Theo's Lost Trunks

by andlat

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Chapter 1

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“You know the drill, Theo.” Mom said, taking the pool bag from him. “Get changed and meet us at the water fountains. We're a group.”

“Sure thing, mom.” Theo pushed open the light brown door into the men’s room, his swim trunks bunched in his hand. He hated the locker room, but cleaning his room had taken so long, he had not had time to change. So, here I am. He thought.

It took a few steps before he realized the locker room was silent. Could it be? It was! It surprised him that the locker room was completely empty on such a hot day, but he was relieved. After all, he had to get naked to put on his swimsuit!

Theo walked giddily over to the wall of navy blue lockers. Normally, he tried to change as quickly as he could, tugging down his shorts and underwear in one fell swoop and using his shirt to cover up as he quickly pulled on his green trunks. He knew he should not waste time because, with his luck, a whole family would walk in right when he was naked.

Theo stepped out of his shorts and popped them into a locker. Then came his shirt. He stood there for just a moment in his briefs, suddenly taken with how empty the locker room was. He turned to grab his trunks. They were gone.

“Where’d they go?” He looked around at the benches. He had

just put his trunks right there! “Did they fall?” He bent over and looked under the bench, even though he knew they wouldn't be there. He had to find them before someone came in and saw this weirdo in his undies crawling all over the floor.

“What’s that?” Tucked between the leg of the bench and the wall was a balled-up pink something. He grabbed it out of curiosity and it unfurled. He laughed as he saw a little girl’s swimsuit. It was pink with a fish scale pattern and even three frills around the waist like a tutu. “Maybe I can give it to Emily.” He said with a snort, dropping it back on the floor. It landed on his foot and he gave it a little kick. “What the?” The swimsuit stuck to his foot.

Theo gave his foot a shake, but the swimsuit clung to it all the same. If anything, it seemed to be covering his foot even more, almost up to his bony ankle!

“Get off!” He snarled, but the swimsuit began to climb up his leg. Theo clawed at it, but it seemed to anticipate his every move. He could not even be sure how, but it somehow got over his other leg and began to climb up his body. He panicked as it covered his underwear, his navel, his chest. In no time at all, he was wearing the swimsuit. “Ok, this is weird,” he said, trying to stay calm. “But I just gotta get it off, right?” The swimsuit seemed to have other plans.

Theo ran his fingers along the straps, but every time he tried to pull them down off his shoulders, they snapped back to where they had been. Figuring he would try from the bottom,

he batted in frustration at the skirt until he got to the elastic at the bottom. It was so much more skimpy than his underwear and he realized his briefs, which he knew he had been wearing, were gone. He tugged at the swimsuit, but with the straps steadfastly on his shoulders, he could not get it down. Enough was enough. Time to get help.

Slipping his feet back into his flip flops, he walked to the door, grateful that the locker room was eerily empty for another reason now that he was forced to cross the expansive room in the most girly swimsuit that had ever existed. Why was this even in the men's locker room?

He stood by the drinking fountains, but realized his mistake. He could not be seen like this! He turned back toward the men's room door when he heard his mom and sister's voices.

“Where is your brother?”

“Not sure.” Good, they didn't realize it was him.

“Theo? Theo!” Shoot. Mom had spotted him. He turned around with a nervous chuckle. “What on earth are you wearing?”

“So pretty!” Emily said as Theo's mouth opened and closed, a strangled whimper all that came out.

Theo looked at his sister's navy blue and white swimsuit. It had no extra decoration. It was sleek and cool. Even the way her straps made an X on her back seemed better than his. She looked like she was about to swim in the Olympics. I look like her girly little sister, he thought, almost running a hand

through his short hair to remind himself he was not, in fact, a girl.

“It's very pretty!” Emily said, looking him over. “Didn't I have one like that when I was four?”

"Emily, stop teasing your brother. A swimsuit's a swimsuit." Had Mom decided he wanted to wear this? She pulled sunscreen out of her bag. "You do know you'll get tan lines, right?" Was that all she was worried about!?

"I swear, it put itself on me." Theo said. How Mom was able to give him her no nonsense eyes even with giant sunglasses in the way, Theo had no idea.

"This isn't Emily's." Mom said as she slathered sunscreen around the shoulder straps. "Where did you even get this? You didn't put on a swimsuit you found on the floor, did you?"

"No! I told you!" Why had it been on the floor of the boys' room anyway? "It put itself on me."

"That's not something swimsuits do." Mom shrugged. "Well, if you're happy."

"I'm not." Theo said.

"Come on, let's go swim." Emily grabbed his hand, leaving Mom to find them a spot for their towels.

“Let go!”

“What? You look like my little sister.”

“I'm two years older than you.”

“And a boy.” She smirked. “But that swimsuit? Geez.” Theo rolled his eyes and launched into the pool, hoping he somehow soaked Emily even if she was in the pool when he came up from his cannonball.

Even with his girly as all get out swimsuit, before Theo knew it, things felt normal again. He raced his sister across the pool, laughing and dodging other, more serious swimmers. The only times he really noticed his swimsuit was when his sister commented on it or he got out of the pool and felt it tug at the frills on his swimsuit. Why did it have to be so frilly? If he had been in a swimsuit like Emily's, he might not have minded so much.

“Why are you wearing that anyway?” Emily asked. Her tone was less teasing and now more curious.

“I was in the locker room, I lost my trunks and when I was looking for them, this thing climbed onto me.”

“That doesn't make any sense. Wouldn't someone have seen?”

“It was empty in there!”

“But there's so many people here.”

“I dunno! It's weird! I don't want to wear this stupid thing!” He tugged at the shoulder strap, almost certain it would snap back into place like it had before. When it didn't, he stared at his shoulder in confusion.

“Checking for tan lines?” Emily shook her head. “You really are weird.” She swam off, but Theo had one thought in mind.

If he could take the swimsuit off now, he was going to!

He swam faster than he ever had over the ladder. The lifeguard was busy chatting with a duo of tanned surfers, so he ran over to Mom's base camp where she sat, reading a book.

“Tabby! No running!” He heard a woman call. Mom set her book aside and looked right at him “Tabby! Walk.”

“Tabby?” He panted. Mom stood up and enveloped him in a beach towel.

“All done swimming?”

“Uh, yeah. Can I go change?”

“We go as a group, remember?” She began to vigorously dry him off. “You can sit and read with Mommy while we wait for Emily.” With the towel over his head, Theo was almost certain he had misheard Mom. He finally managed to wrangle the towel from her and draped it over his shoulders, trying to cover up as much of his swimsuit as he could.

“Ugh, you gave me Emily's.”

“It's not a big deal.” Mom said. “Here, protect your eyes.” She pushed a pair of sunglasses on his face. When he tried to adjust them, he realized the lenses were heart shaped. What was going on? “Here, this'll be fun.” Mom lifted him up, towel and all, placing him on the lounger next to her. Before he knew what was happening, she handed him a tropical punch juice box and a picture book. "Now you're a poolside

reader like Mommy!"

“Glitter the Unicorn Goes to the Beach?”

“I know you've read it. Just hold it for a photo.” Mom said, smiling as she held up her phone. “Big smile!” Theo knew his smile was more confused than happy even before Mom showed him the photo. He gaped. That was not him! That was some little girl! His hand shook as it touched his head to confirm he had the two mini space buns he had seen in the photo.

“Mom, this… something's wrong. That isn't me.”

“Yes it is.” She switched her phone's camera so he could see himself. He stared in disbelief.

“This… I… I'm Theo. Your son.”

“Tabby, what are you talking about?”

“Who is Tabby?” At that exact moment, Emily came strolling over.

“Emily! Tell Mom who I am.”

“Uh…” Emily looked from Theo to Mom.

“Are you done swimming? I think we need to get a fussy little miss home. She's had a little too much sun.” Mom fanned herself. “And I think I have too. Let's go home and crank that AC!” She laughed.

“Mom, this… this isn't funny!”

“Tabby, I've had enough of whatever this is.” Theo, panicked, grabbed her phone. Her lockscreen had been the same photo for months now: him and Emily playing on the old swingset in the backyard at Grandma and Grandpa's! That would prove it.

“What?” His voice was the epitome of defeat as he looked at the lockscreen. It was completely different! There stood Emily in a dress Theo remembered her wearing last Easter. Standing next to her was… was him, in the same dress. The pair of them were playfully holding their dresses out as they smiled for the camera. “This… this isn't right.” He murmured as Mom took her phone back and, picking him up, carried him toward the locker rooms.

Theo hardly even whimpered as she carried him into the girls’ locker room, only putting him down to help him rinse off under the shower. He sat, staring down at his fingers which now sported chipped white nail polish, as Mom dressed him in girls’ underwear, white shorts, and a red tank top.

“Can… can we get ice cream?” He asked as Mom led him out into the sunlight. It was a post-pool tradition.

“That depends.” Mom said. “Who are you?” His lips quivered.

“Tabby.” He said reluctantly.

“Attagirl!”