

The Amazing July-Ah

by Julia Smillie

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When my friend S. handed me an invitation to her birthday party, I was stunned. The theme, it seems, is superheroes and supervillains and I couldn't quite contain my amazement – and, yes, excitement – when I heard the news. Nor did I successfully hide my emotions as S. examined my face, a knowing smile spreading across it. She leaned forward. “You've already got a costume planned, don't you?” she asked. Gulp. I shook my head in denial. “No. No! Of course not.”

It wasn't exactly a lie. You see, I don't have a costume...exactly. What I mean is...it's not so much a costume as it is...an alter ego. *My alter ego...The Amazing July-Ah!* There! I've said it. And I'm not ashamed. Well, yeah, sure I am.

The problem is I'm just not sure if *The Amazing July-Ah!* is ready for the public yet – or vice versa. Like all good modern day super heroes, I can't tell you where she came from. I can only tell you that she emerged, this part of me, about three months ago.

I was just going about my business – a la Clark Kent or Peter Parker – when it happened. No spider bite. No sudden super strength. Just complete and utter boredom and an admittedly very immature sense of humor. I was standing at the kitchen sink, doing dishes, slipping into a coma of domesticity and desperate for some thing, anything, to entertain me. Then it happened.

Suddenly, I started making announcements to the empty house. Loudly. My voice boomed, a cross between a carnie barker and a game show host. “Watch the Amazing July-Ah as she does the dishes with her bare hands!” I bellowed. “Gasp as she rinses the lid in cold water!” I called out to the cats.

And they did.

They watched...and I, like the emotional five year old I can be, giggled uncontrollably.

What had taken place here? A few moments before, I was doing housework, bored to tears and now, suddenly a shift in the pronunciation of my first name and the addition of an adjective had transformed me into my very own superhero. Fittingly, I tied a dish towel around my neck and adopted what was to become my superhero stance – something like a lunge, with my arms extended pin-straight up in the air. I was still laughing and announcing my actions to the house – “Watch as the Amazing July-Ah straightens the living room...with no assistance whatsoever!” – when my husband came home.

My poor, poor husband.

I know that he meant it when he said he'd take me, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health. I imagine, however, that he was thinking that was just a turn of phrase and if I, indeed,

fell ill, he was probably figuring on the flue or a bum appendix– not complete and total mental imbalance. But lo and behold, I was quickly to learn my first lesson: everyone loves a super hero.

Once he stopped laughing (at me, not with me) and was able to stand upright again, Chris was smitten. In no time, he embraced The Amazing July-Ah! Over time, he even began to request her presence and eventually began making his own announcements heroine: “Watch as the Amazing July-Ah submerges herself in the bathtub!” “Watch as she balances a cat on her lap!” I finally had to cut him off. *My superhero, I make the announcements.*

“Can’t I be someone, then?” Chris beseeched me. “You need a sidekick. Every super hero needs a side kick.” He had, of course, logic and historical evidence on his side. Fair enough. Thus, The Mediocre Chris-TOE-pher is born. Yet, for some reason, my ingrate of a husband wasn’t entirely thrilled with his new status. I started to question whether he was really a team player.

“It’s not exactly an arresting name, is it?” he pointed out. “What? Like Robin? You wanna be Just Chris?” I ask. I’d see if he was cut out for this after all. “Do I get a stance? Like your lunge?” he asks. I shake my head and he shuffled wordlessly from the room, clearly dejected. For some reason, The Mediocre Chris-TOE-pher hasn’t made a whole lot of appearances. (I knew his heart wasn’t in it.)

I have had to admit, lately, as I contort my body into a lunge in the living room, that when it comes to super powers, the Amazing July-Ah! really...isn’t. Which brought me to a line of thinking usually reserved for televised first dates – if I could have any superpower, what would it be?

It’s not an obvious query, nor one I spent much of my childhood pondering. I wasn’t the biggest fan of the superhero set, although I’d sit through a gathering of the Justice League on a Saturday morning while waiting for Scooby Doo to come on. There just weren’t too many female role models for me. What was there – Wonder Woman and that chick Wonder Twin?

The former was groovy and all, but even as a child I suspected her outfit was heinously uncomfortable and impractical and, as no fan of Westerns, I wasn’t tempted by her magic lasso. Nor was I eager to become a Wonder Twin, which didn’t seem to carry much benefit other than that cute little monkey for a friend. How often would I need to turn a bucket of water into a water buffalo? Almost never.

Even Jaime Sommers, with her bionic abilities, wasn’t someone I longed to be. Sure, she could do all kinds of cool things – not the least of which was fill out her velour jumpsuit– but her job, frankly, looked exhausting. Even as a child I knew I’d have to be a much less active form of superhero. I mean, I didn’t love crime, but it sure looked like it took an awful lot of energy to fight it...and that segment of the market seemed pretty saturated.

No, I was much more drawn to the Samantha Stevens of the world. The Bewitched babe did just that to me with the way she wiggled her nose and prest-o change-o – chores were done! Beds were made! Dinner was on the table! If anything, that’s the superpower I’d like. Forget X-ray vision – it could get annoying, not to mention morally and legally troublesome. Move faster than

a locomotion? Please. I don't run unless someone's chasing me. Spew spider webs from my palms? When you think about it, it's just not that practical – or attractive.

I have realized, upon reflection, that the fact that The Amazing July-Ah! appeared while doing housework was no coincidence. You see, with my admiration of Samantha's powers, I wasn't really looking for super powers. It turns out I just really wanted a maid!

Until then, The Amazing July-Ah! will stick around, I suppose, although I confess that she's already growing a little tiresome. I'm still toying with the idea of taking her to S's birthday party this weekend, but I don't know. I don't think she's a really social superhero; she'd probably just want to do the dishes. Sure, people will be disappointed not to meet her, but I'll strike a deal. I'll promise them that when I get the real superhero I crave – a maid – I'll invite her along wherever I go.