

**Bug Rivera-Smith**

Age: 14, Grade: 9

School Name: Interlochen Arts Academy, Interlochen, MI

Educator: Mika Perrine

Category: Flash Fiction

---

## **Jessica, Apparently**

Jessica, Apparently

Jessica, apparently, has a serious case of... something. Whenever she sees someone else's painting, she notices how astoundingly pretty it is, and she tries to paint something like it, but instead of being proud of how it turns out to be, she ends up trashing her picture because she feels like everyone will judge how different her work is, so she feels like she can't paint because while everyone else wants to paint morbid things and dark streets and death, all she wants to make are dragons and sentient bugs and fields. When she paints, she likes to talk to them, the dragons and bugs. She likes to think that they talk to her, whispering encouragements, reassuring her that no one will care what she paints. Yet she still feels like everyone is ahead of her.

Watching everyone do so well makes Jessica stressed and want to cry. But why should she cry? She's doing good in school and has friends and is doing well with her paintings, according to her parents. But her few friends try to explain that she needs to sleep more, eat more, that her paintings are just as pretty as the others. Her friends try to explain how she really needs to see someone because they can't keep being her therapist.

But Jessica, apparently, wants to cry because she needs a day where she doesn't worry about anything or anyone and can spend it alone. Because maybe all this is really overwhelming, coming from being alone most of the time, but she probably just needs to suck it up and get through it, then she will get her break. Besides, this is what college is supposed to be like, right? Stress and homework on weekends and what feels like no breaks? At least that's what Jessica signed up for when she applied. But she keeps telling herself, that at least she's not at home, where she constantly feels stressed. But hey, her parents don't beat her, and she has supportive parents, so maybe she is just overreacting. Maybe she is taking advantage of the fact that her parents encourage her to be an artist, to not be ashamed of herself. But isn't this whole situation like spraining your ankle then claiming you don't need medicine because some people have actually broken bones?