

I stared into a crowd. People were minding their own business, trying to fulfill their own purposes, their own goal, or destiny, as they called it. There was no reason for me to exist any longer. I fulfilled my destiny. Yet I was still there.

My story started a few months earlier. I woke up somewhere in an alley. At first I was confused, I didn't know who I was or how I got there, but then I realized what had happened. Some thugs came after me, claiming I was some sort of demon. They were probably right. No cat-person should have ever existed in this world.

I searched through my pockets, trying to find out if I was missing something. Turned out I was missing something, my wallet. I guess these thugs didn't leave empty-handed. I looked around to see if I didn't drop it by mistake. The only thing I found was some plastic with a name on it. "Leo". Yep, it's my ID alright. Even they had no use for that.

At that point I considered going to the police office, reporting theft, but I realized they weren't going to help me, simply because I was different. In fact, everyone in this world treated me differently. No matter how hard I tried to act like them, they never accepted me. Well, except for those outcast kids. You know, the goth girl, the geek, the dumb one, those kids. But even with them I didn't really fit in. I just wasn't human. These kids didn't really mind though, they probably even saw me as their leader, mostly because of my ability to fight back, or what you can call an ability. At least everyone who didn't like me feared me, although I did have this feeling that even the outcasts trembled in my proximity.

I decided to just go home, and to try and break in my own home. I probably just lost my keys somewhere during the pummeling, but I was too tired to search. So I walked up to my apartment, when the landlady walked up to me.

"What are you doing here?" she said.

“Well,” I replied, in a very tired manner. I really didn’t want to have this conversation. “As you might have known I live here.”

“Not anymore you do,” the landlady said.

“Why not?” I asked, a little bit confused, but too tired to actually be upset. Somehow I had the feeling it would come to this. “Never mind,” I said, and I left.

“And don’t you ever show your face in here again!” she yelled at me, as I walked out of the building.

Just my luck. Now I had no money, no food, no place to sleep. What was I supposed to do? At this point I felt my life was over. I decided to just end it once and for all, so I walked to the nearest bridge. I stared at the river, then at the sky, as if I was asking why I was brought upon this world. I then climbed onto the balustrade, and closed my eyes.

I stood there, and I could feel the wind blowing against me, as if it wanted to say: “Don’t do it! It’s not your time yet!” I didn’t care. I already decided. I would make the jump. I leaped forward, and plunged into the deep.

Now that was a stupid move. I should have known my basic instincts would have allowed me to swim to either side of the bridge, into safety. I guess it’s the common fear of water most cats have, or rather, the myth of cats hating water. So, now I stood there, broke, homeless, wet, and now also hungry. Since the river wouldn’t allow me to kill myself, and since I couldn’t afford anything to off me, I had no choice but to find some shelter. I decided to hang out with some hobos, but the moment I approached the bridge, they ran away. All of them, except for one. I guess this hobo was a nut-job anyway, since he called himself “doctor”, but he didn’t seem to notice anything odd about me.

We talked all night about everything, and nothing. Most of the time I didn’t understand what he was saying, but we had some fun. Genuine fun. It was probably one of the best times I had with a human person. He shared with me some of his food,

or what you could call food. My main source of drinking was some alcoholic beverage. It tasted awful, but it was fluid, nonetheless. At least it kept me warm during the night. He also taught me how to get some food, by waiting until cooks throw their food out, or scavenging leftovers at fast-food restaurants. He also told me stories about some money-grubbing potato trying to rip off money off of little peas.

But as the day went by, I knew I had to move on. I couldn't stay with him that long, and I said my goodbyes later that day. I didn't know that would be the last I saw of him. I heard he died of hypothermia, just a few days later.

I spent a few days on the street, trying to make a living with the knowledge of that hobo. But one day, while taking my last bites off a whole burger, I noticed something moving in the shadows. At first I thought it was just my imagination, but as I looked better I saw someone staring at me. From my point of view it seemed like a strange creature, with a strangely shaped head, but as I approached this person, I could see that he wore shorts on his head.

He approached me. I bet he knew I noticed him. He walked up to me, and said: "You must be this so-called 'demon' I keep hearing about. You don't look as vicious as people tell me you would be."

"And who might you be?" I asked him. He pulled out a card.

"People call me Pantsman," he said, "mostly because I wear trousers on my head. Occasionally underpants."

"So you're some sort of hero?" I then asked.

"Yes," he replied. "Of course. Haven't you heard of me before?"

"Obviously, no." I replied, slightly agitated.

"I see people don't have a strong liking for you," this guy said. "Maybe I can fix that."

"And how can you change that?" I asked, with a slightly irritated tone.

"Here's the deal," he started. I had a slight feeling this could take a while. "I'm a super hero. I make a living out of helping

people. By helping people, I get money from the government, which allows me to pay my bills and buy me some food. However, as you know a super hero needs a few things to truly call himself super hero. First he needs a costume, second he needs some super powers, or else some gadgets to help him out, and third, he needs a side-kick, at least at one point in his or her life. Since I lack the last, and never even had a side-kick before, I'm in need of one."

"And where do I fit in this?" I asked. I knew what he was aiming for, but I wasn't going to give in easily.

"Right now I want to beat your sorry ass to please everyone in this city. But since you're no match for me anyway, that wouldn't be a challenge. So I'll give you a choice. Either you join my ranks and become my trusty side-kick, or you'll get a good pummeling."

"And what, if I may ask, are the benefits of being your side-kick?"

"Well, first of all, you won't get your ass served. Besides from that, I can see you're living on the streets, so working for me means you get a house to sleep in. You also get breakfast, lunch and dinner every day, snacks in-between you'll have to buy yourself. You get one percent of what I earn, and I think that's about it."

This offer sounded good, perhaps a little bit too good. You'll have to remember that at that time I didn't trust anyone, so of course I questioned his motives. Nevertheless something told me to accept the offer.

So, at that point I became Brief Boy, Pantsman's side-kick, his partner in crime. At first I didn't think he was that serious. I mean, he did have a huge mansion and all, but that could have been because he owned some huge company, I believe one that dealt in comic books. His costume was outright ridiculous, it was just some boxer shorts pulled over his head. What made matters worse was the fact that I had to wear a similar outfit, only with briefs.

But it was just on our first job together that I noticed he truly was what he claimed to be: a crime fighter, capable of taking down criminals. And it wasn't an easy job either. We had to stop a bank robbery. I didn't know what his plans were, or if he even had a plan, but he just stormed into the building. A few minutes later he came out, holding the two robbers in his hands, saying that "this is how a super hero works." I didn't even have to do a single thing that time.

Even though that was the only job we got that day, he didn't stop to take a break. He took me to the gym, or at least his own gym, to teach me the basics of what he called "kicking butt". And this was how it went for several days. When there was no crime, we were practicing, but during the jobs, I was left at the sideline. After a while he allowed me to do the groceries. I didn't really think these would help me out that much, at least not in becoming more accepted, like he claimed. I always wore some type of costume which would hide my true appearance, like trench-coats, hats and sunglasses. It was strange that no-one could see through this flimsy attire.

Anyway, one day I was doing grocery shopping, when the store got robbed. Of course, I had my Brief Boy costume on all the time when I'm out, just in case. Pantsman even encouraged it, so that I would get used to it. So, I opted to take off my costume to reveal Brief Boy to the people, even if it was just a petty theft, but I didn't. I mean, at the time I still felt insecure. With only my side-kick costume, people would probably see the fur on my body and face. I decided to just tackle the robber.

So, as the robber made his way to the exit, I rushed after him. Before he got the chance to exit, I grabbed him by his feet, and he tripped. I didn't think I would even be able to get to him from that distance before he got to the exit, especially since there were a lot of people there, and nobody even felt me pass by. Well, perhaps just the gust of air caused by the speed.

Needless to say, the robber got incarcerated. I got interrogated by the cops on what had happened, but they just let me be. I didn't want to be involved in this too much, I probably was afraid people would find out I was actually a

humanoid cat. Yet somehow I felt at least someone knew about my real identity, someone I have never met before. I looked outside to see if there was anyone there, but I saw nothing particular.

After I got back to the mansion I told Pantsman about what just happened. At first Pantsman was silent, but then he said: "I'm very proud of you."

That was the first time I've heard anyone say something like that to me. Not even my surrogate parents said anything like that. I felt touched, and it almost brought a tear to my eye.

"I think we should celebrate this with a party!" Pantsman said.

"Wait, a party?" I was surprised to hear that, and a little bit concerned as well. "You mean, with people?"

"No, with stuffed animals," he said, sarcastically. "Of course with people! You're a true hero now, people deserve to know you're not such a bad person!"

"But wouldn't people be shocked if they found out about me, about who I am?"

"Nonsense," he said. "I think you would be the one surprised about them."

And he was right. All his friends just treated me like a normal person. Well, at least to a certain extent. They did ask me questions, like how it is to be half man half cat, or if I could climb trees and such, and I would just answer. But mostly they just hung out with me. Pantsman asked me not to wear the Brief Boy costume, because he wanted me to show the real me. It was also then I learned about Patnsman's real name, or at least that his first name was Scott.

I really had fun, but I was also a bit suspicious. Were these guys for real, or did Pantsman hire them? That suspicion soon lifted though the day after, when I went back home from shopping. On the way I saw Dave, someone I met on the party. At first he didn't notice me, but when I passed by him, he noticed me.

“Leo?” he said. “Is that you?”

“Yeah,” I replied. “It’s me.”

“Hey, Leo!” he said. “Good to see you! Hey, why are you wearing this disguise?”

He tried to take my hat off. “Hey, don’t,” I said.

“Oh,” he said. “I see. You’re wearing that Brief Dude costume under there.”

I was a bit surprised he knew about Brief Boy. “Wait, you know about me?”

“Of course,” he replied. “Scott and I are friends. I know about his identity, and he also confided me with yours. Don’t worry, I won’t tell. I don’t want to embarrass you anyway, that underpants really look stupid.”

I was still confused. “How many people know about me?”

After a quick thinking, he replied: “Well, of the regular guests only I and a few others know about it. For the rest almost all super heroes have learned of your existence. I’ve heard you’re unique, or at least there aren’t too many of you.”

“What do you mean by that?” I was full of answers.

“Well, it’s better that we don’t discuss it here.” He walked on, and made a gesture to follow him. I did.

We ended up in a bar.

“It’s safe here,” he said. “You can take your coat off if you want. Oh, but I do advice to keep the hat on.”

We sat on a table.

“What is this place?” I asked.

“This is where a lot of different people meet, mostly super heroes, but regular people come here as well. To them, you’re just a super hero in a cats costume.”

He ordered a drink. I wasn’t really that thirsty, so I passed.

“Anyway, you wanted to know about who you are, right?” I nodded. I myself didn’t even know what I was. Dave took a sip, and then began his story.

“Leo, I, with some other people, have been trying to track you down. Eventually we did this trough Scott, or Pantsman as

you know him. You see, when we heard about some cat person walking around in the city, we had to investigate it.”

“Wait,” I interrupted him. “Who are you people?”

“Well, you can say we are the descendents of a group of warriors, who traveled the world. These warriors consisted of multiple ethnicities. They aren’t mentioned in any history books, but some scrolls and copies of these scrolls passed down from generation to generation refer to them as the Order of the Sky Spirits.

According to the scrolls these sky spirits were created by some divine deity to keep order in the world, and to protect mankind against an impending evil. They were there when man first roamed the Earth, and kept on existing through time. Of course, in the beginning, there were a lot more of them, but as time went by, the world became more intolerant, and sky spirits would not be summoned again until yet another evil would arise.”

He paused. “With your discovery, we know that time has come.”

“How do you know that for sure?” I asked. He continued.

“The scrolls tell us that the sky spirits were like the domesticated cats found in Egypt. In appearance of course.”

We were silent for a while. There was so much I wanted to ask them. Where did I come from? What was my role in all of this? Finally Dave spoke: “You understand that we need to protect you at all cost, and we think you’re the safest with Scott right now.”

Just about then Dave got a call.

“Problems at the bank,” he said. “Let’s go, Brief Boy.”

We arrived at the bank. I didn’t know what was going on, but apparently something got out of hand. When I finally stood at the foot of the stairs leading to the entrance, Dave filled me in.

“Scott is being held hostage.”

“Hostage?!” I could barely believe it. Pantsman, the hero of the city, being held captive?

“We’re trying everything to help him, Leo, but not even the toughest super hero can approach him.”

I didn’t hesitate for a second. “I’m going in.”

And I did. I took off my coat and my hat. Inside, I saw some super heroes standing in front of what appeared to be a force field.

“We can’t penetrate it!” said one. I decided to approach the force field, to see how strong it was. I reached out my hand, carefully. I didn’t want to fry my hand. Surprisingly, my hand went through.

“We’ve got a breach!” another hero said. I passed through the force field, but apparently, I was the only one able to do so.

“It’s all up to you now, little one,” a third said.

I went further along the way. It was dark, or at least I believe it was dark, the lights were all out, and there wasn’t any window shining through the building. My luck was that I could see in the dark, or at least somewhat better than regular humans. Still, it was hard seeing anything. The place looked deserted.

I made my way to the safe, hoping to find something there, and there was. A giant hole in the ground was the entrance to an underground tunnel, or something similar. I went in, to see if there was any trace of Pantsman. It appeared that the tunnel was just made. Naturally, if it wasn’t, people would have noticed. My sight was better here, since every few feet there were torches hanging from the walls. I could see a light in the distance, and chanting. It felt like some horror movie, where at any moment a ritual sacrifice could be made. I truly feared for my mentor. Yes, at that point, I kind of did see him as my mentor.

I rushed to the light, and there I saw him, hanging from the wall, chained. He was awake, but weakened. Around him were hooded people. I knew I had to act fast. You’ll never know what you should expect in such situations. This could be the summoning of an ancient demon. I didn’t want to take the risk.

I jumped towards the nearest hooded figure, and at that moment they all turned, eyes all yellow and shining, face deformed. They weren’t human. Even before I could strike, one

of these creatures already floored me. I was frightened. These were no ordinary criminals. I could faintly hear Pantsman say in my head: "Never give up," although it could have actually been him yelling from his imprisonment.

But those words did give me the strength to fight. Pantsman told me this once, no matter how strong an enemy is, or how numerous their count is, there is always a way to beat them. I decided to jump in their middle. It was a good thing they were all close to each other. With every swing or kick they made I dodged, making sure I wasn't the one getting hit. It was frightening though, moving between creatures who don't even resemble humans. And when they got hurt, their screams were as terrifying as they were petrifying. But I couldn't stand still. If I did then I was dead.

Yet, I couldn't keep this up forever. It seemed there was no end to them, and I had to save Pantsman. I tried to make my way to him, but then something hit me hard. It wasn't something I haven't felt before, but it always hurts when you get hit.

At that point I didn't know what happen. I only heard the screams of the creatures, as if they were hurting. The next thing I remembered was that I was right in front of Pantsman when he got drawn into some sort of portal. I did hear him say something, Kruglor. I believe I did try to enter this portal, but something dragged me away. It was likely that at that moment I passed out.

I finally came to a few days later. I was in some makeshift bed. I looked around. It looked like I was sleeping in some sort of subway station, one that hasn't been used in a long time. I looked further, and saw someone at a fire.

"Stay down," the person said. It sounded like a woman. I had so many questions at that point.

"What happened? How long have I been out?"

"You've been out for at least two days," she said. "And you fell into a trap. I had to come and save you."

"A trap?" I was curious. Why would anyone set a trap for me?

“They needed to lure you so that they could kill you,” the woman said coldly. “I bet you’re hungry.”

She turned around, and walked towards me with a bowl of soup. She then laid the bowl of soup in front of me and went away.

“Hey!” I yelled. “Where are you going?”

“I’m trying to hunt for food,” the woman said.

The soup was great, especially for one made in such circumstances. It kind of tasted like mouse or rat, but I’ve never ate cooked rodent before. I once did eat a mouse as a kid, because I thought cats like me had to eat mice. They didn’t taste as good as this.

It then hit me. Pantsman was taken captive. I had no place to stay, because they would expect me to be at the mansion. I was alone again. The only one I had was this woman, but I wasn’t too sure if I could trust her. I had to find my own way from here on. I was back at where I started, only this time, not only was I not welcome with the humans, I was also hunted by demon-like creatures.

I stood up, and was about to go in the opposite direction of where the woman went, when I heard a voice. My voice.

“Well, well, if it isn’t Leo.”

I turned around. I could see the person in the shadows. He was exactly like me, a cat person about the same height, with what appeared to be grayish fur. Only his fur seemed paler, less colorful.

“What do you want?” I asked.

“Isn’t the first thing you should ask who I am?” the person said. “But, since I already made the suggestion, the name’s Noel. And, to answer your question, I was just checking what your standings are, and so far you’re not even close to your full potential.”

“And how do you know for sure?” I asked.

“Well,” he said. “I’m you.”

At that point the woman came back, asking: “Who were you talking to?”

I looked at her, then looked back at where Noel was. He was gone.

“It was him, wasn’t it?” she said.

“Who are you talking about?” I asked.

“That person who looked just like you,” the woman said, “he was here, right?”

“Yeah, he was.” I was a bit confused, partially because she knew about the doppelganger, and partially because of her non-shocked behavior.

“I should have known,” she mumbled. “We have to move.”

She quickly packed everything. She wasn’t just talking about moving on to somewhere, she was actually talking about finding another place to stay.

“Why are we moving?” I asked.

“He found us,” She said. “Your doppelganger I mean. These creatures you saw a few days ago, they are called the shadows of darkness, or the shadows. Your double just lead them to us.”

“What do you mean?” I could still say, before they arrived.

“Keep moving,” the woman said. “Or better yet, run.”

We ran as fast as we could, but I could still hear them get closer. Eventually the woman stopped, and I stopped as well.

“Why are you stopping?” she said. “Keep running! I’ll catch up with you later!”

So I started running again. I didn’t know what was going to happen, but I was sure she would be alright. She had to be, or else I was dead.

I kept on running, over the main tunnel, through various sideways, until after a few minutes I found myself at a large room, full with several non-functional equipment. It seemed pretty deserted, but I was still cautious. I walked through the room, checking every corner, until I was absolutely sure there was nothing in here. I decided to crawl under one of the main consoles mounted on the wall, in case anyone would enter, so that I wouldn’t be noticed that quickly.

Time went by, but finally after about an hour, I heard a noise. I could smell it was the woman. She was alone as well. I crawled back up, since I knew I was safe now. She herself thought so too, since she turned on the lights of the chamber. I didn't even know there was electricity running through this section of the building. I was wondering if the machines still worked, but there was no time for that. She wanted me to follow her. Apparently this room was the entrance to a secret section of this subway complex.

"You go first," she said. "I have to turn off the lights first."

So I did. I climbed down the ladder. It wasn't really that long, so I stood on solid ground fairly quickly. From here we went down with the stairs. I was glad I didn't have to go all the way with the ladder. At least now I had some solid footing, and a rail to hang on to.

As we descended deeper, I had to rely more on my other senses than my sight, since it was now pitch dark. No light shone from this point. But as we went on, I began to see a light somewhere. Not really that bright, but a light nonetheless. It appeared to come from some kind of room.

It did, but it wasn't exactly a regular room. I don't even know you could call it a room. It was more of an underground fortress, or a bunker. In fact, I've seen it before on the news, when I was little. It was about some atomic shelter being shut down for not being reliable anymore. Since then they built a new one outside the city. This is what's left of it. Since new buildings were placed over it since its completion, they couldn't just blow it up. Coincidentally the entrance also lied in the shut-down part of the subway. I'm not sure why they shut that part down, but I know they originally intended it to be a temporary shut-down. However, since then this part of the subway has been deteriorating, so it would be unlikely if it would ever re-open again.

It was strange, to see a building underground. It even had mounted turrets. I originally didn't know why there was a mounted turret, but I learned from the woman later that they were there in case this place would be discovered by the

shadows. Now the bunker didn't completely look like it was a building, it was only one wall, reaching up to the ceiling. But it still looked pretty impressive.

The interior was impressive as well. It had this very clinical look. Of course, it also felt deserted and neglected. You could see some stains on the floors, walls and ceiling, but for the rest it looked really good.

"This will be your new home for now," the woman said. She took off her coat.

There I saw what she looked like. She was not what I've expected at all, yet I should have.

"The name's Aeris, by the way," she said to me.

She was a cat person, just like me. She was even more special however, due to the fact that her fur was pink.

"Well," she said. "What are you waiting for? You want to see your room or not?"

I finally realized I wasn't alone. But it also explained how she knew stuff about me that I didn't even know myself.

I lied in my bed. It wasn't as soft as the bed I had back in the mansion, but at least I had a decent place to sleep. I didn't know whether it was day or night, but that wouldn't really matter anyway. There was a television in my room, but that was only for playing videos. It appeared though that Aeris had swiped a DVD player somewhere, since I could also see a DVD player. It was even possible that there were more DVD players down here. In fact, I could find a lot of useless junk just by looking around in my own room. I even had a coffee machine in case I was thirsty.

After a while Aeris came to bring me some food.

"Thanks," I said.

Aeris was about to leave with her own plate, when I said: "Why don't you just eat here?"

"I don't feel like socializing," Aeris said, and left.

I looked at my own plate. It appeared to be conserved food, like beans and jerky meat. It also had some vegetables, but I wasn't sure if they were fresh. They did taste fresh.

Later that day (or was it already the next day?) Aeris called me over to what was once one of the storage rooms. It was turned into a training area of some sort.

“What am I doing here?” I asked.

“I’ve seen what you’re capable of,” she said. “You can do more than you think, you’ll just need to unlock that hidden potential.”

At first I wondered how she could know, but then I realized.

“What happened before I passed out?” I asked.

“That guy you were trying to save, he got carried away to a different dimensional zone. You tried to go after him, and in your way, you’ve decimated most shadows.”

“And that’s how I passed out?”

“No. I hit you with a shovel, so that you wouldn’t go after the person you were after. But enough talk. You can ask more after training.”

Aeris walked to a console on the wall, where she was preparing a training simulation.

“This training will hurt you,” Aeris said, “but only if you don’t pay attention. The bullets coming out of the automated turrets will not kill you, but you don’t want to get hit by them either.”

She pressed the final button.

“The training will commence now.”

At that point the lights went dim. Then, something came at me. I was too late to dodge it, so obviously, I got hit hard. I looked a bit closer around me, and noticed that several hazards had appeared, on the ceiling, on the ground, even on the walls. But there was no time to think about it, for yet another object came at me. This one I did get to dodge, but not the one immediately following it.

Needless to say, the machines won. I got hit from the front, the back, the sides, even from below. I was happy the turrets didn’t fire on this level.

Aeris allowed me to rest a bit. She had expected this, I assumed, but I could still hear a big sigh. She threw a bottle of water at me. "Drink it, you'll need it." She was right. During exercise, you'll need to moisture yourself frequently, or else you might get injured a lot.

The second round started, at the same level. This time, I paid a little bit more attention. I still got hit a lot, but less frequently. This went on for the rest of the training.

In the end, Aeris called it a day. She shut down the training program. I felt like I made no significant progress. I went to Aeris and asked: "Why are we doing this? It's not like I've learned anything from it."

"I know," she said. "I just wanted to test something."

Without warning, one of the turrets began to fire. At that moment, it literally seemed like time slowed down. The moment the first shot was fired, I turned around. I saw the bullets coming at me, slowly, but still fast enough, so I knew I had to act quickly. I decided to dodge to get out of my way, while realizing Aeris could be hit by the bullets at this point.

Time went its regular pace again, but at that point she had already drawn a sword. It seemed as if she was unscathed. The bullets hit the walls besides her. They didn't leave a hole or crater, but I could see the impact of the bullets there. Apparently these bullets were fast enough to at least incapacitate a person for a while. I then wondered how these bullets got deflected at such an angle.

We decided to get something to eat. Or rather, I decided to get some snack. As I munched on a frozen burger, I asked Aeris some questions, mostly about my past.

"So, what's the deal with my life?" I asked.

"What's the deal about it?" she said. "Well, first of all what they have said about you, the people watching over you, it's true. But it's not the whole truth. Or at least, it's all they know about you."

That made me curious. And more hungry. I grabbed another frozen burger. The one I put in the oven still wasn't ready.

“And you know more about me?” I asked, with my mouth full. I expected she wouldn’t understand me through the mumbling and munching, but apparently she did.

“Yes,” she said. “I do know more about you. You and I are of the same species.”

“No shit,” I replied.

“You know that’s not what I meant,” she replied, a bit annoyed. “I know a lot of our species.”

I was curious. “Tell me all you know,” I said.

“The people above, they told you we were like saviors of the world right? What they don’t know is that they’re only half right. Our species has always been there since man first roamed the Earth, but our initial goal was not to protect the humans. We were sent to enslave them.”

This revelation shocked me. But she went on.

“Apparently our species are conquerors, coming from a different planet or dimension, I’m still not sure about this, and apparently immortal. When they discovered planet Earth, they searched for intelligent life. They did, and found it in the earliest form of mankind. It was around the time people were able to make fire.

I don’t know what happened exactly, but eventually humans turned out to be capable of fighting off our species, perhaps with ease. Despite our physical advantages, their determination to protect their own kind startled us. Even with primitive weapons they could fight us. Our species left, with only a few staying on Earth, might there be a time the home world would decide to come back.

The only place safe to go was the area we now call Egypt. Eventually when humans decided to settle here were worshipped as Gods. It was then that the surviving group decided to protect Earth. To cast away our urge to conquer, our species split their own personalities, removing that part which was considered ‘dark’, but in the process, we lost our immortality.”

“Is that what that other me was?” I interrupted her.

“Yes,” she said. “That’s your dark side.”

She paused, and then continued.

“The reason our numbers kept decreasing is because we contain a certain power, the power to transfer our own knowledge and energy to another person. When we die at the hands of another person, they will gain that power. That also meant that if a human were to kill us, they would get the same advantages as us. Basically it was a good thing we lost our immortality, if a human would ever manage to kill one of us, they would have also gained immortality.”

A few days passed, and I got stronger. The trainings became more intense. I finally learned how to slow down time, at least make it seem like time slowed down. You know that movie where a guy could make things slow down around him by raising his adrenaline level? It’s almost the same, with the only difference that I can move around as if time flows normally for me. It’s also how I realized how Aeris was able to deflect the bullets with just her sword. When she draws her sword, she doesn’t hit the projectile, she let it pass the side of the blade. When the bullet then makes contact with the blade, she quickly twists the blade. The bullet would still move along with the blade, so it simply changes directions. It’s like when a train stops at a rotatable track.

But eventually the time came she would tell me what I was training for.

“It’s almost time,” she said.

I was a little confused. “Time for what?”

“You might not know what the shadows of darkness are after, but they’re after us.”

I was even more confused now. “What are you saying?”

“The reason I trained you is for this day. Today marks a new era, the time when our species comes back to our world. The shadows of darkness know that.”

“Wait, our species are coming back to our world? Why do I get to hear these things now?”

“It’s something I just found out. Look, all I know is that the shadows are planning an initial attack on the humans. We need to stop this first attack. After that, I’ll tell you more.”

We rushed to the place where the initial attack would start. At first, I didn’t notice anything. It was just a regular tunnel. Despite the fact that this place was never used, it still had lights on the ceiling, probably because Aeris installed them. But then the lights began to dim. Right there, at the end of the tunnel, I could see it. A portal was opening.

“How many do you think will come through this portal?” I asked.

“I don’t know,” she replied. “It could be a couple of thousands.”

“That’s a lot, that’s a whole lot. That’s not an ‘initial attack’. That’s what we call an invasion!”

I didn’t know what would happen if I were to let any of them pass, but I wouldn’t allow it. I stomped everything that came my way. The only weapons I had were some large daggers, while Aeris was only armed with her sword. But I can tell you, it was a bloody mess, or, at least as far as these shadows can bleed. The first couple of hundreds were a piece of cake. They were just the regular foot soldiers, and they didn’t expect us to be there. But then came the heavier troops. We were both forced to back out step by step. We were still able to slay a lot, but at this rate we wouldn’t be able to keep them inside the tunnel.

Eventually, while fighting a big one, I noticed a few slipping trough. I jumped up, stabbed the sucker in the neck, and followed these shadows. I was able to slay them, but when looking behind me, I could see more coming my way. There was no way I would be able to stop them.

But then I saw flashes. I tried to track where the flashes came from, but even with everything slowed down I couldn’t really see what it was. Whatever it was, it was killing these shadows. It allowed me to go back to where Aeris was, and allowed me

more space to keep these shadows from going to the living world. Then I finally noticed what this blur was. It was Aeris.

We looked in front of us, and a hoard of shadows came at us, more than I could count. They went all-out this time. I readied myself, but Aeris stopped me.

“Let me handle this.”

She stepped forward. I could feel a wind blow, despite the fact that there was no way there could be any wind blowing. Then I looked at Aeris. Her sword was glowing green. I then heard a scream, some sort of war scream, and then a blinding flash. Her sword had increased in size, almost as big as the tunnel was wide. She then rushed towards the hoard. She only needed a few slashes. It was as if her slashes shot fire.

The portal closed, and I saw Aeris collapsing. I carried her back to the bunker.

“What was that?” I asked her when she regained consciousness.

“I already told you before,” she said. “I transferred my powers to this blade.”

“Wait, you mean I can transfer my powers to inanimate objects?”

“Animate or inanimate, it doesn’t matter. As long as it’s in the physical plane, it can be transferred to.”

“So you’re saying I don’t have to be dead to transfer my powers?”

“No, you don’t have to. But you shouldn’t just transfer your powers just like that. It can kill you, and your powers would be lost forever. What I just did was transfer all my powers to my sword. It drained a lot of energy. That’s why I collapsed when I returned my powers.”

She paused a bit. I was ready to say something, when she said: “There is also something else you should know, something about what you saw a few days ago. The one that looks exactly like you.”

“Noel,” I replied.

“There is a reason he exists. Remember that I told you that people would chase after our kind for our powers? In order to protect them against these people, our ancestors created a sort of fail-safe. After each birth, each individual of our race gets split in half. Basically they make an exact duplicate of us, and distribute the powers over the two. If one of the two dies, the powers get transferred to the other instead. This also means that our kind will never reach our full potential until one of the two gets killed.”

“Why are you telling me this?” I asked.

“Because I’m also training you to kill the other you.”

We trained for a few weeks, and things went well. I got stronger, faster, I discovered powers I never knew I had. I even got the feeling she felt proud for training me, or at least she didn’t tell me constantly that I would have been better off with a rat on a stick if I were to fend myself off against my enemies. But still I had this feeling that I shouldn’t wait too long to save my old friend. I finally realized this. All this time, Pantsman never treated me as a sidekick, he treated me as his friend, his equal. And I really felt I couldn’t just let him rot away in whatever place he’s stuck in. I had to talk to Aeris about this.

“We shouldn’t wait too long in saving him,” I said.

“I agree,” Aeris replied. “That’s why we’re going above ground. We need to find the only one who knows where he might be, and what we could expect there.”

“Who?” I asked.

“His arch-nemesis. Kruglor.”

It was pretty exciting, and scary. For the first time in a long time I was going back to the surface. We had to prepare for the trip above ground. First of all, clothing that wouldn’t reveal our appearances, both to the humans as well as unknown forces roaming above ground.

We quietly made our way up. The first thing we had to do is get the fuck out of the abandoned metro system, which is bothersome considering the minions of the shadows of darkness

were still walking around. This already had been troublesome when trying to find some rats to eat, but now we even had to go out in the open.

Aeris lead the way. The room was pitch dark. Luckily we had some night vision goggles, to see if there really wasn't anything in the room.

"There's nothing here," she said, "let's go."

I didn't trust this one bit however, and turned off the goggles. I quickly pulled Aeris back into the hole. The advantage of being an anthropomorphic cat is the ability to see in the dark, and when I turned off the goggles I could truly see them. You can't see them with night vision goggles, at least not the higher level ones. We almost got caught here.

"What the fuck was that for?!" Aeris said angrily.

"Turn off your goggles and see for yourself."

She did, and then turned to me again. She knew the goggles would be useless now. These shadows were special. You can't see them when it's light, they're basically transparent. They don't absorb nor reflect light. However, they do absorb darkness, and in a way reflect darkness. That's how we could see them. It was strange, it still is strange. How can you see darkness? Darkness eaters would be a fitting name for them. But anyway, we needed a plan to get past them.

"Isn't there another way?" I asked.

"Not that I know of," she said.

There was something we haven't tried though. During my training with Pantsman I learned how to create flash bombs using regular household items. I made some during my stay down at the bunker. I also took some extra fuses in case the bombs wouldn't go off. I took some bombs with me when packing, and right now, they could be of some use. So I tied up all the bombs together with one long fuse, and lit this fuse. By accident, I found a way of making fuses that don't light up when burning up, in case I would need to secretly light something.

I gave the bombs to Aeris.

"Put them somewhere close to the hatch," I said.

"Why?" she asked.

“Just do it!”

After she put the bombs at a safe place I lit the fuse. After a few seconds, we could see a thin stream of light coming from behind the hatch. It was a very bright light. I didn't even know my flash bombs were that powerful. Anyway, Aeris then took a peek, to see what had become. It was safe to get up.

So, this was the easy part. Now we needed to sneak out. First, we turned on some lights, to make sure no darkness eaters would enter here. From here, we sneaked outside, to the tunnel. There weren't a lot of shadows out here, but we did need to dispatch them silently. This whole tunnel in itself was already a mess, you could easily hide between the rubbles of what remained of it. It was in such a bad condition, bricks were falling off the ceiling.

This actually gave me an idea. The only thing I needed was a small twig or a piece of paper. I found something light, a bottle cap. I wondered how much money it was, but I didn't have a lot of time to waste here. I had to make sure the bottle cap hit a loose brick, so that it would fall off the ceiling, and onto one of the minions. This would draw the attention to the others, or at least I hoped.

I looked at the ceiling, found a good spot, aimed, and with a quick flick I threw the bottle cap. A brick fell, but barely missed him. I was almost afraid they would notice me now, but I looked at Aeris, who remained calm. She pointed at the spot I threw the cap, and noticed the rest was coming off as well.

That was enough to draw the attention of the rest. As the ceiling came down on that poor bastard, we took a run for it, of course, while still hiding. I have to tell you, there were a few instances we almost got caught, where we ran into the minions, who coincidentally ran the other way.

Finally we arrived at the old metro station. I expected there to be at least some minions, but apparently they weren't there, perhaps in the rare occasion that somebody would enter this place from here. We silently walked to the stairs, put on our disguises, and made our way out.

It was early in the morning, and the streets were quiet. The only people there were drunks and hobos, and on occasion the hookers that had just been returned. The sun still hadn't risen, but it wouldn't be long before it would. We made our way to one of the alleys, and then entered a building. Man, what a difference between the outer appearance and what's inside! From the outside, it looked like rubbish, abandoned, but from the inside, it looked like some expensive hotel. Everything was nicely decorated. It didn't even look like a place for an arch-nemesis, or even just a nemesis, or even a villain at that. But I decided not to judge too soon, things might not be what it seems. Eventually we came upon a closed door. Aeris knocked.

"I know you're in there," Aeris said. The door opened. The room behind the door looked more of what I expected an evil lair to look like. It was furnished as a dungeon, pretty neat, actually. We entered the room. It had all the things I expected it to have. Chains hanging from the wall, science kits, a big pot of some evil brew or something, a table to perform experiments on, it had everything.

I looked around, and there I saw something of a shadow. It wasn't a regular silhouette, it didn't really seem all that human. You could say it was an evil silhouette. I turned to Aeris, and she said: "Doctor Kruglor. So we finally meet." He remained silent. I could sense something. I couldn't understand what this feeling was, but it was an empty, cold feeling, like I could feel his darkness. As I stared into his eyes, I could literally feel his stare. It was something that isn't easily explained.

He broke the silence. "Pantsman, I presume?"

"Yes," Aeris said, "the masked fool. Where is he?"

"Far down he was dragged, yet immovable he remained. Not far has he gotten. He is where it is."

"And what is 'it'?"

"You mean who is 'it'. It is the heart of the shadow. It is the source of darkness, but also the source of life. The source of your life."

That drew my full attention. "What do you mean, our life?" I asked.

“It seems Aeris has not told you the full story,” he said, with an obvious grim and a maniacal laughter in his tone. For a brief moment I could see his true self. He was more of a demon, blood red of skin, teeth shining like a newly sharpened blade. He was big, with his head almost reaching the ceiling. I can’t say I wasn’t frightened without lying.

I asked again. “Tell me about the full story.”

“I’ll tell him,” Aeris said. “For centuries, people thought of us as angels, heroes. Perhaps most of us acted like that, yes, but we weren’t always like that. And we didn’t always look like cats. We looked more like them.”

Aeris points at a book, conveniently opened at a page with some strange, bipedal creature. I can’t really describe it, it looked like a shadow of some reptilian creature, like those merfolk in many horror flicks, but stranger, scarier, more frightening. And I had a feeling that image even couldn’t fully describe what it looked like.

“Could you flip over the page?” Aeris then said to Kruglor. “I actually meant this.”

What I saw I actually could have expected. I imagine you would expect it as well.

“Yes,” she said. “We used to be like them, but we were different. We were darker, we slaughtered, we murdered. We weren’t of the same species, but we were very similar. And that’s the reason the Gods punished us for our crimes, that’s why the Gods turned us into what we were now.”

“Now hold up,” I said. “This sounds more like a fucking story some 25 year old masturbator would write on some crummy old laptop! This can’t be serious! You can’t possibly say that our species used to be like them? And then you go and say that our species was darker and shit, and that the Gods punished us by turning us into fucking cats. What the fuck kind of punishment is that? If I were a God and I wanted to prevent a group of creatures from murdering an entire species just because they were evil, I sure as hell would not turn them into something that could possibly do even more damage! And I would especially not let them roam the motherfucking world!”

Then doctor Kruglor spoke again. "Think what you must think, for this is the truth. And the truth lies deeper than you think. For you know, the darkness and the light are two separate entities, but each lie closer to each other than one might think."

"Great," I replied. "So, what help was that?"

Aeris then stood up, and said: "I think I know enough. Good bye."

"Wait," I said. "That's it? No grand fight?"

"First of all," Aeris interrupted, "do you really want to fight that guy? Second, even though he is your enemy as well, he is the ally of our species. Let's get out of here, I'll explain later."

We stood there, again, at the bank. After all these times, it was still closed, probably for renovations, or to investigate the disappearance of Pantsman. At least the force field was gone.

"Pantsman has always been there," Aeris said. "He's just waiting in the shadows."

At first I didn't understand, but then it hit me. The reason the creatures only lurked in the darkness, the only reason that dark void was there, all was because of the light. It wasn't so that they couldn't stand the light, they were just unable to live in the light. Once exposed to the light, they instantly phase back into the darkness. That's where the portals were required. To enter into our world, these creatures required some doorway to step from the darkness into a dark area in the light world. But why would the darkness want to invade the light world?

We went inside the bank, into the underground area. It was quiet, although I did feel some strange aura, as if I felt myself. At that point I knew he was around. Without warning, Noel started to attack me. I drew my sword, just in time. At that point we all heard shrieks. They were really close.

"Aeris!" I yelled. "Try to hold them back until I've finished off Noel!"

Apparently she was already on it.

"It's no use resisting," Noel said, with a smirk. "I know you've grown stronger, but you're not nearly as strong as you think you are."

He threw another blow at me, and each time he did, I parried. I just couldn't find an opening. Meanwhile, Aeris was waiting for the darkness to arrive. And it came closer. I was getting tired, and Noel kept driving me towards the wall. At that point I finally found an opening. I threw a kick at him, and naturally he backed off, trying to protect his crown jewels. This left him open for attacks.

I swung my blade, but Noel regained his footing, and quickly parried it. Meanwhile the darkness finally got to Aeris. As I was attacking and parrying, I could hear Aeris throwing blow after blow, and the wails of dying shadows of darkness. I knew she would be okay, so I only had to concentrate on myself, which was made more complicated with a few shadows breaching Aeris' defense. So not only did I have to watch out for Noel, I also had to take care of shadows. Luckily for me, so did Noel. Finally it became apparent that Aeris alone could not hold the shadows off, so I had to help out, and apparently so thought Noel.

I slashed like there was no tomorrow, killing hundreds of shadows. Finally we all made it to the main room, the room I last saw Pantsman, and apparently, for now, they ran out of shadows. The portal that was there was closed, so all we had to take care of were the shadows that were still left. While Aeris fought off the last of the shadows, I could finally concentrate on my fight with Noel again.

"It seems that we will settle this today," I said.

"It seems we will," Noel said. "Unfortunately it ends for you."

In an unexpected event, Noel drew a gun. It was something I would expect from a dark alter ego. I readied my sword. This would have to be the first time I would get to get the technique right, to dodge the bullet with my sword. I breathed in, and then heavily breathed out. Suddenly time slowed down, or at least it seemed like it slowed down.

The shot has been fired. I could see the bullet come at me. I aligned the bullet with my sword, and at the right time, I

twisted. The bullet changed its course, but the moment it hit my sword, the blade shattered.

The bullet lodged into my arm, and I can tell you that it hurt like a motherfucker. So right now, I was without a weapon. I was a goner now. Noel then fired a second shot. I closed my eyes to rethink my life. But there was nothing to rethink. Well, yes, there was. The only thing that came into my mind were the times Pantsman treated me. He was the only one who treated me like I was one of them, like I was human.

I opened my eyes. In yet another twist of events, the bullet didn't hit me. I looked beside me, and there was Aeris, with her sword extended in front of me. She deflected the bullet for me... but paid the price.

Apparently when she rushed towards me, the bullet aligned with the sword, and slowly followed the curve she made when she rushed further by, going through her sword, through her arm, and lodging into her heart. She sacrificed herself for me.

My eyes were filled with rage, my heart consumed with hate, and darkness. I was about to lose myself, but then...

I again thought back to my past, to my time with Aeris. I remembered her scolding me, telling me I was no good, that I was a disgrace to mankind and to my species, and that I would have been better off with a rat on a stick.

My rage subsided, and I reached to my back. I still had a rat I was going to eat on my way here, but apparently I forgot. I also still had the hilt of my blade, now reduced to a mere stick. I had a weapon now. I tied the tail of the rodent to the hilt. Noel laughed.

"What are you going to do with that?" Noel said.

"I'm going to beat you," I replied. Noel laughed harder. "Don't believe me?" I said. "Just watch."

Energy flowed through my body, concentrating at my arm, right into my weapon. I could feel my mind slipping, but I had to hold on. My weapon could use all the energy I could give it. I closed my eyes. I could feel the fear in Noel's eyes, I bet he

never seen anything like this, all this power coming from someone as inexperienced as me. I then opened my eyes again, and at the same time, there was a big flash. When the eyes of Noel began to adjust themselves again, he looked at me, with my big weapon, a giant log with a gigantic rat attached to it. I uttered the next words before beating Noel to a pulp.

“Rat morning-star.”

Noel was dead, I could feel his energy flowing inside my body, like a cold stream of air. I retransferred all the energy from the weapon back into my body and rushed back to Aeris, who was still alive, but barely. I didn't know how she could survive that long, with that bullet lodged inside her.

“Aeris,” I said. “You're...”

“I know,” she replied. “I... I have to tell you something.”

Aeris whispered, using the last of her energy to talk to me. “The reason why we exist... the reason why there were two of us... it wasn't just because we needed to protect our species... When we split up... we don't just get separated... our own selves cast away the dark side of us... the bigger part of us... to be given a chance to redeem ourselves for our past deeds... so that the Gods might have mercy with us... So that the Gods might take care of our souls...”

Aeris paused. “Leo... you were always the light side... Your friend, Pantsman... he saw the good in you...”

“Aeris,” I said. I shed a tear. “You will be taken care by the Gods, right?”

“No, Leo,” Aeris replied. “I will not... I am a being of darkness... Where I go to, the Gods have no say in.... This is the last time you will ever see me...”

“No, Aeris, it won't.”

“You... idiot.” She said it with a sort of smirk, before dying. I cried, and kneeled before her body, before it turned into dust and dissipated.

I stood up, and walked towards the portal. I had to confront the heart of the darkness, and get Pantsman back. If I wouldn't,

all of this would be in vain. I only needed to find a way to open the portal.

Next to the portal was a control panel, with a big button. I pressed the button, and the portal opened. Actually, that was pretty much a downer. I expected the process to open the portal to be much harder. But at least it was open, so I stepped through it.

If you ever try to find a definition of 'mind rape', this place would probably be mentioned, even though this place literally doesn't even have a name. Actually, it does. It has the same name as this world, but only covered in shadows, and warped. Probably a lot more other things, but words could actually not describe what was going on. The only thing I could see clear was a crystal from afar. I ran towards it. Apparently either my movement was slowed or that crystal was far away, but when I slowly approached it, I noticed that there he lied, inside the crystal, in some form of stasis. I only needed to get Pantsman out, and that would be the end of my mission.

Suddenly behind me, I heard something appearing. I turned around, and there I saw it. Or actually, I didn't really see it. It was clearly there, yet it wasn't. I wasn't even sure it existed, all I know was that if it did exist, it would be huge, larger than the tallest mountain, no, larger than the world! I might have exaggerated, but I think you'll get the point. It was all too much to fathom for any normal human being. Its appearance alone would drive any man insane.

Then it talked to me, in a somehow menacing though artificial tone.

"This is nothing of your concern."

"It is," I said. "You're keeping my friend hostage, and you somehow want to invade my world, which would be very unlikely to happen since it's practically filled with light, but I suppose you're going to tell me your grand plan."

"But Noel, you surely must know what is going to happen."

"First of all, my name is not--"

I stopped. Suddenly shards of memories came flying by, memories not from me, but from Noel, many of him standing in formation in between a large group of others like him. Dark doppelgangers. I also finally got what Aeris meant. There I saw her. She was one of them.

Even more shards came flying by. The objective. The objective was to be one with their other halves, no matter how. It was step one to bring everything back to the darkness.

Back to the darkness. That means doctor Kruglor and Aeris were right. We did come from the darkness. Everything in the light basically originally was darkness. Their purpose was not to invade our world, but to drag everything and everyone in our world back into theirs to uncreate that which was never supposed to be. It almost seemed... noble. The reason they needed Pantsman was because they needed someone who had the same lightwave as the rest of the world, so that his resonance would cause a shift on the rest as well, and the reason my race had to merge was because even though the part in this world was dark, the part in our world was light. It was the very same combination between light and darkness that could make the resonance possible.

For a moment I really wanted it to succeed, but I quickly realized that it wouldn't turn out that great for everybody. Not everybody on this world could handle the new setting. And sure, I was treated like crap by almost everyone, but that didn't justify the fact that everything should go down. I snapped out of my thoughts, and turned back to Pantsman, where I started to take a run.

But the moment I turned around, something began to change. I started seeing silhouettes of buildings. It already started, so I had to be fast. Immediately after I rushed further I was stopped by minions of the darkness, most of them were shadows of the darkness. I fought my way through, which was made more difficult due to me not having any weapon that could potentially help me, aside from my rat on a stick, but the longer I battled, the more clear the buildings became. Soon, it would spread to the streets and to the people walking on them.

At that point I had two options. Go back out through the portal, leaving Pantsman behind, or trying to save Pantsman, with the high risk of the resonance being fully set. It felt like a no-win situation. But help came from an unexpected place.

“Leo,” I heard. It came from a demon-like creature, the very same race doctor Kruglor appeared to be part of. “We have come to your aid.”

“Why?” I asked.

“Because we prefer living in the world of light, not in this dumphole.”

More demons came to my aid. I rushed further, and as stronger enemies appeared, even more demons came. Finally, I reached the crystal. I looked back. Just a few moments and the city-like environment was entirely in sync with Pantsman’s lightwave. With a swift and firm punch I then shattered the crystal. Just as I did that, the buildings disappeared.

Pantsman came to.

“Don’t open your eyes,” I said. “It will drive you crazy.”

I pulled out a handkerchief, and blindfolded him. “We have to get out quickly.”

Pantsman nodded. We really had to hurry. He was in no condition to fight, and even if he was, he couldn’t, so we were basically moving targets here. I also didn’t know how much longer the demons could hold the minions of the darkness off.

I can still remember what the heart of the darkness asked to me. “What have you done? Why would you turn your back against one of your own?”

I turned up and said: “My place is there, in the world of light. You have no business there.”

“They will reject you, they will hate you.”

“They might, but at least it’s my home.”

The path was still long, and even more mooks came after me. I couldn’t leave Pantsman alone, and I also didn’t have a weapon to keep them at bay. I had to rely all the way on the demons protecting me, and their numbers reduced as time passed. I knew I couldn’t hold on much longer, I was already beginning to

get tired, but I had come a long way. There was no way I could give up now.

But it also felt like things were getting harder for me, as if the darkness was trying to keep me in. In reality I was fading away, merging with the world, due to the fact that the dark part of me was compatible with the darkness of this world. My life seemed to slip away, and I was about to give up when these words reminded me of what I am.

You were always the light side...

It was that which gave me the strength to move on. I carried Pantsman on my back, and ran like I've never run before. My trip didn't even take a second from that point it seemed. It was as if I only had to blink to be there. Right before the portal, I threw Pantsman through, and then I looked back.

"Guys!" I yelled to the demons helping me. "The portal is still open!"

"Don't worry about it!" Yelled one. "We will take care of it!"

"But what about you guys?"

"We will find our way to the real world. We always do."

The moment I passed through the gate, it closed. As expected, the device refused to work. Or at least, I assumed it, seeing as it just blew up next to me. I looked at Pantsman, who then asked me me: "Can I take off the blindfold now?" I nodded, and then a few seconds after, I said yes, he could.

I looked at the spot where Aeris used to lie. I was wondering if her powers got transferred to me, since it was Noel who killed her, or that it just vanished. But it didn't matter now. The world was safe again for a while, and I was tired. We were all tired.

After we got back up, we immediately went to Pantsman's house, to see if it was still there. It was, and it was still under his property. Apparently several people close to Pantsman kept it clean for the time he was gone. He asked me if I wanted to come in, and for a while I lived there again.

But I knew I couldn't stay there. Not that Pantsman minded my presence, but I felt that I had to move on, I had to find a way. I finally found a home of my own, and due to my heroics he was willing to pay it for me, and even offered to move all the stuff I owned for me.

The day I moved out, he talked to me. He said: "You've grown a lot, especially since that time I 'went away'. I don't know exactly what happened, but it seems you've opened yourself up a little. Still, I do know it will be a hard world for you. I might not have treated you differently than I would have to others, but I do know your 'handicap'. I know not everybody will accept you. But know that there are always a few who will take you for who you are, like me, or like that hobo you've been talking about in the past. And who knows, maybe you will find someone like yourself, or at least someone who will love you for who you are."

"Thanks, Pantsman," I said.

"Just call me Scott."

It was really comforting what he said, but I felt that I did my part, that this was all I would ever do, that my whole life would only revolve around this journey.

I stared into a crowd. People were minding their own business, trying to fulfill their own purposes, their own goal, or destiny, as they called it. There was no reason for me to exist any longer. I fulfilled my destiny. Yet I was still there.

It was then I bumped into you, knocking your glasses from your head, accidentally stepping on them. At first I didn't even notice it, but when I saw you, I knew it was no accident.

I mean, Aeris never told me what she did with her other self, and apparently this was because she never even met her, she never even met you. Or perhaps she did, but decided to let you live. I mean, despite your appearance, you always kept your cheerful, perhaps a bit naïve attitude.

I still remember that day. I said to you: "My name is Leo," and then you said: "I'm Sirena." I guess you know how the rest goes.