

## The Truth in the Paint

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Lora was adding the last dab of paint to her latest creation when her cellphone rang. “Yes?” she asked.

“Hi, it’s Clara from the Gallery,” said a posh accented voice over the phone. “I just wanted to tell you how pleased I am with your latest painting. I see you’ve gone in an entirely different direction. I should have a buyer for it shortly. Check this out.”

Lora got a notification on her phone, and a photo of her painting popped up, beautifully framed and hanging on the Gallery’s wall. “But that’s not my painting,” she protested, seeing layers of bright paint spatters covering a black illustration beneath.

“No, it’s not your usual is it?” said Clara. “Well, I’ll see you at the gallery later. I’m still waiting on your other two paintings to arrive.”

“See you soon,” responded Lora, puzzled. She picked up the paintbrush. She always painted what she knew. On the surface of the white canvas was an illustration of her mother. Except she was drawn in fractals, to represent their tumultuous relationship.

“Almost done,” Lora muttered to herself. But as she placed the paintbrush back down on the palette, it frustratingly stood straight up in the air. “What the?” she muttered.

The paintbrush swirled around the palette, before finally choosing a bright green color. Then it launched itself at the painting, spotting it in multiple locations.

“No!” Lora cried, trying to grab the brush, but it moved too fast for her to touch it. The brush returned again and again to the palette, absorbing new colors, before returning to the painting. In minutes, her painting was transformed from a sombre illustration of her mother, to a vibrant and lively image of a beautiful woman.

Lora sat back on her stool and shook her head. “Why do you do this to me?” This strange ghost had been haunting her for the past month. The tears started falling down her face. Then she glanced at her watch. “Damn! I have to get to the gallery.” She went to wash up at the sink, then grabbed the two large paintings that were standing up by the wall, covered in brown paper wrap.

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“Wow, these are amazing,” said Clara Huffman, owner of the Gallery, a large space that contained the best of Seattle’s premier artists.

“Do you really like them?” asked Lora uncertainly. “I’m just not certain about all the color. I have no idea where it came from! Usually I dabble in blacks, greys, and whites.”

“I know,” said Lora. “And we still have some of those on the wall over there.” She pointed toward the back of the Gallery.

Lora let out a sigh of relief. “Good,” she thought to herself, some of her paintings were unmarred.

“And those sell well, but that painting I was talking about this morning already has some interest in it. I think all of these will sell quickly too.”

Against the wall lay the two new paintings that Lora had brought in that afternoon. She shook her head as the two were bright and colourful, victims of the ghostly paintbrush.

“And I wonder what you have in that box that you brought?” asked Clara.

“I was hoping to get some work done here,” said Lora.

“Oh, of course,” said Lora. “Why, you could even have a demonstration tonight for our guests.”

“Yes, I could do that,” responded Lora, feeling inspired.

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Lora set herself up near the back of the gallery. She wanted to be near her original paintings, not the travesties that Clara was having the handyman install near the front of the gallery. Even though those paintings were bright and colorful, she felt unsettled near them. Clara said she felt the same, but that was what made them so brilliant.

Clara painted images from her past. But instead of painting images of her hurtful parents, she chose to paint her three best friends from her childhood, Dan, Nancy, and Mariko. Each of the children smiled out from the painting. Dan and Nancy had gotten married but then both died in a car accident. Mariko still lived in Seattle, but they hadn't seen each other for years.

“Wow!” said Clara, sneaking up behind her. “I may admire your new technique, but the detail you can capture in simple colors is amazing! I do hope you aren't going to splatter this one.”

“No,” said Lora, smiling. “I think this one is nearly perfect.”

“Great! Let's get ready for the opening,” said Clara. “The caterer is here, and we need to put our dresses on.”

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The Gallery was packed with people. Even the press had shown up and were going around videotaping the guests. They had already interviewed Lora, and she still felt inspired as she stood at the side sipping a glass of champagne.

But one thing she noted was that everyone was steering clear of her bright and bold paintings, well, the ones that were created by the ghost, anyway.

People admired them from afar, but so far none of them had sold. At least she made sales on about eight of her original family and friends illustrations in the back.

Clara came up to her shaking her head. “I don't get it. I thought for sure that those paintings would have sold! Well, that just goes to show that even an expert knows nothing after all these years.”

“Well, I'm glad that I went back to my original style,” said Lora.

“Yes, those are good, but they aren’t paying my lease!” said Clara.

“I’m sorry,” said Lora. “Perhaps I can think up a better technique.”

Clara swallowed the last of her champagne. “I think not,” she said tersely. “I’ve given you plenty of chances. I’m happy to take on your simple paintings for the BACK of the gallery, but I think I’ll go with Hubert or Claude for next month’s opening.”

Lora stood there, angered. “But you encouraged me to do the colorful paintings, while I could have done more of the simple paintings!”

“Well, mistakes are to be made.” Clara then walked off to speak to a buyer.

Lora shook her head in anger. She slammed her champagne glass down on a nearby display table. The large vase on the stand shook. She walked to the back of the Gallery where her painter’s toolbox was and rummaged through it. Settling on a knife that she sometimes used to smooth the oil paints over her palette, she stomped back to the front of the gallery where the larger paintings were.

Some of the guests saw her carry her knife across the room, and their chatter quietened. Lora stomped up to the first painting, raising the knife in the air, pointed tip forward. She thrust her arm forward and stabbed the painting, again and again. Every few strokes she add in a few slashes.

Still not satisfied, she moved to the other two large, three foot by six foot art installations that were on the wall. She slashed and stabbed at the paintings. Finally, she stopped when she was exhausted. She took a step back.

The colors in each of the paintings slowly faded away. The entire Gallery let out a gasp of surprise. Beneath each of the paintings, her original figures were revealed. Here was her father, her mother, and her brother. They were still geometric and fractalized, but no longer were they covered in the colorful paint spatters that her painter ghost had done. And miraculously, the gashes and cuts healed up, leaving no sign of her damage.

Just then, the entire gallery broke out in applause.

Clara rushed up to her. “I don’t know how you did that!” she said, considerably impressed. “Why, even the spots where you slashed and stabbed them are gone. I did say that you had talent, and these simple paintings do sell well.”

Lora was a bit annoyed that Clara had somehow forgotten their talk earlier, but she managed to pipe up and say, “This is representative of the tumultuous relationship I had with my family.”

“Aww,” said everyone in the audience.

“And please expect more art performances from my partner in the future,” said Clara. “Thank you to Lora Jackson for making this happen.”

Lora and Clara accepted more glasses of champagne from the waiter. “To us,” said Clara.

“I want another art show,” said Lora.

Clara nodded and smiled.

Mrs. Speers approached the pair. "I'd like to purchase all three for our mansion," she said.

"Of course, but the price has just gone up," explained Clara.

"I hope so," said Mrs. Speers. "That girl has talent!"

Lora and Clara beamed at each other, their rift forgotten.

"I do hope you can produce more of the bigger paintings? Perhaps a few more of your smaller ones for the back too," asked Clara.

"Yes, I have more of the larger paintings back at home. But I have some conditions," she said. It was like Lora had reached a second life, one that was free of inhibitions. She felt like a huge weight had been lifted from her shoulders.

"Yes?" asked Clara.

"I want my smaller paintings moved to the front of the gallery."

"Oh yes, I can do that," said Clara.

"Plus, an extra ten percent cut for me," Lora added.

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"I'm the boss now," Lora proclaimed proudly, back at her artist's studio. "If I say paint, then you paint. Otherwise, hands off my paintings!"

Lora stood in front of her latest, a small painting of a young Japanese child with a kitten. Her ghost left this one alone. But the next canvas over was much larger, several feet in width and length.

"This is a painting of both my parents. Have at it!" The paintbrush lifted itself off its palette and began the intricate process of dabbing paint in just the right spots on the canvas.

"I'm so glad we have this understanding," Lora whispered at her ghost, as she pressed buttons on her cellphone.

"Hello?" answered a voice at the other end of the phone.

"Hi Mariko, long time, no hear."

The End