



Juicy Central

Nichell

Artistic, loyal, generous, secretive

Holding Back

Jada Jones



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Bein' Good
Blind Trust
Fitting In
Holding Back
Keepin' Her Man



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*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

dark by then. She turned the corner. The bus was pulling away! She sprinted after it, her backpack bouncing off her back and her arms waving wildly. It wasn't going to stop for her! She was about to give up when the bus finally stopped.

Nishell quickly hopped on. She gave the driver her biggest, flirty out-of-breath smile. Someone once told Nishell her smile was brighter than the stars. Probably because her teeth sparkled against her smooth, dark skin. The bus driver frowned back at her. "Guess he doesn't think my smile is so dazzling," Nishell thought. She saw an open seat and went for it.

"Hey! Home girl! I done made the driver stop for you. Don't I get some love?" a voice beside her said.

Nishell opened her mouth to say she didn't owe nobody nothing. Then she saw the bluest eyes she'd ever seen.

Nishell knew those eyes. She'd been obsessing over them since seventh grade, although he didn't know it. It was Jackson Beauford. Too bad he always belonged to another girl, or two, or three. It was probably best to just be friends with Jackson. Oh well.

"I ... I ... uh. Thanks, Jackson," Nishell stammered. She blushed. She didn't usually act like this around boys. Not even Jackson. Flirting was more her style. She wasn't supposed to flirt with Jackson anymore, though. He'd been going with Marnyke for a week now.

Jackson gave her his trademark smile. The one where his mouth curved up, only on one side. It made Nishell melt. She always forgot it made every other girl in school melt too. Especially Marnyke. Jackson had always been a flirt.

"No prob, girl. You know I got your back," he told her.

Nishell smirked. She couldn't resist. "Yeah. But just because mine is so fine."

Jackson looked her over. "You got that right, girl. I don't know nobody with such a nice big behind," he teased.

He couldn't get away with that. Nishell couldn't let him know she was crushing.

"And I don't know nobody with such a big head ... or a big mouth," Nishell said.

Jackson looked upset. "Nah, home girl. You know it was a compliment. You a dime. For real."

Nishell didn't respond for a second. She knew she was a little bigger than most girls. That never stopped her from flirting. In fact most guys seemed to like her better than prissy thin girls like Marnyke. She might not be like the other girls Jackson chased, but at least he was interested.

Jackson still looked unhappy. Nishell grinned and shook her curls. She should

tell him the truth. “I know I’m a dime. I was just makin’ sure you know it too.”

Jackson smiled. “You had me goin’ there.”

“Who do you think I am? Some chick that needs primpin’ day and night? I got better things to do than just you,” Nishell said.

“Nah. You better than that,” he told her. He seemed to be thinking for a second. “Hey, you be ’round later tonight, right? Make some time for me. I’m thinkin’ I should be hangin’ more with a girl like you.”

A week ago Nishell would have said yes, no question. But then, a week ago Marnyke and Jackson weren’t almost an official couple. Nishell really liked Jackson, but she didn’t want drama, especially not girlfriend drama. If Nishell went out with Jackson, she knew nobody in YC would even look at her anymore.

She'd be called a no-good, double-crossing, back-stabbing slut. She didn't need that right now.

"I don't know, Jackson. Don't you got somebody else you hangin' with?" Nishell asked. She felt bad about flirting with Jackson now. She just couldn't help it sometimes.

"Nah. I'm free as a bird. Don't listen to what you hear," Jackson told her. Nishell felt the bus jerk to a stop.

"I don't know, Jackson. I don't think it's a good idea," Nishell told him.

Jackson jumped up. "Don't you worry, girl. I'll be seein' you later tonight!"

Before Nishell could say anything else Jackson hopped off the bus.

For the rest of the ride Nishell wondered what she was going to do. This was what she'd wanted, always. Nishell and Jackson had always flirted, but he'd never made a move. Until now. What if

Marnyke found out? Nishell didn't want trouble. She almost missed her stop she was thinking so hard.

When Nishell got to her house she could smell dinner even before she opened the back door. What was going on? Her mom didn't usually start cooking for another hour or two. Sierra liked to relax on her night off from her job as a telephone counselor at the Tenth Street Shelter.

But all of Nishell's questions drifted away with a sniff. Meatballs and home-made spaghetti. She remembered her award and smiled. Tonight was going to be a good night. She pushed open the door. Instead of her mom stirring the pasta, she was racing from the kitchen to the dining room.

"Where have you been, Nishell?" Sierra snapped. "You're late."

Nishell couldn't believe it. "What's all this?" she asked as all of her troubles came rushing back.

"I expected you to be home an hour ago, young lady," Sierra told her. "We're having some friends over for dinner tonight. You were supposed to help me get ready."

"You serious, Mom?" Nishell asked, though she already knew. In their house, "having friends over" meant her mom had invited some homeless people from the shelter. She did it once a month or so.

"Mooommm. This is our one night a week to eat as a family! Don't you even care? You didn't even ask what's goin' on with me." Nishell crossed her arms.

Her mom didn't turn around. "Stop giving me sass, young lady. You know we gotta do our part to help. Give back what we got."

“Seems like you been givin’ everything away forever,” Nishell said under her breath.

Her mother spun around. Pink spots stood out against her white cheeks. Guess she’d heard what Nishell had said.

“Miss Nishell Saunders,” Sierra told her. “I mean it when I say get your butt ready, because we *will* be having guests over. Whether you like it or not. I want you on your best behavior. No rattling anyone’s ears off. Not everyone wants to hear ’bout you,” her mom said. She turned back to the stove.

Nishell couldn’t believe it. It was the one night she’d been looking forward to all week. Her mom had to go and ruin it by inviting people over! Even worse, homeless people. Nobody else Nishell knew had homeless people over for dinner. At school homeless people were a joke. If anyone at school knew, they’d

just laugh at her for being such a loser. Sierra probably didn't even care that Nishell had won an award today. Lately it didn't seem like her mom cared about Nishell at all.

"For once, why can't you think 'bout me!" Nishell shouted. She ran to her room before her mom could say anything. Nishell made sure to slam the door extra hard behind her.



Nishell

Artistic, loyal, generous, secretive

They weren't always BFFs, until the yearbook club brought them together. So what's a little gossip between friends?

Holding Back

Nishell has been crushing on Jackson since forever. But Jackson is Marnyke's man ... And Nishell doesn't want any girlfriend drama.



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