

## Rosewood

Stupendous Man flew through the sky over Rosewood. The wind blew through his air as the small town carried on beneath him. The air rolled down his dark blue spandex and golden boots. His bright yellow cape ruffled in the air. In the center of his chest, he had a large S. The blonde hair on his head was slicked back perfectly.

Rosewood was a small town about thirty minutes from anything of note. Comprised mostly of chain restaurants and craft stores, few people stayed here past high school.

That's what set Stupendous Man apart from everyone else. He was the only thirty-year-old around that wasn't currently spending their nights helping a child with math homework. Born and raised a Rosewood resident, Stupendous Man never left the comfort of his hometown.

He possessed the strength to explode the sun, but he never used it for anything more than stopping a drunk driver. He had the ability to clap a planet out of existence, but all he used them for was for high fiving kids. He could shout and the country would go deaf, but all his voice was used for is cheering on the local high school's football team.

As he soared above, Stupendous man noticed a small, blond-haired girl looking through a forest for her lost baseball. She slowly waded through the forest careful to not graze any poison ivy which was about the most dangerous thing in this town.

Her name was Piper and Stupendous Man had always kept a close eye on her. At the age of twelve, she had yet to find a good friend in life. Her obsession with animals gave her a large heart. She couldn't bear to see a worm on the sidewalk after it stopped raining and she checked outside her window before she went to bed every night for any stray animals that could be injured. He liked that about her. She cared for what might seem insignificant to others. Unfortunately, this meant she usually wasn't good at keeping up with trends thereby keeping her out of social circles.

He continued watching as she walked forward. A thorn scratched her frail leg. She bit her lips and continued onward. Piper put her hands up over her eyes and searched around for the small, white ball. With a gust of wind, Stupendous Man appeared next to her.

"What are you looking for, sweetie?"

"Stupendous Man! I lost my baseball somewhere around here. Do you see it?"

"That shouldn't be too hard for me to find! What's that on your leg?"

Stupendous Man kneeled and looked at the scratch on her leg.

“It’s nothing. It doesn’t hurt that bad,” she said.

Stupendous Man exhaled quietly, and cold air blew out of his mouth and the cut froze over.

“Well, now it shouldn’t hurt at all!” Stupendous Man said. He searched for the ball with his x-ray vision. He flew away and returned with it.

“Thank you!” she said.

“It’s my pleasure!” Stupendous Man responded as he passed it over to her.

Piper gave him a hug and then ran off out of the forest. Before Stupendous Man took off flying, he heard something with his super hearing.

“Piper, you’re such an idiot.”

“Yeah, I don’t know why we invited you to hang out today.”

“I’m sorry guys, it was a mistake,” Piper said.

Stupendous Man appeared next to them.

“Do I hear a problem here, girls?” he said as his eyes glowed red.

“No, Mr. Stupendous,” the first girl said.

“We’re sorry. We were just mad Piper kept losing the ball,” the other girl said.

Stupendous Man’s eyes continued to glow brighter and brighter.

“Maybe I could just blast you both right now and Piper won’t have to deal with this anymore?” he suggested.

A tear rolled down the first girl’s face. The other held her hands in front of her eyes to hide Stupendous Man from herself.

“OH! I’m just messing with you! You’re all good!” Stupendous Man said jovially as his eyes stopped glowing. The girls laughed nervously.

“I can see my joke was not well received, but I hope you all have a nice day regardless!” he said as he patted them on the shoulder. Stupendous Man reached his arms into the air to fly away but noticed a woman in a military suit standing off to the side of the field.

*Ugh, Colonel York is back again.*

Stupendous Man appeared next to her.

“Nothing I love more than getting a meeting from you! Are you here to request the usual?” he asked with a wide, but fake grin. His pearly white teeth glistened as the sun reflected off them.

Colonel York’s teeth were a yellow tint from all the years of coffee drinking. Part of the stain likely comes from the coffee in the president's office. She thought he could serve some of the best coffee in the world, but it usually meant she would be having a long few days after.

Colonel York had this same conversation with another hero just two days ago. They always say yes. They had to. For the human race, for their family, for her own sake. She had to form the best team possible for what awaited them. Stupendous Man is the only one who had ever said no. He was going to crack whether he knew it or not.

The images on her briefing from a few weeks ago hurtled through her mind as she began to speak. She hadn’t been able to stop thinking about the picture of the large, purple alien wielding her golden trident stained with blood. The name “Atomsplitter” haunted her dreams.

“I think a great conflict is approaching us as a human race. We need you,” she said. That was a classic first line. Most people were sold at that.

“Same thing you said three days ago. I get the gist. Big threat coming, can’t tell me because government stuff, but you want my help. Perhaps we should take this conversation somewhere else.”

Stupendous Man grabbed Colonel York’s hand and with a gust of wind they stood in a field surrounded by a forest. Colonel York adjusted the collar to her suit. Stupendous Man smiled as he took in a deep breath of the oak trees that surrounded them.

“I want you to take this position in the Capitol. We need someone like you on our side.”

“What exactly is your side again?” he asked.

“Law, Order, Justice. We are just trying to keep everyone safe, like you do for these people. We just do it on a larger scale.”

“Uh-huh. What if I refuse for the fifth time? Will you stop coming back?” he asked.

“I’m not sure why you would refuse. This is a real shithole,” Stupendous Man clenched his fists as she spoke, “Is there anyone you know here anyway?”

Colonel York noticed his response. Perhaps she was pushing too hard she wondered. Stupendous Man thought about the people he graduated with. He hadn’t seen them in years. Almost no one came to the reunions.

“I know plenty of people. I stay in close touch with a lot of my friends from back in the day,” he said as he started to float around her.

“Why would you stay here? You enjoy hanging around closeted racists? Did you never find anyone that liked you outside of this dinky town, so you decided to settle? Do you get off to the god complex?” she asked. At this point, anger had taken the best of her. The thought that someone wouldn’t be willing to lay down their life for the betterment of society like those that came before them angered her.

“I’m not a god, I’m a guiding light. I’d take a closeted racist over someone openly racist. At least they know it’s bad to be that way. I don’t think anyone here is unsalvageable. They just need someone that believes in them,” he said.

“That’s a job for parents,” she responded.

“Not all parents are good at their jobs. I’m not leaving here.”

“Listen. I was a little harsh on this town. But these people are less than a fraction of a percentage of every life on this planet. They are worth no more than anyone else.”

“They’re worth more to me,” he said as he continued to float around her.

“Why are you so insistent on staying here?”

“Because I believe people can be better.”

“Don’t give me that cliché crap. Why don’t you care about the other people that may die if you don’t help? I bet they could be better too,” Colonel York asked.

“Because I know these people. This town raised me when I fell from the sky as a baby. I’ve witnessed love bloom between others, the birth of children, the wonder in a young human’s eyes on Christmas morning, the way a father prepares sandwiches delicately for the youth to eat, and grandparents pushing their bodies to its limits so they can go to their descendant’s soccer games. I know every single person here and everything about them.

A million people could die right now on the other side of the globe, and I wouldn’t care. Hundreds of humans have died since I started this sentence, and I don’t feel a thing. But I feel it when even one person in this town dies. It’s different when you know them,” he said.

“Don’t you realize that everyone thinks that? It’s what makes you human. The fact that things can change so quickly, and you can’t do anything about it,” Colonel York said.

“But I’m not human and I can do something about it.”

“Countless children and families will suffer if you choose to stay here.”

“As long as none of the kids here die,” Stupendous man said before landing on the ground right in front of her. They stood inches apart. Stupendous Man’s cape ruffled through the stale air as Colonel York’s hands instinctively reached for the gun in her holster.

“You don’t scare me. If you refuse to come with us to help, then I have no choice but to treat it as treason,” she said.

“Not like the government can do anything about it.”

“Then on behalf of the United States of America I am turning you in!” Colonel York said as she raised her hand into the air.

“Ku--yu--am!”

The walkie-talkie on her hip sputtered out noise.

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Moments ago, dozens of snipers got into position in the trees surrounding Stupendous Man and Colonel York as they spoke. Silently, they slung their ropes over the branches and used the spikes in their boots to scale the oak. Each of the soldiers retrieved a case off their back and opened it to reveal metal pieces laying in black foam. Delicately, dozens of sniper rifles were built.

The captain put the scope on and flipped it up. He lifted it to his eyes and watched as they continued talking in the distance over a mile away.

“Sound off when in position,” he whispered quietly into their comms.

Countless voices muttered out “in position” simultaneously.

Stupendous Man landed in front of Colonel York and the safety on the rifle clicked off. Colonel York reached for her gun.

“Don’t fire until you see the mark. Copy?”

Sweat beaded on his head as he watched them continue to talk. Stupendous Man’s cape fluttered behind him, but he wasn’t moving.

*Why is his cape moving?*

The captain’s sweat rolled slowly down his forehead and soaked into the cotton of his visors.

“Did you copy that?” he asked. No one responded.

“DID ANYONE COPY ME?”

*We've been ambushed! There must be more than one. I've had my eye on him this whole time!*

He reached for the walkie-talkie on his belt, "COLONEL YORK, IT'S AN AMBUSH! GET OUT OF THERE!"

As he spoke, the forest disappeared from his sight as color blurred around him and wind blasted past him. Instantaneously, he was in the middle of Antarctica. The captain was thrown forward and slid across an icy lake as a sonic boom cut through the air.

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 "I wouldn't try anything with the snipers. I took care of them already," Stupendous Man said. Colonel York's eyes opened wide, but she maintained her confident posture.

"How?"

"I didn't kill them. They are just away. I'm going to play nice with you and try my hardest not to kill anyone today. Know this, if a single civilian gets hurt in your escapade, I will topple the White House tonight. The only reason I haven't done that yet is it hasn't gotten in my way," he said. His eyes lit up red.

"BETA SQUAD ATTACK!" she shouted.

**Zip! Zip! Zip!** A speck in the air grew to the size of a man and punched Stupendous Man in the face. This man wore a suit of copper with a silver helmet that had small balls rolling across it. Stupendous Man stood unphased. He clapped his hands and with a boom the forest in front of him parted and the man in the copper suit went flying back. Stupendous Man grabbed onto the air around his neck and flung his arm forward. Something tumbled across the ground and static spread through the air before revealing a man lying on the ground with a knife in his hand.

With a boom, the ground beneath Stupendous Man erupted in flames. A woman wearing a maroon hood reached toward the quiver on her back. She notched some arrows and shot them forward. Stupendous Man's eyes glowed red and he blasted each arrow out of the air. The sky cracked as a woman in red spandex flew forward. She spun in the air and spiraled into Stupendous Man. With a grunt, he held her back then slammed her into the ground.

The man in the copper suit put Stupendous Man in a chokehold. With a gust of wind, they were gone. Stupendous Man reappeared alone.

"What did you do to him?" Colonel York shouted with her gun pointed toward Stupendous Man.

“I put him on the moon. He probably has about ten seconds before his head bursts open,” Stupendous Man said as he shrugged his arms.

“BRING HIM BACK, NOW!” she shouted.

Stupendous Man blinked away and returned with the man in the copper suit. He threw the man forward. The man reached for his silver helmet and tore it off. His face was a dark blue as he gasped for air heavily. The archer, the invisible assassin, the woman in red spandex, and Colonel York surrounded Stupendous Man. Colonel York’s gun snapped back and forth as she shot at him. The assassin spun around him slicing at his body while the woman in red spandex pummeled him. The archer waited for an opening and rattled off arrows into him. Stupendous Man stood in the center of the chaos and heard something with his super hearing. He discerned the rattling of a shopping cart. Stupendous Man disappeared.

“WHERE IS HE! IS EVERYONE ACCOUNTED FOR?” Colonel York yelled.

In the parking lot at the front of a grocery store, an elderly woman rolled her cart up to the side of her car. She slowly walked over to the trunk and beeped the keys to open it. Stupendous Man appeared next to her. He waved to her with a grin on his face.

Every week at the same time Mrs. Frickly would go and get groceries. She would spend exactly forty-three minutes in the store before coming out. Mrs. Frickly usually bought too much to carry as she wanted to make sure she would have ample snacks for her grandchildren. Stupendous Man never skipped out on helping her put the groceries in the car, not since her husband had passed away five years ago.

“Let me help you with that, Mrs. Frickly!” he said.

“Oh, you are just the sweetest,” she said as she slowly walked to the driver’s seat. In an instant, all the groceries were loaded into the back of the car and the shopping cart was back in the store. Stupendous Man opened the door for her and waited for her to sit down. He closed the door and waved to her as she drove off.

Stupendous Man reappeared in the field and grabbed the archer by her head and flung her into the assassin. The trees shattered as their bodies crashed through them. The man in the copper suit got up and slowly stepped forward. Stupendous Man reeled his arm back then smashed it into the metal man’s chest. He went flying off into the distance. Stupendous Man grabbed the woman in red spandex and spun her around before slamming her into the Earth. The sound of her

smashing through the ground grew quieter and quieter as she fell further and further down. Stupendous Man turned his head toward Colonel York.

“I think we’re done here,” he said. Stupendous Man reached his arm forward and crumpled her gun then dropped it to the ground.

“There is big stuff out there, Stupendous Man, the kind of stuff only you can deal with.”

“And if it poses a threat to Rosewood I will handle it,” he said.

“You’re insane. There is more to the world than Rosewood,” Colonel York said.

“Not to me.”

“Whatever, keep your stupid beliefs. It will feel heroic till it isn’t anymore. You should be doing more than stopping teenagers from drunk driving,” she said.

With a gust of wind, Stupendous Man disappeared.

In a small, three bedroom and two-bathroom house a father set down his beer bottle. The table shook from the force as the foggy liquid bubbled while it settled in its glass container. He ran his one hand through his scraggly, brown beard as his other hand unbuckled his belt. His eyes scanned the room and he only got angrier when he saw the torn, flower covered wallpaper on the wall, the cracked tile in the floor, and the door with a hole in it. The leather on the belt was worn down with cracks from years of wear.

Mr. Roberts wasn’t always so easy to anger. He had watched his parents yell at each other all the time as a kid and he vowed to never do the same. In elementary school, he was thought to be the nicest kid any of the teacher’s had ever met. Whether it was due to a lack of practice in managing his emotions or some form of cruel irony he became quick to lash out as he grew older. The fear of becoming like his parents kept him from ever seeking help.

“I didn’t want to do this, but you made me,” Mr. Roberts said to his son cowering on the ground. The son covered his face as he curled up in the corner. He had been in this situation numerous times before. It was never as bad as he thought it would be. Even knowing that, he couldn’t help but fear his father at this moment.

“Dad, I’m sorry. I’ll do better next time, just please don’t hit me,” his son said in between sharp breaths.

The man’s hands shook as he held the belt. Stupendous Man appeared in front of him. He could smell the beer off the man’s raspy breaths.



The son peeked between his fingers to see the stalwart hero standing in front of him. His father had taught him not to cry but seeing Stupendous Man with his deep ocean colored suit and golden boots brought waves of relief. The overload of emotions brought his tears forth.

“And who do you think you are coming into my house like this?” the father asked wildly. The belt cracked as he pulled it taut in his hands.

“You know who I am.”

Stupendous Man reached his hand forward and pinched the belt. It snapped. The two pieces of worn leather lost their rigidity and fell toward the ground.

“Mr. Roberts, what are you doing right now?” Stupendous Man asked. The father stared blankly forward. A shudder spread through his body. It started in his legs and spread up through his torso then out through his arms and head simultaneously. It awoke something inside him.

“I . . . Oh my. . . I’m so sorry . . . I don’t know what got into me . . .” he said.

“Alcohol affects people in different ways. Some people don’t handle it as well. I keep an eye on you and I noticed every time I have to stop you from doing this you bought alcohol the week before,” Stupendous Man calmly said as he rested his hand on the father’s back. Mr. Roberts flinched slightly at the touch of him.

“I am not going to hurt you. I want to help you,” Stupendous Man said.

“I’m a horrible person. Please break my arms. I don’t want to ever hurt my son,” Mr. Roberts said as he collapsed at Stupendous Man’s feet. He laid his head on the golden boots as he wept.

Stupendous Man knelt next to the man and carefully thought about what to say next. Since he never really had parents, he had trouble relating to others that dealt with these issues. He opened his mouth and said, “And you won’t.”

The father wiped away his tears then said, “But that’s only because you keep stepping in to stop me.”

“Each time you wait longer and longer before you buy alcohol again. There’s a good father in you, Mr. Roberts. We just need to get past this hurdle, and we will be in the clear. Besides, I’ll always be here to step in,” Stupendous Man said.

Stupendous Man turned to the son on the ground and helped him up.

“You okay, son?”

“I will be. Thank you, Stupendous Man,” the boy said after sniffing.

“No, thank you for being so strong. It’s not fair you have to deal with this. But know that I will always protect you when your father fails you. Don’t fear him for I will always be listening,” Stupendous Man said as he tapped his finger against his ear.

Stupendous Man raised his arms into the air to fly off before pausing to turn around. He looked back to see the son walk over to his father. They hugged and Stupendous Man disappeared.

As he flew above the town, he watched the school buses depart from the Rosewood elementary school and saw the line of parents waiting to pick up their children. He noticed the cars waiting for fast food to bring home to their families. He listened to the conversation an elderly couple had about how excited they were to see their grandchild this weekend as they walked through the small, local park.

*Colonel York might be right that I could achieve more if I left here. But these people are capable of achieving so much if they have someone that believes in them.*

After flying in the sky for a little longer, Stupendous Man descended to land by a soccer field where dozens of little kids were kicking a ball across the grass. Half were wearing red shirts and the other half were wearing green. On the sidelines, parents sat in pop up chairs and cheered at every movement the kids made. The sun began to set in the distance as a cool breeze blew past. The lofty smell of mud had been kicked up into the air.

“Hey, Stupendous Man! You’re a little late to the game today! No worries, I got a cold Gatorade waiting for you if you wanted to pop a squat over here and watch with us!” one of the dads said. He had a dark black beard that was well kept with white bleeding in from the edges. The man wore a bright polo shirt and khaki shorts with close toed sandals.

*“That’s a job for parents.” Colonel York’s words echoed in his mind.*

“As long as it is a purple one!” Stupendous Man responded.

He accepted the Gatorade and sat in the empty foldable chair next to the father.

“How was your day today?” the man asked.

“Not too bad, met some new people which you don’t get to do often around here,” Stupendous Man said.

*“Did you never find anyone that liked you outside of this dinky town, so you decided to settle?”*

The father chuckled then said, “No kidding, have you gotten a chance to try the new pizza place? It’s run by the same family that has the taco place but might be good!”

“I haven’t yet, maybe I’ll try it out tomorrow,” Stupendous Man responded.

*“You’re insane. There is more to the world than Rosewood.”*

One of the girls in a red shirt kicked the ball and it slowly rolled past a girl in a green shirt standing in the goal. The parents and Stupendous Man erupted in applause.

“Who do you think is gonna win tonight? The Red Elmos or the Green Apples?” the father asked.

“I’m thinking Red Elmos, but who’s to be sure,” he said as he finished reliving the conversation in his head.

*“Not to me.”*

Stupendous Man took a sip of his purple Gatorade and leaned back as a girl in a green shirt threw the ball onto the field.