

We can probably all recall a moment when our parents told us “No.” At one point or another, we’ve probably all complained about how unfair they can be. In her short story “Sol Painting, Inc.” Meg Medina shows that it can be incredibly difficult for a child to understand some of the difficult decisions that a parent may occasionally have to make, especially when that parent is someone the child looks up to. Merci, the story’s protagonist, is disappointed and angered by a decision her father makes, but she comes to learn that there is often great thoughtfulness behind his decisions, even if she may not see it right away.

Merci clearly admires her father. For starters, she dreams of one day taking over his painting business. In other words, she wants to follow in his footsteps someday. She would not want to do this if she did not respect her father and the work he does. This admiration for her father and her desire to impress him makes her rather self-conscious because she doesn’t want him to think less of her. This becomes clear when Merci responds to Roli’s accusation that Merci doesn’t want to paint in Dona Rosa’s building because she is afraid of ghosts. Merci claims: “I’m too busy, that’s all. School starts next week, and I have to finish my summer reading” (42). She doesn’t want her dad to think she’s afraid of something childish, like ghosts. This might make her appear weak. In addition, she lies about having started her summer reading, clearly for the same reason. If her dad knew she had not even started her summer assignment, she might seem like a slacker. One thing that is clear is that her dad’s opinion of her is important to her.

Merci’s admiration for her father makes it all the more confusing and challenging for her when he chooses not to take a stand. The girls soccer team enters the school and makes a mess of Merci’s family’s paint job. Merci fully expects her dad to stand up to the girls and get them in trouble, but when he doesn’t, she explains that “...it’s Papi’s stillness that makes me feel worse...He’s the boss, the adult, the guy in charge. How could he let this happen?” (55). Merci’s impression of her dad is a man who does not take nonsense from anyone, yet here he lets a team of young high school students make a mockery of him. She is so shocked and confused by his inaction that she blames him for not standing up for all of them. To make matters worse, Merci’s dad yells, “Quiet, Merci!” (56) when she suggests the girls clean up the mess. In Merci’s eyes, not only has her father failed to stand for his family, but he has also embarrassed her with a public scolding. It takes some time and some brotherly advice for Merci to come to understand the decision her father had just made.

Roli, Merci’s brother is able to help her come to understand why their dad responded the way he did at the school. Roli sees Merci sulking by the pool and asks, “What did you want Papi to do Merci? Pick a fight and blow your free ride?” (59). Roli recognizes that there was an awful lot at stake. If Papi had angered anyone at the school, he could have lost not only his job, but also Merci’s opportunity to attend such a highly regarded school. He was able to hold back his anger when he realized that it could possibly harm his family. Roli continues, “Papi *chose* to be invisible today so you won’t ever have to be....That’s harder to do than shooting off your mouth” (59). Roli explains that what Papi did was for more admirable than starting a fight

would have been. Papi had a choice. He didn't have to accept being looked down upon, but he chose not to fight back in order to ensure that his daughter has a chance.

It takes Merci time and assistance in order to realize that her dad was actually acting in her best interest and putting her before himself. Most children have experiences just like Merci's, where they find a parent's actions or decisions to be unfair or confusing. Often, their anger and disappointment prevents them from taking the time to think about why a parent may have made a certain decision.