

## Heat Vision

Jackie's been my crush since first grade. She lived across the street from me and we played in the creek almost every day. She was a tomboy once, which is kind of contrary to the prima donna, aspiring pop musician object of every boy's desires and every girl's jealousy she eventually became.

That makes it hurt that much more when she blasts me with her laser eyes above the school parking lot. I feel the heat singe my impenetrable skin as I fall a good fifty feet to the ground, smacking into Johnny Brooks' nice new truck. I heard his dad gave it to him. He's going to be pissed.

Bullets can't hurt me. Steel can't cut me. But heat still hurts. I'm still trying to figure out what all of my weaknesses are, but as I look up out of the crater that was Jonny's truck, I know for sure what one of them is.

God she's beautiful.

"Zack, get your skinny ass out of there and fight me you loser!" Jackie yells at me, still hovering fifty feet in the air, where we were slugging it out a moment before.

Jackie got super powers about a week after I did. It started with flying and picking up heavy things, like I can. Then she discovered the heat vision. I don't have that one.

I stand up, feeling my fists get hot. It isn't from Jackie's heat vision though. No...this is one of mine.

Jackie screams as two blazing fireballs erupt from my hands one after the other, rocketing towards her. She zips to her right a moment before the two of them explode. I see her dark brown hair and her pink skirt ripple in the heat wave.

"You asshole! I just got my hair done!"

I'm kind of relieved I didn't hit her. She's too pretty to blow up, and I'm kind of still madly in love with her. Even if she is a super villain.

I feel myself hurtling through the air towards her, taking advantage of her distraction to hopefully catch her off-guard and put a quick end to the fight.

It is sort of hard to quickly end a fight between two near-invulnerable super beings though, teenagers or not. Jackie sees me and hits me head on with a right cross to the jaw. If I had been a normal kid like I was two weeks ago, my teeth would be raining on the pavement below, but I suppose I wouldn't be up here if I were a normal kid, would I?

Jackie, me, and all the kids of Jackson County High started developing powers recently. Everything from flight to teleportation to transforming into pure electricity. I don't know what caused it.

Could be aliens. Could be government experiments. Whatever it is...it made me close to unstoppable. That is, until my arch-nemesis, the school principal sent *her* after me.

"Jackie, stop it! You know you can't win this!" I yell at her, shaking off her attack. I grab hold of her arms and we wrestle there, in mid-air above a high school that isn't really a high school anymore.

"As if!" Jackie scoffs, "You couldn't beat me at Mario Brothers when we were kids. You couldn't beat me at go karts. And you can't beat me now!"

I feel her knee digging into my stomach. I could take a wrecking ball to the ribs and not feel too much pain, but Jackie herself was now worse than a wrecking ball. I'm discovering quickly that there's nothing worse than a teenage girl with super-strength.

"Ow!" I scream, letting go of her right arm. She grabs my hair and yanks it to the right. Now *that* still hurts, not matter how strong I am.

"God, Jackie, what are you, twelve? Let go of my hair!" I yell.

"You let go of my arm!" she replies.

Neither one of us realize we're drifting into a parking light until it's too late. I hear it crumple beneath our struggle, crashing to the ground below and probably taking out three or four more cars.

I'm only fourteen. A freshman. I can't drive yet. Jackie's sixteen and drives her dad's convertible. Her parents always gave her everything she wanted. Probably part of the reason she turned out to be a super villain.

Hitting the lamp is enough to distract us both long enough to let one another go. We hover there, staring at each other for a long while, waiting to see who moves next. More heat vision? Fireballs? Jackie's lightning kick? My super speed?

Instead, what comes next is a surprise to both of us.

"Why don't you talk to me anymore?" I hear myself ask her.

Jackie's face scrunches up in confusion. She makes a sound in the back of her throat like she's both annoyed and taken aback.

"What the hell? It's not like you talk to me either," she retorts.

"Come on. You haven't sat with me at the lunch table since fifth grade. You don't even look at me in the hall anymore. If this hadn't happened, you still wouldn't even be acknowledging me," I say. You know what? Yeah, maybe it is time for some of this stuff to come out. Before one of us gets thrown into the sun or smashed into the Earth's crust or blown to smithereens.

"Oh shut up. If you weren't such a nerd-ass, maybe the popular kids would talk to you," she says.

"I'm not talking about the popular kids, Jackie. I'm talking about you," I say, feeling that old familiar pain in my gut. The pain of being left behind.

I see what looks like anger and confusion cross her face. Then she's rocketing towards me again, fists extended.

She hits me full-on, but as I take the blow I wrap my arms around her and fly us both to the ground. Her struggle makes us pull up just enough to skid off the pavement. My pants leg rips half-way off. I think she loses one of her shoes. And then she pushes me away from her and we're standing there, facing each other again.

"Jackie, I didn't become a nerd-ass. I'm the same kid I always was," I say. Her heat vision flares and I dodge to the left just in time, hearing it sear into the metal door to D Hall.

"Bull crap," she yells, her eyes still red from the blast, "None of the kids sit with you because you turned into a geeky kid that plays video games and reads Lord of the Rings instead of going to keg parties and wearing clothes that don't look like your mom bought them at K-Mart!"

"You used to read Lord of the Rings too!" I scream at the top of my lungs. I'm angry now. I throw another fireball at her so fast she doesn't have time to react. It explodes in front of her, taking out part of the sidewalk. She falls backwards. I can smell her clothes burning.

"Jackie!" I yell in alarm, suddenly afraid I've blown her up. I run over to her. I rip off the cape I made out of a bed-sheet and toss it over her to put out the flames. I then get to my knees and put my arms around her, not knowing how that would help, but wanting to do it anyway.

"I'm immune to fire, you idiot," I hear her say before she shoves me off.

I take a step back. Her hair's a bit singed, but she looks none the worse for wear. She keeps my cape wrapped around her. Looks like her clothes weren't so invulnerable. I feel myself blush. Among other things.

She doesn't attack again. She just looks at me like she's trying to make up her mind about something.

"You really think it's my fault we don't talk anymore?" she said, the fight gone from her voice.

I lower my guard.

"Yeah. I do. You say that I changed. That I became a dork. But I was always a dork, Jackie. You were too once. We watched cartoons together and ran around in the woods pretending to be elves. Your dad took us to see Labyrinth three times because I wanted to be The Goblin King and you wanted to be Sarah. We did everything together. *You* changed," I say, feeling the accusation rise back to the

surface. Years of anger and betrayal welling up. No super strength could express how I felt. No fireballs or heat vision. Only words.

“When you went to middle school before I did, you started talking to the big kids, the seventh graders. They all liked football and Brittany Spears and drinking. It was like I was bugging you when I talked about magic and adventures. The things we used to love. And eventually...you just stopped talking to me altogether.”

Jackie looks stricken. Her eyes are back to their normal blue now. The blue eyes I remember staring at the sky with and talking about which clouds looked like dinosaurs.

“Zack,” she says softly, “We all grew up. The people in middle school...they didn’t like those things. They showed me different music and different clothes and...they let me be cool, like them.”

“And I wasn’t cool,” I observe aloud.

“No,” she says, shaking her head, “No you were still...the same old Zack.”

So I was right. I was right all along. She didn’t want me anymore because she had changed...grown up...and I hadn’t.

I feel myself start to cry. I put my head down and clench my fists. Superheroes don’t cry. They fight evil. They stop alien invasions. They save the world. They don’t cry.

“Zack...” I hear her say. Her voice is almost apologetic.

“Don’t...” I say, raising a hand and stopping her, “Don’t. You can shoot at me and beat me up. You can throw me into a bus or a train or whatever. But you can’t pity me. I won’t let you.”

She just looks at me.

You know what? Screw it.

“I loved you, Jackie. Yeah it was little kid love, but it was real. We were going to grow up and sail to some island and be king and queen together and I was going to protect you forever. That’s what I wanted. That’s *all* I wanted. And when you left me, it was like...”

Crap, there are the tears again.

“It was like losing a part of myself,” I said, refusing to look at her. Staring at the broken sidewalk beneath me.

“Yeah I’m a dork. Yeah, nobody likes me. But you know what? I like me. I like who I am and I’m not going to change for a group of jocks and bimbos who at the end of the day don’t give a damn about me at all. You didn’t have to change to be cool, Jackie. You were always cool to me. You were perfect.”

When I feel her hand on my chin, I expect another punch across the school yard. I expect to be hurled into the trailers or cooked by her heat vision. Instead, she lifts my chin up with her fingers...and kisses me.

She wraps my cape around the both of us and holds me there in the shattered entryway of Jackson County High School. I hold her back, but I'm only half aware of it. All I want to feel right now are her lips on mine, something I haven't felt since I stole a kiss from her behind my grandma's shed when she was twelve.

When it's over, she lays her forehead on mine. She has to lean down a bit to do it because she is two years older and still a bit taller than me.

"You better not cop a feel, dorkwad," she says.

I laugh and look up at her. Her blue eyes are staring into mine. She could melt my brain right out of my head at that range and I wouldn't care.

"So I'm still a dork, huh?" I say.

She smiles, "Yeah well...maybe you can be *my* dork."

I grin so wide I feel like my head might fall into two pieces. I hold her for a few more moments before realizing that I still have a purpose here. Teenager in love or not...I'm still a superhero.

"Are you still going to try to stop me?" I ask, my grin fading.

She looks behind us at the school, the metal door half-way melted. She thinks for a moment, and then sighs.

"No. My friends are in there too. Principal Jenkins is powerful though, Zack. He's powerful enough to imprison a school full of super-kids. I'm done working for him. I'm not going to be a pawn for some balding, middle-aged freak with super powers."

"Come with me," I say. "Let's stop him together."

She shakes her head. "No," now it's her who looks at the ground, "You're the super hero. I'm just the school bitch,"

Now it's my turn to lift her chin up. I kiss her forcefully, holding her tight. I feel her go a little weak at the knees. Now, I think to myself, *this* is what it's really like to feel powerful.

"You're not a bitch," I say after I stop kissing her, "You're my best friend."

Now I see her eyes tear up a bit. I back away, prepared to do what I came here to do.

"When I get out of there, you, me and the rest of the kids have work to do. Whatever happened to us probably didn't just happen here. There's more than one Principal Jenkins. I'm sure of it."

She nods, filled with resolve. “And more than one girl like me too caught up in herself to do the right thing. You’re right Zack. We have a lot of work to do.”

Her eyes begin to glow again. I’m startled for a moment as I see the heat vision erupt from them once more. It shoots behind me though, melting the rest of the way through the door, clearing the way for me into the school turned super-prison our megalomaniacal ex-principal had established.

I nod, and turn towards the school.

“And when we’re done,” she says behind me, “Maybe that island?”

I turn to look at her, the grin back on my face. She’s grinning too.

“You *better* come back to me, hero,” she says.

I tip her a corny salute, and then fly into the school like an angry rocket.

“Count on it,” I say, ready to take on the world.