
[chapter]

1

C*lick. Click. Click.* It was getting late. Nishell knew it. School was over. Shadows followed her down the sidewalk. If she stopped for much longer she'd miss the bus home. She just wanted to take one more picture, of a flower growing between shards of glass and graffiti on the crumbling pavement.

Click.

“Perfect! That’s it!” Nishell said to herself. It was everything she wanted to capture. It showed poverty and cruelty, yet with something beautiful growing out of it. Her mom, Sierra, would love it.

Nishell brushed her big brown curls out of her face. Then she carefully put her camera away. The camera was the best thing she owned. She didn't usually bring it to school, but the yearbook club needed an extra camera today. Nishell knew she took the best pictures with her own camera. Many times, her camera was like her best friend. It helped her express what she thought and felt.

For a mandatory punishment from Mr. Crandall, the guidance counselor, YC wasn't so bad. He assigned the after-school club activity when Nishell skipped gym for the tenth time. Nishell made the best of it. Her long-time secret crush, Jackson, was in YC. And she was making some tight friends. Nishell never would have gotten to know brainiacs like Kiki and Tia. She was even getting along with the more popular girls like Marnyke, one of the hottest girls in

school, and Sherise, Kiki's twin sister.

That said, no one was allowed to touch her camera except Nishell. She'd worked a whole year serving ice cream after school to buy it. She wasn't about to let anyone take it or break it. Her mom wanted her to save her money. But after a year of arguing about it, Nishell paid for that camera in cash.

Ms. Okoro, the YC advisor, made a surprise announcement at the meeting today. Nishell had won a district art award for her "Beauty in the Hood" photo series. Tia, Kiki, and Sherise clapped and screamed for Nishell. Even Marnyke seemed sort of happy for her.

"Nice photos," Marnyke said. "I kinda like them."

"You can all see Nishell's pictures next week. The school is hanging them in the first floor hallway for the rest of the year," Ms. O said. "Congratulations,

Nishell! Let's find a place in the year-book for a photo of Nishell next to one of her photos."

Nishell's own pictures! "Oh, thank you, Ms. O!" Nishell said. It was a good day, for once.

Nishell started walking to catch the bus. She was so hyped. She couldn't wait to tell her mom about her award and photos hanging in the school. Sierra would be damn proud. Even better, it was Thursday, her mom's night off. Nishell, her mom, and her brother, Ka'lon, would have dinner together. They might even watch a movie. Best of all, once her mom heard, maybe she would finally want to talk to Nishell about her photography. Maybe she would stop thinking it was a waste of time and money.

Nishell walked faster. She couldn't miss this bus. The next one didn't come for another thirty minutes. It would be