

- My life with Atomic Girl -

Have you ever read a comic-book? Superman, Batman, Spide-man and so on? As for me and since I'm a kid, I have always loved these readings. Many people don't understand where is the point of following, month after month, the adventures of paper super-heroes; actually, you just have to turn the television on to watch the latest exploits of Plastic Man or Invisible Woman, real super-heroes. But you have to admit that if you saw Galactus on television news, about to eat our planet for his own subsistence, there would be some people panicking all over the world. That's the reason why I like comic-books: everything can happen in Superman's world. That's even why I become a comic-drawer.

I don't know if you have ever paid attention, but super-heroes stories always have the same plots. For instance, the rule number 4: they are set in the United States of America; mostly because their writers and main readers are American.

Then, semi-gods that would only help old ladies to cross the street don't make thrilling top-selling stories. What's more, *boy-scouts* are supposed to look after grannies. Thus, here come the foes. Nemesis. Super-villains. Bad guys with enough powers to challenge the good guys. That is rule number 3. Actually, I think super-heroes tend to create super-villains, in comic-books as well as in real life. Before Giant God, we never heard of Buldozarian, did we? (By the way, you shall notice that they – good and evil champions – always have stupid nicknames. Which could be another rule, as for the flashy-colored costumes too.)

But, those men of steel seem to literally attract troubles. Even if the worse is to save the planet before the end of the episode, their social life is just a total mess. When they can have one, of course. To imprison a random criminal they usually sacrifice a romantic date – which tends to frustrate every poor readers of us, now forced to wait at least three months before the Mary-Jane Watson on call dares to accept a new rendez-vous at the theater. Or to disarm a bomb, they forget a birthday and so on. And, when they do have a social life, a super-villain never cease to succeed in kidnapping a super-innocent and super-close-to-the-super-hero somebody. In the real world, the victim, whose only mistake is to know a secret identity, loosely ends in the newspaper obituary columns, anonymously as he or she would have preferred to be when living. Only in the real world. Nobody dies in comic-books, not even Dr Fatalis or Lex Luthor. Writers' rule number 2: eventually, the villain always comes back. From prison, from another twilight zone, from the heart of the galaxy or just from the dead, eventually, the villain will come back to get revenge.

And finally at last, the golden rule that every foe forgets: never underestimate a super-hero. He or she always has more than one trick up his or her sleeve. Just take a look at Batman's belt, you would find everything possible to face every possible situations whether it is a shark attack (an anti-shark bomb) or a fit of madness of Superman (a Kryptonite ring).

To qualify my statement about comics, I must confess there is one thing that bothers me: the lack of creativity. Not dealing with the death of minor characters, but dealing with the storytelling. Indeed, super-hero are always the core of the story, the main point of view. No super-heroic adventure has been written with a normal person as for main character. I'm sure you would tell me there no interest in following a super-hero from average Joe's eyes. And yet, this is the story of my life. My life with Atomic Girl.

I guess I have some time left; I can spend it to tell you about her, and me.

#

I was born in a small town lost in Kansas, barely bigger than Smallville. I have always been the kind of guy who stays out of troubles. My concerns were about Superman's and Spiderman's troubles. They were my favorite characters. They still are. As a teenage boy, I used to read Spiderman because of how he tried to have a normal life and how fatality seemed to never get along with that; nevertheless, resourcefull he was, he managed to overcome problems. Most of the time. Now, as a grown-up, I have the feeling that my life is as much complicated as Peter Parker's. As for Superman, he is just the digest of all I wanted to have: handsomeness, strength, speed, flying ability, Lois Lane...

I have to admit that I was more disposed to read their adventures than my Mathematics notes and that I lived my dates through the ones Peter had with Gwen Stacy for example.

The significant turning point of my life was high school. As everyone else. Because, once the middle school is over, your first preoccupation becomes the others and what they think about you. How to stand out from the others ? So that, one day, someone says about you : "That guy in senior year, *that* guy was awesome! I wonder what he does now for a living?".

There are different means to get this kind of achievement. For boys, becoming quaterback in the football team is the most glorious way, making out with a popular chick too. For daddy's boys, let's just say a brand new sports car is quite appreciated. For girls, being a member of the cheerleaders is, generally speaking, quite enough; but they can also date

the quarterback or any sports car guy or become a prom' Queen. Then, there are low celebrities, like the one you can purchase by stealing the school mascot for instance. And finally, the losers. The people who make the chemical lab exploded, who bring a defeat in a season finale match for a loopy shoot to the quarterback...

I was part of the loser side : reading comic-books and talking about them tends to make you a geek. Other people don't like geeks, they don't like what they can't understand. Nevertheless, the writer of my life could have been meaner regarding the high school years I had. I had some friends of my own, geeks like myself that respected me for my draws and what I knew about comics.

I remember high school for two reasons. First, I published my drawings in "The Doodle", the school gazette. And then, because I met Atomic Girl.

Well, I did not really *meet* her in high school, like after a class; it would be more accurate to say she entered into my life in high school. What would do a girl like her in my town? It was a few weeks after I got in sophomore year, Atomic Girl prevented a bank from being robbed. A new super-hero appeared in New York, near Plastic Man and Giant God to fight criminal (and secondarily, their own nemesis).

After the bank attack, she was still unknown, unnamed. A few weeks later, the first picture of her was taken as she saved people from a building on fire in Manhattan. The picture spread all over the world news. Feel free to say I'm so 'moon in June' but I fell in love with her by looking at this photo. She was running through fire and flames, holding a baby in her arms. Among ruins and desolation, among dust and soot, I saw nothing but her angelic face. And her eyes. Her eyes shining like two jade stones.

Atomic Girl was a sixteen year-old girl, about five feet and a half tall and very athletic as every super-hero is supposed to be. Shingled red hair. In a New Yorker interview, she humourously explained it made life easier when she needed to fly or to fight.

To compare with somebody I know quite well, she was a sort of Supergirl without frost breath and laser eyes. To bend the rules, her outfit was all the most refined: skin-tight shirt and mini-shorts, gloves and top boots. Each and every red-colored. Regarding her hair and her costume, a *good* journalist would have tried to find a better "stage name", a bit more related to words like "scarlet" or "red". But nevermind. In the same interview, as for answer to the question "How do you choose this outfit?", she said that wearing it under her everyday-like clothes saved her time when she get changed in a phone booth. This idiot interviewer didn't even notice she was making fun of him with the Superman cliché: New York doesn't have any telephone box left for many years!

#

After getting my diploma, I went to Columbia University, New York, in order to study Art History. I didn't give up on my comic-drawer carrier, I just wanted to learn more and continue to practice.

For anyone coming from the countryside, the Big Apple is a real culture shock! Even the campus of the university was bigger than my home town. But the writer of my life had never been more inspired than the day he picked up New York and Columbia U. for the next episode of my life. Third morning after the beginning of the term. I was just closing my locker (487) when I saw the most beautiful girl ever opening her own (491).

You've ever heard of this moment of your life when Time freezes and Space loses one dimension? Well, I was stuck in that very moment. There and then, just in front of her. I guess she noticed and then said "Hi. Something wrong?".

If you are like myself, you probably spent half of your time elaborating 'life scripts' and then analysing the aftermaths. Had I have my brain, I would have study every consequences of a "Hi. I wonder if you'd like to have a drink after courses, this afternoon.". Consequences that could have been "Yes, I'd be delighted to!", "No, thanks" and a highly pitch "With you?" followed by a hysterical laugh. So understand that I was the first to be surprised when I heard myself saying nothing about a drink but a "Nothing. I just prefer when you have short and red hair instead of long and black."

As much black and long hair, and glasses, and over-size clothes, and fainterated manners she could have, she was definitely Atomic girl. I ruined my retinas up to the optic nerves upon every photos of her I could find, so this disguise was not even closed to fooling me! For once, even if she was wearing the "Average-Jane-suit", a super-hero had been exposed. In comic-books, it never happens. At least, not *that* easily. Except in Richard Donner's Superman II where Lois Lane proves in three minutes she was not as dumb as her paper counterpart!

As far as I could tell by her dumstruck gaze, I hit the bull's eye! Then there were some jabberings and I made off to my next class and I left her there, stuck near by the 491st locker, obviously lost in her thoughts. I did my best not to go through the lockers hall, afraid to meet her again. The first time was awkward enough. So this evening, I studied late at the library. Just in case.

I lived in an apartment in downtown Mannathan – apartment whose owner, my dear aunt Dalia, wasn't using anymore since she got married again and left for warmer latitudes. Last floor, quiet, huge and for the matter I was concern this particular day, far from the campus. I was pretty sure there was no way we could bump into each other. Yet, she was sitting against my door, reading Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*. I should have said one of those terrific all-purpose sentences to start the conversation, like nothing happened this morning. My life writer didn't agree.

"Can you read in the dark?"

"Night vision." she said with a smile.

"Oh. Right..."

"I... Thanks." I lend her a hand to get on her feet. "Can we talk?"

"Aren't we talking right now?" I retorted using my Peter Parker sense of humor. She smiled again.

"I mean... You know..."

"Oh. About *that*... I kinda hoped *that* would have gone unnoticed."

I opened the door and invited her to step inside. Luckily, the semester was only beginning and the flat was quite tidy for now.

"And... erh... How long have you been waiting?"

She threw a hand in her bag and pulled back seven books: "This much" she said. And her smile never seemed to leave her lips.

"I'm sorry. I was copying some anatomy draws out, I didn't know that... wait a minute! How did you get my address?"

"Rule number one: never underestimate a super-hero."

"I know this one, but still: how?"

"I looked for your file in the college data. Found your name according to your locker. 487. Then, the address was just a formality. And I checked your criminal record, just for sure."

"Is this legal?" I asked with a smile. I didn't really care. "You hungry? I think I have some pizza slices..."

"Are you always that nice with girls waiting for you at your door?"

"Only with those who can save my ass once in a while!"

"By the way, how did you know I am..."

"Atomic Girl? The real question is: why am I the only one to notice that kind of stuff?"

"*There* is the point worrying me! Fake hair, fake glasses and these clothes always covering myself. Even from my boyfriend! How did *you* know?"

"Let's just say I have a very good memory for faces. Unfortunately, I can't give any more rational explanations."

I couldn't tell her I recognized her because I had a crush on her just looking at pictures, reading interviews and so on. Being in love has no rational explanation.

"You won't tell anyone, will you?"

"In fact, I thought about Apocalypse Death..."

"Put him in jail last week. Too bad."

"I know. But he will escape sooner or later..."

"Would you tell him?"

"Not even for Fort Knox! His Soul Burster would kill me as soon as you'd come to save me. Once I'm a useless bait. Thanks, but no thanks. Your secret is safe."

"I dunno if I can trust you."

"Says the girl who illegally checked on my criminal record..."

Then a lull in the conversation. And we both laughed.

"I don't even know your name."

"Elizabeth."

"Elizabeth, pizza's ready!"

By chatting with her, I had the feeling that she was the girl of the interviews. I mean, there wasn't two behaviours, like you find in Clark Kent and Superman. She admitted making concessions as Elizabeth and overacting as Atomic Girl; but tonight, she was neither one nor the other, she was just her.

"Thanks for the diner. And the evening. It's been a long time since I haven't felt... free."

"You're welcome."

"I thought that when somebody'd know who I really am, he would freak out or act... you know, weird."

"You dunno who I were before I met you."

"Were you different?"

"Naaah, you know, I'm used to mix with super-heroes."

"Are you?"

"Hell yeah!"

"I don't believe you!"

"You better! I'm able to tell you who Superman is, who Spiderman is, every secret identity of the X-men, of the Fantastic Four..."

"You're stupid." she said looking up and gently shaking her head.

"Whatever! If sometimes, you feel like talking, with or without fake glasses... well... you just... come, alright?"

"You *are* really nice!"

Without any word to say back, I just flushed.

"I gotta go, some jerks are robbing a bank. They must believed I've no night shift or super-hearing!"

"Have fun!"

And she flew off through the window, leaving behind her just a scarlet shade. Some day, I shall ask her where and how she hides her clothes once she is Atomic Girl. The last super-hero mystery I haven't resolved yet

#

This is how I became Elizabeth's friend at college and Atomic Girl's friend at my place. The friend. The buddy. The confidant. A shoulder to cry upon. You know...everything you are, everything you are glad to be, everything you hate to be when you are in love with a girl who doesn't see it.

She already had a boyfriend, but don't you dare tell me this sort of detail would ever stop you from hoping. And you never understand why your beloved is so determined to stay with this dumdbass, always a good argument in mind: "One day, she'll be mine" (but when?), "I don't tell her my feelings because her happiness is enough to me" (and what about *my* happiness?), "I'm ten thousands times better than him!" (especially with my anorexic nestling shape and my scrawls, I'm *sure* to be ten thousands times better than a future neurosurgeon and a swimming champion), "Why doesn't she see how I feel?" (maybe because she has night vision) and finally "Why this dumbass?" (and the circle is now complete).

In spite of this, I did take the role Elizabeth gave me with pleasure. She was really an amazing girl, with or without her wig. I just had to put my feelings aside and not think of them while she was around: better have a good friend than a disastrous situation from a word or a gesture too much *cavalier*... What do I know about relations? My better one is worst than Mary-Jane Watson with the webweaver's. Because even if M-J sometimes trampled Peter Paker's feelings, the writers of Spiderman were less sadistic than mine.

A November day as any one else, she came to me:

"I've a problem with my boyfriend," she said after beating around the bush for a long.

"The Man from Atlantis?"

"Don't be jealous of his swimming gift."

"I'm not! I know how to swim, no need to do five hundreds lengths to prove it."

"Don't be petty either!"

"What's the problem?" asked the irritated best friend.

"Saturday evening. We have planned to have... you know... to have... sex."

You *have to* admit the writers of Spiderman never thought of this dialog between M-J and Peter!

"Well... erh... Is this a problem? Is there something about your... body that would prevent you from..."

"Oh no. No no. It's just I've never... It'll be the first time I'll... you know."

I wanted to die, right there, right now.

"Erh...I'm not really the guy to ask about this kind of stuff. You see... I, myself..."

"No. That's not the problem. The point is I may need to take off my glasses. And I'm quite afraid my wig pops off, so he would recognize me."

"I see. So just cancel your date on saturday."

"Don't be stupid. What can I do?"

I hate the writer of my life.

"Just do it in the dark. You have night vision after all!"

Saturday, she had sex.

Sunday, she learnt that bad guy were not always with super-powers.

Monday, she cried upon my shoulder for having being dumped by a future neurosurgeon who finally laid her.

Tuesday, she put ice over wounds a swimming champion did to me. Unofficially, I were to explain, maybe with too much aggressiveness, that he shouldn't have treated her like a slut. Officially, I felt in the stairs. In a comic-book with Atomic Girl point of view, I would have know if she swallowed that lame lie.

Weeks later, she was dating another guy. A quarterback, I guess. Exams were approaching and my heart was ravaged. I came to terms with it: Atomic Girl would never be mine, neither would Elizabeth, no matter how much I loved her.

I have to forget her. This had to come to a end. Unable to tell her the thruth, the pain I felt as she was near to me was burning me from the inside. I could have tell her, but I couldn't take nor stand a "no" for answer.

I had to leave New York.

I managed to gather my things for the next morning after the final exam. The first train would take me as far from the Big Apple as it would be possible. Leaving early, I could go without seeing her again and without explaining myself to her.

~~Rule number 1: never underestimate the super hero.~~ Rule number 1: never underestimate the writer of my life. I should have known this one, considering the years! At the very moment I took the key out of the double-locked door, she appeared at the edge of the stairs.

"You're an early bird today..."

"Same for you. What are you doing here?"

"Was in the neighborhood. 'Tought I could say hello..."

"On saturday? At six in the morning? Let me have a guess. He dumped you, in the same way the other swimming jackass did. And now, you have to talk to someone."

"Is it so obvious?"

"You look like having crying all night long. And I don't know any villains whose power would be the excitation of lacrimal glands."

"I'm in no mood for laughters."

"I've no time for you."

"You... You're leaving?"

Depressed look on my face, luggage in my hand, train tickets in my jacket... It would have needed at least a Batman investigation to come to this conclusion.

"Yes, I'm leaving." I said resisting the temptation to add the sarcasm.

"Holiday? And what about the passing?"

"I don't care."

"You seem pretty confident. Is History of Art such an easy major?"

"I haven't learnt anything I already knew."

"So... You're going back home? Kansas, right?"

"I dunno yet where I'm going."

"Sounds like an *adieu*."

"So it is."

"What! You're leaving New York? Like forever? Why? I don't understand."

"I don't care."

"What is wrong with you? You... You don't sound as usual..."

I could see her eyes on the edge of crying again. Looking away, I managed to not take her in my arms, to not overturn my decision.

"I don't wanna talk about it. I gotta go."

"But... What am I going to do without you?"

I was about to step down. In every scenario I made up in my mind in case she showed up before I left, she never asked this question. In a comic-book, there would have been a sign above my head indicating that I found the answer to my obsession: "why does she never see how I feel for her?"

"What are *you* going to do ? Here is the problem. It's only about you and yourself! I'm so stupid, stupid to have even thought that... The point is I was nothing more than an outlet. A secret diary. An Alfred for Bruce Wayne. My flat, was is a sort of Fortress of Solitude?"

"What are you talking about?"

"You know exactly what I'm talking about." My voice went stronger. "Because it's always about *you*."

"So you're leaving because of me?"

"No, I'm leaving because of me!"

I'm leaving because of me! What a beautiful and theatrical exit; my image going smaller and smaller as I left. Of course, it could be that easy. My foot was just on the first step when she ran and stop in front of me, well-resolved to make me miss the train.

"Stop it! Stop it right now! Tell me why you're leaving!"

"I'm leaving because I love you! Since the first day. Even before. I love you so much it is painful! It's just killing me to be around you without being with you! That's why I'm leaving! You happy now?"

Do you remember her dumbstruck gaze at the first sentence I tell her? She had the same on the last one. I ran down the the stairs, without looking back, and went to the railway station. I wish I could have read the comic book of my life from the super-hero point of view: Was she crying? Did she try to catch me up? Did Apocalyspe Death escape and fight with her so she couldn't wait for me on the platform?

Atomic Girl waiting on the platform for the boy in order to prevent him from leaving, that would have being a nice happy ending. Obviously, my writer doesn't like happy endings: I've never seen her and I left. Far from New York. Far from real super-hero. Far from her.

All travel-long, I kept dewling upon the irony of the storyline: the day she became single again, I tell her my feelings and I ran away. How impressive! What a brilliant idea from the writer of my life! Really! So typical. So me...

#

The journey finished in Seattle, where I settled. No city could be any further from New York. Stuck in an economical and industrial recessionary period, Seattle was in no need of super-hero, which fit me well.

I found a precarious job as a freelance in a web-design compagny. I earned enough money for a room and for some food, once in a while. Lame job through the day, drawer through the night. I got used to have little sleep, few hours without thoughts about her. Only dreams of her.

By dint of hard work and willpower, I finally got an interview with an editor who bet on me. A trial on a Sci-Fi thriller named "Vane". In the best case, I helped selling more copies; in the worst, I still could get my lame job back.

The comic-book was raw material with good ideas and characters. As I wrote the scenario and drew it, my editor thought the newbie I was would stick to the former episodes... My Vane would never be the same, every hope, every positive facet of the main character were litteraly crushed. He began a dark path among violence, disenchantments, drugs and revenge. In other words, my run on it was nothing but a therapy for which I got a salary.

At my own surprise, my vision of Vane made the character quite popular and valuable ("the series raked in" said my editor). So I asked for doing what I knew best : super-heroes! Of course, they refused. So I kept going darker and darker in the adventures of my antidepressant-junkie cop and I kept asking for my super-hero series.

Finally, one day:

"Hey kid, you still wanna do super-hero?"

"Hell yeah! Got one for me?"

"Maybe. Don't take it the wrong way, we can't put you on major licences, you know, with all the on-going crossovers. But, our marketing team have an idea: realistic super-hero. Less tremendous, closer to our reality, you know. All brand new excellent concept."

"That is to say?"

"That you won't manage to clamp a galactic threat whose issue would be the Earth so as to prevent the universe from retracting on itself. For instance."

"I like challenges."

"Nevertheless, we like you to do some sketches for a serie called Atomik Girl."

"Wait a minute. *The Atomic Girl?*"

"Atomik with a K. According to latest polls, Atomic Girl with a C is most popular super-hero. And the prettiest. The comic would be launched with advantageous marketing assets."

And to think the writer of my life had gone bother someone else. As a matter of fact, it seems that dynamic duos never split.

"I dunno. Do I have to do Atomik Girl with a K look like the C-one?"

"Your concern. You're free to do whatever you want to. She can't sue us afterall, she's quite like State property."

"We never know." This girl did rummage among college computer to find out about me. "Has it to occur in New York?"

"Actually, it has to. Listen kid, if you are not interested, just say so."

"Give me a couple of days."

Atomic Girl. Or Atomik Girl, no matter what name she was given, seemed to be part of my life and the writer of my life must have thought it was too easy to let her go. Was it what I really wanted? If I was to forget her, shouldn't it be already done? 'Vane' let me no time to think of her, but every time I closed my eyes, I saw her smiling at me.

I e-mailed my scripts and sketches, then called my editor. I couldn't let any stupid writer to do yet another uninteresting copy of Supergirl. It was my life, it had to be me.

"I want Atomik Girl. But at one condition."

"Which is?"

"I write, draw, ink and color it."

"Wait a minute kid, you're really thinking of..."

I didn't let him finish. "Did you receive the script I sent you?"

Hearing white noise on the telephone, I guess he was reading it.

"Who the hell is this... Dick Deckard? Why is he the narrator?"

"Because he's the main point of view."

"Does he have powers?"

"Nope."

"I dunno kid... You know, ordinary people don't make good stories. I would prefer something more... classical. Atomik Girl character has enough material to make stories on its own."

"You told me you wanted something new, less tremendous, closer to our reality."

"Well, yes, about the super-hero."

"Like reading her buying some tampons?"

"That's not what I meant."

"Have you finished my script?"

"Not yet."

"Please, do. Your marketing wanted a brand new concept, here it is."

After several minutes, he finally said: "Listen kid, I have to admit your idea can be genius but I have to call the editorial team. This is different, this could be sold like hot cakes. Will you manage to work fast enough for monthly issues?"

"Let me finish my run on Vane and then a couple of month to have some issues ahead."

"I call you back kid."

Three days later, I received my contract. As expected, I concluded 'Vane' with a exploding memorable finale issue where everything was falling apart. I received tons of letters for my work, mainly from people bemoaning that I was moving on. But life had to go on.

#

So I went back to New York. Decors and compositions would be easier to make. And the Apple was big enough for Atomic Girl and I for us not to meet each other. I didn't ask for my aunt's flat, let's not make the writer of my life's work easier than it already was.

My Atomik Girl was not that different from the real one but my editor did have some directives: New York and big boobs (to catch up male readership...). I had drawn so many times Atomik Girl in the past that the editor was literally on cloud nine with my first sketches. Of course, Atomik Girl wasn't really Atomik Girl: her hair and costume were violet and I swap the mini-short for a mini-skirt. Elizabeth's alter ego was name Jenny, and Jenny was blonde.

Dick Deckard was – I have to confess – nothing more but an ersatz of myself as for his life and his point of view were mine. Well, it may happen, from time to time, I fictionalized some events... like for instance the wallop a swimming champion once got.

I worked for seven months before the first issue was release. The marketing king had the idea of the century by proposing series "inspired" from real super-heroes; and the editor didn't regret the support he provided me : Atomik Girl #1, Vol.1 was sold out before arriving in shops, just by counting the reservations. The first two months, it had to be reprinted six times.

Every issue was in the top 3 best-sellers, next to grandpas Batman and Spiderman. But I didn't really realize how popular Atomik Girl was until I went to the San Diego convention. Atomik Girls everywhere ! Everywhere you looked were a girl dressed in violet suit or a boy in an Apocalypse Breath's costume. (And even a man dressed as Atomik Girl, *that was weird.*) The line to have one of my sign seemed to never end. I saw more purple mini-skirts that day than during a special sixties clearance at Macy's. I even met some old friends from high-school, still addicted to comic books and pleased to talk to me.

By the end of the day, I was so exhausted I didn't really look at who asked for an autograph, I was just feeling like a

signing robot smiling back to smiling happy people.

"I like what you do!" said a rousing fan.

"Thanks! I do as best as I can" I answered.

"It's incredible how you manage to create an Atomik Girl that make me feel she can be me!" said an teenage girl.

"Thanks! I do as best as I can" I answered.

"The way you handle the underlying antagonismes between the two main characters stuck with their own psyche, so as to reveal the life each of them would like to have, is really streaking realistic!" said a guy just as weirdo as the one dressed in Atomik Girl

"Thanks! I do as best as I can" I answered.

"I like the violet costume" said another.

"Thanks! I do as best as I can" I answered.

"But my breast is not *that* huge!"

Remember my first encounter with Atomic girl in a college hall? Take her dumbstruck face and put it on mine.

"Elizabeth! What a surprise. Seeing you. Here. In San Diego."

Her beautiful smile.

"Not really next-door, but the sky was pretty clear."

"I didn't know you read comic-books."

"Usually, I don't. Only yours actually."

"You read the thriller I did before as well?"

"Of course! A friend saw your name and told me about. And... (she looked around) it was quite difficult not to see the Atomik-with-a-K Girlwave..."

"So... do you like it?"

"It's... enlightening."

"People usually say 'entertaining'"

"Enlightening from my own point of view. It explains a lot of things..."

"Erh... About that... And what happened... I'm sorry."

"No, *I* am sorry. I should have been... more clever. I should have talked to you, *listened* to you... instead of making you suffer."

"I should have told you before I left. Long before I left. It could have been an happy end."

"You know, it's not to late for a happy end..."

So we began to see each other. A coffee. A restaurant. A date. A kiss. A few months later, we moved together, ready to live happily ever after.

She saved lives while I slowly recounted what had been my life with and without her. Soon, I would have to get onto the end of the series. And I didn't know what to do: living with her had changed everything. Atomik Girl was really a success, I liked to work every day on it, so I wrote story-arc after story-arc to delay the end. But I didn't want to continue if it was to turn the character into a tasteless hero.

As I was thinking about possible endings, someone knocked on the door.

"Good day to you, sir. I feel terribly sorry for bothering you at this time but is there any chance to see Elizabeth, please?"

"..."

"Are you alright, sir?"

"Er... yes. It's just... It's just that your black costume and the Soul Burster suits you better than this 'average-joe' outfit."

Rule number 1: Never ever underestimate the writer of my life. Especially when he begins to play with the rule number 2.

"I beg your pardon?"

"I know why you are here."

"So you know! Who did dare tell you my secret identity? Apocalypse Death had never been exposed before! It's her! Atomic Girl did tell you! That is the only explanation!"

"Let's just say I have a very good memory for faces. Unfortunately, I can't give any more rational explanations."

"I do not care for your explanation! I have endured thousands of sufferings, confined in that quantum jail, there is no way I let myself hector by a little pencil pusher with no future! Now that I am freed, Atomic Girl will pay for my humiliation. Incarcerated, years after year, my wrath grew in the shadows. But now, in the light, comes the hour of revenge; and this day will be remember as the day Apocalypse Death wipe Atomic Girl out. Her fiancé will serve me as a delicious bait to trap this infectious little pest. My soul buster twangs, desires, ready to tear her flesh off and..."

"Er... excuse me. Aren't you declaiming your super-villain monologue?"

"How dare you laught at my *grandeur*? You! *You* miserable roach!"

Now, I recognize that I shouldn't have taken his arrival *that* casually. But seriously... his entrance, that need to talk about himself, to explain me his tactic... everything was so totally a cliché that it was quite difficult to panic.

Apocalypse Death put his super-villain suit in an original way; I finally got an explanation of the biggest mysteries of heroic people. His disguise seemed to be generated by a kind of electro-magnetic device over his villain costume. Very clever, so misused... If only evil genius devoted their time, money and energy for goodness of mankind. I did understand very well why he called his sledge 'soul burster'. Every hit crashes your bones, then an electric discharge goes through your muscles and your organs to tear them apart for several minutes.

He beat me again and again, unleashing his fury and his anger in every sledgehammer hit. Then Elizabeth came. And he run away without even fighting her.

The writer of my life did every wrong. But it was nearly a good story full of clichés: I do live in the USA, I fell in love with a super-hero, she had a stupid name, so had her nemesis, she had a disastrous private life then found love and the bad guy arrived after years of emprisonment.

Apocalypse Death should have taken me, then wait for Atomic Girl, then try to kill me in front of her.

#

I can't remember how long I have been lying here, in my living room, in my own blood, with Elizabeth crying at my side, begging me to stay with her... I think I can hear emergency sirens coming...

My editor once told me "ordinary people don't make good stories". As for me, ordinary people make the best stories... they just end up badly.