

Brooklyn chewed on the inside of her cheek, watching the cracked sidewalk blur past her. The rain was doing that annoying, persistent drizzle that soaked through her jacket after ten minutes and made your shoes squelch. The bus smelled like old french fries and wet dog, a familiar Thursday afternoon aroma. She wasn't thinking about flying or teleportation. Those were comic book fantasies. Brooklyn's fantasies were grounded in the gritty reality of her life.

"If I could have anything," she muttered, "it'd be... to know. To know what people really mean."

Not mind-reading, exactly. More like a translator for the unspoken. Because everyone lied. Or, okay, maybe not lie, but they definitely didn't say what they actually meant.

"Everything's fine, honey," her mom would say. Fine. Fine was the word she used. The word she used when getting off the phone with some bill collector, her face strained. Brooklyn could see the worry lines etched around her eyes, the way she rubbed her temples as if she had a headache that wouldn't go away. "Fine" definitely didn't mean fine.

Or a girl she knew, Kara. Brooklyn watched as Kara's friends joked about her, Kara laughing along. But her eyes had flickered with a flash of hurt, and her laugh was just a little too forced. Kara didn't think it was funny.

And Leo? He'd say, "See you around," after they'd walked home from school, but his gaze had lingered a second too long, and he'd shuffled his feet like he wanted to say something else. Something... more.

"Everyone's got a code," Brooklyn mumbled, pulling her worn headphones over her ears. "And I'm stuck trying to crack it."

She imagined it: a little mental decoder, translating the subtle shifts in tone, the micro-expressions, the pauses between words. No more second-guessing, no more wondering if she'd misinterpreted something. Just... clarity.

She'd know when her little brother, Rio, was actually scared of the dark, not just pretending to be tough. She'd know when her history teacher was being sarcastic, not just mean. She'd know when her dad, who lived across town, was actually missing her, not just saying he was busy.

It wouldn't solve all her problems. Her mom would still be stressed about bills. Kara would still be complicated. Leo would still be confusing. But at least she wouldn't be stumbling around in the dark, constantly misreading the signals.

The bus screeched to a halt, and Brooklyn hopped off, the city noise hitting her like a wall. She walked down the street, past the pizza with the flickering neon sign and the graffiti-covered walls. The world was a mess of mixed signals and unspoken feelings. But maybe, just maybe, if she could understand what people really meant, she could navigate it a little better. Maybe she could even figure out what she

wanted to say, too, without all the awkward stumbles and misinterpretations. That felt real. That felt like a superpower worth having.