

## Super Nobody

When I was growing up my favorite superhero was Superman. He could do anything he wanted and have anything he wanted, but he still chose to spend his time helping people. He gave me hope—something to dream about. I wanted to be just like him. Actually, that's not true—he always seemed a little pompous. What I really wanted was to be able to do the things he could do.

I realized later, as I lay in the dumpster below our building's fire escape, that Superman was super because he was born that way. But I wasn't. I really couldn't fly. And, in retrospect, I was lucky to have survived my seven-story-fall into the trash I'd thrown out that morning. Jumping was easy. It was living in the real world that scared me.

So, my next favorite superhero was Spider-Man. He wasn't born with special powers; they came to him by chance. And I liked the idea that normal people could become something more. But, of course, when I tried microwaving my snake so that it would turn radioactive and bite me, my mother went ballistic. She forbade me from ever having pets or reading about superheroes again. She even sent me to a child psychiatrist to try and get to the bottom of my obsession. The shrink said 'I developed my love for glorified-super-men to compensate for my lack of a father figure.' My mother didn't send me back for a second session.

Batman was my next favorite hero. Technically, he wasn't a superhero because he didn't have any superpowers. And, as far as anyone could tell, he was just an ordinary guy screwing around in bulletproof-leather. But he still managed to help people. He still made a difference, with or without super strength and agility, and, in my mind, that meant I had a chance too. It meant there could be something more to growing up than just getting older—I could be a superhero too.

"No, you can't," Brad protested, dipping one side of his fry into ketchup and the other side into Cheese Wiz. "Superheroes don't come out of middle schools in Jersey."

"Who says?" I snapped, flipping through one of the library's books on famous heroes.

"Any of them come from Jersey?" he asked, pointing to my book. "They wouldn't even visit," he continued, eyeballing the cafeteria's entrances. "They probably figure we got it so bad, we can't be saved."

"Stop quoting your mother," I groaned, slapping the book shut and putting it in my bag. "And what difference does it make where you come from?"

"What difference? Whether or not you're super, that's the difference," he exclaimed, sipping his soda. I gave him a long look so he'd know just how stupid he was but I don't think he got the idea.

Brad was the only man in a large family of women. His sisters were actually pretty good looking, so it meant sleepovers were a chance to sneak a peek. But, unfortunately, it also meant Brad didn't know how to communicate without nit-picking or antagonizing—two words I had to learn just to try and explain what was wrong with him.

"So, fine, maybe no heroes have come out of here yet... but I'm gonna."

"All you're gonna do is get knocked out," he replied, double checking the side doors in case my attackers tried to sneak in. "At least if you run away they could get tired and give up."

"Superheroes don't run away."

"Then if you'll excuse me," he stated, stepping back from the table and pointing to something behind me. I swallowed hard and turned around slowly. My arch nemesis—the bane of my existence—Ardy and his retarded gang of abortion-worthy-dipshits had shown up just like they said they would. The fight I'd been running from for years was about to have its way with my face. I turned around and swore under my breath. I managed to catch a glimpse of Brad as he ran away and sunk into the crowd gathering around my table. I'd told him I didn't want a sidekick and that he didn't have to fight. He told me he wasn't my sidekick and that he couldn't fight. Things worked out perfectly—this would be my moment. That is, as long as I actually had superpowers.

"I feel sorry for your mother," Ardy announced, as he and his minions stomped their way around front of me. "She's not gonna have anyone to go down on her after you're dead," he continued, pausing for the crowd of children to laugh at me. I kept my eyes low, looking at the table and clenching my fists under it. I'd put up with Ardy through all of elementary and middle school, but I couldn't take it any longer.

"Only one who's 'going down' is you," I whispered. Ardy frowned and took a step forward to stand beside me. He leaned down and lured the corner of my eyes to look at his empty expression and hungry fists. Whatever my powers were, I needed to find out quickly.

"You just gonna sit there? Or, are you gonna do something?" he asked, shoving me so hard I almost flew out of my seat. I glanced at the superhero book poking out of

my bag and dug deep inside myself for whatever courage I had. Then, before anyone, or even me, could see it coming, I sprung out of my seat and shot my fist forward like a bullet out of a gun. It landed hard across Ardy's jaw and the whole cafeteria echoed from the smack of my knuckles. But Ardy's face didn't even move from the blow, and the echo had come from the sound of my cracking bones. I pulled my throbbing hand back and released a whimper. Ardy grinned and grabbed me by my shirt. He lifted me clean over his head and spun me around like a top. I tried grabbing onto his arms in order to get down but he just kept flinging me around. Eventually he picked a direction and sent me hurdling across the room. I landed hard on a table and toppled off it onto the ground. Ardy was stronger than I'd thought—stronger than made any damn sense to think. It was almost as though Ardy was the one who had superpowers.

I stood up slowly and wiped someone's pudding off my forehead. But before I could shake the dizziness or figure out where I stood, Ardy was on top of me again. His fists dug into every inch I had showing—faster and harder than jet-engine-baseball-bats. I tried to scream for help, but he kept pounding me before I could form words—letting out high pitch shrieks instead. The crowd of children stood in shock, unable to believe the beating they were witnessing. I tried every super power I could think of to keep Ardy away from me. Laser eyes, invisibility, web-slinging, telekinesis. But it was no use. I couldn't do anything. Brad was right; I wasn't a superhero.

I stopped trying to fight back, to stand up, or hold onto my dignity. Ardy laughed at my swollen face pressed against the cold cafeteria floor—one eye still open to reassure the crowd that I wasn't dead. But just as Ardy pumped his fists into the air, gloating about yet another victory, the walls started to shake and I felt my cheek flap against the ground. Ardy looked anxiously at me, wondering if I were the one making it happen. But I was just as surprised as everyone else. Then, just as a carton of milk vibrated off a table and landed on my head, the cafeteria doors burst inward and a whirlwind of papers and half eaten sandwiches filled the air. Everyone ran for cover, ducking under tables with their hands planted tightly over their ears. But as I lay on the ground, squinting to try and decipher the chaos, I could see a blurry figure walking towards me.

"Only bullies bully," a deep voice bellowed, as a shiny pair of gold-knee-high-boots came to rest beside my head.

"Captain Bling!" the crowd of children cried, climbing over one another to get a look at a real life superhero.

"I would have expected more from you," Captain Bling continued, ignoring the crowd and lifting me into the air with one arm. But as my limp body was elevated I felt every bone I had sink—shattered from the pummeling I'd received. I shrieked like a little girl and wiggled violently to get free. "Wait... you're the one who got beat up?"

Captain Bling exclaimed, letting me fall back to the ground as he looked from side to side for the real Bully. But Ardy was already long gone. Unlike me, he knew better than to mess with someone bigger than him. And, unlike me, he hadn't been taught his lesson.

*Continued in The Collection: Volume One*

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