

## Neighborhood Hassle

By Stephenie Lincoln

"I wish you guys would hurry up," I yelled, looking up towards the hoop. I was standing by the wire fence that was off to the right. The boys on the block were playing basketball. They never let me play because I was a girl and they didn't want girls with them.

It was a sunny day. Birds were flying by and all the neighborhood kids were out all over-playing kickball, stickball, catch, tag, anything. I had just come out from eating one of my favorite lunches, peanut butter and jelly, so I was ready to ball.

"You ain't playin' so you might as well leave," Timmy said. Timmy was about an inch taller than me. He wasn't skinny, but he wasn't fat either. He had a nappy mini afro and he always wore too little shorts and shirts with Coasters from Volumes.

"Oh yes I am, and just for that, you gone be the first person I beat," I said. All the other boys was like, "OOH." So when they got finished playin, Timmy called me out. The winner of one-on-one stays on the court until he/she loses.

"Now, these is the rules: game is 5, ain't no outs, and winner gets ball."

"O.K.," I said, and we started.

"You got first ball since you a girl," he said. That was his first mistake.

I took the ball out top. We were on the corner of Michigan and Webster at the Frazier's hoop that had been nailed up to the top of the garage. On the right side was a fence and on the left were bushes.

The bushes were very tall and had big green leaves that were also glossy. On the other side of the bush lived a lady that we all called crazy. She looked like a monster cluck.

I had Timmy all to myself. I faked left, crossed over to the right, went through my legs, and layed it up with my left hand. Timmy was embarrassed. Now all the rest of the boys were going crazy. They never knew I could ball.

I was always a tomboy, but I never let them know I could ball because they were so mean. But I was fed up. So I had decided it was time to school 'em.

It was my ball again. I dribbled to my left, crossed to my right, and busted a "J."

"In yo face Timmy," I said like I was all that. "My ball." I went right, tried to go through my legs, and Timmy stripped me. He laid it up and the score was 2-1, me. His ball. All the fellas was jumpin' up and down now yellin', "Go Timmy, don't let no girl beat you."

Little Ronnie was the fat one. He never did anything but instigate and eat. He had on one of those polyester T-shirts that was brown and orange, with some brown pants. They looked like they both had been painted on. He had curly hair and the prettiest white teeth.

Jimmy was Timmy's lil brother. He was the little tagalong with Timmy's old pants and shirt on. But Jimmy wore those little brown Dexters, and his hair was always combed. He had a cute little dimple in his left cheek and some of the most chocolate colored skin.

Timmy was grinnin' now. He had the ball and pulled up for a two pointer. I blocked it, turned and layed it up. Score was 3-1, my ball. I drove in strong to the right and pulled up for another "J."

"Cheating," I said. "Yes. Money."

The boys were laughing now. Timmy got so mad that on my next out he knocked me down so hard I could have cried.

He had a little grin on his face like, "Yeah, now what Steph?"

I was wearing my favorite jean shorts and my Aries T-shirt with my blue and white old school Nikes. I was lookin' too cute. And he had pushed me onto the dirty ground. My

shorts were all dusty. I think I might have even had a few pebbles in my pants. Anyways, I was pissed off and hurt. But I got up and socked him in the face.

"Oh my goodness," yelled Jimmy, his little bro.

"She socked him," yelled Ronnie.

By then other neighborhood kids were watching. They had never seen me play either. Plus I was playing Timmy, the best boy baller on the block.

"Get up Timmy, get up," they all started yelling.

I just walked down the little so-called court and turned left leading home. As I walked, I kicked the cherry tree that was on the right of me. By the time I turned the corner, I saw Mr. Johnson.

"Steph, wus the matter?" he asked.

"Nothing," I said sounding as if it was his fault I had been pushed on the ground in my favorite jean shorts.

The next day I went outside. I was sitting under the tree in front of our house. I had on my pink overalls and white T-shirt and sandals. I was making some mud pies and was interrupted by Timmy.

"I'm sorry, Steph, for treating you like that." He continued, "Do you wanna play again?"

Feeling kind of fresh cause I had got the best of him, I said, "Yeah, but don't let me have to kick yo butt again."

So I washed my hands on the side of the house and went in to put on my old school Nikes. When I came out Timmy, Jimmy, and Ronnie were standing at the end of my steps. When I walked down the stairs, they moved out of my way.

We walked to the Frazier's hoop and we got our ball on. From then on, they never told me I couldn't play with them.

## My Name is Not Kunta Kinte

By DeShawn Holden

I am not Kunta Kinte; I recited to myself after being woke up by my mother. If she called my name one more time, I might as well have breathed my last breath. I didn't care that lions roar. That didn't scare me one bit, but my mom did. Hey, I figured I could take my time since she was waking me up the butt-crack of dawn.

The obnoxious sunrays beamed into my eyes. I really didn't want to go to the berry field, but I had to go in order to make some pocket change. This didn't motivate me too much. What do you expect? A nine year old to take money over sleep? I don't think so.

Rushed by parents and siblings, I walked right out of the house with eye boogers still in the corners of my eyes and slobber stretching from my mouth to my ear. I didn't care until my grandmother, Mrs. Rise and Shine herself, who goes to bed at 8 p.m. and starts her day at 3 a.m. said, "Boy, why haven't you washed your face? You look like you been sleeping in a barn. And you didn't even bother to comb yo' ole nappy head. Looks like chickens been having their way with it."

She meant well, even though it sounded pretty harsh. I love my grandmother. She was light in spirit, but heavy every where else. She was a strong woman, a warrior, and a survivor. My grandmother loved me in spite of all my mischievous, devilish, sneaky ways. She always managed to speak life when I was bad and everyone else wanted to speak death. She said that I was going to be the one to grow up to be a preacher.

We finally made it to the land flowing with rows of raspberry bushes and big ole dirt clods that me and my brother Bunky and my nephew Mario used to throw at one another when no one was looking. Bunky was the oldest, then me, then Mario. I was the strongest. Bunky was the smartest, and Mario was the skinniest. Boy, was he skinny. He was so skinny he could be on the "Feed the hungry" commercials and make millions. When we stepped out of the car, I could smell the sweet perfume of berries.

"Come on. Y'all let's get started. The quicker we get started, the quicker we can get out of here," my impatient sister insisted. I was with her on this one. The thirteen adults and three children crowded the untouched ripe rows of berry bushes. Everyone tied the berry-stained bucket to their waist and scarves to their heads, ready to sing the old slave field songs, "I don't feel no ways tired." Each adult took the mile long rows for themselves and Bunky, Mario, and me took a row together. These rows were too big to handle by ourselves.

After working the hot 90-degree weather for hours the three of us grew tired. Ka plunk. "Ouch, Shawn. That hurt. I'm tellin' on you."

"Tell tell, go to jail. Hang yo drawls on a rusty nail," I teased Mario.

"Y'all betta stop that before Mama sees you," Bunky said, sounding afraid.

"Oh hush, yo ole scaredy cat before I make you eat this dirt clod," I tried to sound tough, even though I wasn't.

"Do it and see if I don't hurt you."

I looked at Bunky and started building up my inner strength because I knew if I made him eat dirt, I'd need to run for my life. Bunky could beat me up even though I didn't want to admit it. Pow! I did it and I wasn't afraid. Bunky bent over spitting chunks of dirt out of his mouth.

"What does it taste like?" Mario asked while he rolled on the ground cracking up laughing at Bunky.

"You stupid bald headed monkey, I'm gonna get you," Bunky had steam comin' out of his ears.

I saw that and took off running. He chased me and I ran through the berry vines, sliding in the dirt, in the outhouse, out of the outhouse, hiding behind a bush. I had outsmarted him.

My grandmother was walking on her way to our row to check up on us. We had started up our war again. Every man for himself. But Bunky was especially trying to go after me. He was throwing dirt clods with all his might at me. He threw his last dirt clod so hard; it went past me, past Mario, down three rows of berry vines at the speed of light. Smack! It hit my grandmother right square in her back.

Now, my grandmother always stickin' up for me and takin' my side and never blaming me, but this time, she cried out from the pit of her belly, "SHAWN, COME HERE NOW!" On my way comin' she found a switch and went to whoopin' on my head. "Now didn't I tell you about chuckin' that dirt?"

"But . . ."

"Don't but me boy. I'm gonna beat that devil outta you. Now get over there and pick that row by yourself. And I better not see one berry left behind."

Walking to my new row, mad and hurt, "Shoot, that wasn't even me," I thought to myself. "Grandma's not fair." My heart was shattered and my ears grew irritated by the teasing laughter of smart aleck Bunky and "Feed the hungry" Mario.

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## Super Soaker War

By Bobby Bowden

It was a hot day on Mississippi Street. The sun was blaring down like a heat lamp, and the sky offered no protection with clouds or smog. My older brother and Roxie our dog were on the porch. The dog's tongue hanging out of his mouth like a pink slug.

The four of us: Damon the biggest and strongest of us, Maquinji, a big, plump, asphalt Black kid, only a little taller than me, me the dirty white kid with skinned knees and dirty pro-wings, and Nathan the fastest and the littlest. All of us had decided to play war. Now every one wanted to be on Damon's team. It just happened that I was his best friend that week. So he picked me to be on his team. Man, on Damon's team I felt that we could be like twin brothers.

Now, this game was played with super soakers. The object was to tag one of the other team's members with water from the water gun. One team had a base, and the other tried to take it over.

"Garage is our base," I shrieked.

"Nuh-hu," replied Maquinji, idly picking at one of the numerous scabs on his elbow.

"Rock, paper, scissors for it," said Damon.

One, two, three. They both threw scissors. The game continued, one two three. Damon threw rock and Maquinji threw scissors. "Yeeaaa, we got it!" I shouted like a lotto winner.

Maquinji glared at me, "So what man? You gotta' be so loud?"

Damon and I hurried to Damon's garage. The garage was about six trillion years old and had seen more than a million of our wars. It had been the home and base of numerous amounts of clubs and had been my pouting place for four years. If it could talk, it would probably be in an asylum. Damon took the secret way up to the roof, and I guarded the front door.

After three minutes of waiting, Damon and I became impatient and decided to hunt down Maquinji and Nathan. We saw Maquinji hiding in some bushes, crouched like a cat. We got him in a crossfire and started shooting. Damon's stream of water went over the bush and hit me.

"Got you, got you, we win!" exclaimed Maquinji streaking out of the bushes.

"What are you talking about it was Damon that got me not you, so I am still alive." I retorted, shaking my gun at him.

"Man you are lying!" shouted Maquinji getting in my face.

Then just on time to save me from getting my ass kicked, Damon had a light bulb. "Hey guys, my dad just finished painting my room, we could use the left over paint."

"Yea, each team could have a different color," said Nathan as though it had been his idea.

What a good idea. Our team was white paint and theirs was brown. Now it was easy to tell who killed who. We played with our paint-filled super soakers for a full three hours. Then we went home. My dad saw me and my clothes and quietly asked me if I preferred paper or leather.

"Whatcha mean, Kit?" I inquired innocently, not knowing he was offering me a choice between a book or a belt.

I got a beating for punishment. All four of us also had to give that garage a well-deserved cleaning, and then we had to paint it entirely by hand.