

Tim wandered onto the studio lot. His auburn hair was slicked back and his khakis and deep blue polo shirt were clean and neatly pressed. Tucked under his arm, as per usual, were copies of his resume and headshots. This was going to be it. This was his chance to get his big break and get on T.V. and get famous and maybe even get into movies within the next four to five years...

Okay, yeah, this was the kind of thing he said to himself all the time...but...but....

But this was an audition for something outside of community theater! This was an audition that required him to talk and not just linger in the background! And most importantly of all, Tim really needed this.

Disney had officially run out of good ideas and were now doing a spin off of a spin off of one of their old shows: "Cory in the Kitchen". This time, Kyle Massey was playing Cory- the kid from That's So Raven without the psychic powers- but he's grown up and a chef. Yeah...not great. It was purported to contain as much if not more of the standard lowbrow mugging, nonsensical meandering plots involving cartoonish schemes, and over the top slapstick that made Disney Channel Sitcoms...Disney Channel Sitcoms.

At least it was T.V., Tim reasoned. Disney Channel standards meant he wouldn't have to try very hard to be "good", and this was a speaking part. Tim's demo reel had made it so he was auditioning for the part of Cory's bumbling sous chef, Doug. No way would the inept comic relief character be cut after the pilot. If nothing else this was Tim's chance to get a regular paycheck.

It was either this, Tim knew, or finally break down and get that job at the phone company call center. What happens to a dream deferred? It goes into a cramped room filled with cubicles and tries to up-sell strangers on their latest wireless plan and internet bundle.

He walked into the front of the office. The room was oddly vacant, truth be told. That was odd. Tim had been thrilled to make it this far, but he was suddenly worried when he saw the empty waiting room. Most nobodies would kill to play C-List actor's sidekick.

The young man looked at his phone. Was he very, very early or very, very, late? According to his phone, he was right on time.

"Excuse me," he called out. "Can anyone help me?"

The reception window opened and a young woman with neat blonde hair poked her head out.
“Hi there! Can I help you?”

“Is this where the audition for Cory in the Kitchen is?” Tim asked.

He might as well have been speaking ancient Sumerian. “Cory in the Kitchen?” the receptionist asked.

Tim pulled up the confirmation email he’d been sent, complete with date and time and showed it to the receptionist. “Newest Disney pilot...?”

The blonde lady frowned, not out of anger or confusion but out of awkward sadness. “I hate to tell you this, but I think you’ve been scammed.”

“What?!” Tim’s mouth felt dry and his pulse picked up, beginning to panic.

She turned his phone back around and showed him. “It’s got the logo and mouse ears and everything, but look at the sender. Disney isn’t supposed to have a ‘k’ in it and is supposed to end with a ‘y’ not a double ‘e’.” Tim blinked and the world went silent for a second, like right after a grenade goes off. “I think you got pranked, hun.”

Tim snatched “How did I not catch that?”

“Address is wrong too,” the receptionist added. “Right street numbers, wrong zip code. The place you’re looking for doesn’t exist.”

“But...but...but...my GPS led me here.” Tim’s voice was coming out as a squeak. His world was crumbling before him. Failed audition after failed audition...and now this. This was a wake up call. He wasn’t cut out for this. “Excuse me...” he covered his face to try and hide his flushed face and glassy eyes “I need a minute.”

Tim quick-walked over to a wall of chairs and sat down, taking an intense interest in the floor space between his shoes. This couldn’t be happening. This couldn’t be happening! How stupid could he be? How desperate? How gullible?

A kind hand gave him a tissue. His nose was running along with his mind. "Thank you," he said, wiping away tears and snot in that order.

"Actor?" the receptionist asked.

Tim nodded. "Sorta...I'm trying."

"Yeah. Happens all the time, here," the receptionist told him. "People come here all the time looking for their big break. Thinking that they're getting their big break." Tim couldn't bear to make eye contact, but he saw the receptionist's shadow slump down and its shoulders sag right besides his. "But instead they take a closer look and realize that the email came from Universal with a 'Y' or Werner Bros instead of Warner Brothers."

"Or Dis-knee," Tim added.

"Yeah." the receptionist said. "It's just as much a prank on us as it is on you all." She sighed, sounding defeated. "I've kind of gotten used to it by now."

Tim was shaking his head. "Yeah. Me too, I guess." They sat there for a beat before he remembered his manners. "What do you guys do here?"

"Straight to home motion capture films."

The struggling actor sat up a little straighter. "Motion capture? Like computer cartoons? Like Andy Serkis?"

The receptionist sat up a little straighter too. "More advanced than what Andy Serkis works with. Less body suits and more sophisticated cameras. No need for blue screen. We film live with practical sets and wardrobe so the actors have something to react to, and then animate it in post."

"Sounds like the old rotoscope tricks they did for the early Disney cartoons."

The receptionist smiled, impressed. "You know your stuff." Tim blushed a little bit. "Hey, this is just an idea, how would you like to make a little money today? We just had a walkout this morning, and could use you for a part."

Tim felt something gnawing at the back of his brain. "I don't know. I know about this stuff in theory. I'm not very experienced."

"That's fine. No training required."

"I haven't read a script."

"You won't need to."

Fuck. Another extra non-speaking role. "Oh."

"We're going for a mostly improv style. We're testing equipment and tracking capability as much as acting. We just need someone who can think on their feet. Being cute helps too."

Tim brightened. "Cute?" The receptionist didn't say anything to that. Just shrugged. "Um. Okay. I could use the work." Then he thought to ask, "Does it pay?"

Blondie nodded. "One hundred and thirty five dollars for a day's work." Tim mulled it over in his brain. Not the regular paycheck he was hoping for, but not bad for a random prank. "That's just one day," she added. "If you gel well with us, we'll hire you back."

Tim arched an eyebrow. "Yeah?"

"Yeah. We've got a small but tight knit group. A kind of new age theater troupe. If you're a good fit for us, we'll take care of you."

Tim was intrigued. Tim was hopeful. To be honest, Tim was desperate. "How much?"

"Between twenty and thirty thousand a year."

The young actor exhaled. It wasn't Hollywood money but it was still good money. If he was being honest with himself, it might be comparable to playing an inept comedic relief on a doomed to fail Disney Channel Original. The idea beat the hell out of working for the phone company. "Who do I need to talk to?"

"You're talking to her. I'm the casting director."

“You’re are?”

The blonde woman smiled. “What? Did you think I was a secretary or something?”

“Receptionist,” Tim admitted. “Why’d you come to the window and talk to me?”

“You asked for help.” she said. She took his hand and stood up. “What’s your name, cutie?”

“Tim.”

“Come on, Tim. I’ll get you to Wardrobe.”

Tim looked at himself and frowned. “Are you sure this is the right costume?” It was at least the seventh time he’d asked, not that he’d been counting... His costume consisted of black baggy shorts that stopped just above his knee, a yellow t-shirt, a red baseball cap and matching sneakers.

It was embarrassing. He couldn’t get a good look at himself, but he knew he looked like a total doofus. The Baseball cap for whatever reason had a little propeller on top. The sneakers didn’t have laces, just Velcro. The shorts didn’t have pockets. It looked like something a kindergartener, no, a pre-kindergartener would wear.

“You look great,” the casting director assured him. “Very cute. Just like your headshots.” Tim had unfortunately assumed that the blonde lady had meant sexy instead of adorable. Tim sighed. A paycheck was a paycheck. Even a day’s pay meant something besides ramen for dinner tonight and he could afford internet for another month. A regular gig meant paying rent without borrowing more from his parents or going to a call center.

And from the looks of it, this place might just have money to burn. They were on a soundstage, but the production company had gone to absurd lengths to make it seem like they were in a stereotypical suburban neighborhood. The walls were painted masterfully to seem like an outdoor sky and a surrounding neighborhood. And this place might not have been Disney, but it definitely knew how to use forced perspective. Tim had had to do a lap around the perimeter just to convince himself that his eyes were playing tricks on him (or that something was playing tricks on his eyes)

Even the lights in the rafters were bright and warm enough, that Tim could have sworn he was outside on a hot summer afternoon. The centerpiece of this soundstage was an entire house, front and back lawn included. It wasn’t until he’d experimented with plucking a few blades of

grass that he confirmed the stuff was some kind of fancy astroturf. There was a playground in the backyard, and circling the house, he'd gotten enough of a view to know that it wasn't just a set piece.

This was crazy. This was Tommy Wiseau levels of intricate and wasteful. Then again, according to the Disaster Artist, Tommy Wiseau was more than a terrible writer, actor, and director: He was also loaded and could somehow afford ridiculous stuff like filming outdoor scenes in doors.

This lot wasn't using simple things like basic inside sets and separate exterior shots. This place, it seemed, could build an entire house in a soundstage and go to the trouble of making it look like it wasn't. And, if the casting director was to be believed, then pieces of this would be turned into a kind of motion capture animation. This kind of thing took Wiseau level money and Wiseau level crazy.

Yeah. They could afford him. Tim could swallow his pride and take their money. Even with the behind the scenes look at the money sink that was *The Room*, that bomb still had things this place didn't.

Tim looked around. "Where's the recording equipment?" he asked. "The microphones and cameras and stuff?"

"Around," the blonde woman said. Tim was still having a hard time. "We've got little hidden cameras everywhere. They'll be honed in and record everything you say and do. You and your costar, both."

"Co-star?"

As if on cue, a woman came out of the house. She was that age that some women matured into- that ambiguous kind of beauty that could have been mid thirties to early fifties that no gambling man would have taken odds on. Long dark hair cascaded down her shoulders and thick black rimmed glasses framed her face. The woman had a certain maternal expression that Tim couldn't quite put his finger on that he found oddly attractive. In terms of stereotypes, she might not be beach babe anymore, but could definitely pass for a M.I.L.F.

Tim thought it odd that she came out of the house. He'd seen no hint of movement in the house, and he'd come in through a side entrance after changing into his ridiculous costume. Did she live in the fake house? Was it even a fake house if someone was living in it?

On the bright side, Tim no longer felt like an idiot. The dark haired lady wore a black dress, that while concealing, still managed to accentuate her breasts and hips. It might have been sexy if not for the alphabet print splattered all over the dress. The A's all looked vaguely like alligators, the M's looked like monkeys, and the D's had a pink doughnut glaze. Her dress wasn't just an

'Alphabet Dress' but looked more like a 'Baby's First Alphabet Dress.'

The not-quite Kindergarten teacher vibe the woman was given off was only enhanced by the white apron tied around her front, and oddly magnified by the green jeweled brooch she wore around her neck and the matching earrings. To top it all off, she wore a plain black pointed hat. She was Miss Frizzle from *Magic School Bus* meets Samantha Stephens from *Bewitched* and Tim couldn't help but feel oddly welcomed by it all.

That was the weird thing about costumes: They were bizarre until you were around other people wearing them. Then they were kind of fun. Maybe that's why cosplay was so popular these days. She looked like a weird kind of teacher-witch. He looked like a doofus manbaby. In other words, they looked like cartoon characters. He could work with this.

"Hello Cynthia!" the newcomer said to the casting director. Shit! It had been close to forty five minutes by this point, and Tim had yet to even ask the blonde lady her name.

The two women hugged. "Hello, Auntie Marie," the casting director said before ending the embrace. "Ready to go to work?"

"Ah-ah-ah," the witchy woman said. "First thing's first." She looked at Tim. "Who is this little cutie that I'll be working with?"

While she hadn't been talking directly to him, Tim felt obliged to speak up. "Nice to meet you, Miss Marie," Tim said. He extended his hand. Neither woman said anything. The casting director just looked off to the side, averting her gaze, while the lady in the witch getup just stared at him as his hand hung in the air.

It was almost like she expected something. Tim looked her in the eye, but a glare in her glasses was just enough to prevent him. Instead his eyes went a little lower. Her brooch seemed to flash a bit; glow even.

Tim dropped his hand. "I kind of just walked in off the street, but I've got some experience act-"

He was cut off as the woman practically engulfed him without warning. "Two things you should learn about me right off the bat, Timmy," she said. "The first thing is that I never shake hands. I hug."

Timmy? Ugh. Tim hated that nickname. He hadn't been Timmy since second grade. Something was off. "Wait," Tim squeaked out, still in the woman's grasp, "how did you know my-?"

"The second thing you should know is that my name is Auntie Marie," the witch lady interrupted again. Finally, she released her hug and Tim could breathe again. "You have to say the whole thing. It's like *The Weekend*, or *The Band Perry*. I'm Auntie Marie. Not Auntie. Not Marie. Nor

Miss Marie. Auntie Marie. Okay?

Tim nodded. "Yes, ma'am."

Playfully, the witch woman put her hands on her hips. "Yes...?"

"Yes, Auntie Marie."

Auntie Marie looked at him again. The glare from her glasses were gone, but Tim swore her brooch glowed again. She turned to Cynthia, the casting director and said, "Oh, I like him."

Both women broke out in laughter, leaving Tim bewildered. "Excuse me," Tim interrupted their cackling. "How did you know my name?"

The blonde lady raised her hand. "I told her while you were getting changed."

Oh. Oh yeah. That made sense. "So what are we going to be doing today?" Tim asked. His face started to flush, feeling silly for suspecting something was amiss.

"I'm the casting director, as well as director of photography." Cynthia explained. "And I'll also be helping with editing and animation, but that's in post."

Auntie Marie gestured to herself. "And I'm the lead writer, actor, and editor. I'll be playing the part of Auntie Marie, the helpful witch that is everyone's auntie."

"Uh-huh," Tim nodded. This was definitely a Tommy Wiseau situation. Had to be. "Why, auntie?" The woman just stared at him, her hands back on her hips, her eyebrow arched. "I mean...Why are you everyone's auntie, Auntie Marie?"

"Because the best part about being an auntie is that I get to play with the kids, but then give them back to their parents when we're all done."

Tim looked down at his costume. "And I'm a kid?" Duh! Of course he was. "I mean, I'm playing a kid?"

"You got it right the first time, Timmy." A thin smile shown on Auntie Marie's face.

"Auntie Marie's a bit of a method actor," Cynthia jumped in. "She almost never breaks character."

"I'm not playing a character."

Cynthia shrugged. "See what I mean?" Maybe this is why they had that walkout, today. She handed Tim an earpiece. "Put this in," she said. "This will let me communicate with you in case

there's some blocking issues or a better shot to be had from one of the hidden cameras.”

Auntie Marie turned her head to side and pointed to herself. “It also plays mood music.”

Tim put his ear piece in and blanched. “Mood music?”

“You know how shows and movies put in music to make something seem sillier or heavier? More emotional?” Cynthia asked

“Yeah?”

“That’s typically done in post, only. With these ear pieces you can kind of hear of the soundtrack of the film.”

“It’s a godsend” Auntie Marie said. “Knowing the soundtrack really informs your choices as an actor.”

“Kind of like how they piped in live music when filming Les Mis?” Tim asked.

Both Cynthia and Auntie Marie clapped their hands. “Exactly!” they said.

“I can see why you liked him,” Auntie Marie said to Cynthia. “Perfect for the part.”

Cynthia faced Tim. “Right. So first thing’s first. This is going to be mostly improvisation.” Tim nodded. He remembered this part. “We’re also going to try to get most of it in just one take.”

ONE TAKE?! The surprise and shock on his face must have shown, because both women took up comforting, non-threatening positions next to him.

“Timmy will be fine.” Auntie Marie chimed in. “I’ve got a good feeling about him.”

Tim swallowed. “It’s, Tim.” he corrected Auntie Marie.

“Tim is the actor.” Auntie Marie replied. “Timmy is the child who has come to visit his dear Auntie Marie while his parents are out shopping.” She booped him on the nose with the tip of her finger.

“Right,” Tim remembered. “Method acting.”

Cynthia turned around and started walking out of the sound stage. “I’ll be headed up to the control room. I’ll let you know in your earpiece when we’re ready to start.”

It took two long minutes for Cynthia to get ready. “So how many times have you...?”

Auntie Marie's finger pressed up against his lips. "Shush, dear. Let's use this time to get into character." Tim had to close his mouth and quietly nod his head to get Auntie Marie to remove it. And step back.

After two minutes, Cynthia's voice buzzed in Tim's earpiece. "Testing. Testing. I'm in the control room. Testing. Testing. Auntie Marie can you hear me?" The witch woman nodded and flashed a thumbs up in the air. "Roger that. Timmy? Can you hear me." Tim bristled at being called Timmy, but he gave a thumbs up, hoping the hidden cameras caught him.

"Things are good to go on this end." Cynthia said. "We'll do our first and hopefully only take in five, four, three..." the earpiece buzzed out. Auntie Marie finished the countdown silently on her fingers.

Two fingers.

One finger.

Action.

Once upon a time, there was a little baby boy, named Timmy. Timmy thought he was a big boy, but he was just pretending. Timmy was a great pretender. He liked to pretend that he slept in a big boy bed and that he could drink from a big boy cup and that he had a big boy job and big boy house. Timmy was so silly, he even pretended that his diapers were big boy undies and that he could use the big boy potty.

But Auntie Marie knew what to do. When Timmy came to visit her, she used her magic to dress him up in big boy clothes, a big boy T-shirt and a big boy hat, big boy shoes, and even big boy pants and undies.

"I'm so glad you could come and visit me, Timmy" Auntie Marie said.

"Me too!" Timmy said. He was so excited!

Auntie Marie pointed at the outfit she had magicked onto her nephew. "I love your big boy clothes."

Timmy gave Auntie Marie a big smile. "Me too! They're super neat!"

"I bet you're super proud that you're out of diapers and can use the big boy potty all by yourself."

"Um...yeah?" Timmy was confused because he couldn't actually remember having gone potty before. It had all been pretend up to this point, and even though Timmy was a very

good pretender, he wasn't so good as to pretend into memory something he didn't know how to do.

"I can't wait to see all the neat big boy things you can do now that you're a big boy, Timmy!"

Just then, Timmy heard a sound he'd never heard before. It was like the little tinkling of a bell. Timmy had to go potty. He'd never heard that tinkling little bell before because he'd never actually gone potty. When big boys and girls have to go potty, they hear the little tinkling of a bell that lets them know.

Do you sometimes hear the tinkling of a little bell, dearie?

No. Of course you don't. You're not big, either. Maybe you're just silly and pretending like Timmy was.

Timmy could only hear the tinkling sound because of Auntie Marie's magic. He wasn't really ready to be a big boy, and Auntie Marie was going to teach him just that.

"Um...Marie?" Timmy felt funny inside. He put his hands over his pee-pee place and squeezed hard. He'd never done that before! It didn't feel good at all!

"It's Auntie Marie, Timmy. Remember?"

"Auntie Marie..." Timmy said. "I have to...to..." Timmy didn't have the words. He'd never really asked anyone to go potty before. He was used to nice grown-ups like his Auntie Marie and his Mommy and Daddy and babysitters just checking his diaper to see if needed changing. If it got really bad, Timmy would cry and cry and cry until a grown-up changed him. But he'd never used his words like this before.

Auntie Marie decided to help Timmy. "You have to go pee-pee?"

Timmy blushed and nodded his head. He was so embarrassed because deep down he knew he wasn't a big boy. There's a fine line, little ones, between pretending and lying, and Timmy wasn't sure which one he was doing.

Auntie Marie took Timmy's hand. "Then let's go inside, quick," she said. "You can show me how good you are at going potty now that you're going potty." So she took his hand and led him inside.

Tim allowed himself to be led inside the faux suburban house. His head was on a swivel. Where was the bathroom? *Where was the bathroom?* He had to pee like a racehorse!

Yeah, he'd been vaguely aware of needing to pee when the hidden cameras started rolling, (and damn were they hidden), but it wasn't anything he couldn't hold or work through. Then he'd heard a little jingling sound in his ear piece and suddenly his bladder was in full overdrive. Tim couldn't think straight. His bladder had gone from a state of barely registering and might need to take a break in an hour or two to the feeling of being in an eight hour traffic jam and it was time to start searching the car for empty soda bottles if he didn't want to piss himself.

Auntie Marie was even worse: Asking him if he needed to pee as if he were a two year old and leading him into the house by the hand. Lady wasn't kidding about not breaking character and doing it all in one take. It had been so humiliating to have to play along, but the number one rule of improv was "yes, and..."

Hopefully there were no hidden cameras in the bathroom. That was against the law, wasn't it? Tim wasn't going to get the chance to find out. Instead of the bathroom, Tim was half dragged half led to the middle of what appeared to be a living room.

A T.V. sat across from a comfortable sofa, and in between the two pieces of furniture sat a potty. Not a toilet; a potty. A big plastic bowl to piss in. Had it been made of metal it might have been an old timey chamber pot or a large bedpan. This was made of thick blue plastic, like a cooler, and had a toilet seat with a splash guard in the front. The rim was decorated with cartoon bees, all smiling up at him, inviting him to sit on their stingers.

Auntie Marie gestured dramatically, theatrically like a Shakespearean actress past her prime. "I've got your big boy potty all set up! Ready"

Tim froze. They weren't...? Were they actually expecting...? Was he supposed to...? He shook his head and mouthed the word, "No."

"Or do you need Auntie Marie's help?" The witchy woman's broach seemed to glow green again.

"I can do it!" Tim yelled. "I mean, um. I'm a big boy!"

Damnit!

Legs pressed together to conceal his junk. As quick as he could, Tim slid his shorts and underwear down and lowered himself onto the potty. He was full to the point of bursting and had quickly past the point of caring.

JESUS IT WAS COLD! It was like all of those drawn on bees had decided he was their enemy and had stingers made of ice. Tim felt like he jumped an inch in the air right after sitting down.

“Cold?” Auntie Marie asked, her voice tinged with sympathy.

Tim nodded. “Uh-huh. A little.” That was a lie. It was A LOT cold.

“You haven’t been using the potty very long, so you’re not used to it. Diapers are much warmer, aren’t they, Timmy?”

Tim didn’t know how to respond to that. He hadn’t been in diapers since before he could remember. So instead he just averted his gaze. “Maybe…” he whispered.

“Show Auntie Marie what a big boy you are,” the witchy woman coaxed. “Just let it all out. I’ll be right here watching.”

Fuck. Those were the exact wrong words at the exact wrong moments. Tim had developed both a case of overactive bladder and shy bladder simultaneously. The seat was inhumanly cold and not warming up AND this stranger was staring at him.

Tim shut his eyes and tried to block out the world. All he had to do was relax his bladder and let nature take its course. Yeah. That was it. Just relax his bladder. Just stop the polar ice caps from melting. Just invent the cure for Ebola. That’s all he had to do. Easy as that.

“I...I...can’t,” he mumbled.

Auntie Marie stuck out her bottom lip. “Awww, that’s too bad. Maybe it was a false alarm.” She reached out her hand and took Tim’s arms, pulling him to his feet. “False alarms happen to little boys who aren’t used to the potty yet.”

“But I’m a big boy,” Tim said without meaning to.

“Of course you are.” Auntie Marie winked at him. She stepped to the side and pinched his cheek, condescendingly.

It wasn’t a false alarm. Tim still desperately needed to pee. Improv be damned. They’d just have to do this in two takes. Time to break character. Pants still around his ankles, Tim asked “Can I use your...?”

Before Timmy could finish his sentence, a new sound came through his ear piece. It sounded like a xylophone playing a tuneless song. It wasn’t tuneless, however, just random. If it had had lyrics, they would have gone something like “I’m a big kid look what I can Doe a deer a female deer, ray a drop of golden Sun, Sun, Mr. Golden Sun. Please shine down on me!”

Little Timmy had an accident! Just like a baby, Timmy piddled all over the carpet and

down his legs while he stood still. Even though he'd been sitting on the potty just a few seconds before, not a single drop had made it into the potty. Timmy was used to wearing diapers and just didn't know how to go potty, even though he was really good at pretending. He wasn't ready to be a big boy.

"I'm so sorry!" Timmy said after he'd gotten all his pee-pees out. "I didn't mean to! I swear! I didn't mean to." Timmy looked like he was about to cry. He normally only cried like that when he got an owie or when his diaper leaked.

Going tinkle all over Auntie Marie's carpet and down his legs was like the biggest leakiest diaper he'd ever had. Timmy hated it. Deep down, Timmy wished he could admit that he was a baby, but he just couldn't stop pretending. He didn't know how.

"I didn't mean to," Timmy kept saying. "I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to!"

Auntie Marie looked cross. "You didn't mean to...?"

Then Timmy remembered his manners. "I didn't mean to, Auntie Marie!"

Auntie Marie patted her nephew on the head. "Of course you didn't, Timmy," she said. "You haven't been potty trained for that long. And little boys still have accidents sometimes." This time, Timmy didn't argue and say he was a big boy. He knew better.

"What do I do now?" Timmy asked.

Auntie Marie looked at the mess Timmy had made. "I'll clean this up," she said. "But I don't want you making another mess in my house." She reached into her magical apron pocket and pulled out a pull-up. "I'll need you to wear one of these just in case."

"But I don't...I mean I can't...I don't wanna wear diapers!" Timmy whined. Auntie had already grabbed a packet of wipes from her magical apron and was wiping down Timmy's pee-pee covered legs.

Auntie Marie popped open the Pull-Up and like a good boy, Timmy stepped in. "It's not a diaper. It's a Pull-Up," she told Timmy. "You can still pull it on and off like your big boy underwear, but it will soak up any accidents you make."

"I'm not gonna have another accident," Timmy said in his best pretend big boy voice. "I pwomise...I mean, promise!"

Auntie Marie shushed Timmy by putting her finger to his lips. "I know, Timmy. I know," she said. "That's why you'll only be wearing it just in case. You used to wear these all the time when you were first learning to use the potty, remember?"

Timmy looked unsure of himself. That's because he'd never worn a Pull-Up before. Just like you, dearie, he was only pretending. "Uh-huh...?" Timmy said.

Auntie Marie pulled the new pull-ups onto Timmy since he still didn't know how to dress himself. Then she reached into her magic apron pocket and pulled out a juice box. "Here, Timmy. Have some punch. You'll love it."

Timmy took the juice box and watched as Auntie Marie put the straw in for him. "Um...okie. Auntie Marie." He smiled super big for her as she led him out to her backyard.

"You can play on my playground while I clean up your accident. I'll be right back. Okay?"

Timmy nodded, really pretending to be a little boy with all his might. "Okie dokie, Auntie Marie, I'll be the bestest little boy I can be and play all by myself."

Auntie Marie patted him on the head. "I know you will. But finish your juice, first. It's important."

With a swat on his butt, Timmy stumbled out into the faux backyard, juice box in hand. He was barefoot, wearing a pull-up instead of his studio issued costume, and was alone without any other actor to play off of. Timmy would have expected some kind of direction from Cynthia in the control room, but he could hear only the faintest of static coming from his ear piece.

He didn't really want to be out here, but Auntie Marie told him to play out here. He couldn't say no to Auntie Marie, however. She had a presence about her that for some reason he could not cross. When she talked he just wanted to make her happy. Oh yeah, and she was the lead in this improv scenario.

Not knowing what else to do he sat down on the nearby swing set. It was a rinky dink little thing. A one seater. But Auntie Marie probably didn't have more than one kid visit at any given time. The only other swing didn't count in Timmy's mind. It was a harness seat; the kind used for babies.

Speaking of Timmy's mind, something else was gnawing at him. Didn't he hate being called Timmy? Wasn't it Timothy? Time? No. That felt wrong. Then again, a lot of this felt wrong. Sipping on his juice box, Timmy lifted up his shirt and stared down at the pull-up he was wearing.

A cartoon bee was resting on his pubic area, sitting on a potty and giving him a smiling thumbs up. Further below near his crotch was a little honeycomb sketch. Timmy wasn't experienced

with kids, but he knew from enough random commercials and cultural osmosis that if he had an accident, that honeycomb would fade away at the first sign of wetness.

There wouldn't be any wetness, Timmy knew. He was a big boy. No, a grown-up....a big boy. No point in thinking about the impossible. When Timmy's straw started gurgling, he let the juice box drop to the ground. If he was supposed to play, he'd just improvise and play. It might not be very exciting, but it was what he'd been hired to do.

He rose from the swing and climbed the nearby slide. It wasn't anything fancy, just an inclined plane with a ladder. Three feet tall at most. Experimentally, he climbed the ladder, feeling rather silly and exposed once he got up to the top.

"This is a closed set," he reminded himself. It didn't matter that he was half naked and wearing what was functionally a diaper without the little tapes. This was just acting. This was just pretend.

Taking a deep breath, Timmy sat down on the slide, grabbed the railing at the top, and PUSHED.

The trip was short and fast, his bare feet hitting the ground only a second or so later. But he liked it.

He liked it! It was a rush. Timmy got up and ran around to the ladder so he could climb the three feet again. The second time, he slid down with his arms up in the air. The third time he picked his legs up and skidded into the grass bottom first. He'd lost count by the time he started going down face first like Superman. At some point he'd lost his hat, but he didn't care. Superman didn't wear a hat, so why should he?

It had become a weird kind of game within a game. How many different ways, Timmy wondered how many different positions and poses he could strike going down the slide.

Barrel roll.

Backwards.

Sideways.

Standing up? Could he do it standing up? Stay on his feet the entire way down?

Timmy never got to find out.

Just as Timmy was climbing to the top of the slide and figuring out how he could do it, he heard that strange music in his earpiece. Again, it was a cut and paste of different xylophone music,

mixed with some kazoo for good measure. There were no words, but the lyrics in Timmy's mind seemed to go, "Mommy WOW! I'm-a-big-kid Tomorrow! Tomorrow! I love ya, Tomorrow! You're only a Day-O! Day-O! Daylight come and me wanna go Home, home on the range!"

He felt his pull-up warming before he felt his bladder releasing. Lifting his shirt back up to his belly-button, he stared. "MARIE!" he screamed. "AUNTIE MARIE!"

The back door flung open, and in a blur, Auntie Marie dashed out. "Timmy! What's wrong honey! Are you stuck on the slide, little boy?"

From his perch on the slide Timmy felt every bit the cat stuck up in a tree. He looked down at Auntie Marie, her kind, reassuring face looking up at him. Already her arms were reaching out to help him down. Something was different about her.

Her black dress no longer had the animal alphabet motif on it. Instead, the black cloth was dotted with pictures of safety pins, storks, and rattles. Baby stuff. What hadn't changed was her pretty face, or her glowing green brooch. "Let's get you down from there, Timmy."

"Okay..." he sniffed.

With Auntie Marie grabbing him by the waist, Timmy was amazed as she lifted him off the top of the slide and placed him on her hip. His amazement was short-lived. He felt a certain warm squishiness between his legs as Auntie Marie pressed him to her hips.

Without warning, the witchy woman pulled open one of the leg holes on his pull-up and stuck two of her fingers inside. Timmy could only freeze in embarrassment as he, big boy that he was, had his pants checked like a baby. The fact that he'd wet his pants had only made it worse.

"Ooooh," Auntie Marie said. "That's why you were crying. You wet your diaper."

That only made baby Timmy cry all the harder. "It's not a diaper," he said. "I'm wearing a pull-up."

Auntie Marie bounced him on her hip and rubbed his back. "It is a pull-up. But you used it like a diaper, sweetie. You haven't been in pull-ups very long. I don't think you're ready to be a big boy just yet. I think it's time we put you back in diapers. Won't that be nice?"

Timmy didn't think that was nice. He'd spent so long pretending he was a big boy, that he'd gotten fussy when Auntie Marie had told him the game was over. But being a grown-up who knew what was best, Auntie Marie just carried the fussy boy back into her

living room and laid him down on a changing pad on her couch.

Reaching into her magic apron pocket, she pulled out a pacifier and put in Timmy's mouth. Like a good baby, which is what Timmy was deep down, Timmy started sucking on the binky. He stopped fussing a little bit.

Pinning him down with one hand, Auntie Marie reached again into her magic apron pocket and got the diaper bag that Timmy's parents had left for him when he got. Timmy was still feeling very silly, saying things like "Mo," and "Iya ik oy", and squirming all over the changing pad. That didn't stop Auntie Marie, though. She'd changed lots of little babies and Timmy was no exception.

In no time at all, Auntie Marie ripped open the sides of the old yucky wet pull-up, wiped Timmy down with more baby wipes, slid a fresh poofy diaper underneath him and put it on. "There we go," she said, as she taped up Timmy's brand new diaper. "I bet that feels soooo much better."

It did.

"Mmm..hmmm?" Timmy agreed. He still felt very silly and blushed. It was hard to pretend to be a big boy when everyone could see his diaper.

Auntie Marie picked Timmy up and put him in his playpen that had replaced the potty in the middle of the living room. "Now you play here with your toys. Auntie Marie has to tidy up around the house"

Fever dream. That was the most logical explanation. Fever dream.

Any minute now, Timmy would wake up, and he'd be sick as a dog, but he'd be in his house, and not at his Auntie Marie's. He didn't even have an Auntie Marie, did he?

He was in a diaper for Chrissakes! Now all the cartoon bees on his waist had diapers on too. No wetness indicator this time. As far as the diaper was concerned, as far as Auntie Marie was concerned, wetness was a 'when' not an 'if'.

He'd thought the pull-ups were thick. The pull-ups had felt like he'd put on several pairs of big boy undies at once. This diaper was like there was a pillow taped around his hiney! And now he was in a playpen, surrounded by plastic blocks and sucking on a pacifier!

Improv be darned, this needed to stop. This wasn't worth all the noodles in the world! Leaning forward, Timmy gripped the rail of the playpen and pulled himself up. He was able to stand for about as long as it took for a single trip down the slide in the backyard.

Within two seconds he'd plopped back down, his diaper more than cushioning his fall. His tummy started making funny sounds. "Affi Mree!" he called. Looking down past his nose, Timmy only now realized that he'd forgotten to spit out his paci. "AUNTIE MARIE!" he repeated his call.

Auntie Marie came rushing to the playpen to see what was the matter. "Yes, Timmy?" she said. "What's wrong? Do you want a blankie for a nap?"

"No!" Timmy pouted with his arms crossed over his chest. "I want out of this playpen!"

Auntie Marie giggled at the silly baby. "But a playpen is a perfectly good place for a baby like you,"

Timmy wasn't done pretending yet. He grabbed the bars of his playpen and leaned on them so that he could pretend he was walking. "Let me out!" he shouted. "I'm not a baby! I'm not! I'm not!"

Auntie Marie giggled at the silly baby. Now it was Auntie Marie's turn to say silly things. "Yes," she said. "You're a big boy. That's why I'm babysitting you."

"You're not..."

"That's why you're wearing a diaper."

"But you...?"

"That's why you were sucking on your paci."

"That's not..."

"And that's why you're holding yourself up in a playpen. Those all sound like really big boy things."

"None of those are big boy things!" Timmy yelled, not realizing how silly he sounded.

Auntie Marie gave her nephew a kiss on the forehead. "But you're doing all of them." she said. "You're doing something else too."

Timmy looked back over his shoulder. He heard the funniest noises coming from his diaper. He was already in the middle of doing something that big boys didn't ever...ever

do. That's when he stopped pretending.

"Baby shark-doo-doo-doo-doo-doo, Baby shark doo-doo-doo-doo-doo-doo, Where are you? We've got some work to do now. Scooby Dooby Doo Where is baby, where is baby, here he is, here he is!"

The music! It had started again. When had it started again? Why hadn't he taken the earpiece out?! It was too late, now, Timmy realized. He could feel himself slipping. Not just his physical footing, but his mental footing as well. He fell back down, the inside of his diaper warmer and mushier but no less comfortable. He didn't want it to end like this, he didn't want it to end. But like a drug overdose, there was a sense of euphoria enveloping him. He could love or hate it, but he couldn't fight the good feelings that were happening to him.

Above him, standing at the edge of his playpen, Auntie Marie smiled and cooed. Timmy wasn't sure what she was saying now. Either she wasn't speaking English, or Timmy couldn't understand much English anymore. She was waving her hands all funny, too. That made him smile. Auntie Marie smiled back at Timmy. Her green necklace thing was still glowing all pretty.

So pretty.

So pretty.

He laid back, sucked his thumb, grabbed his toesies, and let the last of his big boy thoughts out into his diaper.

It felt nice.

"Good baby."

Timmy understood those words. That was good. Those were some of the few words he'd need to understand from now on.

"Good baby," Auntie Marie told Timmy. Timmy had finally stopped pretending. "I knew you were a little baby who was just pretending. Your Mommy and Daddy think so, too."

"Mama," Timmy said. "Dada." Timmy was happy. It was good to stop pretending and just be himself.

DING-DONG!

Auntie Marie walked over to the front door. "You're right on time!"

“Auntie Marie!” Mommy and Daddy greeted. All the grown-ups hugged.

Auntie Marie let Timmy’s Mommy and Daddy inside. “Mama! Dada!” Timmy called.

Mommy and Daddy were so happy to see that Timmy had finally stopped pretending to be a grown up and was back where he belonged. “We’re so happy that you stopped pretending to be a big boy.” Mommy said. “Now there are so many other games you can play.”

“And we’ll be right there to play them with you and take care of you,” Daddy said. He lifted Timmy out of the playpen. “Forever and ever.”

“Aaaaaand cut,” Cynthia said over the earpieces. “We have more than enough footage for our purposes.”

“Thank you, Cynthia,” Auntie Marie said. “We’ll take it from here.”

The adults all took their earpieces out that had been informing them of Timmy’s progress. The man-baby’s mother helped take out his ‘special’ one that had helped speed up the process.

“Thank you so much,” Timmy’s mom said. “We couldn’t have done this without you.”

Timmy’s father added, “We had no idea that our boy was so deeply unhappy and unfit to be an adult. If you hadn’t found us and showed us that informational video, we might never have realized the truth about him.” He bounced Timmy up on his hip a little bit.

Timmy only giggled and cooed at the grown-ups talking, and how nice he felt all over.

The witchy woman gave the man-baby a gentle pat on his head and a cute little pinch on the cheek. “It was no trouble, at all,” she said. “Easy, really. It’s almost like he wanted it. I think deep down inside he knew the truth.”

“Of course he did,” Timmy’s mom replied. “You showed us that, remember?”

A wry smile came across Auntie Marie. “Of course…” Her brooch flashed once more, not that anyone consciously noticed it or understood its significance.

Timmy’s mother’s nose wrinkled. “Speaking of memory,” she said, “I remember what that smell means.” She sidled up next to her husband and child and pulled back the latter’s diaper so she could take a look inside. “Yup. Thought so.”

“She who smelt it deals with it,” Dad joked.

“Oh you!” Mom scoffed. She took her big baby anyway. “Keep joking like that and I’ll put you back in diapers, too.”

“That can be arranged…” The parents laughed at Auntie Marie’s joke. Timmy laughed too, if for no other reason than because his Mama and Dada were laughing. Auntie Marie just kept that same quiet smile.

Mom patted the back of Timmy’s diaper and looked to the couch. “Can we use your changing pad there?”

“It’s your changing pad, now.” Auntie Marie said. “But I’ll do you one better.” She led the family to a back room. In it was a nursery, perfectly sized for a baby Timmy’s size, including a changing table.

Timmy had never had a changing table the first time around. Why spend money on a piece of furniture he’d outgrow? From now on, it would be a critical investment.

Timmy cooed and babbled as he was laid on this one, a strap pulled snugly across his chest so he didn’t squirm too much. The boy’s eyes lit up as Auntie Marie maneuvered the mobile over his head and he reached for the hanging animals spinning slowly just out of reach.

Timmy barely noticed as Mommy undid the tapes of his old diaper. He didn’t think about modesty or physics as Mommy lifted his legs in the air and started cleaning him up right in front of Daddy and Auntie Marie. He didn’t think much at all. He didn’t have to. Thinking was worrying, and Timmy was worry free.

The wipes were cold, but not nearly as cold as that whatchamacallit had been…the weird chair with a hole in it. The diaper that didn’t fit in his pants. It wasn’t nearly as cold as that. This was refreshing and kind of wet. Timmy liked feeling wet.

“Whoops!” Daddy threw a cloth over Tommy’s pee-pee and Mommy laughed as it got wet as if by magic. “Gonna have to get used to that, hon.” Daddy said. Not that Timmy could understand.

Mommy took the cloth off and finished wiping all of Timmy down. The dry diaper was nice and soft. The powder was cold, but it was a dry kind of cold and it smelled good besides. As Mommy was pulling up the diaper and taping it on, Timmy felt as if a part of him was finally coming into focus.

First the left side, then the right. He was complete. The old diaper was forgotten about the moment it was in the can. Dry and clean was nice, too. For a little while, anyways.

“What do you think of the nursery?” Auntie Marie asked when the first of many changes to come was complete.

“It’s very nice,” Timmy’s father said as a compliment.

That same wry smile had yet to fade from the witchy woman. “Good,” she said. “Because you’ll find his nursery will be very similar?”

“Really?” Timmy’s mother asked. “That’s wonderful!” She undid the safety strap and picked her son up off the table and back into her arms. He nuzzled her head, grinning.

“Of course,” Auntie Marie said. “What did you think the thirty thousand dollars was going towards? Diapers?”

“Well...actually.”

“They are going to the diapers, too, don’t worry.” she said. “You’re covered for a year. But your entire house has been retrofitted and baby-proofed. After a year, the expenses will level off and the diapers and food will be just another manageable expense.” She gave Timmy a friendly pinch on the cheek. “Perhaps cheaper overall since you won’t have to worry about Timmy growing out of any of his clothes.”

“So like the first time he was a baby?” Daddy asked.

Daddy’s eyes flashed in time with Auntie Marie’s broach. “This *is* the first time,” she told him. “Timmy’s always been a baby, it’s just that none of you realized it till now.”

“Thank you so much,” Mommy gushed.

“Don’t thank me,” Auntie Marie said. “Thank the Bay-Bee Corporation.”

“And we’ll be right there to play them with you and take care of you,” Daddy said. He lifted Timmy out of the playpen. “Forever and ever.”

THE END

The words flashed across the screen, but the movie was still playing. No credits just yet.

Mark stared at the screen, slack jawed and eyes vacant; completely entranced by the amazing production he’d just seen.

“Hello, sweetie,” Auntie Marie’s sweet loving voice came out of the headphones. “Did you like the movie?” Auntie Marie was talking to him! Mark was so excited, he felt a little extra pee-pee spurt into his diaper.

Mark nodded. “Uh-huh!” He’d been fussy when he’d woken up in just the little t-shirt and the big diaper with the cartoon bees on it. He’d been downright cranky when he realized that he’d been put in a special high chair in front of a T.V. screen.

But then Daddy had put the headphones on over his ears and Mommy had given him a kiss on the cheek. They’d turn on the T.V., left the room, and Mark had just watched the best movie he’d seen in his entire life.

AND NOW AUNTIE MARIE WAS TALKING TO HIM! HOW COOL WAS THAT?!

The screen flickered green, and Timmy came back on screen. But he wasn’t dressed the same as he was in the movie. It was less of a movie and now had become a highlight reel. Some shots he was in a onesie. Others a sailor suit, or shortalls, or jammies. He was naked in the bathtub, obviously. In more than a few he was just crawling around in just his diaper. It was a lot like home movies. Between each came another flash of green.

“Timmy now lives at home with his Mommy and Daddy.” Auntie Marie’s soothing voice told Mark. “His favorite things to do are playing peekaboo with his Daddy, having long babbling conversations with his favorite teddy bear and stacking blocks. His current record is three whole blocks before the tower falls over.” It was true. The proof was right there in the movie.

As she narrated, more of that pretty music played. The music that had been playing every time Timmy had an accident and realized that he wasn’t as big as he thought he was.

“Just like you, sweetie, Timmy pretended to be a big boy. And he pretended so hard that he believed it for a while. So Timmy’s parents had Auntie Marie show him that he was pretending.” Mark was nodding. Nodding and wishing his hands weren’t tied up. He desperately wanted to suck his thumb.

“Are you ready to be a big kid honey?” Auntie Marie asked from the T.V. Little green flickers lit up the screen.

“Noooooo....?” Mark’s eyes were blank, his voice mewling. His eyes were beginning to water, though he couldn’t for the life of him say why. It’s like some part of him knew what was coming and even more strangely, didn’t want it to happen.

“Are you ready to stop pretending to be a grown-up and just be the baby you’ve always been?”

The words were barely above a whisper, but they came. “Yes, ma’am...”

“What?”

“Yes, Auntie Marie.”

“Are you ready to let all of those big kid thoughts go away?”

“Yes, Auntie Marie.”

“Do you want to be like Timmy, and be a happy baby for the rest of your life?”

“Yes, Auntie Marie.”

“Then do your best to be like Timmy and get ALLLLLLLLL the big boy thoughts out.”

“Yes, Auntie Marie.” Those would be some of the last big boy words Mark would ever say. Not that he knew. Not that he cared. It was time to be like Timmy.

“Ready.”

Mark leaned forward and raised his diapered bum up just enough.

“Set.”

Mark felt the pressure in his tummy, gurgling. It was time. Time to let go and be a baby. Just like Timmy in the movie. He cheated a little bit and started pushing. But that was okay. If he’d been able to hold it, to really hold it, he wouldn’t have needed the diaper. He wouldn’t have been a baby.

And just like Timmy, Mark was going to be a baby.

“Go.”

Mommy and Daddy were going to be so proud of him!

After they changed him.

(Fin)