

Style Shifts

by Nonnie Augustine

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“Oh, yes, my cousin. We were rude boys until the armed gangs started to gather. Used to be we could pass a night driving, playing our songs, acting tough. Yeah. We'd mouth off, flash some teeth, spark some anger when we felt like it. We had style, man. Pants down low, fleece hoods, kicks or boots. That's all over now, man. We had to shoot up from sixteen to thirty years old in a month. Every kid wears a button down shirt, khakis, belts in the loops. We still try to hang, but no more than three of us at a time and we don't swagger or talk trash. They were shooting us, man. Those loud days be over down here. Mama wants us to leave, but where would we go? This fire could rage anywhere, believe it. I got to go, man. There's a guy looking at me.”

“No, Ma'am. I'm not going to the mall with them. Those girls stay too flashy for me. Tina and me are going straight to the movies, and after it's over, we'll be back here. No, Ma'am, we won't meet up with any boys. Boys, girls, what difference does it make? They don't care. They just shoot. Yes, Ma'am, I'm wearing the grown-up clothes you bought me. My hair is plain ponytail, no scarf, no beads, no nothing. No, Ma'am, I'm not going to look at anybody 'cept Tina, or talk to anyone 'cept to buy my ticket for the movie and some candy. Tina and me can do this, can't we Mama? Can't we go out tonight, Mama?”

