

**Sample Chapter from *Revenge of the Soccer Moms*
by M. E. Levine**

PROLOGUE

KARMA, THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Karma froze. She had been hugged, kissed, and patted like a dog by her Grandma Minnie, but never grabbed by the face like this. She held her breath against the choking combination of lilac face powder, peppermint candy, hair spray, and prehistoric dust. Her eyes began to water. Mom said that Dad was fibbing about Grandma Minnie smoking Cuban cigars, but now Karma wasn't so sure. Every inch of her chubby little body screamed to be released, to escape to the backyard where the other cousins were climbing trees and playing cowboys and Indians. *Why did I come in here? Why didn't I pee in the bushes like the boys?*

Grandma Minnie pulled her oldest granddaughter, her darling sweet Karmella, in closer. With her thick new eyeglasses, she could still see pretty good, knock on wood, and Karmella's fat little cheeks were so pink, so healthy, it was a blessing from G-d Himself. She kneaded them like bread dough with trembling fingers, and smiled as they grew even pinker.

"Kahrmellah, sveet child, now you remember vat I'm telling you. I vant you should marry a nice Jewish boy."

Karma let out a strangled squeak. A tiny bit of grandma spit had just hit her chin, and she *really* needed to get away. There was only one way to end this. So underage, overweight, and living in a small Indiana town with no Jewish boys except her own cousins, she said, "Okay, Grandma, I will."

It wasn't exactly a lie, it was more like promising to become an astronaut. Not impossible, but you wouldn't bet your allowance on it. Cheeks still smooshed in her grandmother's iron grip, Karma's eyes shifted to her mother, who was watching the whole thing from the kitchen, a damp dish towel in her hands. Charlotte gave her daughter a tiny nod of permission, and Karma twisted out of her grandmother's icy fingers and escaped out the back screen door.

KARMA, THE FRUSTRATING YEARS

Karma, twenty-two, was seated at the long formal dining table next to her Cousin Lisa's brand-new fiancé. As was the tradition, Passover Seder was being held at Grandma Minnie's house, though she could no longer cook the meal without assistance. Lisa's fiancé was lean, handsome, well-dressed, and Jewish, an ideal match for Lisa, with her perfect figure, glossy dark hair, and unerring sense of style. Karma, two years older than Lisa, was no closer to becoming the blushing bride of a Nice Jewish Boy than she was to planting the Israeli flag on the moon. During the customary break in the Passover ceremony, while the younger kids searched for the hidden matzo that would allow the Seder to be concluded, Grandma Minnie led Karma into the formal parlor of her musty old house and onto the yellowed plastic slip-covered sofa. To Karma's knowledge, no human bottom had touched the actual fabric on that sofa. Karma helped her grandmother down onto the plastic, and took a seat beside her. She had a feeling she knew what was coming.

"Kahrmellah," said Grandma Minnie, *"I vant you should marry a nice boy."*

Karma noted the edit. In an obvious gesture of pity, Grandma Minnie was lowering the bar. Karma fought back the need to defend herself, to explain to her grandmother that not every girl got married these days, and that it was perfectly acceptable to choose a career instead of marriage. If she did meet somebody, she might even decide just to live with him. Or she might become a lesbian and join a commune in Vermont and grow vegetables. Men weren't everything, she wanted to say.

But just in time, a loud cheer from the dining room signaled that the hidden matzo had been found, and the Passover dinner was about to conclude. That meant dessert, and Grandma Minnie practically bounded off the sofa to get back to the table. Frail as she was, she could move fast when she was motivated.

Karma composed herself, peeled her thighs off the sofa and detoured through the kitchen to pour herself another glass of Manishevitz before taking her seat at the dinner table. But she barely heard the final prayers. There was no point feeling insulted or upset; Minnie couldn't help being a relic of a bygone era when woman needed men. Karma, thank God, was a liberated woman with a college degree, a cool new job, and her own efficiency apartment. She was still plump and still single, but she had her whole life ahead of her, and women without men were like fish without bicycles. Anyway, that's what Gloria Steinem said, and that's what Karma told herself on date-less Saturday nights. Maybe she'd get a cat.

KARMA, THE DESPERATE YEARS

Hurricane Andrew hit Florida, Bill Clinton hit on Monica, and Karmella Moskowitz, thirty-one, attended yet another family wedding without a date, much less a husband. At the reception, only her father asked her to dance. Grandma Minnie was now confined to a motorized scooter that she insisted on steering, in spite of near-blindness. When you heard the whine of her motor, you got the hell out of the way. Fortunately, Grandma Minnie spent most of the evening parked at the lavish dessert table.

Remarkably, Minnie's radar for her oldest and only unmarried, granddaughter was sharp as ever. As Karma tried to slip past her grandmother to make another trip to the cash bar, Minnie reached out and grabbed her arm with a grip that was still like iron.

Karma leaned down in front of her grandmother. "Hey, Grandma, how's the sponge cake?"

"Dry. Is a pity. The chocholaht ees better." The old woman gazed sightlessly and silently into Karma's eyes for a long moment. Finally, she spoke. *"Ah, my Kahrmellah, you are such a lovely girl."* The old lady paused. *"You know, I just vant you should be heppy."*

Karma tried to smile. The bar, previously lowered, had just been crushed and sold for scrap. With a sigh, Karma pulled a chair over next to Grandma Minnie and helped herself to a piece of chocolate cake. It was better than the sponge cake.

Sadly, the following spring, Grandma Minnie fell and broke her hip while sweeping up a Metamucil spill in her kitchen. She died in a nursing home a few months later. The funeral was well-attended, and everyone agreed that the indomitable old woman would be missed. She had been the matriarch, the glue that held the Moskowitz clan together. The stories about her life in the Old Country were legend. She had been a tough young girl, then a tough young woman, and she died a tough old lady.

If only Minya Moskowitz had lived a little longer, she would have seen her beloved granddaughter join Weight Watchers, lose forty pounds, meet a nice Jewish boy named Sam Kranski, marry him under the *chuppah*, and give birth to a baby girl who was named in her honor.

Everyone agreed that it was a shame she wasn't there to enjoy it. On the other hand, it was surely a blessing that Grandma Minnie missed what happened a few years later. At least in Karma's opinion.

During so many sleepless nights, she imagined the old lady, hands on hips, clucking her tongue and tapping her black orthopedic shoes as she looked down from the Great Dessert Table in the Sky.

“Oy gevalt, it shouldn’t happen to a dog vat happened to you, Kahrmellah. But knock on vood you hev still got yer health.”

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