

ACBA: Fiction and Prose

GRACIE'S FIRST SHOW

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Francine walked into the bedroom and took her little sister into her delicate arms. "Mom said it's okay. We get to go to the next rabbit and guinea pig show," Gracie's very first one. "Mom says you're old enough now, Gracie. We will have so much fun together. Here let me brush your red hair."

"Thank you," said Gracie, and then sat patiently as Francine pulled a tiny tangle.

Gracie could hardly wait. For the next five days all she thought about was going to her first show. "The mailman won't lose my entry, will he? What if they don't get it, Francine?" Francine ignored her. She was too busy cleaning a cage, putting brushes and other things into a box to take to the show. For five days, Gracie wondered what it would be like. "Francine, will anyone be there I know? Will the judge be kind? What do I do at the table? What will I eat for lunch, Francine?"

"Gracie, you talk too much. Just be quiet. Everything will be fine."

"Promise not to let me get lost," but Francine had gone on to doing something else and ignored her. "Francine won't let me get lost. Francine will stay with me."

Finally, Saturday arrived and Mom helped Gracie and Francine into the back seat of their metallic Chevette. The drive was a short one, only fifteen or maybe closer to thirty minutes. Youngsters like Gracie can't tell time too well anyway. All Gracie cared about was hoping the judge would be kind, and that Francine would make sure she didn't get lost.

The show building looked big. "I've never been to the fair before, Francine." Francine patiently looked down into Gracie's sparkly dark eyes. "You won't let me get lost will you?"

"Gracie, you talk too much. Just be quiet. Everything will be fine."

"Francine's right. I talk too much, but a little girl like me gets scared easily. This is such a big place, lots of strangers, cages with weird flop-eared mutts in them. And this building is so . . . cold."

"Gracie, you're shivering! Here, I brought a blanket to help keep you warm. Here, let's wrap it around your shoulders."

"Thank you, Francine. She is so nice to me. Francine won't let me get lost. Francine loves me."

"Look Gracie, French lops. Aren't they cute?"

"Cute? Those are the ugliest dogs I have ever seen? How can they run and jump? They make Dumbo's ears look puny. Francine, how can you say those mutts look cute?" Gracie tried to squirm a little and get away from her petite hands.

"Really Gracie, you talk too much. Just be quiet. Everything will be fine."

The judging began, an hour late. Francine said they somehow always start an hour late. The judge looked a little like a pudgy Santa Claus, but without a beard. He bellowed out strange statements: good this, trifle that...excellent mustache. Mustache? "Francine you never told me about mustaches. Are guinea pigs supposed to have mustaches?"

It was hard to see up on the show table. It was so tall, a long board with carpet and tiny cages, all in a row. How cute! That pudgy Santa Claus continued making comments. Some skinny lady wrote down everything he said. Some walrus-faced man in a lab coat would take pigs, then hand them back to their masters. "Francine? Francine, when is it my turn? Will the judge be kind? What do I do at the show table? I'm hungry. When do we eat?"

"Please, Gracie, you talk too much. Just be quiet. Everything will be fine."

Well it was finally Gracie's turn. The show superintendent yelled for Peruvian reds. Francine came forward. Gracie quivered as Francine helped lift her up high enough to see over the top of the show table. Then these giant hands came down and clutched onto Gracie, lifting her over and onto the table. Gracie went into shock. She screamed in terror as Francine looked smaller and smaller, mingling back in with a crowd of exhibitors. "Francine! Help me! A giant carnivore has me in his talons!" The

entire showroom fell silent with the shrieking cries of poor, frightened Gracie.

"Oh, Gracie, you yell too much," and then Francine's voice was drowned out by the returning chatter of the showroom.

There was Gracie, scared stiff in her own eight by twelve inch prison cell. Everyone staring, a little nasty boy was poking his finger in her rear. Gracie turned with a sudden start. The boy giggled. He poked again, only harder, and giggled. "Rude little boy," Gracie chattered, "if you do that again I will..." Just then the boy did poke again. Gracie lost her temper, and not in a nice way for a little redhead to act either. The boy, startled by the sight of blood gushing from his index finger, headed for his parents sniveling about something.

"I hope his mother spansks him," said Francine. Then, looking back at the table, "You poor thing. I will stand closer to protect you."

"So help me, if that judge pokes me, I'll bite him too. Take off his finger, I will!"

"Gracie, settle down, everything's fine now."

Next, it was Gracie's turn. The judge cautiously helped her out of the little jail cell. His warm, gentle hands caressed her. She gazed into his piercing eyes, surrounded by that pudgy beaming face. "He's cute," cooed Gracie. Please like me." Francine nervously stood by, waiting.

"Good head, excellent eyes, good red color, excellent body condition, fair ears. A very promising junior sow," said the Judge.

"What do you mean, fair ears? My ears work fine," said Gracie, suddenly doing her best to break loose of his firm grasp.

"Feisty little sow too," replied the judge. "She will be first place. We will keep her up here for Best Junior of Breed.

Francine giggled with delight, her first blue ribbon, and Gracie won it for her. "Mom, Gracie won first place."

"That's nice dear, let's go home now."

Homeward they went, Francine squeezing Gracie the whole way, "And when we get back, I'm going to give you the best piece of carrot you ever had."

"Lettuce too? Caesar Salad? Can I have a new cage, and can you put my ribbon on it? When is the next show? Can I go to it too?"

"Lettuce too," sighed Francine. "And Gracie, you talk too much. Just be quiet."

"Really, Francine, you speak to that guinea pig like it was your little sister," said Mother.

Francine proudly glanced down at Gracie. A little smile came across her face. "Yep, she's my little sister."

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