



Bakari Who?

I squeeze my eyes shut, then open them again. Shut, then open. Shut, then open. Nope, my name is still there. Finally I turn away. “Wardell, why did you do this to me?”

Wardell shrugs. He’s my best friend — okay, pretty much my only friend — and half the time I still don’t understand what goes on in that oversized melon he calls a head.

This is one of those times.

“I thought it’d be good for you,” he mumbles.

“Good for me?” I can hear my voice going higher and higher. I sound more like my mom’s ancient cat than a fourth-grade boy. I stab a finger at the piece of paper tacked onto Mrs. Crump’s bulletin board.

There’s my name under “Candidates for Hall Monitor.”

And right below the only other name on the list. The only name that's ever been on this list, or any other list. Ever. In the entire history of Mrs. Crump's fourth-grade class at Thurgood Cleavon Wilson Elementary.

Until today.

"How," I ask Wardell, trying to get each word out, "is competing with Tariq Thomas good for me?"

I slowly glance across the room. There he is. Tariq Thomas. Thurgood Cleavon Wilson Elementary's golden boy. Tall, charming, athletic. Tariq has it all.

Including his own personal pep squad and enforcer rolled into one. Keisha Owens.

The very same Keisha who is currently glaring at me from beneath the tower of curls that makes her almost as tall as her cousin.

"What were you thinking, Bakari Katari Johnson?" Keisha demands. Her voice carries across the room with the might of a lioness. Heads turn to look at me, then back at her, then at me again. It's like a tennis match — and I'm the ball. "You go up against my cousin," she continues, "you're gonna get beat. You're gonna get beat hard!"

Tariq smirks. He doesn't say anything. He doesn't have to. Keisha says it all for him.