No Small Parts

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

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"I know you're late, Johnny, but there's no need for you to bow." Mrs. Krass said with a smile.

"Sorry, I just... lost track of time." That was somewhat of a lie, but true enough. "I really want to be in this show." His mom had told him a thousand times that there was no such thing as small parts, but he still liked that he was playing a sailor with a name, even if it was just his own, and not some child in the crowd.

"I know you do." Mrs. Krass replied, trying to resist the urge to reach out and tousle the shaggy blond hair of the tiny sophomore in front of her. Johnny's mom had spared some details, such as that Johnny had been barely able to sit still for his bath due to his excitement, but she had called Mrs. Krass to tell her just how excited Johnny was about being cast in the school play. "You better hurry backstage. The other sailors are already getting fitted for their costumes." Johnny nodded and ran off to get his costume. Mrs. Krass shook her head at his spunk. She supposed that when you lived your whole life as the smallest boy, you got in the habit of running everywhere just to keep up.

"What? No... no way!" Johnny said, staring with revulsion at

the costume before him.

"All the sailors are wearing them!" The wardrobe director said with a sigh. "It's your uniform." Johnny looked around, unable to see any of the other guys playing sailors to confirm that. Then again, why would his outfit be any different than theirs, other than in size?

"Fine." He took the shirt, shorts, and cap.

"All the dressing rooms are being used, so you'll have to change out here." Johnny's face turned bright red. "I'm just joking. You can go behind that curtain there." Johnny nodded, but paused.

"Do I just wear my normal shoes?" He pointed down to his scuffed white Velcro shoes. The wardrobe director consulted his clipboard.

"Nope. Mrs. Krass says you're barefoot." This was news to Johnny, but he shrugged it off as he disappeared into the makeshift changing room.

He stuffed his clothes into his backpack but quickly regretted not getting dressed first. Here he stood, with just a faux velvet curtain between him and backstage in nothing but his underwear as he heard voices. Girl voices. He quickly pulled on the shorts, but realized that the braces meant he needed his shirt on first. He yelped a bit louder than he meant to as his shorts fell to the ground as he busied himself with the buttons of his shirt. There were not that many, but they still fought his fingers. He froze as the girls' voices grew closer. What if they

opened the curtain and saw him standing there in his sailor shirt and sky blue briefs? He quickly tugged up the shorts, too panicked to dwell on how ridiculously short they were, barely even halfway down his thighs. Now he had to deal with the braces or suspenders or whatever they were.

Johnny spun around, chasing the straps. Finally he caught them, but they were all twisted. He groaned. He knew enough to know when he was beat, but asking for help? That was another thing entirely. He took a bracing breath and stepped out.

"Hi there, Johnny!" Anne said, looking him up and down. "Oh, what a" she paused. "Handsome uniform." As the shortest girl, she was his dance partner for the musical number that the sailors and maidens did, even though Johnny knew how comical their height difference still was.

"I know, I know." He muttered. "Can you, uh, help me?" The girls all giggled and Johnny felt his face grow warm. They always giggled whenever he said anything!

"Here." Anne said, coming and fixing his suspenders. "And now for your kerchief. You've probably never tied one before."

"I wore one in Boy Scouts, but I quit." Anne simply nodded, her gaze almost maternally warm as she straightened out his outfit.

"Now, where's your cap, buddy?" She tousled his hair. "Every sailor needs his cap."

"Oh, in here." Anne smiled and moved past him to grab it, planting it on his head. "Hmm"

"Hmm?"

"Hey, Mary, do you have some bobby pins?"

"Bobby pins?" He watched as Mary handed Anne a few strange looking things.

"We gotta keep this cap on for the dancing and running and all that, kiddo." Anne said. "Hold still. There! After rehearsal, you just come find me and we'll take that off." Her gaze fell on his feet. "Are you supposed to be in just your socks?"

"No, I" He gasped as she picked him up, setting him in a nearby chair. She yanked off his socks and handed them to him. He sat there for a moment, stricken silent by how quickly she had done that.

"There! I think you're all set, mister sailor." She saluted him, but not in a mean-spirited way. Her smile made it seem like they were sharing a private joke. "Oh! We gotta get on stage! We're in the first scene, aren't we?" She took his hand and pulled him out of the chair.

Johnny tried his best to hide how he had to run to keep up with Anne, a small part of him terrified she might pick him up again. How would that look? A sophomore being carried by the only eighth grader in the cast. As they emerged out onto the stage, Johnny noticed something very wrong. All of the other sailors were there, but their pants, navy blue shirts, and smart black boots looked completely different from his

white shirt and short short shorts, to say nothing of his bare feet slapping on the stage with every step.

"Oh, perfect!" He heard Mrs. Krass say from her seat in the front row, yellow legal pad already in her lap. "Now we have all our sailors looking ship-shape." Johnny blushed and took his place, his mom's words from last night as she dried him off following his bath ringing in his ears.

"I bet you'll be the star of the show!"