

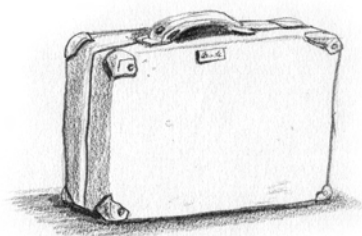
TENTH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

ALL MY FRIENDS ARE
**Super
Heroes**

ANDREW KAUFMAN

NOW WITH
MORE
SUPERHEROES





ALL MY FRIENDS ARE
SUPERHEROES

ANDREW KAUFMAN

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This is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.



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for Marlo

ONE

DESIGNATED WAITING AREA

Tom and the Perfectionist sit in the designated waiting area of Gate 23, Terminal 2, Lester B. Pearson International Airport. It's 10:13 a.m. Tom watches the Perfectionist check the address on her carry-on luggage. She tugs the tag. It's the third time she's done this. She looks around the airport lounge. There are more people than seats. She can't figure out why no one has taken the empty chair to her right.

The chair to her right isn't empty. Tom sits in this chair. To the Perfectionist, Tom is invisible. He's been trying to convince her he isn't since August 14th, their wedding night, six months ago. Tom has whispered and shouted. He's made phone calls and sent faxes, telegrams and emails. Mutual friends have tried to convince her that Tom isn't invisible. They can see him. She can't. Tom is invisible only to the Perfectionist.

They have fifteen minutes before boarding flight AC117 to Vancouver. The Perfectionist is completely unaware that Tom's beside her. He touches the back of her head; the Perfectionist begins to hiccup. Whenever Tom touches her head, she hiccups. When he touches her leg she has muscle spasms. Touching her back makes her sneeze. Tom takes his hand away from her head and puts it in his lap. The Perfectionist stops hiccuping.

Their relationship has never been simple. The Perfectionist is a superhero. The source of her power is her need for order. She needs it so badly she can will it to happen with her mind. Tom isn't a superhero, although the Perfectionist isn't the first superhero he's dated.

Tom's first superhero girlfriend was Someday. She had red hair, a compact frame and two superpowers: an amazing ability to think big and an unlimited capacity to procrastinate. Someday had never used her superpowers in combination until one Sunday morning, three months after she'd started dating Tom. They were lying in bed. Someday was staring at the ceiling.

'Imagine it all,' Someday said.

'Hmmm,' Tom said. He kissed Someday's freckled shoulder.

'We're going to get married and own a home. We're going to have kids ...' she said.

Tom stopped kissing her freckled shoulder. He stopped moving his fingers. They could hear the refrigerator.

'... someday,' Someday quickly added.

The moment she said it, she shrank. It started happening all the time.

'I'm going to paint the bathroom ...' she'd say.

‘Don’t say it!’ Tom would yell.

‘... someday,’ Someday would say. She’d shrink.

Every time Someday used her superpowers in combination she shrank, and every time she shrank, she shrank by a little bit more. When they’d met in March, Someday stood 5’ 4”. By May she was 4’ 7”. At the end of August she was 11”. By October she was sleeping on the cotton from a bottle of aspirin.

The last time Tom saw her was in December, through a microscope. She stood next to a dust particle.

‘Someday, I miss you!’ Tom told her.

‘Someday you won’t,’ she said.

She disappeared.

Tom’s second superhero girlfriend was tv Girl. As a child, tv Girl loved television. She could empathize with the people on television in ways she couldn’t with real-life people. She watched so much television, caring so much about the people she watched, that her connection with television became biological. She started crying televisions. When tv Girl was sad, little television sets would flow down her face.

Tom wasn’t very nice to tv Girl. He didn’t have a television. He’d go over to her apartment and be mean to her just to watch her cry.

At his own wedding reception, Tom was introduced to the Sitcom Kid. Tom didn’t know the Sitcom Kid was tv Girl’s older brother. Tom stuck out his hand to be shaken. The Sitcom Kid made a fist and punched Tom in the mouth.

‘She’s my sister, man!’ said the Sitcom Kid.

‘Who is?’ Tom asked.

‘tv Girl! You made her feel like Mallory when she dated Alex’s best friend at university.’

Tom held a paper napkin to his lip. He didn’t swing back. He knew he deserved that punch in the mouth – maybe not on his wedding night, but he deserved that punch. All the wedding guests circled Tom and the Sitcom Kid. Hypno knew this was his moment.

Only the Perfectionist noticed Hypno making his way towards her. She wasn’t afraid of him. She knew how he worked. He’d done it the first time they’d met. He’d come into the diner where she worked. He’d sat by himself at the counter, just as the noon crowd had her swamped.

‘I need coffee,’ Hypno commanded. He waved his hand in front of her face. He hypnotized her.

The Perfectionist dropped everything. Plates of hamburgers got cold under heat lamps as she made a new pot just for him. She filled a mug and took it directly to Hypno. She set it down in front of him.

‘How did you do that?’ the Perfectionist asked.

‘You’re a nice person,’ Hypno answered.

‘So?’

‘You wanted to give me good service.’

‘So?’

‘I hypnotized you. But you can’t hypnotize anyone into doing anything they don’t already want to do. I merely give permission,’ Hypno said. He tapped his spoon on the rim of his coffee mug and hypnotized her into believing that sex with him would be the best of her life. The Perfectionist dated him, intensely, for the next three months.



‘Just because you were hypnotized to think it was the best sex of your life doesn’t mean that it wasn’t,’ is how the Perfectionist remembers their relationship. For Hypno, the feelings went much, much deeper. He was still in love with the Perfectionist when he approached her at the wedding reception.

The Perfectionist stood still. His timing was perfect; a brawl had broken out by the shrimp table. If he made some sort of scene, nobody would notice. Hypno hugged her. She hugged him back. It was her wedding day. She didn’t need anybody’s permission to do anything.

‘Congratulations,’ he whispered.

‘What?’ asked the Perfectionist.

‘Congratulations,’ he whispered, even more softly.

‘What?’ the Perfectionist asked again. She couldn’t hear him. She turned her head. She offered her ear to Hypno. He leaned close and whispered.

Only the Ear heard what Hypno said. The Ear was in the bathroom changing the cotton in his ears. He’d just pulled out the used cotton. He had fresh cotton in his hand. His hearing was at its most sensitive.

The Ear heard the fight between Tom and the Sitcom Kid. He heard someone whispering behind it.

‘Are you worried that he’s not like us?’ the Ear heard. He recognized Hypno’s voice. The Ear didn’t know who Hypno was talking to. The other person wasn’t saying anything.

The Perfectionist wasn’t saying anything because she was thinking. She had never been asked that question before and

she realized she'd never let herself even think about it. She bit her bottom lip. She nodded her head.

'What do you see in him?' Hypno asked.

'I ... I ... don't know,' the Perfectionist replied. She knew she loved Tom but she suddenly didn't know why.

Hearing the Perfectionist's voice, the Ear rushed out of the bathroom. He tried to push through the crowd encircling Tom and the Sitcom Kid. He kept listening.

'In fact,' the Ear heard Hypno whisper, 'I don't think you see anything at all.'

'Perf, no!' called the Ear.

But the Ear was too late. The Perfectionist was hypnotized. Tom was invisible to her.

TWO

ALL HIS FRIENDS ARE SUPERHEROES

A group of children, all holding hands and wearing identical blue T-shirts, walks past Tom. He leans forward in the uncomfortable airport chair and watches them walk away. Careful not to touch her, Tom bends close to the Perfectionist. 'Please see me,' he pleads. 'You have to see me by the time we land in Vancouver.'

This is true. The Perfectionist is moving to Vancouver. She's shipped her belongings and rented an apartment. As soon as flight AC117 touches down in Vancouver, she'll leave everything, Tom included, behind. All the pain, all the heartache, all the love she has for him, will disappear. She'll make Vancouver perfect. She has the power to do this. It's been six months since he disappeared. Six months is long enough.

It was the Amphibian who pulled Tom off Hypno that night. He let Tom get in five punches. Hypno was down and his nose

was bloody. The Amphibian decided five was enough. He grabbed Tom's arms and pulled him off Hypno.

Tom resisted. The Amphibian had to use all his strength to keep Tom's arms pinned behind his back.

'One more!' Tom called.

'It's not going to help,' the Amphibian said.

'One more!' Tom said.

'It will not help,' the Amphibian said.

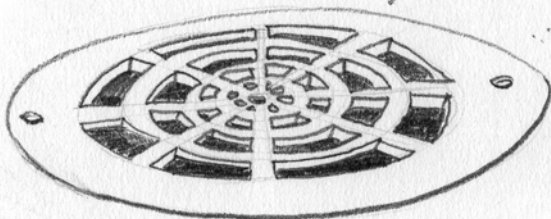
Tom's arms went limp. He stopped resisting. Hypno smirked. Tom spit in Hypno's face. He hadn't wanted to invite Hypno to the wedding in the first place.

The Amphibian and Tom are best friends now, but when Tom moved into town, he didn't know anybody. He'd taken a job as a pool cleaner. The season was ending and Tom had nothing else lined up. He was draining a pool he hadn't cleaned as scheduled. The water had a murky green hue. The people who owned the pool had been away for months and they were coming back the next day. The pool had to be dry and something was clogging the drain at the bottom.

Tom took off his shoes. He took off his shorts and shirt. He dove naked into the pool and swam to the bottom.

The chemicals made it impossible to keep his eyes open. He felt around with his hands. His fingers found something slimy. It was firm in the middle but the top layer felt soft. Tom pulled. Whatever it was was really stuck.

Tom put his feet on the bottom of the pool, got his legs into it and freed whatever it was. He squinted his eyes open. What



he saw made him gasp. He swallowed a mouthful of chlorine pool water, then raced for the surface as fast as he could.

It easily beat him. It slipped out of the pool.

Tom didn't want to get out of the pool knowing it was waiting for him. He swam around, trying to figure out what to do. Eventually he ran out of breath and had to break the surface.

'Thanks!' the Amphibian said.

Tom looked at the Amphibian's green skin, webbed feet and webbed hands. He'd thought it was about to rip him limb from limb, and relief flooded through him when this didn't happen.

'No problem,' Tom answered.

'What's your superpower?' the Amphibian asked.

'Superpower?'

'Yeah, you know. Your superpower.'

'I don't have one,' Tom told him. 'I'm just regular.'

'Really?' the Amphibian said.

Tom swam over to the side of the pool. They shook hands.

The Amphibian introduced Tom to all his friends. All the Amphibian's friends were superheroes. The Amphibian's friends became Tom's friends. Now all of Tom's friends are superheroes. But because they all have a superpower, and everyone they know has a superpower, having a superpower is nothing special to them. What's special to them is not having a superpower. They can't imagine how anyone could get through life without having a superpower. It seems unbelievable to them.

'Now boarding rows 14 through 34. Rows 14 through 34 now boarding,' the airline representative announces.

The Perfectionist picks up her carry-on luggage. She stands in line. Tom waits in his seat. He hates standing in any line he doesn't have to; the Perfectionist can't watch any line she could be standing in. At this stage, they would have been separated anyway.

