

The Sleepover Switch-Up

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

Twelve-year-old Jamie was hoping for a quiet Friday night with his video games. But quiet was impossible in a house filled with giggling, squealing girls—his older sister Emily was having a sleepover with four of her friends. Jamie had been warned to "stay out of the way" under threat of public embarrassment, but the universe had other plans.

Around 9 PM, Jamie ventured into the kitchen for snacks, only to be ambushed by the sleepover squad.

"Look who's trying to sneak through unnoticed!" Emily declared dramatically, pointing at him like he was a cartoon villain.

Before he could retreat, the girls swarmed.

"Perfect timing!" grinned Lily, one of Emily's more mischievous friends. "We were just talking about needing one more person for our spa-and-pajama fashion show!"

"I'll pass," Jamie muttered, trying to sidestep.

But it was too late. In a blur of laughter, teasing, and relentless persuasion (with a few bribes of leftover brownies), Jamie found himself seated in the living room "spa chair." His hair was spritzed, combed, and—much to his horror—pulled into lopsided pigtails with sparkly scrunchies.

"ADORABLE," said Emily, snapping pictures like a proud stylist.

Then came the outfit. "Every real sleepover has a 'blanket burrito' contest!" giggled Ava, holding up a fluffy, zip-up blanket sleeper. It had built-in feet, enclosed mittens, and zipped up in the back like a cocoon. Bright blue with tiny clouds, it looked like it belonged to a toddler—but the girls insisted it was "part of the fun."

"It's for the aesthetic," said Mia with faux seriousness. "A full retro sleepover look. Trust the process."

Jamie, realizing resistance would only prolong things, rolled his eyes and let them dress him like a reluctant mannequin. Once zipped in, the girls declared the transformation complete.

"Look at this cozy little cutie!" Emily teased, holding up a mirror.

That night, the girls watched movies, did face masks, and played board games—with Jamie reluctantly included. To his surprise, it wasn't the worst night ever. The blanket sleeper *was* warm. He even won at Uno.

The Next Morning

As Jamie stumbled groggily into the kitchen for breakfast—still in the cloud-covered sleeper—the girls were already scheming over pancakes.

"We've decided," Lily announced over syrup and orange juice. "You're joining us again today. Matching outfits for the group TikTok."

"Oh no," Jamie muttered.

"Oh yes," Mia replied, pointing to a stack of clothes they'd already picked out: pastel overalls, rainbow socks, and a shirt with a sparkly unicorn. "It's called *commitment*."

Jamie groaned, but inside, a tiny part of him was amused. He'd lost control of his weekend, sure—but he was getting pancakes, attention, and a weird amount of sibling bonding out of it.

Besides, he'd get his revenge the next time he had *his* friends over.

Chapter 2: A Fashionably Confused Morning

Jamie stood in the hallway just outside the bathroom, arms full of the outfit the girls had picked for him: pastel pink overalls, a lavender unicorn t-shirt with glittery stars, and a pair of rainbow-striped knee socks. He glanced down at it all, then at himself—still zipped into the cloud-covered sleeper.

"I don't even know how to get out of this thing," he mumbled.

The zipper was in the back, and with the mittens over his hands, it was like trying to escape a soft, fleece prison. He wiggled and twisted, trying to reach the zipper, but ended up spinning in a circle like a confused puppy chasing its tail.

Just then, a soft knock came at the door.

"Jamie?" a voice said gently. "Do you need help?"

It was Ava—the quietest of Emily's friends. She had been the least teasing of the bunch last night, and now her voice had a kindness to it that made Jamie stop struggling.

"...Maybe," he admitted.

The door creaked open slightly, and Ava peeked in. "I figured. That sleeper's like a puzzle box."

Jamie turned around and gave an exaggerated shrug. "I think I'm stuck forever."

She laughed softly. "Here, hold still." Ava stepped in, unzipped the back with practiced ease, and helped him out of the fleece. He stumbled out in his pajamas, his hair still in messy pigtails, now frizzed from sleep.

He looked at the clothes on the counter and sighed. "Okay, so how do these even work?"

Ava picked up the shirt. "Start with this—it goes on like normal." She handed it to him, then turned away politely while he pulled it over his head.

He looked at the overalls next. "What even is this contraption?"

Ava smiled, stepping back over. "Okay, so, you step into it like pants, then the top part comes up and these straps go over your shoulders. I can help if you want."

Jamie hesitated, then nodded. "Yeah. Please."

She crouched down and helped guide his feet through the pant legs, then stood up and gently tugged the bib of the overalls into place. As she clipped the straps over his shoulders, she said, "There. See? You're ready for the runway."

He looked down at himself—he felt silly, but oddly put together. "And the socks?"

“They complete the look,” Ava grinned, handing them over. “Trust me.”

As Jamie pulled on the rainbow socks and looked in the mirror, he blinked at his reflection. His hair was still wild, but Ava gently began brushing it back into neater pigtails.

“You’re kind of good at this,” he said.

“I have three little brothers,” she replied, focused. “They don’t let me braid their hair, though.”

Jamie smirked. “Lucky me.”

When he stepped into the living room, Emily and the others broke into cheers and laughter—not mean-spirited, but gleeful.

“Our model has arrived!” Emily announced.

“Strike a pose!” Lily added.

And Jamie, after a slight eye-roll, gave a dramatic spin with a mock runway strut.

Ava clapped with quiet pride. And for the first time that weekend, Jamie grinned without a trace of embarrassment.

Chapter 3: Ava Comes Back

A few weeks had passed since Emily's epic sleepover. Jamie had mostly recovered his pride—though his sister still kept the picture of him in the unicorn shirt as blackmail material.

One Saturday afternoon, Jamie was on the couch, deep in a video game, when he heard the doorbell ring. A moment later, his sister’s voice echoed from the front hall:

“Jamie! Guess who’s here?”

He paused his game and looked up as Ava stepped into the living room, waving shyly.

“Hey,” she said.

Jamie sat up, a little surprised but not unhappy. “Oh, hey. Didn’t know you were coming over.”

Ava shrugged. “Your sister invited me to hang out while she works on her school project. She said you’d be home.”

Jamie raised an eyebrow. “You came here willingly knowing that?”

Ava grinned. “Maybe I wanted a rematch in Uno. Or to see if you’d wear those overalls again.”

Jamie groaned. “You mean the pastel ones? With the sparkly unicorn shirt?”

“That’s the one.” Ava flopped down in the armchair next to him. “You were honestly kind of rocking it.”

“Objectively false.”

Ava tilted her head. “Okay, maybe not ‘runway ready’... but you made it fun. And besides, I brought something.”

She pulled a small tote bag up onto her lap and unzipped it. Inside, neatly folded, was the cloud-patterned sleeper from the sleepover.

Jamie stared. “You *brought* that?”

“I asked Emily if I could borrow it,” Ava said. “I thought you might want to settle a bet.”

Jamie gave her a suspicious look. “What kind of bet?”

Ava smiled. “I told Emily you’d totally wear it again if I asked nicely. She said you’d run screaming. I want to win.”

Jamie looked at the sleeper, then back at Ava. “You *really* think I’d put that back on?”

“I think,” she said slowly, “you secretly liked how comfy it was. And maybe you don’t mind looking a little silly if you know no one’s going to make fun of you for it.”

Jamie sat in silence for a moment. The truth was... she wasn’t entirely wrong.

He sighed dramatically. “Okay. But only because you asked nicely.”

Ava’s eyes lit up. “Yes! See? I *knew* you weren’t all grumble and sarcasm.”

“I make no promises beyond this moment,” he muttered, grabbing the onesie.

A few minutes later, with Ava’s help again (because the back zipper was still a nightmare), Jamie was zipped into the cloud sleeper. She tossed him a pair of rainbow socks for good measure and, of course, redid the pigtails—this time with matching ribbons.

“You’re actually pulling it off again,” she said, taking a seat beside him on the couch. “And bonus—you’re now 30% fluffier.”

Jamie rolled his eyes but smiled anyway. “Great. Just what I wanted to be. Maximum fluff.”

They ended up playing Uno again, laughing through ridiculous rounds filled with invented rules and snack breaks. At one point, Emily came down the stairs, took one look at Jamie’s outfit, and just shook her head.

“I don’t even know what to say anymore,” she said, walking off.

“Victory,” Ava whispered, grinning at Jamie.

Later that afternoon, as Ava packed up to head home, she looked over her shoulder.

“You know,” she said, “next time we hang out, I’ll bring something even more ridiculous. Think you’ll be brave enough?”

Jamie grinned. “Only if you help me put it on.”

Ava winked. “Deal.”

Chapter 4: The Outfit You Can’t Escape

It was two weekends later when Ava returned, and this time, she carried a duffel bag.

Jamie greeted her at the door with mock suspicion. “That bag looks dangerous.”

"It is dangerous," Ava said with a mischievous glint in her eyes. "To your ego, at least."

They settled into the living room, and once Emily was upstairs "pretending to study," Ava unzipped the duffel. From it, she pulled out a new onesie—this one was even more elaborate than the last. It was thick, quilted, and pastel purple with a silver star pattern. The feet were built in, the mittens were sewn shut, and the zipper? It started at the neckline and ran *down the back*, ending under a snap-up flap.

"Oh no," Jamie said. "That thing looks like it locks you in."

"It kind of does," Ava said proudly. "It zips and snaps in the back, so once you're in, you need help to get out. My cousin wore this at a winter camp—he called it 'The Padded Trap.'"

Jamie laughed. "Of course he did."

Ava held it up. "So... are you game?"

Jamie gave her a long, thoughtful look. "I assume this is also about proving Emily wrong again."

"That," Ava admitted, "and I kind of want to see you try to move in it."

Jamie rolled his eyes. "Fine. But you're the one zipping me in—and you *promise* to help me out later."

"Scouts honor," Ava said, raising a hand.

It took a bit of effort, but with some laughter and awkward hopping, Jamie stepped into the thick sleeper. Ava zipped him up, then snapped the flap over the zipper, sealing him in. The suit puffed around him like he'd been wrapped in a soft, starry marshmallow.

"I can't bend my elbows," he said, flapping his mittened hands.

"You look like a very cozy astronaut," Ava teased.

They watched a movie, during which Jamie accidentally dropped popcorn on himself and couldn't pick it up. Ava had to feed him like a toddler, laughing through every bite.

As the afternoon wore on, Jamie glanced upstairs thoughtfully.

"You know," he said, "Emily has had way too much fun at my expense lately."

Ava tilted her head. "Thinking what I think you're thinking?"

Jamie nodded. "I think it's time she experienced the joys of back-zip fashion."

Ava grinned slowly. "She *did* say she'd never let herself get caught in one."

Together, they hatched a plan. When Emily came down later looking for her phone charger, Jamie distracted her with a fake argument about where he'd seen it. Meanwhile, Ava snuck behind with the duffel bag.

"Hey, Em?" Ava said casually. "Jamie dared me to see if you'd try something for thirty seconds."

Emily squinted. "If this is about that ridiculous pajama suit, no thanks."

"Oh come on," Jamie chimed in, waddling dramatically in his sleeper. "You owe me after last time."

"Ten seconds," Emily sighed. "Just to shut you both up."

That was all they needed.

Before she realized what was happening, Ava and Jamie expertly maneuvered her into the suit—she struggled, laughed, then gasped, “Wait, this thing zips in the—HEY!”

Zzzzip. Snap-snap.

Emily froze, wide-eyed. “You zipped me in!”

Jamie grinned smugly. “Welcome to the marshmallow club.”

“You little traitor!” she yelled, wiggling her arms in the thick sleeves.

Ava high-fived Jamie, laughing until tears formed.

“I can’t move!” Emily flopped on the couch dramatically. “This is like being hugged by a pillow. Forever.”

“You’re welcome,” Jamie said, settling beside her with a victorious smirk.

Emily groaned but eventually gave in, slumping back. “Fine. It *is* kind of warm.”

As the evening settled, the three of them sat on the couch, all laughter and comfort, bundled up in what could only be described as matching ridiculousness.

“Next time,” Emily said sleepily, “I’m picking *your* outfits.”

Jamie stretched his mittened hands. “Bring it on.”

Chapter 5: Family Fleece

The three of them—Jamie, Ava, and Emily—were still curled up on the couch in their oversized, zip-up onesies when the front door creaked open.

“Kids? We’re home early!” came their mom’s voice from the hallway.

Jamie’s eyes widened slightly. “Uh oh.”

Before anyone could scramble—or waddle—away, their mom and dad stepped into the living room and froze, taking in the scene.

Emily sat bundled in the puffy, pastel star onesie, her arms crossed in mittened protest. Jamie was slouched in the cloud-covered sleeper, and Ava was beside them with the smug look of an instigator.

Their parents stared.

Then—unexpectedly—their dad said, “Are those... adult-sized footie pajamas?”

Jamie nodded slowly. “Back-zip. Mittens. Full commitment.”

Their mom blinked. “Where on Earth did you even *find* those?”

Ava cheerfully answered, “Online. Winter camping gear for oversized children, basically.”

There was a long pause. Then their dad chuckled. “Honestly? That looks incredibly warm.”

Emily sat up straighter. “No! Do *not* encourage them! I got tricked into this!”

Jamie smirked. "And yet, here you are. Cozy and immobile."

"I've been in this thing for an hour. If I bend too fast, I make pillow noises."

Ava nodded seriously. "That's part of the charm."

Their mom folded her arms. "I mean... they do look soft."

"Do you *want* to try one?" Jamie offered, trying not to sound too triumphant. "We're not using the dinosaur-print one Ava brought as backup."

Their dad raised an eyebrow. "There's a dinosaur one?"

Ava zipped open the duffel and held it up with a flourish. It was forest green, covered in tiny orange cartoon T-Rexes, with pointy felt spikes running down the back.

"I'm not saying I *have* to try it," their dad said. "But if it fits..."

Emily groaned dramatically. "This is how it spreads."

Their mom laughed. "I'll pass for now. But I might borrow one next snowstorm."

As Jamie helped his dad into the dino sleeper—causing more laughter than expected when the spikes flopped side to side—Ava turned to Emily.

"We should probably let you out soon."

Emily perked up. "Yes, thank you."

"But only if you say the magic words," Jamie added.

Emily narrowed her eyes. "I'll flatten your pillows."

"That's not the magic phrase."

She sighed. "Fine. You two were right. It's warm. It's comfortable. And I would like a bathroom break *before* this turns into a news story."

Jamie looked to Ava, who nodded solemnly. "Release the prisoner."

A few quick snaps and a careful unzip later, Emily wriggled free and stretched her arms triumphantly. "Freedom!"

As she headed upstairs to change, Jamie leaned back on the couch beside his dad—now wearing dino spikes and sipping tea like it was perfectly normal.

"This has gotten weird," Jamie said.

His dad grinned. "This is the most comfortable weird I've ever been part of."

Ava laughed. "Next time, I'm bringing matching hoods."

Jamie looked at her sideways. "Next time?"

"Oh, this is officially a thing now," Ava said.

From the stairs, Emily called down, "And next time I pick the theme!"

Jamie groaned. "That's how we end up in glitter cow suits."

Ava's eyes sparkled. "...You say that like it's a *bad* thing."

Chapter 6: Uniformly Cozy

It only took a few days.

After the dino sleeper incident, Jamie figured the onesie chapter of his life was closing quietly—but he underestimated just how much their parents *actually* liked the idea. Not for themselves, necessarily, but... for their children.

"Look what came in the mail today!" their mom announced one evening, holding up a large box with a grin.

Jamie looked up from the kitchen table warily. "Should I be worried?"

Their dad opened the box with theatrical flair. Inside were three brand-new full-body sleepers—thick, zip-up suits with back zippers, soft mittens, and padded soles.

Each was labeled with a name tag: *Jamie*, *Emily*, and even *Ava*.

"These are from a specialty catalog," their mom said proudly. "They're supposed to help kids sleep better, stay warm, and—bonus—they prevent all-night phone scrolling."

Emily stared at hers: deep pink with silver sparkles and stitched-on wings. "Is this supposed to be a fairy? Why does it have wings?"

"Because you're our magical girl," their dad teased.

Jamie's was navy blue with neon green stripes down the arms and little lightning bolts on the feet.

"I look like a disco superhero," he muttered.

"And Ava's," their mom added, pulling out the last one, "is lavender with a hood shaped like a sleepy cat's face."

Jamie blinked. "Wait—why did *Ava* get one?"

"She's practically here half the time," said their dad with a shrug.

Emily laughed. "You two really *are* trying to domesticate us."

"Think of it as a family bonding upgrade," their mom said.



The Return of Ava

That weekend, Ava showed up again, just in time to see Jamie trying on his new sleeper in the living room—his arms stiff, the back zipped shut, a resigned look on his face.

"Well, well," she said with a smirk. "Looks like the pod has accepted you."

Jamie wiggled a little. "They're multiplying."

"I noticed." Ava pulled out her backpack and unzipped it. "Because I brought more gear."

Inside were matching fleece hoods, some fuzzy booties, and what appeared to be... a soft restraint belt? Jamie raised an eyebrow.

"They came in a set," Ava said casually. "I didn't want to leave accessories behind."

Before Jamie could react, Emily entered the room wearing her sparkly winged suit—already zipped and snapped—with a surprising air of confidence.

She twirled. "Okay, I'm not saying I *love* it... but I kind of do."

Ava turned to her. "I was wondering. Because I made something for *you*, too."

From the bottom of her bag, she pulled out a pale gold suit with floral patterns and delicate embroidery on the sleeves. It looked less silly than the others—almost regal.

Emily blinked. "Wait. You *customized* this?"

"I might've spent a little time on Etsy," Ava admitted.

Emily touched the fabric. "Okay... okay, this is actually nice."

Jamie groaned from the couch. "I'm officially the least fashionable marshmallow in this house."

"I could sew you a cape," Ava offered.

"You're making capes now?"

"Matching capes," she said confidently.

Their mom walked by with a tray of snacks, chuckling. "Just don't forget who does laundry in this house. No glitter glue."

The Evening of No Escape

That night, the trio wore their suits while watching a movie—this time without argument. They'd each settled into the soft inevitability of it all.

Emily's fairy suit sparkled in the lamp light as she scrolled through Ava's photos on her phone.

"You're seriously turning this into a fashion project, aren't you?"

Ava shrugged. "Cozy can be cool."

Jamie reached for popcorn, missed, and gave up. "I'm just here for the snacks and mild loss of dignity."

"Don't worry," Emily said with a teasing smile. "Next weekend, I'm bringing *matching sleep hoods* and *storytime scarves*."

Jamie groaned.

Ava leaned back on a pillow and grinned. "And I'll bring the camera."

The Evening of No Escape

That night, the living room looked more like a padded retreat than a family space. Jamie was zipped into his navy-and-neon suit, Emily sat cross-legged in her sparkly fairy one, and Ava had fully embraced her sleepy cat-themed sleeper—complete with the hood up and soft purring sounds playing from a speaker she'd clipped to her belt.

The mittens sewn onto their suits meant all three of them were effectively phone-less. No scrolling, no texting, and definitely no selfies—just the warm, fluffy silence of a no-technology night.

“This is weird,” Jamie said, flopping sideways into the couch with a loud *whump*. “I can’t even scratch my nose.”

Emily giggled. “I feel like a marshmallow that dreams of flying.”

“Exactly the aesthetic I was going for,” Ava said, rummaging through the bag she’d brought. “Which is why it’s time for the rest of the gear.”

From her duffel, she pulled out a few soft accessories: fleece hoods that slipped over their already-puffy heads, oversized quilted booties, and wide, wrap-around “hug belts”—like padded sashes with gentle Velcro closures to keep their arms comfortably folded if they wanted.

Jamie eyed the belt warily. “Is that a... mittened straightjacket?”

“No, it’s a *snuggle strap*,” Ava said cheerfully. “Totally different.”

Emily raised an eyebrow but didn’t object. “Alright, fine. Let’s go full ridiculous.”

Ava helped fasten the fleece hoods over everyone’s heads, leaving only their faces visible beneath rounded, pillow-like layers. Then she cinched the hug belts gently around their middles—wrapping their arms in soft loops, perfect for flopping but not for much else.

Jamie looked over at Emily. “So this is our life now?”

Emily nodded solemnly, her cheeks puffed slightly under the hood. “Silent. Cozy. Powerless.”

“And snackless,” Jamie added, trying to reach a stray cracker with his padded foot.

Ava leaned back against a cushion, clearly pleased with herself. “This is officially the best sleepover ever.”

Their parents poked their heads in at one point, took in the sight of three motionless, bundled kids snuggled in silence, and just smiled.

“Looks like they’ve finally reached peak energy efficiency,” their dad whispered.

“No electronics, no arguments, and no mess,” their mom agreed. “We should’ve done this years ago.”



Back in the living room, Jamie gave up his cracker quest and sighed.

“Well,” he said, muffled by the hood, “at least I’m not cold.”

“And I’m too bundled to argue with you,” Emily added.

“Exactly,” Ava said. “That’s the magic of mitten-mode.”

They eventually drifted off one by one, cocooned in fleece, lights dimmed, and laughter long since faded. And though no one could send a photo or post a status update, it didn’t matter.

This moment was just for them—wrapped up, shut off, and perfectly warm.

Chapter 7: Morning in Mittenland

Jamie was the first to wake up.

Or rather, he *thought* he was. It was hard to tell when your head was wrapped in a fleece hood and your hands were trapped in mittens. The early morning light slipped through the living room curtains, casting a soft golden hue over what looked like a pile of oversized plush toys.

He wiggled a little. The hug belt around his middle was still snug, keeping his arms folded gently against his torso like a burrito with a grudge.

He let out a muffled groan. “I regret nothing... and everything.”

Next to him, Emily shifted under her sparkly fairy-printed blanket sleeper, her hood askew, a single wing sticking out from the pile like a crumpled flag. “Is it tomorrow yet?” she mumbled.

Ava was last to stir, blinking beneath her sleepy-cat hood. “That,” she said through a yawn, “was the warmest sleep I’ve ever had in my life.”

They lay there for a few more moments, bundled and helpless, before Jamie said, “Okay, but seriously... someone needs to free us before we turn into fleece fossils.”

“I think,” Ava said with exaggerated calm, “that’s why I left a pair of scissors in my sock.”

Emily paused. “...You did *what* now?”

“Emergency mitten escape tools,” Ava replied matter-of-factly. “I’m not new to this game.”

With some creative wiggling and light foot choreography, she fished the safety scissors from inside her slipper and carefully loosened her hug belt. Soon enough, she was freeing Jamie and Emily, one by one.

Once they were out, they all stood in the middle of the living room, their suits still on, hair matted under their hoods, looking like the world’s sleepest superhero team.

Jamie stretched his arms overhead. “I feel like I’ve just emerged from a cocoon.”

Emily looked down at her fairy suit. “I still have glitter in my eyelashes.”

“I brought toothbrushes,” Ava said, holding up a Ziploc bag proudly. “Travel-sized. Coordinated colors.”

“You’re terrifying,” Jamie said, but he was smiling.

Later That Morning

Cleaned up, still in their sleepers but with hoods off, the trio gathered in the kitchen for pancakes—Ava flipping them, Jamie pouring juice with mittened clumsiness, and Emily carefully sprinkling toppings like a decorator.

That's when Emily said it: "We should make this a thing."

Jamie raised an eyebrow. "What, the 'Midnight Marshmallow Society'?"

Ava gasped. "Wait. That's actually an amazing name."

"Rules," Emily said, holding up a sticky finger. "One: everyone wears a back-zip sleeper. No excuses."

"Two," Ava added, "no phones. If your hands can't use one, your brain doesn't need one."

"Three," Jamie said, "whoever falls asleep first gets a marshmallow on their forehead."

Emily nodded solemnly. "Perfect. Four: each week, someone new picks the sleeper theme."

"Which means," Ava grinned, "*next time*, I pick."

Jamie looked at her suspiciously. "That means there's a theme *already forming* in your head, doesn't it?"

"Oh yes," she said ominously. "Let's just say... it involves matching tails."

Emily groaned and put her head on the table. "Why do I feel like we're all going to be bundled as unicorns, or worse?"

Jamie took a bite of his pancake and said with mock seriousness, "We chose this life."

Chapter 8: Tails & Secrets

The next Friday rolled around quicker than expected, and Jamie was already bracing himself.

Ava had sent exactly *three* text messages in the lead-up:

- "Theme locked in."
- "You'll love it. Or hate it. Probably both."
- "Don't eat a huge dinner. You'll need room for cookies."

Jamie and Emily were setting up the living room—blankets fluffed, lights dimmed, snack table ready—when the doorbell rang.

"She's early," Emily said, glancing at the clock.

Jamie opened the door expecting Ava's usual sly grin and giant gear bag, but this time... she wasn't alone.

Standing beside her was a boy about their age, tallish, with shaggy brown hair and a confused but amused expression.

“Hey,” Ava said casually, like this was nothing. “I brought Max.”

“Max?” Jamie asked, blinking. “Max from art class Max?”

“That’s me,” Max said with a friendly shrug. “Apparently, I got drafted into something called the Midnight Marshmallow Society?”

Emily leaned out from behind the couch, her eyes narrowing. “Does he know what he’s in for?”

“He *thinks* he does,” Ava said cryptically. Then she swung her duffel bag onto the floor and unzipped it with a flourish. “Theme night: *Creatures of the Couch Forest!*”

Jamie and Emily looked inside the bag and stared.

There were four custom sleeper suits—thick and soft as always, with back zippers, mittens, and booties. But these were next-level:

- Jamie’s was deep green with floppy felt antlers and a fuzzy deer tail.
- Emily’s was a soft gray with pointy ears and a long squirrel-like tail.
- Ava’s was midnight blue with silver stars and a mysterious, twisty fox tail.
- And Max’s? He held it up and blinked. “Is this... a raccoon?”

“With bandit mask,” Ava said proudly. “It even has a ringed tail!”

Jamie crossed his arms. “And he *agreed* to this?”

Max shrugged again. “She said cookies, movies, and something called ‘fleece containment.’ I was curious.”

Emily smirked. “He’s either brave or very under-informed.”

Suiting Up

Getting into the suits took teamwork, especially with the tails and back zippers involved. Ava, ever the expert, helped Max into his raccoon suit, making sure the hood was on just right.

Jamie struggled into his deer suit with Emily's help, groaning as the antlers wobbled comically.

“Great,” he said. “Now I look like a Christmas mascot for forest nap time.”

“Exactly the vibe,” Ava said, snapping shut his zipper flap.

When all four of them were suited up—complete with mittens, hoods, and bouncing tails—they posed for an awkward photo that Ava took with her phone on a tripod, activated by voice.

“Say ‘snuggle society’!”

“Snuggle society,” they chorused—muffled, ridiculous, and completely unable to use their hands.

The Night Unfolds

With phones stashed away and mittens locked in, the night took on that cozy, unplugged rhythm they'd come to love. Max, despite being the newcomer, took to the experience like he'd been in the Marshmallow Society from the beginning.

"This is kind of genius," he admitted between bites of cookie Ava fed him. "You just sit here, trapped in fluff, and have *no responsibilities*."

"You get it," Jamie said from the floor, where he was half-reclining like a collapsed deer.

Emily, perched on a cushion, flicked her squirrel tail back and forth. "It's a lifestyle, really."

They played "guess that sound" with Ava's weird noise playlist, attempted a mittened drawing challenge (using markers in their mouths), and even made up a story together—with each person adding one line at a time, often turning it into something bizarre and hilarious.

A Growing Tradition

As the night came to a quiet end and the four creatures of the couch forest slowly nodded off under a mountain of fleece, Ava whispered, "Max fits in."

Jamie, eyes closed, nodded. "Too well. He's going to start recruiting more people, isn't he?"

Emily mumbled, "We'll need more animal suits..."

Max chuckled softly from his blanket pile. "I already have two cousins who'd join."

Ava grinned in the dark. "The society expands."

Chapter 9: Too Many Marshmallows

By the following weekend, word had officially gotten out.

Not at school—at least, not yet—but among Emily's original sleepover crew. Lily, Mia, and Ava had been there from the start, and now, with Jamie resigned to the Society's "open invitation" policy, they were back... with their own animal-themed sleepers.

Emily's living room was prepped like a plush forest again—this time with extra pillows, more tails, and a large cardboard sign taped to the wall that read:

MIDNIGHT MARSHMALLOW SOCIETY – CHAPTER 4: FERAL BUT FLEECY

Jamie groaned when he saw it. "We're going to need an actual constitution soon."

Ava, now self-appointed Club Seamstress, had outdone herself: Lily arrived in a bright orange fox suit with a brushy tail, Mia wore a cozy owl-themed sleeper with giant fleece wings, and Emily... well, she wore the gold flowered one Ava had made her last time, but now with a matching embroidered crown.

Max was back, too, tail swishing. "So, uh... this many people in mittens. That's not going to go wrong at all, right?"

Jamie looked around the room—now crowded with seven full-grown kids in padded, back-zipped fleece suits, all wearing mittens and fuzzy booties.

"Definitely not," he said flatly.

That's when their mom popped her head in. "Oh, by the way," she said cheerfully, "since there's so many of you tonight and none of you can use your hands, we've arranged for a babysitter."

Everyone froze.

"A what now?" Emily blinked.

"A babysitter," their mom said, stepping aside.

In walked *Nina*.

She was a college student from the neighborhood—tall, calm, slightly intimidating in a no-nonsense way, and carrying a tote bag with the quiet authority of someone who had once run a preschool room full of toddlers during naptime.

"Hi, everyone," she said sweetly. "I'm here to help you stay cozy... and *contained*."

Jamie gave Ava a horrified look. "Did you *know* about this?"

Ava looked genuinely surprised. "Not a clue. But she seems... prepared."

Enter the Babysitter

The evening started off tame. Nina handed out snacks and drinks with bendy straws. She helped them play a trivia game by reading out questions and even kept score with her tablet. She didn't blink when Jamie asked—midway through a geography question—how long it would be until his arms were "uncuffed from fluff."

"You'll survive," she said kindly. "Fleece prisoners always do."

But about an hour in, things began to slide.

Lily and Mia started a tail-tugging game that turned into a rolling ball of chaos on the floor. Emily leapt in dramatically to defend her "throne." Max tried to climb onto the beanbag stack like a raccoon king. Jamie, caught in the crossfire, flopped face-first into a plate of marshmallows.

That was when Nina cleared her throat.

"Okay," she said calmly, "I think it's time for some *soft structure*."

Before anyone could resist (or really move very effectively), she pulled out Ava's own hug belts—previously forgotten in the corner—and began gently but firmly wrapping them around wriggling torsos.

Jamie found his arms secured at his sides once again. "You're really good at this," he said as Nina finished strapping the Velcro closed.

"I've worked with sugar-hyped twins before," she replied. "This is nothing."

Within ten minutes, the whole group was lined up like puffy, pastel burritos on the couch and floor, tails poking out, mittens resting gently on knees or tucked into fleece loops. No one could move much. No one could cause chaos.

And, strangely enough, no one complained.

“Well,” Mia said through a yawn, “this is oddly comforting.”

“I feel like I’m in a padded parliament,” Max muttered.

Emily, regal once again in her crown and bound-in-gold suit, declared, “All in favor of re-electing Nina as Supreme Fleece Enforcer, say *mmf*.”

A chorus of muffled noises followed.

Later That Night

By the time parents arrived to pick up or check on their kids, the living room was a scene of peace: a room full of kids asleep or dozing in snug, secured suits, hug belts in place, tails gently flopped to one side.

Nina was sitting with a book, sipping tea.

“How was it?” Emily’s mom whispered.

Nina smiled. “Quiet now. Once they stopped rolling around like tumbleweeds.”

Jamie stirred and muttered, “This isn’t babysitting... it’s tactical snuggling...”

Chapter 10: Fleece vs. Fear (Pajama Day Approaches)

It started with a flyer.

Jamie pulled it from the bottom of his backpack at breakfast, waving it in the air like it was radioactive. “Did you see this?”

Emily snatched it and read aloud. “Pajama Day—this Friday. Come cozy, come proud!”

“‘Come *proud*’?” Jamie said. “That’s a trap. It’s a setup.”

Across the table, Ava sipped orange juice and smirked. “No, it’s an *opportunity*.”

Max, also joining them for breakfast as he often did these days, leaned in. “We could wear the suits.”

Emily blinked. “*The* suits?”

Jamie stared at him like he’d grown a second tail. “To *school*?”

“Why not?” Ava shrugged. “They’re technically pajamas. And we’ve already got the coolest, weirdest ones in existence.”

Emily raised an eyebrow. “They’re back-zipped, mittened, bootied animal suits. With tails. *Matching tails*.”

“Exactly,” Ava said, clearly loving this. “We’d be legends.”

Jamie crossed his arms. “We’d be *viral*.”

“That’s the point!” Ava leaned in. “People are going to wear boring plaid pants and cartoon t-shirts. We show up with synchronized fleece power and totally blow the roof off Pajama Day.”

Emily was clearly torn. “I don’t know. Once we do this, there’s no going back. This becomes our *thing*. People will *ask questions*.”

Max shrugged. “Let them. We’ve already got a name, rules, matching outfits, and group lore. We might as well lean in.”

Jamie looked at each of them. Ava: grinning with chaotic pride. Emily: reluctantly intrigued. Max: too calm for someone suggesting public fleece exposure.

“I hate how much sense this is making,” Jamie muttered.

That Night: The Planning Session

The Marshmallow Society reconvened for an emergency fleece meeting. Each member brought their suit, and Ava brought her sketchbook.

“We need to coordinate,” she said. “We’re not going in with the ‘Forest Creatures’ theme again. We’ve done it. It’s retired.”

Jamie looked up. “Wait—are we *changing* suits?”

“I am not re-learning how to walk in hooves,” Emily warned.

“No hooves,” Ava said, flipping a page. “But we do need something bold. Something *unified*. Behold: the Pajama Day Protocol.”

She turned the sketchbook around.

On the page were five matching sleeper designs: sleek fleece suits in midnight black, each with a bright colored stripe (blue, purple, green, red, orange). The hoods had minimalist eye masks. The mittens and booties were built-in, of course.

“We go stealth,” Ava said. “Pajama Ninjas.”

Max was sold instantly. “I love this.”

Jamie stared. “You want me to dress like a fleece ninja.”

“Yes,” Ava replied. “And you’ll look amazing doing it.”

Emily folded her arms. “I have *conditions*.”

Ava raised a brow. “Let’s hear them.”

“No glitter, no bells, and I want an actual zipper escape plan.”

“You drive a hard bargain,” Ava said, “but fine. I’ll add stealth zippers under the belt flap. Breakaway fleece tech.”

Jamie sighed deeply. “If we’re doing this, we need rules.”

Max nodded. “Fleece Formation. We enter as a unit.”

“Bathroom schedule,” Emily added. “Or we all go down together.”

“And a code word,” Jamie said. “If anyone bails, we all bail.”

They all looked at each other. Finally, Ava said, “Code word?”

Max grinned. “Fluffstorm.”

Everyone nodded in solemn agreement.

Friday Approaches

By Thursday night, their custom suits were ready. Matching, sleek, soft as clouds but with a look of professional fleece mayhem.

The plan was simple: arrive early, enter together, own Pajama Day, and—hopefully—walk out with dignity intact.

That is, assuming no one chickened out.

As they zipped into their suits for a final test run that evening, Jamie looked at himself in the mirror—mittens flapping, stripe glowing down his sleeve, hood resting above his head.

“I look like a crime-fighting mascot,” he muttered.

“You *look awesome*,” Ava said, snapping the belt into place.

“Fleece Ninjas forever,” Emily said, bumping her padded elbow against his.

Max nodded. “Fluffstorm is go.”

Chapter 11: Pajama Day—And the Fleece Revolution

Friday morning.

The sky was gray, the air sharp with early spring chill, and the students of Maple Ridge Middle School streamed through the gates in varying degrees of sleepy attire—flannel pants, cartoon t-shirts, fluffy robes, and bunny slippers. Pajama Day was always low-stakes and full of awkward fashion choices.

But today... something different arrived.

Four kids stepped off the bus in slow formation, heads held high under soft fleece hoods. Matching jet-black blanket sleepers covered them from neck to toe. Each suit featured a bold stripe—blue for Jamie, purple for Emily, red for Max, and green for Ava—cutting across the chest and down the arms like uniforms.

Their bootied feet landed in synchronized puffs. Their mittened hands swayed at their sides. Their zippered backs were snapped shut.

The crowd *stared*.

Some kids laughed. Some blinked in awe. A few took out phones, fumbling to take pictures.

One 8th grader said, “Are they... *ninjas in pajamas?*”

Ava leaned toward Jamie and whispered through her hood, “And so it begins.”



First Period Problems

The first class of the day was science. Sitting down in fleece wasn’t the issue—it was opening the textbook.

Jamie stared at his mittened hands like they’d betrayed him. “Okay. Anyone figure out how to turn pages?”

Emily was already trying to tap her stylus on her tablet with the side of her arm. “This is like trying to do homework in a sleeping bag.”

Max used his face to swipe his screen. “It’s a challenge. But I respect it.”

Ava attempted to unzip her backpack using her elbows. She succeeded... but then couldn’t reach inside.

Their teacher, Mr. Kendrick, walked by their row, paused, and blinked. “Midnight... power rangers?”

“Marshmallow Society,” Jamie corrected him.

Mr. Kendrick stared a moment longer. “Well... you’re committed. That’s impressive. I’ll write the answers on the board.”

Mittens and Mayhem

By second period, the group realized just how many school activities required hands:

- Jamie dropped his pencil *four times* during math and had to nose-nudge it back to his foot each time.

- Emily got stuck trying to open a snack bar and had to ask their teacher for help like a helpless toddler.
- Ava gave a group presentation using a printed chart and a laser pointer... which she couldn't hold. She ended up propping it between her mitten and chin.
- Max was asked to fill out a worksheet and replied, "Can I dictate my answers to a trusted scribe?"

By lunchtime, they had become *legendary*.

"Dude, those suits are ridiculous."

"I saw them *flop down the stairs* in the gym hallway."

"They can't even open the bathroom door."

"They're kind of amazing."

Jamie and the others sat together at the end of the lunch table, surrounded by a small crowd of curious onlookers. They ate slowly, using bendy straws, tiny finger-snacks, and teamwork. Max used a spoon taped to his sleeve.

"I've lost all dignity," Jamie mumbled between bites of a soft cheese stick Ava fed him.

"You never had any to begin with," Emily said proudly.

Ava beamed. "We made fleece *look cool*."

And then... something strange happened.

The Onesie Rebellion

As lunch break ended, students began returning to class—but Jamie noticed something new.

Three kids walked by... wearing *extreme* onesies.

One had a shiny silver suit with inflatable shoulder pads. Another wore a plush dinosaur sleeper, complete with a tail and matching mittens. The third? A fleece shark, hood zipped tight, fins sewn to the arms.

Emily blinked. "Did you see that?"

"Oh no," Jamie whispered. "They've... *copied us*."

Max looked to the far hallway. More kids were arriving in wild, customized pajamas—some full-body, some hooded, and at least two wearing back-zipped, mittened suits suspiciously similar to Ava's designs.

Ava grinned slowly, like a proud general watching her troops assemble.

"This," she said, "is a movement."

Jamie put his head on the table. "I blame you for everything."

"You're welcome."

By the end of the day, at least a dozen students were in some form of extreme sleeper. The principal made an announcement reminding students that “costumes must still allow for safe movement and learning.”

Jamie muttered through his hood, “Define safe.”

After School

As they waddled out of the building in their fleece formation, Jamie glanced over at Ava.

“So. We accidentally started a trend.”

Ava looked thoughtful. “Not an accident. A fleece uprising.”

Emily pulled her hood tighter. “We need rules. A charter. Maybe matching backpacks.”

Max nodded. “And a secret signal for ‘I can’t unzip myself and I need help.’”

Jamie groaned. “Next week, we’ll be featured in the yearbook under ‘*Revolution in Pajama Form.*’”

Ava raised a mitten. “And it’ll be glorious.”

Chapter 12: Fleece in the Hayloft

Two weeks after the now-legendary Pajama Day, permission slips went home for a two-day school field trip to Maple Knoll Heritage Farm—a historic working farm turned educational center. The trip would include nature hikes, sheep-shearing demos, butter churning (somehow still part of the curriculum), and an overnight stay in the farm’s refurbished barn attic.

Jamie blinked at the form and looked over at Emily. “It says we’re sleeping in a *hayloft*.”

Emily raised a brow. “It also says bring sleeping bags and warm clothes. You know what that means.”

Across the cafeteria table, Ava slowly smiled. “*Society standard issue.*”

Jamie groaned. “We’re really doing this?”

Max leaned in, already excited. “Imagine it: the first *official field deployment* of the Midnight Marshmallow Society.”

And so, plans were made.

Day One: Arrival at the Farm

The bus ride to Maple Knoll was long, bumpy, and full of excitement. Ava passed out custom stickers (featuring a hooded fleece mascot), while Emily carried a clipboard with the “sleepover protocol” checklist. Max brought a fanny pack full of snacks. Jamie... brought mild dread.

As they stepped off the bus, they took in the sights: open fields, crooked fences, sheep bleating in the distance, and the large red barn standing like an old fortress under a cloudy sky.

Their teacher, Ms. Langford, clapped her hands. “Group A to the animal pen, Group B to the butter churning station! Remember: tonight we sleep upstairs in the barn loft. Bring your warmest PJs!”

Ava gave Jamie a look.

“I swear,” he said, “if you call me ‘Barnyard Burrito,’ I’m leaving.”

Evening: Suiting Up in the Loft

By dusk, the students had gone on hikes, learned about crop rotation, and churned enough butter to lose feeling in their arms.

Then came the real event: the attic loft sleepover.

The space was cozy—wooden beams, string lights, sleeping mats, and yes, hay bales tucked decoratively into the corners. As kids unrolled their sleeping bags and pulled out their pajamas, Jamie and the rest of the Society unveiled their newest gear: *The Hayloft Edition* fleece suits.

These versions were earth-toned: Jamie in pine green, Ava in golden straw, Emily in soft chestnut, and Max in slate gray. Each had a hood, mittens, booties, and—new this time—a removable fleece *bedroll flap* that could wrap around them like a wearable sleeping bag.

A few classmates stared.

“Wait... they brought the suits again?”

“Are those... insulated?”

“They look like medieval pajamas.”

Ava zipped up proudly and posed. “Fleece 2.0: Field Trip Edition.”

As lights dimmed and kids began settling down for the night, the Society members were already cocooned. Ava passed out calming mint tea in thermoses, Emily dimmed a travel lantern, and Max played ambient “barn night” sounds from a speaker—complete with soft sheep noises.

“Okay,” Jamie admitted, “this is actually kind of perfect.”

Then someone knocked over a flashlight.

Then someone stepped in a sleeping bag and tripped into the hay bale.

And then—of course—Lily and Mia, who had brought their own custom “farm animal” onesies, started a pillow fight with cow and chicken-themed war cries.

Within minutes, fleece chaos had overtaken the hayloft.

Enter Ms. Langford

A stern figure appeared in the doorway.

“Everyone FREEZE.”

Pillows paused mid-air. Mittens hung awkwardly. Ava froze mid-giggle.

Ms. Langford sighed. “I *knew* I should’ve requested two chaperones for this.”

Then she spotted the four cocooned Society members—bundled up in their bedroll flaps, tucked neatly in a corner, sipping tea.

She blinked.

“You four... are just *sitting there* like sleeping caterpillars.”

Emily raised her mitten in a tiny wave.

Ms. Langford stepped closer. “Wait. Are you warm, quiet, and not involved in this?”

Jamie nodded slowly. “We’re fleece-certified neutral parties.”

She looked around the room, still half-chaotic. Then she pointed at the Society.

“You’re in charge of enforcing lights-out.”

Jamie blinked. “Wait—*what?*”

Ava smiled. “Field promoted.”

Later That Night

Order was restored. Lights were dimmed. Students snuggled into sleeping bags—some still giggling, some still brushing hay out of their socks.

The Society huddled in their corner, rolled up like burritos, the sounds of sleep settling around them.

Max whispered, “We survived the farm.”

Jamie yawned. “Barely.”

Ava, still scribbling in her notebook by lantern light, murmured, “Next year, fleece ponchos. Just in case.”

Emily added sleepily, “And an official sleepover whistle.”

As the wind creaked through the barn walls and a sheep bleated in the distance, the Society drifted off beneath string lights and wooden rafters—warm, ridiculous, and proud.

Chapter 13: Overalls & Overreach

Morning sunlight poured through the barn’s high windows, cutting golden beams across the wooden floor. The barn attic stirred to life with the groaning of tired students, the rustling of sleeping bags, and the occasional hay-sneeze.

Jamie blinked awake, still wrapped in his fleece cocoon. Somewhere nearby, Max was mumbling something about sheep invading his dreams. Emily had rolled half off her mat and was clinging to a bale like it owed her money.

Ava, however, was already *up*.

Not just awake—*up*, dressed, and grinning.

She stood at Jamie's side, hands behind her back, eyes sparkling.

Jamie, still groggy, squinted at her. "What are you scheming?"

Ava pulled something out from behind her back: a folded pair of overalls.

"I made these just for you," she said brightly. "It's a farm, after all."

Jamie eyed them warily. "Those aren't denim."

"Nope!" she said, unfolding them dramatically.

They were soft, quilted overalls in a light indigo-blue, clearly styled after classic farmwear—but with *distinct* upgrades: fleece-lined inside, reinforced knee patches shaped like clouds, snap straps over the shoulders, and... mitten loops at the hips?

"These are pajama overalls," Jamie said flatly.

"They're *dayform fleece*," Ava corrected. "The perfect hybrid for barn adventures."

Emily stirred nearby, blinking at the scene. "She's dressing you like a toddler scarecrow."

Ava handed Jamie the overalls with all the seriousness of a royal tailor. "You've conquered Pajama Day. You led a fleece faction through a barn sleepover. You deserve an official daytime look."

Jamie held them up and sighed. "They have *bootie covers built in*."

"You'll thank me when we're ankle-deep in goat mud," Ava said, tying his hood drawstring for emphasis.

Breakfast and the Reveal

Downstairs, students lined up for pancakes and scrambled eggs in the farmhouse kitchen. Jamie shuffled into line behind Max, who did a double take when he saw the overalls.

"Is that... *stitched fleece farmwear*?"

"Don't start," Jamie grumbled.

Max grinned. "It's kind of amazing. Can I get a pair?"

Behind him, Mia and Lily were already whispering to Ava. "Do they come in pink?" "Wait, do they have cow versions?"

Ava just smiled like a merchant at a medieval market. "Maybe."

Jamie sat at the communal table, poking at his eggs, only to realize one thing: the overalls were *ridiculously* comfortable. Warm, flexible, no waistband digging in. Even the cloud knees were kind of useful when kneeling by the goats later.

"Curse you, Ava," he muttered. "They're... actually good."

Emily, dressed in regular jeans but eyeing his outfit, finally admitted, "Alright. If she makes mine in caramel brown with sunflower pockets, I'll consider it."

The Morning Chores

As part of the trip's final activity, students rotated through "chore stations." Jamie and Emily were sent to collect eggs from the chicken coop, Max and Ava helped sweep out the goat pen, and Lily and Mia volunteered—somehow—to "supervise" the snack table.

It wasn't long before the Society started getting looks again.

"Are those *custom* farm pajamas?" asked one of the teachers.

"Field-tested fleece gear," Ava answered proudly.

One of the farmhands chuckled. "I've seen a lotta field trips. First time I've seen kids show up dressed like sleepy scarecrows."

By mid-morning, Ava had already taken orders from three classmates and sketched a new design on the back of the chore checklist: *Midnight Marshmallow Society Daywear – Barn Edition*.

Packing Up

As the group prepared to leave, students rolled up sleeping bags and wiped hay off their shoes. Jamie folded up his fleece overalls—after wearing them for nearly the entire morning—and quietly slid them into his duffel bag.

Ava caught him.

"Saving them for later?" she asked, knowingly.

Jamie smirked. "Emergency situations only."

"Like school Spirit Week?"

Jamie froze. "Please don't give them *ideas*."

On the Bus Ride Home

As the bus rumbled back toward civilization, the Society sat together near the back, warm and tired. Ava showed Emily her sketches for fleece jackets. Max was teaching Jamie to open granola bars using only forearms. Emily rested her head against the window.

"Best trip ever," she mumbled.

Jamie grinned. "Let's never tell anyone we were the most organized people on that farm."

Ava grinned wider. "Too late. I already sent the teacher a thank-you email... signed *Midnight Marshmallow Society, Rural Division*."

Jamie facepalmed—mittens or no mittens.

Chapter 14: Fleece Overalls and the Rite of Snug

It was a cool Friday evening, and Ava's living room had already been transformed into "Society HQ." Fairy lights draped across the ceiling, oversized cushions lined the floor, and a fresh hand-painted banner read:

MIDNIGHT MARSHMALLOW SOCIETY: OFFICIAL OVERALL LAUNCH & INITIATION NIGHT

Jamie stood in the middle of it all, looking down at the folded outfit in his arms.

"Okay," he said, unfolding it skeptically, "I'll admit—this looks... awesome."

The new *Fleece Overalls* were Society-issued and Ava-designed: soft quilted fabric in cozy muted tones, buttoned bibs over fleece long-sleeves, a hidden zipper in the back, and matching bootie covers. Jamie's was forest green with navy trim. Emily's came in golden brown with sunflower stitching. Max's was a stormy gray. Ava, of course, wore midnight blue with white constellations embroidered across the back.

But tonight wasn't just about overalls.

It was about Mia.

An Unexpected Return

Mia had been one of the original sleepover attendees—the one who helped zip Jamie into his first blanket sleeper, the one who'd giggled through the glitter face mask session, and the one who'd slowly drifted out of the chaos as the Society took shape.

But she hadn't forgotten it.

And when she arrived at Ava's front door—overnight bag in one hand, wide-eyed and slightly nervous—she found the other Society members waiting in full fleece overall gear, hoods up, arms crossed in mock ceremony.

"Mia of the First Sleepover," Ava intoned, standing before her. "You have returned. Do you come to be initiated into the Marshmallow Order?"

Mia laughed, just a little. "This isn't some kind of fleece cult, right?"

Jamie, standing beside a sign labeled *Welcome, Initiate*, said, "Not unless you count bedtime smoothies and a suspicious amount of velcro."

Emily stepped forward with a perfectly folded set of Mia's overalls—lavender with soft star patches on the knees, trimmed in silver thread.

"This is your uniform," Emily said solemnly. "Made to measure. Triple-stitched. Pre-washed. Pre-fluffed."

Mia blinked. "You guys are way too organized."

Max grinned. "We've come a long way since the hayloft."

The Initiation

Once Mia had changed (with a little help zipping the back, of course), the group gathered on the living room floor. Ava cleared her throat and raised a flashlight like a ceremonial torch.

“By fleece and footie,” she declared, “we welcome Mia into the fold.”

Jamie stepped forward with the *Initiation Checklist*, which he read from dramatically:

“Step one: the Fleece Pledge.”

Mia recited along as they fed her each line:

"I promise to wear fleece without shame,
To accept help when zippers betray me,
To use my mittened hands wisely,
And never, ever, leave a fellow fluff-unit behind."

“Step two,” Max said, “the Trial of Marshmallows.”

This involved tossing jumbo marshmallows into each other’s hoods from across the room. Mia hit Ava square in the forehead on her third try and was immediately declared *worthy*.

“Step three,” Emily said, “the Fleece Waddle Gauntlet.”

The others lined up pillows and pool noodles in a miniature obstacle course. Mia had to shuffle through it with her arms at her sides while everyone shouted encouragement like, “FLUFF FASTER!” and “USE YOUR CORE!”

She made it through without falling once.

Ava bowed deeply. “You are now one of us.”

Mia laughed, her cheeks flushed with warmth and maybe a hint of disbelief. “Okay. I’ll admit. This is kind of amazing.”

Jamie nodded. “Told you. Fleece is a lifestyle.”

The Rest of the Night

With the initiation complete and all five members zipped and strapped into their custom overalls, the Society relaxed into their usual evening rituals: group games, whispered stories by flashlight, themed snacks (this time: *overalls oatmeal cookies*), and a late-night showing of *The Fleece Frontier*—a movie Ava insisted had “deep thematic relevance.”

Mia quickly fell into the rhythm. She learned to drink through a straw without tipping her hood. She discovered how to use the elbow-nudge method to press buttons. She even won a round of “Name That Cozy Sound” by correctly identifying a slowed-down recording of someone stepping in plush carpet.

That night, as they all lay in a snuggled heap of fleece and friendship, Jamie quietly said:

“You’re one of us now.”

Mia grinned into her hood. “Yeah. I really am.”

Chapter 15: The Interview (and the Back-Buttoned Revolution)

It began, as many Society milestones did, with Ava getting *carried away*.

Jamie arrived at their usual Saturday hangout—Ava’s basement, now permanently decorated with throw pillows, fleece bunting, and a chart labeled *Suit Evolution Timeline*—to find her pacing, flanked by Emily and Max, who both wore suspiciously smug expressions.

“What did you do?” Jamie asked immediately.

Ava turned, beaming. “We’re going public.”

Jamie blinked. “Please don’t mean that literally.”

Emily handed him a flyer. It read:

Local Kids Start Cozy Club, Revolutionize Pajama Culture

Reporter to visit Saturday at 4 p.m.

Interview includes photos, demonstrations, and “cozy culture Q&A.”

Jamie dropped the flyer. “No.”

Max picked it up. “Too late. She already emailed the community paper. The *Maple Gazette*.”

“Why would you do this?” Jamie groaned.

“Because,” Ava said, opening a garment bag with a flourish, “I’ve made a media-friendly upgrade.”

Inside were five brand-new fleece overalls—similar in cut to the Society’s official daywear... but with one *crucial difference*.

“The straps,” Ava said proudly, “now button in the *back*.”

Jamie froze. “You made daywear... into fleece-trap formalwear.”

“Exactly!” Ava chirped. “It reinforces our values: mutual support, trust, and the complete inability to undress without help.”

Emily picked up hers—caramel brown with tiny stitched sunflowers and matte silver buttons right between the shoulder blades. “I kind of love it.”

Max tried his on. “We need mirrors everywhere now.”

Jamie sighed. “This is how cult documentaries start.”

Later That Afternoon: Enter the Reporter

The doorbell rang at precisely 4 p.m. Ava opened it to reveal a woman in a long gray coat, glasses, and a bright notebook. She smiled politely.

“Hi there! I’m Wendy Marsh with the *Maple Gazette*. I heard about your... club. Or movement? I have questions.”

“Oh, we have answers,” Ava said.

Wendy was led down to the basement, where the full Society stood waiting—Jamie, Emily, Ava, Max, and newly initiated Mia—all suited up in their fresh fleece overalls. Hoods up. Mittens clipped on. Straps buttoned firmly in the back.

Wendy blinked. “You all... need help getting out of those?”

“It’s part of the experience,” Emily said, lifting her arm like a fashion model. “Form meets function. And dependency.”

Wendy took out her notepad. “Let’s start from the beginning. What exactly *is* the Midnight Marshmallow Society?”

Ava launched into the history: the first sleepover, the accidental onesie takeover, the school Pajama Day uprising, the hayloft field test. Emily explained the fleece pledge. Max showed her the snack-access pocket he’d sewn into his suit’s chest.

Jamie demonstrated “Elbow Tactic No. 3: Texting Without Thumbs.”

Mia gave a live tutorial on how to open juice boxes using nothing but mittened hands and table friction.

Wendy scribbled furiously. “So what’s the philosophy here?”

“Comfort. Community. Chaos,” Ava said proudly.

“And,” Emily added, “the idea that sometimes, it’s okay to not do everything yourself. Because fleece makes you ask for help.”

Max raised a mitten. “And it’s funny watching Jamie try to tie his shoes with his elbows.”

“*That was one time,*” Jamie muttered.

Wendy grinned. “This is honestly one of the most wholesome things I’ve ever covered.”

Photos & Demonstrations

The group posed for a full line-up portrait—hands at sides, booties together, hoods up like a line of fleece-fighting mascots.

They showed Wendy their obstacle course (cushions and pool noodles). Jamie performed a dramatic reenactment of Pajama Day. Ava showed the fleece-overall blueprints. Mia and Emily did synchronized waddling.

Wendy was laughing by the end. “This is going to be front page of the Community Life section. You’ll probably have copycats by the weekend.”

Jamie looked horrified. “More fleece clubs?”

Ava lit up. “A *network*.”

Emily whispered, “We’re going to need regional chapters.”

That Evening

After the reporter left, the group collapsed into a pile on the carpet, still suited up and proudly button-trapped.

"I can't believe we just got interviewed about pajamas," Jamie said, staring at the ceiling.

"*Structured fleecewear*," Ava corrected, poking him with a mitten.

Max chuckled. "Do we have any unifying motto for the paper?"

Mia thought for a moment. "How about... *Snug. Supportive. Slightly Ridiculous.*"

Everyone nodded.

Ava pulled out her notebook and wrote it down.



Chapter 16: The Fleece Front Goes Public (Again)

The *Maple Gazette* article hit town on a quiet Monday morning.

It was supposed to be a fluff piece (pun very much intended)—a local oddity, a charming community story. But the moment it was published online, the Society's group photo, snappy motto (*Snug.*

Supportive. Slightly Ridiculous.), and Ava's quote about "redefining team spirit through fleece" went viral—at least locally.

By Tuesday, the school office had received *six* calls from nearby middle schools asking if the "Cozy Kids" could come talk to their students.

By Wednesday, the school principal called Ava and the others to her office.

"I don't know what kind of cult you're running," Principal Niles said, holding up a printed photo of the Society's basement group shot, "but the PTA wants to *sponsor* you now."

Emily covered her face with a mittened hand. "It's happening again."

Max whispered, "We need merch."

Jamie groaned. "We need to disappear."

Ava, of course, *was already writing ideas in her notebook.*

Later That Day – Emergency HQ Meeting

Back in the basement, the Society regrouped.

Ava stood at the whiteboard she had *definitely* installed since the article, marker in hand. She'd drawn a crude fleece-covered person with arrows pointing to different parts labeled "*new potential upgrades.*"

"We're being noticed," she said, eyes gleaming. "That means it's time for the next stage of uniform development."

Jamie slumped into a beanbag. "We're one step away from wearing company badges."

Ava flipped a page in her sketchbook. "So. I propose three new categories for public fleecewear."

1. Everyday Uniforms

"These are for semi-cozy situations," Ava explained. "Think: school-approved fleece shirts with thumb-loop cuffs, quilted vests, and soft cargo pants with built-in seat cushions."

Emily blinked. "Seat... cushions?"

"For the *bus rides*," Ava replied like it was obvious.

2. Utility Overalls 2.0

"These are our public engagement suits. Same warm fleece, but new features: clip-on name tags, phone pouches with elbow-access zippers, and—" she flipped the sketch—"a *convertible hood-scarf combo.*"

Max gave a low whistle. "We're gonna need a textile lab."

Jamie mumbled, "And possibly a legal department."

3. Formal Marshmallowwear

"For ceremonies, assemblies, and charity pancake breakfasts," Ava said dreamily. "Soft tuxedo stitching. Built-in bow ties. Velcro cummerbunds."

Emily paused. "We're seriously talking about fleece tuxedos now?"

Ava nodded. "Imagine showing up to a fundraiser, formal but fluff-wrapped."

Mia clapped softly, mitten to mitten. "I kind of love it."

Public Call to Cozy

By Friday, the principal asked them to present during the school's weekly *Morning Assembly*.

"You've somehow inspired both creativity and strange fleece economics in this school," she said.

"You might as well own it."

Ava grinned. "Gladly."

Jamie tried to protest, but it was too late. The Society was officially on the schedule under the listing:

"Student-Led Presentation: Comfort, Collaboration, and Cozy Culture."

Chapter 17: The Cozy Runway Revolution

Friday morning. Maple Ridge Middle's gymnasium buzzed with restless students shuffling onto bleachers. Teachers milled near the stage, trying to look supportive while quietly wondering why this week's *Morning Assembly* had a fog machine.

On the schedule: the **Midnight Marshmallow Society's presentation**—officially titled:

"Comfort, Collaboration, and Cozy Culture: A New Era of Togetherness"

featuring: The Marshmallow Collection – Autumn Fleece Line

At exactly 9:02 a.m., the lights dimmed.

Soft instrumental music—something suspiciously spa-like—began playing over the speakers.

Then came Ava's voice, amplified through the microphone:

"Welcome... to the next stage of evolution. Where comfort meets community. Where fashion can only be *fastened* with *friendship*."

A spotlight hit center stage.

And out walked Jamie.

Act I: Utility Everyday

Jamie, wearing Ava's "Utility Overalls 2.0," shuffled carefully down the ramp. Forest green quilted fleece, reinforced knees, back-buttoned straps, and a shoulder-mounted pouch labeled *SNACKS*. His hood had a built-in fleece sun visor. A drawstring cinched the ankles like he was ready to wade into a swamp of soup.

He turned, with exaggerated stiffness, to show off the back buttons—neatly secured in a way he *absolutely could not reach* on his own.

The crowd laughed and applauded.

Emily came next in caramel fleece coveralls with a sunflower print sash and optional wrist flaps that extended into soft “serving mittens”—a nod to the group’s many snack-related activities. Her pose included holding a plate of cookies and offering them to the audience with mittened grace.

Mia followed in lavender fleece with star-shaped elbow pads and a snap-on head pillow. On the back? A plush badge reading “*Certified Hug Required.*”

Max marched out in “adventure fleece”—gray and slate blue with reflective trim and a pull-out footrest that unfolded from his booties like he was transforming into a living recliner.

Then came Ava.

Act II: The Marshmallow Monarch

The lights dimmed to a purple hue. A hush fell over the room.

From behind the curtain, Ava emerged in her most *outrageous* design yet: a deep midnight fleece robe with quilted layers stitched like petals. Giant soft mittens reached nearly to her elbows. Her hood was lined in faux fur. A detachable capelet flowed behind her, fastened with oversized safety clasps that took *two people* to remove.

She was wheeled out *on a rolling ottoman*, seated in royal posture, sipping hot cocoa from a sippy-lid thermos.

Around her neck? A lanyard reading:

“UNZIP ME ONLY WITH CONSENT. Zipper access: Rear. Buttons: Back-mounted. Escape rating: 1/10.”

The audience *howled*.

Jamie leaned into the mic. “She calls this one *The Marshmallow Monarch*. It can only be removed with three friends, a written request, and ten minutes of prep time.”

Ava stood, barely. Her arms barely moved. Her smile was pure victory.

“This is the future,” she declared. “Fashion you can’t wear alone—and *shouldn’t have to.*”

Act III: Demonstration of Dependence

The final portion of the show demonstrated “Cozy Teamwork in Action.”

Jamie pretended to need help opening a juice box—Emily used her forearm and the side of a folding chair to assist.

Mia, pretending to be stuck with her back buttons tangled, called for Ava and Max, who helped unfasten them with gentle coordination and dramatic flair.

Each moment earned laughter, applause, and at least one “*Wait, I want one!*” from the crowd.

The Finale

The five Society members lined up center stage, mittened hands linked, hoods up, overalls buttoned tight. Jamie stepped forward.

"This may look ridiculous—"

"It is," Emily added.

"—but it's also what brought us together," he finished.

Ava raised her mitten. "In fleece, no one gets left behind. Mostly because they physically can't get out of their outfit."

Cue a standing ovation. Even the teachers clapped—some a little too enthusiastically.

Afterward

Backstage, flushed and thrilled, the Society collapsed in a pile of pillows and portable fleece blankets.

"That went better than expected," Mia said.

"We just turned fleece into performance art," Max said.

"I may already have three order requests for capelets," Ava whispered.

Jamie sighed, smiling. "We're going to need a *membership department* soon."

Chapter 18: The Cozy Challenge – Lights, Camera, Containment

The call came on a Tuesday.

It started with the principal knocking on Ava's homeroom door with her phone in hand, looking both baffled and mildly horrified.

"Um... Ava," she said, "there's a producer from Channel 7 on the line. Something about pajamas?"

Fifteen minutes later, Ava burst into the Society's usual lunch table, waving a permission form and grinning like a person who had just been offered her dream job in fleece.

"They want to film us. For TV."

Jamie almost choked on his applesauce. "What?"

"**Cozy Challenge: Classroom Edition.**" Ava slapped down a sheet with a bold heading and glittery logo. "It's a *reality segment* for Channel 7's weekend show. They want to document us trying to survive a *full day* of school... in **Extra Extreme Fleece Gear.**"

Emily blinked. "What does *extra extreme* mean? Aren't we already doing that?"

"They want us *contained*," Ava said excitedly. "Custom suits. No hand access. No visible zippers. Built-in hydration tubes. Rear flaps for bathroom breaks—but *only with buddy support.*"

Max leaned back in awe. "They're making this sound like a survival game... with mittens."

"It *is* a survival game with mittens," Mia said, already texting her mom for permission.

Preparation Week: The Containment Designs

Over the next few days, Ava went into full production mode. Sketchbooks exploded with ideas. Terms like “*quad-snap security flaps*” and “*anti-fidget thumb guards*” were spoken in total seriousness. The final designs included:

- **Fleece Containment Suits 3.0:** full-body gear with rear zippers, double-snap shoulders, mittens sewn directly to the sleeves, and oversized bootie soles with grip tread.
- **Integrated Hoods:** with built-in pillow padding and optional sun visors.
- **Snack Capsules:** attached by magnetic clips that could only be opened with an elbow press.
- **Emergency Assistance Patches:** a soft fleece badge on the chest that read “HELP ZIP ME” with a removable Velcro arrow pointing to the back.
- **Communication Bandanas:** because no one could reach their phones, each member had a color-coded bandana that let others know how urgent their situation was.

Jamie stared at his outfit during the first fitting and muttered, “I look like a futuristic teletubby designed by NASA’s nap department.”

Ava clapped her hands. “Perfect!”

Filming Day: Let the Challenge Begin

The TV crew arrived early Friday morning, their cameras already rolling as the Society marched into school—slow, swaying, and gloriously over-equipped.

They were introduced on camera as follows:

“Meet the Midnight Marshmallow Society: five brave middle schoolers facing their greatest test yet—a **full academic day without the use of their hands**. In suits that require *teamwork, trust, and total fleece immersion*.”

The rest of the school stopped and stared.

Some classmates laughed. Some cheered. One kid muttered, “That’s the most secure pajama I’ve ever seen.”

The Challenge Begins

First Period – Math

Emily had to solve equations by calling them out while Ava wrote with her nose. It actually worked. Sort of.

Second Period – Science Lab

Max attempted to pour vinegar into a beaker with a straw in his mouth. It ended with a small eruption. The science teacher gave them extra credit for “enthusiasm and creative failure.”

Lunch

Mia, unable to open her bento box, triggered her emergency bandana. Jamie and Emily sprang into action, activating the flap release and helping her eat with a long-handled spoon wedged into her hood collar.

PE

They were excused. Instead, they filmed a slow-motion fleece relay on the field, waddling like noble penguins.

Unexpected Difficulty – Bathroom Protocol

Mid-afternoon, Jamie quietly said, “I need to go.”

Ava activated the rear-flap sequence: Max held the shoulder straps, Emily undid the safety snaps, Mia held the hood back for visibility.

The process took 6 minutes and required an instructional diagram taped to the stall door.

TV narration: *“Fleece... is not for the faint of bladder.”*

Victory and Interviews

At 3:30 p.m., the bell rang. The Society had made it.

They posed in front of the cameras—hoods up, suits zipped, bandanas fluttering like victory flags.

Reporter: “How do you feel?”

Jamie: “Trapped. But in a nice way.”

Emily: “Like a s’more that went to a leadership seminar.”

Ava: “We proved fleece isn’t weakness—it’s *collaboration wrapped in comfort.*”

The Broadcast

That Sunday, the segment aired across the region.

Clips of their fleece waddling. Their teamwork. The juice box struggle. The bathroom mission. A teacher saying, “I’ve never seen kids take community this seriously. Or look like sleepy astronauts.”

The episode closed with a voiceover:

“In a world full of solo players... five kids dared to be zippered in, mittened up, and *cozy together*. The Midnight Marshmallow Society: redefining strength, one buttoned overall at a time.”

Epilogue: From Fleece to Fortune

Seven Years Later

The showroom was quiet, bathed in soft amber lighting that glowed against the polished wood floors and thick wool rugs. Models strolled past lush couches in muted earth-toned *sleep-formalwear*—quilted cloaks, bootie-cuffed joggers, minimalist fleece robes with asymmetrical zippers. The audience of fashion editors and influencers leaned in, murmuring approval.

At the back of the room stood a silver nameplate:

Marshmallow Society Studios

Elevated Comfortwear. Unified Design. Cozier Together.

Behind the curtain, the founders watched it all unfold, suited in matching executive loungewear—sleek, structured, tailored like something between a hoodie and a hug.

Ava adjusted her clipboard, eyes gleaming. “We just closed another licensing deal in Seoul.”

Emily leaned against a heated panel wall, sipping from an herbal tea thermos. “We’ve officially conquered all time zones.”

Mia tapped her smartwatch. “Inventory alert. The self-warming mittens are back-ordered again.”

Max grinned from a plush armchair. “We should host a board meeting in sleep sacks.”

And Jamie—co-CEO and Head of Design Strategy—looked out over the crowd with a familiar smirk.

“We started in a basement,” he said. “Wearing suits we couldn’t take off without help.”

“Now,” Ava said, “we sell them for \$480 a set... with a waitlist.”

Across the industry, *The Marshmallow Society* had become more than a fashion brand—it was a movement. Their ethos of mutual support, emotional warmth, and gently absurd coziness had struck a cultural nerve. Their debut fleece tuxedos had been worn at three film festivals. Their flagship “Togetherwear” line was required gear in at least four high-end co-working retreats.

And the company’s tagline?

“Snug. Supportive. Slightly Ridiculous.”

(Still stitched into every garment tag.)

That night, as the team met in their studio’s lounge room—feet tucked under blankets, still drinking cocoa out of wide mugs—they laughed about their very first onesies. The back zippers. The hug belts. The pancake mornings and obstacle courses. The pillow gauntlet and the barn attic.

“We should bring the old suits out for one last sleepover,” Mia said.

Jamie raised an eyebrow. “And make Ava unzip us all again?”

Ava smiled. “Obviously. It’s tradition.”

They clinked mugs in a toast.

“To cozy beginnings,” Emily said.

“To fleece dominance,” Max added.

And as the lights dimmed and the soft hum of ambient music filled the room, the five of them reclined in designer recliners, still as ridiculous—and still as united—as ever.

THE END.