

## Annamaria Part 8 – The Trip

**Summary: Annamaria and Laura find that their small date with Barbara takes them further than they once thought. Stepping foot in Port Solei, Annamaria and more important Laura are confronted with another opportunity, but is it the blessing Annamaria always wanted?**

**Tags: Multi-Arm, Multi-Leg, Multi-Head, Port Solei, Taur, Slice of Life, Tail Head, Drama**

*This is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy, this is crazy.*

My mind was going in circles as I tapped my foot on the floor of the bus. My right head was busy chewing on the nails of two of my hands while my left kept looking around nervously.

“Hey, are you ok?” Laura asked me from the reclined taur accommodating seat next to me. “You look nervous. What are you thinking?”

“I’M THINKING THIS IS CRAZY!” I blurted out way louder than I should have, prompting the whole bus to turn and look at me. Laura grinned politely and assured them I was OK, even though my behavior wasn’t exactly convincing.

“What’s crazy about it?” Laura asked. “Didn’t you want to do this?”

“Yeah, I wanted to hang out with Barbara at a café or something, you know... “

“And isn’t that what we are doing?”

“YES!” I shouted. The whole bus turned to look at me again. Laura again assured them I was OK. “Yes, we are, but I thought we were going to... you know... go to a café down the block not go all the way to Port Solei!”

Strange fortune found us on this bus. You see, after the fashion show we made... tentative... plans with Barbara to hang out over drinks. She said she had very little time left before she had to go back to Port Solei, and I thought that meant that she was going to make the most of her time left here.

No... no the world of models is a strange and sometimes scary thing. What she actually meant, was that she wanted to show me and Laura around Port Solei. Before we knew it, we were on a plane to the infamous mutant country, and now we were taking a bus to the city proper.

“I don’t know why you are so nervous...” Laura said. “You said you’ve been here before, right?”

“Only for a short while...” I said with one head, the other still jammed full with my fingernails. “I don’t... really remember it well.”

Truth be told, the only memories I had of Port Solei were of my very early childhood. Like, very very early. I didn’t even meet Taff and the girls until after we had moved off the island. There was something

really special about spending my early years in Port Solei. You really learn that mutants aren't something weird or different here. That we were just, people, like anyone else.

But Port Solei is kind of expensive and, frankly, we just didn't have the money to stay here long. Eventually my moms decided to move to the mainland instead, where the cost of living was cheaper. We were always close enough to Port Solei that there were plenty of mutants about. It's just, getting to the island is always a mutants dream and heck, I was way more preoccupied with my job and romance prospects right now.

And here Laura was, treating me as if this was my old stomping ground. It wasn't the most...comfortable feeling in the world.

"Well, what's the worst that can happen?" Laura said.

"The worst that can happen is we literally packed our bags and got on a plane with a day's notice? Who's gonna walk my dog! Feed my fish!?" I complained.

"... you don't have either of those..." Laura said.

"But what if I did! My hypothetical dog would be whining for me right now! I couldn't just leave them alone! How hypothetically irresponsible could I be!?"

"OK, did you, like, drink on the plane or something?" Laura asked.

"No," both of my heads said, staring wide eyed and bloodshot straight at her.

"Just... asking..." Laura replied.

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The bus soon pulled into the city proper, and the two of us stepped off. Honestly, the scene was exactly as we both had imagined it. Mutants coming back from abroad. Mutants migrating to Port Solei for the first time, in the hopes of finding a better life. Tourists looking to see the sights that Port Solei has to offer. People diagnosed with the mutant gene, hoping to find answers or at least direction from the specialists here.

And then, of course, there were the lookers. These were the people who came to Port Solei just to see the mutants. While everyone else had their eyes set to Port Solei's skyscrapers, or beaches, or beautiful town center, they were just leering at each and every one of us... Laura included. I never felt so protective. All my arms gripped one of her right arms tight.

... too tight.

"Nnngh y-you are kind of hurting me," Laura said. Sure, enough my fingers were digging into her arm, grasping at it as if I were about to fall off a cliff and letting go would mean the end of my life.

Ugh, maybe that's how I was really feeling. Maybe I thought that Laura would find something awesome and new about Port Solei and then she wouldn't want to stay with me. Maybe I was just worried that

with more experience being a mutant she would see that they were as awesome as I thought they were, and then she would find any other mutant that was cooler than me, with a better job, a better life, and then maybe-

“Anna!” Laura said pushing off my claw gripped hands. I guess I just clutched tighter the more I thought about losing her.

... dammit I’m a wreck, aren’t I?

“Maybe... we should just check into the hotel?” Laura asked me, her tail head looking around. “It looks... kind of... busy here.”

“Yeah, busy... that... that’s a good way to put it. I think it’s just... a few blocks from here...”

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For the next few hours we just, unpacked and adjusted. Laura was still a bit in awe of all the mutants running around. The receptionist at the hotel was a gigantic multi-armed snake girl, something you might see out of myths or legends... and she was just taking called and getting coffee. That’s what’s wonderful but also intimidating about Port Solei. Mutants are so commonplace here that they soon become... I guess I would say ultra-normal. Things that would surprise you just don’t. Anything becomes possible. Mermaids and Centaurs might be mythical creatures elsewhere. Here they are flipping your burgers and doing your taxes. In fact, we saw one arguing with a demon-like girl as we walked to our room.

We were still on a time schedule though, so we only took a small bit to drop our stuff off and start toward our “date” with Barbara. A group of high school girls passed us, all with many different bodies, all talking about what they were going to buy at the mall. Laura was staring at a cat-girl and a girl whose head was removed and held in her heads.

I poked Laura’s shoulder with two of my arms to get her attention. “Don’t stare!” I whispered under my breath. “That’s how they know you are from out of town!”

“Oh, oh, right sorry.” Laura said. “It’s just... I mean it’s a little overwhelming Anny, you know? I was so scared when I first mutated and now I’m not even the weirdest one on the street. I mean, I swear I saw someone made out of slime! And another one was like a two headed ogre!”

“Yes yes! I know. It’s just. Look, I may not have many memories of Port Solei, but I do remember what it felt like, you know, to not have my mutation be a big deal. Mutants come from all over just to get a small taste of a life where they don’t have to be a carnival sideshow here. So, you know, play it cool.”

Hah, here I was telling her to play it cool. What a hypocrite I was. I was just as excited. It’s just that I was too scared to show it. I really wanted to just drool over each and every mutant I saw. But being back here it’s just...

Well to be honest it felt a little hollow. Every mutant dreams of living in Port Solei. But my job is back home, and it’s a great job! I’ve really thrown myself into fashion, and so many good things have

happened in my life, including Laura. I wouldn't have the money or opportunity to move here. Which makes visiting feel... I don't know... kind of bad. Because visits are temporary. I'll have to leave again, leave the mutants, and the beaches, and the culture. I don't know. I was probably making a bigger deal about it than I should be. After all, Laura no doubt is feeling the same thing. Going back to the "normal" world after a visit to Port Solei is a bit jarring. As jarring as-

BEEP BEEP BEEP

My watch was going off. Why was it going off? What did I set an alarm for?

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"WE ARE GOING TO BE LATE!" I said, as I clutched Laura's arm again and dragged her even faster than her six legs could take her through the city.

The last thing I wanted to do was disappoint Barbara. This wasn't just a personal meeting. This was professional. She was a work contact, and I flew all the way here to get a cup of coffee with her.

Was this the type of jet set life fashion designers have?

This really was crazy.

I whimpered and ran even faster, pushing myself as hard as I could.

I could have won a mutolympics event that day.

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When me and Laura finally got to the café, we were sweaty, out of breath, and disheveled. Any hope of us pulling off the professional fashion designer appearance had gone out the window, but to be fair, any concern of doing so went with it. We burst in through the door with quite a racket causing all the mutant patrons to turn their heads and look our way.

Let me tell you something. You won't get stares just for being a mutant in Port Solei. You will get stares when you look like you ran a marathon for no good reason.

"Annamaria?" Barbara said from a stool near a window. "Is that you?" She looked around nervously as the café patrons seemed to expect some sort of explanation.

"Yes! Yes! It's just me. We were, uh, running late!" I said nervously.

That seemed well enough to deflate the tension in the room. The patrons went about their business, and we walked in dripping some sweat across the floor. It wasn't the grandest entrance, but it would have to do.

Barbara laughed getting up to hug us... despite our sweat drenched selves. "Well come in! Come in! It's great to see you again."

She led us to the booths she was in. There was another mutant, just waiting for us. By all means she looked normal at first appearance. But give it time and you saw just how unique she was. She had four breasts, on one side, and two on her back. Again, easy to miss if you weren't paying attention.

Perhaps more unique was she didn't have a head! Or at least, she didn't have a head where you would expect one to be. Instead, her head was at the end of a thick tail, prehensile, and able to swivel where she wanted it to. It's just that she had a habit of resting her tail head on her shoulders. It made sense considering everyone else's head was at... head height. Still, it was another testament to the variety of mutants you saw every day in Port Solei.

"Annamaria, Laura, this is Mary, Mary, Annamaria and Laura. Annamaria is one of the biggest up and coming fashion designers back on the mainland," Barbara said. "She's working for Lucien DuBois."

"It's a pleasure to meet you," Mary said, snaking her head over to me and extending a hand to both me and Laura. Laura in particular, didn't know how to take this whole meeting. She was used to being the "weird one" back home. In fact, it's all she ever knew since her mutation. Now she was just another face in the crowd. To be honest... I couldn't tell if she liked this better, or worse than her normal life.

"So, uh..." Laura started. "It's... really nice of you to invite us all the way out here to Port Solei. I mean... we both thought you were going to just invite us to something local," her tail head snaked around to look at Mary's tail head. It almost looked like two cobras doing a dance from a nature documentary.

"Well, this is local, for me," Barbara said with a huge smile on her face. "Though, you are correct, this isn't just a social call."

Mary laughed a bit. "Far from it. Babs had me running all around town, making calls, putting things together."

"Oh!" I said curiously with both heads. "Are you Barbara's secretary?"

Mary grabbed her gut and nearly doubled over laughing. "Hardly!" she said. "Just call me a really dedicated friend... maybe too dedicated." She snaked down her head to wipe away a tear of laughter.

"Come on Mary it's not that bad," Barbara protested, blushing a bit.

"Babs," Mary said. "Ever since you mutated you've been the 'mutant model sensation!' But you can't keep a calendar. Remember how you missed your first five, count em FIVE gigs?"

I couldn't help but laugh. It was good to know that I wasn't the only disorganized mutant around here.

"You are exaggerating," Barbara said with an even deeper red hue to her face.

"Hardly," Mary laughed. "She's real picky about the image that she shows to other people but she's a space case," she said to me and Laura, twisting her snaky tail neck back and forth. "Lucky for her I also

do modeling on the side and so have to keep track of my own calendar of gigs, so it's not too hard to also pencil hers in as well."

At that moment, a cow mutant clomped over to us on large brown hooves, tail swaying a bit behind her, and took our orders. She was probably one of the most 'normal' mutants here despite the obvious udder beneath her uniform and huge bovine ears.

"She'd forget where her head was if it wasn't attached to her neck. Good thing she's not an NBM am I right?" Mary continued as the cow mutant walked away to get out coffee.

We all shared a laugh while Barbara looked away embarrassed. It just felt good to not be the butt of a joke for once.

"As I was saying!" Barbara said clearing her throat and tapping one front and one back heel on the ground to get our attention. "This is more than just a social call. I actually wanted to set up something special for you Annamaria."

"Special? For me?" I said, sipping the latte the cowgirl had just sat down in front of me.

"Yeah. See Lucien reached out to a partner modeling agency that I work for, and he's going to start a big project, right here in Port Solei! He wants to make Port Solei the future of fashion! I mean why not! We can make clothes unlike any other using the special abilities of mutant seamstresses. The random people that walk down our streets look like the people attending the Met Gala back on the mainland!"

I nodded along, though Laura seemed... a bit perturbed by how excited Barbara was getting.

"So, we are going to open up a big fashion co-op. Representatives from all different designers, all working for mutants, with mutants in Port Solei! And Lucien wants YOU to be his representative!" Barbara said, pointing straight at me.

"Wait, what? Me? What. Wait... wait what do you mean? Why didn't Lucien tell me?"

"They're a weirdo..." Mary said.

"Well, that and we weren't sure we could make it all work out. Besides, Lucien told me you hadn't been to Port Solei in ages. I wanted you to be able to see the sights and remember everything you loved about it before making the decision you know."

We sat at the table silent for a long time before Laura finally broke the silence.

"I... I gotta go," she said getting off her stool and walking briskly out of the café. Barbara and Mary were taken by surprise.

"Is she OK?" Barbara asked.

"Y-yeah," I said. "She will be fine. I just... I need to check up on her."

As I ran out of the café, I could hear Barbara say, "Well... I expected things to play out differently..."

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I caught up to Laura at a nearby park. She was kneeling near a fountain as mutant children played around her, one with wings, one with three legs, tossing pennies in and floating ships across it. She was just staring into the water.

"You ok?" I asked her, putting two hands on her shoulder.

"No..." she said. Her tail head wouldn't even look at me.

"Want to talk about it?" One of my heads asked while the other leaned on her shoulder.

"Anny... look. It's been... It's been really great going out with you but..." Laura said trailing off.

"You aren't breaking up with me, are you?!" I shouted with both heads.

... I was making a scene again.

"No! No no no it's not that it's just..." Laura lazily trailed a hand through the water of the fountain. "Ever since I met you, you have been on this jet set course for some kind of fashion stardom."

Me? A fashion star? Was that how she thought of me?

"I... I mean I didn't expect it to--"

"Let me finish," she said interrupting me. "I'm happy for you. I'm really really happy for you. It's just that... when we got together, I wasn't looking to date some fashion star. I was looking to date the down to earth girl from the mutant clothing store at the mall... you know there's a big difference, right?"

"I'm still the same me Laura..." I said, pleading my case.

"Yeah, Ammy... you are the same you, and I LOVE who you are. You make me smile and you make me feel like I'm not a freak. YOU are my Port Solei you know? I don't need this island when I have someone in my life that just likes me for who I am...."

"So, what's the problem?" I asked honestly.

"The problem is... well look at this place. Port Solei is awesome. You know it. I know it. What's not to love about it. Every mutant wants to live here, the height of mutant civilization... But... You know what that means for me right?"

"No.... what?" I asked.

"Come on Ammy you know. It means I'd have to leave MY job. You have to take a plane to get here. I'm not gonna be able to just drop everything and do that. I'd have to leave my home and my friends and make a new life here if we are going to remain together. I'd have to give up everything because you

suddenly get this fantastic opportunity that OF COURSE you should take... I'd be an asshole if I asked you not to take it."

Both of my heads looked away. "So, what do we do?"

"I don't know, ok? I don't have the answers. But this isn't my life. Suddenly working for multinational fashion designers. Picking up and leaving everything behind to go to some mutant paradise? I'm a small-town girl Ammy. I have things at home that comfort me. So now I'm in this position I don't want to be in. I either leave everything behind and keep you or keep everything and lose you. Or we try a long distance relationship which is just... I mean you know these things never work out."

I took a deep breath. "I'm not definitely going to take the position you know..."

"You aren't?" Laura asked, tears welling up in her eyes.

"No, I'm not... but I'd at least like to think about it.... but we don't have to think about it now," I said, kissing her forehead with my right head. "Look, let's forget this right now. We have a whole weekend to have a vacation in Port Solei. Can we at least try to enjoy it? I can talk to Lucien when we get back home and maybe we can work something out. But for now... it's just us, ok?"

"Just us?" Laura's heads asked.

"Just us," I said.

Laura laughed weakly to herself. "Ammy... I've never seen you handle a situation so... adult before..."

I laughed back, "too weird?"

Laura smiled. "Yeah, I like it better when you are panicking and freaking out."

I giggled and gave her a bit of a nudge on the shoulder. "Come on. Let's go see the sights. Maybe we can spend some time on the beach?"

She gave me a tight hug. "I thought you'd never ask."