

THE HARDY BOYS



MAISON ENCHANTEE 4



When last we saw them, the Hardy Boys were, to be blunt, quite beside themselves. Each now found himself a girl. What's more, each wore a skirt. The boys, it may be certain, knew full well that true blue All-American boys do not wear skirts unless they are Scotsmen, and then only on special occasions when called upon to play the bagpipes. Moreover, they had found a treasure chest in the attic. They thought this mysterious chest could provide a clue or more, only to discover the chest was locked. Further, a note indicated the key the chest was in the chest.

"That is not helpful at all," Frank said. "How can we get the key to unlock the chest when it's *inside* the chest? He clenched his fists in rage and felt his long fingernails dig into his palms.

"I hate this stupid house and that mean little girl," Joe said. Feeling his heart racing as he was overcome with anxiety, he fished his lipstick out of his purse and started to touch up his lipstick. Though he'd only recently been compelled to wear makeup, he found the act of touching up his makeup soothing. As he puckered and painted, his eyes drifted to the old, musty mannequin in the corner. An idea stirred; connections started to be made. Joe took out his phone and inspected his face, using one long fingernail to scrape a little smudge where his lipstick had strayed over the bottom of his lip. He liked his lips to have a perfect heart shape and—heart. Chest.

His mouth fell open. "I have it. I know where to find the key."

"Duh," Frank said, twisting some of his long hair around his fingers. "We already know it's in the chest."

"Exactly." Joe went over to the mannequin and got ready to pick it up. He'd once helped the lady at his mother's dress shop move the mannequins around, so he knew it would be easy. He grabbed the mannequin and tried to lift, but the base barely came off the ground. Thinking he needed a better position, he looked at Frank, who was watching with some interest even as he checked his own makeup. "I need to use my legs, not my back." Rubbing his hands together, Joe bent his knees and once more tried to lift the dummy. His arms shook as he made pretty little panting noises. "Unh. Unh." The dummy barely rose off the ground.

Blowing his bangs out of his eyes and planting a hand on his hip, Joe said, "That must be the heaviest dummy ever."

"It's not heavy," Frank said. "You're just a weak girl. Look how tiny your arms are."

"Unh, for your information, you have tiny arms, too, Francine."

"I can still beat you up, Josie."

The boys stared at each other, slitting their eyes. Joe threw his hip out to the side and tossed his hair. Frank did the same. "Hold on," Frank said, seeing how Joe looked and knowing he was standing the same way. "We're acting like girls."

"Whatever," Joe said, voice oozing with sass, then he squeaked. "You're right." Immediately, he changed his posture, trying to stand more like a man, though it wasn't quite possible in his high heels.

Frank did the same. "We need to work together," he said. "Or we may end up being bridesmaids at Nancy Drew's wedding."

"That does sound like a living nightmare. They always have to wear such ugly dresses."

The boys lifted the dummy together and turned it over.

There were cobwebs stretched across the opening. Joe felt an intense fear of spiders and took a step back. Frank might have given his brother a hard time for acting like a girl again, but they had just agreed to work together. Besides, he also found himself consumed with a fear of spiders, and he didn't want to have to get anywhere near those webs. "It's a good thing boys aren't scared of spiders," he said, thinking to outwit his brother. He lowered his voice and chuckled. "Hunh. Hunh. Hunh."

"I'm a boy," Joe murmured. "Boys aren't scared of spiders."

"That's right," Frank said.

Joe bit his lip, gathered his courage and reached into the mannequin hollow center.

"Gross." He felt the webs sticking to his arm, tickling, but he was determined to keep going and reached further in, closing his eyes, feeling around the chest area until he felt the cold hard metal of a key. "Got it!"

He pulled the key out and held it up triumphantly, then immediately found a rag to wipe the disgusting webs from his arm. "I just don't like the way webs feel," he said. "It's not like I was ever afraid of spiders. Hahaha."

"Of course not."

The boys decided to move the chest into an open space on the floor before opening it. As they lifted it together, Joe couldn't help but notice just how pretty Frank looked now, with his bright skin, big eyes and tiny nose. He had a serious look on his face, which just seemed so cute now that he was so pretty. Guys will be all over him, Joe thought, then felt a stab of fear hit him as he realized the same was true for him. Gross, he thought, hating the idea of guys asking him for his number.



Once they'd finished moving the chest, the boys took the key and inserted it into the big, rusty padlock. Click. It popped open, and Joe and Frank pushed the lid open. Their faces immediately lit with a golden glow as the light caught what was inside the chest. "Wow," Frank whispered.

"Double wow."

The chest was heaped full of gold coins, jewels, goblets, even a silver tiara. There were also stuffed animals and wooden horses. On top of it all sat a fancy music box made of marble, with aluminium filigree and encrusted with sparkling diamonds.

“Diamonds,” the boys gasped, suddenly finding themselves fascinated with the sparkling jewels.

Joe reached toward the box, but Frank snatched it first. “Hey.”

“It might have been booby trapped,” Frank said. “I was protecting you.”

Joe rolled his eyes.

Frank, as smitten as he was with the diamonds, had noticed a small plaque on the side of the box. He now read the inscription, a smile spreading across his pretty face. “Play the song to break the spell.”

Joe’s mouth fell open. Frank’s mouth fell open. The boys squealed with joy. “Open it. Open it,” Joe said.

Frank opened the box to reveal a tiny ballerina perched on one leg. It didn’t move. No music played. “It needs to be wound up.” Yet, there was no way to wind it up. He saw only two keyholes. “We need more keys,” he said, annoyed.

“Maybe they are around here in the attic somewhere,” Joe said, crestfallen, only to notice a piece of parchment rolled up and bound with a string. “What’s this?” He pulled the parchment from the chest, undid the string and rolled it open on top of a dusty oak desk sitting in the corner of the attic. Frank came over and they looked together. It was a map, and they quickly determined it was a map of the local area, albeit distorted and inaccurate as old maps tended to be. The coastline was familiar enough, and of the coast there was a pirate ship with dash marks leading from the woods to the Maison Enchantee. An X marked the spot in the family graveyard behind the mansion.

“A treasure map,” Frank squealed. He’d always loved stories of lost pirate treasure. “And look!” There, in the bottom corner read the words, “Here be the keys.”

“All we have to do is follow the map and dig up the keys,” Joe said. He noticed a diary among the treasure and plucked it from the chest. Maybe it would have more clues?

“Better wait until tomorrow to go digging,” Frank said. They could still hear the pounding of the rain on the roof, the whistling wind rattling the windows.

Joe did not like the idea of spending the night in the spooky house. “Boys aren’t scared of rain,” he said. “We should go right now.”

Before Frank could even start to answer, a flash of lightning lit up the attic and then a boom of thunder shook the whole house. “Boys may not be afraid of rain,” Frank said, “but those of us who aren’t blonde are smart enough not go out when there’s lightning everywhere.”

Joe tilted his head to the side and played with his hair for a moment. “Agreed,” he finally said. “Good thing only one of us is blonde. Maybe we can at least find a bed somewhere that isn’t all gross and moldy.” He turned and screamed.

He found himself staring directly into eight, cold, gleaming spider eyes. Those eyes belonged to a big, fat, black spider that dangled from the ceiling. As it looked at Joe, it began to pincer its mandibles as if preparing for a feast.



Joe screamed once more and ran from the spider as fast as he could in his heels then froze. He now found himself staring down at a greasy looking brown rat, which stood on its hind legs, chattering. He screamed again. Frank, who now saw the spider and the rat, screamed.

Then they both screamed and began to run about in a panic. Terrified, the boys raced around the attic, bumping into each other, the furniture, the walls, tottering on their heels until they finally managed to find a safe path to the stairs, which they descended, constantly glancing back to make sure they weren't being followed. Each of the boys was hyper-ventilating, his chest heaving. "I have a confession to make," Joe said.

"Yes?"

"I was always scared of rats."

"Me, too. Also, spiders."

"You were scared of spiders?" Joe said. "What a girl." Then, he looked back over his shoulder and winked. "Me, too."

"Let's never tell dad."

"Or anyone."

As the boys went down the stairs, the shutters on a window blew open and a blast of wind soaked them both. "Great," Joe said, water now dripping down his face. "My makeup is ruined now."

"It just keeps getting worse," Frank agreed.

They continued on downstairs until they found a bedroom that didn't seem too bad. They went in, propped a chair against the door to keep it shut. "I'm cold," Joe said, shivering, wet, miserable.

"Me, too. I wish we had something dry to wear." He went to the dresser and pulled open the top drawer, not really expecting to find anything. Looking inside, he frowned and considered before picking up a dainty little silk top. "There's stuff in here," he said.

Frank looked horrified. "I can't wear that," he said. "It's for girls."

"So what you're wearing right now is for guys?" Joe said, looking at his brother who was sitting in his skirt and blouse, with his legs crossed. "Do what you want, but you're not getting into bed with me all sopping wet."

The boys overcame their manly shame and were soon dry and much more comfortable in their girl's silk pajamas. In fact, the silk was cool and comfortable against their soft skin. Meanwhile, they each went instinctively into what was for now their evening routine. Using wipes they'd found in the attic, they cleaned off their makeup, then brushed out their hair.

“We’re like two sisters,” Joe said as they brushed their hair. “If dad saw us now...” His voice trailed off, and he shivered to even think of what his father would say if he could see him now.

“Once we get the keys, we’ll be able to break the spell,” Frank said. “No one will ever know.”

Their nightly routine complete, the boys climbed into bed. Joe propped his head on Frank’s arm. As much as they fought, in the end the Hardy Boys were brothers, and they always stuck together. “What if we can’t break the spell?” Joe asked as they each slowly drifted off to sleep. “What if we’re stuck as girls forever?”



“Don’t think that way,” Frank said. “We’ll break the curse.”

“I hope you’re right.” Joe closed his eyes. He tried to imagine his future life as a girl, and he saw himself in the kitchen covered in flour while a crying baby tugged on the skirt of his dress. Smoke was coming from the oven, and he heard himself cry out, “Calgon take me away!” He shivered. “I think I’ll become a nun,” he said. “That way I won’t have to get married.”

“Nuns are married to God,” Frank murmured as he drifted off to sleep.

‘Oh,” Joe said, reconsidering. “Well, I’d have to date God first. Just to make sure he’s nice.”

The storm had broken by the time the boys woke in the morning. Joe yawned and stretched, surprised to find he was a girl, newly bothered by how strange he felt inside this girl’s body. All the parts seemed too big or too small, and it was definitely much bouncier than his old body.

He went to the window and pulled open the curtains. Though the rain had stopped, the sky remained filled with menacing grey clouds. He could see the tombstones of the cemetery, the stone arch, though it was shrouded in mist.

Even the soft light coming in from the window on a cloudy day was enough to sting Frank’s eyes and make him moan. “Close the curtains.” At the soft sound of his voice, he opened one eye and looked down to see a soft pair of mounds on his chest. “I’m a girl!” He said, sitting up, his hair flopping in his face.

“That’s why we need to get moving,” Joe said. “So we can undue this curse.”

Frank pushed his hair from his face as the memories of the day before came back to him. It may seem odd the Hardy Boys had forgotten their new bodies, but when you wake up as a boy your whole life, it does come as a surprise when you wake up as a girl for the first time. “I’m hungry,” he said, his tummy rumbling.

“Me, too,” Joe said, frowning as he looked around the room. “Our clothes are gone.”

“What?” Frank was out of bed now.

“They’re gone,” Joe said.

Frank looked down at himself. He was wearing a flimsy little silk top that didn’t even cover his belly and a pair of tiny shorts. “Are we supposed to go digging in the garden dressed like this?” He said. “In bare feet?”

“No,” he heard a little girl’s voice call from somewhere. “Look in the bottom drawer.”

Frank pulled open the bottom drawer and found a pair of overalls with a rose stitched to the front. It was the kind of thing a cute girl would wear. Thinking of his silk pajamas, he fumed. "Why does everything we wear have to be cute?"

"Because you're girls," the voice called. "You'll get used to it."

"How about breakfast?" Joe said. He was very keen to eat breakfast. Every All-American boy knew breakfast was the most important meal of the day.

"In the kitchen," the girl called back.

"Could we get some coffee?"

"Don't push it."

"Oh, boy. This nightmare just keeps getting worse and worse," Frank said as he stared in horror at something he saw in the dresser drawer. It was one of the most frightening things he'd ever seen, though he had once found such a thing quite fascinating.

"What now?" Joe looked over to see his brother holding a lacy, purple bra. Frank was holding the bra as far away from himself as he could, his nose scrunched up as if in disgust as if the lady undergarment was a dead skunk.

"Are we supposed to wear one of *those*?" Joe said, saying "those" as if the bra was the most terrible thing in all the history of all the world. He shook his head in horror. "No way. No way. No way!" Bras were only for girls. No boy would ever wear a bra unless it was for mix-up day or a powderpuff football fundraiser.

"Agreed," Frank said, tossing away the offending garment, which landed on the bed. "There is no way either of us will ever wear a bra. You hear that weird ghost girl? NEVER!"

"We'll see..." she called back.

Not long after, the boys stood, blushing with shame, tugging on their bra straps, which clearly showed on their bare shoulders. Not only were the brothers struggling to deal with the indignity of wearing bras, which they agreed were too tight and made it harder to breathe, but they were also confronting the limitations of their long fingernails, which the boys likewise agreed were totally impractical. As much as they usually disagreed, the boys now discovered they shared a mutual disdain for the silly and impractical nature of the female world.

"It's hard to do anything with long fingernails," Frank complained as he slipped one under his bra strap, then got his finger under and pulled it up onto his shoulder.

“I know. Why do girls even want long fingernails?” Joe said as he struggled to try and get his own bra to fit just right. “I can’t believe I’m even wearing a bra.”



“Stupid overalls,” Frank said. He and Joe had both found when they had put on the overalls that their chests, how shall we say this politely? Their chests spilled out the sides in a most immodest way. Sticking to the boy code was one thing. Allowing their new, feminine chests to be exposed to the world was unthinkable and easily trumped the code of boy. It didn’t matter that no one was likely to be around. One simply didn’t traipse about with his side boobs showing.

Besides, though neither would admit it, the overalls had been quite rough against his soft, sensitive chest, while the cups of the bras were lined with a soft, comfortable material that somewhat balanced out the constricting feeling of wearing what felt like a harness more befitting a farm animal than an All-American boy.

So many mental struggles assailed our heroes. In addition to the fact that no true blue All-American boy would wear a bra, they also believe no true blue All-American girl would ever be so crass as to allow even so much as a hint of a bra strap to be seen. Girls were meant to be modest. In a double whammy of shameful confusion, the Hardy Boys agonized both as boys wearing bras and girls exposing their bras.

“My head is spinning,” Joe said, glancing in the mirror. “I look like a hussy.”

“Not one word of this to dad. Ever,” Frank said.

“Or to Mom.”

“And especially not to Nancy Drew.”

To be continued...

