



1 ★ Shiny Things

“Wow! Look at that!” I said to Rebecca.

My friends Nia and Rebecca and I were arranging our sleeping areas for our slumber party. Nia brought the softest blanket I had ever touched and unfolded it over my living room couch. It was pink, with fluffy down feathers in it. It felt amazing!

Rebecca shouted, “I want to feel it!” She stood up beside the couch with her arms out wide and fell backward onto the blanket. Her body sank into the softness.

“Wow! This is like . . . clouds!” she said.

I wanted to feel it too, so Rebecca got up and it was my turn to fall back onto the blanket. It felt like I was landing on cotton candy!

“If this were mine, I’d never sleep in my own bed!” I said dreamily.

Nia sat on the edge of the couch and gave us a look. Something about that grin told us that her bed at home was even better.

She explained that her bed was a *Tempur-Pedic*.

“A temper? . . .” I asked.

“Pedic,” she finished for me.

“They’re like a thousand dollars,” she added.

“Whoa!” I said.

Our conversation was interrupted when my mom came into the living room with hot-buttered popcorn.

“Thanks, Mom!”

“Thanks, Mrs. Graves!” chimed my two friends.

“Need anything else, girls?” my mom asked.

“No thanks, Mom,” I answered. “I think we’re good!”

Nia looked upset, though.

“Nia, are you OK?” I asked.

“Yeah, Shawnee,” she said cheerfully, before quickly putting her smile back on.

Hmmm . . . That's strange. Something's up, I thought to myself.

I got up off the sofa and put in the new Justin Bieber DVD.

“Have you two seen the movie?” I asked with excitement.

They answered at the same time.

“No!” Rebecca said.

“Yes,” said Nia.

“Oh, cool! I just love Justin Bieber! He’s coming to town tomorrow for a concert,” I said.

I laid back down on my red blanket and blue pillow. Rebecca cuddled into her sleeping bag while Nia lounged on her cloud-like bed.

“It would be so awesome to go!” Rebecca said as she grabbed a handful of popcorn and stuffed it into her mouth.

“The most awesome! And I think I would faint if I got his autograph!” I said as I grabbed my own handful to munch on.

Nia sat quietly as she looked at her heavenly blanket — the blanket that felt like clouds.

I sat there imagining that clouds must



feel like silk. When I snapped out of my daydream, I noticed that Nia was wearing the same strange expression as before.

This time, though, I wasn't the only one who noticed. Rebecca saw the look too.

“What’s wrong, Nia?” Rebecca asked.

“Oh, nothing,” Nia muttered.

She looked at the popcorn. She took a handful. She breathed a big sigh. Rebecca and I waited for her to speak. This was taking forever!

Nia started, “It’s just that I have tickets to that concert and . . .”

We didn't even give her a chance to finish her sentence before we both jumped up; we must have looked like rockets launching.

“What! Are you serious? Are you for real?” we both asked.

Izzie, my fluffy white dog, bolted her little body into the living room to investigate. The poor little thing was now getting along quite well, considering that last week she had super glue all over her paws!

“That’s the coolest thing ever!” I said as I picked up Izzie and swung her around.

“Yeah,” Nia said plainly, as if she were

bored with the whole subject. It was like someone had asked her if it was raining. She just didn't seem to care.

As if it could get worse, she answered flatly, "Yeah, front row and backstage passes."

You would have thought Rebecca and I had won a million dollars, because we both jumped up and down screaming, "Oh my gosh! Are you serious?"

We were way past excited. Izzie played at my feet and tried to jump to my knees while Rebecca moved her jumping to the couch.

Nia just answered with another flat "Yeah."

"Yeah? Uh . . . yeah? That's all you can say?" I asked.

"Yeah!" added Rebecca.

"It's . . . nothing. It's just, I know it seems really cool and everything, but I'd rather go with, you know, my mom and dad. They never have time to do anything with me, so they send my nanny instead."

Why does that matter? It's Justin Bieber! I'm sure they could come another time!

These are the things I was screaming in my

head!

“OK, take this, for example,” she said as she pulled out a small bag that had Ls and Vs all over it. “This is a Louis Vuitton,” she said.

“A what?” Rebecca and I asked together.

Nia sighed. “It’s a really expensive purse made by a really famous designer. They bought this for me when they missed my piano recital.”

I sat and thought for a minute before remembering my mom talk about a man named Louis Vuitton once before. I had heard of him.

“Your parents missed your recital?” I asked.

“Yeah,” she said. She looked upset.

I looked at her bag. It was so pretty. Sometimes I wish I had everything Nia had. Then again, my parents had never missed anything of mine before. I couldn’t think of a time that they weren’t there — unless one of them or my sister Robin was sick or something.

“Aw . . . Well I’m sure they’ll make your next piano recital,” I said as cheerfully as I

could, trying to make her happy again.

Nia rolled her eyes and sighed.

“For the past five years, they’ve missed every single one. But they watch it afterward . . . on video. Like when they’re on a plane or something . . .” she said, her thoughts trailing off.



“Huh?” I asked, confused. I’d never heard of anything like that before.

“So, are they pilots or something?” Rebecca asked.

“Yeah, what are they?” I asked.

“Ha! I only wish,” Nia said.

“So, they’re gone a lot, but they fly a lot too?” I asked, still a little confused.

“It’s complicated. They’re . . .”

Just then, our favorite song started playing on the movie. We stood up and began dancing and singing every word.

“Oh my gosh, Nia, you have to bring us

back a souvenir or something!” I said, still dancing. “I can even give you my allowance money. You are, like, the luckiest girl in the world!”

“Yeah . . .” she answered slowly, even a bit sadly. “The luckiest.”

Why is she so sad? I wondered.