

Bo McMillan

Supernova

I am one of the most powerful superheroes ever. My name is Supernova. I got it from a TV show about outer space. I have a really cool suit and it's easy to put on. The only hard part is when I have to tie the strings in the back, but I just have Mom or Mrs. Laven help me. I used to have a cape, but I made Mom take it off because it was too big and sometimes I tripped on it. One time I was leaving my house and it got caught in the door. I didn't know it got caught so I kept walking and I fell down. It was really scary because I thought someone was behind me and grabbed me. It's stupid when superheroes wear capes because they don't help you fly like some people think.

I was kind of sad when Mom took the cape off because Dad made the suit for me and he wanted it to have a cape. He said, "All good superheroes have a cape," but he didn't wear one. I haven't seen Dad in a really long time because he's in the army and had to go fight bad guys. I was really scared when he left because I know sometimes when you go to war you don't come back. But he said he would be okay because he was as strong as Captain America. I miss him sometimes, but when I look at the pictures in the comic books he gave me and I watch superheroes on TV I don't miss him as much because that's what we used to do together. He told me I was the man of the house now so I had to take care of Mom and be brave and not cry when I miss him. Mom cries a lot, and I tell her how great of a hero he is and that he'll be okay, but sometimes that just makes her cry more. I try to say things that will make her feel better because if she cries too long she shuts the door to her room and calls Aunt Betty.

Dad told me it was important to hide my true identity, so he made me a mask. The mask helps keep my secret safe but it protects me too. Like, if a bad guy punches me in the head it won't hurt as bad. My mask isn't very hard, but that's okay because it probably wouldn't even hurt if I got punched because I'm so tough.

I'm walking around in the backyard because I'm looking for Captain Machinegun who is in the army like Dad. We meet sometimes and talk

about stuff like formations, which is the way an army stands when they're going to attack. Before Dad left I told him to stand in the back of his formation so he would be safe.

It's a really nice day, which is good because if it's too cold or rainy Mom makes me stay inside. If it's too hot then I get really sweaty because I wear my costume over my regular clothes. But today there's some wind and it feels good.

Captain Machinegun is supposed to be in the big patch of dirt near Banjo's doghouse, but he's not. In fact, he's not anywhere in the backyard. I go in and ask Mom but she doesn't know. She tells me to play with another toy because I have so many of them, and I tell her that Captain Machinegun is the only one in the army. She tells me she's making macaroni and cheese, and it's almost ready, and to just go find something to do until then or I'll get a smack. I run into my room and look on the floor and look in my toy chest but he isn't there either. I run back into the kitchen and tell Mom that he's gone for real but she's mad now and starts counting. I make it out of the kitchen before she gets to two and sit on the couch to think. If Captain Machinegun isn't in the house or outside, and I can't find him, and Mom doesn't know where he is, then what happened to him?

Somebody must have kidnapped him.

Who would take him? I didn't do anything to anybody so why would they want to take him away from me? Bad stuff should only happen to you if you do bad stuff. I'm going to find out who kidnapped Captain Machinegun and I'm going to save him.

"Justice League" is on TV, and I'm hungry for macaroni and cheese, which Mom yells will be ready in five minutes. I take my mask off because sometimes it's hard to see with it on. I'll start looking for Captain Machinegun tomorrow. I smell the macaroni and cheese, and it smells good and my mouth makes a bunch of spit, but I swallow it because I'm not supposed to spit in the house.

I eat dinner with Mom in the living room. We sit on the couch and eat on TV trays. They're called that because they have cartoon characters on them. When Dad first bought them Mom said they were the tackiest things she'd ever seen, but now she eats on them every night so she must like them.

"Can we watch something else?" Mom asks.

"But we always watch 'Justice League,'" I say.

"I don't really like this show. I've had a hard day and thought maybe we could watch something different tonight."

I've seen this episode a hundred times, and I remember how Dad told me to take care of Mom.

"Okay, but can we watch it tomorrow night?"

"Of course we can," she says.

"When Dad comes home me and him will watch it together every night again."

She doesn't say anything but it's because she just put a big bite of macaroni and cheese in her mouth and she's trying to find something on TV.

"Mom, I think someone kidnapped Captain Machinegun."

"Don't be silly, you probably left it at school. I'll bet you'll find it tomorrow in your desk or your cubby."

"No, I don't take him to school. He's my favorite action figure. I keep him at home so nothing bad will happen to him. If you had an action figure you loved as much as Captain Machinegun, wouldn't you always keep him at home?"

"Yes, I would," she said.

Sometimes people don't look at you as much if you're not wearing your costume. It only really works if people don't know your true identity though. I walk to school and I look like a regular boy, but I'm not. Nobody knows I'm a superhero because I'm not wearing my suit. This means I can be a detective. There will be a lot of suspects at school so I'll use detecting on them to see if they're the kidnapper. Superheroes use detecting a lot because they're only allowed to beat up bad guys and sometimes it's hard to tell if someone is bad or good.

One time, Mom said I was bad because I ran away from her at the grocery store and hid behind a big tower of soda. I jumped out to scare her when she walked by and she grabbed me and hit my hand and said I was bad. I started to cry because I'm a good guy and I didn't want to be a bad guy because then I wouldn't be a superhero anymore and couldn't wear the costume Dad made me. Mom gave me a big hug and told me that I wasn't bad and that she was just upset because she thought she lost me.

I'm carrying a stick because a lot of boys my age like carrying sticks they find. It's what Dad calls a "little detail." He says when detectives are solving a case they look at the little details that other people miss and that's how they figure out what happened before anyone else does. Even if a good detective saw me, the stick would make him think I wasn't a superhero. I like holding it because it feels like a sword, but I'm really just holding it to look like a normal boy.

On the way to school I see something red in the street. It's a dog that got hit by a car. There is a tire mark right over its belly, and its belly has exploded. The tire mark means the car tried to stop and some of the tire was left on the road and on the dog's belly. That means the person driving the car didn't want to hit the dog. That's how detecting works. You can look at a dog that got hit by a car, and you can know what someone was thinking.

I want to go out and touch the dog with my stick but I'm not supposed to go into the street so I just throw the stick at the dog.

At school I see Tommy Kovacs. He sits in the desk to the right of me, and he's very stupid because he's a superhero too but everyone knows his true identity. He's not really a superhero though. He used to be a superhero,

but then he became a super villain. Tommy's super villain name is Ratman, which is a stupid name because it sounds like Batman, who is already a superhero even though he doesn't have any superpowers, which I don't understand. I told Tommy that Ratman was a stupid name but he thought it was cool because he likes rats, which is also dumb because rats are gross and if they bite you you'll get sick and die. When Tommy was a superhero, he wanted to be my sidekick, but I said no because sidekicks are lame. If a superhero is strong enough he doesn't need a sidekick because no one could beat him up anyway. I told Tommy this but he said lots of cool superheroes, like Batman, have sidekicks. I told him that Batman didn't always have a sidekick and that Robin looked like a girl. He said Robin looked like a boy, but I know he's wrong, so I pushed him. He pushed me back and I fell down, and that's why he's a super villain.

Tommy's parents are dead because they died in Russia in a car accident, which I don't feel sorry for because the United States is the only place that's safe and they should have known that. That's another reason that he's a super villain, because super villains always had something bad happen when they were little, like their parents died or something. I know that Batman's parents died, but Batman also doesn't have any superpowers and he has a boy who looks like a girl for a sidekick.

Tommy is sitting at his desk writing with his pencil and his pencil isn't very long which means he sharpens it a lot, which means he doesn't have another pencil, which means he's poor. Tommy is real easy to use detecting on, and if he kidnapped Captain Machinegun I'll figure it out really quickly.

No one is playing with Captain Machinegun during recess. Why would someone kidnap him and not play with him?

Bethany Westland and Richard are playing with action figures, so I decide to talk to them because maybe they like action figures so much that they kidnapped Captain Machinegun.

"Hi, Richard." I say.

"Hey," Richard says.

Richard looks at me real quick when he says hi and then looks back down. This means that he is guilty of something. Whenever there's a criminal on TV you can tell that they're a criminal because they don't look you in the eyes because that's how you can tell if he's lying. Dad told me that one morning when we watched TV. I wish he was here to help because he would have already figured out who the kidnapper is. Richard probably has Captain Machinegun.

"Do you want to play with us?" Bethany Westland asks me.

Sometimes bad guys are really pretty and they act nice to try to trick people into thinking they're not bad guys. I tell her yes, though, because good guys can be sneaky too. What I do is called "going along" with her. That means that even though I know it's a trap, I act like I don't so I can be a detective.

Bethany Westland gives me a Rhinoceros-Man action figure. I have one at home, and it's one of my favorite action figure besides Captain

Machinegun. Bethany probably knows this. She's good at being a bad guy.

"Okay, Richard is the robot vampire, and we're trying to stop him from taking over the world," she says. "He's really powerful, but there are two of us, so we can stop him."

"What all can my guy do?" Richard asks.

"Well, he can fly and drink blood, and look." She pushes a button on the back of the action figure and a red missile shoots out of its chest.

"Cool!" he says.

It was cool.

"Why don't we have the army come in and kill him?" I say. "They could shoot him in the head, and he would die."

"Um, because all the army is dead because there was a virus."

I don't know what a virus is, but Dad could beat one up in real life. That was a stupid reason that the army died, but that's okay because I know Bethany Westland isn't as smart as me. She's really pretty though, so maybe she's not a bad guy.

"But the army is really awesome," I say. "Have you guys ever seen an army man action figure?"

This is called "getting to the point," and it's when a detective almost asks the question that he wants to know, but he doesn't. Sometimes Batman does this on TV because even though he doesn't have superpowers he's still good at solving mysteries. A detective can't ask a bad guy if he's bad because bad guys are liars. The detective has to be sneaky and trick the bad guy into telling him that he's bad, but sometimes the detective has a hard time being sneaky and he has to "get to the point."

"Yeah, I have some at my house," Richard says.

I get really mad because Richard just kind of told me that he has Captain Machinegun.

"What are their names?" I ask.

"I don't know. Let's just play."

"Yeah, come on," Bethany Westland says. "We have to stop him, remember?"

But I'm really mad, and I stand up.

"Richard, did you take Captain Machinegun because if you did I'll punch you in the head!"

Bethany Westland walks away and she looks really scared because she just found out Richard is a bad guy. Mrs. Laven comes up to us and asks what's going on, and I tell her that Richard took Captain Machinegun, but she asks Richard if he did, and he says no because he's a liar. I'm really surprised that Mrs. Laven asked Richard that because she's really smart.

"Come on, let's go inside and have a little talk," she says to me and holds her hand out for me to grab. I take her hand and throw the Rhinoceros-Man action figure behind me so Mrs. Laven couldn't see me do it. I don't know where it went but I hope it hit Richard in the face and broke his nose into a million pieces.

I sit down in the front desk of the classroom, which is weird because my desk is in the back. I think it's Brandon's desk, and I wonder if this is what it's like to be him. Mrs. Laven knows my secret identity because I can trust her. I told her my identity because I needed someone at school to help me put my costume on because I like to fight crime on the way home.

"What's going on with you and Richard?" she asks.

"He took Captain Machinegun, and I want him back."

"Who's Captain Machinegun?"

"He's the head of the army," I say.

"Ah, I see. How do you know for sure that Richard took Captain Machinegun? Did he tell you that?"

"No, but I was being a detective, and I figured it out."

"Well, Richard said that he didn't take Captain Machinegun."

"But Richard is a bad guy, and bad guys lie about stuff like that, so if he said he didn't take Captain Machinegun that means he took him!"

Mrs. Laven looks down at the floor and rubs the tops of her hands.

"How have things been at your house?" she asks.

"Okay," I say, but everything isn't okay because Captain Machinegun is gone.

"How is your mom? Does she ever talk about your dad?"

"No, because she gets really sad that he's still gone and stops talking to me and goes in her room and calls Aunt Betty."

"Do you talk to her about your dad a lot?"

I wish Mrs. Laven was a detective so she would know how to "get to the point" and help me get Captain Machinegun from Richard.

"Yes, like I ask when I'll see him again and she says, 'someday.' Mrs. Laven, we need to find Captain Machinegun!"

Mrs. Laven bends down and puts her hand on my shoulder and smiles at me like adults do when they really don't want to smile, which is dumb because if you don't want to smile then don't.

"I'll tell you what, why don't you just stay in here for the rest of recess and color. I'll talk to Richard and see what I can find out."

"Okay."

"Do you want to put your costume on for the rest of the day?"

"Yes."

Everyone keeps looking at me in class.

They're probably wondering where I went and why there is a superhero in the classroom. Whoever took Captain Machinegun must be super nervous. I don't think Richard took him because after recess, before Mrs. Laven helped me put my suit on, he came and shared some of his Pringles with me, and that's not something a bad guy would do. He didn't have a broken nose, which I was happy about since he wasn't really evil.

My mask keeps slipping down my face and I have to fix it because I can't see the board. When I turn in my homework I almost sign my real name, but I don't. Instead I write *Supernova*.

I hide my backpack behind the school before I go home. I do this because that's what Spider-Man does with his clothes when he goes to fight crime. Sometimes Mom yells at me and makes me walk back to school and get my backpack, but I don't mind.

On the way home, I see three boys whose names I don't know, but I know they are two grades older than me. They ask me if I have any money, so I know they're bad guys because if someone needed help and needed money they would ask nicely, but these boys sound really mean.

"Nice costume, turd breath," one of them says.

It's my duty to stop them because they'll probably try to fight other people, like Brandon who is fat and whose desk I sat in earlier.

I punch one of them in the chest because he's taller than me and I can't reach his face. It makes my hand hurt really bad.

"Are you kidding me?" he says.

One of them grabs me by the strings on the back of my costume, and I get scared and want to run away.

"Hey, look at that. The little skid mark just showed you up, man."

The boy who I hit makes his hand into a fist and I'm really scared because I think he's going to punch me, and then he does.

Everything is dark. Why is everything dark? It was light and now it's dark. I still hear the boys but they sound far away and I don't know what they're saying.

I want Dad.

I want Mrs. Laven.

I reach up and touch my face and my mask is sideways and I take it off and it's light again. I remember Mom didn't want Dad to make me a mask because she said it would be hard to see out of. She said I could be like Superman and comb my hair to hide my identity. Dad made a sad face at her, but he wasn't really sad. He told her that Captain America wears a mask and I should too. He gave her a kiss on the cheek and asked really nicely if he could. She said that it was fine and if I was going to grow up to be Captain America, like Dad, it would be a good idea to practice wearing a mask. But it wasn't a good idea. I hate this mask. It's really hard to wear.

The boys are gone.

My hands are wet and I look at them and there's blood all over them like the dog in the street that got hit. I can feel my face now and it hurts really badly and I start crying. It feels like when I fell off the stool in the kitchen and landed on my head except a thousand times worse.

I keep rubbing my nose because it tastes bad when the blood gets in my mouth. I want to hurt the boy who hit me but he ran away. I sit on the sidewalk for a few minutes to see if anyone comes to help but they don't so I leave.

Soon I see my house and my nose stops bleeding which is good because my suit has blood all over it, so when I wipe it on my nose it doesn't really help anymore. There's mail in the mailbox but I don't get it like I used to

when Dad sent letters with stamps that said *US Army* on them. Mom used to put the stamps in a book but Dad hasn't sent mail in a long time and Mom doesn't look at the book anymore. He used to write *Captain America (Dad)* at the bottom of the letters. That was my favorite part.

When I get to my driveway I see Banjo running up to me and he has something in his mouth.

It's Captain Machinegun.

I get excited at first but then I get really mad again because I remember what the boys did to me, and how Dad isn't here anymore.

"Give me Captain Machinegun, Banjo!"

He looks at me and wags his tale and I can see that Captain Machinegun has bite marks all over him and you can't really see that he has grenades on his belt anymore.

"You're a bad dog!" I yell, and then I punch Banjo in the nose as hard as I can. He barks, but not like when he's happy, and he drops Captain Machinegun in the driveway. He starts to walk away but then he comes back, wagging his tale, and I wait until he gets close to me and I punch him again. He barks again and then runs away and I watch him until I can't see him anymore.

I pick up Captain Machinegun and I think about how he was gone and how Tommy Kovac's parents are dead, and I throw him in the street because I don't need him anymore. I walk into the house and Mom says "hi" to me from the kitchen and tells me Mrs. Laven called, and asks if I'm okay. I'm not okay but I don't answer her. I go in my room and shut the door because I just want to play with my toys. I throw my mask on the ground and I stomp on it until it breaks. There's some blood on it and it gets on my carpet, but I don't care.

A bunch of my action figures are on the bed and I start playing with them. I still have blood on my suit and my hands but I don't want to wash it off because it looks cool. I pretend that Superman is beating up Dr. Doom, but I'm kind of tired of playing with Superman so I pretend that Dr. Doom kills him with a death ray. I didn't know this before, but Dr. Doom is pretty cool because he has a mask made out of metal so it probably wouldn't hurt even if he got punched in the head by a hundred guys. I want Mom to make my suit look like Dr. Doom's. I want to hurt those boys like they hurt me.

Some of the other bad guys are really cool too, so I pretend that they team up and kill all the superheroes because once the superheroes are dead then there's no one to stop the bad guys from taking over the world. I throw all of the superheroes in the trashcan because one time Captain America died in the comics and he came back, but in real life if you're dead you can never come back. Not even if people miss you.