

I had made a terrible mistake.

The city trusted me; they believed I was their hero. But I wasn't. I imprisoned the wrong people. The Supers weren't here to destroy us. They were here to save us. And if I don't free them, the world will end. The invaders are coming. And they will destroy us all.

*24 hours earlier*

"You don't really think this will work, do you, Tray?"

I smiled at my companion, a young red-headed woman who was still quite new to the force. "Of course it'll work. It's my design."

We were waiting at the trap I had set. I knew the Supers couldn't resist a bit of drama, so I had created some for them. The bank was being robbed. By a supervillain.

"But won't they see through the ruse?"

"Relax, May. I know these people. Trust me, they'll fall for it."

She shot me a skeptical look but didn't argue.

Most people didn't argue with me. I was Ellsbeth Tray, the head of the supervillain division of Jafferson City. I had caught the legendary Strel Hands only a month ago, a notorious villain with metal hands who was constantly underfoot. I think the Supers had caught him at least seven times. And they were going to catch him one more time for me.

"Are you so sure that they're the bad guys?" May asked quietly. I cast a glance at her. She was staring down at the bank, where there were no police cars in sight as the alarms on the building flashed.

Not this again. A few people on the force had expressed to me that they thought it was foolish to go after the Supers. After all, they were only protecting Jafferson City, like we were. But they were violent and destructive. They had leveled entire city blocks and caused millions of dollars in damage repairs. So many people had been relocated, and we did not have the infrastructure to support them, which is why they currently lived in shantytowns while the city tried to repair the damage the Supers had caused. The Supers had been working without supervision for too long. And I was going to stop them.

My phone beeped. It was Gyron, one of the best on the force.

*The Supers are here.*

Chills went down my spine. This was it.

“No time for chatter, May. Set your ray to stun. They’re here.”

The bank was a short squat structure that had been there since the days before the epidemic. It had been remodeled many times since then, but its marble frame was the same. It looked sad and dejected, much like many of the buildings in Jafferson City. It was another building that would be relieved to see the Supers put away.

I heard the Supers before I saw them.

“Is that all you got, Strel?” said a woman’s voice before a devastating *boom* shook the building.

That would be Mare Gold, a blond woman with superstrength who could knock down walls.

“It’ll take more than that to get me,” Strel grunted before another *boom* sounded.

“Now, now, play fair, big boy,” taunted a male voice. I grimaced. Tinface. He was notoriously slippery, turning himself and everything around him into metal as he captured his villains.

“You all are going to rot!” Strel said before yet another *boom* sounded.

They were going to take down the bank if we didn’t intervene soon.

We rounded the corner to the main section of the bank and ducked behind a column. Debris was flying everywhere. Tinface had already turned half the floor to metal. Mare Gold was throwing Strel back and forth across the room, throwing him into columns without a care in the world.

And there was Iva the Ice Queen, standing dead-center of the room, hands held up to the circular dome on top of the building like she was going to summon a god. No, she was going to summon a snowstorm. And that was our cue.

“On my mark,” I whispered. “Three, two, one, *now!*”

Beams of red light came from all corners of the bank. The Supers looked around, stunned. But as we focused the beams on them, they slowly sank to their knees. My force swarmed them, putting them into specially made handcuffs.

“What is the meaning of this?” Mare Gold demanded.

I walked up to her, beaming. “Why, Mare Gold, it’s what we call a successful apprehend.”

She glowered at me, her golden eyes blazing like little miniature fireballs. “Why, Tray? We’ve worked with the city for years, defeating villain after villain, saving this city countless times! And now you’re going to lock us up? What did we do to you?”

My face sobered. “Collateral damage, Mare. Think about how much harm you’ve done while you’ve been playing hero.” I motioned for Gyron, my strongman of the team, to lead her away. Mare Gold glared at me before she followed Gyron out of the bank, the rest of the captured Supers right behind her.

The team celebrated that night. It was the biggest capture of the year. Tiface, Mare Gold, Strel Hands, and the Ice Queen herself. I’d never seen the team so happy. Or so drunk, for that matter.

After a half hour of the crazy, I slipped away to find Drelt, who I knew would be laboring on his latest project two floors below.

I knocked on the partially open door where a blue light radiated. “Hey Drelt, you home?”

“Come in, Ellie,” came a cheerful voice.

I beamed and opened the door.

His workshop was a mess, computers and wires strewn about many tables. Half finished projects lay neglected on other tables. But in the center of the room stood the MagnaRay, an energy ray that flowed with an ethereal blue light. Drelt was standing to the side, hand on his chin, deep in thought. His clothes were unkept, but it didn’t make him look any less attractive. He was brilliant. And he was my secret weapon.

“What do you think about the coils, Ellie?” he said, motioning towards a mass of wires that bulged from the base of the MagnaRay.

“It looks the same as it did this morning,” I said, before quickly pecking him on the cheek. He grinned at me, his smile slightly lopsided.

“Yes, well, I know that’s not why you’re here. How’s the party?”

“Oh, you know. Delson was so drunk he was doing the hokey-pokey because Fare dared him too. Last I checked, Gyron was arm-wrestling Sean, who was losing big time.”

He chuckled. “I bet Sean kept thinking he could take him.”

Sean was skinny as a twig but believed he had big muscles. Gyron was going easy on him, but Sean had lost fifteen times in five minutes and wasn’t getting anywhere.

“Yeah, he did. Anyways, I thought I’d see what was new with you and if, you know, you wanted to party.” I didn’t often flirt with him, but tonight was a big night.

“Ha! You’re just saying that because you want me to leave my cave.”

Well, yes, there was that too.

“Sorry, Ellie. Not even tonight. I know I’m close to a breakthrough. I know I am.” He started muttering to himself as he reached for more of the metal coils, fiddling with them once again.

I sighed. I knew when I’d been defeated. “Alright. Well, call me tonight, okay?”

He waved his hand at me as he turned back to his work.

I didn’t know what to do now. The party was loud, as only Jafferson Police Officers could manage. I decided to head home early. It had been a successful day and I deserved it.

I walked out to the parking lot right when it started to drizzle. Well, I suppose even on a good night the weather can’t behave. I buckled on my helmet and mounted my cycle.

I had heard that before the epidemic, some people rode things called *motorcycles* that ran on gas and made loud noises, but went super-fast. Those relics had nothing on this puppy. My cycle was white and smooth and ran on light energy. It was the fastest vehicle in the city. And it was mine.

I started her up and she purred. I couldn't stop myself from grinning. Riding my cycle was the biggest joy of my day. I sped off into the night, feeling the wind against me, even through my jacket. But to go so fast felt like flying. This was how humans were meant to travel.

After about twenty minutes though, the air changed, and snow started falling. Snow wasn't unusual for late March in Jefferson City, but it was cold. I could feel it through my jacket. I cut my joyride short and headed home.

Not even five minutes after I'd entered my tiny apartment and petted my cat, a loud *BOOM* shook the walls. It was at least ten times louder than the booms I'd felt earlier that day. I hurried to my window and saw a beam of pure blue light shoot straight up into the sky. It seems to be coming from the police station.

Fear seized my heart. I was sure it was the MagnaRay. What had Drelt done?

My phone rang. Frantically, I grabbed it, my fingers shaking. I tried to keep my voice calm as I answered.

"Ellie, it worked! The portal worked!"

"Drelt? What have you done? It feels like an earthquake!"

"I can see the light. It's beautiful. There are landforms I've never even seen before, oh Ellie, this is it! This is what I've been working for my whole li—"

"Drelt? Drelt!" I practically screamed into the phone. But it was no use. He was gone.

Within hours, the invaders had ransacked and destroyed the entire city center. They were slowly moving outwards. I had to get help. We needed it big time.

I was speeding on my cycle as fast as it could go towards the prison. I'd never gone this fast, especially over the suspension bridge, but I had to try. For Drelt. And for everyone. I reached the stark white building in record time, skidding to a halt. I ran up the smooth white steps and barreled into the lobby, flashing my I.D. to be let in.

I finally came to the Supers' cells, each reinforced with a different material to prevent escape. The Ice Queen was in a cell hot enough to be a sauna, but without any water to prevent her from forming an ice storm. Mare Gold's cell was made out of rubber that she

couldn't break. And Tinface was in a pool with barely an inch of space so he could breathe. I knew these cells. Drelt and I had designed these cells specifically for them.

Mare Gold noticed me first. "Well well," she sniffed. "It seems that the great Ellsbeth Tray is here to gloat."

"No! I'm here to beg your forgiveness."

The Ice Queen threw me a cold look, a look that would've killed had she not been in her sauna. "You're asking us to forgive you? After you betrayed us? Why should we believe you?"

"Because the city is under attack. Invaders burst through a portal an hour ago! Didn't you feel the shockwave?"

Tinface nodded.

"Invaders?" Mare Gold laughed. "That's a first. Where'd they come from?"

My stomach twisted painfully. "From a portal. Look, it doesn't matter now, will you help me defeat them?"

"Us? Help you? Like you could take down invaders from another planet." said the Ice Queen.

"Hey, Iva, chill out," Mare Gold said. "She got us in here, didn't she?"

Mare Gold locked eyes with me. They were still intense, but at least they weren't on fire.

"We'll help you, Ellsbeth. On one condition."

I knew what she was going to say but I asked her anyways.

"Name it."

"You'll let us go free. And you'll never try to imprison us again."

I smiled bitterly. "You got it."