

You stand in your moon-lit driveway, rubbing your shoulders and huffing out clouds of warm breath. The car door slams shut. Your dad bumps you.

“Get the door please, kiddo.”

You leave him making faces. He scrambles to keep his stack of posters and boxes up right. You dig in your coat for your keys. With the sun rising through the trees, you can barely make out the tips of your shoes. You take the porch steps in one leap.

The old front door swings open with a *squeak*. It gets caught on the wooden floor and you grunt as you shove it with your shoulder. You drop your keys into a hand-made bowl with a *clink*. Something brushes against your calf; you move, feeling a lump under your heel — a *YOWEL* is heard across the house as you jerk away from what's underfoot. You barely catch a blur of orange in dim light.

Your dad yells from beyond the door. “Ayi, did you step on Toothless again?!”

“NO, the cat got under my foot!”

You go to stand in the chipped door frame. Your dad taps his boot on the shallow steps, planting one foot up, then the next. He does this for the other two steps. You watch. He slips into the living room and you close the front door behind him. You flip on the light, taking notice of your pants.

“The cat got into your paint again.” you say, looking down.

“What really? I thought I had put it all up.”

You hold up one leg and gesture toward your orange-paint and black-fur covered jeans. He stares, giving you a sheepish grin as he walks past the kitchen. You follow after hanging your coat, rummaging for food in the dirty cabinets. Your dad pushes dried-out brushes and paint-splattered plates to one side of the dining table to set down his stack.

He draws his hands out from underneath it, tip-toeing backwards to see if it stays. After a moment, he spins around, chanting “Ha-HA!” with a raise of his hand. The money box at the top starts to slip - it falls to the table with a hollow *CONK* and more posters fall with a slither. A grimace coats his face as he breathes with clenched hands - he nods to three and releases a huffed breath.

“You hungry, Ayi? I know I haven't done groceries in a while but we're bound to have something.”

He paces the kitchen, letting cabinets and drawers slam shut. You shake the Kraft Mac-n-cheese box you found and point to the already boiling water. He freezes.

“I got it going while you put your stuff down.” You say.

You watch him rub his face. “Mac-n-cheese for breakfast, uh?” He asks.

“Yup!”

He walks over, mumbling “Thank you.” He engulfs you in a hug, his strong arms secure but gentle. You notice paint on his cheek.

“Thank you.” He says again.

You smile. *I like it when we get home at dawn.*