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I don't have a dog ... or a boyfriend. Once upon a time, I had both.

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bothered me before, but seeing Jaleesa's reaction gave this whole thing new meaning.

"B," I said when I found Brendan, "I need to talk to you."

"Hey!" he said. "Thanks again for the pizza. What's up?"

"Look, you can't call me 'T-Nizzle,' not in front of Jaleesa," I said. "Actually just don't say it period."

"Why not?" he asked, genuinely concerned.

"Well you know what it means," I said. "I know you didn't mean anything by it, but Jaleesa got really upset."

"Wait, what does it mean?" Brendan asked, looking confused.

Is he serious? I thought. "Brendan, 'nizzle' means 'ni**er.'"

"What?" Brendan's blue eyes got as big as dinner plates. "Tamara, I would *never* call you that!"

"I know that," I assured him, "but in Jaleesa's eyes, you just did."

"But Dana calls you that all the time!"

"Dana thinks she is Snoop Dogg!" I exclaimed. "Back up a minute, what did you *think* it meant?"

"I didn't think it meant anything!" Brendan explained, a little dumbfounded.

"Well, what do you think 'for shizzle my nizzle' means?" I asked.

"I don't know..." Brendan's voice trailed off. "What does it mean?"

"It means 'for sure my nigga.'"

I thought Brendan's head was going to explode. His reddened face got redder with each heartfelt apology.

Jaleesa's arms were crossed over her chest when I made my way back to the table.

"What did he say?" she asked.

"He apologized," I said, sitting back down. "He didn't know what it meant. Truly."

"How could he not know?" Jaleesa said, her eyebrows shooting up. "That's just ignorant."

"Sometimes people hear things on the radio or on television and repeat it without thought," I explained. "You know how many people are out there singing songs without knowing their true meaning? I was 10 when I was singing Cyndi Lauper's 'She Bop,' and it was about masturbation!"

"Who's Cyndi Lauper?"

"Nevermind," I sighed. "All I'm saying is it was an innocent mistake. Nobody told him it was wrong. He'll never do it again."

"Well, okay," Jaleesa said. "I'm glad he apologized, but people should know what they're saying." She uncrossed her arms and visibly relaxed.

"You're right. Absolutely," I nodded, thinking she would be a good teacher one day. "Now let's get your essay in shape so you can send it out."

Schooling Brendan on race relations was not on my agenda that day, but looking back now, I'm glad I did. His actions, however innocent, were hurtful to another, and counteractive to the racial divide we are constantly trying to close. Brendan has several black friends today, which I will take credit for, since he is no longer throwing around the word "nizzle." As for Dana, after hearing what happened with Brendan, she decided on her own to stop saying it too, although her love of Snoop has never wavered. Ironically, Jaleesa took her smart self to Boston University, where I assume she is schooling other Bostonians like Brendan. Since then I've become pro-active in pointing things out to friends who "don't get it" and it really makes life easier on everyone. My spiel goes something like this, "unless you are a rapper, are black, or from 'da hood,' DON'T SAY IT."

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