

HOPE

Project Middle School

By Alyssa Milano
with Debbie Rigaud

ILLUSTRATED BY ERIC S. KEYES



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Chapter 1

“Hi, I’m—*Whoa!*”

Cosmo leaps into my lap and props his tiny paws on my shoulders. I crack up, sinking deeper into the couch cushions.

“Okay, buddy. You can be in the video, too. Say hi, Cosmo!” I wave to the camera recording us from the coffee table. We look cute together—my big hair, his shaggy fur. And who can resist those pleading puppy dog eyes?



“Hey, it’s me—Hope Roberts, future scientist. Welcome to my first-ever video journal! Guess what?” I pause for effect, and Cosmo waits with bated—and dog—breath. “Tomorrow I start sixth grade! Yes, me at JFK Middle School! My hypothesis is that life as I know it will change. So, before that happens, I want to take you on a tour of my world. This is my home.”

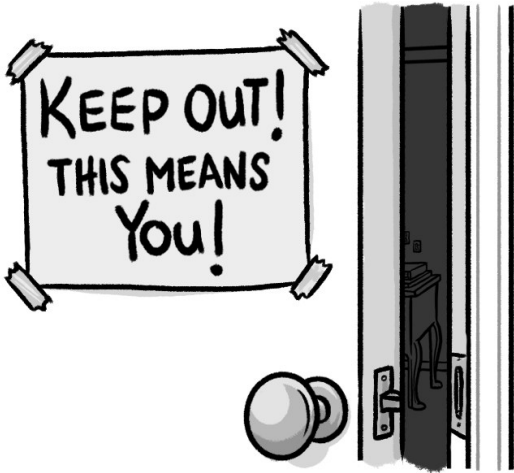
I stand up and wave my Cosmo-free arm like, *Ta-da!* Our other dog, a giant mutt named Rocket, is busy gnawing a bone and has zero desire to be on camera.

Just then, a howl comes from down the hall, setting off Cosmo, so he’s howling, too. I set him down, away from my eardrum. “Cosmo . . . *ssshh!*” It’s useless. The noise is bothering him just as much as it’s bothering me.

“First scientific observation,” I say, going down the hall, past Rocket and toward the sound. “There is a terrible whining coming from an unknown source. And no, we don’t have a third dog.”

The sound gets louder and more irritating as I head down the hallway. I stop at my sister’s bedroom. Marie is inside—singing. (If you can call it that.)

“Aha! Sound origin found.” Her door is ajar, but I nudge it open wider.



Her polka-dot headphones are on, but she tears them off and storms over when she notices me peeking in.

“What do you want? Can’t you read?” Marie points to the KEEP OUT! sign on her door. She crosses her arms and stares me down, her attitude switched on.

I bravely continue documenting my observations. “Witness a teenager in her natural habitat. Imagine being buried in the trendiest clothes and painted with layers of makeup, all while swinging from one wild mood to another. Highly fascinating.”

Marie scrunches up her face. “Who are you even filming that for?”

“For myself, a future Nobel Prize committee, extraterrestrials . . . There could be anyone on the other side of this camera. That’s what makes this so great, don’t you think?”

“You sound like Dad,” Marie groans, like that’s uncool.

“Excellent!” I respond. Dad can never be uncool. He’s a rocket scientist who works at NASA! True story. I’m seriously not being ironic when I say that!

Our mom is pretty awesome, too. She’s super smart and owns a downtown gallery full of masterpieces—some of which she buys for our walls. But she says



her favorite piece of all is our family photo. Mom's just being sweet, because clearly there's a piece of spinach stuck in Dad's teeth. (Okay, maybe occasionally he can be uncool.) Dental don'ts aside, I want to follow in his footsteps when I grow up.



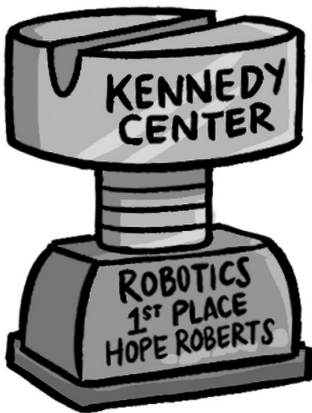
“Whatever.” Marie is tired of my documenting and slams the door in my face.

“Welp. I guess that counts as today’s quality time together. Let’s venture into friendlier territory, shall we?” I take a few steps across the hallway.

“Here we are in my room, which I use as a science lab when I need to.” I pan the camera past the poufy planet pillows and pops of pink to a wooden



bookcase holding books, science kits, community service ribbons, and gleaming trophies. “Grandpa helped me build this to display some of my awards. This one is my favorite. I got it last year when I placed first in the Fifth-Grade Kennedy Center Robotics Fair.” I zoom in on the towering winning trophy. “I built a mini-rocket prototype that launched almost five hundred feet into the air. All on my own,” I say for good measure, still bothered by the kids who assumed my dad must have helped me. But they don’t know Hope Roberts. Science is my superpower.



“Oh, I almost forgot! This is *so* important.” I whip the camera to the shelf below, where a stack of comic books are displayed, covers facing out.

“Galaxy Girl. The *best* comic book series of all time. Galaxy Girl is like a young Wonder Woman meets Dr.

Who meets Bill Nye the Science Guy,” I announce breathlessly. “She’s my age and she goes on interplanetary missions! It sounds like a stretch, but believe me, she and I have so much in common.

“We both love science. And we both believe girls can do little and big things that can change the world—er, or universe. My missions have more to do with good deeds and stuff and less to do with facing off against interplanetary villains, but you get the idea. Plus, Galaxy Girl has this awesome catchphrase, which I totally live by: ‘Be the brightest star.’ Seriously, I can spend a whole day rereading all these comic books.”

My eyes catch something over on my desk. I set



the camera down so that it's angled at the perfect shot of the space. I pick up the paper that's captured my focus. "But lately, there's only one thing I want to read over and over: this letter from JFK Middle School announcing that I've been placed in their advanced classes."

I examine it again and feel a shiver of anticipation run through me. The words "welcome" and "accelerated academic classes" stand out.

"This is, like, *huge* news. JFK Middle has the most impressive advanced program. Their science club teams run circles around everyone at the state science competitions. I've been a fan since the first grade. Since then, I've been working hard to make sure I get into their top-tier classes. And finally, now I'm in! *Squee!*" I hop up and down and squeal some more.

Cosmo and Rocket run into my room and bowl me over. I tumble to the floor laughing. It's no wonder my dad thinks they consider me their human mom. Rocket gives me a bear hug and Cosmo yaps like he's saying, *Stop staring at that letter and let's play!*

Careful not to crumble this very special document, I untangle myself from the dogs. I put the letter on



my desk but far away from Rocket. You never know when she'll be on the hunt for a papery snack. It's safe behind my framed photo of Sam. Rocket doesn't get along with her because Sam plays keep-away with her treats. Sam thinks it's the most hilarious thing.

Oh yeah—Sam! I grab Sam's picture and show it to the camera.

"This is Samantha Bowers, my best friend in the universe. She and I have been joined at the hip since pre-K! But this year, we'll be in separate classes."

Before I know it, I'm sitting on my bed, lost in thought, holding Sam's picture.



From neighboring naptime cots to joint class presentations, Sam and I have always been a team. But she wasn't selected for the accelerated classes, so we won't see much of each other at school.

We've never not been in the same class. How will this even work?

Something crinkly rings out, snapping me out of

the bummed zone. Rocket is trying to shake open one of the individually wrapped snacks I keep for her in my basket of pet toys. Taking pity on her, I unwrap it and throw the treat for her to catch. She misses. It lands closer to Cosmo, who gobbles it up right away.

“Not nice, Cosmo. You know Rocket gets *hangry* when you do that.” I laugh and shake my head, already feeling better.



“One last thing! Check out the outfit I’ve picked for tomorrow!” I race over to my closet and lay out

each item across my bed. “A denim skirt swiped from Marie’s closet (*sshhh!*); a puffy pink vest, because . . . why not?; and a cosmic-cool top to rep for STEM girls everywhere. Mom’s even letting me borrow her vintage backpack from when she was a teenager. How cool is that?!”



There’s one more item I need from the closet—my swimsuit.

“Signing off for now. Sam is on her way over! We’ve planned to spend the last day of summer vacation hanging out at our pool. Until next video, feel free to form your own scientific hypothesis about me. And keep your fingers crossed for a positive and enlightening new school year!”

Ding-dong!

“Gotta run. That’s Sam, right on time!”

