

## A Thirst for More

### Chapter Nine - April 2021

"I don't want a lot for Christmas / There is just one thing I need..." Mariah Carey belts out over the hum of the holiday shoppers. "I don't care about the presents / Underneath the Christmas tree..." Well, maybe *she* doesn't want a lot – but judging by appearances, pretty much everyone else in this corner of the Midwest most definitely does.

I'm trailing along behind my dad, still half disoriented by the oddest sensation: that of having been here in this supermarket many times before, and yet only now seeing it through the eyes of a stranger. There's a term for it, I think, something one of our professors mentioned in class near the beginning of the semester. *Defamiliarization*, I think it was. Showing something familiar in a new or unexpected light so as to make the viewer see it differently.

Well, that pretty much sums it up, I muse as we make our way past the rows of garish toys and snow tires and winter-mix windshield washer fluid. I'd never noticed how people talked here – not, that is, before I heard how differently people sound in New England. I'd never really thought about what a luxury ginormous – and free! – parking lots are. And I'd never noticed just how... ordinary people here are. How very like one another. How... bland.

But now that I actually see it – now that it's been defamiliarized – there's no going back.

"Hey, son. What do you say we do a ham for the big meal, eh? Sound good?" I shrug and mutter my lukewarm assent, reminded afresh that my dad's interests seem to include nothing more than food, trucking, and football. He wouldn't have the slightest interest in stuff like defamiliarization. He wouldn't even begin to understand – or care – about just how ordinary and bland everything here is.

Or that I don't fit in.

*Thank goodness he can't read my thoughts*, I muse as he hefts the ham into the cart and we amble toward the canned goods looking for green beans. Thank goodness he doesn't know how I'm struggling not to glance over at the women's clothes as we pass. How, when the crowd forces us over against those racks of blouses and skirts, that my skin tingles and thrills at the very touch of the soft material. How I dare not glance further off toward that embarrassing corner of the store, that area where half a row carries nothing but bulky plastic packages of "protective undergarments"...

And yes, thank goodness he isn't remotely interested in digging through my suitcase. For hidden deep inside he would stumble across a very similar pack that would have him asking all sorts of uncomfortable questions.

My ankle's practically healed now, by the way. I'm not supposed to go running or anything, but the doctor says it healed pretty nicely thanks to how well I gave it a rest. I don't suppose she saw the blush that came to my cheeks when she said that – a blush that arose at the thought of exactly how and why I was able to give it such a rest...

Yeah, the diapers. Mrs. Fenoli's idea, all well intended to save me from shuffling up and down those perilous stairs of hers in search of the bathroom. And while I still can't think about the things without a strange mix of annoyance and embarrassment, I have to admit that they were... not at bad as they could have been. In fact, they were pretty useful. And even now... well, I guess what I'm trying to say is...

I brought a few along home for the winter break, okay?

No, of course I don't need them, duh. Not really. I mean, I guess there have been a few times during the night when I guess I sort of just... let go. You know, just 'cause I was wearing it and didn't want it to go to waste. And besides, there was still nearly an entire pack in my room after my cast came off, a few days before leaving for home. Naturally I didn't want Mrs. Fenoli to be stuck with them, see?

Yeah. Though if you asked me point-blank if I've actually gone a single night here without wearing one... well, never mind. I just- you know, if I *would* accidentally dribble in my sleep – and I'm not saying I have – I'd hate to make Dad mad. So it's better just to take precautions, you know.

Though I can't deny that some hidden part of me wishes I'd tucked one of those skirts Mrs. Fenoli lent me into my luggage, too.

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"Now here we have it, on this holiest of nights: the proclamation of a miracle – God's miracle – to mankind. And notice with me, my fellow believers, how the miracle was proclaimed. Not to kings or rulers or emperors. No, it was to shepherds. Humble, lowly shepherds who were seen worthy, who were blessed with the spectacular sight of the heavenly angels proclaiming *glory to God in the*

*highest, peace on earth, goodwill toward men..."*

I shift quietly on the pew, glancing sideways at my dad's impassive face. He's not terribly religious, of course, but he's traditional enough to insist on going to church for Christmas Eve service. Seated somewhere ahead of us in the crowd are Marv and Betty, probably amen-ing away to the preacher's words, rapt in their pious enthusiasm to hear the good news for what must be the hundredth time. Me? Well, I've heard it before, too. Shepherds and mangers and wise men and all that jazz. Whatever. Doesn't make much difference to me, though I guess it's kind of an interesting story.

And as the preacher goes on to tell us all about how the real good news is the crucifixion, that there is now salvation from eternal damnation, it all begins to feel ever more surreal. I'm surrounded by a sea of white, ordinary faces: good people, perhaps, but so oddly like one another. I miss the variegated mix of skin tones and accents, I realize now with a start. I miss the tattoos and the nose rings and the pink hair and the leather chokers. I miss the unusual personal pronouns, and the curse words mixed in amiably with ordinary conversation, and the backpacks festooned with badges speaking out in favor of everything from climate change legislation to trans rights.

Dammit, am I becoming some sort of wild, leftist liberal? Or as the likes of Marv and Betty would have it, a hopeless sinner, arrogantly ignoring the wisdom and good sense of a Christian life? Or maybe I'm just someone who wants people not to judge me for what I like... and who I am?

I don't quite know what to think, honestly. Though once we're back home, and as I'm preparing for bed, I find myself hesitating before reaching into the depths of my luggage. *Maybe I shouldn't. Maybe I ought not indulge in such an embarrassing thing. Maybe- maybe-*

But then I do it anyway. *Dammit to hell*, I sigh as I pull out a fresh diaper and unfold it with slightly shaky fingers. It's Christmas Eve, sure. But I'm not going to let my worries about what a few religious folks might say decide what I should and shouldn't do.

*I don't want to be like them, anyway*, I muse fiercely as I shakily open the tapes and draw them tight around my waist. Yeah, I like skirts. Yeah, I love to feel feminine. And yeah, I can't help but touch myself in ways that the folks here say I shouldn't. In fact, I'm willing to admit it now. I've begun to really, really enjoy how it feels when I touch myself through- you know-

I muffle my groan of pleasure with the pillow, feeling the now-familiar wave of tingles and tension mounting within the crinkling garment around my waist as I stroke and grind under the covers. Sure, this whole diaper thing might have started as a weird-ass way to deal with a broken ankle. But

now... well, I've since discovered that these things just feel so nice. So soft. And when they're a bit wet and warm, and I am wearing one of those soft skirts... God, I can scarcely help but envision myself in the strangest situations. As a silly girl who accidentally peed her pants. Or me, lying in bed, and Blair grinning down at me, asking if I've had another fucking accident...

My mind's weird, I know. But you gotta admit that there's one more nice side to the whole diaper thing. At least I don't have any sticky underwear to clean up afterwards.