

Baker's Daughter (Chef to Woman TG)

By FoxFaceStories

A Commission for AI

Aaron is an incredibly arrogant, angry, and pretentious chef who isolates himself due to his issues. But when he goes after a critic for giving a lower-than-acceptable rating for his dishes, the critic's wife decides to visit Aaron and make some magical adjustments to his life. He needs to experience some humility and compassion by starting over, and what better way than to make him the daughter of a kindly baker couple?

Baker's Daughter

Chapter 1: The Review

"Are you fucking *kidding* me?" Aaron Smith screamed.

The cooking staff cowered before him, and as usual it was Michelle that broke.

"I'm sorry, Aar-"

"That's Chef to you!" he retorted.

"I'm sorry, chef. We're one short, and we can't get the meals out in time. It'll just be a short delay and-"

"*Forty five minutes is not a fucking delay!*" he growled, enunciating each word carefully. "Let me be goddamn clear to you. I don't care if you have to snort white powder in the backroom to get your energy levels up, but this restaurant prides itself upon delivering good meals in a speedy fashion, all while providing a sense of *sweetness* to its service. Do you fucking understand!?"

He smashed a meat cleaver down upon a cutting board for emphasis, making the collective staff jolt.

"Y-yes, Chef!" they cried as one, like an army-in-training before their drill sergeant.

"Well hurry up then!" he declared. "Those eye fillets aren't going to sort themselves out! And Jones, get on that crème brûlée already. And don't fuck it up or I'll fuck *you* up, okay? This restaurant isn't called the *Royal Class* because it has purple fucking drapes! We provide the best damn meals on this frickin' seaboard. We're classy fuckers, and you will be too out there. If you make one more slip up, Melissa, I will have you out on your ass and the next girl to replace you. And for God's sake, work on your damn French and Italian pronunciation. You sound like you're having a bleedin' stroke while discussing the pasta selection."

The staff moved quickly, fearful of their chef. It was a sensation that he more than encouraged in them. Aaron was thirty nine years old and had been a chef for almost two decades. He was good - damn good - and he knew it too. It didn't matter what the dish was, be it steak, seafood, vegetarian platters, he could oversee it to its finest form and bask in the glowing admiration of the compliments that soared through the kitchen. The only thing he didn't do was desserts or sweets.

"I'll leave those to the damn bakers. Oh, I'm sure they *call* themselves pastry chefs, but dessert is just the sugar that morons want to soak up afterwards. All adornment and no real art, like you would find in a main."

Thus, he had left the dessert specials to his underlings to arrange, and rarely changed that menu. It didn't stop him from getting praise for his mainstays, though. He soaked these up, rarely if ever letting his kitchen staff take even the remaining morsels of credit.

"I'm the Chef," he would simply state in a rather pretentious tone. "Once you've clawed your way to my lofty heights and had your hands bloodied with the effort, *then* you can get some recognition. Until then, there's a whole tray of plates and utensils in need of cleaning, so get *cleaning*."

This was his regular attitude towards staff. It hadn't always been this way, but the stresses of overseeing the kitchen of the state's most highly booked and expensive restaurant had fed into his ego. It was visible just from his physical appearance: the man had literally *swelled* with adoration over the years, becoming a surprisingly plump and bloated individual. His face had fattened, seemingly with pride, and his regular outburst of anger had left him with a reddened face with visible veins, more than a few wrinkles from his contorted expressions, and an enlarged nose courtesy of the wine he would drink alone to calm himself down from a night of hard work. His hair was black, and while it was hidden beneath his chef's cap, it became a curled tangle when unleashed. This was a significant contrast to his tidy dark goatee, but more than a few staff had remarked privately that the hair showed the true personality when unleashed: wild, spiky, and somehow overbrushed from self-obsession at the same time.

But appearances didn't matter much to Aaron Smith, so long as he was at the top. And with his staff suitably cowed and broken and moving at an exhausting speed to catch up to their duties, he even allowed a wide smirk to plaster itself upon his splotchy face.

Yes, that'll teach them, he thought to himself. *Nincompoops need a kick up the back side. We've got a fucking critic out there, and I am to please him. No way am I losing a bloody Michelin Star to that bastard Peter Cheng.*

It was the only threat that could possibly chip away at Aaron's arrogance: the knowledge that a critic could undo his hard work and sabotage his well-earned reputation for

excellence. Most of the better known critics were absolutely eating out of his hand these days, but Peter Cheng was notorious for his high standards and his occasional foray into contrarianism. The man had a particular palate that was hard to sniff out, and seemed to find the cloud in every silver lining.

I'm prepared, Aaron thought to himself. He'll eat what I give him, and he'll love it. And if he doesn't, the man doesn't deserve to have taste buds, because he'll prove himself more useless than my own freakin' staff.

He took a chance to peek out into the restaurant space where numerous couples and groups were seated, the lighting from the lamps dim enough to give a gentle ambience, the wallpaper and decorations sparse but present enough to provide a sense of spacious aristocracy. There, situated in the middle with his wife, was Peter Cheng. He was a balding man with thick glasses, and his mixed Chinese ancestry was obvious. What wasn't obvious was that the man apparently didn't love Chinese food, a trap some other chefs fell into. Not Aaron, though. Instead, when Cheng had asked for the 'chef's choice,' he'd arranged an eye fillet with carefully crafted sides, a meal that was right up Cheng's alley. He had paid good money from a contact in the business to know that.

That's right, you critical motherfucker, Aaron thought to himself as Jenkins brought out his meal. Eat this and enjoy nirvana. You may be the toughest critic in town, but my food will make you its bitch.

Jenkins delivered the meal with expert professionalism, just as Aaron knew he would. He'd brought out a fucking stake knife and pointed it meaningfully at Jenkin's heart just prior to this. The man had taken the message, because he was the very image of what a waiter should be. Peter Cheng and his wife exchanged a few questions and comments, and then the man smiled and dismissed the writer, before taking some notes on his writing pad.

Aaron narrowed his eyes and scratched his goatee, as he did habitually.

"Is everything alright, Chef?" someone asked. It sounded like Simone.

"I'm fine," he snapped. "Stop being a busybody and get back to work. We have a sumptuous set of meals to make, and not a single mistake is allowed!"

He quickly followed Simone back to the scene of the action, barking orders and demanding perfection, bullying everyone in the room to just shy of their breaking point.

People may call me arrogant and angry, he thought to himself, but I know exactly which buttons to push to get these miscreants to do their jobs well. If they burn out after that? Well, that's their problem. So long as I make perfection!

The staff surrounded Aaron as he stared down at the review column on the paper. Peter Cheng always uploaded his review, but let them simmer in newspaper form first, a fact Aaron knew well. He stared down at the review, aware of the many eyes upon him as he silently poured over the words, particularly those in the title.

The Royal Class Has Lost Some Nobility

A food review by renowned critic Peter Cheng

“Boss? Chef?” someone further back asked. “Is it good?”

“That *fucker*,” Aaron spat, reading further into the review. “Does *this* look good to you!?”

He held up the review, letting those closest take in the words.

Meat that was served perhaps just a tad drably, the meticulous mundanity of its minimalism now well out of fashion. Should not a royal meal - especially once so expensive, I might add - have the rich touch of presentation and care to it? Of course, lest you think me pretension, my palate was not satisfied either. A chef's choice surprise served up a regular eye fillet. Now, I cannot deny that it was indeed sumptuous, but the sides left something to be desired. Perhaps I am being too cruel, though, you think. But then, would your tastebuds not be a little spoiled by the echoing rants of the angry chef in the kitchen, disrupting - however slightly - the enjoyment of your meal? And when you went to order dessert, would you not be frustrated that the available choices have not changed one iota in four years, dispute the wonderful experiences with sweets and after-mains that have revolutionised the dessert offerings in our state as of late?

Yes, while I cannot claim that the food was bad, the Royal Class brings down its offerings by way of an agitated and frankly terrified kitchen staff, so obsessed with perfection that they crack beneath the wait. The result is a stagnating restaurant where flavour is there, but the surrounds are cold, no matter the heat of your dish.

The review went on, but the overall thrust of the piece was clear: Peter Cheng had enjoyed the meals - albeit with his usual cynical backhanded compliments - but it was the atmosphere cultivated by Aaron Smith himself that was pulling it apart. The devastating review was surgical in its attacks, never mentioning Aaron by name but clearly referring to the ‘Chef’ and the dreadful atmosphere he cultivated.

“That fucker,” he muttered again. *I will tear him apart, I swear. I will fucking end him for this. It's not even a proper review, goddamn it! And what's wrong with the desserts?*

That last thought triggered a suspicion in him. He turned to gaze at Farah, who he'd placed in charge of ‘inferior after-mains,’ as he called them.

“Baker,” he dismissively called her. “Did you fuck up the desserts?”

“No, Chef,” she exclaimed. “I was just doing what you asked. I never change the menu without your permission, remember?”

“Well you should have fucking anticipated this!” he spat. The red-faced chef sighed, rubbing his temples. “I am surrounded by incompetents who can’t keep up with my vision. No thought, no artistic thought at all!

“I’ll take care of this,” he finally said. “Everyone, get the kitchen ready for tonight. I’ll make a response to this so-called critic, and ensure that everyone knows what a fake he is. The rest of you, don’t fuck up. Your brains aren’t worth shit compared to mine, so follow my lead and don’t deviate.”

Farah creased her brow. “But you said the dess-”

“When I want your opinion, Farah, I’ll feed it to you. Get to work people!”

Aaron fumed over the review. Cheng had been ruthless, and when critics smelled blood in the water, they liked to partake in the feast. Now, two more reviews had followed Cheng’s, both praising the food but critiquing the atmosphere, lack of desserts, and his own personal leadership of the kitchen. It infuriated Aaron, and he’d smashed more than one wine bottle in the kitchen over it, only to order Simone or whomever to clean it up.

I have to respond, he thought. I am not losing my status, and certainly not a single Michelin star. I’ll bury Cheng in the ground before that happens.

He drank a few more glasses of wine, beginning to feel tipsy and loose, and therefore even more unrestrained.

“Yeah, time to respond,” he said, face redder than ever. He was at home after a long night, and he simply couldn’t get this out of his mind. “Need to go public. Attack him where it hurts. Show the world that he’s just a controversy chaser. A fucking hack.”

He opened up a new tab on his laptop and began typing. He’d need to do several drafts - one for the papers, another for several renowned food sites, one for his own chef’s blog and another for the restaurant site proper. A few online review sites had also joined in on the ‘fun,’ apparently having somehow learned of the chef’s hatred of desserts and subsequent abandonment of them. This led to all sorts of stupid jokes in the reviews, and he went to take them to task too. But always Peter Cheng was in his sights, the man who had started it all.

Peter Cheng lists himself as a renowned critic, and yet apparently is unable to appreciate a quiet and calm decor that is not filled with screaming child like the nearest local McDonalds . . .

Mr Cheng refers to the passion of the kitchen, the art of creation of fine dishes, as a ‘distracting furor.’ Perhaps Mr Cheng would be best never going to a Japanese kitchen performance, or overhearing the sizzling, crackling meats of a barbecue specialist, or indeed

any restaurant - which includes most - that offer its delighted audience a window to the kitchen . . .

Does Mr Cheng even like food? This isn't clear. Does he even know food? Well, judging from this mean-spirited but utterly inaccurate and overwrought review, I think we can well say no . . .

Peter Cheng looks like the kind of attention-starved critic who generates controversy for clicks. The man wouldn't know a good dish if it was presented to him - I know this because I did present a good dish to him! But on top of being attention-starved, the man looked actually starved. Has anyone ever met someone who loves food who looks so thin? His perpetually dour expression tells me all I need to know about his complete lack of knowledge and experience in this field; there is no joy in the delight of food . . .

Dessert? Freaking dessert? That's what Peter Cheng gets hung up on. As if a solid infusion of sugar is all that fucking matters! Frankly, it's pathetic that this review was ever published, or that this man even has a job. Someone give him an ice cream, pat him on his back, and send him away, preferably to a school of mentally challenged children. I'm sure he'd fit right in, except that I've met brain damaged morons with a greater appreciation for the art of cooking than him!

This went on and on, and the more Aaron wrote, the more he cut loose with his language, getting cruder and swearier and more visceral in his descriptions, not to mention vicious to Peter in a highly personal way. He even attacked his wife, calling her a 'dutiful lapdog' and insinuating that she was only there to be part of a successful man's pride, one she hadn't earned.

Not that Cheng is actually successful, he thought to himself.

When he was done, he sent this review, and many other equivalents, off to flood the internet. No doubt Peter would see it in the morning. And no doubt, Aaron imagined, would there be a winner declared.

How wrong he truly was about it all.

The next week saw a noticeable uptick in Aaron's attitude. Unfortunately for his kitchen staff, this only meant that he went from constantly full of rage to simply arrogant and pretentious, no longer demanding they destroy their bodies to redeem their work, but simply destroy their bodies to further enhance it. He was even more of a perfectionist than before, and despite what Farah had asked for, he immediately doubled back on his initial plan to widen the dessert availability. He'd attacked Cheng on this, and didn't want to give the critic any ammo.

And what an attack it was. To Aaron's great pleasure, his various angry rants - even if they had become increasingly drunken and unhinged - had gone memetic, and set off a wave of backlash from ordinary customers aimed squarely not only at Peter Cheng, but numerous other reviewers, even beyond the food industry. There were even journal articles being written about it, though Aaron avoided any interviews, preferring to let his hostile words do the talking. One thing was for sure, though: he wasn't backing down, and he wasn't apologising. Peter was dealing with a veritable horde of angry permanently online posters who were stalking his movements and crashing his personal site, all while making angry and threatening replies to his review.

"Um, Chef?" Farah asked at one point. "Don't you think this is going too far now? Shouldn't you, I don't know, make amends or something? Invite him around for another try as long as he puts away the old review?"

But Aaron just grinned. "I'd be a fucking moron to consider that, Farah. Why don't you put your mind back to your bloody pastries while I deal with the big picture here, huh?"

There's no way I'm not letting this destroy him. That'll teach other critics that come for my reputation, and for my restaurant's stars.

And indeed, he was happy to use any contacts he had to try and ruin Peter. There were other restaurateurs, chefs, market sellers, food suppliers, and even people in the food critic industry who owed him a favour, and he turned them all against Cheng. He was more than happy for a few pot shots to be thrown at his wife too. Apparently she was *always* with him when they went out on these dates, and it wasn't hard to make it out that he was the easily manipulated henpecked husband and she the Jezebel whispering in his ear.

And it all would have gone well, and Aaron Smith would have been triumphant in all his petty arrogance and high-minded pretentiousness. Except that one morning, when he had showered and dressed and gotten ready for the day, there was a knock upon the door. Striding forth to see who it was, he flung it open, only to pause in shock.

Mrs Cheng was standing on the other side, looking prim and professional and glaring at him with what could only be described as a withering look.

"Aaron Smith?" she said, in a lightly accented voice. "We need to talk about how you've been treating my husband."

Chapter 2: A Change of Perspective

What the hell? That's Peter Cheng's wife. What is she doing here?

Aaron could be as irate as anyone about anything, but he was totally flummoxed by the unexpected arrival of this woman.

“Look here,” he said. “What’s going on between your husband and me is-”

“It’ll be better if we talk inside,” she said brusquely, before literally wedging past him into his living room space. Aaron spun about, further shocked.

“Hey. Hey! You can’t just waltz in here and-”

But the woman was already holding up a wine bottle. An empty one.

“Hm, an empty bottle and an open laptop, all in an apartment that looks like a bomb went off in it. This explains a lot.”

Aaron managed to rally. “Hey, just who the fuck do you think you are, coming in here and talking shit about my life? You need to get out, Mrs Cheng.”

“You can call me Yin,” she said abruptly, turning her eyes on him. She was very poised and in command, her blouse and skirt stylish and expensive-looking, though not ostentatious. In many ways, she would have appeared like the perfect customer for the *Royal Class*.

“Well, *Yin*, my beef is with your asshole of a husband, not you.”

At that, she held up a finger. “That is incorrect. You have dragged me into this. I am the Jezebel, am I not? The Eve-like temptress in the garden? The woman who henpecks my husband? That is how you cast me, is it not?”

“Look, it’s all just a fucking argument your husband started. You can take it up with him and get the hell out of my-”

But Yin Cheng had a remarkable power to step on the end of one’s sentence and cut away its power. “My husband merely gave a review, and a fair one at that, Aaron. You decided to act like a pathetic child possessing pretensions of brilliance, all while slandering those you work with and throwing them under the bus, though not before siccing your allies on my husband like a pack of wild, rabid dogs. Hardly, the actions of someone who claims to be bringing ‘civilisation in the form of a cultured dish,’ hm?”

Aaron trembled, trying not to close his fists.

I want to drag this bitch out of my house myself, but I bet she wants that. It would look good for her PR. I bet Peter sent her. Yeah, this is right up his alley.

He folded his arms, then crossed the room and took up his phone.

“I’ve had enough of this shit. What does it take to get you out of here?”

“A public apology would do,” she said in her lightly accented voice, crossing her arms to match his own body language.

“Not gonna happen. In fact, I think I’d rather bury your fucking husband. He wants sweets? He wants fucking *dessert* so badly? Well, I won’t make it for him, but I will serve him

up a *just desserts*, I can tell you that bloody much. Ha! Funny that he sent his wife to me. I guess he's just not *man* enough to come and talk to me in person, right?"

"Actually, I'm here of my own volition. Peter doesn't even know."

"Yeah, right. He's too small-cocked to come and face me. So, what? He has to hide behind his woman? Sounds like he's a woman himself, the dumb fucker."

"So, no apology then?"

"Not in your wildest dreams, bitch." He picked up his phone and held it meaningfully before him. "But I can get *you* to make an apology to *me* when I call the police in a moment and tell them there's an intruder who refuses to leave. How about that?"

Yin met his stare.

Yeah, I got you now, bitch, he thought to himself.

But then, to the arrogant man's surprise, Yin smiled. The smile became a grin, then the grin became a light chuckle. Finally, the chuckle turned into an outright *guffaw!*

"Hey! Hey, weirdo! What's so fucking funny?"

Yin wiped a tear from her left eye and managed to slightly calm herself. "Oh, just that you have no idea how much you have sealed your own fate now, Aaron Smith. I had come here just hoping to extract an apology, perhaps weave a small spell if necessary to patch this stupid argument over-

Huh? Did she just say spell? Like a fucking witch's spell or something?

"-but instead it looks like I'll have to be more drastic than that, Aaron Smith. I knew your behaviour towards my husband and myself was appalling, but I had no idea what an angry, arrogant, high-minded and ultimately *pathetic* man you truly were."

"Hey, fuck you bitch! I'm calling the police!"

He began to dial.

"Not to mention, as you have just demonstrated, an utter misogynist. *Put the phone down and listen to me, Aaron.*"

There was something weird about her voice. Something strange and ethereal, like it was reverberating and echoing, her voice splitting in two and overlapping. Without intending to, Aaron immediately place the phone upon the coffee table like a servile lapdog.

"Very good, Aaron," she said.

"Hey, what did you just-"

"Now hold still, and do not call me a bitch again."

Aaron didn't move. He couldn't. His heartbeat quickened, his eyes darting around in a panic.

Why can't I run? What the fuck is she doing? How is she doing this?

But Yin was simply stepping closer. With a few motions of her hands, she puppeteered him, making him place his arms by his sides, reducing any threat. She stepped around the couch, moving in a circle around him, like a wolf circling its prey.

“You have been a bad man, Aaron Smith,” she said in her soft, yet dominating tone. “It’s time to correct this, now. I had considered an apology would be enough, then when you were rude, perhaps some humiliation too. Now I see that none of this will ever be enough. You need to start again. Yes, a fresh start is what’s needed. Not from the diaper age, don’t worry, but I think we need to wipe away a few years of cynicism, that’s for sure. *Go back to college age for me, will you?*”

Aaron grunted, trying to squirm out of the invisible bindings keeping him rooted to the spot. Instead, he was immediately filled with a bizarre warmth, like a kind of glow or light that bloomed within him. It radiated out from his core, spurred on by Mrs Cheng’s words, spreading to his skin and up to his face and hair. To his astonishment, he felt himself *reduce*. His stomach pulled inwards, years of slow gains around his middle section simply melting away. His goatee fell from his face, disintegrating comically in midair. His wiry hair shortened, becoming trimmer, if still a little disorderly. His skin, full of wear and tear from years of angry tirades, drinking, and his long battles with nicotine addiction, instead knit itself anew. The red splotches evaporated, the blemishes faded away, the scars and burns from working in the kitchen were no longer there at all. The marks and open pores and visible veins pulled back, though some new blemishes also appeared: a couple of warts, and a bit of acne resurfaced upon his face. Energy he hadn’t even realised he’d lost returned to him. It was like being utterly revitalised.

Holy shit. What the fuck!?! What the flying fuck!?! She’s actually making me younger!

The effect ended, and now, standing before Mrs Cheng was a man who couldn’t have been much older than college age. Something was weird about his teeth, and he immediately realised what it was.

“You gave me fucking braces?” he said, his voice higher, youthful.

“I gave you only what you had. *Give me a full length mirror for our friend.*” She clicked her fingers, and suddenly there was a mirror before him, revealing his younger self, who had once been so hopeful and even, just possibly, a little optimistic. “Do you like what you see?”

God, I look so much more healthy. This has to be a dream.

“Pinch yourself if you must,” Yin said. “*You are free to move your arms but must remain on the spot.*”

He quickly pinched himself. Just pain, no waking. His heart beat even faster, and it pounded in his chest. The de-aged man needed to go for a run or something; how did younger people stand having so much energy?

Yin just grinned. "Like it?"

"Change me back! Look, I'm fucking sorry. I didn't know you were a witch-"

"Actually, I'm a sorceress, not that you'd know the difference. Witches do rituals, sorceresses don't even need a focus. And no, I'm not going to turn you back. In fact, this is just the beginning, Aaron."

He gulped. "What - what do you mean?"

Yin cupped his chin. "*Don't try to stop me. You can't make a move against me.*"

He found that he couldn't, even as she examined his features up close.

"Hmm, you were surprisingly handsome as a young man. Not my type, and far too young, obviously, but it fascinates me what you could have been. What you *could* have been. Well, now I'm giving you a chance for a fresh start to see if you can improve yourself. But simply giving you a new lease on life is far too much of a reward, don't you think? So instead I'm going to make a few other adjustments. You are clearly a man filled with rage, so I'm going to make you sweet as the desserts you so despise. Oh, inside you'll no doubt still boil with anger, but *from now on you'll feel a strong compulsion and temptation to be kind and sweet and caring.* Oh, and since you hate sweets and desserts, *you'll also have a craving for them from now on, and adore making them. Thankfully, your figure will never be badly affected by them - consider that part of the fun.*"

Instantly Aaron felt a surge of changes, but this time they were taking place in his head and upon his tongue. The first part of her magic to hit him were the cravings. All of a sudden he had a strong desire to taste sugar. No, not just sugar. *Confectionery.*

Sweets.

Pudding.

Cakes, and cupcakes.

Lollipops and taffy and chocolate and mousse and cookie dough and sweet pastries and anything and everything that could be counted as a dessert or a sugary treat. He had to swallow to stop himself literally salivating at the sheer desire for it all, and the worst part was that it went beyond a mere desire to just eat these things, but to make them as well. His mind, which had always viewed desserts as uncivilised and easy, cheap and tawdry, and thus paid not much attention to their construction, now positively *burned* with hundreds of potential recipes and ideas. They cluttered up his mind, all of them half-formed and needing further training, but the desperation for training was there - to improve and create and add a dollop of cream and sugar here and stir that batch there and see it rise in the oven here!

"N-no!" he cried. "You can't make me like - God, I need chocolate! Please!"

Yin shrugged, clicked her fingers, and then proceeded to throw him one. Aaron caught it and immediately scooped it down, moaning in an almost orgasmically blissful fashion.

“Mhmmm . . . caramel. Oh God, it tastes good. How did I never - you’re messing with my brain! You bi - you bi- you *beautiful person!*”

Yin giggled. Actually *giggled*. There was even a snort. Aaron, meanwhile, was completely aghast. He’d just *complimented* this woman.

What the hell? I wanted to call her a bitch! Because she is one! Even if, you know, that’s not a very nice thing to say about someone, but - hey, what the f-f-firetruck? It’s affected my d-darn thoughts, too?

He could feel his mind shifting and changing to accommodate new thoughts and perspectives. Empathy flooded through his neurons, entwining them in ways they hadn’t been connected for many years. Aaron had burned sympathy and compassion out of his life, and now that it was pouring back into his being, it almost caused him to stumble over; only the magic prevented himself from writhing upon the floor as if he were having a fit. The regret was instant.

How could I speak to Simone that way? She’s always so caring. And Farah, she loves desserts so much, and I tried to kill that passion in her! Oh God, and the way I’ve been treating so many others, all to elevate myself. N-no! This isn’t me! But it feels like it is - sh-shoot!

His mind was twisting itself into pretzels, and no peaceful equilibrium was made between his own arrogance and anger and the imposition of sweetness and kindness upon him. They warred against each other, and it was giving the confused new young woman a damn headache.

“Stop this! Please, I’ll do anything! You don’t have to be such a gosh darned . . . meanie!”

It was the best that he could muster now, and it made him blush deeply. Of all the horrible, cruel things he could have said, he had come across like a petulant child angry at his parent. Which, by the way, Yin Cheng was now old enough to be to him, relatively speaking.

Yin tapped her cheek with her finger, regarding him. “Hmmm, it’s just not quite enough, I’m afraid. Yes, we need to do more to give you a fresh start in life. I know! A new background - don’t worry, you’ll remember your old life, but I think some good role models to serve as your parents might help you out here. And with good fortune, my husband recently gave a favourable review to a lovely pastry place not too far from here. We got to talking with the owners, a beautiful couple, and they told us that their cafe was their ‘child,’ since they unfortunately couldn’t have one of their own. Let’s remedy that, shall we?”

“You - you wouldn’t!”

But Yin’s voice was already taking on that magical reverberation. “*You are now the son of Mellisa and Claud Baker* - yes, that’s their actual last name, amusing, right? - *and are*

training up to one day run the shop yourself. In fact, you're standing there with me right now!"

Aaron blinked, and everything changed. He nearly fell over again as he grappled with his new reality. He was no longer in his living room, but instead what appeared to be a small but respectable pastry shop and cafe, its interior quaint and old-fashioned, with many little rustic decorations on the walls and numerous photographs of elegantly made desserts. His gaze lingered on them, wanting to taste them. He had to bite his own tongue in irritation to stop himself.

"Where are we?"

Yin rolled her eyes. "For God's sake, I did just explain this, *Aaron Baker*."

"That's not my name, you bi - you bi - you *meanie!* My name is Aaron Baker! I mean, it's Aaron Baker! Shoot, you can't do this, witch!"

But Yin's sympathy had clearly run completely dry by this point.

"Oh, still on that witch thing? I'm a sorceress, *young man*, and it's clear to me that we have one last issue to resolve. Let's see, I've given you a chance for a new life - check. I've de-aged you *for* that chance - check. I'd dealt with your angry and arrogant personality - check. Oh, and I've upended your bizarre hatred of desserts and made you love them - check. But there's just one thing remaining. Hmm . . . what could that be, I wonder?"

Aaron had no idea, but then he was already panicking. His body was thin and healthy and bursting with energy, and his mind was trying not to freaking compliment Mrs Cheng on her lovely style. That wasn't even getting to the distractions offered up by the sweet smell of cakes. Meanwhile, Yin was yapping her jaw in a faux-way of thinking that told Aaron that she knew *exactly* what change was to come.

"Oh, that's right," she suddenly said. "We need to deal with all that pent-up misogyny, by making you *truly understand* what it's like for women!"

A chill ran down Aaron's spine.

"Y-you wouldn't! Please, just be nice! Why can't we all just be nice!?"

"My question exactly," Yin said, before casting her next and final spell. "*You are now Amy Baker, a college-age young woman who is cute and sweet. One might even say you're made of sugar, spice, and all things nice.*"

Aaron's jaw fell. He couldn't even think of a word to say. Just one thought reverberated in his mind, and it was in all caps.

NO.

But then it happened. That warm glow rose up within his belly before spreading throughout his form. It extended outwards, reaching the very tips of his fingers and toes. Those were the first to change: they thinned, becoming dainty and slender and perfectly manicured. The effect rippled down his arms as he held them up before his eyes, and traced

up his legs as well. His body hair fell away, illuminating bright gold for a moment before burning to magical nothingness. The skin became soft and smooth, his legs becoming shapely - and shorter. His arms likewise lost some muscle definition, though they also lost flab. As the light reached his shoulders they too compressed, seeming to melt down in size until they were far more womanly. The sensations were maddeningly alien, but Aaron was gobsmacked to also experience a foreign feeling of *goodness* about it, as if this was *meant to be*.

“Oh God! Stop it, please!”

But Yin didn't respond, and the changes continued. His thighs, being somewhat muscular in his youth, now slimmed. His rear gained a slightly more *rondure* shape, fat shifting into his cheeks while providing his new rear with some extra *perthness*. His neck altered, taking on greater delicateness, and as a result his knobbly Adam's apple simply evaporated away. He gasped, and the voice that escaped his lips was high, softer, almost petulant in a reedy sort of way.

“Help!” he cried, his voice positively androgynous. “Help me! Someone help me!”

But the pastry cafe was closed, and no one was coming. All that occurred was the echo of his changing voice as it rose steadily in octave.

His body mirrored his feminised tone as the golden hoops of light rose up to his face and between his legs respectively. Just for amusement's sake, Yin conjured a mirror before him once more. It gave him front row seats to his reflection, just in time to see it become *her* reflection.

“Nnggh!” he groaned, cupping his member as it pulled in between his legs. “Mhmpf! No no no no no NOOOO!!!”

But the inevitable occurred anyway, and his once-proud member began to pull back inside him, as if it were being tugged from within. Aaron tried to grip it, but it only left his penis sliding out through his grip as it shrunk down. His balls emptied, getting smaller and smaller, the wrinkled skin of his sac flattening and smoothing over as it formed part of his new *venus mound*. Still it shrank away, becoming first a *micro-penis*, and then something barely even that.

Oh God oh frick oh frick she can't do this there's no way I'm not going to lose my penis you just can't take it I'm not going to become a GIIIRRRRL!

His mind went haywire as a passage opened up within him. It was like being split open, only there was no pain, only the formation of a deep fissure that burrowed all the way in. A set of *labia lips* formed, and though he could not see them, his clothing shifted to accommodate his new form. Aaron's underwear became a female set, while the legs of his legs joined together to become a cute plaid skirt.

“Ohhhhhh! Mhmm! Nnnooo!!!”

His voice rose ever higher, finally taking on the high squealing pitch of a college age girl. This coincided with the golden hoop that rose up his neck and over his face. Even as he cried aloud from the creation of his new genitalia, his face altered. His cheeks became rounded with the baby fat of a young woman yet to reach her full maturity, while his lips became just a little bit more full. The chef's jaw was quite square previously, but now it cracked and reconfigured, rounded out to leave him with a heart-shaped face. His eyes, formerly brown, took on a more hazel quality, while his nose became button cute in a way he would have dismissed as 'girlish' previously. As the halo of light rose, his hair grew longer. Not, he was happy to realise, too long: in fact, he still had quite the pixie cut! But there was no denying that he had become a total cutie.

I'm . . . I'm adorable, he thought to himself.

The halos began to draw together towards his midsection. As they did, his spine began to compress, and his limbs too. He was getting shorter, and this only added to his adorability. Of course, there was another development that added to his *femininity* too.

Wait, it's going down past my shoulders. I've already got a p-p-p-vagina, I don't want a pair of - UGHH!!

It didn't matter what Aaron wanted though, because soon his nipples were expanding, and the tissue beneath them too. They rose up, filling with flesh and tissue. They rose forth, becoming what were undeniably a pair of breasts. The former man gasped as they inflated, grabbing them with his hands. The sensitivity shocked him, though soon a bra formed to cup them, followed by a casual pale pink t-shirt reforming from his current black tee. The expansion of his new boobs finally stalled, leaving the new woman with what he could only assume were B-cups or so. They felt like the size of apples or small oranges, but not a great handful.

Thank God, at least I don't have huge t-t-boobs!

The golden hoops finally met in his midsection, leaving his stomach trim, his midsection slightly shown off by the termination of his shirt's hem a little early. But the real strange effect was within him, where his organs shifted aside, something new forming within him.

"Ohhhh, what is th-that!?"

"I'd say that was your womb, Amy," Yin said. *"That's who you identify as now, by the way. Amy Baker. A woman."*

This magic worked immediately. It was like a switch had been flipped inside Aaron's mind, because suddenly he was no longer Aaron at all, but *Amy*. Even his personal pronouns flipped, going from male to female in an instant. Of all the changes, this perhaps was equal to losing his - *her* - dick in terms of its destructive power upon *her* ego.

Shoot, shoot, shoot! I'm a woman, she's made me a young woman. I look like a short, cute young woman! Oh God, I've got dimples and everything, and boobs! Not big ones, but they're definitely boobs all right!

Just like she was definitely a girl. And definitely a sweet tooth. And definitely Amy Baker. She turned her hazel eyes upon Yin, barely able to contain the new emotions running through her hormonal body.

"What - what do I do?"

Yin shrugged. "You adjust, you start again, and you try to do better. Do well enough, and I might even turn you back. Might. For now, I think it's time for you met the folks and got all adjusted to this crazy, adventure-filled life of yours, huh?"

And with that, Yin clicked her fingers, and was suddenly gone, leaving the new Amy Baker looking all around her in confusion.

"Wha - what? You can't just leave me? What am I supposed to do? I can't live as a girl - especially not with all these delicious sweets!"

Just the images of all these sweet pastries were driving her mad. She could smell the delicious scent of them in the air, and one in particular caught her attention: a cinnamon flavour that could only belong to a donut, roll, or scroll. She followed her nose, trying to get used to the light bobbing of her new chest and the distinct absence between her legs, as well as other awkward new experiences such as the free swishing of her skirt around her legs and the slight sashay of her hips due to her changed centre of gravity. It was all too much, and it was making her light-headed.

Sugar is the answer. Just get some sugar, Amy, and everything will be okay.

She rounded the counter of the closed cafe and opened up the display from behind, reaching in and grabbing one of the delicious cinnamon scrolls. It looks to have a delicious jam spread within its baked folds, and that only made her hunger for it more.

"Just one, and then I'll figure out what to do," she said, taking the scroll and scoffing it down. It was, somehow, the most delicious thing she'd ever tasted, a quite literally sweet relief after the insane reality change she'd just gone through. She moaned loudly as she licked her lips, tasting each individual crumb.

"M-maybe just one more," she ventured, taking another scroll.

She was halfway through this one when suddenly the door to the cafe opened, making her jump and even let loose an embarrassingly feminine squeak. Two figures entered: a man with greying hair and a slight pot belly, and a woman with dark hair and hazel eyes like her own, slender and pretty, with crow's feet in her eyes.

"Oh, hey kiddo!" the man said in a genial tone, adjusting his glasses. "I see you've finally woken up with that sweet tooth of yours."

The woman nudged her husband. “Honey, my dearest Amy, I told you about eating food from the displays, remember?”

Amy blinked. Then paused. Then blinked again.

“Y-you’re my p-parents,” she managed to say, spitting crumbs from her mouth as she did so.

“Well, of course we are, my little sugar cube,” her father said. “Who else would we be?”

Perhaps this was the greatest revelation of all, or perhaps it was the straw that broke the camel’s back. Her thoughts became a flurry of confusion, even more than they had been up until this point.

Those are my . . . parents?

She began to falter on her feet, swaying back and forth as if being pushed by a harsh gale. Someone was saying something. Two people were saying two somethings, in fact. But Amy couldn’t hear them over the sound of her world breaking apart. Only a few words broke through.

“Amy? Amy? Are you alright? You look a little-”

Slowly, and then implacably, she fell to the ground, her mind going faint. Two shadows rushed towards her in slow-motion, their body language full of concern. But that didn’t matter at all to Amy.

She was already unconscious.

Chapter 3: Welcome to Your New Life

Aaron had a strange dream, one that utterly repulsed him. In this dream, for reasons he couldn’t quite recall, he’d somehow turned into a girl. Not just any girl either, but one that was cute as a button and utterly obsessed with the very sweets and desserts he’d always looked down upon as tawdry and cheap. This girl wanted to be a baker, and rather than possessing any of the necessary ruthlessness one needed to get ahead in such a profession, especially when it came to managing a restaurant and your own crew, she was instead all gooey and warm and naive, wanting to bring kindness and cheer and a beaming smile with every dish.

It was disgusting.

It was pathetic.

Aaron had, apparently, been a sweet child once. He'd purged himself of such hopelessly naive world views when he'd become a man, and even more so as he'd gained success in the world of cooking. One couldn't afford to be nice, and when others took the low road, you didn't take the high road, you went so low in response that you dug them a grave instead.

And yet . . .

There was something about being this dream girl. Something about her love of food and cooking. Something in that innocence that called to Aaron, like a voice that had once been dear to his heart and yet had gone silent.

"No," he said, pulling himself free of the woman's body and reclaiming his own. "I don't give two shits about this la-de-da dream. I have a restaurant to run. I have people to boss around. And I'm not going to achieve greatness by being stuck as some little girl obsessed with -

"Sweets . . . mmmm, sweets."

A little bit of drool escaped Amy's mouth as she woke, stirring slightly to feel more of it matted to her pillow. She opened her eyes, squinting from the sun's rays as they shone down upon her. The young woman was confused, trying to make sense of why her room suddenly looked so girly, and why the walls were a pale blue and covered with posters of Taylor Swift and Beyonce rather than possessing their usual white minimalism. But she was jolted from her thoughts when a hand descended down upon her shoulder, rubbing it softly.

"Shh, sweetie, just wait. You had a fainting episode an hour ago. I told you that you shouldn't have stayed up last night, and to eat some things that were good for you and not just sweets. This is the consequence. Now, how do you feel?"

"I'm . . . f-fine?"

Why does my voice sound so - oh God. No! No, it can't be real, it was a dream!

But even Amy's *thoughts* had a feminine tone, light and cheery. She shot up from the bed, feeling her chest jiggle slightly, noticing the distinct absence between her thighs, aware not only of her reduced height and increased slenderness but the rejuvenation of the new age she now possessed. She couldn't have been older than eighteen. What's more, the woman that she couldn't help but think of as her mother was sitting on her new bed, a look of concern upon her face.

"Are you sure, sweetie?"

Amy swallowed. "I - I'm a woman."

“Yes, you are. Good lord, do we need to take you to the hospital? Honey, did you bump your head or something? Claude, can you come here for a moment?”

Amy’s father clambered up the stairs and entered the room. “She’s awake? You sure gave us a scare there, sugar cube. And right when I was gonna start running you through baking practice.”

“B-baking practice?” she asked, rubbing her hands through her hair. It was pleasingly short. Well, short for a girl, at least, though her pixie cut would be considered longer than usual hair on a boy. Certainly longer than hers had been . . . before.

“I think we should get her to a doctor,” Melissa said. “She’s not running a fever, but she’s a little disoriented. Honey, you know where you are, right?”

It wasn’t like she was on autopilot or anything, but Amy was unexpectedly hit by a strong compulsion to play her new part and reassure her worried mother.

“No! No, I’m . . . I’m fine. Sorry, I’m just, uh, waking up! Yeah, waking up. I didn’t, like, have any breakfast this morning, and I stayed up super late last night, I guess. I think I just ended up wobbly on my feet. Could I have some breakfast?”

“Of course, honey,” her mother said. “What would you like?”

The answer was immediate, leaping into her newly sweet-addicted mind.

“Pancakes with maple syrup?”

Her father burst out laughing. “Like heck you are, sugar cube. You’ll be having some mixed oats and barley, and some fruit thrown in for good measure. Sugar alone won’t help you stay upright.”

Amy assented to this, getting out of bed and going along with her parents. She caught herself in her bedroom mirror, and couldn’t help but stare for a moment. She had changed so much, her dark hair now in an adorable pixie cut, matching the rest of her cute form.

“Everything alright?” Melissa asked again.

“Y-yeah. I’m just - I look cute.”

“Cute as a button, kiddo,” her father said. “Now come on downstairs. And step carefully. It’ll cost a lot to replace you.”

Once more the words erupted from her, the sweet-natured banter from this reality change impossible to resist. “Da-ad! I’m not one a piece of furniture.”

“Could have fooled me, the way you were resting still. Now hurry up. I’m making you a full bowl, and no sneaking any treats in - I’ve done a full census of every little member of my cafe display.”

Damn it, I was hoping to get another - gosh, what am I even thinking? It’s like her thoughts keep overpowering mine, except they’re also mine, somehow. I’ll just have to play

along and figure out what to do - didn't Yin say that she would turn me back if I behaved right? I suppose all these compulsions will have to help me . . . for now.

She descended down the stairs, down to the back rooms that led into the cafe that formed the family business. Once more the sweet scents wafted to her nose, though she was a little more resilient this time, perhaps because of the many other significant distractions, mainly in the form of the many photographs and blown-up pictures that lined the walls, each framed with loving care, no doubt by her mother. Amy was in almost all of them, ranging from when she'd been a baby in this new timeline, all the way through her toddler years and elementary school days, then through to high school, and then to her first day of college. She'd evidently had a number of styles, because one of the older pictures had her with long dark hair that went down to her lower back, but the transition to college saw most of that hair go.

God, there's even a photo of me in a freakin' bikini by the pool! And then this one by the bakery in a pink apron. God, how tacky . . . but also cute? Ugh, this stupid brain can't even be outraged properly, or think up strong curses to describe that outrage! Wait, who's that other guy? He looks familiar . . . no way. No. No way.

It was a family photo, or at least that's what she presumed at first, but there was another figure with them, a male one. He looked to be perhaps a couple of years older than she was in this photo, which looked to be fairly recent, probably only a year ago. That probably put him at nineteen to twenty one. He had gorgeous olive skin and a handsome face, and his black hair had a delightful tangle to it. But his gaze was aloof and no-nonsense, and his clothing impeccable. It was clear from the photo that he was athletic, and quite tall given how very short she looked next to him, beaming with a smile he didn't share. His shirt fit snugly around his powerful shoulders. Despite herself, Amy began to bite her lip, finding it difficult not to find his appearance and body strangely . . . enticing.

She shook her head.

Don't be a darn moron, Amy! That's Felipe, for God's sake!

It had to be, even if the smirking, mischievous-looking man in the image was worlds apart from the miserable wait staff member that Aaron Smith had hired perhaps eight months ago. He had the same light stubble and overall figure, and his facial structure was no doubt the same. But while Felipe Rossi had always been quite a no-nonsense type (one of the reasons Aaron had hired him), he had become depressed and dour, stressed and anxious during his time at the Royal Class. Aaron had delighted in humiliating him for every failure, demanding perfection from his performance, and stating again and again that he would never be allowed to actually train in the kitchen until his service as a waiter was impeccable, a practically impossible task to meet up to Aaron's standards.

Gosh, I was so mean! What was I thinking? But . . . how is he in these photos? It makes no sense . . .

But then her father Claude called, and she had to run. Her stomach was growling, desperate for pudding and chocolate, but in the end a mix of oats and fruit would have to suffice. She ate them down quickly, finding them unbelievably bland, a crime against food itself thanks to the snobbery she was still able to draw upon. Unfortunately, a newfound desire to please her parents said otherwise to the world.

“Mhmm, yum! Thanks a heap, Dad, I’m feeling much better already. This is truly delicious.”

Her papa just chuckled, though. “You are a wonderful daughter, Amy, and a terrible liar, perhaps because of the first reason. I can already see you looking towards the pantry. First, eat up and drink some juice, then we’ll get to work. I promised we’d close the cafe so that we could spend some time training you up, and that’s just what we’ll be doing.”

“Training me up?” she asked. So much was happening that it was hard to keep up with it all.

“In baking, of course,” he father chuckled. “It’s high time you learned the trade, instead of just gobbling up my work!”

His wife tapped him playfully on the shoulder. “Don’t be mean, dear.”

“Well, it’s a little true. I love you, sugar cube, but you do have a terrific sweet tooth. I figure we harness that, and then you can not only make your own desserts, but do more than simply serving as a waitress.”

“Don’t knock waitressing, dear,” Melissa pitched in again. “Or I’ll have you in the doghouse.”

To her embarrassment, Amy actually giggled at her parents’ interactions.

“You guys are so cute,” she said, voice a little airy.

Her parents kissed, milking the moment for all it was worth.

“Ew, not that cute!”

They both laughed, and then her father pointed at her bowl.

“Finish up, sugar cube. I’ll be waiting. Besides, it might impress Felipe, no?”

“Claude Baker, stop trying to force this! If our daughter wants to ask a young man out, it’s none of our-”

But Amy’s mind was whirring once more, making connections. Felipe’s name was up on the serving board, and she could see his face framed as a member of staff, her father’s hand clasped upon his shoulder.

Wait a second. Oh my gosh . . . Felipe works here now? And he’s my Dad’s - well, the guy who is my Dad in this reality - apprentice?

“Please don’t bring Felipe into this!” she blurted out, a statement intended more for Yin Cheng, if she was listening, more than anything or anyone else. Her parents simply exchanged a look though.

“Don’t worry, dear, I was just joking,” her father proclaimed, adjusting his glasses. “Today it’s just you and me, performing the highest culinary calling there is: a good bit of dessert baking, ha!”

The statement would have been sacrilege to the old Aaron. Instead, to her complete horror, Amy actually took on a giddy smile.

No. No, I refuse to be excited for this! I won’t be excited to bake desserts!

But the excitement was budding and building up regardless.

The rest of the day passed in a strange blur for Amy. Her new self was alien to, well, herself! That war between her old mental state and her new one continued, between her old memories and her new reality as well. The fact that she was being taught by her father to make *pastries* felt like it should have been an utter insult delivered by Yin Cheng herself, except that Amy actually felt closer to her own namesake as far as emotions went. She’d never met her father until today, but a father-daughter bond was nevertheless there in some arcane way; she could answer questions from him fairly naturally, banter back and forth, and get embarrassed when he asked personal questions about her own future plans.

“I - I still want to be a chef!” she announced.

“Huh, I would have thought specifically a pastry chef for you, given how much you enjoy your desserts,” he remarked, before correcting her form. “No, remember that scrolls need a relatively thin pastry base. The oven will swell them more than you think.”

She nodded, keeping at it. “Why didn’t you train me earlier?” she asked.

“I have! Except that you only care about the end result. It’s only lately you’ve shown such a desire to learn. About time, I’d say.”

She blushed, wondering why she was even pursuing that line of conversation.

I just need to play along and then track down Yin. Beg her, or something. I’m not meant to, like, be this way. Bad enough being a girl, but I can’t stop smiling and beaming and giggling all the time. I sound like a total ditz!

Apparently, she came to learn by the time the day closed to night, she had a reputation for being somewhat of a klutz. A ditz. A bit ‘up in the clouds,’ as her new father Claude liked to say. She wasn’t *airheaded*, at least, but true enough her once disciplined mind now strayed in lots of directions. When she tried to hold onto an angry thought, it slipped away as she thought of delicious whipped cream. When she focused on arranging

the topping of a devastatingly attractive black forest gateau, notions of other recipes swirled in her head, and then if she looked professional enough to be a pastry chef, and if she was too short, and if the hairstyle she had didn't suit her, and so on and so forth, before eventually rounding back to realising how much she had changed already.

Darn it! This is absurd. Fine, Yin! Maybe I was a little bit of a . . . a meanie. But that doesn't mean you get to turn me into the exact opposite kind of gal!

The exact opposite was right, too, because she was also shocked to find that another distraction had formed, one she hadn't experienced in years: her social sphere. Her phone (which had a pink case, because of course it did) was constantly blowing up with messages from friends she'd never heard of: Lian, Jessica, Eric, Kaley, Piper, Yunis, and several more. There was even a Melissa - no, that was her Mom!

God, she thought, is Mum texting me from downstairs? Do we chat like friends now? Since when do parents talk to their grown-up kids even if they are in the same house!?

Apparently, she had quite the large circle of friends at college, along with childhood friends, family friends, cousins she got along with, and a whole host of extended relations and acquaintances. It just about gave Amy a headache.

"Stupid," she muttered to herself. "This is, like, so stupid. This dumb body is never going to make it to greatness while saddled down by all these relationships. I'm just gonna not answer any of these messages, and then let these friendships die. Then, at least, I can be a little more like my real self, darn it."

She managed to last an hour and a half before she was responding.

To Lian: *'Yeah, the day went well. I had a lot of fun baking which I didn't expect. Didn't get all my sweets though! How are you doing?*

To Jessica and Eric and Kaley, all on the same chat: *Sure thing, let's meet on the college green. I'm literally bouncing with excitement at the thought. I'll bring sweets as always!*

To Yunis: *Sorry, I don't know why she's angry. I think I'm struggling to understand who she is at all at the moment - literally!*

To her Mom: *Yes, I'll be downstairs! Don't you dare start the new episode of The Rich and Romantic without me, I swear Mom!*

It was exhausting to fight the compulsions, especially since following them felt so right. Even labelling them 'compulsions' was wrong: it was like Amy was entirely aware of her old personality and trying to cling to it, except that the new, sweeter, peppy personality wanted other things instead.

"Gosh, this is just exhausting," she muttered to herself when she went to her room after dinner and the TV show. The food had been adequate - hardly up to her standards despite the sheer pride Claude had taken in his wife's cooking - but she had eaten it all

anyway. It wasn't like she could insult it: the worst she could say was, "it's a bit dry, Mum, but that gravy more than makes up for it! Thanks so much!"

Ugh, it's sickening, she thought. It's like I've turned into my biggest nightmare: someone who can't criticise food, or keep it up to a good standard. I hope you're happy, Cheng. Both Chengs.

Amy certainly wasn't happy. Oh, her new personality and body wanted to be. Hell, there was so much energy in it that it took all her willpower not to just jog around the block. She stubbornly refused to do so out of obstinance: Aaron had never been a jogger, so why should she? She was still the same person, just labouring under a curse. That was as far as it went, at least as she was concerned. It didn't matter that her tastebuds were addicted to dessert (and God, had the sticky date pudding after dinner been good), or that she found herself on the edge of her seat during *The Rich and the Romantic* when Stefan proposed to the Lady Denver. It didn't even matter that she was a cute woman who found it difficult not to think about her appearance. All of these were impositions upon her, and her true self would remain.

This she was certain of, and the knowledge flooded her thoughts as she readied for bed that night, in an unfamiliar house in an unfamiliar room in an unfamiliar body. She stared at her naked body in the mirror, taking in the small but pert breasts and their enlarged nipples, and her slight hourglass figure. Her hips were certainly noticeably wider than her old pair, and the venus mound between her legs revealed her womanhood. She lowered her fingers to feel it, and pulled them back when the sensations proved . . . alarming. Sensitive. For some reason, the image of Felipe flicked into her head, though she quickly discarded it. Instead, she got into the shower, tried to ignore how weirdly sensitive her skin was now, and did her best to fix up her hair afterwards. Then she got into her pink, girly pyjamas - which for some reason had singing sugar cube patterns on them, perhaps as a gift from her parents - and pulled herself into bed.

Let's sum up, she thought to herself as she tried to find a comfortable position. It wasn't that being on her chest was greatly uncomfortable, but the pressure on her chest was indeed obvious. I'm Aaron Smith. I am Aaron Smith, even if I feel far more like I'm Amy Baker and that's the only name I can answer too. And I am a man, even if I don't have the freakin' equipment and am stuck as a gosh darn girl, boobs and downstairs and everything. Even if I literally can't actually think of myself as a man, I know, like, intellectually it's true.

So now I'm Amy Baker.

I'm an eighteen year old woman. Practically a girl.

I'm cute, I can't deny that. Pretty adorable, actually, and clearly this stupid new personality knows it because I really like taking selfies and checking myself out in the mirror.

I'm also a bit of a klutz. I dropped two scrolls today, and almost dropped the tray before it even went into the oven. God, that was, like, super embarrassing. Ugh, and I also talk like my head is in the clouds too.

I'm a total sweet tooth. I want to make and eat desserts, especially since Yin told me it'll never make me fat or affect my health. Gosh, the power of that! And this habit is so notorious that even my new friend group jokes about it in our text chains.

So I'm dealing with that. Oh, and I've got two parents who love me very much, and accept me for who I am and want the best for me and don't want to toss me out as soon as I'm old enough to join the army. Gah! Why does that make me all gooey inside instead of angry at how weak they are? How can their standards be so low? How come they aren't chewing me out for all my dumb failures today?

Part of her knew the answer, deep down: because this was a new start, with new life lessons to learn. Yin wanted to make sure Amy became a better person, so now she had normal parents who weren't psychos, and a disposition herself that was just as sweet.

"Fuzz, I'm tired," she grunted, still not able to properly swear. "M-maybe tomorrow I'll wake up and be a man again. Me again. Yeah, that would be, like, nice . . ."

She drifted off to sleep, sighing contentedly in her soft new voice, shifting onto her side and ignoring the strangeness of her feminised, diminutive form.

This time, she dreamed that she was a man named Aaron.

Chapter 4: Felipe Rossi

Three days passed before Amy met Felipe Rossie, Claude's apprentice at their cafe. During that time, she learned a lot, and became - sadly - more accustomed to her new life as a member of the Baker family. For one, she learned the name of the cafe bakery, and what an 'inspired' name it was too: *Baker's Life*. It almost seemed like a cruel joke upon her specifically. For two, she also learned how to deal with women's clothing. Not everything came with an instruction manual for her feminised body, and bras and makeup were two things she actually had to figure out. The former were obviously necessary - she couldn't exactly leave the nips showing, but the latter was something she was happy to skip . . . at first. Unfortunately, the need to make her face look pretty continued to creep up on her, until she was desperately watching online tutorial after tutorial to get her foundation and lip gloss right. The same desires extended to her clothing, which included skirts and logo t-shirts, usually ones that left a small strip of her flat midriff on display.

It was college wear, and that meant only one thing: *college*. Not that Amy Baker really knew what she was doing there: her Aaron *and* Amy halves were finally in agreement

that culinary school and apprenticeship to a chef were the only things she needed, but her parents were adamant that she gain a college education. Which unfortunately meant travelling via bus to attend college with people that should have been nearly two decades younger than her. She was taking a psychology major, and the only good thing was meeting friends that Amy held dear in this changed reality: Lian, Jessica, and Eric especially. Lian was, at least according to their messages, her 'total bestie.' She was a blonde-haired, blue-eyed fashionista who pulled her into a hug as soon as she reached the college greens.

"Oh my God, I love the pixie cut, Amy! It's so cute on you. But then again, everything's cute on you. Come on, Jessica and Eric have already staked out a spot for us. They're arguing about movies again. Can't they just start dating again already?"

Indeed, Jessica and Eric proved to have 'that' energy. It was the sort of thing that Aaron discouraged in his kitchen; the back and forth flirting, the little looks, the jokes and teasing and clear interest beneath the surface. They were trying to prepare for their upcoming psych test, but the pair were getting under each other's skin.

This is hell. I know it now. I'm trapped in hell. I'm stuck with other young people who only care about fu - fuc - having sex, and here I am wanting them to get together rather than ripping into them!!!

"Maybe you two should study outside of college, just the pair of you together?" she said, beaming with a big smile.

Her statement, annoyingly corny as it had been, made the pair laugh.

"Subtle, Amy."

"Yeah, real subtle. Haven't you got your own guy to pursue? Weren't you telling us that your Dad's apprentice was a total cutie?"

"N-no! I don't even know him!"

It was the truth, but it didn't stop Lian from leaping on this, leading to a back and forth that ended only with them having to run to a lecture together. Amy barely listened. Instead, she continued to be distracted by her disordered mind. She wanted to eat the little pudding she'd brought in her backpack. She also wanted to find Yin, despite her body literally refusing to even put the woman's name in a search engine, presumably thanks to the curse. She also wanted to go home and get baking again, despite her interior disgust at ever viewing dessert-making as a legitimate culinary art.

"Psst," Lian said, nudging her and showing her a photo. "Looks like someone's sweet tooth is acting up again!"

Amy blushed a deep shade of red. Lian had taken a photo of her, head propped up on one arm, a little bit of drool escaping down her lip as she thought.

"Don't! I wasn't thinking about food!"

But Lian just grinned. "So, a boy was it, then? I'd be hungry for Felipe, too. Yummy."

Ugh, this is the worst, Amy thought. Why couldn't I just have apologised to Yin? Now I'll have to find a way to get rid of Felipe. I ended up firing him the first time, right? Why not again?

Amy slept in as Saturday rolled around. It had only been a little over four days since she'd changed, and it was already disturbing her how much she was getting used to being a woman. Breasts were still weird, but the feeling of them upon her chest, their weight and bounce and sensitivity, was oddly . . . familiar. Too familiar, really. It was something she mused on as she headed down the steps, eager to raid the bakery once more. There was a delicious caramel slice that looked to die for, and she picked it up.

"Dad! Hope you don't mind if I steal a-

"I mind very much, thank you. I worked hard on those."

Amy spun around, only to come face to face with the very person she was already planning to get rid of. Unfortunately for her, Felipe Rossi was not nearly as diminutive as she remembered. In fact, the attractive olive-skinned man now towered over her, and the way he had one eyebrow raised and his arms folded judgmentally somehow managed to intimidate her. The worm had indeed truly turned.

God, he's massive! I mean, he's not, but is this what most women feel next to guys? And he's - oh Gosh, he's handsome. Wait, why do I think he's handsome? He's not - he just has a really hot figure. And a sexy face. And - AGHH!!

"Nothing to say?" he said again, his voice low and serious.

"I, um - what?"

Look at his eyes, not his shoulders! Better yet, don't look at him at all! This is the guy you fired and chewed out as 'pathetic and weak,' remember?

But his eyes were just as magnetic.

"I said, I mind very much you eating the desserts I make with your father. I know you're Claude's daughter, but that doesn't give you the right to snack away on hard-earned pastries and desserts that are intended for customer purchase."

He reached out and snatched the caramel slice from her hand and placed it back, before shutting the door. He then had the damn audacity to *lock it*.

"Hey!" she shouted, enough that a couple of customers looked her way. "There's no need to-"

But in a humiliating role reversal, Felipe was now the one bossing Aaron/Amy around, and his presence cowed her.

“Backroom,” he said, checking quickly to see that Amy’s mother was serving a customer and her father returning to man the counter. “Now.”

For reasons unknown to her, she actually followed him.

“Like, what’s your problem?” she asked. “I just wanted to try one-”

“One thing. It’s always one. Then it becomes two. Then it becomes three. I worked hard on those, and I’m trying to impress your father so I can get certified and have a respected pastry chef’s recommendation on my side. I can’t do that if you eat everything I make, Amy!”

How dare he act like this to me! Especially since I taught him everything he knows before I fired him! Especially since - since - oh, c’mon, am I seriously starting to feel guilty about this?

She was. Her cheeks were flushed red, and despite her petty grimace, already she was experiencing a knot in her stomach that told her she had to apologise. She held out for several more seconds, Felipe waiting patiently while she warred between her Aaron self and Amy self once more.

“I’m . . . you’re right. I’m sorry, Felipe.”

“Good. Thanks,” he said, before storming off.

“Wait, that’s it!”

“That’s it,” he said coldly.

“But, like, you forgive me, right?”

He shrugged. “Are you going to eat my next batch of scones? My dark pudding?”

She grinned sheepishly. “Not if you make me a little sample to ‘test’ your credentials, you know. At the end of next week, maybe?”

Felipe sighed and rolled his eyes. And then, to her surprise and perhaps his, he exhaled a second time.

“Fine. Just for you to realise how good I am, and why you shouldn’t poach. Now fetch an apron. Your Dad’s been asking if you can help take orders and help with the oven. For some reason.”

Amy’s eyes went wide. She lifted a foot and actually *stomped* it. “You - you - you rude-mouthed, overly serious - HMMH!!”

And with that, she stormed past Felipe, grabbed the apron, and headed straight for the kitchen area.

Since when did Felipe grow a spine! Hmh!

She began her impromptu shift, helping out where she could and trying not to trip over in front of customers or say something too ditzy in front of them, especially since there was no way in hell she would ever accept looking like an airhead in front of *Felipe*, who *she* had once chewed out for not being professional enough. Instead, she dialled up her

brightness and sweetness deliberately, taking advantage of her new personality to light up the faces of those she serves and make them laugh and leave tips, despite it being a cafe and not a proper restaurant. She delighted in this, smirking at Felipe whenever she passed him in the kitchen or by the coffee machine.

“Having fun?” he said, one eyebrow raised again.

“You know,” she said, beaming from ear to ear. “I think I finally am. Those scones aren’t fluffy enough, by the way.”

“I - wha? Hmm, damn it. You’re right.”

“Maybe I’m more useful than you think,” Amy said slyly.

She continued to walk forward, her head held high despite her diminutive status, and she realised the words were actually true. She *did* feel good. How on earth was working at a bakery making her feel this way?

At least I get to show up an old employee and show him what’s what. Darn, he has good shoulders. Why does he have to have such sexy shoulders?

Felipe remained the ultimate contention with Amy’s new existence. No, she didn’t want to be a woman, and even sitting down to pee was humiliating for her. And no, she didn’t actually want to be a baker, despite her newfound obsession with desserts and pastries. But these were things she was at least starting to accept would have to be part of her new life, as surely as makeup and bras and being young and underestimated again. Going to college was much the same chore, but it was easy to at least give in to the temptations of her new life and giggle with Lian over some stupid meme on the internet or try to de-stress together over the coming exam, which neither felt prepared for.

What Amy *wasn’t* prepared for, on the other hand, was Felipe Rossi. He continued to be his overly seriously, overly committed self, obsessed with getting better and better, and it rather startled her to see this kind of behaviour from the outside, especially since when she snuck downstairs to finally grab a cinnamon scroll after the cafe had closed, she instead found him practising after hours like some kind of spectral wraith haunting the building.

“Leave me alone,” he simply said, not even looking in her direction. “Your father said I could stay another hour or so.”

And there was the point of contention. Ordinarily, Aaron Smith would have commended this kind of single-minded obsession. He wouldn’t have congratulated it, of course, the former chef had been far too arrogant for that. But he would have smirked to himself and let the young man continue to burn the candle at both ends in order to baptise his skills in the fires of the oven.

But Amy Baker was different, and she felt the pull to address this. Surely pushing yourself so hard couldn't be good for you?

"What - what are you doing?" she asked, drawing closer.

"I just said that your father said I could stay."

"No, I'm not trying to kick you out, gosh. I'm just interested in what you're doing. Really."

Felipe paused, and this time he did look at her. It made her smile sheepishly, as if his very gaze made her feel all kinds of awkward. Then he huffed.

"Well, fine. I'm working on the almond croissants."

Amy looked at the rather impressively large pile of them already there on the table space. "Um, are you sure we need any more of them?"

The thinnest of smiles appeared at the edges of Felipe's face before he managed to eclipse it. "I'm really not happy with the topping on them. I either use too much powder or too little, and the thin glaze holding it together isn't right. I don't know how your father does it."

"Daddy is a bit of a magician."

God, I call him Daddy now? You'd think almost two weeks into this and I'd be used to it all. I need to exit this conversation. Leave this mope to finally realise his art, like a culinary creator should.

But the thoughts rang false, and so she continued talking instead.

"I'm sure you'll get there in time. I don't think making a bajillion almond croissants is going to help, though."

"Well, I'm also working on the strawberry eclairs. Those could be better."

"How do you know?"

"They don't taste right."

Amy giggled. "That's because everyone is their own worst critic. Give me a try. I'll tell you how they taste."

Felipe sighed. He was starting to prepare another batch, and she got the distinct sense that even *he* felt it was pointless at this stage.

I know that look. Something is missing, you just don't know what. And then you have to slave away and burn the candle at both ends until you reach perfection. It makes sense . . . but darn, from the outside it looks cra-azy.

But then, to her surprise, Felipe handed her a croissant. "Okay," he said. "See what you make of it. You were probably going to eat all of them anyway, right?"

"Only half!" she said, grinning. "And that's only if they're good - which I'm sure they are, by the way."

The new woman of two weeks took the croissant and practically *inhaled* it. Felipe's eyes went wide for a brief moment.

“Well, no one can fault you for enthusiasm, I suppose.”

She nodded eagerly, trying not to smile as she sampled the pastry. She closed her eyes and chewed, taking in the almond flavour as it mingled with the glaze and the sweet, slightly crunchy bread of the croissant. The sugary powder was heaven to her, and she nearly became lost in it, until she managed to pull her head out of the clouds and remember what she was doing.

Stupid desserts. If I was still a man, I wouldn't be so obsessed with these. Mhmm, but it is lovely. But he's right, something is missing. What is it? Need more . . . evidence.

She jabbed a finger in the air in an overly excited manner. “Another!” she declared.

“What?”

“More evidence,” she repeated, this time out loud. She grabbed another croissant and devoured it, this time taking it slow. Felipe went to say something but she put up a finger to silence him.

“Like, give me a minute! Don't say a word! Mhmm . . . good. Very nice. Sugar powder is nice . . . slightly too much though.”

“I knew it,” he said dejectedly. “I just need to minimise that and-”

Her finger went up again. “But that's not your problem. You're putting them in the oven just a little too long.”

“What? But your father says-”

“Daddy gives a guideline but he plays it by ear. Look!”

She took a third croissant, seemingly agitating Felipe a little, and broke it open.

“Hear that crunch? Crunch is good . . . for a baguette. Oh, sure, you want a bit of crunch for a croissant, but only a little! You want more like, well, um, a tear! Yes, a kind of gentle tearing as it pulls apart! You're overdoing them, and that's why the topping fails: it doesn't mix well with the harder pastry, and the glaze becomes too glass-like. Um, that's my take, at least.”

She placed her hands behind her back, biting her lip as she smiled.

“Let me guess. You'd need more evidence?”

“Mhm-hmm!”

Felipe was the master of the resigned exhale. He indicated to the pile. “Fine, dine away.”

She didn't need more permission than that, and was even able to afford some other advice to him, and to warn him about overdoing the strawberry on the éclair when she sneakily grabbed one of those, too.

Why am I enjoying this? I never enjoy chatting with other cooks and chefs and staff, especially not the pastry nerds.

But she was, and despite Felipe's air of self-seriousness, she found herself giggling every time he gave the smallest smirk at her behaviour, or otherwise seemed bewildered by the obvious things he'd missed.

"Maybe I'll try tomorrow."

"Tomorrow is Sunday. We're closed."

"Sure, but your Dad said that if I need to practice, I can-"

"Work yourself to death?"

He raised an eyebrow. "That I can continue making things until they're perfect."

She sampled another éclair. "Dad will be out of the business with the amount of material you're using though, no offence!"

"Oh, I bought all this."

Amy blinked. "You - you bought all of this? Like, the pastry and chocolate and almonds and sprinkles and everything?"

He scratched the back of the head. While his apron did a bit to disguise his figure, there was no disguising the lithe strength of arm as he posed without realising it. Amy found herself a little hungry again, though not for food.

Don't think about how hot he is don't think about how hot he is. You're Aaron Smith, not some love sick and horny girl!

"Well, yeah? It's not a lot, I just need to tighten my belt for the rest of the month and-"

"Oh my gosh, you're a total crazy person."

"Look who's talking!"

"You'll go bankrupt!"

"And you'll get diabetes!"

"At least I'll have the money for insulin!"

"I don't buy many things for myself!"

"Well how come you're able to get so hot buff at the gym then!?"

An awkward silence suddenly reigned between them. It took a moment for Amy to realise what she had just blurted out, but when she did it made her turn bright tomato red. Felipe managed to get control of his jaw again.

"Did you just call me hot buff?"

Amy had to rally. "It was just, like, a generic description!"

He folded his powerful arms. "Sure, real sure."

"Oh, don't be such a meanie!"

"I have never heard anyone over the age of four ever call someone a meanie."

I'd call you a whole lot of things that'd make you cry, if I could be my old self again. I assure you.

But instead she said: "Well, I just don't have very many mean bones in my body."

“Just one mean sweet tooth.”

“Helped you, didn’t it?”

Felipe paused. Clearly, the banter was set to continue, and Amy found herself *wanting* it to continue. But instead he seemed to regard her differently.

“You did help me, didn’t you?”

“Certainly so!” she said, smiling despite herself again.

Another pause, but this time she let the silence carry. He was clearly working himself up to ask something.

“Okay, so, call me crazy-”

“Sure thing, crazy.”

He chuckled, just briefly. “Very funny. But seriously, I’m trying to be a pastry chef here. I respect your Dad, and after a certain . . . reputational issue, he’s the only one willing to train me up. I know this isn’t some great restaurant or anything-”

“Hey!”

“You know what I mean. Just that it’s not a flashy place. It’s a cafe. That’s not a bad thing. But most people learn to be a pastry chef at the bigger kitchens. I can’t do that.”

She furrowed her brow. “Why not?”

“I’d rather not talk about that, okay?”

He’s hiding something, she thought. Does he have a secret? Was he hiding something from me when I took him on as Aaron? Maybe it was a good thing that I fired him.

“Fine, okay,” she said. “You don’t have to tell me. But, you know, you don’t have to *not* tell me, either. I won’t tell anyone else if you ever, you know, want to tell me.”

“It’s funny, I actually believe you. But no, that’s my burden to carry. Look, my point is that I have to learn here, and here has some disadvantages in the wider restaurant space. So I need to be extra skilled, and make *no* mistakes. Ever. But because I can’t stop fucking up, and yet I don’t have the mastery to always know what I’m doing wrong, and *you* have, like, this bloody sixth sense for desserts because you’re a damn addict-”

“And proud!”

“-then perhaps . . . we can make a deal.”

This time it was Amy who raised her eyebrow and folded her arms. She was distinctly aware that she had drawn closer to Felipe without even meaning to, and that he smelled nice too. It was definitely all the cinnamon, but she could have sworn that he was also occasionally looking down at her body too, particularly her bare midriff.

Was he just - was he just looking at me? No, that was totally my imagination. I’m cute, I’m not, like, super hot or anything. Am I? Ugh, stupid girl brain. Can’t even summon the really bad adjectives to describe how dumb this brain is.

“A deal?” she said, and his eyes flicked back up.

“Yeah, a deal. I need someone who can speak my language and help me make the perfect desserts, and as much as your father is great, *you* are the one that instantly realised what I was doing wrong. You’re . . . pretty damn good at this, I guess. So from now on, I can make desserts in my spare time, and you can be the judge. That means you get to eat as many as you like, provided your parents don’t think I’m trying to poison you with sugar. How does that sound?”

Amy should have walked away. She wanted to skate through this existence until she could be the late-thirties, rage-filled, depressive and isolated and *feared* man she used to be. Except . . .

She thrust out her hand. “I accept,” she said, smiling brightly.

He took her hand. It was a lovely feeling, that firmness.

“Deal, then,” he replied.

And just like that, I’ve got him back in my life again. What the heck am I doing?

Chapter 5: This is a Bit Awkward

The deal, surprisingly, held. This was despite the fact that Amy was continually embarrassed by her new, overly sweet existence. Being stuck as a cute young woman was bad enough, but realising that she was *attracted* to boys, boys, boys, *especially* ones like Felipe Rossie, only made things worse. As the days and weeks passed, she found it increasingly difficult not to look at his fine shoulders and forearms, or to find herself imagining his sharp, handsome face with that fine olive skin and dark, wavy hair. He sometimes caught her looking, only to smirk to himself, or simply huff, depending on how overly-serious his mood was . . . which was most certainly too serious most of the time.

That sourness at least helped her cut through her own sweetness often enough. Felipe would make a dour remark about the weather, or a dismal assessment of his pastry work, or otherwise generally be glum for some unfathomable reason, and this would let Amy take a moment to regain herself.

Fu - fu - fu-reakin’ stupid sweet girl hormones! Stop checking out how tall and handsome he is and focus on the delicious pastries instead.

Indeed, the desserts, sweets, and general pastries he made were enough to keep her end of the deal solid, just as her continual advice aided him. Amy found that doing so even allowed her to indulge in her former-chef instincts as well, letting her vicariously live her old life, in however an altered way, by continuously providing feedback and instructions to Felipe, and being his aide in the kitchen.

Not his aide. Not his assistant. His instructor. That's how you have to think of it, Amy. You're just letting him to take charge so you can assess him!

Of course, such 'assessments' meant being able to consume the many offsets, cuts, and prototype dishes he made up, leaving her moaning with an almost sexual glee. The sounds she made were more than a little humiliating at times, in fact. One particular example came early one morning, before Claude or Melissa - or, as she was increasingly thinking of them, Mom and Daddy, or even Mama and Papa - were even awake. They were most definitely aware of the little deal that existed between Claude's apprentice and herself, but so long as it wasn't costing Claude any margins and making his apprentice more skilled, then who were they to object? The fact that her Daddy continually made suggestive remarks about the two getting together only made that fact more obvious.

But on this particular occasion, Felipe had tried something new. Their deal had been going on for over a month now, a month of Amy slipping further into her new life, getting used to her university expectations, and finding her own womanhood second nature. During that time, Felipe had mainly tried to craft recipes that Claude had taught him, or otherwise existed in the many recipe books in the cafe kitchen. Rarely did he experiment beyond a few changes in ingredients. Amy had even started to suspect that he was actually *nervous* to get outside his comfort zone, though this only brought private scorn from her past self: *a true chef must be willing to create his own art*, she thought. *Though the old me would say it a lot . . . meaner.*

"Morning, partner, have you got some good sweets for me?" she asked as entered the bakery proper. She was still in her pyjamas, her annoyingly bright blue ones with the little swirly patterns that were nevertheless *sooooo comfortable*.

Felipe regarded her with his usual annoyance at failing to wake up early enough, but there was something else her feminine instincts detected beneath that expression. It was *nervousness*.

"What is it?" she asked, leaning to the side to see what he was hiding behind him on the counter.

"Well, once again you failed to appear on time."

"It's a Saturday, and my bed has, like, heavier gravity or whatever."

"So I thought . . . well, I got a flash of inspiration. It's stupid."

This got her interest. She folded her arms beneath her breasts and cocked one eyebrow playfully. "Inspiration for what? Wait. Oh. Em. Gee. Are you telling me you're going to try and make something *new*? Have you drawn up a recipe?"

He scratched the back of his head anxiously. It was an annoyingly cute look. "That's just the thing, I didn't even write this down. I guess I just . . . improvised. I've had this idea for

a raspberry-infused chocolate panookie for quite some time, and this morning I just . . . went for it, I guess. It's probably an embarrassment, I don't know what I was thinking."

But Amy was already jumping up and down, unable to help her buoyant and youthful enthusiasm. It was amazing what no longer drinking and smoking constantly did for one's energy levels, let alone becoming a young adult again.

"Lemme see! Lemme see! Lemme see!"

He actually chuckled at that, though his expression retreated to its usual dourness.

"Fine, fine. But don't expect anything much. I don't think it looks too good either."

He stepped out of the way before she could *push* him out of the way. There, still nestled in the warm pan behind him, was the panookie; the pan-sized chocolate brownie/cookie mix with raspberry sauce dripped over the top and several flakes protruding from it. The ice cream wasn't applied yet, of course, but it would be the necessary final ingredient prior to serving, perhaps with some chocolate shavings on top.

He's right, she thought. It doesn't look amazing or anything. The sauce is applied without any finesse and the edges of the cookie should be more neatly settled in the pan. And that arrangement of flakes! What is he thinking!?

And yet . . . it smelled *heavenly*. She sniffed the air as if she were a cartoon character, and for a mere moment she almost thought she was about to start floating like one.

"Well, what do you think?" he asked.

She turned to him, tried to keep as serious as he was, but thanks to her personality compulsions it was practically impossible not to beam with giddy excitement.

"Get me a spoon and I'll tell you."

He passed one to her, only to drop it with a hand that shook.

"S-sorry!"

"Jeez, what's got into you? Burn your hands or something."

"No! What do you take me for? I'm just . . . whatever, just take this one instead."

He passed her another spoon, and this time was much more careful. Her hand brushed over his during the awkward exchange, and their fingers lingered just a few seconds longer than was necessary. Amy's breath caught, and she looked up to see Felipe was staring at her expectantly. He coughed and looked away, and she quickly turned with the spoon in hand, letting the panookie see her blush rather than the attractive young man.

"Here goes," she declared dramatically, flourishing the spoon. "The moment of truth, Felipe!"

"Please, just end my pain. This was a mistake."

She grinned, her old self savouring his pain, but her new self more . . . playful. Teasing, rather than mocking. She blew on the still-hot panookie, which was soft rather than

crunchy - a good sign - and then ate it. She sampled the taste in her mouth for a while, mixing it here and there and getting a sense for the mix of chocolate and raspberry, the almonds crunched through and the gap where the ice cream might fill.

“What do you think?”

She frowned. “I need ice cream to be sure. Let’s get the strawberry swirl.”

“You mean the raspber-”

But she thrust up a finger. “Tell me, which would be better?”

For once, she felt like the dominant one. The true chef.

“Uh . . . no, you’re right. The strawberry will be lighter, and give a distinctness from the panookie.”

“There’s the chef!”

Not long after, the strawberry vanilla swirl mix was applied. This time she ate more, sampling it in different ways, appreciating the texture. The ice cream melted a little, mingling into the dough, softening it further but not reducing its appeal. She tried some more, and then more, and then ate some of the flakes separately and then with the mix also. By the time she’d reached her ultimate assessment, half the panookie had been devoured. She hadn’t even had breakfast. *I’ll probably pay for that later*, she thought. *But right now, I don’t care.*

“Well?” Felipe asked.

Slowly, she placed the spoon down, then turned to face him. His eyes were wide.

“Jesus, Amy. Your face is wet. You’re crying! Is everything okay?”

He touched her arm for a few vulnerable seconds, and it made her shiver with a secret and forbidden delight. She wiped her eyes, which still had small tears careening down from their corners, and gave him the biggest grin she could imagine.

“More than okay,” she whispered, voice almost stammering. “Felipe, that’s the most amazing panookie I could possibly imagine!”

And then she saw something she *couldn’t* imagine. Felipe’s astonishment turned to a smirk, then a grin, and then he was beaming almost as widely as her cherubic features were currently straining.

“Hot damn,” he said. “So that’s what it feels like.”

“Like what feels like?”

He embraced her, pulling her against his body. It was felt protective. It felt *safe*.

“Like being an actual *chef*,” he said, giving a low chuckle. He parted from her, and was already talking out loud to himself. “But maybe there’s more interesting things we can do with it. Maybe a peppermint variant? I think a honey crackle flake would also add a bit of distinctness to it. I’ll need your feminine touch to make it presentable, of course. And then there’s the matter of . . .”

His voice trailed off in Amy's mind. She was still too stunned from the hug, and how much it had made a warmth within her *bloom*.

That felt so . . . right. Oh God, I'm going to have to be very careful with this deal, because I think I liked his touch more than the panookie. Darn it!

"Thinking about that cute boy of yours?"

Amy blinked. She was sitting in the lecture theatre, listening to her psych professor drone on, but her mind had been clouded as she imagined . . . other things. It had been another month, and Felipe was still obsessively trying to create the perfect panookie, despite her telling him to hurry up and show it to Claude already. But as usual, the overly-serious young man had to have it *perfect*. And that meant, between other training and sampling and creating and baking, she was there to help him reach perfect. In fact, they'd even started catching up outside of the bakery, going out to eat together and discuss what to do next. He'd even started asking her about her psychology course, and her love of netball and volleyball (both new obsessions for her that were slowly starting to grow). So yes, it was true that the 'cute boy' was in her mind more often lately, particularly as it got warmer and he got . . . less dressed around the arms and legs.

But how could Lian possibly know that?

"Huh?" she said. "I don't know what you're talking about. I was just, like, taking notes and stuff."

Lian grinned. "Were you, now?"

She flicked her eyes down to Amy's psychology notebook, and Amy's gaze followed. Immediately, she realised how distracted she'd been, because one could see the exactly the moment her mind had stopped paying attention to the lecture and began daydreaming: her flowering, cursive writing (that she was weirdly proud of) had cut off suddenly, replaced by numerous little doodles and doodads and drawings. Several were of pies and sweets, others were almost clinical dissections of possibilities for *their* panookie, as she'd begun thinking of it. But then, dominating the middle of the page, were some surprisingly good and *physiologically accurate* drawings of a rather handsome man who could be none other than Felipe. He was segmented about the page: three drawings that were just his head, for example, all in different expressions: dour-faced per his baseline, adorably frustrated, and finally smirking in that way that betrayed when his inner joy could emerge. Another section was an outline of his body, with only his shoulder and arm muscles really define, as well as a creative recreation of what she imagined his pecs and abdominal muscles would look like. She'd even put little love hearts around this display, all without thinking.

Shoot!

She shut the book almost immediately, with a loud enough *snap* that a few people - including the professor - briefly looked her way.

"Why didn't you, like, tell me I was doing that?" she hissed in a whispered tone to her girly best friend.

Lian chuckled under her breath. "Because I was seriously wanting to see how far you would go, until I couldn't resist. Why don't you ask him out already? You clearly like him."

Amy was aghast. "I do not! It's . . . I don't have a choice. I'm just so dang sweet all the time. It's like I can't *not* be nice. It doesn't mean I like him."

Lian cocked her head like an owl examining its meek prey. "Oh, of course. Judging from those drawings and love hearts, you don't like him at all. Just his face, his expressions, his personality, and . . . *his body.*"

"Shh! You'll get us in trouble for talking."

"At least I'm not *fantasising*," she teased.

"Oh just . . . shut your mouth . . . please?"

Lian giggled. "Oh, my sweet Amy. You are just too good for this earth. I can't wait until you stop fighting this crush and get with that cute man. A Baker in love with a baker, and a dessert baker at that! It's just too sweet. Oh, and your babies would be way too cute."

She did not just say that.

"I am not having his babies. Why would you even bring that up? I'm, like, way too young, and I'm not meant to be a mother or get pregnant at all, and - and - and it's Felipe! No way!"

"Oh really?"

Lian grabbed the book and flung it open again, then jabbed her finger lower down the page to where Amy hadn't looked before. She squeaked like a mouse when she realised the *other* doodle she had drawn: a cartoon representation of herself holding a little baby and grinning broadly like a proud young mom. The baby's hair had an exaggerated, almost impossible black curl to it, one that was *just like Felipe's hair*.

"Not thinking about babies, huh?"

Amy turned so red she might as well have been a traffic light. It was a good thing the lecture ended then and there, because she needed to practically *leap* from the theatre, much to Lian's amusement.

A baby. I drew myself with Felipe's baby! What is wrong with me?

The very thought was horrifying, even as a weird warmth flowed through her. Her body *could* get pregnant. It really could. She could make babies. Felipe's babies, or any man's really. It was weird to think about, but as usual her new sweet personality dipped into the future possibilities a little too deeply.

Babies are so damn cute. I could have my own baby. I could teach them to be a little chef in the kitchen and - and - and what the heck am I thinking! I'm a total loner!

At least, Aaron Smith was supposed to be a loner. Amy Baker instead quickly found Lian again as they headed out for lunch. It was just too hard to resist good company, even when they drove you up the wall.

Just like someone else I obviously can't stop thinking about.

Something was slowly changing in the dynamic between Amy and Felipe, and everyone could see it. As the months passed and she tried to fight against her obvious attraction to her father's apprentice, their work lives bled into their personal lives. Felipe was surprisingly sharp academically, and in return for all her aid with his growing expertise in baking, he actually offered to help her study as well. Normally she did this with Lian, and when she brought up the possibility of bringing Felipe along for a study session with her girlfriends, they all enthusiastically agreed.

Only for all of them to oh-so-conveniently bail at the last second, leaving Felipe and her together in the park, her wearing a cute flowery yellow dress and him looking oddly professional with his ironed blue shirt and dark jeans.

"So . . . I don't think your friends are coming," Felipe said.

Amy looked at her phone, trying to avoid squeaking - as she was prone to do - when she saw the messages on the chat.

*WOOPS! Forget to come, hehe. Guess you'll just have to have a sexy DATE GRRL
Tell us how it goes, Amy! Make that serious boy smile!*

He's hot. If u don't get him Ames, I'll seriously go for it. I've got binoculars nearby.

Don't try to find meee!

Amy was left as enraged as she was embarrassed, and even more of both when she realised Felipe was looking over her shoulder.

"Ah, I see" he said flatly, as if playing the straight man in a hit comedy. "So this is a date."

"It's not! It's just . . . a prank."

And then he surprised her. Instead of calling it off, her just sighed, then gave a brief smirk. "Well, I've got an hour to keep being pranked, and my legs are jumpy besides. Want to keep walking? With me, I mean."

"Like . . . like a date?" she said.

"You just said it was a prank."

"It is!"

He shrugged. "So we'll make it not a date, just two people separately walking together."

That . . . sounds really nice actually, she thought, before voicing the opinion aloud. *God, will he, like, take my hand? Put his hand around my waist? Ohhhh, why am I stuck imagining this?*

But instead he just walked alongside her, and it was quite peaceful indeed. They didn't talk; she didn't know what to say, and Felipe could be infuriating in how long he could go without saying anything at all. He was nothing if not being stoic. Amy's phone buzzed again.

Pls tell me ur having sex right now and that's y ur not responding. GET WITH HIM ALREADY!!!

She huffed, but contained any visible embarrassment.

"Who was that?"

"It's just my friends being stupid," Amy said, shoving her phone away in her pocket. "Ugh, I am so getting her back with this. Lian, I mean."

"Oh, how? Are you going to smile meanly at her? Maybe only be a *little* nice to her?"

"What - what is that supposed to mean?"

Felipe put his hands in his pockets and began walking through the sunlit park. The flowers were in full bloom, making it a multicoloured and quite vibrant sight to take in. It almost made it difficult for the baker's daughter to remain agitated and on guard.

"Oh, nothing," Felipe said. "Just that you don't really have a mean bone in your body."

"I have plenty of mean bones!" she protested. "All of them can be mean, even my pinky!"

She jabbed it lightly into his side, making him jump for a moment. It left him with a smirk, and her actually giggling at the ridiculousness of the action.

"Okay, maybe you've got a point. At least I'm not all dour and rude like you."

"Please, I'm not rude. I'm just . . . realistic."

"Sounds like snobbery to me," she replied. "You'd look on a beautiful place like this and still think the roses didn' smell right."

"I don't smell roses," he said.

"You don't smell anything! You don't savour anything!"

He frowned. They were alone on the park trail, which was a good thing as she would be making herself quite the scene of attention by this point. But something was working up within her that she couldn't hold back.

"What do you mean I don't savour anything?"

She balled her fists, halting on the path and turning to face him. She was short compared to Felipe, but the anger of her previously large self leapt out of her.

“You’re always lashing out and getting frustrated and pushing other people away! It’s like you’re so scared to let anyone in because of some alpha-male bullsh-poo. And you need to be perfect all the time and just won’t let yourself fail, and when you *do* fail you blame everyone else like it’s not your fault, and you lash out and make everyone hate you! And you don’t even realise it, because you’re drinking and smoking and thinking you’re the best chef around, and that making pastries and desserts is beneath you, and they’re not! They make the world sweet, and you should have seen this years ago, Aaron!”

She paused.

Felipe paused.

The wind, as if drawn to the call of good drama, also paused. Even the birds seemed to fall briefly silent.

Did I just . . . did I just use my old name? How did I do that? And why did I do that?

Felipe managed to press his lips back together to form words. They spelled out *Aaron*, as if he were making an impossible connection, only to discard it. For that brief, terrifying moment, Amy had feared that he had somehow, improbably, realised that she was his old, bullying boss. Instead, he refocused upon her.

“Amy, that rant wasn’t really about me, was it?”

Tears began to bubble up in her eyes.

“Just - just leave me alone, okay!”

She began to move away.

“You don’t want to walk with me?”

But she was already moving, faster and faster, breaking into a run.

“I didn’t want any of this!” she declared, trying to keep her thoughts from flinging themselves from left to right to left again in her brain. It was all too much. Her words. Her feelings. The things she had expressed.

I was so horrible as Aaron, so unhappy. How did I not see it? How did I not know until I became a girl.

But then another thought bubbled up, despite all her resistance. Despite all her desire to keep its obvious truth contained.

And how did I not realise how much I’ve started to want Felipe?

Chapter 6: This is Even More Awkward

To Amy’s eternal gratitude, Felipe never did bring up that day, even as the weeks and months rolled by. Even when he grew frustrated at her cheeriness or emotional nature, or she teased him about feeding her well due to a number of baking failures, he never

mentioned the mysterious 'Aaron' at all. If it wasn't for the fact that she knew him better, she would almost have thought he'd forgotten all about what she'd said. But she *did* know him better, and his respectful silence only made her more enamoured with his presence despite her inner reluctance.

And so, as time began to fly by, so too did they begin their 'not-dates' more and more. It started out as just walks in the park, as well as generally studying together, but over time they began to do other things, like grab a bite to eat outside of the cafe, or even see a movie together. The last was an often amusing circumstance. Amy's old male self had only really liked gritty, serious affairs, often with an excess of shock value. Now though, stuck in her soon-to-be nineteen year old body, Amy instead couldn't help but fall to the allure of the silly, the feminine, the pink.

In short, the *Barbie* movie was clearly calling, and she spent the entire time howling with laughter, even more than other women due to the film's humour working for her ditzzy self. The gender commentary alone cracked her up: who better to appreciate the jokes about men versus women than a girl who had managed to find herself in both categories? She left the cinema wearing a bright pink pair of pants and a bright pink shirt, her glasses pink just like Margot Robbie's from the film. She couldn't help but beam from ear to ear, a little jumpy from how much deliciously sugary soda she had consumed across the running time.

"Well, I can tell someone enjoyed that," Felipe said with a wry smirk.

"Obviously! Oh my God, I still can't stop giggling. You had to have enjoyed it, right?"

Felipe gave an ambiguous shrug. "It was . . . less bad than I thought it would be. It got a couple of chuckles, I won't lie. But I usually go for history stuff. Or action films."

"Ugh, way too much violence for me," she said. "Though I could, like, totally watch a historical romance."

"Naturally. You do like a good romance."

"Of course I do! Everyone loves a good, sweet romance, even people who claim they don't secretly want it. Especially them, actually. I'm . . ."

I'm finding that out myself, she thought, trying not to look at him too adoringly. *I'm really finding that out. I can't stop falling into the gravity of your orbit, you silly, serious, gorgeous man.*

It was something she was still grappling with. Everyone from Lian to her parents to a random waitress on a lunch date last week had been encouraging the pair of them to get together. Felipe either shot it down with a hard and simple 'no,' or otherwise just pretended not to notice the hopeful views of those around him. Even as he took on greater skill in his baking, to the point where Amy was less and less vital, he still kept her around, clearly desiring her presence. But, to her own growing disappointment (and what a confusing disappointment it was for the former man), he clearly didn't want anything more. Her

attraction to him was obvious, and she could have sworn that he liked to check her out as well - she was cute as a damn button, after all. But she was never going to make the first move, being too crippled by her vestigial male ego clinging on stubbornly, not to mention her own giddy nervousness. It would have to be him. Only . . . he didn't seem interested.

Those thoughts swirled in Amy's mind as they exited out of the cinema and walked towards Felipe's car. He was often the driver for the pair of them, though apparently Daddy had given him quite the talking to about being safe and responsible with his daughter.

And he always has made me safe. Heck, I feel positively gooey these days. I'm such a darn girly girl now, I swear.

To her surprise, he paused when they both got in the car.

"Is everything okay?" she asked.

"Yeah," he replied, fidgeting slightly. "I don't know, that comment you made about romance before, did you really mean it?"

"Sure," she said. "I mean, I didn't used to believe it. I think I'm, like, only just rediscovering it. Everyone wants love. Like, I super did not realise how good it was to have such loving parents before, and now I do. And friends like Lian! And - and you, as well!"

He waved a hand, somewhat dismissively. "You weren't talking about love like that. You were talking about *romance*. Do you really believe that everyone actually wants it? That it's all just sweet and easy like that?"

Amy frowned. She wasn't sure what was going on here. "N-no," she stammered. "I just mean that, you know, everyone wants it. They need it. Even, like, super serious types like you, silly."

Felipe was silent for a good while longer than Amy was comfortable with. She could see the thoughts battling within him. For once, she actually managed to sit still, letting herself wait until he was done.

"That's your cinnamon roll romance," he said.

"It's - what's wrong with cinnamon rolls?"

He chuckled. "Nothing! Especially now that you've helped me so much with mine. But . . . I don't know. I just don't know sometimes, Amy. I swear, sometimes I feel like the reason I spend so much time with you is because I just want to see what makes you tick. How you maintain that gooey, chocolatey sweet centre of yours. Despite everything. Though I guess if you've had a relatively privileged, loving life, it's easy to view things that way."

"My life hasn't been that easy," she protested.

"It has compared to mine." He put up a hand before she could protest again. "Not that I'm trying to make it a competition. I'm not trying to put you down, Amy. Really. Just the opposite: I realised the other day that even though I could end our deal now - I'm more confident baking than ever, and we both know it - I didn't want to. I wanted to keep your

company. I wanted . . . I guess I wanted that bit of sweetness you add in the air, annoying giggles and ditzzy dances and kindness and everything.”

He likes my ditzzy dances? I mean, he claims he doesn't, but he just smiled now and I know I saw him smirking the other day when-

She jolted herself back into the present as he continued talking.

“You’re this happy-go-lucky person who sees the best in everything and everyone, and that’s refreshing. It’s like an escape from reality, but it’s not reality. Not to me, at least.”

She hesitated, hovering her hand over his arm before deciding to place it there.

“What do you mean?”

“Look, cards on the table,” he said. “Do you remember when you said those strange things to me, a couple of months ago.”

Oh God, I am blushing already. He hadn't brought it up at all!

“Don’t worry, we don’t need to talk about whatever happened to you,” he said. “It’s just that, what you said was my first clue that maybe you weren’t entirely privileged. That you were a real person who had skeletons in the closet. I don’t need to know what they are - I mean that - but I do know that since then I started seeing you in a new light. And when you said the name ‘Aaron,’ it reminded me of my own Aaron. You always complain about me being dour, but I wasn’t always. Sure, I’ve been stoic and whatever, but I used to be more optimistic and fun. I really was. But someone I worked for crushed that out of me. He’s the reason I can’t get work at any other bakery. He’s the reason I’ve got no fucking confidence, Amy. He’s the reason my last relationship - the romance you were talking about - crumbled into the fucking ground. He was an asshole chef named Aaron Smith, and he ruined my fucking life. And ever since him, I guess I’ve just never been able to be properly happy again.”

The revelation hit Amy like a ton of bricks. No, even that would not describe it. An *avalanche* of bricks would be more accurate. She actually shivered in her seat, visibly squirming in discomfort and shame.

I did this to him. All this time I've been trying to get him to open up and not be so down, and I was the one who had broken him in the first place.

“I’m sorry,” she said, extending a hand and placing it over his.

Felipe looked at her with confusion. “You’ve got nothing to be sorry about.”

But the tears just kept on coming. “No, I do. I’m so, so sorry. I’m sorry for everything, Felipe. For pushing you all the time. For making you mad. For being a terrible gi-friend. For not being what you needed me to be.”

He clasped her hand back, and again she had to marvel at the strength of it.

“You don’t have to be sorry about anything, Amy. That bastard taught me everything I need to know about life. I’m just glad you never met him. I hope your own Aaron wasn’t as terrible. If he was, then I guess you’re a stronger person than I am.”

“I’m not,” she said miserably, placing her hands back into her lap. “I’m really not.”

“Please, of course you are. Don’t let me get you down. I’m . . . I’m a fucking broken person at times, Amy. Sometimes I feel like that damn chef destroyed me. But I do feel things around you, at least. I would never want to bring you down to where I am. I’d much rather feel lifted up in your presence. You do that for me more than, well, more than you know.”

A tension revealed itself in the air. A second tension. Amy’s thoughts, usually frantic and excitable, now seemed to fall into an almost hypnotised, foggy calm.

More than I know? What does he mean by that? It’s like he’s reaching out to me and-

It happened slowly, and quickly. It was all at once, and it was drawn out. Like two celestial bodies that had been orbiting one another for some time, their shared gravity drawing them ever closer, the pair finally came together. Amy didn’t even mean to do it. She doubted Felipe even meant to do it either.

They simply kissed.

There, sitting in his car, waiting in the parking lot, they kissed.

It was the most romantic and exciting and unexpected thing.

His lips . . . they taste so good. So wonderful on mine. I want him to hold me. I want him. I want to make it all up to you, Felipe.

She unbuckled her seatbelt with one flailing arm, reaching around to cup his face as he continued to kiss her, and he did the same. Their lips parted for mere moments before colliding again. Amy daringly placed a hand on his chest, sampling the strong pectoral muscle there and savouring his firmness, his strength. He ran his fingers through her short pixie cut before sliding them back to hold her neck with just a touch of firmness. That made her shiver again, this time in delight.

I knew I was submissive, but God, to feel him feel me like that! Ohhhh!

She moaned aloud, just a little, a small squeak of excitement that left her roaming her hands over him. It was intense. It was romantic. It was *right* in a way that her former self could never have imagined. This man who she had broken and betrayed and beaten down, now she was helping make him whole.

“Hey! Hey! Get a room, you two!”

A loud series of teenage giggles echoed from outside the car. Felipe pulled back immediately, and Amy did so too after a delay. A number of teen boys and their giggling girlfriends were walking past, grinning at their display.

Oh. Em. Gee. This is, like, so embarrassing.

In all the arousing embrace, she had somehow managed to get a bra strap loosened over her shoulder. Or had he done that? The thought galled and excited her at the same time. Her nipples were stiff with arousal, pushing against the material of her bra, and she was suddenly very aware of a slight dampness between her legs.

This body is way too horny! Wasn't a bit of self-pleasure enough this morning?

The teenagers left, still laughing. Amy turned to look at Felipe, who had gone a bit pale.

"Hey, are you okay? Felipe? I hope that wasn't too embarrassing?"

He shook his head. "No, it was just . . . I should drive you home."

"Look, we can talk about what just happened. I know you wanted to kiss me. And I wanted you, and -"

"I'll drive you home. I'm sorry about that."

He reversed the car out, keeping stoic and silent once more. The air was chilly between them, and Amy had to squash any cruel thoughts from her formerly male mind, the kind that would enrage Felipe into replying. Instead, she squirmed awkwardly in her seat, not wanting to do anything to upset him. Not out of fear, of course. Felipe was seriously but deeply gentle.

No, she thought. I just don't want to hurt him any more.

When he pulled up outside of *Baker's Life*, she tried one last time to salvage what had just happened. She got out of the car but moved to his side of it. He rolled down the window as she stood upon the sidewalk.

"Look, those teens were just being silly. Felipe, I don't regret what just happened. A few months ago I wouldn't have believed it, but kissing you just then felt right. I . . . I want to go out with you. As your girlfriend."

The words burned as they escaped her. It was like a baptism of fire; the acceptance of being a woman, of being *Amy Baker*, came with accepting that she wanted to remain as her, and to be with this wonderful, wounded man.

Felipe didn't even meet her gaze.

"I'm sorry I let this happen, Amy. I like you. I . . . I really, really like you. Which is why it's best for me not to be with you. I don't want to spoil any more shit. And . . . I think it's best we end our deal. It's more than time enough we did so. Sorry."

And with that, he drove off.

Amy barely made it inside the cafe, before Claude and Melissas - her parents - serving their customers, before she immediately burst into tears.

"Sugarcube? Amy? Are you okay?"

But she had to run past her father and straight up the stairs. She simply couldn't face them. It was all too much, and her body was high on a conflicting mix of arousal, anxiety,

attraction and rejection. She slammed her door shut and flung herself dramatically upon her pillowy bed. And then, like a stereotypical young woman of her type, she began to cry into her pillow.

Damn this stupid female body! Why do I have feel so much!?! Why do I have to care!?! Why did that woman do this to me!?!

But the truth was, she knew, the pain was a good pain. For the first time in her life, she was truly caring about someone else. It had taken becoming a young woman to finally feel that compassion, and for a while now she had tasted the sweet sugar of that empathy.

Now, she was tasting its sourness.

It was the cost of caring.

A few minutes later, when the worst of the crying was over, her father visited her. He knocked upon the door, and she couldn't resist letting him in. He sat down on the bed beside her, rubbing her back as she lay there, as if she were a child and not about to turn nineteen.

"Felipe?" he finally said, as if psychically reading her.

She nodded. "I thought he loved me. I think he does. But he's hurting, and I don't know how to fix him. He just pushed me away when I try."

Another silence passed as her Daddy considered his words.

"Fixing him may not be the issue, kiddo. I've often found that accepting is the better path. Fixing is just . . . something you do yourself when you keep yourself close to people who care about you. He's a good man, for now that should be enough. And you're a good woman, Amy."

"I'm not. I'm the worst."

"You're not."

"I used to be a total brat."

"Well, I'd remember if that were the case. But even if you were, so what? You're not a brat now, are you? Are you?"

Slowly, she shook her head. *God, why couldn't I have had parents like this when I was in my first life?*

"N-no. I guess not."

Her father chuckled. "Of course you aren't. Felipe is a young man with some problems on his plate. That doesn't make them yours."

"But I want to help him."

"Maybe . . . maybe he just needs time, sugarcube. Maybe that's all he needs."

"I'm just so worried about him."

He tapped her shoulder, and she turned her head to gaze into his kind eyes.

"Sugarcube, what am I always saying about a good souffle?"

Amy smiled, wiping away her stray tears. “That once it’s in the oven. It will either rise, or won’t. But worrying about it won’t do anything.”

He nudged her chin affectionately. “Then let’s let Felipe rise or not on his own time, shall we? For now, let’s not worry about it. You focus on yourself.”

I think . . . wow, that’s probably good advice. Maybe that’s what Mrs Cheng was trying to get me to do all along.

Claude left her to mull it over. The sting of Felipe’s words was still there, but it was just that: a sting. No longer a wound.

“I’ll focus on myself,” she said. “And see what comes.”

Chapter 7: Healing

Amy did just as she promised herself. From that day forward, she focused purely on herself and her own development. In many ways, despite having been a woman for over eight months by that point, she was still pretty new to it. Oh, sure, there were the compulsions to wear cute summer dresses and shirts and rainbow-coloured stockings, as well as to style her makeup and act in a feminine manner. But compulsion thanks to magic was not the same as *embracing* her new life, and while she had *accepted* her new existence, there were still steps to go until she could truly say she loved her life and was ready to leave behind the old one.

So that’s exactly what I’ll do, she thought to herself the next day. I’ll work on embracing it. I’ll take all the steps I need, and I’ll make myself into the Amy Baker the rest of the world sees: the sweet, kind-hearted and way-too-sugary girl, with perhaps a little bit of ditzy humour to her. And I’ll leave Aaron Smith behind for good. I won’t get caught up in the past like Felipe has. I’ll move forward.

And move forward she did. When her nineteenth birthday arrived, Amy decided this would be the date of her full rebirth into Amy Baker *for good*. So instead of just having a private celebration with her family, the former male decided to invite *everyone*.

Lian.

Jessica.

Eric.

Kaley.

Piper.

Yunis.

The whole gang, including some people she had only just started getting along with, like the adorably nerdy Tina from her psych tutor, as well as Isla from the mall clothing store where she got fitted for her birthday dress. It was an amusingly spontaneous moment for her, but Amy was embracing her new spontaneity, and so it felt right.

“Oh, wow!” Isla laughed as she checked the measurements one last time. “I mean, sure! I’ll come along. How could I resist my favourite customer?”

Naturally, the celebrations were dominated by *magnificent* desserts. Not up to her father’s standard, of course, but she didn’t want Daddy to be working for her birthday, nor her Mama. Instead, her birthday was held in the park where she and Felipe often walked, complete with a cutesy picnic theme. Everyone invited only had to bring a dessert or sweet of their choice to add to the festivities, though a few couldn’t help but give her some presents. Yunis purchased her a yoga mat - she’d been meaning to get into it as a means of calming herself. She hugged him deeply for that. Jessica got her the cutest pair of shoes. They worked so well she immediately put them on, not caring that parks weren’t exactly high heel friendly. And Lian, best friend that she was, got her some jewellery - a gorgeous sparkling necklace and cute jangling bracelets. It was the kind of present that made her think her bestie was somehow psychic.

“How did you know I totally, like, wanted these?” she asked after putting them on and settling the necklace pendant in the small dip between her breasts.

“Oh, I just had a feeling,” Lian said. “Actually, this lady convinced me when I went to the store: she mentioned that the best friend for a girl was diamonds. And if you can’t afford diamonds, then go for sparkle, I say! She practically insisted I get them for you: she said they were an important step to becoming a true woman.”

This woman, I wonder if she was . . . no. It couldn’t be.

Amy put any concerns out of her mind. Her father, despite being told he didn’t have to bake, unleashed a tidal wave of desserts to join the others, and the group laughed and gossiped and caught up with one another all while treating themselves to muffins, cupcakes, cookies and cream, and one excellent black forest cake.

The best treat, however, was a panookie she recognised. It was just for her, made to perfect by Felipe, who had arrived late but arrived all the same.

“Thank you,” she said.

He nodded. “I thought . . . I owed you that, at least.”

“I guess you really don’t need me in the kitchen anymore!”

He frowned a little, and she realised she’d said the wrong thing. But the moment passed amicably.

“I’m glad you’re having fun with your friends.”

“Of course I am. I’m with one right now. Come join us.”

“Oh, I can’t stay for long, I’ve got to-”

“Nonsense!”

She grabbed him by the arm and pulled him over, and he only hesitated slightly.

“We may be taking a pause or whatever this is between us, but I refuse to let a single person go hungry or alone on my own special day. Consider it the Amy Baker birthday wish. Now come and join in!”

And, to his credit, he did. Felipe did not join the celebrations into the night, when Amy and her friends actually visited a club. She didn’t expect him to, but was slightly disappointed all the same. In truth, it wasn’t quite her scene. The booming pop music was awesome, but she was still too young to drink, even in moderation, and while it felt super freeing and feminine to wear a cute blue club dress that showed off her lovely hips and let her dance, this was more Lian and Jessica’s thing than her own. She giggled and laughed with them, embracing her changed life, but she quickly realised that without Felipe it wasn’t quite so fun.

I would have loved to have seen that overly serious dork try his moves on the dance floor. I bet he’s secretly quite the silly drunk.

Still, it was a wonderful night overall, and the first time Amy could claim to have more than just resignation and acceptance of her body. As she danced, her breasts bouncing her in her dress top, her female form on display in a fashion it never had before, her legs largely bare or all to see (and men were seeing, which only added to the mood of the scene), she felt a *confidence* in herself.

I never could have danced like this before!

Amy’s journey towards healing continued. She became even girlier, embracing this part of herself that a year ago she would have been ashamed of. Feminine self-care was now second-nature to her, right down to shaving her legs and armpits, adapting and styling her makeup, and fixing up her hair. Admittedly, having a pixie cut made that easier, but she was growing it out more now to a very cute bob style. She moved in a more womanly manner, uncaring how her hips swung a little with her step, and even more so when she wore heels, though that was only for special occasions. She occasionally experimented with bras, and even adopted a sports bra for morning runs through the park now that she no longer went with Felipe. Her chest still jiggled, but ‘the girls’ were overall pretty secured. She got a few comments from men, some quite unwelcome, but this too was part of being a woman that she had come to accept. She was quite pretty, and therefore some men would be pigs.

It's not right, and I won't pretend it is either. But I can't say I, like, don't deserve some kind of punishment. I used to say such horrid things about girls just like me, especially when I was drunk!

So long as she was safe, therefore, she could live with it. The same went with other unwelcome parts of being a woman. She had experienced her darn menstrual cycle quite a few times now, but that didn't mean the monthly shedding of her uterus' lining was any more fun. Hers was a heavy flow, and she would lay on the bed writhing from the cramps, her mother bringing her an ice pack or a heat pack depending on what she needed at the time.

"Th-thanks, Mama," she told Melissa. "You're the b-best."

"Oh, my poor sweetness, I wish I could take this pain from you. Don't worry, you'll get through it."

"Ughh, I still hate it. This part of being a woman will always suck."

"Well, there's two ways out of it, young miss, as you well know."

Amy's mind considered this. "One is, like, menopause. No thank you to hot flashes! But what's the other one?"

Her Mom chuckled lightly. "Well, I'm not putting it under advisement, but I can certainly say that the nine months I carried you had its difficulties, but at least there were no periods!"

Oh, yeah, she thought. I can get knocked up. I keep forgetting that. Ugh, weird as it is, I almost want to blow up with babies just to get past this awful period!

Thankfully, those days would pass, and she would get ahold of herself and be back at college. Lian continued to help her through her psychology course, and she passed with solid distinctions by the end of the year. It still wasn't her greatest passion, but anything that made her Daddy proud made her proud of herself.

And besides, I can, like, understand my own mind more now. The anger I was redirecting and projecting, complete with all that self-loathing. And then how I've used positive reinforcement to make myself happier and better!

It still wasn't what she wanted to *do*. When her father asked her what might be in her future, not that there was any pressure just yet, of course, the same image continued to conjure up in her mind: her and Felipe in a bakery together. Him constructing the desserts and she serving them out and charging the customers, the pair of them a finely tuned working machine. Naturally, though she was discovering herself and her passions during this time, she still hadn't stopped being smitten with Felipe Rossi. In those same daydreams, the bakery was also filled with love.

And babies, she thought late at night over a year after her transformation. We'd make such cute - ew! No! Even for the new me, that's a bit much. Is - isn't it?

Yet it was undeniably intriguing as a thought, the notion of blooming with life inside of her. She was still young of course, and technically single, but it became yet another little daydream she possessed late at nights when she need to 'sort herself out.' Where once she had imagined a hot man on top of her, now she imagined Felipe. And sometimes she didn't just picture Felipe sliding himself deep inside her, but actually *impregnating her*. Perhaps it was just the utter taboo of a former man getting knocked up, but it made her giddy, as did the thought of little babies. When Aunt Lira came to visit and brought her new bub, Amy found herself utterly swooning over the sleeping thing, and during that weekend she was almost more in Amy's arms than her Aunt's.

She's just so cute! Look at those little features! How could I have ever thought that having children was a waste of time!? I want one, oh gosh I really want one!

It was only days later that she came down a bit from that particular baby craze. Felipe had found it incredibly amusing. He caught her sighing as Claude and Melissa said goodbye to Lira outside. She was in the main cafe floor, closed over an hour ago. Felipe had been running it since Claude had increasingly given him the freedom to prove himself.

"One would think *you* were the mother," he said as he cleaned..

"Oh, if only!" she replied, drawing closer to him. "I mean, not really. I'd only want babies with someone special. You know, someone who was the love of my life. And even then I'm not, like, totally sure. But they're just so cute!"

He smirked. "Well, I don't quite see the appeal myself."

"Oh yes, you're all about the 'solo life.' You've already given me the whole spiel about *that*."

"It's not just that. It's . . . ah, never mind. It is that, I suppose. I just don't see myself being a father."

She nudged him playfully. "Well, even if you don't, I think you'd be a terrific one. Either way, you deserve to have *something* in your life, Felipe. Or *someone*."

"Amy, you know my thoughts on this. It's been months, but my mind hasn't-"

To her own surprise, she put up a hand to silence him. Perhaps it was an old instinct from her Aaron Smith life. "I know, I know. Look, Felipe, you know my feelings for you. You that I . . . I like you. I like you a lot, actually. I like your face, I like how totally kissable your lips are. I like how silly-serious you get, but also how dedicated you are. And I like how kind and passionate you are, even when you, well, try to hide that away. But! I'm not going to wait for you, either. If you want to move on from what happened in the past, I'll help you. I . . . I owe you that. If you want to just be friends and make sweets together, I'll be right there too . . . though I'll still be totally checking out your amazing butt when you aren't looking."

"I have an amazing butt?"

"That's not relevant," she said, giving a cheshire cat grin.

“I mean, it sounds like-”

“Anyway, my point is that I want you, Felipe. I do. And I think you, like, really want me too. But you’ve got your own issues, and I know I can help you through them, if you let me in. I can’t make you take that step though. So . . . you tell me when you’re ready to talk. I’ll keep eating your sweets in the meanwhile though. I mean, they’re pretty dang good these days!”

Felipe seemed to look at her in a new light. Taking advantage of the moment, she squeezed his hand gently, then gave him a light peck on the cheek.

God I want more, but this is as far as I can go.

“I’ll be right here,” she said, smiling sweetly.

“Well, I figured that. It’s your house.”

“Oh. Oh yeah. Well, I’ll be right here, in my house.”

Felipe considered this. “Okay. Thank you Amy.”

It was a colder dismissal than she’d imagined or even hoped for, but it wasn’t entirely without warmth either. Again, he seemed to be regarding her somewhat differently, as if weighing her up in his mind, seeing something he hadn’t noticed before. But it wasn’t her job to puzzle that out. That was Felipe’s job. She left him to his obsessive kitchen work.

Though she did grab a cheeky glazed donut on the way out.

Can you blame me? He’s getting sooooo good at this!

Chapter 8: The Souffle Rises

Sometimes major life events unfold dramatically, as if in a television show or major motion picture. Other times, however - and this is far more common, Amy knew - they simply occurred slowly over time, a gradual change that only seemed inevitable in hindsight. As much as she had been turned into a woman in a single moment of a single day, other significant shifts had accumulated across many months and moons. This was the case for her life before. She had become an alcoholic and smoker over a length of time, and she couldn’t rightly say when she had stopped being cynical and frustrated and instead become cruel and bullying. But after her change, there were other shifts that had slowly seeped into her life, and with far better results.

Her slow acceptance and then love of her new dress sense.

Her waning embarrassment over her explorations of her feminised body.

Her compulsion to be friends with Lian and Jessica and the others, as well as her connection to her parents, going from something forced upon her to something she willingly embraced and cherished.

And, of course, her genuine love for Felipe.

As time passed, and winter settled in, and she began to wear cute pastel pink or orange coats and sweaters, dancing with Lian in the snow and making her father chortle when she made snow angels in the lot behind the cafe, she continued to hope that her former employee-turned-love interest would make some great dramatic shift to bring him back to her. Instead, the slow drawing of their orbits back together was incremental and inevitable.

It began, she suspected, on the first snowy day of that winter. Amy had found that she loved the snow, but she was shocked to find Felipe joining her once again on her walks.

"I hope you don't mind me joining?" he asked.

"Not at all," she said with a smile. "I thought you'd given up doing this."

"I like the snow," he explained. "And . . . I guess I missed this. Just a little."

She decided not to tease him too much, or to draw it out either. Instead, she simply kept a companionable silence . . . for five minutes. After that, it was fair game to pepper him with all kinds of questions. He didn't seem to mind too much, because he joined her on walks again after that.

There were no other major signs, just little ones. Felipe began to occasionally get her to test his baking creations before he ever considered putting them before Claude. When Amy missed the bus to college, he was there to offer a ride, and from that day was there to drive her to campus several times a week when his schedule permitted. When he fell ill, he actually let her drop off some cough medicine and treats to his apartment doorstep.

"Thanks," he said, in a rather snotty voice. "You didn't have to do this but . . . thanks."

"No problem!" she announced. "I've also put some books there too, so you've got something to read. I know you love reading when you've got the time."

"I - thank you, Amy. I don't know if romance books are quite up to m-"

"Just give one a try, and you'll see!"

Well, she hadn't entirely misjudged the situation. Felipe did end up reading her books, though it was obvious he didn't fall in love with them. Still, the fact that he endeavoured told her something, and it touched her deeply.

I think he's getting better, she thought to herself when he returned to the cafe. *He's even humming to himself as he makes up delicious desserts. Since when did he do that?*

Lian was clearly pleased about all these developments when Amy told her.

"Now it's time to seduce him! Wear a cute dress! Put on something sexy!"

But Amy just shook her head. “He knows how I feel, and I think I’m cute as a button enough already. I just want him to have time. I’ll be there for him when he’s ready.”

Not that patience is, like, my best strength, not as Aaron and still not as Amy. But I can do this. For him.

She didn’t have to wait too long. It was just a couple of weeks after her twentieth birthday. It had been a smaller family event booked at a fine restaurant, and both Felipe and Lian had also attended. Lian had given up her seat so that Felipe could be next to Amy, and the entire time they chatted, the rest of the world falling away as they compared tastes and smells and dish arrangements, especially the layout of the dessert menu the restaurant offered. She caught her Daddy’s smile a few times, but he said nothing. But for the first time in a long time, it felt like their little unit was knitting itself back together.

Especially when Felipe revealed his own present for her: a specially crafted box of donuts he’d made himself, with the most perfect mix of glazes imaginable.

“This is the best birthday present I have ever received,” she said, hugging him tightly. This time, he hugged her right back.

A week later, and the store was closed while her parents were visiting friends. It was just Felipe in the kitchen and Amy was enjoying the warmth of the cafe space. She watched him work, and as he became frustrated again and again by a failure, she worried that he was about to become pentup and angry, as she had once been. But instead, before that could happen, he looked up to her instead, and it was as if her presence calmed him.

“Hey, Amy,” he said, scratching the back of his head almost nervously. “Can I get your advice on these eclairs?”

Yes. Yes. YES YES YES YESSSSSS!

She barely kept the excitement from her face. “I would love to,” she said in her plainest possible voice. She suspected she was fooling nobody, but she managed to work in a companionable nature with him, tasting his prototypes and giving suggestions, and even ribbing him over his obsessive perfectionism.

She stood and walked over to him. Outside the rain began to fall gently, then more powerful. The gale was gusty, and the promise of a storm lingered upon the horizon.

“I feel like I’ve got no idea what I’m doing,” Felipe admitted, gesturing to his various eclairs, some of which were in a state of disarray.

“They don’t look too bad,” she said, examining them. She nibbled on one. “Mhmm, so nice! But I think I see what you mean. They could be a little more sweet, couldn’t they? There’s a secret ingredient missing. But what is it?”

She wracked her brain, Felipe silently watching her. Outside the storm slowly gathered strength, the quiet rumbling emanating, shaking the windows just subtly. There was no one out on the streets, and the interior of the cafe, even in the kitchen, was lacking light.

"I was thinking it just needs more cream," Felipe said.

"No, that's not it. More butter?"

"Tried that. More chocolate too."

"Maybe it's, like, the pastry element? Your teeth need to sink through it."

"Hmm, that could be it. I was thinking of ditching the strawberry bit."

"Don't you dare," she teased. "You know how much I love strawberry and-"

KRA-KOOOOM

Amy *yelped*. The lightning had flashed brilliantly, but the enormous shock of thunder that followed shortly thereafter made her quite literally jump, reaching out for the only thing that could protect her. Naturally, this was Felipe.

"Are you okay?" he asked as she pulled herself against him. He carefully patted her on the back.

"I - I feel like an idiot," she said, giggling. "Afraid of thunder!"

I'm so much more jumpy than I was, that's for sure. But Felipe is so protective. He'd keep me safe against anything . . .

That thought stayed with her as she looked up to her friend's handsome face, adoration in her eyes. Another flash of lightning followed, then another loud crash of thunder, and it gave her a better excuse to keep holding onto him. Slowly, his arms enveloped her, comforting her.

"It's okay to be afraid," he said gently. "I'm afraid all the time."

"What could you be afraid of?"

"You, mostly," he said.

"Me? I'm tiny and cute as a button!"

He smirked. "And you see right through me."

They held their shared gaze a little longer. There was no signal, no clear statement. It was just two orbits finally circling close enough to make do on their attraction. There was another flash of lightning, and when the follow up rumble came, Amy was already kissing Felipe, lips brushing lovingly against his, her hands encircling him tight.

Mhmmm . . . I've waited so long. It's finally happening.

He kissed her again, and then again. There were no words between them, just a tender communication of body signals as he cupped her face, holding it against his. She moaned a little, her nipples stiffening, her lower regions beginning to develop a strong arousal. She felt a stiffening from Felipe also, and this just made her all the more turned on.

“I want you,” he said, and it was the sexiest thing she’d ever heard anyone say. He said it like it was fact, as simple as stating that the sky was blue and water was wet.

He wants me, and that’s that. And I want you, you gorgeous man!

Slowly, he began to unzip her jacket. She untied his apron. They continued to kiss, almost inextricable from one another as they began to discard their clothing. Their hands roamed over one another further, hers exploring his strong chest, and his squeezing her pert breasts, leaving her to groan with pleasure.

“Ohhhh, mmmm, yes! Don’t stop!”

“I won’t,” he said. “I’ve waited too long for this. I don’t want to be dour and alone anymore. I want *you*, Amy. I want all of you.”

Never mind. That’s the sexiest thing I’ve ever heard.

In all the fuss, she didn’t even notice her top come off. Felipe chuckled it up, and it hung from the ceiling fan. His own apron had smushed half the eclairs. Her pants were covered in crumbs from a spill earlier. She was just in her underwear and bra now, and him in his unbuckled trousers. He caressed the bare skin of her back, and she leaned back against the counter as he kissed her. Several pots and pans were knocked loudly onto the floor, leaving her to giggle in his mouth. It didn’t stop him, or her, they were insatiable.

“Take this off!” she announced, indicating her bra.

Felipe helped her, but in their enthusiasm the band stretched, sending it shooting across the room to land on one of the table settings. She didn’t care, because Felipe was already feeling her chest, grasping and groping her breasts, sending glorious fits of pleasure throughout her body.

“We should get out of here,” Felipe said. “Someone private.”

But Amy was already grabbing Felipe and pulling herself up into his arms, wrapping her thighs around him. He staggered back, knocking some more pans and plates to the ground, until finally he turned and held her against the tall oven.

He’s so strong. Gosh, he’s so strong! Mnhmm, I like it. I really like it.

She kissed him again, running her fingers through his hair.

“No,” she said. “Here. Please. I need it. I need you.”

“In the bakery?”

She grinned, unable to help herself. “It’s, like, really hot, right?”

She lowered a hand, feeling at his hardness, releasing it from his pants. It was wild to consider that she had once *had* a member like the one she now fondling.

Oh heck, I want that inside of me. I actually want a man’s thing inside of me. Mhmm, yes I do! I want to feel him. He’s so freakin’ huge, too!

Felipe grunted, clearly aroused by her ministrations.

“G-guide me in,” he said, pressing her against the benchtop next to the oven to keep her secure. A few bags of flour fell, but neither cared, because she pulled her panties to one side and let him slip inside her welcoming wetness.

“Ohhhhhhh, that f-feels so w-weird,” she moaned. “But s-so good! Go in d-deeper!”

He did. It was like being invaded. Penetrated. *Dominated*. It was, in so many ways, the most alien thing she had ever experienced, and simultaneously the most wonderful. There was a brief stinging pain as he pushed through her hymen, but that discomfort quickly faded. He pushed deeper, invaded her depths, and she clung to him like a raft of wood floating in a turbulent sea. She whined in a high, pleasurable voice, and though she had been a woman for almost two years now, *this* seemed to be her final threshold.

“S-so big!” she cried again.

“I’m not even all the way in yet.”

“Then get there!”

He obeyed her pleadings, and finally reached his apex. It was quite the lady splitter he had between his legs, and she kissed him passionately, thanking him wordlessly for it. The bliss only increased as he slowly thrust, fucking her against the benchtop, her weight largely carried by him. For all her sweetness and whimsy, this was a primal act, one dominated by animalistic lust and sensation. She whimpered as he sucked on her nipples, fondling her breasts even as he groped her rear. He took her, and she made such sweet sounds as he did so. They picked up in pace, and soon they were making even more of a mess: Amy rose her arms as a wave of ecstasy hit her, sending several wooden spoons spiralling down to the floor, and another bag of flour to explode when it fell. They laughed, overcome with how ridiculous it all was, but it didn’t stop their passion. Perhaps it only increased it.

“This is the b-best thing!” she announced between passionate kisses and nibbles of her lover’s ears. “The v-very best thing!”

“It is!” Felipe said, his voice ragged like an animal’s, and all the hotter for it. “I’m g-going to c-cum, Amy. We sh-should stop. We aren’t using any-”

But she locked her thighs around him. “I don’t care. Just do it. Cum in me. I want to feel all of - ahhh - you! Mmhm!”

She gripped him tighter again, holding his face as he thrust again and again into her, banging her against the wall. All hesitation was gone now, all barriers broken down. Once, Amy would have been humiliated by this act, now she just wanted to be a full woman. She wanted her man to finish inside of her.

“Oh God, I’m going to c-cum, Amy!” he stammered. I’mn going to - I’m going to - AGGHH!!”

His hard dick tensed inside of her, before throbbing in a deeply arousing fashion. It spurt warm seed after warm seed into her, pumping her full, and this had the knock on effect of finally triggering her own series of orgasms.

“Yesss, oh God, this is even better than d-dessert! Mhmmm! Yes, yes, yessss!!!”

For the first time, she experienced the female orgasm through sex with another. It was far better than any act of self-pleasure. It was like being made complete.

I'm never going back, she thought to herself. I don't ever want to.

She whimpered again as another orgasm hit her, and it was clearly too much for Felipe as well, because his leg suddenly gave way and the two cried out in shock as they fell to the ground. Naturally, another bag of flour fell, and this time it absolutely caked them.

For a moment, the two lovers lay there, stunned.

Then, to Amy's absolute surprise, Felipe broke out laughing. Actually *laughing*. She laughed with him, the two holding one another as the storm raged outside.

“So, what made you change your mind?” Amy asked him.

It was several hours later, and they had cleaned themselves up and their magnificent mess . . . only to go a second round when he took her from behind. This time they opted to go up stairs, of course. It was the better option than leaving yet another disaster zone.

“Change my mind about what?” Felipe asked, gently playing with her breast as he spooned her. It was very, very comfortable.

“About me. About us. About not being alone anymore.”

“I guess . . . I just needed time. You were always there, and always understanding. They say time heals all wounds, and I guess you helped heal mind.”

“I gotta be honest, I feel pretty responsible for them.”

“Don't. It was Aaron's fault. He's not you.”

She was about to try and find a way to explain she *was* at fault, insofar as he could understand, but his words halted her.

He's right, she told herself in her mind. You're not Aaron anymore. Whatever sins you committed, you've totally made up for them. It's time to let that go too, Amy.

She turned, facing him, pressing her nakedness against her lover.

“Well, I'm glad you decided not to be alone anymore.”

“Me too,” he said, smiling just slightly. He ran his fingers over her hips. “Also, you're pretty hot.”

She giggled, then kissed him, running her fingers over his hard-earned muscles.

And then they were at it a third time. Amy had a lot of catching up to do.

It was about eight weeks later, and Amy was incredibly nervous. As was Felipe. His nervousness was adorable, at least, because he was so good at hiding it. She, on the other hand, was snacking upon desserts with wild abandon to satisfy not just her sweet tooth, but her anxiety in general.

“Stop that,” he cautioned. “We need those for the customers tomorrow.”

“I can’t help it!” she declared. “I don’t know how to tell them!”

“We’ll tell them together, and go from there. But please no more, sweetie. Or you’ll have nothing to hand out as a waitress.”

Amy grinned sheepishly. She did love helping out Mama and Daddy in the store. Now that her degree was coming to an end soon, she was looking forward to going to work full-time here. Daddy and Mama had arranged to talk with them about ‘something important,’ and they could only assume what it could be.

“I think he wants you to be a full-time chef here,” Amy whispered, eyeing her father in the kitchen as he got the last of the dinner prepped.

“You think?”

“Sure! We’re doing super well. Thanks to you and me together, we’re making more money than ever, sweetie. We’ve got tourists coming here. Actual *tourists!* We’re, like, a local destination to see and everything. Especially thanks to those eclairs you make.”

“Our eclairs,” he corrected. “Shh, they’re coming.”

Claude and Melissa brought over the roast, and the snacks - what was left of them - were cleared away. The four of them ate together, discussing Amy’s exam preparations, Felipe’s plans for spring, and their own plans for travelling: the pair wanted to see Europe. It was that last subject that took on greater importance as the food was cleared away. Amy’s nervousness was rising by this point; her legs bouncing on the floor and Felipe’s hand on her thigh under the table to calm her.

“Well, before we have dessert,” her Daddy said. “There’s something we want to talk about.”

“Same,” Felipe said, giving Amy a comforting smile. She squeezed his hand again.

“We’ll go first, if you don’t mind. Amy, your mother and I have decided . . . we’re going to be stepping back.”

Amy blinked. “You’re retiring?”

“Semi-retiring. We’ll still watch over the bakery and help it expand, but, well, you two have helped bring in so much business, and you work so well together, that we thought it best to hand it forward to you. Bring you in as partners, if you wish.”

Amy and Felipe exchanged a surprised look. Felipe grew flustered.

"Mr Baker, that would be - that would amazing!"

"Please, you know to call me Claude. You're not my apprentice anymore, Felipe. It'll be a gradual process, but we both feel that with all the good work you do, it's better to get you running the show sooner than later. I know you'll both love it."

Amy's smile was so big it hurt. "Daddy, that's - that's incredible!"

"We're doing it for another reason," her Mom added, a mischievous grin on her features. "The sooner you two can start earning the megabucks and expanding this store, the sooner you'll be in a good position to get married and give us grandchildren."

Amy and Felipe exchanged *another* surprised look. Clearly, this confused Melissa, who'd intended her words largely as a joke.

"Um, about that," Felipe said, coughing into his hand.

"We, um, may have jumped the gun there," Amy said, lowering a hand to her stomach. "It seems, um, that, er, Felipe and I are, well, expecting a baby."

Claude dropped a fork. Melissa dropped her jaw.

"And Felipe proposed to me this morning," Amy finished. "And I said yes."

She beamed, the truth now out there and free and wonderful. Her parents stared back, flapping their mouths like goldfish.

"Well?" Amy asked.

Claude and Melissa regained their senses.

"Well," her Daddy said. "I think it's time we break out the big dessert. This is cause for celebration!"

Amy couldn't reach her Daddy's arms quickly enough.

Epilogue: Buns in the Oven

"Twins! Twins! Felipe, we're having *goshdarn twins!*"

Felipe just gave that same wry smirk he always put on when his wife was positively *giddy* with excitement.

"Yes, dear, I'm well aware. You are seven months along now. And you certainly look pregnant with twins, meaning no offence."

"None taken! Just look how pregnant and pretty I am!"

Amy gestured to her maternity dress, which was cotton white with blue lines running down its length, as well as a blue trim along its hem. It was loose and comfortable, not pulling tight against her like some of the ones she'd worn on their date night, but it certainly still emphasised the top half of her belly, and with the way the rest of the dress hung down

from stomach to her feet, it left the size of her pregnant womb quite suggestive. Some women would have balked at the way such a dress would have made them look even bigger; after all, without it pulling beneath her belly, it left the front hanging what appeared to be several feet out in front of her. Not the case with Amy, though. She *adored* not only the comfort of such a garment, but the way it made her pregnancy so obvious, complete with each swish of the outfit at the front whenever she took a waddling step forward and turned slowly (and carefully) to one side.

"You do in fact look most beautiful," Felipe said, kissing her gently on the cheek. She cooed a little at this; she always did, in fact.

I never get tired of my man. The belly is emphasis of that, I'd say.

"Twins, Felipe!"

This time he actually guffawed. It was a deeply lovely sound.

"I know, I know!" he emphasised, holding up his hands in a patient gesticulation. "And I didn't, the belly would be a dead giveaway. As would all this decoration. Good God, my sweetness, you've really gone all out."

"We've gone all out," she reminded, ribbing him playfully. The act overbalanced her, causing her to go '*woah!*', but Felipe easily caught her as she righted herself. "Oof, sorry. This belly *really* overbalances me. Just wait."

She paused, padding her fingers against her womb, pushing them against the fluid just a tetch. It was a bizarre feeling even now, but one she relished: the sensation of all the fluid - not to mention all the *baby* - inside of her pushing back made her aware just how full with life she truly was. But as she suspected, the little ones within her were still sleeping. One little kick, but it was a light thing against the underside of her belly, and it wouldn't have made a visible dent even if her stomach was naked and out.

"Still sleeping," she announced sweetly, and with a smile.

"Good. I'd hate to set off a party in there."

"You're the one that *put* the party there, sexy," she purred, gripping his lapels and pulling him in for a *very* passionate kiss. He had to almost bat her away, though the sheer distance between them created by her overstuffed womb did make it easy. He had to practically lean right over it to lock lips with her.

"Calm down, woman!" he said in mock seriousness. "Calm down! Guests will be arriving any moment. I'd rather not have our baby shower begin with a practical demonstration of how babies get made."

This just made Amy purr again. "Mhmm, I'd *love* to end it with, like, a private demonstration, once everyone goes home."

Maybe several private demonstrations. I swear, my libido has totally gone up in my third trimester, not down. I mean, sore ankles and big sore boobs and lots of being out of

breath, but God I just want to bend over and have my sexy husband take me. Mhmmm . . . more than once, in fact. Just like the night he totally knocked me up the first time.

"I might be able to arrange that," Felipe said, reaching around to grope her ass gently. Again, she cooed.

And then the moment was broken with a cry from upstairs.

"D-Daddy! I want - I want Daddy!"

The pair sighed. That was little Jack, already awake. A small part of Amy already missed the days when *she* had been her toddler's favourite, but such jealousy evaporated immediately as soon as she saw the welcome grin upon her husband's face.

"I'll go get him. Sounds like he's had a bad wakeup from his nap," he announced. "Though at least he's woken up before anyone arrives, right? He'll love these balloons."

He gestured to the numerous decorations around them, the decked out baby shower that Amy had put together.

"Oh, you've seen nothing yet," Amy. "This is just what we could do. When Lian and Jessica get here, that's when the *real* baby shower stuff takes off."

"You didn't think to have one of them host it?"

She just gave a *pfft*. "I'm having my baby shower in *my* bakery, thanks very much. I need quick access to all those sweets me and my babies are craving."

Felipe just rolled his eyes, already moving towards the stairs.

"Daddy! I SAID I want DADDY!"

This got an amused shrug from him. Jack was nothing if not authoritative for a little three-year old. Felipe rapidly obeyed his toddler's orders and moved quickstep up the stairs to go comfort their little one. Moments later, she heard him putting on his 'Daddy voice'.

'Oh, did you just have a big boy nap? Wasn't that good? No, don't cry. Daddy's right here. Don't you worry. Oh, you want me to lie down? Of course, buddy. We'll lie right here until you want to get up, okay? As long as you need.'

Amy smiled. She cradled her large bump, feeling her little sleeping ones readjust in her womb ever so slightly. She loved it when they were awake and kicking - even if it could get a bit much sometimes - but she also loved the sensation of them sleeping peacefully, protected within her.

"Don't you worry," she whispered as she held her heavy burden. "When the time comes for you to enter the world, Mommy will be here to protect you, and Daddy even more so. You've got such a good Daddy, and he's come so far. We all have."

"I'd certainly say that's the case too, Amy Baker. Though I suppose it's Amy Rossie now, right?"

Amy jolted, looking up to see the figure entering through the open sliding door she'd left for the invitees. To her shock, it wasn't Lian or Jessica, or even her parents who'd texted a few minutes ago that they were on their way. No, it wasn't any of the invitees at all.

It was Mrs Cheng, the very woman - witch, even - who had changed her in the first place.

"Y-you!" she announced, clutching her pregnant form protectively.

Oh God, it's her. It's actually her. I'd remember that face anywhere. She didn't come here when Peter visited, and I thought that was deliberate. Oh dear, what do I do?

But Mrs Cheng, who still looked beautiful and poised as she had been five years ago, simply put up her hands in a gesture of peace.

"Don't panic, Amy, I'm not here to bite. Well, unless you have one of those magnificent desserts my husband recently samples on hands."

Still, Amy held her belly protectively. "What are you, like, doing here?"

Mrs Cheng stepped further into the room, her gaze sweeping over the former male with something approaching satisfaction. It certainly made Amy feel quite self-conscious is just completely girly and pretty and *happily knocked up* she was. It was a far, far cry from her former self. So far even she could scarcely believe it.

"I thought I'd just drop in and see how you were doing. Normally, on the rare occasions I have to punish someone with magic, I leave them to their new lives and rarely check in, and if I do, never with their strict knowledge. I don't want you to think of me as a vengeful witch or anything, but I am protective of my husband, and some people have been very cruel to him. But then I heard that Peter had given a review of *Baker's Life* and said it had the best desserts in the state, even bringing some home. And who should I see pictured on the label? Claude and Melissa Baker, the original owners, and then Felipe Rossi and Amy Baker, its new ones."

Amy fidgeted. She could feel her little ones starting to stir, slowly waking within her.

Please, don't wake up. Don't start kicking. I don't think I could handle the embarrassment of this woman seeing me going 'oof!' in response to little kicks.

"Did you . . . did you come here to gloat?" Amy said. She placed her hands on her hips, a little defiantly. They were wider now that she was a mother, and would probably get a bit wider again when she gave birth to her coming twins. She didn't mind; having a more motherly figure only fitted with her sweet and loving and now *maternal* nature. But now she was in *mama bear* mode, ready to act in case Mrs Cheng did anything.

"I thought I might," the other woman said. "But I hoped I wouldn't have to. And clearly, I don't think I have to. You're happy, aren't you? Truly happy with your new life."

Amy nodded. Despite the tension in the air, it was hard not to give a sweet grin, as was her nature.

"I am. Very much so. I - I love my new life. And I know this is, like, really crazy to say since you turned me and it was a punishment and everything, but I'm so, so glad that you did. I was in a bad place and had been for a long time. Becoming a young woman was the best thing that ever happened to me. You helped me find my Felipe, and, well . . ."

She sheepishly gestured to the massive, rather heavy dome in front of her.

I need to put on a strong image for this woman, but gosh darn it I really need to sit down for a moment. This womb is so damn heavy!

"You can sit if you need to," Mrs Cheng said, as if physically reading Amy.

"I - I'll stand, for now."

"Fair enough. Look, Amy, I just wanted to check in and make sure I made the right choice in changing you. Witches generally have a sense of these things, but I had my doubts about you; about whether you would truly turn your life around. Now I can see that you indeed have, and with babies on the way! I imagine that it would be quite the strange experience to be pregnant after having been a man."

She gave an earnest smile, which in turn made Amy beam somewhat sheepishly.

"Um, it was. But I've already got a little boy. Jack. I gave birth to him three years ago. It was . . . quite the experience."

"A good one?"

Amy bit her lip and nodded. "The *best*. Painful and uncomfortable and, like, totally exhausting in so many ways. And there was morning sickness and giving birth - which was super embarrassing - and then the recovery and all that. But . . . I made a life. I had my little boy growing within me. It was like nothing else I'd ever experienced. And now I've got twins and - and I don't ever want to stop. I want to have so many babies. Just babies, babies, babies with my beautiful husband. I never want to be that lonely, hateful person again. I just want to bring desserts and sweetness and happiness and *babies* into the world, as many and as much as I can."

The witch actually snorted. Clearly even *she* was surprised by how much Amy had changed. But then again, even saying it aloud had surprised the former male herself.

I really do want to do that, don't I? I want a big home with so many loving children, and all the sweet biscuits I can get!

"Then it appears I have nothing to regret. Thank you, Amy."

"Why thank me? I was the one that was awful to you. And you changed me for the better."

The witch just shrugged. "That was all you, believe me. I just gave you the little magical nudge necessary to start your journey. And what a journey it is. I wish you all the best with your twins and any future babies, but before I go, I suppose I'll give just a couple more magical blessings."

She spoke the arcane words that Amy remembered, but this time there was no fear. Amy could sense that she was being blessed this time, not cursed. The tendrils of light reached out and touched her, tickling her, and she giggled despite herself as they did so.

“There,” Mrs Cheng said when she was finished. “Now you’ll never have to fear any health complications, from pregnancy, birth, or any other source. Nor will you have any trouble losing that baby weight . . . until you’re gaining pregnancy weight again, of course. And, just to head off any issues, since you are such a sweet tooth, none of your children will have anything to fear from having powerful dessert cravings themselves. They can enjoy all that sugar without any tooth decay or weight gain, though I’m sure your husband will still put his foot down.”

Amy giggled. “He hasn’t managed to stop me so far.”

The witch stepped forward, extending a hand cautiously. Amy nodded, allowing her to feel her swollen belly. Inside, her babies kicked.

“Oof!” she exclaimed.

“Excitable and joyful already, just like their mother. I wish you a very happy life, Amy Baker. Or was it Amy Rossi?”

The woman giggled, curling part of her short bob with one finger. “Well, I may be way more submissive and girly now, but there’s *no way* I was ever giving up *that* last name. He actually took *mine*.”

The witch cackled. “Well, it seems there’s still a small part of stubborn Aaron Smith in there, tempered by the best parts of Amy Baker. Be seeing you, Amy.”

She moved to leave, but a sudden thought came over the pregnant woman.

“Wait! Mrs Cheng, wait!”

She waddled after her, hands on her back for support. *Gosh, my spine aches! But it’s a good ache!*

The woman turned back and raised an eyebrow, only for Amy to burst into a mighty grin.

“Before you go, let me give you a whole stack of our most delicious desserts! It’s the least I can do!”

Mrs Cheng grinned.

“Who was that you were talking to?” Felipe asked as he descended the stairs, carrying a much calmer Jack in his arms. Amy took her son, balancing him carefully on her prodigious belly. He was a lot like his mother; he really did love his cuddles.

“Just an old friend dropping by to congratulate me, honey,” she said. “I owe her a lot. How’s our little man going?”

“Wanted cuddles,” Jack mumbled in her ears. “Really big cuddles.”

“Then cuddles you will get, my beautiful little man!”

“No!” Jack declared. “Not a little man. I’m a *big boy!*”

She and Felipe laughed at this, the pair embracing with her belly and Jack atop it between them.

“Are you ready for this?” Felipe asked, looking outside to see Lian approaching, entire stacks of baby shower decorations and game equipment overwhelming her arms. Jessica was just behind her with another pile, nearly tripping over from the excess weight.

Amy considered Felipe’s question. She knew he was talking about the baby shower and party, but she thought of it in the framework of everything in her new life.

I am ready, she thought. Ready to celebrate. Ready to eat sweets and laugh and joke with friends. To make them desserts with my husband. To run our gorgeous little cafe for years and years to come. And to totally extend the second story and buy up the lot next to us, because we’re gonna need a lot more cribs for all the beautiful babies we’re going to bring into the world.

“Honey? Did you hear what I said?”

Amy smiled from ear to ear.

“I’m more than ready, sweetie. I’m ready for all of it.”

The End