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Marcel stopped in the street. He was the biggest of the three boys. He was also the kindest. Marcel stopped Akil too. “Wait now, Tre,” Marcel said. “Best looking girl? In the whole school?”

“You heard me,” Tre yelled. He was across the street now.

Akil touched Marcel’s arm. “Later,

big man,” he said. Then he jogged over to Tre.

“Later, Tre,” Akil said. But Tre ignored him.

“Deena is fine,” Tre said. “I know it.”

“She’s okay,” Akil said. “See you later.”

Akil ran to his building. He climbed the stairs. It was late in the fall. The windows were open. He heard Marcel and Tre arguing. They were out on the street.

Akil didn’t think Deena was fine. At all. He disliked her in fact. But Akil didn’t argue with Tre. Not anymore. It wasn’t worth it. Akil used to be small and shy. Tre took

care of him then. But things weren't like that now.

Akil entered his apartment. His mom was on the couch. "Hi, baby," she said.

"Hi, Ma," Akil said. He kissed her cheek. "Long day?"

"The usual," she replied. "You hungry?"

"Nah," Akil said. He walked to his room. He grabbed the notebook under his bed. He returned to the living room. "I ate. Did you? You want anything?"

"I'm fine, sugar," his mom said. "But I'd like to feed you once in a while."

"Ma, I eat."

"Yeah, right," she said. She smiled

at her skinny son. Then she fell asleep.

Akil sat with his notebook. The edges were worn. He got every penny out it.

He stared at a blank page. He didn't hate all girls. Just Deena. Deena was a big mouth. But Tre liked her. So she was always around. Akil couldn't control that. What could he control? "Not much," he said out loud.