

Profoundly POWERLESS

A Novel by Jenny Amara

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Chapter 07 - I've Had About Enough of This

"Do I actually have a superpower?" Paul questioned privately. He had just been through this same ordeal a couple of weeks ago, and having it happen again so soon seemed more than a coincidence. "Maybe my power is 'pure dumb luck,' only I have bad luck as my default."

"Look, Paul, you can calm down. I'm not going to hurt you. I'm... just... tired," the imposing man said before falling forward and crashing over a table.

"Holy shit!" Paul exclaimed as he rushed around the counter to check on the man. Paul confirmed that the man was still alive with a quick pulse check.

"Well, what am I supposed to do about this now?"

Twenty minutes later, the superhero rescue squad, S.Q.U.A.D., was on the scene. S.Q.U.A.D. handled the fallout of superhero events and provided emergency medical relief to heroes in need. On arrival, Paul was quickly ushered away by several S.Q.U.A.D. members. Paul was glad they were handling this mess rather than him, though he was surprised to learn that the man who had collapsed after being more than moderately threatening to him was himself a superhero.

After twenty minutes, the Medical S.Q.U.A.D. resuscitated the suspicious man, and they shortly began discussing something official, but Paul couldn't make out the details. As his curiosity increased, Paul started to inch closer but was shocked to hear a familiar voice shout at him.

"Paul! You're back to normal! What was it, three weeks? Almost to the day! You did so awesome. You look just like your S.U.C.K.S. Profile again. I'm not sure which

version of you is cuter, though, if I'm being honest. You have a classic beauty like Paula but an on-trend nerdiness as a man. I'm going to have to reflect on this...
hmm..."

"Kyrie? Are you for real right now?"

"Wait just a minute..."

"Seriously?"

"Not one for patience, I see; I think that seals the deal. Paula's cuter. We need to get Paula back ASAP."

"Well, that's never happening. My power only works in one direction, remember?"

"I still have a sample of that gunk you were injected with... maybe if I..."

"Kyrie!"

"All right, all right. Can't blame a girl for thirsting..."

"Umm... I think you literally can and should. It's weird..."

"Nah, what's weird is what's up with The Roman."

"The who?"

"No, The Roman?"

"Uh-huh, I stand by my question."

"Him! That dude, he's The Roman! Superhero extraordinaire!"

"He couldn't possibly be. His hair's all wrong. It's not even the same color as The Roman's."

"You think a thing like hair color would limit a hero that draws their power from the Roman Gods?"

"No... Obviously..."

"Right... So, what did he say to you before he went crash and pow?" Kyrie said, gesturing with her hand slapping against her forehead comedically.

"Nothing, he just said my name even though I wasn't wearing my nametag. Is he psychic?"

"I literally told you we don't have a psychic on staff at S.U.C.K.S. like a week ago. Was it your brain that suffered a fall this morning or his?"

"How am I supposed to know? Things can change."

"Not that fast... He knows your name because he was assigned your case."

"What? Why would an S-Tier superhero be assigned my case?"

"It's interesting, right?" Kyrie asked, leaning in. Her words sounded too excited for how mundane the question was.

"Uhh, yeah..."

"Well, you're giving me nothing here, kid. Did you have your coffee, caffeine, espresso, adrenaline shot, or whatever this morning?"

"Huh, Kyrie? Just get on with it. Why would S.U.C.K.S. assign The Roman to look into my case?"

"That's just it, they didn't. He volunteered. He said he saw it on the news and wanted to offer his support personally."

"Really? Then why did he come in here and threaten me?"

"Threaten you? Really?"

"Yeah, he could tell I had caught that he shouldn't have known my name. He made a whole thing of me not running away."

"Well, duh. He is not supposed to make contact with the victim of an active case he's working on. It could put you in harm's way."

"I... Didn't know that. So, is he going to get in trouble?"

"Nope!"

"After all that, you just say 'Nope?'"

"Yep, he's The Roman. He's the closest thing to royalty we have in this town. He

can pretty much do as he pleases, but he's still a fastidious rule follower. Sort of goes with the territory and all."

"Yeah... That makes sense."

"So, he said exactly nothing to you and then passed out. Does that about sum it up?"

"In retrospect, I think it does."

"Cool story, Paul... Cool story..." Kyrie seemed to be moving on as she started checking Paul's body out by making orbital motions back and forth around his perimeter. It was seriously weirding Paul out.

"Can you... not... do that?"

"What? I'm a scientist. It's part of the deal. I get to observe and hypothesize about the world, and right now, you are the most interesting thing going on anywhere on this planet. You do realize you are the first person ever to change genders through a superpower, right?"

"What? No... That can't be right..."

"No verifiable instances have ever been documented. And before you say it, no, that one-time Kimper ran into his female doppelganger from another dimension doesn't count. And neither does pink Kleton! Don't bring it up! We don't talk about that..."

"Uhh, I have no idea what you're talking about, but it sounds absurd."

"Oh, trust me, it was bonkers."

"Right..."

"So... any lingering feminine traits you want to tell me about still lingering?" Kyrie asked, practically salivating.

"No! Cut it out, Kyrie."

"Fine... Fine... But, if you do decide you want to switch back, you know how to find me."

Later that night...

"That all happened in the first two hours after I opened, Annie! Today was supposed to be normal, ordinary... boring."

"Well, to me, it sounds like Paula has an admirer."

"What? Ew, no, gross. I'd never date Kyrie in a million years."

"No, not Kyrie. The Roman. Also, seriously? The Roman? You didn't get his actual name?"

"No, he has a secret identity, Annie. Also, there's no chance he's into me. He'd never even seen me before today."

"You sure about that?"

"What do you mean?"

"He's a superhero. Who can fly."

"Uh-huh, still not following."

"And has super speed."

"Yeah, I think that's one of his powers. And?"

"And has the ability to disguise himself?"

"Yeah, seems pretty much essential to keep a secret identity, so?"

"So, sometimes you are very dense. There's practically zero chance that this is the first time the super-powered, super-speedy, super-disguised man has seen you. He'd obviously be monitoring you at least some of the time in case that old woman were to show up again."

Paul was about to disagree with his sister when his doorbell rang, "Hold tight, Annie. Probably a delivery."

Paul opened the door and saw a heart-shaped box of chocolates at his feet. "Who would have left this," he thought as he brought the box inside.

"You'll never believe what it was."

"You're right, I won't. I won't even bother to guess. Just tell me..."

"It was a box of chocolates."

"What kind of box?"

"I don't know," Paul hesitated to answer.

"Uh-huh, what color was the box?"

"Uhhh..." Paul couldn't bring himself to answer.

"I knew it! He likes you! Oh, it's so cute: a superpowered man meets a man in a coffee shop 'meet-cute.' You'll tell your grandkids all about it someday."

"What!? Don't be ridiculous!"

"Don't be ridiculous? I think I'm being perfectly reasonable here. You're the one who's denying reality. You should look for a number to call him or text him at the least. I'm sure he left it for you."

Paul looked over the box, but there was no card or visible writing on it.

"Nope, nothing, Annie. Maybe it was left at my door by mistake?"

"Mistake? Really? I seriously doubt it, Paul."

"Well, stranger things have been happening. Especially to me."

"My point exactly... Hey, I have to get going. We on for dinner with Mom this week?"

"Yeah, same time and place. I'll see you then."

Paul ended his call and continued to examine the chocolates. The box was ornate and appeared to be very high quality. Paul wasn't one to let a good thing go to waste, so he opened the box and marveled at the menagerie of luscious chocolates. They were the fanciest confectionaries that Paul had ever laid eyes on. He hesitantly selected a piece, using the utmost care to extract the delicate chocolate from the container.

Paul ate the chocolate in one bite.

"Oh my God! That's amazing. So sweet! So velvety! So much Umph! Wow!"

Paul ate five more chocolates from the dozen before finally placing the box down. "I can't eat anymore. These were probably meant for someone else. It's not fair that I'm eating their gift like this."

Paul went to bed feeling carefree for the first time in almost a month. He slept like a baby—a baby who had just eaten the most delectable dessert.

Paul got some odd looks at work the next day. He was kind of used to it now that he'd spent the last three somewhere between a man and a woman in appearance. He filed the thought away and proceeded to be his usual helpful, friendly self as best he could be.

When he got home, he noticed a little bit of a jiggle as he placed his bag of groceries down on his kitchen counter. "Huh, that's odd. I didn't think I bought anything loose like that."

He took a minute and inspected his items. Everything seemed okay, and nothing appeared to be responsible for that sensation. Being a clueless man, he quickly rose to his tiptoes and dropped his weight. He felt a slight motion again situated on his front side. He made his way swiftly to the bathroom and raised his shirt. Sure enough, his chest looked a bit puffy. "Well, more pudgy than puffy," he thought. He hopped on his scale and noted a five-pound weight gain. "Five pounds? That's unbelievable. All that from a few extra chocolates?"

"Well, better lay off the sweets to drop the extra poundage. I'll just drop these in the trash..." Paul said aloud while holding the box of chocolates. As he went to lower the box into the trash, he found he couldn't follow through. "No, moderation is better than cold turkey. I'm sure I can keep it under control. I just need to use some willpower. I'll be all right in a few days, and there's no need to waste such a fabulous gift."

"Hi, Mom!"

"Holy cow! Paul?"

"Oh, uhh, yeah. It's me."

"What? What happened to you?"

"Is it that noticeable?"

"Honey, you are huge! What? How?"

"I don't really know, Mom. I just can't seem to keep from eating these fantastic chocolates..."

"A few chocolates can't do this, honey. You haven't just gained weight. You're looking awfully... feminine. Something is up..."

"Oh... dang."