

Maxine Ruiz-Cohen has a bad habit of bigger-ing things. Like her tenth-grade wood shop project that grew too large to get out of the classroom. Or her mom's fortieth birthday cake—the year she got sick—stacked so high it flopped off the kitchen table. Max's life feels so small and insignificant most of the time. When she can, she biggers things. And *this is big*.

She holds the pistol in one thick gloved hand, welding torch in the other. Bob Marley's *Buffalo Soldier* blasts through her headphones...*dreadlocks Rasta. Born in Africa, brought to America*. When she's creating in her garage workshop, it has to be Marley. The only light that penetrates the dark glass of the mask is the torch's blue flame. Inside her welder's helmet, Max is on her own private island, the annoying world outside on mute. She lays down beads of molten steel and clamps the gun into place.

When she lifts the tinted hood, a grin of devilish satisfaction plays on her lips. Her crunchy granola Social Justice teacher told them to "Make a statement. Be bold."

This is bold. Even a bit obnoxious.

The clock on her workbench reads 3:48 am.

When she's in the zone, hours go by as Max bends steel or dissects electronics. Her school counselor calls it hyper-focus—a rare perk of her ADHD. But her batteries die at school. She daydreams. She fidgets. Her knee bounces like a jackhammer, annoying snooty brats nearby.

Max untangles herself from the jumbled heap of twisted metal and wires. She goes to her garage door, turns the lights off, and taps play on the remote control.

The ten-foot-tall metallic sculpture glows to life: a massive peace sign made from bent rebar and Christmas lights. Ten guns are welded to it, aimed at monitors. Each one frames a young face in black and white: victims of last year's shootings. Hundreds of faces flip past like shuffled cards, guns aimed at their stark expressions.