

It was unfortunate that my mother caught me skipping my peas.

After enduring an intense lecture on vegetables, I flopped onto my bed, ready for sleep.

Wrong.

I ended up reliving one of my most poignant memories.

Dad was driving. I was playing with a piece of paper, trying to make an origami bird. The traffic lights changed to red, but a truck hadn't stopped at the intersection. It headed straight for us.

I was hospitalised for weeks after the crash. I miraculously survived, but it cost me two major things: my dad and my hearing.

But there were gains, too. I found out that I can channel heat into and absorb heat from things. I can read lips, and understand any written or sign language instantly, so cochlear implants are not necessary. I haven't told anyone about my powers; no one would believe a 12-year-old girl who barely survived a severe head injury and lost her hearing.

A flicker in the air interrupted my train of thought. A man dressed in green suddenly appeared with what looked like a dimensional rift behind him.

"Greetings, Carpiello. Can you hear me?"

NO! I signed.

Mystery Man sighed. "You can lipread, right?"

YES!

"Ok. You are the Chosen One to save our country, Devcolrse Vales." Mystery Man looked on intently. "Come with me, and everything will make sense."

I hesitated. **Okay...Mystery Man?**

"The name's Dante. Good grief, have you been calling me *Mystery Man* all this time? Come through the portal with me." Dante snapped his fingers, and the portal reappeared. He disappeared into it. I followed.

Where are we going?

“We are in front of the palace.”

The palace’s interior was as green, imposing, and majestic as the outside. Intricate patterns covered the walls and the high, domed ceiling. At the far corner of the room, a young man with an emerald studded crown sitting on a green crystalline throne.

“Welcome, Chosen One,” King Lodestar said.

Hi? I signed tentatively.

“All right. Carpiniello, we have been watching you for years and we know that you are the Chosen One.”

“You are to vanquish The Dark Master.”

What is going on?

“The Dark Master is an extremely powerful sorcerer. He can use ice, but he primarily defeats his adversaries by mind control. Do not underestimate him. He single-handedly wiped out all the mages in our kingdom.”

“You must retrieve the Devcolrse Sceptre and use it against the Dark Master before he gets even stronger. Look.” Lodestar pointed to a holographic projection of a gold sceptre bejeweled with emeralds.

“You must go now. There is not a moment to lose.”

Wait, I signed desperately as Lodestar got up. **Now?**

“Any delay will alert the Dark Master of your existence. You must go.”

King Lodestar pressed a blue stone into my hand and the room blurred. Within seconds, I found myself standing on a deserted battlefield. Frozen, shattered remains of unidentifiable but once living beings littered the ground. A distant silhouette of a fortress loomed over everything in sight.

Here goes nothing.

I crept up to the fortress as silently as humanely possible. Slipping between doors, I went past the throne room and into the treasury.

The sceptre was on a velvet cushion inside a box made out of ice. I channelled heat into the box, which was soon a puddle on the floor. I retrieved the sceptre and examined it. It felt odd.

That was too easy.

In an instant, the treasury door flew open. A cloaked figure stood at the entrance, blocking my escape route.

“Welcome! Irena Carpiniello,” the Dark Master said. “I’ve been waiting for you.”

Trembling, I lifted the heavy sceptre towards him. A bolt of white energy hit the Dark Master in the chest.

The Dark Master laughed maniacally, melting my courage away. “Nice try, little hero. I am impossible to defeat. I am the greatest. I will rule the Devcolrse Vales. The final thing that I need to do is to...

“Kill you.”

A fog covered my mind, and my hand grasped my throat, squeezing it. I doubled over, choking.

In the back of my mind, a small voice chided, *Keep fighting!*

Gathering my strength, I shook off Dark Master’s mind control, glaring at him.

I lifted the sceptre up again and channelled my anger into it. A massive bolt of white-hot energy blasted the Dark Master off his feet.

“That hurt..... a little,” he chuckled. “But that will not defeat me.”

Fast as lightning, he shot bolt after bolt of ice beams. I managed to focus heat on most of them, but barely.

The Dark Master reached out to take control of my mind again. I felt my mind getting clouded and my grip on the Sceptre weakening. I am going to lose.....

“Irena.....my dear. Don’t give up!”

Dad?

“Irena. You must defeat the Dark Master.... for he was the reason for the car accident! He controlled the mind of the driver in the red truck. He tried to kill you then!”

Indescribable rage welled within me. I channeled my rage, fear and sadness into the sceptre. The sceptre glowed white-hot in my hands and as I screamed in agony, I aimed for the Dark Master. He attempted to dodge, but it was too late. A devastating flash of red lightning consumed him, instantly reducing the Dark Master to a pile of glowing white ashes.

I stood still, breathing heavily.

What now?

The stone, I thought.

Mysteriously, it was in my pocket. I stared at it, and then lightly tapped the stone. Before I knew it, I was standing in front of King Lodestar and Dante, as if I have never left.

“Well done, Carpiello,” they chanted simultaneously.

“On behalf of the kingdom, I would like to thank you,” the king said.

“You have achieved what none of us can you are the Hero of Devcolrse Vales.”

I would like to go home, I signed.

“Granted,” Lodestar said, and a familiar-looking portal appeared right next to me. I climbed in. I was going home.