

The Greatest (Wannabe) Superheroes

Animated Feature Treatment

by Jericca Cleland

ACT I

A limousine stands parked at the curb outside a fancy downtown performance theatre. An old man on a ladder updates the marquis to read: GENEVIÈVE BOULET WEST COAST DEBUT. Above, up on the roof, SUNSHINE, a waify 11-year-old girl in braids and overalls studies the street activity through binoculars. Beside her lie a backpack and a bookmarked university aerospace engineering textbook. She picks up a juice box and slurps it without lowering her eyes from the binoculars. Banging and clanking emanates from a nearby refrigeration unit.

Downstairs, in the basement kitchen of the theatre, SIMON, a chubby maintenance man in his late twenties, finishes adjusting something at the back of the refrigerator. Backs out, picking up scattered tools and replacing them in his tool belt. Pulls out a bag of cheesy-poofs from his belt and opens them. Music swells in the distance, an orchestra. And the voice of a lovely operatic singer. Simon walks down the hall, singing along with her in his rough baritone in between orange-powdery bites.

Simon emerges from a stairwell and into another hall. The music is much louder and clearer here. He listens in rapture as the visiting singer rehearses for her debut, soaring through a complex passage and sustaining a powerful note. Simon's expression of bliss suddenly changes to one of concern and then alarm. He clutches his abdomen, dashes for the nearest washroom—the women's.

Simon sits on the toilet, his maintenance coveralls and polyester long johns down around his ankles. A woman putting on her makeup is staring at him in disgust in the mirror. Simon closes and locks the door saying, "I'll never touch another cheesy-poof." His cel phone rings. It's Sunshine, who speaks incredibly quickly and in an intelligent but over-complicated manner. Simon interrupts her with questions until he can extract that she has spotted an in-progress theft of a bicycle; if they hurry, they can catch the criminal. They will meet at the usual place.

Simon launches into action but is unable to unlock the door to get out of the stall, the latch is jammed. In a hurry, he tries to slide out under the door but doesn't fit. He finally squeezes out a

window. Up on the roof, Sunshine moves with unnatural speed and agility to the far side, using the skates imbedded in her shoes whenever she can. She climbs down the wall to a fire escape then runs the rest of the way, jumping over the last 3-4 stairs of each flight. Simon emerges from the parking garage, pulling on black pleather gloves that match his flaming-scorpion-emblazoned black pleather jacket. They race off to bring the culprit to justice.

Not far away, the thief finishes swiping the bike and takes off. As he turns into an alley, Simon and Sunshine spot him from a block away. The thief hides himself behind a dumpster and calls his boss who warns him that certain superheroes may be onto them. Help is on the way. The thief rides off down the unpaved road, leaving tracks in the soft ground.

When Sunshine and Simon reach the hiding place, the culprit is gone. As Sunshine examines the ground for tracks, three powerful men wearing t-shirts with a wheel insignia approach them. They are cocky, seeing only a little girl and a wussy fat guy. Sunshine smiles sweetly at them then lashes out with her blazing fast hands and feet, wielding her braids like nunchucks—she is THE SUNSHINE/SLASHER. Two of the attackers are knocked out. Simon aims his hand at the oil-slicked puddle the third is standing in. Flame shoots out of his fingertips, setting the puddle on fire—he is THE SCORCHION. The man shrieks as flames catch his pants on fire; he runs off to find another puddle to drop and roll in.

Simon and Sunshine high-five and follow the bicycle tracks onward. As they run, Sunshine mentions having seen that wheel emblem before. This is obviously deeper than a simple bicycle theft. The two of them hope this may be the break they've been waiting for.

Nearing a warehouse down by the docks, Simon and Sunshine slip into a side alley. They discover some broken crates branded with the wheel emblem. They are getting close. Simon finds a locked door and begins to pick the lock with his tools. A well-equipped and professional-looking superhero interrupts him, flashing an id card in his wallet: CAPTAIN OBLIVIOUS, REGISTERED SUPERHERO GUILD MEMBER, CLASS A. He informs them that this is a union job and they are not welcome. They have stumbled upon a sting operation poised to take out the super villain THE WHEELER DEALER, infamous for his nefarious (and creative) use of stolen bicycle parts. Captain Oblivious sends them on their way and makes what is supposed to be an impressive exit up the side of the building. However, he fails to notice an architectural detail and collides with it, nearly falling. He recovers and disappears over the lip of the roof not realizing he dropped his wallet. Afraid of endangering the sting by shouting after him, Simon picks up the wallet: *How come incompetence always rises to the top?* He pockets it, intending to turn it in at the guild later.

The two wannabe superheroes head back to the theatre, grumbling about the unfairness of the whole thing: they can't get into the guild without experience and they can't get any experience without being in the guild. Simon mentions his life-long dream of being in the union and leading a superhero team.

Back at the theatre, Simon, dressed once more in his maintenance coveralls, finds things in disarray. The theatre manager is relieved to see him, claiming that many people inside the building have been feeling sick... there's concern that something may be wrong with one of the air handlers. Simon is charged with checking them out and reporting back as soon as possible.

Encountering knots of ill people exhibiting various symptoms from intense stomach pain to dizziness, Simon checks the first three air handlers, radios back that he has found nothing and is en route to the fourth. This last machine is located off the end of the balcony on the other side of the theatre. Simon cuts through the performance hall on the second level and witnesses a scene down on the stage. GENEVIÈVE BOULET, a gorgeous, dynamic thirty-something African-American woman dressed in a high-style (and very distinctive) gown, is arguing with two theatre employees, refusing to be taken outside. They want her to clear the building for her own safety, despite her insistence that she feels fine. Seeing motion in the balcony, Geneviève looks up and locks eyes with Simon. They both react as if jolted. She sways and nearly faints; he stands stunned: his supersense¹ has just been activated. Geneviève Boulet is a super being. He watches as the men lead her, now unresisting, out of the theatre. Simon dashes to the service room for privacy and calls Sunshine.

Up on the roof again, Sunshine can see Geneviève guided out of the building and into a parked limousine. There is an exchange with the chauffeur who walks off down the street, leaving her in the car alone. Simon tells Sunshine to meet him in the usual spot in 5 minutes. He then makes a call on the radio to his boss: he has found something odd in the theatre air handler and they should evacuate the building.

Shortly after, Simon moves through a stream of people heading outside as fire alarms blare. He steps into a side hall and then into a room marked WARDROBE. Inside, he searches among the hanging costumes until he finds something resembling a chauffeur's outfit. Keeping on his long johns, he dons it and exits, cramming the hat on his head and keeping his eyes downcast.

¹ The first time one super being (or "super") has eye contact with another, there is a jolt of recognition—a strong, slightly disorienting feeling of genetic connection. This effect lessens dramatically over time, becoming unnoticeable when someone is familiar.

Out on the street, he slides into the limousine. The keys are still in the ignition to allow the stereo to play music for Geneviève, who is in the back behind the tinted glass divider. Simon, sweating a little with nervousness, eases the car into traffic, pausing at the corner long enough to pick up Sunshine. When they lower the glass divider, they find Geneviève asleep. Her apparent exhaustion convinces Simon that he has guessed rightly: Geneviève is a latent super being just now manifesting her powers. He reasons that everyone's sickness, including his own, is related to the projection of her voice. Sunshine starts theorizing how this could possibly be, hypothesizing some cell-vibration-altering sound wave. When he can get a word in edge-wise, Simon insists that Geneviève is completely unaware of what is happening to her. They have to get her somewhere where they can talk.

At a nearby park, Simon and Sunshine stand by as Geneviève vents her considerable temper, ranting about everything from the interruption of her rehearsal to being taken from the theatre to these two lunatics with all their ridiculous talk about superpowers. All of this in her rich and heavily French-Canadian-accented English. Sunshine finally convinces the diva to meet her eyes. For the second time, Geneviève experiences her awakened supersense and falls silent. Now she's listening. In short order, they have her testing out her voice, singing the same passage that affected Simon. When she projects the sustained note again, a nearby pigeon falls unconscious, Simon leans into the bushes to puke, and Sunshine suffers a splitting headache. Geneviève is horrified by what she has wrought. She also realizes that her singing career is on hold until she can get her powers under control. She appeals to Simon and Sunshine for help.

Once in the limousine, Geneviève phones the theatre, claiming she's been called home for a family emergency—the concert will have to be rescheduled. She explains the missing limo by saying she hired another driver to take her when she got the call. Simon drives them back to the hotel so Geneviève can check out.

A little later, Geneviève enters the parking garage from the hotel elevators, having changed outfits and picked up her teacup poodle, CHOU-CHOU, who is dressed in matching clothes. Behind her, Sunshine struggles with an overloaded baggage cart full of expensive, coordinated suitcases. They head across the lot to the limousine. A dingy maintenance van enters, parking next to the limo. Simon emerges, having changed into The Scorchion. He checks his hair and teeth in the side mirror, then opens the back of the van and stashes the chauffeur clothes and hat beneath his maintenance coveralls. Seeing the load on the baggage cart, he rearranges various other items: a couple of battered phone books, some tools, an old rope, etc. Geneviève baby talks to Chou-Chou as the

others load all of her luggage. They drive off to a different hotel (the next best hotel in town), leaving the limo behind.

Later that afternoon, the three of them sit in the rundown lounge of a wannabe superhero hangout. Genevieve and Chou-Chou have changed clothes again. Sunshine works at engineering problems in her Sponge Bob Square Pants notebook. Simon drinks a coke and offers Geneviève some of his M&Ms. She sticks with her green health drink, pouring some into a silver bowl (from her purse) for Chou-Chou. Other non-union, slightly-pathetic wannabe superheroes wander by, some of whom Simon introduces to Geneviève. She looks more and more dejected at her surroundings and her prospects of learning to control her powers from anyone around here. She is clearly struggling with the impact of this change on her life and career.

Both wanting to help and impress Geneviève, Simon racks his brain for a plan. Spotting a poster on the bulletin board, he invites her to the superhero masquerade ball happening that evening. It is an official A Class, Guild of Canadian Superheroes event; Simon will pose as Captain Oblivious. Since he hasn't had a chance to turn the wallet in yet, he can use the id. The guild has strict rules and high standards, so this is a dangerous plan, which could ruin his career and dash any hopes of ever getting into the union. Simon shushes Sunshine's objections, sure that the ball will restore Geneviève's spirits and her faith in him. Definitely a risk worth taking.

When they get to the ball, Scorchion passes through security without any trouble, escorting Geneviève and Chou-Chou, both in elaborate matching masked outfits. He is costumed and masked as well. He settles her at a table near the dance floor and goes off in search of drinks. Geneviève relaxes, at ease in this more familiar, upscale setting.

On the other side of the ballroom, a tall woman dressed in a long flamboyant gown enters. She lowers her mask and powders an unhandsome nose, looking in a compact mirror to spy behind her. Pulling out a scarlet lipstick container, she applies it while speaking into the hidden radio; Simon is not the only infiltrator. Two men in tux jackets with cummerbunds matching her dress, receive their radioed messages and move off to carry out orders. The flamboyant woman joins the rest of the party.

Back at the table, Geneviève and Simon drink champagne while she asks questions about various people. Of course, he has little to say about them, since he is not in the guild at all and only knows the most famous of superheroes, all of whom are in disguise anyway. She goes off to mingle on her own, leaving little Chou-Chou in Simon's reluctant care.

The flamboyant woman and her two accomplices work the room, covertly placing bugs and eavesdropping on conversations. She spots Geneviève and is instantly intrigued, what beauty, what style, what magnetism. She begins asking other people questions about her, listening in to hear the gossip. Geneviève creates a stir wherever she goes; she is the talk of the party. But no one knows who she is. Eventually, the flamboyant woman approaches Simon, who has been pointed out as being the escort of the mysterious woman. He sits alone with the dog and is flattered to have some company. The woman invites him to dance and they rig a leash for the tiny poodle and leave it tied to the table. As Simon tries to dance properly, the woman chitchats, gradually leading him into a conversation about his guest. He doesn't notice that she keeps her eyes riveted on Geneviève. Soon one of her accomplices cuts in, taking the woman away from Simon. They melt into the swirling crowd. Alone once more, he heads back to the table. To his dismay, he finds that Chou-Chou is missing.

Scorchion looks everywhere for the missing poodle, but to no avail. He sees a man leaning against a column; he is dressed similarly to the one that cut in on his dance partner. A server approaches with a single glass of champagne on a tray. The man takes it, glances at the napkin underneath. Pours the champagne into a nearby plant and heads for the door. Suspicious, Simon follows him. As the accomplice passes a garbage can, he throws away the napkin. Simon fishes it out, stuffs it in a pocket. Catches a glimpse of the man heading out the back door.

Moments later, Simon steps outside. At the main street, he sees the flamboyant woman and the other accomplice, who carries a yapping bundle, step into a taxi. Then everything goes black as he is struck on the back of the head with a man's dress shoe.

ACT II

Simon comes to in Geneviève's fancy hotel suite, lying on a divan with a pack of ice on his head. Sunshine is caring for him and explains that the diva saw him leave out the back door. When he didn't return, she went out looking for him, finding him unconscious in the alley. She brought Simon back to the hotel but, evidently distraught over her missing pet, has not come out of the bedroom since.

Simon appeals to Geneviève through the closed door; no response. He expresses suspicion that Chou-Chou was dog napped by a super villain. He and Sunshine discuss options. They can't go to the guild without exposing Simon's transgressions. They can't go to the police without exposing

Geneviève's presence in the city; she's too high profile. At this point, Geneviève storms out of the bedroom demanding that if they're all really superheroes, they should go rescue Chou-Chou themselves. Geneviève wails: *Just think, ma petite Chou-Chou has nothing to wear!* (Simon asks Sunshine: *What does "chou" mean, anyway?* She responds: *Cabbage, I think.* Simon: *Cabbage-Cabbage?*) So it's settled. They decide to go after the little dog together. Simon becomes excited, trying to think of a name for their superhero team (e.g. *The Tricky Triad*, etc.). Sunshine points out that they have a problem—they don't know where the poodle is or who took her. She asks Simon why he followed the man outside in the first place.

Simon remembers the napkin, looks in his pocket. It is still there. Scrawled on the white paper in scarlet lipstick are the words POOCH PINCHED EXIT NOW. Not very helpful. Sunshine begins overanalyzing the clues, suggesting chemical analysis, fingerprinting, anagrams, etc. She holds it up to the light trying to determine if the writer was right or left handed. Geneviève notices that the napkin is not plain—all of the napkins she saw at the event were unadorned. This one has the logo of an establishment printed on it. Simon recognizes it as belonging to a bar that closed some time ago. It was in a block due to be demolished—a perfect location for a villainous hideout. Sunshine pulls out a map from the hotel portfolio, and they make a rescue plan. Geneviève soon loses interest and goes into her room, emerging in her new superhero persona, LA DIVA DIVINE. Of course, she is dressed in yet another outfit—her version of what would be perfect for nighttime sneaking. Sunshine takes her back in to find something more appropriate to wear.

Later, The Scorchion, The Sunshine/Slasher, and La Diva Divine exit the hotel garage in the maintenance van. When they arrive at the vacant commercial block, all is quiet. They drive by the old bar, its sign still in place above the address—the windows are all blacked out. Sunshine spots several hidden guards lurking outside. They continue past and go around the block into the back alley. There they are surprised to see various cars parked and people going in and coming out of an unmarked metal door. Sunshine points out that the address spray painted on the wall is the same as the one over the front door of the bar. The door opens, letting out a puff of smoke and the throb of heavy music—sounds like a rave. Driving past a scarlet Cadillac, they park the van around the next corner and go back to the party.

Moving through the large room full of strobe lights and party people, they search for an entrance into the bar itself. Simon spots the man he followed the night before entering from a dark hall. They slip into the corridor. It's a dead end with locked washrooms on either side. A full-length mirror hangs at the end of the hallway. Simon picks the padlocks as La Diva primps in front

the mirror, fussing over what Sunshine made her wear. Simon and Sunshine search the washrooms, finding nothing. Frustrated, Sunshine snaps at La Diva that she could help—it's *her* dog they're trying to find. La Diva says she doesn't know what to look for. As Sunshine launches into a rapid rundown of likely triggers for hidden doors, La Diva uncovers one and opens the mirror.

They pass through, finding themselves behind the old bar counter. Hearing voices, they duck down; several men sit around a table playing poker and drinking beer. They tease and taunt Chou-Chou, who is stuck under a plastic crate on an adjacent table. One of the players folds and goes to tinker on the abandoned piano in the corner.

After a whispered conference beneath the bar, La Diva provides a distraction by entering the room, claiming to have been looking for the washroom. The men are alarmed at the intrusion but soon relax under her charm. She joins the man at the piano. Sunshine and Simon hide behind the bar, plugging their ears with soft wax earplugs; from here on out, they have to use sign language/pantomime. La Diva sings a song with the man but nothing happens. Seeing that the men are riveted on La Diva, Sunshine sneaks in to get the dog. Chou-Chou barks at her, giving them away, and a fight begins. La Diva keeps singing. Simon is pushed against the bar as an attacker catches him by the wrists, redirecting his flames upward. As Simon twists free, an exposed nail tears a gash in the back of his coat. At last, La Diva projects her voice properly and the attackers are disarmed. The superheroes and Chou-Chou flee back through the hidden door, unwilling to take on the guards out front.

Simon, Sunshine, and La Diva, who carries Chou-Chou, wind their way back through the rave. Halfway across the floor, the music screeches to a halt and spotlights train onto them. People run screaming out of the building as several large henchmen drop down from above to surround the threesome. La Diva takes in a deep breath to sing but can only squeak as her mouth is clamped shut from behind. It is the flamboyant woman from the ball. But she is not a woman at all. THE DREADFUL DRAG introduces himself and thanks them for coming to his party—it was so good of them to fall for his little trick. La Diva is strong but cannot break free of her captor's grip. Sunshine attacks the nearest henchman, yelling and gesturing at Simon to burn the ropes to ensure that La Diva cannot be taken up out of reach and that others cannot descend. Simon raises his hands to jet flame and—nothing happens. He waves again, but no flame erupts. The Dreadful Drag is pulled back up into the darkness above, taking La Diva with him. The little dog jumps out of her arms and down to the floor. The henchmen now attack in earnest, another pair clambering down the ropes from above. Sunshine is hard pressed, calling for Simon's help, but he is utterly ineffective.

In desperation, he grabs the base of the ropes and uses them to swing his considerable weight into Sunshine's attackers. One of the men above falls with a thud to the floor. Simon uses his own momentum to grab Sunshine and rush her down the hallway and through the hidden panel. In the bar, the men affected by La Diva's voice are recovering, but Sunshine quickly knocks them out. They race for the front door, which is locked. Simon pushes Sunshine behind him and charges, using his pleather gloves to break the glass. The guards outside are taken completely by surprise as the duo runs off into the night.

Some time later, they emerge from a dark road, still running. The coast is clear. They slump down for a rest. Sunshine turns to Simon, who looks just terrible and has several cuts on his face from crashing through the glass. Bewildered, Sunshine wants to know why his powers didn't work. Looking sick, Simon claims he doesn't know, that they just failed him. He suggests that maybe The Dreadful Drag blocked them somehow. He leans back, closing his eyes, ignoring the blood trickling from his wounds. Concerned, Sunshine takes out a little flower-print hankie and presses it to the most serious wound. His eyes fly open at the contact. He grabs her wrist, snatches the cotton cloth from her. Sunshine is taken aback by his strange behavior. Simon makes an embarrassed excuse, hides the hankie in his pocket. He pulls out his own handkerchief and cleans up the blood.

Just then Chou-Chou appears, jumping into Sunshine's lap and yapping with joy. Simon tries to pet the dog, but she growls at him. Sunshine puzzles over how she could have found them; teacup poodles aren't known for their tracking skills. Something glinting on the pavement in the light from a streetlamp catches her eye. She investigates, discovering a thin trail of liquid leading from where they came right to Simon. She smells it: lighter fluid. As Sunshine begins an overcomplicated musing about how he might have come into contact with the fluid, Chou-Chou starts barking at Simon's back, pulling at the pleather flap torn open during the fight. Simon is unmasked; the hole in his coat reveals a lacerated plastic sac containing traces of lighter fluid. Cornered and racked with guilt, he confesses that his powers are rigged; he has small tubes sewn into the coat that run from the sack to the firing mechanism in his gloves. He's a fraud. He claims full responsibility for the mess they're in. Sunshine argues that he can't be a fraud--he has his supersense. When she presses him about his powers, he becomes angry and cutting, deeply hurting her feelings. She bursts into tears as he walks off, leaving his ruined Scorchion jacket and gloves behind.

Simon wanders aimlessly, depressed. He walks through the streets; in the aging night, the city is still quiet. A homeless man asks him for some money. Simon reaches into his back pocket

and pulls out a wallet, the one belong to Captain Oblivious. Surprised to see it, and not wanting to take steal money, he fishes into his front pocket for some of his own change for the beggar. Walks on, considering the wallet.

Sunshine dries her tears on her sleeve, since she has no hankie. She talks to Chou-Chou, who now seems to have bonded with her. Feeling the need to do something, Sunshine decides to return to the hideout for some scouting/surveillance. She takes off, carrying Simon's discarded coat and gloves with her.

Simon approaches the Superheroes Guild office in a beautiful old downtown building. The main entrance is closed, but an emergency office off to the side advertises OPEN 24 HOURS. Entering, Simon approaches the graveyard shift receptionist—a scrawny, middle-aged man that looks nothing like a superhero. Their eyes meet and the familiar tingle of the supersense assures Simon that the man is for real. Simon begins to explain his problem but the receptionist cuts him off, sliding a clipboard and a stack of forms across the desk. He is to fill these out first. Simon tries to protest, but the receptionist is immovable. Behind him, someone is typing away, entering data into a computer. Simon considers the forms. There are spaces for NAME, ID NUMBER, NATURE OF EMERGENCY, etc. A plastic ballpoint pen embossed with THE SUPERHEROES GUILD dangles from the clipboard by a chain. Simon starts writing: Captain Oblivious...

Sunshine arrives back at the vacant strip. She stashes the coat and the dog, commanding her to be quiet. Chou-Chou insists on coming with her. Sunshine climbs up onto the roof, slinks along. There is no sound of music or a party. A car door slams, causing Sunshine to turn. The scarlet Cadillac, the last remaining car, pulls away. Consulting the poodle (rhetorically), Sunshine changes plans, begins looking for a way into the building from the rooftop.

Simon returns the forms. The receptionist looks them over carefully. Asks to see his id. Simon lies, claiming he lost it in a fight. The receptionist nods but his fingers hover over a silent alarm button beneath the desk. He asks a few more questions, getting a shrewd look in his eye, does not press it. Instead, he presses a button on a panel Simon cannot see. It is marked TRAINING ROOM. He keys a number in on an adjacent pad, then asks the data entry person to take over for him. He escorts Simon down a hall. Opens a locked door. It's an empty conference room. The receptionist tells him he can wait here. Simon sits down.

As soon as the door closes, the lights change to a dull red. Simon jumps up, unsure. An attack sequence begins... this is a superhero training room. The receptionist watches through a concealed window. Simon is barely managing to survive in there and shows no trace of

superpowers. Just as Simon is about to be killed, the receptionist hits the cancel button. Speaks into a microphone, introducing himself as EGOMAN. Shaken by the experience, Simon confesses that he has lied, offers to explain everything if only EgoMan will help him save La Diva.

Sunshine drops into the room where the party was. It is empty. Cautious, she heads for the hidden doorway. It's gone too, the hallway open. There's nothing in the bar beyond; even the tables are gone. Only the piano hulks by itself in the abandoned space. She checks the whole area. There is no one there, no sign of occupation. The Dreadful Drag and La Diva Divine are gone.

Sitting at a the training room table (retransformed), Simon clutches a Styrofoam cup of coffee, embarrassed as EgoMan summarizes his long litany of transgressions: infiltrating a guild event, posing as a guild superhero, putting another superhero at risk, failing to report a kidnapping, etc, etc. EgoMan tells Simon that his career and any hopes of a career are ended. His best option is to turn himself in, thereby lessening the severity of the repercussions and ensuring that the guild will act to rescue La Diva Divine. The guild office will open at 8AM; EgoMan can bring him to the authorities then. Simon allows himself to be lead down a number of maze-like passages through the guild headquarters, listening numbly as EgoMan spouts on and on about how HE would never do anything so stupid. HE once put the infamous duo LOONIE and TOONIE behind bars. HE has the noble power of flight, on and on. As EgoMan locks Simon in an office, he politely apologizes while handcuffing him to a wooden chair. Simon asks how soon they will start looking for La Diva. EgoMan reassures him it will be taken care of ASAPA—he will be next door starting his report. Left alone, Simon slumps down, knowing he is sunk, but hoping La Diva, at least, will be in safe hands soon.

As Sunshine returns from the bar, she notices that the women's room is unlocked. The men's room is still padlocked. Curious, she enters. There are signs of makeup in the sink. As she inspects the sink and counter, Chou-Chou disappears under the stalls, begins barking. Sunshine goes to her and finds a silk scarf hanging over the hook in one of the stalls. It is embroidered with the initials DD. La Diva Divine! But the dog growls—this is not hers. Sunshine realizes then, it couldn't be, La Diva just came up with that name. This must belong to The Dreadful Drag. She checks it over, finding a small label: a local fancy dressmaker.

Simon sits in the chair, locked in the office, limp. A clock ticks away. His gaze wanders around the room. Posters are tacked to the wall proclaiming T.E.A.M. (Together Everyone Achieves Mission), proper procedures for villain encounters, etc. On the desk are stacks of forms and a paperweight. It is made of Lucite, engraved with five large letters and several smaller words

underneath. Unfortunately, it's turned away from him, making the words blurry and backwards. Simon can figure out the large letters: ASAPA. ASAP...A? He'd missed that. What does the last A stand for? He squints, trying to decipher the text beneath, reversing it in his head. Eventually, he gets it: As Soon As Procedure Allows. He snaps back to the poster: the list of procedures for villain encounters is quite long. He'll be lucky if they go after La Diva sometime this week. He cannot allow her to be in the clutches of The Dreadful Drag that long. Simon returns to life. He tries to pry his hands out of the cuffs. Scoots his chair around, looking for anything that can help him.

Outside the decoy hideout, Sunshine goes back to pick up the coat. As she lifts it, hears jangling. Keys. Simon's van. She takes out the keys and inadvertently pulls out the hidden hankie as well. It falls to the ground, looking a little strange. Sunshine picks it up, unfolds it. Instead of being stained with blood, it is full of holes as if eaten through. She examines the coat, noting the pleather, the shiny inner lining, but can find no other sign of holes. In the other pocket, she discovers Simon's cel phone and his handkerchief, which is streaked with rust-colored stains. Heading for the van, she fingers both cloths, feeling the fabric. In the back of the van, she searches for the yellow pages. She looks under Simon's coveralls, seeing the chauffeur's clothing and hat. Looks behind a battered box of stuff and finds the phone book. She pulls it out, then goes back and picks up the chauffeur's hat. Her eyes are not playing tricks: the lining of the hat is in tatters. Realization dawns on her: *Oh, Simon!* She pulls out her cel phone to call him, but disconnects when the phone rings in the coat, reminding her that she has no way to reach him. *I hope he hasn't done anything foolish.* Focusing on the task at hand, Sunshine looks up the dressmaker's name in the phone book. It's on the other side of town. She considers the van, the phone book. Moments later, Sunshine drops the yellow pages on the driver's seat and climbs in. It's an automatic. She swerves her way down the street as the sky lightens.

Simon looks at the clock on the wall. Nearly 7:40. If he doesn't get out soon, the guild will open and he'll be caught. He jumps his chair up and down, trying to break the wood, but it holds. He shifts over to the desk, searching again for any useful implement. The sun creeps in through the window. Simon looks up, gets blinded. Sneezes. Without his hand to block the sneeze, he sprays saliva on a nearby stack of paper. The paper begins to smoke, little holes appearing wherever there was contact. Simon considers this for a beat; then begins chuckling. He turns his chair around until his finger can contact the paper (behind his back). Giving himself a papercut, he presses the welling blood to the back of the chair, just above where the handcuffs are attached. The wood begins to smoke. With a few more cuts, he burns his way through the chair back, slipping the handcuffs free;

his hands, however are still bound. He looks out the window, it's a tough climb down, especially without his hands. He moves to the locked door, which is also made of wood. Spits on the door jamb, above the latch. Instantly, the wood begins to dissolve. Where his saliva hits metal, nothing happens. In short order, the latch is exposed and he can hook his handcuffs over the doorknob and pull the door open. He peeks around the corner. EgoMan sits at his desk writing away. His walls are covered with old newspaper clippings of himself. Simon ducks back inside; EgoMan knows everything. Even if he escapes, he'll be picked up by the guild in no time. Simon hesitates, then makes a decision. He kicks at the wall, making a tremendous noise, then positions himself behind the door. EgoMan rushes in to yell at him, stops in surprise when he sees the broken chair and empty room. Simon rushes him from behind, knocking him down and pinning him with his weight. He demands EgoMan free him; he refuses. With his hands still cuffed behind his back, Simon cannot do anything else. EgoMan seems content to wait. They are at an impasse. The clock keeps ticking. Finally, Simon touches his tongue to the back of EgoMan's neck. He cries out in pain as the skin blisters, agrees to help. Simon maneuvers himself to allow EgoMan to unlock the cuffs while still otherwise pinned to the floor. He replaces the cuffs on EgoMan and forces him to navigate out the back way. As they leave, he spies a Lost & Found slot in a security office door. He drops in Captain Oblivious' wallet.

Meanwhile, Sunshine drives through an upscale part of town, arrives at a two-storey building with a dress shop on the ground level. As she cruises by, she sees the scarlet Cadillac parked in the back. This must be where they took La Diva: The Dreadful Drag's real hideout. As she scans for a parking spot on the street, her cel phone rings.

In an alley not far from the guild building, Simon is using EgoMan's cel phone to call Sunshine. Behind him, EgoMan squirms in a garbage can; with his long legs folded up to his ears, it's a tight fit, which prevents him from running away. Sunshine nearly veers off the road trying to talk and drive at the same time.

As Simon gives Sunshine directions, EgoMan sputters indignantly about his treatment. After all, HE is a guild superhero, Simon is only making his situation worse. Still on the phone, Simon licks a finger and extends it toward EgoMan threateningly. He falls silent. They hear the van just before it turns into the alley. Sunshine swerves up and stalls out, lurching to a halt. She gets out of the driver's seat of the van to confront Simon face-to-face.

Sunshine and Simon have a heated argument. She's furious with him for going to the guild and destroying his career, kidnapping a guild member, etc. He's mad at her for going back to the

bar, trying to rescue La Diva on her own, not to mention driving his van illegally all over town. EgoMan talks at the same time, proclaiming to Sunshine who he is, trying to convince her to come let him out. Neither of them is listening. Simon picks up the garbage can lid and jams it down on top of the can, muffling his protests. They turn their backs on him. To drive home her point, Sunshine begins talking up the guild, how important it is to his career, etc. She extols superheroes in general, using the captured EgoMan, who she doesn't know at all and has never heard of, as a shining example. Hearing her compliments and touched by them, EgoMan's head begins to swell; the lid slides off and he levitates, floating up, taking the garbage can with him. The others are too absorbed to notice. Simon argues back that he's been inside the guild, and it's a bureaucratic nightmare. He tells her about the forms and points out that EgoMan works the graveyard shift as the receptionist. How glamorous is that? Behind them, EgoMan's head now deflates, bringing him back down. During the rest of their argument, his head swells and contracts, lifting him up and lowering him down again. Finally, Sunshine makes an impassioned statement about the true meaning of superherodom, which culminates in her revealing her guess about Simon's powers. Simon is flabbergasted that she figured it out. And ashamed, fearful she'll want nothing to do with him; caustic bodily fluids are hardly the makings of a real superhero. Sunshine professes that it's not the kind of power but how you use it that really matters. She points out EgoMan's powers, which she has actually been noticing and Simon has not. EgoMan clatters back down, red-faced; Simon bursts out laughing.

They now turn their attention to figuring out what to do with their captive. Simon proposes that they keep him until La Diva is free. Then he will turn himself in and pay the consequences—a heavier thought now that he has accepted his true powers and has been inspired by Sunshine's faith in him. EgoMan suggests an alternative: they bring him along to help with the rescue. He will take the credit for saving the day, thereby hiding their involvement from the guild (rescuing another superhero is always a union job). He will gain status points for his actions, raising his profile within the union (maybe he can even get off the graveyard shift). In return, he'll overlook their other transgressions and put in a good word for them down the line. Simon and Sunshine agree.

ACT III

Simon is in favor of charging to the rescue immediately, but EgoMan insists he can use his connections to find them a better window of opportunity for launching a mission. The threesome

now go back to Simon's place to make a plan, sleep, eat, wait for nightfall, etc. While there, EgoMan uses his resources within the union. Sunshine asks him to alert them when The Dreadful Drag is sighted outside of his lair. EgoMan seems disappointed that they are not planning on actually confronting him. Simon asks EgoMan what The Dreadful Drag's powers actually are. EgoMan doesn't know, but assures them that he's categorized as a class A villain. Sunshine is firm; he's definitely out of their league—this is a rescue mission only. EgoMan pouts but places some phone calls, gets on the internet, etc.

Sunshine works with Simon to brainstorm battle uses for his powers. She fishes out a discarded bubble tea straw from the trash, which is full of takeout containers, junk food wrappers, etc. Filling a Tupperware container with polyester (not cotton) balls from Simon's bathroom, she hands it to Simon saying: *Now spit*. It takes some effort, but he produces enough moisture to soak them, Voila, she has invented a spitball weapon for shooting caustic wads that sear any organic material they strike. Simon frets about what to call himself now. Sunshine says he can remain The Scorchion, but he doesn't feel worthy of such a grand name. After sunset, EgoMan calls out that The Dreadful Drag has been sighted going into a hotel downtown. It's now or never...

The three superheroes (and the ever-present Chou-Chou) arrive at the dress shop, the lair of The Dreadful Drag. Sunshine is sure the front way would be alarmed and/or trapped. They go around the side of the building, but Sunshine cannot find a way to climb up. Glancing at EgoMan, she begins to praise him: *Silly me! I'm sure someone as smart and experienced as you must have a solution. I should have asked you right away. What do you think?* As he lifts off the ground due to his swelling cranium, Sunshine compliments him more: *Oh, what a good idea. Of course! You can fly!! Wow...* Simon dashes off to the van to retrieve some rope. EgoMan floats up to the second storey windows, peering in each. He finally finds one that is dark but not locked.

Simon throws him the coil of rope, which thumps against the window. EgoMan makes an uncoordinated, but ultimately spectacular catch and then floats up higher to attach the rope to the roof. Suddenly, a light flares on in the room below him. Startled, EgoMan's head deflates all at once and he plummets, just catching himself on the edge of the roof. He hangs there as a guard opens the window, checks below with his flashlight. It is all clear. He mutters: *Probably some dumb bird*. Shuts the window, locking it. The light turns back off and EgoMan can breathe again. He looks down. Sunshine and Simon reappear from a hiding place and begin to pantomime how awesome they think he is, good job, way to go. He floats back up and ties off the rope. Sunshine nimbly climbs up; Simon needs to be hoisted. He stops in front of the window, using his power to

dissolve the wood around the latch. After he dismantles the window, Simon leads the others into the lair.

They find themselves in a storage room. It is stuffed full of racks of clothing and mannequins, some elaborately dressed, some naked, and some in pieces. They sneak out of the room, clinging to the shadows. The hall leads to a large warehouse-style workroom dominated by a field of posed mannequins that occupies the vast center of the space. The walls are lined with tall shelves stuffed with bolts of fabric. Twenty feet above, exposed rafters criss-cross the room. Only one of the many hanging light fixtures is on; it creates a pool of light at the far end, beyond the mannequin field. They hear a woman sniffing followed by a sharp command in a male voice coming from the same direction. Sunshine climbs up into the rafters to scout.

As she moves toward the light, Sunshine notes that there are five patrolling guards, each wearing a security outfit with FASHION POLICE printed across the back. They carry flashlights and cruel, hooked weapons stuck in their belts that look like over-sized stitch removers. When she reaches the far end of the room, she is shocked at what she sees: La Diva Divine gagged and bound to a mannequin stand in the center of a makeshift enclosure made of two individual three-panel-mirror dress fitting platforms that have been pushed together around her. She has been dressed in clashing, tacky clothes, her hair uncoifed, makeup removed, her feet stuck into nursing shoes. Worst of all, she cannot look away from her own reflection; she's surrounded by mirrors and one more guard is stationed nearby to ensure that she keeps her eyes open.

Sunshine returns to her companions and devises a plan. She gives EgoMan the spitball weapon and, expressing her gratitude and admiration for him, sends him up into the rafters to spy on the patrols. Simon camouflages himself as a mannequin in a fancy dress and works his way through the mannequin field toward La Diva. Sunshine heads off down the hall to take out the two guards EgoMan indicates are there. That leaves 4. Sweating with nervousness, Simon inadvertently begins to disintegrate the silk dress he's wearing. A passing guard's flashlight flashes across his bare skin; he is discovered. The battle begins. EgoMan occupies the guard near La Diva by peppering him with caustic spitballs. Sunshine keeps his spirits buoyed with well-timed compliments while she takes care of another man she was sneaking up on. La Diva observes what she can from inside her pen. Simon fights the guard who found him, spitting at him and avoiding being slashed or beaten with the hooked weapon. Sunshine sets down Chou-Chou, who dashes off toward La Diva, and moves to help Simon. She is broadsided by the last guard. The tables begin to turn when Simon runs out of spit and tackles his adversary. They wrestle on the ground, but Simon is pinned.

Sunshine becomes overwhelmed by her attacker. EgoMan, seeing this, loses confidence, and begins to drift downward. His victim stands below him, eager to extract revenge when he drifts into range. EgoMan shoots his last missile but misses. Sunshine's attacker rolls her up in fabric and stuffs her onto a shelf like a bolt of cloth. He joins the guard waiting for EgoMan. Sunshine screams empty compliments, but they have no effect. Suddenly aware that he has no real control over his power and admitting the mechanism by which he levitates, EgoMan tries to complement himself ("I am the MAN. I AM the MAN"). This fails as well and he drops, barely catching a hanging light fixture. It is not designed to bear his weight and begins to pull out of the ceiling. Chou-Chou reaches La Diva and climbs up her body to her shoulder. Simon, seeing EgoMan in trouble, finds an extra reserve of strength and manages to prick himself with a pin jutting out of one of the mannequins. He uses the blood to sear his prisoner and turns the tables, sitting on him while looking for a means to tie him down. EgoMan is about to fall into the waiting barbed welcome of the remaining two guards. Chou-Chou works the gag out of La Diva's mouth. She whistles at EgoMan and compliments him with a dazzling smile (despite her condition). Coming from her, it has the desired effect and EgoMan shoots back up to the ceiling as the hanging fixture crashes down on the waiting henchmen. The guards disentangle themselves, heading for La Diva. She belts out an aria as her companions plug their ears. The guards fall writhing to the floor and Simon's captive passes out. The fight is over.

The four superheroes and the poodle, once again nestled in her mistress' arms, leave the building. They head for the van, recapping the highlights of the fight, congratulating one another. Simon says: *We're one fearsome foursome*. When they reach the van, Sunshine pulls out Simon's pleather jacket; it no longer has any tubes in it and has been repaired with electrical tape. She casts it about his shoulders as if he is a champion, saying *I think you've earned this, Scorchion*. After a beat, they all resume bragging about the fight, extolling one another, particularly EgoMan. As they get into the van, no one notices that he is levitating. They drive off, leaving him dangling in the night sky.

Around dawn, The Dreadful Drag returns to his lair (*). He steps out of the freight elevator dressed in La Diva's masquerade ball outfit. His lackeys follow him into the workroom, all carrying her many pieces of luggage. As he walks toward her prison, which stands apparently undisturbed, he tells her that he's tried on every single outfit and they all fit, hardly requiring any alterations. He likes the one he's wearing the best. He rolls open the dress fitting stations to show her and is

shocked to find that his songbird has flown. In her place are the six guards, tied back to back to three mannequin stands. The Dreadful Drag lets out an impotent shriek.

The next morning, newspaper headlines flash: EgoMan Saves the Day! Visiting Superhero Rescued!!, etc. On Simon's back deck, Simon, Sunshine, and La Diva sketch out logos for The Fearsome Foursome at a lunch table in the sun. Behind them, EgoMan floats like a balloon, tied with a cord to the railing, grinning from ear to ear.

*Note: I am considering having The Dreadful Drag return home in the middle of the battle, at a critical moment. Although he is far more powerful than our wannabes, they band together and just able to escape his clutches.