

Qiana

(from “Listen To My Kaleidoscope”)

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Qiana walked into the crowded cafeteria looking for a familiar face. After scanning the room she found her friends and joined them at the third lunch table.

“Hey, Rachel. Hey, Becky.”

“Hey, Qiana,” the two girls replied.

“Qiana, you didn’t buy lunch from the cafeteria today,” Rachel said pointing at Qiana’s brown bag.

“I’m going to lose weight so I need to eat good food,” Qiana proudly answered.

“Why do you want to lose weight? To be beautiful?”

“You can grow your hair long and beautiful like ours,” Becky chimed in, running her hand through her long blonde hair.

“I have different kind of hair so my hair can’t grow like yours but when I’m old enough my mom said she will straighten it for me with the hot comb.”

“That’s great Qiana. I like your short ponytail. Big or small you’re pretty to us,” Rachel said smiling.

“Yeah, and your dark skin is so beautiful,”
Becky included.

“Thanks, both of you are my best friends,”
Qiana said with a half-smile. She pulled her shirt down
and patted it down into place.

“There’s another reason why I want to lose
weight.”

“What is it?”

“I’m going to win the-third grade one-hundred
meter run on field day,” Qiana proclaimed with a
smile.

“Oh, Qiana,” Becky whispered in the most
serious tone.

“You’ll need to lose a lot of weight to win.
You’re too fat for that.”

“I know. That’s why I brought my healthy
lunch. I brought my fruit punch for vitamins and I
brought a wish sandwich.”

“What’s a wish sandwich?”

“It’s a mayonnaise sandwich. No meat.”

“Qiana, you’ll need to fly like the butterflies in
your hair and on your shirt in order to win. You don’t

have time to lose so much weight. And if you did, you would have to run faster than Alicia. No one has ever run faster than Alicia. She's won the one hundred ever since we were in the first grade.”

Qiana lowered her head and slowly returned the contents of her bag.

“Don't be sad Qiana. You'll help our class win the tug of war. Then we'll all get certificates from the principal,” Rachel said as she held Qiana's hand.

“I guess you're right,” Qiana said with a half-smile.

Qiana reached the door of her home and quickly entered throwing her book bag at the foot of the stairs while tossing herself on the couch.

“Grandma, The Fruitastics are on. Can I watch it?”

“Oh no baby my stories are on. You can watch anything you like once the stories are off,” Qiana's grandmother answered, without removing her eyes from the television.

Qiana sat on the couch with her head lowered.

“Well I will rest with you and watch your stories with you.”

“Oh no you’re not. You’re gonna get in that kitchen and do your chores for the day,” Qiana’s mom said.

“But Mom, I walked all the way from school. I’m so tired.”

“Girl, don’t make me have to repeat myself.”

“Yes ma’am,” Qiana said as she slowly removed herself from the couch.

She found her older brother and sister standing in the kitchen talking with her mother.

“Pizza!”

Qiana stepped over to the box of pizza on the kitchen table. She lifted the top to find a few toppings and hardened cheese.

“Hey, no one saved me a slice!”

“I thought ya’ll was going to save that child some pizza,” Qiana’s mom said.

“I thought Rolanda was going to put her up some.”

“No, Tyrone took the last three pieces.”

“Next time ya’ll make sure to put my baby up some pizza.”

After taking a deep breath, Qiana raised her head with a smile.

“I don’t need pizza anyway. I’m going to lose weight so I can win the third-grade one hundred-meter race.”

“Hey Yolanda, did you see your boyfriend fall down the stairs today at lunch?”

“Go head with that Tyrone! You know that’s not my boyfriend. You know that’s your boyfriend!”

“There’s a girl named Alicia. She’s in the third grade too and she’s very fast but if I work really hard I can beat her.”

“You two better not be having no boyfriends or girlfriends. Y’all in high school but I still run this house. Even before I consider any boyfriends or girlfriends they need to come meet momma.

“The walk from home helps too. I am really tired but I feel my legs getting stronger.”

“Oh momma, we know you would run anyone out of this house.”

Qiana walked over to the window and waved to the butterfly that danced at the window.

“I know you believe in me, Ms. Butterfly.”

The next day, Qiana walked out of the girls’ locker room with her hair wrapped in a scarf decorated with butterflies. She wore a matching butterfly t-shirt

with small butterflies on her shorts. She sat a bench and took a deep breath before tying her shoes. Once she completed her task she let out all of the air she had kept inside in one groan. She then walked over and joined the other girls stretching.

As she stretched, Qiana sneaked a glance at Alicia. The tall, slender and beautiful girl effortlessly stretched her muscles in conjunction with the teacher's cadence. Qiana attempted to mimic Alicia's motions but her stomach would not allow her to do so.

"Ok class, today we are going to time you running around the gym," the gym teacher shouted.

"I want everyone to form a single line behind the baseline next to me. When I say 'go' I want you to run to the other end and touch the other baseline with your hand. I then want you to turn around and run as fast as you can and cross this baseline."

The girls all lined up behind the baseline with Qiana in the final position. Alicia made sure she would go first.

"Ready. Set. Go!"

Alicia darted off the baseline. With long strides, she effortlessly reached the opposite baseline. Her long fingers kissed the baseline as she turned

around. She turned on another gear and in less time than her trip to the opposite end she easily crossed the nearest baseline.

“We have a new girls’ record for any grade here at Lincoln Elementary!”

The entire class cheered. Qiana clapped shortly and began stretching once again. Her conscious was shouting to her that today is the day she would surpass Alicia. She was moments away from breaking Alicia’s new record. She felt the breeze pass by her as girls left and returned to the baseline like planes on a runway. She hopped up and down on her toes to stay warm for her record-breaking run.

“Qiana, you’re up!”

Qiana placed her right toe on the baseline. She slightly bent her knees and elbows in anticipation.

“Ready. Set. Go!”

Qiana put her feet in motion. As soon as she picked one foot up she placed the other foot down. She closed her eyes and clenched her jaw to muster any bit of potential speed she could find. She only hoped her effort would propel her to her goal.

Qiana opened her eyes and realized the baseline was approaching. She reached down to touch the

baseline but her left foot gave up. The rest of her decided to join her foot. Qiana found herself looking up at the gymnasium lights as the rest of the students laughed. She struggled to get to her feet. She could hear the alarm on her internal clock screaming at her to move quickly. Once she was up she began to pick up and put her feet down. As she ran, she could hear a sound chasing her. She had no time to investigate. She had a record to set. As she crossed the near baseline, her left foot betrayed her once more hurling her into the safety pad against the wall. Laughter from the students erupted once more. Qiana quickly picked herself up placing her hands over her head to catch her breath.

“What time did I get?”

“You did your best. That’s all that matters. Now pull your shirt down.”

Qiana quickly pulled her shirt down to the giggles of her classmates.

The girls changed their clothes and prepared to return to their classroom. Qiana sat in a corner where no one would notice her. She glared down at the separated sole on the left shoe of her only pair of

sneakers. She slowly dropped the shoe and lowered her head.

“Qiana, are you alright?”

“Hey Alicia, I’m alright,” Qiana said with a smile.

“It looks like you’re crying.”

“No, I got some dust in my eyes from when I fell. I’m alright now.”

“Alright, I just want you to know that I’m a good person to talk to about stuff. Is there anything that would make you feel better?”

“Well, there is one thing but it would make you unhappy.”

“What is it? Maybe it won’t,” Alicia said, sitting next to Qiana.

“Well, the thing that would make me the most happiest person in the whole wide world would be to win the one hundred-meter race this year.”

“I don’t blame you for wanting that. I love getting the first place medal every year. It feels good to have the entire school staring at you as the principal puts the medal around your neck.”

“You are so fast and skinny and strong. I am so short and fat. I could never beat you.”

“You never know. If you try real hard it could happen.
Want to hear a secret?”

“Sure.”

“When I was a little kid, I had to wear a special shoe because I had a bad foot.”

“Wow, I never would have guessed,” Qiana whispered.

“And before I was in school, I always had an ugly rash all over my body. But I’m much better now. We all won’t stay the same forever. Who knows what we’ll be like in the future?”

“I guess you’re right. I won’t give up,” Qiana said with a smile.

“Oh, it looks like we wear the same size. You can use my other shoes until you get some new ones.”

“Thank you so much,” Qiana said as she accepted the slightly used name brand shoes.

Qiana skipped home in excited and danced through the front door.

“Hey everyone, guess what happened at school today.”

“Qiana, hush that noise. My stories is on. Move from in front of the television.”

“Mom, I have so much to tell you about what happened at school today.”

“You can tell me all about those dishes once you finish them.”

“But mom, just listen!”

“Don’t make me say it again, Qiana!”

“It will just take a second. “

“Hey everyone, MC Dance is on! Turn the TV,” Qiana’s brother yelled running down the stairs.

Qiana’s sister quickly picked up the remote control and changed the station. Music swirled through the living room as everyone danced in their seats. Qiana glanced over at her grandmother who smiled as she swayed in her chair. Qiana ran to the television and turned it off.

“Qiana, what are you doing?”

Qiana stood directly in front of the television with her arms folded biting her lip.

“Girl, you better turn on that TV,” Qiana’s sister warned.

“Someday I am going to fly away from here!”

Qiana ran up the stairs ignoring her mother’s calls. She opened the unused bedroom and slammed the door. She slammed herself on the bed and began to

cry tears that had built up over time. Her sorrow transformed to frustration as she slammed her fists against the bed.

“Be careful, you may hit me,” a strange voice said.

Qiana quickly leaped off the bed and huddled into a corner.

“If you are going to come into my room you might as well come over and talk to me.”

A wrinkled smiling face appeared from underneath the blanket. A shriveled finger waved for Qiana to come closer. She slowly took steps toward the bed and crawled onto it.

“Who are you?”

“I am your family. I am your great grandmother.”

“Great grandmother, how long have you been up here?”

“For a long time.”

“No one ever talked about you or mentioned you were up here.”

“Good. That’s the way I like it,” the elderly woman said, laughing and coughing simultaneously.

“I like to keep to myself. Why are you so upset child?”

“There’s nothing special about me. No one notices me. I’m not rich. I’m not beautiful. I’m nobody. I try to be somebody but there’s no use. I might as well not be here.”

“It is because you are still in your cocoon,” the woman whispered.

“If a butterfly came out from its cocoon too early, it would freeze. If it came out too late, it would starve. Butterflies can only come out when the time is just right. When the time is right and you are ready to leave your cocoon you will change the world, Qiana. You will be the most beautiful butterfly anyone has ever seen.”

Qiana reached and hugged her great grandmother.

“I just met you and I love you so much.”

“I love you too, Qiana. God loves you. He made you to bring smiles to the world.”

On Field Day, Qiana found an unoccupied space of grass to stretch for the final event. She took a moment to look at all of the other contestants preparing to run the one hundred-meter dash. She spotted Alicia

performing the splits in the grass as she stretched.

Qiana maneuvered her way over to her.

“Hey Alicia, I just want to wish you good luck. Look, I’m wearing the shoes you gave me. I hope they can bring me the same luck as they did for you.”

Alicia wore a deathly serious face. She paid no mind to Qiana’s attempt at sportsmanship. Qiana walked back to her spot. She looked at the starting line and never took her eyes from it.

“Ladies, take your places,” the judge shouted.

Qiana placed her right toe just under the starting line. She took a quick glance at Alicia who looked directly at the finish line with death still on her face. Qiana placed her sights on the same target as she took a deep breath.

“On your mark.”

Qiana looked down at the butterfly on her shirt. She gathered as much of it as she could in her hands and gave it a soft kiss.

“Get set.”

Qiana positioned her arms. Every muscle residing in her body was primed and ready to go. She listened to the words her great grandmother planted

inside of her soul. She bent her knees in anticipation of the next auditory command.

“Go!”

Qiana instantly began moving. She closed her eyes and concentrated on picking up one foot as the other one found its place on the ground. She dared not to take a breath and lose her concentration. As she continued to move she realized the air against her face felt slightly different. As she continued to move she felt her feet moving faster. She couldn't feel the excess weight that everyone reminded her of every day. Qiana didn't look or think about Alicia. She was not sure if she was in first or last but it didn't matter. She was enjoying running the best race she ever had run. She was running away from any insecurity and heavy thought that had ever weighed her down. Qiana's feet continued to move faster pushing the wind across her face at an increasing pace. Her feet moved so quickly that she could no longer feel the ground beneath them. Qiana stretched out her arms and expanded her hands. Her legs straightened and she began to elevate. She opened her eyes and looked at the ground to see the shrinking people staring up at her. No one was running or cheering. She caught a

glimpse of Alicia waving at her just before the clouds concealed the ground.

Qiana looked up at the large auburn sun. She closed her eyes as she glided along the tops of the clouds. She filled her lungs full of the fresh air and exhaled with a smile. She was unsure of where she was headed, but she knew the further she ascended the faster she would be leaving the spoiled contents of the world behind never to return to her cocoon.