

# Profoundly Powerless

## Chapter 1

Paul pressed his broom forward in rhythm with the music playing in the cafe. Each motion jostled a little dust into the air as Paul absentmindedly pushed a small pile of dirt and debris toward the center of the small dining area. A half dozen tables, three larger seating areas with couches, and the barista counter were the only obstacles, but Paul had worked out that the center of the cafe was the best place to gather. It left the fewest remnants behind this way.

Paul's day was progressing as they usually did on a typical Tuesday. The cafe had been busy in the morning, as was usual for a business center, but things had been quiet for the last two hours. Paul used this downtime to do his cleaning. As he was just about to collect the last pile of dirt onto his dustpan, a massive disturbance outside rattled the windows of the cafe, causing Paul to drop the contents of his hands. "Ugh, not today," Paul muttered to himself.

Standing up, Paul stood about five foot eight inches. Paul had sandy blonde hair and was in relatively good shape other than maybe a few extra pounds he carried in his love handles. Scanning the outside area through the cafe windows, Paul could see the commotion. A large semi-truck had collided with the sixth floor of the building across the street. *Every other day, something ridiculous happens like this. Can't these supervillains leave well enough alone?* Paul's thoughts were common among the powerless. More specifically, superpowerless. 20% of the world's population for the last thirty years has been born with some form of superpower. The other 80% of the population was relegated to menial jobs, while the super-powered took on a career that would complement their power.

Paul, well, Paul has a superpower. So, one might reasonably ask, "Why does Paul work at a cafe?" The problem is Paul's power; it's just not a very good one. Actually, the Superpowered Users Coalition Kimper Society (Yes, S.U.C.K.S.), named in dedication to the first super-powered individual - Captain Kimper, cataloged Paul's power as the most useless power documented to date. They currently have 1.1, with a capital B, Billion superpowered individuals registered, 365 thousand different power sets, and Paul's is the least useful. To be clear, Paul doesn't mind that he works at a cafe. There was joy in having a short commute from his downtown apartment, and the unlimited free drinks were a nice perk. He doesn't even resent that he "won the genetics lottery" and was born a powered individual. Paul felt that it was too much pressure to put on oneself. What bothered Paul was when people learned he was "Mr. Irrelevant," a name borrowed from out-of-date sporting tradition and repurposed to mean the person with the lowest power rating in S.U.C.K.S.

Paul had heard them all, "S.U.C.K.S to be you," "Don't let his irrelevance rub off on you," "Maybe he

doesn't know?" So, despite the existence of his power, he tried to pass himself off as powerless. Working at a cafe helped him keep a low profile and "pass" better as superpowerless. So, when the semi-truck collided with the skyscraper across the street, Paul did what every superpowerless person does: he sought shelter.

Soon, a swarm of panicked people rushed into the cafe and begged to be allowed into their shelter. All buildings built in the last twenty years were mandated to have an underground shelter to accommodate the maximum number of occupants plus an extra ten percent. They never passed a law about retrofitting old buildings. Those all collapse quickly, whether by disaster, collateral damage, or villainy. "This way, this way, right through here. Keep an orderly flow," Paul waved for the crowd to follow him.

"Harriet, look! Do you recognize him?" a woman whispered as she passed Paul.

"No, who was it," Harriet replied in hushed tones as she tried to sneak a peak back at Paul covertly.

*Here we go again; it's always older ones. They must have some radar for spotting me. Maybe if I turn away quick enough, they won't say it...* Paul thought as he hunched his shoulders forward while turning away from the shelter's entrance.

"That's right!" the unnamed woman loudly shrieked as she realized who was guiding people. "Mr. Irrelevant! He's mister irrelevant. I didn't realize he did rescue missions. That's so thoughtful of him to still be of service to the superpowerless."

That was all it took. The orderly evacuation down into the shelter came to a halt as everyone turned to spot the biggest loser the world had ever seen.

"Is it true about his power? How would he even know it was working?"

"I know, right..."

"I bet it's all fabricated. Fake news like Captain Kimper's supposed death."

"Hey! Don't disparage Captain Kimper, he's a war hero!"

"Yeah, I wish he were here instead."

Paul was unphased. This chorus happened every time he was recognized, but he was still a good

person at heart, so he did his best to try to get people to resume their escape to the shelter. "Alright, yes, everyone. The woman's correct. I am Mr. Irrelevant, and I'll answer everyone's questions once we're downstairs safely. I'll even tell you what Lady Florence said to me when she finished testing me for powers. It was a doozy. Now, if we could resume walking, please," Paul said, scanning the cafe.

A moment later, the crowd either became bored or accepted Paul's terms as they resumed their orderly evacuation. Step, Step, slight pause while that woman gained her footing on the stairs, forward again; the monotony of watching a hundred people file downstairs wore on Paul as he held the door to the shelter open. At long last, Paul could see the end of the line. Scanning outside the cafe, Paul saw that only small chunks of debris were reaching this far from the ongoing battle. *I wonder who started this scuffle, maybe Doctor Dorian. He was suitably insane to be willing to start this. I wish these villains would get it through their thick skulls that Populous City has enough superheroes to shut down their dastardly plans,* Paul thought as the last person approached the shelter door.

She looked like the haggard older woman straight out of the cartoons Paul watched as a child. She was hunched over and wore a hooded cloak as she shuffled forward. As she got within arms reach of Paul, she reached her hand out, and Paul reciprocated to help stabilize the woman. "Oh, thank you, young man. It's so much harder to get around in my advanced years," she said as she got right next to Paul.

"Will you be ok with the stairs?" Paul asked as he saw the flash of another nearby explosion. He wanted to get the shelter door closed up. It was not safe to extend any more patience to the woman.

"In a rush, are we? I'll only be another moment," the woman said as she wobbled, lowering her foot down to the first stair. She seemed to stumble, and Paul thought he would lose his hold of the woman. She rapidly descended a few more stairs, causing Paul to lurch over as he fumbled to try and stop the downward motion. Suddenly, the woman stood tall on the third step. She was now face to face with Paul. "Thank you, Mr. Irrelevant. You've been a perfect gentleman, but all of that will be coming to an end," with that, she stabbed Paul in the neck with a needle and depressed the plunger, injecting Paul with some unknown substance.

"What? What the Hell!? Why did you do that? And why am I getting so dizzy... Damn it all..."

Paul's eyes shut, his body went slack, and he rolled down the flight of stairs, landing at the bottom in a heap. The sound of Paul's body hitting the ground caused an audible gasp over the crowd of

evacuees. The next sound they all heard was the sound of the heavy metal shelter door shut with the distinctive sound of a pressurized seal forming. The building shook as the battle outside became increasingly violent. Before anyone could come to Paul's aid, the lights flickered and shut off.

Thirty seconds later, the backup generator turned on, restoring the lights. A few nearby evacuees regained their composure and rushed to Paul's side. "Miss, miss, are you alright?" a man asked while gently shaking Paul's shoulder.

"Huh?" Paul grumbled in confusion as he started to regain his senses.

"Oh, thank goodness. She's alive, everyone," the man announced to the crowd. A relieved sigh audibly traveled over the group.

Sitting upright, Paul was entirely out of sorts. His body hurt all over, and he could feel that there would be bruises all over his legs, arms, and back. Sitting with his knees up and arms wrapped around them, he leaned his chest forward to rest his aching body against his knees.

## Squish

"Huh?" Paul said aloud. *What's between me and my knees?*

Paul looked up at the perplexed man. He seemed to be nervous, or maybe he was uncomfortable with something. *Is it something I said?* Paul wondered to himself.

A moment later, another man crouched down beside Paul. "You've had a fall. Do you remember where you are?" the man proceeded to ask.

"Yeah, I'm at the cafe's shelter. We were all evacuating down here due to the super-battle on the street," Paul responded but immediately covered his mouth. His voice was off. It didn't sound right. It was distinctly feminine.

*Shit, I'm not supposed to sound like this. Is that why the other guy called me miss?* Paul started connecting the dots. He wasn't the sharpest observer when it came to himself. Paul looked down and saw his uniform and apron stretched out away from his body in the distinctive fashion that occurs when a fabric stretches over a pair of breasts.

Paul reached his arm out to request help standing up, and the men beside him helped him. Paul took

a minute to dust himself off and straighten his clothes. Fortunately, there was enough give in the clothes to accommodate his new shape. Paul had already had a hectic enough morning to have to deal with a wardrobe malfunction on top of everything else. Paul loosened the tie on his apron and pulled it off over his head. His work uniform's polo shirt stretched over two breasts that shouldn't have been there. Paul resisted the urge to reach up and feel them. He was in public. Still, he was a man. The thought crossed his mind. Then, it kept crossing his mind every thirty seconds or so.

Looking down, Paul saw his slacks stretched wide across his new figure's hips. Further disturbing Paul, his revised body seemed prodigiously gifted in the thigh area. Running his hands over his body one last time, having regained his composure, Paul turned his attention to the group.

"I'm alright, everyone, just a little tumble there," Paul announced. He used this moment to scan the shelter for that older woman who had done this to him. From what Paul could see, there were no hunched-back cloaked women. *That was just a disguise, though; she clearly could stand upright.* Paul evaluated the situation and scenery.

A few people helped escort Paul further into the shelter while waiting for the all-clear signal. As he reached the center of the room, the woman he encountered earlier approached him. The woman called Harriet started first, "You took quite a fall there, honey. Are you okay?"

"Umm, yeah, thanks," Paul answered. The sound of his voice in his head caused more discomfort. *Why does it have to be so high? I sound like I'm a Valley girl.*

The unnamed woman jumped in next. "Where's your co-worker, Mr. Irrelevant? He was helping people down, but I don't see him now."

*They don't know it's me. I guess that makes sense. I don't know what my face looks like now. Maybe I'm a cutie now. Uhh, not that it matters. I can fix this once I have a few moments to myself.* Paul's thoughts were all over the place, but he started to formulate a plan. First, respond to the concerned women.

"Oh, he's alright. I think he's around here somewhere. He just pulled off his polo shirt, so he probably looks different than you saw earlier. I think he was wearing a tank top. So, go find the hot guy wearing these same slacks," Paul said, hoping this would distract the women long enough for Paul to make a quick trip to the bathroom.

"Hot? No, I don't think so, honey. But, you do you, girl. If he's your type, then you should go after him," the woman replied and grabbed her friend's hand. "Let's go find him, Harriet. I want to ask him

some questions."

*I know what those questions are already. How does your power even work? Is that a power? When would it even come into play? Well, jokes on them. My power is precisely the thing I need to get things back to normal for myself. Though, I guess it is situational. Who would have thought this would happen to me? I've just had a chemically-induced metamorphosis into a girl, and my only power is the ability to transform back into your original body. Yes, that's a useless power when I am myself. No, I've never been able to use my power before. I'm sure I can figure it out, though. I've tried to use it before. It feels like a bit of a tingle.*

*I know it works even though there are no visible signs that it is working. One trip to the bathroom, and I should be back to my own body. Then those women can ask me all the offensive questions they want.*

Paul's plan took shape, and he was ready to set it in motion. Knocking at the bathroom door, he confirmed no one else was in there. He opened the door as quietly as possible and kept his eyes scanning for who was watching him. He didn't want people to see a girl enter and a man leave. Feeling the coast was clear, he ducked into the restroom.

"I hope she just needs to go number one..." the unnamed woman said to Harriet, who snickered at her friend's remark. "I guess she **really** had to go!"