

Pneumatik's Rising Part 3

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Superb Woman, though she considered herself Lara Clark, floated above Miller's Mile, a run down part of Shadeston. She'd never get used to the differences between it and her adopted home of Metroville. Always dimmer, always darker, the shadows themselves seemed to cling to the city even in daytime. As much as Metroville stood poised as a city ready to embrace tomorrow, Shadeston was locked at the edge of the previous century. She huffed a little bit of her black hair back behind her head. Somewhere, a family member of a dear friend was missing, and it was up to her. Calling upon her spaceborne heritage, her eyes imposed themselves upon the opaque world below, and convinced it to become translucent. Any sign of Ambush would be all she needed, but aside from the place Ambush was actually taken, the city withheld its secrets. Glances through the tenements didn't reveal clues. Ambush's voice didn't catch in her ears.

If the ground wouldn't reveal her location, perhaps the sky would? Her eyes next pierced the perpetual gloom that lingered above the city, a dour series of storms and smog that would kill visibility for anyone but her. And sure enough, something interesting stood plain to her penetrating gaze. She activated the in-ear comm, on loan from the Family. "Fortune Teller, do you have a reason there would be a lead coated blimp floating around, hidden inside a cloud?"

The other side called back. "No ma'am. You're kidding me, though, right? He's hiding out in a literal Led Zeppelin?" There was some doubtful tone to his voice, unsure whether to expect a joke from the hero on the other end.

Lara laughed a little under her breath, leaning herself forward, and floating closer to the cloudbank. "Everybody's heard of Immigrant Song, Fortune Teller. It's impressive, though. Usually only Daniel Dathor is so elaborate, coating an entire structure in something I can't see through. And this high up, too."

FT sounded concerned. "No kidding. The effort to get something as heavy as lead floating in the air... either he's really committed to bits, or our guy is expecting someone like you. One of yours, acting out of bounds? Merry Prankster? Child's Play?"

Lara was doubtful. "My rogues have a certain sense of grandeur. If it was them, I'd have been invited into the inevitable death trap... like it's a challenge. Still, it's got to be a trap. I'll lose reception once I get close... But mark my coordinates. I'm going in."

FT was a little frantic on the other end. "We're not going in together...? I can signal the others to come in, get you some back up..."

Lara felt the clouds rush by her. Already, static was starting to overtake what Fortune Teller was saying. "Sorry, this is a job for Superb Woman." She clicked off the comm, and focused. She no longer needed her ability to see through the mist, the looming shapes close enough for even human sight to make out, locating a door on the under side of the craft. No sooner did she float up to it, than a voice came to her, projected by the built in PA system.

"Welcome, Superb Woman. This is going to be simple, I hope. Surrender yourself, and I can let the hostages go. If you knock me out, I can make no promise as to their safety." His voice was disguised, the speakers blared it out to make sure she heard, but her superb-hearing could detect the original source from within the zeppelin. And, the distressed breathing of others, no doubt the captives themselves, from within the blimp.

She screwed up her lips in concern. Dead man's switch scenario? That wasn't good. Superb Woman wasn't against lying to an opponent per se, particularly with lives on the line. Her girl scout reputation preceded her with most opposition she found, and they expected her to act by a series of rules. With as much power as she commanded, solving crimes with violence or death where it wasn't needed was punching down. If he would trade earnestly, that was important. And even if he wasn't, playing along until she could find an advantageous position and understand more about what she was up against could only benefit her.

She projected her Superb Voice, rattling it through the zeppelin. "Let's talk about the deal. It'll be easier inside. If I can confirm you letting the hostages go, sure, we can talk about a trade. Maybe we can do that face to face?"

The PA system delivered his intent. "Yes. Fine. Come in." The door ahead of her unlocked, though that was trivial, at best. She floated in, and here she was, the villain's lair. It didn't look fancy. The area once used by the Shadeston police blimp operators didn't seem particularly well kept. It felt like something more like a bachelor's pad than someone into hardcore villainy. Bottles, bagged trash, gas cannisters and various electronic bits littered work surfaces. The air felt different in here. Normally, she was quite keen to this. A secret Lara kept from all but her most trusted associates was the source of her unique powers. The presence of nitrogen in Earth's atmosphere superbly effected her cells, allowing her to leap tall buildings in a single bound, and other equally impressive feats. But something was subtly off in here, her lungs tingling in confusion with the difference. It didn't harm her, but it was strange. She'd just started focusing her vision to the molecules in the room to see what caught her attention, when the voice came again from above, beckoning her. "This way. I'm prepared. No funny business." No sense ignoring him, and risking the deal. She walked, her boots clanging lightly on the metal flooring, before floating into the main blimp compartment above.

Her eyes took in the room quickly, sizing it up. Twenty feet of blimp height, running a solid sixty feet from front to back. One masked man, sweating with tension through his costume. She regarded him carefully, raising her hands and showing her palms in deference. Her eyes rushed to take in the hostages. No wonder he wasn't worried about them escaping, or her rescuing them. Even if you rescued a person who had this done to them... what could you do? Aside from getting them on a tether, and hoping it would wear off... Perhaps someone like Mister Stupendous could figure something out with time but... people turned into balloon-people. She felt spirits lift now that she was here. Ambush was doing her best to hiss a warning, but seemed to be overwhelmed with the sheer amount of pressure lodged in her. The others didn't seem much better. She started speaking slowly, evenly, hoping to resolve this peaceably. Cross training with the Metroville negotiators stood her in good stead on many occasions. "Okay, I'm here. And I concede. You have hostages. These people need help. I should call you something, so we can talk. You clearly know who I am. Who are you? Can you let these people go, so we can start discussing?"

He regarded her....dispassionately. Or at least, he was trying to. She could see through his visor. It looked like he at least thought something was happening. A strange mix of relief and fear crossing on his hidden features. "You can call me the Pneumatik. Yes. I'm prepared to release hostages. If you just surrender yourself to me, I can let them all--"

Lara lowered one of her hands, in something of a warning gesture, pointing her fingers towards him. They stood only twenty feet apart, but it was enough to put him on edge. She spoke calmly, reassuring. "I know, Pneumatik. You said that before. We can start talking, but I'd like you to let a hostage go first. As a show of good faith." She watched him carefully. If this could be reversed, she'd see how, at least. The air around her still wasn't making sense. It felt like there was something under her skin, but she couldn't spare the focus to be concerned for anything that wasn't direct danger yet.

His wariness faltered. The girl scout reputation was doing its job. He let his cautious eyes drift from her. He gestured to a gentleman seemingly more balloon than man. In a rush, in a wave, the air escaped him. The relief on the other's face as pressure suddenly washed from him, lowering him from where he'd sat tethered, and gravity embraced him anew was palpable. Rather than turning into something like a deflated balloon, the man even seemed to recover shape and definition previously lost to air. Powers. Lara allowed a touch of a frown over her lips. No wonder he couldn't guarantee their safety. Conflict, exertion... these things made her own powers unstable, particularly when she was younger. She'd cried so hard she'd fallen out of the sky. A too-solid blow during a fight lit enough anger that she'd unleashed her eye beams for the first time. If he was keeping these people with it... violence wouldn't be an option. Talking him down, then.

The deflated man searched near his feet for the remains of his clothes, putting them back on. Lara nodded to the ladder, and he went for it, not asking how he'd leave, and not thinking twice about it. Getting away from Pneumatik seemed key. Pneumatik, for his part, looked back to her. "There. We can talk. He's not in danger anymore. You know what I want. You know what I'll do to get it. What else is there to talk about?"

Lara returned her hand back upwards, renewing the appearance of innocence. "Pneumatik, I can't just be here for you. I really do want to help everyone I can, I do, and that means, at some point, I'll have to go. You understand that, right?" If she could get some sense into him, if he could listen to reason... She found herself further distracted. The sense of tickling under her skin was only rising. A brief flick of her eyes downwards told her nothing was different. It was time to figure that out. She did her best to look at him, while her Superb Vision examined things ever smaller until she could get her answer.

Pneumatik wasn't taking the news particularly well. Desperation cracked in his voice. "I don't... I don't need you forever. I just need you for a while. I need to stop what's going on, and I only need you long enough to get it all out of my system." He was clinging to rationale, but there seemed to be something to what he was saying. This air in here was all wrong. Limited nitrogen, decent oxygen levels, and a series of unusual bonds that radiated from the space around Pneumatik, and filled the entire blimp. The structure of the blimp even seemed to be altered, acting like a balloon where it shouldn't, including the lead plating outside. He'd done... all of this? It wasn't technology? It was just him? And she was standing in the middle of it.

There was a little trepidation as she responded. "Unless I know what--" Wait. No no no. Since she'd come on board, that tickling feeling. She'd been breathing it. And the atomic scale, there was positive pressure, pushing from him, right towards her. She put her hand to her own chest, touching a pair of fingers to the S symbol that adorned her chest. Invulnerability sometimes made it difficult to appreciate the little things. If she could feel the air inside her, how much was there? How much had he slipped in? How much was he still doing? She wasn't bending like the others yet, but... would she?

Realization made, she looked back to him. All of this was a setup. He'd just started using his powers on her the instant she arrived. And if he hadn't harmed her yet, it was possible he could. Time to take control. "I know what you're doing. I don't know why you need to do this, but I'm not some silly girl who'll just blow up for you. You need to stop this, and let them go." Her voice now carried authority, directing him. Nothing immediately changed, in fact, as if the threat raised some urgency in him, she felt the tingling sensation increase. Her skin still didn't bend to it. But she was feeling... light? That wasn't unfamiliar. She could fly, after all. But to feel the insistent wish to go upwards without her own drive behind it... was unusual, indeed.

She sighed, and stepped forward towards him. He visibly shifted on his feet, his eyes looking towards Ambush, and then, another of his hostages. If he intended to act on his hostages, it didn't seem that he was currently able. She surged over the distance between them, and grabbed him up by his bandolier. He couldn't follow how fast she moved, and she heard him gulp when she hefted him off of his feet, his

arms pinwheeling in alarm. "You can't threaten them while you're doing it to me, can you? You can maintain it, but you can't control them." She peered inquisitively through his mask. He was scared. Panicky. Did he not know his limits before this moment? But desperate people took desperate actions. She wasn't sure what he could hope to achieve until one of the cannisters on the bandolier she was holding started to expel gas. A purple, thick mist whose presence she felt with the very essence of her being. Nypkonite.

It was so hard to describe to others. The sudden weakness. The nitrogen infused cells of her body refuting their power. To suddenly be torn between what she was born to be and what she became on this pale blue dot. Her veins pulsed with its insidious power as it cut to the core of her, and she dropped Pneumatik out of reflex. She stumbled back, waving her arms before her, trying to clear the air, get it away from her. The pressure within her skin shifted. She felt her face flush as adrenaline kicked in. Pain was expected. Pleasure was a surprise. A creaking, jutting feeling formed in her chest, and she whipped her arms in close, crossing them over her bust. Her invulnerability wasn't as thorough as it had been a moment ago. The pressure was constant. Her skin slowly bulged, shoving her into her covering arms, a creaking sound emanating with each movement and give. As if the steel people purported she were made of were bending. Her chest was bigger. Maybe a cup size. But there was more where that came from. And it was still coming. The Nypkonite gas wouldn't leave her so easily.

She could barely focus on Pneumatik anymore. Inside her crossed arms, her flesh shifted again with another metal-bending squeak. Her suit was constructed of Nypkonian weave, and nearly as invulnerable as she was. It was just stretching with her flesh, the S logo standing all the clearer as it rode upwards and outwards. Already, her breasts squeezed together in the midst of her chest, the globes vying to control the center, and shove the other one away. Wild thoughts were starting to run wild in her mind. She needed this to stop. She dropped to her knees for the moment, staring up at Pneumatik through her hair. "Help... me..." She managed to sputter out.

Pneumatik, for his part, had not regained his feet, and was watching her at rapt attention. The fact that she spoke to him seemed to reawaken him, and make him something more than a bystander to the events. "I'm sorry," he sputtered. But it didn't change the invisible force collecting in her.

Ambush, in her own delirium, yelled from where she was tethered. "Oh my god you let him GET you, you suck!"

Pneumatik raised his hands, and moved away from her in fear. "You're doing your part... I... I can free the other hostages, just hang on..." Did he actually care? Was this more than some perverted effort to see her clutching at a chest bigger than the one she'd grown at home in Kansas? Replaced them with what would have surely been prize winning melons? Or just eager to avoid the eventual recompense that he would surely face as soon as this was over? She was still shaking from the combination of exposure and filling gas.

She didn't have the strength to force them in, and they continued to build behind her arms, flowing over and under as she desperately tried to hold them in, feeling sweat dripping from her brow. She gritted her teeth. She'd undertaken more herculean efforts. Caught airplanes falling from the sky. Turned aside natural disasters. "Why can't I hold them in...?! They're... they're getting huge..."

Ambush groaned over. "I'm still bigger than you! You're just getting started!"

Lara felt her knees move on the ground. Her feet, her legs, they were trying to tug upwards. Her bosom bounced upwards. Ugh. All the pressure inside her was still trying to drag her from the ground, and cast her towards the sky. Her breasts rose ever higher, still soft and shifting. The pressure was powerful inside her, but her flesh was still pliable. Her nipples thrust themselves into her arms, thickened with pressure as it surged in them, leading breasts the size of volleyballs. They pressed back against her collar

bones, still creaking as if they might never stop.

Pneumatik was gesturing down the other hostages, their own burdens of pressure subsiding, leaving them to flee towards the ladder out of the blimp. Only Ambush remained. Maybe he feared what she could still do to him. The sooner they were out of here, the sooner she could stop trying to control herself. Lara forced her eyes from Pneumatik to Ambush. "Run, go. I'll handle it."

Ambush's head barely gave something of a nod before she was relieved her own pneumatic size. In the wake of it, she grasped at her chest, feeling herself with an odd combination of relief and regret. She made for the ladder as well, calling back, "If I ever see you again, I'm kicking your ass, Pneumatik!"

Lara was through the pain. The Nypkonite was running its course. A few more moments of weakness, and without another dose, she'd be herself again. But in the weakness, she was left with the feelings. She gave up trying to hold in with her arms, and measured herself with hands instead. They overfilled them. A font of femininity. She'd never been the biggest in Heroes United, but now... now she was the stuff of fantasy. Of dirty magazines. She huffed the heat out of her lungs. She grasped in again. They felt so full. So good. The pressure took forever to shove back at her touch as her fingers explored their squish. They were straining up towards her chin. It just took a little focus to keep her on the ground. Another creak, another strain, and they shoved through her fingers, now larger than her own head.

It was excessive, she thought. But, not unenjoyable. She looked back to Pneumatik. She wondered about his endgame here. There was only one way to get answers. The reporter in her was intrigued. Besides, his answers might be the one thing that kept her from following the raging lust creaking with greater intensity through her. "You did this to them. You like the way this looks?"

Pneumatik nodded mutely. Now that he'd done what he could for his end of the bargain, he was very much like the dog that chased cars: not sure what to do now that he'd got one. But she was still hissing away, the pressure rising and falling as she filled, then stretched. But he no longer seemed... dangerous. His bandolier gone... And at some point, he'd cast his gun aside.

She chuckled to herself. She arched a little more, really pushing her new assets into her costume. The S rose, prouder than ever. Her skin felt electric. A little moan escaped when she felt them creak out further, closer to a pair of beachballs, wider than her shoulders. Her arms didn't quite go around them anymore, and she cradled them to hold them down. Her Kansas morality was at odds. This was awful. But the way it felt... "You should be ashamed. Doing this to people. It shouldn't feel good." Even holding them down, the blue of her suit and S logo atop was forming a horizon that filled her vision. She felt like there was as much of them as there was of her.

Pneumatik lifted up his visor. His voice was edged with a certain amount of pleading. "I can't help it. I have to do this. The longer I go without it, the crazier I feel, like that pressure is in my mind. I don't want to hurt anybody. I want them to feel good." He left that in the air a moment. "It does feel good, doesn't it?"

She groaned in response. She was losing focus. Her chest was winning the war, slowly dragging her up from where she'd knelt, and pulling her upwards. Her feet hung underneath her. She squeezed herself, ashamed, but not able to resist it any more. "Yes," she confessed. At least her tits would hide some of the red in her cheeks. "I've never... I've never wanted, never dreamed that I could feel like this." Keep asking questions, her mind insisted. The same part that both gawked at how large she'd become, and how little of it she could actually see. Her question came out with an edge of concern, but whether that this was going to end or continue, it was difficult to say. "How much more do you have?"

Pneumatik wandered a little close. She could feel the pressure coming from him. Maybe it was how far her nerves were stretched, but it seemed to obvious that the power emanated from him now. She

clutched her thighs together in reflex, her lower half grinding the air on pure instinct. Her eyes fluttered shut, and she focused on her breathing. That was too close, she almost...

"Almost there. Relax." He didn't sound desperate anymore. He sounded calming. Cute. Shut up. No no no.

Lara could feel her cleavage heaving under the Nypkonian fibre weave. Every inch of her felt lush. Waves of contact, her own flesh against itself, carried on her thinned nerves. It never seemed to stop. The pressure within only made it more dire. She opened her mouth to try and get a question out, but found herself moaning instead. The rush didn't stop. The sensations built on themselves. Her back arched, and she swore, she felt it behind her eyes, as muscles went to tension, and the bolts of ecstasy struck down through her. She couldn't control the floating anymore, and she didn't care one bit. She shook until she hit the roof of the zeppelin's interior, and shook some more. She wasn't growing. The Nypkonite was done. The change of pressure within her was waning, scarcely a trickle. She couldn't shift her flesh enough to even see down to where the Pneumatik was, and turned her Superb Vision on to find him.

Eventually, she found the words she wanted to say, and put them as directly as possible. "I promise, I will take you very nicely to prison, if you get me down from here in the next ten seconds, and you promise to never tell anybody about this."

Months later, Samuel Pearson sits in the interview room of Bloch Institute for the Criminally Insane. The room was split, his side padded, a single chair given for him to sit in. The other side was divided with a clear, armored plastic, preventing risk of danger to the other party. The interviewer fed a steady stream of questions, noting his responses down.

"Mr. Pearson, thanks for agreeing to speak with a member of the press. I was able to pull some strings with the administrator to get us face to face. It's not every day a powered individual lands themselves at the Bloch Institute. Can you tell me how it's been treating you?"

"It's a lot. Wrists ache, but the power dampeners they use, they help. With them on, it's like my head is clear, for the first time in years. I guess I didn't really realize how much help I needed. More than a blimp full, maybe."

"There are a number of empowered individuals who claim their powers caused them to act an insane fashion. Is that a factor in your case?"

"The staff think so. Or at least, what I was doing doesn't make much sense now. I've had certain fantasies for as long as I can remember. Maybe I knew what I could do before my powers ever kicked in. I don't think I can completely blame them. But they sure didn't help."

"SKY labs, among others, have been working on technologies to help metahumans afflicted with psychologically effecting powers. I understand that you're scheduled to undergo a trial that might help you gain better control over your abilities. How do you feel about that?"

"I don't know... it's weird to become a Guinea pig. If it can help me and others, it's for the best, I guess. I don't think it changes my release date, though."

"There were a number of people who were happy to accuse you and face you in court. Do you feel any guilt in what you've done to your victims?"

Samuel looked down. He let out a heavy sigh. "I truly never meant to hurt anyone. I kept rationalizing

that as long as I didn't injure anybody, my actions were justified. I'm truly sorry. I can't go back and undo it. Please write that down. I'm sorry. I'm going to serve my time. I just hope they can forgive me."

The interviewer leaned forward slightly, trying to catch his eyes from where his head hung. She lowered her glasses to the end of her nose. "And this is... off the record. But the next time you feel out of control, don't forget that you can ask for help. You'd be surprised what someone might agree to. You never know until you ask." He gaped at her for a moment, and she slid the glasses back up before standing, and signaling to the guard. "Good luck with your recidivism, Mr. Pearson. Let's meet under friendlier circumstances next time." Lara Clark left, following up on her little notes, smirking to herself.

Pearson was eating from his tray. It wasn't an exciting meal, but it was going to be about the most enjoyable thing until he bunked down tonight. A fellow he'd seen a few times before, massive, bald, sat across from him. Pearson and he didn't share a group, but so he was wondering exactly what this encounter was going to entail, when he heard a voice in his own head. A confident, controlling voice, all business.

"Samuel Pearson. The man you're looking at is allowing us to speak. I have it on very good authority that you were able to render Superb Woman functionally inert for several minutes. I've arranged for you to be removed from your incarceration."

Samuel's eyes opened wide. He felt a panic coming on. "No. I mean, no, thank you. I don't want to escape. I want to get this under contr--"

The voice in his head cut him off. "You seem to be laboring under the delusion that this is a request. Do not resist." There was a distant explosion. The lights flicked over to emergency power.