

Chapter 1

Another Problem Solved

*T*hank You, Lord, for working it out for me and my brothers, I prayed silently for York, Yancy, and me. As triplets, we'd been through so much in our thirteen years of life. My dad had been incarcerated, we lost our older brother, Jeff Jr., not even a year ago when he took his own life, and now this horrible fire had put one of my brothers and our next-door neighbor in the hospital.

Even though I was young, I understood that God did care about the Peace family. Things weren't perfect. Though I don't live in a very nice house with both my parents like my friend Veida, at least my own mom didn't kick me out like my friend Asia's mom had done to her. *Lord, thank You*, I continued praying, clasping my hands together and taking a moment to just exhale in the hospital waiting room.

My wild and crazy brother York, who tried to save our neighbor, Miss Sandra, had been successful. Miss Sandra's place went up in smoke, however, but it was such a blessing that we were right

next door when it happened. We knew something wasn't right and got her out just in time.

My mom, brothers, and I lived in Jacksonville, Florida. The rest of our family lived in Orlando. Jacksonville and Orlando are only a few hours apart. As soon as Mom called her mom, Big Mama, as we call her, Big Mama immediately called my dad's brother, Uncle John, and his wife, Aunt Lucinda. The two of them drove up and came to the hospital where we were.

When they rushed in to the ER, Yancy and me got up and hugged them both. It was a relief to have them there for support. But that sweet moment was interrupted when my mom ran out from the emergency room looking very distressed.

What was going on now? I had just seen York. Certainly after God had saved his life it wasn't about to be snatched away. What's up, Lord? What's wrong with my mom? Tears were streaming from her eyes faster than a track runner tries to reach the goal. Myrek, my next-door neighbor on the other side, his pregnant sister Jada, who was carrying my deceased brother's child, and their father were there supporting us as well. Mr. Mike had a crush on my mom. She was digging him too and, when he went over to try and console her, she was uncontrollable. I started freaking out as well.

"What is going on?" I shouted.

Uncle John came over and said to Mom, "No, Yvette. Calm down. Yasmin, you gotta help your mom out. You can't go crazy. It's gonna be okay."

A nurse came out moments later and said, "We need to talk to you, Mrs. Peace."

It was three o'clock in the morning and I was so tired, but when my mom returned from talking to the nurse fifteen minutes later,

she wasn't as upset but she certainly wasn't happy either. All of us rushed up to her.

"York needs a skin graft. He's badly burned on that arm. It's a third-degree burn and it's causing some kind of infection," Mom told us.

The doctor had explained that, during the skin grafting procedure, he would take some of York's skin that hadn't been burned to help the burned skin. He said that when people get third-degree burns, sometimes they have to get skin grafts.

My mom said, "Medicaid is gonna pay some of it, but I don't know what I'm gonna do about the rest. I don't have that kind of money and he needs that procedure. Lord, You know I don't have that kind of money! And none of y'all can help me," Mom cried.

"We'll find a way," Uncle John said, trying to console her.

"Yeah? How can you? You're moving down here to get a new house. Every dime you got, you hafta put on your down payment. And, Mike, don't even look at me. You're barely hanging on like I am," she said to Myrek's father. "I can't even take care of my own kids. Finally I get a good job and that's still not enough. Lord, You gotta help me," my mom cried.

I just went over and hugged her. I didn't have any money. I couldn't tell her it was going to be okay, but I could let her feel from my embrace that I loved her and that she wasn't in this alone. When she squeezed me back tightly, I knew that somehow, somehow we were gonna be okay.

That is, until she pulled away quickly and blurted out, "We don't even have no place to live. Where are we gonna go?"

I hadn't even thought of that. It was time to leave; York was sleeping and there was nothing more we could do at the hospital that night.

Mom was right. As we drove up to what used to be our apartment, only Myrek's was still standing. My mom walked up to what was left of the front door and fell to her knees. The same display of sad emotion that she showed in the hospital, she was now showing. And some of the ashes and dust still burned before us.

"What am I gonna do, Lord?" Mom cried.

"You can't just depend on Him to help us. I'm gonna quit school and get a job," Yancy said.

She quickly got up off her knees and hemmed him up. "Boy, you're about to go to the ninth grade. You're taking honors classes. There's no way I'm gonna have you even think about dropping out of school and becoming some statistic. I'm not gonna have you maybe landing in jail or taking on some road that's gonna lead to nowhere. There's no way I'll have you thinking you gotta help take care of me. We gonna figure this out. The project's management is gonna work this out. Everything is gonna be okay. God's got us!"

My uncle pulled up behind us and gave Mom a key to a hotel room where he and his wife were staying. It had double beds and a pull-out sofa.

"John, you didn't have to do this," my mom said to him.

"Yes, I did, Yvette. I know it seems dark right now. I know you're frustrated. You don't know how you gonna find your way, but we're gonna get through this, sister-in-law. I haven't always been your favorite person, but it's gonna work out."



Oh my gosh, it feels so good to lie on this bed with the smell of fresh sheets, I thought. I had been so used to sleeping with my mom over the years, I didn't even know what it felt like to sleep in a double

bed all by myself. It was wonderful. And I didn't even want to move. I looked to my left and my mom was sleeping peacefully. Then I looked to the right and my brother was a little uncomfortable on the cot, but he was dozing as well. I had never stayed in a hotel before, and though this wasn't a fancy one like the Ritz Carlton that Mom used to work at when we lived in Orlando, it sure was nice.

"I gotta get to the hospital! Wake up, y'all!" Mom shouted suddenly. I wasn't trying to be selfish. I certainly wanted to make sure York was okay, but couldn't I just stay in bed all day relaxing and enjoying this moment?

"Yancy, wake up, boy! Go next door and ask Uncle John to get on up. It's ten o'clock. I need to be at that hospital," Mom said excitedly.

We were there less than an hour later. Yancy and I both were so tired. All we could do was sit in the lobby and hold our heads down, trying to get some more sleep.

"Hey, Unc, can't we go back to the hotel?" Yancy asked.

"I don't know how many more nights I'm gonna have it, son."

"We checked out already?"

"Naw," Uncle John replied.

"Where are we gonna go?" Yancy asked my uncle.

"We're gonna talk to the project's management today. We'll get this all worked out. Just let your mom see that your brother's okay. Then we've gotta try and talk to the hospital insurance adjuster and see how much of this money we gotta come up with to pay for York's surgery."

"I want you kids to come on and eat," Aunt Lucinda said. She had to be getting excited. She and Uncle John were going to be the adoptive parents of Jada's baby. We were excited too, though it was

hard to show it because everything had happened so fast. Jada finally decided that she was going to give the baby up to someone she knew and someone who was related to the baby's daddy.

It was going to be a blessing, boy or girl, to have a piece of my brother Jeff still be a part of my life. I couldn't wait to teach that little baby everything I knew. I'm gonna be the best auntie. Having Uncle John and Aunt Lucinda live in Jacksonville instead of Orlando is really gonna help us make sure we'll be able to do our part.

"Something to eat? Oh, I'm ready," Yancy said, as he got up and walked over to the elevator. When it opened, Myrek stepped off.

"What are you doing here?" I asked the guy who had been my best friend for so long. Now our relationship was a little rocky because he wanted to take it further than I did. I mean, we were friends, so why rock the boat? But I did care deeply for him, and seeing him standing before me I could tell that he was more than just tired. Something was going on. Something was wrong. "What is it?" I asked, when he didn't respond right away.

"We didn't know how to get in touch with y'all. It's Jada."

"What?" Aunt Lucinda asked nervously, as she dropped her purse. "Where is she? Everything okay?"

"Everything's not okay. They had to deliver her baby last night. She went into labor early."

"Oh my gosh, Myrek!" I said, hugging him and wishing that I could do more.

"I gotta go and tell your uncle." My aunt turned around slowly and went off to find Uncle John. Yancy and I stood waiting on Myrek to tell us something. This was our baby too. We certainly cared. But, it was his sister and we didn't want to push. However, I had to know something. So, I finally asked.

“What’s going on? I mean, they’re both okay, right?”

“It’s a little girl. Jada’s fine.”

“Okay, that’s great!” I said.

“Yeah, but what about the baby?” Yancy asked.

“They don’t know. I couldn’t stay up there with my dad anymore. He’s just pacing back and forth. Jada’s all upset about it; she’s saying that it’s her fault because she didn’t have proper medical attention and all that stuff. She even called out for your brother.”

“She called out for Jeff?” I asked.

“Yeah. I don’t think the baby’s gonna make it. She asked him to take care of the baby. She told Jeff to tell Jesus to give her another chance so that she could do better. She’d be the mom that she’s supposed to be. I don’t know. I guess her medication was makin’ her delirious or something. I mean, it was really weird. My dad’s all freaked out about it and I just couldn’t stay up there any longer.” I felt sorry for him. I could tell that he was really upset by what was happening.

Uncle John and Aunt Lucinda came over to Myrek and said, “Please take us up there now.” We all got on the elevator and my aunt had her head buried in my uncle’s chest. This was gonna be their baby. Just when they got the chance, after trying for years to have a child of their own, they get news that the baby might not even make it. All my aunt kept mumbling was, “Please, Lord, please.” She didn’t even care if it was a boy or girl. She just wanted a healthy baby, and I so wanted that for them too. But I didn’t know what God wanted.

So I put my head back and prayed silently. *Lord, I just seem to be too young to be going through so much. But they say You won’t give us more than we can handle. I’m just trying to be happy and find the joy*

in my young life! Why does my little niece hafta be barely holding on? Do You really need her? We need her too, Lord. Please fix this. When we stepped off the elevator and saw the grim look on Mr. Mike's face, I didn't know if God was gonna grant that prayer. I was finding it hard to trust Him.



"It's just a waiting game right now, y'all," Mr. Mike said to us after we got off the elevator with Myrek.

"You had me there for a minute," Uncle John said to Mr. Mike. He had noticed, as I did, that look on Mr. Mike's face.

"She's not out of the woods yet," Mr. Mike said before he looked away.

"Please let me see her," Aunt Lucinda cried.

"Only family can be in there right now. She's in the neonatal intensive care unit," Mr. Mike insisted.

"We're gonna be her mom and dad. We gotta be able to see her," Aunt Lucinda said. "Tell them, John. Tell them that we're the parents. We need to be able to see the baby. We gotta pray for her and let her know that we're here. Even though we just got into her life, I've been praying for this baby for years. God's not gonna take her from me, I know He's not."

"I'm glad y'all are so concerned about the baby, but what about my daughter? Don't you wanna see her and comfort her? Jada's goin' through a lot now too. Y'all ain't the only ones." Mr. Mike sounded even more upset.

I couldn't even stand it anymore. It was just too much to see adults squabbling at such a time that was already hard enough for all of us to handle.

“I’m gonna go find my ma and make sure York’s okay,” I said. When the elevator door opened, I stepped on with a nurse and was happy when the door closed before anyone else could get on it with me. The nurse looked like a girl who used to live in our complex.

“I know you. You’re one of them triplets. Girl, you done grown up.”

“Yeah, you’re Tricky,” I answered her.

“Yeah, that’s what they used to call me. My real name is Trisha. I had to make something of myself, girl, and get out of them projects. I mean, I know you still live there and all, but keep your head in them books and you’ll have other opportunities. It’s so many folks I went to high school with that are dead or in jail and ain’t making nothin’ of their lives.”

She just didn’t know how she was cutting to the core with everything I’d been going through. My oldest brother didn’t even make it out of school and he was dead. York was lying in the hospital right now and the gang that he was affiliated with hadn’t even visited. She didn’t have to tell me that it was a place that we needed to get out of. But now we desperately wanted to be there and couldn’t because it had burned down. It was all just a mess. Obviously, it showed on my face.

She touched my shoulder and said, “Listen, I don’t know what you’re going through, but I know where you come from and I know you got a lot of odds stacked against you. But, girl, don’t you give up. People told me that I wouldn’t be nothin’ and people told me that I couldn’t do nothin’. And a whole lot of the time when the easier way out was the wrong way for sure, I had to pray up and tell God that He said He would never leave me or forsake me.

“I know I need Him to lighten my load. Girl, pray to Him. He

will do it. I know you're young and all, but when you got all that pulling at you like you do, that's when you need the Lord. I don't care if you're two or if you're ninety-nine. With your cute little body, I know some of them men that's still over there turning up them bottles are trying to get at you. Uh uh, here's my number." When the elevator opened, she said, "Call me anytime. I work with kids your age at the boys' and girls' club. I'm a good mentor. It's gonna be all right."

"Thanks, Tricky," I said as she winked and walked off to a door that read "Staff Only."

"Where y'all been?" my mom asked as I got off the elevator. "I can't turn my back for five seconds and y'all into something! And where's Uncle John and Aunt Lucinda? They gon' back to the hotel? They couldn't wait? I just would think that y'all would know that I need y'all right now and I gotta be worried about where y'all go—"

"Ma! Please listen," I interrupted her.

"Listen to what?"

"It's Jada," I said.

"What do you mean, honey?"

"Ma, she's in the hospital too. She had her baby last night."

"What? She was fine when we left here yesterday."

"I know but she started feeling pains or something, Myrek said. And they took the baby. It's a girl, Ma. You got a granddaughter," I announced.

"Lord, she had the baby prematurely. Uh!" she uttered. "Let me go and see my baby."

We got on the elevator.

"She's okay, right? Tell me JJ's baby is okay." Mom shook me real hard. "Tell me, Yasmin!"

“Ma, they don’t know right now. They don’t know.”

Mom said, “I was coming to find y’all because York is fine. He’s sitting up and talking and even Miss Sandra is gonna be okay. And now you’re telling me that my grandchild might not make it? Lord, I just don’t know what You want from me!” She pounded the elevator walls. “I sinned a lot in my younger days, I did. And my ex-husband, he’s in jail now. You took one son from me. What You gonna do, Lord? What do I need to give You? Take me!”

“Ma, don’t say that!” I said. “I need you, Ma. Yancy and York need you too. Please don’t say that! The baby’s gonna be okay. Ma, you can’t break down on me!” I just started yelling as the tears flowed.

There was nothing we could do but wait. So we sat in the waiting room together. Everybody’s faces held a different emotion. Hope, disappointment, anger, and sadness.

When the doctor finally stepped in, he had a smile on his face. “We think the baby’s gonna pull through. She’ll have to stay in the hospital for a couple months, but we’ve got her stable now. Her lungs are finally breathing on their own.”

All of us hugged each other and cried in relief.

When Yancy, Mom, and I went downstairs to check on York, we saw my school counselor and pastor’s wife, Mrs. Newman. Mrs. Newman was also one of the coordinators of the after-school girls’ group I was in, the L.I.G.H.T. group. It stood for Ladies Impacting Generations Here Today. Mrs. Newman said, “The church is gonna hold a car wash on Sunday. We’re gonna raise the funds needed to pay for your son’s operation.”

Mom couldn’t say a word. But I knew just when she was giving up on God, He showed mercy. He came through and helped us out, making another problem solved.