

RISING GENERATIONS

THE UPPER ROOM



RACHEL GOT IN TROUBLE AGAIN TODAY; and to tell the truth, I was a little bit glad.

Of course, I wasn't glad that she told our teacher to "shut up." Miss Brinks had been in a bad mood ever since it happened. But when I saw Rachel at the silent lunch table alone, I figure it was only fair. Honestly, she deserved it.

I lined up with the rest of my class and took a tray.

"I kinda feel sorry for her," I said.

"Who? Rachel?" my friend William asked. "Why? She totally asked for it."

Rachel leaned over her food with her eyes down. She probably knew we were staring at her.

"We never get anything done because of her," Molly added as she took a slice of pizza.

I agreed, but I didn't say anything. I knew something about Rachel that no one else knew.

"**Maybe she doesn't know** how to act," I said. Then I thought, *That's dumb. She's not two years old!*

"How could she not know?"

William said. "The teachers tell her every day."

"My mom says she's probably just trying to get attention," Molly said. "But I think Rachel's just mean. And I don't think she cares how many times she gets in trouble."

The thing is, Rachel does act mean; but I remembered something *my* mom always says.

"Maybe she's doing the best she can," I said, so low that no one heard me. Still, I felt better saying it.

I carried my tray and looked around the cafeteria. At every table, kids talked and laughed together. Rachel sat alone, and I wondered something.

"Hey," I said as I sat down at the table, "where does Rachel usually sit?"

William shrugged.

"**Right there.** At the silent lunch table," Molly said, and everyone laughed.

"Seriously, does anyone know?" I asked.

No one did.

"Sometimes she takes her tray into the guidance office," William said. "Remember that time the door swung back and dumped her spaghetti all over her?"

I did remember that. I remembered a lot of things about Rachel, and it made me feel worse.

"Miss Brinks," I called out before I had time to think it through.

She walked over to our table from her lunch-duty post by the trashcans. “Yes, Sierra?”

“Am I allowed to sit at the silent lunch table?” I asked. My heart thundered, and I wondered if anyone heard it.

“What? Why would you want to do that?” Our teacher looked confused.

“She’s kidding,” William said. “You’re so funny, Sierra!” Everyone else cracked up.

“No, I’m not kidding,” I said and stood up with my tray. “Is it okay? Can I sit with Rachel?”

Miss Brinks studied me for a long moment. Everyone at the table stared at me. She finally nodded. “You know, I think Rachel could use a friend.”

I cringed. I hadn’t said anything about being Rachel’s friend! Was I ready for that? But the knot in my stomach relaxed as I approached the table. I knew I

was doing the right thing.

“Hey, Rachel. Mind if I sit with you?” I asked.

The look of surprise on her face was such a change from her usual glare that she almost looked like a different person.

“Whoa!” I said as I noticed the markings on her napkins. “Did you draw that?”

“Yeah,” she said with a tiny smile.

I placed my tray across from hers and sat down. “That’s amazing. Like M.C. Escher, right?” I said. We had been studying his work in art class.

“I’ve been trying to copy his style, but I get frustrated,” she said. She balled up the napkin. “I’m no good.”

Instantly I remembered the time I had seen Rachel and her mom at the grocery store. Her mother yelled at her in the middle of the cereal aisle, “You’re no good, you hear me? You’re no good!” I had hurried away in the other

Illustrations: Michelle Simpson



direction before Rachel saw me. But I never forgot that. I shuddered a little now as I remembered the harsh words.

“Rachel,” I said, taking the crumbled napkins, “I get frustrated, too. But, seriously, you’ve got a gift! This is amazing.”

She looked like she wanted to believe me, but she wasn’t quite sure. Like maybe she knew I was a little bit scared of her.

I wondered how I would act if my mom yelled at me like Rachel’s mom yelled at her. I’d probably be even worse than Rachel!

“My dad loves M.C. Escher, and his birthday is next week,” I said. “I’ve been trying to figure out what to get him. Would you draw something for me?”

“Sure,” she said. “I mean, I don’t know if it will be good enough; but I’ll try.”

“Thanks,” I said. “He’ll love it.” I chewed my pizza for a minute. Then I said, “Hey, has Miss Brinks seen this? It’s so good, I bet she’ll freak out.”

“**You think?**” she asked.

“Yes! Let’s go show her together, after lunch,” I said.

“Nah, she’s mad at me,” she said.

“Oh, yeah,” I said. I remembered Rachel’s “shut up” under her breath when Miss Brinks asked why Rachel hadn’t done her homework. “Well, then it might be a good time to apologize, too.”

“What?”

“**You know**, to say you’re sorry. Believe me, I know it’s hard. But it’s the only way to make things right,” I said. “I’ll go with you, if you want.”

We ate silently for a few minutes. Finally Rachel said, “You show her the picture first, then I’ll try saying I’m sorry.”

“Good idea,” I said, and I knew it was. Just like coming to the silent lunch table had been a good idea. And I knew, deep down, that idea hadn’t come to me on my own.

Thanks, God! I prayed silently. ■

