

Profoundly POWERLESS

A Novel by Jenny Amara

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Chapter 10 - There's No Stopping Family Dinner

"Kids, have your IDs ready. I don't want us getting held up in security," Paul's mother said, clearly and forcefully, as only a mother could. Given her specific tone, a casual observer would have likely expected to see two younger individuals following her through the first security checkpoint of S.U.C.K.S.

The siblings quickly expressed their understanding and preparedness, saying in unison, "Yes, Mom."

Paul held his ID tightly but felt it slip a bit as his hands had become quite sweaty. His nerves were on edge, as he did not want to go through the critique of another guard judging him for having been turned into a woman. As he handed the plastic card to the man, it slipped, hitting the floor.

"Smooth move, genius," Annie quipped.

"Annie! Be kind to Paul. He's going through a lot right now. He doesn't need your sass," Paul's mother clapped back immediately, causing Annie to freeze. She knew better than to press the teasing any further.

"So, uhh... Paul, is it?" the guard asked, having collected the ID card from the ground. Paul's face instinctively contorted into an awkward smile. His desire to be polite conflicted with his trepidation about being in a feminine and highly curvy body. Despite his intention to ignore his body's current shape, his mother's attention had forced him to acknowledge that these mysterious chocolates had turned him back into a woman and caused him to become a rather voluptuous one at that. He easily carried an extra twenty pounds of fat in all the traditionally feminine locations. Most notably and uncomfortably for Paul in his breasts and backside. Who was he fooling by calling it a backside, in any case? Anyone getting a good look would instantly hear the iconic tune with its funky beat in their heads

with memorized lyrics recounting how prodigious of an ass was on display.

Yes, Paul was thick in all the ways that phrase elicits, and he hated every aspect. The only thing was he couldn't stop himself from eating another chocolate whenever he was near one. Any chocolate would do. In fact, the threat of the mysterious magically infused gender-bending chocolate barely registered as a threat to Paul in his current state, so his mother caught him indulging in a few more on their ride to the GHOST center of S.U.C.K.S.

As oblivious as Paul was by continuing to consume these chocolates, both kids were reminded of how much of a fangirl their mother was for the GHOST building. It didn't matter what they were talking about; when their mother saw the building's outline, she would immediately drop any topic and go into the same diatribe about how significant the building was and how much history there was here. Fortunately for Paul, this diatribe started mere moments after having been caught sneaking another chocolate. Paul had promised himself it would be the last one.

With Paul's attention returning to the guard, he recalled Kyrie's advice and responded, "Yes, but please check my local file directive regarding incident number 97-58008."

"Hmm, it's unusual that you'd have an incident directive. Your hero rating is so... uhh, non-existent."

"Correct, I'm not an active hero. I don't have an assignment."

"Oh? That's-- Oh! You're him! The guy who got the--"

"Yes, but let's not draw any more unwanted attention. You see what was written there, right? I'm a victim here, and victims have rights. You can't just go outing me to show your superhero history off."

"Of course not, Miss."

"It's Mister."

"Not according to your directive."

"What?! Let me see that!" Paul said, diving for the tablet the guard was reading from.

"Unh-unh. This isn't yours to use, Miss."

Paul was starting to get visibly distressed, so his mother stepped in. And not a

minute too soon, as the guard's tone immediately shifted. "Director Nyrdottir, ma'am! I'm sorry I didn't see you there. How may I be of assistance?"

"At ease, guardsman. Thank you for your service here. If you'll kindly clear Paul and Annie so we can be on our way. We're expected in the lab. Doctor Daybreak should have put us all on the visitor list for the day."

Paul's head made the most intense double-take motion he'd ever experienced when he heard his mother speak with the guard this way. "What on earth? Mom, how do you know Doctor Daybreak? Why did he call your director? What is—"

"Paul, I'll answer your questions in due time. We need to be on our way now."

"—But!"

"Leave it be, Paula," Annie teased as she walked past Paul while flashing her ID card at the guard.

"What is going on?" Paul stood dumbfounded.

"Not now, honey. Come along!" Paul's mother called back, walking briskly past the secured perimeter.

Paul looked on as he saw his mother walk with purpose through the building. He was astonished at how seamlessly she navigated the complex labyrinth of corridors. Further, Paul couldn't help but notice the employees' reactions if they saw her. Some looked like they had seen a celebrity. Some looked like they had seen a ghost. Some looked like they wanted to win favor by presenting themselves very properly. And, of course, some people didn't notice her and went about their days.

"Are you seeing this, Annie?" Paul whispered to his sister.

"Seeing what?" she whispered back.

"How people are reacting to seeing Mom!"

"What? What are you talking about?"

"They look like they are star-struck! And why did the guard call her Director Nyrdottir?"

"Mom has always done a lot of volunteer work. You know she's, like, the most active go-getter. She's usually run six miles in the morning before most people

have even gotten out of bed."

"Yeah, but why would she volunteer here? This is where superheroes work."

"I dunno. Maybe she was a superhero before?"

"But, she doesn't have any powers... Does she?"

"No, only you and I have powers."

"Yeah... That's what I thought, but now I'm not so sure."

"Stop inventing conspiracies about Mom and get your head in the game. You're snacking on another chocolate as we speak. Where did you even get that from?"

"What? This? I brought it with me."

"You know you shouldn't be doing that; it goes straight to your boobs."

"Ugh, stop reminding me."

"You're bigger than I am up top now. So, sorry, I won't stop until you change back and the natural order has been restored. I'm your older sister, so I get to have the best figure of the two of us."

"What? I am not competing with you for the best figure. I don't want any figure at all!"

"Shh! We're here," Paul's mother chided her children.

"Helena! So good to see you, babe!" Doctor Daybreak was jubilant upon seeing Paul's mother.

"What?!" Paul and Annie both exclaimed in a hushed tone to each other.

"It's good to see you too, Smith," Helena answered, extending her arms to embrace the atomic-powered superhero.

"Smith?" Paul and Annie questioned aloud as they watched the two old friends embrace.

"Well, I can see why you've come back. Paul's condition has returned," Doctor Daybreak commented.

"Not quite; I think this is something else. The prior transformation was administered via injection. This one was caused by consuming chocolates," Helena replied.

"Not chocolates. Gosh, that's insidious."

"I know, I know. But, we never considered Paul's power to have any relevance, let alone a weakness."

"Weakness?" the siblings again chimed in.

"Well, we had better get started then. Do you suspect you know who?"

"You know I do; I just don't know how they could be involved."

"Yes, since the Captain Kimper incident—"

"Shh! We're in mixed company."

"—I didn't realize. I apologize, Helena."

"Mixed company?" the siblings' heads were practically spinning with intrigue.

"Since The Roman put Devious Doctor away two years ago during the cryptocurrency wars, things have been relatively quiet," Helena continued to share her thoughts aloud. "Each day that passes, I worry that we missed something. It shouldn't have been that easy to catch him!"

"We've been over this. The Roman's magical abilities give him a leg up when dealing with science-based villains. It's his ace up the sleeve."

"Not funny, Smith."

"I wasn't trying to be, but I see what I tumbled into. An unfortunate wipeout on my part."

"Nevertheless, magic isn't a weakness for Devious Doctor. He's got Sorceress at his side. She's taught him enough about magic for him to be able to handle a noob like The Roman."

"Noob? The Roman?" The siblings were aghast at their mother's judgment of one of the Earth's mightiest heroes.

"Well, Sorceress wasn't with him that day. Count your blessings, Helena. It's an easy enough trip to the Tank to check in on our nefarious foe."

"You go. I can't stand to. I'll stay here with Kyrie and monitor Paul's status."

"Certainly. I'd be happy to have a Doctor to Doctor chat."

"Kyrie, is it what we worried? Does Paul have a weakness?" Helena asked impatiently. She seemed to be taking a much more serious stance than either Paul or Annie expected. Their questions about their mother's past grew by the minute.

"You know... I'm not sure," Kyrie answered with a lilting voice that conveyed no sense of urgency.

"What do you mean you're not sure?!" Paul responded out of turn.

"Paul! Manners!" Helena chided, but Paul continued.

"Am I going to turn back into a woman anytime I eat chocolate? Why would I have a weakness to chocolate? I thought these chocolates from that delivery guy were supposed to be magical or something!"

"Oh, those chocolates are one hundred percent enchanted. Of that, I am certain. Give those to an average Joe, and you'll have a babe of a Josephine by the next night. What I don't get is why you seem so addicted to them..."

"Well, I mean... They taste good and—"

"Yes, we all like chocolate, Paula," Kyrie interrupted, causing Paul to be visibly angry at Kyrie's use of a feminine name. This did not stop Kyrie from continuing to pontificate. "I like chocolates. Annie likes chocolates. I'm sure Helena likes chocolates—"

"Hey, don't make assumptions about me, Kyrie," Helena stopped Kyrie's wandering thoughts.

"Hmm, interesting... Annie, could you help me with something?"

"Sure, what can I do?"

"Eat this," Kyrie said, handing Annie one of the enchanted chocolates.

"I'm not eating that!"

"What? Are you worried you'll become more girly?" Kyrie teased, her lascivious look making the other women uncomfortable.

"Umm, no..."

"Good, and here, Paula. You take this too," Kyrie said, handing Paul a regular chocolate. "Now, down the hatches, both of you."

"Mom?" Annie turned to Helena.

"Go ahead, Annie. I think I see what Kyrie is testing here."

"For real?" Paul remarked, upset.

"Yes, Paul. Please do this for me," Helena responded.

"Okay, Mom. For you," with that, Paul and Annie locked eyes and downed their respective confectionaries.

They both stood there motionless, waiting for a signal that something was happening. Sure enough, within minutes, Paul felt a tightening of his clothing around his hips and bosom. Annie, on the other hand, seemed unaffected.

"What gives? Why did I change with the normal chocolate, and Annie didn't change at all? You must have mixed up the chocolates," Paul complained.

"Nope. The enchantment is fine. It only works on men. Annie is thus unaffected. On the other hand, you seem to have both a dopamine-based and a physical weakness to chocolate," Kyrie answered, standing up and moving over to a cabinet where she pulled out a bizarre-looking wand.

"Hey, what are you going to do with that?" Paul tried to stop Kyrie, but it was too late. A flash of light erupted from the wand, and a dose of magic hit Paul.

"There, all better. Well, mostly. The enchantment's been removed, but what we see here is the lingering femininity in Paul's body, which his power hadn't fully expelled."

Paul looked down at himself and saw a primarily male body, but there were hints of feminine qualities. He had small breasts, extra fat on his hips, and larger lips than average.

"So, I can use my power to get back to myself now?"

"Probably, but you might have to wait until you get all that chocolate out of your system."

"How long should that take?"

"I don't know. When was the last time you had a BM?"

"Kyrie! Why are you asking--"

"Thank you, Kyrie. I think we can take it from here," Helena interrupted Paul.

"Sure thing, Director. It's good to see you again after so long. What's it been?"

"Five years..."

"Wow, time flies when you're having fun!" Kyrie said, twirling in her chair.

"Yes, I suppose so... Come on, kids. Let's go home. We need to talk."