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21 illustrations

THE PUMPKIN SPICE OF LIFE

HOLIDAY TREATS #0

Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack



CROSSED
TV/CD
FICTION



J O E S I X P A C K

***THE
PUMPKIN
SPICE OF
LIFE***

**Story & Art by Joe Six-Pack
A Crossed Fiction Story**



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THE PUMPKIN SPICE OF LIFE



The first day of college was always nerve-wracking, but for Davis Barnes and Allen Freeman, it felt like a descent into a bewildering abyss. They had been friends since kindergarten, an unlikely pair bound together by the unspoken agreement that shy Davis needed the confidence and bravado of brash Allen, while Allen needed someone to ground his impulsive nature.

As they stood at the entrance of the sprawling campus of Eastwood University, Davis tucked a strand of his big shaggy hair behind his ear and fiddled with the strap of his backpack. He kept his head down, his gaze fixed on the cracks in the pavement as if they held the secrets of the universe. Shyness had been his lifelong companion, a heavy coat he couldn't seem to take off.

Allen Freeman, on the other hand, surveyed their surroundings with the enthusiasm of a conquering hero. His chest puffed out, he greeted the bustling chaos of the university like a long-lost friend. His attitude was both a reflection of, and a representation of, his wild sandy hair which stood out in every direction. Confidence oozed from every pore, and it was awe-inspiring and somewhat terrifying.

“Come on, Davis!” Allen exclaimed, slinging an arm around his friend's shoulders. “Get excited! We're about to embark on the greatest adventure of our lives! It's time to conquer the art world!”

Davis let out a nervous laugh, his heart pounding like a jackhammer. He was relieved to have Allen by his side, the yin to his yang, but the overwhelming sense of being a small fish in a vast, turbulent ocean threatened to swallow him whole.

The pair made their way through the labyrinthine corridors of the art building, passing countless bulletin boards covered in flyers for club meetings, art exhibitions, and workshops. The vibrant chatter of students filled the air, punctuated by laughter and the occasional argument.

Davis spotted a poster for the “Intro to Art History” class, one of their first-year requirements. It featured a mesmerizing painting of a starry night, and for a brief moment, he felt a flicker of excitement. Art had always been his refuge, the place where he could express himself without words. Yet, the thought of standing up in front of a class full of strangers to discuss it sent shivers down his spine.

Allen, noticing Davis's hesitation, nudged him playfully. “Hey, what do you say we do this ‘Intro to Art History’ thing? I bet it'll be a blast.”



Davis bit his lip, unsure whether Allen was joking or not. He nodded weakly, hoping that maybe, just maybe, this bold adventure of college would help him break free from the shell of shyness that had held him captive for so long.

Together, they pushed open the heavy door to the classroom, stepping into the large, dimly lit room. It was less of a room and more of a theater. The low buzz of conversation filled the space, punctuated by the occasional giggle. Davis scanned the rows of students, a mix of freshmen and upperclassmen, and felt his heart rate quicken. He tried to remind himself that this was an art history class, not rocket science, but the sheer number of new faces was enough to make his palms sweat.

Taking a deep breath, he and Allen found two empty seats in the back row. Davis tried to focus on the whiteboard, hoping the professor would arrive soon and dispel the tension in the room.

After what felt like an eternity, the door opened, and the low chatter quieted. The professor, a slender man in his late fifties, walked to the podium. He had grey, curly hair, and wore a faded cord jacket and jeans. He looked more like a struggling artist than a professor, but Davis was grateful for the lack of a stuffy suit. It certainly was different than high school, that was for sure.

Class was a two-hour affair, mostly slides and descriptions of the slides. Davis was scribbling away in his notebook, taking the meticulous notes he was known for. Allen just laid back and flipped through his feeds on his phone, only occasionally writing something down. Davis was sure whatever he was writing had nothing to do with Art History.

When class was finally over, the two headed out. The sheer number of people going from class to class was staggering and intimidating. The school the two boys had come from was a small one, and the entire 400 students of Kirkdale High could have fit in the art history class alone. Everything was just so over the top.

“Let’s get some coffee,” Allen suggested.

“We don’t drink coffee.”

“We do now, dude! We’re college students!” Allen replied with bravado.

They passed by the various small coffee shops that stretched up and down the main pedestrian avenue, as Davis was too nervous to try any of them, given his trepidations and anxieties.

“So, Davis,” Allen said with a forced cheerfulness, “any word on your roommate?”

Davis grimaced, his thoughts briefly drifting to the text message he had received that morning. “Yeah,” he mumbled. “I’m rooming with a guy named Bryce. Apparently, he’s a star athlete on the football team. They call him ‘Bicep Bryce.’ I guess we’ll find out why soon enough. He arrives tomorrow.”

Allen raised an eyebrow, concern evident in his eyes. “Bicep Bryce? Sounds like someone who lifts weights as a hobby, and beds as a sport. You think you can handle that?”

Davis shrugged, his anxiety bubbling to the surface. “I don’t know, but it’s not like I had much of a choice. The dorms are packed. They even had to convert study rooms into bedrooms just to accommodate everyone.”

Allen scowled, his easygoing demeanor giving way to frustration. “And what about you, man? Have you found a place?” Davis asked.

A deep sigh escaped Allen as he ran a hand through his unruly hair. “Nah, not yet. I’ve been checking the listings, contacting everyone who posted about needing a roommate, but no one’s bitten. I’ve been living out of my car for a week now, and it’s not getting any easier.”

Davis frowned, concern etching lines on his face. “I can’t believe this. You can’t keep living in your car. It’s dangerous, not to mention uncomfortable.”

Allen’s jaw clenched, and he averted his gaze, his pride warring with his desperation. “Don’t you think I know that? But I’ve got no other choice right now. It’s either that or drop out, and that’s not an option. My parents would kill me. They spent every last cent of their savings to get me here.”

The weight of their predicaments hung heavily in the air, and Davis could see the desperation in his friend’s eyes. He wanted to help, but he felt utterly powerless. The realization that they were both in over their heads hit him like a tidal wave.

As they continued walking, the sun dipped below the horizon, casting long shadows across the campus. The once-energetic buzz of the avenue gave way to a quieter, contemplative atmosphere.

“We’ll figure this out, Allen,” Davis said, determination taking hold. “We’ve faced tougher stuff than this since kindergarten. We’re not giving up now.”

Allen managed a weak smile, grateful for his friend’s unwavering support. “Thanks, dude. I appreciate that.”

Finally, Allen pointed to the Starbucks. “How about that? If you don’t feel comfortable in a Starbucks, there’s no hope for you.”

“Fine,” Davis said.

The aroma of freshly brewed coffee welcomed Davis and Allen as they pushed open the door to the bustling Starbucks on campus. Like every Starbucks, it felt a little too clean, a little too calculated. But at least they could sit down.

They found a small table tucked away in the corner, where they could speak more privately. As they settled into their seats, Davis broached the subject that had been weighing on his mind.

“You know, bud,” Davis began, “It’s funny. There’s actually a room in my dorm building that still has an open spot.”

Allen raised an eyebrow, his interest piqued. “Really? Why haven’t you mentioned it before?”

Davis sighed, his gaze fixed on his hands. “Well, it’s a girl’s room, and the college has this strict policy against coed dorm rooms.”

Allen’s face fell, disappointment etched across his features. “Of course, they do. That sucks. Keep an eye out for anyone who drops out. They gotta have some people who drop out, right?”

“Yeah,” Davis agreed, feeling guilty for raising his friend’s hopes only to dash them. He wasn’t sure why he’d brought it up in the first place.

“No worries, dude,” Allen said with his usual optimism. “We’ll figure something out. Maybe I’ll find a place off-campus eventually.”

Davis hesitated for a moment, then leaned in closer. “Actually, there’s something else I’ve been thinking about. I hate living in the dorms with all those dumb jocks and frat-boy wanna-be’s. It’s loud, full of testosterone, drunks, and it’s not the kind of environment I thrive in.”

Allen nodded in agreement. “I get that, man. It’s not exactly the artist’s sanctuary we imagined, is it?”

With a determined glint in his eyes, Davis continued, “What if we look for a place together, off-campus? We can find a more peaceful and creative space where we can focus on our art without distractions.”

Allen’s eyes squinted for a moment. “I thought of that. No luck. There’s not a single rental anywhere in fifteen miles of campus.”

“Figures,” Davis said. “It’s not just the dumb jocks. The girls in my dorm... they’re all about partying, gossiping, and dressing, as they say, ‘basic.’ It’s a constant whirlwind of drama and distraction. It’s like a never-ending episode of a reality TV show in there. I can’t imagine trying to focus on my art amidst all that noise.”

“Well, maybe next term, huh?” Allen said. “I can live out of my car for a little while longer, I guess.”

“Nah, man. You shouldn’t have to do that. We need to find you a place.” Davis looked to the counter. “We should probably order something.”

“Yeah, they’ll toss us out if we don’t.”

As Davis and Allen approached the counter to place their coffee orders, they couldn’t help but notice the prominent display advertising the return of the Pumpkin Spice Latte.

“Oh, great, it’s that time of year again,” Allen muttered, rolling his eyes.

Davis sighed in agreement. “Pumpkin Spice Season, the harbinger of ‘basic bitch’ culture. It’s like they’ve all been brainwashed by corporate marketing.”

They both groaned in unison, sharing a mutual disdain for the annual pumpkin spice craze that seemed to overtake every coffee shop and social media platform.

“Seriously,” Allen continued, “it’s like clockwork. As soon as the leaves start to turn, out come the scarves, UGG boots, and Pumpkin Spice Lattes.”

Davis chuckled, feeling the need to join in on the mockery. “And don’t forget the Instagram photoshoots with pumpkin patches and overly staged latte art.”

They exchanged knowing glances as they approached the counter, looking at their fellow students, dressed in various shades of autumnal colors, eagerly ordering their Pumpkin Spice Lattes and snapping selfies with their cups.

“It’s like a ritual for them,” Allen remarked, shaking his head in bemusement.

Davis nodded, a wry smile on his lips. “It’s amazing how effective marketing can be. But hey, at least we’re not following the herd.”

“Baaaaa-aaa-aaa!” Allen bleated like a sheep.

The pair burst into laughter, earning disapproving looks from the surrounding Pumpkin Spice Latte cultists.

“Can I help you gentlemen?” Said a barista who had approached them. His name tag read “Herm.” He had a cheerful smile on his face. “I couldn’t help but overhear your conversation about finding a place to live. It’s tough out there, especially for college students.”

Both Davis and Allen turned to face the barista, grateful for his understanding, but unsure how he could have heard them from fifty feet away in a crowded coffee shop. “Yeah, it’s been a bit of a struggle,” Davis admitted.

The barista nodded sympathetically. “I’ve been there, guys. College life can be pretty rough. Tell you what, how about I make your day a little better?”

With a deft motion, Herm prepared two cups of coffee, each with a flourish of whipped cream. He placed them on the counter and grinned.

“On the house,” he said, his eyes twinkling with kindness.

Allen and Davis exchanged surprised glances, their gratitude evident. “Wow, thanks, Herm,” Allen said with genuine appreciation.

As they took their first sips, the rich aroma of the coffee filled their senses. “This is delicious,” Davis remarked.

Allen, his taste buds tingling with an unexpected flavor, took another sip of his coffee. “Yeah, it’s pretty good,” he agreed, secretly enjoying the subtle notes of pumpkin spice.

Neither of them were willing to admit it to each other but this was the first cup of coffee for both boys. Allen, in particular was feeling a little blown back by the effects, and Davis was also feeling a little woozy. Coffee was way stronger than either of them expected.



Herm winked at them. “Consider it a small gesture of support from a one-time struggling student to another. Now run this trouble you’re having past me. Maybe I can help you fellas out.”

Davis and Allen leaned in closer, their voices hushed as they shared the details of their housing predicament with Herm. The barista listened attentively, his brow furrowing in thought as they explained the shortage of available rooms and the coed dorm policy.

“So, that’s the situation,” Davis concluded with a sigh. “We’ve been racking our brains, but we just can’t find a solution.”

Allen shrugged. “Unless we take that open spot for a girl’s room,” he said and smiled.

“I should have never mentioned that,” Davis added.

Herm tapped his chin thoughtfully, a mischievous glint in his eye. “Well, you know, rules can be... flexible.”

Both Davis and Allen exchanged puzzled looks, wondering what the barista had in mind. “What do you mean?” Davis asked cautiously.

Herm leaned in closer, lowering his voice to a conspiratorial whisper. “Have you ever considered... bending the truth a little?”

Davis chuckled nervously, thinking Herm was making a joke. “Bending the truth? You mean like lying?”

Herm nodded, a sly grin playing at the corners of his mouth. “Well, more like... creative interpretation. You see, Davis, if you’ve got that room in your dorm building, and Allen here is desperate for a place to stay, all you need is a little stagecraft.”

Allen’s eyes widened as the idea began to take shape in his mind. “You mean, I pretend to be a girl and take that open spot in Davis’s dorm?”

Herm nodded enthusiastically. “Bingo! It’s not like anyone’s going to do a gender check at the door, right? If you play your cards right, you could pull it off. The things my pals and I used to do in college, well... This isn’t even half as nuts.”

Davis burst into laughter, finding the notion absurd. “Herm, you’ve got quite the imagination yourself. That’s crazy talk!”

But Allen seemed strangely intrigued by the idea, his eyes narrowing in contemplation. “You know, it might just work. I mean, I’ve seen drag queens pull off crazy transformations. How hard could it be to pretend to be a girl?”

Davis shook his head, still laughing. “Come on, man, this is real life, not a drag show. It’s too risky, and we could get caught.”

Herm leaned on the counter, offering a wink to Allen. “Well, think about it, guys. Sometimes a little creativity can open doors you never thought possible. Drink up.”

Davis couldn’t believe he was actually considering this plan. He looked at the cup in his hand, wondering if it wasn’t the rush of caffeine that was messing with him. “Come on, man,” he said, a note of exasperation in his voice. “You can’t seriously be considering this.”

Allen, however, appeared unusually resolute, his eyes gleaming with determination. “I’m dead serious. I mean, think about it. I fill out a few forms, make a couple of changes, and bam, I’m officially registered as a girl.”

Herm, the ever-enthusiastic barista, chimed in with a grin. “He’s got a point, there. Sometimes a little creative problem-solving can change the game.”

Davis shook his head in disbelief. “But, come on, what about the long-term consequences? What happens when someone finds out you’re not really a girl? You’ll get kicked out of the dorm, probably the whole school, and who knows what else.”

Allen waved away Davis’s concerns, his conviction unwavering. “I’ll be careful. Besides, we’re artists, right? We think outside the box. This is just another canvas to paint on, a new character to create.”

Herm leaned in once more, this time with a mischievous smile. “I’ve seen weirder things, believe me. Sometimes, you’ve got to take a chance to get what you want.”

Davis was torn between his loyalty to his friend and his fear of the consequences. He knew that Allen could be impulsive and headstrong, but this plan seemed like a recipe for disaster.

“You’re nuts,” Davis said. “And I’m not helping you.”

Allen nodded, his mind seemingly made up. “Thanks, for the advice, Herm. Definitely gonna give this some thought.” He then gave the barista a very deliberate wink.

As Davis and Allen stepped out of the coffee shop, the chilly autumn breeze reminded them of the challenges they were about to face. Allen, with a determined look on his face, checked his phone for his bank account balance. His eyebrows twitched as he stared at the screen.

“I’m going for it, Davis,” Allen declared, his voice laced with unwavering determination. “I’m going to spend every last cent I have left on a makeover. It’s the only way this plan will work.”

Davis sighed, a mix of concern and resignation in his voice. “Allen, this is crazy. You’re going to blow all your money on something that might not even work. What if they see through the disguise, or what if you get caught? You’ll be left with jack squat.”

Allen shrugged, his confidence undeterred. “Sometimes, you’ve got to take risks to get what you want. And trust me, this is going to be *epic*. Besides, you know I can pull this off.”

Davis shook his head, not entirely convinced. “I hope you know what you’re doing. I take that back, I *know* you don’t know what you’re doing.”

Allen flashed a reassuring smile. “I’ve got this.”

As they stood on the college campus, Davis glanced at his watch and realized he needed to head to class. “I’ve got to run, Allen. Please don’t do anything crazy.”

Allen gave a mock salute and a playful grin. “Don’t worry, man. I’ll see you later. And when you see me next, I might just look like a completely different person.”

With those parting words, Davis turned and headed toward his class. He had known Allen for a long time, and he knew this was going to be a disaster. It was just a matter of containing the damage. Whatever the case, there was never any stopping Allen when he got in a mood like this. Davis sipped his coffee for a little bit of courage to face the consequences ahead.



With Davis now gone to class, Allen was left to navigate his plan on his own. Frustration still lingered in his thoughts, but he was now doubly determined to prove to himself and his friend that this scheme could work.

Surveying the area, Allen began by hanging around the nearby salons, hoping to find the perfect one for his transformation. He based his decision on the number of attractive girls coming and going.

After some time, he settled on a salon that seemed to have a steady stream of stylish clientele. Pushing through the glass door, Allen was greeted by the soft hum of hairdryers and the strong scent of hair products. He approached the receptionist with an eager smile.

“Hi there,” he began, his voice deliberately light. “I was wondering if I could get a makeover today, like a new hairstyle and stuff.”

The receptionist looked at him skeptically but still offered a polite smile. “Sure, we can help with that. Let me get one of our stylists for you.”

Moments later, a stylist appeared, her vibrant red hair cascading down her back. She regarded Allen with a friendly smile as she approached.

“Hi, I’m Maya. What can I do for you today?” she asked.

Allen leaned in closer, lowering his voice. “I have a strange request. You see, I need to look like a girl for this prank on my friends. Can you help me with that?”

Maya's eyebrows shot up in surprise. "A girl? That's an... unusual request. Why do you want to do that?"

Allen hesitated for a moment, then quickly fabricated a story. "It's just a harmless prank, you know? We're all friends, and we like playing tricks on each other. This is my turn to get them back."

Maya crossed her arms, considering his request carefully. "I have to be honest, I've never done a transformation like that before. It's a bit outside my usual work. Let me think about it for a moment."

Maya left Allen in the chair as she headed out to the front counter. "Did that kid tell you what he wanted?" She asked the receptionist.

"No, what?"

"He wants me to make him look like a girl," Maya said.

"Wow! Really? Is he trans?"

"No, he said it was..."

"Ding ding!" Said a voice from the front door. "Delivery!"

"Hey, Herm!" said the receptionist, as Herm from Starbucks came through the front door. "I've been jonesing for our order!"

"How are my favorite ladies?" Herm said. He plucked out some steaming hot cups of Pumpkin Spice for them.

"Ooh! Pumpkin Spice!" The receptionist said, eagerly taking hers.

"Yes!" Maya said, taking hers.

"Now did I hear you right, a boy who wants a makeover as a girl?" Herm asked.

"That's what he said," Maya replied. "I don't think I've ever had a request like that before. What should I do?"

Herm took a long, contemplative moment and looked at Allen. "Why not? It's a free country, and his money's as good as anyone's."

"True," Maya said.

"And you're not that busy," Herm added.

"I guess not. I just..."

"Have some fun with it!" Herm said. "Give him the works. Hair extensions, full makeup, leg waxing, fake nails, do it all! Give him the full female experience so he knows what you ladies have to go through."

"Ooh, I like that idea!" The receptionist said.

Maya took a sip of her coffee. For some reason, Herm was making a lot of sense all of the sudden. "Sure, why not?" She said. "Thanks, Herm."

"Always happy to help. Later, girls!"

“Bye!” They sang in chorus as the barista left.

A few minutes later, Maya returned with a determined look in her eyes. She had made up her mind to help Allen with his funny little makeover.

She nodded firmly and said, “Alright, we’re going to do this, but you’ll have to trust me completely and let me handle everything. We don’t have much time. I’m only allowed two hours on a client.”

Allen nodded eagerly, his apprehension giving way to excitement. “I’m all in. Just work your magic, Maya.”

She began by shampooing his hair and examining his facial features with a critical eye. Her fingers worked deftly as she assessed the task at hand.

First, she reached for a bottle of hair dye and mixed a shade of blond that would best suit Allen’s complexion. Then she went two shades lighter. With precision and care, she applied the dye to his hair, making sure it was evenly distributed. The pungent smell of chemicals filled the air as she noted her customer falling asleep.

Once the bleach had done its job, Maya rinsed Allen’s hair, followed by a thorough conditioning treatment to maintain its health. She then began to meticulously attach long, straight hair extensions that flowed down his back, creating the illusion of cascading locks.

While this was happening, the nail technician was affixing long, sparkling french tips to Allen’s fingers. He hadn’t requested this, but Maya wanted the boy to get the full treatment.

Next, Maya turned her attention to Allen’s face. She applied a layer of primer to create a smooth canvas, followed by a foundation that gave him a new, slightly warmer complexion. Skillful strokes of concealer concealed any blemishes or imperfections.

With deft fingers, Maya expertly contoured Allen’s face, enhancing his cheekbones and creating a more feminine appearance. She brushed on rosy blush to add a natural flush to his cheeks.

Maya applied eyeshadow in soft, earthy tones, creating depth and dimension. She carefully curled his lashes before attaching long, fluttery false eyelashes, giving his eyes a captivating allure. The final touch was a glossy, natural-looking lipstick that completed the makeover.

But Maya wasn’t done yet. She pierced Allen’s ears with a gentle touch, adding delicate silver studs that caught the light. Despite her caution, Allen did wake up with a start.

He instinctively looked at the mirror, but Maya had covered it with a smock. “Not yet, we have one more step for you,” she said. She rolled up his pant legs as high as she could take them.

“What’s this for?”



“Leg waxing,” she said. “You won’t be able to fool your friends without smooth legs, you know.”

“Uh... Couldn’t I try?”

“Just stay right there and grip on to the armrests.”

Maya began by applying a thin layer of warm wax onto a small section of Allen’s leg. The initial contact sent a shock of sensation through his body. It was a strange mix of heat and stickiness, and he clenched his jaw in preparation for the pain he suspected was coming.

With a swift, expert motion, Maya pressed a strip of cloth onto the wax-covered area and smoothed it down firmly. Allen’s breath hitched as he braced himself for what was to come next.

In one fluid snap, Maya pulled the strip away, and Allen couldn’t suppress a sharp gasp as he felt the wax rip his hair out at the roots. The pain was intense, a searing, stinging sensation that shot up his leg like a fiery jolt.

Maya worked methodically, moving to the next section of his leg and repeating the process. Each time the strip was pulled away, it felt as though his skin was being peeled from his body. The anticipation of the pain was almost as excruciating as the waxing itself.

As Maya continued, Allen’s knuckles were turning white as he gripped the edges of the armrests. He bit down on his lower lip to stifle his cries, but occasional involuntary yelps still escaped him.

The process seemed to stretch on forever, though in reality, it was only a matter of minutes. By the time Maya had finished with both legs, Allen’s skin was red and sensitive, and his body trembled with a mix of pain and relief.

“Okay, we’re done,” Maya said, her voice filled with empathy as she applied a soothing post-waxing lotion. “You did great, Allen. It’s not an easy thing to go through, although we women do it every few weeks.”

Allen took a moment to catch his breath, his body still buzzing with residual pain. “Thanks? That... that was something else.”

Maya smiled kindly as she helped him sit up. “You’re welcome. Just remember to take care of your skin, especially in the next few days. It’ll be sensitive.”

“Can I see myself now?” Allen asked. “I think I earned it.”

“I suppose you have,” Maya replied as she whisked the cover off the mirror.

When he saw himself, he was rendered speechless.

Staring back at him was a stunning, almost ethereal young woman with long, flowing blond hair and captivating lashes. His features were impeccably made up, his skin glowing with a flawless complexion. He looked like one of the “basic girls” from Starbucks, the very stereotype he had mocked earlier. It was uncanny how convincingly feminine he appeared.



Allen felt a rush of emotions flood over him, a complex mixture of shock, disbelief, and even a hint of distress. He had intended to transform into a girl just enough to secure the dorm room, but this... this was something else entirely. It was a complete metamorphosis.

He turned to Maya, his voice wavering with a tinge of anger. "What did you do? This is... it's too much!"

Maya, however, remained calm and composed, her expression empathetic. "I'm sorry if it's a bit of a shock, but I wanted to make sure you looked the part convincingly. Remember, you can always wash off the makeup and style your hair differently if you feel it's necessary."

With that suggestion, the receptionist appeared with his freshly warmed latte, handing it to Allen. "I nuked your coffee for you," she said, as a peace offering. He took a sip as he contemplated the reflection in the mirror, feeling a strange mix of emotions.

As the warm coffee coursed through him, he began to reconsider. Perhaps this transformation was exactly what he needed to succeed in his audacious plan. He had a moment of clarity as he thought about how he could gain access to the dorm room meant for girls. If he was going to pull it off, he needed to fully embrace this new facade.

"So, I'm guessing you don't have a lot of cosmetics and hair care. If you want to keep the look, I'd suggest..."

Allen turned to Maya, a determined look in his eyes. "You know what, Maya? I'll take everything you used today, all the cosmetics and hair care supplies."

Maya nodded with a supportive smile, grateful for the change of heart. And for the hefty commission. "I can certainly help you with that."

Allen handed over his "emergency" credit card, the one his parents had given him for unforeseen situations. Little did they know that today's transformation had become one of those unforeseen situations, and he charged hundreds of dollars' worth of cosmetics and hair products without hesitation.

As he left the salon with his newfound appearance and a bag filled with beauty supplies, Allen felt that he had just scored a major win. He had to admit, he had doubts about carrying this off, but now, he knew he could do it.



After his class had concluded, Davis was shuffling his many notes on Art Theory, jamming them all into his meticulously organized notebooks. He reminded himself that was going to have to sort through it all when he got to his dorm room, if he could get a few seconds' peace from his frat-boy wanna-be dorm mates. Out of the corner of his eye, he recognized Allen's jacket and headed over to his buddy. As Davis approached him, his eyes widened in sheer disbe-



lief at the sight that greeted him.

“Allen? Fuck, is that really you?” Davis stuttered, blinking in astonishment at his friend’s stunning new appearance. The once-shy art student had transformed into an elegant, captivating young woman — at least from the neck up.

Allen beamed with a newfound confidence, running a hand through his long, blond hair. “Surprised, aren’t you? The salon worked some magic.”

Davis shook his head in amazement. “Magic is an understatement. You look... incredible.”

But Allen’s excitement quickly dimmed as he revealed his next plan. “Thanks, dude, but the makeover isn’t complete yet. I need some clothes to complete the look. Help me pick some out at the thrift store!”

Davis hesitated, feeling a growing unease about the direction in which Allen was headed. “Allen, this is all getting kind of... weird. I mean, I thought we were just trying to secure a dorm room, not turn you into someone else entirely.”

Allen’s frustration simmered just below the surface. “Hey, I’m doing what it takes to make this work. You said it yourself, the dorm room situation is desperate. I need to be convincing, and that means looking the part. Are you with me or not?”

Davis sighed, torn between his loyalty to his friend and his unease about the drastic changes Allen was making. “I can’t help feeling like we’re crossing some lines here.”

Allen’s disappointment was palpable as he turned away from Davis. “Fine, I’ll do it myself. I don’t need anyone holding me back.”

“C’mon, man!” Davis said, as Allen stormed off. “Don’t be like that! I just don’t want you to get caught!”

Allen slowed his pace, but he was clearly still irritated. “Look, I’m just trying to figure this out, and I could use a little support from my best friend. Are you going to help me or not?”

Davis’s shoulders sagged. “I got class.”

“Fine!” Allen said, testily. He continued to storm away, even faster than before.



Allen wandered through the racks of used clothing at the thrift store cutting through them like jungle underbrush in the deepest darkest heart of Africa. He couldn’t help but feel a growing sense of frustration with his search. Despite his best efforts, he couldn’t find anything that felt right for his newfound disguise. He tried on a few outfits in the cramped fitting room, but each piece

seemed ill-fitting, outdated, or simply unsuitable for the image he was trying to project.

Exasperated, Allen leaned against a rack of vintage dresses, deep in thought about what to do next. It was then that he overheard a conversation nearby between two sorority girls who were also perusing the thrift shop.

“I can’t believe we’re in this place,” one of them said with a disdainful tone, her voice dripping with condescension. “I was hoping for something bespoke, you know, like something unique and high-end.”

Her friend nodded in agreement, her perfectly manicured nails flipping through a rack of faded jeans. “Yeah, but everything here just, like, looks... nasty.”

Both girls had a stereotypical sorority girl aura about them, from their designer handbags to their excessive use of the word “like.” They spoke in loud voices, seemingly unaware that Allen was eavesdropping, or that anyone in the world existed besides them.

“Yah, I mean, look at this junk,” one of the girls said. She grabbed a dress from the rack. “I mean, does this dress say ‘fuck me?’ Nothing here says take me and shove your cock in me!”

The other girl sighed dramatically. “Let’s just bail. I don’t think we’ll find anything remotely decent here.” She waved everything off with her limp-wristed hands.

Her companion agreed, her nose wrinkling in apparent distaste. “Totally, let’s hit the mall instead. Forever 21 has, like, the best shit now, and there’s a Shein pop-up store.”

“Shein? Awesome!” her friend said. “Fuck this shit.”

With that, the two girls made their exit, leaving Allen to contemplate his options. The thrift store was clearly not the place for him to find the clothing he needed to complete his transformation convincingly.

After a moment’s hesitation, Allen made his decision. He would head to the mall as well, in the hope of finding the perfect ensemble that would help him secure the coveted dorm room. He couldn’t help but feel a sense of irony as he left the thrift store, realizing that he was about to embrace the very lifestyle he had once mocked — the world of the “basic” girls and the trendy stores they frequented. “It’s a means to an end,” he told himself.



The next day, Davis found himself back at the familiar Starbucks, indulging in his newfound addiction to lattes before his early morning class. As he approached the coffee shop, he couldn’t help but feel a hint of embarrassment at how quickly he had succumbed to the allure of the place.