

# A Staple Diet

by Nathaniel Tower

Whenever Mommy was gone, Josh Forcett's father made him eat staples, often by the spoonful.

Sometimes Josh ate a whole strip of them like a candy bar. His father set down the strip and said, "Enjoy, son." Josh never enjoyed.

Mommy had no idea. Unfortunately, Mommy was gone quite a bit, and Josh couldn't say much. The only clue was the fact that she was constantly buying staples. "Is somebody eating these things?" she once said in the same way one might say "it seems like we're eating the toilet paper." She didn't expect any such thing.

"You know how it goes working at home," was all Josh's father offered for explanation.

She thought about asking what he stapled all the time, but he didn't like talking about his work. So she just quietly bought the staples he fed to their only child.

One day, Mrs. Forcett noticed a staple sticking out of a messy poop in Josh's diaper. It was just a single staple, but Mrs. Forcett decided to ask her husband.

"I found a staple in Josh's diaper," she said in her best non-accusatory voice.

"What are you trying to say?" he shot back in his best defensive voice.

"I'm trying to say I found a staple in Josh's diaper," she responded, still not accusing anyone of anything.

"Well, it sure sounds like you're accusing me," he said, still defending himself.

She shook her head. "I'm just telling you what I found."

"Was it open or closed?" he asked.

"Closed."

"Hmm."

"Do you think he might've eaten it?" she asked.

He rubbed his forehead while eyeing the evening news. "Probably got caught in his diaper," he said. "Dammit, I wanted to go fishing tomorrow," he muttered. "Stupid rain."

"Let's try to be more careful about leaving staples around the house," Mrs. Forcett suggested.

"Sure, blame me," he said as he stood and walked away from the TV.

"And let's try turning off the TV when we're not watching it," she added.

The next day, Mr. Forcett forced a five-thousand count box of staples into Josh's mouth. He broke them into segments of about fifty, and he wouldn't let Josh get out of the highchair until he swallowed them all.

That evening, Mrs. Forcett found a small strip of staples in Josh's diaper. She grabbed the staples and marched downstairs.

"Look at this," she barked.

He glanced up from the TV. Uninterested in the small strip of staples, he turned back without saying a word.

"Well?" she demanded.

"Well what?"

"Why was this in Josh's diaper?"

"I don't know," Mr. Forcett said.

Mrs. Forcett was not satisfied by this answer. She stormed over to the flat screen TV and knocked it off the wall. The news report fizzled out as the TV careened off the entertainment center before landing face down on the carpet.

"Why the hell is there a whole strip of staples in Josh's diaper?" she roared.

Mr. Forcett took a look at the staples. "That's nowhere near a whole strip."

She glowered at him, waiting for further explanation.

"I might've had some staples in my hand when I last changed him."

She threw the staples at him and yelled "If I find one more staple..." on her way back up the stairs.

Mr. Forcett went over to look at the damage. After a quick assessment, he went out to the garage and turned on the small portable he kept there for the days he worked on the car.

About an hour later, Mrs. Forcett called her husband in for dinner. When he sat down to the table, he found a pasta salad filled with staples. There were easily 10,000.

"What the hell is this?" he asked, pushing the plate aside.

"That's your dinner," she said while holding Josh. "And you're going to eat every bite of it."

Mr. Forcett stared in disbelief.

"And for dessert, you're having paper clip ice cream," she added.

Mr. Forcett choked down his staple salad and his paper clip ice cream. He knew there was no point in complaining, especially since he could feed the boy all the staples and paper clips he wanted the next day. He even threw in a "This is delicious" for good measure, followed by a "You should make this more often."

As soon as Mrs. Forcett left the next day, Mr. Forcett strapped Josh into the high chair and poured a concoction of office supplies into Josh's favorite breakfast bowl. Josh gave a frightened look at the pile of jumbo paper clips, pointy tacks, and thick rubber bands mixed in with the usual fare of staples. Mr. Forcett ignored his son's pleading eyes and ordered, "Dig in." Josh jabbed the utensil into the mix and collected a spoonful of tacks, paper clips and staples. Mr. Forcett looked on in delight, smiling in spite of the pain he felt in his throat from last night's meal.

At the sight of his dad's smile, Josh dropped the spoon. The smile faded at the sound of the clanking metal. "What the hell?" he said to the boy. "Pick up that spoon."

But Josh didn't. Instead he let out a terrific belch, and in the midst of the echo, a storm of staples flew at Mr. Forcett, stabbing all corners of his face. Mr. Forcett tried to reach for the child, but Josh let out another belch that launched more than 10,000 staples, enough to send the man sailing through the kitchen. He slammed into the wall just as Josh released one final tidal wave. There must've been a month's worth of staples in that final barrage.

Mr. Forcett's outstretched body remained crucified to the wall for hours. When the staples could no longer bear the weight, Mr. Forcett slid to the floor with a thud that woke Josh from his nap. Josh giggled. A small stream of stragglers exited his mouth and clanged quietly in the bowl below.

