

Nancy Ros

Heroes Among Us Writing Assignment

Of Independence to Kindness

"Hold still!" The boy sat sullenly, bandaging the girl's hands as she continued squirmed from him.

"*But it hurts!*" she whined loudly, right into his ear.

He grimaced at her.

"Kindness, I *already* told you," hissed the boy, as he glared at her. "You shouldn't waste your time helping people you don't even know! And now look at you! You got hurt doing so!"

Kindness frowned at the boy, visibly upset for his reply.

"Independence," she began, suddenly changing her whiney, childish tone into a more somber one. "You shouldn't think of *helping* people as a waste of your time. In fact, you're helping to make a diff-"

"Yeah, yeah," Independence cut her off, waving his hand in dismissal. "Anyway, did you study for that test tomorrow?"

Kindness's eyes widened in horror at Independence's reminder as she immediately forgot her thoughts about her volunteer work.

"Shoot! You're right!" she exclaimed, snapping her arm away from him as he just finished fixing up her hands. She ran out of the room, screaming and panicking, as Independence sat back in his chair, grateful, that at least for now, she dropped the subject.

'*They don't actually help anyways,*' he thought, bitterly thinking about his current predicament: being broke, living alone, and running out of food in his kitchen. '*What could they do for me anyway? No one's that nice...*'

The next day, Independence, upon returning home from school, noticed with a heavy heart that he was going to eat his last instant dinner serving. He sighed, picking at the dinner's boxy package, wondering what he was going to eat tomorrow.

A growl erupted from his stomach, mildly surprising Independence. He stared at the boxed dinner hungrily, finally relenting and giving in to his hunger.

After warming it up, he sat down at his small table, beginning to eat his dinner. In a matter of minutes, he was already done, though, he didn't feel 'done'. He was still hungry.

Independence frowned, as he felt his hunger grow stronger by the second. Sighing in defeat, he walked over to his kitchen, and opened his fridge with shaking hands.

He could feel his heart sink deeper than it already was when his eyes caught sight of the contents in his fridge: a carton of spoiled milk, half a container of leftover takeout, and random bits of fruit and veggies here and there. On his kitchen counter, lay an expired loaf of bread, mold already growing all over it.

Independence moved past that discouragement, swinging open all cabinets and cupboards in sight, disappointing him every time when it revealed either nothing, trash, or a random can of sardines.

He was still so hungry.

And many times did Independence think of stealing in order to satisfy his growing hunger, but every time, he would picture his best friend's, Kindness's, face, disappointed in his actions.

Kindness. He always thought she was weird, especially since she volunteered regularly at random charities and food banks which helped people and-

He sighed.

*'What was so bad about that? They're helping people...people like me...'*

Out of his reluctant mindset, Independence grabbed his keys off the table, and made his way out of his apartment, breaking out into a sprint the minute the cold autumn air hit his face.

In ten minutes, the young man made it to the nearest food bank, heavy breaths trickling out from his lips, tired. His eyes scanned the food bank, at all the shelves of food, all of which he needed.

Quickly, Independence made his way to one of the tables with large paper bags containing food in them, though, instead of picking it up, he just stared, not wanting to do something he might not be permitted to do.

The last thing he ever wanted was help. Independence always had pride in himself, and so, even with his predicament, he wasn't willing to get help from people, *especially* volunteers.

"Independence?"

Independence jumped back, ready to take off, until he saw who the voice belonged to.

"Kindness!?" he exclaimed. "What're you doing here?"

Kindness looked weirdly at him. "I, uh, volunteer here, remember?"

Independence nearly smacked himself. Of *all* the food banks she could've been working at today, it *had* to be the one where he went to.

"Anyway," she continued, ignoring the uncomfortable look on his face. "What brings you here?"

"Oh, I...Uh-um," he stuttered, trying to come up with an excuse that lived up to his name. "I-"

*'Came here to tell you we had extra homework to do? To drop off your teacher's complaints?'*

"I-" he gazed at her kind, unjudging eyes, waiting for his response. "I...I actually need some food...I don't have enough money to buy any from stores so I-"

She didn't even bat an eyelash. "Why didn't you say so!" she interrupted, smiling brightly at him, surprising him. "Here."

She handed him one of the large food-filled bags, surprising him with the weight of the food in the bag. He'd never held so much food before.

"Is," he began quietly. "Is this...all mine?"

He stared down at the bag's contents: a small roasted chicken, cans of beans and soups, non-expired bread, pasta. Everything he only dreamed he could eat.

"Is it really...mine...?"

Kindness grinned up at him, causing him to blink back tears.

"Why...?" he croaked, his hands shaking around the food bag.

Kindness flashed him a grin. "Well, this is what volunteers do!"

Independence took her open-ended words with him all the way home that day. He thought about that the next time he went to the food bank again, to pick up more food.

Independence thought about her words when he signed up to volunteer for that same food bank that helped him out.

Volunteers had once saved him.

And he was planning on saving someone else.