

Blue Nail Polish

By Frances Killea



Mike made the mistake of poking fun at her nail polish right after she'd painted an extra-thick coat of a sparkly robin's-egg-blue on her thumb and pointer fingers; Molly slugged him and left him with tears and glitter and sky-colored nail paint smeared on his face.

She smiled all the way to the principal's office from recess, until she realized that she'd forgotten the bottle of polish outside. Just in time for Dr. Slater to let her in, her face had fallen into a frown the adults mistook for a surly scowl. Really, she was just disappointed to have lost her first piece of makeup, brand-new—plus, she hadn't finished painting her right hand.

She realized it was grounds for expulsion, but from the way that the Doc and the recess aide were saying it, it seemed more like a threat than a consequence. The message was, "Feel guilty; feel scared," and she did indeed feel both. Still, she somehow felt that she wouldn't be kicked out of school forever. Adults just liked to talk.

"Talk to me, Molly," Dr. Slater began, nodding at the same time to the door, motioning the recess aide out of the room. "What happened?"

Molly thought for a moment, still standing, and noticed a change in Dr. Slater's tone. She looked at the smudges on the fingers she's curled into a fist; they were marked with tiny, shiny blue blotches, and she remembered Mike's cheek. It was an easy mystery; the paint on the victim matched the paint on the suspect. If she'd been the bad guy in a book, though, there would have been a whole lot more investigation. Today, someone actually witnessed her crime, and thus her story was pretty boring.

“I just got this nail polish,” Molly began, and wiggled her way into the chair in front of Dr. Slater’s desk. It smelled like perfume. Perfume! That was the next piece of makeup she wanted. “Cole gave it to me - she’s my babysitter - because I didn’t have any and she had extra and brought over a whole bag of it this weekend.”

Dr. Slater nodded, but Molly could tell he didn’t care. She cut him off as he opened his mouth, continuing before he could impatiently urge her on.

“It’s the best color in the whole bag, and I just wanted to bring it to school because it’s pretty. I was saving it for recess. I thought my nails could dry better in the sun,” she said.

“Not a bad idea, Molly, but what provoked you to hit Mike?” Dr. Slater was tired of waiting for an explanation.

Molly could tell, and wondered why he had wasted so much time talking to her when she first came into his office, then. “He made fun of me,” she began. “He picked up the bottle when I had the cap off and said he was going to dump it all into the sand. He said it was a stupid color, and that it looked ugly on my fingers. I got mad.” The end, she thought, trying not to cry as she suddenly felt all the frustration of the situation again.

Dr. Slater crossed his arms. “Okay. I can see that you would get angry over that. It wasn’t nice of him to say those things or threaten to spill the nail polish. But Molly, there’s a difference between feeling angry and acting angry, and most of the time it is not okay to act angry. It is always okay to feel angry; those feelings are yours, and you aren’t wrong to have them. But in most places, like school, you have to learn not to act on them.”

Dr. Slater made sense. Molly listened and listened again, turning the words over in her head. At home, she swallowed her anger like a lump in a milkshake, because her parents told her that it made no sense to be angry about having a little brother, or running out of cereal, or it not snowing enough to go sledding. Today was the first time she’d forgotten to swallow the feeling. She looked again at her fingernails.

“I don’t know what Mike’s parents are going to say about this, Molly.” Dr. Slater tapped a finger on his desk. “Sometimes people get very upset when school fights happen, and the school will need to follow through accordingly. We’re going to talk with his parents and with yours to try to figure something out.”

Molly nodded.

“Why don’t you wait out in the hallway for a moment, while I talk to Mike?” It was a good suggestion. Molly was tired, and there were butterflies in her stomach. Dr. Slater opened his door, and Molly shuffled out past the reception desk and through another doorway to the hall.

There was Mike. He stood against a cubby next to the office. His face still had blue on it, and Molly had to cough to disguise a laugh, but Mike could tell she thought it was funny. Molly looked around. There were no teachers to be seen.

“You’re a jerk,” they said, almost at the same time. Mike stood up straight. “I know,” he said, which surprised Molly. Her shoulders dropped.

Mike lifted a fist. Molly clenched her teeth, expecting payback, but then he opened his hand. “I didn’t want you to lose this,” he said, and handed her the bottle of nail polish she’d forgotten outside. She picked it up with her fingertips and turned her head as Mike walked inside the office door. She felt angry again, like he was trying to be a suck-up, trying to act all nice to get sympathy, but she didn’t throw a punch this time. Instead, she twisted the cap off of the nail polish and finished the fingers on her right hand.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Why did Molly have to go to Dr. Slater's office?

- A because she brought nail polish to school
- B because she made fun of Mike
- C because she slugged Mike
- D because she called Mike a jerk

2. The most important event at the beginning of the story is that Molly hit Mike. Why does she do this?

- A He lost her nail polish.
- B He called her a bad name.
- C He made fun of her nail polish.
- D He tattled on her for lying.

3. Which of the following sentences provides evidence that Dr. Slater understands why Molly feels angry?

- A "But Molly, there's a difference between feeling angry and acting angry, and sometimes it is not okay to act angry."
- B "Sometimes people get very upset when school fights happen, and the school will need to follow through accordingly."
- C "It wasn't nice of him to say those things or threaten to spill the nail polish."
- D "Not a bad idea, Molly, but what provoked you to hit Mike?"

4. Which evidence from the text supports the idea that Molly usually controls her anger?

- A Today was the first time she'd forgotten to swallow the feeling.
- B Molly slugged him and left him with tears.
- C She looked at the smudges on her fingers she had curled into a fist.
- D Molly clenched her teeth, expecting payback.

5. What is this passage mainly about?

- A the importance of forgiveness
- B checking to see if adults are around before you misbehave at school
- C bullying at school
- D understanding the difference between feeling angry and acting angry

6. Read this sentence: "Dr. Slater was **tired** of waiting for an explanation."

What does "**tired**" mean in this sentence?

- A sleepy
- B growing impatient
- C cranky
- D growing restless

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Molly was smiling all the way to the principal's office _____ she realized she had left her nail polish outside

- A because
- B in spite that
- C until
- D although

8. Molly is worried about getting expelled.

Use evidence from the story to prove or disprove this statement.

9. At the end of the story, Mike returns the nail polish bottle to Molly. What conclusion can be made from this action?

10. Based on the interaction between Molly and Mike before he goes into Dr. Slater's office, what would Mike most likely say to Dr. Slater? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
