Anna Merry Christmas to You

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Anna Merry Christmas to You - Chapter 1

What, is it like some sort of uniform? Jake thought as he eyed the girls around him. They all seemed to be wearing the same velvet dress with a red skirt and white tights. Even his sister and all her friends. He hated his formal clothes, but at least he and the other boys had some variety to their outfits.

“Don’t even know why we had to go to this stupid party.” He muttered, slinking deeper into his chair. Every year, they got dressed up and dragged to his mom’s company holiday party on Christmas Eve and he was bored out of his mind. Bad Christmas music, annoying girls giggling nonstop, not even allowed to bring his video games.

“Attention, everyone.” A voice came over the loudspeaker, replacing the Christmas music, at least for the moment. “Santa’s on his way for all the good boys and girls, so we’ll be asking the kids to line up soon!”

“Oh, great.” Jake muttered. “Another stupid little kid thing.” They did not seem to have any idea that there were ages between six and forty and had planned nothing that he wanted to do.

His mood only darkened when Amelia and Brittany came bouncing over, wearing their required Christmas dresses.

“C’mon, Jake. We’ve got to line up for Santa.”

“They said they’d be asking us to line up soon, not right now.” Jake muttered. The girls giggled and Jake almost winced. It was so much worse up close like this!

“So you’re saying we have time?” Brittany asked, barely able to hide her grin. Time? Time for what? Jake felt a rush of cold run down his spine, as if Jack Frost had just dropped a snowball down his sweater.

“Time?” He asked, trying and failing to keep his nervousness from showing in his voice. The girls giggled.

“Did you not hear, Jake?” Brittany asked.

“About what?” They were clearly enjoying him not knowing something they did.

“The gifts Santa’s giving away to all the kids.” Amelia explained. “A Pretty Ponies of Periwinkle Park deluxe playset or that new video game system you’ve been begging mom and dad for.” Jake’s eyes lit up.

“What? Really?”

“Yep. Apparently the company did well this year, so they’re giving out awesome gifts.”

“Oh, my god!” Jake exclaimed, jumping to his feet. “We have got to get in line!” The girls grinned.

“About time you find the Christmas spirit.” Brittany said.

“But you can’t meet Santa like that.” Amelia added.

“What? Why not?”

“It’s not becoming a young lady, Princess Anna.” Jake glared at Brittany, unaware of just how serious the girls were.

“We’ll get you taken care of though, Jake.” Amelia said, patting his cheek patronizingly. “Just like at Halloween.” Jake knew what was about to happen, but that did not give him the strength to overpower the girls as they dragged him over to the bathrooms.

“Let’s take him in here. It has a lock.”

“No, you can’t do this!” Jake yelled. The girls scolded him in unison.

“Inside voice!” When they pulled him into the private bathroom, he saw a couple more of their friends already inside. Of course this had all already been planned. He gulped as the door locked behind them.

“Hi, Jakey.” One of the other girls said. He could never keep them all straight.

“Get undressed.” Amelia said. “We’ve got an extra dress with your name on it.” To make sure Jake got the joke, the girls showed him the gift tag attached to the dress, literally with Jake/Anna written on it.

“Very funny.” He muttered. The girls all giggled before they got down to business.

“Strip. Khakis and a sweater are boy clothes.”

Jake had practically dragged out of his mom that there would be boxers under the tree for him, but they would not be

opening presents until tomorrow morning, which meant he once again had to expose his tighty whities to his giggling sister and all of her friends.

“Jen, do you have Jakes’s panties?”

“Of course I do!” She held up a pair of lacey panties with glittery pink candy canes on them. “My aunt actually sent these to me, but I wouldn’t be caught dead in them.” Great, Jake thought. They’re putting me in something they’d never wear themselves. “I figured they’d be perfect for our sissy boy Jake!”

"What do I need those for?" He snarled, trying to ignore their taunts, unable to quite believe the girls had pulled one over on him again. "No one will see with all that... stuff!" He gestured to the dress and tights, near-identical to his eye to the dresses all of the girls wore. It had to be a uniform or something.

"True, no one will see." His sister agreed. "But you'll know. It'll help you remember that you're not my dorky brother Jake. You're Anna, my sweet little cousin from out of town."

"What if mom and dad see? They know you don't have a cousin."

"Well, I'm sure they wouldn't blow your cover. They'd act like you're their beloved niece." She smirked as Jake's cheeks grew a little red. Any and every girl word did that to him and she relished it. "That's right, Jake, you'd be mom and dad's niece."

"But you're really her little sister, Anna. Princess obsessed and loving wearing a pretty little Christmas dress."

"Shuddup."

"Which is why, Jakey, you need your panties. They'll help you remember that you're just pleased as punch to get to be a sissy little sugar plum all night long."

"Well," Jake stammered. "What... what about my hair?"

"Yeah, I was hoping mom wouldn't make you cut it for this thing." His sister said. "But, trust me, everyone will see the dress and their brains will go 'little girl' not 'teenage boy'."

"Ew, Amelia." Brittany said. "Don't ruin it by calling Jake a teenager. He's not."

"True, he's still a little boy in a lot of ways. Aren't you, Jakey?"

"Shuddup."

"If he was a teen," Brittany teased. "He could never pass for a sweet little girl and we wouldn't get to have any fun."

"You're right!" Amelia exclaimed. "So we better enjoy little Jakey while we can." She held up the panties, shaking them slightly as if to remind Jake of their lace frills and sparkly pink candy canes. "Put them on, Jakey. You've got a date with Santa Claus!"

“Let us cover our eyes first!” The girls all made exaggerated disgusted sounds, covering their eyes as Jake quickly

swapped his underwear for the panties.

“Attagirl.” Amelia praised. “Now for your tights.”

“How do I?” The tights looked way too small for him, like they would fit a doll, but never a boy his size.

“What kind of little girl doesn’t know how to”

“I’m not a little girl!” Jake glared at the girl.

“Whatever, panty butt.” She said with a smirk. “At least I wasn’t Anna for Halloween!”

“Hey!” Jake all but growled.

“Jake, calm down. We need to get you dressed unless you want to go out there in just your panties.”

“They aren’t mine.”

“You’re wearing them and I’m pretty sure Jen doesn’t want them back.”

“Merry Christmas, Jake.” Jen said.

“Do you want his underwear in exchange?” Amelia asked. “Like an undies swap?” Jen scoffed.

“Yeah, no thanks.”

“You need to roll them up and slide them up your legs, Jake.” Amelia explained, getting down to business again. “Hurry, but don’t go too fast. Tights rip.”

“They’re too small.”

“They stretch, dummy!” Brittany said. Jake felt stung. How was he supposed to know? He had never worn tights before.

“Superheroes wear tights too, you know.” Jen said. Jake rolled his eyes and focused on the tights.

“Perfect.” Amelia said as she looked over his work. “You know, even if you tattle on me to mom and dad, I can point out you put your tights and panties on all by yourself.”

“Well, he is a good little girl.” Brittany teased, patting Jake’s cheek like Amelia had just a bit before. “Wouldn’t want to end up on Santa’s naughty list, would we?”

“Sugar and spice and everything nice, right Jake?” One of the other girls said. Why were there so many of them? Jake was outnumbered six to one and that made him more nervous than anything else.

“Let’s get his dress on.” Amelia announced. “Hold still, Jake.” Amelia and Brittany wrestled the dress over Jake’s head and it sunk in. The other girls were just an audience, yet another way for Amelia and Brittany to make sure Jake knew he was theirs for as long as they wanted him.

As the dress settled over Jake’s frame, he did not know what to think. The dress looked just like the girls’: red velvet, fluffy petticoats, lace Peter Pan collar, ribbon sash that Brittany was tying around his waist at that moment.

“Alright,” Amelia said. “Step into your shoes.” Jake glanced down at the girls’ feet. Was he going to wear the same shoes as them? He could break his neck. Noticing his nervous

glance, Amelia patted his velvet shoulder. “Don’t worry. We thought about kitten heels for you, but figured a nice pair of Mary Janes was better for my little sister.”

“Plus, the way they click means we’ll always know where you are.” Brittany said with a smirk. “No hiding for you, Anna!” Jake groaned inwardly as they guided his feet into the shiny black shoes, the silver buckles no better than shackles. Could he feel any more girly?

“Alright, let’s get your nails painted and then it’ll be time for make-up.” Amelia announced.

“Make-up? No way.”

“That’s where you draw the line?” Brittany said incredulously. “Have you even looked at yourself?” The girls pulled Jake over to a mirror. He heard the click-clack of his shoes on the tile, but all thoughts of that were gone as he looked at the girl, no older than six or seven, in the mirror.

“See?” Amelia said. “Even with your hair like that, even you can’t tell you’re a boy.”

“And we’re not done yet!” Brittany added.

Jake stood there, petrified, as his sister and Brittany painted his nails bubble gum pink before applying matching lip gloss. How had he gotten himself into this? Why had he not fought harder? If he had kept yelling, surely some parent would have noticed and intervened? Then again, the girls were bizarrely good at getting adults on their side. Even when he had told his parents about being wheeled around the park in a stroller,

they had dismissed it as some game that Jake had agreed to and that he was only mad that it had gotten out of hand.

“Finishing touches!” Brittany announced. “His cheeks are pretty pink already. Does he really need blush?” All the same, she applied a bit to each cheek as Amelia put a floppy red bow atop his head.

“Your hair’s really short, but… I think that’ll keep anyone from suspecting.” The girls stepped back and let Jake see their handiwork fully. He felt tears welling up in his eyes. He looked like a girl. He would not stick out from them at all, except that he might be the prettiest one in the group, a realization that crushed his fragile male ego.

“Alright, I think we’re set.” Brittany said. Amelia took his hand.

“Let’s get in line for Santa, huh? Focus on that new video game, remember?” Jake had completely forgotten. Maybe all of this would be worth it, he thought, until he realized he could have gotten it dressed as a boy. In fact, he realized as they left the bathroom, his dress rustling and his shoes click-clacking, that was the boy present! Dressed as he was, he would get the girl present!

“I’m going to kill you.” He hissed at Amelia, his heart falling as he realized the true depths of her cruel joke.

“Shh. If you talk too much, everyone will know you’re a boy.” Jake thought it was more risky for Amelia to be saying he was a boy that loudly, but no one seemed to have heard.

“You’re my shy little sister, Anna. Just let me do the talking.”

“Line up, kiddos!” The overly cheerful event organizer said. “Boys on the left, girls on the right!”

“Which line are we in, Anna?” Brittany asked mockingly. Jake glared at her, barely fighting the urge to give her a very unladylike gesture. Still holding his hand, Amelia pulled him to the left.

“These nails are just so good for such a quick job.” Amelia said, turning Jake’s captive hand over. “I think even when we give you your old clothes back, we’ll keep your nails like this. Mom and dad won’t notice, I bet.”

“They would too.”

“Wanna actually bet?” She smirked, loving that her brother was reduced to soft whispers to keep anyone from catching on to his true gender.

The line began to move and Jake’s heart began to race. What if someone who knew them saw him? Surely his parents’ coworkers knew that they had a son and a daughter, not two daughters. It drove him crazy that someone could and probably would mistake him for a daughter dressed as he was.

“I like your dress.” Jake snapped out of his thoughts and stared at the girl in front of him. She was wearing the same dress as him, much as he hated it, so why was she acting like they were so different?

“Sorry, she’s really shy.” Amelia said. “I’m Amelia and this is

Anna.”

“My name’s Sarah.”

“Nice to meet you, Sarah. These dresses are a little girly for me, but Anna goes ga-ga over them. She put her dress on first thing this morning!” Jake looked at Amelia. She knew he would never dare contradict her and reveal that he was actually a boy and clearly, she was eager to make him out to be the girliest girly girl who ever lived. “Isn’t that right, Anna?” He sighed and nodded, feeling the bow atop his head flop around.

“Well, you’re very pretty.” Sarah’s mom said, smiling at them. “Both of you.”

“Thank you, ma’am.” Amelia said. Jake barely managed a weak smile, hating every minute that he had to spend dressed like this.

They made their way to the front of the line where Santa waited. He smiled at them as they walked up to him. The floor right in front of Santa was tile, so Jake click-clacked closer and closer.

“Why, hello there, girls!” Santa said. Jake knew that Santa was not real, but part of him still felt that Santa knew his secret as his eyes lingered over his face for just a half second longer than they should have. “Have you two been good girls this year?”

“We have.” Amelia declared, Jake mumbling his agreement.

“I’m glad.” Santa said. He turned to one of his elves and took two of the Pretty Ponies deluxe playsets, but Amelia had other plans.

“Actually, Santa, sir. We live in the same house, so we don’t really need two sets of the ponies. Plus, Anna’s really into Pretty Ponies of Periwinkle Park, but I’m not. Can I please have the video game instead?” Santa smiled.

“Well, of course.” He looked at Jake. “But you want the ponies, right?” Jake’s face felt like it must be a sickly green. If he could just muster up the courage, he could get what he wanted, but Santa and everyone around would know he was a boy, a boy all dolled up in a dress.

“She’s very shy.” Amelia said. “But you should have heard her squeal when she learned that you were giving those pony playsets away. What am I saying? You probably could’ve heard her squeal from the North Pole! She’s been begging mom and dad for them for forever, haven’t you?” She squeezed Jake’s hand and he forced the same weak smile. Santa took that as confirmation and handed him the enormous purple box, all of the ponies smiling up at him, their manes and tails all ready for him to brush with the variety of brushes displayed within. It had to be the girliest, sissiest gift he had ever received.

“Alright, girls, off you go!” Jake stared covetously at the box in Amelia’s hand as she took him back to the table where she had first found him.

“Please, please can we trade?” He whispered. Anna smirked.

“Why on earth would I do that? I don’t want those ponies. Plus, Santa gave them to you, didn’t he?”

“But”

“It is tempting to offer a deal though.”

“What kind of deal?”

“Oh, you know… something like you promising to spend two hours every day between now and when school starts playing with those ponies in my room in whatever outfit I pick.” He gulped. She had come up with that far too quickly. “I’m just kidding, Jake!” She said with a loud laugh. “Sorry, bud. You got the ponies, so that’s what you’re stuck with. Let’s go get you changed, unless you want mom and dad to see you like this?”

Epilogue

Jake grimaced as he held up the pair of boxers for the camera as his mom took a picture. He should have known there would be a catch, but at least he had boxers, even if it was just one pair and they had teddy bears on them. He saw Amelia stow her phone back in her powder blue robe and he knew all of her friends knew about Jake’s embarrassment.

“Is that all the presents?” His dad asked.

“I think so.”

“Wait, there’s one left.” Amelia said. “It’s hiding behind the tree.” She pulled it out. Wrapped in green foil paper, Amelia handed it to Jake.

“To Jake, From Santa?” He said, reading the tag. His nails were free of pink nail polish but still looked unnaturally clean and feminine thanks to Amelia insisting on giving him a full manicure instead of just helping him get rid of the polish. Amelia smiled at his shiny nails, amazed that he was so ignorant of the ways of girls that he did not realize that she had put clear nail polish on him last night.

Jake opened the package and gasped as he saw it. Amelia had given him her gift from Santa! “Ohmigod!” He exclaimed, launching over and hugging her. She laughed, hugging her brother back.

“He was in the bathroom during Santa, so I got that for him.” She explained to her parents. She had the ponies in her closet and maybe they would come out some time after the New Year, but for now? She would let her big brother be a happy little boy.

Chapter 2

Anna's Princess Storytime - Chapter 2

Jake scanned the shelves of books, trying to find one he had not read yet. He rolled his eyes as he heard Amelia and Brittany giggling. This was a library! They were supposed to be quiet, but he could hear them like halfway across the building! Feeling some sort of fraternal need to take control, he left the row he was in, knocking a sign off of the shelf. He bent over to pick it up. It was a schedule of the children's events the library offered over the summer. Puppet shows, storytime with a princess, magicians? it all sounded so dumb! He rolled his eyes.

"I see Paris, I see France, I see Jakey's underpants!" Amelia teased. Jake shot back up, putting the sign back on the shelf.

"Shuddup."

"Maybe Jake likes showing off his tighty whities. I've seen them like a thousand times." Brittany said, smirking at Jake. "Remember Halloween?"

"How could I forget?"

"He still gushes about it!" Amelia exclaimed.

"Shh, why are you talking so loud? It's a library."

"Maybe we want the librarian to come over." Brittany said.

"I bet Mrs. Harper would love to hear about last Halloween. Or Christmas." Jake glared at the girls. Why did they always

bring it up? His dad's voice echoed in his ears. Amelia only teased him to get a reaction. It was so hard to not react though! Little sisters were so good at being the most annoying things on the planet!

"Just leave me alone."

"We came over to tell you we're gonna run across the street to the mall. Jen's there."

"What? But mom said she'll"

"Pick us up at 2. It's not even noon yet. We'll be back in plenty of time." Jake could not believe his ears.

"But"

"Don't worry." Brittany said. "We've thought of everything." Everything? Jake knew enough, even without the constant reminders, that that was not a good thing to hear from his sister and her scheming friends.

"What are you talking about?" He fought to keep his voice from trembling. The girls smirked.

"Come on, Jake. There's something I want to show you." Amelia said. Jake sighed. Could he make a run for it? He knew that there was little hope. Resigned to his fate, he followed the girls. Once their guard was down, maybe he could give them the slip.

“Seriously, Amelia. This isn’t gonna work.”

“Jake, Jake, Jake.” She said with a smirk. “Don’t you think I

have it all figured out?”

“What does that mean though?”

“Well, we both know mom wanted us to stay here in the library so I can keep an eye on you.” Jake tried to stop himself from blushing. He was older than Amelia!

“She’s right.” Brittany said. “She’s done more babysitting than you, hasn’t she?”

“I’m older.”

“Yeah, thirteen is so much older than ten and a half.” Amelia rolled her eyes. “Thirteen in boy years is like what in girl years? Six?”

“I’d say Anna of Everdale is about six.” Brittany teased, pinching Jake’s arm.

“I am not” The girls exchanged a look.

“She’s getting fussy.”

“Well, it’s because she’s overheating in those shorts and that ugly black t-shirt.” Amelia replied knowingly. “She’d much prefer to be wearing a pretty dress. Isn’t that right, Anna?”

“No way.”

“See? You answer to it, so it must be your name, right?” Jake’s glower could not have been more severe, but Amelia always thought it made him look like he needed to poop. She smirked and patted his cheek, knowing that that would only infuriate him further. When he got mad, he never thought

straight, and that was just what she needed.

“We’re here, Anna. We better hurry. It’s quarter to noon.”

“What happens at noon?” He felt dumb for even asking. It made it sound like he was letting the girls take control! He looked at the women’s restroom sign and groaned even before the girls worked together to shove him inside.

“Here’s the deal, Anna.” Amelia said, finally whispering as her voice echoed in the empty bathroom. “We’re going to the mall and you’re staying here.”

“You’re gonna be at Princess Storytime!”

“It runs from noon to one-thirty, so that’ll give us plenty of time to get back here and get you disguised as a gross boy again.”

“You’re insane.”

“Nope.” Amelia said with a smirk. “We both agreed that Princess Storytime would be less embarrassing for you than traipsing around the mall with us big girls.”

“I’m not doing it!”

“Sure you are.”Brittany replied.

“It’s either that or” Amelia shrugged. “Face it, Jake. We’ve done this how many times now? You know and we know that you’re ending up in what I’ve got here in my bag.” she shrugged to show off her backpack. Jake groaned. He never should have believed her when she said she was bringing it to

hold the books she was getting.

“And it’s not even anything that bad.” Brittany said. “Your Christmas dress was”

“It wasn’t my”

“Don’t interrupt.” Amelia scolded. “All we have for you is a sundress, panties, and some sandals since” she glanced down at his grubby sneakers. “Those aren’t very ladylike.”

“At least his feet are small.”

“So, what do you say, Jake? Go in that stall and get dressed or do we have to force you again?” There were only two of them, so Jake wondered if maybe he could overpower them. He knew that Amelia would play the ‘Jake hit me’ card if he fought back though.

“Why can’t I come to the mall with you?” He asked. “Or even just stay here and read?”

“Princess Sparkle whatever will read to you.” Amelia said.

“Sparkleshine.”

“That’s not important right now, Britt! Geez.”

“This doesn’t make any sense.” Jake groaned.

“What doesn’t make sense, Jakey?” Amelia asked. “It’s just a few hours to keep you out of trouble. Really, like an hour and a half. That’s only ninety minutes.”

“Seriously. I am not a little girl!”

“Here’s the deal, Jake.” Brittany said. “Either you get undressed and into your outfit for storytime or we’ll force you into it.”

“And if we have to do that, no guarantee your boy clothes survive the experience.” Amelia said. “Just imagine what mom would say if she picked us up and you were dressed like sweet as sugar Anna, my little sister-cousin-whatever you are as Anna.”

“Seriously. Do you really think I can pass as”

“Jake, you’ve done it twice before and both times required you to do a lot more than sit quietly.” Amelia said. “This’ll be easy for you.”

“It’d be a lot easier to just sit and read or something.” He muttered.

“Alright, enough. Brittany, take his shorts off.”

“What? No!” Jake tried to push Brittany away, but she quickly had him cornered and down came his shorts. Jake tugged his shirt down, but knew the battle was lost. “Fine.” He said through gritted teeth.

“It’s really not that bad. Just a sundress, panties, and sandals.” Amelia said, handing the bag to him.

“The panties are only necessary because we can’t trust you to sit ladylike.” Brittany said. “I think the kids sit on the floor or something.”

“This is ridiculous.” Jake disappeared into the stall. He

considered barricading himself in there but the girls would be more than capable of sliding under and punishing him.

“All you have to do is sit quietly, Jake. The clothes are only because it’d be weird for a thirteen year old boy to be there.”

“Which I will be.”

“Naw, everyone will see a pretty little girl. Just like at Christmas.”

“What did he ever do with that doll anyway?” Jake gritted his teeth and tried to block out the girls. He groaned as he saw Cinderella’s smiling face looking up at him from the panties Brittany and Amelia expected him to wear.

“Did you see we got you blue panties? For a boy?”

“Shuddup.”

“Just get dressed, Jake.” Amelia said, tapping the stall door impatiently. “We need to get to the mall.”

“And you need to get to Princess Storytime!”

“It’d be making a scene if you got there late.” Amelia said, her voice almost eager. “Imagine everyone staring at you, having to wonder if any of them realize you’re actually a boy twice the age you claim to be.”

“I don’t claim” Jake closed his mouth. No. He was not going to play their game.

“Well, you’re gonna be implying it.” Brittany said. “You’re gonna have to introduce yourself as little Anna.”

“And hold up six fingers.”

“I’m not six.”

“You’re wearing Cinderella panties.” Amelia retorted.

“And have you seen your sundress? It’s pretty little girly.”

“Great.” Jake muttered. He pulled it out and sighed. At least it was not pink, but it was a definitely feminine shade of yellow that almost hurt his eyes.

“See? Polka dots!” The dress was undeniably polka dotted from top to bottom. The top part reminded Jake of the tank tops he wore to the lake, but from the waist with its enormous yellow bow down, it was girly and not the sort of thing he wanted to wear. Still, said a small nagging part of his mind, it’s better than the other dresses they’ve made me wear and it’s better than a diaper. Was a dress and panties better than a diaper? He was not even sure.

“Blue panties and a yellow dress? What were we thinking?” Amelia mused.

“Just means Anna will have to sit ladylike.” Brittany smirked.

“Can you stop saying that?” Jake asked irritably. “God, why am I doing this?” He asked himself as he slipped off his socks and pulled on the white jelly sandals.

The girls grinned as he emerged from the stall, but they did not say anything for once.

"There's no way this is going to work." Jake muttered as he

stared at his sissified reflection.

"You almost sound disappointed." His sister teased. "Does someone like being Anna?"

"No fu" Jake stopped himself. "No way."

"Don't think I didn't hear that. Do I need to tell mom you're swearing again?" Jake remained silent, not even meeting Amelia's gaze. "It'd be fun to blackmail you about it, but really" she laughed. "How could things get any worse for you than they are now, Anna?" He glared at her. "Go on, say your name's Anna. They'll ask where you're going."

"My name's Anna."

"On the plus side, your voice is still high enough that no one should notice you're not a little girl." Brittany said, giggling. "As long as you don't say too much. Just be a shy, demure, sweet little girl."

"This is ridiculous." His eyes widened as he saw his sister stuffing his clothes into her backpack.

"Just to make sure you don't try to sneak away from Princess Storytime."

"Like that's even possible." Brittany said. "My mom brought my little sister Cassie here and the adults are very controlling of the kids."

"There you go, Anna. You'll have no choice but to sit there and listen to all the fun stories Princess Sparkleshine reads to you. Isn't that fun?" Jake did not answer.

“Your hair’s a bit longer than at Christmas, I think.” Brittany said. “But just to be safe, let’s put those barrettes in your bangs.” She took a couple of white plastic bow barrettes from Amelia. “See? Sparkly.” Jake groaned as she clipped them into his hair.

“Looks like you’re all set.” Amelia said. “Now remember to smooth out your skirt before you sit down and try to keep your knees together so that no one can see up your dress, kay?” Why was she talking to him like he knew all this?

“You’re gonna do fine.” Brittany said.

“As long as you’re a good little girl, Anna, we’ll be back in plenty of time to turn you back in Jake, okie dokie?” Jake sighed as Brittany grabbed his hand, practically erupting with excitement over getting to take the teen to a little kid storytime.

“Seriously,” she whispered to him. “I’ll give you fifty dollars if anyone even notices you’re a boy, kay?”

“You don’t have fifty dollars.”

“Sure I do. My grandma sends me that much for my birthday every year.” Jake squeezed her hand.

“Deal.”

“But you can’t tell anyone you’re a boy. They have to figure it out for themselves.” Jake nodded, confident that someone would notice.

“Here we are.” Amelia said, leading them to the children’s

nook.

Kids were running around, eagerly chatting. Jake saw more than a few little girls in princess dresses and he almost felt comfortable in his relatively less girly sundress, but then he saw all the boys. He could have totally come here as a boy, he thought bitterly. Amelia and Brittany deposited him in a plastic chair, guaranteeing he was right in the middle of the group and could not hide in the back.

“Alright, Anna. You sit right here for story time and we’ll be back to pick you up at 1:30, okay?” Amelia said loudly. “You be a good girl, okay?” Jake, mortified, could only nod. To his surprise, his sister kissed his cheek before they left him to story time.

As Jake sat there, knees held tightly together, heart pounding in his chest, he tried not to draw attention to himself. He eyed Princess Sparkleshine's dress, grateful that he did not have to wear something so floofy and girly. He reminded himself that Princess Sparkleshine was both a girl and willingly wearing the dress, unlike him.

Jake quickly realized that Princess Storytime was not the passive experience that Amelia and Brittany had led him to believe. Sure, there was a story or two, but Princess Sparkleshine also had songs for them to sing and dance to. Sitting in the middle, Jake hoped he could simply hide in his chair, but the adults who were serving as the princess's helpers did not allow that. One of the helpers sensed a shy little girl and stayed next to him until he did all the gestures

to Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes to her liking. Even then, she kept a close eye on him to make sure he was participating. How can this get any worse, he thought as he finally sat back down for the last story of the day. He rolled his eyes as Princess Sparkleshine encouraged 'all the boys and girls of the kingdom' to make animal noises whenever she read the name of one, but he made sure to at least half-heartedly participate to keep the helpers at bay.

"Alrighty-doo boys and girls!" Princess Sparkleshine said in her musical voice. "We're almost out of time for today, so let's just sing two more songs. But which songs shall we sing?" A cacophony of suggestions washed over her. "I know, let's sing the boys and girls song! Helpers, can you help the boys get on this side of the room, and the girls on that side?"

Everyone jumped eagerly to their feet and moved to the side of the room Princess Sparkleshine had indicated, the helpers making sure to herd the stragglers. Out of habit, Jake began to move to the boy side, but he saw their confusion and, blushing, quickly rushed to the girl side.

"I see some new faces here, so we'll go over the words. Boys, you'll start." Princess Sparkleshine smiled down at the boys. "You'll sing look at me, look at me. I'm a little boy, I'm a little boy. I sing and dance, I jump and clap. I'm a little boy, I'm a little boy." Jake's ears burned with embarrassment, even before Princess Sparkleshine came over to the girls. "And girls, you'll do look at me, look at me, I'm a little girl." Jake felt as if he might faint, but quickly came to his senses. It was just one song. It would not really make him a girl, would it?

All the same, he felt as if he left his body as he went through the motions like an automaton, jumping and clapping there in that group of girls. "Very good, boys and girls!" Princess Sparkleshine praised. "Now, everyone back to your seats for the goodbye song!"

The goodbye song required everyone to stay standing as they sang the most repetitive song Jake had ever heard. All the same, with the helpers watching, he had no choice but to wave and clap and stamp his feet along with all the other kids. It was only as they reached the very end and Princess Sparkleshine was congratulating them on a splendiferous storytime that he saw Amelia and Brittany standing nearby, grinning as they watched him. How much had they seen?

Ever cautious, he waited until they were away from the crowd before demanding answers. Brittany shrugged.

“That goodbye song was awful. I’m amazed you didn’t like go crazy.”

“And you were even singing and dancing along.” Amelia sounded genuinely surprised.

“The helpers” Jake blushed. “The helpers made me.”

“Oh?” The girls said in unison. Jake nodded.

“There were like ten different songs and they didn’t let me sit there. I had to” the girls giggled, a little too much for his liking. “What’s so funny?”

“Oh, nothing.” They said, their unison unnerving this time.

“Did you like the story at least?”

“There was more than one.” Jake said. “Can I have my clothes back?”

“Not yet.” Amelia said, grinning.

“Are you gonna tell him?” Brittany asked. Amelia smirked.

“Well, it would be hard to keep it”

“Tell me what?” Jake demanded.

“Don’t interrupt.” Amelia scolded. “I guess I can tell you. But it’s something to tell Anna, not Jake. Are you Anna or Jake?”

“Anna.” Jake said with a sigh.

“And how old are you, Anna?”

“Six.” Jake, remembering what they had said earlier, held up six fingers, hoping it would score him some relief. The girls grinned. Brittany seemed about to burst as she jumped in.

“I’d ask if you’re a boy or a girl, but” Jake’s blood ran cold. “We have it on video!” Brittany held up her phone where she had recorded Jake singing along with the boys and girls song.

“Delete that!” Jake demanded.

“I will.” Brittany said. “As long as Anna promises to go to just one more Princess Storytime before the end of the summer.”

“They’re every week, but we’ll only make you do one more.” Amelia said. Jake sighed, feeling trapped.

“Fine. I’ll go to one more.”

“Promise?” Brittany held up her phone to get it on video.

“I promise.” Jake rolled his eyes as Brittany made sure to get his whole outfit in the frame. “I promise to go to one more Princess Storytime.” The girls squealed, relinquishing Amelia’s bag to him. He had to push aside the makeup and other things she had bought at the mall, but there were his clothes, safe and sound. He quickly stripped to dress, but his blood ran cold again as he overheard the girls chatting outside the stall.

“Of course, we’ll have to find Anna an extra special dress for the next one.” Amelia said. “She was criminally underdressed compared to some of those other girls.” Just what had he gotten himself into?