Nate and the Birthday Cake

by andlat

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Chapter 1

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“That's a pretty slick new soccer ball.” Nate grinned and answered without thinking.

“Thanks!” Dad's eyebrows rose and he knew he was in trouble.

“Did you forget that it's Lizzie's birthday tomorrow?” He felt a chill run down his spine. He had not forgotten, but he knew he was in trouble when both parents had the same tone.

“No.” He said before adding half under his breath. “How could I when you've been talking about her party nonstop for a month?”

“Don't start that.” Dad said. “Your party was just as fun.”

“And you are not ruining your sister's party.” He sighed, almost sensing what was coming. “Did you get your sister anything?”

“No.” He said sullenly as his parents exchanged a look. Why did they always ask questions they knew the answer to?

“I think it's best if you go to bed.” Dad said. “And really think about what you did.”

He sullenly complied, even faking being asleep when Dad came in to make sure he had listened. Just to prove a point, he stayed in bed until late the next morning and grumbled his way through half-heartedly vacuuming the living room.

“What do you got there, Lizard?” She had been waving something around for the last five minutes, obviously wanting him to ask. She showed him the Barbie.

“This is gonna be the center of my cake.” Lizzie explained. “She's got your hair.”

“You mean her hair is the same color as mine.” He said. Lizzie nodded, chestnut curls bouncing. It made no sense to him that Lizzie's hair was the same color as Dad's and he had Mom's blonde hair.

“Lizzie, sweetie? I need the doll for your cake.” Mom called from the kitchen. Lizzie's hand latched onto her brother's almost instantly.

“Come see my cake!” She said, excitedly dragging him along, the doll in her other hand.

“The cake's still in the oven.” Mom said, though by the smell of things, it was nearly done. “How about you leave the doll here.” She extracted the Barbie from her daughter's slightly sticky hand. “And go watch for your guests. They should be arriving any minute.” Lizzie bounded away. “And don't you go sneaking off, mister. I need your help.”

“With what?” He turned toward his mom and saw a strange purple stick in her hand. He felt a strange sensation, like he had just jumped into a freezing cold pool. The next thing he knew, he was staring up as his mom fished him out of his t-shirt and shorts. “Mom?” She looked enormous!

“Oh, good. Your underwear shrunk with you.” He yelped and

covered himself. Why was he lying in his mom's palm? He had been one of the tallest boys in his class and now? He could only have been a couple inches taller than a foot! “The guide said it would, but you can never really trust these things.”

“Mom! What is going on? I'm naked.”

“Yes, give me a second there.” Setting him down on the counter, he glared at the Barbie he was next to. She was the same size as him. Almost exactly the same size… Mom's red fingernails popped the bodice off of the Barbie. His eyes widened as he realized what her plan was.

“Mom! No!” He pushed the bodice away. “You can't… I can't be the cake!”

“You're really just the centerpiece.” She snapped the bodice over his bare chest. “All you have to do is stand there. I'll do your hair, it'll be perfect. You'll be part of the party, but you won't get in trouble.” Mom said.

“But… It's crazy! I'm a boy!”

“I used to do my Barbies’ hair all the time. If I can't manage an updo, we'll at least do a nice bow.” She smiled down at him. “Lizzie's going to be so surprised!”

He begged and pleaded, but Mom wrapped plastic wrap around his lower half so snugly, he could do little but flop around, nearly as immobile as the now naked Barbie lying next to him on the kitchen counter. Even his pathetic flops became impossible once she slid him into a hole in the

middle of the cake. The very top of the cake's curve came to his navel and as Mom began to frost the cake, it transformed from plain cake to an ornately decorated skirt that he wore.

“This is going to be lovely.” Mom said as he crossed his arms.

“Where's Nate?” Dad asked.

“Right here.” Nate muttered. A small part of him hoped Dad would intervene, but he had to know.

“That explains your clothes on the kitchen floor.” Dad chuckled. “I was going to scold you, but clearly you're busy with official party business.” He grinned. “I'll leave you to it.” He kissed his wife's cheek and took Nate's clothes away.

Mom gave her best effort on his hair, but ultimately, Nate found himself sporting a big pink and purple bow atop his head. Mom took a step back to take him all in. Nate glared at her. This was a great injustice.

“Smile! I want some nice photos of my baking skills.” Nate glowered at her. “Smile, Nate.”

“No.”

“Smile or you're going with Lizzie to her Princess Fantasy Camp.” She smirked as Nate gave her a prize-winning smile. “Alright. That's better.” She looked as if she might show him the photo, but thought better of it. “Craig? Can you gather the girls around the snack table? The cake's about to come out.”

“Mom. Please. Don't do this.”

“It's not a birthday without cake.” Mom said, lifting the platter on which the cake and her son stood.

“Mom, plea-” his begging became impossible to hear as the cake came out into the dining room full of Lizzie and all her guests.

“You got a Barbie cake, Lizzie?” One girl said.

“So pretty!” As the cake settled down on the table, Lizzie gasped.

“Nate!” Realization swept the room like wildfire and Nate felt like every eye was on him as the girls began to giggle.

“Can we have cake?” Lizzie shook her head.

“We gotta wait, right, Mommy?”

“That's right.” Mom said. “There's party games to play first. Besides, we want Nate to get a chance to enjoy his pretty dress, don't we?”

“No, Mom. You can't leave me like this!” Nate pleaded, but the girls were bigger and much, much louder as they were herded away from him.

Nate could hear the party in the next room and if that had been all there was to the party, he might not have minded. Unfortunately, all the snacks were arranged around the cake and the girls kept coming in, grabbing just a few chips or one cookie at a time to ensure that they would be able to see him over and over and over again.

“Don't you feel so pretty?”

“No.”

“But you're a dolly in a cake!” By the time the question had been asked for what had to be the tenth time, Nate just rolled his eyes.

“Yes, I'm a pretty doll in a pretty cake.”

“Glad you're getting into the spirit of the day.” Dad remarked. Nate blushed.

After what felt like an eternity, the whole party gathered around the table again for cake. Nate realized he was not sure how candles would work. Surely any stuck in the cake would burn him alive? Mom had already made a plan. Lizzie blew out six candles completely separate from the cake.

“Let's get a few more photos of everyone with our cake.” Mom announced. Nate forced a smile, eager to finally be free. He almost cried with joy as she pulled him out of the cake, then out of frustration when he felt Lizzie's sticky hand around him.

“Be gentle.” Dad said.

“He's in his underwear!” Lizzie announced, scandalized. Nate flopped, but it was no use. Lizzie held him tightly while one of her friends bounded into the living room, returning with a fuschia ball gown.

“No!” Nate roared, but the dress went on. When it became clear he could not stand on his own, a doll stand was fetched

and Nate found himself captive in another way as everyone enjoyed cake. He had a bad feeling about what was coming once they finished wolfing it down.

Sure enough, Lizzie proudly carried him out to the living room and a new party game began with him as a focus. Normally, Lizzie had a hard time sharing, but when it came to her doll-sized brother, he seemed to be passed from girl to girl for them to put their chosen Barbie dress on him. His parents simply watched, gently reminding them to be gentle and not to remove the plastic wrap that immobilized him. Nate tried to yell, fight, and wiggle, but he eventually accepted his fate. Leotards and swimsuits were out since his legs could not be separated, so he wore dress after dress after dress. One by one, Lizzie's friends left. While she was sad to see them go, that meant getting the tiny Nate all to herself.

“It's just until Lizzie goes to bed.” Dad said, seemingly entirely unbothered by the fact his son was wearing his five hundredth ball gown and held in one place by a doll stand.

“This is a birthday gift she definitely won't forget.” Mom said, smiling down at him. “And that means you need to be nice to her.”

Despite having insisted to all her friends she wanted him to be her birthday cake again next year, Lizzie seemed to know this was a one-time thing as she ran in with a pink plastic suitcase stuffed full of Barbie clothes. Nate took a deep breath and braced himself, forcing a smile on his face as another pink nightmare of a dress came toward him.