

Profoundly POWERLESS

A Novel by Jenny Amara

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Chapter 14 - Lee, Deputized Hero, in Pursuit!

7:55 pm: Lee Holly darted out of the safe house across from the previously unknown domicile of Sorceress, a known accomplice of Devious Doctor, in pursuit of their subject. The registered responsible hero on the scene, The Roman, attempted to stop him but was unsuccessful.

"Blake, would you mind telling us what happened? It should have been trivial for you to stop Lee. How did he get down to the street without you stopping him?" The superhero detective, Interrobang, asked the beleaguered man sitting before him.

"I would have, it's just..." Blake responded before trailing off, seemingly unwilling to continue his statement.

"Just... what? Surely, he didn't injure or harm you to make his attempt at apprehending the suspect."

"No, of course not. Lee and I are friendly. He wouldn't think to do something like that."

"Then why did he get away and put himself in this predicament? Tell me!"

"I... I... want to tell you. It's just a bit... embarrassing?" Blake responded, acquiescing to Interrobang's challenge.

"What could be so bad that concealing the truth would be considered a lesser evil?"

"Well, it's not my truth that I'd be concealing. It's... Paul's. You see..."

7:57 pm: In an attempt to stop the man from pursuing the suspect, The Roman lunged forward to grab the man's shirt by the collar. In the commotion of Lee darting away and The Roman jumping to action, Paul Mansson inadvertently got between the two men. Instead of grasping Lee, The Roman collided with Paul, sending the two to the apartment floor.

"Tell me, Mr. Mansson, what exactly were you trying to do when you got between your friend and The Roman," Interrobang asked Paul.

"Just like I told my mother and the prior two agents who came in here, I was just trying to get a better look at Sorceress. I didn't know that Lee intended to go after her."

"Why was it so important that you get a better look?"

"It wasn't? I was just surprised. She looked so different from what I expected."

"Yes, I understand her appearance has drastically changed since the last time she was seen in public."

"Drastic is putting it lightly, she—"

"Yes, well, that's not why we're talking, however. We are trying to find out why Lee pursued Sorceress and what their whereabouts may be now that they are both missing."

"I know all that. Lee is my friend, after all. Don't you know I'm worried sick about him?"

"Are you? You seem to be avoiding talking about what happened."

"Of course I'm worried. It's just what happened... it's... embarrassing. I don't really want to talk about it. Can we just move on to when The Roman and I reached the street?"

"You mean at 8:24 pm, some twenty-seven minutes later? Don't you think the nature of that time is

important to this investigation? We're searching for your friend here. So, tell me what happened!" The superhero detective suddenly became aggressive in his interrogation style.

"Whoa! I uhh. Sure, twenty-seven minutes is a lot of time, but you see, it's complicated. We had to work some things out after Blake..."

"After The Roman did... what?"

"He, uhhh, he..."

"That's enough! Leave my son be, Interrobang!" Helena interjected over the intercom.

The detective hero turned his head askew towards the private observation room, looking angered and confused at first before nodding to confirm his understanding. After adjusting his coat and tie, he returned to asking Paul questions, "When you reached the street level, Lee and Sorceress were nowhere to be found?"

"Actually..."

8:24 pm: After an undisclosed series of events to become untangled from their prior interaction, The Roman and Paul Mansson reached the street level and observed a residual magical trail extending down the street to an alleyway. The two pursued at their own paces, hoping to keep up with the fleeing villainess and her captive. The Roman arrived at the end of the trail first.

"You reached the end of the magical trail, and then what?"

"It was a dead end, but there was no one there. It seemed like they had vanished into thin air."

"How do you know that they didn't just exit the dead end back the way they came?"

"A witness told me as much. When he saw me following the trail, he told me he had seen someone abducting a man heading down the alley."

"Onlookers are notoriously unreliable!" Interrobang exclaimed his disposition on The Roman's

explanation.

"This is my final warning, Interrobang. Another outburst and you're off this case!" Helena chided over the intercom. The detective superhero adjusted his tie and nodded his understanding before sitting down at the table with Blake.

"Thank goodness for the bystander, or we wouldn't have any leads at all," Interrobang relented with heavy sarcasm.

"Yeah... so I knew that I had to keep searching in the alley, but I wasn't getting anywhere. A few minutes later, Paul joined me, and that's when we saw it."

"Saw what exactly?"

8:32 pm: The registered but inactive hero, Paul Mansson, arrived at the end of the magic trail, where they saw The Roman inspecting the buildings for any sign of secret doors or other suspicious activity. Paul called out to his friend at a considerable volume but received no response until...

"I'm supposed to believe that magical writing just appeared on the wall before you, Mr. Mansson?"

"Umm, yes?"

"And why should I believe that?"

"Because it's true! And because..."

"Because what, Mr. Mansson?"

"Because my friend needs our help, we need to assemble the—"

"Before getting involved in bigger problems than you can handle, I'd like to introduce you to someone."

"Okay, sure. But we really should be sending the world's mightiest—"

"This is Mikel, our corporate counsel. Mikel, say hello."

"Well, howdy there, Paul. It sure is nice to meet ya!"

"Uhh, yeah. Nice to meet you too," Paul said, unsure of what was happening.

"Now, you see, Mikel is the head of the world's largest lawyering firm, this side of the superhero-business divide. He keeps us safe from the other big, litigious corporations that might not want us to say certain things. Do you understand?"

"So I shouldn't say things like, 'Avengers—'"

"Not if you like your knees to stay where they are," Mikel said in a cheery voice that simultaneously conveyed a complete lack of intended humor.

"Right... so... let me try this instead. We need to bring together a group of individuals with abilities that complement each other so that my friend can be rescued from their harrowing situation," Paul said cautiously, looking at Mikel. "Do I get to keep my knees? I'm pretty fond of them, generally speaking, of course."

"As long as you stay on the right side of copyrights!" Mikel answered with the same cheerfulness you'd expect from a cartoon mascot.

Paul was silent momentarily before asking, "What about fair use?" With that, Mikel lunged across the table at Paul, but, fortunately, Interrobang stopped the man from reaching Paul. Now holding S.U.C.K.S.'s corporate counsel back as he dragged him from the room, Interrobang instructed Paul to leave well enough alone. A brief moment later, Interrobang returned to the room with a black eye.

"He got you pretty good there," Paul commented.

"This? No, this was from Helena."

"Mom? Why did she—"

"So, the message from Sorceress, what did it say exactly?"

Paul huffed at being interrupted but relented when he realized he would extend the conversation to

make a point of it. "Just like before, an exchange is in order. You bring mine, and I'll bring yours. She'll know the time and place."

"Paul! Paul! Wait up!" Blake called out across the hall of S.U.C.K.S. Paul turned to see who it was but continued when he saw who it was.

"Come on, I said I was sorry. How long are you going to hold this against me?"

"Forever, Blake. You used to work with my mom, not with me. We're not friends. Whatever relationship you thought we would have isn't going to happen. You need to leave me alone."

"Please, Paul. It was an accident, and I don't have any plans about anything between us. I am just trying to help you."

"Don't you think you've helped me enough already? Actually, wait. If you want to help, you can go get my friend back from this psycho and then leave us both alone."

"Paul... I'm truly sorry... I'll... I'll save Lee. You can count on me."

Paul scoffed at Blake's words, turned his back on the hero, and exited the secured area.

"What happened between you two?" Helena asked, walking up behind Blake and touching his shoulder. Blake jumped at the touch and spun around to face Helena.

"Director!" Blake said, saluting to Helena.

"At ease, Blake. Now, tell me why my son is storming off."

7:58 pm: The Roman's attempt to stop Lee Holly saw him collide with Paul Manson. Landing on top of Mr. Irrelevant, The Roman appears to have panicked from the unexpected collision. He lifted Paul from the ground but was careless in his actions. In his attempt to expediently undo his mistake, he accidentally activated his powers, which caused Paul's clothing to transmute into a Greek tunic called a peplos.

The sudden shock of the situation appears to have resulted in an immediate argument between the two. Paul was initially agitated with The Roman because of the collision and the shock of seeing their clothing transmute. The Roman appears to have responded poorly, but neither party clarified the nature of his further actions. With no willing participation from the subjects, this detective is required to fill in the details.

Based on Paul Mansson's psychological profile suggests that the suddenly feminine attire would cause him distress. Combining this with The Roman's obsession with Ancient Greece and Rome leads this detective to conclude that he must have made a romantic or sexual advance that was unwelcome.

Given their positions within S.U.C.K.S., further monitoring of the subjects will be necessary.