

## **“Not So Different”**

The morning sun shone weakly through Tye’s threadbare curtains, illuminating her stretched out form on the mattress that served as her bed. She slowly opened her eyes, reluctant to move and start another day of hard work, preferring to enjoy just lying there in peace not thinking about her life.

Her gaze swung over a room that, although small, was neat and ordered; stacks of books in the corner were organised alphabetically; clothes hung neatly or were folded in the cheap plywood wardrobe that lent against her opposite wall; the desk was wonky and stained, yet uncluttered, with an ancient MacBook Pro 22 lying dormant in the exact centre.

And of course, her collection. Tye smiled to herself and she always did when she saw her collection of old junk neatly piled in the corner of her room. Decrepit CD players, old games consoles and bits of hardware from the beginning of the 21st century shared space with archaic children’s toys long since forgotten and discarded – her hoarding nature did not discriminate. Overlooking it all was an old movie poster, faded and discoloured with age but still bearing the legend ‘Avengers Assemble’ in reference to a decades old franchise Tye enjoyed watching re-runs of now and again.

But at the sight of the huge green figure dominating the poster, her smile began to fade.

Her friend Cathryn had heard rumours the government was actually close to genetically engineering such a beast, probably to fight in the endless wars plaguing the Middle East. The very thought of such experiments brought reality crashing back down for Tye as she too, of course, was the result of genetic experimentation.

A ‘saviour sibling’, (or as the media referred to her, a ‘sav-sib’), Tye’s mind flashed back to her childhood. Discarded after being born to provide blood and stem cells for a sick child of wealthy parents, she had been raised in a government-run orphanage for children like her.

Lacking any of the common intelligence or physical enhancements seen in most humans for the past few of decades, she had always been considered inferior to most, solitary and isolated in a system that cared little for comfort and barely attended to her basic needs.

The Saviour Sibling Act (2043) had legally enshrined this discrimination, classing those born as spare parts for others along the same lines as those born without enhancements; second-class citizens able to access only the minimum of public welfare.

All this flashed through Tye’s mind as she gloomily regarded the hulking green figure before her. The prospect of another day at her workplace did little to dispel the cloud that had formed over her, as although she was bright and skilled at her coding job, she would never advance beyond her current low-level position due to her secondary-citizen status.

With a sigh, she heaved herself out of bed, regarding the pale, skinny body before her in the cracked mirror. Her mousy-brown hair hung limply over shoulders already hunched into a defensive curl, tired grey eyes staring back out of a face pulled tight by lack of proper food.

Stifling a sigh, she began pulling on clothes and getting ready for the long day ahead.

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Beams of light scattered in a dazzling array around the room as Aaron's state-of-the-art smart windows refracted the weak sunlight and increased its intensity to bathe the room in a warm glow.

His golden hair flowed out behind him, and his bright blue eyes sparkled in the light.

As he lay there in his magnetically-hovering magnetic bed, goose-down pillows scattered haphazardly over the quilt, he felt refreshed and tranquil, ready to start another day of training.

Aaron thought back over the path that had led to him lying here, a world-class athlete, about to participate in the Olympics at only seventeen years of age and tipped to win at least three gold medals.

Of course, he mused, none of this would have been possible if he wasn't one of humanity's elite – a Supreme, genetically enhanced before birth to be one of the strongest, most powerful and intelligent people on the planet. His parents had spent millions ensuring this status was bestowed upon him, with state of the art PGD therapy and genetic engineering tweaking the very structure of his body into that of perfection.

He shared the characteristics of all Supremes, no matter what race or creed; his enhanced height at 6ft 8 inches; his augmented senses that allowed him to hear and see beyond a normal human's capacity; his tweaked musculature that gave him extra strength, stamina and speed; and of course, his genetic mental boosts that let his neural pathways run at twice the rate of your average human, endowing him with intelligence and intellect previously only accessible to top scientists and logisticians.

This meant that the Olympics were available only to Supremes like him, though – but Aaron didn't really care about that. His main friends were either other Supremes or humans enhanced enough to hold top positions in government or at big corporations. The fact that the less enhanced such as sav-sibs or the naturally born were barred from even attending the

Olympics, let alone competing, weighed little on his mind.

Surveying his room, however, he admitted all of this hadn't translated into a tidy persona.

Clothes lay strewn everywhere, discarded protein shakes and health bar wrappers filled an overflowing waste bin in the corner, and his weight training area still smelt of yesterday's

workout.

That lazy sav-sib Gerda can't have been in yet to tidy, he thought. Useless woman.

As if on cue, Gerda shuffled into the room, along with Carl, his bodyguard and trainer. Whilst Gerda was worth little of his time, being a second-rate sav-sib, Carl had physical augmentation and genetic enhancements that meant he was upper-middle class in today's society, although no Supreme like Aaron of course.

"Late as always, Gerda", Aaron drawled as he flicked a pair of old socks her way. The young woman flinched, and remained silent as usual.

Quickly losing interest, Aaron turned to his bodyguard, an idea forming in his mind.

"Ready for some fun, Carl?", he asked the hulking figure, a rush coming over him as he saw the confused look spread over the man's face.

Quickly throwing on some clothes, Aaron sprinted out the doorway before Carl could react, ignoring the bodyguard's cries for him to wait as he ran past other servants and out into the gardens that surrounded his family's mansion.

Running out the front gates, his guard's heavy steps falling further and further behind him, Aaron felt the weight of his training recede, happy to have even a few minutes alone and away from his life as an athlete.

He felt heads turn as he ran down the street, people noticing his obvious build and stature and marking him as a rare Supreme. This only added to his confidence and the feeling of freedom that had come upon him so quickly this morning, and he ran even faster, laughing as he did so.

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Tye was taking a short-cut through an alley on her way to work when she heard the cries.

Another poor bastard being mugged, she thought, and began to turn around to head back the way she'd come from.

However, something made her stop. Whether it was the unusually melodious quality of the screams, or the several muggings of her own she had received over the years, she instead crept around the corner to see if she could help.

Immediately she knew she had made a mistake. The figure on the ground, far from being another low-level like herself, bore the unmistakable build and chiselled good looks of a Supreme, complete with wide blue eyes and flowing golden locks. But it was the several shady figures around him that really made Tye's heart stop, or rather the red ribbons they wore in a spiralling fashion around their upper arms.

The Equalists.

Mainly made up of women, the unenhanced, or the naturally born disabled, the group were legendary for their actions in what they saw as the fight against social inequality embedded in society.

The remnant of old liberal political parties back when democracy was still common, they kidnapped Supremes, blew up governmental research facilities and disrupted the lives of the rich and famous to try and get attention for their cause: equality for all no matter what genetic background.

Although Tye secretly supported a lot of what the Equalists did, she didn't like the violent side to their organisation that had appeared in media reports the last few years.

It was this that made her start forward, intending to try and stop the beating being carried out before her with the pepper-spray she always carried in her bag, or at least distract them enough to let the Supreme get away.

It was at that moment, however, that she felt something cold and hard dig into her back.

"Thinking of being a hero are we, enhanced-lover", a voice sneered at her from behind, "I think my knife pressed into your back should change your mind".

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As Aaron lay on the ground, mind unable to focus as he tried to find a way out of his situation, and body apparently unresponsive in his efforts to fight his way out of the circle of figures beating him, he really wished he'd let Carl catch up earlier.

Thinking back, he was surprised at how quickly everything had gone wrong.

Running like he had, he'd quickly entered a part of the city he was unfamiliar with; not hard when he was normally shuttled from place to place by private electric limo.

Turning down an alley, he'd realised he was lost, and began to retrace his steps only to find a group of five hooded figures behind him, all with red ribbons entwined around their upper arms.

He only had a second to react before one of them quickly jabbed something into his arm. He began to laugh, as with his enhancements no drug could affect him, and with his speed and strength he could easily take care of his apparent assailants.

But then a wave of weakness spread throughout his body. He felt his muscles sag, his head grow foggy, and the vitality that had allowed him to run so far and so fast drain out of him in a flash.

That was when his attackers moved in, quickly pushing him to the ground before starting to kick and punch him, screams erupting from his mouth as the flurry of blows caused pain to explode all over his body.

Aaron gave one final heave in an attempt to run away, seeing two more figures just beyond the circle of limbs that could maybe help him, but then a foot caught him square on the back of the head. Darkness enveloped him in its welcome embrace.

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Tye felt like she was numb as she watched the figures begore her quickly drag the apparently unconscious Supreme towards a manhole cover in the ground she has previously not noticed.

Her captor has tied her hands behind her back and her feet together before shoving her to the ground and going to help his friends.

She hazily realised that there should have been no way the Supreme could have been taken down by the group of women and unenhanced she saw before her. After all, she had once seen a Supreme fight off ten men in an illegal fighting match she'd been dragged to by an old boyfriend.

Finally, two of the group peeled off and came towards her. She recognised the first by the nasally masculine tone that had told her to stop being a hero;

“What shall we do with this one, boss”, he asked the taller figure beside him, now distinctly a woman with a strong, clear face and a hard look to her dark eyes, one blue, one green.

“We take her”, she said, before turning away and heading back towards the manhole opening that Tye now saw concealed a ladder leading down to some sort of passageway.

The man shrugged, before saying, “Sleep tight, princess”. Tye only had a couple of seconds to process this before she felt a sharp pain on the back of her head as the man hit her hard with the butt of his knife.

Darkness rushed up and claimed her too.