

No one cares

I ran out into the crisp night air, pulling open the door of the black van and hopping in. I used my feet to push aside the trash that was scattered on the floor, making way for my friends to climb in. As I was settling into the faded seat, my friend said, “Ignore the mess.” I rolled my eyes, simultaneously grinning at her. “No one cares, Sera. You should see my brother’s car if you think this is bad!” After I closed the door behind one of Sera’s brothers, I stared out at the smudged headlights on the rainy window.

Many thoughts ran through my mind, but one I lingered on was how grateful I was for this group of friends. We had just come from an activity where we were playing card games the whole time, and I smiled remembering my victories—and my losses.

As I continued to think back on the last few hours, my smile suddenly dropped. We had been playing Uno, and I had been losing horribly. Sera’s mom flung down a plus two and I smirked at her, adding my own on top of it. I turned to Makelle, stunned when she added a third plus two. All seven of us in the circle turned to Ari, waiting to see what would happen. She gasped and clutched her chest as if she had been shot. We all started to laugh as she reluctantly took six cards.

But in that moment, all I could think of was how my laugh raged above everyone else’s. It was so loud and obnoxious, and I immediately shut my mouth, turning to silence for the rest of the game.

Sera tapped my shoulder. I was quickly transported back to the car, and I asked her what she wanted. “Should we play music?” I shrugged, glad for the easy distraction away from my

thoughts. As she scrolled through her music app, I hoped that she would at least connect to the car speaker so I could sing along without being heard.

The first notes of a song that only we two knew started to play. I didn't want to be an inconvenience and ask her to connect it to the car, so I went along with it. Sera nodded toward me, and I knew she wanted me to sing. With her two brothers in the car, her mom, Makelle, and Ari, I didn't want to sing along. It felt like that horrid laugh all over again—embarrassment waiting to happen.

Sera started to quietly sing along, waiting for me to join. I hesitantly began singing the female part, and as the song continued, my voice got louder and louder. I ignored the voice in my head telling me to stop—that everyone in the car must be thinking, “Who does she think she is? Her voice sounds awful!” Instead, I raised my voice even more, to the point where I wasn't even singing but screeching.

Sera matched my every voice crack, and we ended the song doubled over in laughter. We continued on to another song and soon had everyone laughing along to our antics. Her mom grinned back at us, and I could see in her eyes that she was thinking back on the decade of friendship Sera and I had shared.

Sooner than I would've liked, we were pulling up to my driveway. I opened the door and looked out at my neighborhood that I loved so much, at all the familiar houses lining the street. I waved to Makelle and Ari, and they smiled back at me. I reached over to hug Sera, and though her voice was muffled, I was able to make out her saying, “We should do this again sometime!” I laughed under my breath and hopped out onto the wet pavement.

As I walked around to the front of the van, I saw her brother hiding a smile—her brother who pretended he was above our simple joys, her brother who thought he was immune to our silliness. As I walked up my driveway, I watched the black van carry away many good memories inside of it.

I tilted my head up, my hair falling over my shoulder, and smiled at the stars—grateful for the simple moments where I could be myself. It was then that I promised myself that each and every day I would try my hardest not to care what others thought, because chances are, they weren't thinking anything of it anyway.