



Love Is Powerful

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illustrated by LeUyen Pham

A Note from the Author



When I was a kid, I felt small. I didn't think anyone cared to listen to what I had to say, and I was afraid if I *did* say something it might be wrong. I assumed that, because adults were bigger and knew the answers right away, they were smarter and more important.

I believed this so deeply that when I had a cavity and the dentist forgot to numb my mouth, I didn't say a word as he drilled painfully into my tooth. He was the dentist; surely he knew what he was doing.

I'm not as quiet as I used to be. But even though I've gotten *really* good at speaking up, sometimes I still feel small and unimportant.

On the eve of the Women's March, I sat alone at my kitchen table with a fistful of markers. A large white poster board stared daringly up at me. I felt insignificant in the face of problems much bigger and scarier than a cavity. My heart ached from the direction our country was headed and for the people being hurt.

My kids, ages seven and ten at the time, stopped what they were doing to take in the intimidating blank page, the enticing array of markers. "What are you doing, Mama?" they asked.

"I'm writing a message for the world," I said.

That was my hope, but to be honest, I wasn't sure what I had to say would make a difference against what seemed like insurmountable forces.

Here's the thing I didn't realize until I experienced it at the Women's March and then saw it personified in the video of my friend Mari in New York City, whose confidence is an inspiration to me: when we dare to speak up against powerful voices, when even in a whisper we say "What's happening is wrong," we are not alone. Someone else feels that way. And when we say it out loud, we empower that other person. And then that person's voice empowers another. And another, and another, until it's not just a six-year-old girl in a crowd shouting "Love Is Powerful" or a middle-aged woman holding a sign: together we create a wave with the strength to shake the earth, to create mountains.

If there's one thing I could say to my children, to Mari, to my six-year-old self, to girls and young women, to anyone who feels small, marginalized, or alone, it is this: Your voice matters. It has power. It can change the world.

A Note from the Illustrator



When I was asked to illustrate this story of Mari and her march in New York, I kept recalling my own memories of the Women's March. There is a spread of Mari toward the end of the book, in the middle of a throng of people, each tinged with a pinkish hue spiraling outward. It's my version of love as a ripple effect. And it's exactly what I experienced myself.

I was at a conference in Atlanta, Georgia, during the first Women's March in 2017. I hadn't actually planned to join the march. In fact, I was so distraught over the state of the world and the craziness in my country that I had barely wanted to attend the conference. I was mostly in disbelief. At the conference (which had nothing to do with the march), I saw many of my colleagues for the first time since the 2016 elections, sporting pink hand-knit caps, rosy cheeks, and—surprise of all surprises—smiles across their faces. They would come up to me, all aglow from the crisp winter air, brandishing their homemade signs and asking, "Are you coming? Are you coming on the march?" At first, I was baffled. How could everyone be so happy? Was I the only one in despair? I shook my head the first couple times. "No, I'm not up for it," I replied. But the hats kept coming, the signs grew more plentiful. And I started reading the signs, these beacons of positive energy and belief that goodness, kindness, LOVE, is more powerful than anything. "If you're feeling sad, Uyen, you should march!" one friend said, throwing her arms around me. "You'll find what you need there." Without waiting for my response, she ushered me along with the throngs of people, chanting, laughing, talking, sharing, through the streets of Atlanta toward the capitol.

And it was true. The crowd was . . . glowing. There was an energy there that I hadn't ever felt before in my adult life. It was simply love, flowing through the masses and pouring out in all directions. It was love made real. Mari's statement is truth stated simply: Love Is Powerful.

