

Comic Superhero

by Adam Byatt

Andrew swept up the pile of comic books from his desk and stashed them into his folder with his homework. He had a couple to return to his best mate Jackson and hoped to borrow some in return. With his schoolbag packed he headed out the door for the walk to school.

Jackson's route intersected with Andrew's at the corner store. He was walking out with a carton of strawberry milk and raised it in greeting.

"Finished your Modern History homework?" said Jackson.

"Yeah and the Biology stuff, too."

"Bugger. Forgot that. Mr Perkins won't be happy. When's Bio?"

"Just after lunch. You'll have time to finish it then."

Jackson changed topic quickly, "Hey I got the new Wolverine comic yesterday. You can have it when I've finished."

The pair continued the walk to school chatting about their comic superheroes. Jackson favoured Superman while Andrew liked The Phantom.

"But how can The Phantom be a superhero when he doesn't have a superpower?" argued Jackson.

"Batman doesn't have a superpower. And besides, it's not the ability that makes someone a superhero, but the attitude. That makes The Phantom a superhero. He's just classy."

"Yeah, but you a superpower just makes you that little bit more awesome," countered Jackson.

Secretly, Andrew longed for a superpower. All his childhood comic book heroes were bestowed with them. Jackson wanted Magneto's ability to control metal.

Jackson rambled on as they walked, "Could you imagine having Magneto's power? How awesome would that be in Metal work!"

Above the power of flight and physical strength, adamantium claws and laser weapons, Andrew craved one power: the power of

invisibility. Not like the Invisibility Cloak of Harry Potter, but an ability to be seen and not to be noticed.

"What's up first this morning?" said Jackson.

"English. Which means we are going to get our essays back."

Jackson groaned and faced the sky, knowing his inevitable outcome. "At least you're going to get a good mark. Everyone knows that you're The Quiet Achiever. You always get good marks but you never let anyone know. You're kind of like the Clark Kent of English."

"Maybe, but I still have to beat Emily Lewis."

"You two have had a thing going on since Year 7."

"She's a know it all. She always smirks if she beats me and it is so infuriating."

"Just be careful you don't do the same. If you make her look stupid she'll unmask The Quiet Achiever."

Andrew had learned the art of being a chameleon at school where his school uniform provided an exoskeleton. Beneath was no costume, just the fragile skin of adolescent ego.

"At least I don't wear my underpants on the outside," said Andrew.

"Yeah, but you'd look good in spandex," said Jackson and they both fell about laughing.

"We'd better hurry," said Andrew as they entered the school's grounds.

Andrew and Jackson took their seats on the left of the classroom, just back from the middle. It gave them a good vantage point to see Emily who preferred the front. Mrs Motherwell came in and the class sat up in Pavlovian response, eager for their marks. The chat escalated as papers were returned and marks were compared. Andrew said thanks as the paper was delivered but he turned it face down, resisting the urge to look. He wanted to wait until Emily had received hers.

Mrs Motherwell handed Emily her paper who glanced quickly at the offending red mark at the top of the page before turning it face down on her desk.

"Emily, what'd you get?" said Andrew.

"Eighteen out of twenty," she replied.

Andrew whipped his paper over to see his mark. Every superhero has an Achilles heel, their kryptonite. Andrew succumbed to the most basic of tragic flaws.

"Ha! In your face, Lewis. Twenty!" His hubris exalted him to dizzying heights.

Emily turned to hide her face, the shame of ridicule blushing her cheeks.

Mrs Motherwell interceded, "Mr Andrew Hansen. That is uncalled for. Despite the fact that you scored a perfect mark, it does not give you the right to gloat over us mere mortals. In the words of King Solomon, 'Pride precedes disaster, and a haughty spirit before a fall.' "

Jackson hid a smirk. "You got burned."

"I knew it was a mistake once I'd said it."

"Looks like The Quiet Achiever is no more. But you know every superhero needs a nemesis."

Andrew spent the rest of the lesson feeling naked and exposed. Suddenly his identity was no longer a secret. He kept sneaking glances towards Emily, but never held his gaze for long. The bell for the end of class came as a relief for Andrew. He stood to pack away his books but was confronted by the stormy face of Emily inches away from his own.

"I will beat you Andrew Hansen, if it's the last thing I ever do."

She turned and as she flounced away, her dark tresses flowed like a cape.

