



## **Shazam! #5**

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Shazam

*Shazam!*  
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Billy Batson yawned himself awake, stretching his limbs and blinking his eyes as he sat up on the bed. It took a moment for him to process exactly where he was, but then he realized he was in the office of the curator of the Fawcett City Museum, Ibis the Invincible. He had come to Ibis seeking information about the magically-powered fiend called Black Adam, since Ibis was an old and powerful magician who was very knowledgeable about the realms of magic. Billy learned what he needed, but he was so exhausted from his recent adventures as Captain Marvel, that Ibis conjured up the bed in his office and insisted that Billy rest. Billy reluctantly complied and passed out immediately.

Glancing up at the clock on the wall, Billy discovered that he had been asleep for several hours. He got up out of the bed and hustled out the office door, finding no sign of Ibis and breezing past the museum patrons to the front entrance. He had to catch the bus back to the brownstone at the corner of Parker and Binder, where he lived, to plan his next move.

As he descended the museum steps, Billy heard a horrific crash coming from behind the museum, startling everyone within earshot. Quickly scanning the area, Billy hesitated from using his magic word to transform himself into Captain Marvel with so many people around, so he took off on foot for the rear of the museum as fast as he could.

In the rear parking lot of the Fawcett City Museum, Black Adam held Ibis the Invincible in the air by the throat, the villain's face twisted into a malicious grin. Ibis struggled but to no avail, his life choking out of him

with every passing second.

“I will ask you a final time, magician,” Black Adam snarled. “Where is the Captain Marvel I have sworn vengeance upon?”

“Never...” Ibis sputtered as Adam’s grip tightened around his throat.

“Then little man,” Adam sneered, “before you die I will tell you what I am going to do. First I shall take my revenge on the other who imprisoned me so very long ago. Then I shall hunt down C.C. Batson to every corner of the globe, and I will kill him. Then I shall return here and destroy your precious building and all its treasures, thereby erasing all vestiges of you from the Earth. And then-”

KA-BOOM!

A huge thunderclap interrupted Black Adam’s rant, causing him to whirl around, smiling wickedly in recognition of that echoing noise.

“Put him down, Adam,” spoke Captain Marvel, boldly standing before Black Adam with his fists on his hips.

Mary Bromfield approached a small wooden bench at Look Park, clutching her mini-recorder and fairly giggling with excitement. She was there in anticipation of a meeting/interview with Kid Marvel, Fawcett City’s newest superhero, who had requested her personally for the interview. Gazing blankly at the empty jungle gym nearby, Mary went through, for the hundredth time in her mind, the questions she was going to ask the young hero. It was a tremendous scoop for a teen reporter from WHIZ Radio, Fawcett City High; to her knowledge none of the newspapers or television stations had this opportunity, and she was going to make the most of it. She harbored dreams of becoming a career journalist-

“Hello, Miss Bromfield.”

Kid Marvel dropped gently out of the sky, startling her from her train of thought and landing next to her with a grin. Now that she was this close to him and alone, she surprised herself by relaxing somewhat and

thinking: *he seems so familiar!*

Returning the smile, she said, "Hi, Kid Marvel. Call me Mary."

"I said, put him down," Captain Marvel ordered.

Black Adam sneered. "Ah. The imposter returns. Did you not learn your lesson the first time?"

He casually tossed the gasping and panting Ibis to the side, brushing off Cap with, "My quarrel is not with you, pretender. Now get out of my way before you face my full wrath."

Black Adam launched into the air, only to meet a thunderous punch from Cap that sent him sprawling back to the ground, ripping an enormous crater in the pavement.

Floating in mid-air, Captain Marvel declared, "I'm not afraid of you. I'm ready this time."

Adam got back up, shrugging dirt off his shoulders, growling, "Now you have provoked my ire, indeed. When I return, I will destroy you as well, and eliminate all traces of the infernal wizard!"

Black Adam tore two gigantic chunks of pavement from the crater he stood in and hurled them at the red-clad hero. Captain Marvel easily smashed through both, reducing them to rubble, only to have Adam use the distraction to rocket through the air and tackle Cap, knocking the wind out of the World's Mightiest Mortal. The two plummeted down and crashed into the parking lot, creating another hole in the pavement and causing the entire parking lot to shake with the impact. With that, the two combatants began to trade blows that would level trees, neither one doing much damage to the other. Finally, Black Adam lashed out with a vicious kick that caught Captain Marvel unprepared and sent him sailing backward, plowing into a sedan and totaling it. Adam, now somewhat more respectful of Cap, lifted another automobile nearby and postured with it.

"I don't have time for this, stripling," Black Adam derided, "but I assure you I will come for you again. And that day will belong to me, *Captain.*"

Utilizing the speed of Mercury, Cap attempted to fly at Adam, but he was too late. Adam hurled the car at him and Cap dodged it, but, swiftly glancing back, Cap saw to his horror that the car was arcing toward Ibis the Invincible, who was still on the ground recovering from Adam's assault. Whipping around and accelerating, Cap reached the car mid-flight and plucked it out of the air, but after he lowered the vehicle to the ground he was taken aback and irritated to discover that Black Adam had gone without a trace.

At that moment something that had been nagging at the back of Cap's mind came to the fore: *where is Kid Marvel?*

"Captain..." Ibis whispered weakly, snapping Cap back.

"Ibis!" Cap exclaimed, kneeling next to the mage. "Are you all right?"

"I will be fine, Captain Marvel," Ibis croaked, "but I must warn you: Khem Adam seeks to locate Billy Batson's father and have his revenge upon him..."

"I know," Cap murmured. "He doesn't know who my other self is."

"There's more," Ibis said hoarsely. "He has taken possession of the Ibistick!"

The interview was winding down, and Mary was trying to stall for more time with Kid Marvel. She was enjoying the interview very much; she viewed this as her first big opportunity, and she had run out of questions for the young blue-and-gold-garbed hero. And she still couldn't shake the familiar feeling she had about him, that he reminded her of someone she knew.

"So, Kid Marvel," Mary sputtered, "do you...eat?"

"Yes, yes I do... when I'm hungry." Kid Marvel smiled.

Mary blushed at her own question. "Of course you do. I'm sorry, that was so stupid--"

"No it wasn't, Mary, and you're not stupid." Kid Marvel smiled wide this time.

And then she had it.

*Freddy. He reminds me of Freddy.*

But that was impossible. First of all, Freddy was thirteen, just as she was, and Kid Marvel appeared to be- what- eighteen, nineteen? Plus, Freddy was in a wheelchair, and Kid Marvel obviously was not. But everything about him - his bearing, his manner of speech, even his facial features - reminded her of her good friend.

Mary didn't want to embarrass herself again, so she turned her recorder off. She then blurted, "You know something? You remind me of someone I know."

For the first time since the meeting had begun, Kid Marvel's face faltered slightly, almost imperceptibly, but Mary caught it.

"Really? You're probably thinking of Captain Mar- uh, of Cap," Kid Marvel said somewhat shakily.

Mary got a tingly feeling in the pit of her stomach. "Yes," she pressed. "His name is Freddy Freeman, and he's a big fan of yours. I'm sure he would love to meet you--"

"That sounds good, Mary," Kid Marvel interrupted, "but I'm afraid I have to be going. Got people to save and villains to defeat. I'm glad we could do this, and I hope you have enough for your story." He then bent his knees to take off-

"Wait!" Mary called. "Please, just one more question?"

He turned around and faced her. "Sure."

“Why...why me?” Mary questioned. “You could’ve done this with any reporter just about anywhere in the world, so why pick me?”

He thought a moment. “Because I see something in you, Mary. Maybe it’s because you’re young, like me. Maybe I’ve got an eye for talent. Maybe I just wanted to rescue a damsel in distress.”

Kid Marvel smiled once more. Then he said, “I see big things in your future, Mary Bromfield.”

Then he took to the air, leaving a stunned Mary staring in the sky after him.

The Rock of Eternity was a place that could not be accessed by the common traveler. It was a realm of magic that transcended space and time and existed in all planes of reality at once. The keeper and guardian of the Rock was the ancient wizard Shazam, and he sat upon his stone throne in the cavern where he resided, while viewing the historama, a mystical display that allowed him to recall past occurrences and also see current events as they transpired. Absently tugging on his long white beard, Shazam watched again the recent actions of his two earthly champions, Captain Marvel and Kid Marvel, with concern. Though relatively new and inexperienced, the two had not yet attempted to use the full extent of the powers Shazam had granted them, and that troubled the old wizard. And matters were growing worse.

Shazam’s contemplations were disrupted by loud chortling and whispering that seemed to echo in his head as opposed to his ears. He glanced over to the side of the cavern where seven grotesque statues stood seemingly in open defiance of the wizard and everything he represented. They were the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man, and they were the physical embodiments of human failings: Pride, Envy, Lust, Hatred, Selfishness, Laziness and Injustice. Shazam kept their power in check at the Rock of Eternity, but they constantly sought to free themselves and let their energies run rampant upon the mortal world. So the Enemies continually whispered to the wizard, gloating at their influence on humanity, probing for weakness in Shazam and seeking an opportunity to escape their mystic imprisonments.

“Silence!” the wizard commanded. Normally he was able to easily tune out the taunts of the Enemies but when his thoughts were tinged with worry, as they were now, the mocking came through more clearly.

There were more jeers and cackles from the statues, but the wizard was already pushing them from his mind as an image on the historama caught his attention. He stared at it for a few moments, and then ordered the historama to fade from view into the mists as a booming voice filled the cavern.

“Wizard, I have at last returned.” Black Adam spoke slowly, barely disguising his seething rage.

Shazam turned his head to observe his former champion. “Yes, I have been expecting you.”

“Oh, you *have*, have you?” Adam snarled. “Ah, yes. The all-powerful wizard. The one who imprisoned me for millennia and hoped I should remain that way for all eternity. Millennia!”

“I bestowed upon you the powers of gods and you allowed that power to become perverted, Khem Adam,” Shazam declared. “You were weak in heart and spirit and allowed the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man to influence your actions. In time your soul became perverted as well.”

“Liar!” Black Adam shouted, glancing at the statues of the Enemies. “I was your first champion! Your *greatest* champion! I performed deeds renowned throughout the ancient world! I was Teth Adam, the Mighty Adam!”

“Had I looked more deeply into your heart I would have seen that it lacked the purity to make you a great candidate to become my champion,” Shazam lamented. “That was my mistake. You were corruptible and thus what happened to you was most likely inevitable. And no, Khem Adam, you are *not* my greatest champion.”

“You refer to Batson? Your Captain Marvel? I have noticed he has not come forward to confront me; has he lost his precious courage? Or perhaps you refer to the pretender wearing his colors. I did not know you

would place your faith in such a pathetic excuse for a hero. In truth, I did not believe he had been granted your powers.”

“As it ever was before,” Shazam predicted, “so shall Captain Marvel triumph again over your wickedness, Khem Adam.”

Black Adam’s fury was nearly tangible. “Enough talk of nonsense! I have come for justice, wizard. I will destroy you and take my rightful place at the throne of the Rock of Eternity.”

“Your powers hold no fear over me,” the wizard challenged. “Lest you so easily forget that it was I who granted you them.”

“Indeed I remember well, wizard,” Black Adam roared, “and that is why I have brought *this*, which contains the power to slay even you!”

And Shazam’s eyes grew wide as Black Adam produced the Ibisstick from his belt, holding it high above his head in intimidating fashion.

Kid Marvel soared above the rooftops of Fawcett City, on the lookout for evildoers, and on a personal high from his interview with Mary. Swooping lower, he passed over the Fawcett City Museum, where he caught a familiar red and gold sight in the back parking lot.

He dropped down and landed in front of Captain Marvel, who was dismissing the now fully recovered Ibis the Invincible back to the museum. Kid Marvel took in the devastation of the parking lot with great alarm.

“Cap!” Kid Marvel exclaimed. “What happened?”

Cap gave him a stern look. “I need to speak to you, Kid Marvel. Follow me.”

Bewildered, and thinking that Captain Marvel was angry with him, Kid Marvel launched into the sky behind Cap, and when they reached a point high above the skyline of Fawcett City they stopped, hanging in the air just below the cloud line. Captain Marvel crossed his arms and firmly addressed his junior partner.

"We have a situation," Cap intoned. "Do you know who Black Adam is?"

Feeling somewhat relieved, Kid replied, "He's the one like us, but evil, isn't he?"

"Well, yes," Cap confirmed. "He's returned, and he's sworn vengeance on Captain Marvel. I'm certain you will be included in his revenge plans as well."

"You fought Black Adam there?"

"Yes. He nearly killed Ibis the Invincible, and he got away with the Ibistick," Cap stated. "By the way, where have you been, Kid Marvel?"

"I was at Look Park, giving an interview to Mary Bromfield," Kid stammered.

"*What?* You mean while I was facing off against *Black Adam*, you were in the middle of a high school radio interview?"

"Hey," Kid said defensively, "I spent most of the day helping people around the city."

"Let me be clear, Kid Marvel. You were not granted these powers to waste them frivolously on public relations," Cap admonished.

"Is that what it is, Cap? Or could it be because of *who* I was with?" Kid said defiantly.

Cap's brow furrowed. "Don't turn this around, *Kid*. Just because Freddy Freeman likes Mary--"

"And Billy Batson doesn't?" Kid Marvel broke in. "Are you kidding, Cap? Would Billy be jealous if he'd known about it--"

"Hold it right there!" Cap scolded. "You're not displaying much maturity, nor are you using your power of wisdom! What if Mary had recognized you, or if you had accidently revealed something to her that could

compromise ourselves and our secret identities? You make me wonder if perhaps I didn't use the best judgment in sharing my powers--"

"*What?*" Kid shouted indignantly, actually balling his hands into fists. "It was because of *you* that Freddy got into his predicament! You saved his *life* by sharing your powers! *You* claimed Freddy was worthy to receive them! Now I admit I may have blundered here, but--"

"You're right, I was out of line with that statement," Cap admitted, "and I apologize for saying it. But that doesn't change the fact that we face a grave crisis with Black Adam, and we need to be ready for him when he returns."

"Agreed," Kid said. "I'll stay on patrol until he shows up--"

"No," Cap differed. "Billy and Freddy need to return to their lives, but stay alert to any threats from Black Adam."

"I don't want Freddy to return to his life," Kid Marvel said quietly.

"Excuse me?"

"Freddy serves no purpose now," Kid uttered. "*I* have the power, Cap. Freddy's a helpless cripple."

That irked the World's Mightiest Mortal. "Freddy is *not* helpless, Kid Marvel. Freddy has a disability he will learn to cope and live with, and he is much stronger than even *he* knows."

"Freddy hates what he's become!" Kid shot back. "*You* don't have that problem, Cap! Billy can play baseball; he can run and jump and live a normal life! Freddy will be looked upon with pity and scorn and he's lost *everything* in his life he took pride in! *I* have the power to make a difference in the world, and I'll use that power for that purpose!"

"We had this discussion at the Rock of Eternity, remember?" Captain Marvel said softly. "Freddy existed before Kid Marvel. He was alive and vibrant and most of all he was a survivor. He endured hardships every day of his life, and I know he was stronger for going through that pain. If you never allow him to grow and evolve into the man he should become,

then you would be denying a part of yourself that is vital and integral to your being. The world needs Freddy Freeman, Kid; don't let him give up on himself."

Kid Marvel pondered Cap's words.

"Besides," Cap added, "Mary cares deeply for Freddy and she would search high and low for her missing friend. You wouldn't want that on your conscience, would you?"

"No, I suppose not," Kid grudgingly confessed.

"All right, then. This discussion is over. Let's go," Captain Marvel concluded as he zoomed back down into Fawcett City limits.

Kid Marvel hesitated a minute, still unsure, and then he also headed back down to return to the city.

The magical power fairly hummed in the Ibistick as Black Adam brandished it in front of the wizard Shazam. Adam's face was contorted in malevolent glee as he asserted violent threats toward Shazam.

"Yes, wizard, it is the Ibistick. And now I have the means to destroy you," Adam hissed.

The wizard didn't move, still sitting on his throne and keeping a watchful eye on the fallen champion while issuing a warning.

"I would advise you not to make use of that wand," Shazam droned gravely. "You would regret that decision, Khem Adam."

That enraged Black Adam. "DIE, WIZARD!" he shrieked and pointed the Ibistick in Shazam's direction.

There was an inhuman scream as the Ibistick's energies backfired into Black Adam, causing him to drop the wand and collapse to the hard stone floor. He lay there, uncontrollably spasming, with smoke rising from his body for a few moments, until finally the intense agony

subsided. Shazam then spoke calmly once more.

“As has always been the case with you,” he said, “you do not utilize the power of wisdom which you have been granted. Or you would realize that the Ibistick’s power can only be accessed for the cause of good. Never for malicious purposes.”

Black Adam got to his feet, smoke still pouring off his body. “Then I shall destroy you myself!” he yelled, launching himself toward the wizard with all the speed of Heru.

But Shazam was prepared for such an attack, raising his hands and conjuring an invisible barrier, which easily repelled the attacking Black Adam and sent him slumping to the floor once more.

“You do not possess the power to defeat me at the Rock of Eternity,” Shazam said piteously. “You have failed once more, Khem Adam.”

But after a long pause, Black Adam raised his head with a wicked smile across his lips, his eyes glittering with evil.

“Perhaps I cannot obliterate you now, at least not yet. But I now have used my wisdom, wizard,” Adam snarled, “as the Seven Deadly Enemies of Man have been whispering to me, and I have listened. I now know what has happened to C.C. Batson, and I know who your ‘Captain Marvel’ is. So I shall have my revenge upon C.C. Batson at long last, by ripping his son to shreds!”

*To Be Concluded!*

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