

*About Nisha.*

Outsides:

There is a conflict, some signal that goes awry between her insides and her outsides. Inside is a girl who is afraid and hiding from something that hits too close to her heart and who she has known all of her life. Outside... outside she is someone she does not recognize. She is a figment of her imagination, or she is a shell of herself. She is a clone of someone brighter and prettier, but she is anything but herself. Her outsides do not match her insides.

She thought she had it figured out a long time ago. She thought it had something to do with the color of her skin. She was too light to be black, too dark to be white, too ethnic to be Hispanic or anything other than a mutt. And the confusion was between the warring factions inside her—color versus colorless, white versus black, nation against nation inside her body. And when she came to the realization that color could come and go, there was nothing left to worry about. The confusion would go away in time and she could just be Nisha.

Damien was lying on her bed with a magazine open to some article on hair or nails or something else entirely mundane when she found out it was some other signal misfiring and missing her outsides. Damien, safe Damien, asked the question that she had avoided so long, her outsides had become just a shell and a mask with no substance. Safe Damien wrecked her fragile outsides and left her to figure where which piece went.

“She just handed off the leash to the kid behind her, telling him to ‘Hold my poodle,’” she simpered in mocking imitation of the woman. “And starts talking about my dad being *black* and *beneath* my mother. Can you imagine? I thought everyone was beyond that by now. I thought they were... but I guess I was wrong.”

“Really?” Damien asked, dispassion personified. He flipped a page idly, and sighed. “The nerve of the woman.”

“Damien, this is serious.” Nisha frowned and sat down in the chair opposite the bed, her knees settling dangerously close to his head. “What kind of world are we living in that she could just... be that kind of racist in public?”

“In broad daylight,” he added softly, and flipped the page again.

“Damien!” Nisha huffed in annoyance. This was not going according to plan.

He flicked his gaze up to her face. “Look, Nisha. It is not that I do not love you. You know I do. But, sometimes girl? You are just blinding yourself.”

Her heart began to beat a little faster. “I do not know what you are talking about,” she said a little too hastily and stood back up in an abrupt jerk, suddenly needing to start pacing the room.

“You cannot hide from it your whole life, Nisha. Dinah--.”

“Do not talk about Dinah!”

“You are just like her! You know it. You keep looking at that little friend of yours; what is her name again? You know it and I know it.”

“I hate you, Damien.” The sheen of tears in her eyes glittered brightly as she lay flat on the bed in the only space left next to him. Thoughts were firing in her brain, connections finally making sense and her outsides broken, but beginning to fit properly again.

“I love you too, girl. You need me for the truth, you told me that a long time ago. You cannot keep blinding yourself.”