Wolfboy

by andlat

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The Costume Box
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Chapter 1

Wolfboy

Ricky stared at his reflection, barely able to even believe his eyes. With a growl, he bared his teeth. That usually made him feel ferocious, but now? Even his sharp eye teeth could not overcome the humiliation of standing there in Mrs. Chaney's guest room wearing a bright yellow dress. Fighting back embarrassed tears, Ricky looked at his face again, trying to block out the image of the dress seared into his mind. His face looked the same. Bright, intelligent eyes, freshly combed hair, perky pointed ears, his sharp teeth. He liked to think of his teeth as the teeth of an apex predator, even if mom and dad made him eat his vegetables every day. Mrs. Chaney and a few other old people had told him he looked a lot like Eddie Munster, whoever that was.

"Bet he never had to wear a dress." Muttered Ricky. For a split second, he wondered if everyone thought Jane looked like Eddie Munster too. She was his twin after all. Thinking about her however only reminded Ricky that he was standing here, wearing her dress. She was such a little goody two shoes! That was the reason, at least in his mind.

In truth, Ricky was there because he had been grounded for refusing to help with the chores. For most families, being grounded meant staying at home, but Ricky's parents had other ideas. When you were grounded, you were basically attached at the hip to either mom or dad. If dad needed to go to the hardware store, you went with him. If mom needed to

go get a dress altered, Ricky tagged along. That was why he was here. Jane was out of town for a karate tournament, so Ricky, being the same size, had been volunteered against his will as the dress model. What did Jane even need the dress for? He had forgotten to ask or at least had not heard when Mom had told him. Was she going to be a bridesmaid or flower girl or something for their cousin Laura's wedding? That sounded right, didn't it?

His ears twitched as he heard the doorknob turned. He spun around, blushing as the dress's skirt brushed his thighs so very femininely. At least he had gotten to keep his own underwear on, he thought as his mom walked in.

"Oh, good. You got dressed." His mom said, ignoring his embarrassedly squeaky protests.

"I told you I could do it myself!" She disregarded his attempts to push her away as she surveyed her son.

"Other than zipping it up." She mused. She turned him toward the mirror so he could see his face as she zipped the bodice, tightening it against his body. "Fits like it was made for you."

"It wasn't!"

"I know." She said with a tired sigh. "But if it fits you like a glove, it means it'll fit your sister just as well." He pouted, but nodded.

"Can I take it off now?" He tried to reach behind his back to undo the zipper, but his mom caught his hand.

“Oh, no, you don’t. We need to go show Mrs. Chaney. She’ll really decide if it fits you or not.”

Mrs. Chaney was nice enough. She always gave out full size candy bars on Halloween and had even used to send gifts to Ricky and his sister on their birthday. Having said that, there were few things Ricky wanted less than for her to see him in this dress, even if she thought he was amazing for doing a favor for his mom and sister. He hoped that she would not make too much of a big deal out of his appearance, but he knew that hoping for that was probably pointless. He sighed as he allowed his mom to shepherd him out into the living room where Mrs. Chaney sat with her glass of lemonade.

A smile sprouted on her face as soon as she heard the soft shuffle of Ricky's feet and her face completely lit up once she saw him. His face turned a deep shade of red that completely clashed with the soft yellow of the dress he wore.

"Oh, it fits perfectly!" Mrs. Chaney gushed. "Absolutely perfect!"

"I know. I was pleasantly surprised myself. Don't slouch, Ricky. Go ahead and turn for" with her hands on his shoulders, she guided him in a turn. "See? Jane's going to look downright beautiful." Ricky shifted from foot to foot as the two women talked over his head, going on and on about how pretty the dress was and, worse, how well it fit him. He wanted so badly to go put on his own clothes, but they were left, all but forgotten, in the guest room.

"Aren't we done yet?"

"Ricky, hush." His mom said.

"We really do appreciate you doing this." Mrs. Chaney said, gently patting his arm. "Hmm."

"Hmm?" Ricky was not afraid to let his annoyance show.

"Ricky." His mom scolded again.

"Look here. The hem's come undone here." Mrs. Chaney kneeled down to Ricky's knee and touched the dress. "Oh, shoot."

"Well, can you fix it?"

"I can't." Mrs. Chaney said. "But Leslie Chisholm over on Rowan Road certainly can. She was a seamstress for years!"

"That's good." Mom said with a smile.

"I'll go call and see if she's available. It's the issue with these dresses. They sit undisturbed for years, but somehow still get wear and tear." She hurried into the other room.

"Can I go get changed?"

"No, leave it on." Mom sighed as if Ricky was somehow unreasonable for not wanting to wear the frou-frou dress instead of normal clothes. "It'll probably be easier to do the little fixes while you're wearing it." Ricky groaned. At least no one he knew had any reason to walk by Mrs. Chaney's house and somehow see him in the window. All the same, he fidgeted, barely able to even believe he was stuck here in this dress.

"You owe me big."

"You're the one who got yourself grounded." Mom replied.

"Good news!" Mrs. Chaney said cheerfully. "She's able to see us right away."

"That is good news!" Ricky's mom said as Mrs. Chaney began to put on her shoes. Ricky had a bad feeling about this.

"What... what's going on?"

"It's a quick five minute walk." Mrs. Chaney said to Ricky's mom. "We'll just pop over and let her have a look at Ricky." Ricky's jaw all but dropped.

"What? No... no way."

"Ricky," his mom said in warning. "It's just a block or two away."

"I... you..." his shock was so absolute that he could not even form a coherent sentence. This had to be a joke. That was it, right? While he was getting dressed in this horrible thing, his mom and Mrs. Chaney had conspired to play a prank on him, hadn't they? That was the only thing that made sense.

"Let's go." His mom said.

"Can't I... I... I can take it off and then put it on again when we get there."

"No." His mom said in her no nonsense voice. "You're already wearing it and Mrs. Chisholm is expecting us."

"I understand you're embarrassed, Ricky." Mrs. Chaney said, the voice of reason. "So, I have an idea to at least make it a little easier on you."

It took some cajoling on the part of Mrs. Chaney, but Ricky emerged from the house between the two women with a wide-brimmed sun hat on his head. Sure, it made him look more like a sissy, but it did at least hide his short hair. All the same, he tried to walk at a quick pace, confident that anyone who saw them would look past the floral sun hat and dress to his scuffed sneakers and know that he was a boy.

“Everyone’ll think I’m a sissy.” He muttered, even though the walk to Rowan Road proved entirely uneventful.

“Here we are!” Mrs. Chaney pointed to the white and blue house ahead of them. “Oh, and there’s Mrs. Chisholm!” A woman a few years older than Mrs. Chaney stood on the porch, waving to them.

Ricky had hoped it would be a quick visit, but Mrs. Chisholm had other plans. She insisted on feeding them lunch, which meant Ricky had to sit next to his mom, following a crash course in how to sit in a dress, as they ate corned beef sandwiches.

“Oh, that was lovely.” Mrs. Chisholm said, dabbing her lips with a napkin before turning a startling pair of hazel eyes on Ricky. “Now, to the lady of the hour.” Before what she said could even sink in, Ricky found himself pushed into another room where he had to stand on a platform before a tri-fold mirror as Mrs. Chisholm very thoroughly examined the dress,

murmuring to herself all the while. Where had his mom and Mrs. Chaney gone? They could not have really left him here to be poked and prodded by this stranger, could they?

“How’s it going in here?” Ricky’s mom asked, poking her head into the room as if there was nothing amiss about the tableau before her.

“Did you notice there’s a tear right here?” Mrs. Chisholm asked, lifting Ricky’s arm as if he was nothing more than a mannequin to her.

“Oh, dear!”

“There’s a lot of wear and tear that I’m noticing. Little things, but time consuming to fix them all.”

“I see.” Ricky’s mom said.

“Best bet is to take it off her and I’ll fix it all up. Should have it done in a day or two.”

“I see.” Ricky’s mom repeated again, even as Ricky’s heart froze. This crazy lady actually thought he was a girl! Without the sun hat, he had thought it was obvious he was a boy. “Well, we didn’t really bring anything for um her” she ignored her son’s scandalized glare. “To change into.”

“Don’t worry.” Mrs. Chisholm said at once. “I can find something else for the little dear to wear.” She smiled at Ricky’s triple reflection. “You won’t have to walk home in your underthings, princess.”

“I’ll leave you two to it then.” Ricky’s mom said, sending an

ominous shiver down his spine. She paused just outside the door, wondering if she should rescue her son. No, there was no need. Whatever Mrs. Chisholm had in mind, it would be a better punishment than anything she could come up with. Besides, she would surprise him by telling him his grounding was over, once all this had resolved itself.

As time passed, the ladies in the living room began to wonder just what was taking so long. Ricky's mom had a sneaking suspicion that he was putting up a fight and making things difficult for Mrs. Chisholm. More than once, she came close to going to check, but each time, Mrs. Chaney smiled and reassured her it was probably fine.

"Leslie used to be a teacher. She knows how to handle a single child."

"I'm just a little worried. She genuinely thought Ricky was Jane, I think." Mrs. Chaney laughed.

"I'm not sure which is worse for him. Her finding out or her not." She laughed again. "Well, no harm, no foul, if you ask me."

"True. His sister and him used to wear all sorts of ridiculous things when they were little." Reassured, she leaned back. It was only about ten minutes later that she heard the sounds of them coming out. There was an odd click-clack. Had Mrs. Chisholm been wearing high heels? She could have sworn she had been in house slippers...

As they turned the corner, neither woman knew just what to

think. Standing there beside Mrs. Chisholm was a girl in a pink dress far more extravagant than the yellow one Ricky had been wearing. It had bows all along the bodice, a voluminous skirt held up by a petticoat, and looked like the sort of thing Shirley Temple would wear in one of her movies. The girl's white tights-clad knees knocked against each other as she squirmed in place, her feet covered by shiny black shoes, the source of the click-clack.

Ricky's mom was speechless. For just a fraction of a second, she wondered when Jane had gotten here. Then reason set in and she realized the little girl standing there in tights and a dress with that enormous pink bow in her hair was actually her son Ricky. He looked downright mortified and felt even worse, but all he could was stand there and endure their coos of adulation. Unable to help herself, Ricky's mom took more than a few photos with her phone. Ricky swore to make sure no one ever saw them. If Jane got her hands on them, she would have blackmail for the rest of their lives!

"I may have gone a bit overboard." Mrs. Chisholm said once the exclamations had died down. "But I so enjoyed having a young lady to dress again." She patted Ricky's shoulder, seemingly unaware of his attempts to pull away. "With how much she pouted and whimpered, I get the sense she's quite the tomboy. Most girls are nowadays compared to how they used to be, but every girl needs to feel pretty every now and again."

"Yeah, you could say she's a tomboy." Ricky's mom said, trying to hide her laughter. She wanted to know just how Mrs.

Chisholm had persuaded Ricky into the over-the-top pink party dress, to say nothing of the full outfit. Even Jane, who liked to doll herself up from time to time, would have balked at the outfit her brother now wore. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen him, I mean her look so… pretty.”

“Mom!” Ricky exclaimed, unable to stay silent a second longer.

“You know it’s true, hon.” She said. “I know you were admiring yourself the whole time!” Ricky looked like he was about to explode, so she came closer to look over the outfit.

"Settle down." Mom said gently, so that only he could hear. "You've worn worse when you and Jane played dress up as kids." He sighed, but nodded.

"Well, that wasn't so... public." He muttered. Mom at least pretended not to hear.

“This is remarkable. You just had this outfit lying around?”

“I did.” Mrs. Chisholm replied. “Danville Middle School’s drama department ordered it for a show, but the show got cancelled and they weren’t able to pay for it. I keep meaning to sell it, but it’s hard to find a buyer for something like this.”

“It’s very pretty.” Mrs. Chaney said appreciatively. She was as amused as Ricky’s mom was, but she knew the boy had to be dying inside. It was bad enough wearing the relatively plain yellow dress. The one he had on now just had to be a nightmare for him. “But I’m not sure it’s Jane’s cup of tea, as it were.”

“It’s a great outfit for tea!” Ricky’s mom said with a laugh. “But, how often does Ri, um Jane have tea?”

“True.” Mrs. Chaney agreed.

“All the same, it’ll take me a couple days to get her actual dress mended, so she’ll have to wear that home, won’t she?” Mrs. Chisholm said.

“What?” Ricky protested. “How… wha… I can’t!”

“It’s just back to Mrs. Chaney’s, Ricky.” Rick’s mom said. “You’ll have your old clothes back in no time. Though… we may have to help you take it off.”

“So you better mind your manners and be a good little girl.” Mrs. Chaney teased. Ricky groaned.

“On second thought, perhaps we can stay for a while.” Mom said so that only he could hear again. “Unless, that is, you promise to be good?” Ricky nodded, wincing as the bow between his ears bobbed back and forth. As the women cheerfully said their goodbyes, Ricky faced the ordeal before him. With any luck, they would let him run back to Mrs. Chaney’s. Then again, with the dress bouncing up and down with every step and the shiny black shoes squeezing his feet, he was worried all he could manage was

dainty little steps.

“Shall we?” Mrs. Chaney said, grinning down at Ricky.