



TAMING TABBY

Written by Emmy Lorber

Illustrated by Waverly Woodring

I sat at my desk with a whiteboard and marker drawing cats and short comics like always. I blocked out all other noises and sat with my thoughts until I heard my name.

"Lola!" said Ms. Keller, "Come to the rug. We are reviewing for the math test. Erase your board."

"No!" I said. I clenched my fists, and my body tightened. Then I froze. A voice seemed to come from inside my head.

'You're a horrible artist. No one appreciates your art,' it said. I closed my eyes and saw the voice—a blob-like shape, like a bowl of Jello left under the sun on a hot day.

Then Ms. Keller's voice got louder, "Lola, come to the rug!"

The overlapping voices became too much. I stomped to the rug. "Fine! You win!" I screamed and buried my head in my lap.



I took a deep breath and started the test. Soon enough, I encountered a really hard problem. I closed my eyes to try to find the correct answer but instead I saw the blob. It had an angry face with whiskers and pointy ears like a cactus' prickles. It cackled louder and louder until I couldn't take it anymore. I exploded and tore my paper to shreds.

Ms. Keller came over to me. "Why don't you take a break," she said, "Choose one of your strategies to calm your body, and we'll work on your test later."

During our science lesson, my partners started making a chart and asked me to help. I grabbed a marker and started drawing on the chart. "Lola, stop!" shouted Riley. Simon crossed his arms. Emily sighed.

"Why won't anyone ever let me do what I want?" I screamed.

"See, no one likes your art!" the voice said. Little legs popped out of the blob, and it grew a little bit more.

After art class, Cleo handed me a stone that was shaped like a heart with "BFF" in little letters on it. It was as if all the bad from the day melted away. I thanked her and put the gift on my desk. But I accidentally bumped into my desk, and the stone slipped off the desk and shattered.

Cleo looked like she was about to burst into tears. Instead, she yelled, "Lola! I worked so hard on that! You're never careful!"

Her look made me feel like I was the worst friend ever. My fists clenched and my body got tight. "I'm sorry! Why can't you forgive me?" I shouted and burst into tears.

Someone gently tapped me on the shoulder. "Lola," Ms. Keller said, "You haven't been yourself today."

Everything I had been holding inside just exploded out of me, "I hate having autism! Loud noises make me upset, getting yelled at makes me upset, and now there's this voice in my head! All day it's been pointing out what I do wrong! I can't take it anymore! What is wrong with me?"



"Lola, nothing's wrong with you," Ms. Keller said. "Everyone has that voice, even me! We have to work on controlling that voice. First, we give it a name. Then, when it tells you something negative, talk back to it. Remember, you are bigger than it. You are stronger than it."

It tried to listen to Ms. Keller's words. But the voice said, 'She doesn't really want to help you. She doesn't care about you.' Then, the voice grew a body and paws.

'It's a cat!' I realized. 'It's just a cat!' Every second that I was silent, the cat got a bit bigger.

I remembered what Ms. Keller said: 'First, name the voice.'

'Tabby! Tabby Cat.' I thought. I talked back to it, "Ms, Keller DOES care about me! I'm important! So, Tabby, don't tell me I'm not!"

But when Cleo shot me a look, the cruel voice said, 'You'll never have friends again. Cleo doesn't want to be your friend anymore.'

"No. That's not true," I told Tabby. I turned to Cleo and said, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have shouted at you, and I need to be more careful."

"I'm sorry, too," she replied.



"Friends?" I asked.

"Friends!" she said. And then we hugged. Suddenly, Tabby got a little bit smaller.

Next, I turned to Riley, Emily, and Simon and said, "I'm sorry, I should have helped with the project."

"That's okay," Riley said. Simon and Emily nodded in agreement. Tabby's face softened.

At the end of the day, Ms. Keller announced the Star Student of the Week. She said, "I chose this person because she had a tough morning, but she turned it around and had a really good afternoon. This person has some challenges, but she has proven that she can overcome them. The Star Student is, none other than... Lola!"

I smiled from ear to ear. The whole class cheered. Cleo hugged me, and the whole class cheered, and for the first time all day, Tabby was silent.



A Note from the Author:

The most important reason why I wrote this story is to bring awareness about people with learning differences, especially with autism. We can see people with disabilities as human beings with strengths and weaknesses and feelings. I also want to send the message that EVERYONE has that voice in his/her head that tells them "I can't," and EVERYONE has the ability to quiet it down. Lastly, thanks to Waverly for sharing her experiences in order to help me write this story.

About the Author:

Emmy Lorber is in fourth grade. She has two little sisters: Sadie and Dani. Emmy loves to dance, play softball, and write!

About the Artist:

Waverly Woodring is in fourth grade. Waverly says, "I have autism. I love Wednesday Addams, kittens and puppies, writing stories, and dressing up. I have three younger sisters: Viola, Delphine, and Penelope. I love playing with my kitten, Coco, and my dog, Jack."