

The Archhuman

Nat rose up from her squatting position on the roof of the apartment building, balancing on her heels. She surveyed the glass bottle, which showed no difference in the late afternoon sunlight. She sighed audibly, and then noticed movement out of the corner of her eye. She flipped her head around and jumped back in surprise as she took in a figure sitting on the low wall behind her, his back to the four-story drop over the edge. He looked perfectly comfortable, one ankle crossed over the other knee, elbow resting to cradle his face as he smiled at her. She hadn't even heard anyone else come up the fire escape.

"Um, can I help you?" she stuttered, tucking her dark hair behind her ear. He smiled wider. "No," he said, his voice a musical sing-song even in that one word. Nat flushed, unsure of what to do now. How dare he defy all normal societal conventions, when clearly she wanted to be left alone! He seemed perfectly at ease to be intruding on her space.

"Do I know you?" she tried, hoping to ease the awkwardness she felt. He took his face off his hand and faced her directly. "No, I don't believe we've met. I'm Remi. And you are...?" He looked at her questioningly. "Nat. Natalie. But, just Nat, really." Why did she say her name? If he was a crazy homeless man, now he knew who she was. He didn't seem homeless though. He had longer sandy blonde hair, and a bit of a five o'clock shadow, but he was clean enough, in jeans and a t-shirt that said 'Oregon: The Beaver State.'

"Alright, 'just Nat,'" Remi nodded over at the bottle, "let's see what you can do."

She flushed crimson. Surely he can't know what she was trying to do? "Um... what, what are you talking about?" she stammered, hands balling into fists and unclenching out of anxiety. "The bottle. You were staring at it quite intently. I assumed you were trying to blow it up with your mind." That wide smile was still on his face as he stood up and looked at her expectantly. Nat's mind raced. Maybe it was kind of obvious what was going through her mind, if someone was observing her? Maybe he thought *she* was the crazy one.

"That kind of thing is impossible, right?" She laughed. He sat back down on the wall, looking a little petulant. "Why are you asking me? Wouldn't you be the one to know if it's actually impossible or not?" Nat's smile faltered a little. His response wasn't what she was expecting. "Well, of course I can't do anything to it with my mind. Laws of physics, you know?"

Remi looked visibly disappointed now. He sighed. "Well, that sucks. I thought my day might actually get a little interesting." He started to look bored, and perfectly comfortable in it, as if boredom was his resting mood.

Nat was really confused now. This stranger wasn't acting normal. She now wanted to try and find a way out of this conversation and back to her apartment. "I'm... sorry? To disappoint you. You can stay here and try, if you want." She started to turn and walk towards the fire escape. "But what about the globe?" His calm voice stopped her in her tracks. She whipped her head around to look at him, eyes wide. "What did you say?"

"The globe," he repeated. "Didn't you make the Brenton globe explode last month?" His expression didn't change from bored curiosity.

Nat's heart rate accelerated to a fever pitch. Her adrenaline spiked, and she felt like she was frozen to the spot. "What are you talking about? How did you know I'm from Brenton?" she managed to squeak out.

"I just hear things," was all he replied. Nat thought furiously. No one even knew that it was her fault. She could barely admit that it was her without feeling more than a little insane. Unwillingly, the scene flashed through her mind. In the middle of Brenton Preparatory High School, there was a giant globe that turned constantly on its own. It was a gift from some rich alumni, supposedly, made of dark veined marble with inlays of gold. Nat loved to watch it when she walked by the glassed-in area where it was kept. The day of the explosion, she'd discovered something awful about the school, how they were covering up terrible acts that were performed by the richest students against others, her best friend Layna included. She was standing outside, looking in through the glass, and they walked by... those *boys*. Something had

flowed through her then, something terrifying and powerful. And then the Earth exploded - literally.

The fact that this stranger just happened to know something that she'd never told anyone else... Maybe he was part of the insanity. Maybe he wasn't even real and she was hallucinating right now.

"C'mon," he said, smiling again as he stood up. "I can tell by your reaction that it was totally you." He took a few steps towards her. "Maybe today *is* going to be interesting." That wide grin was back. Nat looked down at her arm and pinched it. Not dreaming. Remi looked down at her hand as she did it. "Um, okay. Weird. Are you broken?" He leaned over to look in her eyes, slight concern crossing his face.

Nat decided there was no harm in talking about it to this random person she'd probably never see again, especially since he already seemed to know. Maybe it would make her feel less crazy to actually be able to talk about it. "I did do it. The globe I mean. I'm not really sure how, but I know it was me," she said in a small voice.

Remi smiled a real smile. "Excellent." He stepped back to sit on the wall again. "Okay, let's see what you've got then."

Nat's mouth opened like a fish. "Wha- what. I mean, I can't do it again. I can't just explode things on command. I've been trying. I don't know how it happened, I mean if I knew, I would just..." She held her hands out helplessly towards the bottle, feeling drained and exasperated. "I mean, how did you even find out about me, anyway? How'd you know it was me?"

Remi shrugged. "My friend Mike." He continued to look at her nonchalantly. Nat stared at him a beat, then started sputtering again. "Mike? Who's Mike? Like are people talking about this?! I didn't even know for sure, and now other people are spreading the word?" She felt like her arms were flapping randomly at this point.

Remi spoke again. "Why don't you just try to recreate the feeling? Feelings seem to be a thing." Nat looked at him, wrinkling her brows. He talked about feelings like he'd never had any. "I can't, I mean I've tried that, but at that particular moment, I just felt a lot of anger, and injustice, and then once it started I had that vis-," Nat stopped herself, but Remi perked up like a cat that had just spotted a mouse. "A what?" he asked.

"Well," she began, not sure how to explain this part, "Sort of a vision. But not like I was hallucinating, or imagining things. It felt... visceral. Real. Like it was happening but not in that exact moment in time. It had already happened, but I knew it hadn't yet, but it had, because I was experiencing it. That doesn't make any sense."

"No, it doesn't," Remi agreed, although Nat noted it seemed like he knew exactly what she was talking about.

"What's your story?" she suddenly asked. "Who are you? Do you live in this building? How come I've never seen you around before, but all of a sudden you're here knowing this exact big secret I have?"

"Oh," Remi said, "Well, I'm just around. I just hang out, really. I'm an archangel. Do you have any popcorn? I love popcorn." He stood up and went down the fire escape.

"I'm sorry, WHAT?" Nat screeched. She followed him and noted he was stepping on the landing to her kitchen window. "Hey, that's my apartment! What the hell?" She scrambled down after him and practically dove into her window. She was convinced now that he was crazy, if not homeless as well, and now she just wanted him out of her place. He was rummaging through her cabinets, and apparently found what he was looking for. "Sweet," he said, pulling a popcorn bag out of its plastic sheet and opening up her little microwave on the counter.

"What the hell do you think you're doing? Get out!" she stepped in front of him, arms crossed. She eyed the baseball bat she had propped against the front door for protection. He stared at her. "No, I don't think you want to do that. You're going to need me around. Especially if you can't use your mind power thingy again."

She stopped short, standing in front of the kitchen. Her apartment was tiny, with a kitchen, attached living room, and a curtained off area where her bed was, with a small bathroom next to that. Her taste could only be described as "eclectic chaotic" as clothes and blankets of various colors were strewn over the mismatched secondhand furniture. The microwave Remi was standing in front of was basically the only thing she bought new when she hurriedly moved in a few weeks ago. She had to get away from everything, everyone. She didn't want to hurt anyone else and she had this sinking feeling in her gut that she would someday.

"Why would I need you around? Am I in danger? Do other people know? Does the government know?" Nat started to panic a bit, thinking of what she could hurriedly grab and throw in her backpack if she had to start running.

The microwave dinged above the pops of kernels. Remi smiled and opened the microwave, shaking the bag and looked like a gleeful child. "I love popcorn!" Nat stared at him incredulously until he opened the bag, blew on the first few kernels, and threw them in his mouth, munching noisily.

"Well," he said, not very clearly over the chewing, "Not the government, no. But definitely some people are going to find out and they would rather just kill you and get it over with."

"Kill me?!" Nat squeaked, "Why? I mean, okay, I guess I'm dangerous, but why just immediately kill me? I don't even know if it will happen again."

Remi stopped mid-chew and leveled his gaze at her. "Oh, it's going to happen again. You know it, in your bones." His voice was more serious than it had been since he appeared on that roof. "You're the Harbinger."

Chills broke out all along Nat's arms and the back of her neck. "Wha-what's a Harbinger?"

"Not a harbinger. The Harbinger. You, my dear, herald the coming of the Antichrist," Remi explained, back to focusing on his popcorn, reaching the last few kernels in the bag.

Nat started laughing. Slightly at first, and then almost uncontrollably. She knew it. She knew this guy was absolutely crazy. She had experienced some weird stuff over the last month, but this was by far the craziest. She deduced she was either a magnet for weirdness, or this was a sign that she was absolutely insane and imagining all this in her head.

Stuck on that thought, she stopped laughing, took a calculated look at Remi, who had been watching her with a still bored but slightly concerned look on his face, then leaped forward to see if he was real by touching his arm. He balked and strangled out a "No, don't!" before Nat's fingers collided with his skin.

In the briefest of nanoseconds before she made contact, time seemed to slow to almost nothing. Nat swore she could feel the ions between her skin and his connecting before they actually touched. When her skin finally met his, there was a blinding, white hot searing pain, and then time seemed to make up for the delay by speeding up rapidly, and Nat was blown across the room, her head hitting the wall opposite her.

In the last few moments before she blacked out, she swore she saw Remi's entire frame lit up with lightning, highlighting more of a metal, grotesque-looking skeleton than human, framed by massive glowing wings with feathers...

Nat blinked her eyes open. She was lying on her back on the living room floor. There was a smell in the air. 'Ozone,' her brain placed the word attached to the smell. She sat up gingerly and looked around. Remi was sitting on the couch, looking bored again, watching her. "What... was that?" she choked out, rubbing the back of her head.

His expression turned scolding for just a minute. "Don't touch me, don't ever touch me. You're lucky you're archhuman. That would have killed a normal human."

"Okay," Nat said determinedly, sitting up on a beanbag chair across from him. "Explain. What's an archhuman? Why do you think I'm the Harbinger? What is going on?"

Remi sighed. "I didn't want to be the one to do this," he started, "but that asshole is always late." Nat looked at him questioningly. "My friend Mike I was telling you about," he replied.

Nat stared. "Wait... Mike as in... Michael the archangel??"

Remi's face remained impassive. "Oh, you've heard of him? He always gets the glory. No one's heard of me. You don't see the archangel Jeremiel plastered all over the Louvre, do you?" Nat shook her head wordlessly.

Remi went on. "Alright, so tell me about your life. Where did you grow up? Who are your parents?"

Nat blinked, not expecting the questions. "Well, it was always just me and my mom. I never knew my dad. We grew up in Brenton, kind of poor I guess, since it was just mom. She had to work a lot, and she never really had time to date or anything. She worked really hard to teach me extra things after school every night, though. She wanted me to have a better life than her. But she died in an accident a year ago." Nat looked down.

Remi's face softened just a bit. "Sorry to hear that. Did she ever tell you who your father was?"

Nat shook her head. "She said that it wasn't worth mentioning, and it didn't matter. She wanted me to just focus on becoming who I wanted to be, regardless of who my father is. He's not even on my birth certificate."

Remi sighed. "Well, she was a bit wrong on that part. It does matter quite a bit. Your father is an archangel, which makes you half human, half archangel. Thus, archhuman."

"How? If a human touching you kills the human, how is that possible?" Nat questioned.

"Not all of us are the same," he explained. "Some of us have different powers, some have more power, others have less, we all have different interests and focus on certain things. Your father has the ability to stifle his power in situations like this. Trust me, you're not the first archhuman, and you won't be the last. There are several of us who like to... mingle with

humans." His mouth turned down in distaste. "I wouldn't, obviously, even if I could. No offense, but it's just... weird."

Nat laughed. "No offense taken. This whole thing is weird to me right now. So my father... he's still alive? Who is he?"

"Ah," Remi sighed. "That's the crux of it, isn't it? Yes, he's still alive, and this particular archangel doesn't normally mate with humans. In fact, you're his only offspring in a thousand millenia. No one is sure why he did it, but he may be trying to bring a prophecy into fruition. There's a prophecy that's been floating around since The Fall, saying that the daughter of Azrael will herald the Antichrist and bring forth the end of the world." Remi looked at Nat carefully, who was staring blankly. "So... that's you, kid."

Nat wasn't sure how to process this, so she did the only natural thing: hyperventilation. Remi wordlessly handed her the empty popcorn bag, and she spent a few minutes breathing artificial butter air until she was sure she wasn't going to pass out. Remi just sat, one ankle resting on the opposite knee again, looking for all intents and purposes like he was just hanging out on her couch, like it was a normal day. Although for him, it potentially was, who knew? He was as old as the Earth, maybe older. Nat suddenly wished she'd read the Bible more, except something told her the things she needed to know weren't in there, no matter how hard she looked.

Things she needed to know. This thought brought her back on track. She couldn't change anything about her situation. She didn't know what it meant. She knew she didn't want to hurt anyone, but that was about it. To go forward, she had to find out what this all meant and what she had to do. She looked at Remi. She wasn't sure why, but she trusted him. His motivations were unknown but he at least didn't want to see her killed.

"Alright," she breathed. "So what do we do now?" Remi smiled and stood up. "That's the spirit! First, we have to go see what held up Mike. He'll have a lot more answers for you, and he has an actual plan. So we have to go see him. Got your shoes on?"

Nat looked down. Apparently, one shoe had been knocked off when she touched Remi. She hurriedly stuffed her foot in the shoe and grabbed her backpack. "Um, are we going to like, fly there or something?" she asked nervously, eyeing his back where she saw the outline of wings earlier.

Remi smiled. "Better. We're going to Uber."