Take Me Out in a Ball Gown

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The Costume Box
2023

Chapter 1

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"Ow!" Joe pulled his hand out of his glove and shook it. "Not so hard!" Kailee stood a short distance away, hands impatiently on her hips.

"You're the one who said girls can't throw."

"No, I didn't." Returning his hand to his glove, he threw the baseball back to her just as hard as she threw it to him. She smiled patronizingly all the same. "I said you can't throw."

"I'm as good at baseball as you. If not better."

"Then why am I the one on the team?" She scoffed.

"Cuz it's all your friends on the team."

"And because I'm better." Joe said smugly. She rolled her eyes.

"It's cuz all your friends are dorks." She threw the ball to him, or rather at him. He barely got his mitt in the way before it hit him in the stomach. "Watch it!"

"I guess that was a pretty good catch." She said with a shrug. "But I think it's time we prove I'm better."

"What? How?"

"I'll come with you to practice today. You guys got your first game on Saturday, right?"

Throughout practice, he wondered just how she intended to prove she was better at baseball than him. She isn't. He thought more than once. Sure, playing catch and stuff in the yard with her probably helped him get as good as he was, but he was one of the better players on the team. Everyone said so, didn't they?

Joe had almost forgotten about what his sister had said when at the end of practice, she walked up to him with a bat.

"I've got it figured out." She said.

"What's that?" Eddie, one of Joe's teammates and basically his best friend, said.

"Oh, Joe thinks he's better at baseball than me." A few of the other boys came over, curious. "So, I figured we'd use the pitching machine." She shouldered the bat calmly. "Ten pitches each. Whoever hits the most balls, wins."

"Ok." Joe shrugged. He could not very well back down with practically the whole team around him. "What happens if I win?"

"I admit you're better than me." She said, trying to hide her doubt that that would happen. "Oh, and I'll..." she shrugged. "What do you want?"

"What do you want?"

"If I win, you gotta admit I'm better than you."

"Fine. If I win, you gotta come to our game on Saturday as... as a cheerleader."

"There aren't cheerleaders in baseball."

"Shut up, Eddie. A cheerleader with pompoms and pigtails and... and you gotta do a cheer for me with all the stuff you learned in gymnastics." She glared at him.

"You swore not to tell anyone." Mom had insisted she take either gymnastics or dance and she had chosen what she had thought would be the less humilating option, at least until Mom bought her a pink and white leotard. "Well, when I win, I take your place on the team Saturday." Joe's eyebrows rose. He had not expected that.

"What'll I do?"

"You'll find out." She hissed. He worried for a moment that he might have crossed a line.

"Well, uh, you guys are all witnesses, right?"

"Yep." Eddie said.

"If either of you welch on your side of the bet." Zack said, stepping forward. "No one on this team will ever let you live it down." Well, that's not terrifying. Joe thought, looking up at Zack. Did he seem taller?

"So, who's first?" Kailee raised her hand eagerly.

"Are we doing ten and ten or one and one?" She asked. Joe shrugged.

"One then one's more exciting." Zack said. "That way we can keep score."

"Uh, sure." Joe shrugged again. He needed to get in the zone.

"Alright, Kai's first." She grinned and walked up the plate, the bat hovering over her shoulder. The pitching machine thunked and she swung. The ball flew over to first base.

"Good start!" Eddie said. Joe scoffed. He could do that. He switched places with his sister, giving her rainbow tank top and white shorts a derisive look. What if she made him wear that? The thought was so distracting, he missed the pitch.

"Not gonna win if you don't even swing!" Kailee said as she took his place.

Back and forth they went. On his third at-bat, Joe smashed the ball to left field. On his fourth, he bashed it high into the air. Kailee seemed almost shaken, at least until it landed on the wrong side of the foul line. Since they were only counting fair hits, she was still leading. On her fifth swing, she launched the ball out into the outfield.

"That's gotta count for two!" Eddie exclaimed.

"What? No way." Joe yelled. "My hit to left field went farther."

"I don't think so." Zack said. "But each hit only counts for one. That puts Kai up by two."

Joe tried his best, but as Kai hit her tenth and final pitch right past the pitching machine, he knew he had lost. Though the

defeat stung, he knew he had to honor his word.

"Alright, you're better at baseball." He said to Kailee. Or at least just lucky. She smiled at him.

"Guess that means I'll be subbing for you on Saturday, huh?" He nodded.

"And uh, what'll I be wearing?" She laughed, but she could tell everyone was curious.

"Don't worry." She said, giving her brother's cheek a patronizing pat. "I've got a pretty good idea what you'll be doing come Saturday." The way she had emphasized pretty unnerved him, but everyone else was more focused on chatting with Kailee about some of her amazing hits.

"I can't believe I'm doing this." Joe mumbled as the ball field came into view. Just a few days ago, the night before that fateful practice, he had secretly put on his black and green uniform to see how he looked. He had been looking forward so much to the first game of the season up until that fateful practice and now? Now Kailee had it on, sitting as close to him as she could in the backseat of Dad's car and smiling at him.

"Your idea was pretty good, but I don't want your friends thinking I couldn't come up with my own." He sighed.

"You're being a good sport, Joe." Dad said from the front seat. "We're here, kids."

"I better help you." Kailee said sweetly, jumping out of the

car and running around to open Joe's door. He emerged from the car, the enormous purple gown he wore seeming to explode out around him as he pulled it free of the backseat. "Hold still." Kailee ordered, grabbing his skirt and trying to get it all arranged again.

"Remember the plan?" Asked Kailee as she worked. Joe looked over at the tree and nodded grimly. Kailee had decreed that he would spend the day under the tree in this dress, holding a doll. Well, she had said he was supposed to play with it, but Joe hoped just holding it would be enough. "Here, grab and lift your dress." She laughed at her brother's face. "Seriously, you wanted me to do a whole cheer, so I still feel like you're getting off easy."

Carrying a big bag with her, Kailee led Joe over to the tree. Dad had suggested they get there early to spare Joe some embarrassment, but Joe realized that no matter what, he was in for a rough afternoon. Kailee had on his baseball uniform and he was stuck in a princess dress he would have never imagined her owning. He could not even see his feet, just the dress ballooning out in every direction. Kailee busied herself with spreading out a blanket in the shade for him to sit on. She dug into the bag for something else, but looked at Joe.

"Well, go ahead and sit down. I'll arrange your skirt."

"Uh, how?"

"Go right to the middle and then" she demonstrated, bending her knees and sitting on her feet. Joe did his best to mimic her, the dress spreading in a circle around him until his

bottom made contact with the blanket. "Oh, perfect." Kailee did a lap around him, making sure the dress was evenly expanded in every direction, nearly reaching the edges of the blanket. "Smile!" She snapped photos with her phone. "Now, for the whole game, you need to play with your doll."

"What?"

"Yep. Every time me or one of the other players comes over, you should be talking to your doll, singing to your doll, or brushing her hair." She grinned. "Still better than a cheer."

"You would've only had to do a cheer once. Not for a whole game!"

"I"ll try my best to end the game quickly. We win if we're up by ten, right?" He nodded and Kailee grinned, hands cockily on her hips in his baseball uniform. "Say it one more time for me."

"You're better at baseball than me."

"Good." She grinned. "Get playing. Looks like the team's arriving."

The next twenty minutes were torture for Joe. Kailee hovered just close enough to overhear what his friends and teammates said when they inevitably came over to investigate in disbelief, but she was far enough to make it appear that Joe was happily playing with a doll in a dress all by himself.

"Remind me not to make a bet with your sister." One of the boys from the other team said, staring at Joe. Remind me. Joe

thought glumly. The umpire called play ball and everyone left him alone with the doll.

At least, he wished they would leave him alone. He could not decide if Kailee was behind it or not, but his teammates kept coming over so frequently, he had to almost constantly play with the doll. Brushing her hair was the easiest way to watch the game, but his teammates seemed to constantly stand between him and the action, which meant he could see them or the doll and not much beyond that. Kailee had to be sending them, he thought.

"Better not have stopped playing with your dolly." Kailee said as she sauntered over. "Did you see I stole third?"

"Yeah." He hadn't actually. Kailee laughed.

"I didn’t though! I got thrown out. You really are focusing on your doll, aren't you?"

"What inn" he stopped himself before he exposed just how little he actually knew about the game. "I thought you said you were going to win quickly."

"We're up by five." Kailee said. "But I'm sure you knew that." Joe stayed silent. Kailee smirked. "You should sing a song to your doll when I come over next." She said before jogging back to the dugout.

Joe looked out at the field, determined to figure out just how much more game there was. He felt like he had been sitting here for hours, but the game was still going on. He sighed and looked down at the smiling doll. He heard cheers and looked

up to see the team running out of the dugout and onto the field. His heart leaped. That had to be a good sign!

Joe watched as they celebrated, wishing more than anything he could be out there, jumping up and down ecstatically. He wondered if he should go over, dress or not, but he saw Zack turn toward him and suddenly, the celebration was coming to him.

"We won!"

"I saw!" Joe said, quickly setting the doll aside. The game was over and so, therefore, was the bet.

"By like a ton." Zack added.

"Totally! It's awesome." Chris, the third baseman, added.

"And it's all thanks to you." Eddie said with a cheeky grin.

"What? Oh, cuz I sat out? Funny."

"No, man. You're our good luck charm. Well, you and Kailee!"

"Everyone played better than they ever have." Kailee said with a shrug.

"Quit being humble!" Eddie playfully punched Kailee in the arm like he usually did to Joe. "You hit the winning run."

"But Zack" Kailee began, but Eddie turned back to Joe.

"Seriously, man. You in that dress is like good luck times a hundred."

"Huh? What? Oh, you're joking."

"No way, dude. You gotta do this again next week." Joe's heart raced. This, this couldn't be right. He looked at his sister, who was feigning innocence, but he knew this was her idea. It had to be. "Come on, Joe. Promise you'll wear a dress and sit here with your doll again. Be a team player."

"If it takes us to the championship, isn't it worth it?"

"The championship!? I thought this was just next week."

"So you'll do it?" Joe stammered.

"C'mon, Joe! You gotta do it. We beat them by nine points! We never beat them!"

"How about this?" Kailee said. "Joe only has to wear a dress until we lose."

"Yeah!" The team had come to a compromise, whether Joe liked it or not.