

(Every character depicted in the story below is a consenting legal adult over the age of 18)

A/N: Poor Jessica Yamada...

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Jessica Yamada was, if nothing else, committed to her job. In her opinion, one had to be in her line of work, because if you weren't giving this your all, the consequences could be far reaching and positively disastrous.

She hadn't gone into psychology for the money or anything like that after all. She'd become a psychologist to help people. And in a world that had increasingly stopped making sense, there were more people than ever that needed that help. People with powers they couldn't control. People whose very minds rebelled against them.

Her purpose was to help those people find a path forward if possible, and if not, help them be as comfortable as they possibly could be in their current circumstances. Admittedly, it was tough for her at times, especially in regard to the patients who fell into the second category. Knowing there was no real helping some of them because their malady was that of Parahuman Ability going haywire rather than of the mind... it made things difficult.

And yet, still Jessica soldiered on. Still she did her best. Because they deserved nothing less than her best when the world itself felt like it was out to get them. When it was all outside of their control, they needed all the support they could get.

That said, tonight was... not something Jessica was entirely prepared for handling. Tonight, a miracle seemed to have taken place... but Jessica would have to admit, she didn't really believe in miracles these days. Privately, the state of the world around her had made her bit too cynical for such things.

Which was why, even as she sits across from Sveta with a reinforced crystalline wall between the two of them, Jessica is wary. She does her best not to show

that wariness of course, pulling on the feelings of fondness she has for the young woman instead to plaster a smile on her face.

After all, Sveta was one of those patients who had no sickness of the mind. Her malady was entirely one of the body, but because it was the result of a Parahuman Ability instead of some sickness or illness, she was confined to a Parahuman Asylum.

Her situation had always seemed particularly unfair to Jessica. To be reduced to nothing more than a face, to have your only way to interact with the world be a Parahuman Ability that you could barely control... it was a terrible, torturous fate. Some might say a fate worse than death, though Jessica personally never used such language out loud.

Sveta's power had killed people. That was part of why she was in the Asylum, because her out of control Parahuman Ability was decidedly NOT non-lethal. To be fair, most Parahuman Abilities weren't non-lethal. Most had some capacity to kill or facilitate killing.

Swallowing down her inner turmoil, Jessica focuses herself on the matter at hand. She tries not to stare too hard at Sveta's new body, but she can't help but be fascinated by it, even if Sveta is now dressed in the same loose top and pants that all patients of the Asylum with a humanoid physique are given to wear.

Instead, Jessica meets the young woman's eyes... and sees a determination there that unnerves her just a little bit.

"You're looking well, Sveta. Certainly better than the last time I saw you."

Considering that had been less than a week ago and back then Sveta had still been a floating face and not much else, that was perhaps an understatement. Still, Sveta smiles softly and reaches up with her hand to run her fingers through the tendrils running back along her scalp. Her 'hair' is tightly woven into a braid that slides back behind her, completely unmoving compared to the previous wild and untamed state of her tendrils.

Apparently, Sveta now had complete control of her powers from what she'd told the orderlies. However, she'd also destroyed her entire computer setup, one that had been specially reinforced for accidents regarding her power usage. Hence there still being a barrier between her and Sveta, since Jessica had decided that wearing the normal suit would be too... unwieldy at the moment.

"Thank you, Dr. Yamada. That means a lot coming from you. I *feel* a lot better than I did the last time you saw me too. I feel... real again."

Jessica resists the urge to frown for a couple of reasons. First, the title... she's not a real doctor, unfortunately. However, the Parahuman Asylum has 'requested' in their condescending way that she and all of the other psychologists let the patients think of them as doctors anyways. It supposedly helps to clearly define their relationships with the patients and makes it easier for the patients to respect the psychologists.

Jessica loathes lying to anyone she's working with in such a way, but in this case she doesn't have much of a choice if she wants to be allowed to continue helping the poor people here at this Asylum. If she refused on moral grounds, she would be quickly shown the door and her patients would potentially suffer without her.

The other reason Jessica has the urge to frown at what Sveta had said though is far more personal to Sveta herself and she quickly leans forward, feeling a need to set the record straight.

"You were always real, Sveta. No matter the state of your body, you were and are as real as any of us."

Sveta blinks... before smiling slowly.

"I appreciate that sentiment, Dr. Yamada. Still, I think we can both agree that being trapped here in this place didn't quite constitute living a 'real life'. Now I have the opportunity to get out of here, to actually be treated as a person by others again. I can't help but be happy about that."

Jessica nods slowly even as she winces internally at... multiple things that Sveta has just said. She tries to take it slow, tries to... lessen the blow.

“You have every reason to be happy about your change in circumstances, Sveta, I fully agree. That said, there are obviously questions being asked about... how all of this happened. I’m glad you asked for me and that I’m getting this chance to talk to you, but I hope you understand that I do still need to ask some of those questions.”

Jessica waits to see how Sveta will react. But admittedly, she’s only a little afraid that the young woman will react violently. Sveta, despite the lethal nature of her Parahuman Ability, has never actually been a violent girl as far as Jessica has seen. So honestly, she’s not even that surprised when Sveta nods along rather amicably, albeit with a thoughtful expression on her face.

“Yes, I understand. That’s why I didn’t try to leave immediately... I didn’t want to cause a fuss. I want to do things the right way, Dr. Yamada. However... there really doesn’t seem to be much of a reason to keep me locked up anymore, does there? I wasn’t here because I’m insane or mentally unstable... I was here because my power and the state of my body meant I couldn’t be anywhere else.”

Before she can formulate a response to that, Sveta rises from her chair, causing Jessica to stiffen ever so slightly. But far from trying to be intimidating, the young woman simply steps back and does a twirl, head tilted back, arms spread wide, fingers splayed apart as she smiles joyously. This takes about five seconds before she stops spinning and graces Jessica a bright grin.

“As you can see, the state of my body has changed dramatically. As for my power...”

Sveta reaches up and brings her braid of tendrils over her shoulder, running her hands over them in a way that makes her shiver in delight.

“... I’m in control now, Dr. Yamada. For the first time in my memory, I’m in control.”

She then splits the braid up into its component parts, spreading her tendrils out in the way Jessica best remembers them. Although, they’re far longer now... and even as Sveta spreads them apart, they aren’t the same wild and untamed mess of movement they were before. They move with purpose, with control, with a human intelligence behind them as they ripple in a pattern that’s clearly of Sveta’s design.

When the Case 53 is done with her performance, she shoots Jessica another bright smile, clearly wanting to see her own happiness mirrored back at her. Jessica smiles as best she can right back... because really, it is amazing and beautiful and a lot more words.

However...

“I’m very glad to see that, Sveta. I’m truly so happy for you. But... do you know how this happened? Do you know why you’ve suddenly gained a proper body and control over your abilities?”

The smile on Sveta’s face flickers for a moment before the young woman steps back up to the chair and sits back down. Her tendrils return to their braided state behind her as she takes a second to consider the question before breathing out deeply.

“... No. It came out of nowhere honestly.”

Jessica lets a small frown appear on her face at that, one of thoughtful consideration.

“What were you doing when it took place? You were on your computer?”

Sveta nods her head in easy agreement, picking up steam.

“Yep! One moment I was perusing PHO and regretting every minute of it because all anyone would talk about was the most recent Endbringer Attack.”

Jessica resists the urge to groan, but she can't quite help it when Sveta's name slips from her lips.

“Sveta...”

But the younger woman just waves her off. Because that's something she can do now.

“I know, I know. We've talked about me staying off the internet after shit- err, I mean stuff like that. But you know I have limited forms of entertainment, Dr. Yamada. I was going stir crazy like usual, so I went looking for something to occupy my thoughts with. That's also something you've told me to do, after all.”

Jessica huffs.

“It is, but we've also discussed a litany of other options for when you're feeling that way.”

“... Yeah. Anyways, that's when it happened. I was on PHO and suddenly... new body. Naked body, to be exact, but thankfully the orderlies got me clothes pretty quickly. And while my power broke my setup while I was... filling out, afterwards I had complete control for the first time in... ever. I'm in charge now.”

And she had no clue what had done this to her? Jessica hated to call her patients liars and as a general rule she never did it to their faces. And yet... Jessica has been working with Sveta for a while now. The young woman has always been expressive, or maybe it was just a combination of Jessica's own efforts to focus on the faces of her patients as well as the fact that Sveta was only ever a face.

Regardless, she's pretty sure Sveta is lying to her. The younger woman does know something about what made her how she is now. She's holding it at bay

and that frightens Jessica to no end because... how can she help Sveta without all the facts?

“Sveta... you know you can trust me, right? I want to help you. I want you to get out of this place and be free to live your life how you want to live it.”

There's plenty of Case 53s out there who don't wind up in Parahuman Asylums after all. Admittedly, most of them don't live civilian lives. They either wind up joining Parahuman Gangs and becoming villains, or they wind up with the Protectorate. More often the former rather than the latter.

In Sveta's case, the only way she's likely to see the outside of this Asylum anytime soon is if she signs on with the Protectorate. Otherwise, her release will be a protracted battle in which the government, her current guardian, will fight every step of the way to keep her locked up as the 'clear and present danger to society' that she was established to be in a court back when she was first... detained.

Smiling softly now, Sveta nods.

“I believe you, Dr. Yamada. I know you're a good woman. It's why I wanted to talk to you.”

Then... her eyes flick very pointedly up and to the right. To the camera in the corner of the room behind Jessica that's recording this entire conversation. Jessica resists the urge to sigh and instead does her best to press her advantage.

“I can advocate for your release, Sveta. I will do everything I possibly can on that front. But to convince the people who need convincing, I need honesty from you. We need to know everything you know about what's been done to you tonight.”

She hated this, of course. She was a psychologist, not a professional interrogator. But while Sveta had been extremely depressed and Jessica had feared the younger woman to be borderline suicidal at times, her depression

was purely situational, meaning that it was influenced entirely by outside elements not in her control.

Those outside elements were gone now. As she'd previously stated, she was in control. Under any other circumstances where parahuman abilities weren't involved, Jessica would more than likely have one or two more sessions with Sveta to make sure she was truly doing better and the situation was truly resolved... and then she would let Sveta be on her way because the younger woman no longer needed her services.

Alas... this was not any other circumstances. And the world was not a fair or particularly just place.

"... I guess I should have known I wouldn't get anything past you, Dr. Yamada."

Jessica straightens up in her chair as Sveta smiles a melancholic smile while seemingly finally admitting to something more.

"But I suppose I also knew that no matter what I said, they were never going to let me go. Not without making me join the Protectorate at the very least, right?"

She hesitates for a moment before trying to soften the blow.

"... The Protectorate has resources that someone in your position could really use, Sveta. You don't have anyone or anything waiting for you outside these walls. But if you did sign on with the Protectorate, they would support you in a way you'd be hard pressed to find from anyone else."

Sveta nods along as if in agreement... but then she shakes her head, making it clear she was really just nodding to show she understood.

"Unfortunately, joining the Protectorate just isn't in the cards for me, Dr. Yamada. I'm needed elsewhere."

What? What does that mean?

“Thank you for everything you’ve done for me... goodbye.”

“Wha- Sveta, what are you-?!”

Jessica can’t even really describe what happens next. Not in full. Even though she’s staring right at the other woman, half rising out of her chair at Sveta’s alarming words... it’s like one moment she’s staring right into the younger woman’s blue eyes and the next... nothingness.

Sveta vanishes from her seat like she was never there, leaving Jessica half-standing with her mouth open and her hand outstretched. She stares at the empty seat for a long, long moment before finally remembering to reach down and press the alarm on her side of the glass.

As alarms begin to sound, Jessica collapses back into her chair and buries her face in her hands. She’d done what she could. She was only human, she didn’t have powers, she only had her words at the end of the day.

And yet... once again, she’s left feeling like she failed one of her patients. And no amount of ‘there was nothing else to be done’ was going to make her feel less shitty over that fact.

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A/N: Remember to Vote, leave a Like, and let me know what you think!