

Dylan & Faedra

The Super-Not Chronicles

By C.L. Wells

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Table of Contents

[Ride to School](#)

[A Revealing Hike](#)

[True Confessions](#)

[The Meeting](#)

[Truth or Dare?](#)

[Miscalculations](#)

[A New Plan](#)

[Judgment Day](#)

[The Blow-up](#)

[A Dangerous Discovery](#)

[Secrets Revealed](#)

[Making Plans](#)

[The Secret Weapon](#)

[Operation Track the Mole](#)

[Charge!](#)

[Sample Chapter of The Testament Stone](#)

[Four Spiritual Truths](#)

[Thank You](#)

[Acknowledgements](#)

[About the Author](#)

Chapter 1 – Ride to School

Journal entry #1

Date: Monday – Do I really have to go to school today? Again?

Dear journal, or whatever, this is all new to me so I'll just go with it. Have you ever wanted to have superpowers? I mean, wanted to fly, or be super-strong, or see through walls – something like that? Well, in my world, ninety-nine percent of the population has superpowers, while one percent of the population doesn't. Guess which group I'm in... You guessed it. I'm in the group that doesn't have superpowers. I'm what is affectionately referred to as a super-not and, yeah, it stinks.

Way back before my parents were born, a huge comet passed by planet Earth. Scientists had been tracking it for years, and many people thought it was going to destroy our world. But it didn't. Instead, it streaked by about a thousand miles away. And while the comet didn't destroy our planet, it did change our lives forever.

In the years following the comet's near miss, people began noticing strange behavior in some of the earth's younger population. These days, it's not that big of a deal for a toddler to lift up a couch with one arm to retrieve a wayward pacifier, or for a two-year-old to fly up to the top of a tree and bring 'kitty' back down to earth, but back then, it was really something. You get the picture. Practically everyone born after the comet came was some form of 'super'... except, of course, for my kind – the super-nots.

I wonder if going to high school was this tough back in the days before most of the population had superpowers? I'm sure it was nothing like going to high school now, where 99% of the student body have superpowers, and you don't. Like I said, it stinks.

Right now I'm waiting for the school bus, already counting the seconds until the dismissal bell rings. One of the people who makes this whole thing bearable is my best friend, Faedra. She's a super-not too, and we've been friends since third grade. Here she comes now. Gotta go.

** * * * **

My mom had given me a new journal for my birthday and suggested I start writing as a way to help me deal with living life as a super-not. I wasn't quite sure what to write, but I'd decided to give it a shot. I closed the journal and slipped it into my backpack as I saw Faedra walking up to the bus stop.

"Hey, Dylan."

"Hey, Faedra."

"I'm so excited about the pep rally today! I can't wait to hear the Cool Tones play my song!"

Faedra may not have had superpowers, but she *was* a talented song writer. She wrote an awesome fight song for our school, and the school's jazz band was going to play it at the pep rally at the end of the day.

"Yeah, that's gonna rock. I'm happy for you."

My face and my voice must not have matched the excitement I was trying to convey with my words. Faedra was frowning.

"What's the matter, Dylan?"

I turned to see that the bus was pulling up to our stop, and Bruno stuck his big fat head out of one of the bus windows and yelled, "Hey, Dylan the super-not! Get on this bus so you can do my homework!"

Faedra smiled at me sheepishly.

"*That's* what's the matter," I said to Faedra as we got on the bus.

We picked a seat near the front of the bus. I was hoping that Bruno was just being his usual charming self and didn't, in fact, have any homework that he wanted me to do for him on the way to school. Before the bus driver closed the door and pulled away, however, Bruno had lumbered up the aisle and pushed the kid sitting behind us up against the window so that he could fit his six-foot-two, one hundred ninety-pound frame into the seat behind us. The kid pushed up against the window - some skinny ninth grader from the looks of it - looked terrified.

Bruno's meat hook of an arm reached over the seat from behind me and plopped his Pre-Algebra book down on my lap. I noticed there was a blank sheet of paper and a pencil shoved between the pages – how thoughtful of him.

"I need problems one through ten done by the time we get to school," he boomed.

"Has it ever occurred to you to *try* to do your homework before forcing someone else to do it for you?" I replied, trying not to be too snarky and failing miserably.

"Hey, I'm going to play pro football. Probably won't even go to college anyway since the leagues can draft supers straight out of high school, so who needs to know how to do this stuff? I just need a passing grade so my old man doesn't ground me."

The thought of deliberately putting all of the wrong answers down for the homework I was about to do for him briefly crossed my mind, but it was quickly replaced with a vision of Bruno sticking my head in the toilet in the boy's bathroom in retribution. So, instead of resisting, I did what most people did when Bruno 'asked' them to do his homework – I started working the math problems for him. You have to wonder why his teachers hadn't caught on yet. I mean, how many different forms of handwriting could one kid have? Practically everyone on the bus had done homework for him at some point, and yet he'd never gotten called on it. The teachers were probably just as scared of him as the students were. He was, after all, super-strong, and most of the teachers were single-power brainiacs who wouldn't stand a chance against somebody like Bruno.

I made a mental note to jot down some notes on the hierarchy of superpowers in my journal for posterity's sake. Most supers were single-powered, meaning that they had only one enhanced power trait. Flying, super-strength, enhanced mental capacity, super-speed – et cetera. Some people were doubles, meaning they had *two* superpowers. That happens about ten percent of the time. About one-tenth of one percent of people were triples, with *three* superpowers. Bruno was the garden variety single-power super. Most of the teachers were single-power super-smart supers, or, as most people called them, brainiacs.

I finished Bruno's homework as the bus pulled into the school's unloading zone and handed it back to him.

"Thanks, super-not. You better get me an 'A' or it'll be toilet-scrubbin' time."

He lumbered past our seat and down the steps of the bus. The kid he'd smushed up against the window gave a big sigh of relief.

"He's such a bully," Faedra observed.

"Let's forget about it," I replied. "The good news is that's probably the worst thing that will happen to me all day."

Boy, was I wrong.

Chapter 2 - A Revealing Hike

First period was Chemistry. I was actually pretty good at Chemistry, but I wasn't nearly as good as Chandler. Besides Faedra, Chandler was my next best friend. He was a brainiac. You might be wondering why a brainiac like Chandler would want to be friends with a regular-old super-not like me. Well, let's just say he was a bit socially awkward. Okay, he was a *lot* socially awkward.

I noticed him sitting by himself on the first day of school back in eighth grade, so I went and asked if I could sit with him. I mean, I assumed he was a super-not like me. Skinny, a foot shorter than anyone else in the room, and wearing coke-bottle glasses. We started talking, and it turned out he's a cool guy underneath all the super-smart geekiness. We'd been friends ever since. Needless to say, our Chemistry projects *rocked!*

Brainiacs had advanced classes for most of their subjects, but they were required to take at least one 'social normalization elective' per term to help them learn to socialize with non-brainiacs. That meant they had to take a normal course, like the rest of us. Otherwise, they'd tend to lose the ability to communicate with mere mortals about normal things like relationships, sports, and pretty much anything else that didn't involve nuclear physics or some form of higher math. Luckily for me, Chandler chose to take science as his social normalization elective.

One year, for the science project competition, we made a rocket using only items available at the local hardware store, plus a go-pro camera, that *actually* made it into sub-orbit. Yes, sir, first place in the state competition for that one. He'd already received a four-year scholarship to MIT that was waiting for him after he graduated.

"Hey, Chandler," I said as I sat down at our lab table. "What's our lab on today?"

“How to make wood alcohol through distillation,” he replied. “I took the liberty of setting up the apparatus. Make sure to keep the temperature of the water at precisely 78.3 degrees Celsius. That’s the optimum temperature for the distillation process.”

I scanned the lab instruction sheet the teacher had placed on our desks and didn’t see the temperature mentioned anywhere. “Did he write that temperature on the board somewhere? ‘Cause I don’t see it.”

“No.”

“Okay, wise-guy, did you look that up on your phone?”

He looked at me with a quizzical look on his face.

“The temperature... how do you know it should be 78.3 degrees Celsius?” I prod.

“*Science Journal*, issue 57... I learned that in fourth grade.”

“Really, super-geek?” Chandler was totally out of touch with how smart (and geeky) he actually was.

“Sorry.”

“Don’t be. Saves me five minutes trying to find that information on the internet. Hey, we still on for the afternoon hike?”

“Yeah, sure,” he replied. “I wore my hiking shoes, so I don’t even need to go home first.” He stuck a skinny leg out from under the table to brandish one of his shoes, and wiggled it.

“Cool.”

Hiking was a shared passion for Chandler and me. We both loved the stunning views from the tops of the mountains near where we lived, and it gave us both a chance to escape from the sometimes suffocating world we lived in. Me from being surrounded by supers that I could never compete with physically, and Chandler from being surrounded by frequently challenging and awkward social situations that he wanted to avoid like the plague. Out there, we could be just who we were with no one to judge. Faedra came along with us most of the time. I wasn’t sure if she liked it as much as Chandler and I did, but she seemed to have a good time.

The bell rang, and the teacher called the class to order, took roll, and then gave us the intro to the day's lab. We were done fifteen minutes before anyone but Sam Tulver's team. Sam was another brainiac.

* * * * *

The school pep rally went off without a hitch. The Cool Tones' performance of Faedra's song was out of the ball park good. I watched her scream along with everyone else in the crowd when the song was over. She seemed so happy, so... beautiful... Suddenly it felt hotter in the gym. Not because of the hundreds of screaming high schoolers sitting all around me, either. Faedra was my best friend, and we'd been best friends forever, but what I'd just felt wasn't a best friend feeling.

I noticed how pretty her wavy blond hair looked as it fell down her back. Then I came back to my senses. *What the heck was that about? Must be some crazy teenage hormones.* I looked back at her, and she turned to look at me, her smile a mile wide, and suddenly I blushed. I smiled back, trying to cover up my embarrassment.

"That was great!" I said, shifting the conversation to anything but myself. "You did a really good job on that song, Fae."

"I am sooo pumped!" she replied, turning back to the band as the next song started.

I was just relieved that she wasn't looking in my direction any longer.

* * * * *

After school, Faedra and I met up at Chandler's truck. He was already there waiting for us. We all piled in the front, shoving our book bags onto the floorboard. Faedra sat in the middle, and I rolled down the passenger window so we didn't suffocate on the way out of town. The A/C had sprung a pin-hole leak two weeks

before when we'd all gone muddin', and all of the refrigerant had leaked out. But it was a beautiful day, and the breeze felt good against my face as we tore off down the road.

An hour later, we'd parked in one of the little off-road parking lots at the trail head of one of our favorite hiking trails. We liked it because not many people hiked this trail at this time of day. It led up to a rock outcrop at the top of one of the mountains, and the view was breathtaking. It wasn't as high up as Cheaha Overlook, but it was still a great view.

Today, the hiking was perfect. We didn't see another single soul on the way up to the top, and we didn't speak for the first ten minutes on the trail. Finally, Chandler broke the silence.

"My parents are getting a divorce," he said matter-of-factly.

"What?!" I said as I stopped and turned around. He almost ran into me.

"Yeah, I mean... I'm pretty sure. The signs are all there, you know. They don't talk much to each other anymore. Everything they say is either to my sister or me - almost never directly to each other. Dad keeps working later and later. I've seen my mom... I've seen my mom crying sometimes on the back porch... Anyway, like I said. I think they're getting a divorce. Statistically, it's not unusual... but it still sucks."

I looked at Faedra and her face showed the same thing I was feeling. "Are you sure? Maybe they're just going through a hard time," she said as she put her hand on Chandler's shoulder. I felt something when I saw her hand touch him - jealousy maybe? *I'm such a jerk!* I thought to myself. My second best friend's parents were probably getting a divorce, and I was jealous of him because Faedra was touching his shoulder. *Get a grip, Dylan!*

"I feel... I just feel that something bad is about to happen and I can't do anything about it. I'm not sure what to do."

"Dude, if there's anything I can do..." I offered.

"Well... I just wanted to tell you guys, that's all. If it's going to happen, then it happens."

Faedra gave Chandler a side-hug, and I felt my chest tightening up. I bit my tongue and didn't say anything. *Must not let feelings show!* I told myself like I was Bruce Banner trying to keep the Hulk from showing up.

"Thanks, I appreciate it, you guys." After a few moments, he continued, "Let's just keep hiking; I don't want to talk about it anymore right now."

I could tell he was about to cry. *Faedra* was about to cry, too. I was about to explode. I turned around and started hiking up the mountain again, grateful the moment was over with.

* * * * *

At long last, we reached the overlook where a rock outcrop jutted out from the top of the mountain and gave us a great view of the surrounding mountains and the valley before us. The sun was starting to set, and the sky was turning that glorious mixture of pink, purple, blue, and yellow. The forest around and below us stretched for miles and miles, and the new bright green growth of spring was beginning to show on some of the hardwoods, interspersed with the evergreens. I took a deep breath and just stared. No one said anything for what seemed like an hour, even though it was probably just a few minutes.

"Well, we better head back down or it'll be dark before we reach the car," I finally said. Even though I'd brought my flashlight, I wanted to avoid the possibility of missing a marker in the fading light and spending the night lost in the woods.

As I turned to go, I heard the sound of loose gravel and Chandler's voice saying, "Whoa!" My head whipped back around, and I saw him in what seemed like slow motion as he began to fall off of the edge of the rock we'd just been standing on. I began to reach out to him, but even as I did, I knew I wouldn't reach him in time. It was fifty feet down to some more rocks - a fall that would surely kill him. But *Faedra's*

hand was on his shoulder in a flash and she pulled him back onto safe ground, where he regained his footing.

Chandler was bent over, catching his breath, obviously aware of how close he'd just come to dying. Faedra's hand was on his back as she bent down to speak to him. "Are you okay?" she asked. I didn't feel that same feeling that I'd felt when she'd put her hand on his shoulder earlier. What I was feeling was something else entirely. Because, as I'd watched Faedra pull Chandler back onto the rock, I'd seen something that Chandler *didn't* see. When she pulled him back to safety, Faedra had been standing on nothing but air.

Chapter 3 – True Confessions

I didn't talk much on the way back to the truck. I couldn't believe what I had just seen with my own two eyes. Faedra was a super. My mind raced with a thousand different questions. Why hadn't she told me? Had she always been a super and just been hiding it? *Why* was she hiding it? Practically every super-not I knew (and there weren't that many) wanted to have a superpower like almost everyone else.

What bugged me more than all of the questions that I had was an underlying sense of betrayal. My best friend was hiding something from me. Not just some little something like, 'Hey, I forgot to tell you I borrowed a pen from your desk', but a *BIG* something. This was huge.

By the time we strapped our seatbelts on for the ride home, Faedra knew something was up.

"You okay, Dylan?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," I lied.

Chandler cranked up the engine and mercifully turned on the radio, cranking it up really loud so we could hear it over the wind as we headed back home.

Faedra lived a few blocks away from me, and Chandler dropped her off first. As he pulled up to my house to drop me off, I reached forward and turned off the radio.

"Hey, don't touch my tunes, man," he said.

"Faedra's a super," I blurted out without any introduction. Chandler looked at me with a quizzical look on his face.

"What sort of a joke is that?"

"It's no joke," I replied. "When she saved you from falling off the top of the overlook... I saw her feet. She was standing on thin air."

He was silent for a few seconds before he responded.

"Well, do you think you could have made a mistake?"

“No,” I said, shaking my head. “I *know* what I saw. She was *definitely* levitating.”

“Whoa.”

“Yeah, ‘whoa’. She’s been lying to me... to both of us, for who knows how long.”

“That’s sooo not cool,” he replied. “Are you going to confront her about it?”

“No... Who knows whether she would try and deny it? I mean, she may even be a double for all I know.” I turned and looked at Chandler. I wanted to see how he would react to my next question. “Will you help me spy on her? I need to know the truth, and I obviously can’t trust Faedra to tell me right now.”

I could tell he was going to say yes. Chandler got this look when he was really stoked about doing something, and he had that look right now. He started nodding his head up and down before any words came out of his mouth. “Oh, yeah. I’m in, alright. And I know just how to do it.”

* * * * *

After dinner that night, I got a text from Chandler that he had a plan. After texting back and forth for about an hour, we had all the details worked out. He had gotten some miniature drones for his birthday that had some awesome, high-performance cameras. The plan was to follow Faedra around whenever she went outside of her house and see if we could find any proof of her using her power (or powers, as the case might be).

Saturday turned out to be the perfect day for our little recon operation. Faedra sometimes worked with her dad on one of his old cars on Saturday mornings. When I called her to see what she was doing for the day, she said that she was free after lunch, but working on a car with her dad until then. I called Chandler to tell him the good news, and he came right over.

Chandler parked his truck at my house, and we walked the rest of the way to Faedra's, so we wouldn't arouse any suspicion. There's a little park right across the street from her house, and we found a bench just far enough away so that we wouldn't be seen from her house if she happened to come out the front door. Then we went to work.

Chandler popped open the plastic briefcase he'd brought with him and took out a small drone. "Hold out your hand," he said to me. I held out my hand, and he placed the drone in my palm. It was light as a feather, and not much bigger than, well, a drone that could fit in the palm of your hand.

I watched as he took out a hand-held controller with a couple of knobs on it, a joy stick, and a video monitor that was about four inches by five inches. When he flipped on a switch, the video screen showed a picture of an area of the park right in front of us, where the drone was facing.

"Cool," I said.

"Now, let's see what Faedra's doing with her dad," he said with a smile on his face. As he worked the controls, the little drone gently rose out of my palm and then zoomed across the street in the direction of Faedra's house. A few minutes later, Chandler had succeeded in landing the little spy machine on the top of a privacy fence post with a good view of the garage out behind her house. We could see the front end of one of her dad's muscle cars sticking out of the garage.

"Can this thing zoom in or something? That's a long way off."

"Oh, yeah, this baby's got..."

He proceeded to rattle off some geek-speak about how powerful the camera was and what it could do. I caught something about a powerful zoom, advanced audio capabilities, and excellent stability in flight. I finally put my hand up to flag him down.

"Okay, First Officer Spock, I get it - it's a powerful camera that can zoom in. So let's see it work," I said, motioning to the video screen. He plugged in some earbuds to the controller and handed me one of the buds, then proceeded to zoom in on the

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