom for putting him on a potty training plan.

“I'm glad you're willing to try,” Mom said wrapping Riley up into a hug before lifting him off his feet. “Now how about that nap?”

Riley frowned a little but nodded his head all the same. After everything that had happened it seemed wrong to try and refuse. If he was being honest a nap sounded alright as he was fighting back a yawn. Still did she have to carry him all around?

“Can I walk please?” Riley said as he squirmed a little. His Mom approved as she set him down. Riley lead the way upstairs with his Mom following close behind. She went into his room pulling back the covers of his bed. Riley climbed in as his Mom gave a few pats to his behind which caused Riley to quickly sit on his butt as he gave his Mom a look.

“Sorry Riley, you're just so irresistibly cute sometimes,” she chuckled.

“Mommy,” Riley mewled as his face went red.

“Okay, I'm sorry but you know I can't help but think of you and Carson as my adorable little boys, no matter how old you get,” She said with an affectionate smile. “Now lay down,” she said as she pulled the covers up over him. She then tucked the turtle stuffie and shark stuffie on each side of Riley.

“I don't want those,” Riley grumbled.

“Just making you nice and cozy,” Mom said before grabbing one of Riley's pacifiers off of the bookshelf near his bed and slipping it into his mouth. “And to help you relax I got you a nice little speaker,” she said pointing out a small bluetooth speaker on the shelf. She took out her phone and clicked away and a few moments later some soft classical music began playing. Riley let his eyes close happy that she wasn't playing baby lullabies. His Mom gave him a kiss to his forehead before shutting off the lights and leaving the door open just a crack. She went down to her room and filed away some papers she had been going over. Afterwards she went back to check on Riley. She found him already asleep, the pacifier still in his mouth and his arms wrapped around the large turtle.

Chapter 11

The Rough Patch Part 11 - Chapter 11

Necessary Changes

Riley awoke from his nap. He unclasped his arms from around the large turtle stuffie as he gave another few suckles to his pacifier before he let it fall from his mouth. He shook his head a little realizing how he had slept. At least no one had seen it. He pushed the covers off of himself and got out of the bed. He looked down to see his soggy pull-up and gave a little grunt. Riley then looked around the room for a package of pull-ups to change, he figured a little initiative on his part would go a long way. Unfortunately he didn't see any.

Riley then went to his dresser. He looked through the drawers but did not find any. He then looked up at the top drawer where all his underwear was, that's where his Mom probably kept them. Riley knew she was a fan of having a place for everything. Laundry was never to be grabbed out of the basket, his Mom had always made the boys put their clothes in their proper spot right away. A thought then crossed Riley's mind. Maybe he could change into a pair of underwear. He was fully onboard with the new potty rules. It was a win win in his book after all. If it got him out of pull-ups and some cash in his pocket there was no reason not to comply. Besides if he was sitting on the potty every hour there was no way he was going to have an accident.

Riley reached up and was only barely able to get the drawer

open yet he was in no way tall enough to look in or actually pull anything out. Riley let out a huff. Why couldn't they just put his stuff where he could reach it?

Riley then felt a shiver as the pull-up was feeling rather cold. Riley grabbed a throw blanket from the corner of his room as he wrapped it around himself. With nothing left to do he exited his room. He was going to need to ask for help whether he wanted to or not. Coming down the stairs into the kitchen Riley found it hard to navigate the stairs while also holding the blanket around himself and by the time he reached the bottom he was dragging the blanket behind him with one hand.

Mom was in the kitchen as she looked over to see Riley standing on the bottom step the blanket clasped in one hand while he used his other hand to wipe his still sleepy eyes as he let out one last yawn.

“Look whose finally awake, that was a long nap,” Mom said as she walked over to him.

“I guess,” Riley said having no real concept of how long he had been asleep or even what time it was.

“Looks like you need a change,” Mom said noticing the sagging pull-up.

“Yeah,” Riley said still feeling awkward with the conversation.

“Go sit on your potty and get cleaned up,” Mom said taking the blanket from Riley and folding it up in her arms. “I'll

bring you a dry pull-up in a minute.” Riley nodded as went to the living room. He was still sitting on his potty when his Mom came in.

“How's it going?” she asked as she knelt down in front of him.

“Nothings happening,” Riley replied, he didn't want to stand up until something did, he didn't want to have another accident, there was money on the line now.

“You just woke up from your nap, you probably don't have to go,” Mom said. Riley was about to say something in reply before he realized what type of conversation he was having with his Mom. His stomach fluttered a little at how normal it all seemed. It was then that he noticed his Mom had already removed his wet pull-up from around his ankles and already had a new one she was pulling up his legs.

“I got it,” Riley stammered getting to his feet and pulling it up the rest of the way quickly. He didn't want her thinking that he needed help putting it on.

“Okay, okay,” Mom said in a gentle tone as she fixed the waistband before standing up. “So what are you up to now?”

Riley looked around a little unsure. “I don't know, I'll find something to I guess.”

“Well don't wander too far now,” Mom said. “Daddy told me about the mischief you got up to this morning when you were playing where you shouldn't have been.”

Riley went to protest, that he hadn't been playing as his

parents seemed so intent on calling it, but he fell silent when he couldn't exactly come up with a word for what he had been doing.

“I would really prefer if you kept balls outside,” Mom said as she went over to the bookshelf and picking up a plastic bag from the aquarium yesterday from the ground. “Why don't you play with this?” she asked pulling the bag away to reveal the playset Riley had presumed she had bought for Toby.

“Isn't that for Toby?” Riley asked narrowing his eyes in suspicion. There could just be no way she had actually bought it for him.

“He can play with it when he visits,” Mom said. “It looks pretty fun though doesn't it?” she asked holding it out in front of her like a salesperson. “You could test it out for him.”

“I don't play with toys,” Riley said as he felt a tinge of anger building in his chest.

“Suit yourself,” Mom said with a shrug setting it back on the ground. “Why don't you help me with something then.”

Riley rolled his eyes. “Like what?”

“Carson has been complaining for weeks that we don't have any streaming services on the tv and how it would be nice to watch stuff on a bigger screen than his phone,” Mom said as she walked over to the tv before picking up a small box. “So I finally broke down and decided to get one of those streaming sticks for the tv. I don't know much about this stuff so think you could help me set it up.”

“Its not that hard,” Riley snorted. Honestly his parents weren't even that old, they were barely in their forties, yet they seemed clueless when it came to tech, Riley remembered how he had to play tech consultant on numerous occasions growing up.

“Then we shouldn't have a problem,” Mom said opening up the box. Riley proceeded to guide his Mom through the set up. Everything from plugging it into the tv to setting up the account. As he lead his Mom through how to navigate the program a news story on the splash page caught Riley's eye. It was a picture of his school and there was something about developing story across college campuses that Riley began to read before his Mom clicked away to another menu.

“Wait, go back,” Riley said. “That was my school.”

“Oh that was nothing,” Mom said quickly. “Probably just about them raising tuition rates, we got a letter in the mail a couple of days ago.”

“Great” Riley groaned. That last thing he wanted to hear about was more money he needed to pay.

“So what do you think about watching a movie together?” Mom then asked. Riley gave a shrug, its not like he had any other plans. “There are so many to choose from,” Mom said as she flipped through different selections. Riley saw a movie he had wanted to see, but didn't say anything. It was an R-rated movie with lots of blood and gore and nudity no doubt – who wanted to watch something like that with their Mom?

“Oh look,” Mom said settling on an animated kids movie. “I haven't seen this in years,” Mom said shaking Riley a little. “You used to love this movie. Lets watch this.” Riley put his head back into the couch. He was hoping to watch something a little more mature but it wasn't like he was opposed to it. In his mind it was a bona-fide classic, and like his Mom said he hadn't seen it in years. Which wasn't exactly true he had watched it a couple of years ago, but he had been as high as kite, so maybe a re watch sober wouldn't be so bad.

Riley settled in as his Mom started the movie. Riley found it still held up. Sure it was a kids movie but watching it made him feel a warm fuzzy sense of familiarity. He was a little surprised by how fresh it all still felt in his mind as if he had just watched it yesterday. Riley became sucked into the movie as his attention focused on it wholly, so much so he found himself slumping his head against his Mom curling up next to her without a hint of recognition. She felt really warm and he was a tad bit chilly.

As the movie went on, Riley heard the door coming in from the garage to the kitchen open. He heard some footsteps walk into the living room and saw it was his Dad.

“I see you got that thing set up,” Dad said placing his hands on his hips as he watched on.

“Riley helped me get it all ready to go,” Mom said. “You should see all the movies they have, we should have done this ages ago.”

“I'll have to check it out later,” Dad said. “Just to let you

know I picked up Carson from practice on my way to the store so he could help me carry. I also stopped by the grocery store and picked up stuff for dinner, we're having spaghetti."

"Sounds good," Mom said.

"Riley if I remember you like extra sauce right?" Dad then asked.

"Oh um yeah," Riley said, his attention still on the movie. With that his Dad then left. A few minutes later Riley heard some heavy thuds coming from upstairs. He could hear his Dad saying something about lifting with the legs and Carson sounding somewhat annoyed.

"What are they doing up there?" Riley wondered aloud.

"I asked your Dad to move some stuff for me, that's all," Mom said. A few minutes later it seemed the noise moved downstairs and now Riley could hear some commotion from the kitchen.

"Now what," Riley said sounding a little annoyed with the noise as he was trying to enjoy the movie.

"Your Dad did just go to the hardware store so he is probably having Carson help him bring stuff into the dining room." Mom offered.

Riley frowned a little at the explanation. It certainly didn't sound like it was coming from the dining room, yet he was in no hurry to find out. If anything he was glad that his Dad hadn't asked him to help carry in stuff. Although he knew that

was probably only because his Dad didn't think he could lift the heavy stuff. Which was ridiculous. As a college student Riley had done his fair share of helping people move in out of apartments all the time, which was always a drag, and maybe just this one time he could let the sleight against what he was capable of pass without any protest.

Some time later Carson came into the living room plopping himself into the big easy chair. Riley sat up straight putting a little room between himself and his Mom as he became aware of how it looked with him dressed how he was cuddle up with his Mom on the couch. For a moment he wondered why he had even allowed such a thing.

“Look sweetie,” Mom said addressing her youngest. “We're streaming now,” she said sounding almost proud of the fact as if it wasn't the norm in practically every other household in the country.

“Cool,” Carson said sounding appropriately unimpressed. “Why are you watching this movie?”

“We used to watch this movie all the time, don't you remember?” Mom asked.

“I guess,” Carson said shrugging his shoulder. “But there are other movies you could watch.”

“Me and Riley like this one,” Mom said. Carson pursed his lips for a moment as if he wanted to say something more. “You're just mad we're not watching the one you liked, what was it called, The Booger Train?” Mom said.

“Oh yeah,” Carson said his Mom's words bringing back the memories as he began to sing the title song.

“Carson hush,” Mom said. “We're trying to enjoy the movie and if I never have to hear that awful song ever again I'll die happy.”

Carson just smirked as he sat back in the chair taking out his phone and beginning to scroll. Riley found the blanket he had earlier folded up on top of the couch he grabbed and wrapped it around himself. He had been perfectly comfortable snuggled up to his Mom but did not want to go back. He was starting to find that when it was just him and his parents the way they treated him felt natural, like he forgot that it wasn't normal, but when Carson was around something didn't feel quite right.

Before long the credits of the movie began to roll. Riley's Dad then walked into the living room.

“Alright gang dinner's done and we're all set up,” he said before departing.

“Here we go,” Carson said ominously as he got up and headed to the kitchen. Riley got up off the couch before his Mom touched his shoulder.

“Go potty before dinner,” Mom said. Riley let his head roll back at being reminded but went back to his potty all the same. He sat down and looked to see his Mom standing nearby.

“You don't have to watch,” Riley said with some annoyance.

“Just making sure,” Mom said not moving. Riley just grimaced. He finished and pulled up his pull-up as his Mom held some hand sanitizer out to squirt on his hands. Riley rubbed his hands together as his Mom peeked into the potty.

“I'll clean that up after dinner,” she said before swooping Riley into her arms.

“Hey I can walk you know,” Riley protested. His Mom gave no response as she patted his back. With the way she was carrying him Riley was forced to look back over her shoulder as they went to the kitchen. As they got near the table Riley felt himself be placed into a seat. He was surprised to have not been set down at the table. His eyes bulged as he saw his Mom buckle a strap across his stomach. A moment later she had fastened a plastic tray in front of him.

“T-This is a,” Riley stuttered as he let the tips of his fingers touch the plastic tray as if he was apprehensive to even touch it.

“Its a high chair,” Mom said sounding as if she were revealing a big surprise.

“Why?” Riley squeaked.

“Well honey,” Mom began with a sympathetic tone. “We've noticed you've been having a little trouble getting comfortable at the table. Your stress is messing with your motor skills a little. The doctor said it was a pretty common symptom. That's why you've been a little messy while eating. Me and Daddy talked it over to try and come up with a

solution that would work better rather than us nagging you all the time which isn't helping your stress levels. We felt it would be better for you to have a spot where you didn't have to be worried about making a mess." she said as she grabbed something from the counter off to the side. She came behind the high chair before securing a large bib around Riley's neck. He looked down to see some Sesame Street characters smiling back at him. "This tray is nice and easy to clean," Mom said. "And that bib will protect your clothes so you're free to be as messy of eater as you need to be."

Riley sat stunned. He couldn't even form words as babble like noises emitted from his mouth.

"And check this out," Dad said placing a gray rubber bowl in front of Riley he then pressed down on it little before giving it a rough tap at the side as the bowl stayed in its spot. "We got you a bowl with suction cups on the bottom so you won't accidentally knock it over."

"That's pretty cool," Mom said in with an exaggerated sense of excitement as if that would sell Riley on the concept.

"We also got you a nice cup to use as well," Dad said placing a sippy cup complete with handles and pictures of a rocket ships and stars all over it onto the tray. "The handles will help you hold onto it, and even if you do knock it over, no spills to worry about."

Everybody else then took their seats as if nothing was amiss. Riley looked over to Carson who was already digging into his own plate of food not even giving any sort of recognition to

the new seating arrangements.

“I can't eat like this,” Riley said furrowing his brow.

“Why is that,” Dad said looking up from his plate. “I made it just how you like it.”

“Because,” Riley went to protest but came to a pause. He knew it was useless to protest. It never did him any good. Once they had decided on something that's the way it was. Riley looked down at his tray. “I don't even have a fork,” he grumbled noticing they hadn't given him any utensils whatsoever.

“You can just eat with your hands,” Mom chimed in. “People in different cultures do that all the time.”

“But its spaghetti,” Riley squeaked. “It'll be messy.”

“Now who was it who snapped their fork and said they didn't need it,” Mom said putting a finger to her chin. Riley's mouth dropped a little, incensed she would use that against him. His Mom then smiled at him. “You don't have to worry about being messy, remember? So eat up.”

Riley sat with his chin resting on his balled fist as the rest of the family ate. This all seemed so over the top and unfair. His Dad then looked over at him.

“Riley the longer you don't eat, the longer you'll be sitting there.” Dad said raising an eyebrow. Riley grumbled. They would probably make him sit there all night. Not too mention his stomach was rumbling. He really was hungry. Riley took

a noodle and began to eat. Trying his best not to make a total mess. A task that was easier said than done. His Dad had given him extra sauce, a request that Riley now regretted. As Riley ate his hands were becoming covered in sauce. His face was also becoming a mess as he took bigger bites since trying to slurp one noodle at at time would have him here all night.

“You have to drink all your milk too,” Mom said a little later noticing Riley hadn't even touched the cup. Riley rolled his eyes as he grabbed the handles and sucked at the spout. It was similar to the bottle as he couldn't get a a lot of liquid out all at once, but it was still more than the bottle. As Riley finished his meal he looked around to see he had really made a mess. There was sauce all over his hands which had then spread to the tray and even the cup. His bib was also a disaster. Riley could only imagine how he looked. Just like any toddler after eating spaghetti with their hands. Riley drank down the last of his milk setting the cup down with some relief at finally being done. His Dad came over from the sink and stood in front of the high chair.

“Looks like someone cleaned out their bowl,” Dad said looking at the empty bowl. “Now since your bowl is empty you can wear it like a hat,” Dad enthused as he pulled the bowl up before placing it upside down on Riley's head.

“Hey,” Riley huffed as he felt some of the sauce drip into his hair before he swatted it off his head. “Why did you do that?”

“Just having a little fun with you,” Dad chuckled.

“Now I have sauce in my hair,” Riley grumbled.

“That's not a big deal,” Dad said as he removed the bib and then grabbed a wet cloth and wiped Riley face and hands. “I was going to give you a bath anyways.”

“B-bath,” Riley stammered as his eyes went wide.

“You heard me right,” Dad said as he removed the tray and set it in the sink. “Its bath night mister.”

“I can just take a shower,” Riley yelped.

“That's not a safe option for you,” Dad said shaking his head. “Remember what happened last time?”

Riley didn't need the reminder the last time he had taken a shower had been a few days ago. He had been sitting with his Dad at the table after dinner. They were looking at cars seeing what Riley might be able to afford when his Dad had declared that Riley smelled like a barn. His Dad had proceeded to take him up to his shower since there was an outcropping that Dad insisted Riley sit on while he was showering. Riley had been put off by the suggestion but climbed up onto the seat all the same. His Dad had unattached the shower head before leaving Riley to get undressed. Riley had complied with the request. He didn't want another mishap like with the toilet, so he had decided to play it safe. He had gotten through the shower with little issue except he was finding it hard to hold the bottles of soap and shampoo in his hands. He had to use both hands to squeeze them so he had opted just to pour it directly on himself. The excess shampoo has slithered it's way down to the ground which had made the floor slippery. When he had

went to get out of the shower he had hopped down onto the slippery floor. He had managed to get the door open but one step was all it took and he had slipped falling out of the shower onto the floor face first. His Dad had found him on the ground just having gotten a towel around himself. Dad had of course fretted but Riley had insisted he was fine and it was just a slip. His Dad had then touched the top of his head noting that he hadn't even gotten all the shampoo out. So Riley had then been made to hold his head in over the shower as his Dad finished washing his hair. Riley had his suspicions that his Dad had just been exaggerating how much shampoo had been in his hair. But the soapy water had said otherwise.

“I'll be careful in the shower I promise,” Riley said back in the present. His Dad now stood in front of him with his hands on his hips.

“As I see it you have two options,” Dad said. “Either you let me give you a bath, or you take a shower with me.”

Riley's face went red at the implication. It was one thing that he had been completely naked in front of his Mom twice now when she had put him in the diaper and then when she had taken it off. But the thought of having to be naked with his Dad in a shower was beyond weird. He hadn't done that since he had been what, four or five? There was absolutely no way he would ever agree to it. Even if they were in a gym shower room he didn't want to see that!

Riley stammered out some unintelligible gurgles before his Dad unbuckled him from the high chair and lifted Riley up

into his arms.

“I'll take it you've chosen a bath,” His Dad laughed as he carried Riley up the stairs to the bathroom.

As the bathtub filled Riley tried to resist but his Dad was far too strong for him and in no time flat Riley was undressed, standing naked it front of his Dad.

“Daddy no,” Riley whined as he covered himself.

“Up we go Ry,” Dad said paying no heed to his sons attempt at modesty as he lifted him up before setting him into the warm water. His Dad then took a bottle of soap and poured it into the water creating a smattering of frothy bubbles.

“Everybody loves a bubble bath,” Dad said. Riley sat crossing his arms with a pout. The only silver lining being that the bubbles did cover him up. Dad then took a washcloth and began to scrub Riley down. He went everywhere from from the armpits which caused Riley to helplessly giggle to down to his toes, lifting each leg out of the water. His Dad then had him turn around so he could get Riley's back. The most mortifying part had been the undercarriage as his Dad had called it before the washcloth dipped beneath the water's surface. Riley had let out a little moan of humiliation, thankfully his Dad had been quick if not thorough. Once Dad was satisfied he finally took some shampoo and lathered up Riley's hair. The shampoo smelled fruity, very unlike the stuff Riley usually used. As his Dad dumped water on Riley's head to wash it out. Riley saw the bottle he was using. It had a teddybear on the front. It read “Babysoft Essentials tear free”

Riley could only grimace. Dad then sat back clapping his hands together as if he were dusting them off.

“I daresay you're as clean as you've been in years,” he then checked his phone. “Looks like we got a little time. Want to stay in there and splash around? I think we have some bath toys around here somewhere.”

“No,” Riley said coldly. His Dad merely smiled.

“Then lets get you dressed for bed,” Dad said. His Dad grabbed a towel off the wall. Riley got out of the tub quickly in an attempt to show he wasn't as helpless as they though he was. After his Dad got him dried off he draped the towel over Riley before picking him up. He then sat him on the counter and like every night, brushed Riley's teeth for him. Afterwards they went to Dad's room where he had Riley use the potty.

“Can I have something to wear?” Riley asked still sitting on his potty with the towel draped over him.

“We'll get you dressed in your room,” Dad said as he looked at his phone. Riley thought it was a little strange. They always gave him his clothes in the morning after he had used the potty. Although as things stood he knew he was going to sleep in just a pull-up now. Riley cringed a little realizing that at twenty years old he was in pull-ups full time. After Riley was finished his Dad swooped him back up into his arms. As they walked down the hall Riley could feel that the towel had ridden up fully exposing his naked butt which he could feel the cold air on.

“And whose little tushie do I see?” he heard his Mom say before a second later he felt her actually pinch his butt playfully.

“Mommy,” Riley yipped as he squirmed. Both his parents just laughed.

“Looks like Daddy did a good job in the bathroom,” Mom said as she leaned into smell Riley's hair.

“Clean as a whistle,” Dad replied. “Is Carson done yet?”

“Just about,” Mom said.

“Good,” Dad said. Riley was a little curious what they were talking about. He hadn't heard them say anything to Carson. Riley didn't ask any questions though. He had other things to worry about other than what Carson was up to.

As they got into Riley's room he noticed there had been a change. Everything was normal except now in the corner of the room near the small bookshelf there was a rocking chair, and a lamp set nearby. Riley now knew what the noise had been from earlier, although he wasn't quite sure why it was now in here. Dad placed Riley on the ground near the chair and then went over to the dresser. He pulled out some clothes before tossing them onto the bed. Riley saw it was another footed sleeper similar to the one he had worn yesterday, except this one was yellow with black stripes and had a bumblebee on the chest.

“Do I really have to wear that?” Riley asked scrunching up his face.

“You know how the nights get around here, hot days,cold nights,” his Dad said still at the dresser. Riley looked at his window, it was barely dark out, the sun had'nt even set completely causing the sky to be a mix of orange and purple hues. A reminder of how early it was. Riley still thought it was ridiculous that they made him go to bed at eight every night. It was strange how used to it he had gotten. How did he seemingly fall asleep every night at such an early hour?

“Alright champ,” Dad said turning around holding several things in his hands. “Lets get your diaper on.”

Riley saw his Dad had a tub of cream and a bottle of baby powder in his hands and a diaper like the one he had been forced to wear yesterday. His Dad got onto his knees setting the stuff on the ground.

“That was just for last night,” Riley said horrified. He could only conclude that his Dad was confused.

“ 'Fraid not bud,” Dad said. “You've started wetting more in your sleep. So me and Mommy think it would be best for you to wear the diaper for bedtime.”

“No please,” Riley pleaded. “I can wear a pull-up really.”

“Riley this isn't up for discussion,” Dad said. “The pull-ups cant handle overnight. We don't want you having leaks on that bed, its brand new you know.”

“But – ” Riley began but was stopped as his Dad wrapped an arm around his knees and a hand supporting his back and in one fluid motion had Riley on his back on the floor.

“Don't worry, you'll be back in your pull-ups tomorrow,” his Dad said as he unfolded the towel around Riley..

“Daddy,” Riley moaned.

“Just relax,” Dad said grabbing the pacifier Riley had used during his nap from the bed and slipped it into his mouth. “Your old Dad still remembers how to do this.”

The experience was just as humiliating for Riley as it had been with his Mom as he felt his Dad start in with the cream, spreading it through all the crooks and crevices around Riley's groin area. His ankles were then lifted as Dad placed the diaper under him before shaking out some powder onto the diaper. Riley's butt was then lowered onto the diaper. His Dad then powdered the front and spread it around a little before pulling the diaper up and taping it into place. Riley couldn't imagine a more mortifying situation. Just then there was knock at the door.

“Come in,” Dad said. Carson walked in as Dad was threading Riley's legs into his pajamas's.

“Hey,” Carson stepping in the room looking off into the corner as if he were trying not to look at Riley who at this point had been put on his feet as Dad worked his arms into the sleeves. “ Mom told me to come and tell you when I finished doing what you asked me too.”

“You're sure its right, no extra parts lying around?” Dad asked.

“I followed the directions,” Carson said.

“All right then,” Dad said pulling the zipper up on Riley's back. “Thanks for the help.”

“Sure,” Carson said as he looked over at Riley. It was then that Riley realized he still had the pacifier in his mouth he spit it out quickly, not wanting to look even more babyish than he already did in front of Carson. For his part Carson didn't seem to react in anyway other than giving Riley a small smile. It was unclear to Riley if it was one of pity or sympathy.

“Anyways Jason wanted me to come over for a bit, could I?” Carson asked.

“That sounds fine,” Dad said fiddling with the snaps at the back of Riley's neck. “Just be back by ten alright.”

“I will,” Carson said as he left the room. Riley's Dad continued to fiddle with the snaps as Riley could not comprehend how he had found himself in this strange dynamic. Here he was getting ready to be put to bed while his little brother was off to go hang out with a friend.

“Now how do you do this,” Dad mused to himself. Riley didn't understand what was taking so long but he remembered it had taken his Mom some time to snap the pajamas the previous night as well.

“Oh I see, you loop this here and then like that,” Dad said talking to himself as he snapped the buttons together. Riley then felt his Dad lift him up and put him on his hip.

“Alright all dressed for bed,” Dad said with a smile. “Looks

like you got a solid thirty minutes before bedtime to play," Dad said checking his phone.

Riley grimaced as his Dad began to carry him out of his room. Why did they insist on using that word? It made it sound like he was a little kid or something. Dad carried Riley into the living room. He expected his Dad to set him on the couch or something, yet his Dad walked past going to the back of the living room behind the couch before setting Riley down. The first thing Riley noticed was his feet touched something soft and it wasn't the footies of his pajamas. He looked down to see a large rubber mat that had the abc's with accompanying animals for each letter. He then looked up and noticed he and his Dad were separated by a plastic fence. Riley then looked around noticing it wasn't just in front as there was another section going along the back of the couch. With the wall to his back and to his side he was closed in.

"W-What is this?" Riley stammered looking around himself.

"Its your playpen," Dad said making it sound as if this was the most obvious thing in the world.

"No way," Riley said standing in front of the fence that came up to his shoulders. He looked to the side and saw a door. He went to it, trying to pull it open but it did not budge. He then reached his hand through the bar feeling around the front of the door. He felt the latch but found he couldn't get it to release. He let out huff of air before going and trying to climb out. On top of the front fence was a wavy gray plastic top. With Riley's height he was only just barely able to put a foot

on top but the wavy design made it impossible for him to get a good foothold as his foot slipped off. Riley stumbled back falling onto his but.

“I can't get out,” Riley yelped.

“That's sort of the point,” Dad chuckled. Riley got back on his feet rushing up to the fence.

“You can't put me in here,” Riley whimpered as his bottom lip quivered. Dad gave a little sigh. He turned around to the bookshelf on the opposite wall where there was a small basket with extra pacifiers in it. He took one out that had a strap attached to it. He came back kneeling in front of Riley.

“Listen bud,” Dad said gently as he affixed the strap to Riley's collar before popping the pacifier into Riley's stunned mouth. “You know the doctor said you needed supervision while you're dealing with this stress. We can't let you just wander around the house all alone, I have a lot of things lying around the house right now that could hurt you, remember what happened in the dining room?” Dad said putting a hand on the small part of Riley's back. “That being said there are times when we can't be keeping an eye on you. Right now Mommy is upstairs on an important phone call and I have to go sand out a stain a certain person put on the table,” Dad said with a smile. “So we need a spot where we can put you where we know you'll be safe. And look we put everything in here you need. We put your toys in there and your stuffed animals as well as some books for you to look at,” Dad said as he pointed out each of the items he listed off.

Riley saw his stuffed turtle and shark in one corner. The play set his Mom had offered to him was in the middle out of the box and there was a pile of picture books also stacked into a neat pile.

“Your potty is also in here,” Dad mentioned pointing to the potty in the same spot it had always been. “Although you don't really need that at that moment,” Dad chuckled as his hand moved down giving couple of pats to Riley's poofy behind. “So you see, this is going to be great spot for you to be when we're busy,” Dad said standing up. “I bet in no time flat this will become your favorite spot in the house.”

Riley gave a harried look at his Dad “Let me out, please,” Riley whimpered around his pacifier.

“Sorry bud,” Dad said reaching a hand down and mussing up his hair. “You gotta stay in there right now. Its for your safety, now as I said you have about thirty minutes to play before bed.” with that Dad exited the living room. Riley could hear him in the kitchen as he started up his sander and got to work on the table.

Riley paced up and down the perimeter of the playpen kicking the small pile of books over in anger as he did so. He had to find a way to escape. One side of the fence was right up against the back of the couch so there was no way he would climb over that. The other two sides were walls so his only option would be the front. He couldn't climb over it so he had to get the door open. Riley went over reaching his arm around to inspect the latch once again. He pulled it out but

the door did not move and it snapped back into place. Riley then went to the other side only to find another latch. He now knew how it worked, he would have to pull them out at the same time to release the door, but there was no way he could do that. He couldn't reach both hands around the door. Riley took some shaky steps back before falling on his butt as he was hit by the sinking realization that he was trapped inside of the playpen.

Riley sat with his face in his hands. He lifted his head looking at his pajamas and at the diaper bulge at his crotch. That's when he decided he was going to take off his clothes and the diaper. He had to do something to rebel and this seemed to be the only option available. He couldn't just accept this.

He went to undo the snaps on the back of his neck as he ran into a problem. He got the tab undone but found there was another snap underneath. No matter how much he pulled at it nothing would give. It then dawned on Riley why both of his parents had spent so much time doing them up in the first place. It was obviously no normal button. The pajamas seemed to have a purpose and that was to keep the wearer from taking them off. Riley couldn't understand why his parents had put him in such clothes, it then dawned on him. His parents had taken precautions against him taking off his diaper. Riley's face reddened at the thought and only turned a deeper shade of red when he realized that's exactly what he had been trying to do, he had been doing what the little kids who these pajamas were meant for do, but his situation was different...right?

Riley groaned as he flopped back onto his back sucking on the pacifier in his mouth harder. It was really all he had to try and calm himself lest he burst out into tears, which is exactly what he felt like doing at the moment. He was going to fight back though, he already felt like enough of a baby, the last thing he needed was to cry like one.

After awhile of staring up at the ceiling Riley rolled to the side hearing his diaper crinkle as he did so. He slapped a hand on one of the books on the ground nearby sliding it over to himself. He opened the cover and began flipping through the pages. He wasn't reading it or really even looking at the pictures just flipping the pages one after another. Some time later he heard the door to the playpen unlatch and he heard footsteps walk across the mat. He looked up to see his Mom standing over him.

“Its bedtime,” she said plucking him off the ground and onto her hip. “I see you looking at these books,” Mom said picking the book off the ground. “The Octopus Garden,” she read the title on the front. “Oh this is one of the books I got at the aquarium yesterday, do you like it?” Riley gave a sort of grunt from behind his pacifier, which his Mom took as a yes. “We can read it as your story for tonight” Mom said.

Usually Riley would feel the need to protest such a thing, yet at that moment he didn't feel like he had the energy.

“Hey Riley, guess what,” Mom said in a sing song voice as she bounced him up and down a little. “You made it all day without an accident so you know what that means.” Riley's

Mom walked him over to the potty as she knelt down putting him on her knee. “Go ahead and put your sticker on,” she said handing him the sheet of stickers. Riley peeled off a sticker and put it on the calendar. “Great job,” Mom said giving him a kiss on his cheek. “That's one day down and fifty bucks in your pocket, not too bad, huh?”

Riley gave a small smile. It was really the only good thing he had going for him at the moment. His Mom then stood up putting Riley back on her hip. She walked over to the two stuffies on the ground.

“Okay who do you want to sleep with tonight Mr. Shark or Mr. Turtle?”

Riley moaned as he put his face into his Mom's shoulder. How could she even ask him such a question.

“Oh is someone too tired to decide,” Mom cooed. “Then I guess I will. Lets go with Mr. Shark tonight,” she said as she leaned down picking up the shark. They then walked out into the kitchen where Dad was unplugging his sander from the wall. The stain having been removed from the table.

“Looks like its bedtime,” Dad said walking up to the pair. “Have a good night big guy,” Dad said giving Riley a kiss to the top of his head.

“Do you think you could make up a bottle for me?” Mom asked which Dad nodded. Riley's Mom then took him up to his room. Upon entering she sat in the rocking chair.

“What are we doing now?” Riley whined from behind his

pacifier.

“I had your Dad move this rocking chair in here, I thought it would be a nice spot to read to you, not too mention give you your bottle.”

“I can drink it myself,” Riley grumbled as the pacifier slid from his mouth.

“Now Riley do I have to remind you what happened at lunch, I made it clear that if you refused I would take over,” she said.

“But – ” Riley went to protest before his Mom popped the pacifier back into his mouth.

“Maybe you can try again on your own later,” Mom said. “Now just sit back and enjoy the story.”

Riley furrowed his brow. That statement by his Mom seemed vague at best and he could only wonder when “later” would be. Riley sat in his Mom's lap leaned up against her chest as she read. But she wasn't just reading the words on the page, she seemed to want to make this an interactive experience and would stop to ask Riley all sorts of questions.

“Do you see all of the octopus's flowers? Aren't they pretty,” or “Don't you think it was nice of the starfish to lend their seeds for the garden.”

Riley answered none of the questions he just sat sucking on the pacifier, which seemed to be a good enough excuse to remain silent. His Dad came in at some point and set a bottle on the bookshelf near the rocking chair. He turned on the

lamp and then as he left shut off the lights in the room. With the darkness and his Mom's soft reading voice, not too mention the gentle rocking of the chair Riley did find himself starting to get drowsy. Mom finished with the book setting it aside as she moved Riley so that he was cradled in her arms.

“Ready for your bottle?' she asked removing the pacifier from his mouth.

“Wait a minute,” Riley said causing his Mom to pause from lowering the bottle to his mouth. “Isn't this wrong?” he asked.

“What do you mean?” she asked cocking her head.

“Well don't you think making me drink something before bed is bad? I mean I'm trying to not have accidents, right?”

“Not at all,” Mom chuckled. “Remember we aren't counting nighttime accidents you just need to worry about getting your daytime accidents under control. Me and your doctor are much more concerned with you growing, and that's why you need to drink this. Besides that's half the reason you're wearing a diaper,” Mom said giving a couple of pats to Riley's behind. “So we don't need to worry about a wet bed. Now drink up and then its off to sleep.” Mom said placing the bottle in Riley's mouth.

He began to drink and as he did his Mom switched on some of the classical music she had played that afternoon. Riley's eyes drooped shut as he continued to drink and be rocked in his Mom's arms.

He had fallen into some in between space where he wasn't

asleep but not awake. He felt the formula stop flowing as he continued to suck on air. He felt the nipple be removed from his mouth before being replaced by the pacifier. He was then tucked into bed the soft fur of his shark nuzzled against his cheek. As Riley laid in bed thoughts played across his head as he went further towards sleep.

This had been one of the strangest days of his life. His parents had treated him like a baby, of that there was no doubt, and the worrying idea that this was all part of their plan began to form. That they were actually trying to make him into a baby which didn't sound very far-fetched. Yet part of Riley couldn't see that being true. For one, why would they even do that? Not too mention it wasn't even possible. He also had to consider that a lot of it had been suggested by a doctor. It was all part of a treatment that also came with a perfectly reasonable explanation for every change and that it was all somehow necessary to do so. Was that true? Was this all really necessary to help Riley get better. If they had been trying to make him into a baby they also did things that seemed to contradict that purpose. For instance his Mom had put him back on potty training but had also seen fit to give him money towards a car, if they were just treating him like a little kid then why would she do that? There were plenty of other examples as well. The only conclusion Riley could come too that made sense is that they had been truthful with him. This all was necessary for him to get better. Yet Riley could not accept that, it all just seemed so weird. Yet he didn't get much of a chance to think on it as he succumbed to his sleep.

Chapter 12

The Rough Patch part 12 - Chapter 12

Spiral Down

Riley was sat on the couch while Carson was on the other end. It was the first day of summer vacation for Carson. They were watching some show that Carson had turned on. It was some anime. Riley wasn't paying too much attention to it though. He did'nt really know the characters and it seemed that Carson was smack dab in the middle of the series so it was hard for Riley to know exactly what was going on. Still, it was nice to change from his normal routine. It had been four days since all the big changes had happened, from the potty training regimen to the playpen.

Every morning Riley would be woken by one of his parents. They would get him out of his pajamas and diaper and cleaned up before being sent to sit on his potty in their room. Afterwards they would get him dressed. They at least still let him put on the pull-up by himself even if afterwards they always took a moment to readjust it themselves. Then Riley would be taken down and placed in his highchair and given breakfast. If it was something like oatmeal or cereal and he needed a spoon his parents would spoonfeed it to him. Thankfully that morning it had been scrambled eggs on toast and some bacon so Riley had been able to eat it with his hands by himself. He would then be taken out to the living room where he would have to lay in their arms while he drank his bottle.

His parents seemed to have alternating schedules. His Mom only had to go into the office twice a week so on those days his Dad would be with him. But on days when his Mom worked from home she would opt to put him in his playpen while she worked. Riley had actually broken down at one such time and had spent a whole morning playing with the playset his Mom had gotten for him. It had staved off his boredom at least, and though he would never admit to such a thing he had a little fun in doing so. Lunch would come and he would be back in his highchair and then brought up to his room for another bottle before being put down for a nap. The nights were much the same as well. After dinner he would either be given a bath or changed straight away into his diaper and pajamas. A little before eight, he would be brought into his room to be read a story and then given his last bottle before being put to bed. Riley could certainly see that he was on a routine all meant to reduce his stress, but he doubted if it was actually working. It was all still horribly embarrassing but at least he knew what to expect.

Riley's life had certainly become more structured but it wasn't as if everyday was the same. His parents would still occasionally throw a curve ball his way. Just yesterday Mom had deemed it necessary for him to get out of the house for awhile and had taken him to the park again and lo and behold who was there waiting but Julia and Nathan. Riley had of course suspected that his Mom had no doubt invited them and he was just a little bit annoyed that she had done so of which he let his Mom know. She had just told him to relax and that she and Julia were friends now and they wanted to get

together sometimes.

“Yeah but you don't have to deal with Nathan,” Riley had complained.

“I like Nathan,” Mom said. “If he wasn't here you would just sit around like a lump on the bench the whole time.”

Nathan had of course been excited to see Riley in attendance. He immediately beckoned with Riley to go play with him on the playground. Riley knowing that he wasn't going to be able to refuse gave a resigned sigh and began to walk with him towards the playstructure when Julia had called Nathan back. Riley watched as Julia said something that he could not hear though he noticed when both of them looked back his way. He then saw his Mom say something too, before Julia began talking again. He he saw Nathan flash a smile and give a big thumbs up as he came running back to Riley.

“Let's go,” Nathan said grabbing Riley's hand and dragged him up the playstructure. As Nathan pulled him towards the slide Riley finally pulled his hand away.

“What did they say to you?” Riley asked having a suspicion that whatever it was, it had been about him.

“Nothing,” Nathan said shaking his head.

“Were you guys talking about me?” Riley then asked, opting to be straightforward with the kid.

“Noooo,” Nathan said. Riley furrowed his brows he could see right through Nathan. He wondered what they had said,

especially his Mom. Had she said something about his age? Riley couldn't remember a single time she had lied about his age to anyone, well except for at the aquarium. Riley knew she had definitely passed him off for a little kid then, but she had probably only done that to get him free admission. She couldn't really lie to the neighbors. What would they say when they saw Riley driving off to college? They would know then that she had lied. He wondered if Mom had told Julia about his real age, but she had already promised she wouldn't tell people that if only to spare Riley some embarrassment.

“You go down first,” Nathan then said pointing at the slide.

“I don't want too,” Riley said dismissively.

“Okay then,” Nathan said. “I'll go first so you can see how its done,” before he went sliding down. Getting to the bottom he looked back up at the top towards Riley. “See its easy you can do it.”

Riley scoffed. He had gone down the slide the previous time he had been forced to interact with Nathan. Why did this kids suddenly think he couldn't? Riley was starting to get a sense of deja-vu.

“You want me to come up and go with you?” Nathan then asked. Riley rolled his eyes he then went down the slide only to get Nathan off his back. Riley got to the bottom before scooting himself to the end when he hopped off stumbling a little falling onto his knees.

“Are you okay?” Nathan asked as he went to help Riley up.

“I'm fine,” Riley said clenching his teeth as he pushed the other boys hands off of him.

“Its okay, don't cry,” Nathan said as if he were comforting Riley. “These slides are kind of big for little kids. But you'll get the hang of it.”

“Stop talking to me like I'm a little kid,” Riley said gruffly.

“Well you are a little kid,” Nathan said as innocently as one could, there was no malice in his words to him he was just stating a fact.

“Say's who?” Riley asked. Although he wasn't really sure if he wanted the answer. What if his Mom had actually told them he was a younger age than Nathan?

“I'm taller,” Nathan said. Riley rolled his eyes knowing they had had this same argument before.

“You are not,” Riley said with some offense. “I'm just as tall as you,” Riley then noticed that Nathan was a little taller than last time and now had an inch on him. Riley let out a huff of air through his nose. He knew little kids grew fast but this was a little ridiculous. Although it had been awhile since he last seen him. So it was'nt outside the realm of possibility that Nathan had hit a little growth spurt.

“Also you wear pull-ups,” Nathan then pointed out.

“How did you –“ Riley squeaked.

“Cuz I saw them,” Nathan giggled. Riley's hands went to his back where he felt the papery material of the pull-up sticking out over his waistband for everyone to see since his shirt had ridden up. Riley pulled the back of his shirt down red-faced as he tried to sputter out some excuse. “See I wear big kid undies,” Nathan said pulling down the waist of his shorts a little at the side to expose a red waistband. “That means I'm a big kid and you're a little kid.”

“It does not,” Riley yelped.

“Plus my Mommy and your mommy said I had to look out for you,” Nathan then declared. Riley's eyes widened as Nathan's hands shot up over his mouth. “Whoops I wasn't supposed to say that.”

Riley didn't know how to react as she shot a harried look off towards his Mom who didn't notice as she was too busy talking. Was that what they had been saying to Nathan? That Nathan was somehow in charge. He knew they probably had'nt meant it like that, but Nathan had interpreted it as such.

“You don't have to look out for me,” Riley said after a moment. “I'm not a little kid,” he said feebly after having heard the slew of evidence Nathan had presented to contradict the point.

“How old are you anyways, you never told me?” Nathan then asked. Riley didn't know how to answer has he sputtered out some sounds. He couldn't tell Nathan he was twenty years old. Even if it was the truth its not something he really wanted to admit to.

Riley was wearing a pair of bright green shorts with a shirt that had a big blocky t-rex on solid white background with green and white striped sleeves to boot. Nathan looked considerably more mature in his Pokemon shirt and cargo pants. It would be beyond embarrassing to admit his real age looking like he did. But he wasn't about to lie and say he was younger, there was something so demeaning about lowering himself like that.

“Let's just go back to playing,” Riley said wanting to move away from this particular conversation as quickly as possible.

“Let's go to the sandbox,” Nathan said as his face lit up. “I brought my bulldozer and some buckets.” he said grabbing Riley's hand again as he raced back to where there Mom's sat. Nathan dug around in a bag before shoving some pails and shovels into Riley's arms before grabbing out two large toy bulldozers as he then beckoned Riley to follow. His Mom looked down at him with a smile. Riley turned his face away upturning his nose a little. He was beyond upset with her, for what exactly he didn't know after all he wasn't sure what she had said, but he was sure there was something to be mad at her for.

Getting to the sandbox Nathan wasted no time in taking one of the bulldozers and pushing sand around. Riley sat on the edge just watching.

“Aren't you going to help?” Nathan asked noticing Riley sitting with a dour expression.

“With what?” Riley asked. It looked to him that Nathan was

just pushing sand around.

“Building the wall,” Nathan said. He grabbed a bucket and a pail and extended them out towards Riley. “You can gather the sand and then dump it into a big pile and then I'll use the bulldozer to move it where it needs to go.” Riley's shoulders slumped as he frowned at Nathan. “C'mon it will be fun,” Nathan said.

“Fine,” Riley groaned grabbing the bucket. It wasn't the worlds worst task and building this wall seemed to keep Nathan preoccupied. The boys worked in silence for sometime and by the time they were done Nathan had arranged the sand into a long winding hill that stretched from one end of the sandbox to the other.

“Its done,” Nathan said surveying their work with a proud look. “Nathan's wall,” he said waving his hand over the structure.

“I helped you know,” Riley said with some surliness. He didn't actually care but thought that maybe this was a good opportunity to teach Nathan a lesson in not being so selfish.

“It was my idea so I get to name it,” Nathan said. “But I got another idea, hang on.” he said. Nathan picked up one of the buckets and began to pile sand in it. He then brought the filled bucket to one side of the wall before plopping it down on the ground before pulling it up revealing sand pressed into the shape of the bucket complete with the raised parts at the top making it look like a castle. “There Riley Castle.”

Riley looked at the lone tower with a smirk. He took his own bucket and filled it with sand before plopping it down next to the one that Nathan had made.

“If its my castle then has to be big,” Riley declared.

Nathan and Riley continued to build out the castle. Mom and Julia came walking over after some time that Riley Castle was starting to look like a massive complex.

“Riley come here for a moment,” Mom called from the edge of the sandbox. Riley walked over to her. “How about we go take a quick potty break?” she asked.

“I don't need to go,” Riley said as his face reddened at the request being made in front of Julia. Riley took a step back.

“Oh no you don't.” Mom said as she grabbed him and lifted him up into her arms as Riley let out a squeak. “You boys have been playing for awhile and I don't want any accidents today.”

“That sounds like a good idea,” Julia said. “Nathan lets go potty too.”

“But Mom,” Nathan whined.

“But nothing,” Julia said silencing her sons protest. “It will be really quick and then you boys can come right back to playing.” Something about the way she had said that only seemed to prove to Riley that she was under no delusion that he was not a little kid. As they walked to the bathrooms Riley's Mom made a detour towards the car.

“Can I please walk,” Riley asked as she opened the trunk.

“Of course you can,” Mom said setting him on his feet before grabbing the training potty from the car.

“Can I not do that out here?” Riley asked looking around noticing the park was a good deal more populated than it had been the previous time they had been here and Riley had used his potty in the parking lot.

“We're taking it into the bathroom,” Mom said grabbing Riley's hand as they began to walk.

“But Mommy, Nathan's in there, I don't want to use it in front of him,” Riley said knowing that if Nathan saw him on his potty it would only make him look like more of a little kid. Not too mention the embarrassment of going to the bathroom with an audience.

“We'll use a stall.” Mom said squeezing his hand. “So no more complaints, I know you want that sticker after yesterday.”

Riley knew what she was referring to of course. He had been so confident upon starting the potty training that he fully believed he would be out of pull-ups by the end of the week. Yet yesterday had been disastrous. He wet himself just before lunch. He hadn't even felt the need to go until it was too late. Mom had been reassuring letting him know it wasn't the end of the world and that these things take time, her words did little to comfort Riley. He had been knocked out of getting a sticker and the money so early in the day. What was even the

point of trying? Mom with some understanding then amended the terms of their deal. She had decided to cut the days in half. If Riley was able to make it to naptime without an accident then he would get twenty five dollars and another if he made it too bedtime, that way even if Riley had an accident in the morning he still had an incentive to give his full effort. Although he had ended up with zero stickers yesterday since right before dinner he had felt the need to go. He had ran to his potty, but unfortunately hadn't made it in time.

Riley wanted two stickers today to make up for yesterday. As they walked to the bathroom he did realize that he did need to go, and rather urgently at that.

Getting into the bathroom Nathan was already at a urinal with his shorts and underwear down around his ankles as he held his shirt up. Riley felt his hand released as he ran to the stall only to be crestfallen to see that all he stall doors were closed with a paper sign attached on the front of the padlocked doors.

“Looks like their all out of order,” Julia said.

“Well darn,” Mom said setting the potty on the ground next to one of the stall door. “I was hoping to give Riley some privacy, he's a little shy.”

Julia then clapped her hands. “Hurry up Nathan so Riley can use his potty,”

“I'm hurrying,” Nathan said pulling up his pants as he rushed towards the sink. “I don't want him to have an accident in his

pull-ups since he is trying to be a big kid.” Mom gave a sort of amused expression towards the comment.

“Oh Riley,” Julia then said. “Your potty is so cool I especially like all the stickers you put on it.”

Riley would have said that it wasn't him, but at that point he was far more focused on not wetting his pants as he stood with his legs together and a hand at his crotch. He looked up at his Mom with worried eyes knowing he couldn't wait much longer.

“Its not really a secret,” she said referring to the fact that Nathan already knew about the pull-ups. She gave him a shrug that said it was up to him what he wanted to do. Riley didn't really have a choice. He pulled his shorts and pull up down and sat on the potty.

“I know,” Julia said. “I'll stand in front of you so nobody sees,”

“Thats a great idea,” Mom said as both ladies turned their backs to Riley giving him some much appreciated coverage.

“Did you make it?” Nathan asked peering down at Riley.

“Nathan,” Julia gasped as she put her hands on her sons shoulders and spun him around. “Its not polite to stare, just because you don't care if anyone sees you doesn't mean that other's don't. Give Riley some privacy.”

Riley felt the relief wash over him as he finished up.

“Looks like you're done,” Mom said turning around to help

him pull up his pull-up and shorts of which Riley didn't resist knowing that it would only take longer if he did.

“Great job, you made it,” Julia said smiling as she held her hand up. Riley gave her a half-hearted high five.

After the embarrassment of the potty break Riley was hoping they could leave, yet Nathan asked for the swings and both women agreed to it. Riley kicked a little at the wood chips as he went to resignedly take a seat on the swing. He hopped up into the swing. He hated how his feet didn't even reach the ground. He leaned back to get enough power to get going. He wasn't about to ask for a push, and swinging wasn't the worst way to spend his time. Riley wasn't exactly making much progress. He leaned back further before he lost his grip and nearly flipped over on his back only being saved by his Mom at the last second as she got him sat back upright. Riley sat in the swing not even trying anymore. He remembered his Mom saying something about his motor skills being effected by his illness. It seemed to explain why he seemed to have so much trouble with the simplest task, even things he remembered being able to do just fine not long ago, but like everything he seemed to be going backwards, just when would he start to see some improvement?

“Are'nt you going to swing?” Mom asked noticing him moping on the swing.

“I don't want too,” Riley said sounding more like a whine than he meant to. “My legs are tired.”

“Well there's no use in just having you sit there,” Mom said

picking him up under the armpits and carrying him to the swing on the other side of Nathan. She placed Riley into the baby swing before pulling back and releasing him as he began to swing back and forth. Riley couldn't even protest. Its not like he could object to being too old for such a thing in front of Julia and Nathan. Complaining would only make him look like a little kid. His Mom was giving him some strong pushes and he was going higher than she had allowed when he was in the other swing. Worst of all, but who could really keep count, was that with Riley secured in his own swing Nathan seemed to be swinging higher as well without his Mom telling him not to go too high. Which meant that last time she had only said that to keep Riley from going too high as if he would just want to copy anything Nathan did. They swang for another twenty minutes before the park trip came to an end.

Back home Riley was in his highchair eating a pb&j sandwhich that his Mom had cut up into strips. Riley hadn't even complained about anything that had happened at the park. He was dead tired, so much so that his eyes were drooping as he ate. Mom was sat at the table with some tea looking over some work documents.

“That was a fun time at the park, don't you think?” she mused. “Me and Julia were talking and we decided it might be a good idea for us to get together in the mornings. So we will be going to the park on Mondays and Wednesdays, doesn't that sound nice.

“I hate the park,” Riley mumbled. “Its boring.” His Mom

looked over at him as Riley's head drooped before he snapped back upright a moment later.

“Yes I can see you were so bored that it just tuckered you right out,” she said sarcastically as she got up removing Riley's bib. “I think you can finish this and take your bottle later,” Mom said removing the plate of food off the tray before getting Riley out of the highchair and into her arms. “I think a certain someone is ready for their nap." Riley's head was already resting on her shoulder and his eyes were closed. They hadn't even made it into his room before he had fallen asleep.

Back in the present Riley flopped to his side before re-situating himself on the couch so that his legs were resting up against the back of the couch and his head hung off the front.

“What are you doing?” Carson asked.

“Getting comfortable,” Riley said. He looked over at Carson who just seemed to nod before turning his attention back to the tv. Riley had felt a little awkward all day now that Carson was home. In anticipation he had begged his Dad to give him some shorts that morning which his Dad had obliged in the end. It was no secret to Carson how Riley's days went, still Riley didn't want to be walking around all day in just a shirt and a pull up with Carson around. Mom came walking into the living room.

“Are you two still watching tv?” she asked as she came and stood next to the couch. She watched as a character on the screen got stabbed by a sword. She made a tutting sound with

her tongue. “Carson maybe this isn't the type of show you should be watching with Riley,” she said.

“Why not,” Carson said giving her a side eyed look with a tone that seemed to almost be challenging her. Mom gave sly smile showing that she wasn't going to be baited into whatever argument Carson was trying to have.

“I'm just thinking this is more of a you show rather than something both of you enjoy,” she said.

“He likes it,” Carson said looking over at Riley. “Don't you?” It was abundantly clear to both Mom and Carson that Riley wasn't that particularly interested in it.

“Its fine,” Riley said staring off into space.

“See,” Carson said. Mom then clapped her hands as she picked up the remote and turned off the tv standing in front of the boys.

“Listen up you potatoes,” she said. “Its a beautiful day out and I think we all should take this opportunity to get some fresh air. Carson gave a look of utmost derision. But knew better than to argue when his Mom was in the my way or the highway type of mood.

“So what do we gotta do?” Carson asked ready to be sulky at whatever came out of his Mom's mouth.

“Have you been to that new park lately?” she asked. “Me and Riley have gone a couple of times its pretty nice. They got some tennis courts too. Maybe you could bring your racket

and show us what you've been learning in those lessons."

"I guess," Carson said shrugging his shoulders.

"I could probably call Julia and see if she's free to come along," Mom then mentioned. Riley was hit by a wave of anxiety. If Julia came then she would bring Nathan with and there was only one person he would want to play with. Riley didn't want to have to keep Nathan company with Carson around to witness. They also would most likely end up back at the swings. What if his Mom put him in the baby swing again? What if she asked Carson to push Riley? No way, that could happen.

"I don't want to go to the park," Riley yelped sitting upright on the couch with a panicked look. Carson looked at Riley with a ponderous look.

"You know I don't really want to go either," Carson said as if he was picking up on Riley's extreme apprehension. Mom looked at her kids as if she were considering something. She settled her gaze on Riley who still had the worried expression painted on his face.

"While I suppose we were just there," Mom said. "I guess we can go and enjoy the backyard."

Both boys were shooed out the backdoor into the yard. Mom came out a little later wearing her sunhat and nice fresh pitcher of ice tea in hand. She took a seat at the table and set out the blue tooth speaker she had nabbed from Riley's room. She put on some music before opening up her book. Neither

Riley or Carson really knew what to do. They were walking side by side in the yard when Carson stopped picking up a stray tennis ball.

“Catch,” Carson said tossing the ball over at Riley. The ball bonked him on the head as Riley's hands went up fumbling to grab the ball. He was unsuccessful, but really Carson had thrown it at him out of nowhere. Riley picked up the ball shaking his head at his brother.

“Didn't you used to play baseball?” Carson snorted. It was true Riley had played baseball and had only stopped in his sophomore year. The high school team was a lot more demanding and Riley had just played for fun, so it wasn't a really big deal for him to quit. His Dad had been a little disappointed but understood that it just wasn't something important to Riley.

“Yeah well you suck at throwing,” Riley snarked back.

“Then lets see what you remember.” Carson said as he walked into the middle of the yard before squatting down like a catcher. “C'mon give me the heater, right here,” Carson said slapping his hand like he was wearing a mitt.

“Alright tennis boy,” Riley said with a smirk. He wound up before throwing the ball only to see it arc up and fall to the ground with a thud halfway between himself and Carson. Riley put his hands on his hips as he looked quizzically at the ball. That wasn't right. Sure he hadn't used his full streetlight but he shouldn't have too. It was just a tennis ball and Carson wasn't even that far away. Riley had thrown people out

sending balls from third to first with ease when he had played. Carson got up and walked to the ball.

“Try again,” Carson said tossing the ball underhanded to Riley. “You're just not warmed up.” Riley fumbled once again trying to catch the ball with his hands up against his chest but did manage not to drop it. Riley looked at the ball before gripping it tightly. He threw it again this time with all his strength. Carson had to get to his feet and caught the ball before it went over his head.

“There you go,” Carson said tossing the ball back to Riley. The ball flew past Riley and so he had to go retrieve it. He felt a little more confident that the ball had actually reached Carson this time he just needed to work on his control. Riley picked up the ball and turned around before frowning. He realized that he and Carson were now as far apart as they had been on the first throw. The only reason the ball had reached his brother the second time was because Carson had stayed in the spot the ball had landed on the failed attempt. Riley was surprised he hadn't noticed, then again he had probably been more focused on throwing the ball than where Carson was. It stung Riley's ego a little to see what had happened.

Just then Riley felt some pain in his stomach. He let out a little groan as he crouched down. Just great he thought now he had a stomachache. However a moment later Riley realized it wasn't a stomachache, it was something else. Riley needed to go, yet there was no time as nature took its course and he felt the back of his pull-up expand out as it filled. Riley stayed crouched down frozen. It wasn't real what was

happening, it just couldn't be, he did not just do that.

“Riley you okay?” Carson asked as knelt down putting a hand on Riley's back. Riley's head turned slowly to look at his brother with a fear stricken face. “Whats up, did you hurt...” Carson then came to a stop as he got a whiff of the air. His eyes then trailed down towards the back of Riley's shorts. “Uhhhh,” was all Carson could say as the pieces fell into place. Carson then stood up. “Hey Mom,” Carson called out. Mom looked up from her book. “Its umm Riley he well he...” Carson's voice trailed off as he couldn't really spit out what had happened. Mom's mouth twitched a little sensing trouble as she got up and walked over to the boys. Seeing that there was some issue with Riley she knelt down placing a hand on his back as Carson had done.

“Honey whats the matter, are you hurt?” she asked gently.

“Its not that,” Carson said before motioning with his head towards Riley's backside. Mom looked back confused as her eyes wandered in the direction of Carson's gesture. Her eyebrows then raised as the smell hit her and she saw Riley's shorts looking droopier than normal.

“I see,” she said with a sigh as she stood up. “Riley lets go into the house for a minute, okay.” Riley lifted his head to see his Mom waiting with an outstretched hand. For a moment it comforted him to see her there ready to whisk him away from this horrible situation. Riley stood up. He was on the verge of tears but was holding them back with his whole self. He took a step to take his Mom's hand. He felt the mess shift in his

pull-up bringing the reality of the situation back on him. He let out a little croak as his legs went shaky.

“I- I can't,” he said as he felt the strength go from his legs feeling himself falling backwards. His Mom had been quick to grab him before he fell onto his butt and brought him up into her arms.

“Don't you dare sit down,” Mom said somewhere between exasperation and a laugh. She carried Riley into the house, as soon as they were in the living room his Mom pulled the waistband at the back of the shorts. “Oh boy that's going to need a little more than some wipes,” Mom said letting the waistband snap back as she proceeded to carry Riley to the bathroom. As soon as they crossed the threshold to the master bathroom, Riley could no longer hold it in. With one shuddering breath it came out as he began to loudly wail, tears were falling down his cheeks in a stream and snot was starting to form at his nose. There was nothing to stop it. The humiliation and hopelessness had become all encompassing.

Mom could offer little comfort at the moment as there were far more pressing matters to attend to. She did her best to give Riley some gentle affirmations that everything was going to be okay as she got him dressed down to just the pull-up. She undid the sides as she let the sodden pull up drop into her hand so it did not fall on the ground. The terrible smell only seemed to increase as it was now open which only served to have Riley let out another loud wail. His Mom disposed of the pull-up before opening her shower door and guiding Riley in. She took down the shower head and ran the water till it

was warm before she proceeded to rinse off Riley's behind. Afterwards his Mom dried him off and then brought him back to his room where she proceeded to get him into a fresh pull-up and put his shirt back on him although it seemed she had left the shorts behind. Riley gave no action to try and resist having his Mom completely redress him although at least he had stopped wailing and his tears had reduced to a trickle rather than a stream.

“Try to take deep breath, sweetie,” Mom said stroking the side of his head. Riley did indeed try yet his shuddering breaths were punctuated by his uncontrollable sobbing making him sound as if he were hyperventilating. Mom, upon seeing that Riley was not going to come around on his own decided to give him as much time and comfort that he needed. She proceeded to lift him up off the ground before sitting with him in the rocking chair. She stroked his hair with his head against her chest.

“There there, its all okay now,” she said softly as she made shushing sounds with here mouth. Riley settled down after awhile yet still not able to hold back some shuddering whimpers. His Mom grabbed a pacifier and slipped it into his mouth. Riley didn't resist, his energy having been spent and his mouth seemed to act on its own as it began to suckle on the pacifier.

Riley awoke in his bed having no memory of even falling asleep. He got out of bed looking down to see something good for once. His pull-up was dry. Riley smiled before he started jumping up and down as a jittery feeling of joy

overtook him. This was the sign, it had to be. It had finally happened he had hit rock bottom that morning and now there was no way but up.

Riley calmed down as he remembered that morning. His sides began to ache a little with embarrassment. How was he supposed to face anyone after they had all seen that? He took in a deep breath before he made his way out of his room. He was just going to have to get it over with. Riley came downstairs finding his Mom in the kitchen sorting through some tupperware on the floor.

“Hey darlin,” Mom said as she watched him walk across the kitchen to come and stand next to her.

“Hey,” Riley said looking sheepish as he stood nearby. There was a pregnant pause before Riley finally spoke again. “Um I'm sorry about what happened earlier, I just didn't know until it was too late.”

His Mom gave him an understanding smile. “There is no need to apologize.”

“Yes there is,” Riley said. “I know I let you down and then you had to clean me up and...” Riley's stream of apologies came to an end as his Mom got up from the ground before lifting him up and sitting him ontop of the island counter so they were at eye level.

“Now listen carefully,” she said. “You did not let me down, I know you have been trying your hardest and these things take time. You're going to have some setbacks, its perfectly okay.”

The corner of Riley's mouth twisted down a little. It was nice to hear that his Mom wasn't disappointed with him, but he still felt bothered by how everything had played out.

“I shouldn't be having meltdowns though,” Riley mumbled.

“Oh sweetie that's okay,” Mom said cupping his cheek into her hand as her thumbed stroked his face.

“I just couldn't stop,” Riley said. His Mom then went over to the desk in the kitchen and pulled out the packet the doctor had given to her at Riley's appointment. She flipped through looking for something before coming to a stop on a page.

“Patients may exhibit mood swings and become highly emotional for very little reason,” she read before closing the packet back up. “See, its just part of what you are going through. I think it was healthy for you to cry.”

“Healthy?” Riley questioned scrunching up his face.

“Sure,” Mom said. “I know you've been trying to hold in a lot of those feelings, you needed an outlet and you got it. I just read an article about people who just have a good long cry once a week, the article said it was a cathartic release.”

“You think I need to cry more?” Riley asked finding what his Mom was saying a little strange.

“Not necessarily,” said Mom. “I just think you should let things happen and not push down your emotions. If you're happy then be happy and if you're sad be sad. That sounds pretty easy right?”

Riley mulled it over in his head. Riley could see some sense to it all. Maybe the only reason he had melted down like that was because he had been pushing all his frustrations down as best he could. It was like when he had completely blown his top at lunch a couple of days ago. Maybe it was better to just be a little more free, it couldn't hurt and may just help with the stress.

“I guess I could try,” Riley said although he didn't really know how he was supposed to actually do it.

“That's great,” Mom said. “And I also want you to know that if you are feeling sad or upset you can come and tell me, and then I'll give you a nice big hug,” she said wrapping him up in her arms as she lifted him off the counter. Riley found himself responding as he brought his arms around his Mom's neck. It did feel good to hug her at least.

“Now lets practice,” Mom said setting him on the ground. “How do you feel,”

Riley was silent trying to figure how exactly did he feel at the moment, that was until his tummy let out a growl answering for him.

“Well you did miss lunch and your bottle since you took an early nap,” Mom chuckled as she whisked him to his highchair to give him some food.

The rest of Riley's day proceeded on as normally as it could these days. The only difference was now he was feeling anxious about having another accident. He didn't want that to

happen again. So he spent most of the rest of his day within the confines of his playpen sticking close to his potty. If he even got the slightest hint of needing to go he would then go and sit on his potty. His efforts did see him earning a sticker for the afternoon.

The next morning Riley was once again sitting on the soft mat that covered the floor within the confines of his playpen as he fiddled with one of the scuba diver toys in his hands. His Mom came into the living room looking a little surprised to find Riley willingly in the area he claimed to hate.

“Riley I'm going to the greenhouse to get some gardening supplies,” his Mom said.

“Ok,” Riley said getting to his feet already knowing he was going too. It was just his Mom and him in the house since Carson was at morning tennis lessons and Dad was at work. “Let me use the potty first,” Riley said going to his potty.

“Of course, you beat me to reminding you,” she said as she left the room. Riley sat for awhile yet nothing was happening. He tried to force something but only let out a couple spurts of pee. His Mom came back in with her purse and the large canvas bag on either shoulder.

“Let's go,” she said.

“I can't,” Riley said. “Nothing's happened yet.”

“You just went fifteen minutes ago,” Mom said. “You probably don't have to go.”

“I can't leave until I do,” Riley mewled. There was no way he was having another accident, especially in public. His Mom furrowed her brow a little a hint of concern dancing across her mouth.

“You have ten minutes,” she said looking at her phone. “Then we are leaving whether or not you've used the potty.” Riley continued to sit on his potty trying to make something happen yet nothing did. His Mom returned with a pair of red shorts that went with his t-shirt featuring Simba the lion cub on the front. “Okay time's up,” she said as she knelt down holding the shorts out. Riley clenched his teeth before he resignedly got to his feet. He walked over and let his Mom help him get the shorts on before she picked him up and carried him out to the car.

Riley sat in his carseat becoming more nervous by the second that he might have to go. They pulled into the gravel parking lot of the greenhouse. Before his Mom unstrapped him she got a pair of socks and shoes on his feet. Walking into the greenhouse his Mom grabbed one of the wagons with the wire mesh bottom. She picked him up and plopped him into the wagon before grabbing the handle and pulled it behind her. Riley would have usually protested such a thing if his mind wasn't elsewhere. As his Mom went up and down the aisle of the greenhouse grabbing plants and putting them in the wagon. Riley was becoming antsy with how long this was taking.

“Can we hurry up,” Riley said with some urgency.

“We've only been here ten minutes,” Mom said patting his head before grabbing another plant off the shelf.

“I want to get home,” Riley muttered.

“Do you need to go potty?” Mom asked with a raised eyebrow.

“No,” Riley yelped as he saw two other shoppers pass by causing his face to redden a little.

“I'll be done soon,” Mom said as she pulled a pacifier out of her bag and clipped it to Riley's shirt before presenting it to him. Riley's mouth seemed to open automatically as he accepted it into his mouth and began sucking. “Afterwards we have to go pick up Carson from tennis and if you are patient then we'll stop by Taco Bell or something on the way home,” his Mom said as she pulled the wagon along. Riley gave a weary look not being at all swayed by the promise of fast food. That's when he felt the pang in his stomach. His eyes went wide. He stood up instantly in the wagon.

“Mommy, potty,” he yelped as the pacifier flew out of his mouth. His Mom spun around with the same wide eyes of her son. Yet there was no time as just like yesterday Riley found himself crouching unable to stop as the back of the pull-up poofed out and drooped.

“Oh no,” Mom said as she looked on with a saddened look. She plucked Riley out of the cart. She knelt down at eye level putting her hands on the side of his head smoothing out his hair. “Its okay, it was just an accident,” she cooed in an effort

to stop him from having a complete meltdown. For Riley's part he seemed to be holding back. As he took in deep shuddering breaths and constantly wiping the tears from his eyes.

“Oh didn't make huh?” an older lady commented as she gave a sympathetic smile.

“Appears not,” Mom said with tight smile. The other woman was only trying to be nice, yet Mom knew that it wasn't exactly helpful at the moment.

“Its okay honey,” the older lady said. “You'll get the hang of it soon,” she said before moving on.

Mom took Riley by the hand. “I need you to walk right now.” They got to the checkout desk where Mom asked where the bathrooms were. The cashier informed her they only had porta-potties located on the outside.

“I see,” Mom said sucking in some air through her teeth. She left the wagon at the front before walking Riley out to the car. She then pulled his shorts and pull-up back to survey the damage.

“Its not too bad,” she said as she opened the trunk of the car. She lowered the back row of seats down before placing Riley on his back on the changing mat she had brought. She then put Riley's pacifier back in his mouth which seemed to help him calm down to let out only a few whimpers. She tore the sides of the pull-up and got it off of him before she attacked the mess with several wipes. Once that was done she got a

new pull-up on Riley. She had him stand in the parking lot to put his shorts back on. She closed the trunk before turning to look at Riley. She removed the pacifier from his mouth.

“You doing okay?” she asked. Riley shook his head. “Tell me how you feel,” his Mom said. A couple of words came to Riley. He felt like a failure, how could he have done this twice now. He felt hopeless, as he had tried so hard and it had still happened.

“Sad,” Riley sniffled.

“I'm sorry to hear that,” Mom said. “Is there something I can do to help you not feel so sad?'

Riley paused before he nodded his head. It didn't matter that he was twenty years old and he shouldn't want something like that.

“Can I have a hug?” Riley asked looking at his Mom with big watery eyes. She opened up her arms beckoning Riley forward. He walked slowly collapsing into her embrace as he squeezed her. He let the comfort and security he felt wash over him as she held him in her arms for a minute. She then picked him up putting Riley on her hip so that he could look at her.

“I have to go pay now, do you want to come with?” she asked. Riley shook his head no and so was put into his carseat while his Mom went and finished up in the greenhouse. After loading up the car and getting into the driver's seat she looked back to see Riley still looking glum. She reached back putting

a hand on his leg.

“Tell ya what Ry, we're not going to count this accident.” she said. Riley looked up at her his expression didn't change.

“It doesn't matter, I'll just mess up again,” he said. Mom forced a smile before sighing. She knew that things had reached a certain point.

“I think its time to go see the doctor again.” “Mom said starting the ignition.

The day of the appointment came and Riley found himself being accompanied by both of his parents. Dad had made mention of something about the insurance. Still it was weird that they were both coming. His appointment was with Dr. Colleen again. Riley went through another exam as the doctor checked him over from head to toe and by the time she was done he was standing in the middle of the room wearing nothing but a slightly damp pull-up which he should have been used to by now. There was something about standing in the room like that while everybody else was dressed that seemed to make Riley a little uncomfortable, almost as if he was no longer being viewed as an adult but as a child who had no concept of modesty. It didn't help that the doctor seemed to be directing most of her questions towards Mom and Dad instead of asking him.

“Well I don't really see anything wrong with him physically,” the doctor said looking over her notes. “But I think I know exactly whats going on here,” she said. Riley could feel dread rise up in him. “I think its apparent that Riley is fixating on

making it to the potty and that is becoming a point of stress," she began. "I think the best course of action would be to remove it completely so he no longer has to worry about it." Riley felt his heart drop. It didn't need to be spelled out for him what she was proposing.

"If you think that's best," Mom had said giving a worried look towards Riley.

"I do," the doctor had said going over to a cabinet and pulling out a diaper which she handed to Mom. "Put a pause to the potty training for now, just until his stress levels go down," she had then looked down to Riley. "After that you'll be able to get right back on that horse, sound good Riley."

Riley could only give a couple blinks back as he stared with a far off look into his eyes. "You can use this room if you want to change him," the doctor said. "Mr. Thomas if you would follow me I can get those papers to you for insurance purposes," she said addressing Dad. Riley watched as his Dad and the doctor left the room.

"Okay lets get you changed then," Mom whispered as she lifted Riley up onto the exam table.

"Mommy no," Riley wheezed as the breath left his chest. "I don't need this."

"The doctor's right," Mom said as she tore at the sides of the pull-up. "I've watched you these past couple of days. If you're not sitting on the potty then you're right by it. Its like you're tethered to it. Its not good for you to constantly be worried

about this.”

Riley let out a mewling whine as his Mom took a wipe over his groin before going in with some cream and powder before pulling the diaper up and taping it into place. She then placed him on the ground before dressing him in some bright orange shorts and a tank top that had some sea turtles on it. Riley squirmed in the seat as his Mom put his shoes on. As much as the feeling of a diaper wasn't new to him it felt weird to be wearing one under clothes that were not his usual pajamas and during the day. His Mom came to a pause as she noted Riley's dazed look.

“Riley, this is for the best,” she said stroking the side of his head, a gesture she had found seemed to help in such moments. “I think this is really going to help, and then things will get back to normal just like that.”

Riley frowned as he nodded his head. There was nothing he could say at the moment. He had no choice but to go along with it and hope that his Mom and the doctor were right.

Afterwards Riley found himself riding in the cart as his parents did some grocery shopping. Riley sat with his chin in his hands as he rode along. He cringed as his parents turned down the baby aisle. He had never been with them when they actually bought this kind of stuff. His parents began to look at all the packages of diapers on display.

“Why don't you get that one,” Mom said.

"We might as well stock up," Dad said.

Riley turned in the seat to see his Dad place a whole box of diapers into the cart. It seemed that his parents didn't think that Riley's return to full time diapers was going to be a quick affair.

Chapter 13

The Rough Patch Part 13 - Chapter 13

Intruder

Riley was laid out flat on his back as he looked up at the ceiling from within his playpen. He rolled over onto his stomach, smushing his wet diaper up against his groin, he rolled onto his back again, before sitting up. He looked around his playpen. It had been two weeks since it had shown up and in that time it had become populated with some more toys. Cars, and trucks, as well as some action figures. He didn't know where they were coming from, they just seemed to appear. Although none of it really interested him at that moment. He was feeling a little tired. He had just gotten done eating lunch. It had been leftover stew from the previous night that his Dad had spoon fed to him while Riley had sat in his highchair, since stew was not finger food, still it had been good stew.

Riley looked at the boat playset that had been the first toy that had been given to him. It was still his favorite. He had played with it the most. Riley got to his feet, he looked down at his shirt scrunching up his face a little. He had not been a fan when his Mom had put him in it that morning. It had a cute little elephant on the front holding a balloon in its trunk. Riley had asked for something else but his Mom had apologized saying it was the only clean onesie she had since she was behind on laundry. Well at least she had put shorts on him Riley thought, as he looked down at the tan shorts he was

wearing with the drawstring waist, not like it really mattered though. Nothing he ever wore really covered up the fact that he was wearing a diaper. That was why his Mom had him wear onesies regularly now, she said it would help the diaper not sag so much. But the point still stood, you could still tell looking at him just what he was wearing underneath. As Riley picked his boat up into his hands he looked at the corner where his potty had been, it was of course gone, he didn't need it anymore yet the calendar was still hung on the wall. To Riley it why like a long lost remnant of an age since gone.

“Riley,” he heard his Dad call from behind as he unlatched the gate of the playpen. Riley turned around to see his Dad standing there with a bottle in his hand as he shook it side to side causing the formula inside to make a sloshing sound, before walking away. Riley put down his boat and followed his Dad over to the easy chair in the living room. Riley stood by the side of the chair waiting for his Dad to sit down. As he turned to look at Riley, having gotten settled having put the footrest up Riley lifted up his arms instinctively as his Dad lifted him up and over onto his lap.

“Okey dokey what time is it?” Dad asked. Riley gave his Dad a weary look. It seemed his parents in response to Riley's intermittent protesting of his routine had taken to asking him why he had to do the things that were required of him, perhaps hoping to show him that he already knew why. “C'mon Ry I know you know the answer, and I think there is a Riley word in their as well.” his Dad prodded.

Riley let out a little grunt at the reminder. Riley words were another little device they had adopted when Riley had refused to answer such questions all the time and would rather mumble out the answers. His Mom took one of his mumbles to mean his bottle and thus the first Riley word was born. More were soon to follow, his parents thinking it was good to give Riley special names to call the most important things he had. Things he did everyday.

“Its time for my baba,” Riley sighed.

“Good job, sport,” Dad said as he shifted Riley back into the crook of his arm as Riley opened his mouth to accept his bottle. There were really only three such words. His bottle was now “baba” and his pacifier was “nu nu” the third one however was the worst one and he avoided it when he could. Riley wasn't too bothered by the “Riley words” he was more mystified by how easily they had slipped into his vocabulary. As soon as his parents had given him some encouragement to use them they seemed to effortlessly come out of his mouth without a second thought, almost as if his mouth had really deemed them easier to say and so would opt to default to them. It had been the same with Mommy and Daddy. He never even really thought about calling his parents anything other than that.

His Dad had the tv on while Riley drank his bottle. With the quiet murmur of sports highlights playing being the only sound in the otherwise quiet house Riley let his eyes close. He somewhat enjoyed these quiet moments. His life had certainly taken on a slower pace, a farcry from the chaos he

felt when all this had started. His Mom was at work that day and Carson was off doing whatever he did in his summer days that it was just Riley and his Dad. Which Riley sort of liked. The one on one time with his parents had become welcome, although it wasn't how he had imagined he would be spending time with his parents at his age. Riley still had his moments of protest and frustration but everything had seemed to take on a weirdly normal feeling. He even found himself looking forward to the weekly trips to the park. Nathan had seemed to grow on him and now he didn't really find it all that hard to get sucked into playing along with the boy. Yet there were things that still struck him as weird. Julia and Nathan had not seemed the least bit surprised when Riley started showing up wearing diapers or having a pacifier clipped to his shirt. It wasn't as if they didn't know especially after Riley had needed a change and his Mom had grabbed a diaper out of her bag before taking him to the bathrooms to use the changing station. Not even Nathan had commented on any of it.

However the weirdest interaction had taken place just a couple of days ago when Riley had been taken to the store with his Mom. They had been in an aisle as his Mom looked at drapes for the dining room.

“Is that Carol Thomas I see?” the voice of a lady had sounded out. Riley had turned around from his seat in the cart to see none other than Mrs. Sanders his senior year English teacher from when he had been in high school standing there. Riley's stomach had flip flopped over in on its self upon seeing her.

“Mrs. Sanders how nice to see you again,” Mom had greeted without a hint of concern for how this scene would look to one of Riley's old teachers.

“And is that Riley I see you have with you?” the woman asked looking at the petrified boy in the cart.

“Sure is, I had to drag him along with me to go drapes shopping since my husband is finally almost done renovating our dining room,” Mom said.

“Hey Riley remember me, hows life treating you after graduation?” Mrs. Sanders said. Riley didn't understand how she didn't seem to even look the least bit surprised to see him sitting in the cart wearing a pair of bright red shortalls with a firetruck applique on the front and sucking on a pacifier.

“Riley answer her for goodness sakes,” Mom chuckled as she plucked the pacifier from his mouth.

“Um fine,” Riley squeaked out.

“And college, did you end up going?” she asked still smiling.

“Y-Yes,” Riley stammered still unsure of how this woman, the same one that had given him detention for cutting class and yet had also praised his paper on the Grapes of Wrath, didn't seem to be the least bit phased by his appearance and was carrying on as normal of a conversation as one would have with an old student.

“That's good, I always knew you'd do fine. Do you have a major?” Mrs. Sanders asked. Riley let out some unintelligible

croaks not able to even form words anymore.

“Marine Biology,” his Mom had then interjected answering for him. “You'll have to forgive him he's been a little off today.” Mom said as she slipped the pacifier back into his mouth. The women exchanged a few more pleasantries before Mrs. Sanders said her farewells. Riley sat wondering what in the world had just happened for the rest of the shopping trip.

“All done,” Dad said pulling the bottle nipple from Riley's mouth snapping him back into the present. His Dad sat him up in his lap giving a couple of pats to Riley's back which caused him to let out a little burp. “Alright pal lets see how that diaper is doing,” Dad said as he pulled off Riley's shorts before tossing them over onto the couch leaving Riley in just the snap crotch onesie. His Dad then proceeded to stick a finger up into the leg gatherers of the diaper which did cause Riley to squirm a little. He really should have been used to getting his diaper checked as his parents always did it now, as Riley wasn't keen on telling them when he had used it.

“Pretty wet,” Dad commented “But no stinkers in there, thanks for making it easy on me,” Dad chuckled as he got up from the seat with Riley in his arms. They walked up to Riley's room before his Dad placed him on his changing table. “A nice quick change before your nap,” Dad said as he unsnapped the buttons at Riley's crotch.

Once Riley had been put back in diapers full time, his parents had taken the desk out of the room and had replaced it with

the changing table. Riley laid still as his Dad proceeded with the diaper change. He no longer reacted when they wiped him with the cold wipes or when they used their hands to spread the diaper rash cream all over his most sensitive areas. After finishing Dad took a step back wiping his forehead.

“A little warm this afternoon huh,” Dad said as he pulled Riley up into a sitting position. “So what do you prefer, want to keep your clothes on or should we take them off?” Riley could sense the warmth and knew he would be kind of hot sleeping with the onesie on. “Whats it going to be Riley? Use your words I think one of them is a Riley word,” Dad said giving his son a patient smile. The word Dad was referring to was of course the one he disliked the most.

“Diapee please,” Riley said cringing inwardly at how natural it felt to say.

“Good manners,” Dad praised as he pulled the onesie off over Riley's head. He then picked Riley up and brought him over to the newest addition to his room – his crib. It was white and had a mesh tent like cover on top. Riley's parents had become worried about Riley wandering around unsupervised so had taken the bed out and replaced it with the crib. Riley had of course protested and the first chance he got had climbed up over the top which had resulted in him falling onto the ground which had caused him to start bawling his eyes out. His Mom had been the one to come rushing in. She had put him back in and then had spent the night sleeping on his floor just to make sure he stayed put. The next day they had put the crib tent on top which made it impossible for Riley to climb

out. Dad placed Riley into his crib through the opening slipping the pacifier into his mouth. Riley took the pacifier out of his mouth.

“Daddy?” he asked.

“Yes,” Dad said as he looked down at Riley.

“Can I just skip my nap for today?” Riley asked. Dad shook his head.

“No can do, you need to take your nap, and why is that?” Dad then asked turning the question around on Riley.

“Because I need lots of rest,” Riley said.

“That's right,” Dad said placing the pacifier back into Riley's mouth. “So relax and watch your fishies,” Dad said as he clicked on a toy that was attached to the top railing of the crib. It had a clear plastic window with small plastic fish in water that flitted around on the jets of bubbles that were now shooting up as a soft lulling tune played. Dad then zipped the crib tent shut before turning off the lights. Riley turned onto his side as he cuddled with the stuffed shark. He watched the fish bounce up and down as he put his pacifier back into his mouth. Soon after he was asleep.

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Riley heard the light switch click. He squeezed his eyes shut trying to keep out the light but opened them a second later as he roused himself up into a sitting position. He saw his Dad walking towards him. As the tent was unzipped Riley stood

up holding onto the railing. His Dad reached in lifting him up.

“Up up we go,” Dad cheered as he lifted Riley high above his own head. Riley furrowed his brow a little. He noticed that lately his parents were doing cutesy stuff like this with him more often. Dad then brought Riley down holding him out in front of himself like Riley was some object his Dad was surveying. “Will you look at that?” Dad said with a smile. “You are completely dry after your nap.”

Riley looked down at his diaper, it was a little hard to tell with him being held in the air. The diaper was kind of bunched up as well since he had just slept in it. But it certainly felt dry. Dad then brought Riley onto his hip as he looked at him mussing up his hair a little. Riley smiled a little, it was a small victory for him even if he hadn't actually done anything.

“So Riley think you'd be okay in just your diaper since its kind of a hot day?”

Riley shrugged his shoulders. He didn't really care either way. He was kind of used to having his clothes picked out and decided for him these days.

“Alright, jungle boy it is then,” Dad said patting Riley's butt a few times. Riley shook his head a little, he wasn't wearing a freaking loincloth like Tarzan. Riley was brought down to the kitchen as Dad sat him on the island counter.

“Okay buddy, I gotta fix the disposal under the sink right now, so you got two options. Either you can hang out with me

in your highchair or you can go to your playpen?" Dad said. Riley looked at the highchair. He thought it would terribly boring to have to sit here and watch his Dad work, so the choice was easy. He gave a muttered reply behind his pacifier. His Dad smirked as he pulled the pacifier out of his mouth.

"Use your words buddy," Dad said.

"Playpen," Riley replied. His Dad laughed a little replacing the pacifier back into Riley's mouth.

"I had a feeling that's what you would pick," Dad said carrying him off to the living room. "Guess watching Dad can't compete with playing with your toys."

Riley was set down into his playpen. He got down onto his knees and crawled the couple of paces towards his boat playset. His Dad walked out of the room before returning with a sippy cup filled with some juice and set it into the playpen. He then walked around the couch and switched on the baby monitor that was set up high on the fireplace mantle.

"Holler if you need anything," Dad said as he left Riley to play with his boat. Riley gave a derisive look to the baby monitor on the mantle. He really hated that thing. He didn't like the idea that even in his playpen his parents felt like they had to monitor him. In fact when they had first bought the thing they had set it in the playpen with Riley. He had wasted no time in grabbing the thing. He had switched it off and then had hid it under his turtle stuffie silently telling Mr. turtle to keep it hidden. His Mom had come in a little later with the

receiver in her hand held up to her ear, her suspicions being aroused when she hadn't heard anything coming from it. She had surveyed the playpen before asking Riley where the monitor was. Riley had played dumb. She had then pushed a button which caused the hidden monitor to let out a loud beep. She hadn't scolded him as she lifted up the turtle only taking the monitor and setting it up high on the fireplace mantle. Riley had only glared back at his turtle deeming him to have been a traitor.

Riley spent his time playing with his toys. He had a scenario playing out where his heroic scuba diver was trying to stop the dangerous squid kingdom from getting their tentacles on the great treasure of the ocean which was a giant ruby he had pulled from some pirate action figures that had appeared in his playpen last week. The squids were mounting an attack with their allies the octopuses. Riley maneuvered his boat to meet them head on, loading up the cannon on the boat with its harpoon. He didn't know why a research vessel had such artillery but it was fun to shoot. He pressed the button and sent the salvo flying, unfortunately for him it went straight up over the front of the playpen landing outside. He got up and walked to the front realizing that at some point he had wet his diaper noting its droopy front. Although it wasn't that bad as the yellow wetness indicator was only halfway blue. Riley crouched down sticking his arm through the slats yet the torpedo was just out of reach. He fell back on his butt with a huff. He thought for a moment to call out for his Dad to come get it for him. That's when he heard voices from outside the nearby door.

Riley looked at the handle turn before it opened as Carson walked in followed by some girl Riley had never seen before. Carson turned his head to see Riley standing there in his playpen with just a diaper. He came to a pause as the girl bumped into him.

“Hey,” she said with a laugh before turning her head. Upon seeing Riley a big smile came to her face showing off the braces on her teeth. “And who is this?”

“This is Riley, my brother,” Carson said sounding a little awkward.

“You didn't tell me you had a brother,” the girl said.

“Well I didn't tell you I had a Mom and Dad either,” Carson scoffed. The girl came forward putting her hands on her knees as she lowered herself a little.

“You are absolutely adorable,” she cooed looking at Riley with an affectionate gaze. Riley stood frozen. “What'cha doing in there, playing with your toys?” she asked. Riley's eyes went towards the harpoon sitting on the ground at her feet. The girls eyes followed as she bent down to pick it up. “Is this what you want?” she asked holding it out for him. Riley's hand went up shakily as he took it from her. “How about a high five buddy,” she said raising her hand up. Riley took a step back as he sucked on his pacifier harder.

“He's a little shy around new people,” Carson said looking a little nervous.

“Oh that's alright,” the girl said withdrawing her hand. “It

looks like he needs a diaper change though.” Riley took in a sharp intake of air through his nose upon hearing the comment as he felt the back of his neck get hot.

“I think he's fine,” Carson said as he made a move towards the kitchen.

“I don't know,” the girl said with a raised eyebrow. “That diaper is looking pretty droopy.”

Carson then turned to look at Riley with a hint of concern.

“Maybe,” he said sort of off-handedly as he approached Riley who watched on in horror as Carson's hand came towards him. Riley found the will the move upon realizing what Carson was about to do.

“Riley hang on,” Carson said as his other hand was placed on Riley's chest stopping him from moving long enough for Carson to tug on the back of Riley's diaper as Carson took a peek inside. “Nope, its just a little wet,” Carson said as he removed his hold causing Riley to stumble forward a little.

“Don't you think you should change him still?” the girl asked.

“Uh no,” Carson said looking completely opposed to the idea. “He'll be fine, if he got changed every time he was wet we would be going through a ton of diapers.”

“Okay, I guess you are the expert,” the girl chuckled a little before turning her attention back towards Riley. “So how old is Riley anyways?”

Both boys went rigid as they looked at one another with wide

eyes.

“Uhh well you see he's ummm,” Carson hemmed and haw finding himself in an impossible situation. He knew telling her Riley's real age would be deeply humiliating for his older brother, but going in the other direction and trying to pass him off as some little kid who belonged in diapers would be just as humiliating if not outright demeaning. Riley felt his eyes well up, knowing that whatever Carson chose would no doubt hurt him deeply.

Just then as if by divine intervention Dad came walking into the living room.

“Hey I thought I heard some voices out here.” Dad said. “Looks like we have company. Well Carson are you going to introduce me?”

“Oh yeah,” Carson said “This is Katie she just moved here so I was showing her around and stuff.”

“That sounds nice,” Dad said. “I bet you two are thirsty after being out in that heat, why don't you come into the kitchen and get something to drink and you guys can tell me about what you've been up too.”

“Uhh drinks sound good,” Carson said as he wore expression of relief and embarrassment. Katie followed Carson into the kitchen with Dad bringing up the rear. Just before his Dad went out of view he looked at Riley and gave him a quick wink. As soon as they were gone Riley crumpled to the ground, his butt landing onto his feet. The immense amount

of embarrassment that had just surged through him sapping his body of energy. His stomach began to ache and Riley felt the call of nature as he grunted a little. He grimaced after the deed was done. He could hear his Dad laughing loudly in the kitchen. Riley knew that laugh. He had heard it enough when he was the one bringing girls around and his parents insisted on getting to know one another. Carson was no doubt standing in the kitchen embarrassed by something. All in good fun of course or at least according to their Dad.

He heard the Katie girl laugh. Riley relented in calling out for his Dad to come change him. Not like he would have even if there wasn't a stranger in the house. Riley flopped down onto his back before turning onto his stomach. He laid there for some time, eventually he heard Carson and Katie retreat upstairs. Things became quiet, the only real sound being from the kitchen as his Dad continued to work. Riley reached out from his spot pulling his stuffed shark over to him before nuzzling the side of his face into it. He cuddled with his shark for sometime before he heard the front door open and the sound of his Mom's high heels clicking against the hardwood floor of the living room.

“Riley” she called out in a sing song voice as she came and stood at the fence of the playpen. “Can you come give me a hug?” she asked yet she hadn't even finished her question before Riley was already running up to her with an awkward gait that could be better described as toddling thanks to his full diaper. She leaned down as Riley reached up wrapping his arms around her neck as they embraced.

“I missed you today,” she said as they continued to hug. “Did you miss me?”

Riley let out a little chirp from behind his pacifier. His Mom chuckled a little as her hand moved to the back waistband of his diaper. She pulled it back before letting go.

“Someone needs a diaper change hmmm.” Mom said as she lifted him up out of the playpen. She went over to the corner and picked up her bag that contained extra diapers and supplies so they could change Riley without always having to take him up to his room. She set down the bag near the archway that lead into the front hall and pulled out the mat unfolding it with a snap before she laid Riley down on it. She then got out the diaper rash cream, the powder, some wipes and finally a new diaper. She then gave Riley's feet a little tickle causing him to let out a little giggle from behind his pacifier.

“Were you a good boy today?” she asked. Riley gave a nod as his Mom smiled back. “Well that's good to hear,” she said as she began to un-tape the diaper. “Ooo wee,” she said as she opened the diaper. “Honestly does your Daddy even check on you during the day?” she mused to herself as she lifted Riley's ankles into the air so she could begin to clean his backside with the wipes.

After that she got the dirty diaper folded up and put aside before powdering up the new diaper before lowering Riley's butt onto the fresh clean padding. She then went in with the cream. That's when Riley heard some footsteps coming down

the stairs. His eyes widened as he looked over to see Carson and Katie coming down the stairs.

“Oh hey Mom you're home,” Carson said seeing his Mom, his eyes then wandered to see Riley on the ground in the middle of a diaper change before frowning.

“You must be Carson's mom,” Katie said seeing no problem in striking up a conversation as the two teens now stood with Riley in full view completely naked as his Mom continued to rub in the diaper rash cream.

“That's me,” Mom said. Riley felt his face go red as his Mom carried on with the diapering, although to his Mom's credit he noticed her starting to move a little faster as she gave him a quick powdering before pulling the front of his diaper up.

“I'm Katie,” the girl said. “I'm new to town and Carson has been showing me around all day.”

“Well look at you Carson,” Mom said with a sly smile.

“Err yeah,” Carson mumbled. “We were going to go to the pool and meet up with some people do you think that would be okay?”

“Feels like a good day for a swim,” Mom said as she taped up Riley's diaper before standing up and picking him up off the ground. Riley then hid his tomato red face into his Mom's shoulder. “Do you think you'll be home for dinner?”

“I'll just eat at the pool,” Carson said.

“That sounds fine, ask your Dad for some money before you

leave.” Mom instructed.

“Hey I have an idea,” Katie then piped up. “Maybe Riley could come too, I'm sure he would love to go swimming.” Mom gave a small hum.

“I don't think that will work out, we don't even have any swim diapers for him to wear,” Mom said placing a hand on the back of Riley's head as if she were silently apologizing to him for the comment.

“They probably sell some at the front desk,” Katie said completely oblivious to the awkward air. “Don't you think Riley would like to go?” she then asked Carson.

“I uh don't know,” Carson said shifting nervously. “I don't really want to have to watch him.”

“That won't be a problem,” Katie dismissed. “I've babysat plenty of kids Riley's age. So you'll have plenty of help.”

“You too should just go without him,” Mom said. “You're new to town you'll have more fun meeting people rather than running around after this one,” Mom said.

“Maybe next time,” Katie then said finally taking no for answer. Carson quickly shuffled out of the room with Katie as Mom brought Riley back to his playpen.

“Okay, let me go change out of my work clothes than me and you will go into the backyard and have a snack.” she said. Riley plopped down onto his butt as his Mom departed. He stared off into space. That whole ordeal had been perhaps the

most humiliating experience of his life. He was relived when he saw Carson and that girl finally leave through the front door.

The day then turned to evening and after dinner Riley was in the bathtub as his Dad was lathering up his hair with some shampoo.

“Eyes shut tight,” Dad said as he washed the shampoo out of Riley's hair. Dad then took a seat on the toilet as he looked over some magazine leaving Riley to play with some toys in the bathtub. Riley wasn't sure why but he did seem to enjoy playing with the whale toys making them jump out of the water and splash down. Just then they heard Mom call from downstairs.

“Jim did you fix this sink?” she called up. Dad furrowed brow as he called back that he had indeed fixed it. Mom then called back that the sink was backing up. Dad got up with a groan. He looked at Riley then to the door trying to figure out what to do when just at that moment Carson came walking past the door.

“Carson,” Dad said stopping the boy. “Great, you're here come keep an eye on Riley while I go help your Mom.”

“Uhh I don't think,” Carson began yet Dad was already going out the door.

“You don't have to do anything just sit here for a minute,” Dad said pushing him in through the door before leaving. Carson shuffled in taking a seat on the toilet. Riley kept

making his whale swim under the water although he wasn't having it jump out of the water anymore. There was an awkwardness between the boys. Dad had not put any bubbles in the bath and Riley did feel a little weird sitting naked in the bathtub with his little brother nearby. Carson looked at Riley giving him a small smile before once again looking away. The boys stayed silent with only the sound of rippling water between them.

“Hey so Riley,” Carson began. “I'm really sorry about today, with Katie and everything.”

Riley looked over at his brother pursing his lips a little. “I should have brought her in through the front so she didn't see you.”

“Why,” Riley said. “Are you ashamed of me or something?” He wouldn't blame Carson for saying yes. What other thirteen year old had an older brother in diapers and spent his days in a playpen sucking on a pacifier.

“I'm not ashamed of you,” Carson said furrowing his brow.

“Its not a big deal,” Riley said. “I'd be ashamed of me too.”

“Well I'm not,” Carson said with a huff. “All I mean to say is that if I had known you were going to be right there as soon as we walked into the door I would have gone another way, I kind of ambushed you. Then things got kind of awkward.”

“Awkward?” Riley said raising an eyebrow. “I guess if that's what you want to call having your little brother check your diaper in front of his girlfriend.

“Girlfriend!” Carson exclaimed as his face went a little red. “She's not my girlfriend.”

“Oh,” Riley said cocking his head. “I thought she was.”

“No we're just friends,” Carson stammered. “But that doesn't matter. I just want to say I'm sorry. I know you're going through a lot and I just don't want to make things harder on you. As for the whole diaper thing I just wanted to make sure you know, it can't be comfortable to be wearing something like that.”

“Thanks,” Riley said softly as he continued making his whale swim. He felt rather touched by Carson's apology and was at least grateful that Carson wasn't in the habit of making fun of him he had only acted with good intentions. They had their squabbles in the past but on the whole Carson was pretty good, as far as little brothers go. “So do you like her or something?” Riley asked.

“Um well I guess,” Carson said. Riley smirked seeing his brother squirm a little.

“When are you going to ask her out?” Riley said smiling a little.

“I can't do that,” Carson mumbled. “I don't think she really likes me like that, so she would probably say no.”

Riley rolled his eyes, it had been apparent that Katie was into Carson. Why? He couldn't imagine, especially if Carson was this dense.

“She likes you,” Riley assured.

“Y-you think so?” Carson stuttered.

“Yeah I do,” Riley said.

“Well there was that dance thing happening at the youth center that I though would be fun,” Carson mentioned as if he was thinking out loud “Maybe...”

“I bet she would say yes,” Riley said with a goading certainty.

“I wouldn't even know what to say,” Carson said as if he was talking himself out of it. “I would say something stupid and she would say no.”

“Just text her, right now,” Riley said with a sigh. “All you have to say is hey want to go to the dance with me.”

“Do you really think she would say yes?” Carson said, his phone in his hand as he looked at the screen.

“If you wait you're just going to psych yourself out,” Riley said. He knew the best way was to just be direct and upfront with girls. It had worked out well for him in the past.

“Okay,” Carson said standing up. “I'm gonna do it.”

Riley watched as his brother wrote out the text before sending it. He then set his phone on the counter watching it intently. As a minute passed his expression morphed into one of regretful worry. Just then his phone dinged. Carson grabbed it up immediately as he read the screen. A smile spread across his lips slowly.

“She said yes,” Carson said, as if he couldn't believe it.

“Told ya,” Riley said shrugging his shoulders.

“I actually have a date,” Carson said looking giddy beyond words. “A real date, with a girl.”

“What's this about a date?” Mom said. Carson whirled around to see his Mom standing in the doorway with a raised eyebrow.

“Oh um well I guess I'm taking Katie to the dance next week,” Carson said looking sheepish as he fiddled with his hands.

“A date with Katie,” Mom said as the corner of her mouth twisted up a little. “That's so cute,” Mom said wrapping Carson up into a hug. “My little boy going on his first date.”

“Mooom stop,” Carson mewled as he pulled out of her hug.

“I'm just happy for you and a little surprised you've always been a little shy.” she said as she fussed with his hair a little as if she were getting him ready right then and there.

“Riley kind of convinced me to do it so,” Carson said as he looked back at Riley with smile.

“Oh so this is the culprit,” Mom said as she walked over to the bathtub with her hands on her hips with a look of fake anger on her face.

“I just told him to text her,” Riley said shirking down a little as if he were actually in trouble. Mom merely chuckled

before grabbing the towel that was hung up on the wall.

“Lets get you out of there before you turn into a prune,” she said opening the towel. Riley got out of the tub walking into his Mom embrace as she wrapped him up in the towel. She got him dried off before wrapping the towel around him tightly like a cocoon before transferring him over to the counter.

“Riley thanks again,” Carson said, the dorky smile still on his face. “I'm gonna have to go find something to wear now,” he said retreating out into the hall.

“You should go and tell your Dad the good news,” Mom said as she prepared Riley's toothbrush. “I'm sure he'll want to give you some pointers.” Carson looked back with nervous look.

“Can you guys please not make a big deal out of this,” Carson asked in a pleading tone.

“No promises,” Mom said ominously. Carson shook his head as he walked off towards his room. “Can you believe it Riley our little Carson's first date,” she said as she brushed his teeth. “I think that Katie will be good for him, she certainly isn't shy.”

Afterwards Riley was taken to his room where his Mom got him diapered and dressed in a two piece pajama set. The pants were white and had blue stars on them while the top sported Mickey Mouse and friends. Mom then picked Riley up and sat with him in her lap in the rocking chair as she

grabbed two books from on top of the bookshelf. That's when Riley noticed his bottle sitting there. It was in some sort of holder that was plugged into the outlet.

“Now which story do you want tonight?” Mom asked pulling Riley's attention to the two books in her hands. Riley let his head flop back against his Mom's shoulder. He was about to complain but knew if he did she was just going to ask him why it was important to read before going to sleep. The answer of course being that it helped him relax right before bed. Riley gave a mumble as to what his selection would be.

“I can't understand when you mumble,” Mom said giving him a little tickle to his side. “Use your words.”

“The Sneezy Dragon,” Riley giggled. He had noticed that his parents were always insisting he talk clearly. He didn't know why it was such a big deal. Riley listened as his Mom read to him. He had actually been glad this had been one of his choices. He did sort of like the story, although his Dad read it better as Riley found the voice he used for the dragon to be sort of amusing. His Mom stopped as she was about to turn to the last page in which the Dragon would give one final big sneeze.

“You're going to help me out right?” Mom asked.

“Okay,” Riley said softly.

“The Dragon then reared back his head and...” Mom read before turning to the last page.

“ACHHOOO,” they said together.

“That's a fun book isn't it?” Mom asked as she closed the book and putting it back on top of the bookshelf.

“It's okay,” Riley giggled a little. Just then Riley heard a little bell ding.

“Just in time,” Mom said as she removed the bottle.

“What is that?” Riley asked looking suspiciously at the now empty holder.

“Its a bottle warmer,” Mom said.

“You're making me drink it warm,” Riley said scrunching up his face.

“I though we could try it for bedtime,” Mom replied. “It will help you fall asleep easier.” Riley was a little skeptical of the reason. Why did they have to change things up? Its not like he had any trouble falling asleep these days. His Mom then situated him so he was cradled against her as she placed the nipple into his mouth. Riley began to drink. It certainly tasted a little different. The chalky texture was gone which was welcome. It still tasted sweet but the overpowering vanilla taste was gone. As Riley continued to drink he found he preferred it this way. Even with it being warm it wasn't as off putting as he had thought it was going to be. As usual the closer Riley got to finishing his bottle the heavier his eyes seemed to droop. He felt himself beginning to nod off as the empty bottle was removed. His Mom carried him over to his crib and placed him inside. She turned on the fish toy as the lullaby began to play.

“Mommy,” Riley hummed.

“What is it sweetie,” Mom whispered back.

“My nu nu,” Riley said softly.

“Oh silly me I almost forgot,” Riley heard his Mom walk across the room before returning as he felt his pacifier slip into his mouth. The one time Riley was least resistant to anything was when he was right on the edge of sleep. It seemed to be the only time he was fully open to all of the supposed comforts offered to him.

“Get some sleep now,” Mom said as she brushed his bangs to the side. “You have a very big day tomorrow." Riley's eyes opened a little.

“Big day?” he mumble around his pacifier. What did that mean?

“Don't tell me you forgot,” Mom said as she rubbed his tummy. “The summer term starts tomorrow. You're going to school bright and early.”

Riley would have been utterly surprised at hearing this and would have questioned his Mom further yet he was already well on his way to sleep as his mouth was suckling away at the pacifier. He heard his Mom zip up the opening of the tent before turning off the lamp light. As Riley fell into sleep a thought crossed into his mind.

How am I supposed to go to school like this?

Chapter 14

The Rough Patch Part 14 - Chapter 14

School?

Riley was awoken by the sound of the crib tent being unzipped. He opened his eyes a little to see his Dad's hands coming towards him. Riley felt himself be lifted out of the crib before he was even fully awake. His Dad made a little groan as he did so. Even if Riley was small, lifting someone his size from a lying position inside the crib did take a little strength. Riley was brought over to his changing table as his Dad took of his shirt before laying him back. Riley closed his sleepy eyes as his pants were pulled away. His Dad un-taped his diaper, as the cold air hit Riley, he opened his eyes and was brought fully awake when his Dad touched the icy cold wipe to his crotch.

“You awake Riley?” Dad asked smirking.

“Uh huh,” Riley mumbled around his pacifier as he rubbed his eyes. Now that he was awake Riley could sense something was different. He looked to see outside the window and saw it was still a little dark out as the sun wasn't fully risen yet. Riley was never gotten up early like this. As his Dad began to get a new diaper on him Riley remembered something. It was something his Mom had said just before he had fallen asleep, but it was hard to tell if it had really happened or it was just something he had imagined – there was just no way he had heard her right.

“Um Daddy?” Riley said as his pacifier slipped out of his mouth. His Dad looked down at him with an acknowledging look. “Am I going to school?”

“Yep,” Dad said. “That's why we gotta hurry so you aren't late for your first day back.” Riley's eyes went wide as a whole plethora of concerns exploded in his mind.

“But I don't want to go,” Riley mewled.

“Sorry Ry, but you were the one who signed up.” Dad said as he slid a new diaper under Riley's butt.

“I can't go,” Riley yelped as he shot up.

“Riley quit moving around so much,” Dad said as he pushed Riley back down before pulling the safety strap against his chest. There was no way he could show up to a college class as he was, there had to be some kind of catch – what if they were lying, and only saying he was going to school?

“So I'm going to school, like real school, like college?” Riley asked.

“Yes,” Dad said sounding like he was getting tired of answering the same question. After Riley had gotten into a fresh diaper his Dad then put him on the floor before dressing him in a plain white onesie. Riley still couldn't wrap his head around it. Were they really going to drive him to campus and then just shoo him off to class dressed like this. It was unfathomable.

“Daddy I can't go to school dressed like this,” Riley said

almost becoming a little weepy just thinking about how embarrassed he would be showing up to school dressed like this.

“I know that,” Dad said. “Which is why I got you a super special outfit for your first day back. Dad then pulled some clothes out of a bag. He first got Riley into a pair of black athletic shorts with white stripes going down the sides. “And the best part,” Dad said as he let the shirt unfold in front of himself.

Riley looked at it a little surprised at what he saw. It was a baseball jersey close to his size albeit maybe a tad bit bigger. It was bright red and had the name of his schools team on it, looking identical to the jersey's his schools baseball team wore.

“Even has your name on it,” Dad said turning the shirt around to show that it did indeed have the last name “Thomas” embroidered across the back. “You'll look really cool I'll bet. You want to wear this?”

Riley nodded his head enthusiastically. It certainly looked like something someone at his school would wear. “Great, we'll put it on after breakfast so you don't get any spills on it.” Dad said.

Riley sat in his highchair eating what his Dad said was a quick breakfast consisting of a whole banana cut up into slices, some raisins, and a cup of applesauce which his Dad had practically shoveled into his mouth. As Riley ate the rest of his banana he was still wondering how this was all going

to work. Campus was two hours away. Were his parents really planning to drive him there and pick him up everyday? Riley was broken from his thoughts as his Dad removed the tray from the highchair even though Riley had only finished half of the banana.

“Sorry bud,” Dad said lifting him out of the highchair. “We gotta get going but I'll give you some cereal in the car to munch on.” Dad then got Riley dressed in the red baseball jersey. As he was finishing up the last button Mom came down the stairs in her office attire.

“Ready for school Riley?” Mom asked beaming down at him.

“Yeah, I guess,” Riley said sounding a tinge nervous.

“Where did you get this?” Mom asked as she knelt down picking a piece of lint of his jersey.

“Daddy got it for me,” Riley said. “Its a baseball jersey from my school. Daddy said it would make me look cool.” As Riley looked at his Mom he noticed she had a strained smile on her face. Mom stood up and looked at Dad.

“Jim can I talk to you in the garage for a moment?” Mom asked.

“Is this going to take long, me and Ry got to get going.” Dad said.

“Jim,” Mom said sternly. Dad stopped, looking at his wife with confused look before he threw up his hands a little and went into the garage. “Riley why don't you get your shoes

out, Mommy and Daddy will be back in a moment," she said before she followed her husband into the garage shutting the door behind her. Riley was confused at what they could possibly be doing in the garage. He went and grabbed his shoes from the spot by the door. He went to the bottom step of the stairs sitting down with the shoes in front of him ready to wait patiently. He looked over at the garage door. His curiosity got the better of him as he got up and walked up to the door putting his ear to the door. He could hear the muffled sounds of his parents voices. He couldn't really make out what they were saying. That is until his Mom raised her voice.

"You are trying to influence him aren't you?" she asked sounding frustrated.

"I am not," Dad said, his voice raising in response. "Its a baseball jersey. That's it."

His parents voices fell silent, for a moment before returning to the muffled sounds. A moment later he heard the door handle start to turn. Riley raced back to the step sitting down as if he would be in trouble if they discovered him off of it. He grabbed his shoe and hurriedly try to put it on. His parents walked back into the house. His Dad looked slightly perturbed. Mom came over to Riley kneeling down in front of him.

"Hey you got one shoe on already," she said with a smile as she grabbed the velcro strap and pulled it tightly for Riley. "Let Mommy get the other one on so you and Daddy can hit the road." she said slipping his other shoe onto his foot.

“Um Mommy,” Riley said in a little voice. “Were you and Daddy fighting?”

“Not at all sweetie,” Mom as she got his other shoe secured on his foot before helping him stand up.

“We were just having a talk.” Riley knew that was bull. Something about his outfit had angered his Mom, the shirt specifically.

“Is there something wrong with my shirt?” Riley asked. Mom looked up at him with a soft smile.

“Do you like it?” she asked.

“Well yeah,” Riley said.

“Then there is absolutely no problem,” Mom said as she picked him up into her arms and carried him out to the garage. She got him strapped into his car seat, before she held up one of his pacifiers with a strap attached to it. “Do you want this for the car ride?” Mom asked. Riley nodded. “Then use your words please,” Mom requested.

“Can I have my nu nu please?” Riley responded, before opening his mouth to accept the pacifier into his mouth. His Mom then attached the strap before giving him a kiss to the cheek.

“Now you have a good day at school and I'll see you soon,” she said. Riley and his Dad were then on the road. Riley watched the scenery pass him by outside the window. He was still thinking about what had happened at breakfast and what

he had overheard. Just what had his parents been talking about? His Mom's accusation that his Dad had been trying to influence hung heavy on his mind. Influencing him to do what he wondered? His Dad then seemingly remembered the cereal passing a baggie of some cheerios back to Riley. The boy let the pacifier fall from his mouth as he began to eat. He was a little hungry after all, which was strange. Usually after breakfast and his bottle he felt sated. That's when he realized he had never gotten a bottle.

“Daddy,” Riley said from the back as his Dad acknowledged him by way of the rear-view mirror. “What about my baba?”

“Sorry champ, we didn't really have time, but don't worry.” Dad said with a smile. “Its still earlier than usual so you can drink your baba later, alright?”

Riley nodded accepting the answer as satisfactory, yet it dawned on him what was being said. Have it later? As in while he was at school? How would that work? An image of him sitting on the quad drinking a bottle then emerged. He couldn't do that. Riley then noticed his pacifier hanging down at his chest. He couldn't be seen using that either. Riley became a little anxious at the thought bringing the pacifier back up to his mouth. Sucking on it really did seem to calm him down these days, so while they were in the car he would need to get his fix. He would have to remember to ask his Dad to take it off him when they arrived. It wasn't too much longer before Riley saw they were pulling into a parking lot. He saw a large four story office building. There wasn't any signage or anything. He was confused, this wasn't school.

Dad parked and then went and got Riley out of the car. Dad then got a small blue backpack that was decorated with brightly colored cars and slung it across his shoulder, before picking Riley up and putting him on his hip.

Walking into the building Riley could see it was a multi-purpose building as Dad stopped at the placard inside of the door reading where the different business's that rented space in the building were. Riley went to read some but had only read two before his Dad began to walk towards the elevator. His Dad then pressed the button for the third floor. As they rode the elevator up Riley could no longer contain his confusion.

“What are we doing here?” Riley asked letting his pacifier fall from his mouth. Dad looked at him with a tight smile.

“You're here for school,” Dad said.

“But this isn't my campus,” Riley said.

“You'll see, it will all make sense in a moment,” Dad said. Riley didn't understand why his Dad was being so cagey, or if he even was at all. The elevator door opened and Dad began to walk down a long hallway. They got to the end and Riley saw a door decorated with small paintings of animals directly on the door. Riley could feel some dread start to form. His Dad opened the door and Riley was hit by loud confusing sounds all at once. Stepping in they were now in a large room. Riley looked around as his Dad set him on his feet. The walls were brightly colored and their were various posters adorning them all decorated with bright borders and

large letters. Some of them had numbers and others letters of the alphabet. Riley then saw a small inflatable ball pit and some crawling tunnels. There was another area with some small tables and chairs arranged in front of a whiteboard. In the middle of the room was a large round carpet. The thing that stuck out the most was that the room was inhabited with about ten or so other kids. All of them appearing to be between the ages of two through four.

“You must be Mr. Thomas,” a young looking woman who Riley estimated to be a couple of years older than himself approached. She wore a blue smock and had her hair tied back into a pony tail.

“Thats me,” Dad said as he handed over the backpack he had slung around his back to the woman.

“I'm Ms. Kelly, I believe we spoke on the phone and of course I've met with your wife a couple of times already,” the woman said before turning to Riley. “And this must be Riley.”

The pacifier fell from his mouth as Riley could only look around in horror. This was school? They couldn't be serious?

“You lied to me,” Riley said looking at his Dad in astonishment. “You said I was going to school, like college, this is...this...its not even a school its daycare.” Had they really expected this to work? Did they just expect him to accept this? It was similar to the stunt his Mom had pulled at the aquarium play area but that had been for like an hour. How had they even gotten him enrolled here, had they really passed him off as a little kid? But that didn't make sense.

Surely there was a little more to putting a kid into daycare than just signing some papers.

“Riley I didn't lie,” Dad said as he bent down placing a heavy hand on Riley's shoulder. “This is school.”

“Y-you said real school,” Riley choked up. He then turned to Ms. Kelly. “I'm not a little kid, I'm twenty years old, I'm supposed to be in college.” Of course, through everything he had gone through it felt as if some part of him had forgotten that. He wasn't going along with it any longer though.

“I know that,” Ms. Kelly said with a sympathetic smile. “Your Daddy didn't lie at all. You are here to do college classes, we're all set up for you,” she said as she pointed at one of the tables where a laptop sat open with a small stack of papers nearby and even some headphones.

“I don't understand,” Riley said gobsmacked.

“Listen bud,” Dad said as he wrapped his arm around Riley's waist and rested his hand on his outer thigh. “You going back to campus with your condition wasn't feasible, so me and Mommy made some arrangements for you to do your classes online here, and they will also be able to help you out with your other needs as well. So you see its all going to be alright. Everybody here is on Team Riley.”

“That's right,” Ms. Kelly said. “I'm going to make sure everything goes smoothly for you.” Riley remained unconvinced. The idea of trying to do anything here was just too much.

“I can't stay here all day,” Riley said looking over at his Dad with pleading eyes, begging him not to leave.

“Its not all day,” Dad said wrapping him up in a hug while rubbing his back. “Its just two days a week and just in the morning, Mommy will be here around noon to pick you up.”

“See that doesn't sound too bad now does it?” Ms. Kelly said. Dad and the teacher then talked a little. Riley didn't hear much as reality sunk in upon realizing that he was being left here. “Ready to go?” Ms. Kelly then asked as Riley blinked back into the present to see she had her hand outstretched to him. He looked to see that his Dad was already by the door waving at him. Riley gave a gloomy wave back. His Dad then exited. Riley took Ms. Kelly's hand as he was lead towards the table taking a seat at the laptop while she took a seat next to him.

“Okay, “ Ms. Kelly said as she began to use the mousepad on the computer. “I've already gone through your classes and put together a schedule of everything you need to get done in the day so you can complete the courses.” she explained. “It looks like you got three classes. Salt water ecology, oceanic plant biology, and medevil literature. Which doesn't sound like a marine biology class.”

“I needed a English credit,” Riley mumbled.

“I see,” Ms. Kelly laughed. “Good news is that you have an easy day. You just need to read the syllabus for each class and then watch the intro lecture for your ecology course and make a discussion post.” She got brought up the first thing

Riley had to do. “If you need anything let me know,” she then said before picking up some of the papers and walking off.

As Riley read he found his attention getting pulled away by the going on's in the rest of the room. The noise from all the other kids was distracting. He watched them playing as another woman went around supervising. He then spotted Ms. Kelly off to the side. She had a folder open and reading something rather intently. Riley saw some large letters that he could read from across the room. BMT it said on the front. Ms. Kelly then seemingly looked up as if she noticed she was being watched. She smiled as she walked over to Riley.

“You doin okay?” she asked looking over Riley's shoulder. He hadn't even made it through the first syllabus yet. “You don't have all day to get this done you know?” she said yet not in a reprimanding tone.

“Sorry,” Riley said. “Its just a little loud.”

“Try putting on the headphones,” she said. “Their noise canceling.” Ms. Kelly slipped the headphones on over Riley's ears. They certainly helped, although Riley still found himself getting a little distracted by watching what the other kids in the room were doing. It took sometime but he still managed to get done with everything. He took of the headphones and found Ms. Kelly.

“I'm um done,” Riley said.

“Great,” she said as she checked her watch. “Looks like you got two hours to spare.” Riley wondered what he was

supposed to do for another two hours. “Come with me,” Ms. Kelly said leading him over to one of the poster's on the wall. It had the kids names on it and boxes with gold star stickers and red x's. “Since you did such a great job, I think you've earned a gold star,” she said presenting Riley with a gold star on her fingertip.

“No thanks,” Riley said looking away.

“Don't be like that,” Ms. Kelly said. “It will help us keep track of your progress. Every day you finish your task we will give you a star.”

Riley took the sticker. Ms. Kelly then pointed to his name at the bottom. Riley stuck the sticker on the box with a sigh. He wasn't exactly thrilled about having his name written up there with all the other's kids names. Plus the chart reminded him off potty training – which he had failed. It did feel good to put it up there though. Once the sticker was stuck, Riley was lead back over to the tables where the other kids were now seated as well.

“We're about to serve out a snack,” Ms. Kelly said pulling a chair out for Riley. “Why don't you join us.”

Riley sat down, its not like he had anything better to do and he was feeling slightly hungry since he had small breakfast and had skipped his bottle. Each kid was served two halves of a graham cracker with some peanut butter in the middle and two apple slices. Riley ate the crackers yet didn't touch the apples. He didn't like them sliced up and with the skin on, too chewy.

“You gunna eat dat?” the boy next to him asked pointing at the apple slices. Riley shook his head as he slid them over to the other boy who took them excitedly and immediate took a big bite out of one of them.

“Orson,” the other worker said with some ire. “What have I told you about taking food from other kids?”

The boy lowered his head a little. “Not too, but I asked really nicely.”

“Its fine,” Riley interjected. “I wasn't going to eat them.” The other woman smiled a little as she knelt down on the other side of the table.

“That was very nice of you,” she said addressing Riley. “But we do have rules here, we do not share food like this. Besides Orson your Mommy already gave us extra snacks for you, but what is the rule?”

“I have to wait until after lunch to ask for them,” the boy responded. “Sorry Ms. Gemma.”

“Since you already started you can finish what Riley gave you but no more,” Ms. Gemma then said. Orson seemed pleased as he dug back in. Riley smirked a little. He did actually know another person named Orson and it was kind of funny how similar they were. The Orson Riley knew had been the person Riley had usually bought his weed from. That Orson also had a habit of asking about food. Which was only to be expected as Riley's Orson seemed to have a chronic case of the munchies. As Riley thought about the

people he used to know he began to wonder what his friends were up too. Having been thrust back into his studies had reminded him off his life before, he had pretty much forgotten about it.

“Hey Riley,” Ms. Kelly said bringing him back to the present. “I bet you're thirsty after snack.” she said. Riley looked around noticing that Ms. Gemma was handing out boxes of milk with straws in them to some of the other kids.

“I guess,” Riley said.

“Great,” she said. “I didn't want to disturb you well you were working so I held off, but it would be a good time for you to take your bottle,” she said setting the baby bottle in front of him. Usually he looked forward to it, yet he found himself feeling a little off that morning. He didn't really want it.

“Oh well no thanks,” Riley said pushing the bottle back towards the woman.

“C'mon now,” Ms. Kelly said. “I warmed it up for you and everything.”

“I'll just have the normal one,” Riley said referring to the carton. Ms. Kelly had been treating him normal enough that morning. She knew how old he was, so she would probably respect his wishes.

“Riley,” she said with a more direct tone. “Your Mommy and Daddy were very clear that it is very important for you to drink this.” Riley began to feel a little frustration. He didn't want it, why couldn't she understand that?

“I don't care,” Riley spat back. “I don't want it.” He was twenty years old he could decide what he wanted. These people didn't actually have any authority over him. Its not like he was actually enrolled here as a member of their daycare. He didn't really understand why he was even here in the first place. Ms. Kelly gave a little sigh as she came around to the other side of the table.

“Your parents warned me that you might fight me on this,” she said before she plucked Riley out of his chair and put him on her hip. “Looks like I'll have to take over.” she said grabbing the bottle and taking Riley over to a rocking chair that was placed near the big round carpet in the middle. Riley struggled a little but Ms. Kelly easily had him cradled in her arms as she then brought he nipple of the bottle to his mouth.

“No, stop,” Riley said shaking his head a little.

“No fussing now,” Ms. Kelly said as the nipple slipped into his mouth. Riley's mouth acted on instinct as he began to suckle. His hands raised up in tiny fist and as he drank they slowly lowered onto his chest unclasping as if the warm liquid quelled his rebelliousness. The rest of the kids were assembling on the carpet in front of them sitting on the ground with their legs crossed.

“Okay kids,” Ms. Kelly said. “I have my hands a little full with our new friend here so I need volunteer to be my page turner for story time,” she said. Several hands shot up and Ms. Kelly chose a little girl from the crowd. Next to the rocking chair was an easel with an oversized picture book on

it. As Riley drank his bottle Ms. Kelly read to the rest of the class while the little girl turned the pages when told to.

Riley felt embarrassed. Not only in how he had reacted, but he also felt a little on display to be drinking his bottle in front of everybody like this. Riley finished his bottle a little after the story was done and the rest of the kids were doing something called wiggle time, which seemed to be them dancing to some songs that Ms. Gemma was leading them through.

“All done,” Ms. Kelly said as she removed the bottle from Riley's mouth sitting him up to give him some pats to the back causing him to let out a little burp. “Feel better now?”

“Yes,” Riley said with some meekness. He did feel better and for the first time that day he felt full.

“That's good,” Ms. Kelly said as she got up and carried him back over to the name chart. “But we still need to have a talk.” she said setting him on his feet. “You were being awfully stand offish about your bottle and we can't be having that. I'm only doing what your parents tell me I need too.”

“I know,” Riley said feeling a little intimidated by the way he was being talked too.

“Now I know everything is a little topsy turvy for you this morning with it being your first day, but if me or Ms. Gemma tell you to do something you have to listen, do you understand?” Riley nodded his head. “So this is going to be a reminder of that,” she said plucking a red X sticker from a

sheet and placing it in a box next to Riley's name. “I don't want to be giving you anymore of these. If you get two more of these then I will have no choice but have to have a talk with Mommy about your behavior when she comes to pick you up. It would be a shame to have to do that on your first day.”

“D-don't tell her,” Riley stammered as he wiped some tears bubbling up in his eyes. His emotions coming on fast as was the norm for him these days.

“I don't think I'll have too,” Ms. Kelly said giving Riley a hug. “I know you'll do better won't you?”

“Uh huh,” Riley whimpered a little.

“I'm glad to hear it,” Ms. Kelly said releasing him from the hug which seemed to calm Riley enough to dry up his tears. “Now I think we have a little craft time. Want to help me pass out supplies?”

“Okay,” Riley said. As Riley followed Ms. Kelly to the tables while she passed out supplies to the others Riley though it was better than actually having to do the activities the kids did. Maybe he was just going to be helping out since he was done with his school work. That was until they got to an empty spot next to the Orson kid.

“Here you can sit next to Orson and work on yours,” Ms. Kelly said taking the bin of supplies out of Riley's hands.

“That's okay,” Riley mumbled.

“It'll be fun,” Ms. Kelly reassured. “There's nothing wrong with some arts and crafts You can make whatever you want.”

Riley resignedly took a seat next to the other boy. In front of him was a white sheet of paper as well as a pile of different colored pieces of scrap construction paper in all different shapes and sizes. Riley looked and saw the other kids were using glue sticks to attach the construction paper to the white piece of paper. Riley sat with some indifference. He wondered what time it was, hoping his Mom would show up soon to pick him up. As Riley pondered he felt the familiar feeling of his stomach grumbling a little. His eyes went wide, he knew what was coming. To make matters worse he realized he had wet his diaper at some point as well. As usual he was powerless to do anything as his diaper filled with the disgusting mess. Riley looked around wondering what he could do. He wasn't about to ask Ms. Kelly or the other woman. A harrowing thought then came to his mind. He remembered his Dad mentioning something about his needs being taken care of. Would they actually change him here? No, how could they? They knew how old he was. He had gotten over the embarrassment of his parents changing him, but someone else? That would be beyond mortifying. Riley looked over at the two women walking around and looking at the what the kids were making. He grabbed some paper and then his glue stick. He decided to make it so they didn't give any special notice to him. He had to keep attention off of himself and the best way at the moment was to just comply with the request to participate.

In no time flat. Riley had seemed to forget about the state of his diaper as the the project had taken hold of his attention. Riley was affixing another green piece to his paper. He had remembered from the intro lecture he had watched a rather amusing anecdote the professor had told about a kelp forest and so Riley had decided to make one of his own. As he dug through his pile to find another green piece he was so one track minded that he didn't notice that Ms. Kelly was behind him. That was until he felt the back of his jersey be lifted up and the waistband of his shorts get pulled back.

“I found the stinker,” Ms. Kelly said with chuckle before swiftly lifting a frazzled Riley into her arms. She began carrying Riley away.

“Please, no,” Riley whined.

“Its okay honey,” Ms. Kelly said. “We'll be done really fast and you can go right back to your picture.” Riley was panicked, he had to think of something to get out of this.

“Can't I just wait, Mommy will be here soon.” he said, not having any idea if that was right or not. Although he felt like he had been here awhile.

“Riley we are here to take care of your needs,” Ms. Kelly said coming to a stop as she gave him an understanding look. “And right now you need your diaper changed.” Riley was brought to a far corner in the room where a changing table stood. Ms. Kelly laid him on his back. Riley tried to roll away not really caring if he fell. “Oh don't do that,” Ms. Kelly said as she placed a hand on his chest, before pulling a safety

strap across his chest and securing it. “Your Mommy mentioned you get wiggly sometimes.”

“I don't want a change,” Riley squeaked. His pacifier was plopped into his mouth.

“Just relax,” Ms. Kelly said. “I am a professional, there is nothing I can't deal with.” With that she pulled Riley's shorts down to his ankle before unsnapping his onesie, she then pushed all the fabric up over his belly button. As the she un-taped the diaper Riley felt mortified. He covered his face with his hands. True to her word Ms. Kelly worked quickly as she got him wiped down and applied the cream. For Riley however it was the worst. He was once again going through all the same emotions of embarrassment like when his Mom had first diapered him at the aquarium. He wondered what Ms. Kelly though of him. Here she was changing the diaper of someone close to her age and she was acting as if it was completely normal. Ms. Kelly was soon finished as she released Riley from the changing table setting him on his feet before she made one final re-adjustment to his shorts.

“See, quick and easy,” she said smiling at Riley. “Ready to go back to the tables?”

Riley nodded his head slowly before turning around and walking back to his seat. He sat, not really feeling like going back to his picture, it felt like he had just been on the worlds crazies rollercoaster. He couldn't wait for his Mom to show up.

Afterwards the kids were released back to the play area. Riley

found himself in a corner with Orson and another boy.

“You be this,” the boy said placing a lion figurine into Riley's lap before they started playing with their own figures together. Riley wasn't really sure what they wanted him to do with it. Before long though he was fully engaged making roaring sounds as his lion stomped across the plastic mountain playset. He found it easy to play with the boys. He knew they weren't judging him. In their minds he was one of them. Some time passed as Riley and his new friends played, it was only when he heard Ms. Kelly's voice calling his name that he looked up. Standing by the door was his Mom. Riley dropped his lion before scampering across the room colliding into his Mom.

“Oh did you miss me?” Mom cooed as she lifted him up into her arms. Riley nuzzled into her shoulder as he clung onto her neck. He felt so safe and happy that he never wanted her to stop holding him. The two woman talked a little and Ms. Kelly told Mom that he had done great for his first day and Riley was happy that she kept her word and didn't tell Mom about the bottle incident.

Riley was then taken home. He was put in his highchair for lunch. Mom fed him some yogurt first before letting him feed himself a plate of cheese and crackers and some grapes. Then it was up to his room for an afternoon bottle and a nap. She took off the jersey and his shorts leaving him in just his onesie, deciding after a quick check that he didn't need a change just yet. In the rocking chair Riley did have trouble finishing his bottle as his eyes were drooping. Mom removed

it with a little under half of the bottle left.

“Someone had a big morning,” she said. Riley nodded as he let out a yawn. His Mom placed him in his crib. Riley looked up at her. Being back home was certainly welcome, yet that morning had been a stark reminder of how long all this had been going on. He was back in school. All of this was supposed to be behind him by now. Yet here he was still at the bottom with no end in sight.

“Mommy I'm never going to get better am I?” he asked.

“That's not true,” Mom said as she smiled. “You'll be better sooner than you think.” Riley nodded as he let his eyes close. He didn't have any objection. If Mommy said it then it must be true.

Chapter 15

The Rough Patch: Final Part - Chapter 15

The Other Side

Carol Thomas walked down the hallway towards the door to Happy Smiles Daycare. She opened the door stepping in.

“Mommy!” The voice of her son Riley called out. She looked over to see him running towards her from the tables where the rest of the kids were gathered. She caught him, lifting him up into her arms.

“Did you have fun today kiddo?” she asked.

“Yeah,” Riley said. “We was painting,” he exclaimed with a big smile. Ms. Kelly then came over.

“Riley dear why don't you go take off your smock and get your pretty painting while me and Mommy chat,”

“Okay,” Riley said as his Mom let him down before he scampered off.

“So,” Carol said. “Did he do any work?”

“No,” Ms. Kelly said, shaking her head. “I offered it to him like usual, but he seemed more interested in playing cars with his friends.”

“I see,” Carol said. “I suppose its time just to abandon it all together and get him moved to full days on Tuesday and

Thursdays.”

“Sure,” Ms. Kelly said. “I'll get it changed over in the system.”

“Mommy look,” Riley said having returned holding a piece of paper with splotches of colors all over it.”

“Oh that's very nice,” Carol said.

“Its the ocean,” Riley said. “There's a turtle and some sharks,” Riley said pointing to some colors.

“We will certainly have to put it on the fridge when we get home,” Carol said nodding along. As they left Riley ran ahead to the elevator. He really liked to push the buttons.

Once they got home Carol fed Riley some lunch. He was having some mac and cheese. As a small experiment she gave Riley a fork to try and feed it to himself. She watched as he worked the fork. He was a little messy and uncoordinated with it but seem to at least be getting most of it in his mouth, it was a good sign. Afterwards Riley sat drinking his bottle. They had let him start to hold it himself. After his nap she took Riley out to play in his turtle sandbox that his Dad had gotten him the previous week. Riley seemed happy pushing around his excavator and dump truck.

“Mommy where's Carson?” he asked suddenly, no doubt the question had just formed in his mind a second before he said it.

“He's out with some friends but he should be back soon,” she said.

“Do you think he'll play in the sandbox with me?” Riley then asked.

“If you ask him really nicely he just might,” Carol said. Riley seemed satisfied as he went back to playing in the sand. As she watched him she began to get curious.

“Hey Riley,” she said bringing his attention back on her. “How old do you think Carson is?”

Riley looked at her for a moment before shrugging. “Do you think you guys are the same age?”

Riley stopped pushing his truck as he brought a finger up to his cheek appearing deep in thought.

“No,” he said answering after some consideration.

“Well do you know how old you are?” she asked. Riley looked back a little confused. Any other kid would be able to answer the question without hesitation. Yet Riley's age was not something they discussed with him.

“Not sure,” Riley said looking unbothered by the fact he could not answer.

“Well are you one hundred?” she asked. Riley giggled as he stood up shaking his head as he ran over to her. She pulled him up onto her lap. “How do you know you're not one hundred?”

“Because that's super old,” Riley said. “I would look like a grandpa.”

“Oh I see,” Mom chuckled. “Maybe you're fifty then.”

“Mommy I'm not old like you,” Riley laughed.

“You think I'm old,” Mom said with a fake gasp. “You think I look like a grandma,” she said as she tickled him sending him into a squealing fit.

“Not that old,” Riley said catching his breath. “You still pretty.”

“Now that is sweet,” Mom cooed giving him a kiss to the cheek. “But we still have to figure this out. How does twenty sound?” she watched intently as a little hint of recognition crossed Riley's face before he shook his head again. “What about your friend Nathan, he's six, is that how old you are?” Mom then posed.

“Mmmm he's a big kid though,” Riley said.

“I suppose he is,” Mom said. “Then what about three, does that sound right?” Riley's face seemed to light up.

“Orson's three,” Riley said. “And we go to the same daycare.” Which seemed to be all the proof Riley needed to confirm.

“Three,” Mom said with some enthusiasm. “I thought you said you weren't a big boy.”

“I am,” Riley said confidently. Mom then looked up to see Carson coming around from the front of the house.

“Riley I think I see a certain someone,” she said.

“Carson,” Riley practically screamed as he hopped off his

Mom's lap to run in a full sprint towards his brother. Carol watched as Riley grabbed Carson's hand to drag him too the sandbox.

“Okay, okay I'll play with you,” Carson said taking a seat on the outside of the sandbox. Carol got up and went inside. She pulled out her phone and began searching through her contacts. It was time to go see the doctor again.

Dr. Colleen entered into the examination room where she found Carol Thomas with her son Riley asleep in her arms. She gave a sympathetic look towards the small boy. It was no surprise to see him tuckered out. He had been through a lot during the appointment, which had included three shots for the poor little tyke.

“I've got great news,” Dr. Colleen said. “The test are very conclusive. Riley is officially a very healthy three year old boy.” A wave of relief seemed to wash over Carol's face.

“Oh thank goodness,” she said. “This is finally over. I was worried he was going to end up a newborn.”

“Worry not,” the doctor said. “In fact he has even grown a little since the last time I saw him.”

“This is the best news,” Carol said all smiles. “Maybe we can even start potty training again.”

“I'm sure you are eager to be done with diapers,” the doctor chuckled.

“Honestly yes,” Carol said. “Me and my husband were

actually thinking about having another child you know, remembering the boys when they had been younger, but I think after this we got it out of our system."

"I will caution against making too many changes all at once. It would be better to introduce things slowly. But you can probably discontinue the bottle feedings as we are no longer worried about his rapid nutrient loss. You also won't have to come see me anymore, Riley can be switched over to a normal pediatrician."

"Sounds good, although I will miss you," Carol said. "I can't thank you enough, you've been so good to us through all of this."

"I'm happy to help, and I'm also pleased to see how well you did with the B.M.T you've given Riley a great start." The two of them talked a little longer about what the next steps were. As they came to a close Dr. Colleen gathered up some papers. "So I'll get these papers signed. You should hear from somebody from the Census Bureau to help you change Riley's records so they match his age, they can also assist you in getting control of any of his assets."

"I don't think he had many assets," Carol said laughing a little.

"They can also help you in getting into any accounts as well such as social media and the like." Dr. Colleen added.

"Sounds good," Carol said.

"Oh I also wanted to give this to you," the doctor said giving Carol a slip of paper. "Its a support group for people who are

going through what you did."

Carol looked at it with some hesitation. "I think we'll be okay, we're just happy to finally be moving forward and putting all this behind us."

"Still it might not hurt to go to a couple of the meetings," the doctor said. "I think sharing your experience could help others who might still be in the middle of it, you know show them their is hope at the end of the tunnel."

"Maybe you're right," Carol said before slipping the note into her purse.

Carol walked with her sister Yvette who was visiting up the front walk towards the house.

"Getting out of the house like this was great, I really needed it," Carol said smiling.

"It was nice to get some time away from the kids," Yvette said. "I am curious to see how they fared though." They had left the kids at home to do some much needed unwinding. Although Carol, just to be safe had hired Carson's girlfriend Katie to watch after Riley and his cousin Toby for the afternoon with Carson helping out, but much to his chagrin he wasn't getting paid. The women walked into the front door.

"Mommy," Riley shouted as he came running up to her with just a t-shirt and a diaper on. The family joked that Riley was the guard dog of the family as he was always the first to greet them when they came home.

“Hi sweetie,” Mom said picking him up off the ground. “Did you have fun with everybody while we were gone.”

“Mhmmm,” Riley nodded.

“And you took your nap?” Mom asked with a raised eyebrow.

“Uh huh,” Riley nodded a little suspiciously.

“He was against it of course,” Katie said walking up. “But Carson was able to wrangle him into bed.”

“Good to hear he was helpful,” Yvette said with a chuckle.

“Of course,” Carol said laughing a little herself. “Here I was worried Katie was going to be babysitting three kids.”

“I helped,” Carson said with a sigh as he came and stood next to Katie.

“Oh yes letting Toby and Riley play in that mud puddle was really helpful,” Katie laughed. “I had to give both of them a hosing down afterwards,” Katie said looking at the two women with a hint of sarcasm. Carson scoffed.

“I changed Riley's diaper didn't I,” he said.

“Did you hear that Yvette, he changed one diaper,” Carol said with some faux surprise.

“Strike up the band and roll out the red carpet,” Yvette said. Carson rolled his eyes smiling a little.

“Honestly everything went great,” Katie smiled. “And Carson was a big help too,” she said giving her boyfriend some

credit. Just then Toby's voice exploded.

“He doesn't go on the boat,” he yelled grabbing an action figure out of Riley's hands and throwing it hard against the stone fireplace causing one of the arms to break off. Riley's face crumpled before he started crying.

“Toby,” Aunt Yvette gasped as she went into the living room.

“Riley its okay c'mere,” Carson said rolling his head a little as he followed his Aunt into the living room to do damage control. Carol settled up with Katie before the girl took her leave having another babysitting gig to get ready for in a couple of hours. Carol then walked into the living room to see Yvette had Toby in the corner on a time out while Riley was sat in Carson lap, watching intently as the now older boy popped the action figures arm back into its socket.

“Good as new, see?” Carson said. Riley grimaced before shoving his face into his brother's chest. “Riley don't get snot on my shirt,” he said yet rubbing his little brother's back all the same.

After everything had calmed down everybody moved outside. Carson was in the yard playing keep away with a soccer ball with the little boys who seemed to enjoy the activity immensely while Carol and Yvette sat sharing some lemonade on the patio.

“I still can't believe it,” Yvette said watching the boys. “Seeing Riley being three again.”

“I know,” Carol said.

“To think it's all because of that drug...what was it called again?

“They call it Pixie dust,” Carol said. It was the hot button topic at the moment. It had first shown up on college campuses and had spread. It promised the user a euphoric experience, yet when it had first started circulating no one knew of one of the side effects that affected some users that being onset age regression. No one really knew where it came from. Yet governments all over the world had cracked down hard on it. There were harsh sentences for even possessing it. There was still a lot unknown about it. Even those that did regress didn't all react the same. Some only lost a few years while others like Riley were sent all the way back to toddler hood and in some very rare cases some even became newborns.

“I just can't believe Riley was getting involved with that kind of stuff,” Carol said. “I mean I knew he was doing some weed and drinking, it was college, even I did stuff like that, but he was really getting into some dangerous stuff.”

“Do you know how he even got it?” Yvette asked. “I heard it wasn't exactly easy to come by.”

“His roommates said he probably got it from this new girl he was seeing, Eve.” Carol answered.

“You should look her up. I hear you can sue over this,” Yvette said.

“I found her through a social media account,” Carol said with

some seriousness. “Or rather her Mom's,” Carol added smirking. “Apparently Evie is starting kindergarten in the fall.” The two shared a moment of silence.

“Okay,” Yvette finally said. “I've held back asking only because I knew you all were dealing with a lot but you gotta tell me, how did this even work out? I mean how did Riley even react when he found out he was regressing.”

“He never did,” Carol said. She then began recount the whole story. How one of Riley's roommates had contacted them and told them they needed to come and see Riley. She and Jim had gone to the campus that day. When they got there they found Riley looking like a ten year old, yet he didn't even seem to realize it. To him everything was normal. “Its one of the side effects apparently,” Carol said. “They don't realize anything has changed. To them its as if they always have been that way.” There had been a meeting called by the college administrators for parents of those effected. They had said the kids would be allowed to continue on as long as their mental states weren't effected. Riley's parents had decided they were going to let Riley continue on seeing as he was not exhibiting any signs of distress.

“We were about to leave when one of his friends grabbed us panicked. We walked back in to find Riley with a pool of blood in his lap with a couple of teeth screaming. We rushed him to the hospital where he was sedated. In the morning he woke back up with a complete set of baby teeth and had no recollection of the night before. Jim being a dentist was absolutely shocked. That's when we were approached by a

doctor who was dealing with cases like this and they told us about B.M.T.”

“B.M.T,” Yvette repeated. “I remember Jim mentioning something like that.

“Behavioral Modification Therapy,” Carol clarified. “Basically you start introducing things that would be normal for them at whatever age they are at. For some reason doing that allows their brains to adjust to their new age. Honestly me and Jim were a little skeptical especially about the part where we could under no circumstances tell Riley what was really going on.”

“That does sound a little strange,” Yvette agreed. “Especially about not telling him the truth.”

“They said that those that became aware of the regression would spiral into a deep depression and in some cases have complete mental breakdowns. But still, I mean how do you tell your twenty year old son he now has to wear clothes meant for a five year old or get them to use a training potty?” Carol then went on to explain that it was apparent Riley was going to have to come back home and how they had come up with a story with Riley's roommates and landlord about bedbugs, his friends had even gone as far to pack up their own stuff just to make it believable. Riley's Dad had driven him home since Riley had shrunk down yet again by that point, yet when they got home Riley fully believed he had driven himself. “Thanks again for letting us borrow some of Toby's stuff,” Carol said.

“I'm glad it helped.” Yvette chuckled. “I'm surprised he just went along with it.”

“He didn't, at least not at first, that was honestly the hardest part. He was so frustrated and couldn't understand we were really just trying to help him. So we had to keep telling him he was acting off. Which he was for sure. I mean I came home one day to find he had completely ransacked two rooms. It was even worse when I found out he had been looking for his phone and wallet. Having to act like I was mad at him while knowing full well I was the one who had taken them was rough.”

“That does sound rough,” Yvette agreed. “I don't know if I could have done it.”

“It got easier once Riley went and saw the doctor, she gave us a believable enough story to justify a lot of it. Although it was hardest on Carson. He was opposed from the start. We put him in some counseling and once he saw how much Riley needed it he eventually came around.”

“I can imagine how rough it must have been for him,” Yvette said nodding along as she watched Carson continue to play with the other two boys.

“Its like he lost his brother,” Carol said. “I mean me and Jim kind of have it easy. We remember Riley when he was like this, so for us its almost as if we get to see an old friend. Plus we were so young when we had Riley, I mean Jim was still finishing up dentistry school and I was still working third shift so it will be nice to get to spend more time with him this

time around given that we're a lot more stable. “

“Already thinking about what you are going to do different,” Yvette said with an raised eyebrow.

“Not really. We decided long ago to let Riley grow into the person he wants to be, just like the first time. He's calling the shots just as he always was. We had to really keep an eye on him. When we saw him start to act younger we adjusted.” Carol said taking a sip of her drink. “Although I think we will be going a little harder on the dangers of drugs this time around.”

“You know Jim told me about letting him do college classes even though you had to put him in daycare.” Yvette said with a questioning look.

“Oh well you know, even if he was acting like a little kid most of the time we could still see he had some of his old knowledge. We thought it would be best to at least try. The doctors also said it might be helpful in slowing the regression too. We noticed he started using his words less so we really honed in on keeping him talking.”

“Do you think it worked?” Yvette asked.

“Who knows,” Carol said with a laugh. “He lasted about a week before he completely stopped caring about school.”

“Its a good thing you were able to find a daycare that would take him,” Yvette said. “I saw a news story that lots of places wouldn't even take kids like him.”

“We did have to search a little,” Carol replied. “The place we found though was very accommodating, and they said they already had a kid with Riley's background, so they had no problem with it. Besides it wont really be a problem now that his records now show him being three years old.”

“Looks like he is all set to have a happy life,” Yvette smiled.

“We all are, we can all move forward now,” Carol said.

Later on Aunt Yvette left with Toby. Riley was sad to see them go since he had such good time playing with Toby. Aunt Yvette promised they would visit again soon. Dad soon arrived home with some dinner in tow, and some things for Riley as well. For one they decided to do away with the highchair and Riley was pleased with his brand new booster seat. Dad had also gotten some pull-ups at the store. Riley had been a little wary of the change at first. However once Mommy had shown him his new training potty in the bathroom and a calendar he would get to put stickers on he seemed to come around on the idea of being a big boy.

That night Carol came into Riley's room finding him sat in his Dad lap in the rocking chair as they read Riley's favorite book “The Sneezy Dragon” together.

“Daddy stop,” Riley said slapping his hand onto the page. “I want to read the last page by myself.”

“Its all you,” Dad said with a smile as he turned the last page to Riley's absolute favorite part.

“ACHOOO,” Riley said in a loud voice as he giggled.

“That was a big sneeze,” Dad chuckled closing the book. “Now I think its time for a Riley story. What did your Mommy tell you about last night?”

“She told me about when Riley went and helped baby sea turtles,” Riley recounted.

“Oh that's a very good one,” Dad said. “Lets see what should we do tonight.

The Riley stories were something his parents had started doing with him after going to one of the support group meetings where a researcher on the Pixie Dust epidemic was presenting. Mom and Dad had been a little saddened upon the realization that they would never be able to tell Riley the truth, a whole history lost to them. Memories of family vacations and holidays now gone. Yet the researcher had explained that they were seeing good results in memory recall among people who hadn't regressed as much. It was simple enough. They would just have to tell Riley stories about his old self as if they were made up stories and over time the memories would start to take root. As Riley got older he would come to understand that they weren't just stories but things about himself. Mom and Dad had spent a good amount of time coming up with good stories to tell. They had even reached out to Riley's friends who seemed happy to supply their own. Although some of them would have to wait until Riley was a little older. All the same they wouldn't hide them from him. They were his memories after all. Riley seemed to like the stories and wasn't at the stage where he understood that the Riley in the story was in fact him.

“Daddy I want to hear about Riley going on the boat and swimming with the sharks again,” Riley said.

“You like that one huh?” Dad smiled.

“Yeah,” Riley nodded. “I want to swim with sharks too.”

“You know,” Mom said walking over. “As great as that story is, I think Daddy should tell you a new one tonight. How about when Riley played baseball and he hit that game winning home run.”

“That is a good one,” Dad smiled. “But I don't know if Riley really wants to hear that.”

“I wanna,” Riley said turning around in his Dads lap to face him. “Tell me, tell me.”

“Okay okay,” Dad said as if Riley was twisting his arm. “Then its off to bed in your big boy bed,” Dad said as he motioned over to the bed they had originally gotten for Riley, yet told him it was for Toby. Riley smiled. They had removed the crib two days ago and he was excited to have a new bed.

“Once upon a time there was a boy named Riley who played baseball, and he was pretty good at it.” Dad began as Riley put his pacifier in his mouth before resting his head up against his Dad's shoulder to enjoy the story about a boy with the same name. Mom gave Riley a kiss to the top of his head before leaving the room, with the comforting idea that things were going to be okay. The worry and stress was gone. Riley had finally gotten out of his rough patch and good things awaited him.

THE END