

Nelwina, age 12–14, Gems Millenium School Sharjah

Featuring: Diversity Dani

Title: Mix Paint, Make Colors

As she entered the village of Noro, Dani immediately noticed it.

Silence.

It clung to the air like smoke from a fire that had burned too long. People passed each other like strangers in their own homes. Children stayed on their side of the square. Faces stiffened at the sight of someone “other.”

This wasn’t just a village in disagreement.

This was a village that had forgotten how to see each other as people.

Dani had been sent to help them prepare for the Unity Festival. A celebration of voices, stories, roots—her favorite kind of mission. But Noro? Noro wasn’t interested.

Still, Dani wasn’t one to back down.

She spent the morning listening. One group claimed their dances were “too wild” for the other side. Another whispered that “their food smells strange.” One elderly man muttered, “We just don’t mix.” Like people were paint and unity would somehow make them muddy.

No one made eye contact when they said these things.

They weren’t angry.

They were tired.

And Dani felt something twist in her chest—not frustration, not even sadness, but recognition. She knew that kind of tired. She’d grown up watching her mother switch languages mid-sentence depending on who was around. Seen her father correct the way he dressed, trying to “blend.” Dani had learned early how to shrink parts of herself to make others comfortable.

But here's the thing: shrinking never builds bridges.

It only makes people disappear.

Soon, Dani had heard enough.

That evening, Dani stood alone in the middle of the village square. Lanterns swayed above her, unlit. The decorations for the festival remained untouched, piled in corners like forgotten hopes.

She stood straight and clapped her hands once—loud and sharp.

Everyone turned. Curious. Slightly alarmed. Definitely not ready for what came next.

“I was told this village needed help planning a festival,” she said, her voice clear. “But what you actually need is a mirror. Because what you're showing each other right now? It's not culture. It's fear. You've stopped seeing each other as people.”

A few villagers crossed their arms. Others looked away.

Dani didn't flinch.

“You want to celebrate tradition? Then do it together. Tomorrow, bring one thing that matters to you—music, food, art, anything. We'll put it all in one place. No signs. No labels. Just shared space.”

She turned on her heel and left before anyone could argue.

The next day, the square was quiet—but this time, it was tentatively hopeful.

Dani was the first in the square. She placed a scarf stitched with symbols from her own culture on the mat. Her hands shook slightly. This part always did. But she left it there—bare, beautiful, and hers.

One by one, they came.

A woman arrived with a basket of flatbread. A boy followed, carrying a carved wooden flute.

A man laid out tiny bottles of glowing blue paint. Soon, others joined, unsure at first, then curious.

Dani arranged everything on long, woven mats, side by side. She didn't ask questions. Didn't assign meaning. Just let the pieces sit with each other.

And something shifted. A girl asked to taste a dish she'd never tried before. Two boys swapped drums and ended up playing the same rhythm. An old woman started painting swirls over another man's geometric patterns—and instead of stopping her, he laughed.

By sunset, the village wasn't divided.

It was dancing.

Dani watched from the steps of the well, arms crossed, expression calm—but her heart?

Proud.

Because diversity wasn't just about celebrating differences. It was about connecting through them.

And for the first time in a long time, Noro had remembered how. They'd discovered that paint could mix to make not mud brown, but a thousand splendid colors.