

THE PERILS OF PAINTING

Written by

Hannah Littler

(3 December 2020)

literallylittler@gmail.com

FADE IN:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - ART ROOM - DAY

Ryan (25) eagerly arrives early to a large art classroom. He seems at home and eagerly settles into a spot.

Ryan is confident, but we don't think he should be...Dressed like a 90s throwback, his looser fitting jeans and windbreaker aren't fooling anyone.

MICAH (15) enters shortly thereafter and Ryan's face sours. A regular teen and frequent painter, Micah is all too familiar with Ryan's charade...

MICAH

Ryan.

RYAN

Micah.

MICAH

I would've gotten here early, but a few of the curators from the gallery scholarship were in the lobby. Thought I'd keep my name fresh in their mind.

RYAN

(urgent)

They were here? What did they say? Like did you say anything about me? You know I'm a child prodigy - I bet they know my work already.

MICAH

Was. Was a child prodigy. If that's what you want to call it...

Before another word can be added, LILLIAN (40s) enters. She has a dash of the bohemian vibes you might expect from an art teacher, but still seems fairly proper and reserved. While she pays no attention to Ryan, she heads to the front to set up. Ryan is alarmed and puzzled.

RYAN

(confused, approaching
Lilian)

Hi, there! I don't think I've seen you before and I know everyone. I come here pretty often and like usually Todd, Rachel, or Jaryd teach this course.

LILLIAN

No, I always teach this course.

RYAN

The youth creative painting class?

LILLIAN

No. I teach hyperrealist advanced art...for adults...

RYAN

I think there's been a mistake...

MICAH

Didn't you sign up for this too?

RYAN

This just isn't our usual class. Like I bet Lilian here doesn't even know what tik tac is.

MICAH

Tik tok?

(beat)

Listen, dude. We go through this every time. You can't keep signing up for the kids courses. It's weird. You're...what? 50?

RYAN

(overly emphatic)

O.M.G. I'm seventeen! It's like totally wild they let us in. Maybe we need to leave! We're teenagers...just surfin' the net, checkin' the 'gram.

MICAH

I...Yes, this course is for old people like you, but I talked to the registrar and she said it was alright to sign up.

RYAN

Yup. I did like...the same thing.

More people begin flowing into the class. They're mostly in their 30s or older. Ryan's eyes dart around the room.

MICAH

(taunting)

You seem nervous. Don't think you can take the heat?

(MORE)

MICAH (CONT'D)

You know, painting for people
actually your age?

RYAN

I'm not nervous. I'll just make
another stunning piece for the
gallery scholarship.

MICAH

For children. The gallery isn't
giving a scholarship to fossilized
paintings.

(beat)

You know, just don't be such an ass
today. Charlie cried for like
twenty minutes after last weeks
class.

BEGINNING OF FLASHBACK:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - ART ROOM - DIFFERENT DAY

Ryan sits in a chair that looks a little too small for him,
painting on an easel. The room is filled with a variety of
ages of kids (maybe 11-17). Clearly this class has charted
off course because the art instructor returns from the
bathroom to find -

CHARLIE - 12 and just trying her best - is sobbing holding a
painting of her and her dog. The other younger kids are
frozen in their seats crying and the older ones are appalled.

CHARLIE

(crying)

Biscuit looks fine!

RYAN

I don't know, Charlie??? Is that
what Biscuit sees in the mirror
when he wakes up every morning???
Doesn't look very realistic to
me!!!

CHARLIE

I don't knowwww!

RYAN

Is he purple? If so, you're going
to need more than a Petco dog
groomer and some prepackaged
treats!

END OF FLASHBACK.

INT. - COMMUNITY CENTER - ART ROOM - DAY - CONTINUOUS

RYAN

It's not my fault that her lines
were sloppy.

MICAH

Of course her lines were sloppy.
She's twelve.

All the other attendees are seated and Lillian draws
everyone's attention toward the front.

LILLIAN

Okay, everyone. Welcome to
hyperrealist advanced art.

CUT TO:

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - ART ROOM - SAME DAY

Hours have passed. Ryan is struggling to keep up. Surrounding
him are adult artists, all with gorgeous portraits that could
practically be photographs. Lillian walks around giving tips.

A view of Ryan's artwork: This is the most atrocious self
portrait we have ever seen. It's not even messy in a cute
toddler way. The portrait is a stick figure? A blob? Does he
have seven fingers on his right hand? We're sure he used a
paintbrush and not his fingers?

Next to the painting is a small mirror used for reference. We
can see Ryan's facial expressions through it...oof.

Zoom out to show Micah's art next to Ryan's. It's a good work
in progress that shows high skill for a young adult.

LILLIAN

(pointing at the painting)
So what's going on here, Ryan?

Ryan's painting is half complete, plausibly realistic?

LILLIAN (CONT'D)

I think you chose a really nice
color palette but something
just...isn't quite right.

Lillian pick it up and turns it upside down to look at it.

LILLIAN (CONT'D)

Was it just upside down?...I'm a
little lost.

RYAN
 (pretending to be
 receptive)
 Mhm. Yes. I agree.
 (pointing to Micah's
 canvas)
 But at least it's not like this guy
 over here...

Micah rolls his eyes.

LILLIAN
 I think we should focus on
 critiquing our own work.

Lillian turns to Micah.

LILLIAN (CONT'D)
 And over here, fantastic!
 Exquisite! The composition is so
 mature.

MICAH
 Thanks! I know I'm a little over my
 head, but I'm trying.

Ryan is flabbergasted.

RYAN
 Uh. What??? You're telling me that
 his is sooo much better than mine?
 Are you kidding me?

LILLIAN
 Remember to focus on our own work!

RYAN
 No, I just - I'm exceptional for my
 age too. I'm like maybe a
 month...okay a year...okay two
 years older than Micah, but our
 paintings are basically the same.
 Like if I was perhaps a museum
 curator and I had to choose one to
 hang in a gallery, it'd be a tough
 call.

MICAH
 (to Ryan)
 Bet.
 (to Lillian)
 Hey, I feel like everyone's at a
 good stopping point to do
 critiques.

Ryan goes pale.

LILLIAN

Ooh! I agree, Micah.

(to everyone)

Okay, brushes down. Let's take five to walk around to see how everyone's doing before we do critique.

RYAN

(shouting to everyone)

Yesss! Such a great idea, Lillian. And let's all please keep in mind that some of us are only like 15. So, today was a big deal.

(pointing to everyone)

Some could say, one small step for you all adults,

(pointing to Micah)

but one giant leap for our-kind.

People look really confused.

Attendees begin getting up to look around. They congratulate each other and give productive feedback.

Ryan walks around trying to hide his self-conscious interior. He's saying mostly critical gibberish about the paintings loud enough that it's weird.

So preoccupied critiquing others, Ryan fails to notice that one by one, the rest of the class slowly makes their way to Ryan's painting and remains standing to look at it.

The workshop attendees begin applauding and talking amongst themselves! Ryan finally overhears, rushes over, and nudges through the people.

SURPRISE! The painting on Ryan's easel looks transformed from his original work. It looks nothing like the blobs of color Ryan previously created. Now, a stunning portrait of himself is on display with vibrant use of color and artful brushstrokes.

Lillian joins the group after surveying the others and her breath is taken away.

LILLIAN

Ryan! This is wonderful! You certainly outdid yourself. A record turn around.

RYAN

I did? I mean, I did!

Lilian hugs Ryan. During the hug Ryan looks over Lilian's shoulder making eye contact with Micah with a wicked grin on his face. Ryan's eyes widen in realization...Micah has tampered with this painting.

LILIAN

Excellent job, Ryan. Any questions for Ryan about his work?

MICAH

Oh. I have a question.

LILIAN

Of course.

MICAH

I was wondering what kind of brushes you used for the backdrop.

RYAN

Oh uh, the usual ones.

LILIAN

Don't be shy! We're all here to learn from each other.

RYAN

Just like...standard angled brush.

MICAH

Hmmm. It's just that a standard angle brush wouldn't make those kinds of strokes - would it Lilian?

LILLIAN

I guess it wouldn't. Hm.

The crowd is skeptical.

RYAN

Awe, well it's just a brush. Maybe I used another. Ya know, I don't know all these fancy art terms.

MICAH

And how'd you get that green color? I thought Chas used all the green earlier.

RYAN

Obviously I mixed yellow and red.

MICAH
Yellow and red would make orange.

RYAN
I mean yellow and blue! That's what
I said. O.M.G.

Ryan sweats nervously.

LILIAN
Is everything alright? You created
a great piece. That is...*YOU*
created it, yes?

RYAN
Of course! What makes you think
that -

One of the attendees standing over to the side and closer to
Micah's easel chimes in.

WOMAN
Now that we're saying things aloud -

RYAN
(under his breath)
God, do we have to?

WOMAN
This painting looks an awful lot
like Micah's.

RYAN
(way too loud)
WHAAAAAATTT??? NOOOO. I get it.
It's because we're like twelve,
right?

MICAH
I'm fifteen.

LILIAN
I think Ryan and Micah merely have
similar styles. Moving onto...

Lilian moves onto another painting for critique. Ryan moves
away from the crowd to the sink where Micah joins him. They
speak quietly but for the most part everyone is too
preoccupied to overhear.

MICAH
I sure saved your ass. Something
you want to say to me? Perhaps a
thank you?

RYAN

You know, you actually technically committed like artistic vandalism on my canvas. I could have you arrested.

MICAH

You know I could tell people that -

RYAN

(struggling)

Hanks thou...kank kachoo...t-hanks yow...than you...

MICAH

What was that? I'm a little deaf.

RYAN

Don't make me -

MICAH

I wonder if the Gilbert Youth Gallery Exhibition would be interested in granting scholarships to people who -

RYAN

THANK YOU. OKAY. Now what the hell are you doing?

MICAH

(a little louder to the group)

What's that Ryan?

RYAN

(begrudgingly)

Shhhhh!

MICAH

Drop the act, already.

RYAN

No one has to know, okay? I don't know why the hell you fixed my painting, but I know you drive a hard bargain.

Ryan pulls out of his wallet a measly \$5

RYAN (CONT'D)

(confident this will clear things up)

Here's \$5.

Micah is stunned, but quickly adapts and changes course. He smiles at Ryan, flips him off, and then completely switches tone. Micah begins tearing up and intensifies his cries.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Wait, wait. What about \$10?

Micah cries a little louder and Ryan grabs his shoulders trying to shake some sense into him.

RYAN (CONT'D)

Please, Micah. You know I need this. We're just fella bros. Chillin'. It'll be fine.

Micah wails and catches everyone's attention. Everyone turns to look...the optics are not good...oddly dressed older man shaking a child who is audibly wailing.

Lilian rushes over.

LILIAN

What's going on?

RYAN

Just hit his elbow on the sink again. Ya know, it's hard to be short...

MICAH

(through tears)
He...he stole...he..

LILIAN

Who's he?

RYAN

His dad of course.

MICAH

(the water works)
Ryan stole my painting.

LILIAN

What? Ryan is this true?

The group is still glaring at Ryan. It's like a train wreck they can't look away from.

RYAN

I think he said Brian. B-B-Brian. B as in Beluga.

MICAH
 (crying still)
 RRRRRYAAAANNNN.

RYAN
 I can explain.

LILIAN
 Oh I'm sure you can. I thought your
 portraits looked a little similar,
 but I was ready to give you the
 benefit of the -

RYAN
 You see...the thing was...that...

LILIAN
 You know stealing, let alone,
 plagiarism, is a heinous crime.

RYAN
 Whaaaaat? Me? Never. I don't even
 now how to spell plog-orism or
 haimish.

LILIAN
 Stop the charade, Ryan.

RYAN
 What charade?

Everyone looks at him...

RYAN (CONT'D)
 What! I'm like 10!

LILIAN
 Ryan...you're, what? 40?

MICAH
 A dinosaur.

LILIAN
 Point being, you're not fooling
 anyone, Ryan.

RYAN
 These accusations!

LILIAN
 Ryan...you drove here...I saw you
 in the parking lot. Okay everyone,
 let's drop it.

Everyone seems relieved.

RYAN

What?

LILIAN

We are tired of you Ryan. There's no way to say this kindly anymore.

RYAN

But I haven't even taken this course before.

LILIAN

WE KNOW! You won't stop signing up for the kids courses!

RYAN

That's because I'm like -

LILIAN

NO YOU'RE NOT. You're not 17 or 15 or 10 or 9 or even 20. The instructors thought it was nice the first couple of times - to get back to basics, instill a little confidence, remind you of the gift you had as a kid. But it's become too much. More parent complaints than we can count.

RYAN

(his last attempt to save this)

It's my youthful talent.

LILIAN

Oh my god. This is a set up. The instructors all decided to register you for this class on purpose. To give you some humility. Instead you stole a child's artwork.

MICAH

I like to think of myself as a blossoming young adult.

Ryan is mortified, perhaps shat his pants by now.

LILIAN

Get out, Ryan. You're banned for the rest of the month, at least.

Ryan's panic, sadness, and fear begin to turn into rage...

RYAN

Banned...Banned? You can't ban me,
Lilian.

LILIAN

Take your things and go.

Ryan begins shouting obscenities as he clumsily picks up his personal belongings to leave. He trips over easels, knocking them over. Paint spills onto his clothes. He's still raving like a lunatic. It's a complete breakdown.

Micah follows him out.

EXT. COMMUNITY CENTER - PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

Micah catches up to Ryan who is angrily throwing his items into the trunk of his beat up car.

RYAN

Are you fucking happy? Get a good
laugh?

MICAH

Yeah, actually.

RYAN

Fuck off. I'm still going to get
the scholarship.

MICAH

You are not under seventeen.

RYAN

You don't know that. I know I'm not
six years old, Micah. I wasn't born
yesterday. I was a fan-fucking-
tastic painter then and I still can
be now.

MICAH

You weren't though.

RYAN

What did you just say?

MICAH

I googled you Ryan.

RYAN

And so you saw. You read the news
about me?

MICAH

I did. The paintings were average.

RYAN

No -

MICAH

And when I clicked a little further, I realized that all of those blog spots are all subsidiaries of CornerRock Publishing which is owned by your mom...Sandra Peril?

Ryan's face genuinely shatters. He had no clue and does not want to believe this. Micah thought Ryan already knew and is stunned.

RYAN

What about all the comments?

MICAH

Mostly family members.

RYAN

No, no, no, no, no. No fucking way.

MICAH

I'm not kidding, dude. I swear.

RYAN

(in delusional denial)

No. No. No...You're lying and I'm going to prove it. You're lying.

Ryan gets into his car in a frantic haze. He's a mess. A shitstorm, Ryan drives away leaving Micah in the parking lot.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - LOBBY - A COUPLE MONTHS LATER

Ryan, now in age appropriate clothing, walks into the lobby - Sharon the registrar instantly picks up the phone to call security.

RYAN

No, no, please!

SHARON

Ryan. How many times do I have to tell you -

RYAN

I know, I know! You've told me on the phone.

SHARON

You are banned.

RYAN

Well...what about...oh! My jacket. I, uh, left it here last time.
(grinning)
Can you check lost in found?

SHARON

(eye roll)
Wait here.

With the coast clear, Ryan sneaks down the hallway.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - HALLWAY - CONTINUOUS

As Ryan searches the hallway, he notices a plaque on the wall next to a framed newspaper. HEADLINE: 15 Year Old Micah Lawrence Wins Gilbert Youth Gallery Scholarship.

The picture attached is Micah, holding the portrait of Ryan.

RYAN

That little piece of shit.

He takes the plaque off the wall and dumps it in the closest trashcan as he continues down the hallway.

Ryan sees Micah through a window to an art room. Micah is walking around and the rest of the room is adults.

INT. COMMUNITY CENTER - ART ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Ryan enters, interrupting class. Micah looks up and makes eye contact with Ryan.

MICAH

Ryan. Thought they banned you...Well, a few things have changed since last time. Welcome to my class.

CUT TO BLACK.