

“Daniel! Dan-*iel*. Wait for me!”

Daniel Stubbs ignored the voice. It was a bad day at Northeast High School. He didn’t need anyone bothering him.

“Can’t you wait? Mom said you should.” It was his little sister Kiara. Daniel shrugged. His mom said something before school. He didn’t listen.

“Anyway,” his sister continued, “Jamal’s with me. I thought you’d wait for *him*.”

“What up, brother?” Jamal Harris was Daniel’s best friend. They met in the first grade. Jamal gave his usual fist bump greeting.

“Nothing much. Surprised you’re still talking to me. I’m probably a grade-A nerd now.” Daniel kicked a pebble.

“What! Naw man. You showed up that windbag Mr. Murphy good in class today. Gave him a what for on his fact checking. Nobody’s calling you a nerd. Hero, more like.”

“Yeah. I heard about that! Mr. Murphy’s nas-ty,” Kiara told the two boys. Daniel shook his head. They

talked about it in the middle school? Daniel sighed. He had a NERD sign on his forehead now.

“You’re on top of school. You ready to take on sports? Join the track team with me?” Jamal asked.

“Dunno man.” Daniel shifted. “After today? School stuff isn’t for me. You know? I’m not like you.”

Jamal laughed. “You showed up Mr. Murphy today. You can show me up in sprinting.”

“Who’s gonna show Jamal up? Can I be there when it happens?” A voice came from behind them.

Daniel saw long brown legs and a bright smile. It was Simone Wallace. She had snuck up on their group. Daniel’s face got hot.

Simone was the prettiest girl Daniel knew. She was also the fastest. She won state in track last year. Her black hair was shiny. Even her skin glowed. He'd never said a word to her. She was a friend of Jamal's. They ran track together.

"Uh ..." Daniel couldn't respond. Simone had heard about him correcting Mr. Murphy. She probably thought he was a nerd.

Jamal jumped in to save Daniel. "Just sayin' he should give track a chance. You tell him, Simone."

"You should come! I heard you laid it down on Mr. Murphy today. Good work! Try laying down track. I'm sure Jamal will be eating your dust." Simone smiled again.