

Creative and Courageous

“Are you done yet?” My little brother Aiden asks as he hops up and down on my bed.

“I would be if you would stop jumping on my bed!” I said lunging for him. He rolls off of my bed and starts laughing.

“There!” I say, handing Aiden his dragon.

“Thank you,” he says, admiring his new stuffed dragon. “I’m gonna call you-” (drumroll please) “Dragon!”

“Wow!” I say laughing. “Very creative!” I give him a round of applause. He looks proud of himself as he takes a bow and dashes out of the room calling out to his mountain of stuffed animals.

I laugh. Sometimes my brothers could be hilarious.

Hi there! My name is Natasha Stone, I am eleven years old, (two weeks till my birthday!) and I just finished fifth grade at Stormington Elementary. I have two little brothers. One is in kindergarten (Aiden), and the other one is 4 weeks old (Sam).

Aiden asked me to make him a stuffed dragon so he could add a dinosaur to his mountain.

But enough about them. Let me tell you about me. I’m very good at sewing things. Wait, scratch that, I’m very good at making anything. Bracelets, paintings, quilts, monogrammed aprons, you name it. But the one reason all of my things are popular is because my way of making them is kind of different. For example, if you asked me to make you a knotted friendship bracelet, I would make the pattern bumpy and colorful. It might not always look the best but it’s still cool, and it’s what I like.

In less than a week I would be starting middle school. I have mixed feelings about it, but I heard that the classes are really nice. I am actually pretty excited!

BLEEP BLEEP BLEEP. I rub my weary eyes and hit the button on my alarm clock to stop the alarm. I open my eyes- and see my brother Aiden right on top of me. I yelp and jump out of bed.

“Hah! Your face was hilarious!” Aiden says, cracking up. I mumble something under my breath, when I hear my dad calling from downstairs.

“Nat! Aiden! Come downstairs we’re having doughnuts!”

I look at Aiden and he looks at me.

“Race you!” we both yell. I dash to my dresser while Aiden runs to his room. I run to my bed where I put my outfit. I start getting dressed as fast as I can. By the time I was downstairs, Aiden is sitting in his chair with his shirt inside out, and his hair everywhere.

“Beat you!” he says with a grin.

“Well that's because you put your shirt on wrong.” I point out. He looks down at his shirt.

He shrugs, “Oh well.”

“Okay,” my dad says. “Would anybody like to share their doughnut with Sa-” he stops short. Me and my brother finished our doughnuts just like that. “Never mind.” My dad sighs.

I check my watch. “I have to go!” I say standing up abruptly. “Middle school starts in fifteen minutes!”

“Uh oh,” my dad says. “You’re right! Here’s your lunch,” he says, tossing me my lunch box.

“Bye Nat!” my dad tells me as I step out of the door “See you tonight!”

“Bye dad, bye Aiden!” I call back. *My first day of middle school* I think while I walk. I’m ready.

BRIIIIIINNG! I wince as the school bell rings. Everybody pours into the building. I look around, but I can’t find any familiar faces. I start to panic. Suddenly, I’m pulled out of the rush of people by someone I know.

“Nat!” my best friend Ellene says.

“Hey Ellie!” I say grinning. Ellene, (Ellie for short) has been my best friend since preschool.

“Come on,” Ellie says, grabbing my arm. “Our lockers are this way.” She leads me through the maze of people, up a flight of stairs until we get to our lockers. You’re probably wondering how Ellie knows her way around our school even though it’s her first year. Well, Ellie’s dad has worked as an eighth grade English teacher for as long as I can remember. So she knows the school like the back of her hand.

My locker is number 2465, and Ellie’s is 2466. I’ll bet she asked for our lockers to be next to each other. My schedule is taped to the inside. We have homeroom together and also art and science. There is also a map of the school inside my locker. It says that the school is split into three sections, we are in the Green section. All of our classes are in the Green section, which thankfully didn’t look too hard to navigate. Our homeroom is right by our lockers, so we are the first people there.

Our teacher Ms. Chanler welcomes us. She says we can choose our own seats and we choose the spinny stools. I can already tell that middle school’s going to be great.

Right as I step out of the class the bell goes off. BRRRIIIINNGG!

“Ugh why does that have to be so loud?” I grumble.

“Oh, our next class is art!” Ellie says pulling me in one direction.

Ellie is almost as into art as I am. We even set up a little stand in first grade where we sold some of our artwork. It was really fun. We weave around people until we come to a stop at the end of the hall.

The art room looks kind of... plain. Ellie and I walk in and meet the teacher. His name is Mr. Stinefolk. He has grayish hair, with creases in between his brows. He looks as if he is in his late fifties. He definitely does *not* look like the art teacher from my elementary school.

Turns out Mr. Stinefolk's idea of a "welcome class!" is taking attendance. It's hard to hear him because he has a gruff voice that you can hardly hear over the AC.

When Mr. Stinefolk finally finishes calling the names off of the list, he tells us where we have to sit. Then he says that our assignment is to draw a sketch of our pet or our favorite animal.

No one questions him, because Mr. Stinefolk doesn't seem like the type of person you want to get on the bad side of. I don't have a pet, so I decide to create my favorite animal: a sloth. I think that the sketching idea is a little too boring, so I decide to spice it up a bit. I go over to the paper bin, take out some colorful paper, and create... a sloth collage! The sloth's fur is rainbow, which makes him look like he rolled around in buckets of paint. I'm very proud of it, but when I show it to Mr. Stinefolk, his reaction is the complete opposite.

"What is this?" he asks me in a disgusted tone.

"I-It's my project." I reply.

"Did I ask you to make," he gestures toward my art, "Whatever this is?"

Now I'm insulted. "Well-"

"Young lady, here in my class we do not waste time on useless projects like these! Throw this away and restart." He plucks my masterpiece out of my hand, crumples it up and throws it away.

I can feel the anger boiling inside of me, and all of the stares from my fellow classmates. Luckily I'm saved from the torture by the outrageously loud bell. The rest of the day flies by in a blur. As I reach home, all I can think about was the way he looked at my art in disgust. *He's an art teacher!* I think. *He should understand my art more than anyone!* The anger bubbles up inside of me again, but this time, it comes out in tears. They wash away my anger, leaving me feeling empty and useless. If I wasn't good enough to be an artist, then what was I? I collapse onto my bed and cry myself to sleep.

"Nat, it's time for dinner." I hear my dad whispering in my ear.

I jolt awake. "How long was I asleep?" I ask him.

"Almost two hours."

"What?!"

“Yeah, dinner’s ready,” he says, “we were waiting on you.”

We have my favorite foods for dinner, but I still can’t stop thinking about what happened in art today.

I’m probably making too big a deal out of this, I think. Maybe he was just having a bad day or something. But I know that isn’t true. Mr. Stinefolk is a jerk, and I’m not going to stop making art just because of one small thing he said.

Suddenly, I have an idea. I know a way to prove to Mr. Stinefolk that my art was beautiful. “Hey dad?” I ask.

“Yeah?” he answers.

“How much of that chalk paint do you still have in the basement?”

“Most of it, why?”

“Oh no reason.” I reply. But a plan is forming in my mind. I don’t care what Mr. Stinefolk thinks. I was still going to make my art my own way.

BLEEP BLEE- “Ugh.” I moan as I hit the button on the clock to stop it. It was 6:00 in the morning, but I need enough time to put my plan into action. I grab the chalk paint from the basement, and plan out every little detail. I’ve never done anything this dangerous before. But, I’m still determined.

After my dad, Aiden, and Sam wake up, I tell my dad that I am going to walk to school early today. He says that it is okay, so phase one of my plan is complete.

I walk to school as fast as I can, and as expected, I’m the first person there. I take out all of the supplies I brought and I start to paint.

I paint streaks and swirls of color, all connected in a way. As I paint, everything I’ve been feeling pours out into my artwork. Soon, people start arriving. They crowd around to see what I’m doing, and whisper and stare. Some people say it is ugly, but the majority of people think that it’s pretty. Once I’m done, I stand up to take a look at my creation. It is beautiful.

The swirls and stripes are dancing across the sidewalk, blending with each other, but somehow contrasting at the exact same time. It doesn’t appear to have a specific shape, but I still like it.

“What do you think you’re doing?” a sharp voice behind me says. Everyone gasps. I knew I had gotten caught.

I see Principal Tate stepping through the crowd of people. “You,” she points at me. “Get inside my office this instant!”

I gulp. I’d expected to get in trouble, but I’m still nervous.

“What is your name?” she asked me once I had sat down.

“Natasha Stone.”

“And why did you think that it would be okay to do this?”

“It’s just chalk-”

“It still happened without permission!”

I take a deep breath. Then I tell her the whole story. After I finish, Her expression seems hard to read. But that fades and now she looks angry.

“So you did all of this just so you could get revenge on a teacher!?”

“No,” I reply, staying calm. “I did it so that I could prove that there isn’t just one way to do things like art. People can’t be pushed around and forced to do something in a way that they don’t want to do.”

Her expression stays hard then softens. “I know I should be punishing you, but you bring up a valid point, and that’s why-” She is interrupted by a knock on her door. “Come in,” she calls. The door opens, and standing there is the worst possible person to be there at the moment.

“Sorry, didn’t mean to interrupt anything,” Mr. Stinefolk says as he stands in the doorway, glaring at me as he turns to Ms. Tate,

“I just saw the vandalism on the sidewalk, and wanted to offer you some advice.”

“Thank you, Mr. Stinefolk, but I’m perfectly capable of handling this myself.” Principal Tate replies.

“Well I-”

“Now I kindly encourage you to leave so I can continue this discussion with Natasha.” Principal Tate tells him.

Mr. Stinefolk mutters something under his breath as he walks out and shuts the door.

“Well as I was saying,” She continues. “I don’t think that a punishment is necessary for two reasons. One, it is beautiful, and personally, I think that it’s a great addition to the school. Second, Mr. Stinefolk doesn’t have the right to force you to make art his way, and I will have a talk with him. Oh, and one more thing, would you be willing to help paint a mural on the West Side wall? I’ve been thinking of doing that for a while now.

I’m speechless. “Thank you.” I say “I would love to help.

“Great!” she says. “Now, you should get to your homeroom, you don’t want to be too late.”

I thank her again and stand up to leave. But I turn back at the last minute. “Mrs. Tate?”

“Yes Natasha?” she replies.

“You don’t have to keep calling my art ‘it’. You can call it *Creative and Courageous*.