

Selection Camp: Sonny Comes Home

By Travis Galvan

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Shawn stood on the doorstep of his newest friend's house waiting for him to answer the door. Summer was almost over but because it was Texas, summer was far from over. The temperature was blistering and he was eager to step into the airconditioned home interior. They'd met two days earlier at a board game convention and immediately hit it off.

The door swung open and Vince greeted Shawn with a wide smile. "Hey, man! Did you have any trouble finding the address?" he inquired as waved his guest in and closed the door behind him. "It gets a little twisty back in this section of the subdivision."

Shawn removed his blue cap and wiped his brow with his forearm. "Nah. I just set the GPS and turned when it said turn. You about ready to head out to the game?"

"Almost. We're just waiting for Sonny. He should be here any minute. I got a call from the driver a few minutes ago," Vince replied and motioned to the sofa. "Have a sit. You want something to drink?"

Shawn set his cap on the coffee table and plopped into the sofa. "I'm good. Thanks. Last time I saw you, you seemed really excited that he lasted so long at camp."

"Hells to the yes, I'm excited! He made the final selection. That means private school scholarships from now through college!" Vince beamed.

"Nice! I can tell you're one proud papa. Did he say anything about what they were doing at the camp last time he called you?"

Vince shook his head. "Not really. He said camp was mostly just a bunch of activities and challenges. The kids who didn't do well enough got sent home. I've been trying to ask questions to figure out what the selection criteria is but he's always vague. I can't really tell you anything they've done or what they might have graded them on. Don't get me wrong. Sonny smart for a four-year-old but he's not a genius. Friggin Mark from down the block sent his girl. She basically taught herself to read when she was three. She does second-grade level math already and she talks like a science teacher. She came home in the first batch of non-selections."

"That's crazy! Dude, your boy might not be genius smart like that little girl but there's gotta be something special about him or they wouldn't have selected him. Maybe it's more of an athletic..." Shawn cut himself short and turned to the door when he heard the bell.

“Showtime! Wait here. I’ll get him.” Vince jogged to the door and yanked it open to find his son with a camp counselor. “There’s my boy! Come here, you!” he cooed and pulled Sonny into a tight hug that made him grunt.

The counselor smiled politely and waited for Vince to release his boy. When he did she handed him Sonny’s backpack and said, “You have a very special boy. We look forward to seeing him in class in two weeks.”

Vince nodded and took the bag. “Oh, he’ll be there. Don’t worry. Hey, I was wondering if you could tell me more about selection camp. I tried asking Sonny about it when he’d call each week but you know toddlers. He didn’t really say much about what actually happened, just that he was really excited about all the stuff you guys were doing with him.”

“I don’t really have a lot of time right now. Still have a few kids to drop off. I tell you what, though, Sonny has some materials from camp in his bag. Have him go through them with you and I think you’ll get a better idea of what selection camp is all about.” She backed away from the door and waved to Sonny. “It was so nice to work with you. I’ll see you at school, okay?”

Sonny hopped up and down as he waved. “See you!”

“Alright, thank you!” Vince shouted as the counselor made her way back to the bus. When she was gone, he led Sonny inside. “I have a surprise for you!” he teased as they approached the den.

“Is Shawn here already?” Sonny asked with excitement in his eyes.

Vince looked confusedly at his son. “What? How did you know about Shawn?”

“He’s in the pictures.” The little boy pointed to the bag in his father’s hand.

“What pictures?” Vince asked.

Sonny laughed and ran into the den. “The selection pictures!”

“What?!” Vince demanded and chased after his son.

“Shawn! Shawn! Shawn! Shawn!” Sonny chanted over and over as he climbed into Shawn’s lap and jumped up and down on his lap on the sofa.

“Hey, little man!” Shawn laughed. “Your dad’s been telling me all about you.”

Vince caught Sonny mid-jump with one arm and set the bag on the coffee table with the other. “Sonny. I need you to cool off for a minute. I need to ask you about some stuff.”

Sonny went limp in his father’s arms and began to snore a bit too loudly to be believed.

“Come on now, little monkey. I know you’re not asleep.”

The snoring continued, interspersed with giggles.

Vince sat in the recliner next to the sofa with his son in his lap and pointed toward the pack on the table. “How about you show us the stuff you brought back from camp?”

“Okay!” Sonny shouted as he leapt from his father’s lap and sprung into action. He unzipped the bag and pulled out a folder, which he opened to reveal a stack of drawings. “I got selections! See!” He offered up the pile of pictures to his father and dropped the folder between his backpack and Shawn’s blue cap on the table.

“I see,” Vince agreed and took the stack.

“That’s me!” Sonny beamed as he pointed enthusiastically to the drawing on the top of the stack. For a child’s drawing, it bore a remarkable likeness.

“You’re quite an artist,” Shawn said as he leaned forward to get a better look at the pictures.

“Yeah. This is really good,” Vince agreed and flipped to the next picture in the stack. It was an image of a man sitting on a sofa. In front of the sofa was a coffee table on which rested backpack, a folder, and a blue cap. “What the?” Vince furrowed his brow and turned to Shawn, holding up the image to compare it to him. Again, for a child’s drawing, it bore a remarkable likeness.

Sonny hopped in place, pointing at the picture. “See! See! See! It’s Shawn!”

“What?” Shawn asked and took the page from Vince. He looked hard at the picture, turned to the coffee table, then back to the drawing. He dropped the paper on the ground and shot to his feet. “Dude, what the hell is going on here?!”

“I, I don’t know,” Vince mumbled as he flipped through the rest of the pictures in the stack. It was mostly children though there were two more adults. Women. There were also pictures depicting the scenes of a car crash and several other calamities. The final picture was an oddly shaped boulder next to a tree with a tire swing. “Sonny, who are these people?”

“They’re the selections!” He cheered and held his fists over his head!

Shawn shook his head. “I didn’t go to camp. The selection camp program didn’t even start until this year. I’ve never been selected for anything in my life.”

Sonny took him by the hand. “That’s okay. The teachers didn’t select you. I did. All the other selection kids agreed you were selected too. Just like everyone else in the pictures.”

Vince fished out the pictures of the two adults. “Who are these ladies?”

“That one is Sofie and that one is Olivia,” Sonny answered as he pointed to each in turn. “We haven’t met them yet.”

“If we haven’t met them, how do you know their names?” Vince asked.

Sonny took the stack of pictures from his father than flipped through them until he found the one he was looking for. “This is Julio. He knows everybody’s name.”

Shawn looked confused. “How does he know everybody’s name?”

Sonny shrugged. “He just does.”

Vince stood and pursed his lips for a moment before he spoke. “Sonny, go potty for me. We’re going for a drive so it might be a while before we stop again.”

“Where’re you going?” Shawn asked.

“We’re going back to selection camp. I have some questions.” He searched through the backpack for anything else he might find useful. There was a business card with an address for the camp.

Shawn grabbed his cap from the table. “If you don’t mind, I’m coming too.”