Tommy the Tiger

by andlat

"But why, mom?"

The Costume Box
2024

Chapter 1

Tommy the Tiger - Chapter 1

"But why, mom?"

"Because." She said, sighing wearily. "It's your turn this year. You just have to take Eric around the neighborhood."

"None of his friends need a freaking chaperone."

"Watch your tone, young man." Mom replied, frowning. "It's our rule as a family. You should feel flattered that I consider you mature enough to do it."

"It's Halloween!"

"So? Do you have plans?"

"No..."

"You'd spend all night pouting if I made you hand out candy while I took Eric out,so this works better."

"But"

"No buts, mister." That was how Tommy ended up walking out of the house with his brother Halloween evening. Eric was dressed as a vampire, probably the dorkiest costume imaginable in Tommy's mind.

"Why are we going so early?" Tommy asked irritably.

"I told you!" Eric said. "I need to go over to Jake's house first. It's his first Halloween here, so I'm going to help him with

finding the best houses for trick or treating." Tommy groaned.

"So I'm gonna have to chaperone two little dorks?"

"I'm not that little." Eric replied. "I'm taller than you, especially since you slouch." Tommy grunted, the comment stinging a bit. If it had not been such a sore subject, maybe he would have brought that up to his mom. "You're not really chaperoning me anyway. Isn't it obvious? Mom and dad just wanted you out of the house instead of moping around all the time." Tommy's eyes practically flashed as he realized that Eric was probably right.

"Dammit"

"C'mon, let's get to Jake's!"

Once they arrived at Jake's, Eric seemed to vanish into his friend's room in almost an instant, leaving Tommy alone to sit on the couch and wait for them to come back. Worst Halloween ever, he thought to himself glumly. It was not as though he had had any plans. He probably would have just hid in his room and played video games or something, but following his brother around the neighborhood while he trick or treated sounded like torture. What if someone saw him and thought he was trick or treating? That was why he had dressed carefully in a hoodie and jeans, the least costume-like outfit he could possibly assemble.

“Hello there.” He jumped as an unfamiliar voice startled him, yanking him out of his thoughts. A girl a few years older than Tommy stood there, smiling at him. “What's your name,

buddy?”

“Uh… Tom” he mumbled. She was beautiful and he was immediately smitten. She chuckled at his nervousness.

"Nice to meet you, Tommy.” She said. "What are you doing here all by yourself?"

“Oh, I'm waiting for my brother. He went into the other room with Jake.”

"Ah.” She looked him over. “Aren't you trick or treating with them?”

“My mom wants me to chaperone Eric, but”

“Oh, of course.” She said, nodding in a way that made it clear she was not really listening. “Shouldn't you be wearing a costume?” She drew closer to him and Tommy stammered.

“Oh, I'm a little old for trick or treating, but” Once again, she did not seem to hear what he was saying.

“I think I know where there's an extra costume. C'mon, I'll help you put it on.” She grabbed his hand, Tommy gasping as he felt her impossibly soft skin. Was she an angel? As if she could read his mind, she smiled down at him. “I'm Janet by the way. Jake's older sister. What did you say your brother's name is? Eric?”

“Yep.”

“Well, let's get you ready for trick or treating and then I can meet him. How's that sound?”

“Um, uh”

“I won't bite, buddy.” Janet said warmly. “C'mon. My mom's got some boxes in here that might just have a neat costume for you.”

“I don’t need” he tugged at his hand, but could not get free. “I don’t need a costume.”

“You won’t get any candy without a costume. You do want candy, don’t you?” Realization struck him. Due to his size, she must think he was a little kid!

“How old do you think I am?” Janet did not seem to hear him as she opened up a cardboard box.

“I think mom said the old costumes are in here. Jake was hemming and hawing about what to be.” Janet said, thinking out loud.

“I’m outta here.”

“Where you go, kiddo?” Janet asked, nabbing him and pulling him toward her. “Help me look.”

“I don’t even know you.”

“Sure you do. My name’s Janet, your name’s Tommy, we’re practically besties.”

“That's”

"Aha!” She triumphantly unfurled an orange and black striped jumpsuit. Complete with a hood and a tail.

“A tiger?"

“That's right! Tommy the tiger! Jake wore this in kindergarten, I think. I bet it'll fit you perfectly.”

“I am not dressing up in a toddler costume.” Janet held it up to him and nodded to herself.

“Well, get undressed. Your big brother and Jake'll be ready to go any minute, I bet.”

“Whoa, whoa, whoa. Eric's not my big brother. He's my little brother.”

“Uh-huh. Sure.” Janet looked at him incredulously. "C'mon, enough fooling around. Let's get you dressed. Plus, this should keep you all toasty warm.”

"I am not wearing that!”

“It'll be fun, Tommy. Tommy the tiger! So ferocious.” She poked his belly playfully. “Show me your tiger roar.”

“What? No way. Look, we got off on the wrong foot. I’m not” he squealed as she suddenly began to tickle him mercilessly, falling back onto his butt.

“Tommy’s a ticklish tiger!” She said over and over again in a goofy voice, not letting up no matter how he tried to push her hands away. “Let me hear your tiger roar!” Even if he wanted to, Tommy could not have roared, laughing as uncontrollably as he was.

Through a combination of tickles and genuine babysitter

experience, she got the squirming, squealing boy stripped down to his boxer briefs. If Tommy had known a hot girl was going to see his underwear, perhaps he would have worn a pair that did not have yellow dump trucks and front loaders on it, but how would he have known? She smiled at his adorable underwear before dressing him in the tiger costume, which was more like footie pajamas than a costume, although it did leave his sock-clad feet exposed.

“Oh, you make just the cutest little tiger!” She cooed as she zipped it up. The second her guard was down, Tommy tried to unzip it, but found that the plush paws over his hands made gripping the zipper impossible. He was trapped! “I think there’s even some face paints somewhere in here.” Janet dug through the box.

“You are not painting my face!”

“You need to have your face painted, kiddo. We don’t have a tiger mask in here.” How was it even possible that this baby costume fit him? He knew he was small for his age, but had Jake been a giant in kindergarten? It made no sense.

“I don’t want my face painted.”

“It’ll be fun, Tommy.” She said. “And if you need to go potty, you let me know, okay?” He grunted. “Aha! Here it is! How hold still while I make you a big scary tiger, alright?”

“I don’t wanna be a tiger!”

“Oh, yeah? I bet your tune will change once you see how much candy you get!” She held his chin in a hand. “Hold

still.”

“But”

“Keep your mouth shut. Paint doesn’t taste nearly as good as candy.”

Tommy tried to think of something, anything to get out of this predicament, but nothing seemed to come to him. He was already dressed like a tiger and all he could do was stand there as Janet applied the cold face paint to his face. It was only when she was putting the finishing touches on his face that he realized why he was so anxious. What would Eric say?

“Eric” he murmured to himself.

“Hmm?” Janet said. “Oh, you’re wondering about your big brother! Well, how’s about we go find him?” Without waiting for an answer, she grabbed his hand and pulled him from the room. “We’ll need to go upstairs, so be very careful. In fact” once again, without so much as asking for permission, Janet scooped up Tommy and carried him up the stairs. “Oof, you’re a little heavy!” She said as they reached the top. “Maybe we should have had you crawl up them like a big, scary tiger, hmm?” She smiled and only then set Tommy down on the carpeted floor. Taking his hand, she led the boy down the hall.

As they walked, Tommy felt something tapping the backs of his legs. Looking behind him, he realized it was the tail of his costume. He whimpered as it sunk in that he, the boy who had insisted he was too mature for a costume, was now

dressed like an oversized toddler in a baby costume. Why did it fit him so well?

He could hear their voices coming through the door as he and Janet neared it. He tugged at Janet's hand.

"What's wrong?" She asked. "Do you need to go potty?"

"No!" He realized how loud his protest was when the voices fell silent on the other side of the door for a moment before resuming their conversation. "I just don't want Eric to see me like this."

"Why? You're an adorable tiger."

"But, but"

"But what?" She squatted down so that they were eye to eye. "Give me one good reason why we shouldn't show our brothers my handiwork."

"Because" his blush was invisible under the face paint. "Because I'm Eric's big brother." Her eyes widened. He could tell she had not expected to hear that. "I'm fourteen. I know I'm small, but it's true. My mom wanted me to chaperone Eric, just to be safe, and well… one thing led to another and somehow, I ended up like, like this." He gestured up and down his body with the ridiculous plush paws.

Janet stared at him for a moment and he could practically see the gears turning as she tried to decide if he was telling the truth or not. After a moment, she shrugged.

"Even if that's true, I've done a lot of work getting you into

your costume, so let's at least show Eric and Jake." Tommy reached out to stop her, but she stood and knocked on the door. "Jake? Eric? Boys, Tommy and I are wondering what's taking you two so long!" She smiled down at Tommy before adding "Tommy's worried they'll be all out of candy if you don't leave now!"

"Am not!" Tommy protested, but it worked to draw the boys' curiosity enough to open Jake's bedroom door. Jake did not seem to know what was so funny at first as Eric burst into laughter the moment he saw Tommy standing there. "Shuddup." Tommy hissed at Eric.

"Isn't he adorable?" Janet asked, seeming to misunderstand the reason for Eric's laughter. "He said he didn't have a costume."

"Oh, he looks great." Eric said, wiping a tear from his eye. Tommy had thought Eric was a dork for dressing up as a vampire, but now he would have done anything to trade costumes with him.

"Is that my old tiger costume? I thought mom got rid of it."

"It's a good thing she didn't, huh?" Janet said with a grin. "Oh, I just realized Tommy hasn't actually gotten to see his face all painted up." Once again taking Tommy by the hand, or rather the paw, she pulled him into Jake's room and to his mirror.

"Oh, great." Tommy muttered as he looked at his orange, black, and white face. It was a pretty good tiger and it gave

him the smallest hope that maybe no one would recognize him.

“What do you think, Tommy?” Eric was practically bouncing up and down excitedly. “Did you thank Jake’s big sister for getting you dressed like a cute little tiger?” Tommy glared daggers at Eric, but Janet somehow missed it.

“Oh, I’m sure he meant to. Let’s head downstairs so our little tiger can go get some candy.” Eric and Jake grinned eagerly, both quite delighted by this Halloween surprise. “Oh, and you want to hear something funny? Tommy told me he’s your big brother.” Eric smirked down at Tommy and he knew in an instant that Eric would never in a million years clear things up.

“Well, I think it’s pretty clear he’s my little brother, isn’t it?”

“That’s not true!” Tommy protested, only realizing afterwards that he sounded every bit like a petulant little boy. Janet squatted down again.

“Oh, I’m sure Eric just meant that he’s bigger than you. Like, taller.” She held her hand up as if Tommy might not know what taller meant.

“I know that wasn’t what he meant.’ Tommy muttered, but no one seemed to hear or care what he thought. Janet took his hand again and they headed for the stairs.

“Do you want me to carry you again?”

“Again?” Eric and Jake said in excited unison.

“I can do it.” Tommy said.

“How about you scoot down?” Janet suggested. Tommy was now in a sour mood and he glared at her. “Carrying it is, my tough little tiger.” Tommy descended the stairs in Janet’s arms, Eric and Jake’s cackling laughter echoing in his ears, only barely muffled by the polar fleece hood over them.

Once they reached the ground floor, Janet set him down to his relief while she went to grab him a trick or treat pail from the other room, but that did nothing to spare him from Eric and Jake’s teasing and continued snickering.

“You look so cute, Tommy.” Eric said, admiring just how much like a toddler his brother had become. “This is so great.”

“I’m gonna get you for this.”

“I’d like to see you try.” Eric retorted. “How come you haven’t unzipped it?” He fingered the zipper right under Tommy’s chin. Tommy remained silent. “And why’d you let her paint your face? Didn’t you tell her?”

“I did, but she didn’t believe me.” He whimpered.

“Can’t say I blame her.” Jake observed. “But why’d you even put the thing on? Bet you think she’s hot.”
“I didn’t put it on. She forced me into it.”

“Wait, so are you still wearing clothes under there?” When Tommy did not immediately answer, Eric unzipped his costume just enough to see his pale chest underneath. “She undressed you, dude?” Tommy nodded.

“How old is he, really?”

“Fourteen, but if you tell your sister, I’ll freaking kill you.” Jake grinned.

“Oh, I won’t tell her. This is way too funny.”

“What are you?” Tommy asked Jake, eager to change the subject. He was wearing just black, so it was hard to tell.

“Oh, I’m a ninja.” He pulled on his mask. “See?” Tommy looked from Jake to Eric and realized that, in their dark clothes, his orange and black outfit would stick out like a sore thumb.

“Alright, I found three pails for you three boys.” Janet said, returning. “Tommy, be sure to hold onto your brother’s hand the whole time, okay?” She patted his head between his two round little ears. “We wouldn’t want our little tiger getting lost, huh?” Tommy gulped as Eric took his hand, squeezing it tightly.

“Wow! You sure you can even hold your pail in these things?”

“I can.” Tommy grunted.

“Oh, so you do want to go trick or treating.” Eric grinned, the plastic vampire fangs only adding to the predatory delight written all over his face.

“No, I really don’t” Tommy replied, but no one seemed to hear him.

“I almost forgot. Mom wanted me to send her a photo of the

trick or treaters. Line up nicely, boys. Ninja, vampire, and the tiger kitten right in the middle." She instructed, pointing to each spot.

"Can you send it to our mom too?" Eric asked. "She'll love this!"

"I bet she will." Janet said, none of them seemingly aware of Tommy's attempts to dissuade her. "Now smile, boys!" She held up her phone. "Smile, Tommy or I'll have to tickle you again."

"Again?" Jake and Eric both said with a snort.

"That's much better, Tommy." Janet said approvingly. "Such a ferocious smile for a little tiger."

"Tiger kitten." Eric corrected, patting Tommy roughly on the head.

"I'm gonna kill you." Tommy grumbled.

"One more photo and then you three can go out and get some sweet, sweet candy haul." Janet said. "Eric, Jake, I want you two to look afraid. Tommy, go ahead and give us your best roar face, okay?"

"You've gotta be kidding me."

"It'll be fun!" Janet exclaimed, stretching out the last word. Tommy sighed. Three against one. He had no choice.

"I'm taking this off after this."

"Do you really want to go trick or treating in just your

undies?" Eric teased.

"Shut up."

"C'mon, Tommy. It'll be so adorable! I bet your mommy will love it."

"Oh, yeah! Be sure to send this one to her for sure." Eric grinned from ear to ear. "Come on, Tommy! Show us your, what did Janet call it? Your roar face!"

"Hold up your paws like this." Jake demonstrated.

"I know what to do."

"Then do it." Eric chuckled. Rolling his eyes, Tommy complied. Maybe he could try wiping off the face paint? He did his best roaring impression, groaning as it was met with laughs, like everything he did. Triumphantly, he ran a paw across his face, but looked down at it in confusion. None of the paint had come off.

"It's tougher than that." Janet said. "It only comes off with a special cleanser, so make sure the big boys bring you back here. Unless you wanna stay a tiger kitten forever!"

"Ooh, tempting." Eric murmured to Tommy. "We'd better get going. There's a lot of houses I want to cover." He grabbed tightly onto Tommy's hand. "And I'm sure the tiger kitten wants lots and lots of candy." Tommy looked over his shoulder as Eric tugged him toward the door, silently praying that Janet would come to her senses and realize he was actually fourteen, like he had told her he was. She waved at

him.

“Oh, wait.” She called suddenly.

“Hmm?” Eric looked back at her.

“I wanted to give you my number before I forget. In case your mom wants to call me when Tommy needs a babysitter.”

“Oh!” Eric grinned. “I bet once mom sees Tommy like this, she’ll agree that a babysitter’s a great idea for him.” He took the number from Janet, slipping it into his pocket. “Let’s go, buddy! I can’t wait to show everyone just what a cute little tiger kitten you are!”

Chapter 2

Tommy the Pumpkin - Chapter 2

“We’re going to Jake’s?”

“Yes!” Eric said. “Geez, don’t you ever listen?”

“Why do you have so much stuff?” Eric sighed.

“God, you’re so darn nosey. Haven’t you learned that that gets you into trouble?” He smirked. “‘speically since we’re going to Jake’s.” Tommy blushed. Ever since the tiger incident last Halloween, almost every time Eric and Jake got together, they seemed to trap Tommy in some sort of babyish predicament. He had gotten good at avoiding them, but now? Now he had no choice. “If you must know, Jake and I are gonna go do some pranks.”

“Yeah, right. I bet you’re gonna sneak out for trick or treating even though you said you’re too old. Bet your costume’s in there!” He got a peek at something orange before Eric jerked the bag away.

“Swear to god, we’re doing pranks.” He said.

“And what? I’ll just sit at his house?”

“You can come with us if you want.” Eric shrugged. “But we run faster than you.”

“That’s stupid.” Tommy groaned.

“Well, whatever. Watch scary movies or something while

we’re doing it.” Tommy sighed.

“If I wanted to sit alone in an empty house, I would’ve stayed home.”

“Mom and dad said no.”

“I know!”

“They’re super worried you’ll burn down the house or something, right?” Tommy did not want to get into the reason why he was not allowed to stay home alone. All that mattered was he was going to be spending Halloween with his little brother and his little brother’s best friend.

“Hey, um… what about Jake’s sister? What was her name?”

“Janet? She’s in college.”

“Oh.” So he was going to be alone in Jake’s family’s house. Weird, but maybe he could make it fun. “I guess it’ll be okay.” Tommy mumbled to himself, almost coming around to the idea by the time they reached Jake’s house. After all, if Jake and Eric were gone, he wouldn’t have to worry about… no, there had to be some sort of catch.

The catch stood at the kitchen island as they walked in, wearing yoga pants and a purple tank top. Janet grinned as she saw them.

“Hey, Eric. Ohmygod, is that Tommy?” Before Tommy could even say hi, she had scooped him up and kissed both of his cheeks. She smelled so good that it took him a moment to even start squirming. “Alright, buddy, I’ll put you down.” She

carried him over to the stairs and called up them. “Jake! Eric and Tommy are here!”

“Be right down.”

“I’m going to go change. I was so excited, I forgot I’m still sweaty from my jog. Sorry Tommy.” Tommy tried to explain it was no big deal, but Janet had already disappeared.

“What’s she doing here?”

“Sorry, bud.” Eric shrugged so genuinely, Tommy almost believed he really did not know she would be here. There was no way Janet would ever let him stay here alone! Then again, maybe that meant he would get to go to a party. No, Janet was convinced he was a baby and would never take him to that.

“What am I going to do? You saw how”

“She was all over you. And last year?”

“That doesn’t count! She dressed me up and you two dragged me to every fucking”

“Janet’s gonna wash your mouth out.” Jake said, walking in. “Plus it’s weird to hear little kids swear.” He gave Eric a hug, never taking his gaze off of the fuming Tommy. “Did you guys eat?”

“Yeah.”

“Janet’ll be disappointed. She was so worried about widdle Tommykins going hungry.” He roughly tousled Tommy’s

hair. “Does he still need a sippy? Does he wear bibs?”

“What’d you tell her?”

“Pretty sure he’s on solid food now.” Jake’s grin did not make it clear if he had or had not actually said that. “Oh! Before we forget, I’ve got something to show you, Tommy.” It took Tommy a second to realize that Jake was talking to him.

“HUh?”

“Upstairs. In my room. C’mon.” Tommy looked puzzled. Alone? With Jake? At least he could call for Janet to help him. Or kick Jake.

“Uh, I’ll wait here?” Eric said with a shrug.

“Where are you two off to in such a hurry?” Janet asked. She had changed into jeans and a sweater. The jeans were a downgrade, but at least the sweater still hugged her, Tommy thought.

“Just need to show Tommy something up in my room.” Jake said.

“Careful on the stairs!” Janet said. “Maybe you should crawl, Tommy.”

“What? Why?”

“Ok, you want to be big.” She smiled. “Those stairs are pretty tricky.” How can stairs be tricky, Tommy wondered. “How about you go first and hold the railing? If you tumble, Jake will catch you.” Tommy rolled his eyes, but what if Janet

watched to make sure he did?

Fighting the urge to look behind him, Tommy soon got upstairs and out of sight. Jake then took the lead, snickering about the situation.

“It’s not funny.”

“Sure it is.” He said with a grin. “I barely even have to do anything and my sister’s convinced you’re a baby.”

“She is not!”

“Well, I’ve been telling her stories about” he shook his head. “You’ll see.”

“What do you mean?”

“Obviously she’s babysitting you while me and Eric are out doing our pranks.”

“I’ll tell her that’s what you’re doing.”

“Tattle all you want. Won’t do anything to convince her you’re like four. I’ve told her a lot over the last year, not that I needed to. She dressed you up like a tiger without me even saying anything.” Tommy fumed, but he knew he shouldn’t. After all, Eric always brought up the tiger incident when they saw each other.

“What did you want?”

“Oh, yeah. Mom made me clean out the attic and I wondered if you wanted something.” Tommy felt justified in his apprehension. What would it be? A tricycle? Jake’s old crib?

Both those thoughts seemed ridiculous until he remembered Jake gifting him his old toy car for his birthday. And made me take photos in it, he thought.

“What is it?”

“Ask me nicely to show you.”

“Fine. Please?”

“You can do better than that!”

“Jake.”

“Fine.” He grinned. “Ta da!” He revealed a set of pajamas. The shirt had a smiling cartoon tiger’s face on it while the pants had smiling elephants, monkeys, and zebras. It was brightly colored and babyish, but Tommy had expected something far worse, so he almost felt underwhelmed.

“Oh.”

“They’re jammies, you know, for when you’re sleeping.”

“No duh, Einstein.”

“Well, you got so upset when Eric and I found you sleeping in your undies.” The way Tommy remembered it, he had been more angry about them making him sing and dance before finally leaving him alone to get dressed. “What do you say, little baby tiger cub?”

Downstairs, Eric was talking to Janet. She was clearly thrilled by the prospect of having Tommy for the night and Eric was more than happy to affirm her belief that his brother was, at

best, four or five years old. He was just so tiny, after all.

"Oh, almost forgot. My mom told me to bring this just in case you want to take Tommy trick or treating. No pressure. He got lots of candy at Trunk and Treat yesterday."

“Aw, we wouldn’t want the little guy to miss out!” She smiled slyly. “Where will you two be?”

“Some friends are having a party. We’ll be back by Jake’s curfew, but promise not to tell Tommy? I didn’t tell him that that’s what we’re doing because he might get upset. He wants to be big so bad.”

“Aw, poor little guy.” She smiled. “Don’t worry. We’ll have lots of fun. What time’s his bedtime?” It was Eric’s turn to grin slyly. This was a perfect opportunity.

The seeds planted with Janet, Eric wandered upstairs, more than a little curious just what was taking Jake and Tommy so long. He walked in to see Tommy pouting as he mumbled a thank you.

“For my nice new jammies. Jungle jammies.”

“For my nice new jungle jammies.”

“Cute as whatever this is,” Eric said, announcing his presence. “We better get going to our party, Jake.”

"Wait? You're going to a party?"

"Yeah, but you wouldn't want to come. It's a middle school party and you're in high school!" Eric teased.

"Well, does Janet know?" This could be his chance to get some revenge and sabotage their plans.

"First of all, we'll be back by my curfew.'

"And yeah," Eric said. "I did tell her."

"Dude?"

"Sorry. I just thought you'd..."

"Whatever. Janet will be busy anyway." There it was. Firm confirmation -- not that he really needed it -- that he was going to be babysat by Janet.

"There's no way I'm"

"You don't have a choice, baby." Jake said with a big grin.

"I am not" Tommy restrained himself. He would not take the bait. Jake only kept grinning.

"We'd better get you downstairs, but remember how worried Janet was?" Tommy did not like the sound of that. "Crawl down the stairs or we'll make you do it naked!" He scoffed.

"Won't Janet wonder why I'm naked?"

"You're such an adorable little guy, she won't even question it."

"I'm not crawling." Tommy tried to keep his voice calm.

"Well, let's get you naked." Jake replied just as calmly. "Are you wearing cute undies at least or boxers like us?" He laughed, knowing all too well that he and Eric had purged the

few pairs of boxers Tommy had had, leaving him nothing but cute little boy briefs in bright colors.

Knowing better than to let himself be cornered, Tommy hurried out of Jake's room and toward the stairs, taking care to slow down. The last thing he needed was to fall down the stairs.

"My goodness!" Janet said, grabbing his shoulders and pulling him to her the moment he reached the bottom of the stairs. "Where are you off to in such a hurry? That excited for trick or treating?"

"He sure is!" Eric said, following behind him.

"What? No. No!" Tommy realized the full breadth of their plan. Not again? The same dumb tiger costume? The way they were grinning, it had to be.

"We're gonna get going, but" he leaned over to Janet, almost rubbing in how he was almost her height. "Be sure to send me pics of our little trick or treater."

"I am not trick or treating!" Tommy protested, but as Jake and Eric got ready to leave, no one was listening to him. "I'm fourteen! Eric! Tell her I'm fourteen!" He knew it was a desperate plea, but he had to try it.

"Bye bye, little guy!" Eric picked Tommy up and gave him a kiss on the cheek. "You be good for Janet!" Squirm as Tommy might, rather than set him down, Eric passed him over to Janet. It wasn't fair! His little brother was leaving and he was stuck in the clutches of a girl who, while hot, thought

he was a little kid.

"You sure you don't want to go trick or treat?" Janet asked, depositing Tommy on the couch. He nodded, searching his brain for something, anything that would get him out of an entire evening of little kid treatment. Trick or treating or not, he knew he would be stuck doing something painfully babyish.

Why was Janet even acting like he was a toddler? She had mistaken him for a little kid and dressed him up like a tiger a whole year ago! He was fourteen now. He had to find a way to tell her he was not a little kid!

“Hey, you do know I’m not” he searched for a way to bring up his age without making it sound like he was a little kid protesting his being seen as one. Inspiration struck. “The other day in”

“I see a little tumtum!” Janet cooed, interrupting him as she tugged up his hoodie and blew a raspberry right into his belly button. “Little Tommy’s tumtum!” Tommy did not stand a chance. He squealed in falsetto, squirming and kicking.

“Stop! I’m trying to… to… Eee!” He squealed as another raspberry landed on his stomach.

"Oh, we better hurry and get you into your costume, huh?"

"What costume?" Tommy asked.

"Oh, Eric brought your costume from Trunk or Treat over! Isn't that nice of him? You're gonna look so cute!" He almost

said he did not want to look cute, but there was no way to say it without sounding like a whiny little kid.

"Can't we just stay home? Er, here?"

"It's Halloween! Don't you want candy?"

"I... not really?" Janet laughed.

"Well, you should at least wear your costume since Eric was nice enough to bring it." She smiled and pulled him off the couch. "Can you be a big boy and get undressed while I grab your costume from the kitchen?"

"Right here?"

"I know you needed help last year, but I bet you're big enough to get your pants and shirt off now all by yourself, hmm?" She walked over to the kitchen, calling over her shoulder "do you start kindergarten next year?"

"I'm in ninth grade!"

"Come on, slowpoke! Get undressed. I see Jake in his boxers all the time, I can handle my favorite little cutie Tommy in his undies!" She kneeled down and pulled his shirt up. "Oh, that's that tummy tum tum again!" She giggled as Tommy squirmed just from the mention.

Why am I fighting it? He thought as she pulled the shirt off him. This is a lot better than Eric and Jake teasing me. A hot girl is taking my shirt off! A hot girl who just asked when you start kindergarten, he reminded himself. Still, maybe he could at least get her to kiss him.

"Aw, monkeys on your undies!" Janet exclaimed as she undid his pants. Tommy realized with a chill that his underwear really did match the pajamas Jake had offered him. Good thing I ran before he could see, he thought. "And the green and orange matches your costume! How adorable! Your Mommy thinks of everything!"

"My mom?"

"Did Daddy dress you today?"

"I dress myself."

"Oh, that's right. You're a big boy four year old, right?"

"Teen." Tommy mumbled as Janet nodded to herself.

"Yep, Jake showed me that pic a few months ago of you in the Cozy Coupe he got you, holding up four fingers!" She held them up as if he did not know what four was.

“Well, I” he tried to think of some way to explain why he had done that when he was really fourteen.

“And here’s your costume!” She yanked an enormous orange something out of the bag. It was only when she had unfolded it that Tommy recognized it for what it was, a fuzzy Jack o Lantern with a smiling face. It had holes for his legs and velcro shoulder straps so the wearer could step into it and be encased in fuzzy orange material. “Oh, and a little hat with a stem!”

Could this get any worse, Tommy thought, managing to tear his gaze away from the fuzzy orange pumpkin and noticed

Janet still digging in the bag.

"Hmm."

"What are you looking for?" He asked, genuinely curious.

"Tell me the truth, buddy. You can do that, right?"

"Uh, yeah?"

"Pinky swear?"

"Sure, pinky swear." What was she about to ask him?

"When you wore this for Trunk or Treat," another lie from Eric, he thought grumpily. "Did you have a Pull-up or diaper on underneath?" The speed with which he said no probably did not help his case.

"No." He said. "I wore" he tried to think of what he had actually worn on Saturday, even if he had not done Trunk or Treat. "I wore Bunnydale undies." Why had he said that? Because it was so embarrassing, there was no way he would make it up.

"Oh! Jake used to love Bunnydale and he told me it's your favorite, huh?"

"Uh"

"Can you show me the Bunny Hop?" Tommy hated that he could, thanks to Jake and Eric.

"I want to go trick or treat." Anything to get out of this situation. He had never even heard of Bunnydale until last

summer when Jake and Eric had bought him a pack of Bunnydale underoos and forced him to watch a full two hours of the show with a pair of them – possibly even the very pair Janet saw him in now – on his head like a crown. They probably still had photos of it somewhere. The underwear itself was probably still in the back of his drawer. Where it'll stay forever, he thought firmly.

"C'mon, I'll do it with you!"

"Fine." He brought his hands in front of his chest like bunny paws. "Hop, hop little bunny!" He and Janet bounced in unison. "Shake your cotton tail!" Of course Janet did not do that part, leaving him alone to wave his bottom to and fro. "Hop, hop, little bunny, shake your cotton tail. Wiggle your little nose and waggle your little toes. Hop, hop, little bunny, shake your cotton tail!"

"That was very good!" She said, clapping. "But you're a pumpkin tonight, huh? Do you know any pumpkin songs?"

"No."

"I'll find you one, buddy. But first" he braced himself for her to say it was time for the costume. He had to find a way out of this! "Do you need to go potty?"

"No."

"Well, you should try. That thing looks like it'll be tough to get off in the event of emergencies." She grabbed his hand. "Let's go! Are you sure… never mind."

They walked into the bathroom and Tommy was treated to a full body reflection of just how childish he looked.

“Let’s get you on the potty!” Janet said. He realized what was about to happen only a second too late to stop Janet from tugging down his briefs.

"I don't need help!" Tommy roared, trying to push Janet away and cover himself at the same time. "I'm fourteen, for... For..." Janet pulled her hands away and watched him, her face unreadable. "I don't know what Eric and Jake told you, but I'm fourteen. I don't need help in the bathroom, I don't want to go trick or treating, and I'm not a baby!"

"I know you're not a baby." Janet said. "How about you take a deep breath? You're frustrated, I know. Go on. Take a nice, deep breath." Tommy did, feeling at least a little calmer. Then he hiccuped. “Aw, see? You got so upset, you gave yourself the hiccups.” Tommy hiccuped again. “Do you know how to get rid of them?”

“Hic! How?”

“Hold your breath, touch your nose, and cross your legs.” He was so embarrassed by the situation that he did what she said before realizing he was naked except for the briefs around his ankles. “Now, are you ready to try to potty?” He tried to speak, but another hiccup escaped, so he resorted to a nod. “Good. Let’s get you up on the potty.”

At least I can tell Kurt a girl saw me naked, Tommy thought as Janet lifted him up and set him down on the toilet seat. He

wondered if she was going to stay there, holding him and giving her a glimpse down her shirt, but she stepped back.

“Steady?” He hiccuped in response. Stupid things! “You stay right there. I’m gonna grab something. If you fall in, yell for help, okay?” Tommy muttered under his breath, but Janet was already gone.

“Am I really going to sit here?” He grumbled, eyeing his underwear a short distance away. Even if he got it, his clothes were in the other room and Janet would surely not let him put them on without some sort of catch. “Dude. What are you complaining about? You’ve got a college girl all to yourself. There’s gotta be some way to play this to your advantage.” How?

“Did you go peepee or poopoo?” Janet asked when she came back, not even hiding her surprise to see Tommy still sitting on the toilet.

“Neither.”

“Oh. Okay, well you can stay right there until you go.” She picked up the bag again. “Hmm,” Janet dug around inside again, pulling out a plastic orange pumpkin for Tommy’s candy. “There’s really no pull-up or anything?”

“What?” She smiled, seemingly startled he had heard her.

“Oh, I forgot! You’re four. Big boy four year olds don’t wear diapers, do they?” Tommy frowned.

“I don’t need diapers. I’m in ninth grade.”

“Oh! I almost forgot!” She pulled her phone out of her back pocket. “I found the perfect little pumpkin song. You know I’m a little teapot, right?” He stared at her, which she took as a yes. It was a standard at every preschool, after all. “Well, this is like that, but I think it’s more fun cuz you get to yell boo!” She hit play and an overly excited woman began to sing.

“I’m a little pumpkin, short and stout! Here are my eyes and here are my mouth.” Janet, every put as eager as the singer, pointed to her eyes and mouth. “When it’s Halloween and you are out, lift my head and hear me shout!”

“Boo!” A chorus of children exclaimed. Tommy rolled his eyes. There was no way. He groaned as it began again.

“Now, you sit right there and try really, really hard to peepee, we’ll listen to your pumpkin song, and I’ll paint your face, okay?”

“Face paint? Isn’t the costume enough?”

“It’ll be fun! You’ll look so adorable!” She smiled. “We’ll have to take photos for your mommy and daddy, won’t we?”

“I’m sure they’ll love it.” He shouted over the cheerful song. “I’m fourteen!”

“If you sit still,” Janet said, giving no clue she had heard him. “I’ll give you a kiss!” Tommy paused long enough to work out if she meant it or not and she laughed. “You’re probably too little to think girls have cooties, huh? That’ll come when you’re in big boy school.” She prepared her paintbrush. “Go

potty, Tommy.”

By the time Janet had stepped away to admire her handiwork, Tommy felt like the pumpkin song would be stuck in his head for forever, which he supposed was the point.

"All done on the potty?" Even with her cutesy tone, Tommy felt like she was implying she had been waiting on him, not the other way around.

"Yeah." A girl saw me naked, Tommy thought. That's all you gotta say to K. Did it sound realistic? He felt like he had to come up with some other details, removed from his reality. Maybe he had gotten to…

"You're so serious and focused!" Janet cooed as she held out the costume for Tommy to step into, interrupting his thoughts. "Wanna try out your pumpkin song?" She fastened the shoulder straps over Tommy’s slender frame and he felt ridiculous. He could not even see his feet! The pumpkin ballooned out around him, giving him the appearance of a kid on his first Halloween, to say nothing of his fourteenth. “Go on, let’s give it a try.”

“No.” He said and then sighed. “Janet, can’t we just drop it? I know you know I’m not really four.”

“Sweetie.” She said, “look at yourself.” He did, only then seeing the pumpkin painted on his face. The orange went from his eyes to just above his mouth, his own eyes and mouth serving as the jack-o-lantern, a black triangle on his nose completing the look. At least with his glower, he kind of

looked like a scary jack-o-lantern, at least until Janet plopped the stem hat on his head. “You’re an adorable little pumpkin who still needs help going potty, which is fine. But honestly, if you’re gonna fib about your age, fourteen’s a little silly, don’t you think?” She stood back up and mumbled to herself. “Even six would be pushing it, honestly.” She brightened. “Alright, let’s get going!” She scooped him up and carried him out of the bathroom.

“A pumpkin bubble is such a cute idea!” She said as she set him down on the couch to push his sneakers onto his feet. “It leaves your little thighs open for the nibbling!” She playfully ran her fingers along them and Tommy realized how right she was. If he had been wearing any sort of underwear with a leg, it would have surely poked out the bottom of the costume. At least then it would not have looked like he was wearing a diaper.

“Can we just stay here?”

“Let’s go to… five houses.” Janet said. “That’s one more house than your age.”

“Two houses.”

“Oh! You’re a little pumpkin negotiator! Three houses.”

“Fine.” He sighed, feeling defeated even though he had almost cut the number in half. Janet grinned and gave him a kiss on the cheek. It almost counted, he thought, even as he scolded himself for not turning his face and catching it on the lips.

“The number one rule is you need to hold my hand.”

“And if I don’t?” Tommy asked, trying his best to sound defiant in a fuzzy orange bubble. Janet smiled.

“Well, I think we still have Jakey’s old toddler leash around here.” It would never fit around his fuzzy pumpkin costume, but that did not occur to him and she could see that the threat worked. Tommy groaned. “Or I could always carry you.”

“I’ll walk.”

“Okie dokie! Let’s go, Mr. Pumpkin pants!” She laughed and took his hand, not even giving him the plastic pumpkin pail to hold. “Oh! What do we say when the door opens?”

“Trick or treat.”

“Yep. Gotta do it nice and loud because our first stop” she said as they emerged out into the evening, Tommy having to squint as he saw the sun still above the horizon. “Mr. Mintz is pretty hard of hearing.”

Sure enough, Tommy had to all but yell trick or treat for Mr. Mintz to hear him, earning a single fun size candy bar for his troubles. All the same, Janet made him thank him, which took twice as long as the actual trick or treat request!

“Next house!” Janet said with a smile. “Isn’t this fun?” Tommy felt the cool autumn breeze on his bare legs and wondered just what Janet’s definition of fun was.

“One more house.” Tommy said as they left house number two.

“Do you need to go potty?” Janet asked, concerned.

“No, but you said…”

“I did.” She giggled. “Just a little Halloween trick for the cutest little pumpkin in the whole pumpkin patch.”

“I’m really a Jack-o-lantern.” Tommy said as they ascended the stairs for house number three.

“Hello!” The woman at the door said. She was dressed like a witch, if witches wore exclusively pink. She grinned down at Tommy. “And who is this?”

“Tommy. He’s a little shy.” Janet said. She didn’t even give me a chance to answer, Tommy thought.

“And what are you supposed to be?” Isn’t it obvious?

“Oh! Tommy, sing her your song!”

“A song? Oh, that sounds lovely.” Tommy glared up at Janet, betrayed.

“I’m a little pumpkin” he began, determined to speed-sing his way through the whole song.

“Great, there’s some little kid in the way.” A boy of no more than seven said behind him.

“Jeffrey, let’s go to the next house. We’ll come back.”

“Start again, cutie.” Janet said. Tommy did, the woman getting completely into it and feigning fear when Tommy yelled boo!

“If it’s not too much trouble,” the woman said pensively. “No, I’m sure you two… oh, it’d only take a minute. Can he come in and sing his song for all my guests? We’re having a little shindig here!”

Tommy found himself whisked inside by Janet and stood up on a coffee table to sing his song again. He could have sworn he recognized a few of his teachers’ faces in the crowd, but it was hard to tell with everyone cooing and gushing over him.

“That was so special.” The woman said, escorting them both back out. “But I wouldn’t want to keep you from your next house.”

“Actually this was our last stop.” Darn right, it was. Tommy thought, convinced Janet had planned it somehow. “Tommy goes to bed with the sun.” The woman nodded.

“Oh, well, in that case, here.” She dumped nearly half the bowl into the pumpkin pail, filling it to the brim. “Better he eat it than me!” She laughed far too much. Tommy’s eyes widened at her generosity. Embarrassment or not, candy was candy!

“Thanks!”

“Don’t let him eat it all tonight. Sweet dreams, little Tommypoo!” She waved bye as they walked back the way they had come.

Tommy could not explain it, but he was fighting back yawns the whole half block back to Janet’s. By the time they reached the door, his eyes were starting to droop. Why was he

so tired? Had someone drugged him? No, that was crazy.

He felt almost like a zombie as he endured a few photos before Janet released him from the costume and sat him on the potty. He did not even fight it as he peed any more than he fought her dressing him in the very same jungle pajamas Jake had shown him what? Two hours ago, if that?

As Janet tucked him into bed, Tommy felt energy return to him. Whose bed was this, he wondered, but the pillow felt so soft as she kissed his forehead and whispered good night. He tried to ask her to stay with him, to try and get something more out of the evening, but he blinked slowly and she vanished. The room was still lit by the setting sun, so he forced his eyes open. He would wait for Jake and Eric to… zzzz.

Jake and Eric had a fun night, but they made sure to come back with fifteen minutes to spare. They snickered as Janet sat on the couch and shushed them.

“Tommy’s been down for two hours.” That only made them laugh more and Janet almost wondered if… she shook her head. No, they were too young to be out drinking. More likely, they were on some sugar high. How did cute little boys like Tommy turn into dorky hooligans like her brother and his? She pocketed her phone and went to check on the sleeping little cherub. “Forgot to wash his face.” She said, smiling down at him. “Never grow up.” She whispered down. “If only you could stay little forever.”

Chapter 3

Tommy the Reindeer - Chapter 3

Tommy had woken up the morning after Halloween disoriented and only growing moreso as Janet had come and taken him downstairs. By the time Eric and Jake came out, Janet had him wearing a bib over his jungle jammies as she fed him waffles. He could only sit there as she told them everything, though the way they acted, he had a suspicion she'd already told them a lot of it the night before.

"The only thing I can't really remember," Janet said in a tone that made it clear she really did remember it. "Was your song!"

"You have to remember. I sang it like ten times."

"Hmm, nope. Don't you think Tommy should show us?" Of course, Eric and Jake agreed. Janet stood Tommy up on a chair and he sang in his jungle jammies and the bib, all three of them recording his performance.

"I'm a little pumpkin, short and stout! Here are my eyes, here's my mouth! When it's Halloween and you are out, lift my head and hear me shout! Boo!"

"Boo!" The trio said back, smiling and barely containing laughter.

After that, Tommy got his face wiped and Janet helped him get dressed. She called it helping at least. To him, it was more like standing there freezing in his briefs as Janet folded his

pajamas to take home before finally dressing him in his jeans and hoodie from the night before. Finally, he was able to leave, but only after promising up and down to always hold Eric's hand. At last Halloween was over.

Thanksgiving had been another nightmare. Despite his begging Mom and Dad to let him finally move up to the adult table, he had spent the meal at the kids' table wedged between Eric and Jake with little cousin Alex giggling as they pushed bits of food into Tommy's mouth whenever the adults weren't paying attention. By holding hands behind his chair, they were able to keep him right where they wanted.

"It's a shame Janet couldn't make it." Jake said. "She'd probably feed you on her lap."

"Again." They both laughed and Tommy fumed.

"Is the reason you don't like pumpkin pie because it's cannibalism?" Eric asked as the adults chatted loudly enough to cover his murmurs. "Sing the song!"

"No."

"You will later." Eric announced, winking at Jake.

Sure enough, while Tommy managed to avoid them in the post-dinner milling, they managed to track him down again right when cousin Alex was told it was time for bed.

"You too, widdle Tommy." Jake cooed into his ear as they nonchalantly shepherded Tommy to Eric's room. Through a combination of tickling and trickery, they got him stripped

down to his underwear and refused to give him anything to wear until he sang the pumpkin song once again. Perhaps by luck, they got him into his pajamas and back downstairs just as Alex was making the rounds, saying good night.

"See?" Eric murmured. "You got to stay up as late as Alex the big boy."

"You're going to bed too?" Alex's mom said in disbelief. Tommy felt Jake prod his back.

"All that turkey made me sleepy." He feigned a yawn and rubbed at his eyes.

After Thanksgiving, Tommy swore to redouble his efforts to avoid Eric and Jake, but as soon as snow started to fall, Mom and Dad both went into 'the holidays are for family' mode and that meant Tommy had to go with Eric – and Jake, of course – to the mall for Christmas shopping. Tommy did not dare tell Mom and Dad the depths of Jake and Eric's villany – how they had never heard about the last two Halloweens, he had no idea – and so, he was stuck plodding along between them, each of them holding one of his thickly mittened hands as he struggled to walk in a clunky old pair of Eric's snow boots.

"Cute little baby Tommy." Jake cooed.

"Look, let's just split up once we get there." He knew there was no chance of that even before Jake shook his head.

"Nope. Mall rules say babies under 5 must be accompanied by a grown-up."

"You guys aren't grown-ups."

"We went to a party on Halloween." Eric retorted. "What did you do?"

"Trick or treating and asleep by eight!" Jake crowed. Tommy knew all too well his best bet was to simply roll his eyes and stay silent as a cold wind blew through the leafless trees.

"We really should get Tommy a snowsuit." Eric remarked, giving his brother's hand a squeeze so firm, he could almost feel it through the mitten. "There's a lot of winter yet and we walk to school most days." Tommy reminded himself to stay silent, but what if they actually did make him wear a snowsuit to school?

"Look, Tommy! Santa!" Jake exclaimed as they stepped into the warm mall. It was, in fact, a sign for Santa's Village.

"Should we?" Eric grinned, pulling off his stocking cap and shoving it into the pocket of his coat. Tommy had a feeling his mittens would not be coming off.

"Eh. It's probably a super long line." Jake said. Tommy fought to keep a neutral expression on his face. "Tell you what, do you want to go see Santa?"

"No." Tommy said. Jake laughed.

"Fine," he stretched the word out. "We won't make you as long as you promise to be a good little boy for us."

"And hold our hands all day."

"And!" Jake fished into his pocket and, pulling something lime green out, shoved it right into Tommy's mouth. "Suck on your noo-noo all day long."

"Noo-noo?" Eric asked curiously.

"It's what I called mine." Jake shrugged. Tommy fumed as Jake attached the other end of the pacifier to his coat just as he spat it out, sending it swaying to and fro.

"Noo-noo goes in your mouth." Eric said, pushing it back between Tommy's pouting lips. "Now, promise." Tommy sighed, but did he really want to go see Santa?

"I promise to be a good little boy and hold your hands all day." He said as quickly as he could, knowing the pacifier did not make him easy to understand.

"It's loud, Tommy." Jake said. "Say it nice and loud. Use your biggest voice!" The teenager looked from Jake to Eric and back again. There was no way he would say it again. They had to be crazy!

"Unless you'd rather tell Santa." Eric said, seeing his brother's hesitation. Tommy glared at him.

"Promise." Jake said. "Feels like it's getting busier and busier in here the longer you wait. Just hurry up." Tommy took a breath, the pacifier tumbling from his mouth.

"I promise to be a good little boy, hold hands, and suck on my noo-noo." It seemed like there was a slight lull in every conversation in the mall at the moment he said it, his voice

seeming to echo. Eric and Jake cackled.

"That was great." Jake said, pushing the pacifier back into Tommy's mouth. "But that better stay in your mouth until lunch now, got it?"

"And actually suck on it." Eric added. "It's supposed to calm little kids down, right?"

"And Tommy's our little pumpkin!" They grinned to each other as Tommy shyly complied enough that they were able to take his mittened hands again.

"You know," a passing woman carrying a toddler – an actual toddler – said. "There are strollers if you don't want to worry about holding his hand all day. Plus, the little guy's legs might get tired." He seemed a little big to be sucking on a pacifier, but she trusted that the boys knew what they were doing.

"Thanks!" Eric said. "But we won't be here long." He grinned as she walked on, feeling like her duty was done.

"Do you need to go potty, Tommy?" Jake asked. "Maybe we should go try." Tommy did not have to go, but he assumed either Jake or Eric might right up until he heard the door of the family bathroom lock with him alone with the pair.

"Let's get you undressed." Eric said, shrugging off his backpack before joining Jake in overpowering Tommy.

"Keep your noo-noo in." Jake said as he clipped the pacifier holder to the waistband of Tommy's underwear, pulling down his jeans and grinning. "Aww, look at little Tommy's bunny

undies. Did big brother Eric pick those?"

"Nope. He dressed himself today." Eric said as he pulled Tommy's shirt over his head.

"Oh, do you like your bunny undies?"

"I don't have much choice. You guys got rid of everything good!" The pacifier went back into Tommy's mouth.

"Tell the truth. You must like 'em if you put them on." He grinned and poked Tommy's belly. "Should include Jake tickle the truth out of you?"

"God. I like them, ok?"

"Do you watch Bunnydale?"

"You know the name?" Eric asked incredulously.

"It was on when we were little like Tommy."

"I'm older than both of you!"

"Psh, are not. You got stuck at four. I mean, seriously, these are actual toddler underwear." Tommy knew that, but to hear Jake actually say it still stung.

"Do you actually wanna pee before we get you dressed, Tommy?" Eric asked, holding something brown in his arms, the backpack now stuffed with an assortment of the clothes they'd taken off of Tommy.

"Don't need to." Tommy mumbled into the pacifier.

"Ok." Eric shrugged. "Let's start with underwear."

"What?" Jake said in mock disbelief. "He's got underwear on."

"Yeah, but" Eric grinned. "He needs Pull-ups."

"What!? No!" Tommy's panic echoed in the bathroom, pacifier falling from his mouth and dangling just barely off of the tiled floor. "I'm not wearing Pull-ups."

"The way I see it," Eric said. "Is you either let us dress you up or we take your clothes and leave you here with nothing but your undies and your pacifier. Good luck explaining to anyone what happened."

"But" Tommy wanted to call Eric's bluff, but he knew it would not end well for him. "Fine."

"Can you put your Pull-ups on by yourself like a big boy?" Eric held it out to him so Tommy could see Mickey Mouse's smiling face.

"Fine." Tommy snatched it from Eric's hand, turning his back to the pair as he quickly swapped out his briefs for the Pull-ups, groaning at how they felt. Were they supposed to be comfortable? They felt stiff!

"I'm sure you're chilly." Jake said as he swooped in and grabbed the dangling clip of Tommy's pacifier holder, leading him over to Eric like a dog on a leash. "Good job keeping your noo-noo where it belongs. No, don't spit it out now that I reminded you it's there."

"Here, step in." Eric instructed, grinning at his brother in his Pull-ups.

"But"

"No fussing. We need to get you dressed."

"Why?"

"I'm hungry and the food court is like on the other side of the mall." Jake said. Tommy had meant a more general why, but he realized he was hungry as well.

Tommy slid his feet into the brown outfit Eric held out, unsure still what it was. The brown made him think of Chewbacca, but he had a feeling Eric and Jake wouldn't be so thrilled about dressing him like a Wookie. it was only when Eric pulled the hood over his wavy hair and he noticed the antlers that he realized he was dressed like a reindeer. A baby reindeer, he thought as Eric clipped the pacifier to his new outfit.

"What do you call a baby reindeer?" Jake wondered as if he had read Tommy's mind. "A foal? A fawn?"

"A Tommy." Eric said with a chuckle, giving Tommy's tummy a playful tickle as if he really was his big brother. When he's dressed like this, I am, Eric thought.

"It's a calf." Jake said, checking on his phone.

"Who cares?" Eric said. "Grab Tommy's hand. Let's go eat." Jake made a face at Eric, making a point to send a text before putting his phone away. "What are the rules, Tommy?"

"Be a good little boy, hold hands, and suck on my noo-noo." He muttered.

"And we're gonna add another one." Eric said. "Wear your Pull-ups until bedtime."

"What?"

"Oops." Jake pushed the pacifier back into Tommy's mouth. "Almost broke a rule there, buddy."

"Promise, Tommy."

"But that wasn't-"

"Well, we couldn't tell you before." Jake reasoned. "You would've thrown a toddler Tommy temper tantrum."

"Like you're doing now."

"No!" Tommy pulled his hands free and reached for the zipper, but it had sunken into the plush of his reindeer costume. Trying to grab it with the awkward mittens only pushed it deeper. "I"m not!"

"You're gonna promise, Tommy." Eric said calmly. He remembered Uncle Greg saying that you never match a toddler's tone when they were throwing a tantrum. Sure, he had been talking about little cousin Alex, but it was just as good of advice with a teenage toddler like Tommy.

"I'm starving, Tommy!" Jake said, trying a different tactic. "Please promise for us? Please?"

"Do all your promises like a good lil pumpkin should."

"He's a reindeer." Jake said with a smirk.

"Tommy's a lot of things." Eric said. "A tiger, a pumpkin, and a reindeer."

"Let's just go." Tommy muttered.

"Not until you promise." Eric gave Tommy a tickle. "Or do we gotta tickle it out of you?"

"Might not work with how thick that thing is." Jake observed. "Ooh, what if we hang his little boy panties on his antlers?"

"What? That's crazy." Eric laughed. "But I kinda-"

"I promise to..." Tommy had had enough. He tried to steel himself. "To wear Pull-ups until bedtime."

Satisfied, Eric and Jake took one of Tommy's hands each and led him out of the bathroom, chuckling at how adorable he looked sucking on his pacifier and running slightly to keep up with them, his boots thunk-clunking with every step. Anyone and everyone who saw him smiled at the little boy being led along by his responsible caretakers. Tommy just wanted it over with, figuring that the food court at least meant that he would be able to let go of their hands while they ate.

"Hey, isn't it a left?" Tommy asked, but between the pacifier in his lips and the general din of the busy holiday shoppers, neither Eric nor Jake responded and he realized they meant to take him on a full lap. He tried to tug his hands free, but it was no use. Somehow, even with the plush mittens, they held his hands firmly in their own.

He half expected them to once again 'miss' the turn, but the

second time they reached the entrance to the food court, they headed straight for it. All the same, Tommy noticed more than one adult smiling sweetly at him as he passed by with the two boys holding his hands. At least at Halloween, there had been other costumed kids to distract from him. He stuck out like a sore thumb!

Arriving in the food court, Tommy expected to go to a booth. Chances are, he would get put on the inside where he had no choice but to submit to whatever torments they could come up with. He still shuddered at the time last summer Mom and Dad had taken him, Eric, and of course Jake out for ice cream, neither parent even noticing how Tommy somehow ended up between the pair with a plastic bib around his neck. He sucked nervously on the pacifier, though he stopped himself once he realized what he was doing, as they neared the highchairs against a wall.

"No!" He tried to sound authoritative around the pacifier, but the way it fell from his lips and dangled against his soft tummy, to say nothing of his unconscious habit to stick his bottom lip out, only made him look like a toddler.

"It's more like a booster seat than anything." Jake said.

"And cousin Alex used one when we visited him last summer, didn't he?"

"But not at Thanksgiving!" Tommy protested, fed-up with all the comparisons between him and a four year old who couldn't even wipe his own nose.

"True, but isn't he bigger than you?" Jake said. "He had those soccer pajamas and you were in your snuggly-soft jungle jammies."

"Good point," Eric said, pushing the pacifier back into Tommy's mouth. "Keep it." He said as if Tommy was a naughty puppy. "So, next Thanksgiving, you won't need a highchair, but" he tickled Tommy's belly once again, loving the soft fur every bit as much as he loved that his older brother was wearing it in public. "That's not for almost a whole 'nother year, is it?"

"So a highchair it is!" Jake all but crowed.

Tommy thought that it was a good idea to keep grabbing their hands – after all, that was the rule, wasn't it? His hands kept slipping, barely able to get a grip in the mittens, to the point where he merely looked like he was batting at their hands as they wrestled him into a wooden highchair.

"It's really more like a booster seat." Jake said.

"You're not the one in it." Tommy muttered as Eric adjusted his hood.

"And here's the best part." Eric declared, pulling the highchair away from the wall. "It's on wheels. He's kinda heavy though."

"I better not be stuck in this thing." Tommy muttered, wiggling around.

"We'll take your boots off when we eat." Jake said, leaving

Tommy to wonder just why he had been told that.

Working together, they managed to wheel Tommy in his highchair over to a booth. Jake plopped down while Eric went to go get them food.

"Let me out of this thing."

"Oh, that's right." Jake said, looking up from his phone. "We were gonna take your boots off, right?"

"What? No, stop!" Tommy kicked, but Jake caught his boot and pulled it off.

"Little Tommy's stocking feet." Jake teased. His phone chirped and he responded.

"Is that Eric?"

"Naw, he's ordering over there." Jake said. "I have other friends, y'know. Remember? You met Cody last summer. He's the one who hit you with all those water balloons."

"Yeah" was all Tommy said. He looked over his shoulder as Eric came over with a tray of food. He did not see a kid's meal, a cup of applesauce, anything blatantly childish. Had they gotten him normal food? More likely they don't realize I'm hungry. Tommy thought.

"You didn't get Tommy ready?" Eric asked.

"What do you mean, ready?"

"Sorry, I... my phone." Jake slid out of the booth and grinned at Tommy. "I remember what a messy eater you are from

Thanksgiving, so we don't want to ruin your nice reindeer outfit."

"What do you mean, ready?" Tommy repeated. Rather than tell him, Jake and Eric showed him, the food on the table forgotten for a moment as they pulled down Tommy's hood and, unzipping his reindeer outfit, stripped him down to the waist, the very top of his Pull-ups visible.

"Grab the bib." Eric said. Jake did not need to be told twice, grabbing a plastic bib similar to the one from the ice cream parlor and forcing it over Tommy's gentle curls.

"This is ridiculous!" Tommy exclaimed, feet kicking.

"Well, it's what you need if you want to eat. And I know you're hungry." Tommy glared at Eric.

"What did you even get me?"

"Chicken nuggies." Jake said. "The favorite food of all toddlers."

"Or are you too mature for them?"

"I guess those are ok." Tommy mumbled.

"Should we make him beg for 'em?" Jake asked.

"Naw." Eric shrugged. "I'm starving." Tommy almost felt relieved, but Eric was not done yet. He dug into the backpack, giving Tommy a glimpse of his underwear and other clothes before pulling out a blue and orange sippy cup. "Let's get Tommy some milkies!"

"Gross. Don't say milkies." Jake said.

"Why not?"

"Don't you remember CyborNinja's video?" They both laughed.

"Oh, right. Well, Tommy's too innocent to think about stuff like that." Eric opened up the cardboard box of chicken nuggets as Jake once again stared at his phone. "You're not pulling it up, are you?"

"No, just..." Jake's voice trailed off.

"Do you want barbeque sauce or ketchup?" Eric asked.

"Barbeque." Tommy said. Eric ripped open two packets and poured them all over the nuggets before placing it next to the sippy cup of milk in front of Tommy.

"Uh"

"Go on and eat."

"But they're covered in sauce!"

"So? It's a finger food, right?"

"Or you can wait for us to feed you." Jake teased, tearing into the burger Eric had gotten him.

Tommy sat there for a moment, but it did not look like there was any other option than to eat the sauce-covered nuggets with his hands. He sighed and dug in, trying his best to keep his fingers as clean as possible.

"Good?" Eric asked innocently. Tommy only grunted. He heard a camera sound as Jake took a photo.

"Who are you sending that to?"

"Inside voice." Eric scolded. "And focus on eating. We've been here for so long and we haven't even shopped yet." This left Tommy to wonder just what their plan was. Drag him around stores dressed as a reindeer? There had to be something more to their plan. Were they going to make him run around that playground on the other side of the mall? That had to be it.

"Hi, guys!" Tommy froze, chicken nugget on his lips, as he heard a familiar voice. Oh, no. No, no, no. Janet came into his line of sight, smiling in a sweater. She waved at Eric and gave her brother a quick squeeze as she forced him to slide down the booth bench so that she sat right next to Tommy. "And of course, Tommy!" She smiled at him. "Look how messy you are!" Tommy would normally have tried to deny it, but he could not have looked more like a toddler if he had tried, he thought, self-consciously trying to figure out something to do with his sticky hands. "You two know Tommy's too little to feed himself!"

"We tried to tell him, but he insisted."

"And what's he wearing?" Janet asked, grabbing some wet wipes from the tray and getting to work on Tommy's face and hands.

"Well, he's supposed to be a reindeer, but with him being

such a messy eater."

"Ah." Janet nodded.

"They forced me." Tommy said, sputtering as the wipe almost went into his mouth.

"Well, it was nice of them to get you dressed so cute. I'll have to take a look once we got you all cleaned up." Her gaze fell on the forgotten sippy cup. She lifted it, frowning at how heavy it was still. "But first, you need to finish your lunch." Eric and Jake exchanged a satisfied look at how quickly Janet had taken charge. "Here." She handed the sippy cup to Tommy. "Both hands and I want you to drink every drop."

"But"

"No buts. The next words I want to hear from Tommy are 'all gone'!" He took the sippy cup, considering for the briefest of moments throwing it on the floor before putting it back on the table. "Come on, Tommy." Janet said gently. "Can you be a big boy and drink your milkies?" Jake and Eric both snorted. "Oh, grow up." She said before turning back to the teenager. "Please?" Tommy sighed and took the sippy cup. "So, what's the plan, boys?"

"I had Jake text you cuz" Eric looked over at Tommy and made a show of covering his ears. "Santa needs a little extra help, so Mom wanted us, well me, to go buy a few more things." Janet nodded as if she understood completely.

"I can keep an eye on Tommy and then give you three a ride home after. That's no problem at all." She beamed. "I even

got Mom's car all set for our very special little passenger."

"You can't leave me with her." Tommy hissed to Eric, but Janet just guided the sippy cup back to his mouth even as she stood up to let Jake slide out again.

"I'm not so scary." Janet said with a laugh. "We'll have fun. We can walk around the mall, look at the neat decorations." She beamed once again and Tommy could not help but think she really did look pretty when she smiled, even if she always treated him like a baby. "You two behave and we'll meet at the west entrance in... an hour?" They nodded and dashed off with Janet watching until they were out of sight before turning her attention to Tommy. "All gone?"

"All gone." Tommy said morosely.

"We'd better get you dressed." Janet said. "Though your pudgy little Tommy tum is awfully cute." She gave it a poke before removing his bib. Why did she never seem to question any of these situations? Tommy wondered. "No shirt, no shoes, no service after all." She spied his boots on the floor, perfectly placed as if he had kicked them off. She smiled and put them back on his feet. "Velcro so you can tie them yourself like a big boy." She mused as she did the straps for him. "Alright, let's" her voice trailed off as she spied his sticky face. "Maybe we should get you cleaned up first." She lifted him out of the highchair, seeming to not even notice as he had to quickly pull up the reindeer outfit to prevent it from sliding down his legs and exposing his Pull-ups to everyone. Down on the floor he went and she took a hand, leaving him

to have to try and keep it up around his waist with just one hand as they headed for the bathrooms.

"No, not in there." Tommy whined as Janet took him into the girls' bathroom.

"It's the only place I can go, silly." She said. "And no one will mind a little Tommy tyke in here." The bathroom was empty, which suited Tommy just fine, especially when Janet pulled down the changing table.

"What?" He did not like the look of this.

"It's just for a minute. I figure we should have you try to go peepee and I want to get that adorable outfit of yours off." She picked him up, smiling as Tommy desperately grabbed it to make sure it came up with him. She set him down on the plastic surface, pulled his outfit up enough to admire the scarf and hood before taking off his boots and stripping him. "Still dry." She said, touching the front of his Pull-ups as if it was the most ordinary thing in the world. Had Jake told her Tommy had been forced into Pull-ups or was she once again taking anything regarding Tommy in stride? She's the one who put me in that tiger costume that started all of this! Tommy thought. That had been a year ago, yet he knew that Tommy would never dream he would someday be sitting on a changing table at the mall in nothing but Mickey Mouse Pull-ups. "Alright, we'll get your boots back on." Janet said. "And then you can go peepee before we clean you up."

"Like this? What if someone comes in?" Janet smiled and, spotting the pacifier, pushed it into Tommy's mouth. Great,

just great, he thought.

"We'll tell them you're my boyfriend." She teased. Does... does that mean she finally realized how old I am? She set him down on the floor and he thunk-clunked into a stall, feeling especially exposed in nothing but his Pull-ups and snow boots. "You don't need to go poo-poo, do you?" Janet asked, standing by the stall door as Tommy tugged down the front of his Pull-ups. They were still so stiff, it made it awkward.

"No." He mumbled.

"Good. Wiping you sounds no fun."

"I could do it myself!" Tommy's indignation echoed in the empty bathroom.

"Mmm" was all she said until he had finished. "Flush the potty, big boy Tommy!" Then he clomped his way over to the sink, Janet stepping up behind him to help him wash his hands. Thankfully, her presence mostly shielded him as a girl about Tommy's age came in. She spied the reindeer outfit and then saw Tommy standing between Janet and the sink. She smiled as if she had just solved a mystery and vanished into one of the stalls.

"Aren't we done?" Tommy asked quietly. With any luck, he would be dressed and maybe even out of here before that girl came out. She had looked vaguely familiar. Did they have a class together?

"Your hands are clean, but we still need to wash your face." She squatted down with a wet paper towel and went to work,

Tommy's squirms and whimpers into the pacifier only prolonging the process. The stall door opened and the girl walked out to get a full view of Tommy in his Pull-ups getting his face wiped.

"Little brother?"

"Naw, I'm watching him. He's my little brother's friend's little brother." Tommy whimpered and Janet clucked reassuringly. "But you're still a big boy, Tommy." Tommy forced himself to glance at the girl and realized that he was wrong. She only looked like that girl from his algebra class, right? He doubted himself, but figured she did not seem to recognize him at all.

He allowed Janet to put him back up on the changing table and dress him again. He thought this was a lot better than being teased by Eric and Jake earlier, but then again, they knew his real age. As far as Janet was concerned, he was a toddler. The only spot of solace was that she had called him Eric's little brother instead of his baby brother.

"Alright, I think we'll all set!" Janet said. "Next stop... where are we going?" Tommy shrugged. "Well, if you don't have any plans, how about we go see a friend?"

"Who?" Janet smiled and set him down on the ground.

"Can you be big and hold my hand, even if you get super dooper excited?"

"Yes." Tommy knew enough to know this was not good.

"Can you show me how you act when you're super dooper

excited?" We're in a bathroom, Tommy thought, but he waved his mittened hands. "No, I mean like really, really, super dooper excited! Like you got your favorite toy for Christmas excited!" Tommy jumped up and threw his arms out, eager to get whatever this was done as soon as possible. "Oh, that was super cute! Can you do it once more for me once I've got my phone out?" Tommy sighed.

"Aren't we gonna go meet your friend?"

"Well, he's your friend too." Janet said, fishing her phone out of her pocket. Tommy knew immediately what she had in mind. She's taking me to see Santa.

Tommy would have rather made a hundred videos of him acting like a toddler than stand in the slow-moving line to meet Santa. Sure, if he had actually been a toddler, he would have loved the way the line passed by candy cane forests and gingerbread houses. There was even a surprisingly sophisticated animatronic reindeer that Janet made him stand beside for a photo. He tried to make the most of it, doing a little pose with his arms out, but he spied Janet showing a mom next to them in line a photo of him staring up at the reindeer with an uncharacteristically awestruck expression showing around the pacifier, as if he really was a little kid who thought it was real. How had she even gotten that?

The wait for Santa seemed to take an hour, but also over in a second. Before Tommy knew it, Janet held his hand as he thumped his way up to the smiling bearded man in red and white.

"Hello there, Tommy!" Santa said, laughing and scooping Tommy up. "I almost thought we'd have to tell Mrs. Claus one of our reindeer wandered away." Tommy smiled in spite of himself. Then again, there really was no way to keep from smiling this close to Santa. "And who's your favorite reindeer?"

"Uh, Donner." Tommy said.

"Oh, you're a real expert, huh?" Santa laughed. "How about we take a picture?" Tommy turned and looked at the camera, only then realizing that there was now photographic proof of him sitting on Santa's lap in a reindeer costume and sucking on a lime green pacifier. Eric was going to have a field day!

"That was fun, huh?" Janet said, grabbing Tommy's mittened hand to wave goodbye to Santa one last time. "What did you ask Santa for?"

"Oh, uh, we just talked about reindeer."

"I guess that makes sense." Janet said with a smile. "We've got to meet the big boys soon, so let's start heading toward the car." As they walked, the crowds grew heavy enough that Jent picked Tommy up and carried him the rest of the way out to her car.

"Didn't we say we were gonna meet them inside?"

"I'll text Jake. It'll take a minute to get you all situated anyway." What did that mean? Tommy wondered. He only had to wonder until they reached Janet's car and he saw the unmistakable car seat.

"Oh, no." He moaned, but he knew there would be no convincing Janet to let him ride outside it.

For just a moment, Tommy thought he might actually be too big for the car seat, but Janet had him stand by the car as she made some adjustments. Could he make a run for it? They had walked here, after all, but he knew his snow boots were too bulky to let him have a chance of outrunning Janet. He should have demanded sneakers!

"There we go!" She said as Tommy slid into the car seat. It still felt snug, especially as she buckled him in, but the fact of the matter was, he was in the car seat. "I texted Jake and they said they'd be out in ten minutes, so let's listen to some songs!" She slid into the driver's seat and smiled back at Tommy. "Do you know Jingle Bells?"

"Yeah." Doesn't everyone?

"Sing it for me, cutie!" She pulled her phone out again. "It really bugs me that I don't have your pumpkin song on video." Tommy sighed. "Come on, sing!"

Tommy had to give an impromptu concert of Jingle Bells and then, of course, Rudolph before Janet turned on Christmas music. All the same, Tommy still had to sing along since it was nothing but the ones kids know, with Janet turning the music down randomly to hear him sing.

When Jake and Eric finally arrived, Tommy knew they saw him for what he was: a teenager dressed as a reindeer, pacifier in his mouth as he sat buckled in a car seat while

singing along to Frosty the Snowman.

"We had quite an adventure today." Janet said, showing the boys the video from the bathroom and the photos from Santa. They especially seemed to like the reindeer photo.

"Wow, he really is adorable." Tommy felt his face burn, but what really worried him was how genuine Eric sounded. As they slowly left the mall parking lot, Tommy could not shake the feeling that he was more trapped than ever, even before Eric leaned over. "Remember. Pull-ups til bedtime."

Chapter 4

Tommy the Monster - Chapter 4

“How about this?” Janet asked, pulling out a fuzzy white rabbit costume. “I know you like Bunnydale!”

“No way!” Tommy said. How had this happened? Eric and Jake had left him in Janet’s care and no matter how many costumes she held up, he knew he would never find a Halloween costume in the Three and Under aisle. Janet gave his hand a squeeze.

“I know you were a cutie pumpkin last year, but maybe you could do it again this year!”

“No way.” Tommy snarled.

“Oh, right. You're a big boy now. Your brother told me you're almost totally potty trained!” Janet beamed as if that was a great accomplishment for a boy in ninth grade. “Are you still dry?”

“Yes!” Tommy jumped away from her before she tried to check, trying to redirect both the conversation and the costume search. “I think there's more costumes over here.” He turned the corner, desperate to change the conversation. “Oh!” He nearly walked into a wall of pink frills and sparkles.

“Those are girl costumes, silly.” Janet said, taking his hand and leading him back to the toddler costumes. “Unless you want to be a princess?”

“No.”

“Alright, well, maybe we can try again another time. Someone seems fussy.” He groaned as she immediately picked him up. He was too big, physically, but it did not seem to bother her as she carried him away from the costumes. At least he had managed to avoid getting any of those, he thought. Would he end up being a tiger or a pumpkin again? “Maybe I'll make you a costume.” Janet said, giving his bottom a pat.

“Hmm?”

“Just thinking out loud. Do you need to go peepee?” She asked even though she was already carrying him toward the restrooms.

Tommy had been in bathrooms with Janet countless times before, so he knew enough to cross his arms and just let her pull down his pants and underwear. He really did have to pee, after all.

“Maybe we should go back and look at that Bunnydale costume one more time.” She said as she situated him on the toilet.

“I don't like Bunnydale.” Tommy said, hoping Janet had no clue that he had been wearing Bunnydale briefs for so long, pairs had worn out and he was on his second pack.

“We really gotta get you away from your brother. And mine. I bet you'd be so adorable if you weren't constantly being poisoned by those big boys and their teasing.” He thought

about once again telling her they were both younger than him, but he could already hear her lecturing him in that silly voice about what numbers are bigger than others. “All done?” She asked. Tommy nodded. “Need me to wipe?”

“Can I please?”

“Sure.” Janet humored him and he dabbed at his privates, wincing as Janet watched the whole time. “Alrighty. Off the potty you come!”

“Hooray.” Tommy said sarcastically.

“Up come your undies, up come your pants. Time for Tommy to do his potty dance!” Tommy gyrated his hips just enough to satisfy her. “You're really getting the hang of the big boy potty, aren't you?”

“Uh, sure.” Tommy said, leading the way to the sink.

“Walk, don't run.” Janet said, standing behind him and washing his hands. Being so close to a girl should've been a dream, but instead, Tommy would have given anything to be free of her.

Once they left the bathroom, Janet texted Jake to meet her and Tommy. It was just Tommy's luck that they came sauntering over just as he was riding a coin-operated red plastic car. He glared at the snickering boys as the car rocked back and forth with Janet urging him to turn the wheel and honk the horn.

“What costume did you get?” Eric asked casually as Janet

extracted Tommy from the ride.

“Oh, Tommy decided I should make him a costume.” Janet said,

“He did?”

“Well, more or less.” Janet said with a chuckle. “I'll see if I can find something good.” Tommy did not like the sound of that.

“Maybe we can go look again?” He suggested.

“Nope, we gotta get going.” Janet said. “You seem overtired.”

By the time they reached the car, Janet had decided Tommy needed a nap, so she buckled him into the car seat and then tucked a blanket around him.

“I don't need a nap.” He struggled to keep his voice level to avoid any accusations that he sounded like he needed one. It would only take fifteen minutes to go home anyway!

“Well, you can try.” Janet said sweetly. Tommy glared at Eric as Janet finally left him alone, but realized his brother was not even paying attention. Was this that common now that he hardly even cared?

“Finally.” Tommy exclaimed as they waved goodbye to Janet and Jake. “You gotta stop leaving me alone with her.” Eric scoffed.

“She gave you a kiss goodbye.” He said. Tommy glared at him.

“You know it's not a real kiss.”

“Come on, she's all over you.”

“If it's not that bad,” Tommy said acerbically. “How would you feel if Jake treated you like that?” Eric snorted.

“I'd beat him up.”

“Well, I can't do that.”

“It'd be hilarious to see you try. Janet would probably put you in timeout for hitting.” He dashed inside as Tommy tried to punch him.

Over the next couple weeks, Eric claimed he had no idea what Janet was making for Tommy's costume.

“I don't think even Jake knows.”

“Well, tell him to find out.”

“Tell Janet” Eric mimed texting. “Widdle Tommy Tigercub's super excited for his baby costume.” Tommy felt a chill wash over him. What if it really was a baby costume?

“Where are you off to?” Tommy had not expected Mom to question him.

“Kurt's.”

“By yourself?”

“Yeah.” Why did it matter? “I don't think I need to spend every Halloween with Eric and his dorky little friend.”

“I don't like you going out on your own.” Tommy was about to argue, but she continued. “And I thought you were going with Eric to watch scary movies at Jake's.” Realization dawned. “Are you worried the movies will be too scary?”

“What? No!”

“Sweetie, it's ok. I remember having nightmares for weeks after I saw that Tim Curry clown movie when I was your age.”

“Mom! I'm not scared. I just… Eric and Jake are so immature! I don't want to spend the night with little kids.”

“They're not that much younger than you.” Dad said.

“But those few years do make a difference.” Mom said thoughtfully.

“So I can go over to Kurt's?”

“No, you just need to be a big boy and not let your brother get under your skin.” Tommy groaned and stomped away, fed up that at his age, he was still being told to be a big boy.

Tommy thought that was the end of it, but as they walked to Janet and Jake's, Eric kept mentioning that Mom had asked him to tone down the scary movies.

“Didn't have the heart to tell Mom about your other plans with Janet?”

“What is she even planning?”

“I honestly don't know. Me and Jake came up with the tiger and the pumpkin, so this'll be all Janet. Oh, and the reindeer.”

“Tommy!” Janet cooed, scooping Tommy up almost the second he had crossed the threshold. Remembering what Eric had said about the kisses, he tried to enjoy them, noticing Eric slipping away with a smirk to go see Jake. “Are you still dry?” Janet asked, sitting down on the couch and placing Tommy on her lap to remove his shoes and sweatshirt.

“Uh, yeah. It stopped raining hours ago.” Janet smiled and pulled out the back of his jeans. If she was surprised to find a smiling bunny face on cotton briefs, she did not show it.

“Did you walk all the way here?”

“Yeah.”

“Goodness! You must be a tired little Tommy, huh?”

“It's only a couple blocks.”

“Did you take your nap today?” Tommy could practically hear alarm bells going off. What was the right thing to say? Obviously, he was too old to nap, but Janet had seen and done too much to buy that he was older than Eric. When did little kids take naps?

“Uh, yeah. Just before we came.”

“So big brother woke you up to come?”

“No, I was up for a bit…” Janet smiled.

“Well, alright. We do have time before our Halloween party if you do doze off.” She planted a kiss on his cheek. “Let me text Jake to come downstairs and then we can get started on

making a fun Halloween snack for the four of us."

"No costume?"

"Not yet." Janet smiled and kissed his cheek again. For how often he got kissed by a girl, Tommy wished he felt better about it.

By the time Jake and Eric finally emerged, Janet was hard at work making something she called graveyard dirt. It seemed to mostly be gummy worms, chocolate pudding, and crushed Oreos. Tommy sat in a highchair in the middle of the kitchen, a coloring page of a smiling bat carrying a Jack-o-lantern bucket of candy on the tray in front of him along with a red Elmo sippy cup of juice. Eric snapped a few photos of his brother in his toddler element.

"Tommy and I will have it done soon." Janet said.

"What even is it?"

"It's good." Jake said. "Mom or Janet makes it every year. You totally had it last year."

"Did not."

"The year before then."

"Mm!" Janet said, licking a bit of pudding off of her thumb. "That reminds me, I got one of those memory things on my phone." The three of them gathered around Tommy in his highchair so all four could see the video. Tommy groaned as he realized it was him in his jack-o-lantern costume singing that stupid I'm a Little Pumpkin song.

“Look how adorable you were, Tommy! Just the littlest pumpkin!”

“Yeah.” Tommy forced himself to say.

“Still so fussy and stern.” Janet teased. “Maybe you should take that nap.”

“I'm sure,” Eric said. “Tommy's just upset because he looks like a baby in that video and he's a big boy.”

“Oh! Well, of course you're a big boy now, Tommy.” Janet said, giving him a hug with one arm. “But it's fun to see how much you've grown, hmm?”

“Or not grown.” Eric mumbled under his breath. If Janet had heard, she didn't show any sign of it.

“Tommy's a big boy, yes he is.” Janet sang as she finished making their snack. Eric’s face turned red as he tried not to laugh. “Alright, last things last, let's get Tommykins’s bib on!”

“I don't need a bib.” Tommy seethed.

“We can just take his shirt off.” Eric suggested. “I did that at a cookout last summer.”

“No.” Tommy said.

Somehow, Tommy had ended up next to their four year old cousin Liam at the family barbeque. When Liam's mom had taken off his shirt before lunch, Eric had swooped in and done the same thing to Tommy. It was tough to say which seemed more babyish: the blue Pull-ups poking out of the top

of Liam's shorts or the Bunnydale undies peeking over the top of Tommy's. Eric didn't dare to push Tommy too much, so he let him eat his hot dog in peace, smiling as Liam's mom gave a protesting Tommy's chest the same baby wipe bath Liam got afterwards.

“Alright,” Janet said. “We'll do a bib. Can you show me you're a big boy who can put on his bib all by himself?” Tommy almost expected a Halloween bib, but the one Janet watched him fasten around his neck was just light blue with a yellow duckling on one corner to match the yellow piping. He glared at the snickering middle schoolers behind her as she wet a paper towel and gave his hands and face a quick wipe.

“Don't take that one, Jake.” She called over her shoulder. “That one's Tommy's.”

“What's different about it?”

“Gummy worms seemed like a bad idea for Tommy, so his is just pudding and Oreos.” The boys exchanged a look, but all Tommy could see was Janet taking a seat right in front of him.

“Can't I do it myself?” Tommy asked, but Janet brought the spoon up to his lips. He rolled his eyes and dutifully let the spoon into his mouth.

“Good?”

“I guess.”

“You'll get lots more sweets tonight.” Janet said with a smile.

With Janet setting the pace, it seemed to take forever to finish even the small bowl of graveyard dirt. Finally, she wiped his face and hands.

“Ready for your costume?” She asked.

“I guess.”

“It'll be tough to beat Tommy the Tiger and Tommy the Pumpkin, but I think you'll like it. I went a little scary this year.” That intrigued Tommy, but he wondered if she meant scary for her or him. “But I bet a big boy like you wants to be scary, huh?”

“He had some pretty scary roars when he was a tiger.” Jake said.

“That's true!” Janet released Tommy from the highchair. He slid to the floor, but Janet was quicker.”What'll you two be doing?” She asked, situating Tommy in her arms. Jake shrugged.

“I dunno. Just dicking around.”

“Language!” Janet made a show of covering Tommy's ears.

“He's not really a baby.” Jake said defensively.

“Still. I don't like that either. And you know Mom and Dad don't.” Jake only shrugged and Eric looked uncomfortable. “Let's go, Tommy.”

“Can't I walk?” Tommy asked. She patted his bottom and even gave it a little squeeze. “Please?”

“Let's go potty” was all she said and Tommy soon found himself sitting on the toilet. Kurt never believed him when he told him that Janet – a bonafide girl! – saw him naked every now and again, but Tommy figured that was because he could never really tell Kurt the full truth about how Janet remained convinced he was a toddler.

“You focus on getting all your peepee and poopoo out, okay?”

“Seriously?” Tommy said. “This has been going on for years. You gotta know I'm Eric's older brother, right? You can't honestly think I'm a baby.”

“You're not a baby.” Janet said. “You're a big boy on the potty!” Tommy groaned and peed because he had to.

There was a flurry of motion as Janet managed to wipe him, get his underwear pulled up, and get him over to the sink to wash his hands before he even realized he was in nothing but his underwear.

“Before we show you your costume, I think you should sing a little song for me.”

“The pumpkin?” Tommy asked with a sigh.

“Nope.” Janet pulled out her phone.

“No video!” Tommy covered his crotch. His Bunnydale undies were nothing new to him, but video? Video was a hard no.

“Oh, but this is a fun one.”

“It's a sunny, bunny day in Bunnydale!” Tommy recognized his own voice even before Janet turned the phone toward him. Why did his voice sound so high on recordings? It almost sounded higher than the little pumpkin song from last year! Dr. Schneider told him his voice would deepen ‘soon', but surely it could get a little bit lower than that.”So join all your friends in Bunnydale!” He looked at his forced smile on the camera as he sang in the soft yellow pajamas with the wide white cuffs.

“Come on. I know you want to sing along!” This wasn't the first time Tommy had been forced to sing that horrible song in nothing but his underwear, but having Janet there along with that video made tears well up in his eyes as he began to haf-heartedly sing.

“So put on a smile and shout hooray, it's another sunny bunny Bunnydale day!” He wondered if Janet had any idea that Eric had been dangling Tommy's only pair of underwear not festooned with bunnies over his head to get him to sing along.

“Very nice! Those jammies are adorable. Next time I babysit you,” She picked Tommy up. “You're wearing those. Pinky promise?” She hooked his pinkie with hers. “But for now, I think it's diaper time.”

“D-d-” it was then that he noticed the folded diaper on the bed. A Bunnydale diaper. How did the bunnies look even more babyish on a diaper than they did on his underwear? “I don't need diapers!”

“We're going to be having a lot of fun. I don't want you to

have any oopsies.”

“Well, what about Pull-ups? I-” she scooped him up, tugged off his briefs, and placed the naked boy on the bed. Seeing his horrified glance at the diaper, Janet softened.

“I know, you want to potty train and be a big boy, but you're just not there yet. Santa didn't mind you wearing a diaper, did he? And you were such a cutie waggling your diapered tushie around last Halloween for your pumpkin song.”

“What? I didn't wear diapers for those!”

“You're a very smart baby boy, but even the smartest baby boys need diapers until they're potty trained.”

“No!” He sat up, kicking out at her. “I- you just watched me pee. You have my underwear right there. I am not a baby! You are not making me wear a freaking diaper!”

“Someone's got a bit of a sugar rush from snack, huh?” Janet said.

“You're not listening!”

“It's hard when you're yelling at the top of your lungs.” She said, rubbing his back. “Let's take a nice, deep breath.”

“But”

“I'm serious. Breathe in…. Breathe out. One more time. Breathe in… breathe out. Better?”

“A little.”

“Good. Now, lie back.”

“But”

“Tommy. Lie back. We don't want to miss our fun Halloween party because a certain little boy was fussing about something as simple as his diaper.”

“Janet.”

“Enough, Tommy. I don't want you making puddles on the bed.” She pushed him onto his back and, despite his best efforts, got the diaper taped snugly and securely around his slender waist.

Tommy had thought Pull-ups were bad. With underwear, you could forget you were wearing it. Pull-ups constantly reminded you of their presence, the not quite plastic, not quite paper tickling your thighs, the thickness pressing against you with every step. Just last summer, Eric had blackmailed him into wearing Pull-ups for a whole day, a day that had resulted in him being left with Janet as a potty training toddler. Pull-ups were bad. The diaper he now wore was worse. It ballooned out from his waist, the soft crinkly plastic almost blindingly white anywhere where there wasn't a merrily cavorting bunny.

“Ready for your costume surprise?”

“Yes.” Tommy said, genuinely eager. A costume would hide this diaper at least! The reindeer outfit from last December had made it next to impossible to tell he had Pull-ups on, so surely-

“Tada!” Janet held up something. What, Tommy couldn't be sure. It looked almost like the chestplate of a catcher. Was he going as a baseball player?

“What… what is it?”

“Oh, you'll see.” Confused, Tommy allowed Janet to dress him. The bottom of the chestplate covered his diaper, but nothing else. His chest and stomach were covered, but his back was bare except for criss-crossing straps. He almost felt more naked as Janet pulled a matching hat over his curly hair.

“Aren't you adorable?” Janet scooped him up and smothered him with kisses. Tommy felt numb. He… how could he look any more babyish than he did now? It was impossible.

Tommy's bottom lip trembled and he felt like he could not even speak as he was presented to Eric and Jake.

“Oh, wow.” Eric said in almost disbelief. Tommy couldn't blame him for being shocked, even if this was his fault.

“You like it? I made it myself.” Janet proudly showed him reference photos.

“Yeah, you did really good. Tommy's an adorable little monster.”

“And it's more practical for diaper changes than that pumpkin last year.”

“Aww, but Tommy was a cute pumpkin too.” Jake remarked.

“Tommy's a big boy monster this year, aren't you?” She

kneeled down and kissed his cheek.

“I don't want to go.” Tommy said. This was too much! He was basically just wearing a hat and a glorified diaper cover! Over a diaper! “I'm not going.” Janet picked him up.

“I bet you'll have fun once you see the other boys and girls in their costumes.” She said decisively, “Remember what I told you about scary movies, Jake.”

“We remember.” Eric said. “We're actually gonna go back to my place. Promised Mom I'd hand out candy to trick or treaters.”

“What? When?” Eric snorted. It was almost too funny to hear Tommy's indignation coming from a boy in the most babyish monster costume imaginable.

“We'll see you late tonight then?”

“We'll text you our plans.” Jake replied. “We're not gonna do anything bad!” He added quickly as he saw Janet's expression. Realizing everyone had more or less forgotten about him, Tommy began to squirm. With Janet's guard down, surely he had a chance to get free and make a run for it!

“Tommy's getting restless.” Janet adjusted her hold on him. He felt her finger on his thigh and realized she was checking his diaper!

“I'm not wet!” He exclaimed, wincing as he heard Jake and Eric snort.

“Where are you taking him anyway?” Eric asked.

“Oh, Sunny Days has Trunk or Treat in the parking lot.” She gave Tommy's kiss a cheek. “But that's more for the older kids. They have some preschooler activities inside.” With that, she carried Tommy toward the door.

“Eric, please. You gotta help me.” He protested. Surely even his brother had to see that this was too far. Eric looked conflicted, but the door closed before he could make a move.

“I am not going anywhere like this!” Tommy protested earnestly as Janet buckled him into the car seat in the back of her car. “Let me out!”

“We don't kick.” She said, watching with satisfaction as he tried and failed to undo the buckle. “Now, you're obviously fussy so do you want to go back inside and take a nap or do you want to go to Halloween?”

“Nap.” He said at once. Janet just shook her head.

“You're gonna have a lot more fun at Halloween. I promise.”

Tommy screamed, thrashed, and kicked, but Janet seemed completely unperturbed as she drove them to Sunny Days daycare. Tommy saw little kids and their families everywhere.

“Please? Can we go?”

“We only just got here.” Janet said. “But I'm glad you've calmed down.” She parked and walked past Tommy's door. He tried to look over his shoulder, but the car seat got in the way. He heard the trunk creak and then close a moment later. Janet reappeared at his window. “Are you absolutely sure you

don't want to be a monster?" He nodded. "Ok, well, let's get you unbuckled so I can at least get a few photos."

A few photos turned out to mean standing by Janet's car for ten minutes, posing. If she had ever shown a sign of realizing his actual age, Tommy would have been worried about blackmail potential of the photos. He would have to make extra sure Eric never got ahold of them. Finally, Janet put her phone away.

"Alright, I found another costume in the trunk, but I want you to promise me you're going to be good."

"I promise."

"Pinky promise?" He curled his pinky around hers. "Pinky promise to be a good litlte boy?"

"I pinky promise to be a good little boy." He said. Janet nodded approvingly and Tommy soon found himself in nothing but the diaper, shivering in the late October breeze.

His new costume was a firefighter: red boots, a red hat, and a big yellow coat. Janet looked him over appraisingly.

"I guess it's not super obvious you're not wearing pants." She said, making sure the elastic band from the hat was tucked under his chin. "Maybe we can tell the parents you're a stripper." She laughed.

"A stripper?" He said in disbelief.

"That's just a grown-up joke." She smiled and took his hand. "Let's go inside and partay!"

This was Tommy's first real opportunity to walk in a diaper. Between the heavy boots and the diaper forcing him to walk with his legs further apart than normal, he felt as though he looked like he hadn't completely mastered walking yet.

“Aww, look at the cute little baby firefighter.” A girl who could not have been older than eight said. She was dressed like a princess and held a bulging bag of candy. She looked up at Janet. “What's his name?”

“Tommy.”

“Do you want a piece of candy, Tommy?” She looked back up at Janet. “Does he know what to say?”

“Go on, Tommy.” Janet said, squeezing his hand.

“Trick or treat.” Since he did not have a bag, he extended his hand out. She smiled and handed him a Tootsie Roll. “Thank you.” He intoned, feeling his face growing red. She giggled and ran off.

“Wasn't that nice?” Janet said, taking the Tootsie Roll and slipping it into the pocket of Tommy's coat. “Up you come.” She carried him into the building, which was apparently the epicenter for toddlers. “Oh, this'll be fun.” Janet said, setting him down on the floor again. “We'll have to do everything!”

And everything they did. Janet took Tommy over to a game of Simon Says where Tommy had to cluck like a chicken, jump up and down, turn in a circle, and boo like a ghost while Janet filmed the whole thing. When Tommy had to wave his hands up high above his head, his coat came unbuttoned,

exposing his tummy and diaper, but the game continued. With my luck, he thought, someone I know'll be here with their little brother or sister and they'll see me like this.

“Let's get you set back to rights.” Janet said, fixing his costume once the game had ended. “Don't look at me like that. It's a daycare. Lots of little boys in diapers here.” She pointed to a boy in a teddy bear onesie who couldn't have even been one year old. Tommy grimaced. “Let's go paint a pumpkin!”

Tommy sat at the little table, fingers covered in paint as he tried his best to paint a pumpkin that would prove he was in ninth grade and did not deserve the injustice of being diapered and attending a daycare Halloween party.

“Very scary!” Janet remarked. “Let's get a photo of the artist and his masterpiece!” Tommy forced a smile.

The next activity was a singalong dance party. Janet recorded it again, smiling as Tommy held hands with other toddlers, waddle-clunking his way around in a circle. The way he always looked so serious only made it a cuter scene, especially once they broke from the circle dance and got to freestyle on the rug. It was adorable how he kept trying to get out of the group, only to get pushed back into it.

“Alright, I think this is the last activity.” Janet said, eyeing a series of tunnels curiously.

“Who's this little guy?” The woman by the tunnel asked. She wore a black and orange Halloween vest with a knit witch on

it.

“His name's Tommy. He's my brother's friend's baby brother.” Janet explained.

“Ok, Tommy. What you're gonna do is crawl through this tunnel and keep going until you reach that tunnel over there, kay?” Tommy nodded, though the prospect of crawling did not excite him one bit. “We'll just take your boots off.” Try as Tommy might to remove his boots in a dignified manner, he knew the woman got an eyeful of his diaper under his coat.

“Good luck, Tommy!” Janet said.

“We've lost a few shoes in there.” The woman told her as Tommy began to crawl. “No one over five can fit inside without us taking it apart, so…” Tommy disappeared from sight, crawling and crinkling as fast as he could.

“Shit.” He muttered as his coat came open again. He tried to sit up enough to fix it, but the low ceiling pushed his hat back so that it dangled around his neck. All he could do was try to get through this as quickly as possible and hope that there was a point with a higher ceiling so he could fix his outfit. “Stupid Halloween!”

Tommy the firefighter had crawled into the tunnel. The Tommy that emerged looked every bit like a baby who had tried – and failed – to dress himself. His coat was down off one shoulder, his hat dangled around his neck, and his diaper was out in the open for all to see. Janet, naturally, had had her phone up at the exit to capture Tommy emerging.

“My goodness!” The woman exclaimed. “Someone had an adventure.” Janet swooped in and once again, set him to rights.

“Your monster costume would've survived all of this.” She mused, half to herself and half to him.

“You said I was a stripper.” He remarked, but she did not seem to notice.

The sun was setting as they stepped outside. Tommy waddle-clunked to the car and Janet got him buckled in, wrapping a blanket around him.

“In case you doze off.” It's a short drive back, Tommy thought, but his eyelids grew heavy. He knew he could make it back to Janet's. They had driven to this thing in like five minutes, how could he fall asleep before they made it back?

The next thing Tommy knew, the sunlight of morning was on his face. He kicked off the blanket and realized he was still in a diaper! Just a diaper. He searched his memories for any explanation, but all he could come up with was some fuzzy memories of being carried inside and put to bed. He must've slept for forever!

“Good morning! Oh, you're up.” Tommy stared at Janet, suddenly struck by an even more fuzzy memory. Had… had she changed his diaper in the middle of the night? He tried to focus on it to make it clearer, but that only bewildered him more. Had Jake and Eric been there? Even if Janet had changed his diaper, she would have never let them watch.

“Can I get dressed?” He asked as Janet used his confused state as an excuse to pick him up.

“Let's do breakfast first.”

“No! Not in just a diaper!”

Jake and Eric must have come back last night because they came downstairs to see Tommy sitting in the highchair in nothing but a diaper and bib as Janet fed him oatmeal. He wanted to ask them about last night, but with his mouth full of oatmeal, it only sounded like babbles as oatmeal fell onto his bib. Janet cooed and returned the oatmeal to his mouth. Tommy groaned inwardly. Answers would have to wait until he was a big boy again.

Chapter 5

Tommy Tsunami - Chapter 5

Tommy hated Halloween. This wasn't a dislike of it. It wasn't the sort of hate of a boy who looked at trick or treating as baby stuff. It was the hate of a boy who had spent the last few Halloweens in babyish costumes. This year would be different. As far as he was concerned, he would stay barricaded in his room all day and not emerge until the first of November, if not school on Monday (just to be safe).

He was already starting to see the flaw in his plan when boredom set in right after lunch, but he remained firm. The news that Eric and Jake would be hanging out right down the hall, between him and the stairs, no less, only made him more determined.

"Tomcat." Dad called through the closed and locked door. Tommy jumped.

"Yeah?"

"You're not putting down roots in there, are you?"

"No."

"Well, come on out."

"I can't."

"What do you mean?" Dad tried the doorknob and Tommy panicked. He knew Dad could get in if he wanted to. Neither he nor Jake had actual locks on their doors.

"Um, uh, I'm naked."

"Oh." The doorknob stopped jiggling. "Well, good. You should shower. Er, not shower. It's on the fritz again. You'll need to take a bath."

"I will." He added more quietly. "I guess."

"Right now. I don't, you don't want me to put Jake in charge of reporting to me if you did or not, right?"

"Are you going somewhere?"

"I'm done having a conversation through the door." Tommy groaned inwardly, but figured there was no real risk in opening the door to his dad. If Dad wondered how he had gotten dressed so quickly, he didn't ask.

"Where are you going?"

"Work. Halloween's not a holiday like that." He nodded in the general direction of the bath. "Go on."

"Can't I use the shower in your room?"

"And run naked through the house once Jake gets here?" Tommy bit his tongue and trod off to the bathroom. “Clothes in the chute please.”

“I know.” Tommy muttered, closing and locking – after three tries – the bathroom door behind him. “Doesn't anything work in this house?” He groaned as he tried in vain to start the shower. “Fine. Bath it is.” He shuddered, remembering against his will that this would not be the first bath he had

taken, against his will no less, on Halloween.

For a second, he thought about keeping his underwear just so he had something to wear under his towel if Jake and Eric decided to play a prank, but since his underwear had smiling dinosaurs all over it, he figured being caught naked would be better. Or at least slightly less bad.

Tommy slipped down into the water and almost immediately grew pensive. What would tonight bring? Eric had promised Mom and Dad that he planned to just watch scary movies with Jake in his room. They had asked follow-up questions that made Tommy blush and Eric roll his eyes. Tommy knew enough to suspect that Eric and Jake would take any opportunity to forget about the movie and get into trouble. Whatever, he thought. I'll just hang out in here until they're settled in Eric's room, then make a run for mine. As if on cue, the doorbell rang, the water in the tub splashing almost as high as the spout as Tommy jumped in surprise. The door's locked, right? He awkwardly crossed the bathroom, wet and naked, to make sure. Good.

He returned to soaking and trying to listen to the voices downstairs. Everyone seemed to be talking at once. He could hear Eric and Jake, for sure, and heard Mom laugh. He sighed and relaxed. He was worried over nothing, he thought as he grabbed a washcloth and started to actually bathe.

Tommy heard the doorknob rattle. Whoever it was seemed like they were attacking it, enough that Tommy could actually see it moving from across the room.

"I'm in here." He called. Who went right for the doorknob rather than knocking once they saw the door was closed. "I'm in here!" He said more loudly as the door opened.

"Sorry." Eric said. "Cover up. I gotta pee."

"Go downstairs!"

"It's an emer-"

"Get out!" Tommy didn't even care how shrill he sounded. He was in the tub and the last thing he wanted to do was be reasonable to his brother. Eric looked at him for just a second too long and Tommy felt something was terribly wrong. He pulled his knees up to his chest out of instinct as Eric turned toward the hall outside.

"Janet! Tommy's ready to get out of the tub!"

"What?"

Panic took hold, but there was little Tommy could do as he was gripped by a thousand decisions. Did he stay in? Get out? Try to close the door and just deal with Eric and J snickering? Was Janet even actually here? By the time he had the answer to that last question, it was too late to do anything.

"Someone's super duper excited!" She gushed as Tommy impotently splashed. "I bet you know just how much fun we're gonna have!" She turned her back, but only to go into the linen closet right inside the bathroom door, her body blocking Tommy's only means of escape. He looked past her, both to see if there was any gap to try to squeeze through and

to see if Eric was watching his misfortune.

"Get out! I'm naked!"

"We're gonna get you out of the tub, hold your horses." She unfolded a fluffy robin's egg towel. "Or is that seahorses? Oh! You've still got water in here. We don't want your towel to slurp that all up, do we?" She kept up a steady stream of chitchat, ignoring Tommy's protests and urgent questions as she scooped him up and out of the drained tub, enveloping him in the towel.

"What are you doing here? Let me go!"

"I know you're so very excited for our fun activities, but we can't have you running around naked all day, can we?" Tommy stared up at her, wide eyed. Normally, getting dressed would reassure him, but when Janet was involved, that almost invariably meant some embarrassingly babyish costume.

“Ok,” despite his efforts to remain calm, his voice trembled. “Let me go to my room and-”

“Oh, I'm sure we have just what you need right here. What was it I spied in the linen closet, right by your towel?” Tommy struggled, knowing that whatever she had found was not going to be good. Unfortunately, Janet had all but swaddled him in the towel and even getting a leg out, let alone an arm, was proving nearly impossible. “Tommy's diaper!”

“No! No, no, no!”

“What is it with little boys wanting to be nudists?” Janet wondered out loud. Jake was the same way, way way back when he was a baby.” She kissed Tommy's nose. “Did you know that even your big brother was a baby once?”

“I remember.” Tommy grumbled. “But he's not my big brother. He's younger than me!”

“I've babysat a lot.” Janet said, opening the cupboard under the sink. “I know diapers are never far when there's a baby in the house.”

“I don't need diapers!” He was shouting so loudly, why had no one come to see what was going on? Mom had left, but wasn't Dad still home?

“I see diapers, but I don't see Pull-ups or a potty seat, so something tells me Tommy isn't ready for potty training.”

“What? This”

“Shhh, shh. Someone's a little overstimulated, huh? So excited about all the fun we're gonna have, your mouth's going a million miles.”

“Janet.”

“Yes?”

“I don’t need diapers. I am a teenager, just like you!” He didn't know why he was even trying. Janet never listened and how are you supposed to prove your age when you were wet and naked? Can I get my school ID from my room? Tommy thought. Can I get Eric to get it? That seemed even less likely

to work out well.

“I think we're ready to get you diapered!” Setting him down on the floor, she began to unravel the towel from around him.

“I'm naked!” He squeaked.

“Yes, you are!” He had forgotten just how sickly-sweet Janet's voice could get. “But that's what the diaper's for.”

Unable to even look, Tommy stared at the bathroom wall as Janet powdered and diapered him, rolling his eyes as she cooed about how docile he had become once the diaper was under his butt. Maybe this was all a bad dream? He couldn't remember ever taking a shower, let alone a bath, in a dream and his dreams of Janet certainly never involved her diapering him in full detail.

“Can I go get dressed?” He asked, shuddering at the special sense of violation that came from her running her finger along the leg guards of the diaper to make sure it wouldn't leak.

“Might be better to be in just a diaper.” Janet said to herself, picking Tommy up and setting him against her shoulder. “Two year olds get so messy!”

“Two!?” Tommy pushed against her, but turned beet red as he realized what he had just touched.

“Oh, what a pleasantly pink clean baby boy.” Janet said with a grin, kissing his cheek.

“I am not a baby!”

“I know. Toddler.” Her voice dripped with indulgence. “I'll set you down once we're past the stairs. First rule of babysitting, don't risk the stairs with any little guys. Well, maybe not the first rule.”

As they arrived downstairs, Tommy looked around from his vantage point in Janet's arms, expecting everything to look different somehow. Everything seemed the same at first. The living room had folded laundry on the coffee table, waiting for him or Eric to come and put it away. His shoes still sat on the small shelf by the door. Things seemed the same.]

Janet carried him into the dining room, where Tommy noticed a white pumpkin on the table with paints arranged all around it. So she had been setting things up down here! He desperately searched through his memory, trying to remember if he had noticed her voice. Had she talked to Dad, given him any clue that she thought Tommy was a baby? If I had heard her, I could've gone to my room, gone out the window, slid down the drainpipe, and run to someone's house. Tommy thought. Instead, he found himself being set down on a chair in front of the pumpkin, wearing nothing but a diaper!

“What you're gonna do is paint all over this pumpkin. Make it a bonafide Tommy masterpiece!” She smiled and brushed his hair out of his face. “And don't worry about getting messy. Be a little artist!”

“What are you gonna do?” He asked, almost terrified of the answer.

“Oh!” She seemed as if she had not thought about it. “I

suppose I could paint a pumpkin too.” She looked in a bag that seemed concerningly large. What else did she have in there? “Oops, do you want a smock like a real artist?” The smock she unfolded was pink and white with lambs that could only be accurately described as adorable romping to and fro all over its surface. “You know what sound a sheep makes!”

“Baa.” Tommy said, hoping it would count both as the sound a sheep made and a firm rejection of the idea of wearing the babyish smock.

“The paint says it's washable, so we should be ok.” She smiled at him. “Go on. Let your artist out!”

Looking around, Tommy noticed he had no brush. Painting a pumpkin seemed strange; finger painting a pumpkin was undeniably a toddler activity.

“Could we carve it at least? I know where-” Janet shook her head.

“No losing fingers on my watch!” Tommy sighed. He heard a thump overhead.

“How come Eric and Jake don't have to do this?” It was more of a rhetorical question, but Janet answered all the same.

“They can judge our works of art.” She said, dipping a brush into paint. So she wasn't finger painting? “I'm going to do a ghost on mine! But he'll be a friendly ghost.” Tommy nodded, unsure of what on earth to do. Every year, I end up right here, being treated like a baby and trying to figure out how to get

Janet to acknowledge that I'm obviously not a little kid.

“I was a pumpkin for Halloween a few years ago.” She had said he was two, but surely she remembered that! “And a tiger before that.”

“Are you gonna paint a tiger on your pumpkin?” Wasn't she listening? “You'll need orange and black for that, won't you?”

“Uh” Tommy pushed. “I'm talking about past Halloween costumes. Remember?”

“Oh, right. You were an adorable little pumpkin, weren't you? That must've been when you were one!”

“No, that was two whole years ago!” Tommy said desperately. “You made me sing a dumb song and perform and everything!”

Thump! Thump! Thump! That was the unmistakable sound of Eric and Jake coming down the stairs, drowning out Tommy's attempts to get Janet to recognize that he was the world record holder for oldest two year old. Tommy panicked. He was wearing nothing but a diaper! What was he going to do?

“So much for a peaceful afternoon.” Janet teased as the boys emerged.

“Tommy was screaming just-” Jake's voice trailed off as he saw Tommy's puffy bottom. Eric recovered more quickly.

“Uh, why's Tommy in his un- di- why's Tommy not dressed?” Tommy stared at Eric, unsure why he had even entertained

the thought that Eric might help him.

“We're gonna be messy.” Janet explained as if it was obvious. “He just had a bath, you know. And what are you two up to?”

“We were-” Jake elbowed Eric.

“We're grabbing snacks. We're doing movies in Eric's room.” He glanced at Eric. “‘member?”

“He's lying.” Tommy said.

“Hush.” Eric came over and covered Tommy's mouth. “You're in no position to tattle, punkin pants.”

“Pumpkin pants?”

“Alright.” Janet held her paintbrush to her lips, then added a bit more paint to her pumpkin. “Tommy wants you two to judge our pumpkins, so don't get too invested in your movie. It's too bright for scary movies anyway.”

“Well, we can't go anywhere.” Jake spat back.

“You can always do fall activities with me and Tommy.” Janet replied, clearly used to her brother's attitude. “Just as long as you're where I can find you easily.” Jake muttered something under his breath.

“C'mon.” Eric said, leading him by the arm into the kitchen.

“I'm gonna go see what they're doing.” Tommy slid off the chair, not even waiting a second for Janet to give him permission. This is my house anyway.

“You've got to help me!”

“Why? Can't you paint a pumpkin by yourself?” Eric asked with a smirk.

“It's a Halloween tradition, Tommy.” Jake said. “Did you really think you'd get to just hide in your room all day?” Tommy glared at him.

“You need to tell Janet the truth.”

“Dude, it's been how many years?”

“Shut up, Jake.” Tommy growled. “Eric. Please.” Eric sighed.

“How?”

“Go…. get my student ID or something.”

“Why can't you?”

“Think.” Tommy said, trying to make it abundantly clear to Jake that he was an endless nuisance for him. “The second I try to go upstairs, your sister'll grab me.” Jake snorted.

“Well, that sounds fun to me.”

“Eric, seriously. I'll do anything.” Eric shrugged, but Tommy could tell he was getting through to him.

“Eric, we” was all Jake needed to say to get Eric to nod.

“Sorry, T. We've got our own thing going on. You'll be fine.”

“I'm in a diaper!”

“You pull it off.” Jake said with a smirk. Anyone with eyes

could see that Tommy was much too lanky for the diaper, though it still fit him well enough.

“Can you bring Tommy back in here? His pumpkin misses him!”

“Hear that, baby?” Jake teased. “Waddle back to your punkin.” Tommy sighed and shuffled back, taking advantage of his final moment out of Janet's view to give Jake and Eric the finger. So much for that, he thought as he returned to the table, reluctantly studying the paints and stickers before him.

“Jake, are you guys still in there?” Janet called as Tommy was trying to half decorate the pumpkin, half talk himself into ripping off the diaper and running for the stairs.

“Yeah?”

“Not getting up to any mischief, I hope?”

“Mischief?” Jake and Eric emerged from the kitchen. “We're not freaking pixies.”

“Pixies?” Eric muttered.

“Shut it.”

“I need to go to the bathroom. Can you two watch Tommy?” She walked over and seemed disappointed to see his pumpkin was still pristine and white. “You can't rush art, can you?” Tommy was halfway through the nod before she added. “And your diaper's still dry?”

“Yes.” He said through clenched teeth.

“Perfect. Don't leave him alone. He's your baby brother, Eric.”

“No, Eric's my baby brother.” Tommy said, but Janet did not seem to hear.

“You haven't painted your pumpkin at all yet.” Jake said. “Don't you know how?”

“Would you want to paint a pumpkin?”

“No, but I'd also not get diapered like you did.” Jake said. “Eric, how about we help him?”

“How?’ Tommy and Eric said at once.

“Simple.” Jake grinned. “Eric, hold your baby brother so I can paint his ass.”

“What?”

“Don't you remember doing fruit stamps?” Jake asked. “You dip half an orange in paint and then stick it on paper. No wait, I think it was potatoes? You really don't remember?” The familial resemblance between Tommy and Eric could not have been stronger as they both stared at Jake, bewildered. "I'm the only one who's done that? Huh." He shrugged. "Well, anyway, we're gonna paint Tommy's diapered butt and then push it onto the pumpkin."

"What? Why?"

"You wanted our help, didn't you?" Eric said, getting on board.

"Not like this!" Eric grabbed Tommy's shoulders and held

him in place as Jake used a broad brush to coat the butt of his diaper in green paint.

"And now, mash!" Jake declared, pressing the pumpkin against Tommy's diaper. "So poofy! Poofy Tommy, punkin pants!" He teased.

"That's a unique approach." Janet said. All three boys froze. "And so nice of you two to help Tommy with his artistic vision. But don't sit back down with wet paint on your diaper, Tommy!" She came over and made him stand there as the four of them examined the pumpkin.

After a moment, Janet placed her pumpkin next to Tommy's and then nodded as if that had settled it for her.

“I think we can all agree that Tommy's the winner.” Somehow, Eric had managed to get a perfect imprint of Tommy's puffy diaper butt on the curved surface of the pumpkin. “I think you need to sign your- Tommy!”

He had taken advantage of everyone studying the pumpkins to start slowly backing away, moving as quietly as he could with a diaper on. He had nearly made it to the stairs when Janet noticed him, closing the gap in a few strides. “Actually, your diaper looks just like your pumpkin, huh?” Jake and Eric snorted as she held his puffy green and white rump up right next to the white and green pumpkin.

“Which one's which?” Eric laughed.

“Of course you don't know.” Tommy muttered before it became entirely too much that he was having his diaper

displayed. “Can I take this thing off now that it's all covered with paint?”

“Quick drying!” Janet observed, patting his bottom. “At least on the outside.”

“Wait, did he?” Eric and Jake started laughing so loudly, Tommy could not make his denial heard over them. He had not wet himself!

"We can get your diaper taken care of as soon as we put our pumpkin works of art outside for everyone to see!" Janet decreed as Jake and Eric took the opportunity to disappear upstairs again. They were no help at all. Tommy thought. At least I'm gonna get this thing off soon. "Can you be a big boy" he really didn't like how she emphasized those words as if it was the thing Tommy most wanted to be. In a way though, he supposed that that was the case. "And carry your pumpkin out to the steps for me?"

"No-" A stroke of inspiration. "No one will know what it is!"

"Oh." Janet laughed. "Well, maybe you can stand out there and show 'em your diaper, huh?" Tommy's nose wrinkled. "I'm just being silly. If they really want to know, they'll knock on the door." She picked up the pumpkin. "It's very heavy, so use both hands. Make a basket!" She waited for him to comply, then placed the pumpkin in his arms. "Off we go! The pumpkin express! Choo choo!" Janet tried to nudge Tommy toward the door, but another burst of inspiration came.

"It's too cold. I'm in just my... under...wear." It sounded weird. Who thought of a diaper as underwear? But it was better than saying diaper.

"Good point." Janet allowed. "Our next activity's outside, so let's go ahead and get you dressed. Good job carrying!" She took the pumpkin from him with one hand and then nudged him all the same toward the front door.

"My clothes are all upstairs."

"Then whose outfit is all nicely folded on the table there?" She asked, chuckling as he shrugged. "Guess we better go find out." She bent down just enough to give his bottom a playful pat. "And take care of business." He thought he heard her mumble.

"Oh, aren't these cute?" Janet cooed as she looked at the clothes on the coffee table. She had to be pretending, Tommy thought. It was a flannel shirt, pants, and a puffy vest. Well, if that's what she wants me to wear- "But first, we gotta get your soggy boggy bumbum all dry and clean."

"What? I am not soggy!"

"You're not what?"

"Soggy!"

"You don't have a soggy boggy bumbum?"

"No!" Tommy was scandalized.

"Soggy boggy bumbum." Janet sang. "Froggy boggy

bumbum. Tommy wommy's bumbum nice and clean." Had she hit her head or something? "Lie down on the floor, Tommy."

"No."

"Tommy, don't be like that. Fun is fun, but sometimes, we gotta take care of business."

"I don't need- I want to- No!" This was crazy! Sure, he dealt with Janet every Halloween, but that never made it easier. "I'm fourteen years old, I don't need a diaper change cuz I don't need diapers! I- I-" He tore off the diaper and threw it at her. It landed on the floor with the bone dry interior exposed. "See?" Tommy said before sense set in and he covered his crotch.

"Halfway done!" Janet declared, undeterred. She grabbed Tommy and wrestled him down to the floor. "But now we're at defcon two for puddles!"

"Stop! Stop! Let me go!" How Janet was able to hold him down while also grabbing wipes and a diaper, Tommy did not know, but he was not going to accept a second diaper so quickly. He lashed out with his feet, mostly as a distraction.

"We do not kick, Tommy." She said, catching and holding his feet by the ankles. "Where's the docile little boy from earlier? Did your bath calm you down?"

"You caught me by surprise. This time, I was ready." It sounded pathetic, but the sentiment was true.

"I know what'll calm you down. Well, I guess more it'll put you in a better mood." As she let one of his feet go, Tommy had a split second to wonder if he should try to kick her again or roll over or- he squealed and his back arched! "Tickle, tickle, tickle!" Tommy had had no idea that he was ticklish on the bottom of his feet, but clearly, he was. "There's a smile!" Janet cooed, grabbing his other foot and tickled that one too!

"No more tickling!"

"Okay, but that means I gotta find-" she hit both sides of his torso at once with a tickle attack, reducing Tommy once again to a giggling, squealing baby. "I gotta-" tickle, tickle, tickle. "What was it I needed to do?" Tickle, tickle, tickle!

"I'm... I'm gonna!" Even in his tickle-induced euphoria, Tommy could feel it coming. "I'm gonna!"

"Uh-oh!" Moving quickly, Janet grabbed the first thing that came into reach, the unfolded paint splattered diaper, and threw it over Tommy's privates. Neither of them dared to move for a moment. Tommy relaxed as the pressure in his bladder faded. False alarm.

"That was my fault." Janet said. "Obviously you should've had a diaper on before I started tickling you. Good job recognizing that you had to go and holding it!"

"I didn't use it!" Tommy insisted again, but Janet merely smiled and started wiping all around his privates and even his inner thighs. "Seriously! I have underwear right upstairs-" she returned him to his back. "I do not need a diaper!"

"I'm gonna tape your feet down if you try to kick me again."

"Well, quit trying to diaper me."

"I know, I know. It's no fun having to stop playing and get your diaper changed!" She said sympathetically. "If I knew where your paci was, we could distract you, but we'll just keep powering through."

"I don't need diapers!"

"At the volume you're yelling, I suppose Eric'll probably come and tell us. If not the neighbors."

Whether she was trying to make a point or not, Tommy settled down. The last thing he wanted was for more eyes to see him naked, in mid-diapering.

"All done! And you lived." She winked at him. "Now, let's get you dressed so we can put our pumpkins out and go for a fun fall walk, hmm?"

"I'd rather not" Tommy said, but his opinion did not seem to matter.

In no time at all, he wore the outfit Janet had gushed over, his face still red as the flannel he wore over the humiliating ordeal of getting the pants over his diaper. This was even worse than wearing a costume. At least when he was a firefighter or pumpkin, he could justify the diaper as part of his costume. Now, in normal clothes, the diaper couldn't be explained away.

"That should keep you nice and warm while we go around

and collect leaves." Janet shrugged into her jacket.

"I cannot go out like this." Somehow, the pants made his diaper feel far thicker. He took a step and felt like he had the most extreme waddle imaginable.

"Here." She pulled her phone and snapped a quick pic to show him. He studied it, frowning. He felt like he was wearing a balloon around his waist, but you could hardly even tell he was diapered in the photo, other than a small bit of white plastic that he was able to fix. How could that be? "Do you approve, young master Tommy the Twonager?"

"What's a twonager?" He muttered before begrudgingly giving it the nod of approval. At least a walk around the neighborhood sounded normal. Maybe someone I know'll see me and think I'm on a date, he thought as he noticed Janet's leggings for the first time. Just as long as they didn't try to talk to him and let Janet ruin everything.

As they started out and Janet made him put a few leaves into a burlap bag she had, he wondered just what her plan was. They were collecting leaves, sure, but there had to be-

"Ooh, this one's so pretty and yellow, don't you think?" Tommy silently nodded and added it to her bag. "I don't think we need those icky brown ones, do we?" Tommy shook his head. "You're such a serious little leaf collector!"

"I guess." Janet was undeterred.

"I think I know what'll cheer you up."

“This red leaf?” He asked sarcastically.

“It matches your shirt!” She held out the bag. “But no, I meant that.” She pointed past him toward a sign much too cheery for Halloween: Trunk or Treat.

“I don’t have a costume.”

“We’ll tell them you’re a leaf collector. If you say it with confidence, or in your case, just nod enth- happily, they’ll buy it.” She took his hand without asking and walked toward it. He tried to go quickly, but the diaper made him swing his legs wide with every step. “Is that how a leaf collector walks?”

“No, it's this dumb diaper." He muttered.

"Are you soggy again already?"

"No! I wasn't even soggy the first time."

"You piddled from tickles!"

"That's not even-"

"Hi there! Is someone excited for trick or treat?" He could tell by the woman's expression that she did not get his costume.

"Does it cost anything?"

"How old's the little guy?"

"Two." It stung, not just hearing Janet say it so matter-of-factly, but he could tell the woman at the gate found that entirely believable.

"Oh, sorry. We're actually only three and up. Choking hazards and all that." She smiled down at Tommy, unbothered by his lack of disappointment. "But, I think I've got something special for-"

"Tommy."

"Tommy!" She smiled and pulled out a pair of jack-o-lantern sunglasses. "Here you go, buckaroo!" She slid them onto his face. "Whoa! Super cool!"

"What do you say, Tommy?"

"Thanks."

"Aww, shy guy." She smiled. "But we do this every year, so we'll see Tommy next year!" Bet you won't.

"Well, that's too bad." Janet said, picking him up and carrying him away. "But we've got lots of leaves."

"For what?"

"Oh, you'll see. It's a fun game I've played with some other little boys and girls. You do like fun, don't you? I can't remember." Tommy remained silent. Nothing Janet did was fun.

"Shoot." Janet muttered as Tommy's house came into sight. "I didn't remember to tell the boys we were going out. Hopefully they're still there." She gasped and kissed Tommy's cheek. "And our pumpkins! We never put them out, did we?"

"Guess not."

"Then that's two super important tasks for us to take care of. We've got a busy, busy, buzzy bee day!"

"Hooray." Tommy muttered. Maybe avoiding trunk or treat hadn't been the stroke of good luck he had hoped it was.

With their pumpkins outside, Janet set Tommy down on the couch and thought for a moment.

"I need to go check on the big boys upstairs, so can you be good and sit here?" She hesitated. "Actually, how about you sort the leaves?"

"Sort the leaves?"

"Yep. One pile for each color. You can spread out on the floor."

"Why?"

"It's good for your brain. Bet you can't get through all of these before I get back."

"What do I win?"

"You drive a hard bargain, mister." Janet laughed. "Get through them all and then no nap."

Janet disappeared upstairs, leaving Tommy alone with his thoughts. Should he sort the leaves? Even glancing in the bag, he realized there were a lot more than he remembered collecting. Was a nap better or worse than whatever else Janet had in mind? Almost certainly better. Better still, though? Sneaking upstairs and getting his own clothes on. But Janet

was up there and Eric's room was closer to the stairs, so she'd almost certainly catch him.

I could run! Dressed the way he was though, she was definitely faster. Could he strip?

"Yeah, they flew the coop." Who was Janet talking to? "I've still got the little guy here with me. We went for a walk and they took their opportunity." She came into sight, her phone to her ear. "Yeah, not my smartest move, but maybe they'll show up over there. Anyway, Tommy's curious, so I better go. Bye. Love you, daddy!"

"They're gone?"

"Were you eavesdropping when you shoulda been sorting leaves?" She teased.

"There's more than I expected." Tommy replied.

"Ok, well, you keep at it." She pulled him over to her and, after considering him for a moment, pulled his pants down.

"Hey!"

"Couldn't think of a better way to check ya." Tommy turned as red as the leaf he held. "Alright, I'm gonna get you some water to help you with your sorting and then" she gasped and covered her mouth. "Almost ruined the special surprise!" She giddily ran away, leaving Tommy confused with his pants around his ankles.

"How could things get any worse?" Tommy muttered, pulling his pants up before putting the leaf in his red pile, now unable

to shake the feeling he had jinxed himself. He still, even now, doubted he would be getting through the day without a costume.

"What on earth is she doing?" He muttered as he heard water rushing in the kitchen. With everyone else gone, he was surely the master of the house and, given the way it sounded like a pipe had burst, he needed to investigate.

"Just filling up your sippy!" Janet said with a laugh as she intercepted him before he reached the kitchen.

"With the ocean?"

"Hmm?"

"I heard a lot of water."

"It needed to be rinsed out." He stared up at her. Did she not realize what a lousy liar she was? "Here, drink up and then I'm getting you another."

"I'm not thirsty."

"Your body likes water and we just went for a walk. I drank water, now it's your turn." They were in a standoff. "Unless you'd prefer a baby bottle? Like a baby?" Tommy glared at her and she laughed. "That's what I thought. Drink up, Tommy! You're a little boy, not a little camel."

With such a small cup, Tommy knew he could chug it down in maybe two seconds, but the lid had other plans. Instead, he had to stand there and suck and suck and suck until finally, the cup was empty.

"Very good! See? Not poison." She took the blue plastic cup from him. "I'm gonna refill this and deliver it right to your leaf sorting station. How bougie, huh?" Tommy shrugged and eyed the stairs before reluctantly returning to his sorting.

"What's that orange one doing in your yellow pile?" Janet asked as she came in with the refilled sippy cup.

"That's the oranges. These are the yellows." Tommy explained, pointing to each pile in turn. Janet smiled indulgently.

"Alright, I won't interrupt your process." Tommy rolled his eyes. "Drink your water and let me know when you're ready for your diaper change."

"I..." Tommy sighed. "Whatever."

"Want me to check you?"

"No!"

"Then," Janet smiled sweetly. "Let me know when you're ready for your diaper change."

"What are you doing in the kitchen?" Janet's smile grew.

"You'll find out."

"When?" It grew again, as if she had hoped he would ask.

"After your diaper change."

“This is my house! What are you doing?”

“So bossy!” Tommy nearly threw his hands up in frustration.

"I'm done sorting the leaves." Janet patted the top of his head and looked over his work.

"Did we really grab that many brown ones?" Tommy shrugged. "Such a solemn little tyke. How's that diaper doing?" She asked as she handed him the sippy cup.

"Drier than these leaves." He said, even though it meant the spout went into his mouth.

"I'll be the judge of that." Janet decreed, keeping the sippy cup up to his lips. "Drink!" The water was refreshing, though Tommy would have preferred one of the energy drinks in the fridge. Janet would prolly freak out, he thought, loving the image. "Whatcha smiling about?" Janet asked. "Oh. I know what." Tommy almost choked as she patted his crotch. "Someone's making peepee in his pants!"

"Am not!" Down came his pants. "See?" Janet laughed.

"Such a spicy nugget." Tommy sputtered as she shifted him onto his back. "Drink your water, bud, and we'll get this diaper changed."

"I'm dry!" Had that been why she had been running the water? To try to get him to pee? I'm not gonna piss myself!

"Your sippy isn't. Drink it up." Tommy glared at her. "You know the deal, buckaroo. Boo, no fun diaper change, then we get to have fun. And you'll really like this next activity."

"Doubt it."

"Hmm, maybe we do need a nap, don't we?"

"I won't respond to threats." Janet snorted and ripped open the sides of his completely dry diaper.

As if it wasn't enough to receive an unnecessary diaper change, Tommy soon found himself stripped down to nothing but it.

"Why?"

"Because you're a cutie." She replied. "Plus there's a lot of water in our next fun activity." Tommy's brow furrowed. Had she flooded the kitchen?

"Speaking of," that was all she had to said to get Tommy to finish his water before she pulled him to his feet. "Shake, shake, shake! Shake, shake, shake! Shake your booty." He stared at her. "You are definitely taking advantage of the fact that it's too close to bedtime for a nap." She thought out loud. "Or maybe you're just hangry."

"Or I'm annoyed."

"I bet you'll cheer right up once you see" she picked him up, holding him in one arm as she covered his eyes with her free hand. "Oof, should bring you to the gym. Lifting you is a workout!"

"Cuz I am not a baby!"

"I know, you're such a big boy, you needed two diaper changes already."

"Ugh!" Before Tommy could vent, Janet pulled her hand away and he saw something he would have never expected in

the kitchen he was in every day: a kiddy pool filled with just enough water for apples to float on top.

"Bobbing for apples?"

"But even more fun for a little guy like you." Janet gushed proudly. "Jake used to love doing this, though he usually wore his trunks. Your diaper will work." Tommy frowned. Why did Jake usually wear a swimsuit? "Now," Janet said as she set him down on the tiled kitchen floor. "Once you're in there, no using your hands. Mouth only!" She pointed to Tommy's lips. "Bite in, you win!"

"Win what?"

"The game, silly." Janet smiled and gave his diapered bottom a gratuitous pat. "No cheating!"

"There's a lotta apples if I'm just trying to get one."

"It's supposed to be fun. Just relax!"

"Sorry," Tommy put on a sheepish air. "Must be the fact that I'm a teenager, not a baby!" Janet's eyes met his and then moved up and down his body , as if to draw attention to his slightly bowlegged stance due to wearing nothing but a diaper. "Ugh." He muttered. "Is there a time limit?"

"Nope, splash around like you were doing in the tub."

"You scared me." Tommy muttered.

"Aw, I didn't mean to. Eric told me you knew I was coming."

"Not my fault you believed him."

"Alright, let's bob for some apples, Tommy!" Janet said. He had a feeling she was looking forward to recording him splashing around like an idiot. "Do you want a boost or can you climb in all on your own?"

"Climb in." Tommy muttered, feeling foolish when he realized too late that he should have just done it rather than answer the question. He stepped over the low barrier and immediately slipped in his distraction. Sploosh!

"Well, that's getting into it!" Janet said, retrieving the apple that had been blasted out. "Tommy tsunami! Tsu-Tommy!"

"Now I'm wet." Janet laughed.

"That's not the kind of wet I meant, Tsu-Tommy!"

"So, I just gotta get an apple?"

"Hands behind your back! You have to use your mouth. Or" she reached down and tickled Tommy's foot, producing another smaller tsunami. "It'd be really impressive if you did it with your feet." Tommy put his hands behind his back. This should be quick.

The apples proved much more difficult to catch than he had thought. Grabbing an apple in a basin was one thing, but with a whole pool, they were able to escape him over and over again. He gave chase, slipping, falling, and splashing. Every time he tried to use a hand to steady himself, Janet made him return it to behind his back.

"This is impossible." He bemoaned.

"You've gotten so close, Tommy!" Janet reassured him. "It's a shame your brother and Jake didn't stick around to see this. You're adorable!" Tommy groaned and went back in, though all the water was beginning to weigh on him as more and more got in his diaper. This would almost be easier if I was naked, Tommy thought. Or in a swimsuit. That made more sense.

Worse, the splashing and various other watery sounds were conspiring with the water he had drank to wage war upon his bladder. He paused, wondering what the rules were for taking a bathroom break.

"Keep going!" Ok, Tommy told himself. Get the apple and then we'll find a way to the bathroom. He looked down at his now thoroughly waterlogged diaper. I am not peeing this thing. "Keep going!" Tommy lunged and an apple spun away, bobbing along almost mockingly. He growled in frustration. I'm gonna be here for forever!

Well, if there's all this water, I guess I can pee while trying to catch- he charged forward, even sliding a bit until he reached the far wall of the pool. There was nearly more water on the floor around the pool than the pool itself.

"So close! Keep those hands behind your back." Tommy glared at the apple nearest him, imagining it had Janet's smarmy face. Why did I ever think she was hot?

It was difficult to tell how long he spent trying to get an apple. His lips brushed them a few times, but he had no luck at all. His bladder ached and he had to face the inevitable.

Janet smiled as she watched Tommy flop around in the water. He was such a little cutie. Such a serious face as he tried again and again to get an apple. Janet remembered Jake always being exhausted by the time he got one and she had a feeling Tommy would be exactly the same way. Tommy suddenly froze in the middle of the pool. Janet wondered for half a second if he was just particularly strategizing, but even with his back to her, she knew what he was doing.

"Needed a change before dinner anyway, but I guess that's good too." She eyed the water around his very full diaper, wondering if it would develop a yellowish tinge. "I was going to wash the apple anyway." She said to herself.

With his bladder lightened, Tommy had renewed vigor. He pounced again and again with increasing abandon.

"Aha!" He declared proudly as he settled on his knees, apple held triumphantly in his teeth. Janet giggled and clapped for him.

“I know I said there isn’t any prize, but I think you won a fresh diaper.” Just that once, Tommy did not argue with her.

Tommy sighed in resignation as he got to his feet, freshly in yet another diaper. Where was she getting all these? How had he managed to get so many changes? He shuddered at the thought of another one, but surely Janet would keep insisting. What could she be planning next?

“Hungry?”

“I guess?”

“Perfect. It’s getting to be dinner time, isn’t it?”

“Uh” Tommy realized he didn’t know what time it even was.

“While I’m cooking, I want you to stay out of trouble, okie dokie?” That made it sound like she might finally be leaving him alone. He could- “No sneaking upstairs or going anywhere I can’t see you.” She picked him up. “So you can go in the living room, the dining room, or the kitchen. Those three” she held up three fingers. “Three places. One, two, three!”

“Keep it up and I’ll go to a fourth place. Outside and away from here.” His clothes, well, the clothes he had worn earlier, were still in the living room. He could go for help.

“We need to check on our pumpkins, don’t we?”

Almost before Tommy even knew what was going on, Janet had carried him outside to look at their pumpkins, and he was only in a diaper!

"Still here." He observed, hoping this would be a brief trip outside.

"It's only been a little bit, but sometimes, squirrels eat them! Did you know that?"

"No, actually."

"You'll need to watch the pumpkins, won't you?" Back inside they went. "Where do you usually eat your dinner?"

"At the tab- in my room." Janet smirked as she set him down.

"You think this is my first time babysitting? You've met my brother."

"I have." Agreed Tommy gravely.

"Let's just see here." Tommy watched Janet walk around the table. What was she looking for? "Oh! The closet!" As soon as she opened it, Tommy knew what she had been looking for.

"That thing's ancient!" He protested as she pulled the highchair out.

"I'm sure it was Eric's before it was yours, but ah!" She pointed at the plastic tray where Tommy was scrawled in crayon. "See? Knew it was yours." Tommy could have explained to her how at the age of three, he had had a fit about Eric getting his highchair, going so far as to write his name on it to try to prove it was his, not the baby's, but he knew it was pointless.

Tommy did not like that a highchair was becoming just as much of a yearly tradition as being babysat against his will. This year though was different. This highchair was his highchair. He had an advantage. Sure, it had restrained him as a baby, but surely Tommy the teenager could escape. He just needed Janet to leave him alone.

"Hmm." Janet looked around the dining room once Tommy was acceptably contained by the highchair. "Let's find you some paper and crayons so you don't color more on the tray, hmm?"

"You could grab my Switch from the den." Tommy

suggested. "I can play Mariokart or Capri-"

"Brain rotting!" Janet dismissed. Tommy rolled his eyes. "Is there anything that doesn't make you a grumpasaurus?"

"Yeah, not being diapered."

"Oh, so you wanna be a nakee little baby?"

"That's not what I meant at all. I am a teenager! You can't keep doing this to me! I... I..." he growled in frustration as Janet returned as promised with paper and loose crayons that seemed like they had been chewed on as often as they'd been used for their intended purpose.

"I'm not touching those!"

"Maybe you will once boredom sets in." Janet tousled his hair. "Cutie little grump a rump. I'll be right back with dindins."

"Do not call it that." Tommy worried what exactly she was making that could be called 'dindins'. As soon as she disappeared, he pushed his worry aside. He wouldn't be here to eat it. All he had to do was get out of the highchair, then dash upstairs. He would lock his door and refuse to come out! Janet wouldn't know the trick for unlocking the door, after all, the same trick that had gotten him stuck like this in the first place.

If memory served, the release for the tray was behind him, just out of reach for the highchair's occupant. Good thing I'm a lot smarter than a baby. He pushed against the tray to see if

it had any give. He felt like he had gained an inch or so, so he moved on to try to flip over in the seat to get a better look at what was behind him. It was slow going, especially when he had to quickly look busy when Janet came into the room to deliver his sippy cup.

"You're really not coloring?"

"I'm finding ways to entertain myself." One side of Janet's mouth moved upward as if she was wondering what he meant by that.

"Well, just as long as you're being good. This guy's got wheels, you know." She walked back into the kitchen, melodramatically poking her head back around as if she might catch him in some naughty act that he had started in the last tenth of a second.

Tommy squirmed his way back around, grinning as he spied the release button. So long highchair, he almost said as he reached down and pushed it. Nothing happened. He pushed it again, but he could feel the tray pressed up against his back and the very top of his diaper. There was a button on both sides! He slumped back into the chair in defeat.

"All done fidgeting?" Janet asked, effortlessly removing the tray to get him better situated before clicking it back into place.

"I guess."

"Good, cuz you have a sippy to drink and dinner's nearly done. You're not vegetarian, are you?" That seemed like a

strange question to ask someone you thought belonged in diapers.

"No." Janet nodded.

"Nuggies for my spicy nugget'll be done in a jiffy!" She once again poked her head out of the kitchen. "With smiley potatoes!" While Tommy wished he had managed to escape, he couldn't find any reason to hate chicken nuggets.

Dinner came with a large amount of ketchup as if Janet was daring him to get messy. He took care to eat almost fastidiously cleanly just to spite her.

"Such a little gentleman!" She praised. "You know to be careful when you're not wearing your bib."

As if she was deliberately trying to up the ante, Janet brought out the apple Tommy had caught, sliced into segments, along with even more caramel than there had been ketchup. He wondered just what it looked like from her perspective to watch him take twenty minutes to slowly eat the apple and caramel.

Despite his efforts, there were still red ketchup drips and a few streaks of caramel on the front of his diaper. He braced himself for another completely unnecessary diaper change, but Janet simply had him drink his water while she took a wet paper towel to his crotch. He jumped in surprise, nearly choking on his water, when she blew a raspberry into his inner thigh.

Tommy was worried this would lead into another tickling, but

Janet had seemed to mellow. They moved to the living room where she made Tommy sit with his legs spread eagle as they played a game of rolling a ball back and forth.

"Gentle!" Janet said softly as he tried to push it past her, if only for a break from the tedium. Back and forth the ball went, Janet not even pausing to check her phone when it chirped.

"Can we-"

"Quiet voice."

"Can we do something else?"

"Not yet." Janet cooed, pushing the ball back toward him. He learned quickly to catch it or it would run into his diaper each and every time. He wondered why Janet had such accuracy, but he supposed the white of the diaper against the dark carpet made for an easy target. She didn't sit with her legs spread and her leggings weren't nearly as noticeable. Her legs are nice though, Tommy thought. He really wished it was easier to reframe these Halloweens as something more than they were. The way his friends talked, it should be the easiest thing in the world to. Yeah, but a diaper's not anything except embarrassing.

Back and forth, back and forth. Janet seemed to be waiting for something. Back and forth, back and forth. Maybe I can just stand up? Back and forth, back and forth. Tommy stifled a yawn and nearly missed the ball as it hit his puffy crotch.

"I think someone's sleepy."

"Nuh-ahhhh!" His poorly-timed denial allowed a yawn to escape.

"Alright, buddy. I think it's pajama time."

"It's not even dark out." He looked to the window, amazed that the sun had gone much lower than he had thought. Wasn't dinner super early?

"We've had a busy, busy day," Janet picked him up and another yawn escaped. "So what do you wear for jammies?"

"I don't."

"Okay, we'll go nothing but your diaper." Janet said. "But I think a warm, snuggly blanket is the best plan."

"Stop! I'm not going to bed!"

"There's that second wind." Janet said knowingly. "But you'll crash once you're cozy as a posy." Tommy struggled, but, like always, Janet would not be deterred once her mind was made up.

"Let me out!" Tommy whined as she held him in her arms, wrapped up in a soft green blanket.

"Shh" was all she said, rocking him back and forth in the same rhythm as the ball had been going. He struggled, but it was no use. Maybe it wasn't all bad. This meant Halloween was over, which meant another year free of Janet. By this time next year, he would make sure he would not be home. Maybe even make friends in another town so I can be... he dozed off, unable to fight off the sleepiness a moment longer.