

THE COSTUME EMPORIUM

Written by

Aimee Baker

INT. DAVE'S COSTUME EMPORIUM - DAY

The sound of rain hits the glass windows at the front of the shop, it blends in with the music playing over the speakers in the ceiling. The music is generic and would be found in elevators or waiting rooms.

There are faded posters and advertisements taped to the windows, along with store hours and information on the door.

Attached to the door knob are a handful of bells tied to a ribbon.

ETHAN, 17, unwilling guide, an anxious looking teenage boy with messy hair and rumpled clothing, sits behind the checkout counter flipping through a textbook.

The bells on the door clatter together, but ETHAN doesn't look up from his textbook.

STRANGER, mid 30s, a human-like creature, dressed in baggy layers and gloves, walks up to the counter. He speaks in a polite tone of voice, soft in volume, and steady in rhythm.

STRANGER

Excuse me? Where do you keep your
human suits?

ETHAN looks up.

ETHAN

(cracked)
I'm sorry?

The STRANGER's hands are shaking, and he smiles as if it doesn't fit his face.

STRANGER

The uh, human suits?

The STRANGER removes one of his gloves, the skin of his hand is webbed between the fingers to an extreme degree. The skin is pale and translucent in parts, allowing ETHAN to see the disaffirmed structure under it. It isn't bones.

STRANGER (CONT'D)

Mine's gotten a little big on me.

ETHAN looks down at the register where a set of rules are taped to the black plastic, then looks back up. The rules are listed as: *"rule one: no customers in the back, rule two: cash only, rule three: the panic button is under the desk"*.

He grabs a set of keys from next to the register and slides his chair back on the floor, scraping it quietly.

ETHAN

Yeah, sure. This way.

Both ETHAN and the STRANGER walk away from the desk and towards the back of the store. Around them are racks of costumes with shelves above them stacked with accessories in bins.

The costumes are packed tightly, and the aisle is narrow in a way that feels claustrophobic. It's a sea of colors and textures that surround them on both sides.

The aisle leads to another, followed by another. Each aisle looks almost the same as the first, with minor differences in the colors of fabric or bins on the shelves.

Each new area smells more strongly of stale air and old fabric. The STRANGER hides a grimace behind his gloved hand.

The STRANGER looks around as they pass through, keeping close to ETHAN.

STRANGER

Dave's certainly collected quite the hoard, hasn't he.

ETHAN looks unbothered as they walk, reaching out to touch the fabric as they pass.

ETHAN

I guess so. It's always been this way.

STRANGER

Do people still get lost in here?

ETHAN shrugs, keeps his eyes forward as the STRANGER talks.

ETHAN

Only sometimes, if they don't pay attention - -

The end of this aisle leads to a dead end, until Ethan pushes the hangers of one rack aside with two hands, revealing the next aisle over.

ETHAN (CONT'D)

- - Or if they aren't polite.

ETHAN motions for the STRANGER to step through the gap, following close behind and once again taking up the lead.

This aisle is the same as the previous ones, but the costumes are getting closer and closer to both of them. The fabric rubs their shoulders as they walk.

ETHAN (CONT'D)
Do you know Dave?

STRANGER
(smiling)
As much as anyone does, yeah.

They continue to walk until the costumes around them are too close to move properly. ETHAN reaches up and pulls apart the hangers, revealing more costumes behind it.

The fabric on the other side is pitch black, a void that is only distinguishable from absolute darkness by the plastic and metal of the hangers.

He pulls on those too, putting enough effort into it that the STRANGER reaches up a hand as if to help.

The costumes give way and they step between them into another aisle. This aisle is wider than the previous, enough to walk though.

None of the costumes on the racks look the same as previously seen. There are strange textures, fabrics that whisper when they walk past, some that glow or reach out when ETHAN drags his fingers over them.

ETHAN
Sorry, it doesn't usually take this long to find it.

STRANGER
That's okay, I don't have anywhere else to be.

Something heavy hits the floor near them, neither looks towards the noise. ETHAN picks up the pace, the STRANGER does the same.

ETHAN holds the neutral look on his face as they fast walk towards the end of the aisle. The costumes shift on their hangers, boxes of accessories tremble. Some fall from the shelves.

What was once a whisper

Ahead of them is a dead end of costumes. ETHAN stops in front of the rack, putting his hands on the bar in between the hangers. The whole bar moves as if on a hinge, and they step through the space.

INT. BACK OF THE STORE - CONTINUOUS

The door to the back room is plain against the wall next to another door with a gender neutral bathroom, both are unassuming and unimposing.

There is a sign on the door to the back room reading "*employees only*" in bright red letters, and a standard lock above it.

ETHAN thumbs through the keys, selecting the right one on the ring and sliding it into the lock. It turns and unlocks with no preamble, and the door opens on silent hinges.

Inside the room are shelves of cardboard boxes with no labels or identifying marks, stacked to the ceiling with very little space to move around.

The light from the store creates a halo of sight inside of the room, but doesn't penetrate very far, and the rest of it is left in darkness.

ETHAN
(gesturing)
It's all yours, I guess.

STRANGER
Thanks, I shouldn't be too long.

The STRANGER shuts the door quietly behind him, leaving Ethan standing on the other side.

Silence takes over the space, devoid of music or rainfall. The costumes are still on their racks. Ethan stares at the door.

INT. DAVE'S COSTUME EMPORIUM - EVENING

The rain continues against the glass windows at the front of the door, now shaded in dark grey as night rapidly approached.

ETHAN sits at the checkout counter, eyes down at the textbook, when the STRANGER walks up to the counter.

The STRANGER is wearing the same outfit, but the gloves are tucked into his pocket. He places a bundle wrapped in velvet fabric on the countertop, it's heavy enough to make a noise.

STRANGER
I don't know if you've got a way to
give me change for this, so just
keep it.

ETHAN
(incredulously)
Thank you?

The STRANGER smiles in a way that's sharp. Predatory. It suits his face.

STRANGER
Tell Dave I said hi the next time
he you see him.

He exits the store to the sound of bells on the door, ETHAN watches him walk across the parking lot and into the darkness.

ETHAN unwraps the bundle, finding an uncut and unpolished stone inside. It's a deep red color, and vaguely in the shape of a human heart, small enough it sits in the palm of his hand. It's warm to the touch.

There is a slow pulsing vibration in the store, a deep bass noise. It vibrates the glass of the windows and the bells on the door bang together.

It slowly grows into a cacophony of noise that mimics the panic of a natural disaster, or the rabid hunt of wild animals.

ETHAN eyes the top of the table, under which is a red panic button. His hands never wander towards it, even as the noise grows.

Florescent lights in the ceiling flicker. The door shudders in it's frame.

From the corner of the desk ETHAN pulls out a stack of carbon copy paper, writing down the STRANGER's purchase and the total.

ETHAN
Almost done, don't rush me.

Heavy objects hit the floor nearby, ETHAN focused on finishing his paperwork and filing it neatly away.

ETHAN pushes a few buttons on the register until the drawer pops open and the stone is deposited in an empty slot next to the large bills.

The store goes quiet.

END