



Not-So-Super

by

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NOT-SO-SUPER

I stared at the band on my left wrist. To the normies, it looked like one of those souped-up watches that could tell the time in fifty different zones and do tricks under water.

It did tell the time if I had it on the right setting. Unfortunately, that wasn't all it did.

Right now, it was glowing a soft red. I didn't like red. Red meant there was trouble.

Trouble meant I had to find somewhere to transform into my secret identity and go off to save the day.

I never should have gone along with the Super Group when they'd invited me to join them. Despite the Saturday morning cartoon-style name, the Group was made up of legitimate superheroes. Men and women who had mutated into something powerful, or who'd developed technology that gave them the illusion of having powers.

They'd gathered together to fight evil and protect the normies, the humans who mostly didn't even know—or believe—super powers existed.

Farsight, the group's resident psychic, had tracked me down after my morph power went off on its own and turned me into a bear. Not even a scary grizzly that might have scared away the guy who was trying to steal my backpack as I walked home from school.

No, of course my power hadn't done anything that useful. It had turned me into a teddy bear.

Fortunately Power Guy and Polarity had found me before the mugger stopped laughing long enough to grab my backpack. They'd taken me back to HQ and told me all about the Super Group and how they could help me learn to manage my powers and use them to benefit others.

I was all about the benefiting others part. The managing, not so much.

They kept me around, though. I wasn't sure whether they believed they would be able to help me learn to control the morphing eventually or if I just provided them too much comic relief for them to get rid of me. Whichever it was, they kept me around, and when danger threatened the residents of our city, sometimes they called me in.

Like now.

I raised my hand and waited for Mrs. Lewis, my English teacher, to notice. Finally she glanced up from her tattered copy of *To Kill a Mockingbird* and narrowed her eyes. "Yes, Jerissa?"

"I need to, um." *I need to go put on this nifty spandex costume and go save someone.* Obviously I couldn't say that. And I hated saying I needed to go to the bathroom because everyone always laughed. So I just left it at "um."

Mrs. Lewis let out an exaggerated sigh. "Go ahead. Take the pass."

"Thanks." I got up and grabbed my purse, which was bigger on the inside thanks to one of our techy heroes. We weren't allowed to carry backpacks and bags around the school,

only wallets and small purses, and I needed something to keep my super suit in.

I was in luck. The girls' bathroom at the end of the hall was empty. I locked myself into one of the stalls and quickly changed from my ripped jeans and sparkly silver shirt into the spandex thing.

I didn't look good in spandex. I tried not to think about that. With the morphing ability, I wished I could give myself a better-looking body, but apparently that was more than a super power could handle.

I didn't have time to get all bummed out about the bulges in my super suit, though. I shoved my normie clothes into the purse and stuck that in an invisible pocket in the spandex. The pocket was part of the same techy thing that made my purse expand to fit jeans and a shirt. I didn't pretend to understand any of the gizmos and gadgets the Super Group had. I just used them when I needed to and was glad to have them.

The tricky part was getting out of school without being seen. Fortunately, the bathroom was right around the corner from one of the side exits. Unfortunately, that door was kept locked during the school day and had an alarm on it so no one could sneak in or out. Heightened security FTW.

Fortunately, I had a gizmo that disarmed alarms. Of course I did.

I got out that door and concentrated. I needed to morph into something that could fly so I could get to the rest of the Super Group. My wristband was specially designed to grow or shrink as needed to fit whatever I morphed into, so it would stay on and guide me to the others.

Something that could fly so I could get where I was going quickly and without being seen.

I ended up in the form of a hummingbird.

A freaking little fluttery bird that most people pointed at and smiled. With a heartbeat so fast I felt lightheaded.

So much for trying to intimidate the bad guys when I got to them.

But at least I could travel to the rest of the group without worrying about any normies noticing. Even though it was early spring and most birds were still down south where it was warm, hummingbirds were common enough around our city that I wouldn't draw attention.

Plus I could fly so fast most people wouldn't even see me.

I let the wristband guide me to an alley downtown. Some of the other Super Group members were already there, standing around on the sidewalk talking in urgent tones. I couldn't understand what they were saying; hummingbirds don't speak English. So I morphed back into my normal shape. At least that worked right.

"Morph Girl, we've been waiting for you." Super Guy, the head of the organization, stepped away from the rest of the group. "You should have come as soon as the indicator summoned you."

"I was in English class," I said. "Short of telling my teacher I had to come help save the city, I couldn't get out any faster."

"You should join our school." He rolled his eyes. We'd already had this conversation a bunch of times. The only way I could join the Super Group's school would be to tell my parents about the morphing and all the rest of it, and normies weren't supposed to know who we were. They knew superheroes existed, but that was it, and most of them didn't believe that much.

He apparently realized he was just opening himself up for another argument. "Never mind," he said. "We need you. The Chartreuse Charmer has taken over a bank and has locked everyone in. You have to morph into something small enough to get under the door so you can let the rest of us in."

"Can't you just break down the door or something?" I hated having them count on me. By now, they should have realized that just because I wanted to morph into something helpful didn't mean I'd be able to.

"Morph Girl, we've talked about this. You have to have confidence." He put his hands on his spandex-covered hips. "We don't have time for doubts. There are infants in that bank."

Of course there were. There were always infants or pregnant women. I was pretty sure the supervillains in our city had a manual that included instructions about taking the most vulnerable normies hostage.

Super Guy led me over to the door, and I followed because I didn't see much choice. If there were babies in that bank, not to mention all the other people, I had to do something. I was the only one who could get small enough to crawl under the glass doors.

Assuming my morph power actually cooperated this time. Last time I'd tried to morph into something small, I'd turned into an elephant.

"Why can't you break the doors?" I asked again, hoping this time I would get an answer instead of a lecture.

Super Guy sighed. "We're still paying off the damages from last time, when Brute Dude broke into the supermarket to rescue the preschoolers."

"Ah." No big surprise there. When the Super Group really got going, there was always property damage. And Brute Dude lived up to his name. He didn't care what he broke as long as he saved the good guys and dealt with the bad guys. At least he was on our side.

"You're going to have to become an insect," Super Guy said. As if I couldn't have figured out for myself that I would have to morph into something that tiny to fit through the gap at the bottom of the doors. "Once you're inside, make sure Chartreuse Charmer and his henchmen won't see you before you morph back. And then unlock the doors to let us in. We'll take care of the rest."

"Okay." The taking care of the rest part was good. I wouldn't have to fight or morph into anything else. My part would be done as soon as I unlocked that door.

Which would involve morphing into a bug so I could get into the bank.

Morphing back from a shape always went just fine. I'd never had any trouble becoming

myself again. But for whatever reason, morphing into another form rarely ended well. I didn't know why. I got the image in my brain of what I was supposed to be, but somehow things got garbled between my brain and the actual morph. Which was why I'd turned into a teddy bear when the attempted mugging triggered my power, and why I'd just flown to the bank as a hummingbird.

If I tried to turn into a bug, I'd be just as likely to end up being a tank or something.

Inside the bank, a baby wailed. There really was at least one infant inside. I didn't know why Chartreuse Charmer had decided to take over a dinky little bank in a dinky little alley, but whatever his reasons, a child was in danger.

The Super Group was supposed to protect normies from danger, and even though I was a total screw-up when it came to using my powers, I was part of the Group. And that meant I had to try. The worst that could happen...

Yeah. I didn't want to think about the worst. No pressure.

Super Guy was just standing there looking at me, which kind of annoyed me. He knew I got self-conscious when I morphed, and having him stare at me was making it worse.

I pretended I didn't notice, though. I closed my eyes.

I had to become an insect. Something small enough no one would notice me crawling through the gap.

An ant. There were tons of ants in the city.

When I opened my eyes, I was tiny. My vision was really weird, but I could see the gap in front of me.

For once, I'd actually morphed into what I was supposed to. Or at least something as small as I was supposed to be. I wasn't an ant.

I was a raisin. A freaking tiny little raisin lying on the sidewalk. Because a raisin could definitely crawl under a door. I wanted to cry, but fortunately raisins don't have tear ducts.

I knew I should try again, but before I could, something shoved me under the door. Probably Super Guy. I'd messed up again as far as becoming something that could move under its own power, but I was small enough to fit through the gap, at least. That was an improvement over my usual morphs. I'd come close.

Determining whether I would be seen took a little more effort, since I couldn't exactly wander around to check on Chartreuse Charmer and his henchpeople. I heard voices nearby but couldn't understand what they were saying.

Yeah, raisins can't see or hear, but no matter what I morphed into, I could always see, hear, and think. I didn't know why, and none of the Super Group science folks had been able to explain it to me.

On the other hand, they hadn't been able to explain why I morphed in the first place. So I figured they just didn't have a clue.

I guessed the bad guys were far enough away that they wouldn't see me morph back into myself, so I did. The rest of the Group was standing near the door, ready to charge in as

soon as I unlocked it.

Someone grabbed me from behind. "A superhero," a hissy voice said right in my ear. "How nice. Charmer! Look what I've found!"

My heart raced and I struggled to get free. The eyes of all the superheroes gathered around the door widened, but not a single one of them moved to help me. Of course not. They couldn't get in, because I'd been stupid enough to get captured before I could unlock the door.

The henchman dragged me across the bank lobby while I struggled. Chartreuse Charmer stood behind the counter, looming over a group of people. He held a gun.

Like most of the villains we dealt with, despite the term, Chartreuse Charmer didn't actually have any superpowers. The only things he could do were threaten and wave things at people. He just liked wearing a costume and having a cool name.

I'd dealt with him before, but I'd gotten the rotten end of it when he'd startled me so much I'd morphed into a spoiled egg. And from the way he laughed when he saw me, I could tell he remembered that.

"Well, well. Morph Girl, isn't it?" He gave me an unpleasant grin and kept his gun aimed at the people. The baby kept wailing while his or her mother murmured little shushing noises.

I took a deep breath. I was scared. My powers were way too unpredictable, and there wasn't much I could do other than change into things anyway. But these people needed help, and I was the only superhero in the building.

It sucked.

"That costume doesn't flatter you, dear," Chartreuse Charmer said. "You need a better fashion consultant."

"Shut up." I knew how I looked in the costume. I'd been lobbying for something looser than spandex, but I was one of the youngest members of the Group, so of course no one listened to me.

He was trying to get to me. Insulting me so I'd wallow instead of fighting him. As soon as I realized that, I straightened my back and looked him right in the eye.

"The rest of the Super Group is right outside," I said, my voice stronger and clearer than I'd expected. "Surrender now, Chartreuse Charmer. You have no chance."

He laughed so hard he almost dropped his gun. "Seriously? You're going to intimidate me into surrendering? The least they could have done is send someone whose powers actually work."

That was the last straw. I wanted to scream at him that he was an idiot, but throwing a tantrum and letting him know he'd gotten under my skin was not going to help his hostages.

I had to morph into something that would help. Something that would scare him. Even if it backfired and he just kept laughing at me, maybe it would be enough of a distraction to

give the rest of the group time to figure out how to rescue us.

Because I needed to be rescued. Exactly what I was not supposed to do. I was supposed to be the rescuer.

I looked around. None of the henchpeople were armed. The only gun in the room was the one in Chartreuse Charmer's hand. He didn't really trust his henchpeople; he just kept them around because they made him feel important.

If I could disarm him and subdue him, one of the hostages could open the door, and the rest of the Super Group could take it from there.

"Not speaking, huh?" Chartreuse Charmer chuckled. "You forgot to morph your vocal cords?"

I ignored him and looked at the hostages. I recognized one of them. He'd graduated from my school the year before. He caught my eye, and I glanced toward the doors. He turned to look, then nodded. Hopefully that meant he would open the doors if I could distract the bad guys.

"You might as well have a seat, Morph Girl." Chartreuse Charmer sneered. "You aren't going anywhere until I have what I'm after. And those tellers had better hurry up with my cash, or no one will be leaving."

"Did you run out of money to fund your pigeon farm?" I asked innocently.

His face went red. "They aren't pigeons!" He waved the gun around. "They're doves! Beautiful white doves!"

"They're grey pigeons." I leaned against the counter. *Now who's getting under whose skin?* "You could sell them, you know. Then you wouldn't be broke all the time."

"Shut up!"

He pointed the gun at me. That was my chance.

I didn't even know what I wanted to morph into. Just something that would be big enough and strong enough to knock him down and get the gun out of his hand. I concentrated without even coming up with a mental image.

I ended up in the form of a Saint Bernard.

Close enough. Those dogs are huge!

I leaped over the counter and before Chartreuse Charmer could react, I pinned him to the ground and grabbed his gun hand between my teeth. Whimpering and babbling something I couldn't understand, he dropped the gun.

The hostages erupted into noise.

Next thing I knew, the Super Group was surrounding me and Chartreuse Charmer. I backed off him slowly, while Super Guy and Incredawoman grabbed him and hauled him to his feet. Some of the other superheroes grabbed his henchpeople.

Seeing that the hostages were being led out of the building and sure that the bad guys were under control, I figured my job was done. I wandered off to the side and morphed

back to my normal self. My heart swelled, and I couldn't help smiling. I'd captured Chartreuse Charmer. I, the least super superhero in the city, had won!

The police were waiting outside, so the Super Group turned Chartreuse Charmer and his henchpeople over to them. A couple of ambulance crews nearby checked out the hostages to make sure they were okay.

The guy from school, Brian or Brice or something, walked over to me. My heart sped up, and I tried to look totally casual and probably failed.

"You're Jerissa, right?" he said. "You were in my graphic design class last year."

"Um, yeah." I managed not to blush. I couldn't believe he even remembered me. Graphic design was one of the classes that were open to people regardless of grade, but seniors usually ignored underclassmen.

He gave me a brilliant smile that lit up his blue eyes. "I didn't know you were a superhero. That was awesome! Can I give you a call sometime?"

"Sure." I smiled back and tried to pretend I wasn't completely shocked.

"I'd better go talk to the police. They're trying to round us all up." He touched my hand. "I always thought there was something special about you. Good job, Morph Girl." He winked and walked away.

"That's going to be a problem," a stern voice said behind me.

I turned around to face Super Guy. I should have known he wouldn't be able to just let me enjoy the moment. "What's going to be?"

"He recognized you." Super Guy sighed. "I'm going to have to have Superaser erase his memory, you know. He can't know that Morph Girl is Jerissa Anderson."

"Oh." My heart sank. The one guy who'd been interested in me since... ever, and I wouldn't even get to enjoy it.

"You did an incredible job." Super Guy put his hand on my shoulder. "How did you know Chartreuse Charmer is terrified of large dogs?"

I hadn't known that. No wonder he'd been so easy to get the better of after I'd morphed. For once, my stupid power had done something useful.

I decided to pretend I'd known exactly what I was doing. "He raises pigeons. I thought maybe large animals would freak him out. It was just a hunch."

"Excellent hunch." He smiled. "You should be proud. When I saw the henchman grab you I was afraid we would be lost, but you did exactly the right things. Congratulations, Morph Girl. You saved the day."

His praise made me feel all warm and squishy. I smiled. "Thank you, Super Guy."

"You're welcome." He patted me on the head. Like I actually was a Saint Bernard. "You'd better get back to school. I'll see you at our meeting tonight."

"Thanks."

I didn't want to take a chance on morphing into something that couldn't move under its own power again, so I just walked the mile or so back to my school. The halls were packed, which meant classes were changing. I'd missed the end of English, and now I would have to face Mrs. Lewis and listen to her complain, because I had to go back to get my books.

It didn't matter, though. I'd faced a supervillain. I had *defeated* a supervillain all by myself, for the first time in my superhero career. Even though he'd been armed with a gun and a bunch of insults.

Compared to that, an angry English teacher was nothing.