



The morning's pills were lined up on the bathroom counter: one prednisone, two magnesium oxide, two mycophenylate, two tacrolimus. Except the first, they would all need a second two-pill dose in the afternoon. Corey had put those pills in his pants pocket in a small plastic container. The others, with long practice of many months—over six years!—he dry-swallowed each and every one. It was a ritual by now. Not to be forgotten, because the complications of rejecting a liver and a kidney were too horrible to contemplate.

Corey snorted. Science could give people cosmic powers beyond reckoning, but it couldn't give an Innocent Bystander a reliable organ transplant. Oh, the medication was good, and the surgery left very little scarring. But the prognosis for the foreseeable future meant a daily regimen of pills, pills, and more pills.

Sitting next to them was his nephrologist's phone number, and the time for his afternoon appointment. Since today was going to be a wash, he'd taken it as a sick day. For the morning's activities he had other things planned. He slipped his left foot into his prosthetic shoe, grimacing a little. As good as the surgery had been, it could not prevent some unfortunate complications. The front half of his foot had needed amputation. *Why the hell can't we get some of that heroic medicine?* he wondered, not for the first time. *How about a nice cloned foot? Or cybernetics?*

But as everyone knew, Bystander, Hero, and Villain alike, that sort of thing risked getting you an Origin. That was why they screened all organ donators for metahuman genes, after all. That was why all R&D centers were staffed by people who more or less expected to end up with four arms, lasers shooting out of their eyes, and in the modern age, quite possibly mouse ears.

The Universe had a peculiar sense of humor. Even having done some stand up comedy in the past, Corey wasn't laughing. Every other new hero these days ended up with some

kind of animal feature.

Afternoon was for the doctor, morning was for other activities.

The La Paloma Theater was built in the early Twenties as a multi-purpose facility, having both movies and a full stage for plays. The white stucco walls and red tile roof made it somewhat out of place in Olympia, but its builder had come from San Diego. The various owners—and it had changed hands a few times over the years—never had made enough money to install air conditioning. During the summer months it was closed in the daytime, and showed third-run movies late at night. But that only left barely enough money to keep it open.

Corey parked behind the rear stage doors, noting that he was the first here. There were supposed to be two others today, helping with maintenance. The acting troupe he belonged to used the place from fall through spring. And there was a ton of work to be done.

The sound system was shot. There were burned out lights everywhere. The floorboards on the stage needed to be torn up and replaced. Barring that, they needed sanding down and refinishing. Decades of productions had ground powdered makeup into the wood, and there were layers upon layers of paint and tape.

Unfortunately one of the other volunteers had the keys, so he had to wait. And wait. And wait. After nearly an hour, Derek finally pulled up with his five-months pregnant wife, Brittany. Derek looked apologetic when he got out of the car. “Sorry about being late, Corey. Couldn’t be helped. Laser Llama and Red Renegade were having one of those big battles. Held us up for half an hour, then they had to bring in the nanoconstructors to make repairs to the roadway...”

“Laser *Llama*?” Corey replied incredulously. “That’s a new one.” The other one was a local villain who was half fox, not to be confused with the heroine Renegade Red, who was



also half fox, although female. “I didn’t hear anything over here.”

The expectant mother shrugged. “Who knows what the Universe is thinking these days? Let’s get to it.”

Corey turned on the lights as the married duo went into the building before him. Sitting on a table were a bunch of papers, notes from the previous week’s volunteers and some of the official paperwork needed to start the minor renovation. “We’ve been cleared of secret bases in the basement and unwelcome mystical surprises under in the stage floor. I guess old Mr. Hodges didn’t have any heroic past to speak of,” Derek said. “We can officially start replacing it.”

“No money from an unnamed donor, then?” Corey added. “No suspicious stationery from a secret society?”

“If it worries you so much, Corey, you could always start on the lights.” Brittany said, pulling back her unruly curly locks. “If you...”

“I can handle the ladder,” Corey said sourly. “And if I don’t finish I’ll be back after my appointment.”

Derek glared at his wife. “Hope that goes well, Corey.”



The hospital had two wings. One of them was devoted to Heroic Medicine, and even had a teleportation system in case any local hero became injured enough to merit immediate attention. Even the architecture was different, looking like something pulled from two centuries in the future. A couple of flyers in bright costumes were visible as they took off from the landing spot on the roof. One had a long lizard tail and bat-like wings. *Another dragon.*

Corey drummed his fingers on his steering wheel. The risks to Bystanders using Heroic Medicine were usually too great. *The way things go around here it’s amazing there aren’t even more Heroes and Villains.*

His nephrologist’s office was in an older wing. Corey knew this place well, having spent his time in ICU here after the liver transplant. He signed in, then was weighed in and brought to an examination room.

“Good morning, Corey,” Dr. Zawadzski said through his mustache. He held a tablet PC, one of the thicker, less-advanced versions used with Bystanders. “I’m glad you could come in today, since I have a proposal for you.”

Corey raised his eyebrows. “Oh?”

“You’ve mentioned you’re growing tired of all your medication, in the past,” he said. “So many pills.”

“Never missed a dose, Dr. Z.”

The middle-aged man nodded. “I know. But there are new options coming out of Hero Pharmaceuticals that show very little risk to Bystanders these days. O-factors smaller than point-one.”

Corey chewed his lower lip. An O-factor meant “Origin Risk Factor”. The FDA wouldn’t approve anything over .1 percent. “Experimental?”

“Still, so there’s a greater Origin risk than other medications. But you’ll be reduced to a single pill, once per day. It basically makes the body think that any transplanted organs are actually a part of your own body, and enhances your regenerative abilities. You’ll lose what scarring you have, and it might start some very slow regrowth of your metatarsals, toes, and kidneys.”

The transplant patient brightened. “You’ve got my attention, Doc. I’d rather not end up looking like a lizard, though.”

“No worries. We’re in the latter stages of testing. Any anthropomorphic effects are screened out. I can call in a specialist with some paperwork if you want more details. I’d like to get you started on it today if you *are* interested.”

One pill, Corey thought. “Bring him in. I’m all ears.”

As it turned out, the doctor in charge of administering medication was a statuesque woman with black hair tied up in a bun, who wore a pair of square glasses. With a physique like *that* she had “Secret Identity” written all over her, and probably knew that both men knew it. She sat down across the table from Corey. The light reflected off her glasses, concealing her eyes. “I’m Dr. Larson,” she said warmly. “Penny Larson.”

Wonder what kind of powers she has? Corey wondered. She looked like a Natural rather than any of the other four Origins. “Pleased to meet you, ma’am.”

“Before we can do anything, please read all of this. And I do mean *all*. Since the O-factor isn’t quite pegged down, we’re covering our asses legally. The hospital and the pharmaceutical company is *not* responsible for any damage you do if your new powers come into being, wherever you are, and whatever you’re doing.”

Corey nodded, then took the booklet. “Understood, Dr. Larson.”

It took an hour. The legal language was very convoluted. By the time he put his initials on the release form, and the compensation forms for agreeing to participate in an experimental study, and the pill was swallowed, it was nearly three. Ample time to return to the La Paloma and help out with whatever remained to be done.

“Didn’t expect to see you back, Corey,” a sweaty Derek said. He was covered in wood dust and slouching in one of the theater’s old seats in front of the stage. “How’d things go?”

Corey smiled. He could already feel the medication going to work. He felt buoyant, energetic. “Great! I’ll tell you about it later, okay? I guess I’ll get back to changing light bulbs.”

His fellow troupe-mate nodded. “You do that. This damn floor is going to take weeks to tear up and replace. We’re either going have to call in more volunteers, or find better tools.” He sat up a little. “Remember to watch that wiring, okay? We still can’t afford an electrician, and some of those sockets are really *old*.”

The lights in question were on the marquee over the concession stand. There were well over a hundred of bulbs, and since he did have ladder trouble with his foot prosthesis, it was a long process. After flipping on the switch to see which were left to do—he was about a quarter finished—he resumed his work.

The mild shock nearly jolted him off the ladder. Letting himself down again, Corey rubbed his tingling hand. “Okay. I’m going to finish this with the lights off.”



Being the only man in a medical billing office filled with mostly 40-50 year old women would try any man’s patience. Add a generous helping of patients who were equal parts irate and stupid, a fifth of them intelligent, and the rest just delinquent, made for a stressful work environment at times. The building itself was just a portable classroom-sized room filled with cubicles. The most common topic of conversation? Men.

Most of the time Corey just kept his head down and did the work in front of him. He hadn’t even told any of them of the change in medication. But considering the differences he was starting to see in himself every morning, somebody did notice.

“You’re looking very smooth the past couple weeks, Corey,” Bertha observed, looking over the edge of her cubicle. The iron-haired woman never missed *anything*. “And I mean that. When did you shave last?”

“Couple days ago?” he replied. He was visiting Dr. Larson weekly. He’d noticed was some modest weight loss, about ten pounds. But what was *really* exciting was a growing tingle on his left foot. Dr. Larson said that his toes really were starting to regenerate. In a few months, he’d no longer need the prosthetic.

“I mean, really smooth. You look like my son before he started shaving.”

Corey shrugged. If his weight loss continued he’d end up having to buy a whole new wardrobe. That in itself would make the entire gossipy herd of them go on and on for weeks. “Look, I really need to finish this. I’m supposed to see my doctor again tomorrow, and I’m due back at the La Paloma.”

Bertha’s eyes brightened. “Oh, what are you planning to do when you open? I always take my husband at least once during theater season.”

Yeah, I know, Corey thought. “Um, we were thinking of doing *As You Like It*. Shakespeare’s always a good standby. We might get a shapeshifter to play the title role, we hope.”

“Delightful!” the woman squealed. “Spruce the place up a little, will you? The floors looked awful the last time we were in there.”

Half-day complete, Corey walked out to his car and took a moment to tighten his belt another notch. Even the complexion of his skin was changing a bit, looking lighter. And that morning he’d found the roots of his hair were darker. The list of potential side effects had been five pages long, so this was within norms as the medication switched various genes on and off. Except... he looked at himself in the vanity mirror. His face really *did*

look rather smooth. What hair was there felt downy rather than stiff from years of shaving. *Youthening appearance? Was that on the list?*

Well, it didn't look serious. In fact, he felt great! If there was anything wrong he'd just tell Dr. Larson when he went in for the monitoring exam tomorrow.

The problem with volunteers is that they were *volunteers*, and they only had a limited amount of time they could devote to keeping the theater up and running. Unfortunately, since they had gone so far as to tear up the stage, unless the volunteers got with the program and put out a concerted effort, the season would open late.

Derek and his gravid wife had done much of the same kind of work on their home. And since the current owners wanted to maintain the building's quaint "hand built" look rather than use modern nanobot construction techniques, that meant hand-laying the new floor.

Olympia wasn't large enough to attract high-level heroes or villains, but there were enough local gangs and lower level heroes of all archetypes to make any drive downtown an obstacle course of super-powered gangbangers running in terror from energy-bolt throwing, kung-fu kicking heroes. Somehow the La Paloma had never been used as a hideout, secret base, occult center, door to the higher planes, or anything else of that nature in its lifetime. There was not a single play whose characters ever took over the actors. It was downright *boring*.

Brittany was unloading flooring material out of the back of their van when Corey pulled up. She wasn't carrying much, and her pregnancy was progressing without abnormalities. The blond woman looked at him closely as he attempted to pick up an armload, only to find he'd overestimated himself slightly. She looked at him, head cocked. "Is that you, Corey? I hardly recognized you with that complexion."

"It's the meds," he explained, holding the floor pieces against his chest. Something uncomfortably went squish, but he ignored it. "But I feel great!"

"I was going to say you still look great. Wonderful to see a smile on your face. I'm sorry we haven't seen you in a month, though. The construction and repair business is always busy."

He nodded, following her inside. "I suppose I'll finish out the lights. Has anybody else been here since us?"

"Rick Baker had an Origin, so I doubt he'll be back. He's off chasing some half-hyena into the Cascades. I have no idea what he's calling himself, but he ended up part grizzly bear."

Corey groaned. "Just great. I'm going to finish those lights, okay? Once they're done I can help you on the floor."

Brittany smiled. "Thanks, Corey. But don't hurt yourself on that ladder."

Unfortunately the ladder shelf could only hold a few bulbs at a time. With the job barely half finished, and frustration growing at the repetitive nature of the task, he started to go faster and faster. Once, he even jumped down the last three steps.

Oof. Corey held his arms to his chest. There had been a... a bounce. An unmistakable *bounce*, as if there was just a little extra fat there that shouldn't be. He frowned, feeling uneasy. But he also didn't want to leave this job unfinished. *Slow and steady. Slow and steady.*

When he got up on the ladder, the lights went out. All of them. Without even emergency lights, the concessions area was absolutely pitch black. "Hey! What the hell happened!" he shouted, suddenly feeling a chill. It was as if the very life had been drawn out of the place.

"I think you tripped the circuit breaker with that last bulb!" Derek replied in the direction of the theater doors. "I'll get it! Stay wherever you are!"

When they came back on, they were dim. Browned out. But then the whole room started to hum... then each bulb began to shatter, a blue electric arc connecting between them. It moved slowly enough for Corey to watch, but too fast to react to. It impacted him right in his belly, and for a moment every nerve was on fire! In a dramatic shower of falling glass from two hundred breaking light bulbs, he was thrown off the ladder across the room, where he blacked out.



"How many times do I have to tell you? I'm fine!" Corey grumbled, waving them both away irritably while he got to his feet. "I look fine. I feel fine. There's not a mark on me!"

Sitting behind him, Brittany sighed. "Corey dear, nobody takes that kind of short circuit without apparent injury unless they've just had some kind of Origin. Didn't you say you were at risk from these meds?"

"I'm fine!" he insisted, voice cracking up a whole register. "I'm just going to go home and sleep this off. I'm seeing my doctor tomorrow anyway."

Husband and wife regarded each other. "It's your life, Corey. I suppose if you did just have an Origin, it could just be Sidekick-level powers. You never know. Maybe you got lucky. This place has never been known for anything heroic."

"I'm going home," Corey insisted. "I'll give you two a call later with an update. I'm fine, really."

The drive home was punctuated by the need to pull the seat forward one notch so he could reach the pedals more easily. His partly amputated foot started to throb. Corey barely pulled into his parking space at his apartment before he had to start removing the prosthetic and struggle out of the specially-made shoe. With the fake half-foot on his lap, he realized he could wiggle his toes. Corey smiled weakly. *Maybe I'd better call Dr. Larson. This is a little faster than she anticipated.*

Corey opened the driver's side door and had a look at the healed foot. Then his heart leapt into his throat. "That's... that's not my foot." Five toes, yes. But it was noticeably smaller than the right side. It was almost dainty.

It was a woman's foot. A little nail polish, and...



He pushed that thought out of his mind. *Um, it's just not full size yet. Damn it. I want a shower and I want some food.* After he had something in him, he'd decide when to go see his doctor. She *did* need to be called. Just not right that instant.

Corey enjoyed the walk to his apartment in spite of the obvious weirdness, and felt like dancing. He dropped his clothes on the bathroom floor, stepping into the stream of hot water. *Just a couple hours to relax a little, and I'll get Dr. Larson to check me out. No problem...*

The water tickled as he lathered up. Then he noticed something going down the drain. His body hair was sloughing off, leaving light-complexioned skin behind it. In fact,

his whole body now looked softer, smoother. And...

He put his hands to his chest. It looked puffy around the nipples and areolas, which were themselves visibly swelling larger. He numbly shut off the water and reached for a towel.

Cramp. He doubled over. It was the worst stomach cramp Corey had ever experienced, almost like being punched in the gut. Except, it wasn't *exactly* in the right place. It felt deeper, more in his pelvis than his stomach. Only when it relaxed a little could he stand up straight and finally get a look at himself in the bathroom mirror. It had fogged up, so he used a towel to wipe away the moisture.

Just a few minutes ago he had still looked merely boyish. Now the face that looked back was outright feminine. As for the rest of him, he'd developed a definite pinch about the waist, and the rest of his body's proportions were just a little off. "Oh, shit," he muttered. Even his voice had noticeably changed. "Um... hospital. Hospital. I'd better call... ahem."

Putting thought into action required a great deal of effort. His pants refused to stay on without a further belt tightening, and his shirt fit over his slightly narrower shoulders only when stuffed in. Shoes? One try told him that they were just too big. He'd just have to drive barefoot. His neighbors watched him as he rushed towards the elevator, nascent breasts a-jiggle. He dialed Dr.



Larson after pulling his seat forwards another couple notches, barely able to keep a hold of the phone with a trembling hand.



“Larson speaking,” she said.

“It’s Corey,” he said, trying to speak down in his old register. “I’m... I’m... I think...”

“Calm down, Corey,” she replied. “Just hold on.” He felt a tingle in his ear, then the tone of voice changed. “You’re having an Origin, aren’t you? Don’t say another word and head to the Emergency Room. Tell them it’s a Code H. They’ll take care of you and I’ll be in as soon as I can.” An alarm started blaring in the background, and she sighed. “Which may be a few hours. Hang tight, Corey.” The line went dead.

He had two more cramps on the way to the hospital, though none as serious as the very first one. His entire body tingled ominously. And when he told the nurses it was a Code H

and who his doctor was... Then things got really strange.



“Disrobe, please.”

Corey looked at the male nurse as if he was an alien and blushed furiously. Given the ant-like antennae on his head, it was probably the truth. “Why?”

“Because the body scanner can’t see through even a hospital gown,” he replied matter-of-factly. “I’m not going to leer, ma’am. I really won’t. Martian women have three breasts and you’re just not stacked enough yet anyway.”

Stacked? Corey thought, feeling an urge to fold his arms. He refused to think of himself as female yet. Not when he hasn’t quite crossed that line physically. But the weigh-in had already told him he was well on the way: five feet, six inches tall, a hundred and thirty pounds, obvious developing hourglass, and breasts that were more than merely pubescent. Even his ass felt swollen. “Thank you for your candor,” he replied dryly.





Dr. Larson had arrived looking disheveled and exhausted. But she also hadn't batted an eye when informed what was happening to her patient. "Transgender Origins are more common than you think, Corey. The Universe likes messing with people's gender at least as much as species," she'd explained, pushing buttons on the scanner control panel. "Tell me, in detail, exactly what happened."

They had taken blood samples, then put him in a room in the Heroic Medicine Wing that looked like something out of Star Trek, down to the Federation-style biobed. An hour later he was in a scanning booth with a holodeck-like grid. Dr. Larson had arrived just as he was removing the gown.

She folded her arms across her chest, holding a PADD. "I should probably make you feel more comfortable. But the bare fact is that within a short time you'll be as female as I am, Corey. That's the prognosis, and it's irreversible. The good news is that you'll have the body of a very healthy young woman about ten years younger than you. I suppose you could say that's also the bad news."

Corey tried to smile, but the chilly air made the continuing changes feel all the more obvious. "So what am I doing standing in here for?"

"Just making sure everything is going smoothly. Here, let me show you."

A holographic image appeared next to him. It was, clearly, himself. At last how he had been at his last exam. "This is you last month, when you started on the new medication," Larson explained. The image morphed smoothly, shrinking a few inches, the physical

shape developing curves and breasts. Corey looked down at himself as the image's package shrunk. Larson had just done a more physical exam, announcing that he no longer had a prostate, but actually *seeing* it in accelerated time made him want to cross his legs. What was left down there was only barely male. "And this is you in realtime."

The holo-Corey turned translucent, exposing organ systems in various color coding. Dr. Larson altered the image to zoom in on his pelvic area, highlighting something new. "You know what this is, don't you?"

It was distorted and incomplete, but obviously growing. "A uterus. That's where the cramps came from, I bet."

"No bet. Here you can see migrating gonads that are already more like ovaries. Corey, I see fallopian tubes, a pelvis that is already quite feminine, your estrogen levels are normal for a twenty-five year old woman... I could go on and on." She sighed. "As I said, this is irreversible. We'll make the transition as easy as we can."

"We also suspect you have electricity-based powers, but we don't know of what caliber. We'll keep you here until the transformation is complete, and set you up with a therapist."

Corey nodded, folding his arms under his chest, unable to take his eyes off the sluggishly growing breasts. *Can I even consider myself a 'he' anymore?* "Um, so what's causing this, exactly?"

Dr. Larson used a pointer to bring up more information from the hologram, highlighting the transplanted liver and kidney, both of which were almost glowing, with an indicated *outflow* to every corner of the body. Even the spaces that had held his oxalate-clogged kidneys were regenerating new ones. "We've determined that your body cells are being replaced with genetic material identical to your donor organs. You're essentially becoming her body double. Yes, your donor was female."

"Obviously," Corey replied. There were odd things going on in her hips and pelvis, and afterwards she would swear she felt the moment when her gender finally crossed over. It was a rather moist, slimy feeling. One moment, marginally male. The next, *schlup*. The cramps were gone, but from the realtime holographic view, everything was swiftly connecting up both inside and out. "But what *caused* it?" She cupped her breasts. "And just how big are these things going to get?"

The taller woman brought up another holographic diagram. "There were some previously undetected metahuman genes in your donor organs. Giving you the experimental medication turned those genes on, and the electric shock you received a month ago and the much larger one today basically super-charged the synergy between the drug and the donor organ genetics. Convolutd, I know. But that's how the Universe operates these days. We've gotten wise to the simple Origins."

"As for your breasts," she looked at her critically. "I'd say you're almost there. They only feel heavier because you're never had a pair of your own."

"Well, *that's* reassuring," Corey replied sourly. "On both counts." Her voice had apparently settled. She wondered how she sounded to others. Her hair now tickled her

shoulders.

“We’ll keep you overnight, but you’ll be able to go home tomorrow. No reason to keep such a healthy young woman cooped up here. We have a complete transition kit for just these situations. So, don’t worry, all the small stuff will be taken care of. Before you leave you’ll have ID, reference materials, access to an extended support group, and a whole new wardrobe.” A red light started flashing on her bracelet. Larson’s eyes went wide. “Oh, crap. Not him again! I have to go.”

“Will you be back tonight?” Corey said, sounding very worried.

She walked quickly towards the door. “I’ll try. And pick a name, too. It’ll really smooth things over. Keep that chin up! Remember, you’re not alone!” She broke into a run down the corridor.

Corey stared after her. “Who the hell says ‘keep that chin up’ any more?”

Only Heroes and Heroines.



A night of pacing, staring at herself, and more pacing followed. A nurse checked on her every few hours, waved a scanning device over her abdomen and chest, then walked out again without saying much. She was clearly uncomfortable, and only mumbled a few pleasantries before remembering that the woman she was taking care of did not, in fact, know the first thing about being one.

Every few minutes the new woman would either hook her finger over her gown to get a good look at her fresh cleavage, give her breasts a gentle squeeze, or feel the contours of her altered facial features. All the while thinking about Dr. Larson’s last comment. *I suppose I have to pick a female name. At least for official purposes.*

Dr. Larson had not returned by morning. Whatever she was doing made her “temporarily unavailable”. And there were *no mirrors* in the high-tech hospital room. When she asked the nurse why at five in the morning, the answer was straightforward. “Patients in your cases sometimes react poorly seeing their new faces. They’ll have you look at yourself before you go.” A strained grin. “Don’t worry, Miss. You turned out quite beautiful.”

I think I can see that well enough from this angle, Corey thought.

As it turned out, the nurse was right. When a new Doctor arrived with an antigravity-suspended mirror floating behind her, Corey’s heart leapt into her throat. She gasped and stared at herself anew, taking in herself in all its heroic perfection. The face... the face bore no family resemblance whatsoever. Black hair framed an oval-shaped face with full lips and high cheekbones. She bounced on the balls of her feet, watched her breasts move in kind, felt the tug of gravity and inertia on her shoulders and back. She turned around to look at her behind, and found she looked great coming *and* going.

She was utterly speechless.

Dr. Rachel Conrad, the psychologist assigned to her case, was herself a Transgender. “Stare as much as you like, Miss. I’m in no rush. I wanted to go over your final paperwork

and give you some clothes that fit. We've streamlined the process a lot over the past five years. All I need from you are two signatures—your old name and your new one—and it'll bounce through the entire system within a day or two. We'll even give you new credit cards and driver's license before you leave."

"I'd like to wear the same outfit I wore in, somehow," Corey replied, not taking her eyes off the woman in the mirror. She carefully gripped her breasts and jiggled them. *This is so surreal. But... I'd better start thinking of that reflection as mine... wow. What should I call myself?*

Conrad took out a spray can. Her age was indeterminate, but she was as stunning as Corey herself now was. "Just let me know when you're ready for me. I'll make sure your old clothes fit. And I have a bra and panties ready. You might have taken them *off* before, but putting them *back on* is a required skill, when you're the one they fit."

Corey pulled her hair back. "I think I'm ready now, Doctor. No sense standing here all day ogling myself."

"Honestly, do that as much as you like. It's healthy for a heterosexual man in your situation. Do you have a new name in mind? Most choose something quite different as a clean break from their pasts."

The black-haired woman nodded. "I do. And I'll take that transition kit Dr. Larson mentioned, too. I can use all the help I can get."



The apartment manager had clearly seen it all. The old woman just shuffled Corrine's new identity papers back at her and winked. "If you need any motherly advice, young lady, I'm here," the kindly woman said. She had silvery hair that at first glance might have been naturally gray, but on closer examination was actually slightly tarnished silver. Clearly a retired Heroine. "I mean it, Corrine. I'm just a phone call away. Lovely new name, by the way."

"Uh, thanks. It's been surreal so far, let me tell you," Corrine replied, shouldering the purse that held the hospital's Transition Kit and other things. The material was clearly magical, holding as much as a large suitcase in something one eighth that size, yet not weighing her down.

Other than color that remained the same—red button shirt and khaki slacks—the spray-nanobots had changed her male work clothes into a very snug short-sleeved tee shirt



with a deep v-neck and a pair of Capri pants that felt almost painted on. The shoes had been provided by the hospital. At least they were standard Nikes without a heel. With her hair in a pony tail, Corrine had sauntered out of the Hero Wing of the hospital, determined to meet the world on female terms without fear.

It sounded cheesy, but she felt renewed, energetic, invigorated. Literally, a new woman. Before going into the apartment building she stood out in the warm summer day and spread her arms wide, turning her head towards the energizing sunlight. No prosthesis, no immunosuppressant medication. No genetic defect that had clogged her male self's bloodstream with oxalates and caused the liver transplant in the first place. Ten years of her life regained, since she had been on dialysis years before that became needed. As she rode the elevator up, she smiled and felt like dancing a little. In fact, she did bounce on her heels a bit, just to feel her breasts do their thing. If the price for these benefits was "rebirth" as a woman, it was gladly paid. *There has to be a downside, but I'm just not seeing it.*

Corrine had expected money to refresh her wardrobe. Instead there were two cans of "nano-fogger". Sitting on her couch, she read the directions. "New Life: M2F Edition(tm). Our nano-reconstructors will alter the décor, personal effects, and clothing of any former man into their female equivalents, and even provide new items from our Welcome Catalog. Five levels of feminine to choose from."

From the before and after pictures on the instructions, Corrine opted for Level 3. The first two settings kept too many aspects of the old life, while the last two were simply too *pink* and stereotypical. *I wondered why they didn't give me money for a new wardrobe*, she thought. *The wonders of nanotechnology.*

As instructed, she removed the tops, opened all the interior doors, and set each in the center of the living room and bedroom. Maybe she was acting too hastily, maybe she wasn't thinking it through, but in the near-euphoria of the moment it didn't *feel* right to live in what was obviously a man's bachelor pad. *If I'm going to be a woman, I'm going to be a **woman**. This is what the Universe has planned for me? Fine, I'll go along with it.* If there was any time to discard the old life and see what kind of woman she could make of herself, now was that time. *I'm an actor... actress! Actress. Lots of new roles I can play.*

Tomboy or Femme Fatale, it'd be a challenge if nothing else.

Corrine set the foggers, grabbed her purse—the real one inside the Transition Kit rather than the "magic suitcase"—then headed for the Starbucks on the corner to let them do their work.

As she was closing her door, she heard a familiar screechy voice behind her. "Ohmygod! What the hell happened to you, Corey?" The female voice was rather petulant. "That's not *fair!* I have to dye my hair black, you know."

Corrine turned to face one of the college students who lived across the hall. She was actually rather cute, and not as into dark magics as some of her roommates. But her voice

had a habit of rising to a very high pitch when she was upset. Corrine sighed and folded her arms. “I guess you noticed me leaving in a hurry yesterday.”

The younger woman nodded. “The *whole floor* knows by now. I’m just the first to see you in person like this. It’s actually kind of neat, I guess. Um, expect some kind of gift from Jean and Breanne down the hall. Maybe even an ‘Estrogen Party’ as a welcome to our side of the fence.” Seeing the confused expression on Corrine’s face, she smiled wryly. “I kid you not. You’re one of *us* now. Not that I didn’t like you before! But... um... do you have a..?”

“Corrine,” the new woman replied.

“Pretty name, Corrine. Seriously. Look, the short of it is that it’ll be nice to have another woman on this floor. There’s too many *boors* in this building—not that you were one of them!” she quickly added, stumbling over her words, realizing she’d really put her foot in her mouth. She sounded like one of the Chipmunks now. “You were just, ummm... too old for me,” the nineteen year old squeaked.

Corrine’s expression turned flat, as well as her tone of voice. “I’m going for a walk. I need to get used to this body, so I’m going to be out for a while. See you later, Tina.”

“Are you going to Starbucks?” Tina screeched as Corrine turned towards the elevator. “Let me come along. Seriously, you shouldn’t be walking by yourself. I have a taser, too. This is a nice neighborhood but you *are* a pretty, petite girl now, right? There’s still muggers, and you can stand around for what feels like hours quaking in your shoes waiting for some lowbie hero to come by and knock them out.”

I suppose she’s right, Corrine grumbled. “Sure, come along. I guess I can use the company after all. Just don’t tell everyone we meet who I am, okay? I’m trying to make a new start.”

Tina smiled. “I’m cool with that, *Corrine*.”



In Washington State there was almost literally a Starbucks on every corner, and it seemed that every one had its own group of regulars. People from the neighborhood who would drift in and out over the course of the day, the week, the month. So it was unusual to see a new face, especially attached to a physique like Corrine’s. Every face turned, male and female, but when they saw her come in with Tina close behind, the dozen or so patrons shrugged and went back to their laptops and lattes.

“Going to get the usual?” Tina asked. “Oh, your walk is much better now. More um... naturally girly. I thought you should know that.”

Walking was an adventure in itself. Corrine’s body just didn’t move like it used to. The quarter mile from apartment to coffee shop had made that abundantly clear, and she had learned not to fight her hips. But it was a delightful difference compared to seven years with a prosthetic half-foot.

I just wish this stupid bra would stop digging into my shoulders, Corrine thought. The bra didn’t stop the bouncing, it merely contained it. The barista behind the counter

couldn't take his eyes off of her as she walked up. She made a show of looking at the menu, but only felt like one drink. "Steamed milk with a shot of vanilla, with whipped cream."

The barista was one of Tina's non-goth roommates, more or less just a generic male undergraduate. He looked in the goth girl's direction. Corrine saw the young woman mouth something... and grimaced. "It's Corey!" she was saying.

"I knew it," the barista said. He spoke loud enough so *everyone* in the shop heard. "Nobody else gets that drink. Looking hot there, Corey! Get one of those Extreme Makeover kits they're selling at Bob's? Didn't think Bystanders could get those without the State's approval. Guess it healed you up, eh? Honestly, I can't think of a better way to do that. You look awesome!"

Corrine glared at Tina as Ron yammered on and on. The college student blushed and retreated into a dark corner. "It's a lot more complicated than that, Ron. But yes, it's me. The new me. So just give me my steamed milk, okay? And it's *Corrine* now, if you don't mind," she said irritably.

Ron smiled. Corey had lived here for years, so there were a lot of the people who knew about the liver transplant simply because word got around about those things. A couple patrons were noting the absence of a prosthetic foot in addition to the breasts and the hourglass figure. The barista started on the milk, but on a second drink as well. "Hot chocolate. You couldn't have that before, could you? A new drink to go with the new you, Corrine? On the house."

She couldn't find any objections to that suggestion. When he was finished, Corrine took both drinks back to her regular table next to the windows and decided that a little quiet contemplation was called for. The other patrons, whom she'd chatted off and on over the years but could not really call friends, moved on with only a little staring and the occasional wink. Corrine prodded one of her breasts back into place, then pondered trying the hot chocolate. It certainly *smelled* good.

Coffee, hot chocolate, tea, among other things with high amounts of oxalates, had been explicitly verboten just a day before. Now? The barista had a point. There was no reason for a gorgeous young woman to stick with the old self's usual. "Thanks, Ron."

She put the steamed milk aside and picked it up, raising the paper cup with its savory steaming contents as a toast. "To the new nuh..." Corrine stopped cold. She felt vast energies gathering, centered outside. But nobody else seemed to feel it.

Midday traffic screeched to a halt as blue arcs of electricity flowed between the buildings. Thunder reverberated through the air, shattering windows down the block and making everyone cover their ears. Between the two buildings, clearly visible to Corrine and anyone close to the windows, a distortion formed in the air. Larger and larger it grew, expanding into a portal through which an alien landscape was visible. Bulbous "trees" and waving purple "grasses". And through it stepped a monstrous insectoid creature, only vaguely human in shape, its four arms each holding a gun that might have been fruited by some twisted evil tree.

“Oh, damn. It’s BEM again,” Ronald said with a disgusted snort. He checked his watch. “He’s two days early this year.”

It was a familiar face to Corrine, too. She rolled her eyes. Officially Bug-Eyed Monster, he/she/it was Olympi’s perennial invader from another dimension where humans (sort of) had evolved from insects. Either it wasn’t very smart, or it wasn’t the same bug-man-woman-thing-deal that had come every year for the past fifty. It was more or less a neighborhood event. “Did he have those guns last time?” Corrine asked. “I can’t remember. But then, I’ve had a big few days. I’m not exactly thinking clearly.”

“At least he gives the X-Terminators steady work. Damn thing never learns its lesson no matter how many times they kick its ovipositor,” Ron added. He reached into his pocket and took out his cell phone. “I’ve got ‘em on speed dial.”

Another flash of interdimensional lightning from the portal and all the lights went out, casting most of the store into darkness except for an emergency light over the menu. People started to calmly move towards the emergency exit, but Corrine felt compelled to find a place and keep a close watch on BEM. Just because it was a known quantity didn’t mean it wasn’t dangerous. Corrine searched her memory. “Wait... the guns are new.”

“You sure?” Ron said. He looked at his now-dead phone. “Damn, I hope I got through. I think that lightning zot had some kind of EMP.”

Corrine blinked at him. “You mean you don’t *know*?”

The young man looked a little panicky. “Well, um...” Then his face literally brightened. “You’re glowing. Your eyes are glowing.”

“I’m what?” Corrine hissed.

“Glowing!” Understanding dawned. “Oh. My. God. You didn’t just become a hot chick, you had an Origin!” Understanding turned to near panic. “Look, I’m going to have to ask you to leave.”

“What? Why?” she said. Corrine should have felt panic. Instead, she felt calm, and a growing certainty of purpose. But it was still necessary to fight it, if only to create the proper dramatic tension. “I only *just* changed into a woman and now I have to...”

Ron just sighed and gestured in BEM’s direction with an almost bored emphasis. “That thing is out there for *you*. I couldn’t get through to the X-Terminators, it has new tricks, and it’s two days early. Every Heroine has a first time. That thing is *yours*. Now go get it.”



From elementary school onwards, everybody learned Basic Origin Theory and the Innocent Bystander’s Survival Guide in tandem. The laws of physics, biology, and other sciences weren’t really laws, but guidelines that could be bent at will. Corrine herself had lost a few tens of pounds with the gender change, but where that mass goes in those situations, nobody could quite figure out. It was certainly conserved *somewhere*. But for all anyone knew there was now a tiny new asteroid of boiling fat and drying bone orbiting around Gamma Reticuli, billion light years away. It’s a big universe.

Once you crossed the line from Bystander to Hero, even those loose rules were thrown out the window. Given the right application of power, even a hundred and thirty pound girl had a chance of defeating a seven-foot tall bug man-woman-thing from another dimension who was easily five times her mass.

“Don’t I need a costume?” Corrine said. “I mean, there’s the whole Secret Identity thing...”

“You’re a Local Heroine variant, I think. Everyone around here will know who you are, but they won’t reveal anything to outsiders. You’re safe. Go on, girl! What are you waiting for?”

The vaguely human-shaped insect just stood there, apparently confused. Perhaps it was used to almost immediate opposition from the X-Terminators, and had been prepared to come out of the portal with guns blazing. Instead he was faced with an almost-empty street. Except for Corrine, who suddenly found herself standing before him without remembering covering the distance.

BEM *laughed* at her. He pointed and laughed, mandibles making a staccato clicking noise as he rattled them together in what was probably his version of English. For all she knew he was saying “your mother was a hamster and your father smelt of elderberries!”

“Go back through that portal right now, or there’s going to be trouble!” Corrine said, trying to put as much threat into her tone of voice as she could. “I mean it!”

A strange pressure built behind Corrine’s eyes for a moment, culminating in a blue energy blast that bubbled the blacktop at BEM’s feet. Corrine was as shocked as the invader. The new Heroine grimaced. *Okay. I have laser vision.* She turned to the surprised bug. “That’s going to be *you* next!”

The blow would have seriously maimed a normal person, but Heroes are much more durable, and subject to different rules besides. With a lower arm, BEM smacked Corrine hard enough to send her flying, landing hard enough on the roof of a car to dent it and dramatically shatter the windshield. Dazed, she groaned for a few seconds while the bug-thing started laughing again.

At just the right moment, the sun came out from behind the clouds.

Corrine dazedly levered herself to her elbows and saw that BEM’s claws had basically torn away her shirt’s right shoulder, leaving deep, bloody gouges in her skin that were *healing* as she watched them. The sunlight felt incredibly good! As if it was energizing her. The black-haired Heroine grimaced, putting a few facts together. *Crap. I’m solar powered! That means I should... crap!*

If she wanted more power, she’d have to expose some more skin.

The shirt was a lost cause anyway. It was just that, underneath, was a blue satin bra. She pulled off her top, then looked to see where BEM was. He had gone down the street a distance, still confused that his Archnemeses were nowhere to be seen. Much longer and he’d start putting people—other than herself—in danger with those guns of his. Corrine

allowed the sunlight to come down over her bare shoulders, the remaining lacerations healing over without a scar.

She knew the basics about her powers. It was instinctive for all new Heroes. There would of course be new powers to discover in the future. For now, she held the palm of her right hand out in front of her, steadying with her left, and concentrated...

The ball lightning sniper shot blew off BEM's lower right arm. The bug-thing screamed in pain, shattering windows all around him. He spun around to face Corrine, and didn't even pause.

BEM opened fire.

The shots were wild and not aimed. BEM either had had *no* practice with his new weaponry, or was physically unable to get three guns all aimed in the same direction. Corrine weaved and dodged the spiky projectiles easily enough. But in a situation like this, her poorly-supported breasts became a painful liability. It was as difficult for her to get her unfamiliar body moving in synch as it was for the giant bug to use his guns. *Damn it! This is the downside! I need a better sports bra for hero work*, she thought ruefully.

But this was how the Universe did things these days. By making gender-changed Heroes, the additional physical and social complications added a new element of Drama. Something else the poor person (newly male or female) had to think about, since the less complicated Origins were well-known quantities. *I wonder if the new men have to go through anything like this!* she thought, dodging another shot with one arm supporting her chest.

After the Bad Guy was put down, maybe it was time for some shopping.

Corrine raked BEM's chest with a couple of eye-beam blasts, creating a smoking X across its carapace. The creature's shots became even more wild, but it was actually moving backwards now. Back towards the portal. But he needed more convincing that this invasion wasn't a good idea. *Okay, let's finish this!*

A streak of pain across her left shoulder made Corrine stumble, just a little. The thorn-bullet also cut right through the bra shoulder strap, neatly exposing her breast.

This only made her angry.

BEM really wasn't that smart, and insects are nature's robots. Being from another dimension didn't make BEM any different. There was a pattern to his shots. Corrine danced right into the middle of them, and felt the power build between her outstretched arms. Energy arced between them, accompanied by a sound like a charging capacitor. A monumental blast erupted between them, the surge of crackling light energy hitting BEM right in the chest, throwing him back most of the way towards the still-open portal.

The new Heroine staggered to her knees, drained of all her energy. "Damn it... I'm going to need to recharge... I hope..."

Incredibly the stinking, smoking ruin that was BEM staggered back to his feet. One of its huge eyes was gone, and its antennae and three remaining arms were *missing*. For a worried moment Corrine feared that it was going to pull a Black Knight and charge her

for a good, hard kick with its clawed feet. Instead it squealed in pain, jumping back through the portal, which vanished behind him.

Exhausted, euphoric, and half naked, Corrine couldn't even do anything about her bra. Her knees felt like Jell-O, arms like wet noodles. If it hadn't been for the apartment manager—the old woman all dressed up in an ancient costume with a moon theme—she would have fallen rather ungracefully to the street.

“I've got you, deary. Let's get you back to my office. Great job, but we have a few things to discuss.”



Ten minutes later Corrine was sitting in the old Heroine's over-decorated apartment, wearing a blue sweater with snowflakes and crescent moons on it, sipping hot chocolate. It was a taste long forgotten, and she savored every drop. The mini marshmallows were a nice touch. And however it was made, it certainly wasn't from any mix.

The walls were covered with photos. Places, friends, family. Mrs. Beaman had clearly gone many places in her lifetime. Her hair had once shone brightly in moonlight.

“I started my career as Moon Maiden in 1948,” she explained. For someone her age, she had aged gracefully and would still look good in a bikini. Beatrice Beaman! She even had an old-fashioned name for her Secret Identity. “Of course, that became Moon Matron once I married and had children...” She looked distant, a haunted look on her face.

“Mrs. Beaman, not that I don't appreciate this, but...” Corrine said.

Moon Matron smiled. “We're having a Dramatic Revelation here, Corrine. You're an actress. Play the role for a few more minutes so I can get the Universe to ignore us.”

She paused and sat down next to Corrine. “There's no easy way to say this. But I more or less expected something like this would happen, Corrine. I know a Retcon when I see one. You see, you have my Granddaughter's body, and her powers. You're not the same *person* she was, of course. But I see you sitting there in my sweater, and there's an image of a little girl sipping hot chocolate when she visited at Christmas.

“She was powerful, Corrine. Very powerful. And Heroines like that never stay dead in this world. And I'll wager that my granddaughter knew this when she decided to become an organ donor. Because I've been around so long and I know how these things work, I'm not upset. In fact, I'm certain the Universe put you *here* so I could teach you how to use your powers.”

Corrine chewed her lower lip. “Retcon, huh? Mrs. Beaman, when they perform organ transplants, they pull everything they can. Heart, lungs, liver, pancreas, kidneys. Even skin and corneas. If anyone else received her organs...”

Moon Matron nodded. “There will be more than one of her out there. Considering the outcome of her Final Battle—her powers were gone afterwards, understand—it wouldn't surprise me at all if this was planned. Her death six years ago was no accident.”

“Of course not,” Corrine replied, tapping the mug with a fingernail. “It never is.”

The old Heroine checked the clock on the wall. Drama over, both women decided to move on. There would be plenty of time for more “family reunion” later. “I understand that you set some nano-fogger in your apartment before you left?”

“The Hospital set me up with some New Life stuff,” Corrine said.

“That’s *technically* against the rules in this complex, deary. I’m going to make an exception in your case, but I need to be with you when you go in. How much longer until it’s finished?”

“About an hour.”

“Splendid! And I meant what I said earlier, Corrine. You have a lovely name. And I hope I’m invited to that party Jean and Breanne are planning. We need to give you a proper welcome.”

Corrine barely had time to absorb everything her “Grandmother” had told her when she returned to her apartment. Adding to the headache was that word had gotten around. Word of the battle, word of who this woman actually *was* in the neighborhood, and some simple curiosity. When she came out of the elevator, still dressed in the snug blue sweater, everyone broke into applause.

“Take a bow, Corrine. You gave a splendid performance.”

The black-haired young Heroine shrugged, and curtsied instead. “Don’t expect any encores, everyone,” she said to the gathered multitude.

“He’ll be back next year,” Ron said, standing next to a still-mortified Tina. “Probably larger and more powerful.”

“I wish you hadn’t blabbed to everyone who I was,” Corrine said, glaring at both of them.

Ron shrugged. “Secret Identities are passé. Like I said, you’re a Local. Now, let’s see this new place of yours. If it’s anything like the old one…” he said, smirking.

The two women down the hall, Jean and Breanne, were at the front of the group, right next to her door. Corey had actually dated each of them, once. But it had been clear that it just wouldn’t work out. They had remained friends. Jean was as tall as Corey, which meant the brunette was now taller than Corrine. Breanne was close to the same height. Both women wore tee shirts and shorts, and had Heroine physiques. “Welcome to Extreme Makeover: Transgender Edition,” Breanne quipped.

Corrine blushed. “Come on, you two.”

Jean had liquid brown eyes, and always smelled faintly of deer musk. “You open that door, Corrine, and it’s really official. I don’t know what level you chose, but it really doesn’t matter. That’s all she wrote for your existence as a man.”

“Like I have anywhere else to go,” Corrine said pointedly.

Jean nodded. “Just making sure you know the *gravity* of the situation.” She smiled and gave her own breasts a squeeze. “It’s been seven years for me and Breanne and we’re still not quite used to it.”

Corrine was shocked. She'd been inside their apartment. They never seemed to wear anything that wasn't in the Victoria's Secret catalog. "You two? Really?"

"We'll tell you the whole sordid story later, okay? Now go on, open it. Don't keep us in suspense, Corrine."

The new Heroine opened the door and walked inside. The place still looked lived-in, but it was unmistakably a single woman's apartment. Overall, after going through her rather tastefully sexy wardrobe, after seeing the boxes of tampons under the bathroom sink, and the makeup on the counter, Corrine thought the transition kit had done a perfect job. The place even *smelled* right. It was feminine without being over the top. *I can live with this.*

The small stuff was taken care of. The rest was up to her.

EPILOGUE

Tina's complaint was accurate. Most of the building's occupants were young, single men with only a few married couples and young children. Corrine's arrival was a significant advance to the feminist cause—at least on a very local level. The following Saturday after Corrine's rebirth, Jean and Breanne socially swept her into her new gender. "Total immersion is the best way," Jean had explained as they'd wandered through a local mall. "Being a woman physically is simple. I mean, anyone can do that. It doesn't exactly require a lot of thought. The hard part is to learn how to be one *socially*. And let me tell you, on a day-to-day basis it's like changing species."

"At least I don't have to deal with that, too," Corrine had said.

Jean and Breanne had only laughed knowingly. "Wait until you get to know us better, girlfriend," said Breanne.

After the mall trip, the two women begged off, apologizing for "other commitments" but reassuring the group that a couple of Heroine "friends" would gladly help with the rest of the Estrogen Party.

Even in Olympia, summer could be full of clear skies and warm sun. Corrine basked in it poolside, wearing the smallest bikini she was comfortable with. The powers specialists at the hospital had told her—and in fact had almost ordered her—to get at least two hours of sun daily during summer, with as much skin exposed as possible. Her body was like a solar battery, and real sunlight was best. Two hours in afternoon sun was equal to six hours under a powerful full-spectrum lamp, which was for the coming winter.

At least for today she didn't have to worry about leering from the apartment building's numerous male residents. The pool was inside some high fences that blocked anyone from seeing in. Brittany and Tina were playfully splashing each other. Upon arrival, the pregnant woman had just smiled knowingly at Corrine and patted her belly.

Leopard Girl stood guard at the gate. She wore a bikini also, but it was the same pattern as the anime-style catgirl's fur. It was almost like she wasn't wearing anything. It also happened to be her standard Battle Uniform. "There's only one way any of *you* are

getting in here, guys,” she purred. Several of the building’s young men had quickly put on their swimsuits and were hoping to get in.

But it was hard to overcome the feline Heroine’s rather dangerous smile. Breanne had a lot of experience with this.

“Well, which way is that?” Ron asked.

Leopard Girl’s partner, Steel Doe—Jean, in heroic guise—handed her the bikini and started shaking a can of Weekender: M2F nanobots. The anthropomorphic doe wore a tankini that might have come from a Renaissance Festival. “First, we shall only let one of you in,” the doe said. “Second, thou—*you* will have to *properly* fill out the bikini that my partner is holding.”

“No ovaries, no admittance,” Leopard Girl said. It was actually a modest garment as bikinis went.

“Hey, that’s stuff’s restricted!” some guy said.

“We have all the permits if thee wants to read them. Now, who wants in? Low O-factor…” Steel Doe said, wiggling the can. Her own armor “uniform” was currently just a steel bracelet on her left wrist.

“Now that’s just *cruel*,” one guy said. The hopeful group immediately started to break up, leaving only Ron standing there. The Starbucks barista looked at the assembled examples of womanhood, at Corrine, at the can of nanobots, then at himself. “I’ll do it. Gimme that.” He signed the forms and snatched the can out of the feline Heroine’s hand and the bikini out of the doe’s. “Be right back.”

Corrine laughed and turned on her back again. She wasn’t even wearing the bikini top now in order to maximize how much sunlight she was soaking in. Surrounded by her new friends and her “grandmother”, the sun bathed her in its welcoming glow.

THE END

Author’s Comments

This is a very silly, over the top setting. I’m not really a comic book geek, but I’ve read enough of them and about them to know what all the tropes are. I rather enjoy poking holes in them. For more fun reading, check out the [Innocent Bystanders Survival Guide](#) and the other fun lists on the site. The main point of **this** setting is that while Bystanders are smart enough to know what the cliches are, the Heroes and Villains are too wrapped up in them to break away. Of course, there are still all sorts of interesting stories to tell.