
[CHAPTER]

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Kiki Butler sat on the bottom bleacher of what passed for the South Central High School football stadium—really two sets of risers on either side of a weed-strewn field. Her classmates were sprawled out on seats behind her. Most had eyes glued to their cell phones. Nobody dared text—that was against school rules—but there was no rule against clock watching.

Kiki didn't have her cell out, since she was actually paying attention to her English teacher, Ms. Okoro. That didn't mean she couldn't sneak a peek at the

phone of the person sitting next to her, though.

“Ten thirty,” Kiki thought. “Twelve more minutes here. Then one more class. And then no more school. What a year. What an effing year.”

Kiki knew her classmates were craving the final bell that signaled sleeping in and partying off the hook. She herself wasn't much of a party girl—she much preferred the basketball court to doing shots and smoking herb—but she had a good summer ahead. There'd be plenty of time to hang with her boyfriend, Sean King. She'd be working at the day-care at Northeast Towers, the two-building apartment project where she lived with her older-by-two-minutes twin sister, Sherise, her mom, and her stepdad.

Since the weather was so great—sunny, calm, temp in the seventies—Ms. Okoro (everyone just called her Ms. O)

had brought the eleventh grade English class outside. Ms. O had been born and raised in Nigeria and wore a festive orange dress and a ton of bracelets in honor of this last day of school. She often spoke of how teachers in Africa were treated with reverence and how kids went to school dressed nicely.

“South Central High sure ain’t Africa,” Kiki thought. “Even if school be savage!”

Kiki took in her own cutoff jeans, Chicago Bulls jersey, and basketball kicks. Pretty tall at five foot eight, her hair was back in her usual braids after an experimental new 'do for prom. Her classmates were as casual as she was, except for Tia Ramirez, who sat a few rows back. Tia had come to the hood from Mexico a year or so ago. She wore a beige pants suit with her dark hair in a thick bun and glasses perched on her head.

Tia always dress like she goin' to court to testify.

“Christopher Okigbo was not just a poet,” Ms. Okoro spoke without notes. “He was a poet, and he was a revolutionary. He died in a rebellion against the Nigerian government in the late 1960s. Listen!”

I have fed out of the drum!
I have drunk out of the cymbal!
I have entered your bridal chamber;
and lo,
I am the sole witness to my
homecoming!

“Okigbo wrote that in a poem called ‘Distances,’” Ms. O said. “And the homecoming he is talking about is not high school homecoming. But I’ll spare you analysis and let you enjoy the words.” She stepped toward the bleachers, made