

# 1

I DIDN'T MURDER my best friend-turned-bully in cold blood Really, I didn't.

Don't believe the rumors you hear in the hallways of Southwest Douglass High School or read on the Internet.

Seriously. Don't.

Even though they are more believable than the truth. More believable than what *really* happened that night when my whole world changed.

But it wasn't just my world that changed when that meteor crashed behind my apartment building. It was everyone's lives, every person who lived in or near Oklahoma City, even if those people had never heard of me, Tobias Miller.

Because the monsters that were born that night?

The ones you read about in the news?

The ones everyone thinks were space aliens sent to kill us or escaped government experiments or even shadow beings trying to torment our souls (depending on your flavor of conspiracy and if you are my granny or not)?

The ones that crippled Oklahoma City's greatest superhero and left the city defenseless?

I made them. All seven of them.

And now, I have to kill them before they kill more people I know, people I love, even if I didn't know it.

So sit down. I promise this story won't be too long, but it will be sad. You'll probably think I'm an idiot.

And yeah, I *was* an idiot. Maybe still am.

But please read to the end. Someone needs to know what really happened that night, during those fateful four months that changed everything (and not always for the better).

Someone needs to know my story, the story of Tobias 'Wyldfyre' Miller. The story of how I made my own supervillains ... and how I killed them, too.

Superheroes are lame. And do you know who the lamest superhero of them all is?

Captain Cowboy, the guy in the ridiculous cowboy/pulp spaceman hybrid costume lecturing my high school social studies class on the importance of following the Superhero Standard.

What *is* the Superhero Standard, you ask? Or don't, if you're smart and don't want to hear a middle-aged guy playing dress-up lecture to you about 'doing the right thing' and 'telling the truth' and other things that were cliché in kindergarten.

According to Captain Cowboy, the Superhero Standard is kind of like the Oklahoma standard but really, really lame. It includes such genius ideas like 'acts of service' and 'selflessness' and 'kindness' (insert vomiting noises here). It probably also includes butterflies and rainbows and tea parties and other things my annoying nine year old younger sister thinks are cool.

Then again, it makes sense that Mrs. Karen (yes, that is seriously her first name, and yes, it's fitting) Smerters would think our class needs to hear this garbage. Our social studies teacher has taken it upon herself to fight all sorts of injustices and isms and phobias and crap I don't care about in the comfort of her classroom. Guess that's what you do when you're a middle-aged cat lady who has nothing to look forward to at home other than your cats.

So I decided to spend social studies the way I spend pretty much every class I took: Drawing badass supervillains and anti-heroes in my sketchbook.

Why do I do that? ‘Cuz you’re looking at the next big comic book artist, baby. I might be only 15 years old, but even I can tell that school is a waste of time. Much better to spend my time becoming the next Joe Kettle AKA the coolest comic book artist ever, instead of listening to Oklahoma’s Son (yes, that’s one of Captain Cowboy’s nicknames) preach about being a good person or whatever.

“What are you doing there, son?” asks a drawling, Southern-accented male voice above me.

Snapping out of my thoughts, I look up to see Captain Cowboy himself standing in front of my desk. His hands are on his hips and he’s wearing the same look that every adult gives me when they see me drawing instead of paying attention.

I raise an eyebrow. “Drawing. Duh.”

I hear a familiar rehearsed gasp and Mrs. Smerters appears at Captain Cowboy’s side. She’s like half his height but double his weight and they make a weird-looking couple. “Mr. Miller! What have I told you about speaking to adults respectfully?”

I pretend to think about it for a second and shrug. “I dunno. Guess I wasn’t listening. Mostly because I already have your speeches memorized after hearing them a billion times.”

Mrs. Smerters’ face becomes red, which makes her look like a big red beet. “Young man, I won’t tolerate such disrespectful talk to either me or the guests I invite to speak in my class. Mr. Keaton here is a very busy man, so show him some gratitude for taking time out of his busy schedule protecting the city to speak to this class about the Superhero Standard.”

Captain Cowboy waves off Mrs. Smerters’ lecture. “Don’t worry, Mrs. Smerters. I always make time in my week to speak to schools in the OKC metro area. Besides, there is at least one kid like him in every class I speak to. He’s definitely not the first.”

Huh. Although I will never, ever admit this, I have to admit I am impressed that he isn’t going to just lecture me like Mrs. Smerters. Granted, he is cringe incarnate, but I guess not all adults feel the need to treat me like I’m a criminal before I have committed any real crimes.

Captain Cowboy folds his arms in front of his chest and leans against my desk. “Tell me your name, son.”

He is obviously trying to establish eye contact with me and I obviously am not going to give him that satisfaction. “Tobias. Tobias Miller. Though I go by Toby.”

Captain Cowboy nods. “Well then, Toby, it’s nice to meet you. You said you were drawing there? I like art. What are you drawing? Care to share it with me?”

That is when I realize that everyone in my class is staring at me, Captain Cowboy, and Mrs. Smerters. In particular, I notice that Mandy Summers, the prettiest girl in my class who sits a couple of rows ahead of me, is watching with fascination, her eyes practically glued to Captain Cowboy.

My neck growing hotter for some reason, I say, “I, uh, I draw—”

Someone coughs behind me and mutters, in that fake muttering way that people do when they want everyone to hear them, “School shooter art.”

I whip my head over my shoulder to see who had spoken and immediately spot Drew Ellison, my bully and archenemy, behind me. He keeps his head down like he is carefully studying his textbook instead of looking at me like everyone else, but I know he is paying more attention to me and Captain Cowboy than anyone else in the classroom. He is smirking, for god’s sake. No one has ever smirked at a social studies textbook.

As nonchalantly as I can, I kick the shin of Drew’s left leg, which he just so happens to have sticking out. Drew immediately pulls his leg back in and looks up at me, still smirking like the idiot he is.

That is why it is really creepy when Drew whispers, “Watch out after school today, Miller. You never know when you might get hurt.”

That may have sounded like a lame threat, but I suppose I forgot to mention that Drew Ellison is the quarterback of our high school football team and approximately half the size of a newborn baby elephant, and smells about as good. I, on the other hand, am a normal-sized human being with normal-

sized muscles, even if I am a bit on the thin side because I don't stuff my face like a pig every time someone puts food in front of me like Drew does.

But I don't show any fear toward Drew. Or I try not to. Like I said, baby elephant.

"That is not a nice thing to say to one of your classmates," Captain Cowboy says, reminding me that he is still standing there. He reaches out and picks up my sketchbook before I can react. He flips it open to a random page as he says, "I'm sure that Toby's art is perfectly fine. Why, I certainly can't draw a stick figure to save my life, so I'm always impressed by people who—"

Captain Cowboy goes silent when he sees one of my drawings. He even becomes as still as a statue, his mouth hanging slightly open.

I fidget in my seat. I hear giggles around me, more whispers and mutterings about that weird Toby and his weird art. Drew even manages to get in another fake cough about school shooter art. Mrs. Smerters just looks embarrassed.

I don't pay attention to any of them. Really, I don't. I don't care what any of those dummies think about my art. Not like any of them even have a creative bone in their bodies, anyway.

But it always is awkward when someone who has never seen my art before sees it without proper warning.

And Captain Cowboy is the last person in the world who I think would appreciate, much less understand, my art.

Then Captain Cowboy abruptly drops my sketchbook onto my desk and, without looking directly at me, says, "Uh, interesting art, kid. Not my style, really, but keep at it. I'm sure it'll get, er, better over time. Practice makes perfect!"

Then Captain Cowboy looks at the rest of the class and says, in his normal happy voice, "Well, it looks like it's time for me to go, kids! Remember, you don't have to be a superhero to follow the Superhero Standard and make Oklahoma City a safer place for everyone."

Coincidentally, the school bell rings at that exact moment and then my classroom becomes a whirlwind of activity as everyone tries to get their stuff and get out first. Drew slams into my shoulder with his bag on his way out and reiterates his veiled threat to beat me like a punching bag after class.

But I pay them no attention. I do, however, notice Mandy and her friend Millie joking and laughing with each other as they empty their desks and fill their bags. Due to all of the noise, however, I don't know if they were laughing at me or not.

Not that that makes much of a difference either way, however.

Because I feel really embarrassed.

And not just because I hear Captain Cowboy say to Mrs. Smerters in a low tone on his way out the door, "That kid needs counseling," to which Mrs. Smerters replies in her usual shrill voice, "We've tried."

Though honestly, that isn't the worst reaction I ever had from an adult I didn't know who has seen my art for the first time. It is a pretty mild reaction, actually, given how it showed a guy who is obviously meant to be Drew being devoured by one of my supervillains, Humanimal the Cannibal, in very graphic and bloody detail. At least he didn't see the ones showing Humanimal eating Mrs. Smerters or my dad.

Then he really might think I am disturbed.

But I don't care. I just slide everything into my backpack, including my sketchbook, and leave the classroom.

After all, I don't want to be late for my 'date' with Drew later.

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Read the rest of "Gluttony" is [HERE!](#)