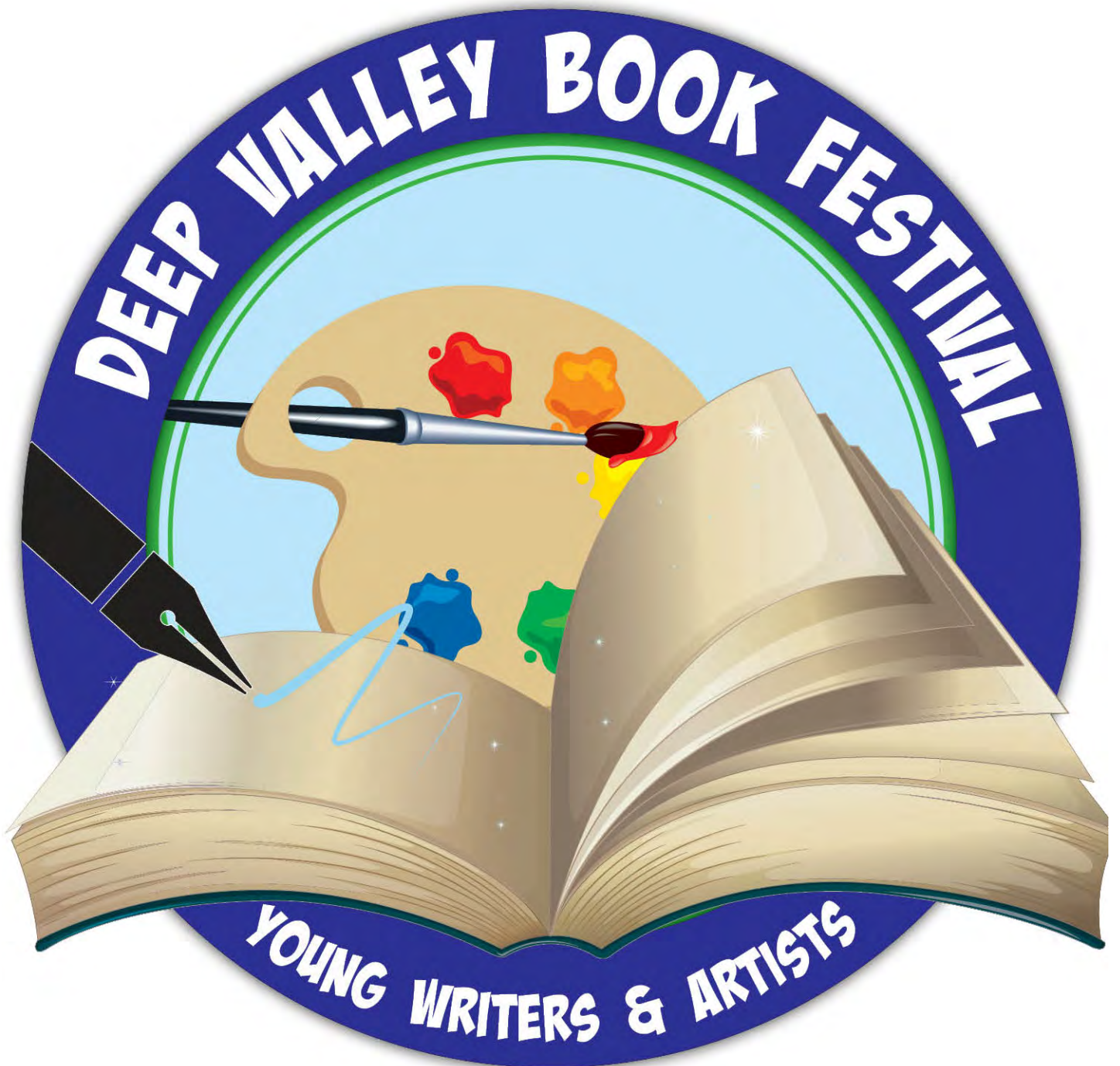


**DEEP VALLEY BOOK FESTIVAL
YOUNG WRITERS & ARTISTS COMPETITION**



2023 ANTHOLOGY

The Deep Valley Book Festival (DVBF) is organized by an all-volunteer committee of writers, publishers, and book lovers. The festival gets its name from the setting of the beloved Betsy-Tacy children's books written by Mankato-born author Maud Hart Lovelace.

The DVBF encourages young people to express themselves through writing and art. An authentic audience is so powerful for students. The DVBF Young Writer and Artist Competition (YWAC) is an easy and inspiring way to give kids an authentic audience. The more a child writes or draws, the more confidence they will have in their abilities. Not only are they writing or drawing for a real panel of professional judges, but there are awards to strive for!

The Rules of Entry for the 2023 YWAC were: Young writers (ages 7-18): Write a story in 1500 words or less using the theme "Hero." Young artists (ages 7-18): Create an original illustration of a scene from a favorite book and provide a quote from the book that describes your illustration.

Young Writer Judges:

Rachael Hanel

Author and professor of Creative Writing

Melanie Cashin

Writer of nonfiction

Young Artist Judges:

Ann Rosenquist Fee

Executive Director, Arts Center of Saint Peter

ARK

Gallery coordinator, Arts Center of Saint Peter

YOUNG WRITERS AWARDS

AGE 7-8

1st: Alydia Bair

Pg. 4 - The Storm

2nd: Joy MacPherson

Pg. 6 - Bartholomew's Hero

3rd: Arianna Robin

Pg. 9 - The Super Granny

3rd: Coralei Volden

Pg. 10 - Scared or Brave, You're the Same

AGE 9-10

1st: Abby Bair

Pg. 11 - A Hero Within

2nd: Nia Walton

Pg. 14 - A Kindness Superpower

3rd: Lucia Huber

Pg. 19 - A Prickly Situation

AGE 11-12

1st: Evalyn Altman

Pg. 21 - Not All Heroes Wear Capes

2nd: Rishabh Jain

Pg. 25 - The Anatomy of a Hero

AGE 13-14

1st: Emerson Marsolek

Pg. 29 - Redemption

2nd: Rohan Sharma

Pg. 34 - A Hero

3rd: Zoe Zhang

Pg. 36 - Morning

AGE 15-18

1st: Grace MacPherson

Pg. 39 - The Reluctant Hero

2nd: Marissa Novak

Pg. 42 - The Silver Bullet

3rd: Bethany Hanson

Pg. 45 - Monster

YOUNG ARTISTS AWARDS

AGE 7-8

1st: Ziva Schewe

Pg. 52 - Peter Rabbit

2nd: Nylyn Huber

Pg. 53 - Princess Ponies

3rd: Madeline Mehlretter

Pg. 54 - Fantastic Mr. Fox

AGE 9-10

1st: Abby Bair

Pg. 55 - The Secret Garden

2nd: Kamila A. Smith

Pg. 56 - World of Wonders

3rd: Synnove Volden

Pg. 57 - Alone

AGE 11-12

1st: Clara J. Loeffelmacher

Pg. 58 - The Hunger Games

2nd: Lily Hanson

Pg. 59 - Keeper of the Lost Cities

3rd: Xander Meerbeek

Pg. 60 - From Small Town to Football Star

AGE 13-14

1st: Price MacPherson

Pg. 61 - The Aeneid

2nd: Tyyna Hall

Pg. 62 - Warrior Cats

AGE 15-18

1st: Meghan Lawver

Pg. 63 - Threads

2nd: Jadynn Meerbeek

Pg. 64 - Africa: Natural Spirit of the African Continent

3rd: Jada Schewe

Pg. 65 - The Wonderful Wizard of Oz

The Storm
By Alydia Bair

Once upon a time, I, a lonely oak tree lived out in the open prairie. I could not see another a tree in sight. All I had for company was an old man that would go out and sit next to me and talk to me. He loved to sit in the shade of the old tree. He was kind, but he was very old and soon he passed away. His son moved into the old man's house with his wife and his boy. The young boy's name was Thomas. He adored me. He would climb up my trunk and sit on his favorite branch. He would read a book or eat an apple but mostly he would talk to me. He would tell me everything: how school was going, what the weather was like, and what he had for dinner.

I soon learned that Thomas was a kind boy that loves nature. He did not have very many friends because he had just moved in. I thought that he was just like me.

Thomas' dad was very good at building. One day he started building something in my branches. Thomas told me that it was a treehouse. He played in there for hours and when he played in the treehouse, it felt like I was playing with him.

One day Thomas came out and said that there was a bad storm and tornado coming so he couldn't play outside with me. The wind howled and my branches were swinging everywhere. It was raining and the wind was swirling. The tornado came closer and closer until I looked down, and I was off the ground. I swirled around until I was really dizzy. When the storm stopped, I was on the ground. The treehouse and my branches were broken. I was laying on my side, and I thought this was a nightmare.

After a few days, people came and cut me into pieces of wood. What would happen me? Where was Thomas? I could feel my self being carved and nailed into something. I was put into the back of a truck. It was a very bumpy ride. I saw Thomas at the front of his house. He was looking in the hole where my roots were supposed to be.

Thomas' dad came and said they found his special tree and made it into a play house. I was excited that I would be playing with Thomas again!

I saw Thomas take an acorn from one of my broken branches and bury it in the hole that I used to be in. I lived a very happy life being a playhouse. Thomas would talk to me still and play for hours.

When the boy grew up, he left for college. I felt sad when he left, but I had a new friend right next to me. The acorn had grown into a big, strong, healthy tree. We became very good friends. I lived a very happy life.

Thomas would always be my hero because he was always there when I needed him. Even when he left he made sure I was not alone. Thomas is a true hero.

Bartholomew's Hero

"Bartholomew!"

It was the day Bartholomew was finally going to meet the Messiah – the Savior! 'Rabbi' was what his disciples called him. His name was Jesus, Bartholomew thought.

"Bartholomew!" called Bartholomew's mother again. (Her name was Lebana.)

Bartholomew slid his toga on and ran down the stairs.

"Well, well, you're here at last." Lebana shook her head smiling. "So you said that Master Levi, the one who teaches you, would show us the Messiah?"

"Yes," answered Bartholomew.

After breakfast, Bartholomew went with his father David and mother. David, Lebana, and Bartholomew went into the streets and tried to find Master Levi. They had not gone far when a crowd gathered.

"I wonder what this is..." David said. He went to find out. When he came back he was smiling. "He's coming!"

"Who?" Bartholomew and Lebana asked at the same time.

"The Messiah," David said.

When a man on a donkey passed by, Bartholomew was sure He was Jesus, so he took a palm branch and waved it saying: "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" like the other people. He wanted to spread his clothes on the road but Lebana wouldn't let him. After he was about four fathoms away from the family, David said, "Let's go home now."

"May I stay and play out here?" Bartholomew asked.

"Yes, it's a nice day," Lebana replied.

When David and Lebana were out of sight, Bartholomew followed Jesus. (Bartholomew wasn't going to play; he had planned to follow Jesus, but he wasn't sure his parents would like him secretly following Jesus, so he didn't tell them.)

Jesus went into the temple and Bartholomew sneaked behind. Bartholomew was surprised to see people selling and buying things in the temple! But Jesus took care of this. He turned tables upside down and drove out the buyers and sellers and said: "My house shall be called a house of prayers, but you have made it a den of thieves." And then he said to Bartholomew, "Bartholomew, come out, I can see you and I need to talk to you."

Bartholomew slowly crept from his hiding place, which was behind a big pillar.

"Let us go outside and talk."

Bartholomew now walked beside Jesus. Jesus and Bartholomew sat down in the shade of a tree. "The time will soon come for me to die," Jesus said. Bartholomew noticed a change in Him. Before, He had sounded calm and loving, now he sounded sad.

"But why?"

"I must do it for you, for the world. You all deserve to die; you sinned; but I will do it for you."

"But I won't get to see you after that," Bartholomew sobbed.

“I promise, one week from today you shall see me.”

“How?”

“I will come back to life from My Father’s power,” the Messiah said. “Now run home and tell your family.”

Bartholomew got up at once and ran. He didn’t know if he should be happy or sad. Suddenly he burst into tears. He ran faster. When he got home, Lebana asked: “Did Timothy give you a black eye?”

“No, I’m sorry, Mother, I followed Jesus. He told me He would die soon and then He told me He would come back to life.”

“What!? But He can’t die; He’s God!” Lebana said.

“But He said–”

“I know.” Lebana sighed. “I guess I’d better tell David about this....” She went into another room.

The next four days were quiet, and everyone thought it strange that Jesus would die. No one knew that He would die very soon – tomorrow.

The next day Lebana packed a lunch for Bartholomew; he was going to play outside today. Soon it became dark. Bartholomew wandered around. Soon he heard something or someone. He seemed to praying; these are the words He said: “O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.”

Bartholomew saw the dark person walk to where three other people lay sleeping. Bartholomew realized no that the person who prayed was Jesus! The people sleeping were probably some of his disciples. Jesus looked at the disciples and said, “Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter temptation.”

Jesus went out and prayed again. He came back to the disciples, shook his head, and went a little farther and prayed a third time. He then went to his disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping? Behold, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is being betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us be going, My betrayer is at hand.”

Then Bartholomew saw soldiers and a man. *What!? The man is Judas – Jesus’ disciple! Why is he with all the soldiers? Will he attack Jesus?* Bartholomew asked himself.

Judas went to Jesus and kissed Him. *Maybe he isn’t bad at all,* Bartholomew thought. Then he changed his mind. The soldiers seized Jesus and took him. Then one of the disciples that had been sleeping woke up and, taking his sword cut off one of the soldier’s ears. But Jesus said, “Put away your sword, for all who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or do you not think that I can not now pray to My Father, and He will provide me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then could the scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen thus?” Bartholomew saw the disciple run away, but he followed Jesus and the soldiers.

They led Jesus to Caiaphas, the high priest. Bartholomew kept following Jesus, but soon bumped into some two he recognized. “Mother! Father!” he said.

“Shh...” Lebana said. “Listen.”

And Bartholomew heard a man say, “This man said he would destroy the temple and rebuild it in three days.”

Then the high priest said to Jesus, “Do you answer nothing?” But Jesus remained silent.

Caiaphas asked Him, “Are you the Son of God?” Jesus answered, “It is as you say.”

Then the high priest said, “He has spoken blasphemy! What do you think I should do?”

A man answered, “He deserves death.”

“No!” Bartholomew shouted, “Don’t kill Him!”

The people did not pay attention to Bartholomew. They spat on Jesus. Bartholomew cried on his mother’s lap.

The next thing he knew, Bartholomew was blinking in light. *I must have fallen asleep*, he thought.

“Come on, wake up,” Lehana said.

“Bartholomew, it’s time to go see Jesus, He’s with Pilate,” David said.

Bartholomew walked with David and Lehana. When they got there, they saw Pilate ask Jesus, “Are You the King of the Jews?”

“It is as you say.”

Pilate said to the crowd, “Whom shall I release? Barabbas, the prisoner, or Jesus?” The crowd answered, “Release Barabbas!”

“What shall I do with Jesus?” Pilate asked.

“Crucify Him!”

“No!” Bartholomew shouted, “No!”

“You do know that one person can’t change a crowd’s mind,” David said. “Besides, this may be what Jesus told would happen. Jesus also said, though, he would rise from the dead.”

At that moment, Pilate said, “Why, what evil has He done?”

“Let him be crucified!” the crowd shouted.

Pilate washed his hands and said, “I am innocent of the blood of this just person. You see to it.”

Jesus was nailed to a cross with a sign that said:

JESUS OF NAZARETH, KING OF THE JEWS

Bartholomew stayed awake for a while and heard Jesus cry, “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!” Later, Jesus said, “It is finished!” And then Jesus seemed to collapse.

“He’s dead,” Bartholomew whispered.

“Come, let’s go home now,” David said. “You need to sleep now.”

Two days later, Bartholomew heard a knock at the door. Lehana opened the door. “He is risen!” a woman said.

“Mary, Who is risen?” asked Lehana.

“Do you mean Jesus?” Bartholomew asked.

“Yes,” said Mary.

“He’s my” – Bartholomew searched for the right word – “Hero.”

Scared or Brave, You're the Same

By Coralei Volden, age 8

Once upon a time, there was a dog and a kitten. The dog was named Fluffy and the kitten was named White Paw. Once White Paw went out to play, Fluffy watched White Paw so White Paw didn't get into trouble. But then Fluffy fell asleep. And White Paw got into trouble with the bigger dog named Fierce. White Paw was scared! Fluffy, who was still asleep, didn't hear or see what was happening. Fierce chased White Paw around the house. Fierce kept barking and White Paw kept meowing. Fluffy just kept sleeping. White Paw knew what she should do, so she suddenly stopped which caused Fierce to run right past her. Then White Paw ran towards Fluffy and jumped on top of Fluffy. Fierce, who was still running and thinking he was far behind, suddenly stopped and looked. Fluffy was protecting White Paw. But Fluffy was really nervous. Fierce growled a lot and barked. Fluffy got the courage to bark, growl, and then pounce on Fierce. Fluffy was a hero. THE END

Amantha tiptoed down the stairs rather fast, breathing heavy along the way. She ran to the window and looked out, relieved her new owner was not here yet. She needed time to get perfectly ready. Amantha was so nervous because she has been in foster care almost her whole life, and she had bounced back and fourth to five different families. Amantha shook her head to get that terrible thought off her mind.

Amantha sat on a soft blue seat by the cold window, and she took a deep breath. She was ready. A few minutes later, which felt like a few hours to her, a zoo truck came rumbling down the road. A door swung open and pretty, young lady in a zoo keeper outfit walked towards the house. Amantha noticed that the truck had the words Columbus Zoo written across its side.

The kind-looking lady disappeared inside the front door. She heard the lady talking with her foster parent. Amantha walked into the room to meet the lady. She noticed a name tag on the the ladies shirt. It said, "Dr. Susie." Amantha stared, her eyes wide open, as the kind lady took her hand and said "My name is Susie, and I will be your new foster care mom."

After three hours of driving in the car, they pulled into an archway that had Columbus Zoo written on it. Amantha swung open the door and followed Dr. Susie into the main lobby of the zoo. They walked together along a long hallway, until they reached a big door. The kind lady opened the door which led into a pretty yard overlooking several small cabins. The doctor guided Amantha to the farthest cabin and said, "This is your new home! If you look over there, you can see a pasture of elephants. To the left, there is a section of cheetahs. In a section in between the elephants and cheetahs are the ostriches. This is where I work. I have to live here incase of any emergencies. I hope you like it here and let me know if you need anything. Also, you will get to meet other zookeepers and help feed the animals. Maybe someday you will be a zookeeper too!"

Amantha could not believe how lucky she was to be working with animals and have new friends!

Four years later Amantha turned twelve and was an expert with animals. She had learned a lot from the zookeepers. They were always willing to teach her. She especially loved watching the veterinarians help and save animals' lives. She was happy in this place. Her favorite animals to visit were the amur leopards. There was a momma leopard named Kayla. She was pregnant with twins. Amantha spent many hours with her.

One night some keepers set out cameras on the nearby beach to watch for turtles. They saw on the cameras that a couple of turtles had laid eggs. The next day Amantha went to the beach to find the eggs. Amantha hopped on the wheeler with a keeper named Michael. They raced across the beach, the wind flowing through their hair. Amantha loved these adventures.

"Right here," said Michael, "is where a turtle laid eggs."

Amantha peered into the hole, seeing many little white eggs. Michael and Amantha got back on the wheeler and raced back to the zoo to share the good news about the healthy eggs.

When they got back, an extreme surgery on a loved walrus was going on. Amantha was nervous as she ran into the busy room because she loved the animal. Doctors were cutting through skin and trying to save this animal.

Then, Amantha noticed a fin infection. She grabbed a bit of medicine. Without thinking, Amantha plunged the needle with the medicine into his flipper. A few minutes later she realized that she had used the wrong medicine. She told Dr. Suzy. Right away, the doctors tried to take out the medicine. Amantha ran back to her cabin, feeling terrible. She sat down on the porch swing and thought for awhile.

Later that afternoon, Dr. Suzy came in and told Amantha that the walrus would heal. Amantha sighed in relief and said, "I'm so sorry."

Dr. Suzy said, "Just leave the medical stuff to us, but you are still a great help."

After that day, it was hard. She was not allowed in the surgery room any more, but she was still happy that she could help feed the animals with the keepers.

A few days later, Amantha woke up in the middle of the night with a bad feeling. She climbed out of bed, put on her shoes and started walking around the zoo. As she neared the cat exhibit, she heard an amur leopard moaning. It was Kayla! Amantha grabbed an emergency kit and ran as fast as her legs could take her to the leopard cage. There was no time to go for help. This amur leopard was pregnant. Her species was almost extinct. The zoo hoped that the twin babies would help the population grow.

This leopard was not breathing very well and had heart issues. Amantha worked as fast as she could for two hours. Finally the leopard was breathing better. Amantha took a deep breath of relief. The leopard would live and have her babies because of her. She stumbled to the ground shaking from exhaustion and relief.

The next day, every one in the zoo heard about this and was so grateful for Amantha's help. Dr. Susie and all the zoo keepers were so proud. That day, Amantha became the first kid zoo keeper. A few months later Kayla had her adorable twins and Amantha loved them! Amantha grew up a zookeeper and lived a long and happy life at the zoo. Many animals were saved because of her love for them. Amantha was a hero.

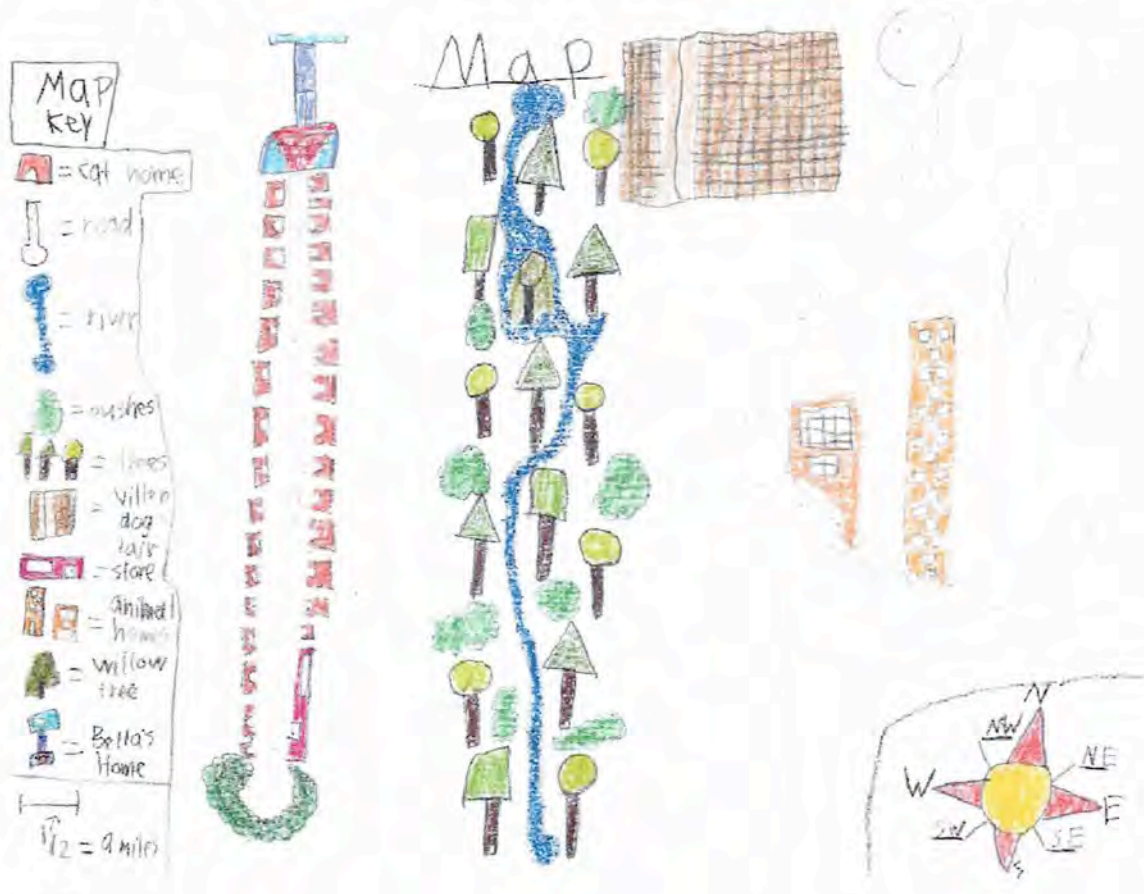
A Kindness Superpower

By Nia Walton

Chapter 1: Angel Cat's Advice

I was so worried, then Angel Cat told me something. I looked at the gray sky and it all made sense. Let me tell you how this got started.

I am Bella the superkitten. I have a big sister named Ellie and a grandmother named Angel Cat. Oh, and my Mom and Dad. We live in a giant cat tower. On the outside of my tower there is an elevator to the top. On the inside there is fluffy ground, walls and ceiling so we can lay down and be cozy. There is also a bed, stove and window. The ceiling is very high so we can jump up high. There is another tiny window and inside you can see a case with a shiny crystal locked inside.



Other cats live in the village, called Kitty Land. The village is a big place. There is a long road and houses on the sides. The houses are squares. The road is made out of small rocks. One night, we had dinner and got tucked into bed. The next morning, we had breakfast, until mom noticed something surprising. Ellie was missing! Just then, a rumbling sound came from the sky. Rain began to pour down.

Mom, Dad, Angel Cat, and me went down to the village to look for Ellie. We asked all the villagers if they had seen Ellie recently. One cat said, "I heard paws on my roof last night." Another cat said, "I heard barking last night." Mom, Dad, Angel Cat, and me walked back to our cat tower home. I didn't think this was enough information. I was just so worried about Ellie.

When we were inside, Angel Cat told me "When I was a superhero, I noticed that Villain Dog didn't have anyone to play with," said Angel Cat. I said "really?" "Yes" said Angel Cat. I thought that if I didn't have any friends, I would be sad. "I am going to check on Villain Dog," I said. I looked at the gray sky and it all made sense. Villain Dog must have snuck in at night to lure Ellie away with the shiny crystal!

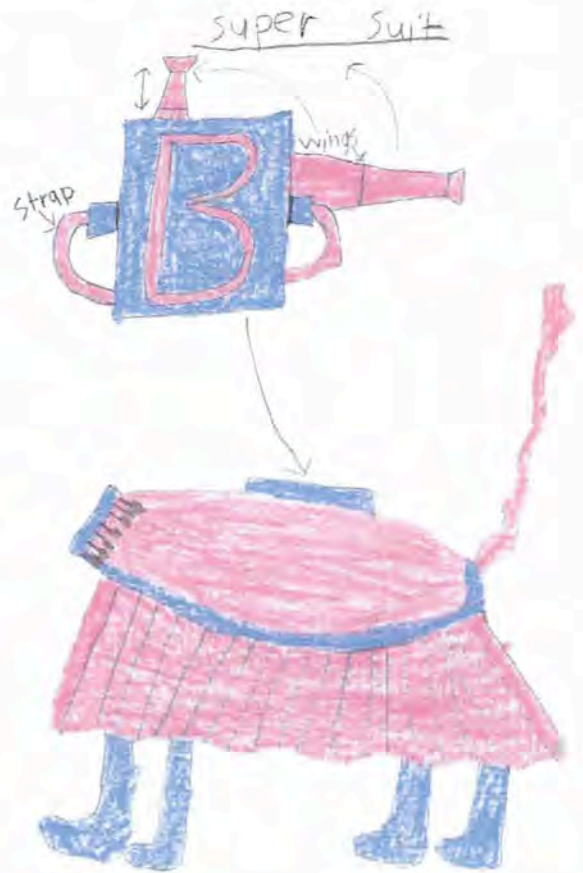
Chapter 2: Bella saves Ellie

I knew that my family likes colorful toys. So, Ellie must have woken up to chase the colorful crystal. It must have been Villain Dog from what the villagers had told my family. Also, Angel Cat told me that when the crystal is in bad hands, it rains.

I decided to go and get Ellie and the crystal from Villain Dog. I got in my suit and put on my wings. You might be wondering how I got my powers. I got my powers from a rainbow. My powers are seeing through things and flying. Angel Cat told me that I also have the power of kindness. To get your powers and superhero costume, you must walk over the rainbow. Your costume appears as you go over the rainbow. My costume has bells on the collar and a pink dress with spots for my legs. I also have a

wing pack on my back. When I first got my powers and superhero costume, I was nervous to be a superhero. After I grew into my suit and practice my powers, I now love my superhero costume and powers so much.

Rainbow!



Good thing I had practiced flying a lot I thought. Thunder crashed all around me. I was a pink streak! Well...maybe not. But I was still fast! I was so worried about Ellie because she might not understand Villain Dog. I knew that Villain Dog just wanted a friend. I could see animals in the distance which meant I was close to Animal Town. More rain poured down. It was faster and stronger than ever. Down below, there was soggy grass everywhere. I was starting to feel more and more nervous that I would need to land and wait for the storm to pass. I felt a little bit of confidence growing inside me when I thought of using my power of kindness to help Villain Dog.

I flew over the big forest. Angel Cat had told us to never go into the forest. The forest is a forbidden place. Angel Cat said to never go into the forest because bad things will happen. It is thick and dark. She told the cats that one time a cat went in, and never came out!

Soon, I saw Animal Town. I used one of my superpowers and looked through a wall. "Nope!" I said as I moved on. There was only a family of mice. I looked through another wall and saw that Villain Dog's lair had a spiny chair, a computer and lots of costumes. There was also a fragrant smell of dog treats. I saw hard ground and a medium tall ceiling. Ellie was in his doghouse. Then I heard Villain Dog asking Ellie to be his friend. I went through his secret door and said "do you want to come to Kitty Land with us and return the crystal?" "Yes, I would like to have a friend, also!" he said. We all went back home together.

Chapter 3: Villain Dog's Party

I told all the cats not to be afraid of Villain Dog because he just wanted a friend. I showed them that we all have the power of kindness. We all watched as Villain Dog placed the crystal back into its case in my home. The weather immediately got better. The rain stopped coming down from the clouds and the sun came out.

We all decided to have a party to celebrate the power of kindness and new friendships. There were lots of treats and food. Banners were hung everywhere, and there was a big piñata. We all celebrated as the sun went down. At sunset, clouds floated back through and burst into colorful shiny confetti. All the cats went wild and lunged at the sparkling confetti.

Then I found Villain Dog and said, "do you want to live in Kitty Land with us?" He said "yes!" I showed him a big doghouse and guess what? He loved it! He invited everyone to come inside and take a

look. Then we all went outside and heard the crickets chirping harmoniously. It was a beautiful summer night. The moon was shining as we all went to sleep.

I learned that it takes practice to be good at skills – like flying and friendship. We all learned everyone has a superpower - kindness!



A Prickly Situation

Not all heroes wear capes; or are human.

It was a cold winter day. There was a fresh layer of snow on the ground, and more was falling from the sky. The trees looked like something you would see in a Christmas movie because of how the layer of ice on them sparkled. Paisley the porcupine was looking for some food. "Ugh! I can't find anything to eat!" she thought. "Maybe if I head out onto the lake a bit?" As she was walking down onto the frozen lake, she tripped and fell, and went through a thin spot in the ice into the cold water! Oh no! Paisley can't swim!

While this was happening, Lexi was taking her dog Danny on a walk. They were on the trail by the lake when Danny heard cries coming from the lake. "Help! Help! Please help me!" Danny began pulling frantically at the leash and barking like crazy. Lexi was super confused. She said, "Danny chill! What's wrong?" but Danny just kept on trying to get out of his leash. Why couldn't Lexi hear the calls for help? He needed to get to whoever was crying for help. If only Lexi spoke dog. Eventually Danny managed to slip the leash out of Lexi's hands and ran to the lake where he saw Paisley drowning.

Without thinking Danny hopped into the water to help Paisley. Paisley had barely any energy left, but she was freaking out. "No! Don't eat me!" "Get away!" She managed to get a few quills in Danny. Danny didn't care and kept helping Paisley. "Calm down. I won't eat you. I'm trying to help. Relax!" Paisley was worn out but realized he was trying to help so she relaxed.

Then Danny gently carried her out of the frozen lake. Paisley apologized for getting her quills in him. "I'm so sorry, thank you so much for saving me. You are my hero!" Danny said, "It's ok! Anytime. Be careful." Paisley scurried off into the woods.

Meanwhile, Lexi saw the whole thing. In a panic, she ran over to Danny to make sure he was alright. "My sweet boy! Are you ok?" She checked him over and only saw the quills sticking out of his body. She knew she needed to take him to the vet to get the quills off of him. After the vet, and because Danny saved Paisley, Lexi got Danny a pup cup. "For my brave boy!" she said. Danny was very grateful for the treat and for getting the painful quills out. He was glad Lexi was his human.

Lexi decided to go back to the lake to see if Paisley was there. Sadly she wasn't but Danny and Lexi both knew Paisley got to see another day because of what Danny did.

Not all heroes wear capes

By: Evalyn Altmann

As I finish eating cereal for breakfast (Strawberry Swheat - best kind to ever exist), I realize Isla isn't in the living room. I walk up the stairs, open the door to her room, and see that she's wide awake. Since she's a teenager, most people would think she's probably checking her phone for any new notifications. But no, she's finishing a card she had made for her teacher. It reads, "I looked up the best teachers! And guess what? You were the only one on the list!" She finally notices my presence, looks up and says,

"What? Today is Teacher Appreciation Day so I wanted to appreciate my teacher!" she states.

"Ok ... just wanted to check what you were doing," I say.

I start walking out of her bedroom-

"Hey! Don't think that I don't appreciate you, either!" she grins.

How does she do it? Every day she manages to make me smile. Whether it's a compliment or her just being ha I sometimes wonder how someone as lousy as me could have her as a sister.

"Kai, you coming?" my mom yells up the stairs.

"Yeah, just talking to Isla," I reply.

I come downstairs only to see my mom's laptop open. Why would she have it out? She has to drop me off at school. My curiosity gets the best of me, and I peek to see what she was looking at. 'What to do if your child has an imaginary friend' has filled up the search bar. Does she mean Isla? She's real! All of a sudden, she comes over and sees me looking at the laptop.

"Don't worry about that. I was just looking something up for a client," she reassures me.

A therapist? Looking something up for a client? Even if she was, wouldn't it be private? That just doesn't sit right with me. Plus, I'm 13- don't you think I would be able to look that stuff up if I was concerned? And I'm not. Because Isla is

Evalyn Altmann - Age 12

real. I look up, and see my mom walking out of the doorway. I quickly run out after her into the car.

I hop off the bus with Isla right behind me.

"So, how was the field trip today?" I ask her.

"It was fun!" she replies.

We walk into the house and my mom tells me she wants to talk to me. I follow her to my room.

"What is it now?" I say since whenever she does this it's always something bad.

"I wanted to tell you that you have your first therapy appointment Tuesday." she says, already looking guilty.

"Therapy? For what?" I can feel my face heating up.

"For Isla. Your sister," she replies.

"Well if it's for her, then why doesn't she have to go to therapy?" I fume.

"There's a difference between you and your 'sister'. You're still here and your 'sister' is-"

"MY SISTER IS STILL HERE!"

How does she not get it? Her, of all people should know she's still here.

"Sweetie, I know that's what you think, but it's time for us to figure this out. Isla is no longer with us," she hushes me before I can say anything else, "and I thought that maybe going to a therapist might help. This has been hard for me and even harder for you " she finishes.

I know that anything I say won't change her mind, so I decide to just sulk in my room for the rest of the night.

Tuesday comes around, and let me tell you, I am *not* looking forward to this therapy appointment. School goes super fast, which means that the appointment is gonna go super slow. I get home and my mom instantly pampers me, asking questions like, "How was your day?" and, "Would you like a snack?" I end up with applesauce and watching *King's Mountain: A Rise to the Top*. Soon enough, my mom tells me it's time to go. I groan, but start putting my shoes on.

Evalyn Altmann - Age 12

Once I'm in the room, sitting in the most uncomfy chair ever, she asks how my day is. I tell her it's it's good. even though it was mediocre at best.

"So, tell me about yourself!" she says.

"Well, I have a sister named Isla and I like bagels," I reply.

"Tell me more about Isla," she questions.

"Well. .. she's always been a bit of a hero to me," I think I'm starting to warm up to this girl? And I don't even know her name.

"What's your name?" I accidentally blurt.

"Crystal," she answers.

"And I'm guessing you already know my name?"

"Yup," she chuckles.

"So, anything you want to say?" she asks me.

I debate telling her, but finally give in.

"My mom thinks that Isla isn't still here, when she clearly is." I say, my voice shaky.

"Aah. I see. And how old is your sister?" she wonders.

"18."

"And why do you have such a special connection with her?" she asks.

"Well, she's always been really kind and supportive of everything that I do," I reply.

We talk some more and she checks her watch.

"Oh! Looks like we 're out of time," she states.

She directs me out of the room to my mom, and waves goodbye.

"So ... how was it?" my mom asks, excited.

"It was fine I guess," I say, trying to sound as bored as, possible. I can't let her know that I actually liked it!

"Might there be a reason for why you're grinning. then?" she smiles.

Shoot. I forgot I'm really bad at acting. There's no way I'll be able to pretend I didn't enjoy it without her knowing.

"Ok, ok. You caught me. I liked it." I say.

"I knew you would!" her smile grows.

Evalyn Altmann - Age 12

Over the next few appointments, she seems to convince me that Isla is less and less actually here. It's really sad, because I always thought she was the best sister and I was so lucky to be her brother. She was ... how do I put it? A hero? Even that's not a good word to describe her. It just seems as if she was there whenever I needed it. And I needed 'it' *a lot*. So, if I didn't have her (whether she's still here or not), I wouldn't be where I am today. But, let me state my mom word for word:

'You're getting older, you need to come to your senses.'

I believe I've now 'come to my senses'. But also, over the course of these appointments, I've learned that Isla has helped me with so much. Crystal said that I could still have Isla as a support, just to not put her over family that's still here. I suppose that saying only Isla has helped me is a slight lie, Crystal has as well. Anytime I feel down, I can still go to Crystal since she'll always be there. I can tell that Isla is slowly fading away, I see her less and less. But, I've learned a lot by going to these appointments with Crystal. I lost my sister to a car accident. and at 11 I couldn't grapple that. She helped me realize that for me, my only way to keep her in my heart was to believe she was still here. She's taught me many coping skills, and I would've never known how helpful therapy could be if it wasn't for my mother. I have multiple heroes in my life, and I'm really lucky to know them. Crystal, my mother, and Isla are all examples. Now that I can focus more on my life, instead of Isla's, I have more time with my friends. Isla seemed to take more and more of my regular day away from me. I would always be thinking about her and not thinking about myself and couldn't fully figure myself out. I've figured myself out, learned from it, and opened the door to a new path. 'We dream of a brand new start, but we dream in the dark for the most part.'¹ I think I finally have the lantern to overpower that darkness.

1 – Aaron Burr, Hamilton

RISHABH JAIN
12 years

THE ANATOMY OF A HERO

The world is full of heroes. The word hero means different things to different people. It could mean a person who defied the odds, creating something wonderful or simply someone who did an ordinary thing in an extra ordinary way, in the process redefining excellence.

In this article we shall discuss the attributes of a hero, who they are, what they do, what they symbolize, what impressions they leave on the world, and what you can do to be a hero. Because the world is a big place, and only true heroes leave lasting impressions behind. Here, I have quoted multiple references from the series "Keeper of the Lost Cities". So, let's begin!

Definition of a Hero and what they do

The actual definition of Hero is "a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities." And most heroes fulfil this definition. But not all heroes are well deserving. Some are imposters, stealing credit from others. Alexander Hale from "Spy School" by Stuart Gibbs is a good example of this. But others don't seek any kind of fame.

RISHABH JAIN
12 years

Strange as it may sound, some people don't want to be recognized as a hero. Again, some book characters like in "Keeper of the Lost Cities" "Aru Shah" and "Funjungle" are relevant examples. Although some of these heroes don't seek public recognition or intend to become famous, the evil acts of villains spur them to act and defend the good. Sophie Foster in "Keeper of the Lost Cities" is an excellent example of this. She will do anything to stop the "Neverseen" (group of villains from KOTLC), but at the same time making sure that no one she cares about gets hurt. That's another quality a hero has.

The Power of Words

Villains like the "Neverseen" play mind games by getting into the hero's head creating self-doubt. Questions such as: Am I good enough? Can I really save everyone? Is this hopeless? and so on.

Words can be very impactful and can be very effective weapons. They can change the course of history forever. A good compliment can motivate a person to achieve great things. But an insult can be highly destructive. For example, the heroic Team Valiant in "Keeper of the Lost Cities" works harder, better, and happier when they are motivated well, compared to when they fight each other.

RISHABH JAIN
12 years

The Truth About Heroes

You might wonder why I am talking about how villains play mind games. But it's all part of the mix of light and dark that make up a hero. And now things get interesting. Because here's the truth about heroes that you have all been waiting for:

There is no fine line between light and darkness.

That may sound like a cliff-hanger in a book. But it's the deep truth. Heroes are not perfect. No one is. Because sometimes even the very good people do bad things. And not everyone views a person as a hero. Sometimes a person who does bad things can be an idol for another group of people. The character of "Robin Hood" is a classic example. So, one has to look between the lines. You will be able to see that person for who they truly are. Keefe learned this the hard way about a character in KOTLC.

The Qualities

There are qualities of being a typical hero. This includes:

Bravery.

Determination.

Kindness.

Strength (mentally or physically).

Intelligence.

Empathy and willingness to help.

RISHABH JAIN
12 years

These qualities and others make up most heroes. They may experience setbacks sometimes. But these core qualities keep them going, until the goal is accomplished. However, you don't have to be all of these, just do what my science teacher Mr. Duis says: "Be kind and work hard." This will get you very far in life.

Conclusion

Heroes are everywhere. From Mickey Mouse to the person who saved a polar bear's life to a knight in shining armor, they stand together. And who knows? Maybe you did some heroic act in your lifetime! The thing is, heroes are protecting us every day, like the doctors and cops in our community. And they might be good or bad, depending on who we may ask.

What you can do

If you feel like something in your neighborhood/village/town/city needs to change, do it yourself and use those qualities! Don't wait for a hero to come along. And if someone has the same goals as you, join hands and help them! Don't hesitate. Because anyone with good intentions and right action can be a hero. And you don't have to call yourself a hero. Just say that you achieved your goals.

So, go be a hero, get out there and change the world not just to benefit yourself, but to help and serve everyone.

REDEMPTION

BY EMERSON MARSOLEK

This is the story of a villain. I know, this is supposed to be the story of a 'hero'. In all honesty, I want you to explain to me what a hero is. 'A person who saves and protects people,' some will say. 'Someone who defeats the villain!' others yell. Don't those two intersect? How does a hero protect people without hurting others? All a hero is, is a random person, usually with superpowers, in a flashy costume, trying to get a point across. Isn't that what the villain is? "But the villain hurts people while doing it!" Really? So, your precious heroes have never had to step on people to get what they want? They have never injured innocents in an effort to get to the villain?

The word hero and villain have been muddled and thrown against a wall when it comes to figuring out who to cheer for in a fight. Everyone looks the other way when there are a few civilian deaths around the hero, but when it comes to the villain? It's a whole different story.

I apologize, we are getting off track. My name is Mia Poole, and I am the villain The Void, or just Void for short. No, I am not the 'Mwhahaha' villain, those are plain annoying. I am a villain who would like change in this world. You see, in my world those with powers often suffer from one of the following.

- A) Abandonment (doesn't matter if by friends or family)
- B) Experimentation (The normals *love* poking and prodding us)
- C) Abuse
- D) Being used like a weapon

Pick your poison. My hope is to change this, I had learned that violence tends to get my point across much faster than polite conversations. So, I decided that being a villain might just help out. I am Void. I am Mia. And this is *my* story. Not the hero's, not the civilians, it's the villains. *Mine*.

PART ONE: THE GIRL IN THE WINDOW

I was not a stranger to orphanages. Especially not to Littlewood orphanage, I lived there myself for some time. It was the only orphanage in the world that took only Supers. Contrary to the nice name it was not a nice place. It was constantly dirty, and the children slept on bare mattresses. It was part of why I did what I did. It wasn't right for people to just leave the children and ignore what they were going through. Also, no one ever got adopted from there. I didn't, no one did while I was there. Everyone walked past it and ignored it, like it didn't exist, like the children didn't exist. Except me. I made a point of waving to the children who always stared from the window.

One day, I noticed a new girl in the window. She was thin, with brown hair that reached her ears, she had a searching look on her face, like she wanted to know the real reason I was there. Was I pitying them? Was I going to gossip about them? I would do neither. I didn't pity and I had no one to gossip to. It was one of the many perks of being a villain, no one knew you existed. Sure, sometimes it was lonely, but not really. I continued to walk. The next day the girl was there, again the next day. She seemed to only appear when I did, that odd look on her face. I decided to find out more about her.

No, I wasn't going to spy on her! I was going to talk to her. *Goodness* what is with you people? *Anyway*, I left the place I worked my day job at earlier than usual and managed to get to the orphanage at the time I knew that they would all be outside; but the girl wasn't there, this meant that she was probably still inside, which was odd since the matrons didn't like to let anyone out of their sight. I would have to use my own abilities to find her, now, in my world there are about five levels when it comes to powers, mine, is a level five. Shadow control. It's exactly as it sounds; I can turn my body into shadows or control them themselves.

So, all I did was step into the shadow of a tree, and bam, I was gone. I found the girl in a room by herself. Which was odd, no one was allowed to room alone at Littlewood, not even someone who was as supposedly dangerous as

me! Although, that might have changed, given the fact that my last roomie had left with PTSD.

“Hello there!” I said pleasantly.

The girl gasped and shot straight up, she stared at me “the hell.”

“Well, theirs’s no need to be rude.”

“Who? You-... You came from the shadows!” She startled “You’re Void! I knew it! I knew you were a super!”

“Yes well, I prefer Mia while I’m not in costume.” I scowled at her “And who might you be?”

“What? Oh! I’m Tessa, but you can call me Tess!” The girl, Tess, smiled “Wow, I’m actually like, kind of a fan of you ma’am.”

That, caught me off guard, “a... fan?” “I have... fans?” I hadn’t known that. I shook my head, that was not the reason I had come “Actually” I said, before Tess could answer my question “never mind that, is that why you were staring at me? Because you thought I was a villain?”

Tess nodded.

“Why didn’t you tell anyone?” I asked.

“Because.” She responded simply; she was careful about what I wanted from her. I liked that; she was smarter than most of the heroes I fought.

“Why are you in here by yourself?”

“The matrons think I’m too dangerous.”

“And why’s that?”

“Because I can control people.”

I froze. Mind control, that’s... new... It wasn’t like mind control was unheard of it was just... rare. Very, very, rare. It was the only power that was classified as level six.

“They don’t like you, do they?” I asked slowly. Technically the matrons didn’t like anyone, but Tess? They probably liked her least.

Tess shook her head “No, they hate me, and the kids beat me up a lot because they know I can’t use my powers to defend myself.” She looked up at me “That’s why I like you, you’re trying to help kids like me. Even if no one will admit you’re not a villain I believe you aren’t!”

Being a super, it wasn’t... illegal per-say. But if you were rated above a three? You weren’t allowed to use your powers.

Odd child. The stairs creaked and I melted back into the shadows.

A matron walked into the room and glared at Tess, “Monster, enough slacking. Get off your butt and do the chores. Now.”

“All the other children are still on free time, and I already have done my chores!” Tessa yelped.

The matron bristled and grabbed a handful of Tessa’s hair “Are you talking back?!” she dragged Tess out of the room, I stared after them.

One thing for sure. I’m getting the kid out of here.

PART TWO: THE RESCUE

It wasn’t hard to get back to the orphanage. I snuck through the shadows back up to Tess’s room. She sat on her bed head in her hands.

“Psst” I hissed.

“What are you doing?!”

“Consider it a surprise adoption, pack your things.”

Tessa lept to her feet and dashed to the closet, quickly grabbing what little was inside.

Her door clicked open and a girl with red hair stood there, her eyes went wide when she saw me. I was wearing my costume to help blend with the shadows. A black jumpsuit with a matching mask.

She pointed at me and screamed “villain!”

And...

I don't know why it shook me to my core. I think it was because I was trying to help children like her and yet she still thought me evil. I shook myself and picked up Tess. Then, I ran. We were maybe a mile away before I stopped and set her down. Tess looked up at me, smiling.

“Thanks, for what it's worth? You're my hero.”

PART THREE: THE END

I'll be asked this question a lot, so I'll just answer it here.

“If you could tell younger you one thing, what would it be?”

That you don't have to be angry at everything. The words hero and villain have been muddled over the years, but not in the way I used to think. Those terms are subjected to someone's personal opinions, let me ask you something, if I kill a killer am I good or bad? That depends on who you ask. In this world you want to be a hero to those you help, not their villain. I am Mia. I am Void. This is not the hero's, civilians, or even the villain's story. It's mine.

Klaus Hermann was a young man when he was recruited to join the German army during World War II. He believed in the cause that the Nazis were fighting for and was eager to serve his country. Klaus quickly rose through the ranks and became known for his bravery on the battlefield.

One day, while on a mission to capture a Soviet village on the outskirts of Odessa, Klaus and his men encountered a group of civilians who were attempting to flee. Among them were women and children, and Klaus couldn't help but feel immense guilt at the thought of causing harm to innocent people.

As the battle raged on, Klaus faced a critical decision. He could either follow orders and continue the deadly assault, which would result in the massacre of hundreds of innocent people, or he could choose to disobey his superiors and allow the civilians to escape.

"Take no prisoners." Oberleutnant Viktor's words rang in his ears.

Klaus forced himself to refocus his attention on the scene in front of him. Five of his infantrymen including one of his best friends, Felix Schmidt, were holding apart a terrified mother and father from a horrified young boy who appeared to be about four or five. The mother was hysterical with fear as the soldiers taunted them and waved their rifles menacingly. The leader of this pack of hyenas was a tall, lithe, serpent of a man known as Otto Weber. He laughed demonically as he charged, bayonet drawn towards the boy who had nearly passed out with terror.

A single shot rang out and all was momentarily still.

Otto's eyes glazed over as he collapsed where he stood, his last sadistic laugh still etched on his face. His comrades, shocked, stared behind him at Klaus, whose Luger pointed at where the soldier had stood just a moment before. The young boy scrambled back to his family, sobbing uncontrollably.

Klaus didn't, he couldn't, kill any more innocent civilians for a crazed, narcissistic dictator who couldn't even keep his own lies straight.

Felix, his best friend, walked up to him aghast and blurted "Why, Klaus? Why? "

Klaus kept staring straight ahead, as he slowly dropped his gun to the ground.

Felix continued. "You know what happens now, Klaus. My duty to my country is more important to me than even my best friend. I hope you understand that. Forgive me."

Felix stumbled back to the Oberleutnant's camp.

When the band of troops had had enough of beating Klaus, they brought him before Oberleutnant Viktor. Victor did not bother to hear Klaus' story, and his only contemptuous words were quite simply, "Shoot him."

Klaus felt numb. He had given just about everything he had to his country, and now they were going to take the only thing that he had left: his life.

As the firing squad assembled, Felix whispered to him as he was tying him to the pole that would become his grave. "Why Klaus? Why would you do it? I don't like it any more than you do, but what possessed you to do something like that."

And Klaus looked him straight in the eye and said; "Imagine if it was your family, Felix. Imagine if the Soviets made it to the Fatherland and did what we're doing now. Your two daughters ripped away from their mother, as their father was shot in front of them. My little boy, Hans, just five years old, having to witness what we are doing today. When I joined the army, my wife begged me to reconsider. We could have run to Switzerland! Even if we win, how would I be able to face my son, after being complicit in the slaughter of innocents. I refuse to pay homage to this disgusting atrocity against the human race. You may continue to play the Aryan soldier, but I would rather die than commit these sins. I only pray to my God that Hans will be saved when the inevitable happens, just like this little boy today."

Felix, with tears in his eyes, placed the blindfold around his friend's eyes and fastened the last knot around the pole, dooming his friend to a battlefield grave.

And as the Nazi firing squad counted down, Klaus felt at peace with himself and the world. He thought of his five-year-old boy at home, and hoped that there would be a hero for him too.

Drei . . .

Zwei . . .

Eins . . .

Feuer!

For it is a sad fact of life that the greatest heroes are often unsung, as their acts die with them.

Morning

Zoe Zhang, 13

Helen was in a fantastic mood. It was early morning, and she was dressed in a lovely lavender gown and her silky black hair braided and twisted into a bun and topped off with a silver ribbon tied in a neat bow. She had just left her bunk on the 2nd floor of an old mansion in the outskirts of New York. It was a neglected place, covered in vines and with weeds sprouting through the pavement. As she headed down to the living room the floorboards creaked as if they would collapse then and there. As she opened the imposing door connecting the hallway to the living room she spotted something that lifted her mood further. The housekeeper, a short and jolly woman, was standing at the dining table with a marvelous, fudge filled double decker chocolate cake for all the children, -and the best bit? It was absolutely smothered in sprinkles. She had said it was to celebrate the very special occasion, for which she was very, *very* much looking forward to. Helen frowned though as she had noticed the one thing detracting from her joy; the miserable weather which she thought was rather inappropriate for such a joyous day. The sky seemed to be drenched in darkness with lightning raining down. The disappointment faded as soon as it came though as just the thought of the special occasion filled her up with excitement. As she walked into the room though, Helen paused as she did not fail to notice the headhouse keeper's sudden look of discomfort. It was a face she'd never seen Ms. Polly make, an expression that seemed rather out of place on Ms. Polly's face, creased with smile lines, and usually full with joy. Helen shook away this thought however as Irina's Home for Children was about to open its doors in 10 minutes. Helen had spent the entirety of the morning preparing for this exact moment, and was shaking from excitement. She thought that it would be nice to talk to the other children gathered around the new couch near the entrance of the living room as well, as it wasn't just her who was excited for this special occasion. She ran over to the other children who were sitting on a couch covered in floral fabric -brand new. As they talked and laughed, Helen thought that nothing *-nothing* would ruin her day.

Maddie was sitting on the small brown couch which seemed to be approximately 40 years old, the color of lake water, musty, and of course was in the corner of the living room. She was mulling over the fact that she was *doomed*. Not to sound dramatic, but this was her 10th year sitting through this occasion, *-adoption day*. Once she was one of those children filled with excitement about this day who were now chatting near the bright, floral couch near the entrance. *For all those children it would be their first time -and maybe their last* Maddie thought bitterly. 10 years ago she was also one of those 7 year olds watching on as the others met their 'family'. Now as her 18th birthday was approaching she had no hope as nobody who walked through the gates of Irina's Home For Children would think to adopt *her* who would be, essentially kicked out in precisely 5 months. She wondered what exactly about her seemed to ward off all adoptees -almost as if she was cursed. She scoffed -what other reason would she be the only one to not be adopted out of all of the 100 children residing in this wretched house? Everyone treated her as such, who wouldn't? She hadn't even bothered to look nice, dressed in a drab brown dress and had her dull brunette hair down. The only person who ever treated her as if she might get adopted; even if she barely had a better chance than the world ending right then and there, was Ms. Polly -the

head housekeeper. Polly had always been a comfort to her and the others who weren't adopted. Maddie had always noticed that all the lively looking bright children were picked first, leaving all the 'sullen' looking children behind. *Like her* she thought. She waved such thoughts from her head however, as Ms. Polly announced the arrival of the visitors. She felt a sense of dread, and an icky bitter feeling as she rose from the couch as she stood to trudge towards the door, from which the guests would enter.

Ms. Polly watched on as the children prepared to greet the visitors; but this time she felt even more uncomfortable than previous years gone by, as for the fact that Irina had just informed her that Irina's Home for Children would be closing, for it was under maintained and they had run out of funding. All leftover children would be left on the streets of New York. Polly worried as the city was known for poor sanitation even as the 20th century approached -and certainly nobody cared enough to take in orphaned children. She shook off the thought -surely everyone would be adopted. In the back of her head she did think that perhaps Maddie wouldn't -but ignored the thought.

The visitors walked in, greeting Irina and the rest of the staff before turning their attention to the children; who were lined up in a neat row. One woman wearing a silken green tea gown and with a lovely smile stopped in front of Helen's bunkmate; Violet. As the sun sank lower in the sky, so did Helens spirits. She had begun to have doubts but now she was in a full blown panic. As if it couldn't get worse Irina called Violet back and proceeded to hand the woman who had been talking with Violet earlier a few documents -adoption procedures Helen assumed, and a couple minutes later signed them and beamed at Violet. At this point around only 10 children were left. Helen later saw Violet and the woman -whose name was Hazel, as she had been informed by an ecstatic Violet, hand in hand walking away. Now only her and Maddie remained. Helen had expected Maddie not to get adopted, everyone knew this fact, she was the only 17 year old after all, but her? Helen was shocked. She stood in denial for what felt like an hour before she thought; *there's always next year*.

"Ms. Irina would like to tell you some things." Polly announced.

Maddie had watched people come and pass -like she expected, but it didn't make it hurt any less. She knew it was over and she'd accepted it. But she still felt that horrible feeling of despair inside her as all her worries piled onto her. She knew she was already lucky not to be sent away to work in the factories, she was already lucky, many girls her age would've been working in the factories for around 2 years now -if not longer, but now she most certainly would. She sat down once again on the brown couch with the couch creaking underneath her worries.

She thought that *She would probably be fine just to have a harder life than the others*- at that thought Maddie felt rather bitter, *who wouldn't?*

She snapped back to attention as Irina had announced something to the both of them. Maddie's eyes opened in shock, and glanced at Helen.

"The home is closing."

-did she say the home was closing? It didn't matter to her but she glanced at Helen. She'd always watched her, playing with the other kids -even envious of them. But now... she couldn't help but pity Helen.

Polly was watching from the back of the living room as Irina delivered the news. She watched as Maddie, who wasn't particularly affected by this news, turned her head towards Helen. Polly had actually been thinking about all the what if's if a child wouldn't be adopted. She had been paid well by Irina, far more than those who weren't at the position she was in, and had been planning to retire as soon as the home was closing, and she was only 30, extremely young to be retiring. Becoming a legal guardian was one of the thoughts that had crossed her mind as she'd processed Irina news earlier.

I'll have to think about this.

January 1st, 1900

It had been nearly a year since Helen had moved to the suburbs of New York. Maddie had just dropped by to check on her as she'd been working a job at the nearby retail store, far more than Maddie had hoped for -she often said that Polly was her hero -as she'd recommended Maddie for the job, with it having far better working conditions than the factories of New York. She often dropped by to see Polly who was growing older. As for Helen, Polly was almost like her hero.

"Good morning Helen," Polly said with a smile.

The Reluctant Hero

I'm fuming by the time I finally fall asleep.

Fuming because there's no way we can win now, win a fight I didn't want to be part of in the first place. I never wanted to sacrifice and stay up late at night wondering when it'll be me who turns up dead after the secret police make another raid, never wanted to be a part of all this heartache as good people try to do the right thing in a world that punishes everything but evil.

All I wanted was to be a normal teenager. I'm not even sure how I got roped into this thing, but normal teenagerhood is about as far from me right now as fish are from the desert.

And those are the thoughts tumbling around in my head when I finally fall asleep.

The first thing I hear in my dreams is a rapid, methodical scratching. I sit up and open my eyes to find that I'm in a pristine white bed—too pristine, like a hospital. Someone is sitting next to me, knees drawn up in front of her and head bent over a notebook, blond hair covering her face. I clear my throat, and she starts upright, eyes wide.

"Oh! It's just you. Sorry, I wasn't expecting you."

The dream—if that's what it is—is oddly vivid, and I narrow my eyes. Probably just another plot to get me to reveal some secret that can take down the underground. Well, it's not going to work. I'm no hero, but I'm not about to play the traitor either.

"Although," she continues, "I suppose it's just as well you showed up anyway. I've been wanting to talk to you."

My eyes narrow further. "I don't even know you."

Her smile is infuriatingly patient. "Oh, yes, you do. You see, I'm your creator."

"Right, and I'm the king." Then what she said sinks in, and I blink at her, clutching the blankets to my chest. "You're my *what*?"

"You," she says slowly, like she's talking to a child, "are a fictional character. You weren't even in the original draft, but I needed a sidekick character to help emphasize the main character's flaw."

"Okay," I manage after a moment. "That's fine. It's not like I even want—"

"—to be the hero," she finishes for me.

"Yeah." I clear my throat, resisting the urge to fiddle with the blanket as I watch her like she's a predator. "Um... do you read minds or something?"

Again, that infuriating smile. "Only my fictional characters'."

"Right."

"You don't believe I'm your writer? I can prove it."

"Go ahead."

"And don't look at that!" She snaps her fingers, and the folder I was eyeing disappears. "Outlines are not for fictional characters. Anyway, I know literally everything about you. You're fourteen years old, and never wanted to be involved in this whole mess of trying to take down the Empire and all—"

“Are you the reason our plans always seemed so far-fetched?”

“Maybe.” She pauses to indulge in a smirk, then continues smugly. “But before the underground took you in, you were living on the streets. You really don’t want to be sent back, but you also don’t want to be a part of anything illegal. You just want to do your thing and ignore the rest of the world... but unfortunately for you, the rest of the world refuses to ignore you. So, your solution is to do what you must to make the underground keep you—you also struggle with understanding unconditional love—and in the meantime, you love to annoy the serious main character.”

“Let me guess—Andrew?”

She nods, and I groan.

“Of *all* the *people* you could *possibly* have picked, it *had* to be the most *boring* person *ever* born?”

“Don’t be so dramatic,” she says. “Italics are a pain to type. Anyway, I wasn’t expecting you to show up tonight, but I have to talk to you. You haven’t been following the outline very well lately. In fact, you’ve been developing a mind of your own.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t intend to relinquish it.”

“That’s unfortunate, because if you don’t, you’re going to destroy the world quite rapidly.”

“Lovely.” I make a face, staring at the ceiling, then say, “Can’t you just force me to do whatever you need me to do?”

“Technically, I *can*,” she says slowly, “but I prefer not to. It makes for choppy writing. It’s my fault, really; I threw you into the story before really figuring out your motivation. Even now I’m not quite sure what it is. I don’t suppose you could shed any light on it?”

“No, not really.”

She sighs, flipping her notebook shut. “Then I suppose the only thing left to do is give you a plot spoiler.”

“Fire away.”

“If all goes as planned, you’re going to die in the next chapter.”

Probably this should send me into hysterics, but at this point it’s all so laughable that I don’t even blink. It’s just a dream, right?

“You see, when you wake up, you’ll discover the rumors were true. The Empire’s soldiers have uncovered the underground. A few people will go into hiding—Andrew among them—and the underground will continue, eventually rising to crush the Empire and begin a new world. That’ll eventually go sour, of course, but it’ll be much better for a very long time.”

“And... what exactly does this have to do with me?”

“You will be among those captured by the Empire. I’m sorry, but I really did need you to be captured so Andrew can discover his flaw.”

“Which is?”

“Being too serious. Of course, seriousness can be very helpful sometimes, but that doesn’t mean humor is wrong, which is what he seems to think.”

“Tell me about it.”

She eyes me with pursed lips. “I can see why you irritate him so much.”

“Finish telling me how I’m going to die—then we can talk about Andrew.”

“Well,” she says after a moment, “I’m not exactly sure. See, there are two paths your future can take. Neither of them is what you want, I’m afraid.”

“And... what are these paths?”

She waves her hand, and a mirror appears in front of me, hovering in thin air as if anchored to the ceiling by invisible strings. I stare at my own reflection—thin face, wary gray eyes, unbrushed brown hair.

“If,” she says softly, “you betray the underground, this is what will happen.”

The reflection in the mirror slowly morphs into an older face—arrogant, even cruel, opulently dressed, surrounded by a rich mansion, a beautiful woman on his—my?—arm.

“You will be hailed as a hero,” her voice continues, “and eventually rise to great power and wealth. You will even have a wife and children someday. But if you refuse, and keep their secret...”

The mirror shifts again, back to my own face, but not quite. The eyes are shut, and it’s covered in bruises that look so real I lift my hand to touch my cheek.

“Those are your choices,” she says with what might be genuine sadness, and the mirror disappears. “I would have liked to write you a happy ending, but I couldn’t. Not this draft, at least. If you refuse to betray the underground, you will die—rather painfully, I’m afraid. If you tell them all you know, you will receive all the glory, all the honor, all the heroism you could ever dream of.”

The mirror is gone, but all I can see is the closed eyes of my own reflection. I exhale slowly, fingers skimming over the bedspread.

I never wanted to be the hero.

“All right,” I finally whisper. “I believe you. Just... let me wake up and get it over with.”

She doesn’t ask what I chose. Maybe she doesn’t need to.

My eyes flash open to meet a blinding light, so bright I can’t even see the hand holding it, only hear the harsh voice that demands,

“Who is your leader?”

I close my eyes, allowing myself a faint smile. Probably my last.

“I’m sorry,” I say. “I can’t tell you that.”

Bethany Hanson, age 17

"Monster"

Every great story has a greater hero.

Sure, heroes aren't perfect. They have their flaws, but that's why we love them. Imperfect humans, like us, whom Fate calls to something bigger themselves, and they rise to the challenge. They become legends. People who have never met them love them, imitate them, honor them. Girls fall in love with them. They are an inspiration- they are all we could ever want, or hope, to be.

They're all *I* ever wanted to be.

All my years of childhood, that's all I dreamed of being. Every hour of sword practice, every good deed, every daydream was a part of my heroic mission. To be loved and admired.

To be *needed*.

Then my chance came. Fate pulled me out of my small town and threw me into the quest of a lifetime. I met a couple of friends, we joined forces to kill a dragon, got lost a bunch of times and ended up in a tavern, made a rich guy really mad... etc. You get the picture. And now we're on the battlefield, fighting against an evil rebellion.

This is it. If we were in a book, this would be the climax. The turning point. The hero's chance to prove himself once and for all and save everyone.

The problem is, I don't care anymore.

Somewhere along this long journey, I found out the truth.

I'm not the hero.

No, I'm not the villain character. That would be something.

I'm not even the lover.

I'm the sidekick. The best friend. The third wheel.

Sure, shake your head. Sigh. Think I'm too ambitious. Tell me everyone loves the ally character.

You'd feel different if you were in my shoes.

All you've ever wanted is to be noticed. Your entire life you trained for and dreamed about one thing... only to have it stolen by your best friend.

Christopher, who plays the lover character, although he doesn't quite realize it yet, motions me towards him. I channel my anger to make one last hit on my opponent, who falls over dead. I weave my way through the battlefield, dodging steel blades and men's bodies, and make my way to Chris's side. We fight our way away from the fray and hide behind a boulder on the forest's edge.

He is panting slightly. "It's not looking good out there."

"Can the King send more troops?"

"I doubt it. Where's Alexa?"

I grind my teeth, faking a teasing expression. "Probably off doing her hero stuff."

He laughs, and at that moment, she runs up to us. Her dark raven hair looks gorgeous, even in the middle of battle, and her perfect cheeks are flushed a rose pink. She drops to her knees in front of us, breathing hard.

"We must do something. Too many men are dying."

Bethany Hanson, age 17

"Monster"

"You're bleeding," Christopher says abruptly. He reaches forward to cradle Alexa's face, brushing away the thin stream of blood from her cheek. They stare at each other for a moment, as if they're all alone in this place, and that's all they need.

I wish someone would hold me like that.

Instead, I cough loudly and tease, "Do I need to leave you two alone?"

They break apart, flushing but smiling. I bet they wish I would leave.

Alexa looks down, obviously warring with herself. Finally, she sighs. "I'm going after him."

"No, you can't!" Christopher exclaims at the same time as I mutter, "Here we go."

"He may be your father, but he's also the leader of these rebels," Christopher continues, and Alexa winces at the reminder. "You've seen what they can do. I-I can't lose you."

"And I can't lose you." She takes his hand, and then turns to me. "Either of you."

Oh good. I thought you'd forgotten me.

"That's why I have to try to change his mind." Alexa gets to her feet, and we follow suit. "I've spent my whole life avoiding who I am. It's time I face it." She embraces Christopher, and then pulls me into a hug. I force myself to return it. She smiles at me, and I try to see her as my best friend again. It's not easy. Christopher folds her into his arms once more, and she leans up to kiss his cheek.

"I love you."

"I love you too."

She dashes off into the fray. She doesn't have much for weapons because she's not very good at using them, but she is quick. Christopher just stares after her, an inexpressible look in his eyes.

Why her? Why him? Why did Fate choose them instead of me? Why must I always be left behind while they race to their destinies?

Christopher turns to face me, his face heartbroken and lost. "What now? What should I do?"

"Follow her," I encourage him gently. "Whatever happens out there, she's going to need you."

He takes a deep breath, and a determined expression rises to his eyes. "I will. Thank you."

I grimace and nod, and he shoots me back a weak smile before running after Alexa.

I stare after him for a moment, and then turn and walk into the forest. I don't know where I'm going or why I'm not rejoining the battle. I only know I'm not needed here, and that I can't stay.

Why? Why her?

She's just a girl from a small town in the middle of nowhere, but she never had to work for love or notice. She turns heads and attracts friends wherever she goes. She isn't perfect, but no one cares—her crooked nose doesn't turn off all the guys who have their

Bethany Hanson, age 17
"Monster"

eyes on her, and despite her paranoia and talkativeness and annoying, random fears, everyone loves her.

She may have Christopher's heart, but I was the one who first convinced him to join forces with us.

She may have dealt the death blow to that dragon, but I was the one who brought it to its knees so she could stab it.

She may have managed to get us unlost, but I was the one who thought to bribe the tavern keeper for information.

She may have found the secret passage out of the rich guy's dungeons, but I was the one who had begged and pleaded and persuaded him not to kill us immediately.

She may be the hero, but I'm the reason we're alive to fight this battle.

She never had a dream.

I did.

And

it's

not

fair.

I don't care what happens anymore. I hope she gets just what she deserves. And I don't mean that kindly.

Something cold and wet laps at my foot, and I look down to see my reflection staring up at me from the river. My figure, dusty and ragged from battle, waves gently along the current flow. My hands are clenched into fists, and it's only when I open them I realize I've drawn blood. There's a raw wound over my left eye, and my hair is disheveled and tangled, despite the pony I pulled it into. My heart stops when I reach my eyes.

All I can see is hate.

Pure, unhindered hate pouring out from my soul and into my eyes.

I slowly sink to my knees, unable to look away.

So... much... hate.

Is that really me?

Do I really hate my closest friend in the world *that much*?

That can't be me. I don't want that to be me.

I tear my eyes away and bury my face in my hands. The tears stream.

Who wishes death on their best friend? Only a monster would do that.

Maybe that's why I'm not the hero.

I'm the monster.

After a while the sobs wracking my body start to steady. I don't have the strength to stand, but I do. I don't have the courage to turn around, but I do. I don't have the resolve to make my way back to the battlefield and try to fix the wrongs I have done... and yet I do.

Marisa Novak- age 17

The Silver Bullet

Marisa Novak

Marisa Novak- age 17

Everett Zachary stared at Metroville from his penthouse window. He saw the towering bronze statue of himself in an ugly elastic supersuit with his arm outstretched and his hand clenched into a fist. The expressionless face tilted up towards the sky. The statue was a tribute to his heroics as the Silver Bullet, the city's chief protector. But he felt nothing but guilt.

Everett checked his phone. There were infinite requests from the *Metroville Post* begging him to spit out the generic comic-book-worthy superhero epic about how he rose up from nothing and eliminated his villainous older brother, Victor. The *Post* wanted to show the glory while forgetting about the guts. Everett couldn't forget the guts.

Everett had been Metroville's most famous superhero for years, but he still didn't understand why people were interested in his life story. He was just Everett. Unfortunately, Metroville didn't see it that way. They craved a hero.

Everett and his older brother Victor were 14 when their superpowers manifested. Victor could shapeshift. When angered, he transformed into a large, black wolf that terrorized the city. As he got older, his villainous deeds earned him the nickname the Wolf.

Everett could fly and had superhuman strength and vision. He tried to hide his superpowers, but Everett's school principal caught him flying around the school building during lunch hour. He was found out and soon became the biggest hero of Metroville, the Silver Bullet.

Everett's phone buzzed. He picked up the call.

"Hello, Everett! How's my special superboy?" His mother spoke as though he were a poodle. He would have preferred the *Post* to his mother. "Did you see the TV special? You look so handsome. I hear we might be getting a movie deal!"

Marisa Novak- age 17

“Is this really why you called me?” asked Everett. “Because you needed my signature for a movie deal?”

“Um, actually, no,” his mother admitted. “We are converting the attic into a studio space and we found the Wolf’s belongings. We’re thinking about donating them to the Metroville Supers Museum, but that might be insensitive due to all the death and injury the Wolf caused. We might throw them away instead. ”

Everett cracked his knuckles. Like it wouldn’t be insensitive to send the only remnants of their oldest son to the junkyard. Corrine and James couldn’t even call Victor by his name. Victor was erased after the Silver Bullet speared the Wolf through the stomach with a street sign. Every time Everett closed his eyes, he could see Victor’s blue eyes fade to stark green then blink out.

“What do you think, buddy?” Everett’s father asked from the background.

“I think that you won’t do anything until I’ve had the chance to look through everything.”

Everett hung up the phone and walked out to his launchpad. He sucked in a deep breath, feeling his heart pound as the wind ruffled his hair. He took a step and flew into the sky.

.....

James and Corrine Zachery lived in the biggest mansion in Metroville. From the sky, it looked like a stain upon the countryside. Everett swooped down towards the estate, clearing the trees, the golf course, and the Olympic-sized swimming pool. He strode through the massive front doors without knocking and jogged up the gilded staircase, his shoes squeaking on the floor. His overdressed and finely-coiffed parents were waiting by the small ladder leading up to the attic.

“Mother, Father,” Everett greeted them as he approached the attic stairs.

Marisa Novak- age 17

“There’s my super son.” Corrine plastered on a smile as she strode over to Everett. She pinched his cheek like he was a newborn baby. “It’s been too long.”

“Where’s the stuff?” asked Everett.

“Up there.” His mother gave a halfhearted gesture towards the attic.

Everett blew past his parents into the attic. His heart was thudding, and he felt his hands grow clammy as he reached for the light switch.

“Victor?” Everett glanced down the grimy city alleyway, hoping to see his brother.

Everett jumped when he heard a soda can clatter against the graffitied brick wall behind him. He whirled around, feeling his gut twist when he saw the Wolf. It had vicious emerald-green eyes that pierced Everett’s soul. It growled and hunched down ready to go in for the kill.

“Victor?” Everett’s voice was soft.

The Wolf didn’t respond. If Victor still existed in the Wolf, he was hidden deep inside. Everett choked back a cry when the Wolf lunged for him, saliva flying from between its razor-sharp teeth.

The bulb flicked on. A small mountain of memories had been shoved off to one side of the attic to make room for the video equipment Corrine used to make spectacularly fake YouTube videos. Everett made a beeline for a pile of half-opened cardboard boxes caked in dust. Inside were Victor’s drawings—elegant pencil sketches depicting everything from alien spaceships destroying cities, to playful dogs that conveyed human-like emotion.

Everett touched the drawings carefully so they didn’t crumble under the weight of his hand. They still bore the smell of Victor’s cologne. Using his super vision, Everett could make out the faint outline of his brother’s hand on the paper. Tears sprung to Everett’s eyes as he ran his fingers around the edges of the worlds his brother had brought to life with pencil.

Marisa Novak- age 17

Everett threw a punch, using his super strength to knock the Wolf back against the brick wall. The wall exploded and the Wolf whimpered but quickly recovered. It lunged for him again. Everett wrapped his hands around its throat, using every ounce of his powers to keep the Wolf from tearing him to pieces.

"Victor!" he cried, desperately. "Victor, are you in there!?"

The Wolf growled.

"Victor, please!" Everett pleaded. "If you can hear me, you need to come back. The public, mom, and dad, ...they want you dead! They want me to kill you!"

Before Everett could react, the Wolf lashed out with a massive paw. Everett's chest exploded in pain as the Wolf's claws tore through his super-suit. He glanced down to see red stains spreading across the silver material. He grunted and threw off the Wolf.

Regardless of what Victor did when he was the Wolf...he was still the older brother who had stood up to bullies on the playground and played hide and seek late at night. But he knew Metroville would never be safe as long as the Wolf kept tearing people to shreds. He had to stop Victor for good.

"Do you choose me or Metroville?" the Wolf snarled.

On that day, Everett made a decision that he could never undo.

"I choose Metroville."

Just as the Wolf lunged, Everett ripped a street sign out of the ground.

"Victor!" Everett landed a blow that shattered the Wolf's leg. It could not continue to fight Everett with the latter's superhuman strength. However, Everett took another step closer to the Wolf.

Marisa Novak- age 17

The creature whimpered, and Everett saw its eyes flicker back to blue for a split second. His heart skipped, and he knew that it was now or never. Everett raised his arm and plunged the pole through the creature's stomach.

Everett looked at his fingers like they might still bear his brother's blood. He glanced at the boxes that served as his only link to his brother. Regardless of what Victor did as the Wolf, he was still Everett's family. His best friend by blood. No matter how many statues Everett had or how the public spun what had happened that night, Everett made the wrong choice.

He couldn't change what happened, but he could honor Victor by not letting his memories rot in a junkyard. He picked up the boxes using his superstrength and climbed back down the ladder to where his parents were waiting in the hallway.

"I'm keeping Victor's stuff."

"Why?" James asked. "He was a monster."

"So am I. So are you. You wanted him dead. I killed him." Everett's voice broke, and tears burned his eyes.

Corrine and James stood staring like Everett was an exploding volcano. They couldn't pretend they were innocent bystanders who merely got caught in the blast. They were the ones who caused the explosion in the first place.

"I wish we'd never manifested powers," Everett murmured. "Maybe Victor would still be here if we were just normal people."

Everett left the mansion with the boxes storing Victor's life and took off into the sky. He looked down at Metroville. The city failed Victor. And when Everett thought about it more, he realized Metroville failed him too. Everett wouldn't fail Victor.

Marisa Novak- age 17

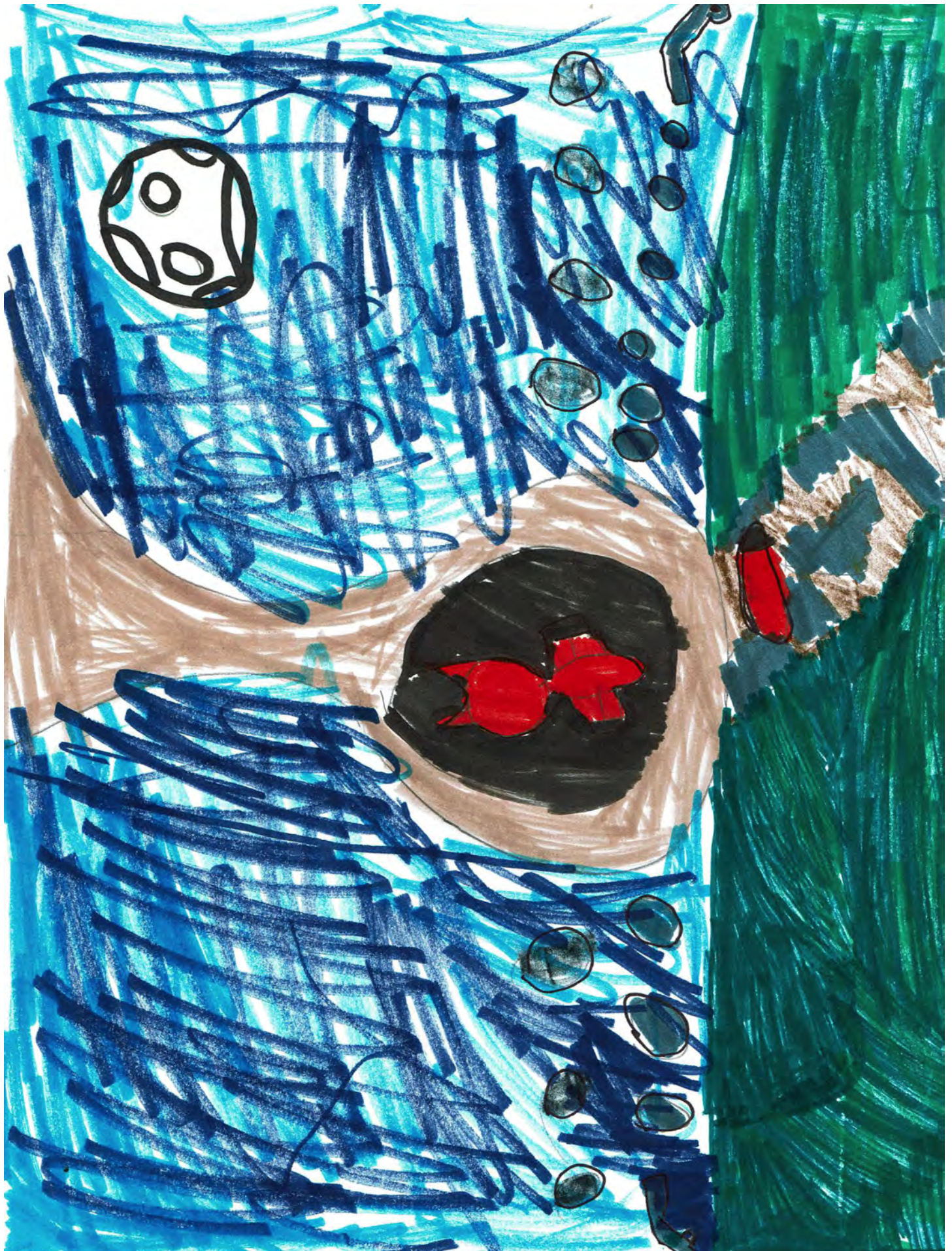
After tucking away Victor's boxes in the penthouse for safekeeping, Everett knew what he must do. Victor was buried underneath a tall oak tree far from the city. Everett knew the place. He would visit his brother's grave for the first time. The violent deeds of the Wolf were history, but the memory of Victor would live on.

"I'm coming, brother," Everett said before he took off into the sky.





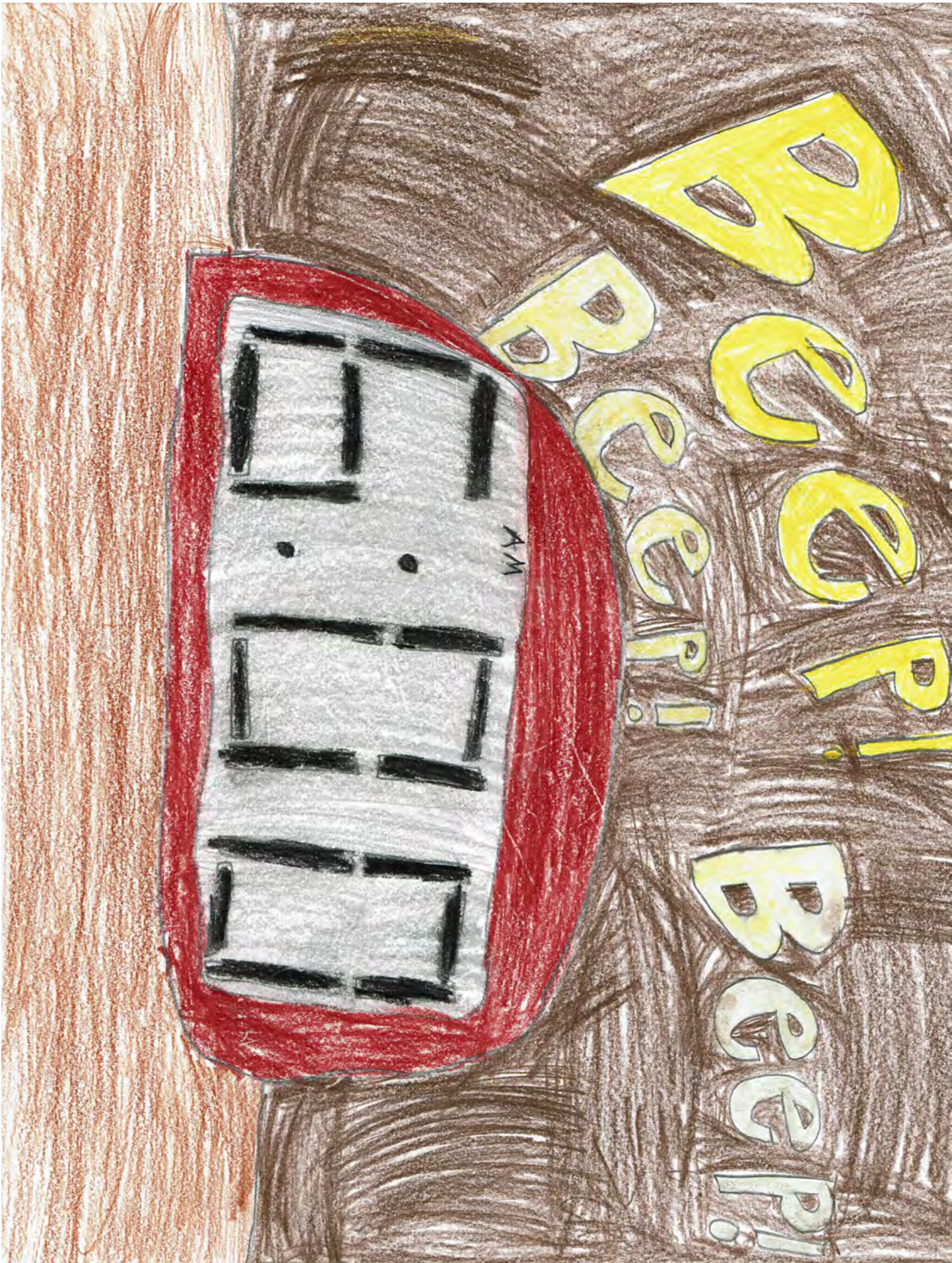
Nyllyn Huber





Abby Bair

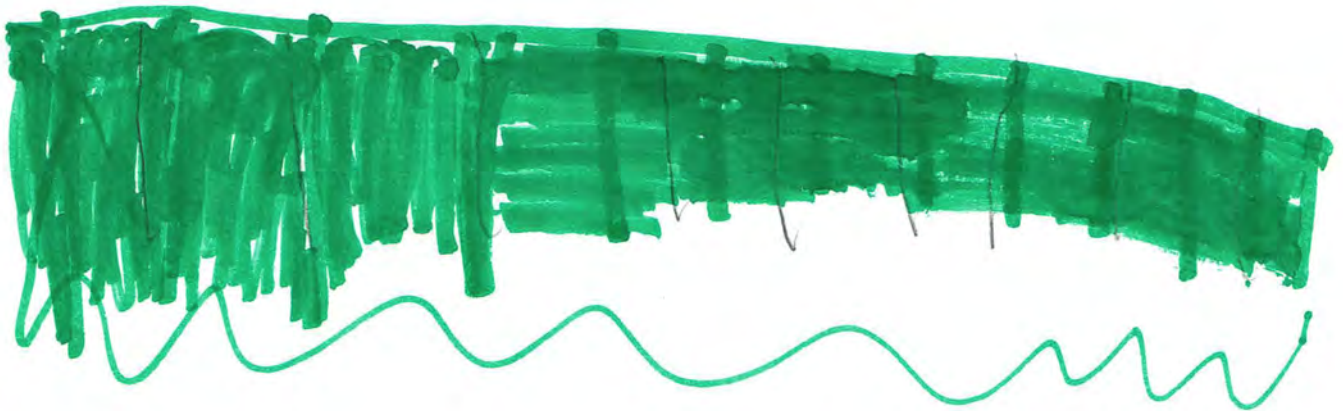


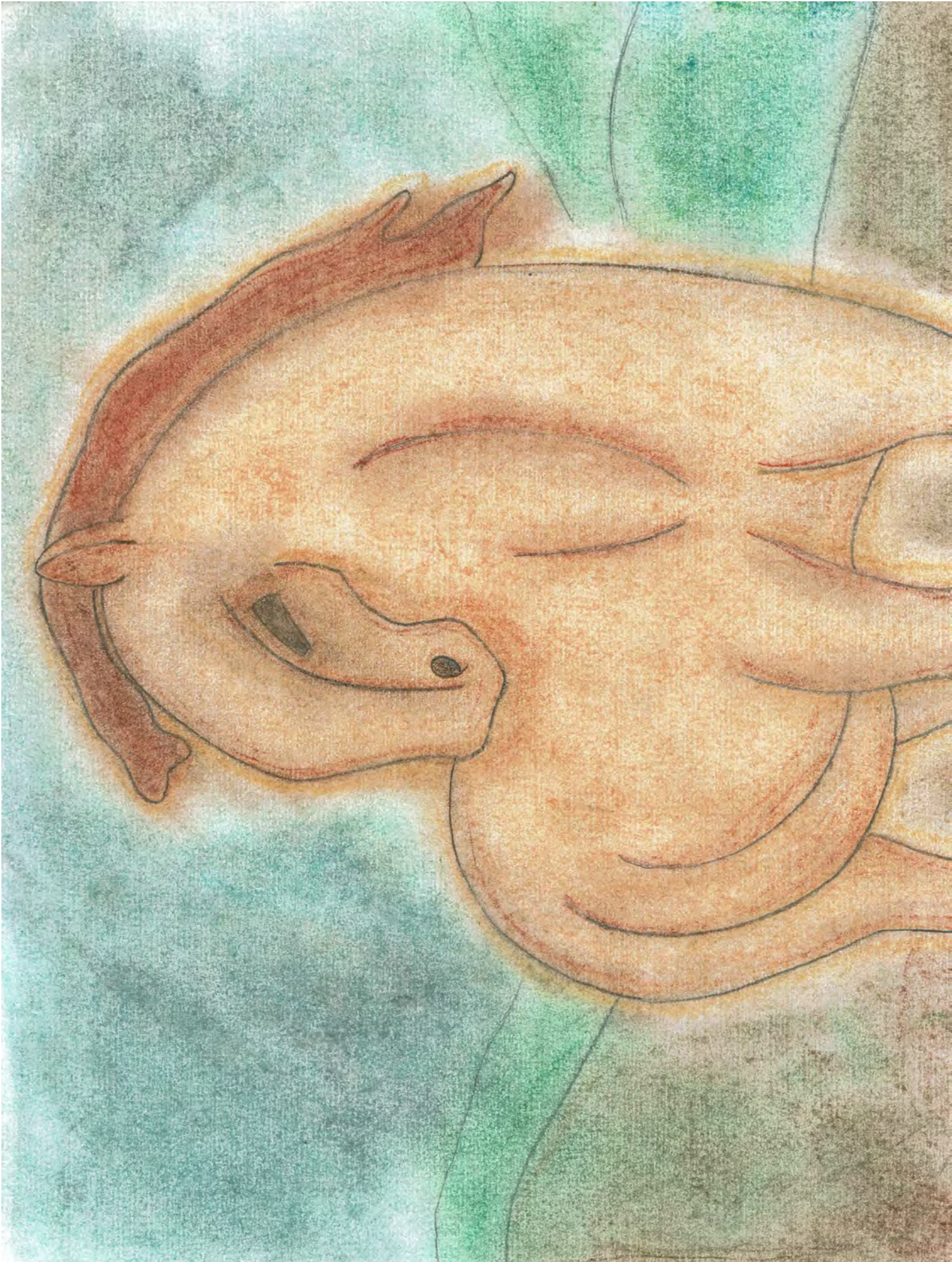






ADAM THIELEN











Deep Valley Young Artist favorite book and quote to describe their illustration

Ziva Schewe – age 7 – pg 52 – Book Title: Peter Rabbit

Quote: I fear that we shall be obliged to leave this pudding.

Nylan Huber – age 8 – pg 53 – Book title: Princess Ponies: A Special Surprise by Chloe Ryder – Chapter 3 - Quote: Pippa felt relieved as the two giant seahorses exploded through the motionless wave and stared expectantly at her.

Madeline Mehlretter – age 8 – pg 54 – Book title: Fantastic Mr. Fox by Roald Dahl – Chapter title: The Shooting – Quote: Quick as a whip, Mr. Fox jumped back into his hole and at that same instant the entire wood seemed to explode around him. Bang-bang! Bang-bang! Bang-bang! The smoke from the three guns floated upward in the night air.

Abby Bair – age 10 – pg 55 - Book title: The Secret Garden by Frances Hodgson Burnett - Quote: And over the walls and earth and trees and swinging sprays and tendrils the fair green veil of tender little leaves had crept, and in the grass under the trees and the grey urns in the alcoves and here and there everywhere were touches or splashes of gold and purple and white...

Kamila A. Smith – age 10 – pg 56 - Book title: World of Wonders by Aimee Nezhukumatathil – Chapter title: Axolotl – Quote: If a white girl tries to tell you what your brown skin can and cannot wear for makeup, just remember the smile of axolotl. The best thing you can do in that moment is to just smile and smile, even if your smile is thin. The tighter you smile, the tougher you become.

Synnove Volden – age 10 – pg 57 - Book title: Alone by Megan E. Freeman – Chapter title: Morning - Quote: Going off, going off, going off, going off, six a.m.

Clara J. Loffelmacher – age 12 – pg 58 – Book title: The Hunger Games – Chapter 13 - Quote: Oh, let her stay up there. It's not like she's going anywhere. We'll deal with her in the morning. Well, he's right about one thing. I'm going nowhere.

Lily Hanson – age 12 - pg 59 – Book title: Keeper of the Lost Cities: Stellarlune by Shannon Messenger – Chapter 42 – Quote: So she tilted up on her toes and leaned forward, meeting his eyes as she lined her lips up with his-careful to leave a tiny wisp

Deep Valley Young Artist favorite book and quote to describe their illustration

of space. A chance for him to change his mind. Keefe closed the distance between them. And then...everything was new. The soft press of his lips against hers.

Xander Meerbeek – age 12 – pg 60 – Book title: From Small Town to Football Star Adam Thielen by Lindsay VonRuden & Ryan Jacobson – Chapter 18 – Quote: Adam spent the 2014 preseason proving that the Vikings had made a good choice. He performed well enough at wide receiver, but he truly excelled on special teams.

Price MacPherson – age 13 – pg 61 - Virgil's Aeneis – Chapter title: The Second Book of the Aeneis - Quote: By destiny compell'd, and in despair, The Greeks grew weary of the tedious war, And by Minerva's aid a fabric rear'd, Which like a steed of monstrous height appear'd.

Tyyna Hall – age 13 – pg 62 – Book title: Warrior Cats: Long Shadows by Erin Hunter Quote: Upset? I'm not upset. You have no idea how much pain I'm in. It's like being cut open every day, bleeding onto the stones. I can't see how any of you failed to see the blood.

Megan Lawver – age 15 – pg 63 – Book title: Threads by Ami Polonsky – Chapter 26 Quote: In the center of the park, families, little kids, and even old people are all flying kites now. It's like the world is upside down and I'm looking down into an ocean full of fish, instead of up at the sky.

Jadynn Meebeek – age 15 – pg 64 – Book Title: Africa: Natural Spirit of the African Continent by Gill Davies – Quote: A zebra's stripes may serve to confuse the vision of its enemies but they also act as a badge of recognition for the animals themselves. They identify each individual as no two same-species zebra bear exactly the same markings.

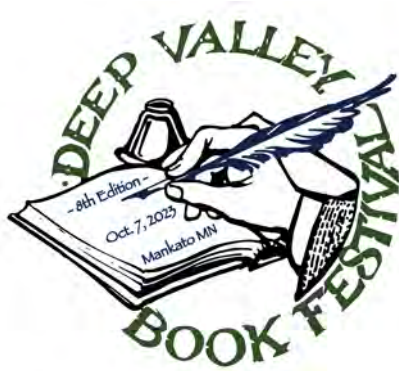
Jayda Schewe – age 16 – pg 65 – Book title: The Wonderful Wizard of Oz by L. Frank Baum – Chapter 2

Quote: "She was so old", explained the witch of the North, "that she dried up quickly in the sun. That is the end of her. But the silver shoes are yours, and you shall have them to wear."

Thank you to all of our entrants! Watch for news regarding the 2024 contest. You can find updates on our Facebook page (Deep Valley Book Festival) or website www.deepvalleybookfestival.com

The 9th edition of the Deep Valley Book Festival will be held Saturday, October 5, 2024.

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