

“The Girl With The Power”

By Lauren Rivers

There are a lot of names for people like me. Cursed, gifted, special. I think the term I hear most often is Active. The name comes from the fact that no one is born with special abilities, at least no one I know of. Everyone gets their powers when they reach the age of maturity, usually sixteen or seventeen. A week ago it was my sixteenth birthday.

I didn't think anything of it at the time. Most kids think of it as the day they get their learners permit or the day when they don't have to listen to their parents anymore. I just thought of it as another day of the year. It's not that I don't appreciate the celebrations most folks have on their birthdays, but for my sister and me it usually was just a little bit different than any other day.

Most of the time I end up having to make my own dinner and get myself to school since my older sister has a big government job that usually requires her to work long hours and be out all the time. When she's home we generally spend it hanging out watching a movie or something low key because we typically don't have the energy for anything else. In any event the only thing really different about my birthday is that I get a present and my sister makes an extra effort to get home early so we can do something like order pizza together or go somewhere special.

This year my present was one of those watches that tracks how far you walk. Generally big sis isn't one for impractical gifts. Perhaps it has to do with the fact that for most of our lives we've only had each other to depend on. In that kind of scenario you usually don't end up having a lot of frivolous needs. It was one of the pink ones, probably because of the cultural assumption that all girly products have to be pink, even the practical stuff. I hear they even have a pink gun or two. Honestly, if you're needing to defend yourself who gives a bear's ass what color your gun is?

In any case it was something I could use and did the double duty of keeping time too. I slipped it on my wrist and thanked her for the thought.

Imagine my surprise when she said she wasn't finished. She ordered me to close my eyes and the next thing I knew there was a small box in my hands with a ribbon on top. With no small amount of curiosity I opened the box to find a small bracelet inside with purple and clear jewels all around it except for the clasp. Purple being my favorite color it was perfect. I knew the stones weren't real, but to me that didn't matter. It was a gift from my sister, and that's all I needed to know.

“Thank you,” I said. I remember gushing over it for at least ten minutes after the fact. Once I had expressed how much I loved it my sister brought me a cupcake with vanilla frosting and a raspberry filling. Since a cake was impractical for two people, we always got a big cupcake from the local bakery which we split between us. I blew out the gently burning candle and we watched a movie I'd wanted to see which my sister had the foresight to rent for us.

It's hard to believe how everything was normal back then. If I'd known what was going to happen afterwards I would have appreciated it more.

The next few days were the last I would ever know of 'normal'. I went to school, sat in class, and did what every teenager in the history of the world does.

The funny thing is, everyone knows how it happens. They talk about it all the time on the news. People are living their life like everything's fine, and the next thing you know you've got abilities. The media called it 'awakening'. I suppose it's appropriate, given when it happens to you it's like you've woken up from a lifelong dream. It seems like nothing at first. Just another impulse.

For me it happened when I was in the bathroom. I'd just finished washing my paws when one of the popular girls came in. I kept my head down but it seemed like somehow I'd done something to offend the upper crust of high school society. The next thing I knew I was shoved violently to the side. I kept my balance by grabbing onto the countertop but just barely. I looked up at my tormentor and immediately realized who she was. Samantha Curtis.

She's a skunk with red hair and a temper to match. If you ask her she's the Almighty's gift to fashion. Personally I don't understand half the things she says are in style. All I know is she's the one that most people say determines what's cool. I guess she decided I wasn't. Most of the school worships her, fears her, or knows enough to stay out of her way. Most of the time I do, too. This time, I had somehow earned her undivided attention.

"Who said you could use this bathroom?" Samantha asked.

I knew no matter what my response was it would be wrong, but to refuse to answer would probably be just as bad. Either way I was pretty much screwed so I might as well get off a parting shot. "Your mother did, when she recommended places to wash off that ugly makeup of yours."

Admittedly 'yo mama' jokes were about the lowest form of insult there is, but I only had a second to think about it and I was already still a little off balance from the shove.

Either way it had the expected result. Her eyes widened with rage and she bared her teeth in the nastiest growl I'd ever heard come from a girl. Don't believe anyone who says the males of the species are the roughest. They've never messed with a teenage girl.

It happened fast.

I don't even remember feeling it. I closed my eyes right as the fist was barreling towards my muzzle and the next thing I knew there was a big clap of sorts and I was standing in front of a crater of broken tile and twisted plumbing. I didn't even see what happened, and neither did Samantha apparently. She was lying unconscious on the floor in a pool of growing water.

I knew I had to beat it before anyone showed up to see what happened. I checked to make sure she was alive and ran like hell. Fortunately no one saw me but I didn't stop running until I was clear on the other side of the school.

Everyone in school stopped to watch the ambulance pull Samantha out of the restroom. From what I heard later she was unconscious for three days. She said after the fact that she didn't remember what happened but whether that was true is anyone's guess. All I know is for right now my secret was safe. If she did know what had occurred in the restroom then she didn't reveal it to anyone based on her numerous videos shot from the comfort of her hospital bed. Leave it to her to turn a three day coma into social media gold.

It doesn't feel like much, at least not at first. A little tingle or something, just a sensation like your engine is revving up. I don't know if it's the same for everyone. All I

know is that I could feel it in my bones. It didn't take long before I figured out what it meant. I was an Active.

Most folks I know keep it under wraps and perhaps it's for the best. Reactions to what we are and what people like me can do range from awe to outright hatred. Given the fact that people known to possess such abilities tend to attract attention I knew I had to keep mine as close to my chest as possible. I found a place that was relatively secluded to test my powers. It was far enough away from anyplace populated but not too difficult for me to get to from school.

I started small, just seeing if I could identify what it was that I could do. The first time I stood about fifteen feet away from an empty soup can. I held out my paw and spread my feet apart, feeling the energy build from my core and travel through my paws, exploding outward in a wave of force powerful enough to flatten the can against the far wall.

Once I was certain nobody had heard anything I ran like hell. After a little research I found out the formal name for what I can do is concussive force blasts. Think of it like a sudden burst of energy pushing your target away from wherever it is you're standing. It doesn't look like much, mostly a rippling effect in the air. Most of the effect is visible in the objects it's being used against. I've been able to repel larger and larger objects the more power I put into it but I've been hesitant to see how much I can do at full blast.

Not to mention I think my sister is starting to get a little suspicious. I told her I was in some after school club but that excuse also limits me to training a couple of times a week. If she has any clue what I've really been up to she hasn't let on, but knowing her before long she'll want some proof of what I've been doing. I might actually have to join something.

Everyone at school turned up to witness Samantha's heroic return to class. She had some crutches and a fake looking cast on her ankle but I knew she wasn't really hurt. Of course she played it up for the cheap seats, pretending to be pain and letting the popular boys carry her books to class. I knew she wasn't actually hurt since she'd really been released a week ago. She just stayed home to better sell her story. Hard to believe some people define themselves by how many likes they get on their photo posts.

I ran into her after school a few days after she'd been back. I can't be sure if she was waiting for me or if it was an accidental encounter but either way she shot me a glare like she could destroy me with her mind. I don't know if anyone out there can actually do that but if they could, she had the stare down. Despite my best efforts to avoid her she stood in my way when I tried to pass. Her crutches were conspicuously leaning against the lockers.

A quick glance around proved that no one was going to interrupt us. More than likely she had arranged for the privacy with the help of some carefully placed senior classmen. So much for me being able to avoid what was coming next. With all thoughts of this being anything other than a trap banished from my mind I started thinking about what I was prepared to do.

I still didn't know how much she remembered, and it was risky to use one's powers in public. Once you became flagged for having them it was hard to avoid what followed. I'd been lucky so far but I had no idea how long that luck would hold.

As if she sensed my hesitation Samantha smirked and stepped forward. "I've been waiting for this."

I chose to give no response. I wanted to let her keep talking to find out how much she knew. People like her could never resist the desire to lord their perceived superiority over you and in doing so tended to reveal more than they should. I waited. She came to within a few inches of my muzzle and growled. Baring her fangs she spoke very quietly.

"I know you did something to me. Whatever you did I know it was you. You're the reason they had to take me out of that bathroom on a stretcher," she said.

So that was it. Revenge, plain and simple. I could tell based on her lack of detail she didn't know what happened any more than I did. The only thing we could be sure of was that we were both certain I was responsible. Normally for incidents involving special abilities the authorities are summoned. However, other than a momentary surge of energy most abilities don't leave much in the way of trace evidence other than a bit of destruction here or there, or sometimes nothing at all. It's one of the reasons it's so difficult researching incidents where powers are involved.

I knew if there was any evidence at all that I had done something I would have been called to the principal's office. Given that hadn't happened, it meant no one had seen or recorded the event so likely Samantha was seeking to find out for herself just what had happened in that bathroom and maybe get some payback in the process.

"Look," I said, "I didn't mean to hurt you." I knew it wasn't likely this would produce any results but it seemed like it was worth a shot.

Samantha narrowed her gaze and widened her stance. "I can't say the same." She swung at me hard.

I ducked, the air from her attack whistling above my head. I kicked her in the stomach hard enough to push her into the lockers. Under most circumstances the sound of a fight would be enough to gather a crowd of our classmates around to watch, but fortunately for me Samantha's desire for privacy worked in my favor. I dodged her next attack which connected rather painfully with the metal of the locker. Sliding to the side I thrust a knee into her side and then delivered a hard right cross to the back of her head. She hit the ground in a fairly significant thud and groaned.

Stepping onto her back I applied just enough weight to keep her face down on the tile floor. "Whatever you think you're doing, back off." I menaced her with a growl just before turning away to leave.

A few of the boys who had no doubt ensured our privacy showed up probably expecting to congratulate her but instead finding the most popular girl laid out on the floor. They picked her up before anyone saw, and I'm sure right about now they're swearing revenge on me.

I guess it couldn't be helped. Once you become the target of the popular kids there's not much you can do about it. I walked away as quickly as possible but it wasn't over, not by a long shot.

While I can't say I was ever particularly popular at this school after the second incident between us people started to keep a more noticeable distance from me. I don't know what Samantha told them but I started to hear people mutter as I walked by them in the halls. Maybe they thought I couldn't hear them, but I could. A lot of them watched me from the moment I entered their field of view until the time I turned around the corner. In some ways I appreciated the distance but I knew it was only the calm before the storm.

A few weeks later I overheard what they were calling me. No doubt in an effort to save face and play the victim to her legions of adoring senior boys she couldn't admit some bear girl from the suburbs kicked her ass. No. I must have used some ability to take her down.

There was no evidence, and she had made sure there were no witnesses, but that's the thing about rumors. Once they start they're very hard to stop. Whether it was true or not, from that day forward every time I walked by a group of people one of them would call me what had become my unofficial nickname.

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