I've Got No Strings

by andlat

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Chapter 1

I've Got No Strings - Chapter 1

"I've got no strings to-" he sang, practicing the dance in the mirror. Even after a full rehearsal, he was nervous that he might mess it up, so he was doing extra practice at home. Pinocchio was no small role! Try as he might though, he could not focus.

"Ugh, my feet go like this!" He did the move three times in quick succession to drive it home. "There!" He yelped as his left foot suddenly slid out from under him. "Weird." He shook his head. Maybe he had been rehearsing for too long. "Definitely." He said as he watched his arm rise up in front of his face, looking for all the world like a string was tied around his wrist. He tugged it down, but his arm immediately returned back to its position. "What the?" All at once, he seemed to lose control of all four of his limbs, stumbling and tripping over himself as he charged toward his bedroom door. He only just barely managed to get control enough to open it before he went careening out into the hall. His heart raced though he could not be sure if it was due to fear or how fast he was running down the hall. At least he was heading away from the stairs and toward… He stumbled into his sister's room, falling face first onto her floor.

"Whoa!" He pushed himself back up to his feet.

"You're not going to believe this but-" his eyes fell on the cross brace his sister held. She smiled and twiddled it and he

found himself waving.

"Oh, so cool." She said.

"What is going on? How are you doing that?"

"Geez, your head really is made of pine."

"What?"

"It's a Pinocchio joke."

"What?"

"Yeah, I think this is for the best." She twiddled the cross brace and he slumped onto the floor. "Oh, yeah. Have a seat." She laughed. "I pulled you in here because we're gonna do some recasting." He sighed. She had begged him to let her be Pinocchio like a dozen times and he had remained firm.

"Mrs Montgomery said-"

"She said she gave you the lead because you're older. By like fifteen months! But we both know I'm better. Right?" She flicked her wrist and he nodded.

"Hey! How are you doing that?" She ignored the question.

"I'll be Pinocchio and you'll be one of the prancing ballerinas in the background!"

"What? No, I can't!"

"Why not?" She asked innocently.

"I... I don't know the part!" She grinned.

"I thought you might say that." With a quick twist of her hands, he rose shakily to his feet, twirled, and then curtsied elegantly, holding it for silent applause. How he had managed to curtsey in a t-shirt and basketball shorts, she had no idea. "But we've got plenty of time for you to learn, don't we?" She flicked her wrist and he nodded.

"But"

"Shh... here." She turned him around and walked him toward her bed. "You get your tutu and tights on, then I'll do your puppet make-up. After that, we can rehearse for hours and hours to make sure you've got it down pat!"

It took an eternity to get him into the tights and tutu, but she was nothing if not determined. Finally, he was wrapping the ribbons of the ballet slippers around his ankles.

"Hmm... That's a little too dexterous for this thing to do. You must really want this!" She wiggled the cross brace until he nodded and did a childish plié. "Lots of work to do."

"Please! I'm Pinocchio."

"Nope. You're a prancing ballerina." She grabbed her role card from her desk. "It literally even says prancing ballerina, if you can believe it. Look!" She showed him the card, but he only saw that she had crossed out her name and written his. He lunged, desperately going for the cross brace. All that he managed to do was end up on the floor in a mess of arms, legs, and tulle. "Up you come!" She navigated her helpless brother over to the mirror. "Let's start with the basics. No,

let's start with something fun!" Down he went again, left in a heap on her floor.

There he remained, unable to do much more than wiggle his toes until she returned, wearing his costume!

"That's mine!"

"You already have your costume." She said, playfully posing in the Pinocchio costume. She picked up the cross brace once again and wiggled it, laughing as her brother helplessly ran through a series of ballet moves with surprising poise before settling in what felt for him like an impossible position. His arms were raised above his head, the fingers of his out-turned hands meeting in a point. He stood precariously on the very tip of his toes, but there was no pain, he realized as his sister came up beside him. Like invisible strings were holding him up.

His sister stood next to him, the hand with the cross brace hidden from the mirror behind his sparkly white leotard. He looked every bit like a prancing ballerina next to his sister Pinocchio. She held up her phone.

"Smile!" She laughed. "There! Send that to the play group chat and our roles will be set."

"But-"

"Hush. Don't worry your pretty little head about that." She plopped down on her bed. "Face it. I'm more of the tricky Pinocchio type anyway, aren't I?" Still holding the humiliating position, he felt his head nod. "Attagirl! Now"

she raised the cross brace like a conductor's baton. "First position, second position, third"

Chapter 2

I've Got No Strings 2 - Chapter 2

Mason stepped out of the shower, but only had enough time to grab a towel before he was dragged down the hall, skidding to a stop at his sister's closed door. On it was taped a note in his sister's precise handwriting: Knock three times once you have your tutu and tights on, my pretty Prancing Ballerina brother! He held back a loud groan, rolling his eyes. He turned away and began to walk toward his own room, but found himself walking in place, feet scraping through the hall carpet. He could just barely hear a snicker from the other side of Gwen's door, just like he could feel the slight tug of the strings. He sighed. Why fight the inevitable?

What would Mom or Dad think if they came upstairs right now? He wondered as he dressed. He hated that he was slightly relieved Gwen had included a pair of his underwear in the tidy pile of ballet things. All the same, they vanished under all the pink he put on before he was finally ready to knock. He took a deep breath and felt his body rise on its own accord into an elegant arabesque before he knocked daintily on the door three times. He remained like that long enough for Gwen to open the door and record him effortlessly shifting to two feet and entering her room primly on his tiptoes. How was she doing all this with that cross brace? He only had a moment to wonder before she set him to work twirling and prancing and dancing in front of the mirror.

"You're such a pretty ballerina!" She cooed. Mason grimaced

as she made him pirouette. A whole weekend of this and he was sick of it, but he could not help but wonder. Just what was Gwen's plan? Tomorrow was rehearsal and it wasn't like she could just show up and declare they had swapped roles. Mrs. Montgomery would never go for that! He almost felt relieved by that thought, even as Gwen forced him into a string of prissy pas de chats in front of the mirror.

"I'm going to be a great Prancing Ballerina at rehearsal tomorrow!" Mason thought Gwen had said it, but his mouth moved. And that was almost his voice, but not quite, like Gwen was doing an impression of him.

"I'm so glad you think so." Gwen grinned as she wiggled the cross brace.

“I love being a Prancing Ballerina!" Mason said in that Gwen impression of his voice. "Stop doing that!" He added in his actual voice.

"What? It's you saying it."

"You're laughing. You know it's you!" Mason abruptly pirouetted and curtsied to his reflection.

"I'm getting good with this thing, aren't I?" Gwen remarked, twisting and waving it so her brother rose up on his tiptoes, arms majestically raised above his head in fifth position. He looked so much like a ballerina! How would anyone at rehearsal tomorrow not accept their trade?

Mason felt his stomach twist and turn all night up until rehearsal the next day. How would Gwen do it? Would she

make him dress up like a ballerina? To his surprise, he was still in his own clothes as they arrived at the theater. Gwen seemed weirdly peppy, but he could not help but think, hope even, that all her plans would go up in smoke.

"Mason, there you are."Mrs. Montgomery said, cutting through the backstage start of rehearsal chaos. "Your sister said you have something you want to talk to me about?" Mason froze, but he could feel the heat of Gwen's grin beside him.

"Um, uh, er" he stammered.

"Jayden, honey, please don't touch that." She called before turning her attention to the siblings. "I assume this is another ploy by you? Trying to convince me I was wrong to cast you?"

"Uh" Gwen said. "Go on, tell her, Mas."

"Tell me what? Jayden! Put that down. Gwen, go find the other Prancing Ballerinas. I think your brother can speak for himself." Mason watched his sister walk away. "So, what was it?"

"Um, I'm having trouble learning the lines." He said. That was true enough. Did Gwen really think he was going to play along? "There's a lot of them."

"And you have plenty of time yet to learn them." Mrs. Montgomery said. "Everyone, let's head to centerstage to start us off." She walked away, leaving Mason scratching his head. Had he won? What was Gwen's game? "Everyone to

centerstage!"

Mason trod out with everyone else, wondering where Gwen even was. He spied her with the other Prancing Ballerinas, sticking out like a sore thumb since they were all already in costume. Mason shuddered as he remembered wearing that very same thing all weekend long.You're still Pinocchio though. He reminded himself.

"Before we begin, I just want to remind you all that I am proud of each and every one of you. We're going to make this a great production and the only way to do that is with all of you giving it your best. There's a lot to learn, a lot to do, but I know we can do it. That's what rehearsal is all about." She smiled warmly at the faces all around her. "So, any final thoughts before we begin?"

"Pinocchio is too stressful!" Mason announced. "Luckily, my sister Gwen has agreed to swap roles." What was he saying? Everyone suddenly erupted in confusion, but no one was more so than Mason. He spied Gwen with her hands behind her back, but no one else was looking at her.

"Is this... is this true?" Mason felt himself nod, noticing Gwen's arms twitching. She had the cross brace, she had to! "Well, it's not that simple. Sure, I'm sure Gwen is... talented enough to be Pinocchio, but you would..." she seemed taken aback. "Do you even know ballet?" Mason felt himself nod again. "Well, huh."

"I want to be a Prancing Ballerina!" How did no one notice that that was Gwen's voice coming out of his mouth? Even he

had to admit it was hard to notice something as subtle as that when they all saw him suddenly pirouette, landing in an elegant curtsey. He could feel the invisible strings pulling him, but as far as everyone else was concerned, he had done that himself.

"Uh... huh." Mrs. Montgomery said. "Well, I... everyone off the stage. Mason, why don't you show us what you can do?" Mason's eyes almost bulged out of his head. This could not be happening! "I guess crossdressing is a theater tradition." Mrs. Montgomery murmured thoughtfully as she sat down in the center of the front row of the auditorium. "Begin."

"Begin what?"

"Show me your ballet skills." She said, shrugging as if she was as perplexed as him.

Mason stood there, feeling all of the lights and eyes in the theater focused solely on him. He turned his head to stage right and saw Gwen, alone and openly brandishing the cross brace. She mimed blowing a kiss, flashed him a thumbs up, and Mason began to dance. Over the weekend, Gwen had made him learn the Prancing Ballerina's routine, so he knew all too well that this was far more advanced than anything he would need to do in the play. Gwen was just having fun! He heard whispers from stage left and managed to look over there as he elegantly spun in arabesque. The Prancing Ballerinas were watching him appraisingly and he could tell they were impressed. How had they not noticed Gwen puppeting him? Mason came to a stop impossibly perched on

the tips of his sneakers, arms up in fifth position before dramatically bringing them down and curtseying, pulling the hem of his t-shirt out to either side. Halting applause came, everyone stunned by what they had just seen.

"Alright then." Awe colored Mrs. Montgomery's voice. "I guess you've got the part. Are you okay with changing right now?" Mason felt himself nod once again. He had to do something, but he felt an overwhelming urge to smile. He gritted his teeth and the urge subsided, but he could not speak. "That settles it. Gwen, wherever you- ah, you were watching from backstage! You'll be our Pinocchio and Mason will be a Prancing Ballerina." Mason felt like his stomach was on fire. Gwen had never looked happier. "Can you show him his new costume?"

"You saw it this weekend." Gwen said to Mason, grinning as she led him, his teeth still tightly gritted, backstage. "And you and I know it fits perfectly!"