

"Fiction"

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## **A start by Jade Lee (a short story)**

The sound of sirens echoed in the distance, blending with the sound of the city as Samara sat on her bedroom floor, staring at the blank page in her notebook. She twirled her pencil between her fingers, but the words wouldn't come, not yet, so she doodled.

Outside her window, the street lights flickered over the sidewalk where she and her best friend, Amaya, used to jump rope. Lately, though, they didn't play outside as much. Not since the argument between two older boys turned into something worse. Not since Samara's mom started double checking the locks before bed and giving her that worried look whenever she asked to go out to play alone.

Samara hugged her knees to her chest, thinking about how things had changed. Violence wasn't just something she saw on the news, or on social media. It was in her own neighborhood... Roseland, in the way people whispered about what happened but never said it out loud. It was in the way her older brother, Malachi, stopped walking her to school because he was afraid of being caught in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Her teacher had asked the class one question to answer in the journal for homework:

What are the causes of youth violence?

At first, Samara thought the answer was simple. ANGER. Of course it's anger!

She began to write A... N... G.... But her thoughts grew deeper, she realized it wasn't just that. The older kids who fought didn't just wake up angry one day. It had to start somewhere.

She thought about the boys she saw arguing last week, the ones who used to be friends since kindergarten. We all had grown up and been in the same class for years together, played basketball and soccer together during recess. But something had changed. Maybe it was the pressure of fitting in, the need to prove themselves to people who wouldn't even remember their names in a few years. Maybe it was the violent music everyone listened to, Maybe it was the neighborhood... Maybe it was the way no one ever seemed to have enough... enough money, enough food, enough peace, enough people that cared... just enough!

Then there was Malachi. He wasn't in a gang, but people treated him like he was just because of who he hung around and how he looked. He's tall, dark, and has locs. She overheard her mom say

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he was "just trying to survive." Maybe that was another reason, survival. Some kids got into fights or joined crews not because they wanted to, but because they felt like they had to.

And then there were the things people never talked about, the hurt, the loss, the way some kids carried pain that no one saw. Samara knew what it felt like to hold things in, to pretend everything was okay when it wasn't. Maybe that was part of the problem too; no one knowing how to deal with their pain except to let it out in the worst ways.

She picked up her pencil and began to write...

"Violence isn't just about anger. It's about feeling like you don't have choices. It's about needing to be seen and heard, needing to belong, needing to survive."

As the words filled the page, Samara realized something. If kids fought because they felt alone, maybe the answer wasn't just stopping the fights, it was making sure people didn't feel alone in the first place

She didn't have all the solutions, but she had something, her voice. And maybe, just maybe, that was a start. A start to something important.