

Zoe W.

Be A Lady

Vibrant paint, fine-tipped colored pencils, pigmented watercolors, aesthetic markers, hundreds of sketch books filled to the brim, and paint splattered walls. This is the light at the end of my tunnel. This is my moment of clarity. This is my life.

“Rin! Wake up! You’re going to be late for school! If you’re even one second late, you can forget about eating dinner.” Mrs. Li, my mom, yelled from the living room.

Jokes on her, I’ve already been awake for an hour. I closed my sketchbook and tossed it into my backpack. I checked my outfit, a paint splattered tee tucked into a suspended skirt with an oversized jacket. *Perfect.*

Downstairs, the air was thick with sticky buns and green tea. Pastel yellow paint covered the walls while a small money tree stood next to the kitchen entrance. Every millimeter of furniture was placed and sculpted to perfection. Watercolor paintings hung on each wall with a comfy leather sofa that sat in the middle. The only thing off was my mother’s disappointed stare.

“Tsk. Tsk,” my mother clicked, “What are you wearing? You should dress more like a lady.”

Here we go again.

“You should wear something nice and clean with no paint stains. That skirt’s too short and revealing, you’re asking for it. Don’t get me started on that jacket of yours, it makes you look homeless. Be a lady.”

The ever-present line; *be a lady*. I've always hated that line. Why do we have to act like someone else while the men do whatever they want? It makes everything so stressful.

"I'm 15 mom, you don't have to judge everything I wear," I sighed exasperatedly.

"You have to uphold the family reputation. You're the next generation," she reminded.

I headed to the front door and grabbed a bagel, my heavy backpack slung over my shoulder.

"Also before I forget, I saw the grade on your recent math test," mom said in a casual tone, "You got a 95. That's 5 points away from a 100!"

Ah yes, *that* math test.

"You do remember I said you must get a 100 on every graded assignment or else I'd throw away all your art *things*. Well since you couldn't uphold your end of the deal, no more of this becoming an artist nonsense, you've wasted enough money on something you won't get far with. Just focus on your studies and become a doctor so you can support a family."

"WHAT? You can't be serious about this!"

"We had a deal, you couldn't meet it. End of discussion."

"FINE!" I yelled as I stormed out of the house and towards school. At least I still have my sketchbook from this morning.

School went by in a blur. Everything was the same, from the blue and yellow textbooks on the bookshelves to the sticky gum underneath my desk. Soon, 7th period art with Mrs. Thompson arrived.

"Mrs. Thompson! I need to speak with you!" I exclaimed as soon as I reached her class.

"Talk to me after class, I have to run to the printer," she said.

I raced to my seat and slung my heavy backpack over my chair, tapping my pen anxiously.

Mrs. Thompson entered the room with a stack of heavy flyers and plopped them on her desk.

“Class, Scholastic Art is having a competition this week. The winner gets \$10,000 for their school plus a brand-new laptop that comes with 2 premium art apps and their name in the newspaper. There will be prizes for the runners up. You can use whatever materials to create your masterpiece. Flyers are on my desk. Ready? Go!”

My classmates excitedly raced to get a flyer and sketched out ideas. An art competition? I can prove to my parents that I can make a living being an artist! I skimmed through my sketchbook in search of a good topic until I heard the bell.

“Remember your pieces are due on Monday with the results coming in on Wednesday. Class dismissed.”

“Mrs. Thompson, can I speak with you now?”

“Yes, my dear.”

I rushed through the events of this morning. “Art was my passion. I mean, it still is, but I don’t know how I’m going to survive home life without my art supplies. I don’t want to disappoint my parents,” I explained.

“Oh, my poor child, you can come in the morning before class to finish your competition piece. Ask if you need extra supplies.”

“Really? Thank you!”

I spent the rest of the week sketching, drawing, and coloring. I could barely think about anything else. Soon, Monday arrived, and I turned in my final piece. I anxiously waited for the results. It felt like years till Wednesday arrived.

“Congratulations to all who participated. I will be announcing the top three winners. In third place, Jessica!” A round of applause. “In second, Clark!” Another round of applause. “Last but not least, in first, Rin Li!”

I gasped in surprise. I poured my heart and soul into that piece, and it finally paid off! My classmates clapped and shook hands. The bell rang and all the students filed out of the classroom. I rushed home ecstatic to tell my mom.

When I reached home, however, she was holding the black and white newspaper exclaiming that I had won the art competition. I froze.

“Not only did you disobey me, but you even made it public!” my mom exclaimed.

She raised her hand and I started to wince until I felt a light pat on my head.

“Haha, I did the same thing when I was your age. My mom wanted me to be a housewife while I wanted to be a businesswoman. Once she saw my name in the paper, she encouraged me to keep going,” she said.

“So, you’re not mad at me?” I asked.

“Of course not! Just never do that again,” she said.

With my new laptop, I slowly bought new art supplies by selling stock and digital art, and finally had supportive parents! Life couldn’t be any better.