

New Shoes

Charlie had a problem. Her sister Becca's wedding would be in just under two weeks and the bridesmaid's dresses hadn't been picked up or fitted. And Charlie's problem was growing, because not only was she missing a dress but she didn't have shoes either—and she hated dresses, hated shoes, especially formal attire. So Charlie sat in the back seat of her mother's car with a scowl on her face, arms crossed as she stared, seething, out the window. Colours blurred past as the car sped along the freeway, but all Charlie could see was red.

'I don't see why I have to be a bridesmaid. Becca's got plenty of friends.'

'But she wants you to be there, you might as well go and enjoy yourself,' Charlie's mother replied as she stepped on the brakes. Colours stopped swirling out the window. Charlie smacked her gum and rolled the tinted glass down. Air rushed past her cheeks.

'I don't want to.'

'Why not? You love parties.'

Charlie looked away. True. Yet she didn't want to go to this one. Not now. Not ever. Not until she was something more than a skinny little pile of legs and bone and patchy pink marble skin. Charlie liked dresses, liked them a lot, but she still looked like a boy anyway. But she never wore them and never let her hair down. At fifteen, Charlie would much rather look like a pre-pubescent boy than a girl struggling and failing to cope with the change in her that was from a small child into a blossoming young woman.

'It's not that hard,' Charlie's mother would say, fully aware of her youngest daughter's insecurities.

'You forget how long ago you went through this yourself,' Timmy muttered from next to Charlie, speaking for the first time that whole ride. Timmy was Charlie's next-door neighbour, older by almost two years, and he would never know, but Charlie adored him. So much that every time he'd tell her about that fantastic girl he'd met the day they'd gone to the school fete, Charlie boiled with anger and was almost swallowed up by her insecurities.

Now Charlie gave up. She hated not fitting into anything, and lately parts of her had been changing more noticeably. She'd taken to wearing baggy clothes in order to hide her insecurity, the changes she didn't know how to handle. And she was still the same old Chas, the one with the gap in her teeth and milk rot on her incisors, with gangling limbs and freckles speckled over her nose.

Out of the car, Charlie and Timmy followed her mother up the marble steps into the hall full of perfect dresses. It smelled of Ajax. Charlie wrinkled her nose. Moments later she was pulled into a cramped red room, where a pretty lady in black tossed her a pale cream-coloured dress. Charlie caught it apprehensively and heard Timmy somewhere to her left let out a yell of delight as he caught a tux and shirt.