

At school you are known as the nice girl. The one who is always smiling, and sweet to everyone. Some like you, others don't, but you were taught not to think too much about those others. You were never much of a trouble maker. You got good grades, and had great friends who made you smile, who you made laugh. "Smile and keep moving forward" has always been the fundamentals of your life. It's what you live by and what has unfortunately shaped you to the person you are today.

Ya' see with all this smiling and keep moving forward mumbo jumbo, it gets tiring as some would imagine. One of the greatest human accomplishments: having the ability to entertain and bring joy to others, as some would think must be the greatest feeling of all, though too much of one feeling starts to hurt. What you become known for sticks by you until you're trapped. Stuck having to put on the same costume every year, the same mask every day. Talking to someone about feelings is now like telling a child their favorite toy is broken. Or that the shop ran out of their favorite ice cream flavor. You end up with faces you never wanted to see. The "I'm sorry" faces, when you started with smiles and laughter. Not such a great feeling anymore, huh? This is why you are stuck having to reach for the mask every day. You may not be happy, but that can't mean other people shouldn't be.

The halls at school are filled with the rumble of the children laughing, chatting, and studying. A sea of white and navy blue uniforms rush from class to class, each student with a secret of their own, wearing their own mask, with their own story. You wonder if they have someone who listens to them when the mask is off. Your stories are normally short, when there is someone to tell them to, but there never are. Therefore, the stories keep going, keep growing longer, stronger. Your blood heats, eyes water, fists clench; until the mask needs to come back on, and the pencil is set down. The story back into your pocket, waiting until one day it can be told.

The walls at home are the best listeners. They never talk back, interrupt, or ask you to "repeat that last part." They are there when you need to tell someone about your victory in the mile race at school, or about the boy in science class. They are there to hug you with the warmth of the escaping outside light, when you need to be held as tears stream down your face. And are always forgiving when you recklessly hurl items off your bookshelf. As you kick and slam anything you can find at them, screaming in pain and relief. The walls will listen to you at your best or at your complete breaking point. They are there for you when no one else is. They will listen, they keep you as one.

"Keep on going!" a sharp neon orange post-it note reads. It had fallen off the wall and now lies on the floor with the rest of the mess you had just made.

"Keep on going," you say. "I have to keep on going."

Swiftly and orderly, you put everything back on the shelves before Mama gets home, before she notices. You don't want to give her another reason to talk to the walls. You don't want another night of the walls telling you what she's saying in the room next to yours. You are tired of listening.

Tomorrow is another day. Another day to put on the mask, to make people laugh and smile and feel happy. Tomorrow you will add another chapter. It's time for everyone to start listening. At school I'm known as the nice girl. I have a story to be told and I don't know how much longer I can keep going.