

CHUY
Start from the beginning.

ASHLEY
The beginning.

CHUY
When did “Being Ashley” start being a bad thing?

ASHLEY
...Fifth grade.

CHUY
Go on.

ASHLEY
(after a long beat)
I got the Excellence Award. Best in my grade. Mom and Dad were so proud. They laminated it.
(beat)
Everything I got, Mom would laminate and put on the wall.. the first thing you’d see is this wall of Ashley Banks First Place Best Debater Straight A Student. Never second. Always best. I couldn’t break it.
(beat)
Now what?

CHUY
What do you do to blow off steam? To let it all go?

ASHLEY
(a beat) I cheat.

CHUY
What?

ASHLEY
Yeah, you heard me! I cheat!

CHUY
How often?

FIRE HAZARD

ASHLEY

When I'm desperate.
(less bold)
That stays between you and me, okay?

CHUY

I told you. Off record. Ashley, you can trust me. (beat) You know, it makes sense. Only people who really care would cheat.

ASHLEY

My mom... my mom is constantly comparing me. To other outstanding students. I can't be the best all the time. I can't. I can't.

CHUY

What about your dad?

ASHLEY

Out of the picture.
(beat)
I used to be able to tell him everything. And he'd listen. I'd tell him about how I do so much. I do *so* much—school, volunteering, debate, cheerleading, business society, work, applications.
(she starts to breathe real hard)
(struggling) Sometimes, I can't breathe. It's like I have to grab it all before I—

CHUY

Hey. Hey! Deep breaths. Focus.

ASHLEY

I can't—breathe—

CHUY

Look at me. Finish your sentence. What do you have to grab? And before what?

ASHLEY

(calming down a little)

Oxygen. Before it all runs out.

CHUY

That's called hyperventilating. Does this—does this happen to you often?

FIRE HAZARD