



## THEY THINK I DON'T HEAR THEM

BY KEVIN HORGAN

Mama and Papa don't think I know what they are saying. Mama cleans and sings all day with me. Papa grunts when he's home. Mama smiles and hugs me and stays happy all the time and tells me she loves me. Papa complains about his job all the time. "What's your job, Mama?" Mama tells me I am her job, and our family, and our apartment, and she loves her job no matter what even if Papa doesn't like his job.

When my nose runs Mama wipes it off before I can lick it. Mama tells me to run to Papa when he comes home and bring him big kisses and a hug but he holds me away with his hands and his smile is bigger with bigger gaps in his teeth and I see he is happy tonight. Papa grunts and Mama sings to him to wash up for dinner, noodles and a porkchop, and Papa hums back, "Good." We sit and I eat the butter on my noodles first.

Papa eats hard and fast and listens to Mama singing about our day and how I saw a bug in my room and ants in the kitchen and we walked in the rain and mama washed the floor and the bathroom. Papa says it sounds like you love this and his eyes are sad. Mama says, "I do love my family, and if that's my job, so be it!" Papa smiles with lots of noodles in his mouth.

Then Papa talks and asks Mama the same fast questions about neighbors and the loud dog next door and the thing under the sink and money, money, money. Mama sings every time that it's okay. Then Papa gets angry and talks about work and his boss and other bad people, on and on and on and I don't understand what he

says except that he's upset and sad and angry and whiny. Mama's face, happy all day even after I screamed at the bug, gets a little less happy as I hear the clock chime and I look at my cold noodles.

Papa keeps talking sometimes strong and sometimes not, his hands pointing up and down and whipping around his head, and Mama is not happy or singing and is silent and her eyes get wet and cloudy and dark and her smile that I love and she loves to give me and Papa is a thin line like when she talks to the landlord about the barking dog.

Papa stops and looks at mama, sad. "Are you okay?" Very quiet, very still. Mama says yes but it comes out like a hiss. Papa mumbles about how hard he works and how bad his boss is. Mama sits taller but her eyes are down even as she looks at Papa's face. "At least you have a job you can hate." And they think I don't hear them.