

The Art Contest

Violet ran home from school, happy to get away from the bullies who would tease her about being so quiet, and the teachers lecturing to her after class about participating more. Violet was glad to be home. When she got inside, she quickly put her backpack away, ran up the stairs two at a time and went into her room. Violet took out all her paints and paintbrushes, grabbed a sheet of paper, and got to work.

Painting was the way Violet dealt with all her big feelings. It always made her calmer. She loved painting, and was good at it, but she never showed her paintings to anyone else because she was worried about what they would think of them.

Violet finished the stormy ocean scene she was painting, to express her sad and angry feelings about her day, and tucked it into her folder under her bed where she kept all of her paintings, safe from anyone's eyes.

The next day at school in art class, Ms. Iris, the art teacher, had an announcement.

"A school art contest is coming up next week. If any of you want to enter your paintings or sculptures, then you can. There will be a first place winner, a second place winner, and a third place winner. The deadline to enter is Wednesday next week."

Violet really wanted to enter, but she worried about what other kids would think of her paintings. *The whole school will be there! They'll all laugh at how bad I am at painting!* Violet thought. *There is no chance I'm going to win, it's sure to be an eighth grader. There isn't really much chance of me even being the third place winner.* Violet sighed.

After school, her mom, hearing about the art contest from the weekly school newsletter, asked Violet if she was entering.

"No. I'm not going to put my paintings anywhere where people can see them," she answered stubbornly. Even Violet's own parents had never seen her artwork.

"No one will make fun of your paintings. Everyone will love them!" said her mom.

Ha. Violet knew many kids who would make fun of anything they knew was hers.

Violet went up the staircase to her room, telling her parents again that she wasn't entering the contest. The truth was Violet really wanted to show people her art; she just didn't want them to tell her it was bad.

She went to sleep that night still thinking about the art contest. The next day, when Violet came home from school, she went straight to her room to paint, as usual. But when she walked in, her mom was already in her room. To Violet's horror, she was flipping through Violet's folder with all her paintings in it.

"WHAT ARE YOU DOING, MOM?!?" Violet screamed.

"I'm sorry, Violet, but I was doing some cleaning in here, and I found this." Before Violet could say anything, her mother continued. "You're very talented, Violet. These paintings are amazing."

Violet was shocked. *Someone actually likes my paintings!* "Do you mean that? You're not just saying that because you're my mom?"

"I mean it. They are really good. Why don't you want anyone to see them?"

Violet wasn't going to answer, but she really needed to talk to someone about her worries. "I don't want people to say they're bad, to not like them."

"Violet, there will always be some people who won't like your artwork, but there will be many, many more who will. And you shouldn't care what they think. *You* like your paintings, and that's all that matters."

The next day, in art class, when Ms. Iris asked if anyone wanted to enter the art contest, Violet raised her hand.

"Hey! Quiet Violet's actually *volunteering* for something!" sneered Rose, one of the bullies.

"That's enough, Rose," said Ms. Iris. "I'm happy for you, Violet! What are you going to enter?"

“A painting,” said Violet.

“Wonderful! I’ll put you on the list!”

At lunch, the bullies walked over to the table where Violet was eating. “So, Quiet Violet, I heard you’re going to enter the art contest,” said Megan, the leader of the bullies.

Violet ignored her.

“I’m entering too. And unlike you, I’m going to win,” said Megan. “What are you going to paint? An abstract? A self-portrait?”

Violet couldn’t resist talking about art, even if they were just making fun of her. “No, I’m painting a landscape. I don’t paint humans often.”

“But you wouldn’t be painting a human. You’d be painting a mouse,” said Megan. Everyone laughed. Violet pushed away the tears that were starting to form in her eyes. “I bet your painting’s going to be the worst in the contest,” Megan continued. “You’re only a sixth grader. I’m a whole year older than you. I bet I could do much better.”

Violet remembered what her mother told her. “*You shouldn’t care what they think. You like your paintings, and that’s all that matters.*” Violet stood up, and walked over until she was a foot away from the bullies. “I don’t care what you think about my paintings. You haven’t even seen them. *I* like them, and that’s all that matters to me.” She glared at Megan. “And don’t call me a mouse. I’m a human being, just like you.”

Megan looked shocked. She probably didn’t expect Violet to stand up to her. Then Megan turned around, and she and her friends walked away. Rose whispered something to Megan. Violet didn’t care. She felt amazing. Her mother was right. She was glad she stood up to them. When Violet got home from school, she told her mom what she had done.

“Violet, I’m so proud of you! You did the right thing.” Violet’s mom hugged her as a huge proud grin spread across Violet’s face.

Then Violet went up to her room to work on her painting for the art contest. For her birthday, Violet had gotten an easel that she really liked. She put a big canvas on the easel, and

got out her paint. She squeezed out on her palette greens and blues, browns and grays and started to paint. Violet let her mother be there, and she gave Violet's painting compliments and feedback.

Violet worked on her painting for the whole week until the day of the art contest. When she was done, her mother smiled.

"This is amazing, Violet. I'm really proud of you. You worked hard."

As she walked to school, her heart pounded in her chest. Violet was nervous, but she knew she could do it. She arrived at school early to set up for the art contest and walked over to the library with her painting under her arm. There were many paintings and sculptures already there. She hung it up on the spot marked VIOLET. Ms. Iris arrived a few minutes later.

"Oh, Violet, this looks wonderful!" She smiled at the painting.

Violet had painted a forest with a river running through it and mountains in the very back. It was beautiful, detailed, and looked very realistic. Then Ms. Iris said that Violet still had two hours of class until the art contest, and that she should get back to class. So Violet did.

But in all of her classes, the only thing Violet could think about was the art contest. *What if my art is the worst in the contest?* This thought kept repeating in her head. Finally, after what felt like days, it was time. Violet walked over to the library with her class.

She was nervous. When she walked in, there were many more paintings and sculptures than before. For a while, she walked slowly around, looking at each painting and comparing it to hers. There was one painting of a cat that she thought was amazing. She thought that one might win.

Everyone then made their way to the auditorium so Ms. Iris could announce the winners. Ms. Iris stood on the stage with a microphone. Everyone was talking to their friends before, but then they got quiet as Ms. Iris started to speak.

"I am impressed with all of the paintings and sculptures here. If you do not win, I am not saying that your artwork is bad. Everyone did really well." Ms. Iris had a box behind her. Violet

could not see what was inside. Ms. Iris pulled the painting of the cat from the box. "Third place goes to...Megan Lewis!" *Megan made that?!* Violet was surprised. Megan wasn't joking when she said she was good enough to win. Megan walked over to Ms. Iris, grinning smugly. She took the bronze trophy.

Ms. Iris pulled a sculpture out of the box. It was a dragon, and it was very detailed. You could see each scale. "Second place goes to...Kevin William!" An eighth grader Violet didn't know walked over and took the silver trophy. When he walked away, Ms. Iris started speaking again.

"I am amazed by the painting that earned first place. It is beautiful and breathtaking. It looks so real that I feel like I could step right into the painting." Ms. Iris showed a painting, but from where she was, Violet could not see it. A. "First place goes to..." Then, right before she announced the winner, Ms. Iris turned a little, and Violet could see what the painting was. She gasped. Ms. Iris smiled. "Violet Robins!"

Violet couldn't believe that she won. It seemed like a dream as she walked over and Ms. Iris gave her the giant golden trophy. The crowd broke out in loud applause. Violet smiled. She knew she wouldn't always win art contests, but she didn't care. Just the feeling of sharing her paintings made her feel so happy inside.

Violet would never hide her art again.