Outside Time

by andlat

A classic Andlat tale

The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

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"Alright, you're about to put down roots. I think it's time to play outside." Jack said, noticing that Andlat had not even looked up when he entered the room. The fox remained on the couch, chin tucked to his chest as he slouched, staring at the video game in his paws. Jack half-expected a string of drool to be coming from the fox's mouth. It was almost as though he was raising a zombie. "Andlat, now."

"Let me finish this level."

"Andlat."

"It'll be like two minutes!"

"Kit." The fox's ears perked up in alarm. Jack nodded. "That's more like it, young lady." The fox blushed, his paws playing with the hem of his Ace Incredible t-shirt. He was dressed as a boy, the gesture meant, but Jack did not care. Even tomboy vixenkits were still vixenkits. “Don't forget Rose.” Jack said as the fox shuffled past him. Andlat returned to the couch and the little vixen doll, his face the very picture of annoyance. Jack pretended not to notice as the fox planted a tender kiss atop the doll's head.

As the fox walked past with Rose nestled in his arms, Jack assessed his outfit. He liked to send the fox to the backyard in a sundress, but he did not think Andlat would humor him

insisting he change his clothes. Should've dressed him in one this morning, the wolf thought. There was always next time though.

They emerged out in the backyard and the little fox stopped at the far end of the cobblestone patio. Andlat pensively surveyed the yard, trying to decide which grand adventure to have first. The garden was always fun to explore, as long as he avoided some of the scarier flowers. Not for the first time, he was glad that the sunflowers were at the front of the house. It was easy to avoid those under the pretense of racing the wolf to the car. What adventure first?

Andlat remembered that he had hid something under the slide for safekeeping and was about to dash off to retrieve it when he felt the wolf’s heavy paw on his shoulder.

“Now, Andlat, remember to keep an eye on Rose while you two are playing outside. I don’t want her ever out of your sight, okay?” Andlat nodded. “You know how easy it is for little vixenkits to get lost, don’t you?” The fox blushed. “Give Daddy a kiss.” Jack smiled as the fox went up on his toes to do just that. “Love my princess.”

“Boy princess.” The fox bashfully corrected.

“Yes, boy princess.” The wolf chuckled as the fox ran off to play, making a beeline for the plastic playground with its red slide that must look so high to the little fox. Jack sat down on the patio, chuckling at his penchant for exaggerating how small the fox was. That was a large part of the fun though, wasn’t it?

Andlat crossed the backyard, wishing he could be inside playing his video game still. He knew, however, that whining about that could and probably would result in Jack taking it away for a few days. Maybe even a week!

“It’s just not fair, Rose.” He said to the doll. She smiled up at him, like she always did. Rose understood, even when Jack did not. “There’s a stick under the slide.” He explained to the little vixen’s unspoken question. “ It’s a good stick. I’ll be a brave knight and you’ll be the princess I’m rescuing.” He stopped and thought for a moment. “I’ll be a knight and a wizard. Magic makes everything better.” He nodded to himself. Yes, that sounded fun.

To his dismay, the stick was nowhere to be found. He looked all around the slide and even did a few laps of the full playground, just to be safe. With a disappointed groan, he climbed up the ladder and stood on his tiptoes at the top, scanning the immediate area for the stick. It was gone.

“I bet he took it.” He glared at the wolf quietly reading in a chair on the patio. He launched himself down the slide and marched toward the wolf. He had mowed back here just the day before and had most definitely stolen Andlat’s favorite stick. There was no other possible explanation. Scooping up the doll, he marched across the yard with a singular purpose: to get justice. Jack looked up to see the fox approaching.

“You’re not done playing already, are you?” He asked.

“Where’s my stick?” The wolf’s eyebrows rose.

“Excuse me?”

“I put a stick under the slide and now it’s gone.”

“And you think I took it?”

“Well, yeah. You did, didn’t you?”

“What have I told you about making accusations, kit?”

“Not to.” The fox mumbled as he stared down at his feet, suddenly bashful as his nerve left him. Maybe the wolf had not taken it. Maybe he had misplaced it.

“How about you play a different game?”

“Like what?”

“You had a lot of fun playing hopscotch with those other girls at the park the other day, didn’t you?” The fox simply shrugged in that way that meant the answer was yes, but he did not want to admit it. Jack nodded. “Alright, hopscotch it is.”

Andlat walked over the squares not far from the wolf and looked at them. He wanted his stick, not hopscotch. All the same, he grabbed a pebble. He would play for a bit and then go back to finding that stick, he decided. Setting Rose nearby so she could watch him, he tossed the pebble and began to hop along. He realized quickly that he was instinctively holding down his nonexistent skirt and tried to stop himself from doing so. It was a difficult habit to break.

As he neared the pebble, he bent down to retrieve it,

marveling at how much easier it was to do so when he did not have to worry about his skirt and flashing what he wore underneath. He would have to make sure to wear shorts the next time he played hopscotch in the park, he thought, blushing as he heard the titters of those around him echoing in his ears from when he had inadvertently flashed his puffy baby vixen panties the other day.

“Not a baby vixen.” He mumbled to himself, glancing shyly over at Rose, who only smiled back at him reassuringly. Andlat knew that she did not think he was a baby vixen. They were best friends and knew everything about one another, after all.

He had expected to grow bored of playing hopscotch by himself, but he soon found his mind completely consumed by trying to do his absolute best at it. He imagined Rose cheering him on and even began to concoct a whole narrative around it.

“Even the slightest wrong move and I’ll plummet to my death.” He said to himself. Naturally, any time he made something that could possibly be considered the wrong move, some plot device intervened and he was saved at the last possible moment. Who cares if Rose had used her one-time only spell to remove gravity three times already? He was the hero and the hero always prevailed. Andlat needed to retrieve the pebble before the bad guys did and that required his utmost agility.

Eventually though, his imagination outgrew the dozen chalk

squares on the pavement and, picking up the doll, he swore to resume his noble quest for his stick. Dashing across the grass, delighting in how much easier it was to run when not having to worry about your sundress blowing all over the place, he returned to the scene of the crime: the playground. Caught up in the moment, he climbed up to the top of the slide and slid down before investigating under it again. Where could it be?

Jack watched the fox curiously. Andlat had such a wild imagination that it was sometimes fascinating just to watch him play. He had heard him mumble something while playing hopscotch, but it did not really matter what. What mattered was seeing Andlat hop along like a content little girl. His content little girl.

“It’s not here.” Andlat muttered. “Where is it?” Rose offered no answers beyond a comforting smile and the little fox thought for a moment. He sighed. “I guess we’ll have to check the garden.” He hugged Rose a bit tighter. He was brave. She was just a little vixenkit. He had to keep her safe.

“Where are you going, Andlat?”

“Into the garden.”

“Why?”

“Trying to find my stick.” The wolf examined his face.

“Are you sure you’re not going in there to potty?” Andlat gasped, scandalized.

“No!”

“What’ll happen if you do potty on daddy’s flowers again?”

“Diapers.”

“I don’t understand vixenkit mumbles, remember?” The fox huffed. This was so unfair! They both knew what he had said.

“I’ll have to wear diapers again!” He said much more loudly and clearly. He hoped none of the neighbors could hear.

“Not just diapers, right?”

“Right.” His brush wrapped around his legs. “I’ll wear puffy baby vixen panties.”

“That’s right. You’re gonna think twice about peeing in there now, aren’t you?”

“I wasn’t gonna!” Andlat protested. Jack smiled and nodded.

“Of course not.” The wolf returned to passively watching the fox as Andlat stepped into the fenced off garden, taking care to avoid the daffodils right by the entrance. Daffodils were gross!

“Let’s find the foxgloves. Then we’ll go look at the cucumbers.” Andlat said to Rose, forgetting what he had come to the garden for. Andlat did not really like the foxgloves, but with a name like that, he felt obligated to see them every time he came to the garden.

The foxgloves were right where they always were. The little fox spent a moment cheerfully watching a fuzzy bumblebee fly around the flowers. He liked bees. They always seemed to

be busy doing something, buzzing from place to place.

“Making honey to make my paws all sticky.” He mused to Rose, who silently smiled back. “Let’s go see if the cucumbers are growing in yet.”

Taking care to step over a line of ants crossing the path, Andlat found the cucumbers, squatting down in front of them. He reached out and touched one, like he had seen Jack do.

“Not quite ready yet.” He murmured before realizing he was not sure how to tell if a cucumber was ready to be picked. He stood up and turned toward the patio. “Hey, da” the question died on his lips as he came face to face with a butterfly.

The fox whimpered and took a step back, eyes wide as he did not dare blink. He hugged Rose close to his chest, feeling tears welling up in his eyes, his breath ragged as his chest tightened. It was so big! Too big! The butterfly flew toward him, flapping its brightly colored wings. Andlat tried to run, but he could not trample the plants behind him. There was only one thing to do.

Jack watched a few birds bouncing around in the trees. He sighed, content, and made a mental note to refill the bird feeder over by the playground. Watching the birds was so relaxing, he thought. His ear flicked and he felt his hackles begin to rise slightly.

“Hmm… that doesn’t feel like relax-”

“Daddy!” Jack was to his feet before he had even registered the word. In the span of a breath, he was in the garden. He

picked the fox up and hugged him close as Andlat tried to explain through his tears.

“Shh. Shh shh shh.” Jack soothed. “It’ll be okay. How about we go inside for a bit, hmm?” He felt Andlat’s head move as the fox tried to nod even with his face buried in the wolf’s shoulder. “You can play something inside.” He cooed, heading toward the house. “Outside time can wait until later.”