

High School Autism Play

Created May 2025, main storyline supplied by Carg, text and pictures by ChatGPT 4o.

Chapter 1: The Play

Ellie had never thought much about autism until Ms. Simmons announced that their high school's annual educational play would focus on increasing awareness and understanding of autism spectrum disorders. When Ms. Simmons looked around for volunteers, Ellie had just bent down to grab her water bottle.

"Perfect, Ellie! You'll play the lead," Ms. Simmons declared cheerfully.

Ellie's head shot up. "Wait—what?" she muttered, too late. The decision was made.

At their first rehearsal, Ms. Simmons introduced Ellie and her classmates to a variety of materials designed to help them authentically portray the experiences of autistic individuals. Spread across the stage were tables filled with sensory tools—noise-canceling headphones, weighted blankets, textured fidget toys, and special clothing with soft seams and tags carefully removed.

But being the lead meant Ellie was to experience a more immersive preparation. Ms. Simmons, along with a consultant who specialized in autism support, brought out a selection of adaptive garments and tools typically used by individuals with heightened sensory needs or behaviors that required safety measures.

First, Ellie was fitted into a compression vest—tight but not painful, it felt like a constant firm hug. She didn't mind that part. But then came the bodysuit, made from smooth, stretchy fabric with no zippers or buttons—impossible to remove without assistance. "Some individuals wear these for sensory regulation or to prevent self-injury," the consultant explained. Ellie nodded, a little uncertain.

Next were the soft arm guards and a helmet, meant to simulate protection gear for those prone to head-banging or other self-harming behaviors. "This feels... heavy," Ellie said, rotating her shoulders. "That's part of the experience," Ms. Simmons replied kindly. "It's meant to help you understand the day-to-day reality for some."

Over the next few weeks, Ellie rehearsed in different combinations of the gear. One day she wore tinted glasses to mimic visual sensitivity; another day, she tried walking with noise-muffling headphones in a hallway filled with clattering lockers and chattering students. She also spent time in a special five-point harness vest, designed to prevent sudden movements and provide safety in situations of distress.





One afternoon, Ms. Simmons helped her into a molded car seat set up onstage, explaining how it was used for both physical support and security.

The disorientation was real. Once, she panicked slightly when she realized she couldn't unzip the bodysuit on her own and had to call for help. Another time, after wearing the harness for a long rehearsal, she broke down crying—not because it was painful, but because it felt overwhelming to be so vulnerable.

"It's frustrating," she admitted to her friend Jess. "Not being able to take it off myself—it makes me feel helpless."

"Exactly," Jess said. "Some kids have to feel that way every day."

What made it even more complex for Ellie was the care and gentleness Ms. Simmons showed her during these rehearsals. Every time Ellie was buckled into a harness or helped into gear she couldn't manage alone, Ms.

Simmons was patient and calm, even humming softly to distract her. It was the kind of nurturing touch Ellie hadn't felt in years.

Ellie had lost her mother when she was eight. Since then, she had lived with her father—a kind but emotionally reserved man. He provided for her, made sure she was safe, but their house often felt quiet, almost hollow. Being taken care of with such warmth brought something back Ellie hadn't even realized she missed. She began looking forward to rehearsals not just to act, but to feel held—seen—in a way she hadn't in a long time.

Opening night arrived. Ellie suited up in her costume—this time layered with a soft helmet, arm guards, the bodysuit, and a sensory harness under her hoodie. She looked in the mirror and felt something beyond nerves: responsibility. The story she was telling wasn't just a script; it was a reflection of real lives.

During the performance, Ellie navigated scenes depicting overstimulation, miscommunication, and emotional overload. In one scene, she reenacted a classroom meltdown, her muffled cries echoing in her helmet, her body tensed under the compression vest. The audience sat in heavy silence.

After the show, parents, students, and teachers came forward with praise and questions. Some had tears in their eyes. One mother approached Ellie and whispered, "Thank you for showing what my daughter goes through every day."

Ellie smiled, overwhelmed but proud. Through the process—uncomfortable clothes, restricted movement, intense rehearsals—she had not only embodied a role but stepped into a deeper empathy.

Chapter 2: A Safe Place

In the days following the final performance, Ellie found herself struggling with an invisible weight. The applause had faded. The gear was packed away. Everyone else seemed to move on.

But Ellie hadn't.

She missed the structure. The comfort of the gear. The safety of Ms. Simmons's steady voice, the hum of the rehearsals, the ritual of being helped into clothing that made her feel calm and whole. The return to ordinary school days felt cold in comparison.

One afternoon, after a particularly hard day where everything felt too loud and fast, Ellie stood outside Ms. Simmons's classroom door, hands clenched into her sleeves.

When the door opened, Ms. Simmons blinked in surprise. "Ellie?"

"I don't know where else to go," Ellie whispered, voice tight. "It feels like... like I lost my mom again."

There was no hesitation. Ms. Simmons opened the door fully and pulled her into a hug.

"Come with me," she said gently.

That afternoon, Ms. Simmons took her to the old drama room, where a few bins of props and gear from the play still sat. Without a word, she helped Ellie into the compression vest and the soft bodysuit. She wrapped the weighted blanket over her shoulders and guided her to the stage's edge, where they sat together in silence.

Ellie closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. Her body relaxed.

"You're not alone," Ms. Simmons said quietly. "And I'm not going anywhere."

That moment changed something in Ellie. From then on, Ms. Simmons began inviting her to spend time at her home on weekends—just to read, do homework, or bake something simple. Her house was small but bright, full of warm lighting, soft rugs, and the comforting smell of cinnamon or lavender.

At first, Ellie was content just being there. She sat curled in a reading nook or helped chop vegetables in the kitchen. But eventually, the stillness made her ache for something more. She didn't miss the stage. She missed being cared for like she was back in those rehearsals.

One Saturday, over tea, Ellie looked down into her mug and asked quietly, "Do you still have the other stuff? The clothes we didn't use?"

Ms. Simmons studied her gently. "I do."

"I... think I'd like to try them."

They went to the guest room closet. Inside were folded garments: fleece onesies, extra overalls with adjustable straps, sensory-friendly shirts, and even a few prototypes that hadn't made it to the stage. Ellie picked out a pair of soft navy overalls and a sky-blue bodysuit, both with playful stitching and wide seams.

She changed slowly, and when she came out, Ms. Simmons smiled warmly. "How do you feel?"

"Small," Ellie admitted. "But good small."

Sometimes, when Ms. Simmons had grading to do and Ellie needed to concentrate on homework, they brought out the soft harness again. Ellie would sit at the dining room table, secured

comfortably, with her books open in front of her. Ms. Simmons would grade beside her, occasionally reaching over to gently adjust a strap or offer a sip of water.

The harness wasn't about restraint—it was about stillness. Stability. Trust.

Ms. Simmons never treated it like a performance or therapy. It was simply a part of how Ellie lived, a tool to help her focus, to stay connected. Ellie didn't feel weird or broken when she wore it. She felt cared for.

Weekends developed a rhythm: breakfast with warm waffles, time to read or draw, quiet afternoons in the garden, or curled up in front of a movie, often in her favorite sleeper—a lavender one with soft feet and little stars printed all over.

Once, when Ellie was already asleep back home, Ms. Simmons called her father, and explained about why Ellie liked to visit her, and the effect the adaptive gear had on her. Ellie's father was very grateful, feeling guilty not being there for his daughter as much as she would need. They ended up talking for 1.5 hour.

One Sunday night, as her dad came to pick her up, Ellie lingered by the door.

"Thank you," she said.

"For what?" Ms. Simmons asked, gently brushing her bangs aside.

"For giving me somewhere I can just... be."

Ms. Simmons wrapped her in a hug and whispered, "You're always welcome."

As Ellie walked out into the evening with her father, her backpack heavier with new sensory clothes she was slowly beginning to call her own, she felt lighter than she had in weeks.

She had found a safe place.

And for the first time since she lost her mother, she wasn't just surviving—she was healing.

Chapter 3: The Autumn Outing

Ellie had always liked the idea of nature more than nature itself—on paper, it was peaceful, but in practice it could be full of unpredictable noises, rough paths, and bugs. But when Ms. Simmons suggested a quiet walk through a nature reserve just outside of town, Ellie surprised herself by saying yes.

"We'll pack light," Ms. Simmons had said gently. "Just a little picnic, and we'll stick to the quiet trail. If it's too much, we turn back. No pressure."

Ellie nodded, nervously twisting the hem of her sweatshirt. "Can I wear the overalls again? And maybe... the bodysuit under it?"

"Of course," Ms. Simmons smiled. "Let's make sure you're comfy."

They spent the morning preparing snacks—carrot sticks, sandwiches, and a flask of warm apple cider. Ellie picked out her clothes with care: her soft cotton bodysuit, the embroidered overalls with the high bib, and a hoodie just a little too big that made her feel safely small inside. She paused at the harness. After a moment, she quietly added it to the tote bag.

Her father came along too, carrying the picnic basket. The three of them drove out to the reserve in the early afternoon, sunlight slanting through the trees in golden ribbons. On the way, Ellie asked to sit in the molded car seat Ms. Simmons had brought again. She fit perfectly into it now, the five-point harness clicking closed around her with reassuring snugness.

"It's not because I feel unsafe," she said softly, "I just... focus better like this."

"We know," her father replied, reaching back briefly to squeeze her foot. "Whatever helps you feel okay."

At the reserve, the air was crisp and rich with the scent of pine and old leaves. Birds called from high branches. Ellie held one hand in Ms. Simmons's and one in her father's as they followed the gravel path. The harness wasn't on yet—but it was folded neatly in Ms. Simmons's bag, just in case.

For the first half-hour, Ellie was relaxed. She skipped a little, pointing out mushrooms and squirrels, her overalls rustling quietly as she moved. The sounds of nature blended in a soft hum around her.

But as they ventured deeper, the path curved toward a quiet brook. The trail became narrow, and birdsong echoed in sharp bursts through the trees. Ellie slowed. Her breaths came shorter, eyes darting to the brush.

Ms. Simmons paused and crouched to meet her eye. "Want to stop here?"

Ellie shook her head. "No... I think... maybe the harness? Just for now?"

"Alright, sweetheart."

Ms. Simmons helped her step into it. The buckles clicked softly, the gentle tension between her and the adult grounding her again. With one hand gently tethered, Ellie let herself lean into the sensation. Her body relaxed.

They found a sunlit patch by the brook to spread the blanket. While her father unpacked the food, Ellie settled beside him, swaying slightly, the tether still attached to Ms. Simmons's wrist as she poured cider.

"Next time, I want to bring a book," Ellie said suddenly. "This place is... actually kinda nice."

Her father raised an eyebrow. "You? Reading outdoors?"

Ellie giggled, then nodded, curling into the blanket. She sipped cider from a thermos lid, cheeks pink from the chill. The tether lay across her lap, now loose—but still connected.

That afternoon became one of those days that settled in memory with a golden glow. They didn't stay too long, didn't push farther. They just existed together in calm, laughter, and understanding.

And when they returned to the car, Ellie climbed back into her molded seat, hugging her knees close as Ms. Simmons fastened the final buckle.

"Did I do okay?" she asked quietly.

"You did wonderfully," her father said from the front seat.

Ms. Simmons leaned in, kissed her forehead softly, and whispered, "You're amazing."

And Ellie, secure in the gear she'd once found strange, nestled in the embrace of care, let herself drift into sleep before they even reached the edge of town.

Chapter 4: The First Connection

That weekend, Ms. Simmons invited them both for tea and pie. Ellie arrived first, already comfortable in soft denim shortalls and a cotton hoodie with little stitched stars across the shoulders. She helped slice apples while Ms. Simmons straightened the small table in the living room.

When the doorbell rang, Ellie jumped slightly, but then dashed to open the door.

Her father stepped inside, removing his coat. “Smells great,” he said, offering a polite smile.

“Homemade,” Ms. Simmons replied. “Ellie helped.”

The evening was quiet but warm. Conversation started with the play, drifted toward teaching, then into books and weekend routines. Ellie watched them both with wide eyes—like an observer in a secret experiment.

And to her surprise, they laughed. Her father—who so often defaulted to silence—laughed at one of Ms. Simmons’s stories about a student mistaking a stage prop for a real fire extinguisher. Ms. Simmons, in turn, asked genuine questions about his work, and listened.

At one point, Ellie interrupted, completely failing to mask her grin. “You two get along kind of well, huh?”

They both looked at her, amused.

“Ellie...” her father said cautiously.

“I’m just saying,” she grinned. “If we were characters in a play, this would be the part where you look into each other’s eyes for too long.”

Ms. Simmons chuckled, “Well, luckily we’re not on stage.”

“But you could be,” Ellie muttered under her breath, then went to get more pie.

After that evening, something changed. Ellie started inviting Ms. Simmons to join them on small weekend errands or walks. Sometimes they’d go to the farmer’s market. Other times, just the bookstore and a café.

It was during one of these walks that Ms. Simmons gently asked, “Do you think your dad would be okay with helping pick out some sensory clothes for you too?”

Ellie blinked. “He doesn’t know what to look for.”

“He’s willing to learn,” she said. “He asked me.”

The idea made Ellie nervous—but excited. She’d always kept those two parts of her life separate. If they came together...

Later that week, her father came home with a small bag from a specialty shop Ms. Simmons had recommended. Inside were a soft zip-up hoodie with textured lining, a short-sleeve bodysuit with flat seams, and a pair of stretch overalls with gentle compression in the waist.

“I don’t know if they’re right,” he said, rubbing the back of his neck. “But I thought we could try them out.”

Ellie didn't say anything at first. She just stepped forward and hugged him tight.

And so, the next outing became a little family affair. They went to the botanical gardens, Ellie wearing the bodysuit and new overalls. She felt secure, the fabric like a gentle whisper all around her. Ms. Simmons brought the harness just in case—but Ellie didn't need it this time.

Instead, she bounced between her two adults like a dandelion in the wind—bright, safe, and light.

And that night, when they returned home, Ellie sat between them on the couch under her weighted blanket, sipping cocoa.

"I think you're both good for each other," she said suddenly.

Her father looked up, raising an eyebrow. "Ms. Simmons and I?"

"No," Ellie said with a dramatic eye roll. "All of us. This. Us. We're good for each other."

And neither adult could argue with that.

Chapter 5: A Rhythm of Care

It didn't happen overnight, but it happened quietly, steadily.

Weekends had once been lonely stretches of time for Ellie—hours filled with chores, homework, and silence broken only by the hum of the refrigerator or the turning of book pages. Her father cared, of course, but he didn't always know how to show it. And Ellie, not wanting to bother him, learned to keep her needs tucked away.

But now, weekends felt different.

They began to blend—three lives weaving together like a soft braid. Ms. Simmons started coming over regularly, sometimes Friday evenings with a tote bag full of books, tea, and a change of clothes. Other times, Ellie and her father visited her small home, where the guest room slowly became "Ellie's room," complete with a basket of sensory clothes, drawing supplies, and a stuffed turtle Ms. Simmons had rescued from the donation box after the play.

It wasn't just about the gear anymore. Though Ellie still reached for her bodysuit or overalls on difficult days, she began learning to choose them not out of distress, but for comfort. She had favorites—her sky-blue romper with the gentle cinched waist, her soft flannel shortalls covered in tiny clouds, and a fleecy sleeper that zipped up the back and hugged her in all the right ways.

Each item had a purpose, a story.

On quiet Saturdays, Ellie would often sit at the dining room table doing homework while Ms. Simmons graded papers beside her. Her father, after some



time, joined them—paying bills or sketching quietly at the end of the table. If Ellie fidgeted or found herself unable to focus, she would tug gently on the harness loop that hung beside her chair.

No words needed to be spoken. One of them would come over and help her into it, buckle her softly in, and return to their own work. With the steady tug at her sides and the slight restriction, her mind stilled. She could breathe easier.

Sundays became their reset days. Morning waffles. Afternoon art projects. Walks through the park with Ellie in her hoodie and new shortalls, hand-painted patches added by Ms. Simmons. Sometimes Ellie wore a vest under her outfit for gentle pressure; sometimes she didn't.

The three of them learned to dance with each other's rhythms.

One afternoon, Ellie sat in the living room, curled on the rug with her knees tucked under her, coloring a mandala book. She wore a soft sleeper dotted with stars and moons, one she usually saved for nighttime—but today was a "hug" day.

"I think this is what it feels like," she said suddenly, not looking up.

"What does?" Ms. Simmons asked, glancing up from her book.

"To be... safe."

Her father, sitting nearby on the couch, set down his tea and said, "You are, El. Always."

Ms. Simmons didn't speak. She just reached out and squeezed Ellie's hand, her touch full of all the words Ellie didn't need spoken.

Later that evening, after a slow dinner and a quiet movie, Ellie climbed onto the couch between them. Her father draped a weighted blanket over her as Ms. Simmons rested her hand gently on Ellie's back, tracing soft circles.

She was not a project. She was not a student.

She was family.

And in that gentle rhythm of care—weekends filled with thoughtful silences, chosen clothes, and hands that always helped—Ellie healed in ways she never thought possible.

Final Chapter: Home

It wasn't a dramatic decision. No big announcement. No sudden change.

It started with a toothbrush in the bathroom. Then a few pairs of shoes by the door. A growing number of dinners shared, evenings that slipped into overnights. Ms. Simmons began leaving her favorite mug by the sink, a jar of herbal tea on the counter, and a folder of student essays near the dining table.

One day, Ellie looked around the house and realized it had already happened: Ms. Simmons was part of their family.

The official move came on a late spring weekend. The sun was bright, the breeze gentle, and the boxes were few. Ms. Simmons didn't bring much—just what made a home feel like hers. Her

paintings, her records, her books, and of course, the gear that had once been tucked into a bin for the school play but now had a place all its own.

Ellie helped unpack. She made labels for drawers, organized the art supplies, and carefully folded the soft clothes they'd collected together: overalls with bright buttons, shortalls with flower patches, rompers in cozy knits, sleepers lined with stars, and cotton bodysuits that wrapped her like a hug.

Her wardrobe had grown with her—each piece thoughtfully chosen to offer comfort, security, or just a moment of calm in a busy world. Some days, Ellie dressed like any other teen, but on others—when school was overwhelming or her mind spun too fast—she picked a familiar favorite: her snug hoodie with thumb holes, a sleeper with feet, or the pale green romper she called her “storm day suit.”

The harness stayed, too—not as a necessity, but as a tool. It lived in a small basket in the corner of the dining room. If Ellie felt anxious or scattered, she would quietly bring it to one of the adults. Without fuss, they would help her into it, clip the straps, and sit beside her as she worked or rested.

No judgment. No questions. Just care.

The new living arrangement didn't erase her grief. There were still moments Ellie missed her mother so deeply it hurt. But now, when the ache crept in, there was a soft place to land.

Ms. Simmons didn't try to replace anyone. She was just there—filling the silences with patience, offering steadiness where there had once been gaps.

One evening, after a difficult day at school and a loud, overstimulating cafeteria incident, Ellie came home and walked straight into her room. She changed into her favorite sleeper—the lavender one with moon and star patches—and returned to the living room, dragging her weighted blanket behind her.

Her father was there, reading the newspaper. Ms. Simmons looked up from her knitting and smiled.

“Tough day?” she asked.

Ellie nodded, eyes tired. She climbed onto the couch between them, pulled the blanket around her shoulders, and leaned into her father's side.

Without a word, Ms. Simmons reached for the harness, clipped it softly around Ellie's middle, and secured it to the couch pillow. Just enough pressure. Just enough connection.

“You're safe now,” her father murmured, placing a kiss on the top of her head.

Ms. Simmons tucked a stray lock of hair behind Ellie's ear. “You're home.”

And she was.

In a house filled with understanding and chosen family, with clothes that calmed and voices that soothed, Ellie had everything she needed.

Not every day was easy. But every day she was supported. Loved.

Held.

And that, more than any script or costume, was the story Ellie would carry with her.

Always.