

“So, what have you been up to?” Uncle Ren prompted, smiling at his niece. She avoided his gaze and looked upon the floor. “You gonna answer me?” He continued after an uncomfortably long stretch of silence.

“Answer him,” her mother nudged. “Tell him about the art you’ve done?” She blinked at the floor again and the mother gave the uncle an apologetic look. He went over and instead talked to the girl’s siblings.

“And I went to the VERY top of the stairs!” Her younger brother boasted.

“The top?! And was there money at the top?” Her Uncle joked. While he entertained the conversation the girl’s mother lectured her,

“You need to talk. You’re being rude.” The girl blinked again and walked out of the room, fighting back tears. She went and found her dad and he looked at her,

“Dee, what’s wrong?” He asked.

“Mommy got mad at me for not talking,” she sniffed.

“Why weren’t you talking?”

“I didn’t want him to make fun of me,” the girl sniffed again.

“Make fun of you?” Her dad asked, confused.

“He was talking to Leo and he brought up money at the top of the stairs.”

“He was joking...”

“It didn’t feel like it,” she muttered. “I don’t know what I’m supposed to say in response to money? And I don’t want him to make fun of my art.”

“You just don’t like being in the spotlight,” her dad decided, giving her one last hug as he went to go find her mom. The girl sat herself on the couch and played with one of the house’s decorations in her hands. She tried to calm down. She couldn’t understand why everyone got so mad at her. She couldn’t help it.

What they couldn’t see were the racing thoughts in her head, calculating every possible response to every single statement. It didn’t help that she didn’t comprehend certain jokes. She didn’t find them funny or she had no idea that’s what they were. It felt like everyone was poking jabs at her for being confused. It was impossible to best her beating heart and the constant embarrassment.

She didn’t want to be rude, she just didn’t know any different.