

TAKE NOTE

By Constance Edo



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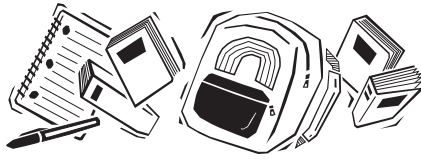
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*For my parents, my little brother, and
my guy, who always believed in me.*



CHAPTER 1

Amina Hall tapped her feet in time with the clacking clothes hangers as she rummaged through her closet. The morning sun cast a warm golden glow across her bedroom. She tossed about one outfit after another. White tee? Nah, too casual. What about that adorable corduroy orange skirt her mom bought her last Christmas? Nope, not quite. Her room was becoming a mess of clothing options, like a shopping mall sale gone wrong. Amina continued to add to the “no” pile as she danced around and looked for the perfect outfit.

The mess didn’t matter. It was her first day at a new school. This was a big deal! All her friends from elementary were going to a middle school in Brooklyn where she used to live. Here, in her new neighborhood, Amina didn’t know anyone yet. She wanted to make a good first impression.

Amina tossed out her coziest hoodie as she imagined what her friends back in Brooklyn were doing right now.

She'd bet that Tasha was picking out new yoga pants and a T-shirt of some band her newest crush was into. Charity was probably wearing a bougie new dress only she could pull off, like some fashion model. Amina had a little tinge of pain when she thought about her old friends. Her fingers continued to brush past more shirts and skirts before finally settling on a floral-patterned dress with a denim jacket. This would be the perfect first-day outfit.

After slipping into her new white sneakers and picking out her Afro, Amina turned her attention to her backpack. She carefully packed each item: her favorite rainbow-colored gel pens, a fresh notebook covered in her newly created doodles, and the lunch her mom had made earlier—a turkey sandwich with a side of baby carrots. The smell of freshly sharpened pencils and new books tickled Amina's nose.

“Mom! Dad! I'm ready!” Amina shouted down the hallway.

“Coming, honey!” her mother replied, her footsteps echoing from down the hall. They had just moved into a new apartment in Harlem due to her father's job and, as he liked to say, “The rent is too high in Brooklyn.” They hadn't even fully unpacked yet, but Amina didn't mind. Unpacking old stuff was like a new adventure. And more

than anything, Amina loved an adventure. She ran into the living room, dodging around the unpacked boxes, just in time to meet her parents.

Amina's mother, Shanice, was a tall and elegant woman with dark, smooth skin that seemed to glow. She wore her hair in long, slender braids. Amina thought she looked very royal. Her father, Eric, was tall and broad-shouldered. But since moving, he looked tired all the time. His new job had him working long hours even if he did get to stay home and work.

"Hey, how do I look?" Amina asked as she twirled around showing her full outfit.

"Nice," her dad said absently, as he rummaged through one of the boxes still cluttering the room. Her mother rolled her eyes.

"Oh, Eric. You didn't even look. She looks great!" Her mother turned toward her. "You look, great, sweetheart."

"Shanice, I did look. I'm just trying to find a file for work. I thought it was in this box. Have you seen one lying around?"

"No, I haven't, but I'll help you look."

"Thanks," he said, giving her a quick peck on the

cheek. Then he turned his attention to Amina.

“Are you sure you remember how to get to the school, or do you want me to walk with you?”

“Dad!” Amina rolled her eyes. Showing up on her first day with her dad wasn’t really the impression she wanted to make. “It’s just a few blocks away. I know the way. We’ve practiced. I’m not a little kid anymore.”

“Okay. As long as you’re careful.” He nodded and smiled. Then he went back to rummaging through the boxes.

“Bye, sweetie! Have a great day!” her mother added, planting a kiss on Amina’s forehead.

“Love ya!” Amina said before stepping out the front door.

Out on the street outside her apartment building, the sky was a bright, cloudless blue. Birds were chirping and flying in and out of the trees. This was a great sign for what she hoped would be a perfect new school.

Amina breathed in the fresh air and smiled as she made her way down the block. She saw a few other kids ahead of her. There were plenty of adults around as well, probably headed to work. She knew not to talk