

Lydia's Land

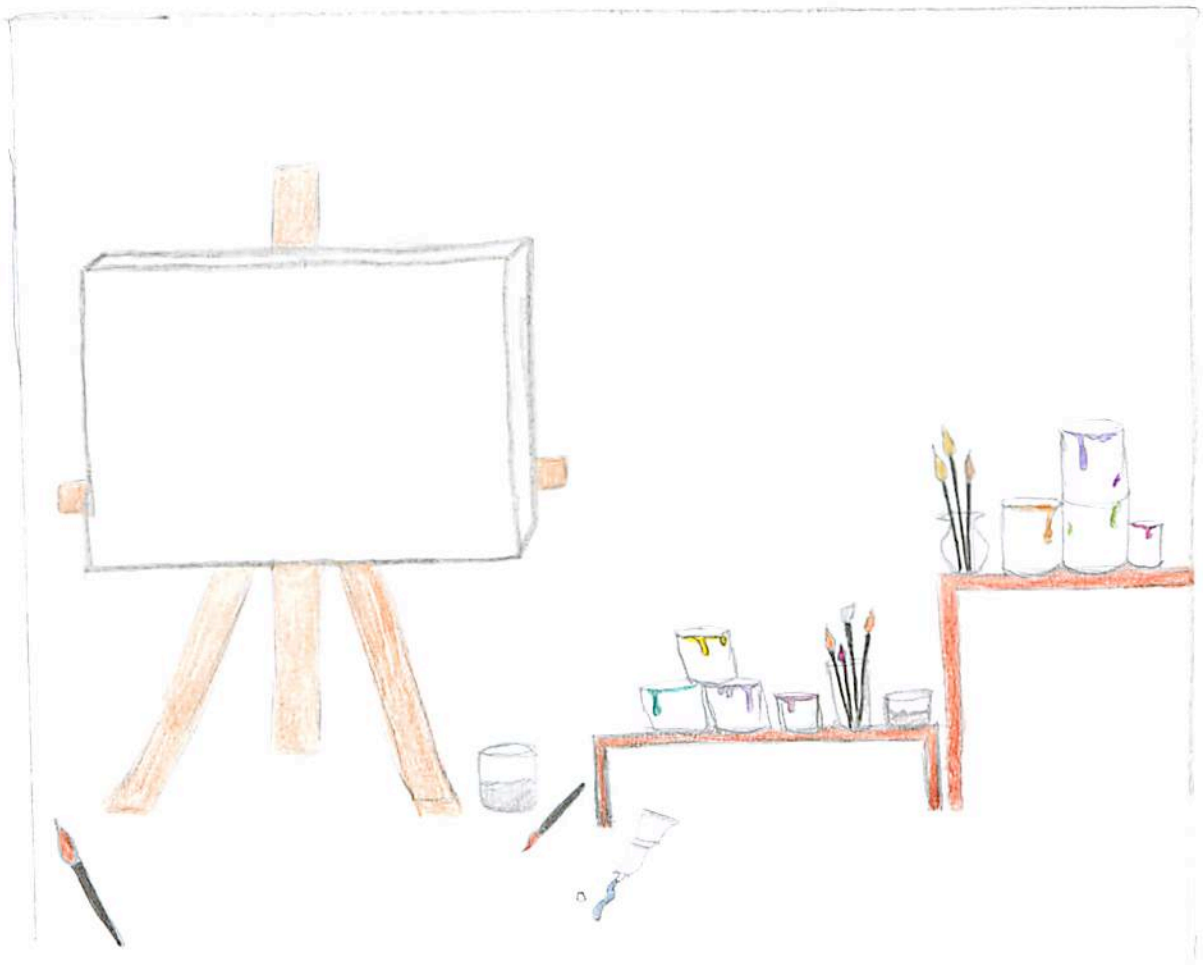
Lydia was a lovely little girl. She was six years old, loved to pick flowers, and she couldn't wait to lose her first tooth. She loved her family very much, and spent time with them often. Her mother was a chef and her father, an architect. Lydia loved to help her mom cook delicious treats, especially if they included chocolate. She also enjoyed designing funny shaped houses on paper with her dad. Her uncle was a pilot and her aunt, a doctor. Lydia loved to be picked up by her uncle and spun around like an airplane. She would whisper "shhhhh-oom" quietly to herself, pretending she was really flying. And every time Lydia got sick or hurt, her aunt would come over to make her feel all better.



But most of all, Lydia loved to spend time with her grandparents. They were both passionate painters and their house was an artistic explosion. Every inch of wall space, floor space, table space, even ceiling space was boldly decorated with one of their own pieces.

For many afternoons Lydia had sat in their studio and watched them both as their brushes floated back and forth on tall canvases. They were surrounded by paint cans upon paint cans, splattered with polka dots of acrylic. There were oodles and oodles of brushes scattered about, and all around the room, there were glass jars of water, turned gray from many paintbrush washings. Lydia just loved to spend afternoons gazing at her talented grandparents.

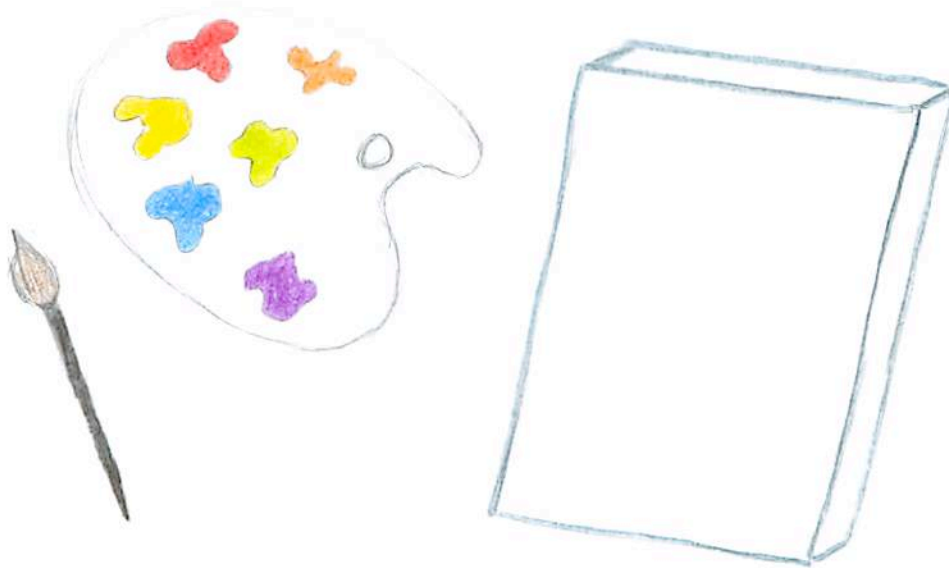
Once, Lydia watched her grandfather working in front of a huge canvas. The vibrant oranges and reds of a sunset, the rough blues and pale aquas of a rushing river, and the crisp greens of a soft hill seemed to appear out of thin air. It was so beautiful. Lydia wished she could be there, wished she could sit on the padded lawn, hear the whisper of the river and feel the warmth of the setting sun.



“Grandpa?” Lydia asked one day. “The places in your paintings seem so magical. I wish I could paint like you.”

Lydia’s grandfather smiled at her for a moment before crossing his studio and retrieving a dusty cardboard box. He pulled out a thin slab of wood, it was almost egg shaped except for a small rounded indent. Along with the wooden palette, he handed Lydia a fresh canvas and a petite paintbrush.

“Just have fun Lydia,” he said lovingly, with a wink. “And your paintings will be magical.”



From that day on, Lydia never left the house without a paintbrush. She would paint before school and after, all the way until dinner. Lydia liked to paint everything that she saw. She painted pictures of her cat and her mom, of ballerinas and candy. She even painted pictures of her dinner each night.

But most of all, Lydia loved to paint pictures of gardens. She painted warm golden meadows in the summertime, filled with fireflies and poppies. She painted cobblestone paths and curly queue benches overlooking walls of climbing ivy and serene statues. On rainy days, Lydia painted sheets of raindrops falling over willow trees and landing in a cool lake. And all the while, Lydia day dreamed of traveling to these places.



One afternoon, Lydia had just finished a very impressive painting of a soft hill, sprinkled with wildflowers, gazing at a honey colored sunset. She stepped back to make sure it was perfect, when she slipped on a puddle of dark olive paint and her brush was sent zooming towards the canvas.

“Oh no!” she cried from where she landed on the floor. “My painting! It must be ruined!” But when she looked to evaluate the damage, there was no harm done. Lydia looked high and low for her brush, but it was nowhere in site, it simply disappeared.

Curious and puzzled, Lydia sat down in a chair to recap what had just happened. She looked left and right, there was no paintbrush. Up and down, there was no paintbrush. After a while, Lydia gave up and decided to go show her parents her newly finished masterpiece.

As she reached for the embellished canvas, Lydia noticed something wasn't quite right with her picture. It appeared to be a tiny stick like tool lying in the middle of her sunny hill. “The paintbrush!” Lydia announced to the empty room. “But how could it have gotten in there?” she continued to wonder.



At once, the canvas illuminated and glowed around the edges. Lydia was surprised and reached out to examine the luminescent border of her piece. It was magical and happy.



Next, Lydia tried to reach for the brush and take it, but when her fingers touched the canvas, they reappeared in the picture much smaller and seemingly painted. Startled, Lydia jerked back her hand, fingers and all.

For the next few hours, Lydia was fascinated by her glowing painting. She practiced disappearing and reappearing her hand and arm over and over. Once she decided there was no danger, Lydia took a step back and jumped feet first into her painting.



Lydia's landing was padded by soft, wispy pale green grass, but she tumbled a bit down the slope of the hill and scraped her knee. All around her there were wildflowers of every shape and color and Lydia could barely believe her eyes. All she could do was sit on the hill that she had imagined and stare at the never ending honey colored sunset. It all looked so familiar, she almost remembered painting each precise flower and every blade of grass. She sat under a thick oak tree and appreciated her

hand created sunset. She picked bundles of wildflowers and still, the hill seemed overcrowded. Lydia was very pleased with her work and couldn't have imagined a more pleasant place to spend her afternoon.



After what felt like hours, Lydia began to miss her family. She became sad and missed her mom and dad. Lydia wanted to play pretend airplane with her uncle and she needed her caring aunt to bandage her cut.

But most of all, Lydia wanted to share her discovery with her grandparents. She wanted to thank them and bring them to see the sunset. Just as Lydia became excited with this idea, she realized, "There's no way home! There's no painting to jump into to get back home. How will I ever get back?"

"Maybe I can walk home," she hoped. She started to run to the top of the hill to see if her house was near, but since the canvas only allowed

Lydia to paint within its boundaries, the hill stopped short with a blank white wall.

"Perhaps I can dig my way home," she wished. Lydia grabbed the paintbrush and used the handle to carve away at the ground. While Lydia was digging down, she realized what a silly idea this was. Her house was nowhere underground and the mud was too wet and sloppy.

And that's when it hit her. "Of course," she said proudly. "I will paint a new picture. One of my house. One that I can jump into!"

Lydia quickly scooped up some soft mud and trotted over to the trunk of the oak. With her magical paintbrush, Lydia dipped into the mud. She then stoked back and forth along the tree trunk until a rather precise picture of her house was shown.



Lydia tested it out by disappearing and reappearing her hands. When she felt it was safe, she took a step back and jumped feet first into the picture.

She landed bouncily on her bed. Overjoyed, Lydia grabbed her painting to show her grandpa. "Wow! Just magical Lydia," he told her with a wink and Lydia was very pleased. She hung her new favorite painting on her bedroom wall where it could always be seen and sometimes, if the sun's shining just right on it, you can just make out the little brown mud painting of Lydia's house on the oak tree.

