Pink!?

by andlat

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The Costume Box
2024

Chapter 1

Pink!?

Why did I let her talk me into this? Jesse thought as he stared out the window. Part of him was still excited to start ballet, despite the circumstances, but another part of him, the part that was making his stomach twist, secretly hoped they would never get to the studio. He knew deep down it was at least partly his fault. He had agreed to the bet in the first place, but...

"Why so glum?" Casey asked next to him. He looked at her before returning to staring out the window. She knew why. Rather than continue to annoy him, however, Casey shrugged and gave the duffel bag on her lap a bit of a squeeze. They were about to start their first day of ballet and she had every reason to be especially excited. She had avoided the pink nightmare, even if it was just for a few weeks.

She knew she was partly to blame. When they had toured Curtain Call, all the ballerinas had worn black leotards and white tights, so she had naturally assumed that was what she would wear. Instead, she ended up with pink, pink, and more pink. Pink leotard, pink tights, pink slippers, even a pink hair bow that the attached sheet called compulsory, whatever that meant. And it was not even just pink. It was pink pink. Pinkalicious, according to the tags. It only got worse when she learned her brother would be wearing a white tee and black leggings with plain black slippers that didn't even have ribbon to go around his ankles.

Still though, Jesse was equally to blame. He had agreed to the bet. And it had been him, not her, who had insisted the first round didn't count since mom had called his name right as they had started, but Casey refused to budge. She had lost just as many bets due to parental interference, so fair was fair. Just like he had had the right to call for double or nothing, which he did.

“What am I going to do?” Jesse whispered, pulling himself from the window to look to his sister for advice. She shrugged. On the car to class was really an awfully late time to wonder that.

In fact, they had gone over the plan multiple times. They would trade clothes for a month’s worth of classes. Jesse would wear pink, she would wear his clothes.

"But someone'll notice." Jesse had insisted when he had first learned of the consequences of losing their game.

"No, they won't. I'll just tell everyone you're shy and don't talk much, so that covers your voice."

"Hmph"

"And the whole class learns the same basics. By the time it breaks into boys or girls, the bet'll be over and you'll be back to being a boy."

"Casey!"

"Jesse!" She laughed. "You know you got yourself into this. If it's any consul..."

"Consolation."

"Thanks. If it's any that, you don't have to try it on until class." Jesse had tried to talk her out of it a few more times, but she had stayed firm. Besides, the last thing he wanted to do was attempt a third round and end up a prissy pink ballerina for six months or something!

Back in the present moment, Casey tried her best to stay sympathetic. He really was doing her a favor, she thought, almost feeling like she could see the mass of pink hidden within his duffel bag.

“Here’s what you’ll do.” She leaned in close, pushing a well-loved and worn Princess Prim paperback out of her way. Somehow, they had to keep this completely top secret from mom and dad “It’s simple. When we get there, I’ll go into the boys’ room, you go into the girls’”

"Wait, I have to go change with girls?" Couldn't he get arrested for going in the girls' room?

"And I gotta change with boys. We used to share a room before we moved here, remember? Just do what I'm gonna do. Look at the floor or something and get changed fast."

"But"

"What are you two whispering about back there?"

"We're just excited for class, right Jess?"

"Uh yeah." Casey smiled and pulled away, but not before adding one last reassuring comment.

"At least there's not a tutu." Jesse only rolled his eyes.

"Casey! Are you still complaining about your ballet clothes?"

"No, mom." Casey said, feeling like she was telling the truth for once. I really should be nice to Jess. She thought to herself. Even before he had known about her plan, he had tried to help her get out of all that awful, rotten, no-good pink.

"Maybe… you can wear the same thing as me." Jesse had said, eyeing the pink outfit Casey had brought herself to lay out on her bed to show him what she would be stuck wearing.

"Don't you think I thought of that? Dad said I'd feel like I'm sticking out. Mom said pink won't kill me," she paused. "And I know that, but" she sighed. "It's so much pink. When we went on the tour, they were wearing black and white and now I've got this." She sighed. "I'll think of something."

And think of something I did, she thought as she shouldered her duffel bag and headed inside. Jesse looked like he was about to turn green as Madame Brusatte stood at the doorway, smiling at them.

"Boys to the left, girls to the right." She said cheerily as if they could not see the signs.

"Good luck." Jesse grunted at her. "You'll be fine."

Following her own advice, Casey alternated between looking at the wall and her feet as she got dressed. The black leggings and t-shirt were infinitely better than the pink she thought she would be wearing, to say nothing of the black slippers she

slid on her feet. No one paid her any mind and she hoped Jesse was having just as easy of a time. She could not hear any outraged yelling outside, so that had to be good news, right? You're worrying over nothing, Casey, she told herself.

It was only when she noticed that one of the boys' hair was longer than hers that she realized she had not even thought about hair. She looked herself over, nodded approvingly, and emerged from the changing room just as a small herd of pink ballerinas emerged from the girls' changing room on the other side of the studio space. She immediately spotted Jesse, looking horribly self-conscious. She wondered if one of the girls had helped him with the pink hair bow atop his head. What kind of monster required every girl to wear one, she wondered not for the first time.

It did not surprise Casey one bit that Jesse wasn't the only one who looked miserable all in pink. After all, she'd done everything she could to avoid it. She almost had to hide her face to stop everyone from seeing her laughing, however, when the teacher mentioned it.

"Now girls, let's turn those frowns upside down." Madame Brusatte said with a tone that hinted at this being something she dealt with with every class. "Look at yourselves in the mirror. See the ballerinas in training? I want to hear each of you say, nice and loud, I'm a beautiful ballerina." Casey did her best to look like she was watching with indifference as Jesse had to join the girls in the mantra. "And boys? You are handsome, strong dancers." Casey dutifully repeated it. It felt strange calling herself handsome, but when in Rome, right?

"I believe that's all of us." Madame Brusatte declared, standing imperiously in the middle of the room. This was her domain. What she says, goes. "Let's form two lines. Boys here, girls here, facing each other." The boys formed a much shorter line than the girls, so the teacher came along and gently moved the boys down so that there was one boy facing two girls apiece. "The first thing we will learn is etiquette. It is how we will end every class. My brave, bold boys, you will do this." She demonstrated a crisp bow. "My beautiful ballerinas, you will do this." She dropped into an effortless curtsy. Casey wished she could have been right in front of Jesse as he tried, even as she felt a pang of guilt. She had promised him they'd be learning the exact same things. How hard will it be for him to learn to bow in a month, though?

After that initial embarrassment, the rest of class went smoothly. They learned foot and arm positions. Every chance she got to sneak a peek over at Jesse, he was picking at his tights or fidgeting in some other way. It only reminded her that her brother was in tights and a leotard while she was comfortable in a t-shirt and leggings.

"Casey, please join your classmates in second position. Thank you." She had to fight the urge to squeal in excitement. She was going to enjoy this month!

Any time someone asked Jesse a question, he was able to get by with just a couple mumbled words and come off as just shy. All the same, Jesse refused to talk to Casey about class beyond a short argument the night after the first class about whether a curtsy was ‘basically the same’ as a bow or not,

quickly changing the subject whenever she even tried to gauge how bad he was feeling about having to wear the girls' uniform. If she was surprised by anything, it was just how well he fit in. Of course he fits in, she thought. That was the whole point! Surely Jesse would have said something if he thought someone suspected him of being a boy.

By the time they were through the first two weeks of class, they had the basics down and Casey felt as if they were establishing a rhythm. Jesse seemed more like his old self, though he still fell silent when the topic of ballet came up. Part of that, she knew, was because it was getting more and more difficult for her to keep insisting they were learning the same things. Once they got the basics down, Casey and the boys focused on mechanics. Jesse and the girls focused on poise and something Madame Brusatte called 'airyness'.

Every now and again, Casey considered suggesting trading back early, only to remind herself she had earned this. Plus, she really wanted to avoid the pink outfit for as long as she could. Jesse would survive. If he really complained, she would figure out some way to make it up to him. Doing his chores for a week or something. That's what she had done when she broke his favorite action figure.

Week three of the month arrived and the air in the studio was different somehow. Madame Brusatte seemed excited about something, but what? She stayed quiet as they went through preliminary stretches and a few basic barre exercises.

“Gentlemen.” She said with a punctuating clap. “The

ballerinas have a special surprise for you." Casey's eyes darted over to Jesse, who suddenly seemed absolutely terrified. "Well, it's a surprise for them as well." Madame Brusatte laughed. "Please practice your pliés in the mirror while the girls and I adjourn to the other room. Ladies, let's focus on deliberate, but airy steps! This is still class time!" They vanished and Casey did a few half-hearted dips as she wondered just what the surprise would be. How bad could it be, right? Besides, it's only a few more classes, she thought. If it's really bad, whatever that would be, maybe I can make it up to him somehow. Then again, he did get himself into this, didn't he? She felt conflicted, but that all vanished from her mind as the girls came out of their changing room, their brand new tutus every bit as pink as the rest of their ensemble. And I thought they looked like giant five year olds before, Casey thought.

Madame had obviously coached them on how to emerge because each one of them had her hands placed just so on her tutu as she walked with a straight back to return to the girls' position in the studio. A few of them looked overjoyed, more looked embarrassed, and then there was Jesse glaring daggers at Casey. I might owe him big, she thought.

"Don't they look lovely, gentlemen?" Madame Brusatte said. The boys all nodded and a few mumbled noncommittal responses. "Ladies?" Can't even deny that a curtsy is different than a bow now, Casey thought as the line of ballerinas and her brother curtsied in unison. She quickly joined her line in bowing back. "Now, let's begin class! Now

that the girls have donned their tutus, we will be moving beyond the basics and into the fun stuff!” She smiled as she gazed around at her class. “"Oh, and gentlemen? I expect you to keep your heads up like the girls. If I catch you staring at your feet, I might just have to put you in a tutu too to break you of that habit!" Her laugh was genuine enough to rub the one boy already in a tutu the wrong way. Yeah, a boy in a tutu would be ridiculous, Jesse thought bitterly.

He continued to fume until they were out of class and back in the car. He glared at Casey, who sat there in silence, knowing what was coming. The only question was, would it be now or later?

"Tutus. Weren’t. Part. Of. The. Deal." he whispered emphatically. Casey completely understood.

“I know. If I had known,”

“We need to,” she shook her head to stop that thought right there.

“Sorry, deal’s a deal. It's only two more weeks. You're doing great! I'm still having to watch my feet half the time." Jesse snarled.

“What was that?”

“Oh, we did a lot of stretching today. We’re both pretty sore.” Casey said. Would Jesse tell Dad what was going on? There was no way, right?

It was almost as if the lack of tutus had been holding

Madame Brusatte back and now that the ballerinas had them, she was letting loose, which meant Jesse had to join the girls in a cavalcade of over-the-top femininity. She almost relented and traded back early, but the urge to avoid that pink and especially that tutu won out every time.

By the final week, class ended with Casey and the boys standing in a tight group pliéing as Jesse and the girls fluttered around them on their toes, making a ring of pink ballerinas. In theory, Casey sympathized, but to actually witness it was still delightful. I don't even care that I'm going to be doing that next week, she thought as she watched her brother flounce by in his tutu.

"And... pas du chat!" Madame Brusatte announced. By pure serendipity, Jesse was right in front of his pliéing sister as he changed to the little jumps. "Faces to the left, ladies! Clockwise, clockwise!" Casey forced herself to remain as stone faced as she possibly could, but her toes still curled in delight as her brother pranced out of her sight, tutu bouncing elegantly with each movement. She had to deal with his ire outside of class.

"This whole time, you said we'd be learning the same stuff! You got to stand there while I flounced around on my toes, waving my arms and stuff!" It was hard to believe that the furious boy in Capricorn pajamas had been praised for being such a skilled ballerina just a few hours ago. “Madison even says all the tiptoe stuff we’re doing is only for girls!”

“That means you have less to catch up on than me once we

trade back.”

“I look like a complete sissy!”

"I know, I saw." She snickered, wishing more than anything she could smuggle a camera in before the end of the month. "You've just gotta do it for a couple more classes. After that, I've gotta do it for who knows how long?" She was already planning on just how to convince him to trade again, but he didn't need to know that yet. “It’s just two more classes. If we trade now, it’ll confuse everyone.”

“That doesn’t make sense!”

“Two more classes.” She repeated, all but pushing him toward his room.

Casey was almost relieved that the next two classes were mostly uneventful. They did the same things, but Madame Brusatte didn’t make the girls prance around with fairy wands or anything that might make Jesse even more mad with her. He really seemed like his old self again when he tossed his duffel bag at her the night after their final class in each other’s things.

"I hope you washed this stuff."

"Sure did. I'm finally free." He flopped onto her bed. "A whole month was way too long."

"I've got eleven months of it ahead of me. And recitals. And all that." He looked as if he was about to say something, but closed his mouth. "You sure I can't convince you to do just

one more week?"

"No!"

"I'll do a month of your chores. Make your bed, clean your room, all that." Casey did seem desperate, but he immediately squashed the temptation.

"No way. I'm done with it." He grinned. "Your turn to prance around like a goofball." Casey grinned and closed her eyes.

"Doesn't matter. I still have the sweet, sweet memory of my brother daintily prancing today."

The first class post-trade came and Casey felt a little strange walking into the girls' room, though it amused her to see Jesse's cubby labeled 'Jessie'. It felt even stranger to be easing tights up her legs after a month in a t-shirt and leggings. Somehow, the pink seemed even pinker when it was on her body. She looked around the room and felt a little better. Everyone else was wearing it. Maybe this wasn't so bad. She stood up and fixed her tutu and her hairbow. She nodded and then did a few quick rises to her toes. Yep, she would be fine! Maybe a little awkward for the first twenty minutes, but she'd catch on real fast. She smiled to herself and joined the rest of the class on their walk out to the barre. She gave Jesse a reassuring smile as they crossed paths. Everything had worked out perfectly.

She watched him all the same, just to make sure, as they did their initial greetings, ballerinas curtsying, boys bowing, before returning to their respective barres. Jesse felt so

normal in his leggings and t-shirt. He could still feel the tutu around his waist, but it was thrilling to finally be free of it. He took an excited breath, ready to do proper ballet, not that girly, prissy stuff!

"Young lady?" Madame Brusatte cleared her throat. Was Casey in trouble already? Jesse snuck a quick peek and jumped. Madame Brusatte was right in front of him, looking sternly down at him.

"Uh"

"What do you think you're doing?"

"Who? Me?"

"Yes. Jessie. Who else would I be talking to? Why are you not in uniform?"

"Uh, I..." he stammered, his heart in his throat. What was going on? He was in uniform! White shirt, black leggings, black slippers. Madame Brusatte grabbed his wrist and pulled him out of the line. He looked over to Casey, who seemed as perplexed as he was, although less panicked.

Madame Brusatte brought Jesse into her office and began to rustle around in a cabinet.

"Tell your parents the first replacement is free, but I expect you to be prepared for every class from now on."

"What?" was all he was able to squeak out. What was going on?

"Is this a joke? Did you forget your uniform? I don't much care. I expect you to be dressed in five minutes." She shoved a mass of pink into Jesse's arms and he understood. She thought he was a girl! "As if I'd start class without one of my most promising ballerinas." She murmured under her breath. She actually thought he was a girl!

"But... I... I'm a boy." Madame Brusatte was already moving, manicured hand holding his upper arm as she escorted him past the class. Casey's eyes lit up as she saw what he held. She was going to help him, right? They couldn't both get in trouble, could they? Casey cowardly remained silent as Madame Brusatte dragged Jesse past her all the way to the door of the girls' changing room.

"Five minutes." She repeated before turning to address the class. "The rest of you, let's work on an arabesque while we wait for our wayward ballerina." She looked back toward the dumbfounded boy, his arms practically overflowing with pink. "Scoot."

"What am I going to do?" He mumbled as he found himself once again in the girls' changing room. He could not very well hide in here. Madame Brusatte would easily be able to find him. There was no way to sneak out, though he did eye the window high on the far wall. Even if he could climb that high, he'd probably get stuck trying to squeeze through it. There was no other choice. "You did this for a month. We'll straighten it out after class." He wished he could believe that.

Jesse timidly made his way out of the changing room,

wishing more and more with every step that he had just made a run for it. Madame Brusatte was waiting for him.

“And lower those legs. Jessie, why don’t you make your way up here?” Everyone in the room immediately recognized that he was being put in the troublemaker spot: right in front of the teacher. Thanks to his attire, Jesse almost naturally fell into dainty, airy motions as he walked past the assembled ballerinas. He expected Casey to look overjoyed at his predicament, but she looked worried as she eyed him up and down. What was that about? “Hold on. Face the class.” Jesse complied.

"Repeat after me. A ballerina must never keep her class waiting." Jesse repeated it. He felt Madame Brusatte adjust the hair bow atop his head. "And curtsy. Lovely, lovely. You may join the other girls." She looked over the entire class and nodded before resuming class. "Now, let’s"

The End

Epilogue

“Maybe it’s for the best." Casey said, the both of them sitting on her bed after class. "After all, you spent a whole month learning all that poise and airy stuff, you might have accidentally done that as a”

“You’re the one who came up with this idea!”

“I suggested two weeks, you went for that dumb double or nothing thing. Remember?”

“Which you rounded up to a full month, remember?” Casey scoffed

“I’m right there with you in pink, remember?”

“Yeah, well… you’re a girl. It’s not as bad for you.” She laughed in disbelief.

“Believe me, it is.” She shrugged. “Far as anyone’s concerned, we’re both ballerinas.”

“Not if I tell mom and dad.”

“You’ll really tell them you were wearing my ballet stuff for a month?”

“They’d understand! Wouldn’t they?” Casey shook her head and flopped back onto her bed.

"Face it. We're both stuck."

"We're stuck? We’re?" He hissed. "What do you have to be so upset about?" He was the one who was trapped as a girl!

"Mom and dad paid for a year of lessons." Casey moaned. "Now that you're a ballerina too, I can't swap. I'm stuck in pink for the whole year!"